
BILL BOLTON
AND THE
FLYING FISH



Lieutenant NOEL SAINSBURY, Jr.

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Lieutenant NOEL SAINSBURY, Jr.

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and the

Flying Fish

BY

LIEUTENANT NOEL SAINSBURY, JR.

Author of

Bill Bolton, Flying Midshipman

Bill Bolton and the Flying Fish

Bill Bolton and Hidden Danger



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MADE IN U. S. A.

To

PHILIP MALSEED

grandson of a Marine Engineer, and who may become one

himself some day.

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Bill Bolton and The Flying Fish

CHAPTER I THE DERELICT

“There’s something wrong over yonder, Osceola.”

“Where, Bill? What are you talking about?”

The young Seminole chief spoke from the rear cockpit of Bill Bolton’s two-seater amphibian, into the transmitter of his headphone set. Bright August sunshine painted a calm Atlantic brilliant blue two thousand feet below the speeding airplane. Cirrus clouds like fleecy wisps of carded wool flecked a light blue sky which melted into the sea on the unbroken circle of their wide horizon. Since passing Cape Hatteras Light Ship flying north a quarter of an hour before, neither lad had seen a single thing to relieve the monotony of an empty ocean.

“I thought my eyesight was better than average,” Osceola continued, scanning the horizon, “but I don’t see a blessed thing.”

“It’s more habit than good vision—spotting something at sea,” returned Bill from his place at the controls. He clapped a pair of field glasses to his eyes. “There’s a single stacker off our starboard quarter. She’s almost hull down to the horizon. I’ve been watching her off and on for the past five minutes, and I’ll swear she hasn’t moved an inch. What’s more—the glasses don’t show the slightest sign of smoke.”

“I can make her out now. Think she’s worth while investigating?”

“Yes, I do. There’s something queer about that ship.”

“Why not investigate then?”

“That’s my idea. The people on board may be in a bad way. It’s our duty to be of help if we can.”

“I’m with you, but—how about the time, Bill? You father expects us in New York this afternoon.”

Young Bolton banked to starboard, then neutralized his ailerons when the plane’s nose was headed toward the dot on the horizon.

“The airline distance between Miami and New York City is one thousand and ninety-five miles,” said Bill, applying a normal amount of right rudder to offset the torque. “We’re a good deal better than half way now, and we’ve made swell

time with this light wind on our tail all the way. Don't worry, you'll see the Statue of Liberty before they turn the floodlights on her tonight."

"Okay. Your father is such a grand guy—he's been so wonderful to me and my people ever since we cleaned up that Martinengo gang—I'd hate to disappoint him. And especially so now when he is giving me this trip north."

"I savvy," Bill replied. "I'm pretty fond of Dad myself—but he'd be the last person in the world to suggest we pass up anything like this, you know."

He brought the glasses to his eyes again and stared through them for a full minute without speaking.

"The nearer we get, the queerer she looks," he muttered finally.

"Some kind of a yacht, isn't it?"

"It is. And a whopping big one. But that's not the point, Osceola. She's not moving, yet she hasn't broken out her breakdown flag at the fore. She isn't even flying her colors."

"I can't see anyone on board."

"Neither can I—and still, if she was abandoned after sunset yesterday when her colors had been hauled down, why doesn't she show her three red lights in vertical line—that's the sign of a ship not under control?"

"Some mystery!"

“I should say you’re right, Osceola. And what’s more, I don’t like it—not one little bit.”

Bill banked until the amphibian was headed into the teeth of the light breeze. With the wings level once more, he closed the throttle and pushing his stick forward, sent the plane into a normal glide. At an altitude of about twenty-five feet, he began to break the glide with a slow backward movement of the stick. With expert precision he gradually decreased their gliding angle until they were in level flight with the bottom of the hull perhaps a foot above the water. Although the plane was steadily losing speed he did not yet permit his craft to make contact; but continued to pull back the stick gradually raising the nose and depressing the tail.

Like every other trained aviator he knew that as a plane approaches the stalling point, its nose-heaviness increases sharply and the stick must be pulled farther back to compensate for this. When his point of stall was reached, Bill pulled the stick fully back, completing the stall. The step of the hull made contact. There was no rebound. For an instant, the plane skimmed the surface, then floated forward. A few yards to windward lay the yacht, broadside to the gentle ground swell.

Bill ripped off his headgear.

“Slap your feet on the pedals, Osceola,” he called. “Keep her headed for that gangway amidships. She’ll fetch it all right!”

Without waiting for a reply, he caught up a looped mooring

line and climbed out of the cockpit. An instant later he stood on the heaving grating, with the taut line wound about his arm.

“Come aboard!” he shouted. “Make it snappy, will you? This ship’s rolling like a drunken sailor!”

The agile Seminole landed beside him and the two lads ran swiftly up to the deck.

“Looks deserted, all right,” Bill eyed Osceola, while he played off the line to the plane, then made it fast. “Packed your gat, I hope?”

The young Chief grinned, and nodded emphatically. “You bet.” He produced an automatic from its holster below his left armpit. “I do everything except sleep with this since the Shell Island mixup.”

Bill nodded. “Me too, old man. From the lay of the land, we’re alone on this craft. Still, you never can tell. There’s something uncanny about a sea mystery——”

“She’s a swell ship.” Osceola motioned toward the polished brass and mahogany. “Some rich man’s plaything, I guess. Must have cost a pretty penny.”

“And she must have carried a large crew. I wonder where everybody disappeared to! I don’t know how you feel, but this ship gives me the creeps.”

“I’m glad I’ve got my gun.” Osceola released the safety catch.

“Well, we can’t stand here all day,” declared Bill. “Let’s take in the engine room first. There can’t be a leak. She’s too high in the water.”

“How do we get down there?”

“The thwartships passage forward of the main companionway is probably what we’re looking for. Let’s go see.”

Bill entered the passage with Osceola at his heels.

“Captain’s and chief engineer’s quarters,” said Bill, glancing through the open doorways on either hand.

“And everything is in apple-pie order,” added Osceola.

Bill stepped inside the captain’s cabin and began to rummage, pulling out drawers at the small desk and bureau. “Strange,” he murmured, “—not a sign of it.”

“What are you looking for?” Osceola sat down on the captain’s bunk.

“Not being a sea-faring man yourself, you probably don’t quite realize *how* darned mysterious this business is.” Bill slammed a drawer shut in disgust and turned toward his friend. “This ship has no name!” he exploded. “Oh, she had one, all right. I spotted the marks on the hull, under a fresh coat of paint where the metal lettering had been—even before we came overside. And her boats, lifebuoys and belts are gone. I thought I would find the logbook or some of her ship’s papers in the skipper’s cabin—but I’ve drawn a blank.

There isn't the merest scrap of paper.”

“And yet,” remarked Osceola thoughtfully, “the lads who had these cabins left in a hurry. I may be what you Naval Academy midshipmen call a landlubber—but I can see that they left their clothes behind.”

Bill's eyes crinkled. “Right you are. Let's go below now. I don't think Sherlock Holmes could dig any more dope out of these cabins.”

A steep stair further along the passage led down to a roomy forecabin, which, like the cabins above, they found empty. Next to the bunkroom were a crew's mess, lazarette and galley—likewise deserted.

“Look here, Bill!” cried the Indian, lifting a lid from the cook range.

Bill bent over and was astonished to see the red bed of glowing coals. “Well, I'll be doggoned! That fire has hardly burned down at all.”

“Somebody has put coal in that range less than three hours ago. I don't know anything about ships, but fires are another matter.”

“This yacht seems to be the original question mark,” said Bill gloomily. “But in spite of it, we do know three things.”

“That the people on board left in a hurry, and left not more than a couple of hours ago.—What's the third?”

“Why, that they were so keen on hiding the name of this craft that they either destroyed or took with them everything that could identify her.”

“Yes, that’s so. It sure is confusing. Everything was all right on board at breakfast time, too.”

“How do you fathom that one?”

Osceola took up a large bowl from a table-rack. “Taste that.” He pointed to a cream-colored, doughy mass in the bottom.

Bill dipped in a forefinger and brought it to his mouth. “Wheat cakes!” he exclaimed. “You’ve got it. The cook doesn’t feed the men wheat cakes knowing the ship is going to be abandoned shortly. They’re too much trouble to make in a rush.”

“Exactly!” Osceola looked pleased.

“I always knew you Carlisle lads were a wide-awake bunch,” grinned Bill. “Anything more, Mister Holmes?”

“Yes, there is, big boy—even if they do turn out real live kidders at Annapolis! I don’t know what time the ship was abandoned, but the cook left this kitchen—”

“Galley—” corrected his friend, with a wink.

“The cook left this *galley*—” Osceola continued, “shortly after breakfast.”

“And how—”

“Well, you see, he’d washed the griddle—it’s hanging up over there—”

“But he hadn’t got to this bowl yet, or those other dirty dishes on the table—” Bill broke in.

“For the first time in history,” said Osceola suavely, “Midshipman William Bolton, U.S.N., Second Class, and all the rest of it, shows a decided glimmer of almost human intelligence! ‘Sing ho, the jolly maiden and the tar’—or words to that effect . . .”

Bill saluted. “And seeing there’s no maiden, the tar suggests we beat it out of here before the famous Seminole Chief goes completely nerts! That door across the passage is marked ‘Engine Room—Keep Out.’”

“And so, naturally, we’ll go in,” laughed Osceola, and leaving the galley, he swung open the door.

The two stepped onto a metal grating. A steel ladder led down to the floor of the engine room ten feet below.

“You wait here while I have a looksee,” suggested Bill, and he ran lightly down the ladder.

From his stand on the grating, Osceola watched him make a hurried inspection of the main engines.

“Diesels,” he called up, “they are certainly big ones—but there’s not a blooming thing wrong so far as I can see.”

He stayed below for about ten minutes, then joined Osceola above. “The machinery’s all in running order,” he began.

The young Indian suddenly raised a hand to his lips, cutting Bill short. He tiptoed across the grating and into the passage, and presently beckoned Bill forward, cautioning silence.

“There’s somebody on deck!” he whispered. “He walked across that passage one flight up just now, and went on deck over on the side by the captain’s cabin.”

“You certainly have a pair of ears,” murmured Bill. “I never caught a sound. Are you sure it wasn’t a cat or a dog that got left behind?”

“Dog nothing! My ancestry and early upbringing have been more or less of a hindrance in this white man’s country—but when it comes to distinguishing sounds, Bill, I’m one hundred per cent. Those were the footsteps of a human being. He knows we are down here, whoever he is—and he doesn’t want us to know he’s aboard, or he’d have come into the open long before this.”

“Well, let’s get after him then, and find out why he’s hiding.”

“Right. But let me go first. I’ve had more experience in tracking than you. Better take off your shoes. This is a ticklish business and it’s more than likely he’s armed.”

Osceola waited until Bill was in his stocking feet with his shoes tied together and hanging about his neck. Then he passed up the stair to the passage that led to the deck like a stealthy shadow, with the young aviator at his heels.

After pausing to make sure the way was clear, the two went out on deck. Osceola seemed at a loss for an instant, then started aft, motioning Bill to follow. He walked with his body bent forward so as to keep below the level of the deckhouse portholes, and darted into the main companionway. Then without the slightest hesitation he entered a large cabin on his right, evidently the main salon. For a moment, he gazed about, then he sprang back into the passage, pushing Bill ahead of him.

While his friend watched, Osceola did a peculiar thing. He dropped to the floor and wormed his way along the passage wall until he could peer round the open door. His hand, with the automatic revolver in it, came forward, and trained the gun on someone within the room.

“You’re covered,” he said in his deep voice, “come out from under that couch—and come pronto! *Or I’ll fire!*”

CHAPTER II

SURPRISED

Bill didn't care to be thrust out of danger's way by Osceola. He stepped into the open doorway, his revolver leveled. At the far end of the yacht's salon, taking up the entire space across the rear wall, stood the couch. It was so low from the floor that he wondered not only how a human being could squeeze beneath it, but how Osceola could possibly have known that anyone was hidden there.

"Come on! Get out of that!" growled the Seminole. "And come out feet first, or you'll stop a bullet before you leave the floor."

"Please don't shoot!" cried a high-pitched, muffled voice. "I'm—I'm coming!"

A pair of rubber soled sneakers appeared from beneath the couch, soon followed by two stockinged legs. Then while the two friends stared in amazement a boy of possibly twelve years wriggled forth and got to his feet. He was a round-faced, red-headed youngster in khaki shorts and outing shirt, and across his nose and one side of his face he bore a great smudge of black coal-dust. He looked hot and badly rumped, but did not appear to be frightened in the least; on

the contrary, he was bursting with rage, and began to hold forth immediately.

“Look here, you!” he piped in his ridiculous treble, both hands thrust into trouser pockets and balancing on the balls of his feet against the roll of the ship. “What are you fellas doin’ here? Whose yacht do you think this is, anyway?”

Bill and Osceola broke into roars of laughter and holstered their automatics.

“That’s exactly what we want to know, young bantam-cock!” gasped Bill, when he could speak.

“Tell us all about it, bub,” seconded the chief. “We aren’t going to hurt you.”

For a full minute the boy stared at the two young men.

“Say!” he exploded. “You fellas don’t look like pirates!”

“Pirates?”

“Hijackers, then, or whatever you call ’em.”

“What *do* we look like?” asked Osceola, smiling.

The boy looked puzzled. “You came in a plane—I saw you land—but you talk like college men.”

“Remarkable perception—” The chief winked at Bill.

“Oh, quit your kiddin’—who are you guys, anyway?”

Bill shook his head. “Who are *you*, and what are you doing here?”

“I asked you first,” stubbornly insisted the youngster.

“All right, then,” laughed Bill. “My name is Bolton, and I’m ‘commonly known as Bill.’”

“A college man?”

“Midshipman at the Naval Academy.”

“You aren’t in uniform,” said the boy doubtfully. “How do you happen to be here?”

“Oh, I change my clothes occasionally. And this is my second class summer—I’m on leave. Anything else you’d like to know?”

“Sure—heaps!”

“Well,” Bill drew a deep breath, “I was born an orphan at the age of five, and until I was ninety-seven I could only go upstairs backward with my hair parted on the side—”

“Raspberries!” flashed back redhead. “Come on, who’s the other fella? I’ll bet six bits his middle name is Mussolini!”

“The other fella, as you so elegantly put it, is Chief Osceola, Grand Sachem of the Seminole Nation and a senior at Carlisle. And incidentally, neither Chief Osceola nor myself permit grubby little schoolboys to get fresh when we’re around.” Bill shot out a long arm and gathered in the

urchin. “Will you scalp him, Osceola?” he inquired solemnly. “Or shall I lay him across my knee and give him what he’s asking for? Stop wriggling, you young ruffian, or you’ll get a double dose!”

“Please, Mister Bolton—I didn’t mean to be fresh—really, I didn’t!” The youngster was all contrition now.

“Then snap out of it, and answer *our* questions!”

“I will, sir, I will—” he broke off and stared up at Bill, awe and amazement written on his round face. “Say!” he fairly shouted. “You must be the two guys I read about in the newspaper. The ones that busted up that gang of gunmen down in Florida a couple of weeks ago!”

“What of it?” Bill released him. “That doesn’t give you license to show off your bad manners, does it?”

“Gee whiz! And to think I was trying to get fresh with a couple of real men like you! I’m darned sorry—and I apologize, Mr. Bolton, and to you, too, Chief Osceola.”

“That’s all right, kid. No harm done,” laughed Osceola. “Quit stalling and tell us something about yourself.”

“Well, I’m Charlie Evans,” returned the boy, still awestruck at his discovery of their identity. “My father is C. B. Evans. We live in Boston, and this is our yacht, the *Merrymaid*.”

Bill walked over to the divan and sat down, while Osceola leaned against the arm of a chair. “Come over here, Charlie,” he invited, “and tell me how it happens that we find you alone

on this yacht. Chief Osceola and I are on our way from Miami to New York. We sighted the *Merrymaid* adrift and evidently abandoned out here, so we naturally landed to investigate.”

“Gee, that was fine of you!” Charlie curled up on the couch beside him. “But you see, I can’t very well tell you what happened, because I don’t know!”

“You don’t know?” Osceola’s voice sounded rather gruff.

“Look here, Charlie,” cut in Bill. “This is a serious matter. We’ve got to be on our way soon. You are wasting our time and your own.”

Charlie flushed. “I ain’t kidding you, Mr. Bolton, really I’m not.”

“But there must have been a crew and passengers aboard this ship. Do you mean to say that they disappeared into thin air and you don’t know why or how?”

“Yes, sir, I do. You see, I went below to the trunk room after breakfast. When I came on deck again, there wasn’t a soul in sight. I searched the yacht, but you fellas are the first people I’ve seen since I came up on deck.”

“I reckon you’d better start at the beginning,” said Osceola. “I’ll ask questions and you answer them. And maybe we’ll be able to get somewhere. Suppose you tell us where this yacht was going and who were aboard her at breakfast time?”

“That’s easy,” returned young Evans. “We were out of

Boston, bound for Savannah. Dad had business there, so he took Mother and me and Uncle Arthur along. Uncle Arthur is Mother's brother, you know. The four of us had breakfast together at eight o'clock, and—"

"Woa, not so fast. I suppose somebody skippered this boat?"

"That's right. Captain Ridley is skipper. I forgot to say that he had breakfast with us, too. And we carry a pretty big crew. I can't tell you how many without counting them, but I know all their names."

Osceola smiled at the boy's earnestness. "Never mind the crew, now. What happened after breakfast? I take it everything was running as usual up to that time?"

"Yes, that's right, chief. Well, you see, after breakfast, I wanted to practice that slow drop Harold Lane told me about. You see, I pitch on our team. So I asked Uncle Arthur if he would catch for me. He said he would, so we went out on deck—but say—Uncle Arthur can't catch for nuts! He muffed the very first ball, and it went overboard—"

"You shouldn't pitch balls," interrupted Bill. "Strikes are what make a pitcher."

"Who's kidding now?" said Charlie delightedly.

"Say," Osceola broke in, "I'm cross examining this witness. Don't listen to him Charlie. What did you do after the ball was lost?"

"I went into my cabin, but I couldn't find another one there.

Then I remembered that I had one in my trunk—so I went below to get it. Well, when I got the trunk open, I got interested in some things I found that I didn't know I'd brought with me—and I guess I stayed down there for some time.”

“About how long, do you think?”

“Oh, something over an hour, maybe. I came across a book I like, and got to reading it.”

“Did you know the ship had stopped moving?”

“Of course, but that was nothing. I mean, father often has her stopped on a hot day, and goes overboard for a swim. I do, too, and so does Uncle Arthur.”

“I see—and when you came upstairs again—”

“One says topside or above on shipboard,” suggested Bill, winking at Charlie.

“O-and likewise-K,” replied Osceola. “Not that it has a thing to do with the matter in hand. Now, Charlie, when you came—on deck, you found that everybody had vanished—that you were alone on board?”

“Yes, sir. And believe me but I was some scared! I went all over the ship, but even the cat had gone. And, well—I guess you men won't tell on a fella—I came in here, and I guess I cried some—” He ended shame-facedly.

“Of course you did! I would probably have done the same

thing in your place!” Bill encouraged him.

Charlie looked relieved. “Gee whiz, but it was lonesome!” he exploded. “I hung round a bit, didn’t know just what to do. Then I thought of sending out a call for help. I know the International Morse Code. But when I got to the radio room—someone had put the darn thing on the fritz. Wouldn’t that jar yuh!”

“Pretty tough!” agreed Bill. “What next?”

“Well, I kind of nosed around. Thought Dad or Mother might have left a note or something for me. I couldn’t find anything, though. Gosh, it was so quiet! Then I made myself a couple of sandwiches and ate half a plum cake I found in the pantry, and felt better.

“After that, I hunted some more, but it wasn’t any use. I heard your plane about that time. I didn’t know who you were, of course, so I decided I’d better lay low until I could size up what kind of guys you were. Oh, Mr. Bolton—can’t you find Mother and Dad for me?” Charlie’s voice broke suddenly and he sounded very much like a lost small boy.

Just then Osceola raised a warning hand. “Listen!”

There came a rush of feet on deck. Before the three in the salon could reach for revolvers, men with leveled rifles appeared at every porthole.

“Stick ’em up and keep ’em there!” cracked a voice from the open doorway, and a man in the smart white uniform of a ship’s officer strode into the room.

CHAPTER III

MAN OVERBOARD

The man who entered so abruptly was a tall, heavy-set individual in the early thirties. Blond as only the Scandinavians or North Germans are blond, his very next words betrayed Teutonic origin.

“So!” he sneered as the three kept their hands level with their ears. “A boy and two half-grown men. Master Evans, and a pair of aviators, eh? The one, we miss the first time. The others descend on us like manna out of heaven,—I don’t think! Three more mouths to feed and no money in it for anyone. *Donnerwetter, noch ein Mahl!*”

“Nichts kom heraus, mahogany bedstead,” piped Charlie. The added danger seemed to revive his waning spirits with a vengeance. “The same to you and many of ’em, Dutchy. I know some more, too,” he went on proudly. “Schweitzerkäse, frankfurters and getthe-Houtofhere! That last is the longest word in the Heinie dictionary!”

“What’s the shortest?” inquired Bill, who was enjoying this byplay.

“Oh, I don’t know—but the one they say the quickest is

‘camerad.’”

“*Halts ’maul!* Shut up, I mean!” thundered the blond stranger. The whites around the pupils of his light blue eyes became bloodshot with anger. “I am master here,” he roared. “*Silence!* I will have it!”

