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Title: The Treasure Hunt of the S-18

Author: Graham M. Dean

Release date: August 26, 2014 [EBook #46688]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and Sue Clark

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TREASURE HUNT OF THE S-18 ***

The Treasure Hunt of the *S-18*

By

Graham M. Dean

THE GOLDSMITH PUBLISHING COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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The Treasure Hunt of the *S-18*

CHAPTER ONE

The Man of Mystery

The high pitched drone of a wasp engine sounded over the municipal field at Atkinson and Tim Murphy, famous flying reporter of the Atkinson *News*, poked a grease-smudged face out from behind the cowling of a trim biplane and squinted skyward. Against the brilliant sky of the late summer afternoon was the outline of one of the new high speed transports of the Red Arrow Transcontinental Air Express Company.

The *Day Express*, Chicago to the west coast, was swinging around, preparatory to landing on the smooth, crushed-rock runway. Tim watched with appreciative eyes. The new transports, capable of winging their way from coast to coast at better than three miles a minute, always fascinated him. He envied the trim, clear-eyed young chaps who sat at the controls while they in turn would have been willing to exchange their daily routine for the adventurous news assignments which often came Tim's way.

The twin motors, mounted in nacelles projecting from the sturdy wing, idled as the ship drifted downward to touch lightly on the runway and roll smoothly toward the main hangar.

"Star gazing again?" asked a quiet voice at Tim's elbow.

The flying reporter turned quickly. Carl Hunter, manager of the airport, was beside him.

"I always get a thrill watching those high speeds come in. There's something in it that gets into my blood and makes it tingle."

"They're the finest transport planes in the world," nodded Hunter.

"I'd like to fly one of them," mused Tim.

Hunter looked at Tim shrewdly. The flying reporter was slender but his muscles were like tensed steel. His blue eyes were clear and unwavering. There was a pleasant twist to his lips but from experience the field manager knew that they could snap into an uncompromising line of determination.

"I'll get you a job on the Transcontinental any day you want one," he said. "Come over to my office and fill out the application blank."

"That would mean leaving the *News*," said Tim. Then, as Hunter grinned broadly, he added, "I guess the smell of printer's ink is stronger than the call of the skyways. I'm a reporter first and a flyer second."

"I wouldn't rank either of your abilities ahead of the other. You're first class at both."

"Thanks, Carl. That reminds me. Have one of the boys finish up this job. Give all of the plugs a good cleaning. I'd almost forgotten I've got another column to write for my department in tomorrow's paper."

"I'll make out a work ticket right away."

Tim slipped out of his jumper and followed the field manager toward the main hangar. The usual crowd of curious people was lined up inside the ropes to watch the passengers as they disembarked. Tim, always on the lookout, scanned them as they came down the steps from the plane.

Two attractive girls were first. They looked as though they might be movie actresses. He'd check the passenger list with the stewardess to make sure. An actress was always worth a paragraph or two.

The last man to leave the ship drew Tim's attention. There was something vaguely familiar in the carriage of the head and the set of the jaw.

The stewardess came by and Tim hailed her. "Who's the tall, well-built fellow in the gray suit?" he asked.

The girl scanned the passenger list.

"Sorry, I can't tell you. He isn't listed."

"What do you mean by that? Is he traveling on a pass?"

"Hardly. I collected his fare in Chicago and he's getting off here."

"Then you must know his name."

"He didn't give me his name and instructions from the general manager were to do as he directed so I've listed him on my seat chart as 'Mr. Seven.' That's the chair he occupied on the trip out."

Tim thanked the stewardess and hurried into Carl Hunter's office.

"Who's the mysterious man who came in on the *Day Express*?"

"He's just as mysterious to me as he is to you," replied the field chief. "Why don't you ask him what it's all about? I've had a radio from the general manager to extend him every courtesy and not to ask questions, but I guess that doesn't cover you."

"Asking questions is one of the things I do best," grinned Tim as he left the office.

"Mr. Seven" was superintending the unloading of his luggage from the plane. Three large traveling bags were pulled out of the baggage compartment and Tim whistled as he thought of the excess fees which must have been paid for the transport of the heavy bags by air.

When "Mr. Seven" had made sure that his baggage was in proper order, Tim stepped up.

"I'm Tim Murphy of the Atkinson *News*," he said. "Your face seems vaguely familiar but I can't place your name. Since you are stopping here, I'd like very much to have a story."

"Sorry, Murphy, but there's nothing I can tell you. I prefer not to talk to reporters."

Tim was undaunted. "Do you plan on staying long in Atkinson?"

"That's another question I decline to answer." The muscles around the stranger's jaw were tightening and Tim sensed stormy weather ahead. Normally he would have let the whole matter drop but there was something so definitely perplexing in the other man's attitude that he persisted in his questioning.

"You must have some special mission here," said Tim.

"I told you before that I wouldn't talk. You can fire away with questions all the rest of the afternoon

and you'll get the same result—zero. Now if you'll be good enough to suggest your best hotel, I'll be on my way up town."

Tim named the city's leading hotel. "I'll be glad to take you there in one of the *News*' cars," he added.

"Thanks, but I'd have to parry too many of your questions."

"It's a draw so far," smiled Tim, "but I'll bet I know your name before another 24 hours, 'Mr. Seven.'"

"Why call me 'Mr. Seven?'"

"That's what the stewardess did. You were in chair seven coming out from Chicago."

"It's as good a name as any other."

"Except your real one," interjected Tim.

"Mr. Seven" bundled his bags into a taxi and whirled away toward the city while Tim stood on the ramp and gazed after the car.

"That fellow's face is familiar," he muttered half aloud, "and I'm going to dig into our files at the office until I find his picture. Unless my hunch is way wrong, there must be a big story connected with him."

Tim's hunches were notoriously right and just how correct this one was, even Tim would never have dared dream.

CHAPTER TWO

A Secret Service Case

When Tim reached the *News* office he found a note rolled into his typewriter asking him to see the managing editor. He crossed the large news room and knocked at the glass-panelled door which bore the printed words, "George Carson, Managing Editor."

"Come in," boomed a voice from behind the door and Tim stepped into the office. "You wanted to see me?"

"Sit down, Tim," smiled the sandy-haired editor who guided the destinies of the *News*. He motioned toward a chair.

"I've had some correspondence with Ace McDowell of the High Flyers, a flying circus that is rated one of the best in the country. He wants to bring his show in here this week-end under the auspices of the *News*. What do you think about it?"

"I've never met Ace or any of his fliers," replied Tim, "but they have the reputation of putting on a good air show."

"It struck me as rather a good idea," went on the managing editor. "We could give the show a lot of space in the *News* and it would help popularize the airport. Some people are kicking about the taxes they have to pay to help support the field. Do you think you could arrange things with Carl Hunter so the show can come in Saturday afternoon and put on their stunts Sunday? Of course they'll be carrying passengers between stunt flights."

"I'll call Hunter at once," promised Tim.

He left the managing editor's office and placed the call from one of the telephones in the editorial room.

"I've no objections to the High Flyers," the airport manager said, "but they'll have to pay the field the usual percentage for taking up passengers."

"I'll put that in the contract," promised Tim. "Keep this under your hat for I wouldn't want the *Advance* to print the story of our own air show first."

"I'll forget all about it until I read your story tomorrow," promised Hunter.

Tim returned to the managing editor's office.

"Hunter has no objections but the High Flyers must pay the field fifteen per cent of all the money they take in on passenger rides. That's the customary percentage for barnstormers."

The managing editor had the contract from the High Flyers on his desk and Tim, at his suggestion, filled out the blank.

"I'll telegraph McDowell that we will expect them to land here Saturday," said Carson. "They're over at Charleston this week."

"You might ask him to send on any pictures of the flyers and planes that are available," suggested Tim.

When Tim left the managing editor's office he knew he was in for a busy week. There would be stories every day about the flying circus and then the problems of parking and policing the airport, for a huge crowd would be on hand to see the stunt flying.

"Get the Jupiter all tuned up?" asked someone behind him.

Tim turned to face Ralph Graves, another *News* reporter who had been his flying companion on many an adventure. Two years before when news had been breaking fast on the skyways, Tim had trained Ralph in flying and the other reporter now held a transport license. They were bosom companions and their managing editor counted on them coming in with any story to which they were assigned.

"I didn't get all of the plugs cleaned," said Tim, "so I'm having the boys at the field finish the job."

"What's on Carson's mind?" asked Ralph, jerking a thumb toward the managing editor's door.

"He's just contracted to sponsor the appearance here of Ace McDowell and the High Flyers. They'll be in Saturday and put on their stunts Sunday afternoon."

"Which means plenty of work for us," commented Ralph.

"It will mean plenty of work but it will have everyone talking about the *News* being alive and wide awake and that's what we want. The *Advance* is slipping every day and some morning this fall I wouldn't be surprised if we wake up and find that our rival paper has folded up and, like the Arabs, silently stolen away."

"That won't hurt my feelings a bit," said Ralph. "The fellows on the *Advance* have made it mighty tough for us these last few months. They lie, cheat and steal to get their stories and I've run into some actual bribery."

"So have I, but it won't win for them in the long run. I'm glad we're working for a paper and an editor that's clean from top to bottom."

Returning to his desk, Tim rummaged through the drawers until he found an aviation magazine which contained an illustrated sketch of Ace McDowell and his flying circus. McDowell was short and swarthy with eyes that were a little too close together to suit Tim. But the *News* reporter knew that the head of the flying circus was a real flyer and would put on a good show. There was no sense in building up a prejudice just from a picture.

Tim rolled a sheet of copy paper into his typewriter and after a moment's thought on the wording of his opening sentence, started hammering out the story announcing the coming of the flying circus. By the use of plenty of adjectives he contrived to write a full column and, after reading over the story and correcting one or two minor errors, he laid it on the copy desk.

Dan Watkins, veteran head of the desk, looked up from beneath his green eye-shade.

"Good story?" he asked.

"One of the best you'll ever read when it comes to writing a lot from a little," grinned Tim. "As a

matter of fact, Dan, we're promoting an air circus next Sunday and I have a hunch that Mr. Carson will want a full page headline on one of the inside pages tomorrow."

The chief copyreader scanned the story with practiced eye.

"I should say your hunch is correct. I'll mark it for an inside banner right now."

The chief copyreader was the only one at the large desk and Tim sat down on the edge of the horseshoe-shaped work table.

"I wish you had been at the airport this afternoon," he said. "You've an uncanny memory for faces and names and it would have come in handy."

"See someone you couldn't place?"

"There's something vaguely familiar about him. I've seen his picture some place and I've a hunch there's a mighty good story connected with his coming to Atkinson."

"You can always ask them questions," grinned Dan.

"I asked plenty of questions and didn't get a thing."

"Wouldn't he talk?"

"He talked but he didn't say anything. I tried the stewardess and also Carl Hunter but both of them had received instructions from the general manager of the line in Chicago to extend this man every courtesy and do as he directed. The stewardess had him down as 'Mr. Seven' because he occupied chair seven coming out. When I tackled him about that he said that 'Mr. Seven' was a good enough name. I couldn't make a dent in him. He's smooth as silk and as hard as steel."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know exactly. I'll try to keep tab on him at the Ransom House where he is staying but with this flying circus coming to town I won't have much extra time. I'm going to dig into the files and see what I can find there. I'm positive I've seen his picture in the last year."

"I'll trail along over to the hotel with you if you'd like. Maybe I could identify him. I've got one of those card index memories."

"I thought maybe you'd help me out, Dan. We'll have a try at it after supper. I'll meet you at the Ransom House."

Tim and Ralph had dinner together down town and Tim told of his meeting the mysterious "Mr. Seven."

"Sounds like a story to me," chuckled Ralph, "and I'll be way wrong if you don't dig it out. Guess I'll invite myself in on the party tonight and trail over to the Ransom House with you."

"Glad to have you. Maybe you'll be able to identify my mysterious stranger."

They discussed plans for the flying circus and after leaving the restaurant proceeded to the city's leading hotel. Dan Watkins was waiting for them in the lobby.

"I'll see what name he registered under," said Dan. Inquiry at the desk revealed that the object of Dan's curiosity had registered as Mr. G. Seven of Chicago.

"He's in the dining room," said Tim when he rejoined his companions. "We might as well sit down here. He'll have to pass almost directly in front of us, which will give Dan a good chance to see him."

"If Dan can't identify him, I'll be glad to help you go through the files," offered Ralph.

"Thanks. With all of the details necessary in arranging for the flying circus I'll be glad to have a little extra help. Look sharp now. Here comes our man."

"Mr. Seven" was dressed in the same well-tailored suit he had worn when he stepped out of the *Day Express* and into the life of the flying reporter. He walked slowly from the dining room toward the elevators in full view of the sharp eyes of the newspapermen. They watched the elevator doors close and turned to pool the results.

Dan Watkins shook his head.

"I'm afraid I'm of no help. There's something definitely familiar about the face but I can't place the name. Maybe it will come to me later."

Tim swung around to Ralph. "What about you?"

"I'm just another disappointment and in the same fix as Dan. 'Mr. Seven's' face is familiar but that's as far as it goes. His name is among the missing."

"If 'Mr. Seven' will only stay around until this air circus is over Sunday I'll find out what's behind his mysterious coming to Atkinson," said Tim, who felt that "Mr. Seven" had challenged his ability as a reporter.

On leaving the hotel, they parted, the chief copy reader returning to his bachelor headquarters and Tim and Ralph going to the *News* building where they hauled out files of the paper and spread the heavily-bound books on their desks.

"We'd better check together," suggested Tim. "Then there will be no chance of our missing a single tip."

For an hour they poured over one volume, scanning each page and watching with especial care the picture page which was a daily feature.

"I'm too sleepy to go on," said Tim when the city hall clock chimed eleven times. "Being outdoors most of the afternoon working on the plane gave me a yen for bed even though I want to keep on digging into the file. I might go right on over the very picture I'm looking for."

Ralph picked up a telephone and called the Ransom House, where he ascertained from the clerk on duty that Mr G. Seven had indicated he would be a guest there for at least a week.

Relaying that information on to Tim, Ralph added, "Now you can go to bed tonight and sleep soundly."

They had just finished putting away the files when the door of the editorial room swung open and a stranger walked in. He was middle aged, with close-cropped, iron-gray hair, piercing blue eyes and large, capable hands.

"I'm looking for Tim Murphy and Ralph Graves, flying reporters of the *News*" he said.

"I'm Murphy," said Tim, "and my companion is Ralph Graves."

"Then I'm fortunate to find you together. My card may give you some idea of what I want."

Tim took the engraved piece of pasteboard and read the following words: "Henry Prentiss, United

States Bureau of Narcotics.”

“I’m glad to know you, Mr. Prentiss,” said Tim, “but I’m afraid your card hasn’t given me any clue on what you’re here for.”

“I understand the High Flyers and Ace McDowell are going to put on their air circus here Sunday under the auspices of the *News*.”

“That’s correct, but no announcement has been made yet.”

“Then you’re likely to have two stories for your paper next Monday, the actual story of the flying circus and the story of the arrest of Ace McDowell as the head of a notorious ring of dope smugglers.”

CHAPTER THREE

The High Flyers

The federal narcotic agent sat down on the edge of Tim's desk and smiled at the amazed expressions on the faces of the flying reporters.

"Do you mean that you are going to arrest McDowell on a charge of smuggling dope?" asked Tim.

"I'm going to do my best to take him in custody. He's a slippery customer but I think we've got all the evidence we need this time."

"What a sensation this will make," whistled Ralph.

Tim was thoughtful. "It's too bad the *News* is sponsoring the appearance of the High Flyers if their leader is to be arrested on a federal charge," he said.

"I'm afraid it's too late to make any changes now," said Mr. Prentiss. "As a matter of fact, it will make a stronger story for, even though you are now aware of McDowell's identity, you will go on and help a federal law enforcement agency to carry out its duty."

"You're right on that point," agreed Tim. "I'm sure that the *News* will do all in its power to help you."

"I'm wondering why you looked us up," said Ralph. "You could just as well have waited until Sunday."

"True enough," nodded the narcotics agent, "but I know that both you and Murphy, as a result of your efforts toward the apprehension of the Sky Hawk and his gang, were made officers of the state police. I may need a little official help Sunday and I want men I can trust in an emergency."

It was a fine compliment to the undaunted courage of the young newspaper men and it pleased them both. Prentiss had made warm friends and allies on whom he could count in any emergency.

"McDowell has been smuggling for a long time," went on the federal agent. "We've been after him for two years but he's a shrewd flyer and a shrewder smuggler. It wasn't until I got one of my own men into his outfit that I commenced to get results."

"You've actually got one of your agents flying with McDowell?" asked Ralph.

"He's rated the next best flyer in the outfit, Tommy Larkin, by name."

"I've heard of him," said Tim, "but I never dreamed he was a federal agent."

"Neither does McDowell or I'm very much afraid Tommy would be among the missing."

"Meaning what?" asked Ralph.

"That it would be comparatively easy for McDowell to arrange a crack-up of Tommy's plane somewhere on a long hop if he ever became suspicious."

"That would be unthinkable," said Tim.

"Not for McDowell. You might as well realize right now that he is ready to go to any length to save himself from arrest. According to information from Larkin, McDowell will receive a new shipment of drugs just before they take off from Charleston on their flight here. McDowell is to keep it in his ship until they reach Nemaha, their next stop after they finish their exhibition in Atkinson. That means McDowell will have the stuff on his ship for at least 24 hours. He flies a four passenger cabin plane most of the time but for one of the stunts he goes aloft in a fast two-seater. That's when I'll have a chance to seize the dope in his cabin ship and take him when he lands."

"Sounds fine if nothing slips," nodded Tim.

"There'll be no slips this time," promised the federal agent.

They discussed plans for the apprehension of McDowell at length and before he left the office, Prentiss promised to see the managing editor the next day.

"I'm counting on you two to be with me Sunday," he said before leaving. "There might be a leak if I called in the local police or even some of the state troopers at the barracks here."

When the narcotics officer had gone, Ralph wiped his brow and slumped down in the chair at his own desk.

"Talk about news," he said. "Things never come singly in a newspaper office. First you bob in with the mysterious Mr. Seven, then we put on an air show and now we find the head of the air circus is wanted by Uncle Sam for peddling dope. What next?"

"Learn the identity of 'Mr. Seven,'" grinned Tim.

"You can worry over that one," snorted Ralph. "It's almost midnight now. I'm going home and I expect I'll have all kinds of nightmares."

"If you suddenly discover the identity of 'Mr. Seven' I'll be glad to answer the phone even if it is three in the morning," said Tim.

"Just for that, I won't phone you even if I do suddenly open some hidden recess in my brain and recall who he is." Ralph threw the words over his shoulder as he left the editorial room.

Tim picked up the aviation magazine which contained the picture of the High Flyers and looked again at the printed likeness of Ace McDowell. The eyes were cruel, hard, merciless. Even on the inanimate page there was something disturbing about them. Next to McDowell was the picture of Tommy Larkin. He was about the age of Tim or Ralph, stocky and well-built.

Tim placed the magazine back in one of the drawers, snapped off the light, and left the office. As Ralph had observed, things never came singly, and Tim felt a weight of apprehension settling on his shoulders.

The next morning a board of strategy met in the office of the managing editor. Grouped around the table facing the heads of the *News* were the narcotics officer, Tim and Ralph.

"Of course we'll help in every way possible," the managing editor assured Prentiss. "You can rely upon Tim and Ralph to give you the utmost assistance and you'll not find their courage wanting in the pinches."

"That's why I came to them," smiled Prentiss. "I need two men on whom I can count."

In the rush of plans and details which had to be worked out for the coming of the High Flyers, Tim was forced to relegate thoughts of "Mr. Seven" in the far depths of his mind. He managed to drop in at the Ransom House once a day to check on the presence of the mysterious stranger and each time learned that the object of his interest was still in Atkinson.

The High Flyers arrived late Saturday afternoon, wheeling down out of a cloudless sky. There were eight ships, three mechanics and two stunt men. Six of the planes were trim, modern crafts but two of them were old trainers that should have been on the junk heap long ago. Tim was surprised to see that type of craft.

By agreement, Prentiss had stayed away from the field for McDowell knew him by sight.

As soon as the ships had rolled up on the ramp, Tim stepped out to greet McDowell. The head of the High Flyers was even shorter and swarthier than Tim had expected. His hand was cold and limp and Tim felt a chill run along his spine as the close-set eyes seemed to bore into him.

"Nice field," commented McDowell. "Hope we have a good crowd."

"We've been giving the show plenty of publicity," said Tim.

"That's good. I'm pulling a new stunt tomorrow afternoon. It's a head-on collision at 2,000 feet between two planes. That's why I'm wheeling those ancient trainers along. They'll go up in smoke tomorrow."

"Pretty risky sort of a stunt, isn't it?" asked Ralph.

"Not as much so as it sounds. The pilots will chase each other for a while and then come on head first. Just before they crash both men will dive over the side in their chutes."

"Who's going to handle the ships?" asked Tim.

"I'll fly one of them. Tommy Larkin will handle the controls in the other. By the way, you must meet Larkin. He's a fine flyer."

At the mention of Larkin's name, Tim felt a sickening premonition. It was the fear that McDowell suspected Larkin of being a federal agent. It would be so easy for him to crash into Larkin before the scheduled time.

McDowell called to a flyer who was squirming out of coveralls.

"Tommy," he said, "come over and meet the flying reporters from the *News*. There isn't enough going on here on the ground, so these fellows hop around in the clouds hunting stories."

"Glad to know you," grinned Tommy, as he shook hands with Tim and Ralph. "I've read a lot about you, first getting the Sky Hawk and then cleaning up the rustlers in the mountains west of here."

"I was in on the pursuit of the Sky Hawk," said Ralph, "but Tim ran down the rustlers single-handed. He's getting to be quite a sleuth."

Tim saw McDowell's eyes narrow and he felt them boring into him. He changed the trend of the conversation at once.

"We brought several cars from the *News* down," he said. "Let's get out your baggage and we'll be glad to take you uptown."

By pre-arrangement, Ralph stepped over to help McDowell while Tim went with Tommy Larkin. They reached into the baggage compartment of Larkin's monoplane and Tim whispered, "Prentiss is in town. He got your message and everything's set for tomorrow afternoon."

"Tell him the stuff is in McDowell's ship in a special compartment under the floor. Be careful. I've a feeling that McDowell doesn't trust me."

"Then don't risk your life by going up tomorrow in one of those old trainers and staging that crazy stunt."

"I'll keep a sharp lookout. McDowell will never be able to crash me before I jump. Better not say anything more or try to talk to me. It might arouse suspicion."

Tim nodded and picked up the large suitcase. Together they walked across the ramp and joined Ralph and McDowell.

They left the flyers at the Ransom House and Tim caught a glimpse of "Mr. Seven" in the lobby. As soon as the flying circus was out of town he'd get on the trail of "Mr. Seven" again and see if he couldn't learn his real identity. There was a story there if he could dig it out.

Sunday, the day of the big air show, dawned clear and windless, ideal for the stunt flying and just warm enough to insure the attendance of a large crowd. The first stunts were scheduled for ten o'clock and half an hour before Ace McDowell went aloft to do an outside loop there were more than a thousand cars parked in the roped off spaces around the field with more arriving every minute. Tim's plans for handling the big crowd were working out smoothly and he felt some of the tension slipping from his shoulders.

At an early morning conference in the *News* office with Tommy Larkin and his chief, it had been decided to arrest McDowell when he floated down in his chute after the plane crash. In the meantime, Prentiss would seize the dope in the flyer's plane and they would spring the net from which there would be no escape for McDowell. Tim and Ralph were content to be on the sidelines for they knew the danger in crossing a man like McDowell.

The other flyers in the circus were quiet, competent chaps, most of them under thirty and, as far as the narcotics agent could learn, had no connection with McDowell's smuggling activities. The show started with McDowell's stunt flight, which left the crowd gasping and speechless but not so paralyzed but what as a large number rushed for the ticket sellers and bought rides in the other planes. The next stunt program was at one o'clock with Tommy Larkin going aloft with one of the wing walkers, who capered all over the ship in a series of sensational stunts.

