

THE SUBMARINE'S TREASURE, A COMPLETE NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

JUNE • 192 PAGES OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE • 25 CENTS



Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

ANDREW WOOD • HAROLD TITUS • FRANCIS COCKRELL
HUGH WILEY • H. BEDFORD-JONES • ROBERT MILL

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Four Men at Peace

Date of first publication: 1940

Author: Henry Bedford-Jones (1887-1949)

Illustrator: Grattan Condon (1887-1966)

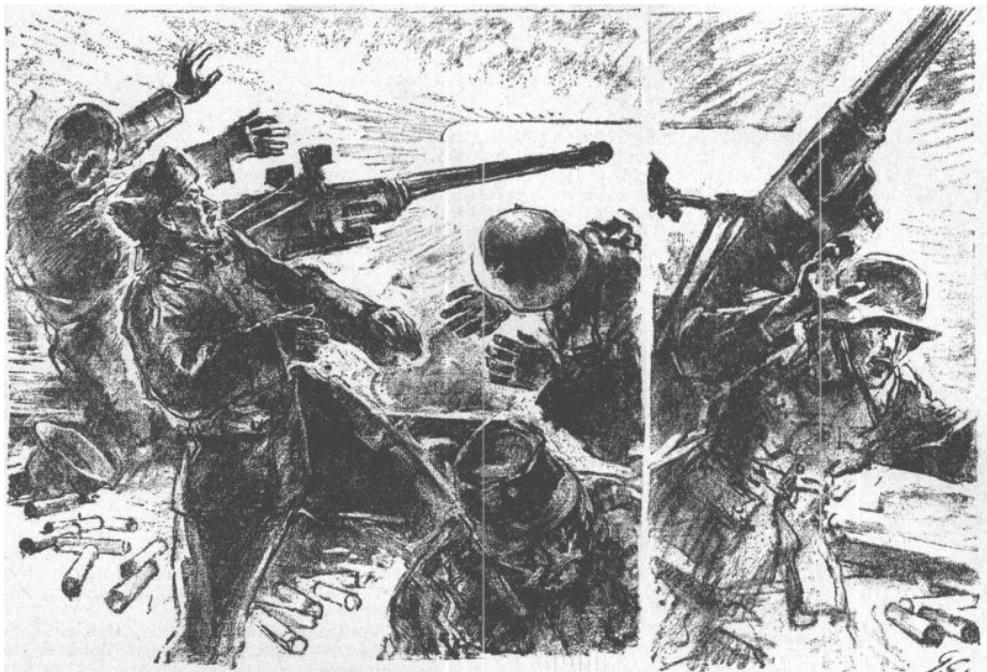
Date first posted: Sep. 9, 2022

Date last updated: Sep. 9, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220929

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive.



There was a terrific concussion; must have been a direct hit, overhead.

FOUR MEN AT PEACE

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

First published *Blue Book Magazine*, June 1940.

Bill Jenkins takes sides in this war—and talks with that famous old soldier Gustavus Adolphus.

Dr. Kaino sat up and looked around. He knew immediately that his right leg was broken below the knee. A lucky escape, at that, he reflected.

The Russ plane was gone. It had swooped, spat its storm of death, and winged away. Of Kaino's party, half a dozen riddled corpses were clumped in the snow around the two sleds they had been pulling. The other four men, who had taken cover among the black blasted grove of trees, were half-heartedly emerging and calling to one another.

Suddenly Kaino was aware of a stranger sliding up behind him on skis—a tall, rangy, hard-eyed man. Kaino spoke sharply, but the other shook his head.

"Sorry. Don't know enough of your lingo to shake a stick at."

"Good Lord!" broke out Dr. Kaino. "An American?"

"Sure!" The other's face lit up. "But never mind gabbing, till I fix that leg."

An efficient man, thought Kaino. He rid himself of the skis, produced a first-aid kit, examined the wound, and quickly covered it against frost.

"Leg broken; might be worse; we'll take care of it down in the dugout," he said. "Tried to signal you to take shelter, but that damned plane was too fast. I'm Parson Joe Hitchcock—used to be a college professor; hence the name. How-come you talk American?"

"I *am* American, man—American of Finnish descent. A surgeon. I was making a round of these isolated defenses, aiming to reach No. 358. Should be close by."

"It is. Any relief on the way?"

"Afraid not."

The rangy Hitchcock looked at the pile of dead men, waved his arm at the four survivors, and Kaino translated his orders to them. With the wounded surgeon on a sled, Hitchcock led them all in among the trees.

March was already passing, but still everything was snow and ice, here on the shore and there along the seacoast, and the far islands where the Russians lay. For Viipuri had all but fallen; now the hammer and sickle were pounding and slashing at the outlying batteries which still defended the coast. These, under the unceasing swarms of planes, were falling one by one, and the way to Helsinki was opening. Yet the Finns battled doggedly on, hoping against hope.

Upon gaining the battery emplacement hidden among the trees, Dr. Kaino was really astonished when he was carried down into the subterranean quarters. Here were two big rooms, one containing the Bofors guns, the other for living-quarters; but here with Parson Joe were only three men, and none of them was Finnish; nor were these men soldiers.

“Where are the gun-crews?” demanded Dr. Kaino as Parson Joe laid bare the injured leg, with bandages and splints ready. “Where’s the garrison?”

“Out in the snow, Doc—rather, under it. I think a gas shell got in here. We’ve been here two days already—came just before the attack started. Tell your men to go bring in your second sled, because we need all the grub you have. Then grit your teeth and hang on, while I set this leg.”

Dr. Kaino gave the order. After this, the pain sent him into a merciful coma.

Yet his last memory was one of lingering astonishment. He knew this particular battery had been hard at work all day yesterday. A thrust from the Russians had been hammered back; the ice of the bay outside was even now heaped with corpses. How, then, when only four men had been here?

