

A One-Man Navy

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

Author of "Salads and Slum," etc.

Hunting subs was like running down lobos. Wolver Dean had done both, so he knew. It took fast head-work and a quick trigger finger—but there wasn't a chance for a mere gun pointer on the Shenandoah to use either.

"I'M FIT to be tied!" "Wolver" Dean, late pointer of the forecastle three-inch, S. S. Cohoxon, and a member of the armed guard detail, grieved upon the forecastle of the lean gray little Shenandoah. Over the life lines he could see the convoy forming. There were miscellaneous merchantmen, large and small, fast and slow; for in these early months of the war, little attention was paid to assorting merchant vessels according to their speed.

Yesterday Wolver had been a member of the armed guard and perfectly happy, while to-day he was one of the cruiser's first division and entirely miserable.

"Ever' time you try to figure out a common-sense way o' doin' somethin' in this man's navy, you run your head into the loop o' some 22-caliber regulation, an' down you come on your ear, like a piled steer."

He was justifiably peevish. Transferred in early April from the big cruiser Wilmerton to the armed guard, he had drawn the Cohoxon, an ancient freighter. But it was duty that suited his solitary and independent nature perfectly. Down in Texas, this lank, angular, steel-muscled young man had been a wolver. Every lobo he had trapped or shot represented a particular problem. He had had to outguess the wolf. All this discipline that the outfit set so much store by seemed foolish to Wolver Dean.

"Listen, country!" an angry voice snarled in his ear. "Y' done not a solitary thing since y' come aboard this mornin' but mull around an' moon overside. Now, y' happen to be on the Shenandoah, see? Happen to be in my section, see? An' if y' was to be Josephus Daniels' old-

maid sister, y'd turn to with y' ears snappin' back, when I spoke to y', see? Now—"

Deftly, the big cox'n named Purdy caught Wolver's lean shoulder. He half-twisted, half-pushed, and finally applied the toe of a number-ten shoe to the seat of Wolver's blue regulation trousers.

Nobody had ever kicked any of the Deans around and walked off the scene without contusions to report—not any of the Deans Wolver had ever heard of. He was hardly conscious of what he did, so automatic and instinctive was his reaction to this insult from the hulking red-headed cox'n.

He wrenched his left shoulder from Purdy's grasp and whirled. The cox'n, not expecting any activity of this precise sort, took a fist in the midriff. He doubled up like a jackknife; for the right hook, driven with all the force of Wolver's powerful shoulders and the momentum of his pivoting body, had caught the old sailor with muscles relaxed.

Wolver hooked a hard left to the jaw, as Purdy sagged; smacked him on the ear with a vicious glancing right upper-cut; and saw Purdy drop to his knees on the deck.

"You two men!" a voice bellowed overhead. "Lay up to the bridge, here, both of you. On the double!"

Wolver looked thoughtfully that way. It was the executive officer, red and angry. But, another officer appeared at this moment, to whisper in the executive's ear. The executive officer shrugged impatiently. But when Wolver and Purdy—the cox'n still panting for breath—came up to the bridge, the exec hummed and hawed.

“What was the trouble down there?” he asked with a sort of forced mildness.

“Trouble, sir?” Wolver’s eyes opened widely, innocently.

“No trouble at all, sir,” Purdy managed to mumble, between great inhalations. “We—was kind o’ scuffling y’ see, sir. That’s all!”

“Hmm,” said the executive officer. “Dean, something tells me that your career on the Shenandoah is apt to be hectic. Perhaps you may come to regret reporting aboard.”

“Yes, sir,” Wolver nodded earnestly. “You’re absotively correct, sir. I already am. I never wanted to come a-tall. All I was wantin’ was to stick in the armed guard, sir. An’—an’ I certainly would take it as a mighty big favor, sir, if you’d fix it up to le’ me go back, right now.”

“Why, then, did you tear yourself from the bosom, as it were, of the armed guard?” This was a new voice to Wolver. He turned slowly, and saw a brisk little man with sharp black eyes, a big nose, and an immaculate uniform with four gleaming gold stripes on the cuffs. Wolver saluted respectfully and stood at attention.

“Why, if you so loved and cherished the armed guard,” Captain Banning continued, “did you arrange for transfer?”

