



The Little Man of the Marne

*Maurice Brocco, Spindly-legged Legionnaire, Hacks His
Portion of Glory Out of War, and Grabs His Share of
Wealth in the Competition of Two-Wheeled Racers!*

HE was little, with spindly, hard-muscled arms and legs, and a sharp nose splitting a pair of intent eyes. Napoleon once said that a man must "have a bone in his face" to succeed—and if that were true this little man was born for success.

He stood before a sergeant of the French Foreign Legion, looking at him quite steadily.

"You know what you're in for, *bleu?*" asked the sergeant.

"Yes," said the little fellow. "Seven years of hell. That's what they tell me, anyway."

"They're not far wrong," answered the non-com, with a grin. "They make it hard for chaps like you in Africa."

"Nothing is too hard for me," said

the little man with the bone in his face. "My name is Brocco—and I'm tough!"

He was tough, this Maurice Brocco, who had been born of Italian parents on the Marne in France; far tougher than his slight frame would indicate. He was only seventeen, but there was a weazened quality about his eyes and mouth that made him seem older.

He had become bored with the farm. He had not yet been called upon for military service, and he thought the Foreign Legion offered him an escape from life.

Brocco's hope and ambition was to become a professional bicycle rider, but having made slight advances in that direction he went to the recruiting office of the Legion in Paris, told