Two sailors appeared in the doorway behind him. He wheeled about. “Adolph, you will keep the prisoners covered. Hans, take their weapons from them. And now,” he continued, when the three lowered their hands after they had been searched, “you will tell me what names you go by.”

Charlie sprang to his feet and made a stiff, military bow. “The dark gentleman over yonder,” he said solemnly, “is traveling incognito. So that you will not be confused by false appearances, I will breathe his secret. He is no less a personage than His Majesty, George the Fifth! Beside me on this couch is Mary, the Four-Fifths, and I am Herbert Hoover! —Oh, Doctor, why so angry? You may call me Herbie if you’re good!” He finished in falsetto, with rolling eyes toward Bill and Osceola.

“*Ruhig!* Silence!” shouted the exasperated officer, while Bill and Osceola were convulsed with laughter at his fury. “Hans —take this devil-child on deck and keep him there until I come. If he offers more insolence, give him a taste of your belt!”

“Gosh, you can’t please the Doctor,” protested Charlie with an air of injured innocence as he was led forth. “He asked for the go-by, so I gave it to him.”

The stranger waved him away. “Now, you two will tell me who you are,” he commanded. “From American children one expects insolence—with you, it is different. Your names at once, if you please.”

“My name is Bolton.” Bill saw no reason for hiding his identity.

“And I,” said his friend, “am Osceola, Chief of the Seminoles.”

“So,” mused their captor. “The two young fellows that were mixed up in the Shell Island business. *So!*” He pronounced the last word as though it were spelled with a Z. Then for a minute or so he appeared lost in thought. Neither Bill nor Osceola uttered a word.

“So——It shall be done.” Apparently the blond man had arrived at an important decision. “I am the Baron von Hiemskirk. And remember, both of you—my word is the law. I am in command. You will earn your keep. *Ja*, you will be put to work and it will be well to remember that my discipline is that of the Imperial Navy. You will obey all orders—on the jump!”

“And the alternative?” Bill rose to his feet.

The baron stuck a single eyeglass in his eye and stared at Bill with an evil smile on his lips.

“We are now about sixty miles off the coast of North America,” he said coldly. “It is a long swim, my young friend. Come now—we will go on deck.”

He strode out of the room, and Bill and Osceola followed him, with a look of mutual understanding. The sailor brought up the rear.

Charlie called to them from the rail. “Say, look what I’ve found! That’s what took Mother and Dad and everybody off of here while I was in the trunk room. Hans says they’re going to take us too. I don’t care what happens now, I’ll be with Dad and Mother—but it’s pretty tough on you fellows! Say, you wouldn’t think these Heinies had brains enough to run one of those things, would you?”

He waved excitedly overside, and the two friends saw the long gray hull and conning tower of a submarine moored beside the yacht.

The baron, who had stopped to speak to a young officer, walked over to the boy and caught him roughly by the shoulder.

“Devil-child!” he roared in his deep bass. “I spoke to you regarding insolence for the last time a short while ago!” He turned to the officer. “Herr Lieutenant!” he commanded. “Take this boy forward and see that he is well punished.”

“The whip, Herr Baron?”

“Ten lashes—yes—and at once.”

“*Zum befehl*, Herr Baron!” He grabbed Charlie’s arm and yanked the struggling youngster along the deck.

Like a flash Bill darted after them. He caught up with the pair

at the gangway, and gripping the young officer by the collar, he jerked him backward on to the deck. Then, as Charlie made a dash for Osceola, he bent down and deliberately slapped the lieutenant's face with the palm of his open hand.

“Before you try to maltreat that boy, perhaps it would be as well to settle with me,” he said calmly, while along the deck came the click of the sailors' rifles. “That is,” he added, “if you've got the guts to do it.”

“*Schweinhund!*” cried the enraged officer, as he sprang to his feet. Without an instant's hesitation, he swung for Bill's head.

The useful art of self-defense is well taught at the Naval Academy, and Bill had ever been a proficient pupil. He jerked back his head, dodging the man's fist by a hair's breadth. Then as the other overbalanced, he stepped in with a short-arm jab to his opponent's kidneys. This he followed up immediately with a powerful left hook to the point of the jaw, and the Herr Lieutenant went crashing overside, through the ropes of the gangway. There came the dull thud of his head as it struck the metal side of the submarine, and he disappeared down the narrow strip of water between the vessels. Immediately Bill dived after him.

His lithe body cut the surface with hardly a splash, and he shot into the cool green depths from his twenty foot dive with eyes wide open. To right and to left dark blurs of the vessels' hulls shadowed the translucent green. No other objects met his searching gaze, so using a powerful breast stroke, he forged further downward. All at once he saw something grayish white below. His lungs were bursting with

lack of air and the heavy water pressure at this depth. It grew icy cold, but he continued to strain onward, backing his muscles with an indomitable force of will.

The white spot beneath him was taking shape now—surely the linen uniform of the unlucky lieutenant. Yes, there he was, sinking face down, arms and legs spread-eagled and useless, the wind knocked out of him by the double blow of Bill’s fists and the crash against the submarine side.

Bill caught the sprawling, inert figure, with a cupped hand beneath the chin. Instantly his legs and free arm got into action again, but heading this time in the opposite direction. Up shot the drowning man and his rescuer. Bill’s head was whirling, his faculties were leaving him. The man would sink again if he lost his hold. Slipping the crook of his elbow beneath the unconscious lieutenant’s chin, he held his head close to his side. Would they never reach the surface—and air? What if his own unprotected skull should strike the bulging curve of a vessel’s hull? Sharp pain stabbed him between the eyes—he knew no more.

Far away—fathoms above him—Bill heard a voice calling his name. He seemed to be floating upward in a sea-green haze, but there was air at last—heaven-sent air.

“He’s coming round now,” said the voice, which sounded like Osceola’s, and much nearer than before. “No wonder he went out—under water nearly two minutes and a half! How’s the other fellow, Baron?”

“Poor Fritz!” Surely this was the blond commander

speaking and his voice seemed much louder and closer at hand than that of the young chief. And as the words grew more distinct, their meaning impressed itself on Bill's dawning consciousness. "Poor Fritz!" repeated the baron. "We've got the water out of him now and he will live—but it will be a touch and go for some time. The poor lad has a bad case of concussion. I can't tell whether his skull is fractured, but I don't think so."

"He got an awful crack on the back of his head, but you can't hold that up against Bill Bolton," returned Osceola.

"Oh, no, my dear chap. I assure you I hold no grudge at all."

Something has happened, thought Bill, to alter Osceola's status with the Baron.

"I wish you to know, my dear Chief, that both Fritz and I are sportsmen. Blows were struck in fair fight. When Fritz hit the submarine, I could have killed young Bolton without hesitation. But when he dived after my cousin—I loved the lad. It was splendid—*colossal!*"

"I'm glad you feel that way," Osceola remarked.

"Things were getting a bit strained, I thought."

"Yes, yes, I know that. But I have had a terrible day, my friend. That devil-child put my temper on edge. And a dozen wildcats are as nothing to the boy's mother when she found we'd left him behind. God be thanked, that is over. I cannot let you and Bolton continue your journey at present, but at least you will live well, and have an interesting time. In saving the life of Fritz, you two have rendered me a service.

Karl von Hiemskirk does not forget such favors.”

“Thanks for dragging me in,” laughed Osceola. “I didn’t do anything.”

“Hah! You dived in after them while my men looked on like half-wits!” bridled the Baron. “You brought these two unconscious fellows to the surface! I call that a very great deal.”

Bill heard him sigh, but although he was now fully awake, he kept his eyes closed and listened attentively to the Baron’s next words.

“The thing of great importance that is worrying me is that Fritz was first pilot of my command. I, myself, am an aviator, a combat flyer, who had the great honor to be a member of what you call the circus of the unsurpassed Graf von Richthofen, of glorious memory.”

Bill opened his eyes to find himself on the *Merrymaid*’s deck. He sat up and began to speak rapidly. “Richthofen was undoubtedly the greatest air strategean who ever flew,” he declared, “they tell me that his combat formations and the battle manoeuvres of his famous circus have never been improved upon. Sorry I wasn’t old enough then to take a crack at you myself—you must be a humdinger, Baron, when it comes to this flying game! If you want to use my bus and friend Fritz is temporarily out of the picture—why not fly her yourself?”

Osceola put his arm about Bill’s shoulders, and the Baron bowed from the waist.

“Thank you, indeed, my dear young friend,” he said formally, “both for your eulogy of my long-time-dead friend von Richthofen, and because, after stunning my cousin, you had the courage and graciousness to save his life at risk of your own.”

“Oh, please don’t.” Bill colored a dusky red. “Or I shall have to pass out a second time.” With the chief’s help he rose and held out his hand. The Baron shook it heartily.

“We will let our has-beens be never-wases.”

“I couldn’t help overhearing what you said to Osceola when I was regaining consciousness,” went on Bill. “So as long as you can’t see your way clear to letting us go, I’ll do my best to be peaceable in the future.”

“Say nothing more about it, my boy.” The Baron fairly oozed urbanity. “*Es tut mer sehr leid*, I mean, it makes me very sorry to have to detail you chaps, but it is the fate of war.”

Bill and Osceola looked their surprise. “War?”

“I have to inform you that my command is at war with society. I can not allow my liking for individuals to deter me from my aim.”

“And what is that?” inquired Osceola.

“We will talk of that later. Now, there is work to be done. Too much time has been wasted already. I need an airplane pilot, Bolton, because with my multitudinous duties, it is impossible for me always to handle the controls. I will make you two

what you Americans call a proposition. You will fly where and when I tell you, Bolton. You will give me your word of honor to do that and no more. The chief here will also be given congenial duties. Obey my commands and you need not give your parole—there is no escape except by air and that will be circumnavigated by your word!”

“And you can sure use big words, Baron,” observed a much subdued Charlie, who had been silently taking in the conversation.

“Perhaps,” the Baron smiled, “but if you will take my advice, such things are better left unsaid. Your tongue has already got you and a number of others into trouble today.” He turned again to Bill. “I am awaiting your decision,” he said.

“And—the alternative in this case?”

“You and the chief will be kept prisoners until such time as I can negotiate your ransoms.”

Bill looked at Osceola, who nodded slightly. “All right, then, Baron, I promise to fly your planes as you dictate, but I suspect that your war is nothing more than hijacking on a big scale. And I’m hanged if I have anything to do with that!”

The Baron bowed. “It is a bargain. I will now conclude my work on this vessel. Fritz has already been taken aboard the other craft, and when I am through here, Chief Osceola will go in her with me and my men. You, Bolton, will follow us with Charlie, in your amphibian.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” returned Bill with Naval Academy crispness, now that he had recognized the baron as his superior officer. “You will keep above surface, I suppose, otherwise, I am likely to loose your ship.”

“Oh, no, we won’t,” broke in Charlie the irrepressible. “He’s going in the air!”

“The air? Don’t be silly, kid—”

“I’m not the silly one—” retorted the youngster. “I’m right, ain’t I, Baron?”

“That submarine is an invention of my own,” declared the commander. “The boy speaks correctly. I shall *fly* her.”

CHAPTER IV

VANDALS OF THE HIGH SEAS

An hour later, Charlie sat aboard Bill's amphibian which now lay moored to a sea-anchor a quarter of a mile to leeward of the *Merrymaid*. A hundred yards from the plane, the gray submarine rocked gently to a long Atlantic ground swell. Charlie, a pair of field glasses glued to his eyes, focussed them alternately on the yacht and on the deck of the submarine which was crowded with men.

The object of all this interest was a group of three aboard the *Merrymaid*—three men and a youth. Left on board the vessel with a boat wherewith to make their escape, these men were to open the seacocks of the fated ship.

In the side of every vessel, somewhat below the waterline is a large circular manhole, two or more feet in diameter into which fits a steel plate or plug. The plate is fastened to the reinforced sides of the ship by means of bolts arranged at intervals of a few inches around the circumference of the hole. Into this plate fit large pipes which, communicating with the sea, form an intake for salt water. This plug and its manhole are together called the ship's seacocks.

Opening a ship's seacocks is a feat of not a little skill and danger. The nuts of the bolts which fasten the plate to its manhole must be unscrewed in such a manner that the plate loosens suddenly and not gradually, so that the sailor who opens it may work until the last minute and then escape from the intruding water. To do this, special strategy is necessary.

The men from the submarine went about the operation in the following way: Early that morning when the *Merrymaid* was first captured, some men were sent down into her hold to begin preliminary work on the seacocks. Two of these men carefully unscrewed one rusty nut at a time, thoroughly greased its threads, and then screwed it back into place again before loosening the next. While this was being done, the other men unbolted the pipes leading into the seacock and removed all obstructions in the way of hasty escape from its neighborhood.

This preliminary work of greasing and loosening was done merely in order that the seacocks might be in readiness for immediate opening without loss of time should an enemy appear or other emergency require hasty action. The seacocks thus greased and disencumbered of pipes and impediments were then left in place, and the men returned to the submarine.

The men who had accomplished this work were now aboard the fated yacht once more to finish the opening of her seacocks. With them were Bill Bolton and the Baron. Bill, who had had never witnessed this particular operation before, though heartily condoning the act, was deeply interested. Knowing that he was a midshipman on summer leave from

the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Baron von Hiemskirk permitted him to remain as a responsible party.

The Baron, a sailor and Bill stood on deck while another seaman named Muller, a strong, heavy-faced fellow who made a specialty of this work, climbed down to the seacock, equipped with a monkey wrench and a sledge hammer. Around his waist was tied a rope, the other end of which was held by the three above for use in emergency.

Muller, under direction of the Baron, took off the nuts from every second bolt in the circle. Being recently loosened and greased, this was easily done. After he had gone completely around the circumference of the plate, the plug was being held by only half its former number of bolts. Beginning once more, the adroit seaman again removed every second nut, from the remaining bolts. The plate was now held by only one-fourth the original number of bolts. This process of halving was continued until the plug was finally being held by only two bolts on diametrically opposite sides of the circumference of the seacock. By this time, the pressure of the water outside was meeting with so little resistance that the plate was bending slightly inward, letting water spurt between the rubber packing and the steel plate up into the hold.

Muller, sweating in every pore, now thrust his wrench into his overalls pocket, picked up his sledge, and called out: "Ready!"

At his signal, the men on deck took in the slack of the rope so that if necessary they could hoist the imperilled seaman up out of danger.

Muller now lifted his sledge hammer, took accurate aim, and with a single vigorous blow, smashed one of the two protruding bolts through its nut and hole. As the plate did not fly loose, he let the heavy hammer fall again, throwing all his strength into the blow, this time upon the remaining bolt. With a dull explosion, the whole two-foot plate flew loose, and a geyser of sea water gushed upward into the hold.

Muller at once leaped for the ladder and, still holding the sledge, clambered to safety. Had he slipped, or been washed away by the force of the water, his comrades on deck would have fished him up by means of the rope.

By this time the yacht was rapidly filling. As the doors through all compartments had previously been opened, the water coming through this one seacock at once began flowing to all parts of the hold. The men on deck were now in real danger, for a sudden listing of the vessel, or its unexpectedly rapid sinking might mean their death.

All, therefore, at once scrambled overside to their boat, the Baron last of all, and pulled away as quickly as possible, lest they be sucked into the vortex of the sinking ship.

For a short space the *Merrymaid* settled rapidly, giving the watchers reason to expect her to go to the bottom within fifteen or twenty minutes. Their expectations, however, were not realized, for the ship soon began to rest at the same level.

The Baron turned to Bill. "Doubtless air has lodged in the tops of compartments and is imprisoned elsewhere. She must

ultimately go down, of course, but there is no telling how long it will take—and I am in a hurry to get away.”

“What are you going to do, use dynamite?”

“Yes. We’ve got sufficient here in the boat, for such an emergency. We’ll row back now, and get busy.”

Dynamite was presently placed at the base of the ship’s two masts and amidships, and the fuses lit. They then rowed swiftly away, and had hardly reached a position where they would be out of danger, when the explosion came. Three crashes, one after the other, shattered the sides and decks of the vessel. The *Merrymaid* was sinking rapidly. First her bow filled; then the gallant yacht stood perpendicularly on her prow, and slid with a rush out of sight.

At the instant her funnel plunged under, a final tremendous explosion took place, throwing a cloud of steam and water high into the air. A moment later, only a vortex of oily, tossing water gave evidence that a million dollar yacht had gone to the bottom.

“It’s a dirty shame!” Bill spat the words without caring whether the Baron took umbrage or not.

“It is indeed,” that blond giant answered seriously. “But this is war, remember. I cannot use her, still less can I afford to have her discovered. Yes, it is a shame. Vandalism, if you like, but none the less, a necessity.” The Baron shook his head, then went on pompously: “An hour ago that splendid little ship might have been of great service to mankind. Now she is no more. Let it be her epitaph that she was fulfilling her destiny,

with work well done. May the world say the same of me when I have gone to the eternal reward.”

Bill kept silent and managed to conceal his disgust. He did not appreciate such philosophizing. Neither could he agree with the Baron’s estimate of his own worth. His work might be well done, but in itself piracy on the high seas could hardly be called more than a disgraceful profession. Bill began to realize that the commander’s brain, although active enough, was more than slightly warped.

They rowed over the spot where the *Merrymaid* had gone down, and looked about for any stray bits of wreckage which might have floated to the surface. They found none, so made for the amphibian at once.

“You will wait until you see us take off before you do the same, Mr. Bolton,” directed the Baron with a return of his superior-officer manner, as Bill boarded the plane.

“Aye, aye, sir. Any further orders?” Bill returned the military manner with interest.

“Yes. You will follow my craft as though you were number two of a patrol. Land when I land, and taxi over for further instructions.”

“Very good, sir.”

“A pleasant flight, Bolton.”

“Thank you, Baron. The same to you, sir.”

The boat moved off in the direction of the submarine and Bill climbed into his fore cockpit. Charlie was already in his place in the rear cockpit, and Bill noticed that he seemed strangely quiet, almost sullen.

“What’s eating you, old boy?” Bill turned round to face him, then added kindly, “I don’t blame you for feeling low. It’s hard lines about the *Merrymaid*. Made me feel rotten myself. Nastier piece of vandalism was never committed. But you mustn’t take it out on me.”

“Well, I thought you and the chief were my friends,” began Charlie aggrievedly.

“But we are—what makes you think we’re not?”

“Oh, I know you saved me a hiding—and risked your life for that pirate. That was a bully thing to do, but now you and Chief Osceola have joined up with them and—”

“How come—joined up with them?”

“Why, didn’t I hear you, myself, tell the Baron you would work for him—do exactly what he told you to do?”

“So that’s it.” Bill’s laugh was without humor. “There’s no good reason why I should explain my actions to you, but I like you, Charlie, and I’m sorry for you into the bargain. Now, pin back your ears—”

“Well, I’m listening!”

“But, before I tell you what’s what, I want your promise to

keep your mouth shut!”

Charlie produced a packet of gum. He tossed Bill a stick and began to munch another. “Okay,” he said earnestly, his eyes on the older lad’s, “let’s have it.”

“I should think you might have guessed it—but neither Osceola nor myself have gone in with these pirates. I gave the Baron my word to obey orders—but only so far as they have to do with driving his planes. It was either that or being locked up—and cutting out any chance there might be to escape. It’s the same with Osceola. He saw my scheme quick as winking—which is more than you did—but then, you’re just a kid, of course.” Bill’s eyes twinkled as he saw the boy’s discomfiture, but he went on more seriously. “The Baron is so sure of himself and his strong organization that he has no fear that we two can do anything to hinder his plans. But unless we’re allowed some freedom, don’t you see, Osceola and I might just as well have given up before we started?”

Charlie was profoundly interested and ashamed of himself. “Gee, I was a pill, all right. But, Bill—do you really think the three of us could break up the gang?”

“Well, you never can tell till you try,” Bill answered. “First of all, we must pretend to work in with this bunch of sea bandits—do our best not to arouse their suspicions, you know. Then, when we learn more about them and their ways of doing business, it will be time enough to start planning on our own account.”

“That’s right. And don’t you worry. I’ll keep quiet. I wouldn’t breathe a word!”

“You mustn’t, kid—not even to your dad and mother when you see them.”

“Cross my heart—hope to die if I do, Bill.”

“That’s all right, then. And always remember that it’s the three of us against a great big organization. A single slip on our part—and well, so far as we’re concerned, it would be just too bad.”

“I’ll keep my promise, Bill. Any idea where these pirates have their hangout? Where we are bound for now?”

“I have not. Why?”

“Some hideout on the coast, I suppose. Shouldn’t wonder if maybe it was somewhere in Pamlico or Albemarle Sound. There used to be lots of pirates in those waters long ago, before the Revolution, I mean. There’s a book at home, tells all about them.”

“Times have changed a lot since then,” mused Bill, “and piracy, too, I reckon.”

“Then you don’t think they’ve a base of some kind over there?”

Bill was facing forward now, staring steadily out over the water. “Something quite different, Charlie,” he muttered; and then in a sharp tone that made the boy start—“So that’s the

way they work it!”

“Gee whiz!” Charlie craned his neck and gazed in the same direction. “The submarine’s sprouting wings!”

CHAPTER V

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SEA MONSTER

The two lads, Bill and Charlie, stared with undivided attention at the astonishing spectacle. Two large fins which evidently had been lying close to the submarine's sides, were rising into the air. With a speed that seemed remarkable these fins reached a vertical position. For a moment they remained pointing straight toward the high blue arc of the heavens. Then they swung outward, lowering horizontally from the ship's sides, to come to rest when level with the deck, and about five feet above the surface of the water—a complete set of airplane wings.

“Gosh, she's a monoplane now!” exclaimed Charlie.

“Wonder how they'll produce a tail unit?”