He learned the answer when he came to himself, after a slug of aquavit and a cup of hot tea. His own men were carrying up ammunition from a still deeper dugout. Around him were Parson Joe and the other three, and tobacco-smoke was blue in the air.

“Oh, we’re just neutrals!” said Parson Joe cheerfully. “What’s the name? Kaino? Well, Doc, meet the gang. We belonged to the third ambulance sector, the one that came up here from Paris last month. Here’s Bill Jenkins, a Yank like me. This is Jan Philp, a Hollander. And this is Oley—he’s got some Norwegian name, but we call him Oley and let it go at that. He put up most of the money for the ambulances.”

“And you put up the brains,” grunted Jenkins solemnly. He was tall and thin and dark, with strange, bulging eyes. They all had the queer, hard, strained calmness that is unnatural, and tells of a past almost beyond endurance.

“And Philp the schnapps,” spoke up Oley, young and bright of face. “I wish we had more of that good Hollands!”

“Well,”—Bill Jenkins rose, with his grave solemnity,—“I’d better go out and have a talk with those dead men of yours, Doc. They may need a steer to get ’em started right. It’s always sort of a shock, they tell me, when it happens sudden.”

He went out. The others exchanged a quick glance. Parson Joe spoke quietly.

“Doc, just don’t be surprised at anything Bill says. You see, we were at the No. 3 Hospital a few days ago; we got here from there, somehow. I don’t rightly know how. . . . Yes, we were stationed there when the Reds bombed it three days ago. Incendiary bombs, gas and machine-guns. That ended our unit for good, and Bill went clear off his nut. But he’s harmless, so don’t take him too seriously.”

Dr. Kaino, who had seen horrors enough, felt a thrill of fresh horror. That No. 3 Hospital, clearly marked and isolated, had been deliberately destroyed.

“You Finns,” said the Dutchman, a heavy, stalwart young man, “should exact payment for some of these brutalities. You should bomb those Russian cities.”

“We’re not barbarians,” said Dr. Kaino. “They are. I will tell you about Colonel Peter Kalevala; then you will understand.”

“Not now,” cut in Parson Joe with decision. “You save your strength. There’ll be another raid before dark, I expect. I’ll want your four men to do scouting tonight; we’re about done up. Worked like hell yesterday.”

“Did you work these guns?” demanded Dr. Kaino.

Parson Joe grinned, hungrily. “We’re neutrals, Doc. Benevolent neutrals. We work hard at it. Come on, Oley, let’s get that soup fixed up.”

Kaino lay silent, wondering. His four men, elderly veterans refused for active service and put into hospital work, were jubilant; they were loading clips for the 40-mm. Bofors guns, four shells to a clip. Oley made them comprehend that two of the four guns were jammed, but they grinned and said they could be repaired. This Oley was a blond, serious young giant, the youngest of the four; Parson Joe was the oldest.

Presently Bill Jenkins came in. "Hey, Parson!" he called. "I can hear 'em, but can't see 'em. Must be high. I was talking to King Gus. He says the Reds are fixin' to attack at sunup, from the two islands to the north, and that a feller named Gizeri is with 'em."

Dr. Kaino swallowed hard at this name. Gizeri! There was no time to think, however. Parson Joe barked an order. Kaino was lifted and carried into the living-quarters; the massive doors were slid shut; a lamp was lit. Parson Joe came and sat beside the Doctor.

"We carried twenty-odd corpses out of here," he said casually. "I guess they forgot to close those doors and a gas-shell landed. Too bad. The place was deserted. Glad of your men to help—it was damned hard work feeding those guns yesterday."

"I thought you said you were neutrals?" said Dr. Kaino.

"Yeah. You should have seen those incendiary bombs hit No. 3 Hospital." Parson Joe glanced up as Jenkins drifted over to them. "What you want, Bill?"

Jenkins lit a cigarette and nodded in that queer spasmodic way of his.

"Gus says they're bombing heavy, all along the coast, and not to open up till he gives me the word. I got a date with him for later tonight; he says a guy named Richard Lionheart will be along. Ever hear of him?"

"Often," replied Parson Joe, in the soothing tone one uses to a child.

"Well, he says he has a message for us," said Jenkins with finality, then sat down and smoked, his eyes fixed on nothing.

"Good God!" murmured Dr. Kaino, looking up at the hard, thinly chiseled face of the American above him. "He seems perfectly normal—how the devil did he know about Gizeri?"

"Does it mean anything?" asked Parson Joe.

"Yes. It's what I want to tell you men about."

"Oh! Well, Bill's been crazy, as I say, since that hospital went up. He had a girl there, one of the nurses. She was about where one of the incendiary bombs hit. And we had just finished painting an enormous Red Cross on the flat roof, too! Cleaned the snow off to do it. They must have run the building up in a hurry, to put a flat roof on; that's no kind to have in snow country—"



There was no danger in getting out under the sky, now that day was done.

“What did Jenkins mean, about Richard Lionheart?” intervened Dr. Kaino.

For a moment the hard blue eyes of Parson Joe searched his face.

“Bill isn’t what you’d call educated,” he rejoined slowly. “That makes it hard to understand, I suppose. Anyhow, he’s been talking to somebody he calls King Gus—Gustavus Adolphus, presumably. Now, accept things as they are, Doc. Don’t lose your grip. Bill may be stark insane, but all he wants to kill is Russians. He won’t hurt us.”

Dr. Kaino forced himself to acquiesce.

Soup had been heated. Everyone had some, with hard bread and sausage. Finding that the lot of them must remain here until the savage, persistent, searching airraid up and down this sector of coast was over, Kaino relaxed.

“Call your friends,” he told Hitchcock. “I’ll tell you about Colonel Peter Kalevala and this Gizeri. It may be a needed warning to you, especially in your present guise as benevolent neutrals.”

