

# BEYOND COURAGE



**A**BOVE him, Lieutenant Fortier saw the robust back of Sergeant Klaus swaying with the efforts of the climb. Behind him, the Legionnaires of his section panted and swore; bushes cracked and stones rolled. The Moroccan sun, already high, beat down upon the slope.

"Getting there, Lieutenant." Klaus had braced his heavy boots solidly before turning to reveal his broad, red face. His eyes were clear, limpid as water spread

over blue glass. "Captain means to serve them a dish of their own cooking. You'll see how they like it."

"Ready!"

Klaus resumed the ascent. The lieutenant followed.

He was as tall, as broad shouldered as the big sergeant, but leaner, more finely built. His face was darkly tanned, wrinkles converging to the corners of the gray eyes. He was twenty-six.

The Legionnaires following them were

# *A Novelette of the French Foreign Legion*

By GEORGES SURDEZ



"The crest, Lieutenant," Klaus warned.

He progressed on his stomach, and Fortier slid to his side quickly. A man standing would have been silhouetted against the blue—visible from any angle for miles. Fortier cautioned his men with a gesture, swept the ridge in a swift glance of appraisal. Then he allotted a definite emplacement to each of his four combat

of several races, of many types. They ranged from tall, long limbed blonds to the squat, swarthy Mediterraneans. But the majority were composed of the sturdy, dependable German stock, basic element of the foreign regiments of France.

They crept slowly up the slope, which seemed to lead straight into the blazing sky. Out of the short, brownish green grass, boulders and shrubs jutted. Stunted trees grew in widely spaced clusters.

groups. Bending low, crawling when necessary for concealment, the Legionnaires filed rapidly to the positions indicated. They did not converse, made no unnecessary sounds.

The canvas jackets were stripped off the automatic rifles, and the weapons, dark metal and oiled steel, were soon ready to fire, propped on the stumpy fore supports, heavy muzzles thrusting into the foliage. Surrounded by their attentive crews, they assumed a definite aspect

of living individuality, became more than simple killing tools of metal. The big leather pouches were unbuckled, the magazines taken out and laid within easy reach.

"Ready!" Each gun commander signaled in turn.

Fortier nodded. He was satisfied with these men. He had known them two or three days, but five years in the Legion in other parts of North Africa and in Syria had enabled him to distinguish well trained soldiers at a glance.

The lieutenant propped himself on one elbow, parted the leaves screening his face deftly, scanned the country spread below him. The scene emanated rustic peace and contentment. From the purplish, white topped slopes of the Atlas, the lower ranges of hills swept toward his observation post like petrified waves. A streak of silver picked out by the sun was the surface of a mountain brook in a remote valley.

Perhaps a kilometer away reappeared the trail that Fortier had left to climb the hill. The red ribbon curved around the base of the high ground and stretched in the faded green of the grass, with a wooded ridge on the left, immediately below the section commanded by Fortier, and a sharp declivity on the right. The road vanished three kilometers farther as if swallowed by a gap in the hills. Fortier's attention concentrated on that pass. His eyes swept the slopes, thickly wooded, strewn with boulders and cut by the ditches left by many rain storms.

According to reports turned in by emissaries kept by France within the hostile zone, it was at that spot that the attack would be launched upon the supply-convoy bound for Post Walter from Khenifra. If this information were correct, there must be at this moment several hundred riflemen concealed almost within rifle range. Fortier looked for a flash of steel, a suspicious movement. He saw nothing. This meant little. Berbers have a justly deserved reputation for remaining invisible until they choose to be seen.

"The convoy . . ." Klaus whispered. Red dust whirled up from the path, pounded upward from the hoofs of trotting horses. These riders were *mokhrazenis*, natives of the nearby loyal tribes, who served as scouts. They wore red or blue cloaks and rode perched high on their saddles. The rigid line of a carbine crossed each pommel. The man in the lead was a Frenchman, an officer, easily spotted even at this distance by the glitter of the braid on his *képi*; Lieutenant Gallar, once of the Spahis, now of the Native Affairs.

Fortier watched him with deep admiration, for he was being tested. He knew that an attack was almost certain, was aware that many rifles were slowly converging upon him, yet had to keep up an outward semblance of nonchalance. Two hundred and fifty yards behind the horsemen came the first section of the escort—Legionnaires marching in three files of khaki. A dapper figure strode abreast of the first rank, Sub-Lieutenant Martin.

Then came the first detachment of laden mules, plodding steadily. Fortier saw the arms of the native drivers rise and fall, heard the faint echo of loud voices. On either side of this procession of pack animals marched Legionnaires, rifles ready. In a clear space a combat group of ten followed, then the second detachment of pack mules, also flanked by soldiers.

Between these and the section of Legion in fighting array bringing up the rear, was a rider wearing a flowing white cloak—Captain Prazini, commanding.

A week before Fortier had reported at regimental headquarters at Meknes. He was assigned to Post Walter, Middle Atlas, and had immediately gone to Khenifra, capital of the Zayan district. There he met Captain Prazini, who was taking up a supply convoy, and would remain to enlarge the fortifications with a view to establishing a central post on the site of the smaller blockhouse.

When news had leaked through to the French that the convoy would be attacked, the commanding officer of the re-

gion suggested that Prazini accept reenforcements, in the shape of North African infantrymen. Prazini, an old time Legionnaire, not over friendly with other units, refused, taking the possible result upon his own shoulders. He knew the Chleuhs of old had campaigned against them before the World War when the French first clashed with the mountain tribes. He had kept his plan to himself, however, until that morning, when he called Fortier.

"I have heard of you, Fortier. I know you can be depended upon to act intelligently. Here is the situation: I shall not permit the riders to go by the pass, but have instructed Gallar to nose about on the slopes to force their hand. At the first shot, we shall take the usual measures, the pack mules will fall back a couple of kilometers, under guard of one section. For your part, I assign you to the rear guard. When you arrive at this point—" he indicated a spot on the map—"do not keep behind us, but climb the hill and hold the crest. Meanwhile I will thin out the flankers to form a skeleton section for the rear, enough to deceive those observing us from a distance. Use caution; the Berbers must not learn where you are, must have no idea of your new position. That's understood?"

"I shall do my best, Captain."

"That's all that's needed. You're new here but you know these fellows we're coping with from meeting them in the desert. They are not fighting for the glory of Allah; they want loot. Loot is to be found with the convoy. Their choice of ground is all right. They'll have us between the slope and the declivity. The convoy can not maneuver with ease. They'll do their usual stunt, make a very determined demonstration forward, draw our fire while the larger mass speeds on our left flank, hidden by the bushes and trees, concentrates again and attacks the convoy to the rear of the engaged units. You see your rôle, then."

"I am to enfilade them with my automatics from the crest of the hill just before they launch their attack on the convoy."

"In case they don't bite and fight differently, or fail to attack us at the pass, use your own judgment as to when you rejoin us. I'll watch the crest—and I don't want to see hide nor hair of your men. Everything hinges on that. Have Sergeant Klaus go in the lead. He knows the ground, was there with another column a year ago. Good man, Klaus, even though he's a bit conceited."



FORTIER remembered the words now as he looked at Klaus. He had found him efficient and very likable, a curious blending of almost feminine sensitiveness and brute strength, not so much intelligent as cunning, taught by experience, the best teacher in mountain warfare.

"Gun moved. See it, Lieutenant?"

Far off, a breech block had opened and shut and the slight movement had been telegraphed to them by a sharp flicker. By this time the advance guard was within long rifle shot of the pass. Fortier and his men would not come into play for many minutes after the first discharge, yet the anxiety of approaching action quickened his pulse. His neck throbbed steadily. Below Klaus' big car he could see a like pulsation. The gun commanders spoke to their men in low tones.

The scouts had arrived at the path and grouped as if for conference. Then upon a signal from Gallar evidently, they separated into two small groups, which in turn strung out into isolated riders to scour the slopes on either side. Fortier could not distinguish them clearly, lingered the field glasses in the case. But the sun spilling on the lenses might be seen and he refrained this natural impulse. The colorful little blotches that were horsemen jerked steadily farther, appeared and vanished through the trees.

Minutes dragged by.

Then a flicker—followed by the far off whack of a Mauser. The riders turned and came tumbling down the slope into the road and back toward the infantry, which was already deploying. The pack

mules had halted, there was a moment of confusion, then the entire convoy started back in good order.

The fusillade swelled, punctuated by the bursts of an automatic from the first section. Fortier sought anxiously for Gallar, breathed easier when he saw the golden gleam of his *képi* in the center of a group. The lieutenant, reputed born lucky, had once again proved the rumor. One of the riders was being taken aside; two men were bending over him. The first blood had been scored by the Chleuhs.

As if by schedule, the combat developed. A handful of Legionnaires were escorting the mules to a place of supposed safety, while the rest of the company sought cover. The hammering of a Hotchkiss machine gun broke out, there were a few grenade explosions. As yet, it was hard to discern whether the captain intended to retreat or force his way through the pass. The last might be unwise, for he had perhaps two hundred men available for fighting, while reports mentioned the probable strength of the enemy as over seven hundred.

"Here they come," said Klaus, to whom Fortier had confided Prazini's plans after the actual movement was under way. "Say, isn't the Old Man a wise guy? Called it right again, this time."

Almost invisible as yet, because their brown garments merged with the soil, groups of natives were sliding along the slope through the trees. They moved with the almost unbelievable swiftness and agility Berbers show in action. In ten, fifteen minutes, they would be in position to attack the convoy. Elsewhere, their comrades were keeping the sections busy, attacking vigorously, darting forward, withdrawing, darting forward again, in swift, deft motions, hard to foresee.

Fortier's glance picked up the gun commanders one by one and he held up his hand to restrain too great enthusiasm. A hasty discharge now would spoil the whole affair for the French. With the hammer back and a nervous finger on the trigger, the accidental shot was a constant danger. Sergeants and corporals

evidently sensed this at the same time, for each firer lowered his hand.

These minutes of waiting, with the preliminary thrills of action, were the compensation the men had for their hard training, their many privations.

The first of the Chleuhs reached the point of concentration, splendidly chosen, in a depression whose lip was screened by trees and bushes. Prazini, who knew the lay of the ground, had evidently selected the hiding place of Fortier's men after much consideration, for the massing was under way within five hundred meters; that is within excellent range, where even men less well trained could have little excuse for missing.

More and more mountaineers came, until there were probably three hundred crouching, each with a modern repeating rifle in his hand. In cloth or leather sacks slung around their necks, they carried additional cartridges. Many of them wore a string belt through which a long, naked blade was passed—the clumsy yet magnificently efficient knife of the hillmen.

Fortier took a swift survey of the convoy massed on the road protected by its handful of khaki clad soldiers, and admired Prazini. The captain knew how to gamble. He had accepted the chance of a mistake on Fortier's part as meaning complete debacle. For the Chleuhs, unless checked from the flank, would submerge the defenders with the first rush.

At last, no more men appeared. A half dozen natives crawled toward the road, widely spaced, each one to become a sort of guide post when the attack was started. Aside from these scouts, no one moved below. It was an impressive sight, those crouched, grim men tensing for the fight ahead. Meanwhile, a new detail presented itself. Other mountaineers had formed a thin skirmish line at an angle to the road, to enfilade the sections which they expected to double back upon the convoy at the first sign of an attack.

The leader of the Chleuhs, whether Sidi Moha or another, had foreseen all possibilities, save what Prazini had organized. A single watcher posted on this hill

would have altered the whole engagement. In combat with another tribe of their own breed, the mountaineers would certainly have taken measures of the sort. Against the French led troops, which usually depended, when moving in large bodies, upon airplane reconnoitering, they had thought such precautions foolish.

Fortier signaled the range, allotted the objectives for fire by signs. The firers grasped the protruding grips of their weapons once more. One or two of the purveyors gave final, fond attention to the set of the clips on the breech blocks. The lieutenant knew that the main body of the Chleuhs were covered, and concentrated his attention on the scouts. He must fire at the right moment, just as the enemy received the order to charge.

So completely did the job before him grip his mind that he was not conscious of the heavy firing from the other sectors of the field. He felt alone, coping with the raiders. Small details were etched clearly: a non-commissioned officer with the convoy had gone aside, lifted his hand; a tiny flare showed that he was lighting pipe or cigaret.

One of the Chleuhs who had crawled forward returned toward the main body, halted and started to lift his hand.

Fortier's voice cut out.

"Fire!"