“You mean a rudder?”

“Yes. That, together with a stabilizer, fin and elevator.”

But before the words were well out of Bill's mouth, the miracle occurred. A large rudder lifted itself out of the water, and opening out as it came to rest, seemed to sprout like a

giant seabud into a complete tail group.

“Can she use the water propeller in the air?” Charlie kept his eyes glued on the submarine. “It seems to me that would hardly be big enough to fly with.”

“Hardly. That outfit is the queerest engineering jumble I’ve ever seen. But unless the Herr Baron can work absolute miracles, it will take more than one motor and propeller to move her.”

The submarine lay to windward of the amphibian. The lads therefore obtained a stern view of the ship and it was difficult for them to see exactly what was going on forward.

Suddenly Charlie raised another shout. “Look, Bill, look! Here comes the motor. Some jack-in-the-box, I call it.”

“And there’s another one! And still another! Gee-jumpin’-gee-roosalem—the blamed thing is coughing up motors like —”

“Like a cat with the belly-ache,” suggested Charlie.

“Inelegant, but apt. Let’s see, there are one, two . . . *five* of them!”

“Some packet!”

“Some packet is right. I’d pay admission to see this any day.”

The reason for this excited dialogue had been, first, the

raising of that section of the deck between the two great wing sections until from wing-tip to wing-tip, one continuous horizontal plane was formed. Next, up through what was probably a hatch in this center wing section, though of course invisible at that distance from the lads, appeared an airplane motor. This rose on its own engine struts, slid to starboard along the wing and came to rest. Another made its appearance and moved to starboard in line with the first. The next two found places on the port wing, and the last engine remained directly above the hatch which probably closed with a sliding cover. Then the mechanics came topside, through another hatchway, bearing propellers which were fitted to the engines, fore and aft.

“That’s the first time I’ve ever seen two propellers on the same engine!” cried Charlie. “What’s the reason for it, Bill?”

Bill turned round in his seat. “Each one of those engines, as you call them, Charlie, is a double unit. In other words, two motors joined together, one forward and one aft. There are ten propellers, because there are ten motors in that line. The propellers forward are tractors, those aft pushers. The *Dornier*, the big German DO-X passenger plane, has the same arrangement of motors.”

“Guess they must generate a heap of power?”

“Plenty. But you need it to propel a heavy ship like that sub. By the way, do you happen to know what they call her?”

“The *Flying Fish*—one of the gobs told me.”

“Say, where do you get that Navy stuff?”

“Gobs?” Charlie chuckled. “Oh, I’ve got a sea-goin’ dad. He had a U.S.N.R.F. commission during the war.”

“That so? Great!”

“You bet yer. Say, Bill, hadn’t you better get our own engine going? The *Flying Fish* will be taking off right away. She’s a regular monoplane now.”

Bill shook his head, and turned to face the submarine again.

“They won’t take off for a few minutes yet. As she is, those wings will never hold her weight in the air. And for another thing, she sets much too low in the water to ever get off.”

“But, see, Bill—she’s rising. She’s getting higher in the water all the time.”

“By Jingo! She is, at that!”

“How do they do it?”

“Same method as a submarine helps to raise itself from the bottom. Water is forced out of certain compartments and air pumped in.”

“Gee, it’s a marvel! And look, there are short wings or fins, extending from the hull under each wing. What do they need them for?”

“Wing-strut supports, I guess. Yes, there come the men with

the struts. See how they are securing them from the wing sections to the fins below, and shorter ones from the fins to the hull?”

“Is that what you meant when you said that the wings of the *Flying Fish* wouldn’t hold her?”

“That’s it. Without struts to support that spread, the wings would surely crumple with her weight in the air.”

“Well, I guess she’s all set for the take off now.”

“Reckon she is. Yes, there go her motors idling! Hear ’em?”

“What shall I do now?”

“Strap on your helmet and your goggles. Then go forward and haul in our sea anchor. When you get back to your cockpit, keep your hands off the controls in there and adjust the headphone set hanging below the instrument board. Some day, if we ever get out of this mess, I may give you flight instruction, but not on this hop.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes. And this is important—for safety’s sake, remember. I’m skipper of this craft. What I say goes—and goes with a bang. Savez?”

“Yes, sir.” Charlie’s voice was sober and subdued.

“O.K., then. Hop to it, kid, I want to get moving.”

A very important Charlie quickly buckled the chin-strap of his helmet and scrambled forward. He followed directions exceedingly well, considering the fact that he had never been in a plane before. Once out on the nose he pulled in the mooring line and the collapsible canvas bucket known as the sea anchor, and carried them back to the rear cockpit. There he stowed them away. Back in the pilot's seat again, he adjusted his goggles and the headphone set. Then he stood up, and grasping the cockpit's cowl, he leaned forward so as to watch Bill manipulate the controls in the fore cockpit.

From the time that he was a little tad of a fellow, Charlie had been crazy to fly. At home, his bedroom was decorated with pictures of famous flyers and their planes. He fairly ate up airplane stories and his book shelves were crowded with literature on flying, although he found some of the volumes too technical. Now that he had a chance to witness a take-off at first hand, he wasn't going to miss a single detail if he could help it.

Charlie knew that the take-off includes the handling of a plane from the time the throttle is opened until the ship is in level flight directly above the surface. He had also read somewhere that in order to leave the ground or the water, it is necessary for the plane to have flying speed, the minimum speed at which the lift of the wings will equal the weight; for the object of the take-off is to gain this speed. The plane must first be manoeuvred into an attitude which facilitates a quick increase in speed. It must be held in this attitude while moving forward at an increasing rate and must finally be taken off in such a way that it is under full control from the instant it leaves the surface. He also knew that *all take-offs*

must be made directly into the wind.

The *Flying Fish* was already moving through the water, her ten engines roaring like an express train, when Charlie saw Bill set their own motor idling. Rudder and ailerons were placed in neutral and the amphibian allowed to swing until it was headed directly into the wind. Then Bill slowly but steadily opened wide the throttle. At the same time, the youngster saw him pull the stick back in order to raise their bow out of the water. This he knew was necessary, both to gain planing speed and to keep the propeller out of the spray which might damage it.

Six or eight seconds after opening the throttle, with the bow well up and the amphibian gaining momentum every instant, Bill pushed the stick all the way forward, and did so in order to raise the tail and depress the nose. But as the plane was moving at some speed, the bow could not be pushed down into the water. Instead, the speed at which they were taxiing gradually forced it upward until they were skimming the surface on their step. Bill then eased the stick back to neutral and maintained it there while speed was being gathered. Spray was dashing against Charlie's face and chest as they sped along. The sensation of traveling at terrific speed was enormous.

“Gee! This sure is great!”

“Getting a kick out of it?” asked a voice in his ear, causing him almost to lose his balance. Then he remembered the transmitter on his chest and realized he had been talking into it.

“I sure am, Bill. What’s the next thing you have to do?”

“The next thing for *you* to do, young feller, is to get back to your seat and buckle on your safety-belt. If you are so keen to learn, I’ll talk as I run this old crate into the air, and you watch what I’m doing. Maybe that will keep you from trying to climb down the back of my neck.”

“Thanks, Bill, that’ll be great. I’ll sit tight, honest I will.”

“All right, then. We are skimming the surface on the step now, as you’ve noticed. No more large movements of the controls may be made, as the plane is now sensitive to them. I’m paying particular attention to the lateral balance from this stage on.”

Bill stopped talking for a moment, then went on again:

“Remember this, Charlie. It’s important. *The plane must not be taken off until speed adequate to give complete control has been attained.* Any attempt on my part to pull it off prematurely will result in a take-off at the stalling point, where control is uncertain. Now we’ve gained flying speed, so I break her out of the water with a momentary pressure on the elevators. That pressure was very slight and I eased it at the moment of take-off.

“When the plane left the water, its speed was only slightly above minimum flying speed. Any decrease in this would naturally mean a stall. Therefore, I’m keeping the nose level for six to eight seconds in order to get a safe margin above the stalling point before beginning to climb. Safety first always—when flying, Charlie. Now she’s all right, the engine’s

running smooth and sweet. So I pull my stick back gently, and as you see, we're leaving the water behind."

CHAPTER VI

THE RAIDER

Half a mile or so ahead of Bill's plane, the great sea monster, the *Flying Fish*, leveled off at an altitude of twenty-five hundred feet, and headed out on a northeasterly course.

Bill continued to climb his amphibian until they too reached that height, then he spoke to Charlie again.

“Now that we're high enough, I've got to make a right turn in order to follow that ship. So I push my stick slowly forward, drop the nose to level like this, and maintain it there throughout the turn. Next I give her right aileron and increase right rudder considerably at the same time.”

“And we've gone into a bank. I see.” Charlie unconsciously leant toward the raised wing.

“That's it. And now that I've tilted her far enough, I check the wing with the ailerons, and at the same time ease the pressure on the rudder. I maintain a constant bank, you see, and a constant pressure on the rudder bar throughout the turn.

“Now we are round to where we want to go, so I resume level

flight by applying left aileron and left rudder. The wings are level once more, so I neutralize the ailerons and give her a normal amount of right rudder. And we're pointed in a direct line for the *Flying Fish!*"

"Gosh, but there's an awful lot to it," muttered Charlie into his transmitter. "Looks so simple and easy when you're on the ground, watching a plane flying. How do you ever remember it all?"

"Oh, at first it's a bit confusing, until you get the hang of the thing—but it soon becomes second nature to do the right trick. When you come to fly you'll find that there isn't time for slow thinking in the air. In fact, as my instructor used to say, a flyer must develop instinctive coordination between the sensory organs and the muscles."

"You can't prove it by me!"

"Well, it simply means that when flying a pilot must act quicker than he can think."

"Humph! Like Dad does when he gets mad and gives me a walloping."

Bill laughed heartily. "Hair brush or slipper?"

"Oh, I always get the hair brush. He can get a better grip on it. But I get a choice at that—back or bristles."

"I should think that bristles might be the less unpleasant."

"So did I. Just once. Never again, though. I had to carry a

pillow around with me for a week after that session.”

“If I,” remarked Bill, “had your imagination, Charlie, I’d be worth more than John D. Rockefeller!”

“Raspberries!”

For a time they kept silence, unbroken save for the humming drone of the engine.

“I wonder where that hideaway is we were talking about?” Charlie said after a while.

“Well, it isn’t located on our coast, if we’re bound there now. This plane is pointing straight for Northern Europe.”

“Gee! Do you really think we’re going across—making a trans-Atlantic flight?”

“Not a chance, kid, with the gas we’ve got aboard this crate. If you ask me, the *Flying Fish* is heading for a mother ship of some sort. This gang will have to operate from a steamer if they have no land base. Slap on those sea glasses you were using and take a squint dead ahead beyond the *Fish*—Smoke on the horizon, isn’t there?”

“Sure is. Yes, I can make it out plainly now. Say, you don’t realize how fast we’re traveling until you get a bead on something in the distance. The ship is still hull down, but the smoke seems to be getting denser—”

“I can see it now,” said Bill, giving the amphibian more altitude in order to gain a better view. “That’s no single-

stacker, or I'm a landsman."

"You're right—she isn't! I can see—one—two—three—*four* funnels! Jingoos! She must be a whopper!"

"I wonder," muttered Bill, half to himself.

"What? But I can see—"

"Oh, I'm not doubting your word, Charles."

"What are you wondering about then?"

"Remember the *Amtonia*?"

"*Amtonia*? Why, she's the big British liner that was held up at sea a couple of months ago!"

"Yes. A freighter SOS'd and when the *Amtonia* went to offer help, the crew of the tramp forced the liner's crew and passengers to swap steamers. Then they made off with the big ship."

"Sure, I remember all about that. Harry Davis' dad was on the *Amtonia*, coming home from England, when it happened. It was in the papers but I got the inside dope from Harry. His old man told him all about it."

"Dollars to a dead stick, you'll be able to tell Harry Davis more about the *Amtonia* than he ever dreamed of, one of these days."

"You mean—that ship over there is the *Amtonia*?"

“Exactly. See—she’s hove to now—and the *Flying Fish* is nosing over for a landing!”

The two in the speeding amphibian saw the *Flying Fish* descend in a long glide to the surface of the ocean and taxi toward the great steamer.

“She’s the *Amtonia*, all right, all right!” said Bill.

“Gosh, she’s big. What’s her tonnage?”

“Twenty-five thousand tons, I think.”

“Whew!—Say, listen, do you suppose Mother and Dad are on board her now?”

“I shouldn’t be surprised if your Mother and Father and some other boys’ papas and mammas, along with them.”

“That is, unless business in the ransom line is bad.”

“Which,” said Bill, “considering the number of passengers watching us and the *Flying Fish* from her decks—it isn’t. Shut up now, kid,” he added, cutting his gun and pushing forward the stick. “We’re going down and it sure would look rotten to nose into the drink with that gallery’s eyes on us.”

“Humph! And what about us in that case?”

“Boston papers,” said Bill, “please copy!”

Down they soared, straight into the wind to land with hardly a splash, went skimming over the water for fifty or sixty yards

and came to rest just behind the *Flying Fish*. Charlie, at Bill's bidding, flung out the sea anchor.

To port lay the *Amtonia*, now Baron von Hiemskirk's traffic raider, and neither lad was surprised to see that she was blatantly flying the flag of piracy, a skull and crossed bones of white on a black field.

Bill had no difficulty in recognizing the *Amtonia*. She was one of the largest passenger ships afloat, and consequently hard to disguise. Her camouflaged hull and stacks, painted in broad wavy stripes of grey-green and black made it still harder to judge her length on the waterline. He knew, however, that she must be quite as long as two city blocks, and her many decks rose above the amphibian to the height of a ten-story building. Her four gigantic funnels—so huge that the greatest locomotive could have passed through one of them lengthwise without scraping—and her tall masts, made her easily recognizable to the young midshipman.

“Hello!” exclaimed Charlie, “there's a gob on the *Flying Fish* signalling the liner. Gee, I wish I understood wigwag.”

“If you did,” said Bill, standing up on the pilot's seat and flapping his arms like a semaphore, “you'd know he was signalling us and not the *Amtonia*. For heaven's sake, kid, button that lip of yours. I want to get this message.”

Bill then snatched up the helmet he had just doffed and clapped it on again, buckling the flaps over his ears. Charlie watched proceedings with interest that for once was wordless. Presently the sailor aboard the *Flying Fish* stopped

waving his two red flags. Bill answered him with his arms, and the man rolled up his flags and went below.

Bill Bolton unbuckled the chin-strap of his helmet and turned toward the rear cockpit.

“Snap on that safety belt and put on your helmet again,” he ordered, “and don’t take it off this time until I tell you to. We are going aboard.”

“Aboard what?”

“The *Amtonia*, of course.”

“But how can I go aboard that liner if I’m tied to this seat?”

“Wait and see—I’m too busy to talk now—even if you’re not!”

Bill got down, started the engine idling and commenced to haul in their sea anchor.

Charlie stood up in the rear cockpit and called to him.

“Hey, Bill!”

“Well, what is it now?”

“How *are* we going aboard if I’m to be tied up in this belt?”

“Great jumping snakes!” exploded Bill, with a furious glance over his shoulder. “Have you still got that safety-belt on the brain?”

“No—around the middle!”

“For a counterfeit two-cent piece with a hole in it, I’d throw you into the Atlantic and let you swim aboard!”

“Aw, please tell me, Bill!”

“Well, if you must know each detail, we’re going aboard by way of the electric crane—”

“Aw, quit yer kidding—there ain’t any electric trains out here!”

“Not train, bozo—*c-r-a-n-e*—hoist!”

“Oh! an electric crane! Are they going to hoist us up?”

“That,” said Bill, as he stowed away their mooring, “is the usual procedure when cranes are used. Sometimes up—sometimes down—and—chew on this one thoughtfully, for this is the point of the story: Sometimes when the tackle slips on a haul, there is a tendency to slip sideways. And then, little chatterbox, since it is this amphibian which is to be hauled upward, and you who will be sitting in said amphibian—the aforementioned safety belt is likely to prove mighty useful. *Now do you savez?*”

“Yup. But my teacher usta tell me that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points.”

“And when,” replied Bill with a grin, “you want to make a home run, it is absolutely necessary to touch all three bases and the plate!”

“Oh, yeah? Well, I think it’s pretty tough when a feller can’t open his mouth without bein’ told to pipe down every other minute!”

“Cheer up, Charles. It’s a long worm—you know. And you’ve got this one on his back with your chatter. The Baron said that this was war, and I, for one, believe he’s right!”

“And,” Charlie chortled, “Sherman said that war was—”

“All that *and* more. Nothing slow about you when it comes to pickup. Well, there’s the crane showing topside. Reckon I’d better feed the old girl a little more gas and mosey over there.”

CHAPTER VII

ABOARD

The *Amtonia* had stopped her engines and now lay broadside on to the gentle groundswell. Bill landed to leeward of the great ship, and taxied the amphibian upwind to a point off her leeward quarter. Then he shut off his motor and when the plane's momentum carried her to within a few yards of the hull, towering high above the little aircraft, he ordered Charlie to fling out the sea anchor. Their drift, of course, was to leeward, so the manoeuver brought them nose on to the ship's side, directly below the long arm of the hoist.

In order that seaplanes may be taken aboard ships, flying boats are provided with slings. Bill's craft being an amphibian, was equipped with retractable landing gear, operated electrically from the cockpits. But inasmuch as the *Amtonia* boasted no deck upon which an airplane might land, the hoist was the only means available.

A heaving line was cast to the amphibian as soon as her propeller stopped, and made secure while Bill and Charlie worked like beavers to secure the wing lines. That accomplished, the lads broke out the sling, and after considerable trouble, passed it completely around the hull of their craft, using spreaders to prevent crushing during the

hoist aboard.

While they were working on these details, the hoisting hook was let down to them and presently the sling was made fast to it.

“Gee whiz! Look at the gallery now!” cried Charlie, staring up at the line of faces along the deck rails of the steamer. “Say! there’s Dad—and Mother! And there’s Uncle Arthur! See them up there, next to the top deck! They’re waving to us! Hi, Dad! Hello, Mother! Hello, Uncle Arthur!”

“Swell,” was Bill’s preoccupied comment. “I’m glad you’ve found your people, kid. But get into the rear cockpit now, and pipe down a bit, please. This is a ticklish job and unless you keep quiet so I can do a bit of talking to those guys on the ship, it’s likely to turn into a first class accident instead of a reunion.”

Charlie, only slightly abashed, subsided in his seat, but he kept on waving frantically to his parents.

Then a chief petty officer, who stood by the rail just below the arm of the hoist, raised a megaphone to his lips.

“Avast below!” he roared, showing a strong foreign accent. “Is that sling secure, sir?”

“All secure!” called back Bill. “But be sure your men keep the slack out of our wing lines when you hoist us. I don’t want the plane to start swinging.”

“Aye, aye, sir. Are you quite ready, sir?”

“All ready.”

“Stand by to be hoisted, sir.”

The officer raised a hand. There came a creaking of the sling as the hoist hook caught up the slack, then very slowly the plane rose out of the water on her upward journey.

“Sit down and keep perfectly quiet, Charlie,” ordered Bill. “If we start the plane see-sawing, there’ll be the dickens and all to pay.”

Charlie did as he was told. “Don’t worry about me, skipper,” he answered in a somewhat aggrieved tone. “It’s not me that’s raising all the row now.”

The passengers, or possibly they might better be termed prisoners on board the liner, were waving handkerchiefs and calling greetings to the boys. Any break in the monotony of ship life is always made the most of, and Bill surmised that many of these people had been held on board the liner for weeks.

The plane in its sling went slowly upward, watched by the enthusiastic gallery on the promenade deck. The hoist was situated far forward and as the amphibian topped the bulwarks, it was swung aboard and deposited on deck beside an open hatch. No more had she been landed and braced than Charlie jumped out and raced off to seek his parents.

Bill, in the meantime, had his hands full. It was explained to him that inasmuch as the *Amtonia* was not equipped for the

carrying of aircraft, the plane must be disassembled in order to permit its being stowed away in the hold. A number of men were told off to assist him and for the next couple of hours, he was busily engaged directing the work. Wing sections were removed first and lowered through the hatchway. The tail plane came next, and at the same time, the propeller was taken from the engine. Last of all, lines were riven about the hull and made fast to heavy fittings on the plane, such as engine bearers. Then the denuded hull was hoisted from the deck and lowered nose first into the hold. Even then Bill's work was not completed, for it was necessary, of course, to secure everything below against possible damage from the rolling or pitching of the ship.

Sandwiches and coffee were served to him by a steward, while he was still on deck. He had sent his excuses when the captain had asked him to lunch, as he felt it imperative that he stay with the men on the job.

It was three-thirty before the work was finished to his satisfaction, and with a petty officer as guide, he located the Baron in his cabin. The *Amtonia* had got under way again several hours earlier. Upon coming topside, he saw that the ship was steaming into the northeast. Close in their wake, the *Flying Fish*, once more a submarine, ploughed the smooth surface of the ocean.

When Bill entered the captain's cabin, he found the Baron seated at his desk, reading a paper which had just been handed him by the wireless operator.

"Stand by for a few minutes, Mr. Bolton," he said,

putting the note aside. “Take a seat on the couch. I have need of you again.”

Bill sat down while Baron von Hiemskirk went on talking to the operator.

“Do your best to find out what other craft are in the vicinity and report to me on the bridge as soon as possible.” He said this in German which Bill understood but did not speak well.

“Aye, aye, sir,” returned the man, saluted and departed.

The Baron stood up, picked up his cap and turned to Bill who also rose.

“All secure with the plane below?”

