



COLD STEEL

A Story of the Legion

By GEORGES SURDEZ

FORBACH was well known in the Foreign Legion. Marshal Lyautey, military governor of Morocco, had once called him from formation, after a review at Fez, to present him to a party of official visitors.

"Rudolph Forbach, of the Legion. He was with me in the Tonkin. I was middle aged, listening to my first bullets, and he was young, hearing old music! Forbach, ladies and gentlemen, Adjutant Forbach—a Legionnaire of the grand epoch!"

The Alsatian was a gigantic, bony man, with long limbs. Once deemed the handsomest man in his regiment, his head was covered with thick, fur-like gray hair and his dissipated, tanned face was lighted by child-like, innocent blue eyes. Esteemed in Legion history, his span was tremendous. His first important campaign had been Dahomey; he often told of fighting against the Amazons of King Behanzin. He had followed

Gallieni and Lyautey in Tonkin and Madagascar and, already a veteran, had witnessed the decorating of the First Regiment's flag in 1906.

Men who had been his company commanders, his lieutenants, were colonels and generals. Often a staff automobile would stop beside the marching battalion, and officers with white mustaches, medals glittering on their chests, would leap out to greet Forbach.

"My good old Rudolph! Still solid and on the job?"

"I carry on, *mon Général*."

He was somewhat erratic in his conduct, because he had the self-righteousness of old soldiers. His unkind critics attributed his peculiarities to indulgence in white wine. They pointed out that from three to six quarts a day pouring down a man's throat, year after year, might well affect his brain. But those who really knew him said that his conceit came from the fact that he consid-

ered the Legion his family. Having enlisted at sixteen and having stayed with the Corps since, he could recall little else.

He was perhaps fifty-three; but to men who averaged two years under thirty, to his second in command at Ain-el-Rab, Middle Atlas, he appeared to be a patriarch. He was laughed at occasionally, hated at times, but granted a sort of awed veneration.

There were forty-odd Legionnaires stationed at Ain-el-Rab, which was not a military post, not even a blockhouse, but a mere hamlet on the sloping bank of a narrow torrent slashing across a valley; a huddle of mud built huts, swarming with flies, swept by the dusty wind. There was little for the soldiers to do, even less to drink. At best, there would have been sulkiness and rancor; but, with Forbach in charge, all would have been well had not Lieutenant Lavoine of the Colonial Infantry arrived to supervise them.

To start with, the Legion detachment was isolated from other units of the Corps, for the sector of Ait-Bazza had been taken over by the Native Infantry upon completion of the outposts. The men were casuals, members of various groups of specialized workmen left behind to do construction work when their companies had evacuated, and had been reassembled into a military formation for the need of the moment. The neighboring tribes, although severely handled in a recent campaign, were showing signs of discontent with the approach of Summer. Ain-el-Rab closed an outlet badly guarded by Blockhouse No. 4 on one side and Guard Tower No. 9 on the other. The Legionnaires were a sort of cork in a bottle's neck.

They obtained supplies from Blockhouse 4, but as it was occupied by Native Infantry and a traditional rivalry existed between the Legion and the Tirailleurs, food was doled out to them grudgingly, and they seldom were issued their rightful allowance of wine. Forbach had cheered them up, promising

that he would obtain their recall from regimental headquarters at Meknes, and pointing out to them that all their protestations brought pure joy to the infantrymen.

"Can't last forever. Look at me! How many dirty holes do you think I've been in? Plenty one day, starvation the next—that's the Legion."

Forbach rather enjoyed himself. His rank of adjutant, peculiar to the French Army, placed him midway between sergeant-chiefs and sub-lieutenants. He had many privileges, and independent command was pleasing to his pride. It looked well to have his mail addressed—Post Commander, Ain-el-Rab. He had ordered the yards cleaned, loopholes knocked in the walls, organized a routine of patrols and detailed hunting parties to bring in game that amply made up for the shortage of canned meats. As he often told his second, Cambard, an ambitious young chap of twenty-four, all this reminded him of outpost life on the Chinese border.

His life's great burden, paper work, was taken from his shoulders by Cambard, who enjoyed it and would relax from adding columns of figures and composing reports by opening his text-books and studying for a commission. The Legionnaires were, almost without exception, disciplined, clean men who made little trouble when sober and had little opportunity to get drunk.



FORBACH was returning from a patrol in the valley one afternoon when Cambard, perspiring, out of breath, much excited, met him two hundred yards from the first houses of Ain-el-Rab.