**THE FIRE** bursts struck short. Dirt spurted under the impacts of the bullets. Then all four guns were on the target.

The blast of lead struck the Chleuhs; their ranks appeared to quiver. For several seconds they seemed rooted to the spot, motionless, uncertain where the danger lay. Then they scattered, many speeding toward the convoy where the Legionnaires and the drivers, made alert by the ripping of shots from above, shot them down one after another.

Targets grew scarcer with each passing second. The mountaineers had recovered from their bewilderment and with their marvelous ability to use cover had literally vanished. The bodies of those struck

down in the surprise attack were left scattered where they had dropped, but already men were crawling back to collect ammunition and rifles, expensive commodities in the Middle Atlas.

These searching parties were fired upon by the Legionnaires equipped with ordinary carbines, yet they kept at their task bravely. Answering fire came from various hiding places, the whack of a Mauser or the thud of a more ancient weapon. Lead whined overhead, leaves suddenly parted from a bush with a tearing sound, scattered in the air.

The automatics settled down to adjusted fire, working away in short spasmodic bursts, like the barking of a dog giving tongue at sight of the quarry. The action was nearly over. Before long the enemy would vanish. They had failed in their chief purpose, obtaining booty from the convoy, and they cared little for glory.

Meanwhile, at the scene of the other engagement, near the pass, a section had deployed on a wider front to leave a detachment free. Led by Prazini, fifty or sixty Legionnaires were doubling back toward the convoy. They were met by the fusillade of the protective line thrown on a diagonal from the road to meet just such an emergency. Three or four were left in the red dust; the rest plunged up the embankment into the bushes.

The glassy smashes of hand grenades began. Bayonets glittered. And through the whirling conflict Prazini rose, conspicuous, unafraid.

Stories that Fortier had heard about him everywhere in the Legion seemed proved—steel or lead could not touch him. In full sight, doubtless selected by dozens of snipers, he was untouched while a mule driver had gone down near the convoy, probably hit by a "lost" bullet.

Soon it was evident that the Chleuhs had abandoned all pretense of holding the pass. Their retreat was south by east. The bursts of the automatic nosed around bushes and rocks to find them.

"It's over," Klaus said.

The Legionnaires were in fact advancing up the knolls, cautiously, firing at in-

tervals. Suddenly, the first man stood on the ridge, then disappeared on the other side. Immediately below Fortier's section the last of the native groups had passed by.

"We'll go down now," Fortier announced.

He took the lead. One or two bullets saluted him, droned near his face—the last shots of the engagement. In ten minutes his section had joined the others.

A lean, yellow haired sergeant came to Fortier.

"Nice work, Lieutenant. Thirty-two of them here—Allah knows how many in the bushes. Captain Prazini said for you to join him at the convoy."

Fortier passed through the huddled bodies of his victims. Some one had gathered a bunch of wild flowers and placed them in an outstretched hand. The face was thrown back, grinning through the reddish beard. The poor devil seemed to be offering flowers to the passers-by.

Men were gathering knives and amulets, possessions as sacred to a Berber as a wallet or a watch to a European. The convoy had already started when Fortier reached the road, but his horse had been kept for him by the rear guard.

He mounted and joined Prazini a half mile farther on.

Joachim Prazini was a Corsican, risen from the ranks of the pre-war Legion, formerly with the mounted company of Igli, one of the celebrated types of the corps. He was young, under thirty-five.

His naturally dark, coarse skin had been toughened by years of exposure to sun and wind into a hard, leathery surface. His low forehead sloped toward a thatch of bristling, short cropped hair, wiry, black save for a tinge of gray at the temples. Beneath the long thick mustaches his mouth was firm, the lips full and very red. His chin was held forward by muscular jaws. The head was poised on a powerful neck planted on massive shoulders.

His big torso was tightly held by an old type dark tunic, with the ancient, re-

spectable full loops of gold stripe to mark his rank. He wore light khaki riding breeches, almost white, extremely well tailored, showing off the muscles of the thighs, flaring above the knees. His calves were caught in high boots of soft scarlet leather; the spurs were silvered.

The majestic sweep of the blue lined *burnous* of fine white wool, the dust veil that was wrapped around his braided *képi* and curled about his neck, combined in a whole effect that was theatrical and showed an obvious love for show and color. But the first impression of mediocre intelligence was dispelled when one encountered his glance. The eyes were large, deeply set under strong brows. In the center of a very slender rim of brown, the pupils glistened like coal. There was intelligence, mad courage and immense pride in those eyes.



HE GATHERED the reins in his left hand, brought his handsome Barbe horse about and returned to greet Fortier. The lieutenant, pleased with the success of the undertaking, smiled. But there was no answering flash of teeth, no approval in the captain's voice.

"Well, Fortier?"

"Things went splendidly."

"You're evidently satisfied, pleased with yourself?"

"Yes, Captain."

"There were only thirty-two bodies picked up at the meeting place. You fired too early. With four automatics concentrated on those men, how did any escape? Why didn't you wait until they were all gathered, ready to attack?"

"I did, Captain. Their leader lifted his hand to order them forward—and I opened fire."

"I suppose that can be proved by Sergeant Klaus?"

"If you need proof of my word, it can."

"I hope so. Too late to mend matters now."

"What am I to do, Captain?"

"Assume command of the rear guard, as before."

Prazini wheeled his horse about and was off at a fast clip. He was evidently angry. Fortier tried to understand why, and failed. He could not sincerely believe that automatic fire at five hundred yards should blast every Berber from the face of the earth. And the full score had not been counted. There were undoubtedly as many bodies scattered in the bushes. A twenty per cent. loss—that was not a record to be ashamed of. Fortier's high opinion of Prazini lowered swiftly.

He dismounted, led his horse by the bridle and finally halted near Gallar and his men, who were grouped about some one on the ground. A medical sub-lieutenant was drying his hands on a piece of cloth, smiling.

"Tough lad—he'll be on his feet in six weeks."

The wounded native rider, first man hit in the engagement, was placed on a mule. Gallar spoke with him in Arabic. Then he saw Fortier and came to greet him. Gallar was about Fortier's age, slighter, shorter. He was a handsome man with charming manners. The son of a government official, he had been brought up in Morocco and was, by exception, the right man in the right place.

"Badly hurt, that chap of yours?"

"Through the chest. They're hard to kill. I know of one who covered sixty miles on horseback with two slugs from an old *moukhala* in his bowels."

"The captain bawled me out for having dropped only thirty-two men before they took cover. The wounded must have crawled off."

"Listen, Fortier—" Gallar hesitated, then went on, "I might as well tell you from the start. Never expect to satisfy Prazini. Never expect a word of praise *after* you've done anything. *Before* is another story. He'll kid you to get you to break your neck for him . . . Works once or twice. Are you going on?"

"Waiting for my section to come up."

"I'll wait with you. I've had my fill of being in the lead. I died a thousand deaths on the way up that slope." Gallar took off his *képi*, pushed his fingers

through two rents. "Varnished all over with good luck paint, I am. Have you a cigaret—gave my packet to that chap." He struck a match, smoked. "Not sore at me, are you?"

"Why?"

"For criticizing Prazini."

"The devil—no!"

"That's right. You're old enough to distinguish between corps spirit and common sense. There's a dividing line, you know. Young Martin raked me properly for mentioning his idol in a way that was not wholly complimentary."

"Serious youngster, isn't he?"

"Horribly earnest. Not long out of school, dropped here under the orders of the famous Prazini, his loyalty was entire. Verbally, it still is. Privately, I'm not so sure. Prazini has a way of cutting men to the bone with his remarks. When Martin first arrived he gave him a long lecture on the Legion being one large family, where the officer knows his men personally. Three days later he berated him for conversing too long with Klaus.

"The old time non-coms know Prazini and pay no attention to his scolding. The men worship him. He mentions the fact that he can still pack a kit better than any man in the outfit—and so he can. Glad I won't be under his orders at Post Walter. I have independent charge of native affairs there—and don't let him put his nose in my business. Prazini is a hog, that's all. Wants to achieve things himself and blames his subordinates for not making his successes greater."

"Smart man, however."

"Would make an excellent general—but makes a rotten friend."

## II

A DETACHMENT of Legion which held Post Walter remained to help in the construction of a larger enclosure. Despite surface grumbling, the men took pride in the tradition of the corps: The Legion makes its own roads, its own buildings.

The site was well chosen; at the top of

a high hill, dropping abruptly facing the dissident zone, it was easy to approach from the French side. Stretches of the trail between Khenifra and the Post were unfinished. Automobiles could not assure regular service. Occasionally a staff officer got through in a light American car, but the ponderous trucks could not. The outpost was linked with Khenifra and other points within French zone by telegraph and wireless, and the isolation was relative.

Fortier, not new to outpost life, fell into the routine without jar. Captain Prazini ate alone in his quarters. Fortier and Martin messed together in a little tin roofed shack flanking their sleeping rooms. Among the Legionnaires they had found a man who had been cook in a former incarnation, and astonishingly enough, performed well enough to back his statements.

Through field glasses, an observer on machine gun bastion No. 1 could discern the first dissident village—long flat topped houses of sun dried bricks. At the foot of the slope toward the north was a last friendly gathering, identical in aspect, but flanked by a reddish fortress of some size, the local *kasbah*. There the Moroccan standard fluttered against the tricolor, for Gallar not only represented France but also the government of the sultan.

Gallar rode up from time to time, reported to Prazini and often remained for the night with the lieutenants. In Martin, Fortier found a satisfying companion. He was young, twenty-two or three, very earnest, with an amusing eagerness to learn. He took his mission in life to heart, was conscious of his duties. For Prazini he voiced admiration, but Fortier could see plainly that his belief in the absolute integrity of the famous chief was shaken. When the regimental order announcing the success at the pass was posted, he read it without comment. It was patent that Prazini had mounted his stunt like a scarf pin. The result was a lyrical citation in approved staff style:

"Order of the Regiment No. 104. Citations:  
 PRAZINI, Joachim Leon—Captain 2nd Foreign

—2nd Battalion. Company Commander remarkable for his superb calm and sublime courage under fire, for his ability and initiative . . . defended the convoy trusted to him against overwhelming odds . . .

This citation, listed by letter No. 387-A, carried the attribution of the Colonial War Cross with Silver Star.

Prazini evidently carried his own supply of trinkets. Without visiting the Greek's shop he wore a new white star on the blue and red ribbon of his cross; the eighth. To the congratulations offered by Fortier and Martin he replied:

"You know how it was. It would have been wrong for me to mention any one in particular. Yet, as usual, they concentrated upon one name, mine. Not quite just—but what would you? It's the army's way."

He was satisfied at the way the work was going on at the post. The outer wall was rising swiftly from the ground, the higher structures of the corner bastions taking shape. Fatigue parties, well guarded, led by native agents, sought everywhere for building material. Aside from necessary hardware, the Legion must do with local resources.

Martin organized games and recreations, choirs were formed by Germans and Russians, concerts given at night. Prazini always attended. Aloof and cold with his officers, he showed great kindness to the men. Two sins found no excuse before him: shirking and uncleanness.

Yet Fortier clashed with him three weeks after arriving.

One night, inspecting the sentries, he crossed the moonlit yard. The unmistakable impact of knuckles upon flesh, low exclamations and moans, attracted his attention. He circled the looming bulk of a supply shed, came into the free area between the wall and the long barracks in which the men were sheltered. There, he halted uncertainly. Order must be maintained, yet there were times when it was unwise to interfere with the men's way of enforcing good behavior.

Then he noted, in an angle of the wall, a confused, whirling group. Half a dozen

Legionnaires in trousers and shirts were watching two men who were fighting. So engrossed were they that Fortier's arrival went unseen.

"Don't, Corporal, you'll kill him—"

"That's what I want to do!"

Fortier rushed forward, pushed his way to the center of the group. A man, standing, was kicking another who had fallen. In the first, Fortier recognized Corporal Gottfried Brenner. The fallen man was a young private, freshly arrived from an Algerian training base.

"What's the trouble?"

"That's none of your business," Brenner said.

"That's the Lieutenant, Brenner," some one warned.

"What do I care? This is a personal question."

"Stop striking that man—I order you," Fortier snapped.

"You order me? Why, you lousy stuffed shirt—smooth beak—I'd like to see you give me an order! Know me? Corporal Brenner, eight years service, who doesn't give a damn for you!"

"You're drunk. Go to the lockup and report to me in the morning."



