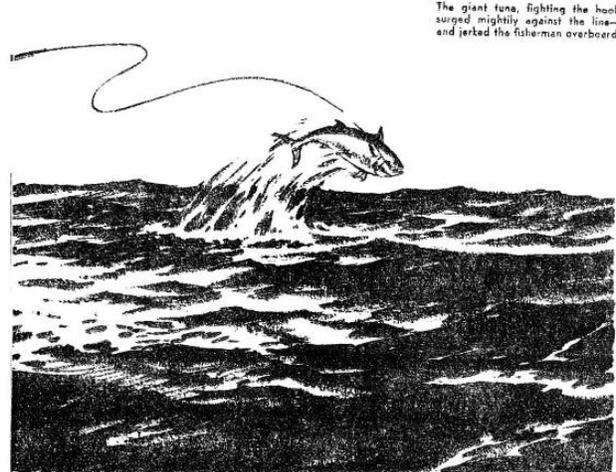
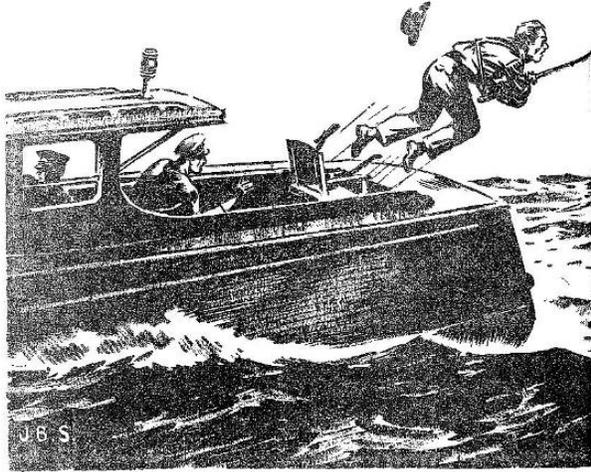


IT'S TIME TO GO HOME

By WILLIAM G. BOGART



The giant tuna, fighting the hook, surged mightily against the line—and jerked the fishermen overboard!

A broken clock couldn't tell Sandy Swim the time. But he wasn't interested in the clock's hands; its eyes were what he needed

SANDY SWIM, at the moment, did not resemble an officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Clad in windbreaker and blue denim pants, he appeared more like one of the lobster fishermen out of Cape Sable Island.

Sandy stuck his leathery face above the cuddy of the broad-beamed fishing boat, breathed deep of the crisp salt air whipping past the home-made windshield of the small cabin. His eyes dropped to the small compass located just above the wheel which he held.

He brought the thirty-five-foot craft back on her so'east course, then stared ahead into the brilliant glare coming off the choppy water. Sandy Swim figured that he should pick up the hazy, vague outline of lower Pubnico—where, it was said, they caught the biggest tuna in Nova Scotia—at any moment now.

For the first time in a year, Sandy Swim forgot that he was an officer in Canada's finest. Again he was a fisherman out of Clark's Harbor; again he was just a guy who loved the sea and who thrilled to the roll and pitch of the gas-engined powered boat. He

braced his feet, took the roll of the boat with bended knees, and wished that this vacation of his could last another month.

That is, he wished it until he finally came upon the tide "rip," where everyday they pulled in giant tuna running up to nine hundred pounds.

Five fishing boats were out in the rip this morning. Waves—choppy sea that tossed the boat up and down like a matchbox—sent salty spray flying over the little forward cabin. The salt stuck in Sandy Swim's bleached pale hair, and made little beads on his eyelashes. He grinned as he cut down on the gas throttle and kept the boat headed into the rip. It was going to be fun watching someone get a strike.

Sandy lay off, parallel with the line of tuna boats. The powerful engine in the covered pit almost at his feet kept turning over easily, just enough to hold the boat headed into the running tide. In the next boat nearest him, helpers in the stern were "chumming" out herring in an attempt to lure a tuna.

You could tell the regular fishermen, who operated the boats, from the men who came down here for the sea's greatest sport. The

fishermen themselves wore old jumpers, or perhaps a frayed sweater open at the neck. The breeze was strong, and quite cold. But they did not seem to mind.

