

Another Brilliant Story of the French



An ENEMY *of* SOCIETY

BILL MASON drifted into the French Foreign Legion as a direct result of certain violent incidents which had to do with a girl and another man and some cops. He shot the other man and winged a couple of policemen. After that he skipped out of the country, but the European forces of law and order made things so unpleasant for him that when

he heard about the Legion he made a bee-line for the nearest recruiting office.

The Legion took him, tactfully refraining from asking any questions which might have embarrassed him, and shipped him down to Fort St. Jean at Marseilles along with a batch of two dozen of the worst looking ruffians he had ever had the pleasure of associating with. Some came from Bremen and others from Moscow,

Foreign Legion by J. D. NEWSOM

but they were uniformly disreputable. The party was marched to the station by a squad of *gendarmes*, and Mason noted with quiet satisfaction that they showed no signs of wanting to arrest him.

He did not give a whoop what his ultimate fate might be; anything was better than having to go back to America with a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. He celebrated the occasion by spending his last sou on gallons of red wine. All the way from Paris to Marseilles he bought liquid refreshments for the gang packed in like sardines in a third-class compartment. At Dijon they were in an uproar; at Lyons they were terrorizing the travelers in neighboring compartments; at Avignon they tore up the wooden seats and hurled them playfully at the railroad officials along the way; and when they reached Marseilles they were so mellow that they had to be kicked out on to the platform. Mason did not mind being kicked. In fact he enjoyed the sensation, for every kick helped to remind him that the long game of hide-and-seek was over at last, and that ahead of him lay a new life in a new world where wine was cheap, and strange women were said to be plentiful.



FORT ST. JEAN, which is the clearing house for all troops bound for Africa, is a large, gray, dilapidated building dating back to the days of the Knights Templar. It is an interesting example of medieval military architecture, but nothing else can be said in its favor. Its walls, woodwork and bedding are alive with a thousand generations of hungry vermin, and its sanitary arrangements are primitive. Cooped up inside these somber walls are to be found samples of every regiment in the French Colonial

Army: Zouaves in vast khaki trousers, yellow Annamites in horizon blue, Chasseurs d'Afrique draped in blood red cloaks, coal black Senegalese, brown Algerian Tirailleurs, and gunners and signalers and ambulance men, not to mention down-at-heel civilians on their way to the Foreign Legion depot at Sidi bel Abbès.

Discipline is slack, the food is no better than it should be, and at the canteen there is a never ending demand for the ripe, red, cheap Algerian wine which makes the recruit forget his homesickness, and cheers the old-timer on his way.

In this bear-garden atmosphere Mason felt perfectly at ease. He recovered his appetite just in time to scramble with several hundred other men at the cook-house door for a mugful of so called stew and a hunk of bread. He wolfed it down before it could be snatched out of his hands and rushed back for a second helping.

"You," snarled the cook, "species of a camel, I have seen you before."

"Positively," agreed Mason in his appalling French. "Once seen never forgotten—that's me. How about another dose, Monsieur the Cook?"

The line of hungry men surged forward on his heels, but he refused to give way.

"Meet me at the canteen," he urged. "It will be my pleasure to buy you a spot of something good."

A ladle full of *rata* slopped into his tin can.

"Stand to one side for a moment," ordered the cook. "Give the other *cretins* a chance."

Scenting the possibility of a few choice morsels coming his way, Mason did as he was told.

"*Dis donc*," the cook went on, speaking over his shoulder as he dished out the stew. "Where is it that you come from?"

"New York—the city of sky scratchers, as you perhaps know. I could do with another hunk of cow. Have you a bit to spare? I'll make it a whole liter of wine if you can dig up a real piece of meat."

"Imbecile, learn that you are now in the army," snorted the cook, wiping a greasy forearm across his glistening face. "It is not every day you will sink your teeth into such excellent *rata*. I thought you were an American—you have the foolish manners of your compatriots. A third helping he demands! But that is nothing. What I desire to say is this: There is another American here. A recruit also for the Legion."

"That's good to know!" cried Mason. "It will certainly be pleasant to speak my own tongue again. Where is he, this compatriot of mine?"

"You will find him up on the ramparts. A strange man. He stands there by himself, staring down at the harbor. A most gloomy man, let me tell you, who reminds me of nothing so much as a Protestant clergyman."

"He is not of a convivial nature?"

"Him? *Ah, lala!* He has been here five days, and not a word has he spoken. He buys his own food at the store, and will not touch the rations."

Mason looked dubious.

"You are sure he is an American?"

"That is what they say at the office. Haywood is his name. Thomas Haywood—what a name, eh? A jaw cracking mouthful of a name!"

"He needs a word of cheer perhaps," Mason decided. "I shall bring him around to the canteen later on."

The cook laughed heartily.

"Go ahead," he advised. "If you succeed, I, Alphonse Brellan, I shall pay for all the wine you can consume."

Mason mopped up the juice in his mess tin with a piece of bread which he shoved into his mouth.

"A rash promise," he asserted. "Tidy up the kitchen, Alphonse, and proceed without delay to the canteen. We shall be waiting for you, I and this Haywood."

On his way across the courtyard he

stopped in at the canteen and drank half a bottle of white wine to wash the stew down his throat. It did not taste quite right, so he had a whole bottle of red, which tasted much better. Thus fortified, he ambled up the stone staircase with only a very slight lurch, and, on the battlements, caught sight of a short thickset man standing with his hands clasped behind his back.



THE MAN, Thomas Haywood, looked surprisingly out of place in that environment.

The expression on his weather-beaten countenance was solemn and taciturn. He had slate gray eyes, a tightly closed, determined mouth and a rather weak chin with a dimple in the middle of it. His clothes were spotlessly clean despite the fact that he had been at the fort almost a week. He wore a suit of blue serge, a black derby and stout, square toed boots.

His looks did him no more than justice; he was a God fearing righteous man, and not so long ago he had been first mate of a freighter on the Atlantic run. He had a nice little house in Brooklyn, a plump little wife and two children. But he also had one vice—he drank. Not as other men do, in public with one foot on a brass rail, but secretly, in his cabin, at sea.

And while he loathed himself for doing it he could not break himself of the habit. He had a lively conscience, and he spent hours on his bended knees begging his Maker to help him. His Maker, however, turned a deaf ear to his entreaties and each time he wrestled with the demon rum the demon knocked him for a loop. His weakness so disgusted him that he was merciless with other men who suffered from a similar affliction. If there was one thing he could not abide it was the spectacle of a soused sailor; and the more he drank the stricter he became with his crew, with his wife, his children and himself.

Ashore he preached sermons on the evils of hard liquor, but at sea, although he was never wholly drunk, he was never

quite sober. He came on watch just sufficiently intoxicated to be sickeningly aware of the calamities he might cause. And in due course of time his worst fears were realized. In broad daylight, on a clear morning, he ripped the bottom out of the *Carmarthen* on the shoal rocks outside Brest harbor. The ship broke in two and went down in ten fathoms of water. With it went Thomas Haywood's reputation.

He was caught red handed; he had no excuse to offer. Twenty angry men came forward to testify as to his pernicious habits. For once he heard the unvarnished truth about himself. He was accused of intemperance, hypocrisy and brutality. His weakness ceased to be a personal affair between himself and his Maker. His mental anguish, his struggles against temptation were dismissed with contempt. Nobody cared what his principles might be—and prison stared him in the face as he stumbled dazedly out of the office of the *Inscription Maritime* at Brest after the preliminary inquiry.

The whole world was against him, and he felt sure than not even his wife would forgive him when she heard the news. The shock cured him of his vice. More than ever he hated the sight and smell of whisky, but it was too late in the day to make amends. He could not force himself to face the music, and before any steps were taken against him he signed on for five years in the ranks of the Legion.



HIS FIRST contact with military life at Fort St. Jean disgusted him beyond words. It even restored some of his former self-righteousness. Surrounded by troopers who seemed to think of nothing but wine and women, he felt that he had reached purgatory at last.

He did not pay the slightest attention to Mason as the latter weaved a crooked course along the rampart walk. He was staring down at the shipping in the harbor while he told himself for the hundredth

time that his fate, ghastly though it might be, was no worse than he deserved.

His sufferings were acute and he did not want to be disturbed by drunken soldiers, but Mason, instead of passing him by, smacked him a resounding blow between the shoulder blades.

More in sorrow than in anger, Haywood turned upon him.

"*Allez!*" he said sharply in his first mate's voice. *Allez* was one of the few French words he knew, so he added "Beat it!" for good measure.

