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The Legion Takes the Field

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

THE quiet little officer in the blue burnous and blue kepi listened with a grim smile to Sergeant Ike on the subject of Erfoud. A year ago that town on the northern edge of the Taflelt oasis had been a mere *poste* built by the Légion; it was now a small French city with military walls, gates, a marketplace of Roman arches having the usual *suks* and commercial quarters. Its army and administrative buildings were laid out in wide rectangular streets planted with palms. It was, in fact, a brand-new metropolis such as the Romans would have built in their day, and for the same purpose—a signal of the imperial power on the very borders of the largest rebel district left in all Morocco, and a broad hint that that power was here to stay.

Erfoud, the city, was all the work of one man, Duvigny, this officer of the Intelligence in the blue burnous and kepi of his corps. Ike, who had seen his own Texas towns grow in the same lively fashion, was enthusiastic. "You-all ought to hev a mayor an' sheriff an' a city gov'-mint *pronto*, sir—all good Democrats, of course!" he exclaimed naïvely.

Duvigny grinned. "*Aiwa!* Politics! They are outside, my Sergeant. You do not believe that Belkacem likes all this, or me, do you?"

"He shore must be scratchin' his haid over it, sir," Ike agreed. "Lookit this here market; it's full of them Filaliens all day long. You're showin' 'em thar's another way to git money besides lootin' and pillagin'."

He had put his finger on Belkacem's difficulty. That sultan of the Aït Atta confederation of desert tribes scorned trade. The way these tribes got money was by spectacular raids, on galloping *mehari* camels, with powder-play and

massacre—also by exacting a heavy tribute from the Filaliens, those peaceful date-growers and leather-tanners who formed the bulk of the Taflelt population of about a hundred thousand souls.

"No. Of a verity, Belkacem does not like Erfoud!" Duvigny smiled grimly. "Nor does he like it that I am winning over the Doui Menia tribes of the Ghorfa to the south of here. We have had secret conferences, by night, with their notables. They would come over to our side if they were sure we were here to stay, and not to leave the Taflelt as we had to ten years ago, at the opening of the Riff War. I have asked for you and your combat-unit of the Hell's Angels as an escort, my Sergeant. I and my *goum* are not force enough when we go to pay our return visit to the Ghorfa country."

"Shore, we'd like nothin' better, sir!" said Ike with enthusiasm. That cavalry combat-unit was Ike's pet, his own invention. It consisted of a squad of horses lent them by the Légion Cavalry Brigade, two automatic rifles carried in saddle-boots, and a fast led mule burdened with ammunition for the quick-firers. It had the speed of cavalry combined with the firing-efficiency of a whole platoon of infantry and could keep up with Duvigny's *goum* of mounted native police.

"Report tonight, then," said Duvigny. "Belkacem will know. He will send the Aït Hammou against us, for he would give many warriors to capture Duvigny and his *goum!*"

Those devoted Intelligence officers who were always extending the French influence into the dissident areas beyond, certainly led uneasy lives! Raids and counter-raids, hired assassins, ambitious snipers trying for the Intelligence officer

Our old friends the Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Légion play a desperate part in a desert battle which begins as a sham but ends in deadly earnest.

as he rode at the head of his *goum*, these were all in his day's work.

"We go to arrange a *baroud*, my sergeant," said Duvigny. "You know what is this *baroud*? It is an affair of honor. The Doui Menia cannot submit to us without a battle. The other tribes of the Tafilelt would taunt them if there is no fight first. So it is agreed between us and their notables that there shall be one. On the day of the *baroud* the *group mobile* will move out of Erfoud under our esteemed Commandant Knecht—Légion, tirailleurs, Senegalese. I and my *goum*, and you and the fighting Hell's Angels, are the advance guard, the attackers by their flanks, the raiders in their rear. There is shooting all day long. Everybody is happy, everybody satisfied. In the evening come the notables of the Doui Menia to our camp, bringing the bull to be sacrificed in token of submission."

Ike grinned. It was a typical Arab custom, where honor was everything; but if *he* was that Aït Hammou sheik he would have something to say on the day of the *baroud* too. There were gorgeous chances for stratagems and spoils, in this understood affair where a third party understood nothing but to do the most damage he could to both sides!

"We won't have no trouble gittin' there, sir; our trouble will be gittin' back," said Ike.

Duvigny gave him a glance of quick intelligence. "*Parfaitement!* We arrange the *baroud*; the Aït Hammou catch us afterward and *de-range* it! We shall not let that happen, my cowboy friend!"

"Choose!" called Sidi Yakoub as Ike stopped. "Die they with us, or are we allowed an honorable retreat? The Ait Hammou will never surrender!"