BRENNER was a large, powerful man, known as a well disciplined, obedient soldier when sober. When drunk there was no reasoning with him. For answer, he swung toward Fortier's face. Fortier stepped back, ordered the men to stay aside. He knew from the louder hum of voices that other men had come out of the sleeping quarters.

"Don't do that," he warned.

"He called me a thief; you back him up—" Brenner rushed forward, head low.

Again Fortier retreated, hesitating. His strict duty was to avoid scandal. However, if he could cope with the corporal himself, it would ultimately turn out better. He had no illusion that Brenner was incapacitated by drink. The corporal was the type that is made stronger, more dangerous until the stupor of absolute drunkenness comes.

"You wish to have it? Have it—" He stepped forward, crashed a heavy blow on Brenner's face, felt the hard skin give way under the impact. The corporal staggered, recovered and came back.

Fortier caught the full smash of the long swing on his left shoulder; his arm grew numb. Brenner was not skilful, but he had immense reserve power and a certain crude science of his own. Even in the uncertain light, the lieutenant could see the blows start, yet they arrived upon him with such whirling speed that he found it difficult to dodge. At last, a short jolt to the jaw dropped Brenner, who sprawled on hands and knees.

"Report at the lockup, Brenner."

Fortier had bent forward, near the corporal. He barely managed to pull his face out of the way to escape the hard driven heels directed toward him, forced upward by all the springy strength of the back resting on the ground. For the first time, personal anger entered in. His calmness left him like a cast off garment. The danger of getting a public beating dwindled in importance.

He turned sidewise to protect his body from a possible kick, and when Brenner rose lashed at him with one hand, then the other. His blows were unscientific, but very efficacious. Brenner reeled backward, on his heels, his hands hanging limply. The lieutenant drove both hands to the unprotected stomach. Brenner fell, writhed about and ended in a spell of violent nausea.

"Over with him, Lieutenant," said Klaus.

He had arrived clad only in trousers. His right hand grasped a carbine by the middle, butt ready.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Lock him up. I must make charges against him."

Klaus reached down, grasped Brenner by the back of the neck and hoisted him to his feet with a single effort. "All right, Lieutenant. The rest of you dismissed."

Fortier was about to leave, to continue his inspection, when he noticed the beaten private staggering to his feet near the wall.

"What's your name?"

"Meweik, Jacob, Lieutenant."

"What was the trouble?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant."

"All right. You were fighting with the corporal over nothing."

"Not fighting, Lieutenant. He was licking me for—"

"For what?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant."

"I'm continuing my inspection, will be back in my quarters in ten minutes. Wait for me there, and you better make up your mind to talk. No one will blame you if you have a just grievance."

Later, Meweik was seated in Fortier's room, telling his troubles. He was a large red faced German boy, not more than seventeen, evidently enlisted because of the craving for adventure. His face was marked, and he felt for tender spots on his body as he talked. The lieutenant had shifted to German, as Meweik was none too fluent in French.

"Brenner comes from the same city as me, Lieutenant. He said he would look after me. I became his orderly and he kept my money. I drew the second instalment of my enlistment bonus in Meknes and turned it over to him. He drank it all up, then wanted me to wash his shirts and do for him for nothing. And when he was drunk, he was awful. He—"

"I understand; go on."

"So he would elout me. I couldn't eat my soup today, I felt so sick. Then he got drunk again tonight and took me outside and started to beat me again. I guess I moaned too loud, for the others came out and tried to stop him."

"Is there any one who knows he took your money? Witnesses?"

"Karl Presler was with me when he took my bonus money, Lieutenant. And the trader—the one near the gate on the right, at Khenifra—knows because he bought a lot of soap and cologne before starting and he made me pay for it right there out of the few francs I had kept. Presler tells me he was tried once but he was let off because of his decorations."

"All right. Now, don't worry, Meweik.

Brenner will be tried and punished. But I can't understand why you fellows don't complain. We're here to help you, but we can't see through walls or guess what's happening."

"A Legionnaire never gives away another."

"The man's unfit to be a Legionnaire. Go to bed."

Left alone, Fortier made a report, charged Brenner with drunkenness, abuse of authority, hazing, theft, forgetting professional dignity. Any one of these charges would bring reduction to the ranks; any two would bring a prison term. He might have added insults to a superior in line of duty. But these he considered personal matters, an outgrowth of the others.

Consulting the reports signed by Prazini the next afternoon, he was bewildered to find this marginal note on his report:

Charges dismissed. Court-martial denied.  
Sanction: Eight days in prison, four of them cell.



HE WAITED in the little room until the captain arrived with his secretary to sign documents.

For many minutes there was only the humming of the flies, the scratching of the pen and the slight pounding as the scribe blotted the signatures on the papers which Prazini slid toward him with a flick of the hand.

"Well, Fortier?" the captain asked finally.

"I wish to speak to you alone, Captain."

"Personal matter? Why not come to my quarters?"

"Service matter, Captain."

"Go out and close the door, Sergeant," Prazini ordered.

He waited until the panel closed. Then he reached for a cigaret and lighted it with easy, dainty gestures, very irritating to Fortier.

"I am listening, Lieutenant."

"About Corporal Brenner, Captain."

"I've decided, I believe. You will find a marginal note on your report."

"I have read it. However, I promised

Meweik, the man's victim, my help and protection."

"You exaggerate. You allow sentiments out of place here. Certain things must be condoned. These men are not conscripts. Meweik must learn to take his troubles bravely, to handle them himself."

"He is a boy."

"The doctors accepted him as a man."

"Then—"

"Brenner is punished enough. Moreover, his going down to trial would hurt the reputation of this company. For years I have avoided disciplinary measures outside this company. It's unfortunate, I admit—" Prazini smiled amiably—"but after all, I rule. My mind is absolutely made up. No outside trouble, no airing of dirty linen before court-martials."

"I don't quite understand, Captain."

"For one thing, a court-martial means sending Brenner down to Meknes. Under guard. Sending Meweik or two or three others as witnesses. Sending you, very possibly, to make charges. Six privates, one sergeant and one officer away for several days. Interferes with the routine. Mars the company's record. Let us talk no more about the matter."

"Nevertheless," Fortier said steadily, "I must inform you of my intention. I shall report the affair to the colonel."

"I shall not forward the report, Fortier."

"Then I shall send a report to the ministry of war." Fortier looked swiftly at the captain. "I'm sorry to seem stubborn, I am sorry to remind you also that the forwarding or holding back of a report is not optional. You may comment upon it as you wish, but it must go through."

"You are serious?"

Fortier saw the captain's chin quiver with rage.

"Utterly, Captain."

"You make mountains out of molehills. You are aware it would go against your record if you sent in an unwarranted complaint over my head? A man's career often cracks up that way."

"Investigation alone would show whether it was unwarranted."

"It might appear warranted to those outside the Legion, who judge according to another code. In the old Legion—"

"May I cite a case in 1909? Even in those days, the man—a sergeant, not a corporal—was deprived of rank, sentenced to eight years public works, excluded from the army."

"I pity your inexperience, Fortier—and for the sake of the friendship I bear you, I will prevent you from making a fool of yourself. Brenner shall be sent to trial, at my order. Are you content?"

"Thank you, Captain. I am sorry—"

"That you spoke your mind and stuck to your point?" Prazini laughed and came toward the lieutenant, rested his hand on his shoulder. "That is natural. No grudge, eh?"

"None whatever."

"Sergeant—" Prazini opened the door—"have Brenner brought here immediately." He turned to Fortier. "I'll make it clear to him that it's over."

The captain's plan was evident.

He wished to make it appear to others that sending Brenner down was his own wish.

Brenner was sent down to Meknes.

Fortier felt no regret for what he had done. He had served no personal spite but had acted according to strict regulations and duty. Men such as Brenner were dangerous. Their valor in action too often blinded their chiefs to their shortcomings. Prazini made it a principle to condone the sins of old soldiers. As the veterans controlled the attitude of the company, this made for the leader's popularity and added to his peace of mind. But this can be carried too far—become a source of decay for the Legion as a whole. Men older in the unit than Fortier thought the same, as proved by the many private circulars sent out by colonels.

Hazing and injustice brought discontent and homesickness to the new arrivals. In Meweik's case, ultimately the youth would have been unable to bear his miserable existence, to endure the physical beatings and moral torture inflicted upon him. Three courses would have

been open: desertion, murder or suicide.

Desertion was punished by at least eight years hard labor. Murder ranged from fifteen years to the capital penalty. Even if Meweik were transferred, trouble would recur. Brenner, at his worst in an isolated post, would not be stopped by a warning from Fortier. He would select another victim.

On the other hand, Fortier understood his chief's wish to avoid publicity. No one knew where a scandal would halt, with the opposition press combing court-martials for flaws and seeking to attack officers at any cost. And an officer mentioned unfavorably in the French newspapers was not likely to earn swift promotion.

As for the rank and file, they showed little feeling. Meweik was a new arrival and Brenner had never been popular, even among those who had served a long while.

On the surface, relations between Prazini and his officers remained cordial, but Fortier sensed a definite tension.

### III

"KLAUS is not in sight yet," Martin said as Fortier reached the machine gun platform on bastion No. 2. "The other parties are in."

"To be on the safe side, I have a section ready."

"Gallar signaled from the village that there were dissident groups reported to the southwest," Martin went on, "and I'm afraid they'll hook up with Klaus on the way back."

Several detachments had left the outpost that morning, one sent to the quarry near the village, a second to obtain lime. Klaus and sixteen men went for wood, for building use and fuel. The emplacement was several miles away, not visible from the post or from the *kasbah*. There appeared to be no particular reason to fret. The sergeant was unusually careful and had six native riders with him.

On the other hand, Gallar had reported bunches of Chleuhs gathering here and

there; he said that the natives had recovered from the defeat at the pass and the leaders dwelt upon revenge in their speeches.

There were almost three hours of daylight left. No shots had been heard. Fortier sat on the parapet, exchanged a few words with Martin. But aside from needless speculation as to Klaus' whereabouts they had little to talk about. In the yard below the section ordered under arms by the lieutenant had formed. The men were smoking, laughing. They patently believed that this would be an unnecessary display.

"D'you hear that?" Martin said suddenly.

"Shots . . . Better call the captain."

The crews of the machine guns scrambled to their places. Fortier dropped into the yard. Prazini came running from his quarters, fastening his tunic. He had been fast asleep, enjoying his post-lunch *siesta*, but the first faint thud had awakened him, although louder and nearer sounds left him undisturbed.

"Section to move down at once," he shouted.

"Ready, Captain."

"Fine."

The gates of the post swung open and Fortier led his detachment out. He had four combat groups, forty-five men, behind him. Rifle shots whacked with increasing frequency, coming nearer and nearer. The automatics mingled in at intervals.

"At the double; keep your mouths shut. . . . One, two, one, two—"

Boots pounded in regular rhythm, and the red trail unwound quickly. The creak of leather, the breathing of men, a certain exhilaration foreboding action that hung in the atmosphere: These were the moments of pleasure, the break in the deadly monotony of the post. Minutes went by. Fortier's eyes swept the slopes constantly.

A native rider came toward him, rifle slung muzzle downward over one shoulder. He was grinning, his bearded face yellowish. He held out one hand, wrapped in

bloody rags. Cartridge pouches and military belt showed him to be a French partisan.

"Belga—baroud bessif," he announced.

"Surprise attack—much fighting," Fortier translated to Sergeant Schultz. "Come on!"

Three hundred yards farther, the returning detachment emerged from the bushy slopes, descending toward the main trail. There were more native riders; a dead man was slung across a saddle. These men were very calm, laughed without making noise. A Legionnaire was perched on top of the load of wood on one of the mules, his limp left leg dripping blood into the dust.

"Where's Klaus?"

"Up slope a bit," replied a Rumanian corporal. "He saw you coming and ordered me to meet you with the wounded and the wood. Would be a shame to have worked for nothing all day. They're still shooting."

"All right, get back. Advance by groups—rifle grenadiers—to my orders!"

He led the way up the slope, pistol in hand. The *voltigeurs* of each group fixed bayonets. The flash of the rifles was visible on the flanks of the nearby hills, but the snipers were exceedingly well hidden. This last demonstration did not last long and silence settled down like a blanket.

"Klaus, Klaus!"

"Here—" The sergeant emerged from between two boulders, waved his carbine over his head. Fortier ran toward him, and pressed his arm in greeting. "Fine mess, Lieutenant—"

"What are you doing here?"