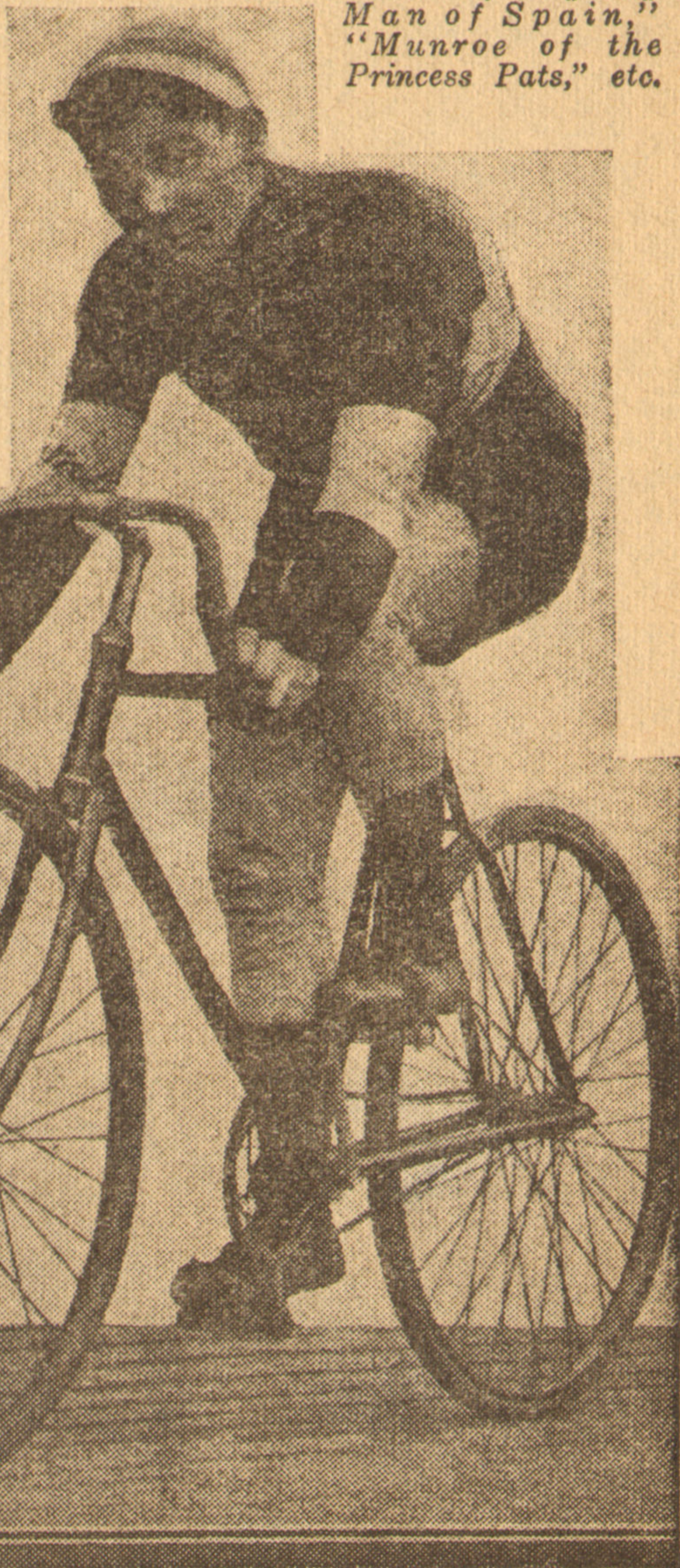
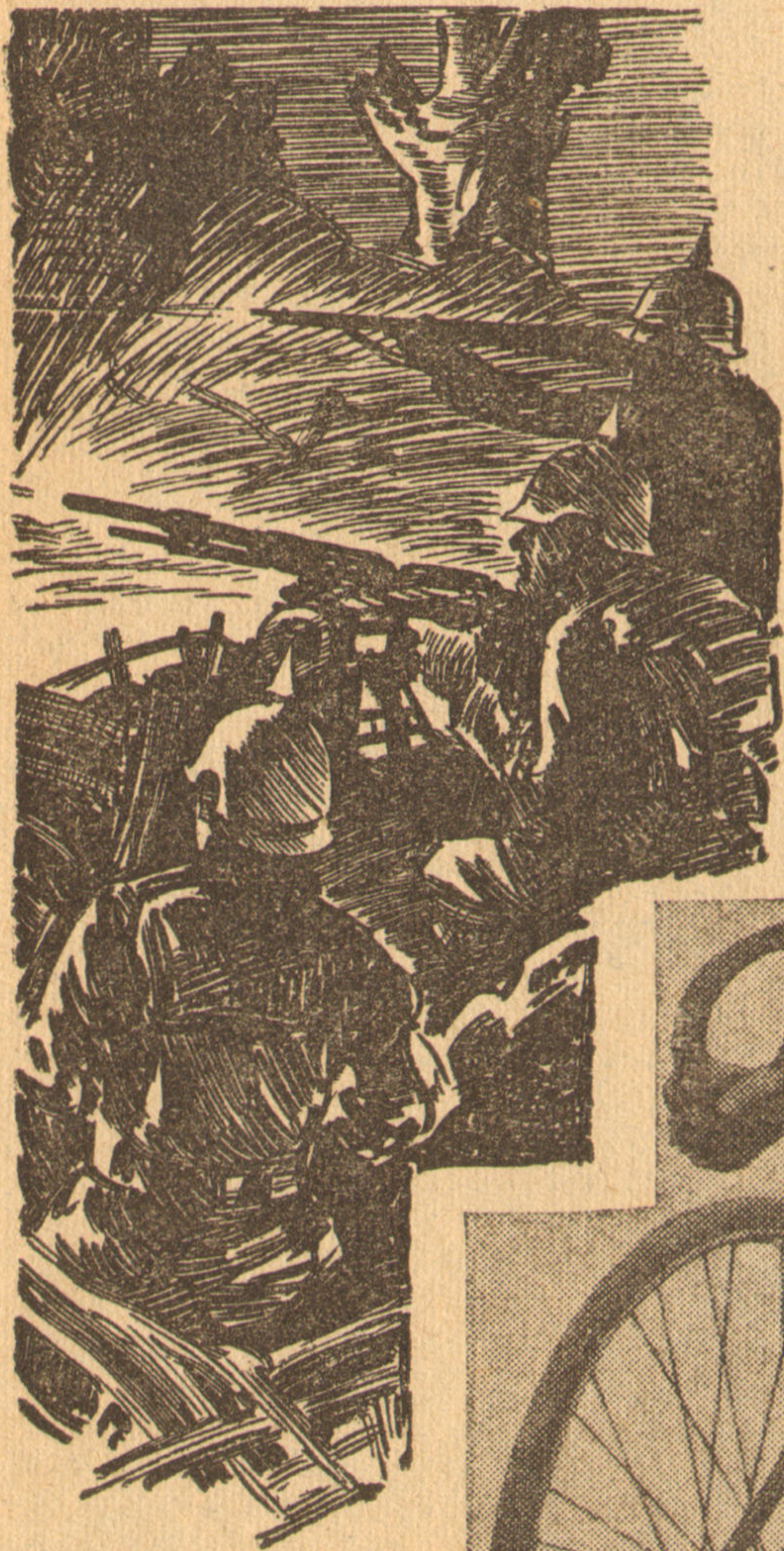
ONE OF A SERIES OF TRUE STORIES FEATURING
FAMOUS SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE!

