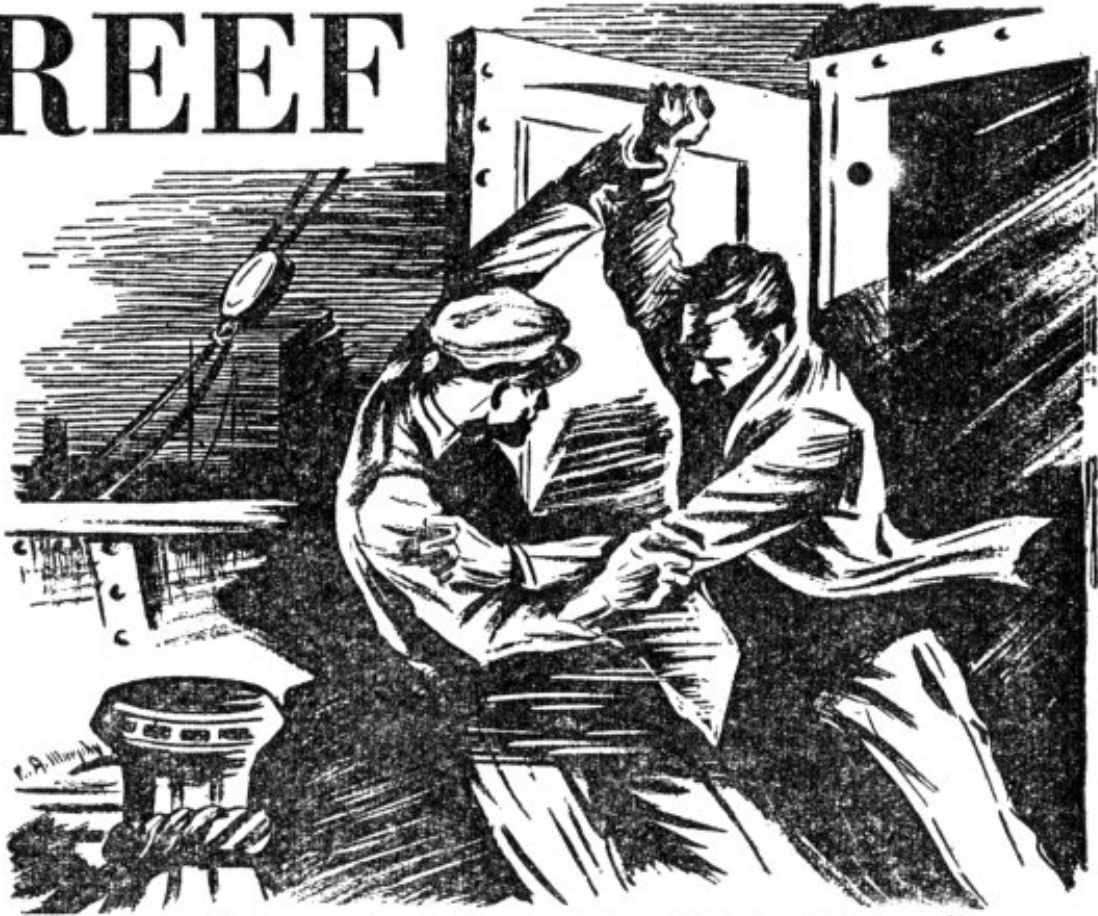


Thrilling Adventures, July, 1936

DEAD MAN'S REEF



Beating back a cry of pain, he seized the wrist that guided the knife

*Failure of Command Spurs the Young Skipper of the
Lugger "Flame" to Superhuman Efforts to
Regain His Lost Standing!*

By EARL GRIFFIN

A STRANGE and unreal moan like a nor'west monsoon swept the Aru Islands and the port of Dobbo; yet there was no wind. Jeff Cord whirled in his

tracks, his slate colored eyes peering into the tropical night. Then he began to race desperately toward the waterfront.

As the first shock of the earthquake

struck, a vision rose up before Cord, a vision of a broken old trader with tired, kindly eyes. He could not fail Eli Spencer; he must not fail the man who had taken him as a kid beachcomber and made him into a skipper—skipper of the lugger which the quake's resultant tidal wave might smash to kindling upon the beach while he dallied ashore.

The flimsy trade buildings of the little South Seas port swayed and crackled as Cord sped beachward, the earth convulsing beneath his feet.