Illustrated by
Charles Fox

Ike could not see how he was going to prevent it. There wasn't the slightest hope of there being no raid by the Aït Hammou. From their fastnesses of the Djebel Sarro the *goum* and its escort would be pounced on. The only question was, where and when?

LATE that night the great gates of Ksar-el-Arrash, the principal citadel of the Ghorfa country, opened to them. As Ike rode in through those portals of a red mud-brick stronghold with four tall towers at its corners, a sense of entering prison assailed him. They had made the trip from Erfoud without incident. To their left the rocky ramparts of the Hammada du Guir rose high above them—a desert plateau haunted by the Aït Hammou and having but a single road bisecting it. To their right were the palmeries of the Tafilelt along the river Ziz—fifty miles of palmeries and fortified farmhouses, three million date palms. No sounds but the barking of dogs in the

night; and yet—watching eyes that saw everything, but could not be seen. . .

Ike had six men whom he could absolutely depend on; Corporal Criswell, the giant Michigander; Anzac Bill, their Australian soldier of fortune; Di Piatti, their tall Italian count; Mora, their thick-set Spanish bull; Calamity Cyclops, their one-eyed sharpshooter, the best in the battalion; and Rütli, the little Swiss machine-gunner. They formed the famous "Hell's Angels squad," so named by the battalion. They were a hard-boiled and unlovely lot, but Ike's invention of a cavalry automatic-rifle unit made them equal in combat efficiency to any platoon of infantry. And there was Duvigny and his devoted *goum* of fifteen Berber partisans. . . But Ike would have remained outside this Ksar-el-Arrash—where the mobility of the two commands would count for something!

THEY were received in the audience-hall with ceremonies. Haunting fear, however, lurked in the eyes of all the notables gathered around the Caïd Sidi-el-Aman, that old hawk of a chieftain. These Doui Menia had been sitting on the fence all through the Tafilet troubles, paying tribute to Belkacem but hoping for the coming of the French, to stay. Now they



were unfavorably impressed with this force of one *goum* and six Légionnaires, as the sole visible military power that France had seen fit to send. This agreement for a *baroud* and submission meant life or death to them. For ten years they had maintained an uneasy and humiliating neutrality with the Tafilet. Once they went over to the French there could be no turning back. Belkacem would launch the entire confederation of the Aït Atta on them in reprisal. . . . Were the French really coming in force?

Duvigny was in a very delicate position here. The Intelligence officer is the father of his district; after the army has conquered it, his task is to restore the life of the pasturages and palmeries again, to punish banditry hard and swiftly, to stand at the Caïd's right hand, advising him, supporting his authority while preventing tyranny. It is he who aids the people in their plantings and the betterment of their flocks. He starts with a tent in a desolate land. He builds a *poste* for his headquarters, a rallying point for the fighting men of the newly surrendered tribe. The people come back; the *ksours* are rebuilt, and flocks dot the pasturages once more. His job is, then, to protect them from raids by neighboring dissident tribes and at the same time carry on penetration into the rebellious areas by intrigue, by small combats, above all by encouraging commerce with his own pacified district. Often an Intelligence officer wins over a whole district to the Morocco Government without any army action at all. . .

Here Duvigny had to deal with a whole confederation of tribes occupying a territory the size of an American State. He had to promise them, on his honor as an officer, that France would not back out again, once having set her hand to the work. Duvigny spoke of the immense army concentration now going on at Erfoud. General Grimaud, with twelve thousand men, was preparing to advance against Belkacem and drive him out into the desert. He spoke of the long trains of lorries coming down the line of the Ziz, over the new road built by the Légion, guarded by armored cars, carrying tons of provisions and ammunition. Would France retreat again, once having set on foot an army of that size?

The Caïd nodded his head. "*Aiwa!* We were neutral once before, when eight thousand soldiers of the French came down here. Allah be praised that we

were! What happened to Mouley-el-Mahdi and his brother—to all the tribes that submitted to the French? Thou knowest, Sidi Duvigny! Belkacem fell upon them all when your soldiers abandoned the Tafilelt; count ye the number that he left alive!”

The Riff War, Duvigny explained—it took not eight thousand, but a hundred thousand soldiers to settle that! Three years of fighting—three years of restoring peace and prosperity. Then three years spent in pushing through the Grand Atlas,—where there were many dissident tribes, the Caïd would understand,—and one year in getting ready at Erfoud. . . Thus slowly but powerfully did France move, as had the Roumi of old.

It was his own town of Erfoud that won for him. The Caïd had been there. He had seen it grow to a city from a mere *poste*. He had seen the thousands of Légion soldiers boring the tunnel through the Atlas that made the road possible. And he had ridden in a steel car with the machine-gun in its roof—Duvigny had craftily seen to it that he had, before he ever commenced these negotiations!