"Welcome to our city!" cried Mason, thumping him again. "The fat hash slinger Alphonse told me you were up here. Haywood, ain't it? By heck, they're in luck to get hold of a pair of genuine Americans. My name's Mason."

Haywood listened to this tirade without any display of enthusiasm.

"You have been drinking," he retorted. "A filthy habit! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Maybe," agreed Mason, leaning for support on Haywood's arm. "But the point is, I'm not. This ain't no Orphans' outing; this is the Legion. There's some wild guys down below. Come on along and have one on me."

"I don't drink, thank you. And if you're an American I strongly advise you not to make a hog of yourself in front of all these foreigners. You don't need the filthy stuff. It's bad for you. Why, it's dangerous!"

"So's dynamite."

"Don't be a fool. You're a fellow countryman, and what I'm saying is for your own good. Keep yourself clean."

"Say, what in hell's name is it all about?" exclaimed Mason. "Is it a Temperance Reform meeting I've butted in on, or what? I ain't ready to be saved now or any other time. I'm an enemy of society, I am, by heck! Give that bunk the air and act sociable for a while."

"If I am supposed to act like those drink sodden beasts before I can be sociable I'm afraid it can't be done. I've never seen so much depravity in all my life!"

"There you go again!" protested Mason. "Be reasonable. Come on down. Alphonse is waiting at the canteen. He's buying drinks. Good guy, Alphonse. We'll have a couple of bottles of *vin rouge*."

"No," Haywood said firmly. "I shall not go, and for that matter I think you have had more than enough yourself. If you weren't an American I shouldn't give a curse what happened to you, but it's my duty to see that you do not disgrace yourself."

Mason laughed long and loud. Tears rolled down his dirty cheeks.

"Disgrace myself," he repeated. "Well, I'll be darned! What do you think I joined this outfit for, to sing hymns? Boy, we may be dead as cold boiled mutton this time next month. While I'm alive I'm going to have a good time."

"Can't you have a good time without tanking up?"

"It's all the same to me. Sure you won't change your mind and have a small one?"

"Not a drop," Haywood answered sharply.

He laid a heavy hand on Mason's shoulder, and added:

"What's more, I don't think you ought to do so either. Leave the vile stuff alone. Mason, did you say your name was? Let's get acquainted. It's good to talk my own lingo again."

"You're a crazy cuss," confessed Mason. "I can't dope you out at all. Get this straight; I ain't the reforming kind. Nix. Absolutely nix. If you won't come, you won't—and that's all there is to it. I guess I'll be going. The canteen closes at nine, they say—"

Haywood's grip on Mason's shoulder grew tighter.

"It'll kill you," he declared. "Think of what may happen to you if ever you should have to go into action without having taken a stimulant! Your nerves may go to pieces. You may become a coward . . ."

"Gawd! How you can make my flesh creep!" jeered Mason. "We can talk it

over some other day. There's lots of time. See you some more."

"No, you are not going," retorted Haywood. "You can hardly stand up. Just pull yourself together and tell yourself you don't need the stuff."

"I'll knock hell out of you in a minute!" snorted Mason. "Let go my arm quick!"



HAYWOOD slowly shook his head from side to side. The look on his face was grim and determined. Mason, he realized, was another black sheep in need of salvation. It was his duty to do all in his power to put the sinner on the uncomfortably narrow road which leads, it is rumored, to redemption; and it gave him a great deal of quiet satisfaction to think that he was making amends thereby for his own misdeeds.

"I want you to listen to me for a minute," he began.

"Yea, I'm listening," agreed Mason, and at the same instant he walloped Haywood in the pit of the stomach.

The blow unfortunately had very little effect upon Haywood's well developed abdominal muscles. He gave a slight grunt and retaliated with a tremendous uppercut which, delivered at close range, lifted Mason off his feet and dropped him in a heap against the breastworks.

"I don't want to hurt you," explained Haywood. "I do not want to fight. Some day you'll thank me for having butted in."

"I will, will I?" sputtered Mason. "I'll show you!"

He went at Haywood with reckless fury, but, before he could land a blow, he ran into something astonishingly hard which mashed his face almost to a pulp. All his teeth were jarred loose and his knees displayed a tendency to wobble in a most disquieting manner. Then Haywood hit him again on the point of the jaw.

When he recovered consciousness he was too dazed to care what became of his earthly shell.

"No harm done, old man," he heard

Haywood saying. "You're all right now. How about it? Still want that drink?"

Mason hiccoughed dismally.

"That's the way to talk," agreed Haywood. "Up you get! We'll walk up and down for a while and talk things over. Say, it's certainly a pleasure to have somebody to talk to again. It's been weeks since I've heard anything but this *parlez-vous* flapdoodle . . ."

And walk up and down they did until tattoo was sounded and the canteen closed its doors. Haywood did all the talking. He spoke earnestly about life and decency and other kindred subjects; and when the time came for them to turn in he helped pull off Mason's clothes.



HAYWOOD meant well, but he was a born reformer. He had had his bad habits scared clean out of him and he wanted other men to share the blessings of temperance. There were times when the old temptation returned—times when he was tormented by an almost intolerable craving for booze, but he resisted the temptation, and it exasperated him beyond words to have to watch his fellow creatures giving way to their immoderate passions without a single qualm of conscience. None of them seemed to care what sins they committed. Indeed they positively gloried in their disgusting vices.

The more he saw of other troopers' behavior the more lenient a view he took of his own failings. After all, he had been the victim of circumstances. He had not been wholly to blame for the loss of the *Carmarthen*. Other people had shielded themselves behind his broad back—the captain and the second officer among others. They had sacrificed him to save their own skins. It was only when he thought of his family that he felt any regrets. Not for his wife—she had always nagged at him—but for his children. He missed them terribly, although he assured himself that their mother was sure to have poisoned their minds.

Before long he was quite convinced that he had been misunderstood and

grievously wronged, and he was glad to be away from it all. The one thing which worried him in his new environment was the moral turpitude of the Legionnaires with whom he had to associate. He could not very well reform the entire French army, but he could at least concentrate his efforts upon some small portion thereof, and he concentrated upon Bill Mason.

It was a most unsatisfactory business. Mason positively refused to be reformed. On board the transport he eluded his well-wisher, and when he went ashore at Oran he was so wildly hilarious that the escort sergeant promptly had him locked in the guard room—where he stayed until the draft was sent on to Sidi bel Abbas.

"You see," Haywood pointed out while they were being herded into a cattle car at the station, "you see what you've missed. While you were in the cells under lock and key I've been looking around Oran's a great place. The view from the old Spanish fortress is wonderful, and the Jew market—I've never seen such meat in my life. You'd think the French would pass a law against that sort of thing."

"You ain't on a sight seeing tour, you poor boob," snarled Mason, who had a ten days' growth of beard on his sunken cheeks, and looked more crapulent than ever. "This is the Foreign Legion. Pretty soon you're going to shed that suit of yours and crawl into a uniform—"

"And so are you. You don't want to disgrace either yourself or your country. Mason, you've got to stop drinking so much, I tell you."

He was being stern and hard, but Mason merely laughed at him.

"You mind your own business," he urged, "and I'll mind mine. I ain't got no country and I'm short of morals. When I want a drink I'll have it. Life's short. Don't preach. Not to me. You slugged me good and plenty, I'll grant you that, but next time I'll know better. Watch out I don't wallop you with something harder'n my mitt next time. There's bayonets waiting for us where we're going, not to mention rifles."

"Don't be absurd; you wouldn't com-

mit murder, and anyway I'm only trying to help you."

"You can stop right there," snarled Mason, and his face, seen in the blue white glare of the arc lamps, was altogether evil. "You wouldn't be the first man I've ever plugged, you big hunk of cheese. That's why I'm here now. And if you come shooting off your mouth too much or too often you'll soon find out where you get off. I'm having a good time, and I mean to go to hell in my own way. Get all that straight?"

Haywood stared at him in horrified amazement.

"You have killed a man!" he whispered.

"Sure, you boob. It was him or me—I let daylight into him. Any objections?"

Haywood forced himself to speak calmly.

"None whatsoever."

Then he turned his back on Mason to hide the look of loathing he could not repress.

At a pinch he could understand and sympathize with good-for-nothing inebriates, but with a murderer he wanted nothing whatsoever to do.



THEREAFTER all intercourse between them ceased. They lived in the same barrack room, they sweated on the same parade ground, they drilled and marched and washed their clothes side by side, but there was no attempt at friendliness.

