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. When they arrive in Tierra Libre they find both Zora and her husband dead. It is Mitchell's job as chief engineer for a fruit company that Jeff has been called to fill. Later Jeff's friend Bill Henderson is also killed, and Jeff suspects his employer, Senor Montaya, of murdering him and the Mitchells because they had found a clue to the strange things going on at the plantation. Other sinister figures are the company chemist, Dr. Toenjes, and the flyers, Ryden and Lannestock. A U. S. Army plane is forced down, but Senor Montaya does not appear alarmed by the presence of the army men. Jeff and Lee discover that their housemaid is spying on them. Now Jeff is talking to a man named Collins.

NOW CONTINUE WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XIII

The man's eyes veiled suddenly. Curt flared.

"Well, make up your mind whether to trust me or not. I can't manage a tete-a-tete very often. You're from the Canal Zone. And you drink about as much as I do. Your general appearance needs to be explained." Curt dared a little guesswork. "You came in through Soledad on the destroyer that called there a week ago Monday!"

A rigidity in the other convinced Curt he was right. He went on.

"You've built yourself into a tramp by sleeping in old clothes and not shaving for ten days. Your skin isn't used to a beard, it itches. You keep scratching your face. But you couldn't resist the comforts of a clean body. You got those bleary eyes from going without sleep, and that hungry look from doing without food. For about two days, huh? Three days? The whole thing's a build-up. Why?"

Collins gave in.

"I needed a good background. McInnis says I can trust you. I think so, too, first judgment. It's a long story, and I can't even give it to you. All of it, anyway. I'm asking you, as a fellow American," he emphasized the words, "to give me a job. I want to get established here."

Steps mounted hurriedly to the door in the outer room. The door snapped open. Curt picked up the application blank Collins had been working on, and was studying it as Emilio entered, black-browed.

"Everything is ready," the native announced hardily.

Curt looked up. "Okay. We'll have to hold it a few minutes. All right, Collins," he snapped at the ragged man, "it so happens I do need men. I'll give you a try-out, but you better be as good as you say you are. You can go up to camp with me now."

He looked the man over with distaste. "First, go to the next room and take off those rags. Get under the shower and I'll find you some clean clothes. There's a razor in the bathroom. Get those whiskers off. And hustle it up."

Scarcely a word passed on the chugging trip to the levee camp. Esteban, the Carib launch boy, sat at his controls and stared straight ahead. Emilio sulked.

As for Collins, after a few minutes of that stare he simply turned his back on Emilio and gazed at the river's edge slipping by. Collins was a far stretch from the tramp of an hour ago. In spare shirt and breeches Curt kept on hand in his Tampujo quarters, Collins showed up a tall, rangy, athletic person.

Curt had plenty to occupy his mind. His guess, confirmed by the other's silence, that Collins had come to Soledad on the destroyer, was proof enough that something was brewing. But what?

The man had said he came "to see Mitchell," but Mitch had been dead for days before Collins had—presumably—left the Canal Zone. Did he come to investigate Mitch's death? If so, then he had plenty more to investigate.

True, violent deaths of three Americans would assume an importance that Mitchell's alone didn't have, but these other deaths hadn't occurred until Collins was already on his way. So that couldn't be the answer. Besides, he wouldn't have needed a disguise for this.

Now, it was to the United States' interest, Curt reasoned, so far as it could to see that peace was preserved throughout these countries. Did it mean that Montaya, innocent as he appeared to be of such aspirations, actually had political yearnings?

But here again were objections. Dr. Areca, the "provisional" Presidente of Tierra Libre, was a good executive, the people not abused, their economy prospering reasonably well. You can't have a revolution among satisfied people.

Monahan's shift was coming off duty as the launch made the levee camp's landing. Curt took Collins ashore—under Emilio's watchful eye—and while the camp cook was replenishing the lunch basket, he turned the man over to Monahan.

"Put him on a drag this afternoon, Slats. You can tell one way or another about him by the time we get back this evening. Luck, Colins."

Curt left his musette bag in camp, went briefly into the few questions accumulated since he was here two days ago, then took off upriver again.

There were three of them this time—Curt, Emilio, and the Carib launch boy.

They reached without incident a spot above the C. A. T. holdings, past the point where the Rio Negro levee made an elbow to join the first arm of the Quebrado range. Here Curt had the Indian pull the launch in to the south shore. Then he put on his carefully prepared act. He appeared to deliberate.

"Very well, Emilio," he said at last, "here's our program. I want you to pace off the shore line and plant these flags every forty steps. Be sure they can be easily seen from across the river. This won't be hard to do, with the river now at a low mark, though you may have to use your machete on small brush. When you reach that bend up ahead, wait for us there.