“I never, sir!” Wolver replied sadly. “‘Twas a young ensign, let out a year ahead o’ time, that arranged ever’thing. He was assistant personnel officer, cap’n. An’ he come up as I was helpin’ out some o’ the boys with their splash practice, an’ he never liked what I was sayin’. I tried to explain to him, cap’n, that I was just figurin’ a short cut, like. But he says I was insolent, an’ I never was meanin’ to be, a-tall. But he shanghaied me out o’ the armed guard pronto.”

“Dear, dear!” sighed the captain. “But in spite of that, you want to go back and fight the battles of democracy upon the fo’c’s’le of a cargo boat; protect with the faithful three-inch the supplies intended for our gallant boys over there and so on.”

“If I could be sent over to one o’ them—” Wolver suggested, nodding toward the merchantmen. “I certainly do want to git back onto the armed guard, sir. It’s the only duty in the navy that lets a man use the inside o’ his head, Texas style.”

“No, I fear me not. You’ll have to stay with

us. We can’t transfer you here. But—you’ll have to go on to Queenstown. Perhaps a way will open for you, to return some day.”

“Oh, I’ll git back, a’ right, sir,” Wolver said calmly.

“In the meanwhile, lay below and turn to! And make up your mind that the war isn’t to be finished in a day, You’ll have a chance to smell powder yet—this very trip, it may be. So make yourself one of us—and move on the double!”

Wolver recognized the new note in Captain Banning’s voice that now replaced his bantering manner. But as Wolver saluted and turned toward the port ladder, with Purdy following, he sniffed. He would smell powder, would he? That was a good one, when on his first and only trip across with the Cohoxon, they had fought and sunk a sub. He and the trainer had sunk it, after he had killed the German skipper and a lieutenant with an automatic, pulling the battle out of the bag when it was lost.

THAT night, he stood his gun watches and his lookout with the rest of Purdy’s section of the starboard watch. And he admitted that Purdy was all right; the cox’n made no distinction between Wolver and any other of his section. He was square, if he did get hard-boiled. But that eased Wolver’s homesickness none at all, as he looked across the moonlit water and saw the black hulls of the merchantmen in their columns. That was where he fitted—out there on one of them, standing watch at the guns, with no formalities if a sub heaved in sight.

The days slid by evenly, as they do at sea. Five of them—six. The seventh day out of New York drew to a hazy twilight. Wolver looked out at the moonless, cloud-obscured sky and shook his head. Mechanically—as if all this were his private responsibility—he looked at the Shenandoah’s decks, from which the deckload of coal was vanishing, looked at the shells and powder bags under the tarpaulin by number nine, the fo’c’s’le gun. Have to watch out, tonight!

The convoy was shifting formation, as all early convoys did. Ships which had been file leaders had dropped back until they lagged in the rear of columns they had led. One twin-screw, shining Philadelphia freighter, apparently the best ship in the seventeen the Shenandoah was

escorting, had dropped out of the convoy entirely, her starboard engine out of commission.

Wolver had drawn pointer of the forecandle gun. On the mid-watch, shortly after midnight, there was an odd phosphorescent-like glitter to the sea. There was a glimpse of the hull of a freighter, as the *Shenandoah* turned from her post in the van, to go back around the convoy's rear and up through the files, to see how everything was going with the ships. You could see a hull for a split second, quite clearly, but the eye was tricked so that details evaded you.

They were not zigzagging; Captain Banning had decided to make as much speed and as many sea miles as possible, while there was no actual sign of danger.

As the *Shenandoah* came around the rear of the convoy, Wolver and the trainer were muttering to each other. Wolver, staring with those plainsman's eyes of his out at the sea, thought he saw something low down on the water, perhaps a hundred yards astern of the nearest cargo boat. He stiffened, with tawny head thrust out and his mouth drawing to a thin line. He grunted to the trainer and without thought, the trainer spun his wheel; number nine came around to starboard and Wolver hunted that half-seen shape through the telescope sight, as he depressed the muzzle out of horizontal.

"What the hell y' guys doin'?" snarled Purdy, who was gun captain.

But Wolver, concentrating rigidly on his hunt for that half-seen, half imagined shape out there, heard Purdy's voice if at all, only as an angry and far-away murmuring. It looked like a sub, but might be only a blackfish or a porpoise. Still—

"Steady on it!" he muttered, to himself rather than to the others of the crew.