"Listen, Rudolph, keep your temper! An officer's come—fellow named Lavoine, of the Tirailleurs. Says the major commanding the region has put him in charge—"

"They may want to establish a more important post here," Forbach pointed out, "and he's come to investigate just how—"

"No. He's come to make trouble, Rudolph."

"Trouble? What for?"

"You remember that row you had with the major?"

"Sure."

Forbach shrugged. Before his detachment had been assigned to Ain-el-Rab, the major in command of the Ait-Bazza sector had ordered the Legionnaires to replace a half company of his own battalion in the quarries. The adjutant had obeyed, naturally, but had communicated with his colonel, as was his duty. And the Legion officer had telegraphed that, the detachment being composed of specialized workmen, the men should be employed at their trades or as a military unit. This was a small quarrel, of a type not known in any army, and the adjutant had thought nothing more of it.

"You remember," Cambard went on, "I told you at the time that the Old Man had it in for you. Blames you for making a kick, and can't see it's his fault for not obtaining authorization first from the regiment. You wouldn't listen to me when I told you what the sergeants at Ait-Bazza told me. The mess orderlies repeated to them that he said he would teach you not to—"

"Teach me?" Forbach stiffened. "Say, I have been in the army longer than he has. If any guy comes along after thirty-four years and can teach me— So you think this Lavoine wants to make trouble for me? I'll show him where."

Forbach had been let alone by officers for many years. In the Legion it was well known that he knew regulations and traditions much too well to risk punishment, and that his speeches and his actions would be upheld. As a general rule, officers outside the Legion avoided contact with him because he had a sharp tongue, was sensitive and usually could find high placed friends to intercede in his favor. That the major should forget this was a great blow to his pride. And if there was anything

that Forbach never avoided, it was trouble. To him, caution smacked of cowardice, and cowardice was much worse than murder.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Cambard protested. "You're so hot headed! Listen, there's one thing neither you nor anybody else can get away with, and that's insubordination. When I say they're out to get you, I mean they're out to get the Legion, because they know how proud we are of you in the outfit. He'll give so many orders that you'll get sore, and you'll interfere for the sake of the men—and there he'll have you. Your pension is due soon, anyway, and they'd like nothing better than to have it rushed through for 'the good of the service'."

Forbach paused thoughtfully. Cambard was right. Lavoine would have much on his side to counter any argument; he would say that Forbach, a veteran, had been too conceited to obey, and that even those who protected him knew well that the adjutant sought trouble wherever he came in contact with members of other units. Over and above him, the major and Lavoine sought to strike at the colonel who had backed him up. Forcing Forbach before a disciplinary council would amount to proving the regimental commander wrong.

"You're not so dull, Cambard," the Alsatian admitted. "What happened?"

"He came with the supply trucks, and naturally, after the lorries had gone down the trail, I went back to the office, for I didn't see him alight. He came in, started bellowing at me for not guarding the place more carefully, said that a hundred men could have entered just as he had. Then, before I could get out to warn you, he had everything changed in the office. Took your table for himself right away and had your greatcoat taken to your quarters. Yelled because we were using part of the room as a clothes closet and supply store for noncoms. And he said to get you at once so that he could tell you

what he thought of the way things were run."

"All right," Forbach snapped. "Come along. I'll show *you* something."

The proper plan had been formulated in his mind instantly. He entered the office, stood at attention after saluting, and, although he grew red under Lavoine's hard stare sweeping him from head to foot, introduced himself briskly—

"Adjutant Forbach, post commander, Lieutenant."

As he spoke, he recalled that he had seen and heard of Lavoine before. The man was not liked in his own regiment. He was tall, slender, with a slight stoop, and appeared almost forty. He had thick yellow hair and protruding blue eyes; the rest of his face was all bony chin and jaws.

"That's not quite accurate now," he stated, softly. "I am in charge here, Lieutenant Lavoine. You shall learn to know me as a just chief, but one who will not tolerate sloth. My first impression is very bad. No sergeant to meet the convoy of trucks; sentries seated and smoking. I understood that you were an old Legionnaire, and everywhere I hear nothing except 'Legion cleanliness'. I come here unannounced. I enter this office like a café. Everything is slack, dirty, filthy, disgusting. Your men look like the forty thieves. A sow could not find her offspring in your yards. Things will have to change, to snap up, immediately."