"Meanwhile, Esteban will set me down at that hill opposite. I'll climb to the highest point, get some pictures for further study, and come down the other side. The launch will pick me up, then we'll cross and get you. Is that clear?"

Emilio fumbled with the flags. "Could not Esteban plant the flags? Then I could stay with you—"

"We need him on the launch. Neither of us could handle it in these rough waters." For some distance they'd been fighting the increased current of the lower rapids.

"But Senor Montaya gave me strict orders—"

"Of course, of course," Curt interrupted impatiently. "He told me, too. That's for where there could be danger of attack such as came to Mr. Mitchell. There can be no danger here. Come, we'll have to get going if we're to get back to camp by dark."

He could see Emilio was watching him.

He hustled Emilio, still protesting and blackly reluctant, off along the shore line, jumped back into the launch, and was set down on the other shore. As the launch boy headed upstream for the rendezvous, Curt took one look behind him. He could see Emilio was watching him.

Curt was now in somewhat familiar territory. On this bank rose a considerable hill thickly covered with a jungle of trees, lianas, undergrowth. Because of the hill, Finca Urana, the Associated's farm, didn't touch the river at this spot.

Curt plunged into a path used by the women of the farm laborers when they came to the river to wash clothes. He picked up a mule trail at the edge of the banana plantation, broke into a trot.

Banana farms are laid out evenly, the "bits" planted twenty feet or so apart. The plants grow rapidly, shooting up suckers, of which the strongest are allowed to remain, and each single plant eventually becomes a ring of plants, like a bed of gigantic cannas. Their long broad leaves meet twenty to thirty feet overhead, allowing only scattered rays of sunshine to reach the earth.

A banana plantation is a lovely, peaceful spot—if one has the time to enjoy it. Through these sunbeams brilliant birds and butterflies dart; there are rustlings underfoot of field rats or iguanas—or snakes; and all is hushed as a green-windowed cathedral.

It was along such a lane, hot, the air still, that Curt trotted. If all went well he could get to the farmhouse of Urana and back to the river in thirty to forty minutes. He would have to explain this lapse of time, but he'd worry about that later.

Out of breath and sweating heavily, he reached the farmhouse. His khaki shirt was dark with perspiration.

There was only a native timekeeper in the farm office, which was the ground floor of the two-story house, while another mozo was raking the corral. He looked up, amazed, at the stranger who appeared out of nowhere, but Curt gave him no chance to put his curiosity into words. He took the initiative.

"Donde esta hoy el Senor McInnis?"

"Creo que fue al Tigre, Senor."

Curt went to the old wall phone and turned the handle sharply. The bell in the box tinkled. The thick soft voice of the exchange operator answered.

"Ring Finca Tigre." He waited. "Senor McInnis there? How long would it take to bring him to the phone? Oh?" He thought a moment. "All right, thanks, won't wait." He hung up. He couldn't risk half an hour.

His eye fell on a typewriter. Seizing a piece of paper, he rolled it into the machine and began to punch out a note:

"Jerry. You've heard of Zora Mitchell and Bill Henderson without a doubt. Convinced of danger here, but don't know what it is. Old Man Moore has confidential file on everyone of consequence in Tierra Libre. Hates to give out but I must know all I can about Montaya. Make him spill to you, and meet me at Riverbend about nine Saturday night. Hiring Collins, no chance to talk to him yet. C."

He cast about for an envelope, found one, sealed and addressed his message.

The native timekeeper had been staring at him throughout all this, half in amazement, half in resentment. Curt asked his name.

"Rafael Diaz, Senor."

"Bueno, Rafael," said Curt. "Tell no one about this. See that Senor McInnis gets this as soon as possible. Phone him to come here. Put it in his hands yourself. Understand?"

As Curt made off at a trot across the clearing, to disappear under the banana plants, the timekeeper, note in one hand, money in the other, shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "Locos — todos locos, Americanos. Siempre tienen prisa . . ." (These crazy Americans, always in a hurry.)

On his way back to the river Curt thought of his sweat-sodden shirt. He ripped it off as he trotted and let the breeze he created nearly dry it by the time he reached the hill, when he put it on again. It would still show wet but that could be accounted for by his exertions along the river.

He saw a brilliant orchid in bloom, an epiphyte fastened to a slender dead tree limb within reach. It was one of the "butterfly" orchids Lee wanted, and had two three-foot candelabra branches covered with dozens of small bright yellow blooms, like butterflies alighted.

Here was his excuse for lost time!