Even in the darkness he could see the *tripang* and pearling luggers shuddering and straining at their anchors as if pushed about by a giant hand. As he reached his dinghy drawn up on the white sand he saw a Papuan dwelling built on spidery piles topple and crash into the sea; and he leaped into his little craft and sent it plunging through the quaking black waters of the harbor.

"Ahoy, Jackson!" Cord bellowed as the dinghy shot alongside the lugger *Flame* and he leaped over the low rail.

But no answering hail came from his brawny, hairy-chested mate; no response came from his native crew of black boys. The first shock passed, jolting like a coupling train, and the quake struck again.

A new and sudden alarm smote Cord and sent him leaping along the deck. He needed no light to guide his flying feet over his darkened command to the little cabin aft, which held something far more precious than a hundred luggers.

The figure of a man suddenly popped out of the companionway and came hurtling at the *Flame's* youthful skipper. His collision with the oncoming figure sent Cord staggering to his knees, and he felt a sudden, tearing pain near the armpit like the strike of a stingray.

Biting back an involuntary cry of pain Cord's clawed hands seized the wrist that guided the knife, and every ounce of his strength went into the twist he applied to his

mysterious assailant's arm.

A choked gasp and the knife clattered to the deck, but his attacker wrenched himself free and sprang to the rail, dived headlong into the quaking black waters of the harbor. Cord staggered up, blood from his wound welling hotly over his heaving ribs, wondering dazedly what peculiar circumstances had caused his crew to desert so suddenly. He reached the companionway and then tumbled recklessly down into the little cabin.

"Jackson!" he called hoarsely. But a groan was his only answer. He struck a light, and his breath caught sharply in his throat. His brawny mate lay with limbs asprawl, his great shock of black hair lying in a spreading pool of blood.

As he stared down at the inert figure, confused shouting from nearby luggers drifted down to Cord. Alert skippers, getting under way and running for the comparative safety of the open sea.

Cord's eyes jerked suddenly past the sprawled body to a spot above his own bunk, and the starch went out of him. The cleverly concealed cache he had built there in the bulkhead had been discovered, the panel stove in, the recess yawning. The secret of Dead Man's Reef—the long lost resting place of a native king's ransom, was a secret no longer. The chart was gone!

CORD'S knees gave way and an overwhelming feeling of remorse and shame engulfed him as he sank upon his bunk, staring dumbly at the recess above it. He had proved unworthy of Eli Spencer's trust. His dream of some day repaying his benefactor by serving him faithfully always was shattered. He sat bereft of alertness, not realizing that the earthquake was rising to a crescendo of violence and that the *Flame* was fighting at the end of her cable like a wild thing.

His thoughts went back three years, when kindly old Eli Spencer had rescued him

from the beach, hungry, penniless and already cadging drinks like the rankest tropical tramp. Then had followed three wonderful, adventurous years of island trading; three years of staunch fellowship and benevolent guidance. Then he was skipper of the *Flame!*

Unaware that his lugger was dragging her anchor, fighting and plunging, Cord's mind lost itself in retrospect. Stagnation of world business had followed; collapse of island trading; idle luggers, financial ruin for Eli Spencer. Then— A king's ransom!

For years Eli Spencer had searched the islands for a clue to the resting place of the wrecked schooner *Boundy*, lost with all hands a generation ago, with a strongbox filled with the richest pearls an island tribe could accumulate.

The unscrupulous, blackbirding captain of the *Boundy* had kidnaped an island king, holding him for ransom. The king's people had given up their harvest of pearls to buy back their ruler's freedom. Then the schooner went down with all hands. Where, nobody knew, except the half wild islanders.

Since the waters were too deep for native skin-divers to salvage the pearls, the tribesmen had made a chart of the ship's resting place and declared the subject tabu. Years later, Spencer had obtained that chart.

Spencer let no man see the coveted chart, not even his youthful skipper, and carried it upon his person. But he had nearly lost it on the trip to Dobbo in a monsoon, and got it soaking wet. Only then did he place it in the secret recess.

Cord's reverie was snapped suddenly by the lugger making a wild lunge, heeling far over as a wave struck her and dipped her scuppers, and water poured down the companionway. The quake's aftermath had struck, lifting the lugger, sending it staggering upon the beach.

With a grinding crash her keelson knifed into the sand. Receding water cascaded from her deck and she was left lying in two

feet of water, tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees.

The deluge of sea water down the companionway sufficed to revive the mate, and Cord leaped to his aid with a guilty feeling of negligence.