But the anglers were dressed in oilskins, or perhaps expensive duds put out by New York's highest priced equipment stores. Sandy squinted his blue eyes and watched.

APPARENTLY there were three men, outside the helpers, in the party. One was sprawled out in a chair in the middle of the heaving boat. Another staggered to the rail, leaned over a moment, then swayed back and sank to the floor just behind the chair. Sandy grinned. Evidently this second one was already seasick.

The third man was in the chair itself. Sandy Swim well knew the setup. This "chair" was a clumsy-looking wooden affair located toward the stern. It was set in the center of a frame structure that looked not unlike a miniature motordrome. The idea was to brace your feet on this thing when you got a strike. The chair itself swiveled around to give you a chance to play the tuna.

And to the angler himself was attached the gear which held the heavy tuna rod. There was a reel at least a half foot in diameter. Straps went from pole and reel to a harness around the angler's chest and shoulders. Another harness securely tied the man to the chair.

The helpers in the very stern of the boat kept feeding out the large herring. Another fisherman was forward at the wheel, uninterested in the proceedings going on behind him. It was his job to merely keep the pitching boat headed into the heavy rip tide.

Again the one who was seasick staggered over to the rail. A moment later he returned to his position in the very bottom of the boat, gripping the foot rest of the man in the chair as he swayed past.

Suddenly there was a yell from one of the boats beyond the one which Sandy watched. The R. C. M. P. man quickly saw the reason

for the shout.

A giant tuna had cut the water close to the boat. Water swirled and a fin flashed. A fish that moved with the blurred speed of an express train had passed between the first two boats in the line. Excitement followed.

Men in the boat nearest Sandy were suddenly throwing more herring overboard. The man in the chair sat up alertly, working his pole up and down.

And then it came. The strike!

There was the whine of the reel as the monster tuna took the bait. It was a thing, Sandy Swim knew, that could happen so quickly that several hundred feet of line would go out before you hardly realized it.

But apparently the angler in the boat knew his business. For Sandy Swim saw the man's left arm move to the brake on the big reel. He was ready to throw it on, as soon as the streaking fish slowed its first run.

Sandy's sharp eyes told him other things. The man strapped in the chair weighed all of two hundred. He had powerful shoulders. He should be able to land this one in less than an hour. He should be—

Sandy Swim gasped, and stared for an instant in frozen awe. For the man in the chair had slapped on the brake which held the powerful tuna from running out.

And then he was yanked bodily overboard!

IT WAS a thing that occurred almost too fast for the eye to follow. One moment the broad-shouldered angler had been in the chair; the next, just as though some great unseen hand had clutched him, he had rocketed over the stern of the pitching fishing boat. And just as abruptly, he was gone.

There was only a foamy swirl of water to show where the man had gone beneath the surface. He did not reappear.

Sandy Swim whipped into action. He threw the wheel over, opened the gas throttle wide and swung his craft in a direction the

mammoth tuna had momentarily taken. But at the same time, Sandy realized, the fish, at that very moment, might be headed in an altogether different direction.

The other boats were also following, each taking a different course.

After five minutes, Sandy Swim's hard jaw set grimly and he gave a sigh. The man had not reappeared. He had been under long enough to drown three times over. Sandy heeled his own boat over until he came alongside the craft from which the man had been yanked.

He noted that even the seasick man was on his feet now. The man was short, stocky, with high-colored full features.

Sandy Swim hailed: "Only chance of ever finding that poor devil is when the tuna breaks that line with his tail."

The fisherman at the wheel of the other boat nodded. It was ticklish business jockeying the two pitching boats alongside in the running rip tide. Sandy was careful to keep at least a dozen yards from the other boat.

He added: "Who was he?"

Faces of those near Sandy Swim looked startled. Someone called: "Hell! That was Jimmy Martin!"

The words gave Sandy a start. Jimmy Martin! Present holder of the world's largest tuna catch!

Swiftly Sandy Swim's eyes narrowed and became thoughtful. He was staring at the big, safely anchored chair from which Jimmy Martin had been pulled to his death. And at the safety belt which now dangled from the back of that chair. Even from where he was, Sandy could see a detail about the heavy belt.