Curt put on the rest of his act with deliberation. He studied the opposite shore, the rising hills behind, put away his field glasses, took his pictures, then fought his way through the undergrowth down the hill to meet the launch.

"It was some time you were gone from view," said Emilio, when at last picked up. The man was jittery. "I worried. You had difficulty?"

"Some," admitted Curt. "But this is what lost me many minutes. My wife wants an orchid collection. She had one when we lived here before."

Curt exhibited the plant with such real pride that it appeared to satisfy Emilio, and the man fell into narrow-eyed sullenness.

"Well, I'm through here," said Curt, tapping the camera. "Let's go."

They picked up the flags Emilio had planted—in his pictures they would mark 100-foot intervals, though this was no more essential to Curt than the pictures. But the ruse had worked. During this process Curt also hunted a couple more orchids to bolster his excuse for the delay across the river.

Then they proceeded to eat lunch in the boat, in the lengthening afternoon shade of a stand of mangroves. Roots of these trees, sprouting from branches in midair, had taken hold in the river bottom, making a natural awning against the sun.

Perched on a branch not far from the launch, a noisy kiskadee jawed incessantly. Esteban, the Carib, called it a "heet-gee-gee." At first it was merely annoying, but before the meal was finished the bird had become a definite nuisance.

Curt pulled his pistol, took aim, fired. His brows shot up in astonishment!

There had been no kick when he squeezed the trigger, and the bullet, expelled without force, made a curious arc and plopped harmlessly into the water.

He tried another shot, but with the same result. Then he removed the clip and examined the remaining bullets. They seemed to be all right. The brass shell case from the first shot had ejected over the side, but the second had fallen into the boat.

Curt picked it up and examined it. Undoubtedly, it was from the same lot as the rest of the clip. Suddenly he noted that Emilio's sullenness had disappeared, that the native was eyeing the proceedings with a dead-pan countenance and completely indifferent eyes.

The bird meanwhile had merely hopped a couple of steps at each shot and was still jabbering its raucous notes. Curt snapped home the clip, tried a third shot. Another dull thud. So he shrugged, reholstered the automatic, and said, "Huh. Bad lot of ammunition." Nothing more.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

The Washington MERRY-GO-ROUND

By DREW PEARSON

WNU SERVICE

Washington, D. C.

TWO-FISTED JEFFERS

Rubber Czar Bill Jeffers lived up to his two-fisted reputation when testifying at a closed meeting of the house interstate commerce subcommittee which was probing the need of nation-wide gas rationing.

Jeffers bluntly told the subcommittee, headed by Representative Clinton P. Anderson of New Mexico, that congressional efforts to block the rationing program would get nowhere.

"I understand the position of you gentlemen, but I want you also to understand mine," said the rubber administrator. "My job is to carry out the recommendations of the Baruch report and I intend to do it."

Jeffers said he hoped to keep the nation "on rubber," so we will have sufficient transportation for workers in war industries. Nation-wide gas rationing is an essential step in this direction, he added, "and I'm all for it."

The rubber boss was questioned closely on whether Leon Henderson was co-operating with him. He replied that it was difficult to be the price administrator and also handle rationing, since the two things are contradictory. As price chief, Henderson was supposed to protect the public, while as rationing director he is depriving the public of something, Jeffers explained.

Several members of the subcommittee continued to fire leading questions about Henderson, hoping Jeffers would take a poke at the OPA boss. They pointed out that it was Henderson who had initiated the nation-wide gas rationing program and that the rubber administration and the Office of Defense Transportation were forced to go along, whether they approved of the program or not.

"I guess you were the victim of a cigar that was too big to be chewed," commented Representative Hatton Sumners of Texas.

"What do you mean?" shot back Jeffers. "I can chew a pretty big one."

"You misunderstood Mr. Sumners," broke in L. D. Tompkins, Jeffers' assistant. "By cigar he meant Leon Henderson." The rubber boss laughed but made no comment.

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ADMIRAL DARLAN

Co-operation with Admiral Darlan continues to cause controversy inside the cabinet and among the war chiefs.

Admiral Darlan's support saved priceless time and even more priceless lives. But it had its difficulties. Many members of the European underground which had been working with us against the Nazis in the occupied countries threw up their hands and got extremely skeptical about playing ball with us in the future.

However, there is definite evidence that Darlan, though an opportunist, several months ago was ready to co-operate with the United States if there was any promise that we would really set up a second front.

Now that we have used Darlan, some people want to throw him overboard immediately. But the weakness of Hitler is that he breaks agreements overnight. Our strength is that we don't break agreements. However, we are now in the dilemma of breaking a tacit agreement with the anti-Vichy group made earlier, or breaking with Darlan now.