By early afternoon the crowd had increased to such an extent that the special police estimated more than 15,000 were watching the air show; and the passenger planes were running to capacity on every flight.

Prentiss, who had arrived at the field, was remaining out of sight in Carl Hunter's office and once, when McDowell entered, was forced to make a hasty retreat into the washroom.

The loudspeakers were blaring with the announcement of the next stunt flight, the crash of the two planes in mid-air. Tim heard the words vaguely.

"The greatest air thriller ever performed," the announcer was informing the crowd. "Two costly airplanes, speeding at more than 100 miles an hour, will positively crash head-on at an altitude of 2,000 feet. It's daring, death-defying, breath-taking in its thrills. You'll be glued to your seats when you see these ships hurl towards each other piloted by Ace McDowell and Tommy Larkin, two of the foremost flyers in the nation. They'll go aloft in fifteen minutes. In the meantime, there's time for one more ride in the passenger planes. Let's go, folks."

The old trainers had been kept in the hangars where a field crew had given them a hasty coat of paint that morning. They glistened bravely in their new dress and the motors, which were turning over slowly, sounded sweet.

Tim inspected the ship that Tommy was to fly. If it held together long enough to get to 2,000 feet Tommy would be lucky but with a chute on, he'd be able to get out if anything happened before they straightened out for the crash.

McDowell's ship was in better condition. It was well rigged and Tim, squinting under the hood, was surprised to see a big Barko 16-cylinder motor turning the prop over. The old plane's lines were good. It was still plenty fast enough to give the average modern ship a good race. Too bad to sacrifice a sturdy old veteran like that just to appease the thrill-seekers.

Tim looked around for Ralph, who had gone over to the pilot's room in the administration building. His companion was nowhere in sight but McDowell and Tommy, their chute packs banging awkwardly against their legs, were making their way toward the hangar. McDowell's own monoplane had been rolled inside.

McDowell was giving Tommy final instructions as they entered the hangar.

"We'll take our time getting up to 2,000," he said. "Then we'll circle around and make several false rushes at each other. After three or four times I'll waggle my wings and the next time we'll let them go. We'll be west of the field where the ships won't do any damage when they crash. Stick with them as long as you can and then go overboard. Got that all straight?"

Tommy, a little grim, nodded.

"I'll handle my end of it," he said, climbing into the cockpit of the ancient trainer.

McDowell, eyes narrowed to slits as hard as steel, looked at the crowd.

"They're going to get a real thrill," he said savagely, smacking his clenched hands together.

Tim looked at him curiously. McDowell outwardly wasn't nervous yet he appeared to be laboring under a great strain. Could he suspect Tommy's real identity? The question burned itself into Tim's mind. If McDowell was suspicious he might fake the crash and after Tommy went over the side, roar away in the trainer. That might explain why the old ship had such a powerful motor.

Tim stepped over to Tommy's ship and climbed up so he could yell into Tommy's ear.

"I don't like the way McDowell looks," he said. "Be careful."

Tommy nodded.

"I'm not taking any chances this afternoon. The first thing that looks funny will find me going over the side in the chute."

The loud speakers were blaring. The field was being cleared and the tension in the crowd increased.

"In the Number one plane," boomed the announcer, "is Ace McDowell. In the Number two ship is Tommy Larkin. Here they come."

The flyers gunned their motors and the old ships, gleaming under their coat of hastily applied paint, rolled out on the ramp.

A mighty roar went up from the crowd. The field was finally clear of the passenger carrying ships. The signalman in the control tower waved his flag at Tommy. The young flyer opened his throttle, the venerable craft waggled its wings, felt the call of the skies, and rolled smoothly down the runway. Tommy took his time in getting off the field. With as little strain as possible on the ancient wings he lifted his plane into the air.

The flag waved again and Ace, pushing his throttle ahead hard, flipped the tail of his ship up and went scooting after the leisurely soaring Tommy.

The planes climbed in easy circles with Ace going up much faster than Tommy. They were up a thousand feet when Tim felt a tug at his arm and turned to face the narcotics inspector. "Give me a hand and we'll see what we can find in McDowell's plane," said Prentiss. They hastened into the hangar and climbed into the cabin. Tommy had given them the exact location of the hidden compartment and without wasting time Prentiss took an iron bar and smashed his way to it. With eager fingers he ripped away the splintered wood of the top and delved inside. When his hands came into view again they held small white containers.

"We've got McDowell with the goods this time," said Prentiss. "When he comes down I'll arrest him. I'll turn this over to the field manager to place in his safe while I'm out getting McDowell."

Prentiss turned back to Tim as he started for the administration building.

"Better come along when I go after McDowell," he said. "I may need some help. Bring your friend with you."

"I will if I can find him," promised Tim. "He disappeared about half an hour ago and I haven't seen him since."

A commotion near the pilot's quarters drew his attention just then. Someone broke away and started running toward him. It was Ralph, staggering slightly, and holding a blood-stained handkerchief to his head.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Mad Pursuit

Something was radically wrong and Tim, forgetting for the moment the drama soon to be enacted in the sky, ran toward Ralph. He caught his friend in his arms as he stumbled. Blood was flowing freely from a long gash on the right side of Ralph's head.

Ralph was on the verge of unconsciousness but he made a heroic effort to speak.

"It's Tommy," he whispered. "McDowell's slashed his chute. If he ever steps over the side he's gone."

Tim's face whitened at Ralph's alarming words. Tommy's chute slashed! He glanced aloft. The planes were almost up to 2,000 feet. In a few more minutes they would be rushing headlong toward each other and Tommy would step over the side to hurl like a falling star to the ground. Tim's eyes closed to shut out the image which flashed across his mind.

Prentiss reached his side.

"What's happened?"

"I don't know exactly," said Tim, "but McDowell's slashed Tommy's chute with a knife. Take care of Ralph. I'm going up to stop Tommy."

"Take him into my office," directed Carl Hunter, who had arrived on the run and overheard Tim's words.

Prentiss gathered Ralph in his arms and stalked toward the administration building while Tim and Hunter ran down the ramp.

Tim scanned the field. It would be impossible to get the fast Jupiter which the *News* owned or the American Ace which he and Ralph operated out of their hangars. He turned toward the other planes on the field. It would take a fast ship to get up there in time to stop the crash of the two planes. His eyes rested on McDowell's own monoplane. It was trim and fast and the 300 horsepower motor was capable of pulling it almost vertically skyward.

"I'll take McDowell's plane," he told Hunter. The field manager gave him a hand and between them they whipped the ship around and headed it toward the open field.

Tim climbed inside, stumbled over the smashed boards which had hidden the secret compartment, and sat down in the pilot's seat. The controls were slightly different from the ships he had been accustomed to flying but he knew he could handle the plane without trouble. He glanced at the gas gauge. The tank was a quarter full.

One of the High Flyers ran toward him, protesting on the use of the monoplane, but Hunter waved him back with a curt explanation. Tim turned on the starter and the motor, still warm, caught on the first turn.

He was about to give the ship the gun when Prentiss ran toward him, a rifle in hand. The narcotics inspector clambered into the cabin and slammed the door.

"Let's go," he shouted. Tim nodded and opened the throttle. The field had been cleared for the stunt and he sped out of the hanger and rocketed into the air. With the motor taking a full flow of gas, he shot the speedy monoplane into the air. They danced skyward in a crazy, climbing turn that saw the earth dropping away from them.

"How's Ralph?" Tim shouted.

"He'll be all right. Got a nasty bump on his head but there's a doctor patching him up now. He's weak from loss of blood more than anything else."

Tim, with the stick jammed back between his knees, was watching the drama of the circling planes. He was careful to keep behind McDowell as much as possible.

The old trainers had levelled off and were jockeying for the first dash toward each other. Tim's hands gripped the stick hard as he saw them start. Then he relaxed a little. Ace hadn't waggled his wings. There would be no crash this time.

The old ships soared past each other with little room to spare and Tim almost pulled his own ship higher by the sheer tension he was on.

Tommy was circling slowly for another dash toward Ace when Tim flashed past him waving frantically. In pantomime he went through the motions of jumping and then shook his head vigorously while Prentiss attempted to indicate to Tommy that his chute was damaged.

As he flashed by a second time Tim caught the look of alarm in Tommy's eyes and saw the other examining the chute pack. There was the sudden roar of another motor and McDowell, forgotten for the moment, shot down toward them.

"He's after us!" cried Prentiss.

Without looking Tim sent the monoplane into a tight roll and the wings of the old trainer almost brushed their landing gear as they flopped over. A bullet crashed through the bottom of the cabin.

"He's on to us," said Tim grimly, "but we'll keep him busy until Tommy can land that crate of his."

Tim whipped the monoplane out of the roll. Below him McDowell was hard after Larkin's plane. It was evident that he was out to destroy the other flyer if at all possible. He was going at Tommy head-on again. This time there seemed little doubt but what the ships would crash in spite of all that Tommy could do to escape the trap. McDowell's plane was too fast. He met every maneuver of Tommy's and played him one better.

For the moment he had forgotten Tim in his terrible concentration of destroying the flyer he felt sure had turned in the evidence which would lead to his arrest. If he had not forgotten Tim, he had sadly underrated the flying ability and nerve of the reporter.

With wind screaming past the struts and motor on full, Tim dove headlong toward McDowell. Some sixth sense must have warned his prey for McDowell threw a startled glance over his shoulder. Instantly he changed tactics and left Tommy to make a hurried landing with the old trainer while he

took up the new feud with his unforeseen foe.

Prentiss opened the windows on the right side of the cabin and steadied the rifle. There was a grim purpose written on the tensed lips. If he could line his sights on McDowell, the rifle would spit flame and death. Crouched on the floor of the cabin, finger crooked on the trigger, cheek resting on the gunstock, he waited for the chance he felt was sure to come.

Below them the startled thousands watched the deadly duel, craned their necks as the planes twisted and darted through the air, and at times seemed almost to crash before one of them flipped this way or that just in time to avert a catastrophe.

Tim and Prentiss had the advantage of a slightly faster plane but McDowell had a chute. If they crashed he would have a chance of escaping while the flying reporter and the narcotics inspector would be pinned in the falling wreckage of their ship.

McDowell was playing the game for his life. In spite of their danger Tim thrilled to the masterful flying which it required to escape the mad rushes of the other.

For half an hour the grim battle went on. Then it ceased as suddenly as it had started. McDowell, giving his plane a full gun, darted away southwest. He was making a break for safety. With a heavy bank of clouds rolling up in the west, night would drop its mantle early. There was just a chance that he might remain aloft until he could find shelter in the darkness. Tim saw through McDowell's strategy at once. Undoubtedly the other had a full tank of gas and since the old trainers usually had large tanks, sufficient to keep the ancient craft aloft until after nightfall. The flying reporter glanced again at the gauge on the instrument board of the monoplane. He didn't need to. He knew what the needle indicated without looking but perhaps there had been some mistake.

The gauge showed only an eighth of a tank of gas. Another half hour in the air; perhaps a little more. Then they would be forced down and McDowell would wing on alone.

Tom leaned back and shouted to the inspector.

"We've got only enough gas for another half hour. Want to land now, fill up the tank, and then try to overtake McDowell, or keep after him until our fuel gives out?"

"Something might happen to his ship before our gas gives out. We'll keep going as long as we can," Prentiss shouted back.

Tim nodded and set out in full pursuit. In three minutes he was on McDowell's tail and he throttled down. No use to push the motor any harder than necessary.

The minutes droned on. Tim checked their direction. It was obvious that McDowell was heading for the border. It was a long hop; impossible in one jump, and he wondered where the pilot ahead of him intended to refuel. He probably had some out-of-the-way airport where he could come down, replenish his supply of gas and oil, and get away without being reported.

Fifteen minutes went by the clock. The needle on the gas gauge dropped lower. Probably McDowell, up ahead, was chuckling for he certainly knew the amount of fuel in the monoplane he had left behind.

Prentiss tapped Tim on the shoulder.

"How much longer?"

"Not more than 15 minutes."

"Close in on him and I'll see if this rifle can't convince him that it's time to come down."

Tim's right hand jammed the throttle on full and the trim monoplane leaped ahead, overhauling the old trainer rapidly.

McDowell, hearing the deeper drone of the motor behind him, looked back at them. Tim banked to give Prentiss a clear shot and the federal agent pressed the trigger. Tim could hear the sharp spats of the gun as the bullets sped on their way. Holes appeared in the fuselage of McDowell's ship. Prentiss was shooting better. McDowell, pointing an automatic at them, emptied the magazine. His aim was wild and not a bullet struck the monoplane.

McDowell put the old biplane into a dive and Tim promptly followed. Twisting and turning, they resumed the battle they had waged over the Atkinson airport. Tim was flying rings around McDowell now and Prentiss pumped shot after shot toward the biplane but the air was rough and it was hard to gauge the distance accurately.

"Concentrate on his motor," Tim shouted. "We can't stay up more than five minutes more and you may be able to put his ship out of commission."

Prentiss filled the magazine of the rifle again and, firing steadily, directed his bullets toward the motor of the biplane. Tim could see the black splashes as the bullets struck the cowling. There was just a chance that he might be able to disable McDowell's motor.

The motor of their own ship coughed. Tim switched on the emergency tank and it barked steadily again. Their minutes in the air were numbered for he had no way of knowing whether the emergency tank was full or how much it held.

"I'm going to try to bring him down," Tim yelled at Prentiss.

"What are you going to do?"

"See if I can't run my wheels through his prop. Hang on."

"Won't that wreck your landing gear?"

"We'll have to take a chance on that. If it does we'll get down someway. Are you game?"

"Go ahead," said the inspector grimly. "I'll try it once. There may not be a second time."

"I'll get you down all in one piece," grinned Tim. Then he turned to the job at hand.

McDowell was just a little above them and about a thousand feet ahead. Gunning the motor hard, Tim climbed above their quarry and with the motor on full, dove headlong for the biplane. McDowell must have sensed what was in Tim's mind for he stood up in his cockpit and took deliberate aim with the automatic. Bullets plunked into the wing of the monoplane, but Tim kept on. Prentiss's rifle was silent for the moment for at that angle he was unable to fire.

Down they dropped like an eagle after its prey. McDowell dove back into the cockpit just as the monoplane crashed down on him, the wheels of the ship above almost raking his head. Tim steeled himself for the expected crash as the propeller of the biplane bit into the landing gear but it did not come. By some trick of magic which Tim would never know McDowell dropped the biplane down

almost ten feet at the last moment. Or perhaps fate had taken a hand and the ship had struck an air pocket. At any rate the monoplane sped on overhead and McDowell was safe again.

"What happened?" asked Prentiss.

Tim shook his head. "I don't know. Maybe the biplane hit rough air and dropped. I thought surely we had him that time."

The motor coughed, rapped out a few more revolutions, and then died.

"That's about all for us," said Tim bitterly.

"And there goes McDowell," said the inspector.

The flying reporter scanned the ground for a safe landing place. They were up a little better than 4,000 feet. To their right was a small town and a fair-sized pasture at one edge, flanked by a white highway. Tim nosed the monoplane down. As they glided toward the field he caught the sound of another airplane motor. He glanced up. Perhaps McDowell was coming back. But McDowell's ship was winging steadily along on the 1,200-mile hop to the border.

"Someone back of us," said Prentiss. There was no need to shout now and the inspector's voice sounded unnatural.

Tim glanced back. The ship was familiar. His heart leaped. It was the fast Jupiter owned by the *News*. Someone had managed to get it out of the hangar and was coming to help them.

The flying reporter opened the window on his left and waved wildly, pointing downward. The pilot of the other plane wagged his wings in understanding and dropped toward the pasture with Tim following him down.

"Looks like Tommy Larkin in the other plane," said the inspector.

"That's the *News*' ship and I don't care who's flying it," said Tim, "just as long as it's got a full tank of gas. McDowell is going to be in for a surprise when we shoot up in the Jupiter. That's an airplane."

The pasture proved surprisingly smooth and they rolled across the field. The pilot who had brought in the Jupiter had it swung around and had it ready for them when they tumbled from the cabin of the monoplane.

"Tommy!" cried the inspector. "Great work, boy!"

"I couldn't stay out of this shindig," grinned the flyer McDowell had planned to destroy.

"What a break," chuckled Tim. "Plenty of gas?"

"The tank's full to overflowing. That's some plane; fast and easy to handle."

"We'll have to leave you here, Tommy," said the inspector. "Maybe you can get gas in this town and fly back to Atkinson."

"I'll make out all right," grinned Tommy. "You fellows get after McDowell. Gosh, I'd like to see his face when you come barging down on him again."

"He's heading for the border," said Tim.

"Yeah. That old tub carried about a ton of fuel and he's got a field way over in western Kansas where he can land and refuel without trouble. He knows it so well he can even land at night but unless I miss my guess he won't be in the air by nightfall."

Tim climbed into the Jupiter and the inspector scrambled in after him. Tim checked the gauges, tank nearly full of gas, motor temp right, oil pressure up. He released the brakes, opened the throttle, and waved to Tommy as the plane shot down the field and rocketed away in pursuit of McDowell, whose plane now was only the tiniest of dots in the southwestern sky.

The Jupiter was fast and Tim cruised along at an easy, mile-consuming 150 miles an hour.

"We'll overtake McDowell in no time," he told the inspector, who was busy refilling the magazine of the rifle.

"I've only about twenty rounds of ammunition left," shouted Prentiss. "My shooting will have to improve."

The dot in the sky ahead grew in size and took on the shape of an airplane. Tim was flying high and there was little chance that McDowell would see them until they were on top of him.

The flying reporter's thoughts went back to Atkinson. He wondered about Ralph and the wound on his head, and there was no mercy in his heart as he guided the Jupiter on the now relentless chase after the fleeing McDowell.

The outline of the old biplane grew larger and larger as the fast-flying Jupiter cut down the distance. Tim had planned a new campaign of action. In the Jupiter, knowing every movement and capability of the ship, he felt confident that he could ride McDowell into the ground, out-manuever and out-speed him until the other would welcome the chance to fight it out below.

The Jupiter was flying a thousand feet above the old trainer when Tim dropped the nose down and opened the throttle for a power dive. As they swooped down, he saw McDowell look up, saw the surprise and alarm on the other's face. Then they were by with less than ten feet to spare between the ships. Tim climbed the Jupiter dizzily until he was back on McDowell's tail, riding it hard and close. The flyer ahead emptied another magazine at them and then threw his automatic away in disgust. He was out of ammunition. Now it was a case of plane against plane, pilot against pilot, and nerve pitted against nerve for Prentiss was unable to shoot now.

Closer and closer Tim drove the Jupiter. He was just above and behind the biplane, riding it down, relentlessly and with grim intent. McDowell twisted and turned, but always the cream and green biplane rode his tail. He dodged to the right and then to the left, looped, barrel-rolled, but it was all in vain. Tim guessed his every maneuver and went him one better.

"Country's getting rougher," cried Prentiss.

"Bad place for a forced landing," agreed Tim.

They were flying at a little under 3,000 feet and Tim was riding McDowell's plane down, foot by foot. It was a slow and nerve-wracking process but it seemed destined for success. Once in a while he would veer his ship enough to let Prentiss get in a shot, but none of them found their mark.

The air was getting rougher. Even the steady, easy-flying Jupiter was rocking and pitching and Tim could see that the old biplane ahead of them was bucking hard.

Prentiss turned around.

"Look at the biplane's wings," he cried.

Tim watched closely. The wings were flapping, threatening to break loose from the ship at any moment. The chase was nearly over. McDowell would be forced down. Tim glanced at the country below. It was rough and broken, almost impossible for a safe landing.

A startled cry from Prentiss drew his attention back to the biplane. The old ship was breaking up! McDowell had been pushing it too hard, the spins and rolls and loops had been more than the ancient spruce could stand. The right wing was giving way, the top section drooping down in the lower one.

CHAPTER FIVE

Death Rides the Air

McDowell was making a game fight, attempting to nurse the old craft over the rough country to the more level reaches ahead. Tim eased up on the throttle of the Jupiter, like the eagle giving its prey a moment's respite before the last swoop.

The left wing of the old trainer was wobbling uncertainly now. The end was near and still they were over the rough country.

Fascinated, Tim and Prentiss watched the drama ahead of them. The biplane was weaving from side to side, the right upper wing now almost touching the lower one. With a rending of linen and wood, the wing tore loose and floated away in the backwash of the propeller. Then the lower right wing collapsed under the strain and the ship started to fall away rapidly.

McDowell, game to the last, methodically prepared to go over the side.

"He'd better hurry," shouted Prentiss.

Tim glanced at the altimeter. They were still up 2,500 feet. There was plenty of time for McDowell to bail out and float down safely. The dope smuggler poised himself on the edge of the cockpit as the ship started to spin.

He waved at them in sheer bravado and then dived headlong from the plane. McDowell somersaulted once, then jerked the rip-cord. The chute pack unfolded and Tim and Prentiss saw the silken umbrella billow out. It caught the wind and unfolded. Then, before startled eyes, they saw the chute collapse and McDowell plummeted from their sight.

"Don't look!" Tim shouted at Prentiss. He closed his own eyes, but even then the image danced in his mind. In the single second in which the chute had opened he had seen the long slit in the silk. In some unexplained manner McDowell had knifed his own chute instead of Tommy Larkin's when he had plotted the death of Larkin at the Atkinson airport. It was a just vengeance but a merciless one.

Tim opened his eyes. Prentiss, white-faced and shaking, looked at him.

"Is there anything we can do?"

"Not a thing. We'll find out where the county seat is and notify the sheriff. That's about all that can be done."

Tim checked their position. The county seat was about fifteen miles back on their return to Atkinson. The afternoon shadows were lengthening when they dropped down on the tiny airport on the outskirts of Walford. Inspector Prentiss climbed stiffly from the plane.

"I'll find a phone," he said. "You might as well wait here."

Tim nodded and cut the motor. There were no attendants at the field and he was glad that there was plenty of fuel left in the Jupiter's tanks to take them back to Atkinson.

Half an hour later the inspector returned.

"I located the sheriff and explained what had happened," he said. "Everything will be taken care of. A party will leave at once to hunt for McDowell so we might as well go on back to Atkinson."

Tim pulled the Jupiter into the air just as the sun dipped behind the horizon. The earth below was shrouded in the half-light of early evening as they roared steadily along at 2,500 feet and some of the strain which had gripped him during the afternoon slipped from his weary shoulders.

The mantle shrouding the earth deepened. Stars came out overhead and he switched on the wing lights. A crimson patch on the eastern horizon indicated where the moon was struggling upward. Clusters of lights passed beneath them and occasionally the streaking lights of a car could be seen. It was restful up there away from the earthy smells.

An hour slipped by and the lights of Atkinson glowed ahead. The airport was outlined in the red, green and white lights that marked its boundaries and indicated to an incoming pilot the runways. Smoothly, easily, Tim dropped the Jupiter down and the swift biplane rolled up to the ramp near the administration building. Tim blinked in the glare of the bright electrics.

A familiar figure loomed out of the glare. It was Ralph, a bandage around his head, but able to move under his own power.

"Where's McDowell?" asked Ralph. "Did he get away?"

Tim looked at Prentiss. The inspector spoke slowly.

"No, he didn't get away," he said as Tommy Larkin joined the group. "His ship started breaking up and he went over the side in his chute. The chute didn't open."

"Didn't what?" asked Tommy incredulously.

"Someone had ripped it open with a knife."

A grim smile flickered around Tommy's lips.

"I guess I can explain that," he said. "McDowell and I use exactly the same type of chutes and our packs look so much alike we can hardly tell them apart. He ripped one of the chutes, folded it back, and then picked it up himself. Fate certainly took a hand in the events around here this afternoon."

"What happened to you?" Tim asked Ralph, who was leaning against the biplane.

"Plenty," grinned Ralph. "I caught McDowell in the pilot's room with a knife in his hand and the chute ripped. He was just ready to repack the umbrella. When he saw me he came at me with both hands going and I went down in a heap. He must have socked me with a wrench when I was down for I've got about a two inch gash on the right side of my head. The next thing I knew I heard planes buzzing around and woke up enough to come out and give the alarm."

"I guess we can write 'finis' to this smuggling case," said the inspector slowly. "I hadn't expected it would end in quite this fashion."