His thumb tensed on the firing button. But at that moment the helmsman, in obedience to an order of the officer of the deck, who chanced to be Ensign Robards, the first division officer, twirled his wheel to starboard. The fo'c's'le five-inch roared, but Wolver had seen the grayish shape vanish, sliding out of the cross wires of the sight, even as he fired. The shell skipped across the gleaming water perilously close to that ancient tramp so magnificently named *The Burmese Rajah*.

Wolver tore off his blue knitted watch-cap

and hurled it to the deck. Furiously he stamped upon it, all the while glaring at the bridge.

"Oh, what's the use?" he snarled, "Spoiled as purty a shot as ever I see! Yanked me right off—"

"Who fired that shot?" came Ensign Robards' voice shrilly from the bridge. "Who gave orders to fire that shot?"

"This bright an' shinin' light out o' the armed guard, sir!" Purdy answered angrily. "Nobody give him orders. He was just runnin' things to suit hisself, sir!"

"Relieve him! Send him up here instantly!"

When Wolver got to the bridge, he faced not only the ensign, but all the senior officers of the cruiser, who had arrived at the run, wakened by the roar of the five-inch.

"Who told you to fire that shot?" Captain Banning demanded grimly. "Don't you know that we've been trying to move through this zone with the absolute minimum of noise? And you nearly sank the *Burmese Rajah*? Answer up! What have you to say for yourself?"

Wolver sagged wearily before them. Regulations! Formalities! Orders! Everything on the earth and the sea but some common sense. And how could he say anything that would explain his point of view.

"Nobody told me, sir," he said slowly. "I just let go on my own hook."

"Oh, you did! Well, well, well," the captain said unpleasantly. "And I presume it was merely to relieve the tedium of your watch? You wearied of monotony, perhaps?"

"I figured, sir, that sinkin' subs was what I was supposed to be there for. Hadn't been for the helmsman changin' course just as I whanged away, there'd have been a right sick tin fish out there now. I was steady on it, an' as I pressed the button, the ship heeled over to sta'b'd, an' my shot went wild. Two seconds more an' I would have gethered him in."

"Utter nonsense, sir!" Mr. Robards said disgustingly. "I was scanning the water all around the ship with my glasses. There wasn't a sign of anything there, except the *Burmese Rajah's* wake."

"It looked like it was just comin' up," Wolver said without interest. "Just barely awash. I got a glimpse o' the connin' tower, seemed like, with a double bow wave a-runnin' aft along the

sides.”

“But nobody else could see it, of course,” Mr. Robards said ironically. “We have only one pair of eyes on the ship—yours. Very peculiar. Very!”

WOLVER waited with weary patience. He was headed for grief, as usual. But three years of the navy had taught him to expect it. Every time he tried to stand on his two feet and use his own judgment in some matter which didn't permit a long wrangling over the best procedure, he got it.

“Why didn't you report what you saw?” the captain inquired. Wolver was surprised; the Old Man seemed merely curious; his first anger had slipped out of his voice.

“If it was a sub, it was cruisin' awash, sir,” Wolver explained. “That'd mean the connin' tower could be open. If I was to have yelled out, why couldn't that German hear me? Well, sir! Wouldn't he've acted like any sensible man? Slammed his hatch to, an' dived an' got off, anyhow? Mebbe have let go a torpedo at us, or at the Burmese Rajah? If you go out wolf hunting sir, an' you catch a wolf over the front sight by havin' luck, you don't howl an' raise the neighborhood, just to let ever'body know you found a lobo. You crack down on him, while you got a chance. Or, anyway, you do down in Texas.”

“Probably a blackfish,” suggested Captain Banning, his black eyes steady on Wolver. The other officers—the exec, the navigator, the engineer officer and Ensign Robards—all stared curiously at the skipper. They seemed puzzled at the delay in disciplinary action.

“Might've been, sir,” Wolver nodded. “But when a blackfish looks so blame' much like a tin fish—well, if he monkeys around me when I got somethin' to shoot an' he's goin' to be hash! I did what seemed best, sir.”

“Lay down to your watch again,” Captain Banning grunted abruptly. “I think you saw a blackfish.”