It was unfastened!

And yet it was hardly logical that an experienced fisherman like Jimmy Martin would sit there waiting for a strike with his belt unfastened.

And so Sandy Swim, on a sudden impulse, called out: "Pull out of that rip. Then tie up alongside here. I'm coming aboard!"

The short man of the red face, the one who had been seasick, looked at his partner, a man almost as big as the one who had disappeared overboard. The second man yelled back:

"What's the idea, stranger?"

For answer, Sandy Swim pushed back his windbreaker. Beneath it he was wearing his R. C. M. P. uniform shirt, and it was immediately recognized. He saw the short chunky man's lips pucker out in a surprised whistle.

A FEW minutes later both boats had pulled ahead into more calm water, clear of the dangerous rip tide. Sandy was able to ease his craft against the other boat without too much danger of the two smashing themselves to bits against each others' sides. He swung agilely aboard the second craft.

There was something awesome about seeing the big swiveling chair there in the tuna boat, empty of its occupant, swinging grimly left and right with each pitch of the boat. Sandy looked at the remaining occupants.

There were the two helpers and the man who had piloted the craft; all French Canadians who, Sandy knew, operated out of Wedgeport. But the red-faced short man and his burly partner were typical New Yorkers, up here on a holiday.

Sandy said: "Both you men knew Jimmy Martin?"

The big fellow nodded. "Hell, yes. We were associated with him in New York. We were all partners." He nodded at the red-face man. "He's Lou Golden. I'm Smith. We—"

"I see," Sandy Swim cut in. Disregarding the two, he turned around to examine the big chair set in the center of the large circular foot support. He picked up the safety belt, noting it carefully. The strong snap fastener was in perfect working order—but free of the ring which would have kept Jimmy Martin from going to his death!

Sandy Swim might have been clad in old clothes suited for the sea, but as he swung back to the group of watching men, he was

again a grim-jawed, alertly trained officer of the Mounted.

He said in a strangely quiet voice: "Jimmy Martin, as I recall, had an unbeatable record at tuna fishing. He was hardly the kind of person who would have left his safety belt unhooked. Even an amateur would have known better!"

The big man named Smith frowned and asked evenly: "Just what are you getting at, sir?"

Sandy Swim jerked his head toward his own boat. "Just this," he stated, "I'm taking you two in for questioning. Climb over!"

Sandy knew that the tuna boat itself belonged to the French Canadians. Tackle and boat were usually rented by the anglers. And so he directed briefly to the man at the wheel:

"Take her in. I'll be responsible for these partners of Jimmy Martin."

The short, red-faced man—Golden—looked aghast.

"You mean," he demanded, "that you're not even going to *look* for Jimmy Martin?"

Sandy Swim smiled tightly. "Perhaps," he said, "after that tuna breaks the line, we'll find Martin on the shore somewhere. But I'd say it will be at least a week—and then only if the right tide carries him to one of the islands around here. The mainland itself is quite a few miles off."

"But—"

"Get going!" Sandy Swim finished.

WHEN he had cast off from the fishing boat, with the two partners of the drowned man on his own craft, Sandy took the wheel and ordered his two captives to take seats atop the wooden covering over the engine. This was close beside where he himself stood at the small wheel.

The one named Smith was protesting: "I don't get this, officer. Certainly Jimmy's death was an accident . . . a terrible accident—"

"Terrible," Sandy Swim rapped, "but no accident. That safety belt was unhooked—

deliberately! I'm thinking one of you had a reason for—"

Suddenly, husky-looking Smith exclaimed, "Yes! Yes, there could have been a reason!" He glared at his short, red-faced partner. "Golden, here, owed Jimmy a lot of money. For some time now, Jimmy's been trying to buy out this man's interest in our business, but Golden won't sell. And so Jimmy beat him in a card game last night, to the tune of three grand. And now he hasn't got it, and Jimmy had him right in a position to force him to sell out. You see, we don't like his business methods, and—"

Suddenly, with swift and surprising movement, the smaller man came up off the motor housing. His hand had whipped from beneath his jacket, and in it there was a lot of gun.

"All right," he sneered. "Then how do you like this!"