"Thought I better stick here and keep them off until you arrived. Two killed, you know, and didn't want them mutilated. Got the detachment out of range. When they saw they couldn't steal the mules they tried to shoot them down. Can't allow that at four thousand francs per mule, eh?"

"Where are the dead?"

"Out there—" Klaus pointed.



A LEGIONNAIRE, a big, burly fellow, had been shot through the head. The other, a slight dark man, had caught one in the back which had broken the spine.

"Pick them up and let's go back," Fortier said. "It will be unhealthy around here after dark."

The relief section soon caught up with the detachment; the dead were thrown like sacks on pack mules. Klaus was very pale and the sinking sun cast a vague reddish glow on his short cropped blond hair.

"How did it happen?" Fortier asked.

"Took a short cut instead of following the trail. They must have been watching me all day, waiting for me to give them a chance. I suspected nothing, thought I was safe."

"That's usually when you're not."

"I feel badly about those two fellows. Good men, had them a long time. It's partly my fault."

"One always feels that way, Klaus. Come along."

Before them the men progressed quickly.

The hands of the dead men swung back and forth. One pair was coarse, hairy, the other long and slender, although the fingers were calloused and deformed by long contact with rifle and tools. The lieutenant knew both well, had seen them often during the sojourn at Post Walter.

Men must die sometime, somewhere. But few would have predicted that these two would end on the same day in a like fashion, wearing French uniforms. Destiny works strangely. In the Legion there is always an added poignancy to death, a sense of warped existences ending brusksly, of lingering hopes cut short. Klaus probably had identical thoughts, for Fortier saw him look at the dead men and then turn away as if in remorse.

Near the village they met Gallar, riding at the head of the local militia.

"Things have been too quiet not to have something like this occur," he said.

"Klaus, do you think I can find bodies on

the slope to identify the guilty tribe?"

"There's one behind the yellow boulders on the right, another fifty yards from the place we were working—unless they've carried them away. The rest, I am not sure of; but those were in line, and I seldom miss."

When the gates had closed behind the detachment, Fortier followed Prazini to the office. He outlined what he had learned. The captained resumed his restless pacing. He referred several times to a map of the sector.

"Why did Klaus take the short cut, Fortier?"

"He was late and feared night would find him on the trail."

"Didn't he know this opened him to attack?"

"Yes. On the other hand he preferred to be attacked in daylight. As it is, night has fallen now, and had he taken the regular path he would be on his way, or attacked, without much chance to save all his mules."

"Why didn't he start back sooner?"

"You personally ordered him to bring a given number of small trunks, Captain. He was unlucky, that is all."

Fortier grew irritated. After all, why did Prazini not wait for Klaus' report, or question the man himself?

"I shall break him for this."

"That would be too bad, Captain. He has been recently naturalized and is due for appointment to St. Maixent for a commission. What happened to him might happen to any one."

"There are two dead."

"Breaking Klaus won't bring them back to life, Captain." Fortier smiled. "I do not believe that he could be broken for this—any court of inquiry would clear him. It would cost him his commission, however. May I beg you, Captain, not to press charges against him?"

"As a personal favor?" Prazini appeared gentler and also smiled.

"If you please to put it that way, Captain."

"He is a friend of yours?"

"I consider him a very efficient ser-

geant and excellent officer's timber. What happened to him has happened to many others. To be surprised by Chleuhs is not a great sin."

"My young friend—" Prazini came close to Fortier with short mincing steps. He lowered his voice, "My very young friend, Prazini is too old in the game to have his hand forced and not square matters. You threatened to send a report over my head. Those things are paid for. You understand that I am not a Corsican for nothing."

"You allow personal spite to influence you?"

"Just between you and me, I would. I don't like Klaus. He is a conceited Boche. I had not sent a man for trial outside the company for years. You forced me to. Therefore, we shall have two. One plays the perfect officer, the moralist, one beats up tough men, but one is too young to fool Prazini. Come along."



PRAZINI swung the door wide, led the way. Night had fallen, but a vague light lingered. The yard was filled with Legionnaires, for the returning men were waiting for a belated meal, while the others were eager to question them.

"Sergeant Klaus?" Prazini called.

"At the ambulance, with the dead, Captain."

Prazini strode across the yard, Fortier still following. Sergeant Klaus was leaving the building when they reached it. He was bareheaded, and snapped to attention.

"What were you doing in there, Klaus?"

"Attending to my dead, Captain."

"Not afraid to touch them?"

"I am accustomed to death, Captain."

"Your carelessness murdered those men just as much as if you had struck them down with your own hand. Have you no shame?"

"No, Captain," Klaus said slowly. "I risked my head to save theirs."

"There is something beyond courage," Prazini declaimed. He was fond of using that phrase, which recurred in practically

all his orations. "You, a sergeant of Legion, permitted men trusted to your care to be killed uselessly. You disregarded elementary caution. Your crime is too appalling to be paid for—you shall be broken. Upon my conscience, I declare you unfit to wear stripes."

Klaus smiled faintly, tore the gold stripes from his sleeves.

"Here, Captain."

"A report shall go to the colonel. We can not have officers—" Prazini faltered, took the proffered stripes, suddenly threw them back at Klaus. "I wouldn't handle them! You are under rigorous arrest. Go to your quarters."

Klaus walked away, striding firmly, back straight. Fortier stepped after him but Prazini halted him with a gesture.

"I said rigorous arrest. No visitors."

Fortier turned away and went to his own room. Martin joined him.

"What's wrong with Prazini?"

"Getting square for Brenner, that's all."

"But he can't treat Klaus that way! He's counted on that commission. Making plans. He was in to see me last night. Good family, last hope of achievement. Went through the agony of giving up his native land, shifted allegiance, for this—it's unthinkable! Prazini was nagging him about those roof timbers yesterday. That's what delayed him. I'll—"

"You can't do anything. Prazini's with-in his rights."

An orderly knocked on the door, announced that dinner was ready.

"I'll see the captain tonight," Martin said confidently. "I can get him around. He's sore because he has to report two deaths without something glorious to show for them. Sure, I know. Do you think I'm blind?"

As they were entering the mess room a detonation rang out.

"Klaus—" Fortier exclaimed.

He hurried back, pushed his way through the crowd already in the room which Klaus shared with two other non-coms.

Schultz, his best friend, was standing before the cot, a newspaper clutched in his hand. He explained volubly to Fortier:

"He came back here—and he said Prazini was right, that it was his fault. I said he was crazy, that it would blow over. Then he lay down and said in a funny voice, 'This isn't the first time I'm broken.' I think he had been an officer once in our—in the German army. Then I thought it best to leave him alone and I pretended to read. He fumbled around in his stuff under the cot. I asked what he was doing. 'Getting myself a cigaret; I need one—' Next thing, that gun went off—and look at my shirt."

"My God," Martin said, straightening up. "The man was weeping; he was weeping . . ."

Fortier looked at Klaus.

The sergeant had inserted the muzzle of his big Ruby automatic pistol in his mouth, pressed it against his palate and pulled the trigger. The top of the head was gone, his pillow soaked with blood. But on the flesh of the cheeks, below where the eyes had been, moisture still glistened. For some reason this added infinite pain to the horror, brought a flood of violent emotion. Fortier drew the sheet over the head.

Ordinary rules forgotten in the reaction, men of all ranks had entered. Others waited on the veranda. Many were talking loudly; some were shouting.

"Prazini killed him!"

"Klaus was all right!"

"Where's the slob?"

"Let him show himself!"

Fortier faced the men.

"Who told you to come here? Get out! Sergeants, clear the room; send those men away."

He joined Schultz and the other non-coms, pushed the Legionnaires back. He dreaded a mob movement that might get out of control. He had seen such things happen and they were not pleasant to live through, or look back upon. At last the room was clear. Schultz changed his shirt. Martin wiped his face.

When Fortier went out he found the yard like a madhouse. Men were shouting, voicing open threats. Klaus had been popular and in the captain's unjust accusations each man had felt himself attacked. Fortier attempted to bring back order but he dared not compel too precise obedience at this time. Martin stopped at the mess room for a drink and Fortier was alone when he entered his quarters.

He struck a match, lighted the lantern. He started when he saw Prazini seated on his cot. The Corsican's face was white, his cheeks quivered. Brave as a lion under fire, the antagonism of his own men frightened him.

"I never meant that to happen," he said. "What was the matter with that fool?"

"Despair," Fortier replied laconically.

"I'm going out there—" Prazini tried to find his lost courage. "I'm going out there and face them. I never meant—"

Fortier looked at him coldly.

"I wouldn't suggest doing that."

"You think—they—"

"You know them better than I. Wait until the first excitement is over. That's wisdom."

"They'll forget, soon—" Prazini looked up hopefully. "We're ordered to the Riff—Abd el Krim has started after us, as expected. The Branes and the Tsoul are in full rebellion. Morocco is in flames—they'll forget."

"Possibly."

He waited until the bellowing of the non-coms herding the men back to quarters had ended, and quiet reigned. Danger of violence was over. The company had had its spell of hysteria. In a week Klaus would be a name, a vaguely unpleasant memory, growing dimmer with each new scene, with each new action, to flame up perhaps at an unexpected moment. Prazini was due for trouble.

This was all the more evident when, escorting his chief to his quarters, he noticed that some one had scrawled on his door in big, chalked letters: Murderer.

#### IV

A STRIDENT whistle . . . The company ascending the hill halted. Combat groups split as the men sought cover, to return the fire of the Riffi holding the crest. Since dawn the struggle had been waged on this slope, courage matching courage, discipline matching superior numbers. Immediately, from the shallow trenches and rifle pits abandoned by their defenders, now cover for the Legion, from the angles formed by boulders, the snouts of automatics protruded. Sharp and clear, the voices of officers called the range—

"Four hundred—four hundred and fifty—"

Breech locks slid open, the oiled steel within flashed and vanished. In the fast increasing heat, the earth exhaled the stench of human bodies, the smell of freshly turned soil. The acrid yellow smoke of exploded shells drifted down with the thin, blue haze of burnt powder. Everywhere, the brass of used cartridges glittered.

Fortier crouched behind No. 2 automatic. The detonations echoed painfully in his head. Fatigue had hewn his face with sullen, harsh lines. The four men of the gun crew appeared as weary. He looked at them with surprise; he recalled them at Post Walter—fleshy Germans, with ruddy faces.

Their faces now seemed carved from seasoned wood, balanced on stringy necks. They were bony, ageless beings in tattered khaki garments too large for their frames, with nervous twitchings of maniacs. They had been marching and fighting, fighting and marching, for two weeks, to plug holes in the human dyke that held the flood of the Riff's warriors from the French zone.

From Post Walter to Khenifra, from Khenifra to Meknes, from Meknes to the front, eternally on the move. Casualties and new drafts, men who appeared one morning and were dead by night. The Riff . . .

"Counter-attack; counter-attack—"

The tawny slope above Fortier was strewn with boulders. Men were dashing down between them in groups of six to ten. They were almost without exception mature warriors, bearded, wiry. The sleeveless *jellaba* fluttered as they ran. Their waists were circled by military belts supporting cartridge pouches; they wielded Mausers, all equipment taken from the Spaniards at Anoual and other places.

"Five hundred—four-fifty—four hundred—three-five . . ."

The range decreased with bewildering speed. Fortier adjusted the field glasses, verified the range by the two little human figures etched on the metal for the purpose.

"At three hundred — two fingers' breadth right!"

The corporal firing obeyed mechanically, stretched out his right arm as in training to obtain perfect understanding of the indication. A first clip of twenty-four cartridges rattled through, clattered to the ground, was replaced by a refilled magazine.

"Two-fifty— Grenadiers, attention!"

Bayonets were gleaming right and left, all along the slope. The automatics appeared aware of the pressing need, spat hastily. Groups were caught, whirled, vanished. Fallen dotted the ground. Still the Riffi came on, heedless of hammering machine guns, of automatics, of bursting shells. Success was near and they strove to achieve it.

The company had reached the sector that morning, from the west. They had joined the Freyberg column, caught in a very bad situation, stranded almost entirely in hostile territory by the uprising of tribes in the rear. Colonel Freyberg had suffered a first defeat a day before, had failed to relieve the line of blockhouses along the border. This partial success had brought the still hesitant mountaineers pouring down from their homes, to throw the weight of their numbers against a common foe.

Fortier had always respected Moslems as fighters. But even after five years of

Legion he was surprised by the energy shown by the Riffi. To counter-attack under shell fire, against Legionnaires, was the best that could be said for morale. At present, Freyberg was trying to storm this hill, to pivot at its base and gain a clear line of retreat through turbulent territory. Whether led by European adventurers, as some claimed, or merely acting on their own initiative, the Riffi understood his intentions and were working cleverly to halt him.