“But, captain,” the exec began as Wolver saluted and went down the ladder, “the orders—”

Wolver did not hear what they said. But what Purdy said a moment after was quite clear and pointed. “An' y'll stay on life-buoy watch the rest o' the time y're in my section, too!” Purdy

finished his statement of opinion.

Wolver spent the rest of his watch pacing a beat between the two copper Franklin buoys that hung in racks on each side of the cruiser's stern. It was a dark and lonely watch, on the poop. For number ten, the poop gun, was not manned. He saw nobody but the quartermaster coming aft to read the patent log at hourly intervals.

He had turned in at eight bells—four a.m.—and had just fallen asleep when the general alarm gong roused the ship. He came out of his blankets in a wild leap and glared around him. The insistent, spine-crinkling clamor of the big brass gong vibrated up and down the decks. Wolver was topside in leaps. On the fo'c's'le he found the gun crew tense at the gun. And the Shenandoah was racing down between two files of merchantmen.

It was the dark hour preceding dawn—but not dark enough to hide that grim spectacle at the tail of the file on their right. A ship had lifted her nose in air like a stricken live thing. She was poop under, already; the lighter underwater section of her bow giving the appearance of a gasping mouth. But of the sub which had torpedoed her, there was no trace.

The Shenandoah circled like a fierce eager dog, hunting something at which to snap. But quickly she gave over this futile hunt and returned to lower boats, throw lines overside and rescue the freighter's crew from the water. She had barely got the last survivor up and darted away, when the ship sank.

Grim-faced, Wolver Dean stared at the spot where the ship had gone under. There was no doubt in his mind that he had seen a sub; that if the Shenandoah had not changed course as he fired, the freighter and her cargo would have been safe this minute.

He stood his life-buoy watch though. Neither Mr. Robards nor Purdy had said anything to him, directly, about his shot of the night before, or the torpedoing of the merchantman.

During his watch, he saw one ship frequently, as the Shenandoah circled from front to rear of the convoy. It was an old, well-decked seven-knotter, without a gun crew that Wolver could make out. There were what seemed to be oil drums, stowed on her well deck, clear to the bulwarks.

He was standing on the forecastle near

twilight when the Shenandoah, making one of her circuits, alert against that sub which had shown itself like a wolf following a cattle-herd, came up to this old ship and ran alongside it.

"Willamette, ahoy!" Captain Banning hailed her.

On her bridge a man moved, coming at the born sailor's rolling gait with a sort of contemptuous deliberateness to lean upon the port wing rail. He was a short man, but tremendously wide. He wore an old blue knitted jersey, and above his square, changeless red face was—of all headgear at sea—a greenish-black old derby hat. His eyes were pale blue and very steady, squinting under yellow-white brows.

"Yeah?" he answered the navy skipper's hail, with a rising inflection. Somehow, it gave the impression of a disgusted, belligerent accent.

"You're steadily dropping behind," Captain Banning said briskly. "And with that submarine about, it isn't safe. Can you keep up tonight? Seven knots?"

"Dunno," the Willamette's skipper said indifferently, spitting over the side, "Jedgin' from what happened last night, I'm as well off by myself. Reckon 'twasn't no blackfish, after all, your gunner was a-firin' at. Too bad he never connected!"

"Never mind all that!" Captain Banning snapped. "The point is, will you be able to maintain the standard speed of the convoy? You've a valuable cargo there—and a dangerous cargo. I don't want you dropping out of convoy if its avoidable. But on the other hand, we're well below a safe speed as it is, thanks to your boat and a couple of others."

"Then what the devil did they load me with depth bombs an' Y-guns for? An' all in such an all-fired hurry I never even got a navy gun crew? I dunno what my engines'll do. If we can stick at seven knots, we'll stay with you. If we can't, go on ahead without us! We'll come as nigh collectin' that tin fish a-heavin' spuds as anybody's done with gunfire this fur!"

With which Parthian shot, he turned his back upon the United States navy, as represented by the Shenandoah's skipper.

WOLVER was on life-buoy watch from ten to twelve that night. There were scattered

shafts of moonlight, showing briefly through scudding clouds. Captain Banning himself was on the bridge. He made a circuit of the convoy. Wolver, listening in that quiet, heard him hail the Willamette again—the Willamette that was steadily lagging behind.