Swiftly the man's red features had changed from that of a worried frown to twisted, leering fury. He held the gun trained on Sandy Swim and the big man, and he shouted: "Sure, I did it!" He stared a moment at the lawman. "I can tell from your actions, mister. You're wise to me, but if it hadn't been for this fool talking—"

Golden's gaze shifted back to the heavy-set man's, and there was murder in his eyes.

For a moment, Sandy's hands had left the wheel. Then his eyes clouded and he gripped it again, watching the man with the gun. He was unarmed himself; it would take some subtle trick to fool this killer—

Sandy Swim said flatly: "I had it just about figured, fella. That time you lurched away from the rail and near the chair. That's when you unhooked his belt. Furthermore, you were never seasick in the first place. A guy sick gets white, or maybe green, but you never lost that color of yours, and—"

Stocky Golden laughed harshly. "Fine!" he sneered. "Now figure this!"

And he fired point blank at the big man who had been his other business partner!

THE big man screamed, clutching his stomach. The shot had been fired from less than four feet away. The gun was a .38, and the mess it made of Smith was not pretty as he sprawled writhing to the deck. A moment later his motions stopped and he lay still.

But Sandy Swim did not wait to see that. He let go of the steering wheel and almost flew across the intervening motor housing in order to tackle the glaring eyed gunman.

But little Golden was too quick. Obviously he had been expecting the attack. He fired again, jumping back toward the opposite rail as he did so.

It was a wild shot, grazing the back of Sandy Swim's left hand. But it was enough to make him pause. He realized, tensely, that this man planned on burning all his bridges behind him. He had killed a man and been suspected, and for this he was now taking no chances.

He kept the gun lined on Sandy Swim's chest. The Mountie waited, his brain racing. Though his eyes never left those of the killer, he almost could see the short length of heavy baseball bat lying near the man's feet. It had been in the bottom of the boat when Sandy left Clark's Harbor. It was a bat used for hitting large fish over the head when they were hauled aboard.

He saw Golden's crazed gaze shift momentarily. The fellow chanced a glance across the water, just to make certain that no other boat was close.

And then, swiftly, Golden's eyes looked startled, fearful.

Sandy Swim understood instantly. A Nova Scotia fisherman could have told blindfolded.

The wind had suddenly changed. It had changed as swiftly as it does around the Cape; and with it there was the thick fog from further out to sea. The fog that lay out there constantly, and which would completely

envelop you five minutes after the wind shifted.

As though someone had dropped a curtain all around them, they were shortly in a bleak, chill world that was wet and drab with the fog that swirled like smoke.

SANDY SWIM stood motionless, a peculiar half smile touching his rugged features as the fog closed in. And he was suddenly thrilling to the salty, sticky smell that came with this fog.

For he was still watching the gunman's eyes, and the terror that was deep within them. For one who was not raised by the sea, Sandy knew that there was something mysterious, terrifying about the gray thickness that was as impenetrable as night.

Golden abruptly cried: "Grab that wheel, damn you! In this fog, we're liable to pile up on rocks. We'd be pounded to death!"

Sandy nodded. "Yes, we might," he said.

He took the wheel, noting that he was warily covered with the automatic. The gas engine had been turning over, the craft moving somewhat aimlessly through the rough water. He held the wheel steady and looked back at Golden.

Fear was still on the man's red face.

Somewhere off in the thickness, there was the mournful *bong-bong* of a buoy bell. Golden's face whitened a trifle. He said:

"How . . . how are we going to get *back* in this fog?"

Sandy Swim nodded to the small compass near the wheel. "With this," he said, "and by using the chronometer."

"You mean," the gunman asked doubtfully, "you find your way back to the mainland with just those things, in"—he waved an arm to indicate the gray curtain that was all around them—"in this?"

Sandy Swim nodded. "You'd better hurry up and get that chronometer before we *do* crack up. It's right here in the cuddy." Sandy made a slight movement toward the small

doorway near him. "Or I can get it myself."

"Wait!" exclaimed Golden. "I'll do the getting!"

Sandy shrugged, held onto the wheel. Golden moved forward, still keeping him covered. The doorway to the cuddy was only a few feet from Swim, and his right hand was out of sight as the gunman stepped dangerously close to him.