"What will the other members of the flying circus do?" asked Tim.

"Half of them have left the field already," said Tommy. "They're pretty much of a happy-go-lucky outfit. Some of them suspected that McDowell was smuggling but they wouldn't turn in information on

him. They'll catch on with some other circus."

"My head feels like someone was using a trip hammer on it," said Ralph. "I'm going home and to bed."

"Here comes a reporter from the *Advance*," interjected Tim. "He'll probably want to know all about the McDowell case," the last words were directed at the inspector.

Mogridge, police reporter for the *Advance*, nodded to Tim and Ralph.

"I'd like to get all the facts on this story," he said to Inspector Prentiss.

"Sorry," smiled the inspector, "but since the *News*' men played such an important part I'm afraid that the story will have to be exclusive with them."

"Then you haven't anything to say?"

"Not a word."

It was obvious from the set of the inspector's chin that no amount of argument or cajolery would change his mind. Mogridge shrugged and walked away.

"Thanks, Inspector," said Tim.

"It was the least I could do," replied the federal agent. "Without your assistance McDowell would undoubtedly have succeeded in his dash for the border."

Ralph took a cab for home while Tim superintended the return of the Jupiter to its hangar. Then, with the inspector and Tommy Larkin, he climbed into the *News*' car he had used that morning and started uptown.

"This is a long ways from the McDowell case," said Tim, "but I've got a pet mystery all my own." Briefly he told the inspector about "Mr. Seven."

"I'll be glad to have a look at him in the morning," said Inspector Prentiss. "I've a faculty for remembering names and faces. Perhaps I can help you out."

"Then I'll meet you here after breakfast," said Tim as the federal men left the car in front of the Ransom House.

"Right," agreed the inspector. "Say about eight-thirty. Good night."

"Good night," replied Tim as he eased in the clutch and headed the car for the garage behind the *News* building.

It was getting late, but tomorrow he would be on the trail of "Mr. Seven." In spite of the let-down after the strain of the afternoon, he went up to the editorial office, switched on the light over his desk, and wrote the story of McDowell.

It was a smashing action story, tense and alive to every bit of the great drama which had been played in the air. Page after page of copy rolled from Tim's typewriter as he spun his thread of verbs and adjectives, creating a living, pulsating picture with his words. He sat back exhausted when he had finished the last line and banged out the last period. He was too tired to read it over and he tossed the handful of sheets on the copy desk, turned out the light, and somehow got to his room where he tumbled into bed.

When Tim awoke the next morning the sun was streaming through the windows. He glanced at his wrist watch. Eight o'clock. Time for him to be at the office. He had overslept.

Seizing the phone he called the copy desk. Dan Watkins answered.

"Did you get my story?" he asked.

"I'll say we did. There'll be an extra on the street before nine o'clock. Great yarn."

"I overslept," explained Tim, "and I've got an appointment to meet Inspector Prentiss at the Ransom House in half an hour. If the office can stagger through another hour without me I'll have breakfast before I meet the inspector."

"After the yarn you turned in last night I guess you can take the day off if you want it," said Watkins.

Tim stopped at a restaurant for breakfast on his way to the hotel and reached the lobby of the Ransom House exactly at eight-thirty. Inspector Prentiss was equally prompt.

"Let's have a look at your mysterious 'Mr. Seven' and see if we can't strip a little of the mystery from him," he suggested.

Tim went up to the desk.

"Is 'Mr. Seven' in?" he inquired.

"Sorry, he left last night," replied the clerk. Tim's hopes crashed.

"Didn't he leave a forwarding address?"

"No, he checked out of his room but he left his baggage with the porter."

"Then he's coming back soon?"

"I presume so."

Tim went to the check room to question the porter. The information gained there was a little more helpful.

"Yes sir, there's 'Mr. Seven's' bags over there," said the porter. "He said he'd be gone several days and for me to keep a close watch on them. I guess they must be pretty important 'cause he gave me two dollars in advance for watching them."

"Didn't you hear him say where he was going?" pressed Tim.

"He didn't say a thing except ask where there was a rent-a-car garage?"

"What did you tell him?"

"I gave him the name of several. Kelleys and Brackens."

There was no further information to be gained from the porter and Tim rejoined the inspector, to whom he recounted the slight information he had gleaned.

"'Mr. Seven' appears to be an interesting character. I'd like to stay here and help you run him down, but I've another case in the southern part of the state that is needing immediate attention. Sorry I can't be of any real help."

Tim watched the inspector depart with a sinking heart. He had counted more than he cared to admit upon the ability of the federal officer to strip away the secrecy which had surrounded "Mr. Seven" since his arrival in Atkinson.

But tracing down "Mr. Seven" wasn't a newspaper assignment and Tim turned his steps toward the

office where Ralph eagerly awaited news of the visit to the Ransom House.

"What's the good word?" he asked.

Tim shook his head glumly.

"There isn't any. 'Mr. Seven' checked out last night but left his baggage at the hotel."

"Then he's coming back?"

"Undoubtedly, but that is another question, and what's more, he may be doing something right now that is big news."

"Why don't you go to Carson and get a couple of days off. That would give you a real chance to run down this story."

"The managing editor would probably laugh at my hunch. Nope, I'll keep my eye on the story and try to grab on to 'Mr. Seven' when he comes back to the hotel."

Ralph had an assignment in an outlying district of the city and he left the office at once while Tim sat down to write a column of aviation news.

The chief copyreader left his desk and joined Tim.

"I overheard what you were telling Ralph," he said. "Too bad that 'Mr. Seven' got away before Inspector Prentiss could see him."

"Just my luck," muttered Tim.

"What are you going to do next?" asked Dan.

"Keep a close check at the hotel and also find out where 'Mr. Seven' rented a car. It's from one of two places and I may be able to learn where he has gone."

CHAPTER SIX

Another Visitor

The battery of presses in the basement awoke with a roar and newsboys scurried on to the street, their shrill cries of "Extra! Extra!" echoing between the lanes of buildings.

A copy boy came up from the press room with an armful of papers so fresh the ink was soft and smeary on the page. He handed one to the chief copyreader and another to Tim, then proceeded down the room leaving them at the various desks where they were eagerly scanned by reporters and copyreaders.

"You turned in a great story on the pursuit and death of McDowell," said the copyreader.

"Thanks, Dan," smiled Tim. "Coming from you, those words mean something."

The managing editor stuck his head out of his office and, seeing Tim, beckoned to him. In one hand he held a copy of the extra.

"Fine work," Carson told the flying reporter, "but I guess we have gotten in the habit of expecting good stories from you."

"The answer to that is easy," grinned Tim. "I like reporting and if you really like a thing I believe you can do it well."

"Any flying assignments for you today?"

"Not so far."

"I'm glad of that. After your gruelling flight of yesterday it will do you good to be out of the air for at least a day."

Tim returned to his desk and sat down to the routine task of gleaning enough aviation news to make an interesting column. He always tried to work a day in advance on the column. It was well after mid-forenoon when he had completed the column and turned it in at the copydesk.

The city editor, Ed Campbell, a comparative newcomer on the staff, looked up from his assignment book.

"I've just received a wire that June O'Malley, new star of the Hollywood Follies, is coming through on the noon plane eastbound. Can you hop down to the field for an interview?"

"Right away," promised Tim.

"Better take a cameraman."

Tim stopped at the photo department and a photographer was assigned to accompany him.

Interviewing the latest sensation of the film capital was little more than routine and Tim found that the girl had little that she could or would say. The photographer got several snaps and they returned uptown where Tim managed, by hard work, to grind out half a column on the visit of June O'Malley to the airport.

"This is poor stuff and I'm making no apologies," he said as he laid the sheet and a half of copy on the copydesk. "She didn't have anything to say and I don't believe she could have said it if she had."

"They're usually pretty poor copy," nodded Dan, "but you should kick on a few assignments like this after your thrilling flight of yesterday."

"I guess you're right at that," nodded Tim.

"I know what's the matter," said Dan. "You can't get thoughts of 'Mr. Seven' out of your head."

"You'd better have a sign painted and start in the mind reading business," grinned Tim.

"It didn't take a mind reader to figure that one out." Dan dialed the automatic telephone. "Ransom House? This is the *News*. Has 'Mr. Seven' returned?"

"Not back yet," said Dan as he hung up the receiver. "Let's go out to lunch?"

Tim agreed and they had their noonday meal at a nearby restaurant.

"How far are the garages where 'Mr. Seven' might have rented a car?" asked Dan.

"Only three or four blocks. The porter at the Ransom House recommended both Kelleys and Brackens."

They paid their checks and Tim turned toward the *News*, but Dan stopped him.

"Things are light today. We'll take a few extra minutes and see what we can learn at the garages."

Kelleys, the first rent-a-car agency visited, could supply no information but at Brackens they found their visit more fruitful.

The man in charge of the office consulted his records and informed them that on the Saturday night previous a "Mr. G. Seven" had rented one of their best cars, putting up a cash deposit of \$100 since he intended to take the car outside the city limits.

Tim described "Mr. Seven" in detail.

"That's the man," said the garage employe firmly. "There's no mistake about it; he's got one of our cars. Is he in some kind of trouble?"

"Not as far as we know," replied Tim. "Did you hear him say where he was going?"

"No, but I saw him looking at the state map on the wall over there. He was a little different from the average run of our customers and I kept an eye on him. He was looking at the roads leading into the Cedar river country."

"But there aren't any really good roads in that part of the state," said Tim.

"That's one reason why I noticed him looking at that section of the map. He made a detailed study of it, but never asked a question of me nor any of the boys who serviced the car for him."

There was no further information to be gained at the garage and Tim and the chief copyreader returned to the *News* office.

"Looks like you're on the trail of a real story," commented Dan. "What's going to be the next angle of attack?"

"The files. I'm going to start with this month and go back into them day by day. Somewhere I'm sure there will be a picture that will give me the identity of 'Mr. Seven.'"

The afternoon passed in routine tasks but when the final edition rolled from the press Tim went over to the room which housed the paper's library and ordered out the files for the last year. When they were available he carried the large, sturdily bound books to his desk where he placed them one on top of another. Ralph's desk was not in use and he opened the last volume of the file and placed it there. Drawing up a chair he started the slow task of scrutinizing every picture which had appeared in the *News* for the last year.

The job was doubly difficult since one of the boasts of the *News* was that it carried an interesting picture on every page. Members of the staff left the office, one by one, until Tim alone remained, bent over the file and scanning the pages as he riffled through them.

Daylight faded and he snapped on the light over Ralph's desk. Under the glow of the electric he continued his task until his shoulders ached from the continued strain of bending over. When he finally straightened up it was 7:30 o'clock and the telephone was buzzing.

"Atkinson *News*," said Tim.

"Hello, Tim," said Carl Hunter. "There's a big amphibian coming in within the next half hour. Thought you might want a story. We don't get many ships like that here."

"Who's on board?"

"Haven't got anything on that yet. Will you be down?"

"Right away," promised Tim. He closed the file, snapped off the light and hurried around to the garage in the rear where he signed an order for one of the *News*' cars.

Hunter was waiting for him at the airport. In one hand he held one of the pink slips on which the radiograms were copied.

"Just got a report on the ownership of the amphib," said the field manager. "It belongs to some fellow by the name of Sladek in New York City."

"Is it Jack Sladek?" asked Tim.

"Can't say. The message asking for refueling here is just signed Sladek. You know someone by that name?"

"No, but I've read a lot about a Jack Sladek of New York. He's something of an international figure; been mixed up in a lot of different things, South American revolutions, Arctic explorations, underwater treasure hunts and rum running when that business was profitable. I've seen feature stories in eastern papers that credit Sladek with having made a fortune in deals that are just inside the law."

"You'll have a chance to see him first hand," grinned Hunter, "for the ship was over Spencer half an hour ago. It should be here in another fifteen minutes."

"That's just time enough for me to get a lunch. I got interested in a little work at the office and forgot to go out and get supper." Tim ordered a hot lunch and while he ate scanned the last edition of the *Advance*, the rival newspaper. He chuckled once or twice as he read the story of the pursuit of McDowell. The *Advance* had only the sketchiest of details and all of the rest of the story was obviously the product of the imagination of Mogridge, the reporter who had been assigned to the story. It could not compare with the brilliant accurately written story which Tim had woven for the *News* and which had been featured on the front page through all the editions that day. As Tim finished his lunch the drone of twin motors sounded high overhead. The amphibian was coming in. He stepped out of the lunchroom. The riding lights of the plane were visible as it circled to come down into the wind. Tim walked over and stood beside Hunter as the big ship dropped down and rolled to a stop on the ramp.

The amphibian was a beauty, trimmed in green and silver, and with a large cabin.

"Twin-engines, 575 horsepower each," said Hunter. "That's a high-speed ship."

"Stream-lined down to get every ounce of speed out of it, too," said Tim. "It cost plenty of shekels to build that flying boat."

Inside the commodious cabin men were preparing to get out through the hatch at the rear. The first to appear was short, squat, with a nose that looked like a substantial fist had pushed it back against his face.

"Nice looking customer to meet on a dark night," said Hunter.

Tim recognized the second man to appear as Sladek. He looked to be about 40 with a strong, hard face and eyes set so far back that they had a peculiar penetrating intentness and gave you the idea that Sladek was trying to ferret out your innermost secrets. The owner of the amphib was followed by a third man, who appeared to be a second-rate fighter, while the pilot was the last to emerge.

Hunter stepped forward and spoke to the former rum runner.

"We'll have your ship refueled and ready to go in fifteen minutes."

"Thanks. I've got to look at some maps. We'll be here half an hour at least; perhaps longer."

Tim remained in the background. He'd pick up as much as he could from the conversation of the visitors before stepping in and asking for a story. It was evident that the two with Sladek and the pilot were bodyguards, for they kept close to their employer and scanned everyone with suspicious eyes.

Sladek went into the administration building and scanned the large scale map of the state which hung on one wall. Tim, loitering behind, started involuntarily as he saw the section of the state which interested Sladek. It was the Cedar river country—the same section into which his mysterious "Mr. Seven" had gone.

CHAPTER SEVEN

On the Trail of "Mr. Seven"

The field manager, who had been supervising the refueling of the amphibian, came into the office and Sladek turned toward him.

"What do you know about the Cedar river country?" he asked.

"It's bad business for flyers," replied Hunter. "The entire valley is wooded, with many high bluffs, and if your motor goes bad there isn't a safe place to set down. All you can do is aim at some tree top and hope for the best."

"That's one reason I flew out here in an amphib. There shouldn't be much trouble landing on the river."

"Not unless you smack down and ram a sand bar or have a snag come up and smash in the bottom of your ship."

"That's encouraging. Doesn't look like we could go much further tonight. You'd better roll my ship into one of the hangars. We'll want to get an early start in the morning."

"If there's some particular place you want to know about in the valley, Tim Murphy may be able to help you," suggested Hunter.

"Who's Tim Murphy?" demanded Sladek.

"He's the flying reporter for the *Atkinson News*. He's flown all over that country and with the exception of a small field near the village of Auburn there isn't another place to land safely and then a big ship like yours couldn't make it."

"You can leave reporters out of this," snapped Sladek. "I guess I'll be able to get along all right."

Tim, standing behind him, grinned. He was certain that "Mr. Seven" and Jack Sladek were bound for the valley of the Cedar on the same mission. Neither one wanted publicity.

Sladek, his two bodyguards and his pilot, left the airport in a taxicab. After the amphib had been rolled into a hangar and berthed for the night, Hunter turned to Tim.

"What do you make of him?" he asked.

"He's after something big," said the flying reporter, "or he wouldn't have flown out here. Another thing, he doesn't want any publicity on his arrival. All of which makes me sure that there is a big story over in the valley of the Cedar."

"That means you'll be heading that way tomorrow morning."

"Maybe before that."

"Trying to land there in the dark would be suicide."

"I don't think a plane will do a whole lot of good on a story like this. I've a hunch that a car and a good pair of legs may be best."

It was eight-thirty when Tim returned to the office to plunge again into the files in quest of the identity of "Mr. Seven." A scrub woman at the other end of the office looked at him curiously, then went about her work. There was no explaining the action of these newspaper men who came and went at all hours of the night.

The day by day record of events slipped through Tim's fingers as he went through the file with new enthusiasm. Six months, then nine months and finally a year of action passed. A clock outside boomed eleven but still there was no clue to "Mr. Seven." Tim went to the library for a new supply of files and spread them out on his own desk and Ralph's. His eyes were getting heavy but he kept at the task.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs and he looked up to see the managing editor appear in the doorway.

"What's up, Tim?" asked Carson.

"Just trailing a story," replied the flying reporter, "and right now it looks like a mighty slim trail with the scent growing fainter every minute."

"Let's hear about it."

Tim recounted briefly the arrival of "Mr. Seven" and how he had aroused the interest of the flying reporter. Then he told of the arrival of Jack Sladek and linked the two together.

"They're after something in the Cedar river valley and if I could only get the key to the identity of 'Mr. Seven' I might know what to aim at."

The possibilities of the story caught the managing editor's vivid imagination.

"I'll give you a hand," he said, "you scan the pages on the right; I'll take the ones on the left. You've given me enough description so I ought to be able to recognize your man."

Editor and reporter sat down and took up the task together. Another half hour slipped by when Tim stopped suddenly. He looked at the page before him with almost unbelieving eyes. There, staring at him from the middle of a large feature, was the likeness of "Mr. Seven."

"Have you found him?" asked Carson.

"Yes," said Tim, but the word was automatic. He was reading the caption over the picture and the words, "Grenville Ford, Adventurer and Globe Trotter," burned their way into his mind. This then, was "Mr. G. Seven."

"Why that's Ford, the globe trotter. He was with Byrd at the South Pole and with Adamson when he made his round the world flight two years ago."

"I'm positive that the man I know as 'Mr. Seven' is Ford," said Tim. "The likeness is unmistakable and you must remember that I have seen 'Mr. Seven' at close range a number of times."

"Has anyone else seen him?"

"Both Dan Watkins and Ralph," said Tim.

"Then get them on the phone and have them come to the office right away."

Ralph, roused from a sound sleep, promised to come at once as did the head of the copydesk. Tim heard an exclamation from the managing editor as he replaced the receiver on its hook.

"I've found the key to the presence of both Ford and Sladek in the middle west," he said. "Listen to

this:

“NEW YORK CITY—(Special to the *Atkinson News*)—Adventure is again calling Grenville Ford, world famous adventurer and globe trotter. This time it is the sunken millions in the stone box of the tramp steamer, *Southern Queen*, which went down in the Caribbean in the fall of 1923. The exact location of the sinking of the *Southern Queen* has never been known but Ford is believed to have learned the whereabouts of the wreckage and to be making plans for the salvage of the sunken treasure.”

“But just how does that link up with his visit to Atkinson under an assumed name and the arrival tonight of Jack Sladek with a couple of bodyguards?” asked Tim.

“Wait until I’m through. Then you’ll feel the same way I do,” insisted the managing editor. He continued reading from the story in the files:

“When the revolution headed by Manuel Crespes in Guato failed, Crespes and his fellow adventurers looted the rich mines there and fled aboard the *Southern Queen*. Estimates at the amount of gold taken by the fleeing rebels have varied from \$500,000 to more than \$5,000,000 but it is safe to say that sufficient gold was taken to make an attempt at its recovery highly worthwhile.

“The *Southern Queen* left Martee, the main port of Guato, apparently in good condition but the vessel never reached port. Exactly what happened has never been known. Her disappearance has been one of the mysteries of the seven seas. Various theories have been advanced. One of the most persistent was that the leaders of the futile revolution in Guato killed all members of the crew when they neared a safe coast, scuttled the ship, took the treasure and escaped in small boats. Another is that a storm which raged in the Caribbean shortly after the *Southern Queen* left Martee caught the little tramp steamer in its center and sent it whirling to the bottom with the loss of everyone on board. Several expeditions have been formed to hunt for the treasure but none of them have been successful and so far no actual trace of the *Southern Queen* has been found.

“*News* that Ford is planning to search for the treasure brings the story into the forefront again for he is known as a soldier of fortune of the higher type. While Ford refuses to divulge his plans in any detail, friends believe that he has learned the whereabouts of one of the survivors of the *Southern Queen*”

The story went on to recount other adventures in which Ford had played a prominent part but added nothing more in the way of information about the hunt for the treasure of the *Southern Queen*.

“I’m still trying to guess what brought him out here,” said Tim.

“It’s as plain as though written on the wall,” replied the managing editor. “This story was printed more than a year ago, yet Ford hasn’t started his expedition. Money hasn’t held him up for he has plenty to finance any such trip. What did? Something must have happened to his source of information. Either it vanished or he has had to do far more work in ferreting out the facts than he expected. In either case I’m betting that Ford came here under an assumed name and went into the Cedar river valley for the one and only purpose of learning something which is vital to the success of his treasure hunt.”

“If he is seeking information in connection with the treasure of the *Southern Queen* that would explain his use of an assumed name and his evasion of reporters,” agreed Tim. “It would also account for the presence of Sladek, who tries to vote himself into anything that looks like easy money.”

“In other words both Ford and Sladek are after the sunken treasure in the *Southern Queen* and there’s some information over in the valley of the Cedar that both are after,” said Carson.

“All of which may mean a good story for the *News*” smiled Tim.

“When can you start for the valley?”

“Right away.”

“Can you go by plane?”

“Not tonight. I’ll drive down. Ralph can bring the plane in tomorrow and land near Auburn. I’m not sure a plane will be much use except for a fast trip home with the story. I’ll probably have to take a boat if I want to get around much in that country.”

“Got any cash?”

“Less than \$10.”

Carson dug into his own pocket. “Here’s \$20. I’ll have Ralph bring you expense money when he flies over.”

In their eager discussion of the possibilities of the story they had almost forgotten the telephone calls to Ralph and Dan Watkins and Tim was about to depart for the Cedar river valley when they burst into the office.

“What’s the matter?” asked Watkins. “Something big break?”

“Not yet, but soon,” grinned Tim. “We think we’ve learned the identity of ‘Mr. Seven.’ Both you and Ralph have seen him. Take a good look at that picture over there and tell us what you think.”

The newcomers scanned the printed likeness of Grenville Ford with critical eyes.

“That’s ‘Mr. Seven’ without a doubt,” said the chief copyreader and Ralph added his agreement.

“Then you’d better start for the valley at once,” said Carson.

“You might tell us a little about it,” suggested the veteran head of the copy desk.

“You’ll hear full details when the story breaks,” cried Tim as he headed for the stairs.

He took the best of the cars which the *News* owned for the trip, a powerful coupe capable of high speed and standing lots of abuse on the rough roads of the Cedar valley.

He swung in front of the *News* building, just as the others came down from the editorial office.

“I’ll take you home,” he called.

"I've got my car," replied the managing editor.

"The short walk will do me good," added Watkins, but Ralph decided to ride.

"Carson told us the whole story and says I'm to fly over in the morning and land near Auburn," he said. "Will you be there?"

"That's hard to say, but if I'm not you wait for me even if you have to stay there a couple of days."

"Sounds like a vacation trip."

"It may be anything but that." Then, thinking of the big amphibian and Jack Sladek and his bodyguards, he added: "The amphibian Sladek came in is in the hangar next to the one we use. If I leave you at the field, do you suppose you could fix it so they'd be delayed several hours getting their motor started in the morning?"

"It's as good as done," said Ralph. "With this flight on tomorrow I'll have an excuse to visit the field."

Tim left Ralph at the airport and sped on alone toward the valley of the mighty Cedar.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Sudden Attack

For the first fifty miles of the trip the roads were hard-surfaced and Tim sped along at a fast pace, the long, powerful coupe eating up the miles. But after that it was harder going. The roads were poorly marked and badly rutted. Tim was forced to drive well under thirty miles an hour and as he neared the valley the country grew more rugged, the road turning and twisting, climbing laboriously up one hill and then skidding down another.

He lost almost half an hour when he ran into a local shower and had to get out and put on the chains. Once or twice the big coupe skidded badly but he managed to hold it on to the road. At dawn he was deep into the valley of the Cedar, the narrow road was dry again, and he took off the chains.

There was no bridge across the Cedar at Auburn and Tim pulled the coupe up on the left bank of the river and waited for the arrival of the ramshackle ferry.

