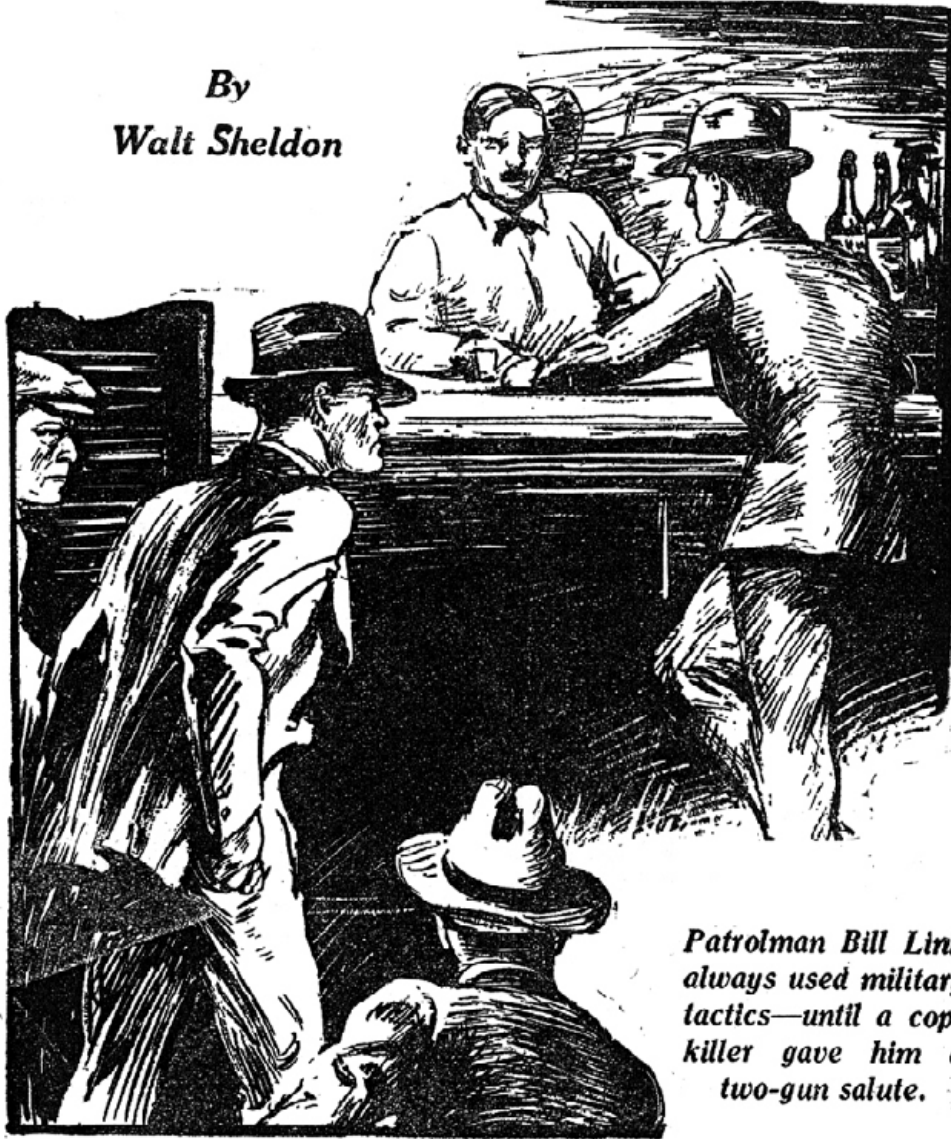


Generalissimo Flatfoot

By
Walt Sheldon



*Patrolman Bill Link
always used military
tactics—until a cop-
killer gave him a
two-gun salute.*

TO A certain degree, I can take it. Like when the other cops salute me as I come into the squad room. Like when they click their heels and hand me scraps of paper marked: *Communique*. Or even when they port arms with an old mop, yank an imaginary bolt, and solemnly hand it to me for inspection. That I can always take.

But when old McGregney calls me

“Generalissimo” —mister, I *boil!*

It must be the way he says it. His blue eyes twinkle and ten thousand leather-skinned wrinkles crease around them. To McGregney, time or place means strictly from nothing. He said it the night we were both sneaking up the back alley to the Hotel La Palace.

“Generalissimo,” he said, “better hike out your artillery. This rotten cop-killer might spot

us before we get there.”

“The name,” I told him bitterly, “is William Clarence Link. Bill Link is even better. *But not Generalissimo!*”

It all started because McGregney walked in on me one night at home when I was working out a problem in tactics—Problem No.2 in *Combat Principles*, page 430, in my *Basic Military Training Manual*—with toy soldiers on my dining room table. The next day every cop in town knew about it, and—well, you know the rest.