"Lord," groaned Jackson holding his lacerated scalp, "what's goin' on?"

"Beached," Cord told him succinctly. "What happened to you?"

"The crew ran out on me," the mate muttered thickly. "Either bribed or had the daylight scared out of 'em. Soon's I discovered it I jumped down here to see if the chart was safe. It was still safe 'cause I struck a light—then bingo!"

Cord pointed silently at the stove in panel and empty recess, and Jackson's jaw dropped. "Jeff, this'll just about kill the Old Man. Dobbo is full of vultures that'd slit our throats for that chart, but I didn't believe they had nerve enough to board us. I figured they'd try to mulct him out of it when he tried to borrow money for salvage."

"I've failed him," Cord said miserably, "and I'd rather have my right arm cut off. It'll take money to refloat the *Flame* and make repairs, and with the chart stolen he won't be able to borrow a dime. I've not only failed Spencer but I've ruined him."

Glumly the men bandaged each other's wounds and went ashore together. Going over the side Jackson spied the knife lying in the scupper and retrieved it, placing it carefully in his pocket. The quake had subsided to an occasional slight tremor. They saw wreckage as they waded away from their stranded lugger; mostly native outriggers—further evidence of his unworthiness, thought Cord bitterly. Other skippers had run to safety.

NIGHT life in quake ridden Dobbo was going full blast again. They found Eli Spencer at the Pearl's Rest. It was characteristic of the old trader that he had not gone down to the

waterfront immediately after the quake, betraying an implicit faith in his youthful skipper and his ability.

"I'm glad you boys came ashore," Spencer greeted them genially. "I have some great news."

Spencer was sitting at a table with the owner of the pub and another man, but it was Teuton, the publican, who attracted Cord's attention. Teuton was a bullheaded, beady eyed, chunky man, covered with the scars of a hundred sordid adventures. He was rumored to be a buyer of illicit pearls from unlicensed fishers, and a man who took an occasional flyer in smuggling arms to the natives of the mandate.

Spencer ignored Cord's signal for private speech with a smile. "Mr. Teuton has agreed to put up the money for our enterprise," the grey-haired trader announced.

Cord stared at him thunderstruck. Eli Spencer and the publican were as far apart as the two poles, not only in character but in their dealings, yet strangely enough Spencer was calmly entering into an agreement with the man. It struck Cord with stunning force that Spencer must be desperately hard-pressed to dream of dealing with such a person.

THE presence of the second man was also puzzling. Captain Quinn was a man Cord only knew by reputation, the plodding kind of island trader who owned and commanded his own schooner. Though long in the tropics, Quinn's smooth-shaven face was unmarked with dissipation, and his uniform was extremely well tailored.

"Nobody seemed to want to take a chance," Spencer was saying, "that is, unless I turned the chart over to them outright. Naturally I couldn't do that. But Mr. Teuton does not feel that he can leave his business and insists that Captain Quinn accompany us to look after his interest. He also wishes us to sail immediately, use my lugger."

Cord swallowed audibly. "I—I'm afraid we can't do that, sir," he said.

"Why not?" Teuton shot suddenly, speaking for the first time. His beady eyes seemed to mirror an intense dislike for the youthful skipper of the *Flame*.

Cord spoke humbly to Spencer. "The *Flame* is aground—high and dry from the quake."

Spencer's face fell, haggard lines tugging at his mouth. Teuton leered at him.

"Didn't I tell you?" the pub owner demanded. "No punk kid like him is fit for a skipper. Beach him like he beached your lugger an' put Quinn in charge. We can use Quinn's schooner, too."

"Impossible, I'm afraid," Quinn objected. "My schooner is laid up for repairs. For two-three weeks at the shortest."

"I'm sorry, too, sir," Cord broke in hastily and painfully. "But the chart has been stolen."

"Stolen!" A chalky whiteness underlined Spencer's haggard face. His kindly blue eyes glazed as from a physical blow, and he muttered over and over again, "Stolen, stolen!"

In short jerky sentences Cord told his story, trying to get the unpleasant affair over with. Throughout, Teuton kept his beady eyes upon Cord's face.

To substantiate his skipper's story Jackson fished out the bloody knife and placed it upon the table, and at the sight of it Cord exclaimed aloud.

"Why, that's my knife!"

The tense, throbbing silence that followed was broken by Teuton's harsh laugh. "So our hero was stabbed with his own knife, eh?" he snorted.