“All secure, sir.”

“Good. Come along then.”

Together they passed through the thwartship passage and out on deck. They reached the top deck of the superstructure by a steep stair and went forward. From this deck another stair led to the bridge, where a sailor with rifle and sidearms stood sentry. The man brought his gun to “present” and both the Baron and Bill punctiliously returned the salute. Long before this Bill had come to realize that strict naval discipline was enforced to the letter aboard this pirate ship.

Once they were on the bridge an officer came forward and saluted.

The Baron said stiffly: “Commander Geibel—Mr. Bolton—in charge of flight operations.”

The Commander and Bill shook hands.

“Has the lookout reported anything during the past quarter of an hour?” inquired the Baron.

“Not a thing, sir.”

Commander Geibel and the others instinctively glanced toward the foremast where about halfway to the top was located the ship’s first lookout station. This station, Bill was to learn, always held an officer and his assistant. Still higher up the mast in the crow’s nest, a sharp-eyed seaman, especially trained to this service, kept a vigilant scrutiny on the horizon. When the man in the crow’s nest discerned smoke or haze which seemed to indicate a ship, he called to the men in the lookout below. Instantly all glasses would be trained in the direction he gave them, and the bridge would make ready to act upon the result of their discovery.

The Baron turned to Commander Geibel again. “We have just received a wireless that the French liner *Orleans* is about sixty miles to the northward, steaming east. She carries the mails, you know, and a capacity load of first class passengers. I think she will be worth detaining.”

“Decidedly so, sir.”

“Make ready to stop the ship, if you please. Also signal the *Flying Fish* to prepare for a flight. While I am away, you will be in supreme command, as usual.”

“Very good, Herr Baron. Any further orders?”

“No. You will maintain the usual routine. Good afternoon, Herr Commander.”

“May I wish the Herr Baron his usual success and a pleasant trip?”

“Thank you, Herr Geibel.” The two shook hands. “*Auf wiedersehen!*”

“*Auf wiedersehen*, Herr Baron! *Auf wiedersehen*, Herr Bolton.”

“*Auf wiedersehen*, Commander.”

They saluted. Commander Geibel stepped to the engine room telegraph and the Baron with Bill at his heels left the bridge.

“Come to my cabin. I want to say a few words to you.”

Bill knew that Commander Geibel had given the order “All engines ahead one-third.” So he was not surprised by the time they entered the Captain’s cabin to find that the vibration from the ship’s propellers had ceased.

“You understand, Mr. Bolton,” the Baron said, “that we are about to capture a trans-Atlantic liner?”

“I understand that such is your purpose, sir.”

“You are ready to obey orders—to pilot the *Flying Fish* as we agreed?”

Bill was silent for a moment. “And if I refuse?” he asked at last.

“Then it will be my painful duty to place both you and Chief Osceola in the brig and keep you there until we make port.”

“Where is Osceola now?”

“He is still aboard the *Flying Fish*. He is to act as your assistant. You see, my dear fellow,” the Baron went on, his manner changing from curtness to affability. “As a midshipman in the United States Navy, you are too dangerous a person to allow you to mix freely with the other passengers of this ship, unless—shall I put it frankly?—unless I have a hold of some kind over you. Those people, wealthy men and women, or they should not be here, are nevertheless but a flock of sheep. You and the Chief proved in Florida that you were made of different stuff. Aboard the *Merrymaid*, I gave you my reasons for the offer. What is your final answer, now that you have had time to think it over?”

Bill hesitated no longer. “I will fly the plane as agreed,” he said. “But there, my duty to you and your organization ends.”

“That satisfies me. I am glad to take your word as an officer and a gentleman on this matter.” He rose from his chair and beamed at Bill. “My organization is perfect, Mr. Bolton—perfect. You will have no chance to escape—there is no where to escape to—but if you and your friend should wish to try—you have my permission to do so!”

Bill smiled, and said nothing.

“Time to shove off now,” continued the Baron brusksly. “The boat will be waiting for us.”

They went overside by means of a ship’s ladder and were rowed over to the *Flying Fish*. Her airplane engines were making their appearance topside by the time they stepped aboard. For a few minutes Bill watched them rise one by one, and slide on grooved tracks into place. At the same time, he noticed that the decking just forward of the central motor was moving upward to reveal itself as the roof of a glass-sided structure about two feet high.

“What’s under that?” he asked the Baron, “the pilot’s cockpit?”

“Just so. Come below and we’ll inspect it.”

CHAPTER VIII

PIRACY

While they had been talking, Bill saw the conning tower lower itself until it stood not more than a foot above the deck aft of the huge wings.

“This certainly is the most remarkable ship I’ve ever seen, or ever hope to see,” he exclaimed as they descended into the hull through the conning tower hatch.

“I designed most of these gadgets before the close of the last war,” replied the Baron in his usual pompous manner. “The armistice interrupted my experiments and as there was no government that amounted to anything in my country then, I kept the results of my work for myself. Some little time ago, speculation in your American stocks gave me sufficient capital to build that ship with added improvements. Now I am cashing in on her.”

The Diesel engines were drawing air from an intake valve just under the small bridge as they dropped into the control room where Bill and the Baron studied the charts for a while, and he was given the course he was to fly. They passed through the battery room where the walls were lined with the crews’ bunks and into the pilot’s glassed-in cockpit.

“Hello!” Osceola beamed at them from one of the pilot’s seats. “It’s sure good to see you again, Bill, old boy. How do you do, Baron?”

The Baron was annoyed.

“It is customary aboard my ships for a superior officer to receive a salute when spoken to. And the salute should be rendered standing.”

Osceola smiled, stood up, clicked his heels together and brought the fingers of his right hand smartly to the edge of the soft helmet he wore.

“Thank you.” The Baron punctiliously returned the salute. “Good afternoon, Chief.”

Then he turned his back on the young Seminole and spoke again to Bill.

“When the buzzer rings in here, Mr. Bolton, you will start idling your engines and take off as soon as possible immediately afterward. You know your course and you have instructions with regard to landing. Further orders will be sent to you should I consider them necessary.”

“I understand, sir,” said Bill.

Both young fellows saluted. The Baron returned their salutes and left the cockpit, sliding the door to behind him.

“Gosh!” exploded Osceola. “That lad gives me the jim-jams with his confounded bowing and saluting. I’ll turn into a

Prussian Yunker myself if we don't get out of this soon!"

"Reckon you weren't cut out for a Naval man," laughed Bill, "I admit I've had my fill of that stuff at the Academy, but the Herr Baron certainly goes the whole hog. Let's see what kind of a crate I've got to run," he mused—"ten motors—dual control—aeromarine inertia starter!"

He studied the layout thoughtfully and glanced at the instrument board. Then he turned to Osceola again.

"Thank heaven, they've fitted this bus with the wheel and column type of control. The clever bird has stolen some of the Fokker features. That worm gear, operated by a crank and shaft from the pilot's seat to adjust the stabilizer in flight proves it."

"Maybe," grinned his friend. "That's all Greek to me. The joke of it is that these bozos think I understand—that I'm an aviator like you!"

"Well, I've given you some pointers, haven't I? You ought to recognize a few of these gadgets."

The Chief snorted. "*Few* is right. Your amphibian is one thing—but this bus is fitted out like the engine room of an ocean liner!"

Bill laughed and picked up a soft helmet.

"Ever been in one?"

"An engine room?"

“Yes.”

“Not yet—and I hope never.”

“I thought so. Well, Mr. Assistant Pilot, get into your seat and look pretty. I’ll do the work. Confound, there goes the buzzer!”

He slipped into his seat and his hand sought the inertia starter. With her multiple engines roaring in deafening crescendo, the *Flying Fish* leapt through the water and was jerked onto her step, quite as easily as the smallest seaplane. A few seconds later she was in the air, nosing upward into the ether.

Bill ran her up to thirty-five hundred feet, leveled off, did a sharp bank to port, then straightened out once more and spoke to Osceola.

“Some bus! Runs like a ladies’ wristwatch.”

“Aren’t you keeping pretty low?”

“There’s no sense climbing higher. The skipper wants to get there in a hurry.”

“Er—you know this is rank piracy?”

“I do, Osceola. But it’s a long chance—and a darned sight better for our plans than being cooped up in the brig. If I wasn’t driving this plane, the Baron would be. Friend von Hiemskirk is so sure of himself he says that we have his permission to escape—if we can. I’d like to give him a run, you know.”

“Yes, nice of him, isn’t it? Still, we got away from the Shell Island gang, didn’t we?”

“Sure did—and put those guys in a place where they belong.”

“Well, I’m entirely willing to try it with this bunch—but between you and me, I’m almost inclined to agree with the Baron—I don’t think we’ve the ghost of a show.”

“Maybe not. But we’ll make a good stab at it, just the same. First of all, we’ve got to know how they work their game. That’s the principal reason why I took over this job. It’s not only escape I’m after, but it’s busting up this organized piracy, as well.”

“Ambitious, aren’t you?”

“Well—hello! there’s smoke on the horizon!”

“Oh, yes, I see it. Dead ahead. Think she’s the ship we want?”

“Hope so. We’re following the course. Herr Pomposo plotted it himself, so he can’t strafe us if it isn’t.”

Osceola clapped a pair of glasses to his eyes and studied the distant smudge of black that was curling up a blue horizon.

“Three funnels. Looks like a pretty big ship—and she sure is moving along.”

“The *Orleans* is a three-stacker. Also, she’s plenty big and fast. Push that button on the instrument board marked ‘C.R.’, will you?”

Osceola complied. “What’s C.R. mean?”

“Control room. I want to let his high-mightiness know we’ve sighted his prey.”

“This,” said Osceola, “begins to get exciting.”

“It will,” said Bill, “get a good deal more exciting than we bargained for unless you pipe down, old man.

There’s some ticklish business ahead of us and I can’t afford to crack it. Now—get these instructions, and get ’em right. That handle yonder works the bomb release. When I say the word, take hold of it—but don’t pull until I tell you to.”

“But—Bill!” protested the Seminole. “You surely aren’t taking orders from von Hiemskirk or anyone else to bomb that liner!”

“Not if I know it,” Bill answered curtly. “Get your mind on the job. When I say NOW—you pull. Not one instant sooner, or an instant later. It’s a matter of life and death—so be careful.”

“Trust me,” said his mystified friend, lifting a nervous gaze to stare at the great steamer they were approaching so swiftly.

The *Orleans* was a beautiful sight; a racing greyhound of the seas, tearing through a glassy ocean, bound for Europe with mail and passengers.

The *Flying Fish* came upon her from the south. As he drew nearer the leviathan, Bill decreased the plane’s altitude to a meager five hundred feet. Below the belching

funnels he could see passengers and crew crowding the starboard rails, for even the most *blasé* traveler is still thrilled by the sight of an airplane in mid-ocean.

The great plane circled the ship. Then Bill dropped behind for a moment, did a flipper turn to port, levelled off and came racing up from the rear. When the *Flying Fish* was directly over the steamer's stern, Bill spoke to Osceola.

“Get ready!” he said.

“Good Lord! You can't do it, Bill. It's murder!”

“Shut up—and obey orders!” commanded his pilot. “This is my funeral—not yours.”

Osceola grasped the bomb release, his brain whirling in consternation and confusion.

Slowly they forged ahead, over the stacks, the foremast, the bow, and on until they had gained a lead of possibly two hundred yards on the *Orleans*.

“NOW!”

Back came Osceola's hand, yanking the handle and at the same time Bill banked the plane in a sharp left turn. Osceola descried an object darting seaward beneath them. He glimpsed it strike the water and a geyser shot upward in front of the racing liner. Then as the *Flying Fish* came about and landed, he saw that the *Orleans* was slowing down. By the time their own craft was moored to a sea anchor, the liner's propellers no longer turned and she lay like a “painted ship

upon a painted ocean.”

Both lads stripped off their headgear as the Baron walked into the cockpit.

“I am about to board the *Orleans*,” he stated in that overbearing tone that was so irritating to Osceola. “You young gentlemen will accompany me. We leave directly. Once aboard, it will be your duty to make note of the quantity of gasoline and lubricating oils carried by the liner and render a report to me. I shall probably be found in the First Class dining salon, where passengers will be interviewed. Come now, it is time we were off.”

When Bill and Osceola came out on deck they saw that a three-inch gun had been brought topside and was trained on the *Orleans*. Signals had evidently passed between the *Flying Fish* and the liner, which lay motionless a few hundred yards off their port quarter. Even as the boarding party, armed to the teeth, stepped into a small launch, a gangway was let down from the side of the leviathan.

The journey across took but a very few minutes. Bill had only time to note that the *Orleans* no longer flew her colors and that the decks were still crowded with passengers, when the seaman in the bow of their launch caught the grating at the bottom of the steep flight of steps with his boathook.

The Baron immediately sprang onto the grating and, followed by another officer, Bill, Osceola and four seamen bearing rifles, mounted the gangway. The launch in the meantime hastened back toward the *Flying Fish* to pick up

another load of men.

An indignant officer, whose uniform proclaimed him to be the ship's captain, met them as they stepped on deck.

“This is an outrage!” he thundered, addressing the Baron. “By what right do you threaten my ship and board her?”

Von Hiemskirk smiled cynically at the scowling captain, and bowed, including the row of ship's officers and men who stood close behind him, in his salutation.

“You make a mistake, Captain,” he replied affably, “when you say ‘my ship.’ Allow me to inform you that she is no longer yours—but mine—by right of conquest!”

“But this is—piracy!”

“I am glad,” said the Baron, “that you realize the fact.” He changed his tone abruptly. “Permit me to inform you also that unless my orders are obeyed—obeyed on the instant,—it will be my unpleasant duty to sink this ship.”

A man in the uniform of the ship's wireless operator pushed his way through the crowd of protesting passengers and saluting the *Orleans* captain, whispered a few words in his ear.

“No secrets,” snapped the Baron. “Operator, what message have you brought?”

It was now the captain's turn to smile.

“I will answer your question,” he returned. “We have been in touch with the United States Cruiser *Stamford*. At the present moment, she is steaming at full speed to this spot!”

CHAPTER IX

THE BARON'S METHODS

Baron von Hiemskirk roared with laughter. "Splendid, Captain—splendid! To use an American expression, Herr Captain—we pirates are not always as dumb as we may look. I know all about that warship. It will take her five hours, fast steaming, to reach this ship."

He turned his back contemptuously on the furious skipper and walked to the rail. A glance overside told him that the launch, crowded to the gunwales with more men from the *Flying Fish* was nosing the landing stage below. He again approached the choleric officer.

"I now take over this ship. Order your crew to the forecastle and your officers to their cabins. You and I, my friend, will repair to your quarters. I want to look over your ship's papers."

By this time the second boarding party reached the deck, and commands snapped from the Baron like reports from a machine gun.

Accompanied by an armed seaman from the *Flying Fish*, Bill and Osceola followed the chief commissary steward below.

The man had been told off for the duty by the Baron, with a promise that if there were any complaints upon their return, he would be shot. On second thought, he had expanded Bill's orders.

"You will attend to the oil and gas," he said, "and in addition, you will commandeer all stores leaving two days' crews' rations for the passengers. Break out what men you need and get the supplies to this deck on the port side. And just as quickly as possible, Mr. Bolton."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Arrived at the chief steward's office, he was amazed to learn from the man's lists the vast amount of eatables carried by the liner.

"Gosh, there's everything here from caviar to oatmeal!"

"Well, orders are orders," said Osceola. "While you're deciding what to take and what to leave, I'll get hold of the crew and meet you below in the storerooms."

"Right-o! I'll be with you in a jiffy. I hate to have to do this, but if we don't make a clean job of it, you and I will finish out this cruise in the well-known brig!"

For the next few hours, both lads worked like beavers superintending the transportation of supplies. Leaving Osceola in charge below, Bill went up to the deck where the boxes, barrels and crates from the storerooms were being stacked by members of the captured liner's crew. The *Flying Fish*, now transformed into her guise of submarine, came

along side, a hoist was brought into use and the provisions lowered to her.

It soon became evident that the underseas boat's cargo capacity would take but a fraction of the plunder, so Bill ordered the *Orleans*' lifeboats to be lowered. One by one, these were loaded. The first boat to receive its quota of goods was secured to the *Flying Fish* by a tow-line, and the bow of each succeeding lifeboat made fast by a line to the stern of the one ahead. When the last load of crates was being lowered overside, Bill found Osceola at his elbow.

“That tears it, I reckon. Good plan that—using the boats. I wondered how you were going to load all that stuff in the *Flying Fish*.”

“I hated to do it,” admitted his friend, “but now that the *Orleans* is practically without provisions, she will have to return to New York, and she can make port in less than twenty-four hours. With this fine weather, there's little or no danger of the passengers needing the boats.”

“What are we to do now?” asked Osceola.

“Report to Herr Baron, I reckon.”

Bill hailed one of the submarine's petty officers who was herding the crew back to their quarters.

“Do you know where we'll find Baron von Hiemskirk?”

“He is in the main dining salon, sir.”

“Come along, Osceola,” said Bill. “He must be pretty nearly finished with his own particular job. I hope so, anyway. If that cruiser shows up and we’re caught—well, it will take a lot of explaining to justify our part in this. The chances are, I’d be handed my discharge from the Navy, if nothing worse.”

Osceola nodded gloomily and the two made their way along an almost empty deck to the main companionway.

“I wonder where the passengers have disappeared to,” mused the young Seminole, as they descended the broad staircase.

“They’ve probably been sent to their cabins for the time being. If my guess is a good one, the big boy is at present engaged in robbing the entire first class of their valuables.”

“It’s certainly a bad bit of work, Bill.”

“Gee, I know it. But some day we may be able to get even with this polite pirate. Just now all we can do is to smile and take orders.”

They found the Baron seated at the head of the captain’s table. An angry gentleman, his wife and two pretty daughters, under guard of a seaman, stood before him.

“Mr. Rodney Conway and family, of New York.” The Baron glanced at a list he held. “I am glad to say that this little interview will conclude my business aboard the *Orleans*.”

“Look here!” cut in the passenger. “This whole thing is preposterous! Why, your men have ransacked our cabins and stolen nearly everything of value we have with us. If, as you

seem to be, you are German citizens, I shall certainly make a complaint in person to the German ambassador, when this ship lands us in England!”

The Baron von Hiemskirk smiled, but the smile was not a pleasant one. “I do not recognize the present German government,” he said sneeringly, “and it also may interest you to know that they are quite as keen to apprehend me and put a stop to my business ventures as you are. Furthermore, Mr. Conway, you and your family are not going to England—not by this ship.”

Mr. Conway started visibly. Then he drew himself up: “I do not care for myself—but I must beg of you to spare my wife and daughters—”

The Baron put up a restraining hand. “There is no cause for alarm, Mr. Conway. Unless, of course, you prove to be unreasonable. Who’s Who tells me that you are president of the Western Hemisphere Bank in New York City, and that you are on the board of directors of other important financial institutions. Now, there will be a small matter of ransom to go into before we part company. At present, time presses. You and your family will go for a cruise with me—an agreeable one, I trust—until this business of ransom can be attended to. You will go on deck with this seaman now. Your cabin baggage has already left the ship. That will be all, I think.” He stood up in dismissal, and bowed.

“Good afternoon,” he beamed, “and bon voyage!”

The Conway family, under guard, left the salon. Baron von

Hiemskirk beckoned to Bill and Osceola who had been silent witnesses of this charming scene.

“I have to report, sir,” said Bill at once, “that the supplies have been placed aboard the *Flying Fish* and the lifeboats. They are now ready for transport to the *Amtonia*.”

“Thank you, Mr. Bolton, and you, too, Chief. I was certain that I could trust you with the job. That was a good idea to use the lifeboats. If a heavy sea had been running the greater part of the stuff must have been left behind.”

“I should think,” said Osceola, “that you would have brought up the *Amtonia* and placed the stuff aboard her direct.”

The Baron smiled goodhumoredly. “Mr. Bolton can you tell him my reason for not doing so? I am not really a blood-thirsty person by nature, Chief.”

“Baron von Hiemskirk does not wish vessels like the *Orleans* to know that the *Amtonia* is in his service, Osceola.”

“But what has bloodthirstiness got to do with it, if I may ask?”

Bill answered this too. “I suppose the Baron feels it would be necessary to sink such vessels whose crews or passengers guess his secret. Am I right, Sir?”

“Quite, Mr. Bolton. That warship, for instance, will arrive here in an hour or so. All that she can learn from those left aboard this ship is that the *Flying Fish* and the *Orleans* boats have departed in such and such a direction—which, of course,

will not be the one they will eventually take.”

“But won’t they wireless that news to the *Stamford* just as soon as we leave the ship?” inquired the Chief.

“Nobody,” replied the Baron gently, “will use the wireless after we leave, for the simple reason that this ship’s wireless will not be in working order. Now we will go on deck.”

He led the way up the staircase without speaking further. At the entrance to the companionway, they were met by one of the Baron’s men.

“Beg to report, sir, that all decks have been cleared. Passengers and crew are locked in their cabins. The fires have been drawn and the wireless has been put out of commission.”

“Good. We shall shove off at once.”

The officer preceded them toward the gangway where a squad of armed seamen were drawn up.

“By Jove!” cried Osceola. “What’s become of the *Flying Fish*? She’s disappeared. Surely she can’t have submerged and carried the boats down with her.”

“No such luck,” muttered Bill sotto voce. “There she is, with her blooming boats in tow, off to the westward. She probably got underway about the time we went below. What’s the matter, Osceola? You seem to be in the dumps.”

“Well, I hate this work we’ve been doing, that’s all, Bill.

Unless we can act pretty soon—do something to stop this robbing of innocent people, I'll be so low, I'll have to reach up to touch bottom!"