“Generalissimo,” said McGregney, “we’ll know in a minute whether those stools were telling the truth about Killer Hurd being holed up here in the Hotel La Palace.”

I nodded. “He’s somewhere in The Warren. That’s certain.” I looked around the dim, puddle-splotched alley. The back of the Hotel La Palace was three stories high and the brick must have been red during, say, Lincoln’s administration. Right now it was a somber, ominous grey.

All of this place called The Warren had that grey feeling about it. Officially, The Warren was the 10th ward. It had once been the fashionable part of town, and in those days some grafting city boss had built under it an elaborate but highly unnecessary system of sewer tunnels. There were stories about those sewers—and the men who haunted them. Men like Killer Hurd, the cop-slayer, the guy McGregney and I had been sent to get.

We were a few feet from the back door of the Hotel La Palace when McGregney said to me: “Look, Generalissimo, you trot up there to the other end of the alley and cover me while I knock.”

I frowned. “That’s splitting the main force. One of the cardinal rules of warfare—”

“Phooey!” McGregney exploded.

“Oh, all right,” I said. McGregney was an old timer, and it was practically yesterday that I was still on probation. You know how it is. I frowned at him and trotted toward the end of the alley. I think it only took me about twenty

steps to get there. That couldn’t have been a very long time. But when I got there, I turned around—I looked—and my jaw flapped. Breath piled up in my throat.

“*McGregney!*” I shouted hoarsely.

He was lying there in front of the door. And an ice pick seemed to be growing from the center of his back.

I RACED toward him. I shouldn’t have done that. I should have been cautious, wary, but I was choked with emotion. Sure, I’d seen death before. I’d even seen dead cops. But never like this, never a guy I had known so well, had worked with, had kidded with.

I bent over him. He was struggling to breathe, but he couldn’t speak. I turned his head and held it, while my own throat got very dry. His lips moved, and I think they said: “So long, Generalissimo . . .”

His eyes seemed to be looking right into mine. They seemed to be telling me to get Killer Hurd. To live and fight against lawlessness, even as McGregney had done. To make the world unsafe for cop-killers—or any other kind of killers.

He died while I was thinking those things.

Never mind what I should have done. Never mind the official procedure. I stood up and pounded at that back doorway with both fists. I did that until the heels of my hands smarted and my uniform was covered with grey dust.

It helped, the pain of that pounding, and after a while I stopped. I felt a little foolish, but still plenty mad. Mad enough to step back and aim my gun very carefully at the lock on the door. I pulled the trigger and there was a lot of splintered wood and twisted metal. The door swung inward.

If you were ever a cop in a large city you know I shouldn’t have done this. I should have called an ambulance and made out an immediate report, and that sort of thing. After all I didn’t know McGregney’s murderer was in this La Palace Hotel. And there were

always heels like Blawson, our squad sergeant, dying for a chance to take an ambitious young fellow over the coals, keep him as far away from that sergeantry as possible. But I hadn't cooled off yet.

I was in a kitchen. What had been a dull babble was now the sound of the bar room in the front of the building. You know what a noisy bar room sounds like? Multiply it by ten for the Hotel La Palace.

I stood there for a moment, noticed empty beer kegs and bare shelves around the place. Meanwhile I filled the empty chamber in my gun. I was clicking the cylinder back into place when the fellow with the checkered tablecloth around his waist and the huge watch fob hanging from his shirt pocket came in. He was big. With a winch and cable, he'd have looked like a barrage balloon.

"Well?" he said. His skin looked as though it might be greasy to the touch.

"I'm looking for a man," I said.

"Yeah? What kind of a man?"

"A man whose hobby is sticking ice picks into people's backs."

"We ain't got nobody like that here."

"Maybe I better look, huh?"

"Got a search warrant?"

I DIDN'T answer that one. He was right, wasn't he? I should have had a search warrant. Maybe another cop would have started something, blasted his way through the guy. But you forget this military business. It means discipline—playing according to rules. Silly, huh? Well you can give me the personal satisfaction that goes with it and take all the advantages of the other way. That, mister, goes for men and dogs and nations.

So I told him: "Okay, I'll go inside for a short beer."

"Then you'll come in the front way," he answered.

That was that. I stared into those hard eyes for a moment, then I shrugged. I about-faced, and that was when my toe scuffed into

something on the floor. It was a square area cut into the planking—square with hinges—a trap door. One of the cracks was a little wide and I could see through it. I could see shining water—one of the sewers of The Warren.

At that point, Fatso dropped a gentle hint. He said: "Well, are you gonna scam or ain't you?"

"Oke," I called back mildly. And then I was out in the alley again. I was out in the alley and smack into the midst of a small conference which consisted of Lieutenant Gray and Sergeant Blawson standing over McGregney's dead body.