"It was hanging over my bunk," Cord retorted hotly. "The thief probably grabbed it when he heard me board the lugger."

Captain Quinn moved his perfectly tailored shoulders impatiently. "His story

sounds plausible, I must say," he interjected. "There's no blood on his jacket but no doubt he could show us his wound, and he could have put on a different jacket, of course."

"I did put on a different jacket," Cord rapped, glaring at Teuton.

"Exactly," Quinn went on soothingly; "just grabbed the first one lying handy—evidently a work jacket from its lumpy appearance." The captain glanced with considerable pride down at his own perfectly tailored garment.

The very spick and span neatness of the speaker caused Cord's own eyes to fall to the garment he wore, and he noted a fresh tear in the material and an unaccountable lump down near the bottom seam. Involuntarily his hands explored, and with a profound feeling of bewilderment drew out a familiar oilskin package. The chart!

Eli Spencer's haggard face became a battlefield of conflicting emotions, like a man overtaken by some dreadful calamity. Slowly his expression ironed itself with indignation, his grey hair bristling, his hurt disbelief displaced by certainty. His sagging old shoulders stiffened and he leveled a shaking finger at Cord.

"You—you ungrateful whelp!" he thundered. "Get out—never let me set eyes on you again!"

JEFF CORD sat at a table in a back street pub, his beard, stubbled face haggard, his slate-colored eyes shot with blood, a half empty gin bottle before him. For a week he had been that way. Jackson sat across from him, a pucker of worry between his heavy black brows.

The neatly tailored figure of Captain Quinn appeared in the doorway, coming in out of the bright sunlight and stopping before their table, eyeing the half empty gin bottle with disfavor.

"We've refloated the *Flame*," the dapper captain greeted. "Provisions are aboard

and the salvage equipment going aboard now. We'll be sailing tomorrow."

Cord shrugged without speaking, his bloodshot eyes expressionless. Captain Quinn hesitated visibly, as if debating the advisability of making further divulgences.

"Teuton is shipping a new crew and plans to go along himself, after all," Quinn said at last. "Frankly, I don't like the looks of things, but Teuton holds a lien against my boat and I don't dare interfere. However, I'll do all in my power to see that Spencer gets a square deal. Sorry you aren't going along."

Receiving no answer, Quinn bade a farewell, leaving Jackson and Cord staring at each other.

"I wish we had sneaked the chart and made a copy of it," Jackson mourned, "down Molucca way when it got wet and the Old Man pattered around all day dryin' it, remember?"

"That reminds me," Cord said suddenly. "I saw Spencer this morning, tried to warn him to be careful. He flew into a rage and the more I talked the madder he got. He wound up by giving us just twenty-four hours to leave Dobbo. If we're not on our way by tomorrow morning he's going to the commissioner and swear out a warrant for our arrest—sabotage and larceny."

Consternation wrote itself large upon Jackson's rugged face. "That means we'll get clear out of the mandate," he said with finality. "The commissioner is a human bloodhound. What'll we do, Jeff? There ain't so much as a skiff sailin' out of here within a week."

"We could get an outrigger and go skin-diving for shell like the natives," Cord returned listlessly. Suddenly he smote the table with his fist. "Say, that's an idea! Hire a native *prau* and a crew of blackboys—good ones—and meet me on the beach at ten o'clock tonight."

Seeing that the old alertness had

returned to the other's eyes Jackson quitted the pub humming a wild Papuan war song. But when ten o'clock that night came and passed and Cord did not appear, Jackson paced the sand, nervous and worried, a black scowl upon his rugged face.

Drawn up on the sand behind him was a native *prau* with seven bushy-haired blackboys crouching beside it—half wild blackboys who had sailed with the brawny mate before, each with a *kris* tucked in his geestring.

Suddenly a muffled explosion drifted down to them from the town, and after a short interval the sounds of pistol shots and a medley of yells. Consternation crept into Jackson's voice as he began to swear steadily and the hue and cry of a savage chase rent the still night. He cursed himself for a fool for not probing deeper into his headstrong young skipper's plans.

Suddenly a figure debouched from the shadows and dashed toward the *prau*. It was Cord, hatless, hair disheveled and blood smearing his pale face. He tumbled breathlessly into the waiting *prau*.

Jackson leaped in after him, the blackboys running the *prau* into the water and tumbling aboard without orders. As their paddles bit deep into the water in savage unison, Jackson bent over Cord.