Forbach could have explained that the moment when a convoy of trucks passed the hamlet might be called a respite for the sentries, who knew, from the presence of the machines and the troops protecting them that they were safe from surprise. And he could have asked Lavoine how he could contrive to keep dust away when every shift of the wind brought in additional quantities from outside. But this would have been a departure from the system he had decided to adopt.

"At your orders, Lieutenant," he said

simply, staring straight ahead.

"No explanations to offer?"

"None, Lieutenant. I am sorry. We'll try to do better."

"Eh—you're Adjutant Forbach?" Lavoine asked.

"Yes, Lieutenant. At your service."

Lavoine was evidently puzzled, helpless. His whirlwind attack had dashed itself into thin air. There was nothing that he could punish Forbach for, as no instructions had been issued for the routine of the outpost.

"Dismissed."

Outside, Forbach smote Cambard on the back.

"See? From now on everything he says is correct. I've seen the trick work before. He'll get sick of it long before we will."

Cambard, less experienced, seemed doubtful. He believed, it was evident, that an officer was accustomed to silence and prompt obedience and would notice nothing unusual. But Forbach was sure of the result.



NEITHER the adjutant nor Cambard spoke to the men, but in some mysterious fashion all caught Forbach's cue at once. Perhaps an orderly had lingered to listen at the door. And it was an odd spectacle, that afternoon, to see Lavoine stalk angrily, grumbling and swearing, before respectful soldiers who accepted the most unjust reproaches without offer of explanation or visible resentment.

The lieutenant, who had come prepared to face mutinous, sulky men—he knew that Legionnaires would resent the sending of an outsider to command them—found privates carrying out orders at the double. The chap he indicated as orderly, a hard faced, dignified soldier wearing the military medal, accepted instantly and took care of his belongings as if he had been a Legion officer. When his old mare arrived the following day, a man volunteered to care for her, and she was attended to

like a racing thoroughbred.

Within two days, Lavoine's face was a constant purple from repressed rage. He felt himself unpopular, was aware that the men laughed at him behind his back, but had no opportunity to make a single remark. He tried to get a single man to break, to talk back and, when he failed in this, tried to win one over as an informer with money and privileges. The private took the bill, thanked him for the favors, but did not appear to understand what was expected of him in return.

During the third night Lavoine ordered the men out for inspection at three. The Legionnaires tumbled out, lined up in the yard, without an oath, a protest, or the least hint of anger. Miraculously, each one had his brushes, his reserve rations and the regulation number of cartridges.

"They look like Ali Baba's forty thieves," Lavoine said again, in desperation. "I want them shaved tomorrow morning."

And he was greeted at drill, during the forenoon, by forty shaven faces. Mustaches and beards carefully raised for weeks had been sacrificed without a whimper. Lavoine could find nothing to say. But he led them out for a practise march, with full kit. This was greatly needed, according to him, although each private walked sixteen miles every other day on patrol or hunting detail. He took them along the trails for forty kilometers, doing route step and march in formation at irregular intervals. When the water ran short, he quickened the pace. When he spotted a man perspiring, lagging behind, he would trot his mare to his side, lean from the saddle, saying:

"Come on—you're wonderful marchers in the Legion! Why, in my old company, no man ever shows fatigue, and we're nothing but ordinary soldiers!"

Swinging back to their quarters, the men sang; athletic games were organized during the evening: Lavoine had failed to break their spirit. On the fifth day

he ordered all peddlers away, stating that they were spies; and the men were short of liquids, soap and tobacco. Good humor seemed to prevail, nevertheless. The lieutenant could not understand it.

He tried to break young Cambard that evening, to tease him into a hasty word or gesture. He knew the affection linking the two noncoms, felt that Forbach would break his reserve to assist his friend. Or perhaps Lavoine no longer desired to punish any one, but felt himself in honor bound to win the odd game forced upon him.

"Cambard, come here."

The sergeant crossed the office, came to attention. He knew what to do, for there was a tacit code. One was presumed to answer questions fully, never volunteering a word.

"You are a Frenchman, Cambard? Thought so. Very intelligent man. Working for a commission, eh? Enlisted on impulse, to get away from some trouble or other? A girl?"

Cambard had failed in the written examinations for military school, because, sent to Paris with much money and little control, he had frequented cafés more often than *lycées*. Instead of waiting for the next year's examinations, he had decided to go through the ranks to achieve his goal, and the Legion had seemed obvious as the best place to learn. But Lavoine, at Ain-el-Rab, was always right.