"Grenadiers!"

Fortier half rose as he called, loosened the pistol in the holster. In another minute the natives would be furling over the French line. No—they were breaking, running back. The officer sheathed the glasses, wiped his eyes and grinned.

"Not bad—not bad," he encouraged the nearest men.

He expected the signal to go forward, but it did not come. Looking back, he saw the *Tirailleurs* winding in the ravine below in column by one, like long, sinuous khaki snakes. These fellows were trying to pass, yet could not as long as the hill above was not cleared of the enemy's snipers. Fortier looked for Captain Prazini, then he saw a sergeant threading his way from boulder to boulder, seeking cover from sharpshooters. He recognized the liaison-sergeant of the major.

"Eh, there, Sulemann?"

The man looked about, caught sight of Fortier and arrived on the run.

"Where's the captain?"

"On the right, somewhere. What have you got?" Fortier took the slip from Sulemann and read:

"Fourth Company must not go beyond Objective 3. Keep clear of grove."

He returned the paper. "That's for us, all right. You find Captain Prazini."

"All right."

The sergeant bent low, scurried off. A bullet sighed near; others smacked smartly against the pebbles, whined, droned. The Mausers followed the running man eagerly, licking at his feet with tiny leaden tongues.

Sulemann at last circled a boulder, did not emerge again. He had probably located the company commander. Before long, Fortier saw Prazini appear, stand for ten seconds in full sight, beckoning to him. And, without transition, Fortier found himself a mobile target. Then he was protected; his hands clung gratefully to the rough surface of a huge mass of gray stone, flecked by scintillating, dark stars of spread lead.

"Come here, Fortier," Prazini said.

He was seated with his back to the stone, alone. Sulemann had gone to report.



THE CORSICAN had changed considerably. His face was a greenish yellow; the skin was stretched like thin parchment on the big bone frame. His nose seemed larger in his thinned face, beard sprouting from his cheeks. But his eyes still had that disturbing, proud, self-sufficient glare.

"I've an order from the major," he said.

"I read it, Captain."

"Yes—a lot of nonsense. 'Fourth Company must not go beyond Objective 3 . . . ' Objective 3 is that very next string of boulders. There's a grove between it and those *metchas* of the village up the slope. No sense in stopping where their riflemen can sneak down and enfilade us at leisure. Truth is, I'm in bad at headquarters. Something of that unfortunate Klaus mess leaked out. They're going to have us reach that grove, then probably send in the other company to go ahead and reap what we've sown. What's your opinion?"

"I have no opinion before a definite order, Captain."

"That's an easy way out. Let's hear what Martin has to say."

The sub-lieutenant arrived. He was unmoved by the work of the morning. In fact Fortier was astonished at the young man's quick grip on the dangerous work set them. Martin was too young to have served in the Great War, and these engagements, compared to the desultory Middle Atlas fighting, must appear to him as major battles. Prazini handed him the

slip, and repeated what he had said to Fortier.

"There's little argument, Captain," Martin said frankly. "Major Roussel would not risk a man unless this was important."

"Hell—" Prazini spat in disgust—"some one has to go through that grove to get at the village; any one who gets at the village controls the crest. We're on the spot, and it's our job. This company's under suspicion—I was talked at for hours in Meknes and had this not been a grave emergency, I guess we'd have been split up. They don't trust us, and we must prove to them—"

"My job's to obey, Captain," Fortier said.

"That's what I think also," Martin agreed.

It was true; the company had given signs of unrest ever since the death of Klaus. Prazini had fallen from his pedestal overnight. In Meknes, both Fortier and Martin had been questioned at length by the colonel. Fortier, according to his own code, had kept information harmful to Prazini to himself. Nevertheless, the facts showed the captain in a poor light. There was no reason for his excessive severity to Klaus. The applications for transfer on the part of every non-com had first attracted attention. When a Legion sergeant risks removal to a quiet sector during a campaign, something is wrong.

The company under suspicion, for difficult undertakings other units were chosen. On one occasion they were taken out of line and replaced by naval infantry. This when a hard counter-attack was expected. The superior officers were too experienced not to sense that Prazini's company had lost its spirit, was an aggregation of armed men and no longer a whole.

Prazini's behavior was understandable. He no longer felt firm footing under him, did not himself know how his men would react under pressure. He blustered one moment and coaxed the next. His superb egotism was gone—he even consulted his officers when in action.

"Go back to your posts," Prazini said at last. "We'll reach Objective 3, anyway."

In fifteen minutes Fortier was back behind Automatic No. 2. Again a strident whistle called the men forward. Fortier was ahead in two long strides and, without conscious will, felt the weight of the automatic leap into his hand.

The nearest Riffi appeared. Many ran away. A few came headlong toward the French. Fortier discharged his gun into the first face before him. All around him men were clashing with the natives, point and butt, grenades and fists. Dull smashes thudded, the explosions of the homemade grenades employed by the Riffi, tin cans stuffed with gunpowder and loose hardware.

The advance formed a pattern of combat made up of a multitude of small encounters.

Heroism and sudden cowardice: The same bearded giant, whose shaven skull had gleamed in the sun as he attacked an entire squad single handed, ran suddenly and was bayoneted from behind when he tried to crawl under a boulder.

The discharge of a flintlock pistol burned the front of Fortier's tunic, specked his face with tiny powder marks. Meweik, the meek, nearby, struggled up the slope, sobbing and swearing, kicking at shins, swinging his broken gun by the barrel. His coat was half off; his white face was streaked by blood dripping from a gash on the forehead. He hurled himself at a muscular warrior, bore him down with the violence of the impact and beat his skull in.

The resistance melted and the Mausers, given a free field, crackled. When the objective was attained Fortier lifted the whistle to his lips. At the same time Prazini's signal cut through the tumult.



THE WHOLE line came to a stop; the gun crew converged around the automatics and the hammering resumed. Fortier took stock of the situation; the last rush had stretched the company on a slant

with one end resting near the crest to the left and the other facing the grove. The crest was not more than two hundred meters distant, while on the right there was the grove to cross, the village to occupy.

Sergeant Schultz had dropped at his side.

"They're not so tough, Lieutenant; not so tough."

"No, we went through them easily enough that time."

"Here comes the captain."

Prazini was coming toward them. He showed sublime scorn for the Riffi marksmen. In the open spaces between boulders, he neither bent his head nor quickened his stride. A casual observer would have suspected him of seeking death—and Fortier was not far from that belief.

When he reached the shallow depression he did not slide in beside Fortier and Schultz, but squatted on the edge, his sunburned hands hanging loosely between his knees. The right one held a lighted cigaret.

"Better get down, Captain," Fortier suggested.

"Matter of luck. Did you have a look at that grove?"

"I did. Doesn't seem defended. But they probably have trenches and pits halfway."

"You can see the Third Company deploying to come up," Prazini said. "I was right. Some one else will be sent in. Captain Braque will probably get the credit for all this."

"If that grove is occupied," Fortier said, "he can take it all for all I care. If things went wrong, that's a regular trap, Captain."

Schultz laughed gently, yet audibly. Prazini looked toward him and his lips moved. But he thought better of it and spat once more. His free hand caressed his long mustache.

"I don't know," he mused. "I don't know."

Prazini, with his broad back to the bullets, unafraid of death, was trying to make up his mind to overstep strict orders.

Where physical courage was required, one was compelled to admit his extreme worth. There were nearly two hundred Legionnaires on the slope, specialists in bravery, yet not one of them surpassed Prazini. The captain lowered one knee to the ground, to be more at ease.

"Initiative, disobedience, what?" Prazini frowned. "I'll chance it."

He nodded to Fortier and walked away. As before, he stood erect.

"The slobs will miss him," Schultz said, contriving to make his tone speculative as well as hopeful.

Fortier turned, focused the glasses. At the foot of the hill the Third Company of the Legion Battalion was waiting. The lieutenant felt shame that once more the unit might be deprived of honor.

From a distance, the grove appeared to be a most formidable obstacle, for the foliage made a green canopy hinting of dark aisles and thick undergrowth. Nearer, Fortier saw that it was sparsely planted, cut through with ditches and walls of dried stones. Beyond it was the village, the terraced roofs emerging, dotted with the tall white silhouettes of storks. Throughout the battle, even when shells were dropping on the houses, these birds, long accustomed to protection, had stuck near their nests.

The artillery of the Freyberg column, two batteries of 75's beating the open crest, leaped to rain steel on the far slope. A lull had come in the rifle firing. The conflicting forces were like two men drawing breath before locking again. The few shots fired passed high over, addressed to the Third Company, now in full sight, ascending the slope.

Prazini had decided too late; replacements were coming. No—for he appeared suddenly, lifted his hand. Strong and clear, his voice came—

"To the right—*en avant, la Légion!*"

In one bound the Legionnaires were on the fringe of the grove. The natives appeared immediately, opened fire. They literally spouted from the trees. But it was too late to withdraw. The sections cut like chisels into the swarming mass,

hollowed room for themselves with the automatics.

Fortier recognized the majority of the warriors before him as Tsouli, men until recently pacified. They had older rifles than the infantrymen encountered near the Riff until now, Chassepots and Gras, with a certain proportion of the long *moukhala* flintlocks, weapons that thundered loudly and seldom did much harm save at very close range. When they came to grips with the first groups, they supplied a new weapon, a sort of hooked blade, a hand scythe.

Knowing that the Third Company was at his back, Prazini was bold, pushed his way farther and farther. In the confusion, he suddenly stood at Fortier's side.

"Tight place. We'll reform at the stone wall ahead. Watch for it."

The rest was a nightmare of confused pictures succeeding one another without transition. The company was cramped on all sides, formed an island of fire in the midst of whirling natives. The automatic riflemen had no time to reload, defended themselves with pistols and carbines. Fortier knew what had occurred, what he should have foreseen. The grove forming a natural shelter, the natives had massed there, to wait for the end of the French charge. This area of quiet had exercised a suction upon the areas beaten by artillery fire. Those who were not assigned posts in the rifle pits or in the village had gathered here.

Unless the Third Company, whose expected arrival had been so unwelcome a few minutes ago, came up soon, the weakened company under Prazini would be cut to pieces. This time initiative had proved evil for the captain.

Something barred the way ahead—the stone wall.

Hugged against it, the sections took breath. Automatics were reloaded. Now a certain number had to face the rear, for the natives had slid in from either side and cut off retreat. They screamed encouragement to each other and many had to be hacked away from the guns.

"Hold on!" Prazini shouted. "The Third is coming!"

At the same moment, a scythe flung from twenty feet away struck Fortier on the cheek. He felt the sun in his eyes; he had lost his *képi*. He rose again, beat off the nearest man with the barrel of his automatic pistol. Schultz freed him and thrust a bayoneted rifle in his hand. The old rule that Moroccans avoid hand to hand fighting with the Legion no longer held. For that matter, since morning nothing had gone as scheduled.

Suddenly Fortier's head hummed, his mouth filled with blood. Something new had happened, a formidable catastrophe. Where the wall had been, five or six feet away, was a hole, and around the rim of that hole were sprawled several bodies, soldiers and mountaineers. An explosion of intense violence threw him down again, and another hole appeared, some distance away. Shells. They fell regularly and the Legionnaires could not dodge them.

The natives had vanished, fleeing toward the village. And the regular dripping of death progressed after them. Schultz shook Fortier and pointed overhead. An airplane was flying low. Fortier tried to think, to give orders, and could not. He sank to the ground.

## V

THREE weeks later, he met Gallar under the arched gateway opening into the native quarters of Meknes. He had not seen or heard from the cavalryman since leaving Post Walter. He noted immediately that he was now a captain and wore the tricolor arm band of the staff.

"Congratulations—"

"To you, Fortier. From what I hear, you were lucky."

"Shell splinter through the shoulder." Fortier moved his arm vigorously. "Nothing left. Dropped out from loss of blood, that's all."

"First outing?"

"The only one—I am going back to the company tomorrow."

"Same one?" Gallar asked.

"Same one."

Gallar smiled and dismissed the subject with a gesture.

"I'm alone. Just drove in from Rabat, leaving tomorrow. Let's get bored together. Three cocktails to start with, dinner at the Regence Hotel, and then what amusements this austere city has to offer."

"Not so dull—people are flooding in because of the campaign."