The squad coupe was at the curb. They must have been cruising and heard the shots. Sergeant Blawson eyed me and said: "Well, where were you? And what happened?"

I told him. He turned to the lieutenant. "To me," he said, "it sounds fishy."

I was annoyed. "Fishy?"

"Yeah," said Blawson. "You were told to stick with McGregney. You disobeyed orders there. Then, with McGregney dead and no sign of the killer, you should have gone to a callbox. On top of that you broke and entered this place."

I might have known it. Blawson was hanging on to his sergeantry by a spider-web, and anyone of us was very much in line for it. You get it, don't you?

The lieutenant said to me: "There'll be an inquiry, Link. You'll be notified when to appear."

I got the notice the next day. And when I appeared I got sand-blasted, immersed in hot water, and run over by a medium tank. All this from Blawson's testimony. He did it—but neatly.

The boys in the squad room didn't exactly smear balm on my wounds. Heaven knows what story Blawson had spread among them. When I came in, with orders to hang my uniform and leave it there for thirty days, they all stopped talking and turned their backs. The ice.

I realized, a little wryly, that now I'd have given anything to have them salute, or click their heels, or even put a broom through the manual of arms for my benefit.

I SWALLOWED and went to my locker and changed into civvies. I gathered up some books—thirty days would give me a lot of time for reading. One of them fell to the floor and opened. I bent to pick it up and my eye caught something on the page.

This book was called *Basic Military Training*, and the chapter was marked: Combat Principles. The particular illustration I saw was labeled: The Assault.

The enemy was marked B, and his position was couched in a hilly forest, flanks and rear well protected by natural obstacles. The only possible attack was at his front line. The book said: “. . . the enemy position may be taken by having the riflemen fire as they move forward. The advance is orderly . . .”

I snapped the book shut and made a beeline for Lieutenant Gray's office. I stormed at Lieutenant Gray and I pounded his desk and waved my arms and jawed at him until my neck ached. I got nowhere fast. But I wasn't beaten, yet. Not by a long shot. Because, instead of heading home like I should have, I turned my steps toward the other end of town. I headed toward The Warren.

The Hotel La Palace, in front, had a big neon sign and dirty windows with chewing tobacco posters in them.

The smelt of stale beer hung around the place like poison gas. Through old fashioned swinging doors came voices and the buzz of electric fans. A group of hard faced, cigarette-lipping youths sat on a cellar doorway next to the window. They eyed me frigidly as I went in.

There were two bartenders. Fatso was at the rear, swishing a soaked rag on the bar, watching, mostly, a small service window to the kitchen in the rear. The other bartender was little and thin. He asked me through a

gold tooth: “What'll ya have?”

“Short beer.”

I paid him a nickel and sipped. I stepped behind somebody—out of Fatso's view—and looked over the place. There were two doors, one to the kitchen, one to a desk and a flight of stairs. This was the “Hotel” part of the La Palace. So I gauged everything. I couldn't get to that door without Fatso noticing me.

It called for strategy.

I remembered the Dead-End type youths outside. I left my half-beer on the table and stepped to the sidewalk. The biggest one was hawkishly thin, with a cap slapped over one ear.

“Hey you!” I called to him.

“Who you callin'—me?” he answered, surlily.

“Yeah. Wanna make five bucks?”

“Stop astin' stoopid questions. Shoot the proposition.”

“You know Fatso in there?”

“Yeah.”

“You know the watch fob he wears?”

“Sure!”

“Five bucks if you get it.”

“When?”

“Right now. Get the watch and you get the five.”

HAWK-FACE turned and said: “Come on, you guys.” They all trooped into the bar room. For once I was glad about my uniform hanging in the locker. I didn't have to follow regulations, now.

I counted ten, then followed. I didn't wait long. Two minutes later Fatso was roaring curses at the gang and scrambling from behind the bar. He was holding on to one fellow and the others were passing his watch-fob back and forth with a lateral technique that practically any college backfield would have welcomed. I'd figured Fatso right. He was too smart not to notice the heist right under his nose.

So while this was going on—all of it quite

absorbing to Fatso—I walked to the door and started up the hotel stairs as cool as an Eskimo’s nose in February.

The second floor hall was dark. The only light came from a blue bulb set in the middle of the ceiling. I could barely see the doors of the numbered rooms. I went to the first one and peeked in a keyhole. Some guy had a dame on his lap, but he wasn’t the guy I wanted. I shook my head and went to the next door.

Remember, I said a fellow hits a percentage on breaks? On the fourth door I got a bad one. A highly bad one. I put my hand on the knob, and the door swung open before me. There—only five feet tall, but huge-shouldered and flat nosed—stood Killer Hurd!