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TIN CAN CO-OPERATION

The Washington Merry-Go-Round salutes Milltown, N. J., for its tin can exchange plan.

Officials in Washington have been pulling and hauling over the tin can collection problem. There were wrangles over de-tinning facilities, and other wrangles over the best methods of collection. In New York city, cans came in so fast, the dirty mixed with the clean, that detinning plants couldn't handle them, and Mayor LaGuardia was forced to revise the campaign.

Meantime, the borough of Milltown, population 3,500, has instituted a plan of its own which makes Washington sit up and take notice. It is called the "can-for-can exchange plan." If a housewife wants to buy a can of soup, she must bring along a prepared empty can, to be surrendered in exchange. If she has no empty, she must pay two cents extra for the new can.

A prepared can is one which has been cleaned and flattened, with both ends and the label removed. In this form, cans can be shipped economically and de-tinned efficiently.

Note: Milltown, near New Brunswick, in the center of the state, is not to be confused with Leon Henderson's home town of Millville, in south Jersey.

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MERRY-GO-ROUND

¶ Admiral Halsey, tough commander in the South Pacific, got to know the Axis as naval attache in Berlin.

¶ Texas' Lyndon Johnson, proposing to FDR that Maury Maverick be appointed head of a Mexican-American defense commission, said: "Would you mind calling up Sumner Welles at the state department and asking him to see Maverick?" "Oh," said the President, throwing up his hands, "Sumner just wouldn't understand a man like Maury."

PATTERNS

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Pattern No. 8269 is in sizes 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 and 20. Size 12 with short sleeves takes 3⅝ yards 39-inch material, ¼ yard contrast for collar.

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Enclose 20 cents in coins for each pattern desired.

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Lady Voiced Appreciation At the Earliest Moment

At two o'clock in the morning a woman phoned the manager of a large department store. After much ringing, the manager answered with a sleepy and gruff "Hello!"

"This is Mrs. Soandso," said the woman in a syrupy voice; "I just couldn't help calling you personally to tell you that the hat I bought at your store last week is simply stunning. I don't know when I've liked anything so much."

"That's all very nice," yawned the manager, "but would you mind telling me why you call me at this hour of the night about a hat you bought last week?"

"Because," she replied sweetly, "your van has just delivered it."

When you're making up that Christmas box for your man in the service, be sure to include a carton of Camels or a pound canister of Prince Albert Smoking Tobacco. Cigarettes and tobacco head the service man's gift list, with Camel his favorite cigarette and Prince Albert the well-known National Joy Smoke. Your local dealer is featuring gift-wrapped cartons of Camels, and Camels in special packages of four "flat fifties." (Both contain 200 cigarettes.) Prince Albert in the pound canister is also holiday wrapped, ready to give.—Adv.

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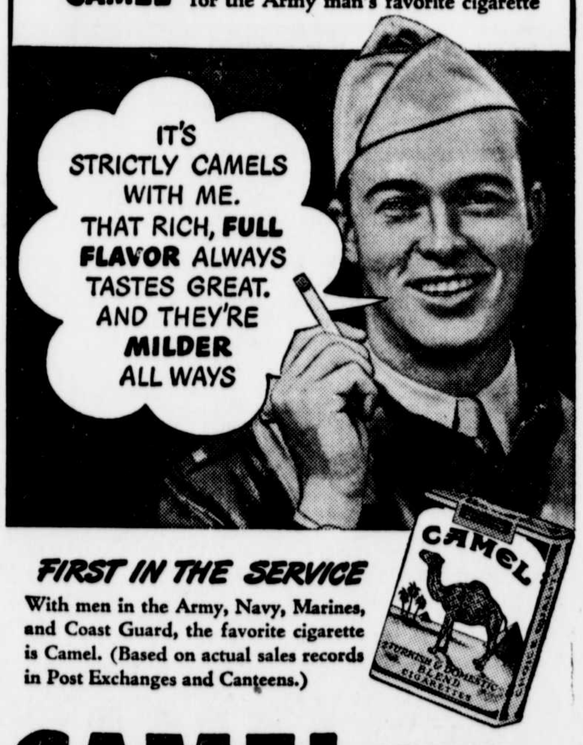
"OFFICE" for the bombardier's place
"GREENHOUSE" for plane's transparent nose
"ROGER" for okay or all right
"CAMEL" for the Army man's favorite cigarette



FIRST IN THE SERVICE

With men in the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard, the favorite cigarette is Camel. (Based on actual sales records in Post Exchanges and Canteens.)

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