"Yes, Lieutenant, a girl."

"Have a cigaret?" Lavoine pushed the box forward. Cambard was puzzled, then decided to accept. "Tell me, is this an unusual group of Legionnaires, or are they like others?"

"They're an average lot, Lieutenant."

"Why, they're no trouble at all—eh?" Lavoine lifted his voice, snarled, "Don't light that cigaret in here! You presume on my kindness. I have given orders against smoking in the office. I gave you that cigaret to smoke when off duty."

Cambard started, was about to toss

the cigaret on the table. But this was not the game. He drew out a case of hammered silver banded with gold and carefully stored the smoke.

"I thank you, Lieutenant."

"You may leave, Cambard," said Lavoine, who seemed somewhat ashamed of himself.

It was on the sixth day that he struck an angle of attack that could not be laughed off. He posted an order, stating that some of the men were in the habit of cutting up bullets into tiny fragments, to bring down small birds; this process injured the rifling. He concluded that, lest the order be ignored or evaded, all hunting was forbidden. And he reminded them all that unauthorized use of cartridges was a court-martial offense. All patrol leaders would be held responsible if any one of their men lacked his supply of ammunition, held to account for the last cartridge.

The men turned the difficulty at first by hiring shotguns from natives. Lavoine ruled against it, explaining that it was likely to bring the men in contact with civilians for the purpose of plotting desertion. This was ridiculous, but would hold good until investigated.

On the eighth day of Lavoine's reign one of the patrols brought in a large wild boar, already cut to pieces. Lavoine emerged from the office, ordered the men to open their pouches and show their cartridges. He sniffed at the guns. Finding no cartridges missing, he ordered a general checkup. Without result. And when he stood, raging and powerless, Corporal Barlier, known far and wide as a cold-blooded humorist, strode forward to explain.

"Lieutenant, we were walking along the trail, when this boar breaks from the bushes and rushes by. Without thinking of anything in particular, mechanically as it were, I let him have it. Down he went, stone dead! Then I began to think it would be shameful to waste the meat. Had it chopped up and brought along." The corporal drew his bayonet from the scabbard, clean and

oily. "Didn't hurt my blade, Lieutenant."

Lavoine squatted to seek for bullet holes. But he realized how foolish this close scrutiny seemed, for Legionnaires were past masters at camouflage. And the next day the patrols returned as usual, bags stuffed with quail and other birds, with hares, all presumably dropped with stones. The officer guessed what was happening, that the men were purchasing cartridges from the soldiers of the patrols coming from the blockhouse. But he could do nothing about it, and thus allowed matters to go smoothly for more than a week.

"He's done for," Cambard suggested.

"Not him; I know the type," Forbach replied. "Listen, Cambard, I'm doing this for the Legion. But the swine will pay for it. I have only a few more months to serve, then I get pensioned. I'll find him again, after that!"

Cambard, who wore the crossed swords of a master-fencer and had taught athletics, would have hesitated to tackle the older man. He sighed, probably at the thought that he was unlikely to witness the encounter. It would be a scene worth witnessing, one that would live long in Legion yarns.

During the feud the men at Ain-el-Rab had forgotten the political situation, which was growing tense. And they were startled when a runner came from the blockhouse one morning, rushing into the office.



LAVOINE came out almost immediately, beckoned to the bugler and ordered him to get the men together. Then he addressed Forbach and Cambard:

"Negotiations are attempted with the tribes, but planes are reporting masses of natives in the ravines south of us. From inside information just communicated all outposts, an attack is planned for tomorrow or the following day. A show of force is expected to delay their action, and give time for reenforcements to arrive from Meknes. For our

part, we are to make a demonstration in the general direction of Guard Tower 9, then return here, pack our stuff and move up to the blockhouse until trucks come to take us eastward. As soon as the patrols are back, inform me, and we can make the demonstration."

"They've noticed the blockhouse's signal, Lieutenant, and are coming in now," Cambard said. He indicated the white walls of the small fort on a distant hill. A red Bengal flare was recalling fatigue parties and patrols.

"All right," Lavoine agreed. He lighted a cigaret, waited until the returning Legionnaires had lined up with the others, then uttered an unexpected order, "Attention—inspection!"

He strolled down the line, flicking a pouch open, pulling a knapsack suspender, criticizing the distribution of weight elsewhere. He appeared absorbed, tense, lighted by some strong inner joy.

