BOMBS BURST ONCE

By GRANVILLE CHURCH

W.N.U. SERVICE

THE STORY SO FAR: Jeff Curtis and his wife, Lee, are already on their way to Tierra Libre when he receives a note from Zora Mitchell warning them not to come. They arrive to find both Zora and her husband dead. Although he investigated the fruit company that hired him before accepting a job as chief engineer, Jeff is already suspicious of the company and of his employer, Senor Montaya. Conversations with Jerry Metanis, who works for a rival company, and with Bill Henderson and Slats Monahan reveal that there is something going on and that Mitchell and Zora were killed because they knew too much. Bill Henderson is killed, and Jeff is convinced his death is murder. Jeff and Montaya are talking to the company's two flyers, Ryden and Lannestock.

NOW CONTINUE WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER IX

This trend of talk was not to his liking, and Montaya patted Karl Ryden comfortingly on the shoulder and steered the conversation into other channels, mentioning at last the fatal injury of Bill Henderson the night before.

"They were good friends, the three of them. Karl and Gosta both feel Henderson's death keenly."

The proprieties satisfied, Montaya put a period to the meeting, much to the young men's relief.

"You haven't visited the airfield yet, Mr. Curtis," Montaya said in parting. "You can telephone any time it is—ah, convenient, to learn if Karl or Gosta is there to show you about. If you play tennis, they will be glad to have a new partner."

The three men left. Curt settled back in his chair, hoisted his feet, reached for his pouch. He felt vaguely unsatisfied — and couldn't put his finger on the reason.

Curt was a good organizer. He put his program on paper that Sunday night, at home, and made prodigious strides in the field during the next two days.

One big job was doubling man hours on railroad work—ballasting the main line, the pushing of two spur lines to feed farms already planted or now being planted.

Another was in putting all earth-moving machines and crews on two shifts a day, using floodlights hastily improvised from ordinary tin dishpans and washbasins.

There were minor matters under the Chief Engineer — farmhouses, wells and windmills, furniture manufacture, production of concrete items—culvert pipe, building blocks, reinforced girders and slabs to bridge farm ditches — all coming along at a fine pace.

But the really important jobs, the Rio Negro levee, the railroad branch lines to haul from present plantings to Tempujo three or four months from now when fruit should start to come in—these things had dragged! The drainage ditches, too, were far behind schedule.

Curt sometimes talked over his problems with Lee. This usually amounted to a monolog, but putting bothersome angles into words seemed to help. And here was something in which Lee had a vital interest.

It was Tuesday evening. The children had been put to bed, and Curt was lounging on the darkened veranda, propped up with cushions, Lee in the curve of his arm. His dangling left foot lazily pushed the couch-hammock back and forth. It was the half-hour after dinner that he was snatching for himself.

They'd held a silence for some time, lulled by the gentle rattling of young palms in the evening breeze, so like rain on a tin roof. The lightning slither of a lizard darting up the screen to the wide overhanging eaves roused Curt. He sat straight and reached into a hip pocket for his tobacco pouch. When he spoke it was in a sober voice.

"Lee, I'm worried. No, not worried—puzzled is the word. There's something rotten going on here, and I don't know what it is. I'm afraid of stepping into something unaware. Like Mitchell might have. If I knew what it was, I could steer clear."

"What—what do you mean, Jeff?"

"You remarked about the coincidence of those three deaths. I didn't intend to go over this with you, but you're level-headed and whatever it is I've got us into, you're in it. You should have the whole picture."

"Jeff, what are you trying to say?"

"Lee, I'm convinced those three deaths were no coincidence. That they were all deliberate murders. The second and third, I suspect, to cover up the first."

"I knew it! Zora Mitchell couldn't possibly have committed suicide! Not the Zora I used to know. But Bill Henderson? What you told me about his accident . . ."

Curt was silent a moment. "I know. It looked like an accident, sure enough. But Lee, last Wednesday Bill told me he knew who killed Mitch, and then refused to tell me anything more for fear of involving me. He pointed out my precarious position, having you and the kids here. Said he'd work it out himself, for me to keep hands off. Well, I was all set to get behind that on Saturday night, and you know what happened."

He felt Lee stiffen beside him, but she didn't speak.

He went on. "You didn't know, I didn't tell you, but Zora Mitchell sent me an urgent note warning me not to come to Tierra Libre, not to bring my family. I got it in New Orleans and like a fool didn't look at that batch of mail readdressed to us until we'd dropped the pilot and were out in the Gulf. Then it was too late to do anything about it. I kept quiet, not wanting to alarm you. I intended to talk with her first chance I got. But she—died."