“*Aiwa!* I have seen!” returned the Caïd with conviction. “Would ye but push boldly and stay! This Belkacem—may Allah curse him and destroy his father’s house!—is but an adventurer thirsting for loot and glory. No holy marabout is with him. He has but a hundred faithful for a bodyguard. But ye taught him the military ways of the Roumi and he uses the desert tribes as he wills. The Aït Khebbash, the Aït Moghad, the Aït Hammou—all the Aït Atta confederation. One good battle with cannon commanding the water from the Gheris river, and they fall away from him like a bundle of straws! Ye have the young Khalif at Erfoud—may Allah salute him! No marabout will give this usurper his blessing. . . Go, then, to the *baroud!* . . . It is necessary,”—the Caïd smiled,—“that our young men shall be breathed and let off some powder—”

“May Allah not have mercy on your graves!” These words, in harsh, menacing Arabic, broke in on the Caïd’s discourse from a dusty desert chieftain standing in the doorway. His arms were crossed under his burnous, but two points that were evidently the muzzles of pistols projected from the folds. “Down on your knees, every one of you!” he thundered. “I am Yakoub-el-Mansour, of the Aït Hammou!”



There was an instant of stupefaction. With that announcement the desert chieftain threw open his burnous in a swift gesture and the two automatics in his hands bore on them all. The Caïd and his notables bowed trembling on all fours, their beards on the carpet. The guns swung on Ike and Duvigny. “You! Hands up!” barked the sheik.

IKE wondered, as his hands went in the air, what had become of Hell’s Angels and his prized cavalry combat-unit. He had left them “at ease” out in the court, and the *goum* as well. He cursed softly, regretting bitterly that he had not followed his own instincts and picketed them outside around this citadel. The trouble with nativedom was that all Arabs would look alike to his troopers. It had been easy for the Aït Hammou to get into the court, ostensibly tribesmen of the Doui Menia coming to the conference. Ike figured it out that at a pre-arranged signal they had grabbed and disarmed both the *goum* and the six men of Hell’s Angels, each taking his man. There might have been a brief struggle, which he had not heard.

Yakoub-el-Mansour rapped out an order, and in came two Aït Hammou, also dusty and desert-worn, who deftly tied Ike and Duvigny with wrists crossed behind them. The chieftain then turned on the groveling Caïd and his notables.

“The *baroud!*” he said with scorn. “We will be the *baroud!* On your lives, ye shall not send a man!”

At a silent gesture of his hand Ike and Duvigny were led out. Ike was glad to learn the name of this great strategist

who had outwitted them all so handsomely at Djihani—Yakoub-el-Mansour or Jacob-the-Victorious, sheik of the Aït Hammou—but he certainly was a hard man to deal with. Their prospects looked blank, at present. Commandant Knecht and the *group mobile* would move out from Erfoud next day, expecting to find a perfunctory *baroud* opposing them, where no one would try very hard to hit anybody. There would be a lot of firing, some gallant combats, medals for certain ambitious officers, glory for the Doui Menia in valiant doings; then the gesture of submission signalized by the sacrificial bull. Instead of this, the *baroud* would be quite a different affair, with a man like Yakoub-el-Mansour managing it!

Outside in the court there was no sign of either the *goum* or of Hell's Angels. It was jammed with lean and tall Aït Hammou, Belkacem's famous Iron Brigade, so to speak. They all carried Lébel rifles and bandoliers of cartridges, product of their raids into the Saoura valley and around Bou Denib. They all looked half-fed, but were wiry and capable of any amount of endurance. They giped at Duvigny as he was led out but laid no hand on him. At Ike they looked with curiosity, with murmurs of respect.

"Sidi Sergeant, you taught us a good lesson at Djihani with your mounted machine-guns!" the sheik said. "We have adopted your combat-unit entire. *Shabash!* We Arabs are not slow!"

Ike listened uneasily. The hell of it was that the Arabs were mechanically minded. It was they who bought American agricultural machinery up north in cultivated Morocco. The Frenchman bought a tractor, and as soon as it got out of order he let it go to rust; the Arab tinkered with it and fixed it up. They would have no difficulty in handling his combat-unit with the same intelligence as had Ike's own squad. And that weapon, turned suddenly on Knecht's flank, for example— This *baroud* would cost men, if it did not turn out a disaster!

DUVIGNY was looking at Ike meaningly. Poor Duvigny—the work of a year had gone for nothing! And he himself was in the hands of the enemy. However, he was not thinking of the fate they proposed for him. His glance seemed to say: "This is all very well, my friend; but it lacks one thing: Knecht will expect a report from us before he moves out. One of us must escape to Erfoud!"