They went into a bar and sipped cocktails through long straws. These brief moment of relaxation, oases of pleasure to look back upon, seemed dull at the time.

"I heard rumors about your show at the Jebel Semiet," Gallar said, "when Prazini overreached himself. However, are you sensitive?"

"No. What do you want to know about it?"

"Exactly how did Prazini, who is all you want to call him save a bad officer, make such a blunder?"

"Thought they were taking his bone away to give it to Braque. He hates Braque—although their careers make them resemble one another like peas. Lost his head—and as a matter of fact, we did not know about the .155's being on the field. There were two batteries, motor driven, and they pounded hell out of the grove and village at nine kilometers. Surprise trick of Colonel Freyberg. Surprise to us, too."

"How many men did you lose?"

"From shell fire? Seventeen."

Gallar whistled.

"Freyberg and the major of Legion dropped in to see me afterwards and took my statement. I heard they had a howling match with Prazini, who squirmed like an imp in holy water trying to clear himself. You know the watchword—no scandal. So Prazini was quietly put out of the Legion and nominated to command a Metropolitan unit."

"Who's your new captain?"

"Not appointed yet. I take charge—we usually work with Braque's outfit, you know. A lot of new men, I hear. Not very

well trained, some of them, but all willing to fight. In any case, I'll see them tomorrow night."

They went to the Regence for dinner. A group of aviators at a nearby table recognized Gallar and invited themselves. Others joined; there were brand new stripes to be baptized. Fortier matched his recent experiences against those of the flyers; the campaign was discussed with the usual pitiless censure of the commanders. The time to finish coffee and a post-meal cigaret and he was dragged into a horse drawn cab. At the Hotel Transatlantique they picked up new friends and formed a procession going back to the native quarter.

"Where are we going?"

"Mother Cartier's."

"Rotten idea."

"Think of something better."

"Nothing better, but it's a rotten idea."

After several minutes of rattling progress through the narrow tortuous streets, they halted before a native house, poured out of the cabs and pounded on the thick door studded with great iron nails. The door opened and, after checking *képis* and cloaks, they filed gravely into a big, softly lighted room, already crowded with officers and prosperous civilians.

On the brilliantly lighted dancing floor two girls clicked castanets in rhythm with the string orchestra. The tobacco smoke was so thick it shrouded the lamps. A greasy Spanish waiter took their order. The aviators, better known than others because Meknes was their base, popular because the prestige of wings had not abated, beckoned to their feminine acquaintances, who dropped their companions immediately.

Fortier danced, laughed, shouted with the rest. Some one had played a siphon on his back, paper streamers were caught in his tunic buttons. Gallar, who danced like a professional, had selected a tall, shapely brunette for a partner. Her hair formed a sort of helmet of tresses, with the sheen of ebony. Her regular features, unsmiling mouth, distinguished her from the others. She seemed more understanding, gentler.



"MEET Maria, queen of hearts," he introduced her to Fortier.

"Queen of spades, Lieutenant, so far as luck's concerned," she said.

"You hold Maria until the next tango," Gallar suggested. "This is going to be a dreamy waltz and needs a stoutish, sentimental blonde."

Maria looked after Gallar with admiration.

"He's an awfully amusing gentleman, isn't he? Better company than the grave digger—Papa Gloom over there—"

Fortier followed her indication, saw a captain in horizon blue of the French Infantry. By the ribbons he was not a new arrival in the colonies. Where had he seen that gaunt, skull-like face? The eyes—He then recognized Prazini, a Prazini with a short clipped mustache, unbelievably aged and thinned.

"Friend of yours?"

"Known him for two weeks. He's a Corsican— Maybe you know him? He was in the Legion and got into trouble."

"Did he tell you?"

"No. A sub-lieutenant. All he does is come here and sit at the table where he is now. Then he orders a bottle of cognac and sips away in little gulps, all night long. Every night he invites me over, buys one bottle of champagne and just has me sit there with him. He says nothing. Then at closing time he hands me twenty francs and goes out. He says: 'Talk to me about anything'—and I do. I feel badly for him. He seems in such trouble. I told him once he shouldn't spend so much each night. Champagne sets you back one hundred and fifty francs a bottle here. He said he had savings, and that he was going back to the front soon, so it didn't matter. If you ask me—" Maria concluded grimly—"he doesn't intend to come back. There he goes, beckoning to me. Do you mind?"

The music stopped and Gallar left his blonde partner. He had seen Prazini.

"What a change in a couple of months!" He tapped Fortier's boot under the table. "He sees you—"

Prazini's brilliant glance had rested on

Fortier casually, then remained upon him lingeringly. Fortier rose and went to him. After all, regardless of the past, Prazini had been his chief.

"Hello, Fortier. Glad to see you better. Have a drink with us?"

"You can go back later," Maria urged. "Come on—"

"Benedictine," Fortier ordered, settling into the chair.

Prazini looked at him intently and the lieutenant saw his hand mechanically touch the collar badge. One did not need to be a mind reader to interpret this unconscious gesture. Fortier wore the grenade of the Legion and Prazini wore it no longer. There was a sense of finality, of extreme despair in the simple movement.

"The company all right—now?" Prazini asked with effort.

"Yes, Captain."

"That is good." Prazini locked his hands before him on the table, looked long at the whitening knuckles. "Glad to hear that."

"Fancy you two knowing each other," Maria said brightly. "I was just telling the lieutenant what good friends we were."

"I beg of you!" Prazini lifted his hand with such weariness that the girl halted short. "Mademoiselle—would you mind—"

"Going?" Maria laughed good naturedly. "Why, no—I have the next tango with Captain Gallar."

"Gallar," Prazini murmured after she was gone. "He is a captain, now. The world moves on and on. Yes, one has illusions. One thinks the world stops turning and it goes on just the same. Fortier!"

"Captain?"

"I heard that Martin was detached to hold the Zergur blockhouse. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"When are you going back?"

"Tomorrow morning; be there by night."

"I was at the staff—to try and get transferred back to the Legion. I can't stand those boy scouts they gave me.

Babies. Filled with tales of what the Riffs will do to them. It's ghastly. It seems nothing can be done—now, or later." Prazini smiled grimly. "It's an awful feeling to be thrown out of the Legion, Fortier. I know you don't like me over much, but I know I'm paying. By the way, did you know that the front has been moved back fifteen miles? The Riffs are pushing in toward Taza, to link up with the dissidents there and cut us off from Algeria. And—" Prazini lifted his eyes swiftly—"there was no time to evacuate the blockhouses and blow them up."

"They can hold on several weeks. By that time—"

"They can't hold on long. The Riffs have artillery—Spanish field pieces and deserters to work them."

"So Martin may be lost?"

"And one of our sections—of your sections—with him." Prazini rested his head on his palms. "When bad luck dogs a unit—"

"Something must be done. They can not be left there to die."

"No. They'll probably send relief detachments to help them get out." Prazini laughed. "And I'll be here, pivoting my little guys about. They're pathetic, Fortier. One of them has had his mother write me that he was apt to catch cold if out in the night air!"

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. Now, you'll go back tomorrow—in time. I wonder if you could do me a favor—a great favor—" Prazini faltered, his face grew red, "I know, I refused you a favor—but Lord knows I'm punished enough. Could you—"

"Sorry to disturb you, Captain—" Gallar had appeared suddenly, and rested a hand on Fortier's Shoulder. "But have I your permission to drag your friend away? He's missed at our table."

"No objections at all, Gallar." Prazini half rose, bowed. "Would you care to sit a moment and have a drink with us?"

"A thousand regrets," Gallar protested. "You see where mixing drinks got me. I'm very much afraid to mix tables." He

lighted a cigaret, puffed out tiny jets of smoke. "There are some things beyond courage, you know."

"Beyond courage—ah, yes." Prazini acknowledged the thrust with a nod. "Then accept my congratulations for your new rank, Captain."

"Thanks. Come on, Fortier."

"A moment— About that favor, Captain."

"Won't need it, upon thinking it over."

When they were away Gallar laughed with cruelty around his lips.

"Didn't he cling to you! Thought it about time for you to come up for air."

"He's terribly broken."

"Don't—I'll burst into sobs!" Gallar snapped angrily. "What of Klaus? Of yourself? Of Martin? He sheared us all one after the other. Come on and have a drink. Hell, we're only young once, and not for long."

"Did you know Martin's stranded in the Zergur blockhouse?"

"Known it since five this afternoon. He's not the only one. But if you can tell me how your moping will help him, all right. If not, stay with us." He pointed to the aviators. "They will be over the lines tomorrow. Only the merest luck stands between them and a fall behind. White hot scythes in the eyes, bowels unrolled liked ribbons and rolled on sticks. Then their head promenaded through the hills. And at this time tomorrow night where will you be? Will another take your place with the detachment sent to Zergur? And without modesty, what of myself?"

"That's right—" Fortier poured himself a cup of champagne, tinged it with liquor grasped at random among many bottles. "Here's luck to you—here's luck to us!"

But Gallar's mood had changed. He grew restless, sullen, abrupt in speech. Like a shadow the same gloom leaped from man to man, tensed each face. Through the noises of clicking glasses, the laughter of women, the sharp popping of corks, and the jazz strains of the orchestra, the dry crackling spreading over remote hillsides

in the darkness seemed to be heard, the cries of men knifed in the night, the impressive flares swinging overhead to illuminate a rush.

"Dirty trade," said one of the aviators.

"Apprentice corpses." The speaker imitated the humming of a motor, then the impact of lead, and gestured wide. "Choice young meat, retail or wholesale. Dirty trade."

"Zut!" a slender blonde exclaimed. "They've all turned prophets." She emptied a bottle into the nearest glasses. "Dirty trade! You start and you come back, until one day you don't. So do we—down the line, Casablanca, Fez, Meknes, Tadla—then farther down, Agadir—then Dakar, then the Coast. Takes us a little longer, but we get there just the same! Here's to maggots, rot and perdition!"

"Bright, cheerful, pretty child!"

Every one laughed. The talking resumed. Fortier drank steadily. Beyond the powdered shoulders trimmed with scarlet silk, beyond the bright pupils, reared whitish walls pitted with metal scars. At the loopholes, men he knew, men he had commanded. He could see Martin: *képi* back on his head, tunic unbuttoned at the throat, jovial and yet with an undercurrent of seriousness. He could hear his voice, crisp and calm—

"Schultz, I wouldn't bet thirty-five centimes on our hides . . ."

And the signal lanterns were blinking from hill to hill, back and forth toward the new French lines, with the same chant of need and accepted fate—

"Cartridges for three days—water for one day—no more grenades—no more water . . ."

## VI

THE BIG car driven recklessly by the military chauffeur weaved through groups of men, frightened pack camels and brought stentorian comments from mules. In the tawny light of late afternoon, the rows of tents in regular patterns, enclosed in girdles of barbed

wire, flanked by massive tanks, were blurred, less precise, unreal.

Lined on the crest above, field pieces pounded away rhythmically. The men of the gun crews, stripped to the waist, appeared as if their tanned, muscled torsos had been chisled from metal. They worked leisurely. Infantrymen off duty had strolled up to watch the show. Shells sought for concentration points and villages miles away.

The automobile slid into a street of the camp, turned once and stopped before a row of larger tents.

The chauffeur addressed Fortier—  
"Legion headquarters, Lieutenant."

Fortier got out of the car, shook hands with the half dozen officers who had come with him from Meknes. Then he hailed a Legionnaire of his company.

"What's that—rifle fire?"

"Yes. The lines are over the crest, four or five hundred meters. Want to see the major? He's in there. Don't worry about your stuff. I'll hand it to your orderly."

In the tent Fortier found Major Roussel seated before a folding table on which a map was spread. The candle in the cage of tin and glass was already burning, casting a yellow circle downward. Roussel lifted his bald head. His clean-shaven face, broad as it was high, split into a smile of genuine welcome. Without rising he extended his hand and asked the usual banal questions. Then:

"Captain Braque will be here soon. As you know, Martin is blocked at Zergur. He's signaled that there's artillery coming toward him and I have authorization to undertake a rescue. I'm not optimistic, but we can't let our men die within eight miles and keep our arms folded. Braque is in charge here."

"I'll be ready to go, Major."

"You were wounded — you're just back."

"Nevertheless, I'd like to go."

"We'll ask. Here's Braque now—"

Braque came in, greeted Fortier, brought a tin trunk nearer without visible effort. He was tall and lean, near forty. His gray eyes were quick, forever

darting about, resting on nothing, missing nothing. A long hooked nose jutted above a graying mustache, a humorous smile. His skinny arm shot forward, his fingers closed on a yellow package of cigarets on the table. A match scratched against the heel of his boot.