Hitchcock grinned, and his friends gathered around Dr. Kaino.

“This happened during the very first fighting, at Petsamo,” he told them. “Colonel Peter had been trained in Germany, and had a full battery there at Petsamo. Now the Ancient Law

says it is not murder to kill Russians, who are brute beasts, but at that time none of our people wanted to kill. And Colonel Peter's battery did dreadful execution on those Reds, until it made men sick to see. So when the foremost ranks of Russians waved white flags, they stopped firing.

"Those ranks of Russians ran forward. They waved their empty rifles, showing that they had no more ammunition; they waved their empty belts. They wanted to surrender, and our people were very glad of this. So the Russians flooded over the lines in a mass, and foremost among them was Gizeri—he was a Finn who had joined the Reds. He had served the Reds as a spy, in Helsinki.

"The Russians had bayonets fixed to their rifles. Once in the lines, they attacked our people with the bayonet. Gizeri killed Colonel Peter. The battery was captured. This little trick, we have later learned, is among the arts of war taught in Moscow. And now our people do not cease firing while any Russians are in sight."

That was the story Dr. Kaino told them. As though to emphasize it, he had barely finished when the earth shuddered; then a second time.

"Those bombs came close," said Parson Joe, and looked at Jenkins. "How did you know anything about Gizeri?"

"I told you," said Bill simply. "Gus said he was there."

They glanced at one another, uncomfortably.

"Damn it!" exclaimed Jan Philp. "I suppose Bill will be talking to me, tomorrow or next day! And I don't want to die."

"You will, though." Bill Jenkins looked at him seriously. "I can see the queer kind of light around your face now that shows it."

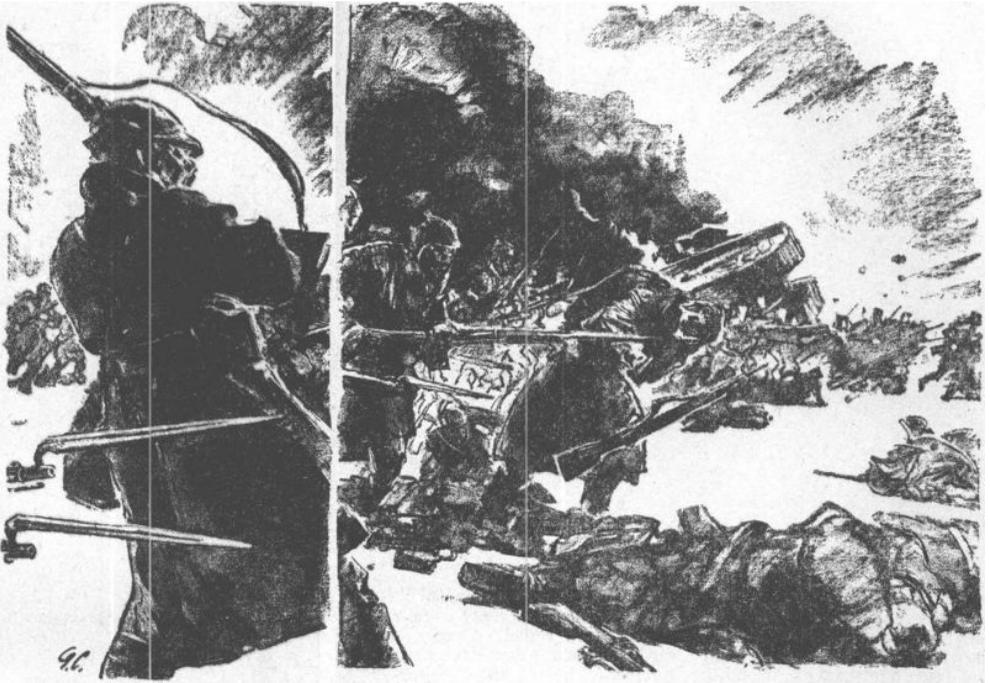
Parson Joe stifled an oath. "And me, I suppose?"

"Sure," replied Jenkins soberly. "Sure. All of us, except the Doc, here. If we want to send out any word to anybody, better give it to him. I got a message all ready."

Dr. Kaino spoke, a little impatiently.

"I'm surprised at you fellows talking this way! Why don't you buck up and show some common sense, instead of yielding to superstitious fancies?"

The four men regarded him, he perceived, in surprise and even vexation.



The whole frontal attack was suicidal; but the Russian strategy was to sacrifice masses of men in order to overwhelm.

“You don’t have much common sense left, Doc,” said Bill Jenkins reflectively, “when you see those Russian bombs spouting fire around wounded men and women, especially the woman who loves you.”

“I’ve been bombed half a dozen times,” said Dr. Kaino impatiently.

“Sure, but you’re just a good doctor,” retorted Parson Joe.

“What the devil do you mean by that?”

Parson Joe regarded him thoughtfully. “Y’ know, Doc, man is retrogressing. Back home, we’ve seen the Japs bomb hell out of China; the same thing has happened in half a dozen countries, and we’re used to it. Then Finland comes along and fights, and a lot of us have waked up. Take me, for instance.

“I was in Paris on my sabbatical year, working for an extra degree. And my wife skipped out with an Italian nobleman she met at the Opera. So what? My world went to pieces, and I met Oley, and here we are with an ambulance section—or were, until the Reds bombed it out of existence. It needed some inside trouble to wake me up and make me feel for the troubles and sorrows of others; that’s what being civilized means. If the world remains callous to such things, we drift back into the decadence of Roman times.”

“Gosh! You sure talk like a professor, Parson!” exclaimed Bill Jenkins.

The Hollander grunted impatiently. “Of course. After all, we’re here; what matter? If we die tomorrow, then we’re ended. I came along because I’m bored with life. The quicker we die and make room for someone else, the better.”