The men were in splendid condition, light khakis washed and scrubbed almost white, boots shining, buttons agleam. But they were all a trifle gaunt and worried. For several days they had lived in an atmosphere of madness. Forty-odd men playing a game against one who was powerful; forty-odd men scolded, held down, deprived of liberties, prey to boredom, milling endlessly under the ardent sun, shifting piles of dirt from one spot to another.

Taking advantage of a Legion ban on certain publications, Lavoine had withheld all books, magazines and newspapers printed in foreign languages. And he had revived an old regulation against the playing of cards for money. The change in habits, the constant oppression, had driven some of the younger privates to the verge of nervous collapse, and many showed twitching faces.

Lavoine himself showed the strain. He had been too nervous to sleep more than a few hours at a stretch, had not eaten much. But now he apparently had regained a measure of spirit.

Forbach understood why when the

officer reached the men of the returning patrols. They had come in excited, because of the signals, had probably neglected ordinary precautions, lulled as they were by Lavoine's recent indifference. The adjutant knew his suspicions would be confirmed when the lieutenant ordered them to slide back the bolts of their rifles, to open their pouches.

"This rifle has been fired," Lavoine announced, addressing a private. Without hesitation he unbuckled the fellow's canvas bag, brought out a hare. "Shot, this time. You had a warning, my lad. Sergeant, take his name and make a report—deterioration of government material, waste of ammunition. If you get away with less than six months, I'll marry your sister."

The man's jaws quivered; muscles lumped his pale skin. But his eyes remained straight ahead, as if he had not heard. Lavoine chuckled with pleasure, went to the next man and produced a brace of birds from his bag, sniffed his rifle.

"This one, also! Sergeant, his name and a report, please."

Forbach kept steady with an effort. Lavoine was winning, had turned the game into a debacle for the Legionnaires. For one of the rules had been to avoid giving the officer opportunities to inflict severe punishment. The men stirred restlessly, a wind of revolt swept them, but the adjutant steadied them with his example. For the moment Lavoine held the upper hand.

"So much for these two," the lieutenant resumed in a brisk tone. "As for the rest, I am going to give you all a lesson in discipline and obedience. When troopers are untrustworthy, won't carry out orders, they should not be armed. Today we are marching out on a demonstration, without cartridges! Corporals, gather the ammunition. I have sent for a squad of Tirailleurs to guard them here for you. Legionnaires, you shall promenade before the enemy without cartridges because you misused those trusted to you!"

As he spoke, Lavoine lashed his leg-gings with his riding stick; then watched, whistling between his teeth as the order was carried out. He was deriving intense satisfaction from the incident, knowing what a humiliation it inflicted upon the men, for it was not merely a sort of unofficial degradation, but it was schoolboys' punishment. Lavoine would relate this story and it would spread. This would expose every member of the detachment to ridicule for the length of his stay in the Legion. And it would be greeted as a good joke on the Corps itself.

"What if we are attacked, Lieutenant?" Forbach asked.

"No attack until tomorrow. Information is sure."

"Information is never sure in Morocco, Lieutenant."

Lavoine hesitated; vague dismay rose in his eyes. But for his pride, he would have reconsidered, for he had been in Africa long enough to be aware that the natives seemed inspired by a sixth sense for propitious undertakings at small risks. However, he had spoken, and the joke was too good to spoil—forty-odd Legionnaires walking before a foe, without cartridges!

"If we are attacked, Adjutant? Why, you men are Legionnaires and fond of cold steel! You use bayonets so well against boars that much less tough, less mobile targets, such as human foes, can offer no serious problem."

Forbach did not insist. After all, his responsibility was covered and, like the majority of veteran noncoms, he dreaded responsibility worse than death. The demonstration would not take them more than three miles from Ain-el-Rab and, in an emergency, they could fall back rapidly. Should he make a fuss, it would only expose the whole regiment to more ridicule.

"Adjutant, the order is for you also. And you, Sergeant."

The two obeyed. Forbach was puzzled more and more, for he did not know whether this was one of the cases pro-

vided for in regulations, when an inferior has not only the right but the duty to assume initiative and interfere with a chief. But Lavoine was neither drunk, ill nor insane.

And should the demonstration be carried out without incident, many would uphold his decision as correct. Such measures were recommended to obtain a grip on sulky, undisciplined men. At Charleroi, during the first days of the World War, a colonel had ordered his battalions to drill under fire until the men steadied to their job. The story of the North African conquest offered several similar episodes.