"What happened?" he asked very quietly.

"Keep to the shadows. Hug the shore," Cord gasped, sitting up and wiping the blood from his face. "I decided to get the chart before Spencer was gyped out of it. I dynamited Teuton's safe! I learned that Spencer kept the chart there, in Teuton's office, and slept beside it. I waited until he went out to the bar to talk with Teuton, and broke in through a window."

Yells and shots from down the beach punctuated his words and the whole waterfront seemed suddenly to teem with life.

The blackboys sent the frail craft leaping along, hugging the shoreline in a roundabout way to the harbor's entrance.

"Now that you've got the chart what d'you mean to do with it?" Jackson asked curiously.

"I didn't get it," Cord answered bitterly. "It was gone—somebody had already stolen it!"

"Teuton?" demanded Jackson with an oath.

"No. He was at the bar all evening. Somebody that knew the combination of the safe got it within five minutes after Spencer went out to talk with Teuton, and before I could break inside. Spencer and Teuton both saw me before I could make my getaway after the explosion. They saw at a glance that the chart was gone, and the next moment I was out in the alley ducking bullets from Teuton's gun."

Silence fell over the speeding *prau*, broken only by the undertone of puffs and grunts of the laboring blackboys as they dug in their paddles. Then suddenly the staccato exhaust of a motor throbbed over the harbor and a launch shot away from the wharf.

"Way 'nough," Jeff Cord ordered sharply and the *prau* drifted in the shadows of the palms along the shoreline. "I forgot about Teuton's launch," Cord told Jackson grimly.

"That cooks our kettle of fish,"

Jackson remarked bleakly. "They'll have rifles aplenty while we only have a few curly-bladed knives. We're over a barrel an' they mean to roll it!"

SILENTLY they watched the launch swing away from the wharf and speed toward the harbor entrance. No use to run for it now. Before the *prau* could cover half the distance the speedier launch would be waiting at the entrance. They were bottled, their escape cut off.

"Head back toward the *Flame*," Cord

ordered on the spur of the moment.

The outrigger swung about and raced back over its own wake while Cord quickly explained his instantly formulated plan, speaking in pidgin English common to the Islands. Eager grunts from the blackboys answered him and a new snap came into their arms—arms that had wielded warclubs less than a decade before. Among the anchored *tripang* and pearling luggers the *prau* sped, and shot alongside the unsuspecting *Flame* like a ghost in the night.

A man smoking a pipe on the lugger and watching the launch rush toward the harbor entrance spun about with an oath.

“Wot th’ bloody—”

A fierce joy surged over Cord as he leaped aboard at the van of his boarding party and his fist collided against the surprised man’s jaw. The man staggered and dropped his pipe, and the next moment was hurled over the side yelling at the top of his voice.

Cord leaped forward to aid Jackson and their blackboys, charging down the lugger’s deck yelling like fiends, crises drawn. The unexpectedness of the attack proved too much for the lugger’s newly shipped crew and they scattered like a covey of quail. The brief melee ended abruptly, with the water dotted with swimming heads.

“Cut the cable!” roared Cord.

Steel clashed against steel; blocks and gear whined and clucked complainingly as the sails were clewed up and the lugger heeled to the breeze. Shoving Jackson to the wheel and shouting for his blackboys to seek protection below hatch, Cord dropped down into the *Flame*’s familiar little cabin. The gun rack was jam-packed with new rifles and ammunition, and seizing one of each Cord stationed himself at the companionway hatch.

“Bend a line on the wheel and get down behind the cabin,” he ordered Jackson. “All hell’s going to break loose.”

THE occupants of the launch waited until the escape ship was almost abreast, at the narrowest point of the harbor entrance, then opened with a fusillade of rifle fire.

As the rifles spurted in the night bullets began plunking solidly into the lugger, ripping up long splinters from the deck, whirring angrily off the windlass.

Cord returned the fire, pumping bullet after bullet as close to the launch as he dared. Instantly all the launch’s fire was concentrated upon the flashes of his own rifle, and a hail of lead zipped dangerously about his exposed head.

Suddenly the launch changed its tactics, racing ahead and swerving back and forth across their bow, but Jackson kept the lugger full on from his position behind the cabin while Cord kept up a steady fire. The staunch timbers of the lugger protected them as no flimsy outrigger could have, and Cord’s heart sang as he realized he had grasped the only chance of escape.