And while Haywood went up, Mason went down. Haywood was a paragon among Legionnaires. He took his new job seriously. As soon as he mastered enough French to make himself understood he was transferred to the corporal's training squad. He learned the Manual of Infantry Training by heart and was soon promoted to the rank of soldier of the first class. He took to the Legion's iron bound code of discipline as a duck takes to water and asserted his authority with a vigor which earned for him the esteem of his chiefs.

Mason, on the other hand, was neither too good to live nor bad enough to hang.

He did what he was told to do, and let it go at that. On pay day he toured the dives of Sidi bel Abbes with other congenial troopers and painted the town red according to the time honored custom of Legionnaires. If the party became uproarious and ended in the guard-room, he accepted the punishment which was subsequently meted out to him as philosophically as possible and forgot all about it as soon as he was released.

In other words he was a normal rough-neck Legionnaire, and in all probability he would have come to no great harm if he had not had the bad luck to be transferred to Haywood's squad.

He ran into trouble less than ten minutes after the transfer became official.

"That kit is not properly folded," announced Soldier of the First Class Thomas Haywood, eyeing the stack of clothing on the shelf above Mason's cot. "Slovenly bit of work. Fix it before you go out on parade."

"What's wrong with it?" protested Mason.

"Ha! Want to be shown, do you? All right: Your No. 1 tunic is not properly creased. Your spare shirts ought to be on top, not under, your clean underwear, and your boots should not stick out over the edge of the shelf . . ."

As he spoke he yanked each article he referred to off the plank and let it drop to the floor. When he was through, Mason's kit looked as though it had been wrecked by a young hurricane.

The other men in the room had followed the incident with detached interest. It was not their funeral. One of two things was bound to happen: If Mason rearranged his belongings at once he was sure to be late for the "fall in" which was due to sound in a couple of minutes; if he left it until afterward he would find himself in an even worse predicament, for room inspection was scheduled to take place at eleven o'clock. He had to lose.

"Now then," snapped Haywood, standing back and hitching his thumbs into his black cummerbund. "Get busy there! Snap into it!"

"Get busy yourself, you crazy mutt!" retorted Mason. "This is where I quit."

"What! You refuse to obey?"

"Sure I do. If you think I can fix that stuff in half a minute—"

"You refuse to obey?" repeated Haywood with icy calm.

"I'm telling you it can't be done!"

"For the third and last time," said Haywood, using the correct formula as laid down by the *règlement*. "Do you refuse to obey a direct order?"

Whereupon Mason picked up one of his campaign boots and hurled it with extreme violence in Haywood's direction. The boot bounced off Haywood's chest and fell to the floor. He stood like a tower of strength in the middle of the room, and his voice was as dispassionate as if he were talking about the weather.

"Mason, you're under arrest!" he announced.

"Fine!" agreed Mason. "That's great—but one of these days you're going to wake up dead."

"I am not afraid of you, my boy, declared Haywood. "I'll do my duty, all my duty, and as long as you belong to my squad I'll make sure you do yours."

Mason spent the next twenty-eight days in a black and steamy cell, where he was a prey to bugs and black thoughts. When he came out Haywood was still placidly determined to make a good soldier out of him.

"Mason," he said, "the time has come for a showdown."

"You'll stop a bullet before you're much older. You're asking for it!"

"Never mind that now. You only did twenty-eight days. I could have had you sent up for a year if I'd told the captain about the way you threatened me. I don't expect you to be grateful, but I want you to understand that I mean business."

"Same here."

"All right then; do your work properly, keep sober and keep clean. That's all I expect of you."

"What you expect and what you'll get are two different things," Mason assured

him. "Next time I'll heave a bayonet into you instead of a shoe. Maybe that'll hold you for a while."



HE WAS altogether incurable—at least Haywood thought so, which amounted to the same thing. Nothing he did was ever right. Haywood pestered the life out of him, for his own good, to compel him to overcome his vile habits. For the next few weeks he was in and out of the guardroom with monotonous regularity, and at last he balked.

He had gone downtown one evening to listen to the regimental band. The night was hot and after having wandered about in the crowd around the bandstand he decided that the time had come to blow himself to a drink.

Accordingly he crossed the street and headed toward a sidewalk café, where perfectly respectable shopkeepers and their families were sipping lemonade and iced beer. He was just about to sit down when Haywood barred his way. Earnest, righteous Haywood with his *képi* on absolutely straight, and his white uniform buttoned up to the last button.

"Don't!" he ordered. "Mason, you don't want to go in there. You have been drinking too much lately. I've had my eye on you."

"For the love of Pete!" cried Mason. "What's it to you what I do?"

"I'm not thinking of you; it's the squad I'm worrying about," Haywood retorted with heavy dignity. "You're giving it a bad name. I won't have it. You're asking for trouble, Mason!"

"Look here," Mason said quietly. "I'm thirsty and I mean to have a drink—and you can't stop me. Get out of my way."

Haywood's expression became mulish.

"There's something else I want to mention," he went on. "I've been thinking a good deal about you, Mason. Blood is thicker than water, you know, and I hate to see you going to the dogs like this. Don't drift! Make a fresh start. Pull yourself together. It doesn't matter to me what mistakes you've made. You

can make good in the Legion if you want to. It's not too late yet. In a couple of years you could be a corporal if you would only cut out the booze."

"Ain't that grand!" applauded Mason. "Gwan!" he jeered, "I ain't ready to be saved just yet. You're one classy hot air merchant, I'll say! Blood's thicker than water. Make a fresh start. Pull yourself together! Don't you know any more good gags?" He laughed derisively. "Say, were you drunk or sober when you piled your ship on the rocks?"

All the blood drained out of Haywood's face, and a look of horror crept into his eyes.

"Who—who told you?" he gurgled. "How do you know anything about me? It's a damn lie. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes you do, sweetie," chuckled Mason. "You know. The *Carmarthen*. 'O Lord,'" he mimicked, "'have pity upon me. I can't leave the stuff alone. I am weak, O Lord, so weak!'"

Haywood was breathing in short, stabbing gasps as though he had just plunged into ice cold water.

"You devil," he whispered. "How did you find out?"

"You shouldn't talk in your sleep," chuckled Mason. "Rave! Say, I've had an earful. You and your goldarned conscience!"

"Does anybody else know?"

Mason shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know? It's not my business to tell 'em. You ain't so hot as a topic of conversation, and it's nothing to me what you've done. Come on, I'm thirsty. If you're a wide open man of the great silent spaces, as they say, you'll have a glass of wine just to show you're not afraid."

"I will not," declared Haywood, licking his dry lips. "It's mighty decent of you not to have told anybody. I'm grateful, and I want to help you. We've both made mistakes, terrible mistakes—"

Mason pushed back his *képi* and mopped his glistening forehead with a red cotton handkerchief. There was a bright

twinkle in his eyes as he stared at Haywood's intent, unhumorous face. Grief and remorse had set their heavy marks upon it. Hard work, the sun of Africa and sleepless nights had sweated the fat off his bones and hollowed his cheeks. There were deep wrinkles about the corners of his eyes; his lower lip bulged out as though it were filled with determination. He exuded good intentions at every pore. He looked good and kind and strong, and damnably in earnest.

Mason made a wry face.

"Yep," he admitted. "You been making a whole lot of mistakes lately. That last ten days extra drill for instance, and the seven days detention before that. They was mistakes right enough. Still, you're a queer duck. Let's forget it. Have one on me and let's call it a day."



THE BAND had stopped playing and all about them a perspiring, gabbling crowd was surging toward the cafés lining the square. Garlic scented Spanish farmers, with lumpy wives and innumerable children, jostled staid French shopkeepers, very conscious of their exalted status in the colony. There were Arabs in flowing white *burnous*, and Arabs in tight fitting jackets and immense trousers with seats reaching down to their ankles, and Arabs in lousy rags, and swaggering Legionnaires treading on civilians' heels, especially the heels of the snobbish French shopkeepers, who shielded their reluctant daughters from all contact with the odious foreigners.

There was a great scraping of chairs and tables, and a rattle of glasses. Small native bootblacks, clad in little but their dubious innocence and verminous fezes, fought and screamed for the possession of potential customers.

"I will not," Haywood declared, raising his voice about the clatter. "Come on, old man. Be reasonable. The show's over; let's drift back to barracks. I'd like to lend you my Manual of Infantry Training. I'll be a corporal pretty soon, before the outfit leaves the depot, I

guess, and I'd like to see you take over the squad."

While he talked he hooked his arm through Mason's and tried to drag him along, but he might as well have tried to drag an unwilling elephant.

"I'm going to drift into the Café de Paris," Mason declared. "I'm going to have a glass of *anis*, and after that I'll wander down to the nigger village. That's my program for tonight. Ever been to the nigger village? Slick. It's got Harlem beat by a mile."