"Gosh, I'm with you. I could hardly keep quiet when that interview with the Conways took place. But tonight, we'll talk. Keep smiling now—here we are at the gangway. Gee, we're swiping the *Orleans* launch! I wondered how we were going to get back to the *Amtonia*."

"These guys," said Osceola disgustedly, "snatch everything that's loose. What's nailed down they pull up and charge the owners for the nails!"

Following the Baron, who was conversing with an officer, they went down the steps of the gangway, and took seats in the waiting launch.

CHAPTER X

BILL STARTS IN

The launch, a highpowered craft, soon caught up with the submarine and its string of loaded lifeboats. Darkness had fallen before the little flotilla reached the mothership, but the plunder was quickly taken aboard, and the lifeboats were sunk. Within an hour of their arrival, the *Amtonia* with her submarine pilot-fish were heading into the northeast again.

The two lads were given a large, comfortable cabin together, where they found the baggage from their amphibian had been stowed. They had just taken a shower in the luxuriously appointed bathroom off their cabin, when there came a knock at the door.

“The Captain’s compliments, sir,” said the steward when Bill opened to him, “and will you gentlemen dine with him and his officers at eight thirty in the Palm Garden? He asks me to inform you, sir, that you will find uniforms in your closet. He begs that you will not wear civilian clothes while aboard.”

“Thank Baron von Hiemskirk on behalf of Chief Osceola and myself. We shall be glad to join the officers’ mess at half past eight. We shall also put on the uniforms he has provided,

although I must say that nothing looks worse than a uniform one hasn't been fitted for!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but the tailor has already altered the uniforms. He took measurements from the suits in your bags. He and his men are working on more of them tonight. He tells me that they will all be finished soon."

"Thank you," said Bill. "That will be fine. By the way, where is the Palm Garden?"

"Off A deck, sir. Thank you, sir." He was gone.

"Well," grinned Bill, "some system they have aboard this packet!"

"You said it. Too much system to suit me, Bill. We're likely to come a bad cropper when we buck it."

"You know the adage about crossing bridges before you have to, Osceola. Let's get into these uniforms. It's nearly time for mess and I'm hungry enough to chew rubber."

The uniforms proved to be made of white duck, and the lads found their names stitched inside the blouses. An officer's cap and pair of white canvas shoes went with each suit. To their further surprise, they found that all these articles fitted them exactly.

"Gee!" exclaimed Bill, as he saw the two gold stripes on his black shoulder straps. "This is promotion with a vengeance! When I woke up this morning, I was only a midshipman. Tonight I'm a full lieutenant! What's the Baron made you, big

boy?”

“I’ve got a broad stripe like yours, Bill, and a narrow one. I suppose that rates me something—but what, I don’t know!”

“That’s the insignia of a lieutenant j.g.”

“And what’s the j.g. mean?”

“Junior grade. A j.g. ranks with a first lieutenant in the army.”

“And you, with your two broad stripes rank with an army captain, I suppose, and you’re my superior officer on board here, I take it?”

“Right. Only we say full stripes, not broad stripes. In Navy parlance, I’m a two-striper, and you are a one-and-a-half striper.”

“Sounds to me like a convict gang,” laughed the Seminole, as he buttoned up his blouse. “Well, if you’re ready, I am.”

“Don’t forget your cap,” Bill reminded him. “Strictly speaking, no naval officer is in uniform without it.”

“Pirate officer, you mean,” grunted Osceola as they entered the corridor. “Last time we were kidnapped and lacked all this luxury, but at least what clothes we wore were comfortable. I feel as if somebody had laced me into a tight corset.”

“You’ll feel better after dinner.”

“Maybe. If the buttons hold!”

Together they mounted the stairs to A deck. A few of the *Amtonia*'s passengers were lounging about on deck. They paid not the slightest attention to them, in fact, Bill noticed that their indifference was so marked that it could not be other than studied.

Then a voice spoke behind them. "Hello, men!" As they turned, Charlie joined them. "I wanted Father to meet you," he said, rather breathlessly, "but he says you've joined the pirates, and— But you haven't, have you?"

Osceola looked down at him quizzically. "Only pro tem!"

"Gee, what does that mean? I wish you'd talk American."

"If I spoke my own language, which is real American, youngster, you wouldn't understand me any better."

Bill grinned. "Pro tem means for the time being," he said. "But I'd better tell you, Charlie, that the Chief is feeling low tonight, so don't get fresh. He'll tomahawk you one of these days if you don't look out!"

"Oh, yeah?" Charlie seemed unimpressed by this dire threat. Then his tone changed suddenly. "Please, Bill," he whispered eagerly, "let me be a pirate, too. Gee, it would be such fun. Can't I?"

Both Bill and Osceola burst into a shout of laughter. "But how about your Dad?" asked the Seminole.

"Well, what about him?"

Bill shook his head. “Talk like that to him, and he’ll be offering you the choice of back or bristles!”

“Aw, cut it out! I’m serious, Bill. Please let me be a pirate!”

“I’ll think about it, Charlie.” Bill took him by the arm and moved over to the rail. “But I do want you to do something for me,” he said in lowered tones. “You must keep it entirely to yourself, though. If you mention it to a single soul, you’ll get us all into a heap of trouble.”

“I won’t—honest, Bill. I’ll shut up like a clam! What is it?”

“All right then, I’ll trust you. I want you to make friends with the wireless operators. There are two of them. Find out when they relieve each other, whether the door is kept locked—in fact, find out everything you can—without making them suspicious. Got that?”

“You bet. Take it from me, they’ll never guess what I’m after!”

“Attaboy! Do you know where our cabin is?”

“No.”

“Well, it’s number 126 on the deck below, starboard side.”

“I can find it.”

“Good. Come there at eleven tonight, and report what you’ve found out.”

“I’ll be there with bells on.”

“Now be careful that nobody sees you come to our door. It won’t be locked—we’ll be there. Just open it and come in.”

“All right, Bill. You can trust me.”

“That’s all, so cut along now, and remember, eleven sharp. We’ve got a date for dinner, and I’m afraid we’re going to be late as it is. So long, Charlie.”

“So long, Bill. So long, Chief.”

Charlie raced away, intent on the importance of his trust and his two friends hurried toward the Palm Garden.

They found the Baron and his officers awaiting them in the foyer of the restaurant. The Baron beamed approval on their uniforms and introduced them to the members of the group they had not already met. These gentlemen each bowed from the waist and shook hands with continental formality upon being presented. The Baron spoke a few words, and then as the single stroke of the ship’s bell clanged, the chief steward appeared in the doorway.

“Dinner is served, Herr Captain.”

The Baron leading, they went into the restaurant. The meal which they sat down to proved to be a long, sumptuous affair of many courses. Every delicacy, in and out of season, was served. Evidently the Baron believed in living well—on other people. Both lads did full justice to the banquet. Muffled

strains of the ship's orchestra, hidden behind palms, lent gaiety to the atmosphere, but could not cut through the rigid formality of their companions' demeanor.

It was after ten thirty by the time they left the table and went out on deck. The stars were like jewels flashing in the great inverted bowl of night. The dark water gleamed quiet as a mill-pond, reflecting the slender crescent of a new moon that had just appeared above the horizon.

The Baron puffed a long cigar while he conversed at his ease in a deck chair.

“This voyage,” he remarked complacently, watching the red ash glow on the end of his cigar, “is becoming quite a successful undertaking. A few more months and we can well afford to retire, and go our own ways.”

“But surely, Herr Baron, you are not contemplating ending this splendid venture?” It was the Chief Engineer who spoke.

“We must not try providence too far, Bauer. To date, this ship is a mystery to the world at large, it is true. But we have already created some stir. Personally, I consider it a positive compliment that the navies of the world are seeking us out to destroy us!”

“It must,” Bill remarked, “afford you a good deal of satisfaction, as well as profit, Baron.”

He was becoming restive. It was nearing eleven o'clock. The cabin door was locked and Charlie could not get in. But how to break away without arousing the Baron's suspicions, he

could not see.

That gentleman puffed contemplatively for a moment or two.

“Yes, you have it right, Mr. Bolton,” he observed at last. “Pleasure and profit. Outside of the vast sums in money and jewels we have taken from captured liners, you perhaps do not realize that we have more than two hundred very wealthy people as passengers. Their ransoms, at the lowest estimate will run well over a million dollars apiece. Yes, this is a most profitable business, Mr. Bolton. But of course, a most dangerous one. We must not practice it for too long a time.”

“Herr Baron,” Bill leaned forward in his seat, and smiled his most engaging smile, “neither Chief Osceola nor I have had the opportunity this evening to thank you for your consideration in the matter of our cabin and the uniforms you have provided us.”

“Yes, indeed, Baron,” Osceola seconded him and threw the stub of his cigarette over the rail. “Very kind of you, I must say.”

“Oh, do not mention it, my dear fellows.” The Baron was joviality itself. “Those are small matters and easily attended to.”

“But we appreciate your wish to make us comfortable.” Bill rose, and Osceola followed his example. “And now, sir, we will say good night. It has been a long day and a busy one.”

“Good night, my young friends,” beamed von Hiemskirk.
“Pleasant dreams, and *auf wiedersehn* until tomorrow.”

Everyone stood up and saluted and the lads marched off toward their cabin. Osceola was unlocking the door, when a stealthy figure appeared from out the shadows of a cross passage, and Charlie slipped into the room with them.

“Gee, I thought you were never coming,” he said, as Bill switched on the light.

“Sorry, Charles, so did we! Have you got any news?”

“Plenty, Bill. I—”

His words were cut short by a crash of gunfire from above. For an instant they stood listening to the thunder of the gun, then Bill broke their constrained silence.

“We’ll have to postpone our talk, Charlie, worse luck. There’s something doing out there, all right, and it’s up to the Chief and me to hustle up on deck pronto.”

Without further parley the three caught up their caps and ran out of the cabin.

CHAPTER XI

DANGEROUS BUSINESS

The lads encountered a crowd of nervous and excited passengers on the stairs and were swept up with them and out on deck. By common instinct the flow was toward port. A few hundred yards away, the lights of a steamer, parallel with them, could be discerned. Signals were flashing, bells clanging, and the clamor of the startled passengers pressing the rail was deafening.

Bill gripped Osceola's arm. "Let's get out of this bedlam," he shouted. "The skipper is sure to be on the bridge—come along!"

Diving across the ship they ran forward on the opposite deck and up the stair to the bridge. Baron von Hiemskirk stood with a pair of night glasses trained on the stranger across the water. Near him a group of white uniformed ship's officers conversed in whispers. He lowered the binoculars as Bill and Osceola approached and rendered them a stiff salute.

"Good evening again, gentlemen. Thank you for your promptness. Chief Osceola, I want you and Lieutenant Schneider to go aft and quiet that rabble. Explain to the

passengers that there is no cause for alarm. Tell them also in my name that unless they go at once to their cabins, they will be sent there forcibly.”

Osceola and the Lieutenant saluted and departed on their errand.

“Now, gentlemen,” continued the Baron, “as several of you already know, I have been aware for some time that we were overhauling that ship we see out there. Had she obeyed our signals and those of the *Flying Fish*, there would have been no need to waste shell fire on her. You will be interested to learn that she is the *Blake* of Cardiff, loaded with twenty-five hundred tons of coal—enough to keep us going for a week at good speed, or two weeks at low speed. Tomorrow morning, we will start coaling, and for the next few days, every one of us will be especially busy. Those of you who are not on duty, will please me by turning in at once, and getting a good night’s rest. Good night, gentlemen.”

Back in his cabin, Bill undressed and got into bed. He was lying there, with the lights burning, thinking over the day’s events, when Osceola came in.

He tossed his cap on the lounge, and began to unbutton his blouse. “Well, we got the sheep herded into their respective barns. Did you find out anything about that ship?”

Bill told him what the Baron had said. “Filthy business, coaling,” he ended with a yawn.

“It will be interesting to find out how they work it at sea, especially when we’ve got at least one warship on our trail.”

“I don’t think the Baron’s worrying about the *Stamford*. We’ve changed our course at least twice in the last few hours. It’s a big ocean, Osceola.”

“Guess so. And some queer people on it. The noble Baron makes me laugh. He’s probably the greatest thief unhung, yet he purposely chatted with us and the other officers after dinner, on the side of the deck away from this collier, so that we would go to bed early and get a good night’s rest.”

“He’s an odd beggar, all right,” yawned Bill. “Switch off the light, and hop into that bed of yours, big boy, or I’ll be talking in my sleep.”

A steward called them at five next morning. By five-thirty they had dressed in uniform cap and dungarees, breakfasted and were out on deck. The collier was now steaming slowly alongside the big liner. The ships were kept together by a hawser across the lips of the *Amtonia*’s bows, supplemented by a few lines across her poop; and a speed of two miles an hour was being maintained by both vessels. This kept their noses together. It also gave them a certain steadiness in the choppy sea that ran this morning. Above all, it kept the pirate ship constantly prepared, steamed up in readiness to dash away in case an enemy cruiser appeared. The lads noted that at each of the cables which held the vessels together, a man was stationed, ax in hand, to cut the strands should the emergency arise.

Bill and Osceola soon found that preparations for coaling on the high seas had already been made. Through the decks of the *Amtonia* the carpenters had cut large circular holes, one

directly beneath the other. In these openings, ship's ventilator tubes were at that moment being inserted. They were then spliced together in such a manner that coal dumped on to the deck merely had to be pushed into the tubes to slide swiftly down into the bunkers.

Three temporary derricks had been erected, one fore, another amidships, and one aft, all electrically equipped. Bill was presently put in charge of the fore derrick, while Osceola crossed over to the collier, where he helped to superintend the loading of sacks and baskets with coal. These when filled were transferred from the *Blake's* derricks to those of the liner, in midair. The coal was then unloaded on the *Amtonia's* deck and shoveled into the tubes by the crew.

As the sun grew higher, the weather became increasingly hotter. So hot was this work of coaling that the men were soon working clad only in pantaloons, cut short like boys' trousers, or even in tights. There were no feminine eyes about, for all passengers were being kept below, so that occasionally the scanty loincloths were cast aside and the men worked naked. Covered from head to foot with sweat and coal dust, they soon looked like gangs of negroes. The officers fared quite as badly, for, though they were spared manual labor and so did not discard their uniforms, they soon became as grimy as the men and fully as uncomfortable.

Work was carried forward night and day, in alternate watches. To Bill it became a nightmare of heat and sweat and coal dust. The ship, usually so immaculate, took on the appearance of a coalyard, and the fine black dust filtered into even the remotest nooks and crannies. When relieved of

duty, the black counterpart of that smart young Lieutenant Bolton would satisfy his hunger at a buffet, get under a shower and then to bed. Here, between coal dust coated sheets, he would snatch a few hours sleep—then hurry above for his next trick at the derrick. He began to find out that the life of an officer aboard this pirate craft was not the bed of roses it had first appeared to be. As Osceola worked and ate and slept on board the *Blake*, the two saw nothing of each other.

Late in the afternoon of the third day, the last of the twenty-five hundred tons of coal was transferred and shovelled down the chutes. Bill saw to the taking down of his derrick and then went below to his cabin, thankful that the dirty job had come to an end. He was getting out of filthy clothes when Osceola walked in.

“Coolheavers ahoy!” he greeted. “I’m one black warrior, if you ask me.”

“And I’ve had pleasanter jobs.”

“Oh, you’ve had a nice, comfortable deck to work on,” returned the Chief, diving into the bathroom. “You’ve nothing to complain about. I haven’t had these clothes off since the day before yesterday! Been working down in the hold of that collier at a temperature that blew the top off our thermometer.” His voice was drowned by the sound of the shower.

“That is tough! I missed you, old fellow. Where did you sleep?”

“Where did I sleep!” spluttered the Chief. “Not in a downy white bed like you—you son of luxury! I slept, or rather, I tried to sleep in a ship’s hammock!”

Bill chuckled, and began to unlace his shoes. “Pretty difficult to navigate until you get on to them. Hard to get into—”

“Harder still to stay put when you’re once in the darned thing! Gosh-all-hemlock, this water is sure a sweet, cool dream, of Paradise! Let me tell you that my hammock had to be slung between-decks—iron decks, at that. Sleep! I’ve forgotten what it is. Every time I moved in that hammock, the confounded thing dumped me onto that dirty iron deck with a jar that nearly split my head! Push that bell for a steward, please. I want food and plenty of it, and I’m going to eat it in my comfortable bed. Then, I’m going to sleep *and* sleep until tomorrow morning.”

“Oh, no, you’re not,” said Bill.

“And who says so?”

“Have your supper, by all means, and have it in bed if you like—but you and I have a date.”

“Date nothing! Keep it yourself. I’m only a poor Indian pirate. Neither am I popular with first class passengers.”

“Perhaps not—but this date isn’t with a passenger.”

“Who then?”

“Have you forgotten the wireless operator?”

“Gosh! Do you have to pull that stunt tonight? I’m half dead.”

“So are a few other people. That’s why I’m going to pull it off tonight. Snap out of it, old man. The fortunes, if not the lives of a lot of people depend on what we’re able to accomplish.”

“Well, what are we going to do? You never have spilled that plan of yours. Not to me, anyhow.” He came into the cabin, drying himself with a bath towel.

“You order your chow,” suggested Bill. “If you haven’t used all the hot water aboard ship, I want to get under that shower myself. When I’m dressed and you’re in your right mind, I’ve got to hunt up Charlie and see what he’s found out. We’ll be back later and I’ll explain the job in detail.”

He disappeared into the bathroom, closing the door after him to cut short further argument. It was after seven o’clock by the time Bill was dressed and ready to go on deck. He knew that Charlie would be in the passengers’ dining salon, and that was out of bounds for the ship’s officers. So leaving Osceola attending to a substantial dinner in bed, he went above to the Palm Garden, where the officers’ mess was held.

It was not a talkative crowd at dinner that evening. Every man at the table was dog tired and conversation flagged in consequence. The meal with its many courses seemed interminable to Bill. When at last it was over, he excused himself, while the others were smoking cigars and sipping liqueurs and went in search of young Evans.

Weary sailors were hard at work with hose and swabs on the

promenade deck, getting rid of the accumulated grime of the coaling. Bill took a turn round to the opposite side of the ship, where he encountered a similar gang at work, but found no passengers about. Charlie was not in the smoking room. Eventually he found him, listening to the orchestra, which was playing in the lounge.

Without appearing to recognize the youngster, he caught his eye as he sauntered past, surreptitiously crooked a finger and went down to his cabin. There he found Osceola fast asleep in his bed, with all lights burning. He was wondering whether he should wake him then and there, or let him sleep, when Charlie softly opened the door and entered.

Bill put a hand up for silence, and led him into the bathroom. “Better let the poor Chief get some rest,” he said, closing the door. “He’s been going it night and day aboard that collier. He needs the sleep.”

“Well, I don’t, that’s a cinch! We’ve been kept off the decks ever since you fellows started coaling, and sleep was the only thing left to do. Say—did you see the *Blake* go down?”

“No. I was sure they’d sink her, though, for the Baron told me he was going to take her captain and crew aboard the *Amtonia* and dispose of her as soon as we got her coal. When did it happen?”

“Just before dinner—about quarter to seven.”

“I was cleaning up in here then.”

“Well, I got a peach of a view from the smoking room

windows, with Dad's field glasses. They cut the ropes and she drifted away from us. It wasn't five minutes later, when she gave a great lurch and went down bow first. It certainly is a crime, the way the Baron sinks good ships. I guess he had dynamite planted on board just like he did with the *Merrymaid*."

"Very likely. But there's nothing we can do about it, Charlie. Not yet awhile. But tell me, what have you found out about that wireless room?"

"Well, since that first evening when we captured the *Blake*, I haven't been able to get up there. But I did manage to get in soon after the gunfire that night. I copped a couple of Dad's cigars and gave 'em to the guy who was on duty. These Heinies are a leadpipe cinch to kid. He isn't such a bad guy at that—showed me the whole business—everything he had. I began to think he's a swell fellow even if he is a pirate. I got a book on telegraphy out of the library and I've been boning up on the Morse Code ever since. That and sleeping. Say, I bet I could send a message now. Receiving's not so easy, though."

"Never mind that—"

"But I'm sure I can, Bill—"

"All right—I believe you—but lay off it. I want the dope first. How many operators does this ship run to? Did you find that out?"

"Yep. There's three of 'em."

“How long are their watches?”

“Four hours each. But sometimes they’re on for eight hours.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, there are two on duty daytimes—”

“Never mind that either—I’m not interested in their complete schedule. How many operators are in the wireless room now?”

“Only one. He’s doing his trick from eight till midnight.”

“Good. Now we’re getting somewhere. How about from midnight on?”

“Another guy comes on duty then.”

“For how long?”

“Till eight in the morning.”

“He’s alone all that time? Are you sure?”

“Yes. The other two lads relieve him then.”

“Do you know the operator who will go on at twelve tonight?”

“Well, I’m not sure. They vary their watches, you know.”

“I suppose it doesn’t matter,” Bill said to himself. “Tell me, is

the door kept locked?”

“No, but they generally keep it shut.”

“Does the night operator sit facing it?”

“No. His back is toward the door.”

“Then that window in the wireless house must be to his right when he’s sending or receiving?”

“Yes, and it’s sure to be open now.”

“Thanks, Charlie. You’ve done splendidly. Run along to bed now. Osceola and I will attend to your friend later.”

Charlie’s face fell. “Aren’t you going to let me in on this?” he pleaded. “Oh, Bill, gee—I did all the work and you two are going to have all the fun!”