He read fear in Lee's voice when she finally said, "Jeff, what are you leading up to?"

"I don't know, Lee, I don't know. I've been going over this business until I'm dizzy! Look. Here are several possibilities. Listen and give me your reactions."

"Go on."

"First, Bill Henderson knew who killed Mitchell, and why. That 'why' is somehow important, from the way Bill stressed it. He was done away with before he could pass it on. Zora knew something, and she died. Well, these two deaths would seem to be for the purpose of covering up Mitchell's murder. Then, the crux of the whole business is why Mitch was killed. Was it really a personal grudge, or was it something deeper?" He paused.

"Go on," Lee said, in a small far-away voice.

"Well, Mitch was no fool, yet at the rate the work was going here, the coming rainy season would have flooded the whole valley again. The railroad and all the planting done this year would have been washed out!"

"Jeff, what are you driving at?"

"You think Montaya had him killed?"

"Just this. You've read my contract. Pretty stiff one. I'm absolute boss in my department—practically—so long as I follow the plans laid down. Well, if Mitchell had a contract like mine, and we can assume he did have, and if he was deliberately slowing up the work, then his death was very convenient for Montaya."

"Sabotage! You're advancing that as the reason? You think Montaya had him killed?"

"I don't say that, honey," Curt answered doggedly. "It simply seems a possible answer."

"Well," Lee replied slowly, "I know you don't like Senor Montaya. I don't, either. But that's simply personal taste on our part. We have no reason to dislike him. Or have we?"

"No."

"It's an ironclad contract you have, sure—for Montaya. There's an escape clause which would let him cancel the contract if you should turn out incompetent or unsatisfactory. Surely he could have got rid of Mitchell in a case of sabotage."

"Sabotage is difficult to prove sometimes!" Curt exclaimed. "For example, I've found Mitchell was making the dragline men use cables too slender for the job. They kept breaking. Every break slowed up the work a little more. There are many ways he could, or I could, slow up the work without enabling Montaya to invoke that clause you mention.

"That clause isn't as elastic as you think. A court, in an ensuing breach of contract case against the company had Mitchell been let out, might have obliged Montaya to pay heavy damages. Not only for remainder of salary under contract, but punitive damages for injury to reputation."

"I see what you mean," Lee said slowly. "But no, Jeff, I can't see Montaya having Mitchell killed for any such simple reason. And two other murders, too!"

"One planned murder," Curt pointed out. "The other two were follow-ups."

Lee said nothing.

"Well, another point. Montaya's put this Emilio Vargas on my tail as a bodyguard. Lee, I never had any trouble with native labor—or any labor. Kid 'em along and you can get anything done. I don't need a bodyguard. Montaya may or may not be involved in these murders—either way, I can understand his wanting to hush them up with the least trouble—but at least he does know what's behind them. Otherwise, why this Emilio Vargas?"

There was another silence. Then, "You say you had several possibilities," Lee reminded him.

"Yes. Well, let's go back to Mitchell. The fact remains that Mitchell was slowing up the work. That's conclusive. But why? Was he really working for C. A. T. or for Associated, say, to prevent rising competition?"

"Well-l, in that case Montaya might have reason to kill him. But Jeff, I simply can't see Mitchell as that kind of snake-in-the-grass. Whatever we might say about his social graces, he was certainly honest about his work. That's my idea."

"Mine, too. All right, could Old Man Moore have ordered it done? You know big business has few scruples when the matter of money and competition is concerned."

Lee shook her head. Light from the room beyond faintly outlined the two on the couch. It was a positive shake.

"No. I wouldn't have put it past him if this were twenty years ago. He's older now, more careful and sly. And I don't believe he's that much concerned today about what competition he'd get from this outfit."

"It may be pretty stiff competition, Lee! Things look mighty good here for bananas."

"Even so," she answered. "No, I can't accept that."

"Well," he went on, "suppose Montaya—this is his project, lock, stock, and barrel—suppose Montaya has a personal enemy determined to wipe him out, who goes to work on his Chief Engineer as the most important single factor for the purpose."

She thought this over.

"That theory's full of holes. Why wouldn't such an enemy go after Montaya direct?"

"Make him suffer piecemeal?" Curt suggested. "Bit by bit?"

"No. That wouldn't explain Mitchell's slowing up the work. That's an important angle, from all you've said."