And he added a few significant details which made Haywood blush a beautiful strawberry red.

"It's out of bounds," said the soldier of the first class.

"I should worry!" said the soldier of the second class.

"You mean to say you'll go down though it's strictly forbidden?"

"You never can tell!"

"For once I can," snapped Haywood. "There's a general inspection tomorrow, and I don't want any blear eyed boozers spoiling the looks of my squad. You're going back to barracks at once." His voice was hard. "I order you to go back at once!"

"Good night!" answered Mason. "I'll be on my way."

He turned on his heel and headed toward the café, but Haywood caught him by the arm.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" he barked.

"I'm deaf," explained Mason. "People are looking our way, you poor simp. Let go my arm before you start something."

His hand dropped to the hilt of his bayonet.

"Be careful," cautioned Haywood. "I've done my best to save you from your worst enemy—yourself. I'll try no more. Will you or will you not do as I tell you?"

A hundred pairs of eyes were turned in their direction. Nearby civilians, scenting trouble between the two men, were pushing back their chairs to be out of harm's way.

"If you don't stop pawing me," Mason said quietly, "I'm going to put two feet of steel inside your belly. First you slobber, then you bully. Wait till you're a real corporal before you start bossing me about."



HAYWOOD grew rattled. He did not quite know what to do. He did not want to make a scene in a public place, yet he did not like to admit that he had overstepped his authority.

"You'll come with me," he said between clenched teeth. "I'm not afraid of your threats."

He tightened his grip on Mason's arm and gave him a jerk which almost yanked him off his feet. Mason lost his balance and floundered against one of the round, marble topped tables. It teetered sideways, spilling glasses, an ice bucket, a syphon and some saucers into the laps of a bearded French grocer and his skinny wife.

"Police!" they shrieked of a common accord. "But where is the police? They assassinate themselves, these Legionnaires!"

Other people took up the shout. The owner of the café rushed forward to save his material.

"It's this man," gasped Haywood, trying to drag into prominence the chevron on his left sleeve, while he maintained Mason with the other hand. "I desire to take him back to barracks, for he is drunk."

"Drunk, am I?" yelled Mason, threshing wildly about among the overturned chairs and the broken glassware. "You mealy mouthed liar, you hot air merchant!"

His fist crashed full into Haywood's right eye. Then he hit Haywood again on the nose and had the satisfaction of seeing a bright red stream flow from that battered organ. He was fighting mad, so mad indeed that he forgot all about his bayonet. He slammed home a dozen blows before Haywood could raise his hands. The whole crowd was in a tur-

moil; women shrieked and strong men stormed; Arab bootblacks and Legionnaires egged on the combatants.

"Separate them!" protested the more respectable onlookers. "What beasts they are, these foreigners!"

Haywood recovered from his momentary surprise and caught Mason a crack on the side of the jaw which sent him tottering back on to the bosom of the grocer's wife who, hedged in by the crowd, had not been able to retreat. Forthwith she fainted, and her husband struck Mason over the ear with the silver plated knob of a malacca walking stick.

Mason snatched the cane out of its owner's hands and bashed it so violently against Haywood's forearm that it snapped in two. So did Haywood's forearm. But he made good use of his remaining fist. Cheered on by the onlookers, he stopped Mason with a formidable smack on the top of the head, which almost broke the latter's spine, and followed this up by a straight left which closed both Mason's eyes at one and the same instant.

After that it was all over except for a few finishing touches. Two civilians and a corporal grabbed hold of Mason, an enthusiast hit him with a syphon, and by the time the picket burst through the crowd he had been pounded almost out of existence.



BUT MATTERS did not end there. As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to stand on his feet again, he appeared before a court martial charged with being drunk and creating a disturbance in a public place, striking a superior, refusing to obey an order, damaging government property, to wit, one hot weather uniform, and destroying the property of a civilian. Verdict of the court: Guilty. Sentence: Two years at hard labor.

Mason had struck rock bottom at last. For two years and an extra six months overtime he sweated blood in a quarry up in the hills of Morocco beneath the lash of Senegalese guards, black savages who were only too willing to exert their

strength at the expense of the half starved white prisoners they held at their mercy.

And while Mason did time, Soldier of the First Class Thomas Haywood became corporal; the corporal took part in the Beni-Ounif campaign where he earned the military medal for distinguished conduct under fire; at a later date he was promoted to sergeant and cited in army orders for his reckless courage at the taking of Bou Telezat.

There was not a better non-com in the Third Battalion than this sober sided and abstemious sergeant. His men may not have loved him, for he ruled them with an iron hand, but they respected his very real courage and his even temper. At times he was inclined to be rather pompous, and he did not make many friends in the sergeants' mess, for the general impression was that he was striving just a little too blatantly for a lieutenant's commission.



IT WAS shortly after the capture of Bou Telezat, while the battalion was waiting for orders to move forward into the Tafilalet hills, that Mason reappeared upon the scene. He trudged into camp late one afternoon with the rear guard of a supply convoy which had creaked its way across a hundred kilometers of rocky desert. He was crusted with dust and sweat, his heavy pack bowed him down, but he perked up considerably when a bemedaled sergeant answering to the familiar name of Haywood bustled forward to take charge of the new arrivals.

"Why, sure enough!" he exclaimed. "My Gawd, silver striped, *medaille militaire* and everything!"

"*Ferme-moi çal!*" barked the sergeant. "Shut your trap! Speak when you're spoken to. Party—eyes right! Look to your right! Front! Shoulder *hipel!* In fours by the right—*march!*"

Snap, swing and decision, he had them all. It was not until he had assigned each man to his proper place and supervised the mounting of their shelter tents that he condescended to notice Mason.

"So you're back again," he remarked, squaring his shoulders and hitching his thumbs inside his belt. "You'll have to look alive down here. *Faut que ça marche*. I'm forgetting my English. Haven't spoken it for—"

"—for two years and eight months," Mason broke in. "Same here. It's a long time, two years and eight months, Sergeant. A hell of a long time to spend with the penal section."

"Old stuff," rapped Haywood. "Forget it. You're on active service now. No nonsense you understand. Battalion's moving out in a few days."

"Yea," admitted Mason, "right smart. You might 'a' been born a sergeant."

"None of that back chat. I'll stand for no familiarity. Drill that into your thick head at once. I bear you no grudge and I'll treat you like every other Legionnaire. No different. If you cause trouble you'll have to bear the consequences. That's all there is to it."

"Thank you," Mason said. "There's just one thing I'd like to ask: Do you remember the court martial, *my* court martial?"

"What's that? Remember it; yes of course. What of it?"

"Remember the evidence you gave?"

He was standing at attention, as he had been taught to stand by the *chaouch* of the penal section; still as a ramrod, heels together, toes turned out, chest out, hands turned palm outward, little fingers "touching the seams of the trousers," exactly as per copy book. His face was an expressionless mask; he started straight before him, and he spoke almost diffidently.

"Do I remember the evidence I gave?"

Haywood repeated. "What are you trying to get at? No, I don't remember. Can't say I do. Other things to think about."

"Well, I been thinking a whole lot."

The voice was as gentle as gentle could be. "You said—correct me if I'm wrong—you said I assaulted you that night in the square at Bel Abbes, and you said I was drunk."

Abruptly Haywood threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh, now I know. Quite right. That's what I said. Something had to be done about you. You were going to the dogs. I'll bet you're cured of your boozy ways."

"So—so."

"And perhaps you've made up your mind to play the game like a man."

"Yes indeed," agreed Mason. "I have. I've decided to put a bullet into your hide, Sergeant, first chance comes my way."

"Is that right!"

"Absolutely. I'll plug you good and plenty." A pleasant smile hovered about the corners of his mouth. "I just wanted to warn you." He looked full into Haywood's eyes. "I'm darn' glad we've bumped into one another again," he sighed. "I was hoping we would."

The threat had no effect whatsoever on Haywood.

"Rubbish," he snorted. "You'll find yourself in front of a firing squad if you're not careful."

"It's all one to me."

"Don't be a fool. I'll stand for no such loose talk. For this once I'll forget what you have just said."

"But I'm not likely to forget the two years and six months I spent with the Zephyrs because of your lies."

"That'll do," snapped Haywood. "You're a cheap little thug. As nasty a scoundrel as I've ever met in my life. Yes, I sent you to prison, purposely, deliberately, for your own good, but it's done you no good. I can see that. You're hopeless; at the first break you make I'll nail you."

"That's where you're wrong," smiled Mason. "You won't know anything about it. I've already served my sentence. It's your turn. I'll be careful, I sure will. Once is enough!"