AS SOON as the squad of Native Infantry arrived to guard supplies and ammunition, the detachment marched out behind Lavoine. The day was clear, there was nothing different in the atmosphere; but Forbach knew that every man in the detachment felt as he did, oddly light, unprotected, nude. The familiar weight of the cartridges was missing. The rifle, usually a source of comfort, had become merely a stick. Legionnaires fingered the smooth, dark walnut stocks feverishly. The air seemed filled with a choking menace.

"Wonder if we'll manage to get a boar." Lavoine bent from the saddle to speak banteringly to Forbach. "I have been curious to see just how it was done."

They reached the foot of the slope on which stood Guard Tower 9. It was identical in structure to such small forts in the Middle Atlas, resembling a gigantic, up-ended match box made of concrete, surrounded by a few strands of barbed wire. Four to six men were stationed there, relieved every three days. No sign of the enemy was seen on the way, and the planes, which had been soaring overhead shortly after dawn, had vanished.

When the halt was called, the Legionnaires breathed easier, for when Lavoine gave the next order they would

be within an hour's march of their cartridges. But the lieutenant dismounted, stretched his legs, grinned.

"We'll rest. Stack arms."

The men obeyed; but although they sat down or sprawled on the grass with outward indifference, they could not keep their eyes from wandering from the officer to their empty rifles. This halt was another humiliation. Forbach became worried, thinking that a prolonged stay might puzzle the enemy's spies, doubtless concealed in the bushes of the distant slopes.

"Barlier!" Lavoine beckoned to the corporal, handed him a small stone. "I don't expect you to find a boar—but surely you can locate a rabbit, one single, little rabbit? Use this to kill it."

Barlier saluted, accepted the pebble and strode some distance from the rest, pretending to be waiting for game. This made a bizarre scene, these men exchanging joking words without a smile, with the consequent undercurrent of mirth flowing through their nervousness. Without orders, at the risk of displeasing the officer, Forbach detached four men to points of vantage. He missed the ordinary routine, the placing of automatic riflemen, the alert, cheering self-confidence of the men.

"An hour should be enough," Lavoine said, glancing at his watch. "Seventeen minutes left, Adjutant."

Cambard saw that the officer was perspiring. He understood that the tension was severe for Lavoine. In case of trouble, the officer would have a difficult explanation to make to his chiefs. But Lavoine evidently possessed a certain type of courage. He was willing to gamble his career for pride. He reasoned, very likely, that the natives could not know that the Legionnaires were without ammunition, therefore would not attack before the day scheduled for their onrush.

Several men rose, pointed. Another green Bengal flare lifted from Blockhouse 4. Then one of the sentries posted by Forbach returned, reported that

armed men were scrambling down the slopes. A plane appeared, circled above the blockhouse several times. Something must have occurred to cause this agitation.

"Halt over," Lavoine snapped.

Forbach consulted his watch and saw that the waiting time had been cut eight minutes. The men hastily formed threes and marched away.

"The hills are swarming with natives," a Legionnaire shouted.

"The plane—look! The plane is coming down on us!"

Some of the men who had served in the World War broke ranks and dodged into the bushes beside the trail as the machine swooped low over their heads. The reconstruction of the scene had been too exact for their quivering nerves, and they expected the ripping of a machine gun, the explosions of air bombs to follow. Forbach was glad, for the moment, that no rifle had been loaded.

"Message! He's dropped a message!"

Barlier was running down the trail to pick up a note fastened around a bit of metal with an elastic.

The men were straggling back to formation, shamefaced, grinning, as the lieutenant unfolded the paper. He scanned it rapidly, passed one hand over his lips in an unconscious gesture of dismay, and handed it to Forbach.

The adjutant read it, stammering the words, for he could not read in silence. The news spread from one end of the detachment to the other.

"Blockhouse signals enemy closing on guard tower. Six men within short of food and water. Beg you assure their immediate relief and withdrawal to blockhouse."

There were men up there, six men who counted on the Legion for salvation. Forbach saw forming in the faces of his soldiers his own desperate resolution. It would be madness, absurd self-sacrifice, but the Legion had never been looked to in vain. A surge of unreasoning heroism swept them all.

"We must go back and get ammunition," Lavoine broke in, dully.

"Would mean two hours," Forbach protested. "The slobs will have closed in by that time and it will be too late."

"No cartridges—can't be helped, Adjutant."