"I know."

"Darling," said Lee, troubled, "we're right back where we started. I can see your point in wanting to know more. But oh, Jeff, darling, be careful. Don't do anything that would put you in danger. I just couldn't bear it if anything should—should happen to you. And we've the children."

He pulled her to him.

"Don't worry, sweetheart," he said, his words muffled in the thickness of her hair. "I'm no fool. I shan't stick my neck out. I can't forget you and the kids. But I can't promise to drop the matter completely. I've got to know what's behind Mitch's murder. I've got to," Curt insisted, "to protect myself from a possible similar danger. I can't help feeling that Montaya's in back of all this, but I don't see myself in any danger because I'm too valuable to him. He has too much at stake. For proof of that, there's the bodyguard he's assigned me . . ."

Yes, there was the bodyguard. To irk Curt more and more. Though Montaya may have had Curt's safety in view, Curt also felt himself to be under rigid surveillance. Not a chance could he find to get in a word privately with Slats Monahan.

The following day Curt took to the field again. He made a fast trip to the levee camp, saw his plans for speeding the work were coming right along, tried again to get Monahan aside. It was no go.

But Vargas did have his uses. Not only did he relieve Curt of many minor details, but he kept an eye on his well-being, too. He saw to it there were lunches and vacuumed drinks when they'd be too far from camp or village. And on this trip, when Curt scratched his arm badly on a poisonous puncture-weed, Emilio was close at hand to drag out a first-aid kit and swab it with mercurochrome. He also insisted on returning to San Alejo early, that the wound might be better cared for.

The mercurochrome had little effect and the flesh about the scratch swelled. Reaching San Alejo in the middle of the afternoon, Curt unloaded himself of musette bag, field glasses, pistol and cartridge belt, as he piled out of the motorcar at the station.

"I'll go on to the hospital from here," he told Emilio. "You can drop these at the office for me. I'll see you in the morning."

Leaving the doctor's office, Curt took a turn in the corridor by mistake and found himself in the patio used by convalescents. Since he hadn't yet had a full look around, he decided to push on farther.

The patio was squared by hospital and service buildings, open at the rear corners. Wandering out one of these openings Curt found himself at the brink of a sharply descending ravine. From here he had a much wider view of the airfield than obtainable from the railroad. There were men on the field and both planes were in front of their hangar.

He pulled a sour face at thought of the two pilots, but mused, "We're here together for a long time. If I can break them down, so much the better. Cost nothing to try. Be pleasanter all around."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

The Washington MERRY-GO-ROUND

By DREW PEARSON

WNU SERVICE

Washington, D. C.

CAPITAL CHAFF

Bernard Baruch, who has been commuting from New York whenever the President desired his services in Washington, is now looking for permanent quarters in Washington.

Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish has rented the old Robert E. Lee house in Alexandria, suburb of Washington.

When a New York banker came to Washington on a government job, he wanted to rent a Georgetown home belonging to Mrs. Lionel Atwill, ex-wife of both General MacArthur and actor Atwill. But the banker balked at the rent. "I can't pay that much," he said. "I gave up a $45,000 job to come here." . . . "That's nothing," retorted Mrs. Atwill, "I gave up a $50,000 husband!"

Once when Mrs. Atwill was asked if she didn't regret divorcing MacArthur, thus losing the limelight of a great hero, she replied, "Which is the greater figure—Josephine or Marie Louise?"

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STEALING THE STARS

Washington is full of movie moguls all worried about the fact that their big stars are leaving them. Trouble is the $25,000 ceiling on incomes. Hollywood stars figure this is an opportunity to jump their contracts, and everybody is now out stealing each other's stars—or trying to.

The ins and outs of the new income ceiling are difficult. But in brief, here is how it affects Hollywood. The total salary which can be paid under the new ruling is $67,000, which, when tax deductions are made, gives a net income of $25,000. Certain other deductions also are allowable, but the treasury regulation specifically states that additional money to care for these deductions cannot be paid out by the companies. If they do pay them, the government may require them to make good the outlays.

This is what gripes the movie stars. Some of them have been getting salaries running up into the $200,000s, so to come down to $67,000 is quite a plop.

Furthermore, movie contracts are for one picture, with an option taken on the next and then the next. So with the companies unable to pay high salaries, the options on their stars are automatically broken.

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HEROES WITHOUT HEADLINES

You don't hear much about them and their names don't get into the headlines, but some of the boys doing great jobs in Egypt are the tank repair crews of the U. S. ordnance corps.