Haywood's expression was scornful.

"You can't be careful enough," he asserted. "Don't waste any more time. Clean up your kit and be ready for work bright and early in the morning." He

waved Mason away with an abrupt motion of the hand, "Dismissed!"



MASON really meant what he said. He had thought it out without heat or passion: he was determined to repay Haywood with a well placed bullet at the first opportunity; but the opportunity was slow in coming, for a military camp is a rather public place in which to commit murder and get away with it—too much to do, too many people about.

And the most exasperating feature of the whole business was that Haywood treated him neither better nor worse than anybody else. No matter how hard he tried—and he tried his level best—he could not get a rise out of the sergeant. In the latter's eyes he was simply the right hand, rear rank man of Squad No. 7. When he did his work properly he passed unnoticed; when he slacked off he was brought up with a round turn. Haywood did not even condescend to speak to him in English. It drove the would-be assassin to hard drink. There was the canteen with its stock of wine, and in the ruins of Bou Telezat a swarm of Syrian camp followers had set up shop. They sold everything a Legionnaire could possibly need from spoiled canned goods to synthetic gin.

Until pay day came around Mason was compelled to live a moderately sober life, but pay day arrived at last. He drew sixteen francs representing sixty-four days of the hardest kind of work, and he was all set for a joyous evening.

With a gang of like minded troopers he made a tour of the shanties and came to rest in a dive on the outskirts of the town. It was a terrible place. The walls were cracked and blackened by fire. On the sagging ceiling bedbugs and flies hung in black clusters. There were no tables or chairs—but the imitation cognac was one sou cheaper there than anywhere else and as strong as TNT.

Fifty ungirt and perspiring troopers were packed inside the windowless room. One man, armed with a guitar, was playing the Legion's indecent and blasphemous

marching songs. The others joined in the chorus:

*"Y en a qui font la mauvaise têtez
Au régiment.
Y tirent au flanc, y font la bête
Inutilement"*

Mason, with half a dozen shots of liquid fire under his belt, thoroughly enjoyed the party—while it lasted. Unfortunately it came to an abrupt and unexpected end just as he was about to treat his mates to a heel-and-toe dance à l' *américaine*.

"What shall I play?" inquired the guitarist.

"Anything," declared Mason. "Play the Dead March if you like. They'll be playing it for a sergeant very shortly. He—"

Then he broke off short and the grinning troops surrounding him stood silent and motionless, for the brassy summons of a bugle rang through the night and shook the dilapidated walls.

Somebody cursed.

"That's the 'stand by'. What's up now?"

Fifty pairs of ears strained to catch the order.

"No. 1 Company, fall in! No. 2 Company, fall in!"

Mason, who belonged to No. 1, hooked up the collar of his tunic and clasped his belt buckle about his waist.

"On the double!" rang the summons. "On the double!"

There was a slow surge toward the narrow doorway.

"Night march," grunted a bearded trooper. "Take it easy, my old ones, it is too hot to run."

But a sergeant appeared in the doorway.

"What is it that you are waiting for, band of camels? Outside, all of No. 1 and No. 2. Show some speed or I shall be planting the toe of my boot against your pantaloons!"

"What's up?" inquired Mason, steady-ing himself as best he could, for the cognac was beginning to affect his legs. "Anything special, *mon sergent*? Is it manœuvres?"

"I'll give you maneuvers!" yelled the sergeant. "There's a rebel *harka* waiting for you at the end of the road you're going to travel."

"Zowie!" cried Mason. "Here's where the guns begin to pop!"

And he sang the Marseillaise in a rasping, unmusical voice until the sergeant, shepherding the party down the dark road, compelled him to shut up.

"Can't I sing patriotic songs?" protested Mason. "It's the first time I've ever been in action. I got to keep my spirits up, ain't I?"

*"Allons enfants de la Patrie
Le jour de gloire est arrivé . . ."*



THE SERGEANT, who was a Bavarian, must have had an innate prejudice against that stirring anthem, for he favored the songster with a mighty kick which sent him crashing into a group of several unsteady Legionnaires. They went down like ninepins.

"Get up!" brayed the sergeant. "Band of *crétins!* Quicker than that!"

Before he was able to extricate himself Mason had been cracked on the jaw, prodded in the ribs and jabbed violently in the stomach. He felt sober and sore. Life was not worth living. He wasn't even allowed to sing the Marseillaise on the eve of battle.

Pursued by the sergeant he jogged down the road leading to the camp. There was a great deal of shouting. Men ran about carrying lanterns; other men tripped over tent ropes and went sprawling; non-coms were astoundingly busy; officers stood about consulting their watches and getting in everybody's way.

"*Allons!*" shouted Sergeant Haywood as soon as his section hove in sight. "Assembly is in five more minutes. Get those tents down quick!"

Mason, however, had lost all his enthusiasm. He did not care if the rebels kicked the French clean out of North Africa. He folded his half of the shelter tent, rolled it and strapped it on to the top of his pack. Then there was his

blanket to attach, and a cooking pot, a mess tin, some pickets, his spare boots, and five days' emergency rations. He had to work in the dark, and all the while Haywood stood over him, egging him on.

"Three more minutes to go," boomed the sergeant. "Another two minutes. Come on, Mason! What's keeping you there on your knees?"

"Aw, saying my prayers," grunted Mason. "And you won't be so cocky when I draw a bead on your nut."

He spoke too low, however, for Haywood to hear anything but an indistinct mumble.

A lantern swung down over him.

"Your pack's lopsided," snapped Haywood. "That's your affair. There's no time to fix it now. Strap it on. Up you get!"

Mason groaned as he swung the heavy pack on to his back and fastened the straps. Two hundred rounds of ammunition in his pouches, a water bottle, an entrenching tool. He was loaded down like a donkey, and the Syrian's cognac was making him sick.

"What's keeping you?" rasped Haywood, shoving the lantern within an inch of Mason's nose. "Get a move on quick!"

"Quit crabbing," retorted Mason. "I'm hurrying all I know, ain't I?"

"Well, hurry faster then!" urged Haywood.

Exasperated by the trooper's evident ill will he caught him by the arm and gave him a shove. The last shred of Mason's restraint snapped. He jerked a bullet into the chamber of his rifle, wheeled around and fired. The bullet fanned Haywood's cheek. Before Mason could fire again he brought his hand down on the rifle muzzle.

"Missed," he commented briskly. "You're a rotten shot, Mason. Now you know why I've never bothered about your threats. We're all square, I guess. Snap out of it! Fall in!"

Startled by the sound of the shot, several people came running.

"Yes, I heard it too," Haywood told a sputtering officer. "It came from over there, somewhere—"

"But, I saw a flash!"

"So did I, *mon lieutenant*. It seemed to come from beyond the horse lines."

Bugles were blowing instantly. A whistle shrilled "assembly!"

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"It is very strange," he commented.

"I could have sworn. Still, there's no time to bother about that now. Get up in your places. Double!"



MASON felt weak and shaken. For some unfathomable reason he was glad he had missed Haywood, and yet at the same time he was fiercely angry because the sergeant had treated the incident in such an off-hand manner.

Without a word he trotted out and joined his section. The two companies lined up outside the camp and stood motionless.

The senior captain, a lanky, bearded man by the name of Taloneur, rode out of the shadows accompanied by an adjutant carrying a lantern.

"Tention!"

The line stiffened.

Taloneur's voice rang out:

"Legionnaires, there's work to be done up ahead. A party of a thousand warriors led by our old friend Ibn Jellud, who escaped us when we captured Bou Telezat, has massacred two of our patrol and is preaching a holy war among the tribes. We'll teach him to steer clear of the Legion. We're going to swing around his flank and drive him down upon Sidi Harbour, where a battalion of Zouaves is waiting to join up with us."

"Yea," grunted Mason, "it's always the Legion has to do the dirty work," and Sergeant Haywood, standing close behind him, nudged him violently with the butt end of his rifle.

"We'll have to hurry," the captain was saying, "and when the time comes to fight, you'll acquit yourselves like Legionnaires— Column of fours to the right!"

"To the right!" echoed the section commanders. "*En avant!*"

Mason was destined to remember that forced march for many a day. It began badly, for his badly adjusted load worked loose and his blanket, jolted out of place, pressed against the nape of his neck. But he could not stop to fix it. Though it was pitch dark Haywood was always near at hand whenever he tried to break ranks.

"When we halt you can straighten it," barked the sergeant. "You can not fall out now."

There were no halts, however, for there was not a minute to waste if Ibn Jellud was to be rounded up. He was said to be seventy kilometers away, lurking in the narrow gorges of the Tafilalet, and unless he was engaged without delay he might slip away, farther back into the hills, out of reach.