Suddenly, Sandy's right hand moved swiftly. He threw the wheel around, kicked the boat over at a sharp angle. Golden momentarily lost his balance, staggered.

In that instant Sandy Swim moved with lightning speed. His left hand shot out, grabbed the man's gun arm, knocked the weapon to the deck.

They went down in a fighting, clawing heap. Stocky Golden was quick and wiry. He flung the Mountie off, came to his feet and shot forward in a smashing drive.

Sandy Swim was knocked through the door opening to the small cabin. Golden landed on him before he was completely on his feet. Both men started swinging blows that were somewhat wild with the pitching of the boat.

A right landed Golden up against a narrow seat that angled forward inside the cabin. Force of the man's fall knocked an old battered alarm clock from a hook nearby. The clock was rusted, faceless, and its hands were stopped at two-thirty.

Sandy leaped in to finish the job, but Golden's feet doubled up, straightened, sent the law officer hurtling back toward the small doorway. Sandy hit the one short step and fell backward.

And in that second Golden had scooped up a heavy lead weight and swung. It caught Sandy Swim dangerously close to the ear. He went down—and stayed down.

WHEN Sandy Swim came to, he knew that he had been unconscious only a matter of moments. For Golden was just

pulling tight the last knot that bound together the officer's hands and wrists. From a length of heavy cod line, he had cut some of the brown cord. In fact, he was just on the verge of frantically shaking Swim when the lawman opened his eyes.

Golden yanked Sandy Swim to his feet, pushed him toward the wheel. "Damn you!" he snarled. "Now get back there and get us to land. Here!"

He had found the chronometer in its neat black case, and he placed the instrument near Sandy on the motor housing top. The device was one for measuring time accurately. With its use, in conjunction with the compass, a man who knew these waters could chart his way back through the fog.

"Now," Golden snapped, "you get us back near Wedgeport. There's an old dock a mile away from the regular pier. Take me there—"

But Sandy Swim was shaking his head.

"Only know the way through to Clark's Harbor," he said truthfully. "Getting *there* is bad enough, but I think I can make it."

Golden stared worriedly. Obviously he, too, knew something about the two hour trip that angled between dangerous reefs and uninhabited islands. A safe journey meant careful figuring of minutes, as various points of the compass were followed in order to hit the narrow entrance to the harbor. And around Clark's Harbor lay more outer islands that had been the ocean graveyard of larger craft than this.

His face tight with worry, Golden rapped: "Okay. And you'd better make it good." He waggled the gun which he again held.

Checking his minutes with the chronometer, Sandy Swim held the fishing boat on its course through the fog. It was uncanny, in a way. There was nothing except the thick fog. It might just as well have been night. Vision extended only a few feet to the threatening waves that composed the Atlantic around them.

Through the wall of gray occasionally

came the toll of a bell, faint and echoing weirdly. To Golden, the sound might have come from a dozen various directions. And he knew that each toll meant warning of reefs and shoal water. The way the sea was running, the least error meant death on jutting rocks.

Terror, therefore, still was mirrored in Golden's eyes.

Time passed, and they were the only two men in a world set apart. From time to time the law officer glanced at Golden, only to be reassured that the automatic was still trained on his back.

Then, after a while, his ears strained and he listened carefully. He could hear the bell through the fog, a sound that was slightly different than the others. Anyone who had ever lived on Cape Sable Island could have told you that it marked the entrance to Barrington Passage.

They were entering the smoother waters of the harbor!

Sandy Swim cut down on his engine speed, and watched ahead through the thick grayness. After a while he said: "We should be picking up the black-can buoy any moment. Then we'll be almost in."

Golden, however, had glanced over the side of the boat. He let out a sudden outcry.

"Wait!" he half screamed. "There's rocks just beneath us!"

But Sandy nodded quietly. "I know," he agreed. "But they're down a good dozen feet. We only draw three. I'm following the shoreline to the pier."

Golden stared. "You mean," he questioned, "we're right off shore?"

Sandy Swim motioned to his left. "It's only about a hundred feet away, here."