“And no future life?” questioned Dr. Kaino.

Philp shrugged. “Of course not.”

Bill Jenkins chuckled but said nothing. The Norseman, blond Oley, gave a laugh and touched match to cigarette.

“I’d like to hear why Bill’s here!” said he cheerfully. “As for me, it’s simple enough. All my money went at Auteuil on a poor horse. I cabled home and found that the firm was bankrupt. So I joined Parson Joe, sold off what I could, kissed my girl-friend good-by, and put the money into ambulances. And here we are! Or were. Now, Bill!”

Jenkins grinned at him. “Me? Oh, I just got an itchin’ foot, I guess. I had a job in the American Bar, and met up with Marie. She was coming on this trip, nursing, so I signed up and came too.” He glanced around with a puzzled expression. “Funny, I haven’t seen her here yet, but Gus said I’d see her today sure.”

“Better see that the air ventilator’s open, Bill,” Parson Joe said calmly.

Jenkins got up and left them. Dr. Kaino spoke quickly.

“That man’s in a dangerous state. You’d better realize it.”

“I guess so,” Philp said carelessly. “Not dangerous to us, though. . . . Doc, is it true the Government is making peace with Moscow?”



The gun jumped under his hand; all those bullets went to one spot

“There are rumors.” Kaino shrugged. “The end’s inevitable, I fear. We’ve no more men; the artillery is nearly all useless—the guns are used up. Peace of any kind would save a remnant of Finland, at least.”

“This whole Finnish war was started by Germany!” exclaimed Parson Joe. “It’s no secret that the Nazis egged the Russians on. And they threatened to attack Sweden if any Allied

troops were given passage to Finland. It's they who've destroyed this country—not the Soviets! The one to blame is the madman in Berlin.”

He checked himself abruptly as Jenkins came back to them, and spoke up.

“That’s right. Say, I forgot I had a message for you, Doc! Gus says never mind if peace is made, if Finland loses out, if everything does go wrong, even if the Nazis do come out on top.”

“He says not to mind?” Dr. Kaino repeated.

Jenkins nodded solemnly. “He says greater forces than anyone realizes are fighting against the Nazis. And he says everything is going to end up right, if you just tell ’em what’s needed.”

“Very well,” said the surgeon soothingly. “I’ll tell them. Just what is needed?”

“Faith and courage,” replied Bill Jenkins; and wandered away as though the subject were closed. Once again the earth shuddered; then twice more, close together. These bombs had been close.

Dr. Kaino glanced around at the unshaven faces, thought of what he had just heard, and blinked. It was real; yet he had an eerie sense of unreality about this place and these men.

He had heard about No. 3 Hospital being completely wiped out by a bombing fleet. These four men must have been through hell and worse; no wonder they were a bit queer in the head. It was a marvel that they had any sanity at all left.

“*Faith and courage!*” That was a queer prescription, thought Kaino. He knew, only too well, that Finland was doomed. He knew how the army was fighting on savagely, stubbornly, with no desire for peace; he also knew that peace alone could save what remained of the army, and how the huddled populace was being swept by disease and death.

“There’s something to what Bill says.” Parson Joe was speaking, gravely. “If the world has faith, collectively, in the outcome of things, if the people have faith in the right, then it’ll pull through. If the world has courage, it’ll pull through.”

“And if not?” asked Philp with a cynical glance.

“Then we’ll all revert to barbarism, and perish. Not our civilization; that’s not threatened. Nazi civilization is outwardly similar to ours. It’s the ideals that differ! Past systems like Rome have died the same way—pulled down bit by bit, destroyed piecemeal by the hordes. Perhaps Bill does see clearer than the rest of us, Doc. . . . Where you from, back home?”

“Minnesota,” said Dr. Kaino. “My wife and I came to take charge of a hospital at Viipuri; and did, until the Russ bombed us out. My wife’s gone to Stockholm now, with a nervous breakdown.”

“You’re lucky,” observed Philp, sagely wagging his head. “Mine gave *me* a breakdown.”

Parson Joe winked. “Wife trouble. That’s why Jan is here.”

“Maybe, maybe not.” The Hollander smiled thinly. “Anyhow, I don’t want to die yet a while. I’ve got a lot to make up for before the end comes. That’s really why I’m with this ambulance unit, or was. I wanted to sign up with the French, but they hadn’t started the war yet; and I had to get away from my wife, so here I am.”

Hard, thought Dr. Kaino, for the man to confess his real ambition—*a lot to make up for!* The thin and careworn features of the surgeon relaxed a trifle as he looked at the faces above.

“If we get out of here alive,” he said, “you might throw in with me. My wife will be back with a couple of ambulances; we’re going to work among the children in the civilian camps. Half of them are down with disease of one kind or another.”

“Won’t be any camps left when the Reds get through bombing,” grunted Parson Joe.

Dr. Kaino’s face twisted sharply. This statement was only too true.

He dozed. Presently he woke, looked around; the four were tossing coins. A laugh broke from Oley, as he rose.

“All right. I am it—what is it you say in America? The sheep?”

“No, the goat,” said Parson Joe. “Good luck. We’ll all get on the door. Must be near dark outside.”

“What are you doing?” Kaino asked.

“Going to see if there’s any gas outside,” said Oley carelessly, and went to the massive doors of steel and concrete, with the others.

Dr. Kaino understood. One man chosen by lot; if there should be gas around, only one would perish.

The door slid back a little; Oley squeezed through, it was rolled shut behind him, and the silence of suspense fell upon the room. The four elderly men who had come with Dr. Kaino were asleep; they had marched long with those sleds.