He looked just like his full-face and profile in the gallery. Same lacquerlike eye—same jutting jaw, like the bow of an aircraft carrier. One thing about that queer jaw, it was a perfect target for a K.O. blow.

I guess Hurd was as surprised as I was. He had his coat off, and I could see his shoulder holster nestling a forty-five automatic. Maybe he was even more surprised than I was. Because, before he moved I had my fist swinging toward that jaw. But he rolled his head. The punch glanced off and the best it did was to send him staggering backward into the room, a little off balance.

When I lunged after him I met a pair of the hardest fists I’d ever felt. That was a counter attack of a little more power than I’d expected. Lots of tacticians have made the same mistake. I went down to my knees, and Hurd kept going. He leaped over me and beat it out of the room. It probably never occurred to him that I was alone.

I went after him into the hall and down the stairs. This was my day for running into people. As I rocketed from the stairway and into the bar room I suddenly hit the huge figure of Fatso. I bounced.

“You!” said Fatso. He reached for me. I slashed him across the forehead with my gun

butt and he toppled like a condemned tenement. Leaving the shouting and milling men in the bar room behind me, I got into the kitchen just as the trap door was slamming shut.

IT WOULDN’T open for me. I peered through the crack and saw a length of rope holding it. And floating in the black water below was Hurd in a small rowboat. Then the rowboat disappeared. That fellow, Ripley, will be interested in knowing that I always grow ten thumbs on my hands every time I’m in a hurry. It was several minutes before I could get the penknife from my watch chain and slice through that rope. I opened the door and looked down at the black, shiny water.

I poked my head into the opening. Killer Hurd and the rowboat were far down the tunnel, just rounding a turn. To myself I said: “Jack Robinson.” By that time he was gone.

“He got away,” I mumbled. Or had he?

The advancing squad may often overcome natural obstacles by using natural means. In this the ingenuity of the squad leader will play an important part . . .

I looked around me. I saw the bare shelves and empty beer kegs of the kitchen. I didn’t stop to think, and a few minutes later I had four beer kegs on the floor and three shelves planked across them. I secured the whole business with the nails that were already in the shelves, hammering with my revolver stock. Then, grunting and groaning, I lowered all of it through the trap door, and dropped on top of it. Another piece of shelf served as a paddle.

There was one surprised Killer Hurd when I rounded that turn. He had slowed, was taking it easy, letting the boat drift.

“Put ‘em up, Hurd!” I shouted “You’re under arrest!”

He put ‘em up all right. He put the automatic up and blazed away. The bullet went wild, but the noise bounced around those cavern-like walls until I thought my ear-drums would crack. It made me flinch and that’s

something you shouldn't do under fire. My flimsy raft rocked back and forth madly. That's why my own shot missed.

But there is the business of an ill wind. The raft was jerking and pitching so that Hurd's next shot missed me. Well, it went on like that—until the echoes were all over the tunnel. The smell of cordite was sharp and stinging in my nostrils, and thin, blue smoke was doing a ghost dance over the water.

The bow of Hurd's boat got caught in a couple of jutting rocks at the edge of the tunnel just about the time we both ran out of ammunition. I'll say this for Hurd—he had plenty of courage for only five feet of man. He stood there waiting.

WE CAME together. Hurd leaped and I leaped. We both met halfway and tumbled in a sort of bridge between both craft. Hurd had arms by Steinway, and one of them started squeezing my neck in a strangle-hold that would have made a boa constrictor green with envy. Jiggling lights were dancing in front of my eyes and my lungs were near-bursting balloons. Then the beer-keg raft and Hurd's boat came apart and we both fell.

In that split-moment Hurd let go. In that split-moment I brought up an uppercut—just six inches of it, but fast, blurring—and it

landed on the exact point of Hurd's prow-like jaw.

He went to sleep like a baby.

I went to McGregney's funeral the next day. I went to it in uniform, because they gave it back to me. In fact they did everything but kiss me on both cheeks. The Hotel La Palace had been cleaned up, and Killer Hurd was where they'd be sure to find him for the trial.

I was riding in Lieutenant Gray's own car when he said:

"I still don't see how you got away with it—walking right into the place and dragging Hurd out. The whole force has been trying to trap him for weeks."

"Well," I answered, "look at it this way. Hurd was an enemy force in a strong position. He'd bottled up his rear and flanks, and his communications were pretty strong. But while he was busy with all this, he forgot about his most vital defense point—*his front line!*"

"I think," said the Lieutenant, frowning, "I see what you mean."

I didn't answer him. I'd just caught sight of a wreath in the car ahead. It was the one I'd sent McGregney. It was marked: *From the Generalissimo.*

KEEP 'EM FLYING