It was seven o'clock before the old barge, powered by an automobile engine, paddled its way across the broad stream and nosed up to the landing stage.

"How much to go across?" asked Tim.

"Dollar for a car that size," replied the riverman.

Tim handed over the fee and drove the coupe aboard. The engine of the ferry sputtered and then settled down to its task as the paddles flashed in the morning sunlight.

"Business been pretty good?" Tim asked.

"Only fair. Usually don't get anyone on the morning trip but yesterday I had a car almost as large as yours."

Here was what Tim had been fishing for. He was on the right trail and a few more questions assured him that Grenville Ford had driven directly to Auburn after leaving Atkinson.

When the ferry docked on the Auburn side, Tim went to the general store. He was known there for, two years before, he had helped save the village, marooned by a flood, by bringing food and needed medicine. At the store he learned that Ford had stored his car in the village, rented a boat with an outboard motor, laid in a supply of food and a tent, and started down river the day before.

"Have any idea where he was going?" asked Tim.

"He didn't seem to want to say much about himself," said the storekeeper. "Appeared to be one of those close-mouthed fellows."

Tim went across the street to the village's one hotel and there obtained an excellent breakfast. Greatly refreshed, he went down to the river bank to make more inquiries. In front of one shanty was the sign, "BOATS FOR RENT," and to this place Tim went at once.

The owner was a white-haired riverman and when Tim introduced himself, he found the boatman willing to talk.

"I remember the fellow well," said the riverman, "but he didn't say where he was going. Just asked to rent a boat for about a week and he left a cash deposit, which is all I require, seemed to know what he wanted for he picked out a good boat and started down river at once."

There was little to be learned in that information and Tim tried another tack.

"Any strangers moved into the valley in the last year or two?" he asked.

The old man shook his head. "All the movin' that's done is the other way. Keeps up much longer and there won't be anybody in the valley and no Indians to give it back to."

"I just though there might have been some new people came in—maybe a sailor or two."

"Nothin' to sail around here except the clammers and they don't sail. Only man around here that's ever seen big water is Crazy John Boggs."

"Who's Crazy John?"

"He came in here about nine or ten years ago and went down river to an island where he does a little clammin' and pearl huntin'. He's always talking about revolutions and sunken treasure and such as that. He's as crazy as they make them."

Such talk might sound crazy to the people of the valley but to Tim it was another link in his story.

"How far down river is it to Crazy John's?" asked Tim.

"About thirty miles and bad water all the way. He's way off the main channel and he don't like company. Keeps a couple of regular man-eating dogs. Some folks say he's got mines planted all around the island so he can blow up anyone he doesn't want around. No one from here's ever been on the place."

"Here's one that's going," said Tim. "Fix me out with a boat and an outboard. I'll be back as soon as I can get some grub at the store."

Tim felt jubilant as he walked up from the river bank. Ford, or "Mr. Seven," was only twenty-four hours ahead of him.

The sound of an airplane motor drummed over the village and Tim looked up to see the Jupiter swinging around to land in the only field that could be used. It was a mile outside the village and he knew he would have plenty of time to secure his food and a couple of blankets before Ralph arrived.

"Fix me up with enough food for about four days on the river," Tim told the storekeeper, "and I'll want a couple of good, warm blankets. I expect the nights in the valley are a little chilly."

"They're all of that," agreed the storekeeper. When the food and blankets were ready, Tim paid the bill and left the store. At the far end of the street Ralph was hurrying in to town and Tim waited for him.

"Starting out as a peddler?" asked the newcomer.

"Just getting ready to start down river. Come on and help me stow this stuff away."

The riverman had a sixteen foot flat-bottomed boat ready for Tim. A light outboard had been fastened to the stern and an extra can of gasoline had been placed in the boat.

"What's the idea of the river trip?" Ralph wanted to know. Tim related what he had learned in the village and Ralph nodded his agreement to the plans.

"You stay here and keep the Jupiter ready to fly any minute," said Tim. "When I get back I'll want to start for Atkinson as soon as possible."

"Everything will be ready. Here's the extra expense money Carson sent for you." Ralph handed out \$50 and Tim paid the deposit necessary for the boat.

"There may be some fellows in here a little later in another airplane," he told the riverman. "They're apt to inquire about Crazy John. Do you suppose you could forget all about him?"

"After what you did for us when we had the flood I could forget a whole lot," smiled the owner of the boats.

"Sladek and his men won't be here for a couple more hours," chuckled Ralph. "What I didn't do to their motors last night doesn't amount to much. I had a hard time to keep from laughing this morning. Poor old Carl at the airport was the goat. They accused him of failing to keep a proper watch over their plane. We'll have to square it with him some way."

Tim obtained detailed instructions from the boatman on the way to Crazy John's island.

"Don't try to sneak up," was the riverman's final word of caution, "or he'll get you sure. Just keep off shore in plain sight and do some lusty hollerin'."

Tim thanked him for the final words of advice, said goodbye to Ralph and started to shove off when his friend stopped him.

"Got a gun?" he asked.

Tim shook his head. "I won't need one. I don't think Crazy John is as bad as he's pictured and I'm sure I won't have any trouble with Ford."

"But there's Sladek and his bodyguards. If you run into them, you might get in a jam. Better take this."

Ralph handed Tim a heavy, snub-nosed automatic.

"It's loaded and here's two extra clips. Take care of yourself."

"See you in a day or two," said Tim as he shoved away from the landing stage. Turning on the ignition he gave the starter rope on the outboard a jerk. The motor responded with a steady putt-putt and Tim started the journey down stream to the island abode of Crazy John.

Ralph watched the boat until it was lost from view behind a curve in the broad river. Then he turned and went back to the village, had breakfast, obtained gasoline, and walked back to the Jupiter where he replenished the fuel and sat down in the shade. He was going to have lots of nothing to do until Tim returned.

On the Cedar, Tim's small craft surged steadily down-river. There was no regular navigation on the stream and the channel swung from one side to another.

Black snags stuck their dangerous heads above the surface of the water and occasionally a broad sand bar ran almost across the stream. Finding the channel was no easy task and Tim realized that it might be at least two days under the best of circumstances before he returned to the village.

The Cedar turned and twisted, first on one side of the heavily wooded valley and then on another. Bayous opened off on long, quiet stretches of back water and once in a while he could see the mouth of some tributary sneaking in around a bluff.

There was no sign of human habitation and he felt immensely lonely. He might have been the first white man down the stream and he would not have been surprised to have rounded a curve and sighted an Indian village on the next strip of sand.

The day was warm and if his mission had not been so urgent, he would have fully enjoyed the trip. But there was a tension that gripped him and drove him on at full speed. He wanted to be at Crazy John's well before sundown.

At noon Tim estimated that he was two-thirds of the way to his destination. Slowing down the motor, he dug into his provisions and managed a snack of lunch. He drank deeply from a jug of cool water the riverman had placed in the boat and felt greatly refreshed. The strain of a night without sleep and the hard drive from Atkinson was beginning to tell on him.

Tim wondered when the amphibian would soar overhead. Ralph certainly had done an excellent job in putting the big craft out of commission.

Another hour slipped by. He was nearing the bayou where he would turn away from the main river and seek out the island of Crazy John. The boatman had told him to look for an island with a monster cottonwood, split by a bolt of lightning. When he came to that island he was to take the bayou to the right and continue taking every possible turn to the right. Crazy John's island was a third of a mile from the main stream. Tim remembered the warning to shout lustily at intervals after he left the main channel.

His sturdy little craft swung around a broad curve, dodged the end of a projecting sand bar, slid between two snags, and straightened out down stream again. Tim's heart leaped.

A half mile down river, standing on an island in the center of the stream, was a giant cottonwood, its top split asunder by lightning. The huge tree towered above everything else in the valley. There was no mistaking it and Tim looked for a bayou to the right of the island.

From behind him and sounding above the steady throbbing of the outboard came the thrumming of airplane engines. Tim glanced back. The amphibian, flying fast and low, was coming down stream.

Tim wondered if the pilot of the big ship would try to land on the river. The Cedar was wide enough but the danger of snags was a very real one. A sunken log could rip out the bottom of the plane and pull the entire craft to the bottom of the river.

Fascinated by the beauty of the big amphibian, Tim watched it approach. The roar of the motors filled the valley with their noise. The craft was less than a hundred feet above the river and coming directly toward Tim.

Looking up, the reporter could see a man leaning from a window on the right side of the cabin. There was something black in his hand. Splashes of water appeared beside the boat. The seat beside Tim splintered under the impact of a bullet. Then the amphibian was roaring down stream.

Tim was cold with anger. The attack on him had been wanton. There was only one explanation. They had taken him for Grenville Ford. The sooner he could get away from the open reaches of the river the safer.

He jammed the throttle of the outboard on full and his boat leaped ahead. Risking a sand bar, Tim cut the corners close and before the amphibian could swing back upstream he was safely hidden under the shelter of heavy foliage from the bank.

CHAPTER NINE

In the Valley

From his temporary place of refuge Tim watched the amphibian circle over the valley. They were hunting for his hiding place and he pulled his boat in closer to shore where the dense foliage would effectually screen him from the eyes of the observers above.

For fifteen minutes the big plane soared overhead. Then as quickly as it had come it vanished upstream and Tim guessed that it was going to Auburn to learn exact directions for reaching the island of Crazy John.

Once sure that he was safe from the amphibian for the time being, Tim started his engine and chugged away from his refuge. The water of the bayou into which he turned was quiet, but there was the hidden menace of snags and Tim was compelled to move forward slowly.

Another bayou opened off the first and then another. At each one Tim directed his boat toward the right and each time he stood up and shouted lustily. There was no response.

The water was shallow now; not more than two feet deep. Rank water grasses waved above the surface but through them there was a definite watercourse and Tim followed this, stopping from time to time to repeat his shouts.

Nosing through a thick clump of the water grass, he came into a stretch of open water at the far end of which was a ramshackle dock.

Tim shut off his outboard, lifted the motor into his boat, and set his oars into their sockets. With steady strokes he pulled toward the island. A hundred yards from the dock he let his oars drag, turned toward the island, cupped his hands, and shouted mightily.

"Hello, there on the island," he cried. "Hello! hello!"

But the only response was the mocking echoes. Tim waited a full minute; then proceeded slowly toward the dock. Once more he rested on the oars and called. This time the baying of dogs answered and two huge beasts came galloping down to the water's edge. Teeth bared, they waited for him to come ashore.

Tim had no intention of providing a meal for the dogs, and he kept a safe distance from shore. For five minutes the dogs snapped and snarled at him. Then they were silent and two men appeared from the tangle of brush.

Grenville Ford was in the lead with an older man, greatly stooped, behind him.

"What do you want?" called Ford.

"I'm Tim Murphy of the *Atkinson News*. Let me come ashore."

"Nobody lands here, mate," boomed the man behind Ford, and Tim was surprised at the vigor of the tone. Crazy John, from his voice, was anything but a weakling despite the stoop in his shoulders.

"What was all the shooting a few minutes ago?" asked Ford cautiously.

"Fellow by the name of Jack Sladek who landed at Atkinson last night was flying over the river in an amphibian," replied Tim. "He took a few shots at me and I've an idea he thought he was shooting at you."

"He probably did," agreed Ford. "Well, since you've come this far you might as well come ashore. I see you discovered that 'Mr. Seven' was just an assumed name."

"I didn't find out until last night and then with the coming of Sladek, things commenced to click. You know what I'm after."

Ford nodded. "You want a story about my plans to hunt for the treasure in the *Southern Queen*?"

"Right. The fact that both you and Sladek are here in this valley is enough to make a rattling good story. I'd rather have facts but if I can't get them I'll have to do a little guess work and I've a hunch I can come pretty close at that. Crazy John came to the valley nine or ten years ago and the Southern Queen disappeared eleven years ago."

"And you think Crazy John knows where the Queen sunk and that both Sladek and myself are after the information?"

"Right again."

Ford laughed. "I'll confess I admire your nerve. Of course you knew the reputation Crazy John has for shooting anyone who prowls around his island."

"I knew that," grinned Tim, "but I hadn't figured on being shot at from an airplane. That was a little uncomfortable."

"Pull your boat in," said Ford. Then, turning to the former sailor, he added. "It's all right, John. This young man is a friend of mine. We may need his help before the night is over."

Tim made his boat fast at the dock and followed Ford and Crazy John up a twisting path. The dogs, mongrel hounds, trailed behind them. On a slight elevation in the middle of the island was Crazy John's house, a rambling structure of logs and timber that had been salvaged from the river. Vines softened the bareness of the house. Inside it was livable, the floor of hard beaten clay swept clean, with a huge fireplace taking one whole wall. On the opposite side opened two cubicles which were used for sleeping quarters.

Crazy John puffed slowly at his pipe. "They don't lose much time," he said as the sound of an airplane came faintly over the bayou.

"Sladek's a fast worker," conceded Ford. "I hardly believed he would be able to follow me here. If he finds you, he'll do anything to get the secret of the Southern Queen."

"He won't find me," said Crazy John. "There's half a hundred places I can hide in the valley."

The sound of the airplane was nearer and they stepped out of the cabin. The amphibian was in sight but low and on the other side of the valley.

"He's going to land," said Tim. "There's a long stretch of clear water over there."

"He'll never be able to taxi that big flying boat up this bayou," added Ford. "It will be an hour before

they can get here. Did Sladek have his usual gunmen with him?"

"Two beside the pilot," said Tim.

"I'm not afraid of a fight," went on Ford, "but there is no use in getting into trouble if it can be avoided. We'll leave the island at once and John can find one of the refuges he speaks about."

"Good idea," said the old sailor. "I'll tell you how to find another way out of the bayou."

Crazy John went into the cabin to pick up a few belongings he wanted to take and Tim had a chance to speak to Ford.

"Do I get the story?" he asked.

"If we get out of this all right, I'll do the best I can," promised Ford.

Tim had to be satisfied with that, for it was imperative that they get away from the island.

Crazy John reappeared, this time with a duffle bag, and he set off down the path ahead of them. He tossed his bag in Tim's boat and climbed in.

"Where's your boat?" Tim asked Ford.

"It's half way around the island. We'll pick it up on our way out."

With experienced hands, the old sailor started the outboard and they shot out into the shallow bayou. With a skill born of long acquaintance with the river, Crazy John guided the boat between snags and always found safe water. They nosed into a cove and picked up Ford's boat, which they took in tow.

From the river itself they could hear the thunder of the motors of the amphibian as the pilot taxied it up and down stream hunting for the opening of the bayou which led to Crazy John's island.

"Good thing they're not in the air. They'd spot us in a minute," said Ford.

"We could get under cover in a minute," said Tim.

"You mean we might be able to," Ford's finger touched the splintered seat at the rear of the boat. "Next time they might not miss." Crazy John shut off the motor and the boat drifted toward a sand pit. It grated gently on the bottom and came to rest.

"I'm getting out here," said the old sailor.

"You're sure you've got everything you need?" The question was directed to Ford and Tim caught the intentness with which Crazy John spoke.

"Everything," said Ford. "Sure you won't change your mind?"

Crazy John's face took on a stony look and his eyes wandered over the valley.

"I won't change," he said. "This is my home. I'm satisfied. That gold is cursed. You'll be lucky to get back alive."

"I'll get back all right," promised Ford, "and you'll get your share."

"You'll need good men. Better take this lad. He's the kind you can trust." Crazy John extended his hand to Ford, then swung his bag over his shoulder and stalked off along the sand bar. Soon he was lost in the undergrowth.

When Ford turned around, Tim caught a gleam of moisture in his eyes and his hands trembled a little.

The flying reporter bent down and started the outboard. The shadows were lengthening and they must find a safe haven for the night.

For an hour they followed the directions Crazy John had given them, keeping always in the backwater of the great river. Then they nosed out toward the main channel. The sound of the motors of the amphibian had long since been lost and twilight was enfolding the valley.

The globe trotter came back and sat in the seat just ahead, facing Tim.

"We'd better hunt a camp site," he said. "It's impossible to make Auburn tonight."

"I've got plenty of food and blankets," said Tim.

"There's a supply in my boat, too," nodded Ford. "Let's turn off the main river now."

Tim sent the boat twisting around the sand bars and toward the mouth of a stream on the right bank. Trees met above the smaller stream and 200 yards up its valley they found a small clearing richly carpeted with grass.

"This is fine," said Ford. "We ought to find a spring somewhere in the bluffs back of us."

While Tim made the boats fast and unloaded the duffle, Ford took a water jug and went in search of water. By the time he was back, Tim had a fire, built from dry, smokeless wood, burning well. Supper was not long, with two experts in camping lending a hand.

The meal was simple—bacon, eggs, fried potatoes, bread and jam, but there was plenty of everything.

After they had eaten their fill, they spread their blankets beside the fire. It was a time when men's tongues are loosened and Tim waited patiently. He felt that in good time, Ford would tell him the story of his efforts to learn the whereabouts of the Southern Queen and the treasure in gold which it held.

"How much do you know about my plans to recover the gold in the Southern Queen?" he asked.

"To be frank, I don't know a great deal," admitted Tim. "When you came to Atkinson as 'Mr. G. Seven' you aroused my curiosity. I knew that somewhere I had seen your picture, that your name should be on the tip of my tongue. I'd have learned your identity sooner but the paper was sponsoring an air circus and I had to handle the publicity. Then when I found your picture in the file in a story a little over a year ago I knew what you were after, but by that time you had left Atkinson."

"How did you trace me here?"

"Found out where you had rented your car, and learned that you had made inquiries about this section of the state. Then when Sladek arrived in an amphibian and made similar inquiries I had a hunch something was going to break. After reaching Auburn it was easy to learn that the only man on the river who had been a sailor was Crazy John."

"So you rented a boat and started downstream after the story and on the way Sladek's outfit took a few shots at you?"

"That's about the size of it. Now all I need to fill out the story is what you're going to do."

"I'm going after the treasure in the Southern Queen and I'm going to take you with me," said Ford.

"You're what?" asked Tim incredulously.

"I'm going to take you with me on the hunt for the treasure in the hold of the Southern Queen."

Tim stared, still unbelieving.

"Will you go?" Ford was pressing him for an answer.

"But you don't know much about me."

"I know that you're resourceful and courageous and that Crazy John said you were a good man. I'd take Crazy John's word for it even if I didn't know the other things about you."

"Then you can count me in right now if it can be arranged so I can get a leave of absence from the *News*."

CHAPTER TEN

"Mr. Seven's" Secret

Under the flickering firelight in the camp in the valley of the Cedar, Grenville Ford unfolded for Tim the story of the revolt in Guato, the looting of the gold mines and the flight from Martee in the old tramp steamer.

"I was covering the revolution in Guato at the time for the old *New York Globe*," said Ford, as he traced the events which had finally brought him into contact with the flying reporter of the *News*.

"The revolution was headed by Manuel Crespes, who was a professional trouble maker. He got together a band of desperadoes, all of the riff-raff in Central America, armed them with modern weapons, and promised them all of the loot they could get. In less than a month he had 3,000 of the toughest soldiers you ever saw with him."

Ford puffed slowly on his pipe.

"Three thousand men is quite an army for Central America," he went on, "and Crespes knew how to handle them. He kept them well fed and paid them promptly. We never knew where the money came from but we had a hunch Russia was supplying him with funds.

"The revolt started at Martee, the main seaport, and the rebels swept everything before them and started inland for the capital, Blanco. They looted every village they went through and it looked like they were going to win in a walkaway. But Crespes didn't know that the foxy old president of Guato had purchased a fleet of American bombing planes and had secured a bunch of former war pilots to fly them. When the rebels got up in the narrow passes of the mountains just east of the capital the bombers dropped down out of the sky.

"I was there that day. Those big eagles just came out of the blue, unloaded their 'eggs' and then soared away for another load. The rebels were trapped. In ten minutes the backbone of the revolt was broken and they were fleeing for the seaport and safety at Martee. I had a hard time keeping up with them.

"On the way to Martee, Crespes and the other ringleaders cleaned out the gold mines in the foothills. I don't know exactly how much, but it was at least a million. They managed to get the bullion to Martee and load it on the only ship in the harbor, the old Southern Queen.

"They got away just before sunset and were well out to sea when the bombing planes swept down in search of them. The Southern Queen was never reported in any port and no member of its crew was ever heard from. There were all kinds of stories. Some said the old steamer had been caught in a tropical gale and gone down with all hands, others said that Crespes had managed to blow it up after getting away with a large share of the gold while some stories said the Southern Queen was beached on the coast of Yucatan, the crew fleeing after dividing the gold.

"It was a mystery that intrigued me. I wanted to know what had happened to the ship and its crew and I wanted the gold it held. For years I ran down one rumor after another. That story last year sent out from New York was written around one of the rumors, but my trip to see Crazy John was based on something more than rumor."

Ford paused while Tim threw fresh fuel on the flames.

"A month ago an old sailorman in New York told me he'd met a fellow years ago who said he knew what had happened to the Southern Queen. I got to checking up and the man he was talking about was John Boggs, the ship's carpenter, the man we know as Crazy John. Again, through sheer coincidence, I learned from a pearl dealer in New York that he occasionally bought fresh water pearls from a man named John Boggs out here in the Cedar river valley. It didn't take me long to get on the job."

"Could Crazy John tell you about the Southern Queen?"

The globe trotter smiled. "Crazy John told me the whole story and I'm so sure he's told the truth that I'm going into the Caribbean at once."

"What happened to the Southern Queen?"

"It struck a reef off an island on the coast of Yucatan. The accident happened shortly after midnight. Crazy John says they started to sink at once and the crew and rebels were too drunk to get the boats off. A few jumped overboard and tried to swim to the island. The sharks got them. Crazy John managed to get a skiff launched and he reached the island. It was uninhabited and a gale wrecked his small boat. He finally made a raft but he drifted for days before he was able to get across the channel to the mainland for the currents held him just away from the shore. He thinks he went insane then and it wasn't until he got away from the sea and settled down here that his mind cleared up. But the horror of those days on the raft is too much for him. He won't go back."

"I don't blame him," said Tim. "It must have been horrible, drifting for days with the shore in sight."

"I've made an agreement with Crazy John that he is to have a fourth of the treasure if it is found," went on Ford. "In turn he has given me an excellent description of the island and that section of the coast of Yucatan. I'm sure I'll be able to find the island without difficulty."

"But will you be able to locate the remains of the Southern Queen and bring up the treasure if you do find her?"

"That's something I've got to take a chance on. A good many people would like to have the same information I obtained from Crazy John."

"Including Jack Sladek?"

"Right. Sladek would give a good many thousand."

"Why is he so interested?"

"Sladek was one of the soldiers of fortune with Crespes on the short-lived revolution. He had a broken leg and they sailed away from Martee and left him stranded there. It saved Sladek's life, but he doesn't know that."

"How could he have learned about Crazy John?" asked Tim.

"Only through keeping close track of my movements and I've felt for months that someone has been shadowing me. Sladek is a cool hand and without scruples but I know the only way he learned about Crazy John was through tracing me."

"Then it looks like he may vote himself a hand in hunting for the treasure."

"He may, but I think I'll be ready and capable of taking care of him when the time comes. Sladek is looked upon none too favorably in Central America while I believe I can still claim a lot of friends."

"Were you really serious about taking me on the expedition?" asked Tim.

"Dead serious," replied the globe trotter. "You're resourceful and that's exactly the type I need. Do you think you can arrange with your editor to get away for about three months?"

"If there'll be some good stories in connection with the trip, he won't be likely to object."

"I guess I can promise him plenty of stories and some of them may be real thrillers. We're going to make the trip in a submarine."

Tim stared across the flames at Ford, wondering if he had heard correctly.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Rescue from the Air

In quick phrases and with vivid description Grenville Ford sketched for him his plan to search for the treasure in the Southern Queen.

"Crazy John thinks the old ship went down in about two hundred feet of water; just ripped its bottom out on the reef, rolled off and dropped into a deep hole beside the reef. Diving conditions may be bad so I'm going to take a submarine. There will be a special diving compartment so the sub can be taken down to the bottom beside the Southern Queen and the divers can walk right out and hunt for the gold."

"Where can you get a submarine?" asked Tim.