Dr. Kaino never forgot this one moment of absolute silence, the air quivering with nervous tension, every thought following the blond young man who had just gone out. He was risking his life, with a laugh, for the sake of all. And these shelters, built without the fear of gas in mind, were traps at times.

Two blows sounded on the door, and the tension broke.

“Everybody out!” cried Parson Joe. “Help me with the Doc, Bill!”

Out, of course, meant more than just a return to the gun-room; there was no danger in getting out under the sky, now that the day was done and the long night starting. And get out they did, even building fires in a hollow among the trees—a new hollow, where a bomb had landed. The sky was greening into deeper blue, and the stars were pricking out their faintly winking patterns upon it.

“Here’s a fag, Doc.” Parson Joe came over to Dr. Kaino and sat down. “Philp is doing the supper; nothing fancy, but it’ll be grand. Wish you’d arrange with your men to keep watch tonight. The Russ might try a night attack.”

“Wait,” said the surgeon. “Now’s your time to pull out of here.”

“Why?”

“Why? You confounded idiot, four men can’t work these guns against an assault!”

Parson Joe chuckled. “We made a damned good bluff at it, then; and what we did yesterday we can do tomorrow. Besides, we’ve got your four men to help now.”

“But they’ll bomb and machine-gun this place out of existence!”

“We figure so,” said Parson Joe. “Know anything about working those guns?”

“No.”

“They have a predictor mechanism for aiming, but I expect that’s only against airplanes; we can’t get the hang of it. Still, we can aim by hand, all right. I think the rifling is about gone, they’ve been used so much; but if we can lay down a hundred shells per minute, out on the ice a mile to a mile and a half distant, we don’t need to worry about being exact. The guns have a faster speed, but that’s as fast as we can work ’em. Well, how about sending you away with your men? Nothing to stop you.”

“To hell with you!” said Dr. Kaino. “I think you’d better send one man, however, to take news. Not that there’s any help to spare, but—”

“Then we need the one man right here,” said Parson Joe definitely.

Oley strolled up. “They came close this time! The snow’s going out before long, Parson. In Norway, it’s all gone now, but there’s no Gulf Stream here to warm the land. More bombs tomorrow; they’ll give us a good one. What are you frowning about?”

“Scared,” said Parson Joe. “Scared as hell, if you must know.”

Oley laughed at this; but Dr. Kaino, lying there under the stars, knew it was true. Hitchcock was afraid, yes; all the braver soul for that.

Supper came, with Jan Philp bragging and posing as a chef, and Dr. Kaino’s precious liquor squandered in drinks. He did try desperately to reduce this madness into some semblance of sanity, but he had no luck. Even his four men were as roaring mad as the others. They were needed here; they could strike a blow against the Russ, and they meant to make the most of the occasion.

Parson Joe came and sat with Dr. Kaino, and the two talked. Not of themselves, but of home, the world of men, books and hobbies. Dr. Kaino again perceived that this rangy man was actually afraid of the morrow, afraid of facing it, yet steeled himself to go ahead here and seize the offered chance to strike at the enemy.

“You wouldn’t guess it from my lingo, Doc,” he said, “but it was English that I used to teach in college. Seems like ten years ago, now! If you do pull out of this alive, as Bill Jenkins claims you will, you’ll have a story of three men, Bill and Philp and Oley, and what they did here, and how they left.”

“What about you?” asked Dr. Kaino.

Parson Joe gestured impatiently.

“I don’t count; not important. Bill says you’ll pull through, and maybe Bill does know. A crazy guy may sometimes have more on the ball than we realize. Are you sure there’s no help being sent to these coast-defense units?”

“None,” said Dr. Kaino. “I was sent to give medical help where needed, and report back. The defenses are crumbling in the north; the whole country is being swept by swarms of planes, and no help is being sent us in any quantity. Our men are worn out, dropping where they stand; we’ve no replacements.”

Afterward, when the night chill was creeping upon them, and two of Dr. Kaino’s men had gone out on the far ice to scout the Russian movements, Bill Jenkins showed up out of nowhere, and hugged the dying fire.

“Well, I met up with ’em,” he announced in a most matter-of-fact way. “There was Gus, and this other feller Richard. Gus, by the way, says he was born somewhere around here, and Richard was kidding him because his folks were all German just the same. This Richard, he’s English, but a swell guy in spite of it. He says there’ll be a relief party here about four tomorrow afternoon, if we can hang on that long. He and Gus and a lot more are going over to work on the Russ commanders.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Dr. Kaino.

Jenkins shrugged heavily. “I don’t know; something about trying to work on their minds and inspiring them to do the wrong thing,” he answered vaguely. “And Parson! They said to tell you that all the hell you had back in Paris, about your wife and so forth, was just like what the Finns are having now. Like some folks getting more than their share of grief, and if they keep their chin up, it’s just that much better for ’em later on. I don’t savvy it very well, nor what Richard said to tell Philp.”

“To tell me?” spoke up the Hollander, as though with frowning resentment.

“Yeah.” Jenkins struggled to find the words. “He says to tell you that all death really means, is another life.”

Philp scowled, and there was silence.

Later, back in the bombproof living quarters, Dr. Kaino wakened from fitful slumber to find Oley, the blond young Norseman, sitting by him and writing by candlelight.

“A letter for you to take out,” Oley said, seeing that the surgeon was awake. “Bill told me I’d better get it done tonight.”

“Surely you don’t take any stock in his insane vagaries?” asked Dr. Kaino.

“I’d say no to that, except that they hold a streak of sense, queerly. Poor devil! When the nurses and wounded men all went up in flames, and his girl too, he was the most pitiful thing you ever saw! Bill’s one of those men who seem mighty tough, but are not. Life’s been a hard, hard scramble for him, until Marie came along and showed him what it might be. Then to have her end that way before his eyes—you know how those thermite bombs explode incredible heat? But after his brain snapped, he seemed to forget what had taken place, so far as any grief was concerned.”