When a tank is damaged in action on the Egyptian front, an American crew goes out at night with a big auto-transport truck, not unlike those which used to carry passenger cars from Detroit to retail auto dealers. They load the crippled tank on board, haul it behind the lines where mobile machine shops have been set up, and in almost no time it is repaired.

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U. S. SOLDIERS—U. S. FARMERS

Forthright Sen. Charley McNary comes from Oregon, where the farmers have had a lot of trouble this year getting men to pick their fruit and harvest their wheat.

So McNary wrote to Secretary of War Stimson pointing out that there were two army cantonments in Oregon, that it might be an excellent thing for the nation's food supply and for national co-operation generally if some of the soldiers were given furloughs and allowed to help Oregon farmers with their crops.

Secretary of War Stimson wrote back rather tartly that soldiers of the U. S. army had to work at war, and that the idea was preposterous.

A little later Senator McNary noticed newspaper accounts of the way American soldiers in England had taken time to help English farmers harvest crops. So he wrote Stimson again.

"The work of our men in training for war must be shot to pieces in England," McNary said, "in view of the fact that American soldiers are working in the harvest fields."

The secretary of war replied a little lamely that if American troops in England were working in the harvest fields, they were doing it on their own time. But he welcomed no more suggestions about helping farmers here at home.

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MERRY-GO-ROUND

Undersecretary of State Welles has made it clear that Chairman Ed Flynn of the Democratic national committee will be appointed to a Latin-American diplomatic post only over his dead body.

The President, always an optimist, will make one more attempt to bring the AFL and CIO together by inviting Bill Green and Phil Murray to the White House. Labor leaders say privately, however, that there will be no agreement. Both sides will patch up a jurisdictional truce and agree to refrain from membership raids for the duration.

Navy department communiques are short and sweet. In the navy department's press section, answering queries from newspaper offices, are two young officers, Lieut. Short and Lieut. Sweet.

ON THE HOME FRONT

With RUTH WYETH SPEARS

HERE is a hooked hearth rug that may some day grow up to room size. So far every female member of the family has hooked at least one square, and the males are all represented by materials from cast-off suits, socks and sweaters. The turquoise flowers and red cherries in the alternate squares are from dyed pieces of the old cream colored wool blankets. When the squares are hemmed and sewn together with strong carpet thread, they form a fascinating pattern of circles, flowers and fruit.

Twelve-inch squares of burlap overcast around the edge made the foundation pieces. Patterns for the repeat design were cut from paper and the burlap was marked by drawing around these with wax crayon. Loops of fabric strips were drawn through with a steel rug hook. Red was used for the curved lines shown at the upper left. Tones of brown for the flower and gray for the cherry background. Mixed colors for the rest of the design.

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NOTE: Mrs. Spears has prepared a special pattern for the rug in today's sketch with detailed directions for beginners. So, even if you have never made a hooked rug, you can start now making squares for a rug of any size you wish. Book 7 in the series of homemaking booklets contains 31 of these sketches with instruction text; also descriptions of the series. Send your order to:

MRS. RUTH WYETH SPEARS
Bedford Hills New York
Drawer 10
Enclose 10 cents for Book No. 7 and 10 cents for Rug Pattern.
Name.....
Address.....

Witness Exerted Himself A Bit to Put It Nicely

During the progress of a lawsuit, a witness was cross-examined regarding the habits and character of the defendant.

"Has Mr. M—— a reputation for being abnormally lazy?" asked counsel, briskly.

"Well, sir, it's this way—"

"Will you kindly answer the question asked?" struck in the irascible lawyer.

"Well, sir, I was going to say it's this way: I don't want to do the defendant an injustice, and I won't go so far as to say he's lazy exactly; but if it required any voluntary work on his part to digest his food, he'd die from lack of nourishment."

If you have any doubt at all what to give that fellow in the service, send him a carton of Camel cigarettes for Christmas. According to latest surveys, cigarettes top his gift list, with Camel his favorite cigarette, according to actual sales records from Post Exchanges and Canteens. If he smokes a pipe, send him a pound of Prince Albert Smoking Tobacco — the National Joy Smoke. Local dealers are featuring Camels in the Christmas-wrapped carton and also in a holiday box of four "flat fifties" (either way you give 200 Camels). Prince Albert Smoking Tobacco in the pound canister is handsomely gift-wrapped making other gift wrapping unnecessary.—Adv.

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MAD

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