"That's not difficult," smiled Ford. "The government had to decommission two big ones this summer on account of the last London naval treaty. I took an option on one of them and as soon as I can get to a telegraph office I'm going to buy it. As soon as it is refitted and I can get a trustworthy crew together I'll start for the coast of Yucatan."

"Will one of those old government submarines be safe?"

"The type being decommissioned is one of the finest ever built; sturdy, lots of room for a submarine, and capable of descending to about two hundred forty feet without too much danger. Oh, you'll get plenty of material for stories that should please your editor."

They talked at length of plans for the trip, but finally fatigue closed their lips and they rolled into their blankets.

They were up at dawn, breakfasted quickly, and started upstream for Auburn.

"We're likely to have a little trouble with Sladek and his crowd before we get out of the valley," said Ford. "When he is unable to find Crazy John he'll start trailing me."

"When we reach Auburn we'll be safe. The Jupiter is faster than Sladek's amphibian."

"If he overtakes us before we reach the village, we'll be in for it."

They chugged steadily up the broad Cedar, the other boat in tow behind them.

Less than five miles below the village the sound of the amphibian's engines echoed over the valley and they turned to see the big ship winging swiftly toward them.

"Here comes trouble," cried Ford. "We'd better hit for a bayou where we can find some shelter."

Tim opened the throttle of the outboard wide and swung the nose of the boat sharply to the left. The amphibian was coming fast. It was going to be close. Little spurts of water rose near them. Sladek or someone else on the plane was shooting at them.

"Duck!" shouted Ford as the plane roared over them.

"That was close," said Tim, pointing to the bottom of the boat where water was spurting through a half dozen holes.

"Get under the shelter of the trees. We'll exchange boats."

Tim shut off the outboard and they drifted under the dense foliage of the river bank. They pulled the other boat alongside and jumped into it. Tim glanced in the gas tank. There was plenty of fuel to finish the run to Auburn.

The amphibian was circling overhead, hunting for the prey which now was sheltered by the trees.

"What'll we do, wait here or try to slip along the bank?" asked Tim.

"Waiting here won't do much good. We'll nose along shore and see if we can't give them the slip."

Tim snapped the rope on the outboard and they churned ahead again, keeping as close to the trees as possible and threading their way along a bayou which paralleled the river. For a few minutes they were in comparative safety. Then an open stretch of the river loomed ahead and the amphibian swept down on them.

"Sladek's going to land on the river," said Ford. "We'll have to duck back into the shelter of the bayou."

"We can switch boats," suggested Tim. "I'll stay in the one with the holes and you may be able to slip away in this one."

Ford shook his head.

"Well, hardly. This is my party and I won't let you face Sladek and his gang alone."

The amphibian, now a mile up the river, was settling down to land. The big ship skimmed the surface of the water, there were sheets of spray, and it glided swiftly toward them.

Above the thrumming of the amphibian's motors came a sharper sound and Tim looked skyward. Then he grabbed Ford's arm.

"Here comes Ralph in the Jupiter. Now we'll see some action."

Dropping fast, the cream and green biplane roared down like an avenging bird. Ralph levelled off about twenty feet above the river and sped toward the amphibian. Tim saw something sticking over the side of the biplane. It looked like a gun but the distance was too great and the speed too fast to make sure.

The men aboard the amphibian were caught unawares. The big craft slowed down and seemed to hesitate as the pilot waited for orders from Sladek.

Ralph whipped the Jupiter over the amphibian and Tim saw the splatter of shot on the water. The biplane shot upward and around in a tight bank and came back at the clumsier plane, which again was showing signs of life.

The motors of the amphibian thundered mightily. The big ship shook its wings and lunged ahead, slithers of spray shooting out from its slide.

Overhead hummed the Jupiter and Tim could see now that Ralph was shooting at the larger plane. As the amphibian took off, Ralph circled over them and Tim saw his flying companion wave.

"Ralph will keep Sladek busy for a few minutes," he told Ford. "We'd better get to Auburn as soon

as possible.”

While Ralph in the Jupiter chased the slower amphibian all over the valley, Tim and Ford sped up the river as fast as the outboard motor could chug.

“That was a timely arrival on the part of your friend,” grinned Ford.

“It wasn’t altogether accidental,” replied Tim. “I was afraid of trouble and Ralph remained at Auburn with the ship all tuned up and ready to go at the slightest hint that I was in a jam.”

“He seems to be a mighty good flyer.”

“He’s ace high and a fine reporter on top of that.”

“Then we’d better take him along on the treasure hunt.”

“He’d be a fine addition to your crew but I’m afraid the managing editor will say thumbs down on that suggestion. One of us has to be within call. That’s why we seldom have a vacation together.”

“I expect you’re right,” said Ford, “but nevertheless I’d like to have a fellow with his nerve. I know that Sladek will follow me into the Caribbean and it’s going to be a fight every step of the way to find the Southern Queen and then to get the treasure up. It won’t be safe until we get back to New York and place it in bank vaults.”

“Then you expect Sladek to trail you all the way?”

“There’s no question about it. With at least a cool million in gold at stake, he’ll stop at nothing to get his hands on it and he seems to have plenty of money. Then there’s a little personal bitterness between us that dates clear back to the trouble in Guato in 1923.”

“All of which means a mighty unusual trip,” added Tim.

They reached the landing stage at Auburn without further trouble and Ford explained briefly that they had had an accident with the other boat. He gave the boatman directions where he could find his craft and paid liberally for the damages.

“We’ll hike out to the pasture we use for a landing field when we stop here,” said Tim.

Several cows were grazing almost in the center of the pasture and Tim and Ford ran to chase them into a far corner as Ralph dropped down to a fast landing. He killed his speed quickly, whipped around and rolled the plane over toward them.

“Hop in,” he shouted. “I don’t think that amphib has any love for me.”

Tim and Ford piled into the front cockpit and Ralph opened the throttle. There was no wind and he took off straight across the pasture just as the amphibian roared over Auburn.

The Jupiter was a good 40 miles an hour faster than the big ship and Ralph waved his fingers derisively at the amphibian as he lined the biplane away for Auburn.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Against Time

The fleet, powerful Jupiter soon outdistanced the slower amphibian and with Ralph at the controls, they sped toward Atkinson at 150 miles an hour. The roar of the motor was too loud for conversation and Tim settled down in the cushioned seat and reviewed the exciting events of the last 72 hours.

They ranged all the way from the thrilling chase after Ace McDowell to the deadly game of hide and seek they had just completed with Jack Sladek and his companions aboard the amphibian.

The big thing now was the fact that he had been invited to go with Grenville Ford on the quest for the sunken treasure in the Southern Queen. Tim, worn by the strain of the last few hours, closed his eyes as he contemplated the story possibilities of the treasure hunt.

That there would be plenty of adventure went without saying. From the one encounter with Sladek he knew that the soldier of fortune would go to any length to obtain the treasure.

The thought of making the trip into the Caribbean in a submarine appealed strongly to Tim. What a contrast it would be after his stirring adventures in the air as the flying reporter for the *News*.

Tim glanced at his companion. Grenville Ford appeared to be enjoying every minute of the flight back to Atkinson. There was a pleasant upturn to his lips and the chin, although square cut, was kindly. But the cheery light in Ford's eyes was what appealed to Tim most for he felt that one of the best ways to judge a man's character was by his eyes. Ford's were piercing but they were steady and a perpetual laugh lurked in their depths. Tim sensed that he would make an excellent leader, a man in whom utmost trust could be placed and he knew he would have no hesitancy in following Ford on the trip.

The Jupiter flashed over the outskirts of Atkinson and Ralph cut the throttle. They dropped down to an easy landing and rolled up on the ramp in front of the hangar.

Tim, now a trifle stiff from the strenuous events and the night in the valley of the Cedar, climbed slowly from the cockpit. Ford followed.

Ralph scrambled out from the rear cockpit and joined them. He was grinning broadly.

"Guess I managed to get in for a little of the fun in the valley," he chuckled. "When I dropped down on that amphib the first time I thought those boys were going to have heart failure."

"What kind of a gun did you have?" asked Tim.

Ralph reached into the cockpit and brought out an ancient double barreled shotgun.

"Here's the pet. Believe me I've got a sore shoulder. This old blunderbuss bucks like a Missouri mule."

"Do you make a practice of carrying an arsenal around with you?" asked Ford.

"Hardly. When I heard the drone of the amphibian down the river I figured something was up for I knew you fellows must be on your way back. I borrowed this relic from the storekeeper at Auburn and got into the air as soon as I could."

"You were just in time," said Tim. "The amphibian was down on the surface of the river and all set to taxi along and give us a nice, cheerful little party."

"What I want to know now," put in Ralph, "is about the story."

Tim glanced toward Ford. He felt it was up to the other to say the first word on that subject.

"I think we'd better go uptown and talk with your managing editor," said Ford. "He'll have to decide just what is to be printed now. Is that agreeable to everyone?"

There were no objections and they left the Jupiter for a ground crew to roll into the hangar. Signalling a taxi, they were soon speeding into the heart of the city.

It was ten-thirty. The first mail edition would be on the press then. Another hour and the deadline for the noon mail, which also had a big street sale. They'd have to work fast if they got the story of Grenville Ford's plans for the treasure hunt into the noon edition. It would depend on how long they talked with the managing editor. Tim had the facts on his finger tips. Once at a typewriter he knew he could spin the story in rapid-fire order.

George Carson was in the editorial office when they entered.

"Did you get the story?" he asked Tim anxiously.

"I've got the man," replied Tim, introducing Ford. "It's going to be up to you on how much of a story develops out of our trip to Cedar valley."

"Come into my office. We'll discuss it at once."

In the managing editor's office Ford sat down in a chair across the desk from Carson. Tim and Ralph, more restless and anxious to get at the actual writing of the story, stood up.

"I'll be brief," said Ford. "In the first place, let me say that you have two unusually resourceful reporters in Murphy and Graves."

"There's none better," admitted Carson, smiling.

"I'm going on a hunt for the treasure in the old tramp steamer, Southern Queen," went on Ford. "The vessel disappeared eleven years ago in the Caribbean with an unknown amount of gold in its hold. I actually don't know how much but it is sufficient to make an expensive expedition in search of the treasure very much worthwhile and I'm leaving New York as soon as possible. I want Tim Murphy to go with me. In return, I'll give you exclusive rights to the stories of the treasure hunt. What do you think about it?"

"Just this," snapped Carson. "Tim has a leave of absence, starting right now, with full pay to be with you as long as necessary. I want the first exclusive story on your adventures in the Cedar river valley."

"I was afraid of that," smiled Ford, "but I guess that can't be helped. You see, Jack Sladek, one of the rebels who looted the gold mines in Guato, is on the same quest I am. He almost got Tim and me this morning. If it hadn't been for Ralph and a borrowed double-barreled shotgun we might now be among the missing."

"What a story, what a story!" enthused Carson. "We won't need to name Sladek if that will prove too embarrassing for you. We can call it a mysterious attack from the air."

"I think that would be better," agreed Ford. "Sladek has voted himself in this thing to the finish but now that I know he's after the gold, I'll be on guard and able to take care of myself."

"When will you want Tim to leave?" asked the managing editor.

"I'll phone for reservations on the late afternoon plane east," said Ford. "Is that too soon for you, Tim?"

"I can be ready within an hour after I finish my story," replied the flying reporter.

"Then get into the news room and get busy," said the managing editor, glancing at the clock on his desk. "It's just ten-fifty now. I'll instruct the press room that the noon edition may be down ten minutes late and to get ready to rush it through. That will give you about fifty minutes to write your story. Think you can make it?"

"I'll get the most important part done by then," promised Tim. "After the noon edition I can polish up the story and round out the details."

"Go to it. And Ralph, you write a first person story about your flight this morning. Put plenty of punch and get the smell of powder into it. We're going to have a smash front page this noon."

Almost forgetting his visitor, Carson hurried after his reporters, stopping at the city desk to inform Ed Campbell of the big stories that were coming up, then dashing back to phone the press room to be ready for a rush edition.

Tim stripped off his coat, flung it over the back of his chair, rolled a sheet of copy paper into his typewriter, and plunged headlong into the story. Swiftly, graphically he painted the picture of the treasure hunt in the Caribbean with an unknown fortune in gold at stake, informing the readers of the *News* that they would have the first information on the progress of the expedition.

At his desk across the aisle Ralph was beating a frantic tattoo on his typewriter, describing in detail how he had routed the "unknown" plane in the Cedar river valley.

Page after page of copy spun from their machines and was hurried to the copy desk where Dan Watkins personally supervised the editing of the story.

"Much more to come?" Dan asked Tim. It was eleven-thirty.

"One more page," replied Tim, without looking up from his machine.

Ralph finished his story with a bang of typewriter keys and straightened up. It had been a terrific strain working against time.

Tim's fingers still raced as the words of the story flowed out. The deadline was past, yet they were holding the presses just for his story. Everything else was ready. The last of Ralph's copy was coming off the linotypes out in the composing room. Make-up men, stereotypers and pressmen were all waiting for the final period on his story. Scores of newsboys were impatiently banging their heels down in the big circulation room listening for the roar of the presses which would signal that the noon edition was ready.

Perspiration stood out in beads on Tim's forehead. There was so much to write and yet so little time in which to do it. He tore off each paragraph now, speeding it to the waiting linotypes.

Dan Watkins bent over him again.

"Only a minute left," he said softly.

Tim nodded. He could write another column. That would have to come later when he polished up the story for the city edition. In a last, breathless paragraph he finished his story.

The copyreader almost tore it from his hands and ran toward the composing room. The story was done. It was eleven forty on the tick. Tim relaxed in his chair.

Ed Campbell stepped over.

"Great piece of writing," said the city editor. "When do you leave?"

"This afternoon on the plane east," replied Tim.

"We'll miss you a lot," went on Campbell, "but I know you'll be sending us some swell yarns."

"I'll do my best," promised Tim.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Eastward Bound

After a hasty lunch Tim and Ralph returned to the *News* office to complete the polishing up of the stories which had appeared in the noon edition. They expanded on the details of their adventures in the valley of the Cedar and by two o'clock Tim was through. George Carson came out of his office.

"Have any idea how long this Caribbean trip is going to take?" asked the managing editor.

"At least two months; perhaps longer," replied Tim.

"I expected as much. You'll be on full time pay while you're away and I've made arrangements for the New York Journal's radio station to keep in contact with your submarine and relay your stories on to us. The Journal, in return, has the exclusive right in New York to print any of your stuff it desires."

"That's certainly fair enough and it insures speedy transmission for my yarns," nodded Tim.

"I've told the cashier to provide you with an extra \$500 to use in case of an emergency and he's preparing a letter of credit should it be needed. That ought to cover any financial difficulties. Take care of yourself and good luck."

The managing editor shook Tim's hand and then turned back to his own office. Other members of the staff stopped to say goodbye and to envy him the adventurous trip.

Ralph was the last. His eyes were misty as he grasped Tim's hands.

"I wish I could go along with the Jup. You may need a little rescuing before this trip is over."

"I wish you could go," replied Tim, "but there'll probably be plenty of excitement around here while I'm gone and you'll thrive on that. Make arrangements for the return of the cars we left at Auburn."

Tim had only an hour to get to his room and pack his bag. He hastened there in a cab, jammed shirts, toilet kit, underwear and other necessities into a sturdy leather case, and then was on his way toward the airport.

At the field Carl Hunter shot one question after another at him for the noon edition had been delivered there. Tim answered them as best he could and countered with one of his own.

"Did the amphibian come back here?"

"We haven't seen it or heard anything. I've asked other ports along the line east to keep a lookout for it but they haven't reported a thing. They'll probably stop at only the smaller fields until they reach the east again."

Grenville Ford arrived in a speeding cab just as the afternoon eastbound express roared over the field and circled to point its nose into the wind and land.

"All ready?" he shot at Tim as he dashed into the ticket office.

"Anxious to go," replied the flying reporter.

By the time the big twin-motored all-metal transport was in the hangar Ford had reappeared with their tickets in one hand and baggage checks in the other.

The eastbound express had been bucking headwinds all afternoon and as a result was ten minutes late. Every effort was made to cut down the time required for refueling and Tim and Ford were hurried aboard the ten-passenger plane and shown their seats with little ceremony. Their baggage was placed in the special compartment in the rear of the plane.

While the co-pilot superintended the refueling and oiling of the super-charged motors, the chief pilot scanned the weather reports in the radio room. The ground crew fairly ran from one task to another and less than ten minutes after landing, the big ship was ready to take off.

The chief pilot took a final glance at the weather chart, then entered the cabin and made his way to the cockpit up ahead. The blocks were pulled from the wheels, the landing stage pulled into the clear, and with a deep drumming of the motors they rolled out of the hangar.

Tim, looking from a window, saw Carl Hunter waving at him. Then they were swinging down the runway, headed on the first lap of what was to be Tim's greatest adventure.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The *S-18*

The next morning found Tim in New York, actively engaged in plans for the trip into the Caribbean. While Ford completed negotiations for the purchase of the *S-18*, the government submarine which the navy was forced to scrap by treaty limitations, Tim called at the office of the New York Journal.

The managing editor was enthusiastic over the chance for exclusive stories on the expedition in return for relaying the radio stories on to the *News*. At his request, Tim sat down and wrote a two-column story on the plans for the treasure hunt. Ford had lifted restrictions on publicity for he realized that nothing said in print would deter Jack Sladek from his attempt to find the treasure first.

Tim met Ford at their hotel at noon and the leader of the expedition was jubilant.

"I've completed the purchase and the *S-18* is being towed from the Brooklyn navy yard right now down to a yard where it will be fitted out for the trip."

"What about a crew?" asked Tim.

"That's not going to be as difficult as it seems. There are a lot of old navy men drifting around New York who are always itching for an adventure. A trip like this will appeal to them and I'll be able to round up enough submarine experts to fill out the crew we need. I'm inserting an ad in the morning papers."

"Isn't there a chance Sladek may try and ring in a few of his men in your crew?"

"I'll have to guard against that," admitted Ford, "but it's a chance I'll have to take." After lunch they departed for Brooklyn and the Laidlaw private shipyard where the *S-18* was to be outfitted for the cruise.

It was Tim's first glimpse of a real submarine and he stood for several minutes gazing at the smooth, glistening grey hull in the water beside the dock.

The *S-18* had been started in 1920 and completed two years later. The sub was 240 feet long and ahead of the conning tower was the turret which housed the four-inch gun. The craft was a picture of sinister power and Tim felt just a little shivery as he stepped down the gangway which led from the dock onto the narrow deck.

"What do you think of it?" asked Ford.

"I'd a whole lot rather make the trip in an airplane," admitted Tim, "but I guess I'll get used to it."

They climbed through the main hatch and descended into the control room. A mass of gauges and polished brass wheels greeted Tim's eyes. The rounded hull was painted a flat white and the air was a trifle stuffy. It was all a Chinese puzzle to him.

Ford, talking rapidly, pointed to depth gauge, periscope controls, ballast tank valves and a score of other devices that had little meaning for Tim.

"This is the heart of the submarine," explained Ford. "From this point every movement and action is directed."

Somewhere aft was a steady clanging and they made their way toward it, ducking their heads under the low doors which separated the various compartments.

Directly back of the control room were the huge Diesel engines which propelled the *S-18* when it was running on the surface. Bank after bank of cylinders were ranged on each side of the steel runway. Each engine was capable of generating 900 horsepower and the two of them could force the submarine along at fourteen knots an hour on the surface.

Behind the engine room were the electric motors which propelled the craft when it was submerged. There were two of these, developing between them 1,500 horsepower. The underwater speed of the *S-18* was rated at eleven knots an hour. In this room was located the master switchboard for the complicated electrical devices on which the life of the submarine depended so much of the time when it was underwater.

They continued their tour of inspection, drawing nearer the sound of the steady hammering. In the next compartment they discovered the cause of the noise. A red-haired youth a little older than Tim was banging away industriously with a hammer at the bent end of a bunk which he had lowered from its place on the wall.

"What's the matter, Pat?" asked Ford.

The red-haired young man looked up quickly.

"Hello, Mr. Ford. I've picked out my bunk and I'm doing what I can to get the dents out of this end."

"I'm glad it's nothing more serious. For a while I thought someone was trying to take my submarine apart."

The young man with the hammer straightened up and looked Tim over with cool, impudent eyes.

"You two might as well get acquainted right now," said Ford, "for you're going to see a whole lot of each other in the coming weeks. Tim, I want you to know Pat Reynolds, who next to me will be in actual charge of the operation of the submarine. I consider Pat one of the finest submarine men in the world. He was with Sir Francis Habernicht on his submarine trip under the Arctic ice and it was due solely to Pat's cool-headedness that they came through alive."

Tim stuck out his hand and Pat grasped it firmly. There was an instant bond of liking between them.

Ford went on to explain Tim's presence.

"If it hadn't been for Murphy I might not be here right now," he said. "Tim and his flying companion kept Jack Sladek from getting me in the Cedar river valley. Tim's going to be a mighty valuable member of the expedition for I've decided to take along a small seaplane and he's to do the flying."

"I didn't know you were going to take a plane," said Pat.

"Neither did I until this morning. Word came to me that Sladek is back in New York and is busy now outfitting a tramp steamer. He's taking a plane and I don't want to feel that he has any advantage which I can not overcome."

"But where can we carry an airplane on a submarine?" asked Tim.

"We'll have to have special rigging placed on the deck ahead of the gun turret. We'll be running above water all of the way to the island and when we arrive we can unload the plane and after that keep it moored on the beach."

"This expedition commences to look like a humdinger," grinned Pat. "I wouldn't miss it for anything."

"There will be plenty of excitement if Sladek can do anything about it," conceded Ford, "I've got a great many things to do in New York this afternoon. Pat, you finish the tour of the submarine with Murphy."

The commander of the treasure hunting expedition departed and left Tim in the tail of the sub with Pat Reynolds.

"This is the last compartment," explained Pat, pointing to the bunks which ranged along the walls. "We'll be carrying a small crew so this is where we'll be living for the next couple of months. There's another compartment for crew's quarters up ahead but we'll probably use that to store diving apparatus and to pack it full of stores and other equipment we'll be needing."

Tim was looking at the rear bulkhead and Pat followed with his eyes.

"That's the aft torpedo tube," he said, pointing to the heavy steel breech through which the tube was loaded. "The torpedo rack is just to the right but I don't imagine we'll be carrying any torpedoes with us this trip."

"I thought it was impossible to get them for private use."

"It's supposed to be, but Ford has ways of getting things he wants. He was one of the navy's ace undersea commanders during the World War and the department hasn't forgotten his fine work. There's such a thing as loaning a torpedo for experimental work. Of course it is just possible that the torpedo might be lost during the experiments." Pat grinned broadly.

"Is that the same reason this sub has been left so completely equipped, even to the four-inch gun?"

Pat nodded.

"That's one of them. Another is an unhealthy dislike of Uncle Sam for our friend Sladek. Federal officers have been after him for months but so far they haven't been able to get anything on him that would warrant a trial. None of them would be sorry if Sladek just didn't return from the Caribbean."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

An Unknown Intruder

Pat started forward and Tim followed him through the motor room, the engine room back into the control room, and then into the forward compartments.

Just ahead of the control room was a small cubby with a maze of electrical devices.

"You might call this the eyes and ears of the sub," said Pat. "Here are the listening devices by which we can ascertain how far away a ship is, and the radio equipment. This is a special compartment built for just this type of submarine."

"Don't the newer ones have it?" asked Tim.

"Yes. Even more elaborate than ours and the equipment in them is located in the main control room."

Ahead of the radio room was a white-walled compartment which had been stripped of its former equipment.

"This used to be crew's quarters, but when Ford got an option on the *S-18*, the bunks and lockers were taken out. Our diving equipment and stores will be kept here."

They went on, ducking their heads to enter the forward torpedo room. In the bulkhead Tim saw the breeches of four powerful tubes. The cranes which lifted the torpedoes from the racks and into the tubes were folded back against the wall but the front end of the compartment was a maze of gauges and valve wheels.

"I don't see how you can remember which valve is which and what all of the gauges mean," said Tim.