"What have you got there, Major, a map? For tonight?"

"That's it."

"I've found a native guide, trustworthy."

Fortier addressed Braque:

"Captain, I have a request to make which you'll understand. That's one of our sections stranded with Martin. Don't you think our men should get the choice when you call for volunteers? And that I might go along as your second?"

"Something in that," Braque admitted. "Can you take charge? You're recently out of the hospital."

"I'd be glad to follow you, Captain."

"I'm willing to step aside, Major," Braque said. "I'm not too anxious, knowing there'll be plenty of lead for all of us before this Riff affair is finished." He turned to Fortier. "The major and I have decided to risk sixty men. A quick march there and a quick march back. Sounds easy—were it not for thirty thousand Riffi in the neighborhood."

"Your company should do the stunt," the major agreed. "The men are pretty well shaken up by all that's happened. There was a question of merging it and recomposing the entire outfit. That's bad —leaves a scar on the battalion, like an operation on a human body. Prazini was too proud of it—something was bound to happen. Prazini was a damned good lieutenant, and grew foolish only after he became captain and started to have delusions of grandeur. Common fault among the old-timers."

"I knew him at Ain Saffra, when he was nineteen. Used to hold his sash when he rolled into it—smallest waist and widest shoulder in the company. What spoiled both of us was the war which gave us commissions. We'd have made perfect *adjuvants* of the old type, he and I. *Bon dieu*,

we have never loved each other, but we have respected each other, from the days when we pounded the Casa-Fez trail with sergeant's sardines on our arms."

"So it's agreed, Major?" Fortier asked. "Agreed."

Soon after Fortier had located Sergeant Begues, who was senior non-com, and asked him to order the men out. The company—what was left of it—drew up in two lines. Of one hundred and sixty faces, only half were known to Fortier. The newcomers, freshly arrived from Algeria, Fortier dismissed immediately.



"COMRADES," he addressed the rest, "I am not exposing a secret when I tell you that this company is presumed to be in bad shape. Many unfortunate happenings have brought us to unfavorable attention. A detachment is to be risked in an attempt to save Sub-Lieutenant Martin, Sergeant Schultz, and our other comrades occupying Zergur. I claimed the right to handle this matter ourselves. There are nine chances in ten we will be massacred. So a limit has been set to sixty men. I count over seventy-five present. I know you are all volunteers. Men with sore feet, or otherwise unfit physically, owe it to their companions not to come. There must be some way of choosing, so I shall ask the sergeant to present me a list of the fit, and I shall select those with the best records."

Fortier went to his tent with Sergeant Begues.

"Armament—carbines and as many automatic pistols as you can draw. Two musette bags—one with food for twenty-four hours, one filled with grenades. Two canteens. Take the sergeants' lists as they come in and check the men. We start at eleven. Gather quietly. Understood?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Four sergeants—you're one of them. Select the other three. No drinking between now and the start. Be pitiless; a man partially drunk is a man out. I want no brandy courage."

Fortier found Braque in his tent and together they worked out a route on the map.

From the information gathered from spies and airplane reports, they knew the principal outposts of the Riffs, the principal camps. The problem was to weave between them to reach the circle of besiegers around Zergur, to break it, to free the small garrison and escape after blowing up the fortifications. Reaching the vicinity of the blockhouse was easy—it might be accomplished without attracting attention. The danger lay afterward.

Braque had sent an orderly for the guide.

A tall native entered, in the khaki uniform and turban of the Moroccan sharpshooters. He saluted the officers, halting eight paces away. Fortier noted the straight, lithe body, the intelligent glance, the grim resolution.

"Corporal Roufil," Braque said. "Roufil, you will go with the lieutenant instead of me. He will trust you as I would. He sees no objection to your wearing garments other than the uniform—and if he fails you can escape."

"No need. I go with the men as one of them. Their quarrel is my quarrel."

"You speak French well, Corporal," Fortier said.

"Fifteen years' service. As a boy I lived here—one of the Tsoul tribal groups. Many times before the French came I crossed into the Riff and returned again with merchandise. Where Zergur is, there was formerly the Thursday market."

Fortier selected a large airplane photograph.

"If one crosses the river near the twin trees, how many trails open, where do they lead?"

"Three trails; one goes north toward the Riff, one follows the river, the third goes on to Zergur. This last passes through a ravine, where men are now camped—so we must seek the left crest, lower and unlikely to be occupied, for one may not see the French lines from there."

"That will do. Report to my tent at ten-thirty." He offered his hand to the

native, who touched it briefly, Arab fashion, saluted and left. "Good man . . ."

"Yes—and hates the Riffi. The son of a Tsouli by a Jewish trader, he suffered considerably the one time he tried to leave the army for civil occupations. They told him he had entered French service to be allowed to wear a red cap instead of the black one."

Fortier went back to his quarters and found Sergeant Begues waiting.

"The sixty men are listed, Lieutenant. Only one in question—Private Meweik. He is a brave lad but there are half a dozen men older in years and with the same replacement draft who wish to go. He said to ask you to decide—that you knew him."

"Put him down. All right, Begues, ten-thirty."

Left alone, Fortier wrote a few letters, to be mailed in the event he did not come back. Sixty men were sixty men—and no match for thousands. From the day he arrived at Khenifra and met Prazini, he had felt that their connection would end in the death of one or the other. This feeling, indefinite at the start, had grown. Prazini, with a home unit in Meknes, was out of danger.

At precisely ten-thirty Begues reported.

"Everybody ready. Food and grenades allotted to each man; one hundred and fifty cartridges apiece. The men are outside. And the guide is there, too."

Fortier tested the laces of his high boots, slipped a woolen tunic without rank marks over his shirt. Instead of the *képi*, a long strip of khaki cloth wound into a turban, four additional pistol magazines in his coat pocket, a bag of food over one shoulder. In another pocket went folded maps, a compass, matches in a safety case, cigarets. A trooper's two quart canteen, filled with water flavored with anisette, was slung over the other shoulder. In his hip pocket a flask of old brandy.

"Ready—"

He looked back at his two tin trunks, bearing his name in white stenciled letters, and wondered whether this were not his last sight of his belongings.

Begues led the way, for the Legionnaires had been sent near the line of shallow trenches.

They were massed in a depression waiting for him. The night was dark; the sky studded with stars seemed to bear down closer than usual.

"Sergeants, count your men. All there? All right!"

A hand on his sleeve. Braque was there.

"Two hours from now the whole battalion will be alerted and moved down to the lines. If you get into trouble near here, within striking distance, send up a rocket."

"All right, Captain."

"Good luck."

Fortier turned a last time, twenty yards farther on. Braque was already lost in the darkness. Cigaret stubs, thrown away at a sergeant's order, curved like scarlet stars and vanished.

## VII

**S**HARP, clear, a boot toe struck a stone.

There was a rattle down the hill, a succession of clicking impacts, a stop, then the dribbling of smaller fragments. Fortier halted, the whole line came to a dead stop. They listened. Then Roufil touched the lieutenant's sleeve, Fortier touched Begues who followed him, and the march was resumed as the signal traveled.

What these men had achieved would have been impossible against well organized foes. But the Riffi's lines were not lines in the accepted sense. There were shallow trenches, rifle pits, with wide, empty spaces between. The principal forces were gathered in camps near water holes. The darkness was complete; the natives dared not light fires because of the watching artillery.

Several times dogs had barked, scenting strangers. But the natives paid little heed to their dogs, for the animals, who considered members of the allied tribes as alien as the French, howled all night. They had forded the river, which raced

knee high on a slippery clay bed. There had been several falls and much splashing, enough to wake the hillsides. But no hail came, no shot was fired.

The feeling of utter security, of absolute confidence in ultimate success, grew stronger. Fortier fought against it, knowing too well this tendency of the mind to acquire peace. There was constant danger of discovery—an unlucky tumble, a butt plate brought down too hard against a stone. Behind him, with the muffled steps of the men, he caught an occasional warning whisper, a low curse.

From the front lines of the French, now several kilometers in the rear, came shots in rapid succession, with the chorus of the automatics. At long intervals, the batteries hurled shells on designated targets in short bursts lasting fifteen to thirty seconds, ever hoping to bring death and confusion into an encampment. The routine of the night was kept according to instruction, for it was feared that the slightest departure from the usual procedure would serve as a warning.

A man slipped. Fortier caught his breath; heard the rustling of his equipment, the scraping of his boots, then the hard breathing of those who held him while he recovered his balance. Silence once again. Fortier, turning, could barely discern the first two men behind him.

After a long space of quiet he grew conscious of a faint, melodious sound, a light hum, very remote. He recognized a familiar Legion song. Glancing at his watch, he saw the luminous hands pointing at two. The Legion battalion was marching down to the lines, singing. Within rifle range, when the battalion reached the open, the singing would cease.

There was a certain measure of comfort in the knowledge that others were thinking of him, of those with him, hoping for them, perhaps praying for their success. He felt less alone. This first elation oozed away swiftly when the singing stopped.

Roufil turned to the right, led the way downhill, brought them into a narrow gully. Above, the sharp edges of the crests on either side, the silhouettes of

trees against the sky which appeared suddenly lighter, like silk, seen from the floor of the valley.

"The nearest camp is a full mile away," Roufil explained, almost in a natural voice. "There is no reason for sentries here. What time is it, Lieutenant?"

"2:05—"

"We must hurry if we wish to return before daylight. It will be easier to come back, for I recall the exact path to follow to avoid camps or sentries. If there is anything more to say to your men, Lieutenant, this is the time. Farther on, we can not halt or speak aloud."

"Begues, tell the men to drink now and then leave the canteens alone." Again he went over the instructions already given, and concluded, "Every fourth man will have a grenade in his hand at the word 'grenade' passed from man to man. At the word 'ready' they will prime it. You have the rocket gun?"

"Yes, Lieutenant." Begues guided Fortier's hand to feel the big pistol.

"Have a light flare ready. Shoot it high at the first shot. That will warn Martin that we are near. At the same time it will be seen from the rear and they'll know we've made it. In case you are put out of action, Begues, who will pick up that gun?"

"I have four men told off to watch me."

"Good. Forward."

Roufil went on with less caution. The march grew swifter. The guide was in familiar country, had obtained his bearings, turned left or right without hesitation, found gaps between hills. Twenty minutes after the halt, he reached out, touched Fortier's arm warningly, and then vanished. He came back soon and signaled to walk on. These halts and stops became more frequent. At length he drew near and whispered—

"The blockhouse—up there!"



LOOMING against the sky a hill swept up steeply. Barely discernible on its crest were the crenelated walls of Post Zergur. Fortier wondered why there was no firing, no sign of fighting. Perhaps it

was too late and the blockhouse had been stormed. Then he reasoned that the Riffi, feeling sure that the fortification would fall without loss of life to themselves by use of artillery at almost point-blank range, preferred to rest. Also Martin would wish to save his cartridges as much as possible.

"Grenades," he ordered.

Need for concealment would soon be over. He knew that those following him had the worst part. He had to think, to plan, while all they could do was wait — interminably. The impact of boots on the soil grew louder. The men were crowding forward, eager to act.

"Ready!"

The lines blockading Zergur must be very close, for they were now less than a kilometer from the post. Far on the right, obliviously beyond range of the French batteries, fires gleamed.

"*Men hou?*" the first challenge came, almost a whisper.

"*Ouled Jedda,*" Roufil replied.

Tall and white, a shape detached itself from a patch of darkness. The gleam of starlight on a gun barrel. Then there was a scuffle, the smack of metal on bone. Roufil rose alone. It had happened with breath taking rapidity. Another sentry appeared twenty yards farther on; again the infantryman replied. This time Fortier tore the Mauser from the man's hand when Roufil grasped his throat and smashed the butt on his skull.

"Should double their sentries," Fortier thought.

The third guard, probably warned by some sound which had escaped the European, knew that all was not well. Roufil parleyed with him for a few seconds, but he stepped back whenever the guide approached. Then the guide suddenly leaped forward, brushed aside the rifle, which Fortier caught and clubbed. He located the fallen man's head and brought the butt down like a pile driver.

But Roufil did not rise. And not far away a sleepy voice arose, asking the reason for the disturbance. With discovery a matter of seconds, Fortier bent

over the guide to help him up. His wrist encountered the hilt of a knife. The sentry had found time to draw his blade and sink it home.