Captain Taloneur planned to reach his objective in forty-eight hours. No other troops but the Legion could have done it; no others would have been asked to do it. The column trudged through the night, hammering out the miles. It was suffocatingly hot; a cloud of dust billowed up about the marching men, clogging their throats, sifting inside their clothes, chafing their skin till it was raw and bleeding.

Before the first streak of dawn came into the sky they had covered thirty kilometers—and Mason was almost ready to drop. He lurched along, open mouthed, glassy eyed, stumbling over every stone, dragging his weary body up the never ending slope followed by the trail.

"*Allons!*" croaked Haywood, straightening his own aching shoulders, "Step out. It won't last long now. Lakdar is just ahead."



THE OASIS, where the column was to halt until the heat of the day was over, was dimly visible in the gray dawn light, a black smudge against the plain. Slowly its outlines grew clearer. A clump of date palm trees sprawled along the bank of a deep gully. Behind the trees loomed

the earth colored wall of a native village. Nearer at hand lay an Arab cemetery with its low mounds and rough headstones. A whitewashed shrine with a rounded dome stood in the middle of the graveyard.

In the distance the hilltops were touched with fire; the walls of the shrine turned pink in the light of the rising sun. Full day swept out of the east on the wings of a gust of hot wind.

Up ahead the point men had quickened their pace. They were within a quarter of a mile of the oasis, and the breeze brought them a whiff of damp earth, and mold and water.

A gray bearded Arab standing beneath the trees shaded his eyes with his hand the better to watch the oncoming troopers. A pack of lean dogs raced out to greet them.

"No stragging!" ordered Haywood. "Up in your place, Mason. Get up where you belong. Smartly now!"

Mason cursed between his gritty teeth. His rifle was a ton weight; the pressure of his topheavy pack against the back of his neck was driving him frantic.

"I'll smarten you up pretty soon," he swore. "Me with a goldarned tin can rapping me over the nut at every step. If I had my way—"

He never finished that particular sentence, for the gray bearded Arab had suddenly raised his hand high above his head and, instantly, a puff of smoke eddied among the trees. It spread swiftly along the ground from end to end of the oasis.

Crash! The point men were down, squirming in the dust.

A roar of rifle fire rolled across the plain. Ibn Jellud had not waited to be attacked; he had come more than half way to meet the French. A swarm of bullets plowed the ranks, and a score of Legionnaires were cut down before the column came to a halt.

Startled and wide awake, all his aches forgotten, Mason saw his company commander pitch forward onto his horse's neck and spill clumsily out of the saddle.

Thicker came the sleet of lead, shriller. He ducked as gracefully as his awkward load would allow. *Smack!* A slug ripped its way through the cooking pot strapped on top of his pack. *Smack!* His front rank man collapsed, spouting blood through a hole in his throat.

A bugle squawked.

"No. 1 Section," shouted Haywood, "form line to the left!"

He was as deliberate and matter-of-fact as though he had been drilling his men on the exercise ground at the depot. Holding himself as straight as a ramrod, he strode down the front of the section's new alignment and placed himself front center, for the lieutenant lay spread eagled on the ground with a bullet in his heart.

"What the heck!" thought Mason. "If he can do it so can I!"

But it was no easy thing to stand erect and motionless in the face of that stream of bullets.

"Fix bayonets!"

Metal clanged against metal. The lean steel blades winked in the sunlight.

Interminable seconds dragged by. His heart arose and choked him; the pit of his stomach was as hollow as a drum.

"Close your ranks," ordered Haywood. "Steady, No. 1 Section!"

Captain Taloneur had dismounted and stood, sword in hand, midway down the line.

"Legionnaires!" Mason heard him shout. "*En avant!*"

Mason found himself running forward, gripping his rifle so tightly that his knuckles ached. The dust, lashed by the bullets, spurted at his feet. His knapsack joggled loosely on his shoulders, grinding into the small of his back at every step. Panting and cursing he stumbled through the cemetery.

Directly in front of him trotted Haywood, and it flashed through his mind that all he had to do was to stumble over one of the mounds, and lunge forward—nobody would notice it—lunge forward and drive the needle point of his bayonet between Haywood's ribs. But he could

not bring himself to do it. He was going as fast as he could go, and Haywood jogged on always just out of reach.



THEN ALL such thoughts were swept away, for the bugles were giving tongue, sending him on toward the curtain of smoke and flame.

*"Y a la goutte à boire, là-haut!
Y a la goutte à boire!"*

The line leaped forward, yelling. Captain Taloneur rolled underfoot. Mason had to jump aside to avoid him. He was running like a deer close behind Haywood. His lips curled back off his teeth; he snarled as he caught sight of the dim gray figures stirring behind the smoke drift.

The last bugler, shot through the stomach, braced himself on one elbow and sounded the charge till he choked his bugle with his own blood.

*"Y a la goutte à boire, là-haut!
Y a la goutte à boire!"*

Haywood half turned toward his men. His mouth opened wide as he yelled:

"Enfoncez moi ça! In you go! Get at 'em!"

Into the acrid cloud plunged the battered remnants of the two companies.

A thousand shrieking devils rose up to meet them. A giant in a blue *bournous* slashed at Mason with a broad bladed sword. *Clang!* Steel rasped against steel; the sword turned aside, and home went Mason's bayonet, buried to the hilt in the warrior's chest. A twist of the wrists; a jerk; out came the smoking steel. Parry and thrust and thrust again!

Jammed in an Arab's skull the bayonet snapped like glass. He clubbed his rifle and smashed the steel shod butt into the twisted faces which loomed at him through the haze of dust and smoke and dazzling sunlight. He fought on step by step, clawing his way over the low mud walls, floundering through the stinking mud in the irrigation ditches, until at last he was brought to a standstill in front of a tangle of thorny bushes.

Sheltered behind this screen of bushes the Arabs shot down the troopers at point blank range. There was no getting through. Thrice Haywood led his Legionnaires forward; each time they were compelled to fall back. The section melted away before the fiery blast. It broke up into little groups which were swallowed up in the fog.

Kneeling behind a mound of dead men, Mason pumped lead into the thorny screen. Something stung his shoulder and, though he felt no pain, his left arm grew numb and clumsy. Heavy hands seemed to be bearing down upon the muzzle of his rifle, tilting it slowly toward the ground.

Again he was hit. A split second later he was surprised to find himself sprawling on the flat of his back staring up at the palm trees through which the bullets whistled and clacked. Shafts of golden sunlight fell obliquely through the gaps between the heavy fronds, and in these streaks of sunlight spirals of blue gray smoke curled lazily upward.

The thunder of the rifles had grown muffled as though the battle was ebbing away into the remote distance. He struggled frantically to raise himself off the ground, but he could not move. There was a dull ache in his side, which glowed and throbbed and spread like fire through his veins. His throat was parched and burning. He fumbled at the catch of his water bottle, and a warm, sticky substance ran off his tunic on to his fingers. Raising his hands to the level of his eyes, he saw that they were stained dark red.

Bullets still whistled past him, skimming the ground, drumming into the corpses and making them jerk and quiver spasmodically. He was alone among the dead, for the battle had rolled away momentarily toward the edge of the thicket, where Haywood was trying to strengthen the right of the line which was being driven in and smashed to pieces by overwhelming odds.

By rolling his head sidewise Mason could see the handful of white clad Legion-

naires dodging in and out among the trees. They were as busy as ants, firing, running and firing again. Little knots of Arabs strayed within Mason's field of vision. He could see them run toward the Legionnaires with great angry shouts. The two groups would meet and sway locked together in a furious scrimmage which ended only when one of them had been wiped out. Then the survivors dodged back again among the trees . . .



FOR NO good reason the situation struck Mason as being extremely amusing, and he burst into gales of crazy laughter. He was still laughing when he was struck a tremendous blow which hurled him heels over head against a dead man with a mashed in face. The slug had severed the shoulder strap of his pack; he lay on his side, curled up around the pain which gnawed at his flank.

All at once he caught sight of an Arab crawling out from under the bushes. Another followed, then another; soon there were a score of them. They bent down over a fallen Legionnaire. A knife glistened in the sunlight. The Legionnaire screamed shrilly. Again the knife furrowed his body and again he screamed.

Mason groped along the ground in a vain endeavor to reach his rifle. One of the Arabs, seeing him move, ran toward him. Fear laid hold of Mason, fear which made his eyes bulge and his lips hang apart. In his ears still rang the shrieks of the other man who was being tortured. With a convulsive effort he snatched at his rifle, but his fingers slid clumsily along the smooth stock and could find no purchase.