Ike nodded imperceptibly. After that they attempted no communication. They were led outside the great gates of the citadel. There was sporadic firing off in the night—the surrounding *ksours* being attacked and their warriors kept indoors. The Caïd had managed very badly, Ike thought. He should have assembled enough of his fighting men as at least to safeguard his visitors during such an important conference as this. On the other hand, the meeting had to be secret, in the dead of night, lest all the rest of the Tafilelt pour out its tribes to stop the *goum* and the Légion squad. A gathering of the Doui Menia at their citadel would cause curiosity, talk. And how could he dream that the Aït Hammou would strike thus boldly, in a raid on the citadel itself? They must have made a night march of over thirty miles, from the distant ranges of the Djebel Sarro.

They would not go back there again. They would pick a likely place for this *baroud* and stage it, so as to be all ready for Knecht in the morning. All it needed was false information sent in somehow to the Commandant at Erfoud.

IKE guessed that this was about what Yakoub-el-Mansour would be doing during the rest of this night. He saw no horses save his own seven and the sixteen of the *goum* picketed outside; and those now were in charge of stout tribesmen. The Aït Hammou raided on foot. They had discovered that cavalry and bombing airplanes mixed disastrously for horses. Now they made incredible marches on those lean legs of theirs.

Presently the whole command of about a hundred and fifty Aït Hammou moved out, leaving Ksar-el-Arrash to cower in terror. They climbed immediately the heights of the Hammada du Guir. One dark mass ahead, closely guarded, was the Hell's Angels squad; the other was Duvigny's *goum*. Ike and the Intelligence officer were kept with the sheik. Along the edge of the plateau they marched northward until the limits of the Ghorfa country were nearly reached. There was a halt, a conference between Sidi Yakoub and his lieutenants. Below them a promontory of the Hammada plateau ran out toward the palmeries of the Tafilelt, like dozens more—but this one continued in a low ridge broken with ravines and hollows. It was an ideal place for a *baroud*.

"*Aiwa!*" The sheik laughed. "We



"On your knees, every one of you!" thundered a desert chieftain in the doorway.

send a message to Knecht! . . . Scribe! Thy pens and parchment!"

A little wizened warrior, who was the *kitabji* or scholar of the command, produced his implements from his girdle—a heavy brass pen-case with an ink-well in one end, a roll of goat-skins. Sidi Yakoub dictated in a rich bass voice.

"Write: *To the Illustrious, the Sword of the Roumi at Erfoud, the Commandant Knecht, whom may Allah salute! We, Yakoub-el-Mansour, Sherif, Defender of the Faith, Lord of the Ait Hammou, do invite you to hold your baroud with the traitorous Doui Menia! We will be present!*"

Duvigny and Ike exchanged uneasy glances as the *kitabji's* pen scratched.

It was subtle, that message! A challenge to the gallant Knecht, which would change his whole plan of attack. A descent by the Ait Hammou would have to be provided against, his reserves held back against attack from he knew not what quarter.

"*Aiwa? Write!*" went on Sidi Yakoub.

"*As for the goum of Duvigny—may dogs defile their graves!—and its Légion escort, my spies have seen them depart from Ksar-el-Arrash. Await them not at Erfoud, ya Commandant! May Allah give thee long life and multiply His blessings upon thee.*

(Signed) *Yakoub-el-Mansour.*"

That too was a poisonous subtlety. He did not say what his Ait Hammou had done to them, if anything. Knecht could imagine what he liked. He would move out to their rescue and the *baroud*, however—which was just what Sidi Yakoub wanted.

"Take to Erfoud! On your lives!" He had beckoned to him two stout warriors. They departed into the night and Ike and Duvigny glanced at one another blankly. The message would be delivered by two o'clock in the morning—Belkacem's spies within Erfoud would see to that. The *group mobile* would move at four. By dawn they would be here, ready for the battle.

What would happen to them then, this wily Ait Hammou sheik was now busily arranging. A thin detachment went down on the ridge, leading the *goum's* captured horses. It would make a respectable *baroud*, with the usual riding about and firing by foot-soldiers from pockets in the rocks. Ike saw his pet, that cavalry combat-unit that he had used so effectively many times before, riding off to parts unknown. But it was now mounted by Ait Hammou instead of by the redoubtable Hell's Angels. At the same time the main body of tribesmen with Sidi Yakoub climbed down the escarpments and took position in ambush in a ravine some distance back of the *baroud*.

It was Hannibal's ancient strategy of letting the enemy drive in your front, only to come under heavy flank fire from the main body. Ike was acquainted with Hannibal only by name, and not at all with his strategy, but his common-sense told him there was plenty of grief for Knecht if he advanced rashly. Nor could he lead off with the whole *group mobile*. The best of it, probably the Légion battalion, would have to be kept back to guard against the Aït Hammou.