But his exultation was short lived. The launch’s riflemen, realizing that only one rifle opposed them, turned suddenly and headed straight for the lugger, plainly with intentions of boarding.

Cord threw caution to the wind and turned his fire directly upon the launch, holding as close to the waterline as possible. Startled yells immediately proved his marksmanship, and the next instant the strangled cry of a mortally wounded man rang out.

The launch sheered off and sped for safety from the now deadly fire, throwing a farewell fusillade after the escaping lugger.

“We did it!” Jackson cheered.

“At a pretty stiff price,” Cord muttered, dropping his rifle with a sudden letdown of feeling. “Do you realize what my fool idea let us in for?”

“I can guess,” his brawny mate retorted with a reckless grin. “Beaching during

the quake will be called sabotage, dynamiting the safe grand larceny, stealing the *Flame* is piracy and that last shot of yours was murder.”

“It’ll mean all that to the gunboat that is sent out after us,” Cord returned grimly. “It’s not too late if you want to take to the dinghy— there’s still time for you to sneak ashore and dig up an alibi.”

“For two bits Mex I’d pin your ears back with a marlin spike,” the mate growled. “We wanted to help the Old Man get his treasure, didn’t we? Well, we got a lugger outfitted for the job! Oh, cripes,” he broke off in disgust, “I forgot we ain’t got the chart. All we know is the stuff lies somewhere along Dead Man’s Reef—which gives us latitude enough to search in for ten years.”

Cord’s hand was digging suddenly, in the mate’s shoulder with a grip that made the big man wince. “Call a boy to the wheel,” he said intensely.

Together they tumbled down into the *Flame*’s little cabin and lit the gimble lamp. Cord dragged out the lugger’s log book and opened it at the last pages with trembling fingers, speaking almost incoherently in his excitement.

“Remember speaking of the chart getting wet, and Spencer puttering around all day drying it? Well, I noticed he placed it between these two pages before it got thoroughly dry, and sat on the log book for hours for fear that the chart would wrinkle and shrink. The chart is on some sort of native parchment and etched on with some hot instrument, a big sail needle probably. The etching should have left an imprint on one of these pages.”

With their labored breathing filling the little cabin, they discovered that the native etching had left an imprint, but a disappointing one—far too dim to make head or tail of. It was Jackson, with two decades of varied Island experience behind him, who thought of dampening the paper to bring out

the lines clearly and unmistakably.

“A double atoll,” Jackson cried. “Man, I know that place! Crack on all sail!”

DAY after day had slipped by since the *Flame* had made its spectacular escape from Dobbo—days in which pursuit must have been organized. They were ten days in reaching the twin atolls, and two more days locating the long sunken *Boundy* lying almost between them. Now, with the salvaging of the king’s ransom on the threshold of success, all thoughts of pursuit had been momentarily forgotten.

Jackson was engrossed in tending the all-important air hose and life line of the diver’s suit worn by Cord down on the bottom. Two of the blackboys twirled the handles of a cabinet air pump, their fuzzyheaded companions grouped at the rail, watching the diver’s exhaust air bubbles breaking the surface of the water.

So enthralled were they all that no one saw the schooner which rounded one of the atolls, her bellying sails sending her onward silent as a ghost ship. The enemy was within a biscuit toss when Jackson glanced around and saw disaster bearing down upon him.

The brawny mate was in a quandary. Cord was inside the wreck; to haul him up forcibly was impossible. The inflated diver’s suit would become impaled upon the jagged timbers of the wreck and drown the diver instantly.

Jackson chose the only alternative, leaping to Cord’s life line and jerking a signal of warning upon it. Then, shouting to the blackboys to keep the air pump going at all costs, he seized his rifle.

Ten fathoms down in the green depths Cord received the danger signal. He had no way of knowing the nature of the threatened danger, and was confronted with a dilemma. For the next quarter hour would either spell success or failure in salvaging the treasure.

After locating the wreck of the Boundy it had been necessary for Cord to blast a hole in her side to allow ingress into the debris strewn, main cabin. He had been forced to use more dynamite than he could well afford under the circumstances, and there was barely enough explosive left for one last charge.

The nestling place of the treasure was in the forward bulkhead of the main cabin, in a built-in, cabinetlike affair made of hardwood almost as tough as iron. Cord had drilled holes in the bulkhead just beneath the hardwood cabinet and inserted his last shot of waterproofed explosive. To abandon his work now meant that the pressure of the bottom would force the sea water through the waterproofing and render the shot useless.