“Not much fun about it.” Bill grinned and was silent for a minute. “Well, I reckon we can use you. But you must remember that this is a very serious and dangerous business, Charlie. If anything goes wrong, von Hiemskirk is quite likely to have us shot out of hand. You’ll have to obey orders to the letter, and take no chances.”

“All right, Bill, of course, I will.”

“Okay. Then go to your cabin and turn in. And be back here at one o’clock sharp.”

Charlie's face was transformed with joy. "Thanks, Bill!"

"Run along now," directed the older lad. "I've got a lot to do before then. And be sure nobody sees you going or coming."

"They won't!" promised the youngster. "Say, are we going to shoot this operator?"

"Certainly not, you bloodthirsty wretch. None of us will have guns. Neither Osceola nor I have one."

"What *are* we going to do then?"

"Obey orders, kid. Get out of here now—I'm busy!"

CHAPTER XII

THE JOB

When Charlie had gone, Bill glanced at his wrist watch. It was just ten minutes to nine. With a sigh of satisfaction, he picked up his cap. Then, snapping off the electrics in the bathroom and the cabin, he, too, went out.

It had been impossible for him to make preparations for this venture of his since its inception at the beginning of the week. As he went out on deck and forward toward the bridge, he could hardly believe that no longer ago than Monday morning, he had been flying his amphibian north to New York, with Osceola as passenger. Then had come the *Merrymaid*, and capture by these pirates, their flying submarine and the raider, this huge liner whose decks he was walking. That afternoon had come the *Orleans* affair; in the evening the collier *Blake* had been taken. Tonight, only Thursday. After the monotony of three days' coaling, the adventures of Monday seemed far away, except when he stopped to realize that ever since then he had had no leisure whatsoever to develop his plan.

“Good evening, sir.” The guard at the foot of the stair that led to the bridge saluted, and Bill came back to the actual present with a start.

“Good evening, Schmidt.” He returned the man’s salute, and recognized him as one of his derrick’s crew. “You look so spick and span I didn’t know you at first glance.”

“Thank you, sir.” Schmidt smiled, keeping his rifle at present. “And I feel a good bit more comfortable this way, sir. Coaling is filthy work, Lieutenant.”

“Nothing dirtier.” Bill nodded and passed on up the stairs.

Above he found Lieutenant Schneider pacing slowly up and down. “Good evening,” said Bill. “Mind if I join you for a few minutes?”

“I shall be honored, Herr Lieutenant,” returned the officer. “An unlooked-for pleasure. A beautiful night, is it not? But I surmised that like the rest of the mess you turned in directly after dinner.”

“I admit I’m tired,” Bill went on chattily, “quite as tired as the other chaps, after the grind of the last few days. Chief Osceola was completely done up. Had his dinner in bed, and I found him sound asleep when I went below.”

“Don’t speak of bed,” grumbled the officer. “I wish I were there now. It is just my luck to be on duty tonight.”

“I found the cabin hot and stuffy, so I thought I’d come up for a breath of air before turning in. Heading more to northward, since we sank the *Blake*, I see.”

“Yes, the course is nor’nor’east now. Captain von Hiemskirk is heading the ship for the transatlantic passenger ship lane.”

“We don’t seem to be in any hurry, Lieutenant.”

“No, our speed is only sixteen knots. Everybody needs a rest, and the Herr Baron, being a wise man, is saving coal.”

“It sounds foolish of me, a ship’s officer, to admit it, but I honestly have only the haziest idea of our position now.”

“I don’t wonder at that,” laughed Schneider. “The way we changed our course during the past week would make a snake break its back. At noon today we were in latitude 38 degrees north, longitude 62 degrees west—and we aren’t far from there now at the rate we’ve been steaming.”

“Mm—I thought we were much farther east,” remarked Bill, and then changed the subject.

As he had now gained the information he wanted, he chatted for ten minutes more with young Schneider, then, wishing him good night, went below to his cabin.

Here he set the tiny alarm on his watch for twelve-thirty. From the closet, he brought forth a civilian suit of his own, and one of Osceola’s. These, together with two pairs of tennis shoes and two soft felt hats that he found in their bags, he placed on the lounge. Again he dug into the bottom of a kit bag and pulled forth a coil of rope, two monkey wrenches and a flashlight. Placing these conveniently near the clothing, he began to undress. Osceola still slept the sleep of exhaustion. Without awaking him, Bill crept into his bed and turned off the light.

It seemed but a moment or two later, though in reality three

hours had crept away, when the tinkle of his alarm bell brought Bill back to a sleepy realization of the job before him. He switched off the alarm and sat up in bed. Osceola's voice cut the throbbing drone of the ship's machinery.

“What's the big idea?”

“Time to get on the job,” Bill murmured in a low tone.

“Had you forgotten it? Don't turn on the light.”

“No, I hadn't forgotten. You said something about working out a plan of yours tonight. But can't we put it off for twenty-four hours? I'm bleary-eyed, I'm so tired.”

Bill got out of bed. “So is everybody else aboard this packet. And that's why we're pulling it off tonight.”

He tossed Osceola's clothes on to the chief's bed. “Here's an old suit of yours—get into it.”

“Oh, if you say so—” yawned his friend. “What are we going to do with those wrenches? Crack the Baron's safe?”

“What a pair of eyes you've got! I'd forgotten you could see in the dark. No, you big galoot, this is not robbery you're in for now. We're going to tie up the wireless operator. I want to do some broadcasting on my own.”

“So that's the way the wind blows!” Osceola, fully awake now, was pulling on his trousers. “I have to hand it to you, boy, when it comes to action—you act!”

“Come on—I know it's risky business, but if we're ever going

to break up this nest of pirates, we've got to have help."

"You're going to wire our position to that cruiser who was on our trail Monday?"

"And to whomever else it may concern—yes, that's the idea!"

Osceola grunted. "And what is the Herr Baron going to be doing to us while the cruiser is trying to catch us?"

"Not a blooming thing, if the wireless man doesn't spot who we are. I've got a couple of handkerchiefs cut with slits for eyeholes. We can drape them over our lovely features just like real thugs, when we get on deck!"

"Swell!" responded his companion. "Gimme one of those wrenches. I'm all set if you are."

Bill glanced at the luminous dial of his watch. "We'll give him three minutes."

"Give who three minutes?"

"Charlie's coming with us."

"What? Not that crazy kid! He's sure to gum the show."

"No, he won't. And we need a lookout, Osceola. The youngster worked like a hero, getting dope about the wireless routine. I know it's a responsibility to let him take the risk—but the chap was so keen on being in at the death—I simply hadn't the heart to refuse him."

“Well, so long as this is your party, I’ll say no more about dragging Charlie into it. But I’d hate to be you if his mother finds out what you’ve let him in for.”

A crack of light appeared under the door, and Charlie opened it, slipped inside and closed the door behind him.

“Here I am,” he whispered.

“Not really,” Osceola whispered back, “why, I thought it was Christmas Eve and Santa Claus had come to fill my stocking!”

“Try the other side of your bed when you get up next time, Chief,” Charlie snickered. “Why the grouch? Don’t lose your nerve. If anybody tries to hurt you, I’ll put salt on his tail.”

Osceola laughed good-humoredly. “You young scamp, if you don’t cut the comedy and do what you’re told tonight, you’ll think you’ve had salt rubbed on yours, along with the hiding you’ll get from me.”

“Thar she blows! thar she blows!” teased Charlie. “What a whale of a guy you are, Chief!”

“Pipe down—both of you!” commanded Bill. “You make more noise than an old maid’s tea party. What do you want to do—wake up the ship?”

“Well, let’s shove off then,” said Charlie in a lower tone, and started for the door.

Bill caught his arm. “Not that way,” he warned. “The ports to this cabin are regular windows, and we’re going out through them. There’s less chance of being seen.”

“Shall I lock the door?” asked Osceola.

“No. If we’re able to pull this off, it will be a case of speed in getting back here. The door may be handier then. Come on—mum’s the word. I’ll go first—”

He stepped onto the window seat. A moment later he was through the broad porthole, and out on deck. Not a soul was in sight. A nod to Osceola brought the Chief to his side and they waited until Charlie reached the deck.

With Bill in the lead, they walked swiftly forward until they came to the open stair leading up to the boat deck. Motioning caution, Bill went silently up the rubber-coated treads with the others close behind. He knew that once above, they would be in plain sight of the bridge. Therefore, before reaching the stairhead, he dropped to his knees and crawled up to the deck level, careful to keep his head below the skyline. Then, turning back to Charlie, he drew the boy’s head close to his lips.

“I want you to stay here!” he whispered. “If anyone comes off the bridge and makes for this stair, run down to the deck below and get out of his way. When he’s gone, come back here. If anyone comes up the stair, crawl into the shadow of that lifeboat. If you see anybody at all going toward the wireless house, whistle twice and beat it back to your cabin, no matter what occurs. Got it clear, now?”

Charlie, tense with excitement and proud of the responsibility given him, nodded mutely. Then he moved to one side while Osceola slipped past him, to lie beside Bill.

Diagonally across the deck from the stairhead aft of the ship's second funnel was a small superstructure, the little wireless house. Light shone through the open window at the forward end of the structure. Charlie, who had never seen an Indian travel over an open space when the red man didn't wish to be seen, was surprised to see Bill and Osceola move forward flat on their stomachs. With the sinuous, wriggling motion of snakes, the two slid across the starlit deck. In a few moments he lost sight of them in the shadow of the ship's great funnel.

"Gee," he thought. "That sure is some stunt. Some day I've got to get one of those guys to show me how they do it."

In the obscurity of deep shadow, the two plotters got to their feet and adjusted their masks.

"Can you see all right?" whispered Bill. "I wasn't sure about the eyeholes."

"I can see. What next?"

"Get that lad in the wireless house from the window. I'll take the door."

"Okay. Good luck!"

"Good luck to you. I'll wait until I hear you speak."

“I get you.”

Keeping always within the shadow cast by the big stack, and careful to avoid the broad ray of light from the open window, Osceola glided swiftly toward his goal.

The blond young man who sat at the open window, dozing, with a magazine in his lap, awoke with a start.

“Stick up your hands and keep them there!” muttered a low voice.

Just outside the window, the dazed operator saw a white-faced blur in the darkness. The grim figure behind the mask held a black object pointed directly at his head.

Like most North Germans, the wireless expert was a sensible young man. He held up his hands.

CHAPTER XIII

RESULTS

The *Amtonia*'s wireless operator heard the door at his back open and shut.

“Stand up!” ordered a harsh voice.

The man obeyed immediately, his magazine slipping to the floor. He did not turn to look at this second speaker. The shiny black object in the hand of the ominous figure outside the window held his eyes like an electric magnet.

The chair in which he had been dozing was whisked away. Strong hands gripped his wrists, brought his arms downward. With a speed and thoroughness that bespoke nautical experience, a rope lashed his arms behind his back, first at the elbows and then at the wrists.

Next, a cloth was bound over his eyes. A gag, made of a rolled-up handkerchief was stuffed in his mouth and fastened by a band of cloth tied at the back of his head. He felt wads of cotton being placed in his ears and his ankles were then strapped together. He was grasped by the shoulders, caught round the knees and lifted to a narrow couch where a cushion was slipped under his head. Deaf, dumb and blind, he

nevertheless knew that he lay on the locker which ran along the farther side of the room. He also knew that locker to be little more than a narrow shelf, and at least four feet from the floor. If he moved an inch, he'd get a tumble. He therefore lay still and tried to imagine which of the passengers he had to thank for his present predicament.

"I reckon he'll do," said Osceola, studying the bound figure on the locker. "It's lucky he didn't try to put up a fight. Things might have got messy."

"Would you have, in his place?" Bill was taking in the details of the room and spoke rather absently.

"No—can't say I would. The poor beggar was scared stiff. That wrench stunt was a happy thought. In the darkness, I guess it passed darned well for an automatic!"

"Say, look at the map on the wall over there. These lads certainly have a system!"

"What are those colored pins stuck all over it supposed to be—ships?"

"Yes. Ships within a radius of several hundred miles that have been sending out radio messages."

"But how does he do it?"

"Oh, I guess our little operator is clever all right. I'm no wireless expert and there are a lot of gadgets in here that I don't understand. Undoubtedly they're delicate instruments by which the operator is able to determine the

approximate distance and direction of any ship sending out messages. You see, he keeps this map constantly before him, charted with the probable positions of ships. He changes the pins when his new readings seem to be in error. This is how the noble Baron knows exactly what is going on in his neighborhood. Just as if he were looking down on the sea from the moon with a telescope!”

“That list up there beside the chart is the key to the colored pins, I suppose.”

“Sure. There’s the *Stamford*.” Bill pointed to a gray pin. “Well, here’s where I get busy. The sooner that cruiser is put wise to our position, the better.”

“But how did you find out where we are?” Osceola looked his surprise. “When have you had a chance to shoot the sun? Do you keep a pocket sextant up your sleeve? Or are you just guessing?”

“Nothing like that. A sight must be taken when the sun reaches it’s highest point. I got the dope tonight from Schneider. While you were asleep, I went on the bridge and got him to give me our position this noon.”

“But that’s more than twelve hours ago!”

“Certainly. But I also found out the speed and direction we’ve been steaming this afternoon and evening. Where we are now is a simple sum in arithmetic.”

“I know, but—”

“Gee, fella, when we’re out of this mess, I’ll take a week or two off and go into detail. But right now, I’ve got to raise the *Stamford!*”

He sat down in the chair before the sending apparatus and adjusted the earphones. Then his left hand sought the sending key and the room was filled with the crash and snap of electric discharges.

Osceola took up a pencil and pad from the table. For a moment he scribbled, then placed the written sheet in front of Bill.

“Go easy!” the message read. “You’ll wake up the whole ship!”

Bill smiled and shook his head. He was sending call after call out for the *Stamford*. In his right hand he held a pencil. Presently Osceola’s note was passed back with a few lines scrawled below his own.

“Don’t worry. These fellows are continually sending out fake messages in order to gain information from other ships. I’ve heard them. If nothing was sent during this watch, somebody on the bridge would be sure to smell a rat.”

Osceola drew up a chair and sat down. Fascinated, he watched Bill’s left hand pressing the sending key, calling—calling—calling. The young Seminole’s education had been academic, not scientific, and his knowledge of radio was only rudimentary. Although the International Morse Code of dash-dot letters was as much of a mystery to him as it is to the average layman, he soon realized that his friend was sending

out the same short message over and over again.

Suddenly Bill lifted his hand from the key. He smiled at Osceola, nodded and commenced to write hurriedly on the pad before him. The Seminole leaned over and watched intently.

“This is the *Stamford*. Who calls?” he read.

Again Bill’s supple fingers pressed out an answer—a long one this time. And for the next fifteen minutes the crash and crackle of an electric storm reverberated through the room.

Presently he stopped.

“You raised the cruiser, I take it.” Osceola only half stifled a yawn.

“I did that, old sport!” Bill was delighted with his success. “Got all the dope over in great style. Told the operator aboard her who I was and a short story of our capture. Dad probably thinks we were both lost at sea, you know. The *Stamford*, will relay a message, assuring him of our safety. Then I tapped out details of this ship, the *Flying Fish*, their crews and armament. Last of all I gave our position, course and speed. By this time, she and some other craft of Uncle Sam’s are making tracks for us.”

“You’re sure a right smart feller, Bill.”

Bill laughed. “I agree with you, Big Chief.”

“About when do you reckon they’ll catch up with us?”

“Sometime tomorrow—or, rather, this afternoon. And then—boy, oh, boy! There will be one sweet little rough house!”

“There’ll probably be one aboard this sweet little packet as you call her, before that,” prophesied the Seminole.

“How come?”

“The Herr Baron is sure to raise an awful stink when he finds that lad on the locker!”

“We should fret over that. We’ll both be sleeping the sleep of the just long before that time!”

“Well, I vote we get out of here and right now. This ain’t a healthy place for either you or me. And say, I’m dead enough to go to sleep under an ice-cold shower!”

“Wait a minute. We don’t want to leave any clues. Grab that paper I was writing on, will you?”

As he talked. Bill was busily engaged in undoing nuts and screws which he stuffed in his pockets, snapping wires and playing general havoc with the radio apparatus.

“Smash that line of glass jars on the shelf with your wrench,” he added, bringing his own down on the sending key with a crash. “There isn’t going to be any radio business aboard the *Amtonia* when our friends arrive, if I can help it!”

“What’s to stop the *Flying Fish* getting wise with their wireless?” inquired Osceola, who was systematically wrecking everything within reach.

“Oh, they haven’t much of a wireless outfit aboard the sub. This bunch of junk in here was the one that counted.”

“Bunch of junk is right—” Osceola stopped short.

He stood facing a small mirror that hung on the wall above the wet cells he had just destroyed. Reflected in the small oblong he saw the door to the deck open slowly—and Baron von Hiemskirk walked into the room.

“So!” he exclaimed harshly. “Passengers—mutiny!”

He got no further. As Osceola jumped for the switch to snap off the light, Bill dived through the air, tackling the commander just above his knees. There came a crash as the Baron’s head hit the deck—then darkness.

Osceola ran to the doorway. The Baron lay prone. Bill was bending over him.

“Nine—ten—out!” said that young gentleman rather breathlessly. “Grab his legs, big boy. We’ll move him inside. It’s a little too public out here for comfort.”

Together they carried the big man into the wireless house and deposited him on the floor.

“Here’s a bight of rope,” said Bill, switching on the light again. “Tie up his ankles—I’ll attend to his wrists.”

“Shall we gag him?”

“No, he’s breathing pretty hard. Slight concussion, probably.

The back of his head hit the decking an awful crack. I don't want him to choke to death."

Osceola finished lashing the Baron's legs together and stood up. "He's a right powerful brute. Got a pair of legs like tree-trunks. Say," he began to laugh, "I didn't think our job would be done up as brown as all this tonight! That was a swell tackle of yours. The longer he's out the better pleased I'll be. That guy has never made a hit with me. I'm only sorry I didn't get a crack at him. If you've got an extra wipe, pass it over. A blindfold won't stop his breathing, and there's no need for him to know where he is when he wakes up."

"Okay. I've unhooked the collar of his blouse," Bill said, surveying their captive critically. "He'll do. Give me a hand with the other guy, now. I'm going to take out his gag and give him a drink."

"Going to leave it out?"

"Sure, I'm no inquisitor!"

"But how about it when the pair of them start yelling for help?"

"With the door and window shut, this place is pretty well soundproof. Anyway, the Baron isn't likely to kick up much of a row—not for a couple of days yet, if I know the signs. The operator couldn't hear him if he did. I'm leaving the cotton in his ears. Make it snappy—I want to beat it while the going's good."

A few minutes later, two dark figures crossed the boat deck to

the stairhead, ran lightly down and after climbing into their cabin by way of the open port, hurriedly undressed in the dark.

“By Jove!” Osceola paused in the act of removing a shoe. “I wonder what became of Charlie?”

“Oh, I guess he’s all right. I told him to vamoose if it looked like he’d get caught. He’s probably sound asleep in his bunk by this time.”

“Hope so. He’s a sassy brat, but I wouldn’t want him to get into trouble with the lads who run this ship. They’re likely to turn nasty when they find their beloved Baron has cracked his nut.”

“Charlie,” said Bill, “is quite capable of taking care of himself. Put away those clothes you were wearing. If anybody comes snooping round here looking for clues, those civvies would give us away. I’m pretty sure His Nibs didn’t recognize us. I ducked my head and the brim of my hat threw my face in shadow. You had your back turned. Too bad, though, we’d pocketed our masks—”

“Confound!” Osceola sprang for the door. “I’ve got to go up there again!”

“But what on earth for? Leave well enough alone, guy.”

“I’ve got to—it’s those handkerchiefs of yours, Bill.”

“The ones we used as blindfolds? By gosh, you’re right.”

“Of course I am. And we were idiots not to remember that all your wipes are initialled! Well, that was a bloomer we both made.”

Bill crawled into bed, and pulled up the sheet.

“Oh, no, we didn’t,” he retorted sleepily.

“How come?”

“Har-har! Had you goin’, didn’t I? Why, I changed the one on the wireless lad—found two in the Baron’s pockets, y’ see. The one you used on him was his own—the other’s on his little roommate!”

“Well, I’m a son-of-a-seacock! That’s a good one. I wonder if the rest of the bunch will figure that ‘they done it all themselves’? Smart work, Bill. You’re as full of ideas as Martinengo’s ship’s biscuit was of weevils!”

“Right the first and last time. Now shut up! I’m asleep.” Bill turned over, his back to the room, and buried his face in his pillow.

CHAPTER XIV

TROUBLE AHEAD

“Isn’t that someone pounding the door?”

“You tell ’em!” sleepily suggested the chief, covering his face with a pajamaed arm to shut out the morning light.

“Oh, Lord!” Bill groaned and crawled out of bed. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was exactly seven-thirty.

He unlocked the door and a steward clicked his heels together and stood at attention.

“Well?” growled Bill.

“Commander Geibel’s compliments, sir—and will the gentlemen be good enough to meet him at half past eight in the executive office for officers’ conference.”

“Right-o. Give Commander Geibel our compliments—and say we’ll be there.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Bill shut the door, and looked over at Osceola. The chief was fast asleep again. Bill went into the bathroom, where an ice-

cold shower worked wonders. When he returned to the cabin after a strenuous rub with a rough towel, he carried a dripping sponge with which he scientifically massaged Osceola's face.

“Hey there! Cut it out!” The chief sprang from his bed as though he had had an electric shock.

“What's the huge idea?” he stormed.

“The Exec.” said Bill, “wants to see us at eight-thirty sharp. It is now seven-forty-four. And we both want breakfast, I expect. Get under a shower and you won't feel so crabby.”