THEY FOUGHT *for* GLORY

By

JACK KOFOED

*Author of "Mystery
Man of Spain,"
"Munroe of the
Princess Pats," etc.*



*Salute a
Bleu With
a Yen for
Victory!*

them he was an Italian, aged twenty, and took the oath for seven years' service in the sternest military organization in the world.

They shipped him to Marseilles, with other recruits, thence to the depot at Oran, and finally to his post at Sidi-bel-Abbes. His mates were a queer conglomeration of ex-soldiers who feared the lash of poverty in civilian life, cashiered officers, embezzlers, deserters from other armies. But they were all molded by the bitter discipline of the Legion into the finest fighting force in the world. Young Brocco found *La Légion* all he had been told it was, but he was, as he said, tough, and took it in stride.

There was desultory fighting with the Arabs. There was always a skirmish to be had with those irrecconcilables. Sometimes punitive expeditions were sent out. Then, the soldiers, with their band playing "The March of the Legion," marched with heavy overcoats and packs under the burning sun for the brutally long treks that tried the endurance of even the strongest. It was a tradition that a *Legionnaire* must not drop out—and men went on with the blood pounding in their temples, dizzy with heat and weariness, hardly able to drag one foot after the other. But they went on somehow.

THERE would be a shrill bugle call. Packs would be dropped. The men would fling themselves joyfully on the ground, bringing out clips and calling cheerfully to one another. The Legion did not like to march or build roads or fortifications—but it loved to fight.

Brocco loved it. When the bur-noosed Arabs on their beautiful horses came charging madly, shrieking their battle cry, he worked the bolt of his rifle as fast as he could, squinting along the shining barrel until he had a target against the sights. These were the happiest moments he had ever known.

But there were too many long intervals between these adventures to suit Brocco; too many months of back-breaking labor. He did a six-months tour of duty in a miserable

outpost, with bad food and worse water and unutterable monotony. Some of his comrades went "*en promenade*"—deserted. But he stuck. He wasn't the kind to quit under any conditions, no matter how intolerable.

Though the little fellow was tough, the life wore him down. He contracted fever, and after a siege in the hospital he was discharged as unfit for further service. So Brocco went back to his little home town on the Marne to recuperate, and at nineteen to decide what he was to do with the rest of his life. But the itch to be a bicycle rider was still with Brocco.

The greatest athletic heroes of Europe are the "squirrels," as they are called. They earn tremendous fortunes and fame in a dozen countries. The greatest event in which they participate is the "Tour of France," a month long grind around the boundaries of that land. It is the greatest test of endurance in the world, but thin little Maurice Brocco decided it was not too tough for him. He made himself a local reputation, and then entered the classic of all bike races.

The Army doctors may have said Brocco was physically unfit, but he had made himself over again. He felt himself ready for the test, and did not believe that whatever lay ahead could put more of a strain on body and mind than had those adventures he had experienced in Africa. But he didn't know.

They started from Paris, those heroes of the push-bikes, in the blistering month of July. A convict's job lay ahead of them. They had no illusions about it—but the reward was proportionate to any effort. Weazened little Brocco looked like a child among the hardy athletes who were his competitors; but he had no fear of them. He had no fear of anybody.

The field pedaled through the lonely fields of Brittany, where white-coiffed peasant women stared at them with wide eyes. Wayside shrines were nestled among the cool trees, and the Bretons prayed in a tongue that sounded outlandish and

strange to Parisian ears. But even these people called out the names of the riders and cheered them on. The *Tour de France* was an event to them, too.