"It does take a couple of months to get the hang of all of them," admitted Pat, "but in a fully manned navy submarine each man is trained for his own task. The successful operation depends upon each one doing his job at just the right time. If someone forgets, then the story makes the front page and the navy goes hunting for another lost submarine."

Tim felt an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of his stomach. He knew the *S-18* was going to be undermanned, but then the only diving they intended to do would be at the actual scene of the salvage operations.

"This torpedo compartment will be made into a diving room," went on Pat. "A special bulkhead will be built to reinforce the regular one and a door cut in the side of the hull through which the diver can walk when we settle down on the bottom beside the Southern Queen. If we find the treasure it can be placed directly in this special room, the diver can climb in after, and up we'll go."

The description sounded simple enough but Tim had misgivings that the actual operation might be a little more complicated.

They left the forward torpedo room and started back to the control room. In the former crew's quarters, Pat tapped the steel deck.

"The storage batteries which operate the electric motors are under here. It's just too bad for us if water gets to them while we're down in the bottom. Then there's chlorine gas and unless we get up in a hurry, the party's over."

"You're certainly painting a cheerful picture of this trip," said Tim.

"I'm making it just as bad as I can," grinned Pat, "but you don't seem to scare much."

"It's a good thing you can't see how fast my pulse is running. Just one more thing I want to know right now. Where do we eat aboard this tin fish?"

"A newspaper reporter would think of that," chuckled Pat, "As a matter of fact the galley will be installed in the rear torpedo room. The entire crew will eat and sleep there and rations won't be anything fancy."

A watchman at the shipyard boarded the *S-18* and informed Tim that Mr. Ford wanted to talk to him by telephone.

Tim hastened out of the submarine and followed the watchman to his shanty near the main gate of the big yard.

"I'm at the office of the Sea King Airplane Company on Lower Broadway," said Ford. "Come over as soon as possible and we'll make the final decision on the type of plane we're going to take with us."

Tim promised to get across the river as rapidly as possible and ran back to the *S-18*. Shouting down the main hatch, he informed Pat that he was leaving. Then he hastened outside, flagged a cruising taxi, and sped toward the office of the airplane company.

The head of the expedition was waiting for him in the main show room, where several seaplanes were on display. He introduced Tim to the company's sales manager and they plunged into a discussion of detail.

"What do you think of this type of plane?" Ford asked Tim, pointing to the nearest one on the floor.

"It looks sturdy enough to me," replied the flying reporter. "What about the speed?"

"It will cruise comfortably at 130 and can be pushed up to around 145," replied the sales manager. "The wings are hinged and can be folded back along the fuselage."

"Which will mean a saving of space, an important factor with us," put in Ford. "Can you give us an actual demonstration?"

"It's a little late to reach the plant out on Long Island in time for trial flights this afternoon. Couldn't we arrange it tomorrow morning?"

Ford agreed and they arranged to meet at the office again at nine the next day.

"We'll take that type if it proves up to expectations after Murphy has made several test trips," he said.

"I've a great many things remaining on my list to do for today," said Ford as they left the office, "and I'm a little hesitant about leaving Pat alone on the *S-18* all night. Of course the Laidlaw yard has

plenty of watchmen but you never can tell what Sladek may attempt. I'd feel a little better if you would take your duffle and go across the river and spend the night with Pat."

"I might just as well get used to sleeping on the *S-18* now as later," said Tim. "I'll get my things and be over at the yard in less than an hour."

The flying reporter checked out of the hotel where they had registered that morning and stopped at an army goods store where he purchased three blankets and two kits of utensils. Then he taxied over to Brooklyn, stopped at a food store to lay in a supply of cold meat, bread, butter, potato chips, a sack of fruit and some small chocolate cakes. His arms were filled when he finally reached the gate of the shipyard and was admitted.

"You're just in time. I was getting ready to close the gate for the night," the watchman informed him. "Mr. Ford has given strict orders about admitting anyone after six o'clock."

"Two of us are to stay aboard the *S-18* tonight to see that nothing happens," said Tim.

"There'll be no one getting through this gate," said the watchman firmly, but he was an elderly man and Tim surmised that he might enjoy an occasional nap in the darker hours of the night.

Shouting for Pat to come on deck, Tim threw down the packages of food, the blankets and then his own traveling bag, finally scrambling down the ladder himself.

"You look like a land crab when it comes to getting down a ladder gracefully," chuckled the red-haired Pat. "Of course, there's just a chance you may learn while you're on this trip."

"You may have the laugh on me when it comes to getting around in a submarine, but wait until I get you into the air. Believe me I'll show you a trick or two in an airplane."

"Which is just what you won't do," countered Pat. "I know when I'm well enough off and the *S-18* suits me. No wings, thank you."

With dusk softening the hard outlines of the shipyard, Tim descended into the interior of the *S-18*, where the bright glow of the electrics dispelled the gloom.

"Ford send you back to keep me company or is he afraid we may have visitors?" asked Pat as they placed Tim's duffle in the crew's quarters.

"Both. He isn't going to take any chances on accidents if it can be avoided. The watchman at the main gate told me that strict orders had been issued to admit no one after six o'clock." Pat nodded toward the river. "They'll come from there if they come. Have you got a gun?" Tim pulled a sturdy .38 revolver from his traveling bag.

Pat whistled. "That's a real popgun. How about a permit to carry it? You don't want to run into trouble in New York."

From his billfold Tim produced the small card which identified him as a member of the state police of his own state.

"Say, what are you," asked Pat incredulously, "A reporter or a policeman?"

"I'm a reporter first of all, but once or twice I've had to serve as a policeman," grinned Tim.

"Well, officer, let's have that grub," said Pat, opening the packages Tim had brought.

They lowered another bunk and spread the food out on it.

"Gosh, but this tastes good," Pat said. "I forgot all about getting anything this noon."

They were both the possessors of hearty appetites and between them they cleaned up every bit of food Tim had brought aboard.

Pat leaned back against the steel wall.

"Anyone could come aboard now and steal the *S-18*. I'm so full of food I wouldn't be able to move."

"I feel about the same way," conceded Tim.

But despite their sluggishness no disaster befell the *S-18* and after a time they bestirred themselves to make a final tour of inspection of the submarine.

Across the East river gleamed the millions of lights of Manhattan, and Tim, fascinated, stared at the majestic scene. A tramp steamer, outward bound for some distant port, hooted dismally as it swung down stream. Lights in the boatyard itself were few and far between and there was a distinct feeling of isolation to the flying reporter on the deck of the *S-18*.

While Tim was on deck, Pat closed all of the doors between the forward compartments, then joined Tim in front of the conning tower.

"I'm not looking for any trouble," he said, "but I've made everything tight. The only possible entrance will be through the main hatch and I'm going to fix up a bunk and sleep in the control room."

They went below and rigged makeshift beds on the steel floor below the conning tower. Pat found a trouble light with a long extension cord and he placed this on the deck outside the main hatch. With the lights off in the control room, it would be impossible for anyone to get down the hatch without being silhouetted in the glow of the electric on the deck.

"I guess we can go to sleep without much worry now," said Pat, kicking off his shoes and rolling into his blankets.

"Good night," said Tim, pulling his own blankets around him. The steel deck was anything but comfortable but after the flight from Atkinson and the busy day in New York, Tim soon dropped into a heavy sleep.

It was sometime after midnight when he awoke with a feeling of alarm gripping him. He looked toward the hatch above. The light was out. Someone was in the control room!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The First Test

There was no actual sound to which Tim could attribute his sudden awakening, but he was certain someone was in the control room beside Pat for he could hear the steady breathing of his companion.

Tim forced sleep from his tired brain. He needed every faculty to meet this emergency.

His right hand moved cautiously and his fingers closed around the hard, cold butt of his revolver. There was a slight scraping sound from the dense blackness at the base of the ladder which came down from the main hatch and Tim wished for a flashlight. He didn't even know where the switch which controlled the interior lights of the *S-18* was located.

Only the slightest of shuffling sounds warned Tim that the intruder was coming toward him. Evidently he was in his stocking feet.

Tim managed to free his legs from the folds of his blankets and he crouched on the steel floor of the *S-18*, ready for whatever might happen.

The hatch which led to the main deck was visible for the sky outside was much lighter than the black interior of the submarine. In this circle Tim saw the head of a man peer into the control room. Unless he did something at once, the *S-18* soon might be swarming with unwanted visitors.

Tim heard a slight grunt as the man coming toward him struck his head on the lower end of one of the periscopes. That was all Tim needed. Throwing his strength into the effort, he lunged forward, his outstretched arms enfolding the legs of the intruder. They went down with a crash that brought a muffled cry of alarm from the man Tim had tackled and a real shout of agony from Pat, on whom they had fallen.

"What's going on here?" cried Pat.

"I don't know," gasped Tim, "but someone turned off the light over the hatch and came down here. I just tackled him and there's another fellow at the hatch about ready to come down."

The man Tim had tackled recovered suddenly from the surprise attack and struck out with a vigor that caught the flying reporter. A powerful foot struck Tim on the chest and sent him flying across the control room to land on the other side curled against a maze of pipes and valve wheels.

"Have you got him?" cried Pat.

"Not now," Tim replied. "He kicked me almost through the side of this tin fish. You try and get him."

"I'll get him all right," vowed Pat. "You keep the boy at the hatch from joining him and making this too much of a party."

Flame lighted the interior of the control room and their eardrums were almost shattered by the deafening roar of a gun discharged at close range. The man Tim had tackled was shooting at the sound of their voices.

"Never mind trying to get this fellow," called Pat, now safely protected by the bulkhead into the engine room. "We'll pick him off when he tries to return to the deck."

The answer to Pat's words were written in smoke and flame as the unknown intruder fired again.

Tim, watching the outline of the hatch against the sky, saw a head appear. He raised his gun and fired in the general direction of the hatch, more to scare the second man than to actually harm him. On the echo of the crash of his gun came a scream of pain and the head promptly disappeared.

"Good shooting!" cried Pat. "Now we'll get this fellow. He's in a cross fire. Next time he shoots let him have it. I'll see if I can get around to the switch and turn on the lights. This party is going to end all of a sudden."

Tim strained his senses to detect the spot where the gunman was hidden. He could hear cautious sounds but he didn't dare fire for fear of hitting Pat. Tim edged near the ladder which led up to the hatch. As he neared it he became conscious of some one crawling up the ladder and he lunged toward the shadowy form.

Just as Tim moved, the man on the ladder lashed out viciously with one foot. The blow caught Tim squarely on the chin and he dropped to the deck, out cold. His gun clattered from his nerveless hands and the man on the ladder leaped for the hatch just as the interior of the *S-18* blazed with light.

Pat, momentarily blinded by the glare, recovered in time to see the legs of their assailant disappearing over the edge of the hatch and with snap aim he sent a volley of shots crashing upward.

Feet pounded along the deck of the *S-18* and Pat heard the sudden splashing of oars as a small boat pulled away from the hull of the sub in great haste. Pursuit, he knew, was useless and he bent over Tim.

The flying reporter was recovering his senses, but he was still groggy from the sharp blow on his chin. His first thought was one of self defense and he struggled weakly to raise his fists and hammer at Pat.

"Snap out of it," said Pat, shaking Tim gently. "The show's all over and we're still in command of the fort."

Tim smiled a little sheepishly.

"Someone certainly landed a haymaker on me."

"You mean a No. 11 shoe connected with your chin at about sixty miles an hour," chuckled Pat. "A kick like that would have killed anyone but an Irishman."

Tim shook himself to make sure that he was still all together and got to his feet. He was still a little shaky.

"You stay down here while I go on deck and see what it was all about," said Pat. He climbed nimbly up the ladder and disappeared just as cries sounded along the dock.

"On board the submarine," boomed a heavy voice. "What's the matter down there?"

A beam of light cut through the night and outlined Pat as he stood on the deck.

"Someone tried to board us and we had to call out our own riot squad," yelled Pat. "Looks like

everything is all right now and I don't think we'll have any more visitors tonight."

Satisfied, the watchman returned and Pat called down for Tim to hand up another bulb to replace the one which had been taken from the light over the hatch.

"I'm sure we won't have any more callers," he said, "but this light may discourage them even though it didn't the first time. How in the dickens did you happen to wake up?"

"You might call it my 'news sense' being on the job," said Tim as he rubbed his bruised chin. "The first thing I sensed was that the light was out. Then I knew someone was moving around in the control room and after that I was almost too scared to move."

"Seems to me you did a pretty nice job of tackling, but the next time don't bring your man down on top of me. It's an awful shock to awake in the middle of the night and find a first class fight taking place right in your midships."

Tim glanced at his wrist watch.

"It's one a.m.," he said. "What's on the schedule now?"

"We might as well try and get a little more sleep. I think the fireworks are over for tonight."

Pat rolled back into his blankets and a minute later Tim followed his companion's action but where Pat was soon in a deep sleep, Tim remained awake, thinking over the attack and the dangers of their long voyage into the Caribbean. He was glad Commander Ford had decided to take a seaplane on the trip. It made him feel more comfortable for if anything happened to the *S-18* on the treasure hunt, they might be able to get word of their plight to the world by using the seaplane.

Tim finally slept and when he awoke, sunlight was streaming down through the hatch and Commander Ford was climbing aboard.

"Fine pair of watchmen I left," he smiled.

"You left one mighty alert one," put in Pat, and he recounted their experiences of the night.

"Sladek is certainly losing no time in trying to hamper my plans," said Ford. "I imagine he'll attempt to trail us all of the way to the island but we may fool him if we decide to travel underwater for a few miles."

"But you couldn't do that with the plane on deck," protested Tim.

"We might release the plane and have you fly on ahead, meeting us at the rendezvous on the island," suggested Ford.

If Tim thought his days on the *News* had been busy, they were nothing compared with the bustle of activity which settled down on the *S-18*. For his own part, he was busy testing the seaplanes at the Sea King factory and he finally selected the craft which the sales manager had recommended. It was a three passenger job, light but sturdy and exceptionally easy to handle.

For the next week Tim went to the airplane plant daily to take special instructions in the handling of the plane and to learn the trick of getting off choppy water for there was no telling in what kind of weather he might be called upon to make a flight.

The fuel tanks were enlarged to give the speedy craft a cruising radius of a thousand miles and the pontoons were especially reinforced for the rough work which Tim and his plane might encounter.

By the end of the week great changes had been effected in the hull of the *S-18*. Steel workers had cut out the special diving chamber in the forward torpedo room, the galley had been installed in the rear compartment which was the crew's quarters, a special radio set capable of communicating instantly with the New York Journal office was in place, and many other minor alterations necessary for the cruise had been made. The crew was being increased daily, but it was not until the first mess was served on board that Tim had a chance to see them together. In all, sixteen men were to make the trip into the Caribbean and Tim looked at them with interest as they sat around the table for the evening meal.

At the head of the table was Commander Ford and at the other end Pat Reynolds. Tim sat at Pat's right. Ranged up and down each side were the other thirteen, George Gadd, the engineer, Fred Hanson, the chief electrician, Joe Gartner, old navy torpedoman and gunner, Charlie Gill and Russ Graham, deep sea divers, and their assistants, Earl Bell and Roy Gould.

Ike Green was the radio operator while Forman Gay, Erich Gaunt, Sam Schneider, Al Hardy and Tom Grandrath were former submarine men who would assist in the general operation of the submarine. With the exception of Pat, Tim and Ike Green, the radioman, and the divers, all of the others had served with Ford during the war. The divers and their assistants were old navy men who could be relied upon and Tim knew that Commander Ford was taking every precaution against any treachery among members of his own crew.

It was a clean, hard-bitten crew that could be depended upon in any emergency.

The Commander, Ford was discussing final plans.

"We're going down the sound for a trial run tomorrow morning. If everything goes well, we'll start south the day after tomorrow."

Early the next morning lines were cast off and the *S-18*, pulsating to the clicking of her powerful Diesels, was backed slowly away from the shipyard. A tug stood by to give any assistance needed, but the *S-18* cleared the yard and nosed slowly down river. Overhead a seaplane wheeled.

Tim was in the conning tower with Commander Ford and he pointed upward.

"That must be Sladek's plane, keeping track of us," nodded Ford. "I understand his ship is ready to go at a moment's notice. He's gathered a crew of thirty of the toughest characters on the waterfront and promised them all a good slice of the bullion if he gets it. Knowing Sladek as I do, I wouldn't put much faith in his word if I were a member of that crew."

When the *S-18* was clear of the lower bay, the warning bell sounded and everyone on deck went below. Hatches were made fast and every member of the crew went to his station. For Tim there was nothing to do but stand in the control room and watch the activities of the others for he was not experienced enough in submarine operation to be placed at one of the important posts.

Commander Ford's commands were crisp and alert. The Diesels were silent and only the faint humming of the big electric motors could be heard. Then the *S-18* moved on a slight angle and Tim knew they were going below. He had encountered a good many queer sensations in an airplane, but

none quite so alarming as the one which gripped him now. He was actually going under the surface with only the thin steel walls of the submarine to ward off the destructive force of the water.

Tim glanced around the control room. Commander Ford was standing with his eyes glued to the periscope. Pat was at the main diving rudders. Forman Gay and Erich Gaunt were at the valves which controlled the ballast tanks. All were silent, intent on their work.

"Are the forward ballast tanks flooded?" snapped the commander.

"Yes sir," replied Pat.

"How about the after tanks?"

"They're flooded."

"Then level off and hold her at forty feet."

The submarine resumed her even keel, but Tim knew they were forty feet below the surface.

Commander Ford left his post and visited each compartment, making sure that everything was functioning smoothly. When he returned, he said calmly: "We'll go a little deeper."

The diving rudders were inclined again and the *S-18* nosed its way deeper into the water.

Tim watched the depth gauge, fascinated. The needle was marking the distance steadily. Sixty, seventy, eighty feet they went. Now they were moving downward again. Ninety, ninety-five and then a hundred.

George Gadd, the engineer, came into the control room.

"Everything's all right so far," he reported.

"Then we'll go the rest of the way," decided Commander Ford.

Tim knew what the order meant. They were going to the bottom, going down to make absolutely sure that the *S-18* was ready for the Caribbean treasure hunt.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

On the Bottom

The depth gauge was dropping steadily as the *S-18* plunged downward through the black waters. From Commander Ford on down, everyone was tense. This was the big test. If anything went wrong— But they couldn't think of that, that is, no one except Tim who had nothing else to do.

"Ease off on the diving rudders," snapped Commander Ford. "We're almost down."

"How's the bottom?" asked George Gadd.

"Charts show it to be good and firm. We'll just touch and then start up again."

The depth gauge showed 205 feet when there was a gentle scraping sound and the *S-18* came to rest on the bottom of the sound. Beads of water were standing all over the interior of the glistening white hull for the pressure at that depth was tremendous.

Commander Ford left his post and made a thorough tour of the submarine. When he returned he was obviously elated.

"Everything's holding fine," he said. "Now we'll get ready to return to the surface."

Orders flew rapidly. The diving planes were readjusted and Forman Gay and Erich Gaunt stood ready to blow the ballast from the diving tanks and lighten the sub for the rise to the surface.

"Blow the tanks," ordered the Commander.

Compressed air hissed through the high pressure lines and Tim knew that despite the pressure of the water at that depth the air was blowing the ballast from the tanks. In a moment or two the *S-18* would quiver, come to life, and start the upward ascent.

Commander Ford was watching the gauges intently. There was no movement of the *S-18* and he turned toward Gay and Gaunt.

"We're giving the tanks all we've got," said Gaunt. "There's 1,500 pounds of air pressure pushing that water out."

"Hold it for a minute," ordered Ford as Charlie Gill, the chief diver, stumbled into the room.

Charlie's face was white, strained.

"We're stuck, chief, we're stuck. This bottom is as soft as a mud pie and the current has rammed us against the side of an old derelict. We're settling deeper into the stuff every minute."

"Stand by your posts," cried the Commander. Grabbing Gill by the shoulder, he hurried him forward. Tim, who had no duty to attend, followed them into the diving compartment where a special quartz window to observe diving operations had been placed. A powerful searchlight had been turned on by Gill and it revealed the trap into which the *S-18* had settled. They were tight against the slime-encrusted hull of an old barge, probably a garbage scow used in hauling the refuse from New York City.

"That also explains the soft bottom," said Ford. "They've been dumping garbage out here."

"It may make garbage of us," said Gill bitterly.

"Can you get into your diving outfit and get outside and place a bomb?" asked the Commander.

"Not at this depth. I've got to be in the diving compartment and come down gradually. The pressure would break me in two if I walked out there now."

"Then how about a bomb?"

"We could get that outside, but it's hard to tell where it will go off. If it's too close to the hull, it might crush us and you know the answer to that."

Commander Ford nodded. "We'll try it again."

He returned to the control room where the motors were raced first ahead and then in reverse, but the *S-18* failed to rise out of the muck and instead seemed to be burrowing its way further into the soft stuff.

Commander Ford ordered the motors cut out and called the crew into the control room.

"We're in a jam," he said. "You know as well as I do that we can't expect help from the surface in time to do us any good. If we escape we've got to do it ourselves and there's only one way. That's by using one of the special depth bombs and hoping it will jar us loose. There's a chance the explosion may crush our own hull, but that's a risk we'll have to take."

"Let's get it over with," put in the chief electrician. "I was on the bottom of the English channel for twelve hours in a sub during the war and this waiting is awful."

The rest of the crew voiced the sentiments of the chief electrician. Pat was placed in charge of the control room while Commander Ford and Charlie Gill and Russ Graham, the divers, and Joe Gartner, the torpedo man and gunner, went ahead to make preparations to explode the bomb.

The explosive was dangerous stuff and none of them relished handling it, but in it they saw their one chance of escape. The bomb was in a special steel case with a small aperture in which the timing device was located. The fuse was set for five minutes and the bomb placed in the diving chamber.

Tim's nerves felt shaky. The bomb was going now. In just five minutes the deadly blast would go off. If they didn't get it out of the diving chamber and against the derelict, there wouldn't be a ghost of a chance for them.

But Charlie Gill and Russ Graham were versatile men. They had been in plenty of tight places before. Working quickly and surely, they opened the outer door of the diving chamber. At that depth a terrific spray of water shot into the inner chamber and the bomb bobbed from side to side. Then the force of the water pushed it outside the hull of the submarine. In the glow from the searchlight they saw the bomb drift away from the side of the submarine. The same current which was holding the *S-18* fast against the derelict was driving the bomb against it.

Commander Ford, watch in hand, was counting the seconds.

"Better close the outer door of the diving compartment," he told Charlie Gill. "There's little more than a minute left."

The Commander of the *S-18* hurried back to the control room.

"On the alert," he told the men. "Everyone be ready for double quick action. There's thirty seconds left before the bomb explodes." Tim glanced around the room. Erich Gaunt and Forman Gay were bent over the levers which controlled the ballast tanks. Pat was tense at the diving rudders while back in the motor room George Gadd stood by to help the chief electrician. The crew of the *S-18* was ready.

The flying reporter was fascinated as the second hand of his own watch ticked off the precious seconds. It might be ticking life and death for all aboard the *S-18*, 205 feet below the surface of the sound.

Ten, seven, five, three seconds left.

A muffled explosion shook the hull of the *S-18*.

"Motors full ahead!" shouted Commander Ford.

The powerful electrics leaped into action. The steel deck beneath them quivered.

They were moving! It was slow at first, but the *S-18* was shaking the slime of the bottom off its hull.

Then, with a sickening leap, they shot upward, motors on full, diving planes at the sharpest angle.

Men tumbled around in the control room like dry leaves before an autumn gale. The *S-18*, out of control, was shooting toward the surface.

Pat managed to scramble to his feet and seized the wheel which controlled the forward diving rudders. With a quick twist he lessened the sharp angle of their ascent.

Before the other men could crawl back to their stations, the grey nose of the submarine shot above the surface of the sound. It must have risen ten feet out of water, then as the rest of the sub came to the surface, slapped back into the water with a resounding crash. Everyone aboard was jarred by the shock.

"Tanks clear of water, diving planes normal?" Questions shot from the lips of Commander Ford.

Before the main hatch was opened and the sunlight streamed in, he made sure that the *S-18* had not been seriously damaged by its sudden rise. In spite of the great pressure, not a seam in the hull had been opened and the crew scrambled out on deck for a breath of fresh air.