THEY were being left alone up here, under a scanty guard. Somehow the mere absence of that brainy sheik emboldened Ike to start groping a way out of their difficulties. "This bird's having everything his own way, looks like," Ike fretted. "We oughta fix up somethin' to throw a monkey-wrench inter the works, seein' as we got our fool selves inter this mess!"

The lieutenant of the guard growled; he did not approve of this talk that was neither French nor Arabic. He cuffed Ike roundly by way of emphasis.

"All right, ol' shorty," said Ike amiably and fell silent. There was not much they could do, anyhow. The lieutenant of the guard stood back from him with rifle grounded and was watching with interest what was going on below. A sentry stood over both himself and Duvigny. Near by in the gloom two seated groups were indistinctly visible, Hell's Angels and the *goum*. Their guards stood motionless, spaced at intervals some paces away. Ten of them, Ike counted. Not much to hope for from twenty-one unarmed men, each with his wrists tied behind him!

Then he heard a faint whisper in English from Duvigny. "Lie down. . . Extend your heels toward me."

Ike sought a comfortable spread on the stony soil of the hammada. There was a good deal of him, measured vertically—six-feet-six. He enlarged it as far as he dared in the direction of that whisper. Presently he felt a tug at his cavalry spurs. Another. It kept up steadily, that plucking motion, and Ike held his heels rigid. Duvigny had managed to back up within reach of them and was using Ike's spur-rowels as a species of saw to cut through the thong that bound his wrists.

Hope! Even two unarmed men could do a lot here if both were free. Ike looked up, calculating their chances. Three

men standing over them—weapons, if you could grab them by a sudden attack! He was tensed to second Duvigny in whatever the Intelligence officer planned.

A twist of his foot in the grip of a human hand. Ike understood the signal. Curl up again; he would find something. . . . He sighed petulantly as if changing to a better position and brought his knees in close. The lieutenant looked down at him, grunted, then was watching below again. Ike's fingers felt carefully over his ankles, and was not surprised to feel an open pocket-knife, with its blade stuck through a boot-lace. . . . It did not need much manipulation with his fingers to sever the thong. . . . Now his hands were free behind him. Duvigny was also free. Ike waited for further orders.

"Punch! Quick! Hard! Now!" came Duvigny's tense whisper. Like a coiled spring Ike shot to his feet. The smash of his right fist drove the lieutenant headlong over the brink; his left caught the sentry's chin, and Ike grabbed his rifle as he fell. Duvigny had been as prompt with his man. They both flung themselves prone and opened fire on the guards. There were curses of surprised alarm, bodies falling, the clatter of *Lébels* dropping among the rocks, a spattering and ineffectual return-fire; then the rest of those Arabs had followed their instincts by a simultaneous bolt for cover among the near-by boulders.

"YOU take your men, Sergeant; I mine—we meet just under the brink. We haven't a second to lose!" Duvigny rapped out those orders as they leaped swiftly for their groups. Ike slashed hurriedly with the pocket-knife, cutting thongs. Hell's Angels, who had all gone prone after that first instant of fire, squirmed, wrung their freed wrists and cursed relievedly. Criswell, Bill, and Calamity hastened to pick up fallen rifles and grab for clips. The Aït Hammou survivors were now sweeping their position with everything they had. Then Calamity got one, in one of his famous snap-shots, and started out to retrieve the man's rifle. The rest followed, on the jump. Ike could not stop them! It became a man-hunt up there—the object, rifles and cartridges. They hated being disarmed, did Hell's Angels—they seemed to feel it a matter of honor to settle with these tribesmen for the treacherous surprise attack in Ksar-el-Arrash.

Ike finally collected them and led the

party down over the brink. The hammada itself was a flat, stony waste where no small party would have a chance against any considerable body of tribesmen such as the Aït Hammou. But below were ravines, gullies, escarpments, rough and broken terrain where the squad could lie doggo in the shadows, or push on to escape as seemed best.

only four rifles between them, lay watching grimly in the rocks. The promontory beyond would expose them like a lot of flies on a wall; if they stayed where they were, they would soon be smoked out.

"Jim," Ike husked to Corporal Criswell, "we got to do a grand sneak up on the derved hammada ag'in, 'pears like. Up this lil' gully. The fust man kicks over a stone I'll lam the pants off'n him!" Ike warned fiercely. "Come on, you birds!"



Sidi Yakoub, having heard that firing, was coming up from the ridge in haste with a big band of his brigands. Those fifteen horses of the *goum* were with them. If Ike ventured down on the plain, that cavalry would soon round him up; if he stayed up here the foot soldiers would track him and corner him somewhere. There was no hope in a surprise attack on them, vulnerable as they were now, for the Aït Hammou still outnumbered them nearly thirty to one. Duvigny and his *goummiers* seemed to have vanished.