"You can't be doing over five knots," Banning told the freighter's skipper. "We can't wait for you. I've all the others to think of. I'm sorry to see you go it alone, but there's nothing else for it, if that's the best you can do."

"Don't bother about me!" the Willamette's skipper returned calmly. "I'll come in, or I won't come in—dependin'. An' it's nothin' to you, either way."

Wolver grinned. He liked that bird sitting on top of a deckload of T.N.T., without a thing bigger than a rifle, with which to protect himself, and due to go sky-high if a shell from a sub landed in those ash cans that were consigned to the American destroyers at Queenstown. Yes, he was pretty thoroughly a man, that hairpin in the derby roof!

"I'd like to be sailin' with him," Wolver told himself.

Then he stiffened. His eyes narrowed, then widened. He grinned. The Shenandoah had come about and was rounding the Willamette's stern, passing within thirty yards of its side. It was a moment without moonlight. Wolver looked for'ard. He saw nobody. He bent under the life line and his body described a clean arc, parting the sea without a splash.

He swam furiously under water, thinking of the Shenandoah's twin screws. When he came to the surface, she was increasing her speed and vanishing in the murk ahead of him. And straight at him came the dark bulk of the Willamette.

"I'm mebbe a damn fool," Wolver said calmly to himself. "But nobody can ever prove I never fell overboard as I was regulation-like inspectin' them Franklin buoys. An' once I land in Queenstown, it'll be hard luck if I can't scabble around an' hook up wi' some gun crew. That damn—baby battlewagon makes me tireder 'n a whole winter's work!"

He swam with powerful strokes toward the freighter, until her bow wave rocked him. He went drifting along her rusty side, until he came to a dangling line that tailed from a slovenly sea

ladder. He clung here for a moment; then painfully he went up it, hand over hand. He tumbled over the low well-deck bulwark and found himself lying on those tarpaulined depth bombs. He crawled under the ancient and shabby canvas, out of the faint breeze, to warm himself a little and think and grin.

He would not announce himself to the derby-hatted skipper too quickly. For if his scheme was to work, he must not sight the Shenandoah again this cruise! He thought that his absence would not be discovered for an hour, or nearly that. Not until the quartermaster came aft for log reading. And when they found that he was lost overboard, they would never turn back to search for him. Not with fifteen ships to escort.

He considered the ash cans on which he lay—destined to smash tin fish in the Irish Sea. Depth bombs were strange things to him; the Wilmerton had received none, prior to his transfer off that cruiser. Nor had he encountered any in Brooklyn Navy Yard. There had been some aboard the Shenandoah, but they were in a track on the poop and “Hands off” had been the order concerning them. Wolver had been too much occupied with his troubles to worry about them.

“Kind o’ creepy business—hunkerin’ on this many o’ the blame’ things,” he pondered. “Wonder how much splash one’d make, if it’d drop overboard? But I reckon the fuses are out o’ these. Still—what was that chief gunner a-sayin’ about ‘em. The big uns had a kind o’ automatic detonator; drop to a set depth an’ the pressure o’ the water sets off the charge. So, mebbe these have got fuses. I ain’t monekyin’ with ‘em a bit—to see!”

He judged that a couple of hours had dragged by. He was fairly comfortable, despite his wet clothing, under the tarpaulin. He looked out at the moonlit sky, where the clouds were disappearing. By turning a little, he could see the sea. The old Willamette was creeping along; not zigzagging either. It was all very peaceful and pleasant. You wouldn’t have thought that anybody, anywhere, was fighting a war.

Then suddenly there was a loud report, from somewhere out on the starboard beam. As Wolver started to sit up, mouth dropping wide open, a terrific splintering crash sounded, from the freighter’s fo’ca’s’le.

Men cried out shrilly. There was a roaring as of an enraged bull from the bridge. Wolver came out from under the tarpaulin and went on all fours across the depth bombs and miscellaneous cargo in the well deck; he found the little passageway left amidships and crossed it and continued to the starboard side. He looked out tensely over the moonlit water.

At first he could see nothing, rake the half-circle of the horizon as he might. That shot began to seem unreal, in the quiet of the night, under that pallid moonshine. He looked forward and saw a dark cluster of figures in the starboard bridge wing. Quiet, now. And no shot came from the sea.