Then he heard a shout and out of the tail end of his eye he saw a group of Legionnaires rush past him with leveled bayonets. They butted into the Arabs and, pinning them in against the thicket, slaughtered them.

A bulky figure came between Mason and the struggling knot of men, and a familiar voice shouted in his ear:

"Column is falling back. It's hopeless."

Mason looked up into Haywood's blood smeared face.

"Say," he wheezed, "hand me a gat, will you. I'm licked."

"Can't you hobble? We'll wait for you. I'm in charge of the rear guard. We're pulling out a section at a time. Don't want to leave anybody behind."

"You'll have to leave me. I'm shot to hell. Give me a gun and make sure it's loaded. I seen what they been doing to Kautski."

Haywood shook his head. He stooped over and took Mason in his arms.

"You're light," he explained. "Carry you—far's possible."

Mason ground his teeth to choke back the shout of agony which filled his throat.

"It's no good," he pleaded, whimpering. "God Almighty! I don't mind croaking. Put me down!"

"That'll do!" snapped Haywood. "Shut up and hold on tight!"

He slung Mason over his shoulder and let him hang head downward, effectively putting an end to all possible argument. Then he rounded up what was left of his section and marched it out of the oasis in orderly fashion.

Three hundred men had stumbled into the trap set for them by Ibn Jellud. Ninety came out. They retired unmolested, for the Arabs had a bellyful of fighting and had no wish to face the fire of those ninety rifles in the open.

The rear guard suffered most. Before it passed out of range it had to face a hail of lead which cut its ranks to ribbons, but Haywood held it steady, and when the fighting died completely away, when the last shot had been fired, he went down as if he had been poleaxed, riddled with bullets, leaking like a sieve.

Mason who was past caring what became of him lay where he fell, face downward in the dust.

"He's not dead," Haywood told the troopers who gathered him up. "Bring him along too."

And Mason, when the fever abated, awoke much the worse for wear in the hospital ward at Bou Telezat.



SEVERAL days elapsed before he took any active interest in his surroundings. Every so often a white coated devil probed the wound in his side, and the wound in his shoulder, not to mention a wound in the small of his back. It was all very painful and unpleasant, and after it was over he was quite content to lie and stare at the flies crawling on the canvas ceiling.

One morning, however, he was startled to see a solemn procession file into the tent; there was a full colonel and a whole flock of senior officers whose spurs jingled and whose swords rattled as they walked. Preceded by the surgeon major, they trooped down the central aisle between the beds and came to a halt at the far end of the ward. There was a buzz of voices, and curiosity impelled Mason to hitch himself up on his pillows just in time to see the colonel bend down and fasten the crimson ribbon of the Legion of Honor on Sergeant Haywood's flannel nightshirt.

"What do you know about that?" pondered Mason. "Well, I guess he had it coming his way."

". . . heroic conduct," he heard the colonel saying, "worthy of the best traditions of the Legion. Skillfully covered the retreat though badly wounded and averted what might have been a rout. Rescued several badly wounded men who, without his intervention, would have fallen into the hands of the rebels."

He leaned over and kissed Haywood's bearded cheeks; then he stepped back and saluted. Everybody imitated his gesture. Haywood turned the same color as the ribbon of his medal. The ceremony was over.

Mason slid down under the sheets to avoid having to sit at attention while the colonel went by.

"Two years and six months in prison," he summed up. "A dirty trick if ever there was one. He's got a screw loose. It's that son of a gun of a conscience of his. I'll say he's a wet blanket. Still he saved my life, for what it's worth, and that ain't much. I should 'a' plugged him

sooner. Guess I'll have to call it off."

Having reached this decision he felt much better. Indeed, he felt as though he were too good to live much longer and was quite alarmed that evening when his temperature went up two points.

"They say some guys reform before they pass out," he muttered. "But what the heck, I ain't reformed!"

Nevertheless, as soon as he was able to hobble across the ward he paid a call on the sergeant.

"Congratulations," he grinned. "That bit of ribbon looks right smart. And—er—say, I'm much obliged to you. Sure am."

"You don't have to thank me," said Haywood. "Couldn't very well leave you behind. You did pretty well yourself, Mason." He chuckled. "You didn't plug me after all. I didn't think you would."

"Aw, you don't have to rub it in. I'm—well, I'm sorry that shot went off before we started out. Say, Sergeant, anything I can do for you any time just shout. Anything, that is," he added hastily, "short of going on the wagon. I couldn't do that for a million dollars."

A solemn expression appeared on Haywood's emaciated countenance.

"You'll never get anywhere until you learn how to practise a little self-control," he declared. "Before you can hope to become a good soldier—"

"Excuse me, Sergeant," Mason broke in, "but I'm sort of unsteady on my pins. I guess I'd better crawl back to bed. And as I was saying—I'm much obliged."

The poor boob, he decided, might be a good sergeant, but he was certainly not good company, not by a long shot.

While they were cooped up in the field ambulance they could not very well avoid each other, and Mason heaved a sigh of relief when they were sent back to the base hospital. There their ways parted.

He was sick of having to be grateful all day long. With Haywood about he was ashamed of being seen smoking a cigaret, and when the orderly brought around the wine ration he gulped it down, feeling all the while like a criminal.



HOWEVER, he recovered quickly enough once Haywood's reproachful gaze was no longer glued upon him. He recovered so quickly, indeed, that the medical authorities kicked him out of hospital before he had had time to get genuinely pickled on officers' invalid port more than twice.

Back to barracks he went with a slight limp and an unquenchable thirst. Unsympathetic drill sergeants quickly cured him of his limp, but the thirst remained.

He nursed it along with loving care until he had accumulated a small capital of ten francs. Then with a determination worthy of a better cause he went out to have a party. Instead of heading straight for the grog shops he made a wide detour through the Botanical Gardens, just for the pleasure of prolonging the agony a few minutes more.

At dusk the garden at Sidi bel Abbes is a dreary spot. Something of the homesickness and despair which three generations of Legionnaires have dragged down its sanded alleys lingers in the hot air. There is a bitter mockery about its neatly labeled shrubs and its nondescript statuary.

But Mason was neither homesick nor downcast. He sauntered along with his hands in his pockets and a cigaret smoldering between his lips. And around a bend in the alley, close to the statue of Icarus, he found Sergeant Haywood sitting in an attitude of utter dejection, holding his head between his fists. The sight was so unexpected that Mason stopped dead in his tracks.

"For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed. "Hello, Sergeant. I ain't seen you for a coon's age. Anything wrong?"

No answer.

Mason pushed his *képi* onto the back of his head, shrugged his shoulders and went on, whistling softly between his teeth. After a few steps he paused and glanced around. Haywood had not moved.

It was more than Mason could stand.

"Y'ain't feeling bad, are you?" he inquired, ambling back to the bench. "Nothing I can do?"

Still no answer. Haywood sat like stone.

"All right," snorted Mason. "Have it your own way. I ain't butting in. Maybe you are a sergeant, but that's no reason for not being civil. Saved my life, didn't you? Can't you speak?"

Haywood stirred uneasily. He looked up, and Mason saw that his face was ravaged and tormented.

"Need any help about anything?" he inquired.

"Nothing anybody can do," Haywood said wearily. "Nothing. I'm licked."

"Gwan! That's what I said back at Lakdar, but you dragged me out of that mess. What's on your mind?"

"I'm a darn' fool, that's all." Haywood was silent for a moment; then he burst out, "I might as well tell somebody; you'll see for yourself. You remember I used to be first officer on the *Carmarthen*?"

"Sure enough. You had nightmares about that boat."

"Well—" he cleared his throat—"back home I had a wife and two kids. When the—that accident occurred I lost my nerve. Couldn't face going home. Too much to explain. They thought I was better than I really am. I'm weak, that's what's wrong with me. Weak and mean."

"You hide it pretty well."

"I've had to. Anyway, after I enlisted I let things drift along. Didn't write to my wife. I was ashamed to let 'em know where I was, you understand. But I always meant to write. Lately things began to look different. That was after I was given the Legion of Honor, and there's just a chance I'll be recommended for a commission before long."

"Pretty slick!"

"I thought so, too, and while I was in hospital I wrote to my wife. All along the idea had been there at the back of my head. I thought she'd wait, if only because of the kids—and I heard from her today."

His clenched fist opened. Crumpled in the palm lay the torn fragments of a sheet of note paper.

"She got her divorce," he explained

dully. "Remarried. That's nothing. I don't mind about her. It's the kids I'm worried about. She put 'em in a home. No money. My God!" he muttered. "What a swine I've been!"