Down the coast and into the Basque country rode the strange cavalcade. Fishermen in boots and white coifs were replaced by woodchoppers with bandanna handkerchiefs wound, pirate style, around their heads. The roads became rougher and steeper—roads up which automobiles must go in second gear.

The squirrels bent over their handlebars and pushed—pushed—pushed—blood gorging their eyes from their terrible efforts. This was the first real test of the *Tour*, and Brocco began to understand why victory was prized so highly.

THE men stopped at control stations for rest and bites of food. If they fell and were hurt they bandaged their wounds themselves, and repaired their blistered tires. Under no conditions were they permitted aid under pain of disqualification, and officials patrolled the roads at all times.

Suddenly the Basque country was behind, and the pack was in the Midi. The July heat and dust was smothering. Crowds blocked the roads. There was a tremendous amount of cheering and gaiety. The race was a Mardi Gras to the spectators—but a Gethsemane to the riders.

Brocco was worn to the bone, and thin as a scarecrow. He had fallen behind the leaders—Alavoine, the great, Brunero, and one or two of the brutally powerful Belgians. But he hung on—because a man never knew what would happen in this race, and if he kept trying there was always a chance to win.

After the comparative ease of the Midi came the rise and slide of the Crau, the switchbacks of Savoy and the Lower Alps, and the black roads of the north country into Paris. Brocco was saddle galled and every breath felt like a knife between his shoulder blades.

But there was still hope—cheerful stories from up ahead. The leaders

were slowing down. There had been falls and injuries. He still had a chance.

Brocco put forth the greatest effort of which he was capable. It was in the Pyrenees, going at top speed, his stringy legs pumping as hard as he could that he rounded a sharp turn. The road was wet with recent rains. His tires skidded. He made a desperate effort to straighten out. It was impossible. He soared into space like a wounded bird and crashed on a pile of rocks.

The patrol judges in their car pulled up at the scene of the accident. Men rushed down the incline to the unconscious body of the little man from the Marne. They carried him to a first aid station, and then to a hospital. His skull had been cracked; one arm broken. He was in bed for a month.

But Brocco was not one to be discouraged by anything like that. It was something that had happened to countless other riders. The prize of the *Tour de France* still beckoned him. He rode in others, and rode well. He entered the six-day racing grind, too, and won victories in Paris and London and New York.

Every one who saw six-day bike races in the old Madison Square Garden remembers the weazened little man in skull-cap and striped jersey. He was one of the shrewdest riders in the game, and besides his speed and endurance possessed an uncanny sense of balance and timing.

It was seldom that he ever fell. He would be seen flitting around the big pine saucer, picking his way through tangles of men, avoiding those who had crashed, keeping on his swift and birdlike flight. The old Garden echoed to the shouts of the galleryites: "B-rocco! B-rocco!" He was the most popular man on the track, this small veteran of the Legion who had traded his rifle for a bicycle.

Then the war clouds broke in a rain of steel over Europe. Brocco was home, and was called for duty with his regiment. The news that stunned the world was not unpleasant to him. He had a taste for war. He liked the thrill and excitement of soldiering. It was nice enough trav-

elling about the world, engaging in bike races, but fighting was a different matter. When life hung on minutes in an explosion-ripped world it became sweet and sharp and exactly what Maurice Brocco liked best.

This business was different than that he had faced in Africa with the Legion. Of course, the Legion was coming to France to hurl itself into fragments at the Butte Des Morts and other places, but Brocco was no longer a *Legionnaire*. He was a soldier in a French regiment, and he was going to die for France if necessary—though he didn't want to die. Life was too full of interesting things.

BROCCO'S reputation as a cyclist was nation-wide. Not only his fellow soldiers, but his officers as well, knew all about him. The commander thought him too valuable a man to slog his way along with gun and needle bayonet on his shoulder. Dispatch riders were needed; men who could handle a motorcycle the way a cavalryman does a horse. So the little man from the Marne was given that job.