THEN he saw it—a mastlike thing above a thicker uprearing column. Moving steadily and with some rapidity, for the freighter. Closer and closer. He could make out figures forward of the conning tower, clustered about a deck gun. Fascinated, he watched it overhaul the Willamette. Then as he stared at the German gun crew, it came to him that it was standing nearer for a better shot. And he was squatting on a deckload of T. N. T.!

“God!” he whispered. “There won’t be enough left o’ us to make a pair o’ mitts for a chee-chee bird! Doll rags is what we’ll be! Doll rags! We’ll have to be toted up the golden stairs—the bunch o’ us together—in a hand-basket! My stars! An’ not a show to fight back!”

Now only a hundred yards separated the lumpy old freighter and the lean, wolfish U-boat. A man appeared in the moonlight, coming from the conning-tower hatch. His squat silhouette showed an officer’s cap. He lifted a speaking trumpet to his mouth.

“Willamette, ahoy!” he hailed the freighter, in very good English, that seemed queer, coming from a German craft.

“What d’ you want?” the Willamette’s skipper demanded grimly, with an evenness that barely hid his rage.

“I’m going to sink you. That shot was a mere indicator of my intention. I’ve been watching you for two days, now. I intended to sink you last night, but that other fool was nearer. And that damned cruiser all but sank me. I don’t know how he missed me, even now.”

“I could tell you—plenty!” Wolver gritted.

“What’m I s’posed to do?” the Willamette

skipper growled.

"Well, you can, of course, use your own judgment, as to whether you'll remain on board while we blow up your ship! But if you move very quickly, I give you permission to take to the boats. But, understand, it is quite immaterial to me! You may be blown up and be damned to you!"

"How you figurin' to blow her up?" One might have thought the derbied skipper was discussing an impersonal point of seamanship, to hear his level voice.

"What concern is that of yours?" the German officer roared, with an oath. "Ask me more silly questions, and I will put a shell through you, here and now! Where are your papers? Leave them on the bridge when you abandon your ship. I will have my men take them when they come aboard with bombs. And, captain, try no tricks! Else you may find yourself in the water, trying to row a sunken boat! Hurry to get those papers!"

Wolver scowled. Not much of an ending to his scheme. Then the derby-hatted skipper appeared in the passage left between the deckload. He was swearing furiously, in a cold even tone, as he came. Wolver stood up in front of him and the skipper stopped, leaning forward a trifle to stare.

"Goin' to abandon ship, sir?" Wolver inquired. "Nothin' else we can do? Oh, I'm a passenger you don't know. I fell overboard off the Shenandoah a couple hours ago, an' clumb onto you. I used to be in the armed guard, an' I was figurin' you would tote me to Queenstown an' I'd git back to the guard."

"Abandon ship!" the skipper snarled. "What the hell else can I do? I'd give a year's pay for a gun an' a few o' your boys to send me a three-inch shell into that sarcastic sucker out there. But we got no gun. An' if I don't shake a leg with my piapers, that Heinie'll be puttin' a shell into us. You better go for'ard an' stand by a boat."

"No, by God," Wolver grated, for a great and wonderful inspiration had come to him. It set him shaking at first, then he steadied to a tenseness like a violin's string. If only it would work—if only it could—

"Gi' me a hand, cap'n! Quick! I betcha these ash cans, here, they got the detonatin' fuses in! If me an' you, cap'n, we could git one unlashd an' tumble her overside—could do it before that Fritz could slam a shell into us!"

"Huh?" the skipper grunted explosively. He whirled and stared out at the sub and shook his head. "He'd be onto us! He'd have a shell through our side before we could do it."

"It's a chance!" Wolver urged him fiercely. "What kind o' sailor are you, anyhow! Looky! He's got that gun o' his trained to the bow. You got nothin' explosive there! He ain't really skeered? He knows you got no guns. If he should see us wrestlin' with the ash can an' they try to bring that gun around to bear on this well deck—hell, we will have it up before he can turn the trick. You game?"

"I never see a navy man that ud do what I wouldn't!" the skipper gritted. "Let's cast loose one close to the side."

"Uh-uh! One o' these, here! Then we can roll her over the others, right fast, an' hoist her over the bulwark."

HIS jackknife appeared twinklingly. He slashed wildly at securing lines. Now, from the German, came a sudden angry and impatient hail. He wanted to know what the devil was keeping the Willamette's skipper.