The seaplane was still circling overhead and with a shock Tim realized they had been on the bottom less than half an hour. It had seemed a lifetime.

To the veteran submarine men the harrowing experience on the bottom of the sound seemed all in the day's work, but to Tim it was an incident he would remember all the rest of his life.

"No more garbage scows for mine," grinned Pat. "That was a little too close for comfort."

"I'd just as soon fly down to the Caribbean," said Tim as he watched the seaplane gracefully circling overhead.

Commander Ford joined them.

"After that test there's no question about the seaworthiness of the *S-18*. We're putting back to the Laidlaw yard at once. We'll start south sometime tomorrow."

That was news and Tim went below and dictated a story to Ike Green, who sent it to the Journal station. It was the first story sent directly from the *S-18*.

That night when they were back in the yard, a truck lumbered through the main gate, a winch on the dock clattered noisily and a long, cigar-shaped object came slowly down. A forward hatch was opened and the torpedo locked securely in its rack. After that a case of shells for the four-inch gun and three machine guns and a half dozen automatic rifles and sixteen revolvers with plenty of ammunition were lowered from the dock.

"We're going to be something of a floating arsenal," chuckled Pat. "Believe me, if we get in a jam old Joe Gartner is a handy man with the four-inch gun."

"What about Sladek and his expedition?" Tim asked.

"Commander Ford told me this afternoon they were ready to sail at a moment's notice. We'll be slipping away tomorrow night which may cause them a little trouble in following us."

The next day Tim went to the Sea King factory on Long Island and made sure his plane was ready. Then he wrote the final stories of plans for the departure and sent them to both the New York Journal and the *News* at home, with release dates for the next day, when they would be well out to sea and off the Jersey coast.

A subdued air of excitement gripped the crew of the *S-18*. This was the big night. Before midnight they would be headed down the East river, bound for the open sea and the start of the big adventure.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Missing Cook

Across the East river the lights of Manhattan glowed brightly while in the Laidlaw yard last minute preparations for the voyage of the *S-18* were being rushed. Supplies were being checked and every possible test of equipment was made.

In the radio room Ike Green got in contact with the New York Journal station and Tim filed his last story. The next would be sent when the *S-18* was out to sea.

A whistle shrilled on the deck overhead and Tim mounted the ladder and climbed through the main hatch. Riding lights of the submarine were on. Yard workers were casting off the lines which held the *S-18* to the towering dock.

The huge Diesels came to life and the submarine pulsed gently to their song of power. Commander Ford was at his station in the conning tower while near him at the auxiliary controls was Pat Reynolds. Half a dozen other members of the crew were on deck.

Down in the inky waters at the rear of the *S-18* the propellers churned. Slowly the submarine nosed away from the boatyard, heading out toward the East river. There was no sound from the workers on the dock; no sound from the men on deck. This business of hunting sunken treasures was deadly serious.

There was little traffic on the river after the midnight hour and the *S-18* felt its way out into mid-stream and then dropped down toward the open sound.

Somewhere behind them a ferryboat hooted dismally and a tramp steamer, just swinging out of its wharf, answered.

"Any chance that that vessel may be Sladek's?" Tim asked Pat.

"There's more than a chance. It probably is," replied the first officer.

The submarine moved down the bay at a steady eight knots an hour and Tim watched the lights of Manhattan fading into a haze. They stood well down the bay for the Sea King factory was on the south shore of Long Island.

Above him in the conning tower Tim could hear Commander Ford conversing with Pat. Then the commander leaned over the edge of the tower and called to the men on deck.

"Everyone down below," he said. "We're going to submerge and run underwater to the Sea King plant. That may throw Sladek's ship off our trail."

They tumbled below, the main hatch was sealed, and Pat checked every gauge before Commander Ford gave the order to submerge. The *S-18* went down twenty feet and then levelled off, the electric motors pushing it smoothly underwater.

With his eyes glued to a periscope, Commander Ford scanned the surface of the sound for another craft. At almost an instant's notice the *S-18* was ready to dive lower.

At the microphones, Ike Green was listening intently for the beat of the propeller of the tramp steamer. He grinned as Commander Ford entered the tiny room.

"They're puzzled," said the radio man, "and they're zig-zagging all over the lower bay."

The *S-18* continued to run underwater at a bare four knots an hour. It was three hours later when they came to the surface and the sky was lighter in the east. Sunrise was less than half an hour away. To their left was the factory of the Sea King company and the *S-18* nosed slowly toward the dock.

As the sky brightened they saw the smudge of a steamer well out to sea.

"Unless I miss my guess there goes Jack Sladek and his treasure-hunting expedition," grinned Pat.

The seaplane purchased for their trip was on the dock ready and it took less than half an hour to load the craft on the deck of the *S-18* and make it fast.

"There'll be no more diving with that sky-hopping bug on deck," said Pat.

"Which will suit me all right," replied Tim. "Anytime you want to do a little exploring under water in this tin fish just let me know and I'll cruise around in the clouds for a couple of hours."

"You may have to do that when we get down into the Caribbean if we find Sladek too close to our trail," put in Commander Ford who had come up behind them. "He's going to be a hard customer to lose and he'll probably use that seaplane of his to do a lot of scouting."

Breakfast was served by Al Hardy, who was the cook, and they enjoyed the morning meal before casting loose from the Sea King dock. Then, with all hands on deck and a bright sun shining down on them, the *S-18* resumed its southward voyage. The next port of call was to be Key West, where the fuel tanks would be replenished for the voyage across the Caribbean.

Once out to sea, half of the crew turned in, for there had been no sleep aboard the *S-18* during the hours they had been submerged. The Jersey coast gradually dropped from view and they moved southward at a steady ten knots an hour.

Tim sought his bunk in the after quarters. Ahead the Diesels pounded steadily, but the air was clean and sweet and in spite of the noise he was soon asleep.

The clatter of pans as Al Hardy prepared the noon meal awoke him and he rejoined Pat in the conning tower. Commander Ford was down in the diving room talking with the chief divers and Tim and Pat were alone.

"Do you think we're going to be in for trouble before we get through?" Tim asked as he watched the sharp bow of the *S-18* cut through the gentle swells.

"Commander Ford told me this morning that Sladek had rounded up about the prize gang of cutthroats on the New York waterfront. You'll get all of the excitement you want before this shindig ends."

"Just give me time enough to get aloft in the plane and I'll be ready for anything that comes along," said Tim, nodding toward the trim seaplane lashed securely on the forward deck.

Mess was served in relays that noon and shortly after that Tim sighted the seaplane winging up

from the south.

"Company coming," he informed Pat, who was back in the conning tower.

Commander Ford was summoned and they watched the approach of the fast craft. The plane was flying high, but as it neared the *S-18*, the pilot put it into a dive.

"That fellow knows how to handle a plane," said Tim, half to himself.

The seaplane came out of the dive at a thousand feet and circled the *S-18*.

"The answer to that is plain," said Commander Ford grimly. "That's Sladek's ship and it won't be long until his dirty old tramp steamer is on our trail again."

The seaplane winged away again and in less than two hours they saw a smudge of smoke on the horizon. Before sundown the tramp steamer, the *Iron Mate*, was riding a half mile off their port bow.

"There's no use trying to sneak away from them now," said the commander. "When we get out of Key West and head across the Caribbean we'll find some way to give them the slip."

Down the east coast the *S-18* made its leisurely way with the *Iron Mate* a constant companion. The sky was clearer, the air warmer, as they neared the southern tip of Florida and nosed into the harbor at Key West. The *Iron Mate* stood out to sea, waiting for the return of the *S-18*, for Sladek was taking no chances on getting into trouble with federal officials.

The *S-18* replenished its fuel oil tanks, fresh supplies were taken aboard, and the crew stretched its legs before the voyage into the Caribbean.

Pat and Tim strolled along the wharfs. It was a picturesque city and they enjoyed the walk at the sunset hour.

A small boat was coming in from the sea. They watched it curiously for the men at the oars were particularly vicious looking.

"I wouldn't want to meet them on a dark night," said Pat.

When they returned to the *S-18*, Commander Ford divulged his plans for eluding the *Iron Mate* and its crew of cutthroats.

"Tim," he said, "we'll hoist your seaplane overboard at once. Then we'll slip out of the harbor and run submerged until we are well away from the coast. You fool around here all day tomorrow. The next morning hop early and rejoin us at this joint." The commander indicated a spot in the Caribbean approximately two hundred miles west of Key West.

"Sladek will probably set his pilot to watching you when he finds we've given him the slip, but I'll expect you to elude him and join us at the rendezvous without being followed. A great deal will depend upon your success."

"It may take some time to shake him off my trail," promised Tim, "but I'll see that he doesn't follow me too far."

"That's good," said Ford. "Now we'll drop your seaplane overboard and prepare to slip out of the harbor. I've special clearances which will allow our departure at any hour we care to leave."

Tim directed the unloading of the *Sea King* and made sure that trim little craft was fast to the dock before he returned to the deck of the *S-18*.

Pat was checking over the crew list. Everyone answered present except Al Hardy, the cook.

"Anyone see Al?" demanded Pat.

"He left just before sundown to get some supplies he needed," said Erich Gaunt. "He should have been back half an hour ago."

"We'll wait a few minutes more," said Pat, hurrying below to inform Commander Ford that the cook was missing.

A half hour elapsed and Al was still among the missing. At Commander Ford's Order, the crew scattered along the docks, seeking their missing cook. By ten o'clock, with still no trace of Al, the commander gave the order to clear the lines. The *S-18* was going without its cook.

"Maybe you can find him in the hoosegow in the morning," Pat told Tim. "If you do, load him in your plane and bring him along. We need a good cook."

"I'll do my best to find him," promised Tim as the *S-18* slipped away from the dock.

Tim watched the submarine until its lights faded into the night. He made arrangements with the watchman at the dock to keep an eye on the seaplane. Then he turned away from the waterfront. He was unfamiliar with the city and he stumbled along a poorly lighted street. From an alley to his right came a groan. Tim hesitated. It sounded like a human being in agony, but it might be a waterfront trap of thugs to lure him from the street.

The sound came again. There was no mistaking it this time. Someone was in great pain. Tim ducked into the alley. Along one wall was a huddled form. He bent down and lifted the man's head. It was too dark to distinguish the features and Tim lugged the man to the head of the alley where the rays from a street lamp half a block away gave him some light.

He bent down again and looked into the battered face of Al Hardy, the missing cook.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Warning Note

The cook of the *S-18* had been badly beaten and Tim realized that he was in need of immediate medical attention. He managed to get the unconscious Hardy over his shoulders and he staggered down the block until he was under the street light.

Glancing up and down the street, Tim saw that he was alone. He lowered the cook from his shoulders and laid him on the walk under the light. Then he raced down the street toward a cluster of lights several blocks away, where he was fortunate enough to find a night patrolman on duty there and the officer summoned an ambulance.

When the ambulance reached the lonely street, they bundled the cook aboard and Tim climbed up in the front seat beside the driver while the interne rode inside.

It was after midnight before the cook regained consciousness and another two hours before he was strong enough to see Tim.

When the flying reporter entered the hospital room the cook looked out at him from beneath a mass of bandages.

"He's got lots of endurance," said the doctor on duty, "or he wouldn't have been able to live through the terrific beating he got. Don't talk to him any longer than necessary."

Tim sat down by the bed.

"Tell me what happened, Al."

The cook's voice was little more than a whisper and Tim leaned over to catch the words.

"I was on my way back to the wharf, when they ganged me and dragged me into a deserted warehouse."

Even one sentence had visibly sapped his strength and the cook rested before continuing.

"They wanted to know our destination. When I wouldn't tell them they beat me."

Tim's eyes blazed with anger. There was no question in his mind who the "they" Al was referring to meant. It was the boatload of ruffians he and Pat had seen rowing in from the open sea. Undoubtedly they were from the *Iron Mate*, Sladek's ship.

"I went almost crazy with the pain." There was a choked sob in the cook's voice. "They burned the bottom of my feet with cigarettes."

There was a long pause and Tim waited patiently, wondering whether Al Hardy had finally given away the secret of their destination.

"They were going to kill me," the cook went on, each word an obvious effort. "Finally, finally I told them it was an island off the coast of Yucatan, but no one but the commander knew what one."

"Did they believe you?" asked Tim.

"They must have. That's all I remember until I came to in the hospital. I'm sorry I talked."

"Don't worry about that, Al," said Tim, gripping the cook's hand firmly. "Any of the rest of us would have talked a lot sooner. I'm going to leave you now. I've got to contact the *S-18* with the seaplane in the morning. I've made arrangements for them to take good care of you here. By the time you're well we'll be on our way back and you'll have a good share of the treasure."

Before leaving the floor, Tim stopped at the desk.

"Just how badly is he injured?" he asked the doctor.

"An average man would die from shock, but he looks like he has a fine constitution. I believe he'll pull through."

"See that he has everything he needs," said Tim. "In case of an emergency you can communicate with Commander Ford's representative in New York for further instructions."

The information Al Hardy had given made Tim change his plans completely. Sladek and his crew knew the *S-18* was bound for the coast of Yucatan and Tim felt sure they would abandon any attempt to follow the *S-18* across the Caribbean. Instead they would use their own seaplane to locate Commander Ford's expedition after it reached the island which held the secret of the Southern Queen.

To Tim it seemed the most important thing was to get in touch with Commander Ford and appraise him of the sudden turn in events. Instead of waiting to keep the rendezvous on the following day, he would attempt to overtake the *S-18* as soon as dawn broke.

On his way back to the waterfront Tim stopped at an all-night restaurant and ate a hearty breakfast. The watchman at the dock lent a willing hand and by dawn Tim had the *Sea King* ready to take the air.

"I don't like the looks of the sky," said the watchman. "There's wind and a nasty sea in them clouds."

"I'll risk it anyway," said Tim. "It's important."

"Then keep an eye on a handy cay where you can find shelter in the lee," advised the watchman as Tim started the motor of the *Sea King*. The powerful engine ran true and sweet and after getting it thoroughly warmed up, Tim scudded across the gray water and lifted the dripping pontoons into the sky.

He knew the *S-18* would be following the course to the rendezvous set for the next day and he charted a compass path through the air.

Key West dropped from sight in the greyness of the morning and he winged a solitary way out over the Caribbean. Below the swells were sharper. It wouldn't be easy landing and getting the *Sea King* aboard the *S-18*.

For nearly an hour Tim bored into the west. He should be near the *S-18* and he scanned the surface of the ocean with anxious eyes. For half an hour he circled in wide swoops. The wind was freshening and the sea beneath him was choppy when he finally sighted the conning tower of the submarine.

Tim dropped down until he was just above the surface of the water. The nose of the *S-18* was plowing through the swells and there were only two huddled figures in the conning tower. Tim

recognized them as he flashed by, Commander Ford and Pat. They waved wildly as Tim gauged the strength of wind and wave. It was too risky to attempt a landing and he scrawled a note on a sheet of paper and crammed it into an old tobacco can he had found along the waterfront and brought along for just such a purpose.

With his motor almost idling, he swept down on the *S-18* again. Watching his speed carefully, he hurled the tin can toward the submarine. It landed well in front and bobbed restless on the water.

Commander Ford and Pat had seen the can strike the surface and under their skillful hands the submarine was brought to a halt. A wave washed the tin alongside where another member of the crew, who had emerged from the control room, retrieved it, and handed the can up to the conning tower.

Pat signalled that they understood the contents of Tim's message, and the flying reporter zoomed the *Sea King* sharply in a farewell salute as he opened the throttle and roared back toward Key West. On the way back he sighted the *Iron Mate* far to his right and a good thirty miles behind the *S-18*. If anything, the submarine was a good two knots an hour faster than the *Iron Mate* when it was running on the surface.

Tim reached Key West safely, saw that the *Sea King* was refueled and ready to go on short notice, and then went to the hospital to see the cook. Al Hardy was sleeping soundly and Tim continued to a hotel where he went to bed to get some much needed rest.

It was late afternoon before he awoke. He made another call at the hospital, but was advised not to see the cook. After supper he went to a movie and then turned in early for with the dawn would come another long flight.

During the night the wind subsided and ideal flying weather greeted Tim when he reached the waterfront. The sun was casting a rosy hue over red-tiled roofs and Tim welcomed the chance to soar into the cool, sweet morning air.

The *Sea King* responded to the impulse of the starter with a roar and Tim flashed across the surface of the bay and into the air. He made a half circle into the west and lined away for a fast flight to overhaul the *S-18*.

It was better than two hours later and fifty miles beyond their rendezvous when Tim finally sighted the submarine, sliding through the water at a strong twelve knots an hour.

He brought the *Sea King* down to an easy landing and then taxied alongside the *S-18*, which was now lying motionless. Willing hands helped fasten the crane and its rigging to the seaplane and the craft was soon lodged safely on the deck of the submarine. Then they were under way again, the thin nose of the *S-18* cleaving its way toward the sunken treasure in the hold of the *Southern Queen*.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Isle of the Singing Trees

While Pat was on duty in the conning tower, Tim recounted in detail to Commander Ford just what had taken place in Key West. When he was through the Commander looked extremely grave.

"Now that Sladek knows we are bound for an island off the coast of Yucatan, our only hope is for speed. It may take him several days to locate us after we are there, but with his seaplane he is certain to do that. We'll continue ahead as fast as possible and once over the wreck of the Southern Queen we'll lose no time in going down and getting what we can."

Only Commander Ford knew the exact location of the island they sought off the coast of Yucatan. As the hours rolled into days, the tension aboard the *S-18* grew. There had been no further sign of the *Iron Mate* and they wondered whether Sladek was ahead or behind.

Tim wrote a story each day and Ike Green flashed it over his powerful set to the station of the New York Journal, where it was relayed to Tim's own paper at Atkinson.

The third night after Tim joined the *S-18* out of Key West he felt the pulse of the diesels slowing down. He tossed on his clothes and made his way to the control room and climbed the ladder to the conning tower. Commander Ford and Pat were intently scanning the horizon.

Pat turned toward Tim.

"We'll reach the island about dawn," he said.

Commander Ford was looking at a chart with a hand torch. One finger stopped at a tiny island off the coast of Yucatan.

"That's our destination," he said. "If Crazy John knew what he was talking about, the Southern Queen went down on a reef just off the Isle of the Singing Trees."

"What island?" asked Tim.

"The Isle of the Singing Trees. It's marked here on the chart and is uninhabited."

The *S-18* crept through the thinning night at half speed and with the coming of the dawn, they saw the outline of the island. It was small and seemed barely able to keep its head above the restless Caribbean. Breakers, indicating the danger of hidden reefs, fringed the isle. Through the powerful glasses they could see a dense tangle of vegetation and beyond the Isle of the Singing Trees the dim outlines of the mainland, which was still shrouded by the morning mists.

The pulses of the men aboard the *S-18* quickened. They were within sight of their goal.

Tim scanned the surface of the ocean. There was no sign of the *Iron Mate*, not even a faint smudge of smoke to cause them apprehension.

Commander Ford ordered the Diesels stopped. A piping hot breakfast was served to every member of the crew and then the slow, creeping trip toward the island was resumed.

As they neared the desolate spot, Tim could understand why Crazy John had not cared to return. There was nothing beautiful about the Isle of the Singing Trees. The beach was rough and strewn with rock and as they approached the island they heard the singing of the wind through the tangled growth. Truly the island had been well named.

The island had never been adequately charted, and Commander Ford was feeling his way past the dangerous reefs, one of which had brought a sudden end to the Southern Queen eleven years before.

Jagged splinters of rock reached up from the ocean bottom to impale the hull of the *S-18*, but each time the skilful hands of her commander directed the submarine past the danger spot. There was a brisk wind, and waves broke sharply over the hull, but at last the *S-18* was past the outer rim of rock which encircled the island and safely into the smoother water. Everyone breathed easier as the order to let go the anchor came from the conning tower and the mud hook was dropped sharply away.

Two sturdy boats, both collapsible, were brought up from the diving compartment and assembled on the deck. Charlie Gill and Russ Graham, the chief divers, checked over their equipment and Pat gave Tim a hand in loosening the fastenings which held the seaplane to the deck.

Joe Gartner even found time to polish his beloved four inch gun and Tim felt that Joe was secretly praying for a chance to get into action against the *Iron Mate*.

When the first boat was lowered into the water, Commander Ford stepped into the stern and Charlie Gill and Russ Graham manned the oars. The commander was going to waste no time in attempting to locate the wreck of the treasure ship.

The crew of the *S-18*, clustered on deck, watched the progress of the small boat as it bobbed about inside the reefs. Both Gill and Commander Ford were busy making soundings while the other diver handled the boat. Back and forth they crept along the reef, their lines dragging the bottom for some sign of the Southern Queen.

The hours slipped away and the other boat, in charge of Pat, joined the first in the quest for the location of the old vessel.

Tim remained on deck, squatting in the shadow of the seaplane. Ike Green joined him.

"Why don't they take the *S-18* down and creep along the bottom until they find the Southern Queen?" asked Tim.

"Commander Ford's afraid of the currents around the reef. He wants to know something about the bottom before he takes the *S-18* down."

The remainder of the afternoon was spent with the two small boats dragging their grappling hooks along the bottom. At sundown the weary crews returned to the submarine. There was no use to ask whether they had found any trace of the Southern Queen. The tired, disappointed faces were enough.

"What about the bottom?" Tim asked Pat.

"It's going to be a tough proposition even if we find the old ship. Lots of rock down there and queer currents. There must be all kinds of holes in the outer reef."

Commander Ford was silent, planning the activities for the next day, and everyone aboard the

submarine, except the watch, was in their blankets early.

The next morning at dawn the men of the *S-18* were on deck, preparing for another day of grappling for the wreckage of the Southern Queen.

"I wonder if Crazy John could have been mistaken?" Tim asked Pat.

"It's possible, but I don't believe Commander Ford would have fitted out an expensive expedition like this if he hadn't been pretty sure of his facts. We've got a lot of territory inside the reefs to explore before we give up hope."

"Or before Sladek and the *Iron Mate* arrive," put in Tim, searching the sky for a possible trace of the seaplane from the tramp steamer.

There was a bright, burning sun and throughout the morning hours the boat crews toiled, dragging hooks on the uneven bottom. After a hasty lunch, they returned to the gruelling task. Tim, confident that the seaplane could be made ready for flight in a minimum time, squatted on the deck and watched the operations.

It was late afternoon when a joyful shout from Pat rang across the water.

"We've snagged something!" he cried.

Commander Ford in the other boat hastened toward the spot and more grapnels were dropped.

Fifteen minutes later the men waiting on the deck of the submarine knew that the Southern Queen had been found. Commander Ford dropped a line with a buoy and the two boats headed back for the *S-18*. Fatigue was miraculously wiped from the faces of the boatmen as they pulled alongside, and Commander Ford gave them the information they all sought.

"Diving operations will start in the morning," he said.

There was a joyous whoop from the crew of the *S-18*. This was what they had been watching for, a chance to get the treasure of the Southern Queen.

The Battle with the *Iron Mate*

Plans for the recovery of the treasure of the Southern Queen were talked over fully at mess that night.

"The wreck is in about 185 feet of water," said Charlie Gill. "That's not a bad depth in itself but the currents down there are tough. They might sweep a diver into a hole in the hull and he'd never get out."

"Then you think we'd better take the *S-18* right down beside the old ship so you can work out of our own hull?" asked Commander Ford.

"From the standpoint of the diver, that's going to be the safest way," said Charlie, "and it will be a whole lot faster. Once we get our hands on the gold we'll be able to transfer it directly aboard the *S-18*"

Commander Ford nodded thoughtfully.

"You're right. The currents you speak of can cause trouble even for a submarine the size of the *S-18*, but I guess that's the only solution. We'll make our first dive in the morning."

Turning to Tim, he added: "You'd better get your seaplane off the deck tonight. Make it fast to the beach. I don't want to lose any time when daylight comes."

Members of the crew aided Tim in getting the Sea King off the deck and into the water. It was night before the task was completed, and he taxied the trim little craft up to the beach under the guiding rays of a searchlight on the conning tower. While Tim was making the plane fast for the night, Pat rowed in from the *S-18* to take him back.