That big body of tribesmen stopped in the gloom and listened. Sidi Yakoub, confound him, seemed to divine just what his prisoners would do if they *had* escaped! There were reports being called down from the brink above—from the survivors of those guards, quite evidently. A commotion and some excited talk, where a group had come upon the body of the lieutenant whom Ike had knocked over the cliff. Then there was movement in the main body—ordered, swift. The cavalry clattered down at a long slant to get beyond them in the direction of Erfoud; a file of infantry moved out along the flanks of the plateau slope to reach positions below them; scattered searchers began coming directly toward the little gully where Ike's six, with

The men climbed with the utmost care. Their little gully rapidly narrowed to a mere crevice, full of boulders of stratified rock. It had a waterfall over a shelf of living rock during the spring rains. Silently they negotiated it, surrounded by enemies in the dark, with no hope of getting anywhere save into more trouble. But cheerfully they crept on, with the rugged courage of soldiers used to the adventures of war. . .

To their pleased surprise, that ledge developed quite a basin above, a dark hollow with frowning ramparts of rock rising to the hammada above. And out of the dark of that cavernous hollow came a low whinny—the whinny of a Government mule! Ike stopped the squad with a tap on the leg passed from man to man. They could hardly believe their luck. For that nicker belonged to the ammunition-mule of Ike's combat-unit! The other six horses must be here too, then—and six more tribesmen!

Ike lay flat, peering and considering. The glint of star reflections in water caught his eye. A tank in the rocks, trapped here after the rains had produced their waterfall! The Arabs knew of it, though the military men did not. And this gully would be directly on Knecht's flank when the *group mobile* came for

the *baroud* in the morning. Just the place for Sidi Yakoub to select for an attack by the combat-unit!

They heard calls in the gully below; then there was movement, grunts, in the darkness of the hollow. The six tribesmen were arousing from their wait—probably employed in sleep. Hell's Angels lay tensed, waiting for them to come on. Ike knew that if he could once get to his automatic rifles the game was in his hands—and he fairly shook with eagerness and excitement.

They came on inquiringly, stupid with sleep and not comprehending the urgent Arabic calls ringing up through the gully. And then their rifles sprang to the carry—but too late. Hell's Angels had risen from among the rocks and launched on them like tigers, the heavy smash of fists their sole and silent weapon. The little victory was won in that single encounter; then they were organizing with celerity. Calamity and Bill remained guarding the waterfall ledge; Criswell, Di Piatti, Rütli and Móra raced for the horses and unlimbered the two "sho-shos" from the saddle-boots. Tripods were set up, the machine-guns mounted, and ammunition loaded in; in a trice that combat-unit was ready to hold this hollow against any number of infantry that cared to attack it!

A scattering fire came from below—yells, shouts—return fire from Calamity and Bill. One automatic covered the entire gully below, in case of a rush; the other swept the brow of the hammada above. All they had to do was to wait for dawn—and Knecht.

DAWN came, after an hour of ineffectual attempts on their position by Sidi Yakoub's detachments. First a rosy glow on the snowy peaks of the Grand Atlas far to the north; then a general lightening and increased visibility; then the flanks of the hammada cast faint shadows and the escarpments beyond the palmeries of the Ziz were touched with orange-red. The plain of the Tafilelt spread out below, scanty pasturage sparkling with dew and threaded with white camel-trails; beyond that the bushy tops of millions of date palms, fringed with the pink cubes of *ksours* lit by the morning sun. The Tafilelt! That thorn in the side of France for ten years, now. A hundred thousand Filaliens lived there, peacefully raising dates and tanning leather; over them ruled a sultan of the

desert tribes—Belkacem, who once had been a sergeant in the Spahi and now commanded the twenty thousand guns of the Aït Atta confederation. It was to drive Belkacem out of the Tafilelt, once for all, that twelve thousand men under Grimaud were assembling at Erfoud.

Through the gap in the gully they had a magnificent view of the *baroud* that was to be staged here this morning with the Ghorfa tribes. Sidi Yakoub had not abandoned his scheme of a substitution of his own redoubtable Aït Hammou for that gesture of a battle by the Doui Menia. He had left a detachment to keep Ike where he was, but the main body was disposed much as before. A thin line of commanded the twenty thousand guns of the *goum's* horses disposed as scouts; back in a lateral ravine the ambush on both sides by the main body was ready to be sprung.