“This King Gus he talks about—could it be that he means Gustavus Adolphus?”

“Well, that’s as near as we can figure it,” Oley said apologetically.

“It’s a strange thing, then,” said Dr. Kaino. “Gustavus actually was a Finn by birth, and a German by family. Maybe Jenkins remembers it subconsciously.”

Oley smiled slightly and made no response. Dr. Kaino, with a feeling of irritation, resolved to abandon any effort at beating sense into the heads of these men. Perhaps they were all mentally affected as the result of that No. 3 Hospital affair. By all accounts, it had been unusually horrible.

Not that such things were rare. Dr. Kaino had seen more than one hospital or civilian camp given its dose of destruction; he was hardened. And he, like many a greater soul, had come to fear lest the whole civilized world become hardened also.

“I suppose,” he said, “we can expect some of Molotov’s breadbaskets tomorrow. Not that they’ll do much damage here; but they may roast us a bit.”

Oley nodded and went on writing. Presently he finished. It was a letter, he said, to a girl in Oslo who had jilted him, sending him to Paris and a dissolute existence; but the life there had brought him no peace, he explained simply. To all four, life had been a struggle almost past bearing.

Dr. Kaino remembered having glimpsed this same thing in their faces, at first.

Just before dawn everyone was astir, and Kaino wakened. He lay watching the men moving about in the lamplight, preparing food, getting shell-clips stacked ready near the guns. His old veterans had managed to repair a third gun, but the fourth was out of service. This left three of the Bofors, and two machine-guns for close work.

To the crippled watcher, the strange thing about this experience lay in these four men who, by Parson Joe’s frightful sarcasm, were neutrals. They constituted a fair cross-section of the men whom Kaino had already met fighting for Finland; Swedes, Americans, Poles and Hungarians and others. But he had got under the shell of these four; he had looked into their hearts; he comprehended their private lives.

Here was Bill Jenkins, in civilian life a bartender—who now talked with the ghosts of the dead. An alienist, thought Kaino, might understand the vagaries of this poor mental case, who was in such amazing contrast to Philp, the thoroughly materialistic Hollander who had no beliefs whatever, except that life ended with death.

Dr. Kaino was not sure about this himself; as he was wont to say, he had explored thousands of people, but had never come across a human soul.

And the young Norseman, a wastrel because of some love-affair; and Parson Joe, the rangy, sardonic, cheerful man who was so born to command, yet must continually fight the fear within! It was the latter who came now to Kaino's side and brought a tray for them both, with food and steaming tea.

"When the fun begins," he said, "you might like to be placed in the lower room? This upper one is bombproof, of course; twelve feet of protection overhead. But the openings for the guns, and the ventilators, make it bad for gas and heat and air-shock, not to mention bullets. Once they get our exact location, they'll gun us from the air."

"These are anti-aircraft guns," said Kaino.

Parson Joe shook his head. "Got to keep 'em trained on the Russ column. These are contact shells, and we can't bother to fight hornets when bears are advancing."

A word from Philp, who was watching. The old Finn last out on guard was coming in. The stars were paling; daylight was at hand.

The Finn arrived. Yes, he reported; one could hear things out there on the ice. At this, Bill Jenkins spoke up.

"No hurry. The planes will come first. They told me so."

Dr. Kaino suggested that his men, who were all veterans, might try their repaired gun on the planes; to this Parson Joe assented carelessly, and the four elderly men went joyously to work elevating their weapon.

"All hands ready to take cover," said Parson Joe, "by that east wall where the Doc is lying; that's the safest place. Who'll stand watch? We must keep an eye on the Russ, so they won't work up under cover of the bombing."

"I," spoke up Oley. He went to one of the gun-openings where a periscope was installed, and leaned over its polished table. "Brightening up fast," he said, as though no one else knew it. Then he fell silent, watching the table intently.

"What's up?" asked Jenkins.

"Queer," Oley replied. "Flashes of light, high up in the sky to the south!"

"Bombers, catching the sunlight long before we get it," said Parson Joe calmly. "To the south, eh? Coming from their bases in Esthonia. Better take cover, everyone."

The four old Finns paid no attention, clustering around their gun. All the others except Oley moved over alongside Dr. Kaino. The gun-embrasures opened only on the shore and gave scant view of the sky; the two machine-guns were placed in forward bays of concrete, with wider scope. Oley, however, had the only means of getting a view all around.

Parson Joe explained to Dr. Kaino, as they smoked, that here the Russians could not come ashore to north and south, because of the high cliffs; they must land directly opposite the dugouts. This made it very nice for the Bofors guns, he observed with his sardonic smile.

"Looks like columns forming and tanks advancing," said Oley.

"Let plenty of them come," Philp spoke up. "We figured yesterday that the windrows of corpses and the two tanks we smashed were about a mile from shore. Better let 'em come that

far, Parson.”

Parson Joe nodded. Oley’s voice came calmly, but with a vibrant stir in it.

“Tell your four ancients to get ready, Doc. Planes are dropping. . . . Lord, a regular river of them coming across the sky!”

His report was not needed. The air was a-quiver with the distant, slowly increasing drone. The lamp was put out; daylight filled the place now. Oley reported that four tanks were pushing shoreward across the ice, but not rapidly, and the main body of Russians had halted. The drone mounted by degrees to a roar, steadily and inexorably increasing until nerves and flesh revolted against the unending vibration.

And then it came, without any warning; a terrific ear-splinting crash so close that the air-shock, filled the entire place. Two of the old Finns were hurled to the floor; to Dr. Kaino, it seemed that the guns and the walls shook like cloth hanging in the wind. The two old men picked themselves up, bleeding at nose and ears.

“Well,” said Parson Joe, “that was a close one. . . . Oh, hello! Give us a hand, Philp.”