“Um!” Osceola was considerably subdued by this news.

“Think he smells a rat?”

“Oh, not a chance, so far as we're concerned. We'd be in the brig by this time if he did!”

“Good enough!” yawned Osceola, scowling furiously as he stretched the kinks out of his powerful arms.

“Hop to it, then. I'm nearly dressed—and I'm hungry enough to eat shoe-leather.”

“All right, all right—don't lose your shirt over it. I'll be with you in a jiffy.” The bathroom door slammed and again came the sound of rushing water as the shower was turned on.

At eight-thirty sharp the two lads found Commander Geibel seated at his desk in the Executive Office, and took their places among the other ship's officers. There was none of the joviality which usually preambled these meetings. The

Amtonia's commissioned personnel seemed utterly mute this morning. Instead of the accustomed good-natured chaff, the various officers merely nodded to each other as they took their places and sat down. Bill noticed that all wore expressions of deep solemnity, yet the atmosphere of the cabin was charged with a current of tense excitement.

The nautical clock on the wall struck one bell. Commander Geibel, who had been studying papers on his desk blotter, came to life.

“Gentlemen—” he leaned forward, one hand on the papers before him, “I have here the report of first assistant wireless operator, Miller. Had I not seen Miller when he was first found with our beloved captain, I could not have believed this outrage possible. We, who have prided ourselves on the most efficient and strict discipline maintained on this ship, can no longer be proud. As a number of you gentlemen already know, at about one o'clock this morning, two passengers who were masked overpowered Miller in the wireless room and wrecked the premises. While these vandals were at work, the Herr Captain, Baron von Hiemskirk, entered the room, where these ruffians surprised him.”

“Pardon, sir,” interrupted the ship's first lieutenant, Lieutenant-Commander Beerman. “It is rumored that the Herr Baron is seriously injured. Will you be good enough to ease our minds concerning the Herr Baron's condition? I understand that he was knocked unconscious.”

“That is so, Herr Beerman. I regret to tell you gentlemen that he is still unconscious, and may continue in that state for a

day or two. Doctor Thierfelder diagnoses his condition as concussion—a slight concussion only, I am thankful to say. The Herr Doctor, who is with him now, believes that Baron von Hiemskirk received a blow from a blunt instrument. Luckily, his service cap partially protected his head. With care, and no complications, our Captain will probably be able to get about again within a week.”

“May I ask,” inquired Bill, “what punishment has been meted out to the perpetrators of this dastardly crime?”

“I am sorry to say that they have not been apprehended, Lieutenant.”

“But I thought you spoke of two passengers, Herr Commander?”

“Miller states that the two men were dressed in civilian clothes. One of them at least had a revolver with which he menaced the operator, while the other bound him. As you know, every passenger, upon boarding this ship, was searched and his luggage thoroughly inspected for arms. Another search of their cabins has been made this morning. No weapons of any description have been found.”

Lieutenant Schneider caught the Commander’s attention. “I was on the bridge while this crime was being committed. During that time, I am certain that messages were radioed from the wireless room.”

“A very important fact, Herr Schneider, and one confirmed by Miller. Due to the cotton that had been placed in his ears, he was unable to decipher anything, but he is convinced that one

or more messages were sent.”

“Could we not ascertain who among the passengers is capable of sending such messages?” It was the Chief Engineer who spoke.

The Executive Officer shook his head.

“Of course all possible suspects will be questioned,” he said. “I doubt, however, if we can learn much. Fifteen of our passengers are yacht owners. Three more are high executives of broadcasting corporations. Any of these men may understand wireless. On the other hand, all of them will probably deny it. But this is not so important. Outside of broadcasting a description of this ship, they can have sent little or no information, as they have no possible means of ascertaining the ship’s position. I must urge you all, nevertheless, to be more than ever on the alert. Now, one thing more, and we may go to our various duties.”

The Executive Officer cleared his throat and proceeded.

“Baron von Hiemskirk keeps muttering over and over in his delirium, ‘*Er ist einer Footballer*’—‘He is a football player—.’ These words may mean nothing; on the other hand, they may be the means of identifying his assailants. Until our beloved Captain regains his reason, nothing can be done about it. Thank you, gentlemen, for your interest and attention. I bid you all goodmorning.”

The meeting dispersed, the officers going their several ways. Bill and Osceola, having no duties to perform, strolled around the promenade deck.

“It is to be hoped that our beloved Captain does not regain his reason until this ship has been captured by the battleships on her trail,” muttered Osceola to Bill, mimicking the Executive Officer’s formal manner of address.

Bill nodded thoughtfully. “You said a mouthful, boy. I’m afraid you and I will be in for it good and plenty if he wakes up beforehand. That bunch we just left are a dumb crew. But there are no flies on the skipper. He had our histories down pat from the newspapers when we met him on the *Merrymaid*. He’s sure to know you play on Carlisle and that I’m on the Navy eleven. What with our previous record, so to speak, in the way of cleaning up dirty messes, that guy won’t miss any bets. We’ll be judged on suspicion if nothing else.”

“I wonder why Charlie didn’t warn us that the Baron was making for the wireless house?”

“Probably didn’t get a chance. If the kid had been caught, we’d have heard of it before this. Schneider told me that all passengers are being confined to their cabins, so we won’t see him today. Charlie and his doings don’t worry me just now—but the weather does!”

“What’s the matter with the weather?”

“See that haze over there to the northward? We’re steaming into fog.”

“You think that even if the *Stamford* catches up to within firing distance we might be able to elude her after all?”

“That’s the big idea. In about half an hour we won’t be able to

see ten feet over the side.”

“Well, maybe we’ll run through it by this afternoon. The *Stamford* won’t catch up to us for some hours yet.”

“Maybe so,” replied Bill. “We’ve done all we could, anyway. From now on, the job’s up to the Navy.”

“Hello!” cried Osceola, as they swung round the end of the superstructure and into the long stretch of deck on the port side. “Look off yonder! What do you make that out to be?”

Bill shaded his eyes. The glare of the smooth ocean was dazzling in the sun. Away to the northeast a ship was nosing out of fog banks that lined the northern horizon.

“That looks to me mighty like a warship!” said the chief excitedly. “She certainly is humping it, brother. But I thought the *Stamford* was to the south of us—and when she came, she’d come from behind!”

“You’ve certainly got a pair of eyes—and she certainly *is* a warship. I can’t make her out very well at that distance, but she looks to me like a first class cruiser of the Plymouth type. Dollars to ditchwater the *Stamford* wirelesslyed her! She’s heading for us all right, all right. Oh, boy—there’s going to be something doing aboard this packet in two shakes of a lamb’s tail!”

“Thar she blows!” sang out the chief, as the gong and bugle sounded for action.

“And it’s quite time you and I beat it for our battle stations.

Everything is being made ready for attack. If we're late, it won't look so good."

Osceola stopped and stared at Bill. "Don't tell me that you, a midshipman of the United States Navy, are going to help these bum pirates fight one of your own battleships!"

Bill looked at him and laughed. "Some patriotic little flagwaver, aren't you," he jeered. "No, Herr Junior Lieutenant, I do not intend to shoot at the *Plymouth* or the *Reading*, or whatever's the name of that cruiser. Have you never played hare and hounds, Big Chief? Well, this time, you and I and everybody on board are hares. Those two 117-mm. guns forward, and the two on the poop are all right for scaring passenger liners and bringing unarmed merchant-men to haul down their colors. But they haven't the caliber or the range of three-quarters of the guns aboard that cruiser. This is going to be a race—not a battle! Beat it!"

CHAPTER XV

THE CHASE

By the time Bill reached his station on the poop, the quiet routine aboard the liner had given way to activity. The *Amtonia* was awake to the heat and fever of desperate life.

Lieutenant Schneider, who was in command of the gun, seized Bill's arm. "Bolton!" he cried, "look there—she's changed her course! She's going to head us off!"

Shading his eyes with his hand, Bill strained them toward the northern horizon. The great molten surface of the sun was already half obliterated by the spreading bank of fog that turned the sea to dull amethyst.

"I doubt it," he replied. "If that fog keeps increasing, the visibility will soon be too poor for the cruiser to get our range."

"There is Commander Geibel on the bridge. The ship is in good hands—that is a blessing!" Lieutenant Schneider's tone betrayed his excitement.

"We're sheering off to starboard—" said Bill. "That's good news. It's going to be a close thing, just the same."

Schneider jumped on the rail and leaned outward in order to get a better view of the forward end of the ship.

“The Exec. has left the bridge!” he cried. “What’s happened now?”

“Calm down! He’s probably run down the steps and crossed that gangway to the foremast. Yes, there he is! See him? He’s climbed up to the lookout. Gosh, that lad’s got a voice. You can hear him bellowing orders all over the ship, I’ll bet.”

“He’s a good officer,” admitted the Lieutenant, getting off the rail. “Too bad the Herr Baron is not able to take command. He would use the *Flying Fish* to get us out of this mess.” He pointed to the submarine racing along off their starboard quarter. “*Donner und Blitzen!* I believe she is going to submerge!”

“The very best thing she could do, under the circumstances,” Bill asserted. “What would you have her do—head over yonder and let go a torpedo?”

“Wasn’t she built for that kind of thing?” Lieutenant Schneider’s tone was still nettled.

“Perhaps she was, but not in a position of this kind. That cruiser would blow her out of the water before she got near enough to make a torpedo effective!”

“If that’s the case, why don’t you go aboard her and get busy with her in the air?”

“And stop both the *Flying Fish* and ourselves while a boat is

being lowered and I am ferried over to her? Even if the *Amtonia* was able to get away, the *Flying Fish* would be blown to pieces long before she was ready to take off. Weren't you in the merchant service before you shipped aboard this raider?"

"I was—but why?"

"Commander Geibel was an officer in the Imperial German Navy. He fought through the war. I've never been in action before, but I've had a couple of years at the U. S. Naval Academy and I know that our Commander is doing the one thing possible to save his ships."

"Then I suppose you think it a waste of time and effort for us to be manning the guns?"

Bill laughed good-naturedly and clapped the incensed lieutenant on the shoulder. "Let's not fight about it. Clearing for action and manning the guns is okay. It's splendid discipline and helps the morale of the crew. But you know just as well as I do, Schneider, that if we win out, coal will do it, not gunpowder."

"I'm sorry," apologized the German, and offered his hand.

Bill took it, feeling rather silly.

"Here it comes!" he cried a moment later, as a white cloud of smoke enveloped the cruiser's forward turret.

"Missed!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "I can't hand your compatriots much on their shooting, Bolton. That shot

didn't come within a thousand meters of the ship.”

“That was just meant as a warning,” explained Bill. “Those gunners know they aren't yet within range of this ship. It's the next five minutes that's going to tell the tale.”

Lieutenant Schneider studied the battleship through his sea glasses. “She's steaming more to the eastward,” he remarked sharply.

“And we've sheered off a point or two. The fog's coming our way—and coming fast. It's getting darker by the minute. The sun's almost washed out. Gosh, this is better than a horse race. Doesn't it give you a thrill, Schneider?”

The young officer grimaced. “Not the kind of thrill I enjoy, thank you. If that cruiser suddenly blew up, I shouldn't weep. There—she's firing again. Oh, if our guns could only carry over to her!”

This time the projectile struck the water a bare twenty yards ahead of the speeding liner. So close was it that those aboard the *Amtonia* felt the spray from the geyser that shot skyward.

“We're within their range, now, that's a cinch!” Bill said calmly.

“Do you think they'll hull us, knowing that there are passengers aboard, Bolton?”

“They're sure to, unless Commander Geibel puts on the brakes. It's his responsibility, not theirs. That last shot was an

order to stop. The Commander is paying no attention to it. He's evidently decided to take the risk. You can't blame him. Give us another minute and we'll be in the fog. Those prisoners below-decks, or passengers, as you call them, will have to take their chance with the rest of us—"

There came a terrific crash which jarred the ship from end to end. Every man of the gun crew was thrown to the deck. For several seconds the *Amtonia* trembled like a live thing in agony. Her speed slackened materially. But before the dazed men could scramble to their feet, she was blanketed in a protecting cloak of fog. Bells rang, men shouted orders, and the wounded ship swung round to the northwest with a suddenness that sent her over at a sharp angle while the crew went rolling into the starboard scuppers.

There was no more firing from the cruiser. The race, for the time being, was over.

"That," said Bill, as he picked himself up, "is what I call a direct hit."

"Don't I know it!" stormed Schneider. "If my knee isn't fractured it's no fault of this deck!" He limped over to the rail and leaned against it. "Thanks be to Neptune for this fog—that's a blessing, if nothing else is!"

"Never mind," chaffed Bill. "When the skipper wakes up he'll pin an iron cross on you. First casualty, you know. Wounded in the line of duty and all that—which reminds me," he went on more seriously, "that there are likely to be other casualties aboard. That shot struck somewhere aft, if I know anything

about it.”

“Look here,” said Schneider. “I’ve got to remain with the gun crew until we’re released from this duty. Suppose you go forward. See the Commander, if you can. If he’s not on the bridge, speak to whoever is in charge, and find out what the damage is. The ship is no more than limping along now. I’m sure there is serious trouble somewhere. Tell the Commander I’m standing by with these men and if extra help is needed, they can get busy at once. There’s nothing to do here. Oh, I forgot to say—give him my compliments. My knee is paining me so, I can hardly think!”

“Don’t worry,” chuckled Bill. “I won’t disgrace you. Bye-bye. I’ll fetch some liniment from the dispensary on my way back, if I can.”

He touched his cap and ran forward.

En route he met several parties of men hurrying toward companionways, but without stopping to question them, he made his way with all possible speed to the steps which led to the bridge and raced up. There he encountered Lieutenant Commander Hoffman, the navigation officer. He came to attention three paces in front of the frowning officer and saluted him.

“Lieutenant Schneider’s compliments, sir,” he said crisply. “The lieutenant wishes to know if his gun crew can be of service to you. He knows, of course, that the ship was hit, but so far has received no further information or orders.”

“Thank Lieutenant Schneider for me,” the officer replied with

all the ramrod formality of the Imperial German Navy. “Say to him that the schwein-dog cruiser shot off one of our propellers. What other damage has been done, I have not as yet ascertained, but I believe it to be of a minor character. Commander Geibel has gone below to investigate. Until he returns, it will be well for the Lieutenant to stand by with his gun crew and await orders.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” Bill had been standing rigidly at attention while Herr Hoffman discoursed. His first salute had been of the type that any Navy Man would term “seagoing,” but into his parting gesture, he put all the snap that only an Annapolis Midshipman is capable of. Turning smartly on his heel, he ran lightly down the steps.

“Perhaps that will hold him for a while,” he muttered, making for a companionway. “Discipline is discipline, but that guy talks as if you were bilge under his feet, the pompous, hard-boiled egg! Dollars to ditchwater that pirate was either a C.P.O. or a Warrant when the Dutchmen had a Navy. That kind are always the snootiest when they’re sprouting gold stripes!”

Which was gross libel, as it happened, but it soothed Bill’s feelings, and he found himself whistling Yankee Doodle as he ran down to the ship’s dispensary.

“Lieutenant Schneider got a crack on the knee,” he told the mate in charge. “Got a bottle of liniment handy?”

“There’s enough stuff here to stock a hospital, sir. If the Lieutenant is willing, I’ll go with him. All I’ve done on

this voyage is to hand out medicine and hold basins for seasick women. It will be a real pleasure, if my officer permits. Herman can look after the shop.”

“Your officer permits, all right,” laughed Bill. “Grab your bottle, Jack, and come along.”

“Thank you, sir,” beamed the man. He picked up a large black bag and heaving it to his shoulder, strode down the passage after Bill.

Back on the poop, Bill found Osceola talking to Lieutenant Schneider, who seemed in considerable pain. While the dispensary’s man brought out liniment and gauze and began to ease the young German’s suffering, Bill delivered Lieutenant Commander Hoffman’s message. Then the two friends moved over to the rail.

“I’ve just come up from the engine room,” said the Seminole. “There was a good deal of confusion below when the propeller was shot off, and the engines were racing and all. Things have quieted down a bit now. The chief told Geibel that the propeller was taken off clean as a whistle. He went down the shaft-tunnel and found she was leaking a little through the stuffing-box, but nothing to write home about. His men are attending to that and we’re running on the other propeller now. Nobody hurt, I’m glad to say.”

“I don’t think the Commander will try to have another fitted onto the shaft while we’re at sea,” remarked Bill.

“No. That’s why I looked you up as soon as I could. I heard him tell the chief engineer that it was his intention to make at

once for their base. They didn't go into detail, but from what they said I guess it's an almost landlocked harbor on the Maine coast."

"That's news," declared Bill. "Good news! Once we're in touch with land our chances of escape will be a thousand percent better. Hello—" he broke off, "what are these chaps up to?"

Six seamen, armed with rifles, a Chief Petty Officer and Lieutenant Brinkerhoff, whom they both knew slightly, were advancing along the deck toward them.

"Lieutenants Bolton and Osceola," said the officer stiffly, "you are hereby placed under arrest."

Bill's eyebrows shot up. "And by whose orders—may I ask?"

"By order of the Herr Baron von Hiemskirk," thundered the officer. "You gentlemen will come with me at once, if you please!"

CHAPTER XVI

PRISONERS

The seamen closed in about Bill and Osceola and they were marched off, walking side by side.

“Our noble Captain has evidently waked up,” said Bill in an undertone to his friend. “Here’s where we catch it, good and plenty!”

“You think then that he did recognize us last night?”
Osceola’s voice was lowered to a whisper.

Bill nodded. “One or both of us. We can’t deny it, you know. He’d only make it the worse for those innocent suspects Geibel was talking about.”

“What do you suppose he’ll do?”

“Shoot us—very likely.”

“But, Bill—”

Lieutenant Brinkerhoff’s acid voice cut him short. “My orders are that you gentlemen will refrain from all conversation. You will be good enough to obey.”

Bill shrugged and Osceola nodded his acceptance of this dictum. They moved forward in silence.

With the ramrod form of Brinkerhoff leading the way, the little procession filed along the decks until they reached the captain's cabin. Here the lieutenant knocked, then entered, closing the door.

Presently he reappeared and beckoned them inside. Bill noted that two of the armed seamen followed them over the threshold. Apparently the wounded captain was taking no chances of further assault.

They found Baron von Hiemskirk propped up in bed with a pile of pillows at his back. Around his head was a linen bandage. He looked pale and ill and seemed to be in some pain. Seated beside the bed Commander Geibel watched him devotedly, and at the foot stood the ship's doctor.

At a sign from Brinkerhoff, the lads approached the sick man. He opened his eyes and looked at them with a keen, appraising glance.

“So—my young friends,” he sneered. “You couldn't leave well enough alone, but must try to interfere with the excellent routine of my ship, eh?”

“When you captured us last Monday,” said Bill, “and we had our chat aboard the *Merrymaid*, I warned you that we would do our best to make things hot for you and your crew if you insisted upon our working for you. I believe you understood my warning. At that time you said that your system was perfect. And that we were at liberty to do what we could to

disrupt it so long as we attended to the duties given us.”

“Ah! So you do not deny wrecking the ship’s wireless last night, and sending messages to enemy warships? Not to mention your attack upon my person—and the vast amount of trouble your disgraceful conduct has caused my officers and crew today?”

“No, we do not deny it,” Bill asserted steadily. “Chief Osceola and I did exactly what you describe. But believe me when I say that it was no part of our plan that you should be injured. You have been courteous to us on board here. We both regret your—accident.”

“Thank you. But that does not alter the rest of it.”

“No. My duty as an officer of the United States Navy is to break up your pirate organization by any means in my power.”

“And my duty, as Captain of this ship, is to have you both executed for mutiny. You are aware of that, of course?”

“I want to tell you, Baron,” Bill continued earnestly. “That I alone am to blame. It was my plan and only mine. Chief Osceola worked under my orders throughout.”

Osceola took a step forward. “Oh, cut out all this formality!” His dark eyes flashed, first on the Baron and then on Bill. “And don’t you try taking all the blame yourself. I’m just as guilty as you are. What’s more, you know right well that if I’d had my way I’d have thrown that Hun welcher over the rail instead of bothering to tie him up!”

“Be quiet, Osceola,” warned his friend. “I’m running our end of this show.”

“Not now, you’re not—by a darn sight, Bill! I’ve got a few words to say to the captain myself. Baron von Hiemskirk,” he turned to the big man on the bed, “do you realize that if you have us murdered, you put a rope around your own neck and the necks of every one of your officers and crew?”

“One has to catch his fish before eating it,” said von Hiemskirk.

“True. And every warship on the Atlantic has a description of this particular fish by now. Are you egotist enough to believe that you can buck the Naval forces of the world and get away with it? Don’t tell me that you, who have made an enemy of all society by your racketeering and piracy, spare crews and passengers of captured ships through any motive of kindness! You are afraid to send them to the bottom. Why? Because, Herr Baron von Bluff, you are afraid to kill them! You know the penalty for murder—you have faked it every time.”

“Ah! But not this time, young man. Secrets have a way of leaking out aboard ship, I admit. But in your case we shall take no chances whatever. In a day or two, you will be removed from the *Antonia* and disappear completely and effectually, far from the haunts of men.”

“If,” said Bill, “you think you will be any safer in the state of Maine than you are on the high seas—”

The Baron started up in bed. “And what do you know about

the state of Maine?” he thundered, visibly perturbed.

“Only what I broadcasted last night,” grinned Bill. “As you remarked just now, ‘secrets have a way of leaking out on shipboard.’ You have implicit confidence in your officers and crew of course. Did it never occur to you that there might be a traitor amongst your devoted band?”