"Well, we all make mistakes," Mason suggested. "And anyway, as soon's you get your commission you'll be able to take care of your children. So what's the use of worrying now?"

"Take care of 'em on a lieutenant's pay? No, I've got to go home at once. I can't wait. I've waited too long." The words came tumbling from his lips. "My two kids in some damn' asylum. It's driving me crazy. They need me—and one of 'em's sick. Oh, she rubbed it in all right. I must get home. I must!"

"If you're thinking of deserting you're a darn' fool," retorted Mason. "Your time's almost up now. Another six months at the most. That's nothing—six months."

"It's hell, that's what it is!" cried Haywood. "I don't know what to do."

"If I was in your boots I'd have a couple of drinks and go to bed," Mason declared. "But you're not a drinking man. There's nothing you can do now that I can see."

"That's just the trouble. I'm helpless." Haywood jumped to his feet and threatened the flaming sky with his upraised fist. "Six months to wait. I'm the greatest coward on earth. I ran away. I left my two children just because my reputation had been smashed. I didn't want to suffer—"

He controlled himself with difficulty.

"I'm sorry," he said abruptly. "I can't talk about it any more. I've got to think it out by myself. Good night!"

He swung on his heel and hurried away down the alley.

"Poor nut!" commented Mason.



HE FLIPPED the fag end of his cigaret into the shrubbery and, cocking his *képi* over one ear, sauntered jauntily out of the garden. He was very sorry for Haywood, but he did not intend to let his

sorrow spoil a perfectly good evening. He was scheduled to go south again in a few days, and the present opportunity was far too good to waste.

He wasted nothing but his money. Three hours later, broke, well oiled and contented, he headed back toward the barracks. His way led through the maze of lanes behind the native market. At that time of night—it was close on ten—the neighborhood was almost deserted except for the dubious folk who cater to the thirsts and other peculiarities of Legionnaires: Syrians and Arabs, Maltese and Italians, all the riffraff of North Africa which makes a living out of the troopers' meager wages.

Through the closed shutters came the muffled wheeze of accordions and the faint rattle of mechanical pianos. Here and there, streaming through a half open doorway, a patch of yellow lamplight stabbed the darkness. The air was heavy with the smell of rotting cabbage stalks, cheap scent and roasting coffee. The echo of a woman's high pitched laughter trailed across the flat rooftops.

All at once, as he came around a sharp bend, Mason heard a yell, which cut knifelike through the blurred sounds of the street. Other voices joined in almost instantly, growing louder from second to second.

At the end of the street, by the light of a hanging lantern, Mason caught sight of a gesticulating group of civilians closing in upon a Legionnaire who stood against the wall, fending off his assailants with a bayonet.

Mason did not stop to think about the possible consequences of his conduct. Like all other Legionnaires, he had a standing grudge against civilians. He gathered himself together and went galloping down the street. He may have been a trifle unsteady on his pins, but when he hit the crowd it gave way beneath the impact.

Somebody took a swipe at him with a stick and knocked off his *képi*, and a knife ripped his tunic open from collar to waist. Otherwise he was still undamaged when he reached the trooper.

"*On les a!*" he shouted. "Skin 'em alive!" Then, goggled eyed, he gasped, "Haywood!"

And Haywood it was, gray faced, sweating, his uniform splashed with wine and blood.

The mob, confronted by two bayonets instead of one, stood back and pelted the Legionnaires with stones, filth and foul words.

"How come the riot?" inquired Mason, dodging a hunk of brick which exploded against the wall inches above his head.

"That fellow there in the gutter," panted Haywood, "tried to stab me. I ran him through."

The man, huddled in the gutter, was dead. A thin trickle of blood oozed out of the triangular wound in his throat.

"*À mort!*" shrieked the crowd. "Kill them, the lousy foreigners!"

"You're in dutch," grunted Mason.

"I had a few drinks. I couldn't help it. I must have gone crazy. I don't know what happened."

"You birds when you flop off the wagon—" began Mason. He left the sentence hanging in midair and said sharply, "Here, you got to pull your freight before the picket arrives."

"It's too late."

"Do what you're told and don't argue," retorted the soldier of the second class. "Edge off to the left and beat it down that alley. I'll hold 'em."

"But—"

"There ain't no buts. You pulled me out of a tight corner at Lakdar. They'd have carved me up if I'd been left behind. Can't have a guy with the Legion of Honor accused of murder. It is murder—Beat it!"

"What'll you say?"

"What's it to you. You keep your trap shut and think of those brats of yours. Let's go!"

The mob gave way before the bayonets. The two Legionnaires reached the mouth of the valley.

"For all you're worth!" ordered Mason. "Go! If you say one word I'll let daylight into you!"

For a second Haywood wavered, then abruptly he turned on his heel and fled.



THE PATROL reached the scene of the disorder just in time to save Mason from being torn to pieces, for the bayonet had been knocked out of his hand and the mob was kicking him savagely.

As soon as he was fit to stand up he appeared before his judges. The witnesses asserted that the prisoner had had an accomplice. Some of them even went so far as to maintain that the accomplice had been a sergeant, but the president of the court quickly put an end to what he called "their aspersions upon the honor, character and dignity of the non-commissioned officers of the Legion". A private might conceivably commit such a crime—a sergeant never, or not unless he was caught red handed.

"Had you an accomplice?" inquired the court.

"Certainly not," the prisoner declared stolidly.

"You admit having killed the deceased, Emilio Gattini?"

"I forgot to find out what he was called," apologized Mason. "He was wearing a blue singlet; that's about all I know about him."

The verdict was a foregone conclusion. For the sake of appearances the court retired long enough to smoke a cigaret or so. Then it reconvened and the guards presented arms.

"In the name of the people of France," read the president, "the Soldier of the Second Class William Mason, having been found guilty of murder, is hereby condemned to death."

And Mason went back to his cell with a faint smile on his lips, which convinced his judges that they had been very wise to have shown no mercy in the case of such a hardened criminal.

The days dragged by until one morning the door swung open and the prison chaplain entered the cell.

"*Mon fils,*" he said, seating himself beside Mason, "I have been talking to

some civilians, an Italian, among others, who was a friend of this Gattini."

"Well?"

The priest laid a hand on Mason's shoulder and looked him full in the eyes.

"Why are you shielding Sergeant Haywood?" he asked. "He killed Gattini."

"That is for me to decide," retorted Mason. "I do not mind dying. It doesn't matter. Moreover, long ago, I was due for the electric chair in America." He tried to bluster. "I am an enemy of society. Haywood can not afford to die."

"And why not?"

"Aw, he had a couple of infants back home. He was much worried about them, you comprehend, *mon père*. When he heard that these children were homeless what does he do but go off and have a drink. He is a good man when sober, but alcohol makes a fool of him. There are such men."

"And so?"

"What else? I found him fighting these civilians. There was a dead man in the gutter. Knowing what I knew, what would you have done in my place?"

"I begin to understand," murmured the priest.

"You see," Mason went on slowly, "this Haywood is not a criminal such as I am; moreover he once saved my life, and that is not a thing one easily forgets. For the sake of the children he must live. I had neither father nor mother when I was small and—would you deprive two children of their father, a good father, even though he had made a few mistakes? Would you?"

The priest was silent, but a look of infinite pity and compassion was in his eyes.

"Haywood's not to blame," Mason went on. "He can't stand liquor—that's all that's the matter with him. He'll

never touch another drop as long as he lives, and he deserves another chance. Do something for me, Father. Make sure he doesn't butt in at the last minute. Please."

"Your mind is made up?"

"Absolutely made up."



FORTY-EIGHT hours later, at dawn, he was led out to the exercise ground and placed with his back against a stake.

He refused to have his eyes bandaged and faced the firing squad without a tremor. Drawn up on three sides of the square, the battalion fixed bayonets and presented arms. The priest kissed Mason on the forehead and retreated backward a step at a time, holding a crucifix high in his trembling hands.

An adjutant stepped forward, sword in hand.

"Take aim!" The order rang crisply in the clean morning air.

Up came the twelve rifles of the firing squad. Mason turned his head slightly and grinned at the priest.

"Fire!"

Mason rocked back against the post, swayed there for a brief second, then dropped to his knees. Slowly at first, then with increasing momentum, he fell forward on to his face.

The adjutant stepped forward and pronounced the prisoner dead.

The drums rolled and the massed bugles of the regiment sang in the morning sunlight as the battalion marched past the crumpled figure.

And the priest standing beside the thing that had been Bill Mason read, not the prayer of the dead, but the martyrs' requiem.

And Haywood, at his appointed hour, went home to his children.