A vision of Spencer's kindly face rose up before him, and his course unrolled before him. He would stay and fire the shot.

Hurriedly he began fitting his detonating device, which in the absence of electricity was a firing pin actuated by a strong spring, which would explode the detonator. The cumbersome metal and ballooning fabric of his diver's dress lent Cord's movements a maddening deliberation, every effort toward speed seemingly reduced a hundredfold by the resistance of the water.

He was forced to bring his long diver's knife into play to tinker the firing mechanism into its final delicate adjustment, and carefully bent on the end of a firing line. Picking up the coiled firing lanyard he began backing toward the point of egress, uncoiling the dangerous firing lanyard as he went.

Both Cord's hands were occupied with the firing lanyard as he negotiated the debris strewn main cabin of the wreck, and he was forced to allow the accumulated slack in his air hose to drag. As he neared the jagged hole blasted in the wreck's side, he drew a breath of relief over not having tripped accidentally and setting off the explosive prematurely. He swung his eyes for a last survey of his

handiwork, and with breathtaking suddenness he was seized from behind!

AS Cord felt the strange unrealness of unseen hands seizing his air hose, an uncoiling horror chilled his blood. In common with most deep-water divers he had always worked alone, the lone inhabitant of the submarine world, battling the unseen dangers of man's strangest element.

A thousand wild conjectures rushed to mind as his hands dropped the firing lanyard and streaked toward the knife scabbard at his lead-slugged diver's belt. His knees sagged; he had left his knife lying beside the charge of explosive!

Through one of his side ports Cord's startled eyes glimpsed a fanlike wake slicing through the water toward him, straight at his air hose.

He threw himself aside wildly as he saw death slicing toward his life-giving hose, death in the form of a ten-inch diver's knife in the hand of a strange diver. Vainly he strove to ward off the other's attack—bare hands against metal and fabric armor and a razor-edged knife.

Cord tore loose from the grip upon his air hose, throwing his assailant partly off balance. The murderous knife sliced past his glass face port and plinked harshly against his metal shoulder plate in a glancing blow. The blade traveled across the shoulder plate and struck the swivel link carrying his life line, cutting the line, but snapping the blade off at the hilt.

With his weapon gone the other came at him barehanded, and Cord was amazed to see that the other's diving dress carried no dragging air hose. It was a self-contained suit equipped with an oxygen tank, and without the encumbering air hose gave its wearer a terrific advantage.

The strange diver was upon Cord instantly, seizing him with arms like steel

springs, trying to butt the top of his metal helmet against Cord's glass face port. They staggered weirdly about the debris strewn cabin, exhaust air valves spewing, their great shoes stirring up a fog of sediment.

The other's clawing hands reached Cord's air hose, kinking it and shutting off the air, trying to tear the life-giving hose from the helmet nipple and let in the sea.

Cord's feet entangled the slack of his lines, tripping him. He fell heavily near the jagged hole blasted in the wreck's side, his attacker clawing for a weak spot in his ballooning suit.

Like a multi-armed octopus the other swarmed all over him, suddenly reaching the air exhaust valve and shutting off Jeff Cord's safety valve which kept his suit from over inflating and bursting.

As he felt the buoyancy of the pent-up air within his suit take hold of him, Cord saw his chance. Drawing his knees up underneath the other's body, he kicked up with all his might.

The other's correlated body catapulted over Cord's head with arms and legs threshing wildly, and through the glass face port Cord saw the other man's face for the first time. The man trying to murder him was not the scarred pub keeper Teuton, as Cord half expected, but the dandyish Captain Quinn!

The instant Quinn's body was free of him Cord's buoyant body began to rise, and his hands clawed the rubbish of the bottom in a vain attempt for something to anchor him down. But he only succeeded in seizing a turn or two of a coiled line, the firing lanyard. With inspiration born of desperation he gave his buoyant and rising body a mighty shove out through the jagged hole in the wreck's side, clinging tightly to the firing lanyard.

With his arms outspread like a cross from the pent-up pressure within his suit, he shot up like a cork. Almost immediately his ascent halted with a jerk and a mighty

concussion smote him.

He had reached the end of the firing lanyard, and his vision turned black and the hands of a dozen giants pushed and tugged at him, the water roiling as from a submarine earthquake.