KNECHT had marched promptly on receipt of that challenging message from his old enemy the sheik. The three columns of his *group mobile* were coming across the plain, the white kepis and blue sashes of the Légion, the red *chachias* and red sashes of the *tirailleurs*, the red fezzes of the Senegalese. A platoon of the Camel Corps formed a fringe across the advance. But there was more. Ike grabbed Criswell's arm and pointed. "See them four trains of mules, Jim? Them's mountain guns, them lil' ol' sixty-fives that kin go anywhar troops kin go! Knecht's answer to this here attack by the Aït Hammou while he's tendin' to the *baroud*, them guns is."

It was a good answer, and they were glad to see the mountain-guns, those little old reliables that supported the infantry when no seventy-five could come within miles for lack of roads. But Criswell fretted: "That's jest it, Ike! The Old Man still thinks them's Doui Menia down there. He's all fixed for the Aït Hammou if they show up, but—"

"Golly! He thinks he's comin' off 'cordin' to schedule—aint it the truth?" Ike exclaimed with exasperation. "By rights Duvigny an' his *goum* oughta be ridin' at the head of that column. The Intelligence officer is allus there with these *barouds*."

"Well, he aint; an' cause why? He can't make it, that's what," said Criswell with conviction. "Mebbe they hadn't no luck gittin' any rifles. Duvigny'd be out there by now, if he could."



Ike waved his kepi frantically. "Git back! Stay where you are!" he bellowed.

"Gosh! We got to do somethin' about it!" Ike turned to give an order. He hadn't much time left nor any too much opportunity. Knecht's columns were deploying now. Contact had been made with the supposed Doui Menia and bullets were flying. Wisps of smoke rose along the ridge, spurts of sand in puffs blown by the wind on the plain. The deployed lines went prone and began their attack. The mountain-guns were held back, but they were unlimbering the pieces from the carrying mules.

"Limber up them sho-shos—*houp!*" Ike yelled. "Out'n this, ef we has to fight our way out!"

He joined Anzac Bill and Calamity at the waterfall brink. There were not more than a dozen Aït Hammou tribesmen guarding this gully, but they gave more trouble than so many hornets. They were all well concealed in cover; it was impossible to get the horses down past them. Ike called Di Piatti to him and the four started an attack of their own along both flanks of the gully.

Meanwhile, down below, the ridge had been carried by the tirailleurs and Sen-

egalese. The Légion remained back near the guns. Knecht was still uneasy and wary. He had seen no Aït Hammou yet, but Sidi Yakoub would surely make good his boast. The *baroud*, so far, had gone as he expected.

Ike swore savagely at the next development. Those ardent young lieutenants of the tirailleurs were pushing on from the ridge—straight for destruction in that ambush! He tried signaling Knecht with his kepi but got a bullet through it for his pains. The distance was too great, anyhow—more than a mile. Nothing but sporadic firing, without apparent purpose, could be seen up here from Knecht's position below.

"Chance it—hev to!" said Ike resolutely. "Criswell! Bring on them hosses!" he yelled back up the ravine.

The four rifles kept down the enemy as best they could. The horses appeared, footing gingerly around the waterfall ledge, with Criswell leading the foremost. Rifles blazed among the rocks below. Through the storm of it the combat-unit slipped and floundered down the steep slopes, their precious ammunition-

mule coming last. It seemed to Ike that now, if ever, was the time to display what his invention could do, at the crisis of a battle, in just the right nick of time.

"Mount!" he roared as Hell's Angels closed in compactly around its horses,



In a trice that combat-unit was ready to hold the hollow.

shooting avidly at every head that showed up in the bush. "Down thisaway, you fellers!"

They clattered off along a species of ledge that ran down to meet the ridge. Cheers from the tirailleurs and the blacks greeted their sudden appearance. Ike waved his kepi frantically. "Git back! Stay where you are, bozos!" he bellowed at them, but it was all lost on those French sergeants. They had not halted their advance.

BUT Ike had far greater speed than they. His unit galloped on down, gaining on them, closing up the distance to that lateral ravine till it was not over five hundred yards. They commanded it from here, in a plunging flank fire that would be ghastly when sprayed into that crowd of tribesmen filling it.

"Halt! Chuck it to 'em! Hustle, fellers!" Ike's order checked the unit on its haunches. Hell's Angels unlimbered the automatics in the quickest time that any of them ever remembered.

Prat! Rat-tat-tat! A stream of bullets was pouring across into the ravine. The Ait Hammou effervesced like a disturbed swarm of bees. The tirailleurs stopped just in time. Their line had not reached the ravine mouth yet. They dug in prone; for those chattering machine-guns up on the slopes of the hammada were warning even their sergeants that enemies might be around somewhere. . .

Knecht's field-glasses told him, first, that the missing Ike was still at large and was pushing this *baroud* with a good deal more energy than seemed necessary for Doui Menia who were about to submit anyhow; second, that the missing Ait Hammou might very well be in the ravine that Ike was firing into—though Knecht could not see any ravine; third, some sixty-five millimeter shells lobbed over there would explode them out of it in a blizzard of flying burnouses. . . .