“Away with them!” shouted the Baron, now thoroughly angry.

“Just one moment—may I say a few words?”

The Baron was the type of bully who loves to see a victim cringe. From the young Seminole’s tone, he was sure the lad was frightened, and that he would beg for his life.

“Make it short. What is it you want to say?”

“Only this, sir. With such a captain, the Jolly Roger is no longer a fitting ensign for this ship. May I, in all humility, suggest that instead of a white skull and crossed bones on a black field, you substitute a lollipop? A green one would be appropriate—and floating on a broad field of bright yellow!”

“T-take them away!” stuttered the Baron, purple with rage.

As they were hustled along the passageway, they could hear him hoarsely shouting invective after them. But as his further rantings were in German, Osceola understood not a word of it.

“What’s he saying?”

“Plenty,” murmured Bill. “It would make me blush to tell you.”

As the brawny seaman who had Osceola by the arm, reminded him of the order for silence, Osceola merely chuckled. But he continued to do so until they were far below the waterline in the very bowels of the ship.

Eventually they came to a long passage running fore and aft. Electric bulbs in the ceiling brightly lighted the corridor on either side of which doors opened into tiny cabins, evidently the quarters for stewards and the ship’s petty officers. Half way down a steel-barred gate blocked this passageway from floor to ceiling. Before it lounged an armed sentry.

The man straightened to attention as the party approached. Brinkerhoff presented a paper which he read carefully.

“Very good, sir,” he pocketed the order and saluted. “All cells are full, sir, except the first on the right. Better stick them in there.”

He unlocked the gate while the Lieutenant pushed Bill and Osceola into an empty cell. Without a word the officer slammed shut the door. The gate clanged and they were left together in their prison.

The cell boasted no illumination of its own. What light and ventilation there was came through the door, which, like the gate in the passage, was constructed of crossed bars of steel. It was no more than a cubby-hole. There were two narrow bunks, one above the other on one side; across from these, a

washbowl and toilet. There was no other furniture. Both the cell and the corridor were terribly hot and stuffy.

“Well, this isn’t so bad, I’ve had worse quarters,” Bill remarked philosophically. “When the Baron took over this ship and needed a special brig for his prisoners, he slapped that gate into the passageway and put others in place of the doors to these cabins. The sidewalls are of wood. If we had some tools, it wouldn’t be such a job to get out of here.”

“Humph! but we haven’t any! And *if* we had, and could cut our way through into the next cabin, outside the gate, where would we go from there?”

They were speaking in whispers, for the sentry outside the gate was only a yard or so from their door.

“Well, we’ve been in worse fixes. This will take some thinking out,” answered Bill.

“Worse fixes?” Osceola’s shoulders moved impatiently. “I doubt it.” He sat down on the edge of a bunk. “Just because these bozos have been more or less polite, don’t get the idea they aren’t dangerous customers. That Baron means to put our lights out. You got him worried when you sprung that Maine story on him, and I purposely got him just as angry as I could.”

“What was your big idea?”

“Why, I figured that when he thought it over later, it would lead him to believe we really did have something up our sleeves—some certain means of rescue or escape. A big bully

like he is would reason that we'd never have the nerve to bait him otherwise."

"You think it may help to postpone the—er—evil day?"

"I am hoping so. If I size that guy up right, he'll make watchful waiting his cue for a few days anyway. He'll want to see if anything really happens before he puts his own head into a noose."

"And *when* nothing happens, we'll be put on the spot for that same reason!"

"Tomorrow's always another day, Bill. Say, you're not up to your usual form this morning. I'll bet you got no sleep last night. You'd better turn in now and take a siesta."

"I'll do that soon, Osceola. But I'm interested in our fellow prisoners. You know, we're lucky—our one consolation is that there wasn't room in this dump to separate us."

"You bet." Osceola yawned and standing up, stripped down to a pair of shorts. "I've got the dope on those lads," he said, as he climbed into the upper berth. "I heard Geibel telling the Chief Engineer that he'd jailed all the suspects on the wireless business. We're down here with a bunch of multi-millionaires. Does that make you feel any better?"

"It certainly does!"

"How come?" whispered the chief from his bunk.

“Why, don’t you see? With all the gaff we gave the Baron, he’ll suspect we’re in cahoots with one or more of them—and keep them down here, where they can’t help us.”

Osceola grunted. “You’ve sure got it in for the poor money kings—what have you got against ’em?”

“Gosh, you’re thick!” snorted his friend. “So long as they fill the cells we’ll be together. It’s a heap easier for us to get out of *one* cell, together, than it would be to get out of two, separately!”

“Boy, you’re talking in circles. We now arrive at the fact, once more, that we have no tools with which to get out! Take my advice and snatch a nap. You need it worse than I do, and this little Indian is going shut-eye right now!”

CHAPTER XVII

CHARLIE'S NOTE

For the next couple of days, Bill and Osceola sweated in their hot-box of a cell. What with the heat, the lack of proper ventilation, and the uncertainty of their fate, both lads sank into a state of mind that bordered on despondency.

The monotony of their existence was broken but three times a day, when meals were brought to the prisoners' cells by a steward. The man was invariably accompanied by the armed sentry, who acted as turnkey.

There appeared to be no possible means of escape. Day and night the electric lights in the passage beyond the steel bars burned brightly. The sentry outside the gate was relieved by another seaman every four hours, with the change of watch. With nothing to read, nothing to do, the lads spent most of their time lying in the bunks or taking turns pacing the narrow confines of their cell.

Sunday night, shortly after ten o'clock the tremble of the ship's engines stopped. The lads guessed that the *Amtonia* had reached her destination at last. Half an hour later they heard the sentry speaking to someone in the passage just beyond the gate. Although the conversation was carried on in German,

Bill was able to get the gist of it.

“What’s the matter, Hans?” inquired the sentry. “Aren’t you going ashore with the rest of the boys?”

“Not me,” replied Hans. “I’ve got to start swabbing out bathrooms at four o’clock.”

“Well, I’m going,” the sentry declared, “just as soon as Otto relieves me at midnight. It isn’t often we have the chance to stretch our legs ashore and have a good time.”

“If your idea of a good time is to swill American homebrew in a speakeasy, it’s not mine,” the other retorted. “I’m from Munich, I am. Good brown Lionsbrew for me. I can’t stomach the stuff they sell you on this side. Anyway, I’ve been on my feet all day long. My legs get all the stretching they want aboard this ship. I’m tired—good night!”

The lads heard the door of the cabin next to them slam shut as Hans went to his well-earned rest.

“That,” laughed Bill, “is the first bit of comedy I’ve heard since we landed aboard this blooming pirate. That Heinie’s a sensible man. We might as well turn in, too. Tomorrow, I suppose, they’ll take us ashore and stand us up against a stone fence. I for one don’t want to think any more about it than I have to.”

“Keep on talking—don’t stop!” said Osceola in a low voice. “Either Hans or someone else next door is scraping on his side of the wall. I’ll try to find out what it’s all about.”

Bill nodded and immediately launched into a long account of the Army and Navy football game in which he had played the previous fall. Meanwhile Osceola climbed into the lower bunk, and lying flat, pressed his ear against the wooden partition which separated their cell from the bath-steward's cabin.

The slight scraping continued and presently the sharp-eyed Seminole saw the point of a knife appear through a board. The slit slowly widened, and a folded piece of paper was pushed halfway through. Osceola grabbed it and scanned the writing that covered both sides. He passed it to Bill, who accomplished the difficult feat of reading it while continuing his story of the football game. The handwriting, though tiny, was unformed and he guessed at once that the message was from Charlie. It ran:

“Dear Bill—Hans is my bath steward. He is O.K. Have promised Dad will make him rich for life if he helps you and the cheif. He will cut through the boards to your cell. Hang your blankits down over the edge of your upper bearth so as to deden sound. He will push through another knife so you can do some cuting. I think the other one better talk or sing or something so the centry can't here you cuting. If you get away take Hans to. His name will be mud after this on board the *Amtonia*.

“Yours truley,
“Charles Evans.”

Bill smiled broadly as he pocketed the boyish, misspelled

note. Then, still keeping up his endless monologue anent football, he hung the blankets, forming a curtain which completely shut in the lower bunk. Osceola was already at work with a knife that Hans had passed through the opening.

Bill continued to talk for the next twenty minutes, but then he pulled aside one corner of the blanket. The bunk was like a bake oven. Osceola was sweating from every pore.

“My turn now. Come out, and don’t forget to talk.”

Osceola handed the knife to Bill, grabbed his clothes and slipped out of the bunk.

Immediately Bill climbed in and divested himself of the underclothes he wore. Because of the heat, neither of the lads had been clothed in more than their undershirts and shorts since their incarceration. As the blanket dropped back into place, he heard Osceola begin a recital of some hunting trip he had taken down in the Florida everglades. He was surprised to find how the double blankets deadened the sound of his friend’s voice.

It was pitch dark in the bunk. He was just beginning to wonder exactly where he should get to work when a light appeared through two parallel slits in the wall-boards. These, he saw, were about three feet long and perhaps a foot and a half apart. From the cabin beyond the voice of Hans came in a sibilant whisper.

“If the Herr Lieutenant will be good enough to start cutting across the boards from the bottom of one slit to the bottom of the other? I shall work on the top end. It is not

necessary to tell the Lieutenant not to press too hard with his knife. The sound of splintering wood can be heard in the passage. There is no need to disturb the sentry—just yet.”

Bill heard the steward chuckle. Then, except for the very slight sound of the knives as they cut across the grain of the wood, no other came to his ears save the low mumble of Osceola’s voice beyond the blankets.

It was hard work and tedious, slicing across the grain of the boards. The heat made Bill dizzy, and he stopped frequently to wipe away the sweat that streamed down into his eyes. After what seemed an endless age, Hans spoke again.

“I have cut through to the farther slit, sir. Will the Herr Lieutenant be good enough now to place the palm of his hand against the piece that is to come out? There must be no cracking of the wood when we remove it.”

“Okay,” whispered Bill.

Less than five minutes later, he completed his job. Hans took the panel they had cut from the wall and switched off the light in his cabin.

“Stand by,” said Bill. “We’ll be with you just as soon as I can get a drink and put on my clothes.”

“Very good, sir,” returned the man, and Bill climbed out of the bunk.

He went at once to the washbasin where he rinsed out his mouth and drank a few swallows of the tepid water. A quick

sluice and a rubdown followed. Then he got quickly into his white linen uniform. Osceola, who was already dressed, spent the time in taking down the blankets, folding them and tossing them onto the upper berth. Far down the passageway they heard a bell tinkle eight times.

“Midnight,” said Bill, in a low tone. “Yes, there’s Otto, relieving our weary sentry at last. We’ll give him five minutes to vamoose, then we’ll get out of here.”

That seemed the longest five minutes of their lives. They kept their eyes glued on the luminous dials of their wrist-watches.

“Time’s up!” said Bill at last.

“To the second,” was the Seminole’s sole comment. One after the other they got into the lower berth and squeezed through the opening in the wall.

“What’s the plan now, Hans?” Bill whispered in the darkness.

“With permission, sir, I will go into the passage and talk to Otto, who is on watch now. I will leave the cabin door ajar, sir, and as soon as his back is turned, it will be well if the gentlemen come out and—”

“Scrag him,” Bill supplied.

“That’s it, sir. Here are four pieces of rope and a gag. That ought to be enough to keep Otto quiet. Will the gentlemen please take me with them,” he asked somewhat diffidently, “when they leave the ship?”

“You bet we will!” said Osceola. “Only don’t be so darned polite. You make me nervous. Cut along now, we’ll attend to Otto just as soon as you get him facing the right way.”

“Very good, sir. Thank you, sir.”

Hans opened the door and went out, leaving it slightly ajar. From the shadows beside it, the lads saw him approach the sentry, who lounged on a stool by the gate.

“Too hot in there to sleep,” remarked Hans. “I’m going above to catch a breath of air.”

“Wish I could!” The sentry placed his rifle against the wall. “This ship is an oven below-decks. Practically the whole port watch has gone ashore. Just my bad luck to be stuck down here.”

“Look at the size of that rat!” exclaimed the steward, pointing down the prison corridor.

“Where?” Otto swung round toward the barred gate.

Hans immediately caught up the rifle and pressed the muzzle against the man’s side. “One peep out of you,” he muttered, “and I’ll give you a bellyful!”

Otto stared at him dazedly. Before he could decide whether or not to make a move, Bill thrust the gag in his mouth, while Osceola caught his wrists and lashed them fast behind his back.

It took only a moment longer to tie up his ankles. Otto was laid on the floor, and with Hans in the lead and carrying the rifle, the three hurried down the passage away from the gate.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FLYING FISH PLAYS ITS PART

Hans led them up through the galleys and pantries into the First Class Dining Saloon without encountering a single soul. They went boldly up the main staircase to the promenade deck, which seemed deserted. A small figure hiding in the shadows ran up to them, and Charlie gripped his friends' hands.

“Never mind the thanks,” he whispered. “We’ve got to work fast. There’s an armed seaman at the gangway head. We must quiet him first. Then we’ll take the ship’s boat that’s moored below.”

“Okay, boy.”

Without another word, Bill walked up to the gangway sentry, who immediately brought his rifle to the present.

“There’s rust on that barrel,” growled Bill and held out his hand. “I can see it even in this light.”

“But—but I think,” stammered the sentry, “that my officer is mistaken!” He passed over the gun without suspicion.

Immediately afterward, he found himself in the same dilemma

Otto had encountered ten minutes earlier. Tied up and gagged with a handkerchief, he was deposited behind a pile of deck chairs.

His captors wasted no further time. They ran down the gangway and piled aboard the skiff moored to the grating. Hans got out the single pair of oars, Osceola unloosed the painter, and Bill, who seated himself beside Charlie in the stern, steered their small craft away from the ship. There were men on the *Amtonia*'s bridge but they received no hail to return.

Bill looked about. Although there was no moon, the brilliant starlight gave ample light for him to size up his surroundings. He found that they were floating in a large cove or harbor almost landlocked. The body of water was eggshaped; perhaps a mile long by half that distance in width. The shores were rocky, with black patches of sandy beach. Beyond grew a dense forest, except at one end of the bay, where twinkling lights marked a small settlement. The outlet to the ocean was narrow, and guarded by high cliffs. It was a perfect retreat for the Baron and his pirates.

Charlie piped up in his boyish treble. "The *Amtonia*'s absolutely hidden by those heads from any ship passing up or down the coast. The harbor entrance makes a right-angled turn half way to the sea. I heard Lieutenant Brinkerhoff say that a warship passed the mouth, going west, about eleven-thirty. The lookout on the head signalled in. Brinkerhoff was laughing about it, I guess it made him feel good."

"Well, his break is ours now," declared Bill. "And there's

another one for us!”

He pointed to where the *Flying Fish* lay moored, with her wings spread, a few hundred yards away.

“It’ll be hot as Tophet in her hull tonight! Row on, Hans. We’re going over there to pay a visit. By the way, does anyone know exactly where we are?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the man, “this harbor is on the coast of Maine. Washington County, I think, sir—not very far from Englishman’s Bay.”

“Good enough! What are those lights yonder?”

“You might call that our private Navy Yard, sir. It’s the Baron’s shore base. He keeps a crew on duty there, while the ships are at sea. There are storehouses, a machine shop, the men’s quarters and a store. It’s ten miles back to the railroad. He owns all the shore acreage hereabouts. A high wire fence shuts in the property from all outsiders. There are one or two big estates up and down the coast, but the nearest house is a good three miles away.”

“How are the roads?”

“There’s no road along the coast, sir. The one from the base runs back to the little town on the railroad. It’s in very bad condition, sir. There is no other way out.”

“Thank you, Hans. You’re a treasure-house of local knowledge.”

“Thank *you*, sir. May I make a suggestion?”

“Fire away.”

“My brother, August, is deck watch aboard the *Flying Fish*, sir. Usually, in port, only one man is kept aboard her. August does not like this life. Like me, he was shanghaied into it. Once with this outfit, there is no getting away, unless by a miracle, like tonight, sir. August speaks no English. May I ask him to join us?”

“By all means, Hans. It will save a lot of trouble. Offer him what Mrs. Evans said she would give you. I will see that it is paid.”

“Very good, sir. Thank you, sir.”

They were close to the converted submarine now. On the narrow deck, abaft the motors a man was seated on a camp chair, smoking. He stood up as the boat approached.

Hans hailed him and for several minutes the two brothers hurled harsh gutturals at each other. Bill guessed them to be speaking a low Bavarian dialect of German. He failed to understand a single word of what they said.

“He wants me to thank you—he will come,” Hans asserted presently.

“What a polite family you are—” chuckled Bill. “Let’s get aboard.”

Fifteen minutes later those officers and men who had

remained on deck aboard the anchored pirate ship were astonished to see the *Flying Fish* taxi down the harbor and take the air. A few seconds later her tail lights disappeared into the dark beyond the headlands. Aboard the *Amtonia* orders were shouted, bells clanged, and presently the whining howl of her siren awoke the echoes of the night.

Half an hour passed. Bill, at the wheel of the *Flying Fish*, leaned forward, his eyes focussed on a pinpoint of light far below and about ten miles ahead of the speeding airplane.

“There she is on a bet,” he said to Osceola, who was in the other pilot’s seat.

“You mean the warship Charlie told us about? What makes you so sure?”

“I’ve got a hunch, that’s all. Anyway, nothing but a fishing boat or one of the little steamers that put in at the small seaports along this part of the coast would be so close to shore. That’s a big ship out there. I think I’m right about her.”

Bill’s hunch was correct, as the two in the cockpit presently saw.

“It’s the *Stamford*, or her twin!” he declared. “Uncle Sam sure is on the job!”

Catching up with the cruiser, he circled her three times. Then the *Flying Fish* darted ahead, landed and came to rest half a mile beyond. By the time the warship hove to beside them, Bill had a sea anchor out and was waiting on the heaving

deck. He held a megaphone in his hand. Beside him, staring at the big cruiser, stood Osceola, Charlie, Hans and August.

“What craft is that?” came a hail from the warship’s bridge.

“The convertible submarine-seaplane, *Flying Fish*, Midshipman William Bolton in command,” Bill yelled back. “She was part of von Hiemskirk’s pirate outfit. She belongs to Uncle Sam now. We captured her less than an hour ago. Are you the *Stamford*?”

“You’ve guessed it!” spoke a jubilant voice. “Commander Brown speaking,” it went on, “are you the chaps who sent out that wireless?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Congratulations, Mr. Bolton. Where is the *Amtonia*?”

“At anchor in a small harbor a few miles up the coast, sir. One of her propellers was shot off in the scrap the other day. She hasn’t got steam up, or didn’t have, when we left—so I guess she’s still there.”

“Good! Take off at once and lead us to her.”

“Aye, aye, sir. There’s plenty of water but the channel to the harbor is a narrow one between twin heads. You’ll have to be careful.”

“Thank you, Mr. Bolton. Any other suggestions?”

“Yes, sir. Please wireless to the state constabulary to guard the road from Twin Head Harbor to Clayton. That’s the only way von Hiemskirk and his crew can escape by land.”

“We’ll attend to it at once,” said the Commander. “Cut along now. We’ll follow you, so don’t get too far ahead.”

“Aye, sir,” said Bill, and sent Hans forward to haul in the sea anchor.

The first pale rays of summer dawn were brightening sea and land when the *Stamford* navigated the entrance between Twin Heads and pushed her wicked snout into the harbor. At the same instant, Bill landed the *Flying Fish* on the calm water.

Through the cockpit windows Bill saw that the *Amtonia* was raising her anchors.

“Von Hiemskirk was all set to run for it,” he said to the chief.

“But he wasn’t quite quick enough,” grinned Osceola. “Next stop, Atlanta, for that bunch. There’s mighty little pirating to be done in a federal prison!”

“They’re hauling down the Jolly Roger!” cried Bill. “Well, that cuts it. Somebody will be sending a boat over here after awhile. Let’s see if we can rustle some chow in the meantime. I’m starved!”

The boat came alongside shortly after the five aboard the *Flying Fish* had finished doing justice to a very substantial breakfast. And all five were on deck when the ensign in

charge came over the side.

“Mr. Bolton?” inquired the young officer, as Bill stepped forward.

“Himself,” smiled Bill.

“I’m Pierce, of the *Stamford*.” The two shook hands.

“Commander Brown’s compliments,” he continued after Bill had introduced the quartet, “he wishes you to come aboard the *Amtonia*. We wirelessed the news, of course, and have just received a message of thanks addressed to you, signed by the President. You are to go to Washington, just as soon as this business here is cleaned up. In fact, the President wants to meet the five of you.”

“I bet Bill will get the Congressional Medal!” shrilled Charlie.

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” smiled Pierce. “Gosh!” he exploded, “this is a big thing you fellows have put over!”

“But Bill was the brains of it,” said Osceola.

“Without everybody’s help,” said Bill, “we never should have pulled it off.”

“Cut the argument,” laughed Ensign Pierce. “The skipper is waiting, and so are several hundred delighted passengers.”

“That’s just it,” protested Bill, “I’d rather be shot than face that mob!”

“*Not me!*” said Charlie. “Gee, it’ll be swell! Because I was the youngest on board, everybody took pleasure in jumping on me. Now I can tell them all where to shove off! Let’s go!”

THE END

Those who read and enjoyed this book and the one preceding it, (*Bill Bolton—Flying Midshipman*) will want to read the next of this series, *Bill Bolton and The Hidden Danger*.

Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard (or amusing) spellings and dialect unchanged.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)

[The end of *Bill Bolton and the Flying Fish* by Noel Sainsbury]