It was no easy one. Riding through pitch-black night, over shell-riddled roads, under fire continually, a man had to have nerves like iron and be master of the spluttering wheel. Brocco was all of that. The pay wasn't that of a professional cyclist by some thousands of francs a day, but Brocco wouldn't have changed places with anyone—not even the last winner of the *Tour de France*.

He was a fatalist. He believed that when a shell came along that had a man's number on it that man went out. If it didn't he lived—and there was no use ducking or playing safe. That war wasn't a game for safety-first players. So he went along for several years with no more than an occasional scratch or bruise from a fall.

Other famous French athletes were under fire, too. There was for instance, Georges Carpentier, the champion prizefighter, who was flying over the German lines and bringing down half a dozen planes. He was handsome and popular, and

was called the "Orchid of the Boulevards." For that reason his exploits were blazoned in headlines in the American papers.

There was Eugene Criqui, the featherweight boxer, whose jaw was shot away and replaced with a silver plate. There were dozens of others, too—but none were more reckless of danger in the service of his country than Maurice Brocco, the skinny little cyclist from the Marne.

There was even a greater incentive for him than for the others, for his home town had been crushed under the steam-roller of war. Where there had been a pleasant house and trees and fields there were now only blackened ruins. Brocco was, in a sense, fighting the war in his own back yard. He was waging a defense of his own home.

One night he was called to the *poste* of command by the colonel. It was a dirty night, with a sting of icy rain in the air.

"Brocco," said the colonel, "I have a difficult and dangerous task for you."

The little man saluted briskly.

"*Oui, mon colonel.*"

"There is a tremendous offensive to be launched at dawn. Our telephone wires have gone out. It is vitally necessary that the regiments on our left flank get their orders. Planes are no good. You'll have to get through."

"I shall do my best," Brocco promised.

"You'll *have* to get through," the colonel told him emphatically. "There are scattered German patrols along the way. It may seem impossible, but one way or another you must deliver these dispatches."

"I understand."

"You already have the *Croix de Guerre*," said the colonel, glancing at the faded green and red ribbon on Brocco's tunic. "If you make this I'll recommend you for the *Médaille Militaire*."

"Thank you, sir."

Ten minutes later Maurice Brocco, his motorcycle tank filled with gasoline, was saying good-by to his mates. Men who tread close to the abyss hide their fears under levity. The

soldiers kidded the little fellow, and told him he didn't have a chance in a thousand of coming back alive.

"Don't bet on it, *mes enfants*," laughed Brocco. "They have said a lot of things about me that didn't come true. And will you be disgusted when they pin the *Médaille* on my chest. What do you know about war?"

He stepped into the saddle, waved derisively, and roared off into the darkness.

Brocco may have joked with his mates, but he knew what was ahead of him, and realized that his chance of coming through alive was really about one in a thousand. The road, itself, was a peril, stippled with holes and still under fire. He couldn't use a light. That would be seen a long way off, and would spell almost instant destruction.

A MILE further on he could cut through a path in the woods, but those woods were full of patrols who were jittery and quick on the trigger. The trees would protect him from one peril and bring him another. Dispatch riders didn't last long—and he had already been on the job for a much longer time than the law of averages allowed him.

Maybe this was his last night on earth. His mind flickered over the events of his crowded past—Africa, with the Legion—the torture of his first *Tour*—the pine saucers of a dozen six-day tracks — applause, gaiety, laughter — girls, who overlooked his queer, gargoyle face because he was a famous man, and came to like him when they knew him.

He wondered if he would ever get back to that old roaring life. After all, while the war called him in strident terms any man got tired of short rations and too little sleep, and the bite that shell-fire had on the nerves. Brocco wouldn't have missed the war for anything, but he was getting fed up with it.

Perhaps he would be all through with it after tonight. No use worrying about it, though. No use planning anything, either. Whatever turned up he'd have to do his best. There was no guessing what might lie be-

tween him and the division commander to whom the code dispatches were addressed.

The artillery fire had died down. The woods seemed strangely quiet—a prelude to a dreadful uproar that would come with dawn. Instinctively he throttled down his motor. It made a terrific racket in the stillness.

He passed through the woods without interference. Maybe there would be a miracle, and he would get through.