Ike saw the two batteries of mountain-guns being wheeled into line, eight of them in a row; then *Boom! boom! boom!* they were off. The ravine was being thrashed with smoking shrapnel. The effervescence among the Ait Hammou increased, boiled up and over into an eruption of fleeing tribesmen, each man for himself and all heading for the Tafilelt, their one refuge left. The Camel Corps got in motion to head them off. It was a terrible cross-fire of artillery and machine-guns for any flesh and blood to have to endure. It did not seem that Sidi Yakoub had a single gesture left now but incontinent flight.

But he had. Ike saw the sheik and a group of his bravest climb out of the ravine and stand there waving their arms valiantly, in all the storm of shrapnel. He was asking for a parley, a truce; and it seemed urgent. Ike stopped his machine-guns and raced down there with Criswell and Di Piatti at his back. His shouts shut off the tirailleurs, who had by now reached the ravine mouth and had begun firing into it. Knecht stopped the artillery; he could see Ike running down to within earshot of that enemy group, and he was willing to await events.

"Ya Sergeant!" called out Sidi Yakoub as Ike stopped within a hundred yards. "Choose—Duvigny or me! We have your *goum*. It is to save their lives that I make this truce. There are five of them dead already by your own gunfire, and the Sidi Duvigny lies wounded." He gestured down into the ravine. "Die



they with us? Or are we allowed an honorable retreat to the Tafilelt? *Aiwa!* The Aït Hammou will never surrender!"

Ike was prompt to grasp the situation. They had recaptured Duvigny and his *goum*, while Hell's Angels had been lucky enough to run into their own combat-unit up on the hammada. Duvigny's people were enduring the shrapnel combing the ravine with the same heavy per cent of casualties as the Aït Hammou themselves. Like them, they would all perish, to the last man, before Sidi Yakoub would surrender. He was offering a chance to retreat in exchange for the Intelligence officer and his *goum*.

It was a hard choice. But Ike could see no hope of saving Duvigny, otherwise; nor could they be sure in the end of capturing Sidi Yakoub. He and his Aït Hammou would vanish out of this ravine somehow, in spite of both the shrapnel and Ike's machine-guns. They were masters in the art of escaping in broken and desert country like this. Ike had seen Arabs disappear before, just when he thought he had them securely bagged.

He called a sergeant of the tirailleurs to him.

"Lend me your helio, feller," Ike requested. "Message to the Old Man about all this!"

His sun-flashes began sending the terms to the Commandant a mile away, back there with the guns and the Légion. And prompt was the answer from Knecht: "Agreed. We cannot sacrifice Duvigny. Am recalling meharistes."

The *baroud* was over. . . . Sidi Yakoub saluted Ike with an ironic smile. "May Allah cherish thee, ya Sergeant! Lo, a fighting man after mine own heart! Fare thee well!"

He was gone with that gesture. He and his followers evaporated up the ravine, in that inconspicuous way peculiar to tribesmen, and reached the palmeries of the Tafilelt unseen by anybody—though the Camel Corps could have found them, had they been allowed to. Ike went down through the carnage in the ravine to find the officer in the blue burnous. Duvigny was unconscious from loss of blood. And they retrieved not more than half a dozen of his devoted *goum*; the rest had suffered with the Aït Hammou in the shrapnel-storm that had made of the ravine a place of death.

Back at Knecht's P. C., the Intelligence officer was revived under the surgeon's ministrations. Duvigny wept when he learned the terms that had been accepted as the price of his life. But he was price-less to France in this region. His work outvalued anything the army could do. The army destroyed; it had to—Duvigny built up. Not only that, but if a tribe was not composed of mere bandits, like the Aït Hammou, unchangeably hostile to any peace whatever, he could win them over by persuasion, by example, by object-lessons in the benefits of peace with the French.

HE gave proof of that as soon as his wound let him take up the threads of his work again: "On to Ksar-el-Arrash, my Commandant!" he begged. "You have the *group mobile*, the artillery, the force. Let them see; and we will not need any *baroud*, this day, to win over the Doui Menia—have you not beaten the dreaded Aït Hammou in their place?"

He was right in that estimate of the native point of view. That afternoon Ksar-el-Arrash opened its gates, with rejoicings, to the *group mobile*. Nothing was said about the *baroud*; but the young men of the Doui Menia took it out in a grand fantasia, with powder-play and feats of horsemanship. And that evening the sacrificial bull was slaughtered by the notables in token that the Ghorfa country had gone over definitely to the French. Those mountain-guns looked as if they had come to stay!

One grim little Intelligence officer, lying wounded on a cot, smiled serenely and assured them that this time they had.