Twigs were crackling near, and a rifle blazed away within inches of his face. He tore the pistol from its holster, fired twice. The detonation of the rocket pistol thumped behind him, a long streak of light lifted smoothly, soared higher and higher. Then the rocket exploded, flooding its harsh, cruel light over the scene, revealing scattered bushes, rocky soil — and natives running toward them.

Carbines came into action, grenades were flung.

Long howls greeted the attack, guns were fired at random from every side.

"The blockhouse, everybody! This way — this way!"

The non-coms repeated his orders. The rocket had gone out; they were in darkness again, but not the preceding stillness. The entire valley was aflame, the crests of the nearer hills were flickering with rifle fire. But the Riffi were not yet certain what had happened. The general opinion seemed to be that the garrison was attempting an escape, and the majority of the bullets were fired up at the block-house.

The detachment fought its way up the slope toward the walls. Men came upon them from all sides, but the Legionnaires had a certain advantage. The element of surprise was with them and they could strike out with the reasonable certainty that they would hit an enemy. Despite popular belief, the flashes of rifles and pistols make poor illumination, present the pictures for too brief a time.

Fortier, who had to make himself heard to give his men a rallying point, was twice dragged down by groping hands, and struck out with the pistol barrel to free himself. He felt the straps of his bags give way, the cloth of his tunic tear in a dozen places. His knee smarted, gashed deeply by an upward drive of a knife meant to disembowel him. Instinct rather than sight or sound made him bring up his leg to protect his stomach as he clashed with his unseen adversary.

His hand reached out at last and met barbed wires. He followed, calling to his men at the same time. Other voices picked up:

"This way! This way!"

He found a gap in the wire. The voices were straight ahead. He continued to shout and men passed before him. When no more came he followed. The walls of the blockhouse loomed overhead. Now he was under the gate; the big panels swung shut, heavy wooden bars dropped into metal sockets.



"LIEUTENANT Fortier speaking! Who commands here?"

"I do. Thanks for coming," the quiet, well remembered voice of Martin answered. A hand gripped his own.

"Get your men ready—we have to get out."

"All right; my charges are placed, the fuse is ready. I'll get some clothes on."

"Begues, find out the casualties and report to me."

"In the office, next to my room," Martin added.

He led Fortier into a building, scratched a match and lighted a lantern. The lieutenant laughed. Martin was wearing pajamas, his feet were in soft slippers. The sub-lieutenant reached for his clothes, tore off the silken stuff, explaining:

"Didn't expect callers. Usually they leave us alone nights. They soon learned that with the rockets and grenades prowlers didn't last long. I have three men badly wounded—too badly to carry out. Can't leave them here alive. I haven't the heart to shoot them, yet I can't leave them here to be blown up or perhaps live to be tortured. And if burdened by stretchers, we are lost."

"They must be sacrificed. How many men have you left?"

"Twenty-four, including seven wounded able to walk. They had a cannon and knocked a hole here and there. This afternoon they smashed four men. On the whole, poor results. Abd el Krim's can-

noneers won't win the show for him—" Martin broke off—"come in."

Sergeant Begues entered.

"Five men missing, Lieutenant, aside from the guide."

"I have given the same instructions to your men about the equipment that I received for mine," Begues added to Martin. "If that's all right, they'll be ready within five minutes."

"Fine."

"And the captain wants to speak to you," Begues concluded.

"What captain?" Fortier asked.

"Well—Prazini. Thought he was still captain, though he doesn't look it."

"You saw him yourself?" Fortier insisted.

"Not five minutes ago."

Fortier looked closer at Begues. He saw bloody smears on his face, evident traces of nervousness in the twitching of the facial muscles, that were perhaps not all due to natural excitement.

"All right, send him here," he said. He waited until the door was closed, then stood up. "I'll go and see that things are done right. Begues' gone crazy. I saw Prazini day before yesterday in Meknes."

A few minutes later, while Martin was collecting his papers, some one knocked at the door which swung open at Martin's invitation.

A Legionnaire entered, closed the door, saluted impeccably. He was a queer looking private who wore officer's laced boots and riding breeches; he was cramped in a tunic several sizes too small, the arms being bare almost to the elbows. He was completely shaven, thin, brown, but undoubtedly—Prazini.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted them. He saluted Fortier specially. "Good evening, *mon Lieutenant!*" He used the private's words in addressing a chief. "I needed no favor from you after all. Prazini's with his men!"

"I see you are, Captain."

"I surrendered the title. I am Prazini, deserter from the Line infantry, amateur Legionnaire. I thought, perhaps, that I might be killed too soon and go unnoticed

by you, *mon Lieutenant*. I should have grieved through purgatory and hell, in that case."

"How did you get here?"

"A party of four traders were leaving the Regence Hotel for Fez at two-thirty in the morning. They let me have a seat in the car. My presence in uniform would smooth out complications with the military guards. At daylight I was in Fez, and learned that a convoy of trucks was leaving for the camp. One of the chauffeurs gave me a seat with him—and two hundred francs purchased an old leather coat and a chauffeur's cap."

"That explains your arrival in camp. But the rest?"

"I had to dodge you and Braque, standing near the trucks. I had shaved my mustache in Fez. Yet I bumped into a fool who recognized me—that youngster, Meweik. He told me about this expedition; that he was going. I had six hundred francs and I offered them to him to swap places. He refused the money but agreed to let me have his equipment. Can you guess why?"

"Lingering respect for his captain," Martin suggested.

"No. In return for my severe treatment of Corporal Brenner, for saving him from further mistreatments. He dripped with gratitude. He wasn't too pleased to let his companions go into danger without him. He—" Prazini bestowed the words like jewels—"is a real Legionnaire. I came to offer you my past experiences, as a Legionnaire more than as a captain. You intend to leave the blockhouse soon?"

"I intend to evacuate my groups one by one," Fortier said. "Sneak them down the slope, mass them there—and wait for the explosion marking the end of Zergur, to charge into a disordered enemy. Sacrificing a few minutes, I'll increase our chances—"

"And I'd allow the lads outside to calm down a bit," Prazini advised. "In spite of what their leaders will tell them, many of them will think we are reinforcements come to help defense. They may go back to their camps and try to sleep a bit."

"But warriors will pour in here from every corner of the field," Martin protested. "Their numbers will increase."

"No; when the shooting started, the watchmen no doubt reported it to the chiefs who thought: 'Ah, something's doing by the blockhouse, probably a sortie of the garrison. The firing grows no nearer—it has failed.' So no one moved this way . . ."

"If we wait too long daylight will come," Martin insisted.

"We'll attack the circle of besiegers an hour and a half before light comes. Break through, make a running fight of it," Fortier said, "and when day breaks we'll be in reach of the artillery. Signal our positions and, being so near, the commander will try to extricate us."

"The three wounded—"

"Dope them," Prazini suggested. "Then remove the bandages. They'll feel no pain. And they will be lost in any case." He offered this solution simply, without emotion.

A sergeant entered.

"Message from our lines, Lieutenant," he told Martin, who was still his direct commander. "They report seeing the flare and wish to know what is going on. Can't reply, as the lamp doesn't function." The non-com looked with astonishment at the private seated with the officers; recognized Prazini and remained motionless, his jaw sagging. Then he drew himself straight, saluted. He left.

"That's a new sergeant—was corporal before. Where's Schultz?" Fortier asked.

"Schultz is one of the three wounded," Martin said.

## VIII

A FAINT glow suffused the east. Fortier followed the last group through the wires. They joined the others four hundred meters down the slope. There was animation among the natives, but no shots were fired. It seemed that the gradual evacuation of the blockhouse had gone unnoticed.

Prazini sat down beside Fortier.

"All right to talk," he said in a low voice. "They're making so much noise they can't hear us. Of all the loud mouthed slob! But it's going to be hard to go through them—hard . . ."

"I have an idea we'll get through."

"Just an idea. I hope I don't. You are a conceited man, Fortier; you don't like me; but at heart you understand. I am not a Klaus; I don't commit suicide that way." He chuckled. "Guess Braque was right when he used to tell me I was cut out for an adjutant."

Not overscrupulous, a rash leader, but a real man and a Legionnaire, thought Fortier. Men such as he had made the old Legion, the glorious battalions of the past. New born sympathy for Prazini brought attendant concern. The epic side of his escapade, his willingness to risk his career with his former company at the moment of trial, would touch all within the Legion. That was something Legionnaires understood and appreciated. But the newcomers to Morocco, numberless in this emergency, would probably try him, and remain unaffected by the beauty of the gesture.

The incidents in the past unrolled in his mind his quarrel with Prazini over Brenner, the consequent unjust treatment of Klaus, the sergeant's suicide. He recalled the tears on the mutilated cheeks and his muscles tightened, the old loathing returned. Yet, was not Prazini's scorn of suicide justified? Had there not been a weak strain in Klaus? It was hard to understand. It was—Legion.

Once one pronounced that name, one could not be astonished at anything. In the ranks of the corps, men were what they had been outside; the motives and characters that had driven them to refuge in the Foreign Battalions still existed. Some remained liars, others thieves or killers. The petty greed of the climber thrived, with the more ambitious maneuvers of the more intelligent men. And the plodder, like himself. One quality welded them and united them—courage, unflinching, invariable courage. And beyond courage that name, that title, more

precious to them than personal ambition: Legionnaire . . .

Prazini, reduced to the ranks but permitted to stay in the Legion, would have thought himself less punished. Roussel, Braque, Martin, himself, not one but would have suffered from a change. Not one would have accepted promotion at the price of leaving the Legion.

"Say, Martin's slow about his job, isn't he?" Prazini whispered. "I didn't like the way those wicks were fastened—the fire might eat through the loops and drop the ends. Would have done better with separate *bickfords*. Still, matter of taste."

They waited.

Rapid footsteps behind him, a shadow appeared at his side. The lieutenant clasped Martin's hand. The sub-lieutenant was shaking. The disposal of the wounded had taxed his nerves more than he would admit. One does not break standards of years lightly—even though he had hastened their ends but a few hours and spared them suffering.

Thirty seconds; they were passed and nothing happened.

"Grenades," Fortier whispered, touching Begues' back.

One minute, two minutes—and no explosion came. The sky was rifting into broad, light streaks, tinged with orange low on the horizon. In a short time, those below would see the Legionnaires on the slope.

"You're sure you lighted—"

"Yes, I waited and saw it burning."

"We'll wait two minutes longer," Fortier said, "then I'll go back. We can't let the supplies fall into their hands."

"I'll go back," Martin said.

"No second chance," Prazini spoke up suddenly. "I have pictured myself coming back here, reaching Zergur—and lighting the *bickford*. You wouldn't permit me before. Now, let me go."

Prazini was weeping, crying for his last chance. He believed that it was slated for him to perform the last rite at Zergur. The conviction was contagious.

Prazini wasted no time in farewells. He vanished as simply as he had appeared

earlier in the night. When he was gone it seemed that his appearance was a dream; the captain had not, could not have been with them.

A minute passed, another, a third. At the fifth, the ground quivered. The detonation of the charges threw Fortier to the ground. He was up again, hand high in the red glow of the explosion.

*"En avant, la Légion!"*

Stones and débris rained around them. The Legionnaires rolled down the slope without firing a shot. At the bottom, white garbed men massed to meet them. There were hundreds. Behind them were the hills and valleys, miles to the French lines. For a moment they formed an island of khaki in a sea of white and brown. Then they were through in a scattering of hand grenades.

Three hours later, the Legion battalion attacked with the bayonet to free the survivors of the detachment. There were forty-five of them, more than half wounded. They had fought their way over eight miles of enemy country. In saving twenty-five, thirty-five had died.

According to Legion tradition, this was logical.

When the battalion brought back its own to the camp, the fife and drums came down the line and played the Legion's march. A wave of enthusiasm brought the other troops pouring from their tents. Once again, the Legionnaires had tried and succeeded.

Sub-Lieutenant Martin, wounded in the jaw and in the chest, went to the hospital. Fortier reported to the major.

Somehow his story seemed to circle in an ever narrowing loop about Prazini. The captain resumed his old prestige. His entire career, not always honest, invariably brave, had received consecration by the monument of charred stones marking the place where he had fallen.

The legend shaped itself—the ride from Meknes to Fez, and the sublime finish. Men smiled, shook their heads. Braque flushed with pride.

"A man, Prazini!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," Fortier heard his own voice agreeing, "he found his true place again, in the Legion. A true Legionnaire."