They picked up Oley, and then they laid him down again, by the opposite wall, and Parson Joe covered his face.

“I told him so last night,” said Bill Jenkins, nodding. “What did it?”

“Shell-splinter, looked like,” replied Parson Joe. “To the brain. A quick end.”

Dr. Kaino stared, astonished at all this, hardly able to realize that Oley was really dead and beyond help; it seemed a matter of course to the others. Then he became aware of continuous shocks. Bombs must be falling everywhere; the roar of engines dinned out every other sound.

There was one terrific burst of heat. Kaino did not need to be told what had happened as he saw the others looking at the periscope table. One of Molotov’s breadbaskets, as the Finns called the fiendish cluster of tiny thermite bombs, had sprayed its contents somewhere near. The columns of roaring flame were spouting with incredible heat that seared everything within a hundred feet.

“The trees are burning,” said Parson Joe, watching. “That’s bad. May make smoke to cloud our vision. . . . No, the wind’s from the north! All’s clearing. Hep! Look out, all!”

Everyone scattered. After a moment Kaino saw why; he heard the roar of diving planes, and then the bullets began to hit. Those Russians knew now where the dugout was. The old Finns were at work; Kaino saw their long gun-barrel jumping, saw them break into yelling glee, but heard nothing. After a moment, there was a terrific concussion; it must have been a direct hit overhead, but nothing happened here.

“All clear for the moment,” came the voice of Parson Joe. “Better get to work, all hands!”

Dr. Kaino came to one elbow.

“Lift me!” he commanded. “Put me up by one of those machine-guns. I can work it if needed, and meanwhile can take care of anyone who gets hurt.”

“Not much shelter in those embrasures from bullets,” replied Parson Joe.

“Does it matter?”

At this, they grinned and lifted him. He could work the machine-gun, at least while the drum was in place; this would only be at a pinch.

Here he had a view of what was happening. The trees, out around, were ablaze from thermite bombs. Something else was ablaze down the shore—two of them! His old Finns had actually brought down two planes! And there, out across the ice, were four tanks coming in,



and behind them dark masses of men; and the sun rising, already high.

How much time had passed? Impossible to say; the senses stood still, and an hour seemed but a minute. Dr. Kaino found himself astonished that the sun should be so high. He wished for binoculars, but there were none.

The guns were jumping. The 40-mm. Bofors were not large guns at all; but those long and sharply conical shells, pumped out with incredible rapidity and precision, were terrible when they exploded. And they pierced tanks like paper, as Kaino knew. He strained his eyes against the sunlit east, watching.

One of the tanks turned and went scrambling back. The others did not. One smoked heavily, afire. One turned over on its side. The third just stopped, and its crew, tiny dots of men, appeared and ran back over the ice. While Dr. Kaino was still watching, he heard a yell and saw Philp at the periscope table; then he heard the planes, but did not see them at all, for a long time. They came from behind, from westward, and zoomed up so swiftly that they were hardly seen.

Bombs first; then the planes swung, flying low above the trees. They had the position exactly spotted, and emptied their guns at it as they flew past. The four old gunners had no chance to shoot or aim now.

Dr. Kaino crouched, desperately making himself small; so did the others. Bullets whined and shrieked in through the embrasures. Those planes must have formed an endless undulating circle. The roar was incessant; occasionally the earth shook as bombs came close, blowing the snow and the burning trees afar.

Kaino felt someone touch his foot. It was Philp, supporting one of the old Finns; they slumped down together, and Philp tried to talk but could not. That bullet must have found him as he stood helping the Finn. It

“What’s that you say, Gus? Made peace with the gods?”

had gone clear through him. The Finn had a grisly head-wound. There was little to be done for either man; Kaino attended to them then dragged himself to one side, and looked

around. The place was hazy, but only with fumes from the guns and a shell. The other three Finns were dead around their gun, which was knocked awry. A small shell of some kind, perhaps from the Russian column, had entered the embrasure and exploded.

Parson Joe was slaving at a gun with Bill Jenkins. Philp, to Kaino’s amazement and protest, got to his feet and went to help them; but he did not last long. The wounded Finn died quietly while Kaino was pouring a drink between his lips.

It was unreal, lost under a roar of sound, like a dream. Kaino found himself staring, staring. He had seen death and horror enough, yet this was possessed of a frightful unreality.

There was some sort of interregnum; he was aware of silence that must have lasted for some time. He found Parson Joe beside him, propping him up, pouring some brandy into his mouth, lighting a cigarette for him.

“What happened?” he asked, blinking.

“I guess you forgot you had a bum leg, and tried to give me a hand.” The rangy American grinned, but had a wild look in his eyes. “Take it easy, Doc. We broke ’em, and if they try again, Bill and I will have a gun each. I guess Bill’s loading the clips now. And don’t you ever say *guess*; never mind if I did! You’re learning English, remember. That’s a word from the American language—”

He broke off, laughed at himself, and took a drink of brandy. Kaino did not blame him for wanting a drink and more drinks, until mind and spirit reeled. Kaino himself felt impelled to queer utterances.

“Still afraid, are you?” he asked, looking Hitchcock in the eye.

“Hell, no! I’ve got all over that,” said the other. “And for the first time in my life, I can understand something. Why all the great heroic legends and sagas of the world are concerned with the death of heroes, all of ’em! Sigurd, Roland, Grettir, Achilles—Christ! I used to think it was a mistake. Now I know better. How Benkei, the old Japanese hero, came to his death is a wonderful story; I can appreciate it now. What counts, Doc, is how you die—and why. Why! That’s it, Doc. I know how I’d teach those old stories if I ever went back to college. How and why—that’s what counts!”

Bill Jenkins came over to them.

