



TWO CALLS IN THE JUNGLE

By Clyde B. Hough

IT WAS a human cry, charged with terror. It came, faint, from a long way off and seemed to have been stifled—choked off—before it was completed.

“Smoke” crouched low and crept forward. He could have gone back to the company of white troops, to which he was temporarily attached, and their captain would have sent a squad of men to investigate. But Smoke was only a few generations removed from the African jungle-man and from him he had the instinct for lone-handed battles. Perhaps this instinct is born of vainglory, perhaps of the primeval urge to achieve, to excel. At any rate, in the final analysis, it amounts to personal courage.

Smoke crept on. Through the coconut grove, across bamboo-set swamps and on over great, tangled masses of vines, he moved with the stealth of a jungle cat. And though he was a heavy man, never a twig did he break and never a sound did he make.

For half an hour Smoke scouted, peering through clumps of bamboo, over boulders and even into the fronded palms and always did he listen, intently, for a repetition of that dreadful cry. But the cry was not repeated, though after a while, he heard a low babble of voices well to the right of him. And

he knew, by the strange words, that they were natives who spoke. He changed his direction toward the voices and moved with even greater caution than before.

Then when the sounds became plainer he lay flat on his stomach and wormed his way forward, painfully, inch by inch, moving with his hands each twig or dead branch that lay in his path. At last he came to the bank of a ravine and the voices told him that the natives were there—at the bottom. Lying flat at the top of the bank he thrust his face, cautiously between the branches of a small bush and looked down.

What he saw was a large ant-hill, more than the length of a man in breadth. Across the ant-hill was a white man, naked, face up, spread-eagled, and gagged; around him a circle of natives. They were watching the ants raise red welts on tender, white flesh and jesting in fiendish glee at the sight.

The tortured man’s muscles writhed like separate bodies and strained against the skin as if their owner’s brain were trying to cry out through them. Smoke watched this display of agony, his brain paralyzed, for the moment unable to perform.

At this juncture, the white man, rolling his head from side to side, sighted the face on

the bank above him. There was a great scar across the profile of the face on the bank, a scar that once seen would never be forgotten. The white man had seen that scar before and he remembered it, even now, in his present agony. His eyes flashed the recognition thought that was in his brain. Smoke saw this flash and understood it; and it caused him to scan the face below him, more closely. Then he, in turn, recognized the other.

The scar across Smoke's face became a white welt on the black skin, his mouth set and his hands clenched. He, too, remembered, and it was not a pleasant memory. Recollection sent his mind back, in one bound, to a day on a certain street in Macon, Georgia, more than five years ago.

FOR a few moments Smoke stood apart from himself, as it were, and viewed that five-year block out of his life as one views a motion picture. He saw himself, walking, with a slouching, slap-footed gait along the edge of a sidewalk.

This was in Macon. Coming toward him, his face flushed, his hat on the back of his head, and his eyes a little glazed, was a white man. This was Milton Carter.

"Hey there, Sambo," said Carter, "get off the sidewalk and take off your hat when you see me coming."

Sambo did not move. He did not know then, and even now, evolutionized to a smart, disciplined soldier, Smoke who had been Sambo, did not know why he, Sambo, had defied Milton Carter, the white man. He knew only that he resented this unmerited hectoring, and to stand still, not to obey, was his protest; the only protest he dared to make.

Milton Carter drew a large jackknife, stepped quickly up to Sambo and slashed the side of his face from cheek-bone to chin. Then with a terrific kick, he sent Sambo to the gutter, spat in his face, laughed and went on.

Sambo regained his breath, scrambled

to his feet, and went home to his black mother, who tended his wound.

Came the day when Sambo's face was well and he walked again in the streets of Macon and hoped that he would meet Milton Carter. For there was another wound deep in him and it cried out for reparation. Sambo did not know what he would do when he did meet Carter, he had no plan, but he knew in a dim way that somehow he would redeem himself in the eyes of himself. Many times he walked the streets, hoping to meet Carter, at the same time trembling and fearful at the prospect.

Then one day the inevitable occurred. Sambo was slouching along near the edge of a sidewalk and Milton Carter was coming toward him. Carter was again flushed, he had just come out of a saloon in the middle of the block. Now they were within two steps of each other.

"Sambo," said Carter, "what did I slash your face for not a month ago?"

Sambo stopped, stood sullen, but did not speak. His knees shook, his body was afraid, his legs wanted to run away, his hand wanted to reach up, take off his hat and save his body physical suffering. But he did none of these things. There was something in him that was greater than his body, that held him there, waiting blindly, uncomprehending, for the chance to redeem himself in the eyes of himself.

Milton Carter drew back his fist and as he did so, Sambo, without realizing what he did, without knowing one second before that he was going to act, swung his ponderous fist in a sledgehammer blow—it landed. The white man would as soon have expected the earth to open and swallow him. He was unprepared. He fell like an ox.

For Sambo, panic, frenzy, terror. He heard already, the low, throaty growl of the mob and already he felt the rope tighten about his neck. He had committed the unpardonable sin. He had struck a white man, and his brain

told his legs to take him away.

There were nights in swamps; fever-ridden nights, and mosquito-tortured. Then days of hunger in the box cars, and “hand-outs” grudgingly given at back doors, and finally a job at St. Louis. And later—the Army and Cuba, the charge, the steel-clad bullet in his shoulder and afterward, a medal.

Then came the Philippines and the affair at Illigau and the second wound; and his regiment, the colored regiment, had gone on while he was yet unable to leave the hospital. Then, well at last, he had been attached to a white regiment till such time as he could reach his own. The white regiment had camped for a day’s rest and wash-up near the coconut grove where Smoke had been drinking luscious, green coconut milk when he heard the cry. Thus the past merged into the present.

The white man stretched and staked on the ant-hill below was Milton Carter. And it was given Smoke to watch the ants saw Milton Carter’s body to infinitesimal bits and haul it away to their storerooms. What greater revenge could he ask? None. For a few minutes his nerves tingled and his mind hugged its gratification.

Then there stirred in him another emotion. This emotion was not native, primeval, like the first; it was one engendered,

the spirit of camaraderie bred of years in the service. Now, Sambo, in all probability had never heard the word camaraderie, but he had heard often its equivalent. A phrase in the service which runs—

“It’s all under the flag.”

That was it. It was all under the flag. He was under the flag and Carter was under the flag. They were both sworn servants of Old Glory and those brown devils down there were enemies.

The muscles in Smoke’s thick neck swelled and the button at his shirt collar popped off. His heavy, shoulders, those shoulders that were the pride of his company, hunched forward and he went down the bank. No, he did not go down; he did not climb down. He landed amidst the circle and it was as if an avalanche had landed. His bayonet and butt worked alternately with the speed and power of a trip-hammer. The Filipinos were bewildered, awed, terrorized. They thoroughly believed that a god had dropped from the sky to wreak vengeance on them, and those who were able speedily took to their heels.

Smoke loosened the stakes and ropes that held the now unconscious Carter, threw him across his shoulder and went up the bank with the ease of a gorilla.