Numb and shaken, his senses reeling, Cord realized that he was still alive and that his air hose must have caught on the jagged portions of the wreck's side. He was still alive because he had been outside the wreck when the dynamite exploded, the interior of the main cabin having received the brunt of the explosion. But Quinn had been inside of the cabin!

A trickle of cool water began to spurt against Cord's body, a worn place ruptured by the explosion. His excessive air pressure gushed past the incoming water, reducing the jeopardizing buoyancy within and allowing him to sink gradually back to the bottom. Quickly he readjusted his exhaust valve, knowing that he could live even if the water filled his suit up to the helmet, provided he remained in an upright position.

He reentered the shattered main cabin and saw a formless shape in the tattered remains of a self-contained diver's suit, helmet flattened and oxygen tank burst. Keeping his eyes averted he made his way through the debris, his heart pounding like a drum. Lying exposed before him was a spilled horde of iridescent beauty, hundreds of pearls flashing their translucent fires at him. The island king's ransom!

He dropped to his knees and dipped his hands full of the precious globules, letting them cascade through his fingers in lustrous streams.

As he gazed, spellbound, Cord felt a violent jerk upon his air hose, and with a start realized that he had completely forgotten the hazards upon the surface. Strongly and relentlessly his air hose began to snake upward. Someone on the topside was dragging

him to the surface like a hooked fish.

“WHAT happened—where’s Captain Quinn?” It was the schooner’s mate speaking, flourishing a revolver.

Cord sat on the deck, helmet off but still encased in the sodden folds of his diver’s suit, still weighted down by his hundred-pound lead-slugged belt. He looked past the beak nosed mate and saw the schooner’s second mate holding a revolver against Jackson’s broad back, while the schooner’s victorious crew herded the *Flame*’s blackboys forward.

A blood spattered deck and several lifeless bodies bespoke a terrific battle. Eli Spencer was not in evidence and Cord decided instantly that the kindly old trader had already been murdered.

“Speak up,” snarled the mate, cocking his revolver.

With a coolness born of the desperate situation Cord’s right hand slipped down to his diver’s belt and loosened one of the lead slugs from its leather pouch. He hurled it with every ounce of his strength.

The heavy slug struck the beak nosed mate squarely in the face and he fell like a yardarm. Cord flung his weighted body forward and seized the revolver almost before it slipped from the mate’s hand.

A shot roared and Cord felt a smashing impact upon the metal of the shoulder plate of his diving suit. It was the second mate, and as Cord’s first shot shaded the other’s second shot a split-second, the man fell forward coughing out his life.

Jackson pounced upon the fallen man’s weapon with a whoop of joy, and the weapons of the two white men roared a blasting hail of lead into the schooner’s crew, charging toward them with *krisis*.

The subdued survivors of the *Flame*’s crew sprang into action, reseizing the weapons they had thrown down in surrender, and the

lugger’s deck became a mass of yelling, stabbing, struggling men.

Cord and Jackson reloaded from the fallen men’s cartridge belts and began firing methodically, picking their men. The schooner’s people began to drop one by one. Then the living began throwing down their arms.

Five minutes later, with their captives securely under hatches, Jackson released Cord from the imprisoning diver’s suit and they boarded the schooner. They found two men lying bound hand and foot, one of them Spencer.

“Thank God you’re safe!” Cord cried, slashing the ropes that bound the elderly man.

Eli Spencer looked at his former skipper, his jaws working queerly. “Forgive me for mistrusting you, Jeff,” he quavered. “Quinn was at the bottom of it all—he framed you with the chart. He framed Teuton too, years ago, forced him to do some crooked work under the threat of imprisonment.”

Jackson released the pub owner who sat up grinning, a grin that was meant to be friendly but which looked like a sinister leer.

“I knew what was comin’ that night in Dobbo,” he told them, “so I tried to get Spencer riled up to fire you out of the pub before Quinn sprung his trap. So he’s dead now, eh? Then maybe I can go back an’ act like an honest man again—in spite of my incriminating looks.”

“Great,” cried Cord, turning to Spencer. “Down on the bottom there is an oyster cracked open, with a king’s ransom ready to be picked up. It’s all yours, sir.”

“Not all mine,” the old trader corrected him gently. “Teuton gets his cut—he risked his life to warn me about Quinn before things began to happen here. Another cut goes to the new skipper of the *Flame*.” He placed his hand upon Jackson’s brawny shoulder. “And half of the remainder goes to my new pardner, a young hellion by the name of Jeff Cord!”