"Can't be helped?" Forbach laughed loudly, all irresolution wiped out.

His powerful hands ripped Lavoine from the saddle, and at the same time he kicked the mare in the belly. She galloped away toward Ain-el-Rab. Then the adjutant took the revolver from his chief's holster and slid it into his tunic.

"You can make monkeys out of us, you can march us out without cartridges, but you can't make the Legion quit those boys up there! There's no time to go for cartridges? All right! We'll go without them." Forbach laughed louder. "You wanted to see Legionnaires use the bayonet? Come along and see. Cold steel? Splendid!"

He turned to the Legionnaires.

"What do you say? Do we go up there with the forks and bring those fellows out?"

For answer, the men whirled about and ran in the direction they had come from, with a sort of fervent, almost drunken verve, sweating, grinning. It was one of the moments when life meant little. And Forbach, urging Lavoine before him, knew that it was for such things they had come; that reckless self-sacrifice and high venture had been the lure to draw them from all corners of the world.

Suddenly the men's faces set; a strange, ominous calm came over them. The automatic rifle in the tower had opened fire. The enemy was near. Forbach ran easily, his brain numbed. With forty men properly armed, there would have been every chance of success. As it was, he felt it would be a useless gesture. But that gesture had to be made.

The first shot was fired at them, more shots; the first man fell. Forbach

was beside him in two leaps, picked up the bayoneted rifle. He signaled to Cambard to take the right of the line.

"Down awhile, everybody. Get your breath before starting up that slope! There are cartridges in the tower, and we can kid them a few minutes that we're holding our fire!" He knelt himself, breathed deeply. Then he was up, lifted his hands. "Fix bayonets! *En avant, la Légion!*"

The bugler slung his rifle, as steel bristled along the line. He wiped his lips with the back of one hand, brushed the mouthpiece of his instrument against his trousers. Then the sprightly, ardent notes of the charge resounded. Forbach went in the lead, one hand on Lavoine's shoulder. A scattering of shots greeted them, and hillmen were seen running, at startling speed, rifles swinging low as they crouched.

"They know!" Barlier shouted. "Look at them coming at us in the open!"

Whether by instinct or reasoning; the mountain warriors had guessed that the rifles of the detachment were useless. Their own guns emptied, instead of dodging to cover to reload as usual, they closed in with knives, clubs and rifle butts. They appeared greedy for close conflict with these men who had so often mowed them down at long range with the deadly precision of their bullets.

"Lie down when they're close in," Forbach called to Lavoine, suddenly remembering that the officer was altogether unarmed.

And he hurled him to the ground as the first opponent leaped at them from behind a bush. At the same moment the two parties clashed along the entire line, men whirled nearby, but Forbach could pay no heed to them.

As always in bayonet fighting, he felt that he was living in a nightmare, both his own movements and those of his foe seeming unreal, utterly deliberate and slow. He saw the straight, needle-like blade of a home-made dagger come in sight beneath the rifle's bole, which

the native clutched with one hand. The point rose toward his chest. And his own right hand traveled to meet a wrist, his fingers gripped a bony forearm. The warrior's face was very near his eyes, and he saw the contraction of his effort in the gathering muscles of his jaws, saw flecks of spittle clinging to the straggling beard and mustache.

At the same time there rose in his mind a contrasting picture of himself, his face tense and suddenly white, contorting with hatred and terror, for he was afraid, mortally afraid of the steel, as all men are at heart, and knew that in his eyes could be read the same speculation he read in those of his enemy. In a few seconds who would be alive?

The arm rose resistlessly; the blade ripped through the thin cloth. He felt the touch of the metal on his bare flesh. But the blade rasped on an obstacle, the revolver in his tunic, then tore through the garment, unstained. Forbach's left hand ripped the rifle from the other's grasp. The weapon hurtled back until the handle of the bayonet was firm in the adjutant's fist. And the Legionnaire stabbed upward as with a knife.

The mountaineer collapsed gently, as if his body had been hinged. Forbach looked about, saw men rising, and as they swayed their heads warily to seek new danger their eyes met his with dim recognition and intense astonishment that they were still alive. The adjutant saw Lavoine among them, clutching a curved knife. The fool had attacked a hillman with his bare hands—and had won! Bayonets jabbed, butts swung, crushing out tenacious life in men who refused to die.



FORBACH saw the barbed wire within two hundred yards.