"Two minutes I give him!" he finished. "Two minutes! Then I will sink you with shell fire, and you can swim!"

"Up she goes!" Wolver grunted. "Heave an' bust her! Good an' heavy! There she is. Now, if we can kind o' keep down an' roll her——"

"Lord!" the skipper breathed suddenly. "Boy, you ever see one o' these things go off? She'll strain our seams! We ought to be goin' like hell away when we drop her. Hold ever'thing a minute. I got an engine room voice-tube back here. Le' me warn Mac."

He vanished. From the sub came the German officer's voice again—angrier, grimmer. One minute left—forty-five seconds—The skipper reappeared, and with his hands on the big can, there came a trembling from the engine room to the deck. The Willamette was going ahead.

"Now, if we can make it before he decides to turn loose!"

They rolled the depth bomb across the tarpaulined tops of its mates; paused a moment at the bulwark.

"I will fire—" the German began.

"Up she goes! Over—she—goes!"

They strained their muscles in that last great heave. Up to the bulwark. And Wolver dropped flat upon his back, catching hold of projections, drawing back his feet. They pushed out upon the poised bomb with all the force of his wiry body—pushed it out in an arc that cleared the low side. It struck with a splash. They peered fearfully overside. The Germans had whirled to gape.

The German bellowed something in his native tongue. No need of translation. The bellow of the sub's gun and the crash as the shell, fired at fifty yards, plowed through the old vessel under the bridge, told what his command had been.

There came an echo to that roar, an indescribable explosion under water. The Willamette, forging ahead under cranky old engines, was barely out from above the bomb. A geyser of water rose high and the stern of the freighter lifted, lifted, lifted, with agonized groan of ancient plates. Wolver found himself hanging half over the bulwark, with the skipper tumbled across his legs. His head had struck something with a resounding crack, and he saw whole constellations of stars. He was out for a fleeting period.

"Gone!" the skipper croaked in his ear, dragging him inboard. "My Lord! Never see anything like that! Just lifted her up an' swamped her. Likely opened every seam in that sardine can, an'—an'—I bet it did almost as much on this'n'!"

He scrambled up and fled. Wolver followed him toward the collapsed bridge. The freighter's deck force and all of the engineer's force who were off-watch, were clustered here. They had been standing by boat falls, ready to abandon the ship. They stared incredulously, even yet, out to where the sub had vanished.

Wolver stood with them. The skipper appeared presently. To the mate he said that she was leaking, but the well showed nothing alarming. The pumps were taking care of it.

An hour passed. Then a lean gray shape materialized like a greyhound, and came

alongside. Captain Banning's voice sounded anxiously. The derbied skipper of the Willamette thrust his head over the port bridge rail and jerked the rim of his derby a bit to starboard, over a cold blue eye. Very briefly he told his tale.

"A navy man?" Banning shouted. "Why—a seaman named Dean, who fell overboard? Where is he?"

"Here, sir," Wolver answered drearily. "I reckon there ain't a chance o' stayin' aboard, sir?"

"No, you'll have to come back. But—well, I'll lower a boat for you."

Not on the bridge did Captain Banning interview him. It was in the privacy of the cabin, with only the exec by to hear. And at Wolver's account, interlarded with his burning desire to return to the armed guard, Captain Banning stiffened.

"Cohoxon?" he snapped. "You were on the Cohoxon? Are you, by any chance, the pointer who sank that sub? Why—why didn't you tell me that?"

"You never ask me, sir."

"Well, I think you can help me win a bet with the executive officer. If you can—and you can tell me the truth without any worries concerning results—I'll promise you a transfer back to the armed guard. Now, did you, or did you not, actually fall overboard?"

Wolver stared at his feet, then looked up. "How was you a-bettin', sir?" he asked.

"That you jumped! For I never saw a man more set on any duty than you seemed to be set on that detail."

"Well, sir, I just don't know whether you won that bet, or not. I never fell overboard—exactly. Nor yet I never jumped. I was right skeered o' the propellers, so I dived! An' swum like ever'thing. It looked like a chance to git back to wolvin', sir, sea-wolvin'."

"I win, and you win!" said Captain Banning, with a faint note of helplessness. "Wolvin' is certainly your line!"