“Say, Parson!” he said seriously, wagging his head. “Gus was in just now. He says they’re going to make one more try, but there won’t be more planes. . . . We’ve only got one gun we can aim. The rifling is clear gone from the other one. Still, it can be used all right against a column. Gus says the relief party will be here by four, sure.”

Strange, thought Kaino. The man spoke of impossible things, yet seemed calm and grave and quite sane. Looking at his watch, the surgeon was amazed to find that noon was upon them.

Conscious of the death around him, Dr. Kaino felt in his heart the truth that these men, all of them, had dared much for scant winnings; to them, more lay in the playing than in the victory. This was the essence of a man’s teaching, he thought. Then he returned to normal as Parson Joe came to him with steaming bowls of soup.

“Bill hotted it, as the Britishers say,” said Hitchcock cheerfully. “Y’ know, Doc, we’re—”

A shell screamed and struck somewhere just outside, bursting in the snow. The Russians had a battery of light artillery at work. Other shells began to hit all around the dugout. Talk was ended. Parson Joe and Jenkins, however, made no effort to use the two ready guns. They waited, keeping a sharp eye on the enemy.

The shelling continued for an hour. It did no particular damage.

Dr. Kaino was fighting the pain of his hurt leg. He roused out of this, abruptly, to find Parson Joe at one gun, Bill Jenkins at the other, exchanging a few words about the aiming. He twisted swiftly and looked out through his aperture.

They were coming: a dark swarm of figures advancing on the ice, already reaching those windrows of putrescent death that marked their former effort. They had spread far out, widely as the bay permitted where the ice was smooth. The sheen of steel flashed in the sunlight with rippling movement, steel of helms and bayonets. Kaino caught his breath as he squinted at the swarm. Against two men!

“All right, Bill,” said Parson Joe calmly, after a moment.

The Bofors began their incredible barking; twice every second, until the two men slowed their effort. No gun-crews here, to keep the clips fed.

The incessant rain of shells was bursting all along that far line a mile distant. White puffs everywhere. The line flowed on, but the ice remained black and motionless in its rear. And then, from far right and far left, two little groups of running men broke from the mass, spurting ahead, then two more groups. Four in all, running in loose open order. What it meant, Kaino could not tell.

“Get ’em, Bill!” shouted Parson Joe. “They’re bringing up machine-guns!”

It seemed suicidal, but the whole frontal attack was suicidal. All the Russian strategy in this war was to sacrifice masses of men in order to overwhelm.

One of the groups scattered and vanished. The column was coming steadily on behind them. Shells sprayed that column relentlessly; then the aim was switched again. Shells struck and exploded all around the three remaining groups; they kept coming on. They were getting in close to the shore-line, now.

One blew into a litter of bodies. The other two came racing on. One halted; Bill Jenkins yelled fiercely to Hitchcock. A machine-gun was being set up. Both the Bofors converged their fire on this gun, these men; the shells found their mark at last. Men and gun became mere black things on the ice.

Dr. Kaino looked for the remaining group, and blinked. It had disappeared. Apparently it had vanished into thin air.

Now the two guns directed a steadily hurtling stream of shells at the nearing column. The ice seemed to erupt flashing fire. The open ranks moved amidst this eruption, and their numbers lessened. Black specks littered the ice more thickly. The ranks of men melted; the tiny fire-flashes quickened along the ice.

“We got ’em, Bill!” A jubilant yell burst from Parson Joe. “Keep it up!”

The shells reached back to the supporting column, then returned to the front ranks. Small, a mere forty millimeters, it was not their size but their numbers that made them so frightful to men in the open. And the Russian ranks broke. They ebbed backward, hesitated, and fled in a crowding, panic-struck mob.

Kaino found himself yelling hoarsely—and then he ducked, ducked again as something whistled past his head. There on the ice, close in, was a spitting little burst of gunfire, nearly invisible in the sunlight.

He had found the fourth machine-gun group, sheltered amid a few ice-hummocks.

The bullets were everywhere. In that very instant of triumph, they came with appalling and incredible effect, like sheer wizardry, like the invisible touch from a dead hand of Russian vengeance. Everything happened in a minute now. They sprayed in at the gun-embrasures, an unceasing stream. Dr. Kaino heard and felt them striking all around him. They were striking everywhere in the chamber, slapping into the walls—

He looked, and his heart froze for one cold instant. Parson Joe was hanging over the rounded base of his gun-standard, a limp thing that dripped red. Bill Jenkins was on hands and knees, his head hanging and swaying. God!

Then Dr. Kaino remembered the machine-gun at his hand.

He twisted himself around; there was no more pain, now. He could see the flashes on the ice. He had a full drum of cartridges ready; the gun jumped under his hand. All those bullets went to the one spot. When the drum was empty, everything out there was silent. That final group had passed with the rest. There was only the streaming rout of men heading away in the distance.

Wiping sweat from his face, Kaino turned. He dragged himself across the floor. One sight of Parson Joe's dead face was enough, and he turned to Bill Jenkins.

Jenkins had, somehow, gained a sitting position, his back against the wall. Blood was pumping from under his shirt, and Kaino checked himself. Bill ignored him completely, and looking up at something unseen in the air, he grinned.

“Sure, Gus, sure!” he was saying, but in a faint voice. “Sure, I can see her! It's darned nice of you, Gus, to fetch her. . . . What's that you say? Made peace with the gods—for they have given men a just wage—and have justice on their side? I dunno about all that, Gus. . . . But we've all—all of us—found—”

What it was they had found, Kaino never learned, for the faint voice died. But the relief column did come at four o'clock, and Dr. Kaino lived to tell his story. This is an amplification of his report. At the top of the report he, or someone else, had scrawled the little message Bill Jenkins had given Philp:

“All that death really means—is another life.”

[The end of *Four Men at Peace* by Henry Bedford-Jones]