The Isle of the Singing Trees was living up to its name that night. The tangled mat of underbrush came down close to the water's edge and from it came a mournful melody. Now and then a vagrant breeze, skipping through the tree tops, added a higher note and Tim shivered at the loneliness and the desolation. The lights of the *S-18*, a bare 200 yards from the shore, looked far away. He was glad when Pat's boat grated on the rocky beach.

Pat also felt the weird atmosphere of the island.

"It isn't healthy here," he said. "Let's get back to the *S-18*."

Tim jumped into the boat and they pulled lustily toward the safety and comfort of the submarine.

Men slept restlessly on the *S-18* that night. Tomorrow they were going to the bottom of the bay. If fortune favored them, they would come back to the surface with a wealth of gold.

Tim was as restless as any of them, turning and tumbling around in his narrow bunk. An hour before dawn he slipped out of his blankets, dressed, and went up on deck. Commander Ford was in the conning tower and Tim wondered whether he had slept any during the night.

"I'm a little anxious about the Sea King," said the flying reporter. "I'd like to turn the searchlight on the beach."

"Not right now," said the commander softly. "There are lights of some kind over to our left."

Tim turned sharply. Low in the water, and far out, he caught the faint glow of lights.

"The *Iron Mate*?" he asked breathlessly.

"Perhaps. We'll have to wait until dawn to know the truth."

"It may be some passing steamer."

"These are dangerous waters. Regular traffic keeps away from this section of the coast."

Tim watched the lights intently. They were barely moving, but it seemed as though they were coming nearer.

There was a faint glow in the east when Commander Ford spoke again.

"Go below and rout out the crew. Tell Joe Gartner I want arms issued to every man. As soon as that is done I want him up here for final instructions."

Tim shot down the ladder into the control room, landing with a bang that resounded through the interior. He raced back to the crew's quarters. Men, only half awake, tumbled from their bunks.

"Everyone out!" cried Tim. "Joe, you're to issue arms at once. Then Commander Ford wants to see you on deck."

"Glory be," croaked Joe. "It must be the *Iron Mate*. Maybe I'll get a chance to unlimber my gun after all."

They tumbled into their clothes and went forward where Joe issued ammunition belts and revolvers. A stack of rifles was placed in a special rack in the control room with a box of ammunition beside them. The *S-18* was getting ready for trouble.

On deck Joe Gartner tore the tarpaulin off the four inch gun. From the depths of the *S-18* a half dozen shells were brought on deck and the gun was trained on the cluster of lights.

The sky lightened and a few minutes later the tense group on the deck of the *S-18* made out the outlines of the ship which was beyond the reefs. It was the *Iron Mate*, rolling gently in the swell.

Through field glasses they could see men clustered along the rail of the tramp steamer and Tim thought he could see Sladek on the bridge. The first move was up to the *Iron Mate* and it was not long in coming. From the far side of the steamer came the roar of an airplane engine and the seaplane took wing, its colors flashing in the bright rays of the sun.

"Better get ashore at once and have your own plane ready to take off," Commander Ford advised Tim. "Take Pat with you and be sure that you have a light machine gun."

Pat got the gun and plenty of ammunition from Joe Gartner and they tumbled into one of the small boats and started for shore.

Out to sea the other plane was climbing rapidly, circling over the *Iron Mate*. It was up 2,000 feet by the time Tim and Pat reached the Sea King and had torn off the motor coverings and loosened the moorings.

Tim piled into the after cockpit and snapped on the starter. The motor awoke with a roar and he warmed it up thoroughly, keeping an eye on the plane above. There was little wind and he could take off in a straight dash across the water.

Pat, the light machine gun in his arms, climbed into the forward cockpit. There were parachutes for both pilot and passenger and Tim instructed his companion in the operation of the chute.

"If we go aloft I'll get even with you for some of the unhappy hours I've spent in that tin fish," chuckled Tim.

Pat, a little white around the lips at the thought of his first trip aloft, grinned gamely.

"I can take it," he said.

The plane from the *Iron Mate* was darting toward the Isle of the Singing Trees. The ship was coming down now in a terrific power dive. Tim estimated the speed at nearly 150 miles an hour. The air was filled with the roar of the motor.

Then the oncoming plane levelled off and flashed over the *S-18*. Something black hurtled over the side.

Tim tried to shout, but his throat closed and he could only gasp. Automatically he leaped into action, his hand jamming the throttle on full. The Sea King scuttled across the water, angling away from the *S-18* while down from the sky plummeted the black object. It struck the water a good hundred yards away from the *S-18* and a fountain of water arose in the air. The noise of the bomb could be heard even above the roar of the Sea King's powerful motor.

Tim lifted the finely trimmed craft into the air and set out in pursuit of the bomber. Below them on deck of the *S-18* Gunner Joe was training his sights on the *Iron Mate*. Tim, looking down, saw a puff of smoke and a fountain of water leap into the air beyond the *Iron Mate*. Joe had overshot his target.

But there was no time to watch the Iron Mate now. Tim concentrated on the task of bringing down the other plane. Ahead of him, Pat crouched in the cockpit, the machine gun ready.

The seaplane was making a desperate attempt to get under the shelter of the *Iron Mate* but Tim drove on relentlessly on the tail of the other ship. There was no chance for the pilot to land and taxi back to the steamer.

The Sea King was fast and easy to handle. In less than two minutes Tim had overhauled the bombing plane and Pat, sighting with a steady hand, pulled gently on the trigger of the light machine gun. It chattered and jumped, but he got his aim again and poured a stream of bullets at the target ahead.

Tim, watching intently and matching every move of the fleeing pilot, saw the bullets ripping into the wings. Then Pat got the range on the fuselage and the line of bullets crept nearer and nearer the cockpit.

Sensing that death was near, the pilot tried to loop and get onto the tail of Tim's plane, but the flying reporter guessed the maneuver almost before it started and he placed Pat in a position to pour a stream of bullets into the motor of the other plane.

Suddenly there was only the sound of their own motor. The other seaplane was falling away with its prop turning idly. Pat, thoroughly angered at the attempt to sink the *S-18* with a bomb, trained his gun on the other pilot but Tim pulled the nose of the Sea King up and spoiled his aim.

"He's all through," he shouted. "They'll never be able to repair that motor."

Spread out below them was a strange panorama. Against the green background of the Isle of the Singing Trees the *S-18* was throwing shell after shell at the *Iron Mate*, and the tramp steamer was responding. One good, solid shot would sink the *S-18*, while the *Iron Mate* could stand a lot of shelling without going down.

Tim noticed that the *S-18* was moving slowly back and forth behind the reef and that the submarine was ready to submerge at a moment's notice. Only Gunner Joe and the men he had selected to help him load the gun were on deck.

"Joe's using a lot of ammunition," cried Pat.

"He'd better get a direct aim soon or they'll get us after all."

A white line of bubbles streaked the water.

"Joe's fired his torpedo!" cried Pat.

A lookout on the *Iron Mate* saw the torpedo and the old tramp swung its stern into the clear just in time. The torpedo streaked on out to sea.

Tim's attention shifted back to the pilot of the crippled seaplane. It was landing at least a mile away from the *Iron Mate* and he admired the cool nerve of the other pilot, who brought his craft down to a safe landing. With motor dead, the flyer would have to wait for a boat from the *Iron Mate* to pick him up.

Tim sent the Sea King into a dive while Pat shouted questions at him, landed and taxied alongside the disabled plane.

Pat covered the other flyer with his machine gun. Tim recognized the pilot as the man who had flown the amphibian for Sladek on the trip to Cedar river valley.

Fierce anger glowed in the eyes of the other pilot, but he remained silent as Tim scrambled onto the right pontoon and made his way toward the rear cockpit.

"Don't try any funny business," Tim warned. "My partner's got an itchy trigger finger."

"You'll never get away with this," snarled the other.

"Don't let that trouble you," retorted Tim. "You'd better worry how you're going to get away from here. You know if we decided to put a few holes in your pontoons it would be a long swim to the *Iron Mate* and the sharks might be hungry."

"You wouldn't dare do that."

"You tried to sink the *S-18*," snapped Tim. "Now get out of that cockpit and crawl down on the other pontoon."

"What are you going to do?"

"Shut up and get down on the pontoon like he told you," roared Pat, waving his gun menacingly.

The pilot of the disabled plane obeyed the command and Tim scrambled into the cockpit. In the bottom was what he had hoped for, half a dozen small, high-explosive bombs.

In less than five minutes he transferred the deadly cargo to his own plane.

"Thanks a lot for the pineapples," he yelled at the disgruntled flyer clinging to the pontoon. "I guess we won't sink your plane after all."

"Give me those surprise parties," said Pat.

"You can't gauge air speed," replied Tim. "I can fly and handle the bombing at the same time. We'll go low and you may be able to rake the deck of the *Iron Mate* with your gun."

Pat grinned and gave voice to a wild, Irish battle cry as the Sea King leaped into the air.

There was a gun both fore and aft on the *Iron Mate*, and both of them were firing steadily at the *S-18* when the Sea King flashed over the first time.

Pat, leaning over the edge of the cockpit, let a blistering blast of fire loose and Tim dropped one of the bombs. It struck a scant 25 yards beyond the *Iron Mate*, sending a great spray of water into the air.

Banking the Sea King sharply, they swept back toward the tramp steamer. Men were running excitedly about the deck for the attack from the air had taken them by surprise. Again Pat raked the deck with fire while Tim, working rapidly, dropped two bombs overboard.

The first one missed, falling short, but the second struck only a few feet from the gun on the fore deck. There was a shattering blast of flame and smoke, the scream of rent steel, and the cries of frightened men.

Relentlessly the Sea King bore down again. This time Tim aimed at the after deck. There were only three bombs left. He swooped low, dropping only one of the missiles, but he had the range and scored a direct hit. In less than a minute both guns had been put out of commission and the ship badly damaged.

"We'll plant another 'egg' midships and then call it a day," yelled Tim.

Once more the Sea King, struts and wires screaming vengeance, swept down. Again Tim scored a hit, the blast from the third bomb leveling the stubby masts and the funnel. The deck of the ship was strewn with wreckage and the *Iron Mate* was definitely out of commission as far as any more fighting was concerned.

Tim landed the Sea King inside the barrier of reefs and taxied alongside the *S-18*.

"Splendid work," shouted Commander Ford, and the others in the crew were loud in their praise.

Tim and Pat made the Sea King fast again at its moorings and rowed back to the submarine. In the distance the *Iron Mate* was painfully limping away from the scene.

Trapped

With the menace of the *Iron Mate* definitely removed from their thoughts, the crew of the *S-18* turned their full attention to the task of retrieving the treasure in the Southern Queen.

Mess that noon was a hasty meal with Commander Ford and the chief divers, Charlie Gill and Russ Graham, taking just time enough to grab a sandwich and gulp a cup of hot coffee.

There was a haze over the mainland and the air was heavy, surcharged with tension. The song of the Isle of the Singing Trees was high pitched and Tim would be glad to see the last of the dismal island.

Plans for the dive down to the hull of the Southern Queen were completed. Members of the crew hurried to their stations, hatches were made fast and the warning bell echoed throughout the interior.

Tim was in the diving compartment. Charlie and Russ had already donned their diving suits and entered the special compartment. Telephone cables, protected by a steel sheeting, ran into the main compartment, giving the divers instant communication with their helpers. Earl Bell was at the phones as chief assistant with Roy Gould standing by.

Commander Ford hurried up.

"Everything all set?" he asked Bell.

"Charlie and Russ are ready and everything in the special diving compartment seems to be all right."

"Tell them we're going down."

Commander Ford hastened back to the control room. From the rear of the *S-18* came the hum of the powerful electrics. Tim felt the submarine move slightly. They were going down, going to the bottom of the treacherous bay in search of a fortune in gold, a fortune which had been under water for eleven years.

The special diving compartment in which Charlie and Russ were seated filled with water. Gently the *S-18* eased toward the bottom, scarcely more than a foot at a time.

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty feet they went down. Tim watched the gauges fascinated.

The two divers, in their heavily armored suits, sat quietly in their compartment as the pressure increased with the depth.

The 100-foot mark was passed. Still the *S-18* was going down. Roy Gould snapped on a switch. Powerful searchlights set in the outer hull especially for this operation cut the blackness of the water. Strange fish blinked their eyes and scuttled away from this monster which was invading the deep.

Now Tim was at one of the quartz windows. In spite of their high power, the searchlights were effective for only a few feet. While he watched the gaunt mast of a ship came upward from the depths. They were descending almost on top of the Southern Queen.

A stubby funnel, rising at a crazy angle, was next, and ahead of that Tim thought he could glimpse the battered bridge.

The motion of the *S-18* was almost imperceptible now. The divers, watching the descent closely, were giving orders which Earl Bell relayed on to the control room.

The main deck of the Southern Queen, now heavily encrusted with sea growth, came into view and the *S-18* slid lower. There was a gentle bump as it touched the bottom.

Commander Ford came forward and took the telephone from Earl. There was a slight jar as the divers opened the outer door of their compartment and stepped outside the hull of the submarine. Pressure inside their own compartment and that outside had been equalized all of the way down and they were ready to seek an opening into the interior of the treasure ship.

Moving slowly and with each carrying a hand torch, they disappeared beyond the outer rim of light.

It was a tense group in the diving room, clustered around Commander Ford. Tersely he relayed the progress of the divers.

"They're going back along the hull, hunting for an opening. Charlie Gill says the current is strong here but the footing is hard; probably volcanic rock."

There was a moment of silence. Electric fans kept a constant flow of air.

Commander Ford spoke again. "They're still moving back. Wait! Russ Graham's found a hole, probably the one knocked in the hull when the Southern Queen struck the reef. They're going inside!"

Every word burned itself into Tim's memory. It took nerve even to go to the bottom of the ocean, but then to get out of a submarine in a diving suit and walk around the ocean floor and climb into the interior of an old hull took more than nerve.

"They're not far from the ship's strong room," went on Commander Ford, each word low but distinct.

Eagerly they waited for the next message from the interior of the Southern Queen. Would the divers be able to get into the strong room? Would the treasure be there? A dozen questions hammered through the mind of every man aboard the *S-18*.

Roy Gould checked the even flow of air through the air lines. It was the life blood for the men outside. Once that stopped they wouldn't have a chance.

Commander Ford bent nearer the mouthpiece of the phone, pressed the headset closer to his ears, straining for the first word of the treasure. His hands were shaking slightly.

Then he turned toward them, his voice hoarse with excitement.

"They're in the strong room; they've found the treasure!"

His words echoed the length of the *S-18* and a shout went up from the crew.

"Charlie Gill says someone must have made an attempt to get the treasure out before the Southern Queen sunk. The door of the strong room is open and several of the steel chests are outside the door. They're bringing them out now."

Minutes passed as the divers, each carrying a steel chest, made their way out of the interior of the

Southern Queen and back along the side of the *S-18*.

Tim's keen eyes were the first to see them. Russ Graham was ahead, his arms wrapped around a rusty steel chest. Close behind came Charlie Gill, with a similar chest in his arms. They deposited these in the diving compartment and waved to the men watching them through the quartz windows.

Then they were beyond the circle of light, seeking more treasure in the hold of the old tramp steamer.

"How long can they remain down at this depth?" Tim asked the commander.

"Not long. The pressure is too great, but Charlie and Russ are the best divers in the world. They'll stick as long as they dare."

Another and still another trip was made by the divers into the hold of the Southern Queen. The pile of steel boxes mounted. Six were stacked together. There were only two more. Then the job would be done.

Ike Green came running forward from his radio room.

"Something mighty funny is happening near us," he told Commander Ford. "My microphones are picking up all kinds of noises within the last two minutes."

A slight tremor ran through the hull of the *S-18*.

Commander Ford shouted into the telephone.

"Charlie! Russ! Return at once! Don't attempt to bring out the rest of the gold. Hurry!"

There was another slight movement. Men looked at each other in amazement and fear. Out of the darkness came the divers. Charlie Gill had a treasure chest. Russ Graham's arms were empty. Into the protection of their diving compartment they stumbled. With a clang the outer doors snapped shut.

"We're getting back to the surface as soon as possible and away from the hull of the Southern Queen at once," snapped Commander Ford.

Men hastened back to their posts, but before they could get there, the *S-18* moved again. From the outside there was the sound of metal scraping against metal. Then silence.

They took their places, diving planes were adjusted for the ascent and orders flew from Commander Ford's lips. The electric motors purred smoothly. Compressed air hissed into the ballast tanks, blowing the water out to lighten the submarine. Tim, watching the depth gauge, waited for the needle to move.

Earl Bell came into the control room.

"You might as well shut off the motors and save the air," he said dully. "That last shock put a part of the hull of the Southern Queen on top of us. We're trapped."

Desperate Hours

The men in the control room stared at Bell with unbelieving eyes.

"I tell you part of the hull of the Southern Queen has been rolled over on top of us," shouted Earl. "We're trapped! We're trapped!" His voice broke.

Tim felt sick. Down 185 feet under the surface of the water, there was no way of sending up news of their predicament and no one there even if they could send it up.

Commander Ford remained calm.

"Stay at your posts," he ordered. "I'll go forward and see what can be learned."

Tim followed him. The Commander took over the telephone and spoke to the divers, sitting inside their compartment.

"What can you make out?" he asked Charlie Gill.

The reply was not encouraging.

"Part of the upperstructure of the Southern Queen was toppled over on us when that last earth shock came," reported Gill. "I'm going outside and see what can be done."

The doors of the diving compartment clicked open and the chief diver disappeared.

Long minutes dragged by. There was no word from the man on whom they were pinning so much of their hopes.

Finally Charlie Gill staggered back into view. Tim knew from the sag of his shoulders that the mission had been useless.

Again the doors of the diving compartment were shut and he heard Gill's voice coming over the wire into the receivers on Commander Ford's head.

"We're caught tight," reported the diver. "There doesn't seem to be a chance to escape."

Tim looked down at the rusty treasure chests, piled in such a haphazard fashion on the floor of the outer diving compartment. All thought of the treasure had left their minds now. The one desire was to get back to the surface.

The *S-18* quivered occasionally as new earth shocks rocked the bottom of the ocean.

Commander Ford put down the headset and turned back toward the control room.

"We'll try it again," he said.

The electrics hummed, the propellers threshing first one way and then another, but there was no upward movement of the submarine.

The water was blown from the diving compartment and Gill and Graham struggled out of their diving suits.

Commander Ford called them to one side, and they conversed at length. Tim caught only snatches of the conversation, but it was enough to tell him that their situation was almost hopeless. Already the air inside the *S-18* seemed heavy and his head ached miserably.

"How long can we last?" he asked Pat, who was standing by in the control room.

The chief officer shrugged.

"Let's not think about that."

The motors were shut off and the only sound was the faint humming of the ventilating fans as they forced a current of air from one compartment to another.

The crew, gathered in little groups, conversed in whispers. Joe Gartner, the gunner, battered open the top of one of the treasure chests and neat rows of gold bars were revealed. There was only a murmur of enthusiasm. Any man aboard would have traded a safe trip back to the surface for his share of the gold.

Commander Ford decided upon a desperate plane of action. A special bomb with a time fuse was rigged and Charlie Gill donned his diving suit again and went outside. They saw him working his way along the hull of the Southern Queen. Somewhere out there he would plant the bomb in the hope that the explosion would loosen the wreckage and allow the *S-18* to shoot toward the surface.

Fifteen minutes later he was back. In five more minutes the bomb would go off. Tim literally counted every second. The crew waited at their posts and the motors were ready to push the *S-18* toward the surface if they broke free.

The *S-18* shook slightly. The propellers threshed madly, but there was no upward movement.

This time Russ Graham went outside. When he came back he shook his head.

"Explosive won't budge the wreckage," he said. "It would take a bucket of nitro at this depth and we haven't any nitro."

Despair lined the face of every man who heard those words. Most of them were submarine men, and they knew what was ahead—bad air, headaches, dimming lights, then darkness for the *S-18* and for them.

"We might as well save the electricity," said Commander Ford. Lights were turned off until only one bulb gleamed in each compartment.

Some of the men got together a meal. Tim didn't feel like eating. Still true to the code of reporters, he sat down and with pencil and paper wrote the story of the last dive of the *S-18*. For an hour he wrote. Time meant nothing to the men now. The end would come when the light faded and the air gave out.

Tim's head pounded to the throbbing of the blood through his body. A few of the men rolled into their blankets, trying to sleep. The treasure chests were forgotten.

The hours passed and Tim wrote slowly, recording his impressions.

The storage batteries had been drained of their reserve by the heavy pulls of the motors in trying to free the submarine and now only two lights were on, one in the control room, the other in the crew's quarters.

It was hard to breath. The air was thick and foul. A thin stream of water was spurting into the engine room where a seam had opened under the pressure and the weight of the wreckage above it. Tim could hear the water splashing on the floor.

The light was dimmer, only a faint glow now. Then it was gone. Writing was a thing of the past, but in his hands he held the record of their tragedy. Perhaps someday the *S-18* would be found and their story known.

Tim fumbled for his blankets. The air was cold. He laid down on the bunk. Up ahead was the steady splashing of the water. Back of him a man was quietly praying.

Tim closed his eyes. His head was splitting. Perhaps sleep would bring peace.

There was no sound in the *S-18* except the low breathing of men who were saving every precious breath and the sound of the water coming in through the opened seam.

"When the water reaches the batteries there'll be chlorine," someone muttered.

"Let's hope it reaches them soon," another voice replied. "This waiting is what hurts."

Tim was drowsy, his mind a blank. The end was near for all of them. Another half hour, not much longer.

An occasional earth tremor could be felt, but they were less distinct.

Tim was on the verge of unconsciousness when the *S-18* rocked sharply as though a giant hand had grasped the conning tower and was shaking the big undersea craft in a playful manner. There was the faint sound of scraping metal, followed by another shock which threw men from their bunks.

Water was cascading in upon them. Screams filled the air.

"We've broken in two," was one desperate cry.

Tim struggled to get to his feet. Water swished about his feet and someone knocked him down. Pat was shouting wildly.

"Shut up!" he cried. "Try and get to your stations. We're moving!"

Men paused, dazed by the words. Gradually the meaning penetrated their fagged brains and through the darkness they hunted for their places.

Pat was right. Without power of its own, the *S-18* was moving. Slowly at first, then with an upward rush that tumbled them about like jack-straws. The slim nose burst through the water and rose above the surface.

Commander Ford, who had remained in the control room, crawled up the ladder and opened the main hatch. A breath of fresh, sweet air, swept down into grateful faces. One by one the men crawled out on the deck.

It was the dawn of the second day. They had been saved from death below the surface, saved by an earthquake which had shifted the wreckage of the Southern Queen off the hull of the *S-18*.

Tim looked toward the Isle of the Singing Trees. The seaplane was riding safely just off the beach. It was less than 48 hours since they had gone below but he had lived a lifetime in those desperate hours of darkness and despair.

For half an hour they relaxed, basking in the sunshine of the early morning. Then they set about making the *S-18* ready for the long cruise back to New York.

Tim, remembering the story he had written while they were on the bottom, plunged below. Part of the paper was wet, but Ike Green decided he could read it and he sat down at the radio to transmit it to the New York Journal and the Atkinson *News*.

"I'm sending a story on the recovery of the treasure," Tim said to Commander Ford. "How much shall I say the gold totals?"

"It will exceed two million dollars," smiled the Commander, "which means a tidy sum for every member of the crew."

"I wouldn't go through that experience again for a whole million," replied Tim.

"Neither would I," agreed the Commander. "It was little short of a miracle that saved us from death."

Out of the air crackled a message that afternoon. It was from George Carson, back in Atkinson.

"Your story is the best of the year," radioed the managing editor of the *News*. "Congratulations on a fine piece of writing, but don't take any more chances by going down in a submarine."

Tim slipped the message in a pocket. It had been a great adventure, more thrilling by far than he had ever dared to dream, but he would be glad when the *S-18* nosed its way back into New York harbor.

THE END

This is the fourth book in the Tim Murphy Series. Have you read all of them?

Volume I Daring Wings
Volume II Sky Trail
Volume III Circle-Four Patrol
Volume IV The Treasure Hunt of the *S-18*

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TREASURE HUNT OF THE S-18 ***

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