Suddenly, a crafty smile flickered across Golden's face. He swung the heavy gun barrel. Sandy went down on his face.

And then the killer was ripping off part of his clothes. Next, he scooped up a fish net, entangled it over the officer's limp form, then jumped toward the gunwale.

But he paused, returning and picked up the delicate chronometer and threw it overboard. Next, he picked up a length of fish line, pulled the wheel over until the boat was again headed away from shore, out toward the dangerous and narrow channel through which they had entered the harbor. Then he lashed the wheel so it could not move.

Yanking wide the engine throttle, Golden again stepped to the gunwale. Just before he dived overboard, he said with a leer: "See you in hell, brother!"

THROBBING of the boat's engine pounded through Sandy Swim's brain. He stirred, groaned with the pain that surged through the back of his skull. He opened his eyes.

Many men might have been panicked had they seen that heavy fish net tied about them. Too, somehow, Sandy Swim realized the trick the killer had used. He knew, instinctively, that his craft was headed at full speed out toward open sea—and toward the dangerous shoals that marked the entrance to Clark's Harbor.

But Sandy Swim had been in tight spots before. He worked with the net slowly, patiently. He tried not to think of what might be ahead of the moving boat.

But when he was finally free, he whipped into flashing action, got his hands untied, and then loosened the line from around the steering wheel.

He stared around for the chronometer, then suspected what had happened to it. He took a quick look at the compass.

Before hurrying into the small cabin, he cut the motor, just to be safe. He was out on deck again in an instant, listening tensely.

Far off, he heard the deep sound of the lighthouse "growler" on the Cape. Off to his left, Sandy Swim heard the faraway, toylike bonging of a bell. Some of the tenseness went out of his face.

He started winding up the old alarm clock

in his hand. . . .

Half an hour later, as though it might have been clear sunlight instead of impenetrable fog, he eased the fishing boat up to the pier at Clark's Harbor.

Men were waiting on that pier. Fishermen with strained faces. Others were already putting out in boats. They paused at sight of Sandy Swim.

Sandy tied up and was on the dock in an instant. He asked hurriedly: "Was there a man who swam ashore a little while ago? A short man who—"

Someone spoke up. "Sure thing, Sandy. Good grief, we figured you were done for. The guy said you and his partner and him cracked up, and then he just managed to swim ashore. He—"

Sandy's eyes flashed. "Where'd he go?"

"Headed for the ferry at Barrington Passage. Got a ride in a car. Must be almost up there by now, but the next ferry ain't for half an hour yet."

Sandy swung toward one of the fishermen he knew. "Get up to the hotel," he ordered. "Call them at Barrington and have them hold that fellow when he gets off the ferry. There's never more than one or two passengers at any time. Also call the R. C. M. P. and tell them to have a man waiting. But I'll be along in a moment."

Sandy's man was trapped. The ferry only crossed to the mainland once each hour. It was the *only* means, other than a small boat, by which you could leave Cape Sable Island. And these men had said that Golden had asked for a ride to the ferry crossing.

Briefly, Sandy explained what had happened. Among the men he knew, he saw a couple of strangers who were here on vacation. They understood something about chronometers, and they stared in wonder when Sandy Swim told how his own had been pitched overboard.

One said: "But I don't understand! Without it, how did you *know* your course? How did you get back here?"

Sandy smiled, gave his fellow men a knowing look.

"Mister," he offered, "fishermen raised on Cape Sable Island can't afford chronometers. They use alarm clocks to time themselves on their course. My chronometer was a gift, but I never used it. I'd rather have this old clock."

Sandy still held the clock in his hands. "Lucky thing it was stopped," he explained. "Or Golden might have guessed that I could use it." He indicated the half rusted hands and the broken face.

"You see, the darn thing always jams up at two-thirty. You have to remember to reset it when you're using it on a foggy day."

One of the visitors to the Island whistled. "Brother!" he exclaimed. "That's what I call navigating."

An old-timer spoke up. "Friend," he said, "I guess we can sort of *smell* our way home in a fog!"

Sandy Swim smiled again. Then his face set in grim lines. He said: "I've got to go. There's *one* fellow I know who's going to learn clocks can do more than tell time!"

THE END