But heedless of the shots fired upon them from the tower, the mountain people faced the Legionnaires. Both parties understood they were struggling for the same prize, the cases of reserve ammunition stored in the

building.

"Into them!" Forbach shouted.

There was no need for him to push Lavoine now. The officer sped like a frightened hare. He had picked up a rifle and seemed avid to use the bayonet. He found what he sought, threw his whole weight into the blow, tumbled on his prone foe. When he rose, Forbach saw that his arms were red to the elbow, his tunic spattered with blood. Then the adjutant looked down at his own hands, and saw that they also were moist, sticky, red.

He took another deep breath and went ahead.

Again there was that confused, chaotic clash, the *mêlée*, with grunts, shouts, screams. Forbach was deafened by the detonation of a rifle close to his face, felt prickling burns on his neck and cheeks, while the stench of burnt powder filled his nostrils. The man who had missed him point-blank closed in. But this time Forbach was wary, and with a swift, deft motion he avoided the clutching fingers.

Forbach stepped to one side, as in the fencing drill, gained clearance, then rammed the blade home. Foolishly the other sought to ward off the lunge with one arm, and the twenty-two inch spike pierced through the biceps to reach the breast beyond.

A step backward to recover, and he was ready again. Some one clutched at his legs, and he reversed the rifle to smash down with the butt. It was a wounded Legionnaire groping for support. The adjutant shook him off. He could be picked up on the way down—if any one ever came down!

The air was filled with thunder, and the *tack-tack-tack* of a machine gun dominated the tumult, while an immense shadow swept the struggling men. The plane! The intervention of the aviators gave the Legionnaires a respite. They rushed upward.

Forbach tore his trousers on the wires, got through to the cleared space between it and the wall. Legionnaires

were knocking off the lids of boxes thrown to them from the platform; cartridges were tossed into eager hands.

"Where's the sergeant in charge?" Forbach called.

"Up here—come on in—"

Forbach entered the building. There was light in the small room, flooding through the trapdoor in the platform's flooring. Empty shells jerked out of the automatic rifle tumbled down, glittering, struck with sharp little clicks on the rungs of the ladder, clearly audible above the hammering detonations.

"Come down out of there. We've got to leave," Forbach shouted, "and that plane can't handle them forever."

"All right, coming down—just a few rounds more," the *Tirailleur* promised.

The *Legionnaires* outside were shooting rapidly. Forbach heaved a grunt of relief. With ammunition, the retreat could be covered, the wounded picked up. Success was a certainty with no greater risks involved than are usual in combat. Cambard came in, escorting Lavoine.

"He wants to see you." The sergeant held a handkerchief to his brow, which was slashed open. "Say, we left seventeen on the way up and—"

Lavoine pushed him aside violently to face Forbach. The lieutenant's face was grimy, and as he passed one hand over his eyes his tears mingled with the dust and soot on his face.

"You know it's up to me! Adjutant, an old soldier like you will understand. I can't face court-martial; I can't live with those lives on my conscience! This man is trying to keep me from it. He reasons—he reasons—"

"Cambard, get out and stay out. You're needed with the men," Forbach snapped. When the sergeant had left, he looked at the officer with quick sym-

pathy. "I get you! You want your gun, eh?"

"My gun, yes, my gun."

"Listen, you've treated us rotten, but you behaved like a man on the way up. You're a soldier, and you get the gun." The veteran drew the weapon, an old-fashioned service revolver, from his tunic, removed five shells which he held in his hand, and presented it to Lavoine, butt first as was proper. "One cartridge's enough."

"Thanks," the lieutenant whispered.

"Better wait until the guys upstairs have gone; the less they see the less they'll talk. Nobody'll know you did this yourself. I'll say you were hit."

The adjutant stood on the first rungs of the ladder, shouted:

"Eh, you, up there! Staying all day?"

When the sergeant and his automatic rifle crew had slid down and darted out of the door, Forbach nodded to Lavoine.

He knew that the officer hated him deeply, indirectly held him responsible for what had happened. And he wondered whether Lavoine would not chance shooting him down first, to take one of the remaining shells for himself later.

But Lavoine thought only of his own remissness, of the seventeen casualties he would have to account for before a court of brother officers. Despair and shame had wiped out thought and hatred.

Forbach heard the shot and mounted the stairs. Lavoine was dead. Forbach picked up the weapon, for arms must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. Then he turned toward the door to join his detachment. But before leaving he halted for a last duty. He turned, stood at attention and saluted.