The woods thinned out. The path, Brocco knew, would end in a fairly wide road that led directly to the outfit he was seeking. He couldn't understand why he had not been hindered so far. There must have been patrols out. They would be on the *qui vive*, too. So what was ahead? A trap? He didn't know—but his spine was beginning to tingle with suspense.

The motorcycle slithered out into the road. He couldn't go fast. It was too dark, and a spill at top speed might be fatal as a bullet.

Suddenly a guttural voice spoke a command. It was a German voice, ordering him to halt. There was only one thing to do now. That was step on it as fast and hard as he could and risk a broken neck instead of a bullet in the back.

His motor roared into sudden life. Humped over the handlebars, peering desperately into the velvet darkness, he gave his iron steed the gun. There was another quick command. A machine-gun went into action—*tac—tac—tac!* He could hear the bullets ricocheting along the road.

Le bon Dieu, he thought, keep them from hitting the tires! In another minute he would be out of range. That was the prayer in Brocco's heart. He didn't think of himself in that excitement-bitten moment. He thought of the dispatches he carried, and how the lives of thousands of Frenchmen might depend on their delivery.

Then, suddenly, there was a searing pain in his shoulder. The shock made him jerk the handlebars. His cycle hit a rut—and Brocco was hurled unconscious into the ditch.

He lay there for awhile; how long

he didn't know. When he came to there was a half dried streak of blood running down his forehead. His shoulder did not pain, but it felt almost paralyzed. He fumbled around with his first aid kit and, ripping off his tunic and shirt, did an emergency bandaging job on himself.

There was no one around. He could not hear a shuffle of heavy shoes nor the grunt of voices. He looked over the top of the ditch. It was too dark to see anything, which cheered Brocco. His message must be delivered before dawn—and dawn was still a long way off.

Painfully he crawled out of the ditch and stumbled over the wreck of his motorcycle. No use fooling with it any more. The tank was punctured, and there wasn't a drop of petrol left. He'd have to depend on his feet; queer job for a cyclist.

The terrain was not new to Brocco. He had been over it before. The *poste* of command should not be more than a half mile away, bearing across the fields to the right. A mile wasn't much, but when a man was dizzy and sick from a crack on the head and his shoulder felt as though it wasn't part of him at all, it could be more than enough.

Still—he grinned a little to himself—it wasn't worse than the last six-day race in which he had ridden. A stupid youngster, who hadn't known how to handle a wheel, had crashed into him and given him a couple of broken ribs and six stitches in his scalp. That had happened on Thursday, and he had gone through until the finish Saturday night, never feeling certain that he could make the next lap. But he always had. A fellow could make almost anything if he kept trying hard enough.

Well, there was a mile to go, and *nobody* could tell when those *schweinhunde* who had shot him might come prowling around. So Brocco started his weary trek. He was so weak his feet dragged and his head spun around, but he kept hunching on until he collapsed at the feet of a French patrol.

They took him to the commanding general where he delivered his dispatches, and then off to a field hos-

pital. Brocco's wound was not serious, but it was a ticket of leave to Paris. The big offensive got under way without him. He was in the queen city of Europe, with no guns to peck at his nerves and pretty girls to tell him what a hero he was.

Brocco got his medal and a promotion and the war went on. He came back to it, and went through other experiences that brought him within inches of death, but he lived through the holocaust.

After the armistice and his demobilization, Brocco went back to rebuild his shattered home. Bit by bit life came back to normal. There were other six-day bike races; other *Tours de France*. There was a reputation to be bolstered and money to be made. The little man from the Marne had had enough of war. He wanted to try his profession again.

It would be reasonable to assume that a fellow who had gone through as much as he would be handicapped in a game that demands so much on speed and endurance. But this wiry little fellow, whose face had grown more weazened with the passing years, seemed to have lost none of either asset. He was still one of the best pedal pushers in the world; and certainly one of the most popular.

There was not a winter passed that he did not come across the sea to ride at Madison Square Garden. He was one of the most highly paid of the squirrels, because he was one of the most popular. No race seemed complete without him whipping his way around the pine saucer.

HE won frequently. He was always in the running, even when his partners were lacking in his own ability. And no rider who ever showed his wares in New York had fewer spills, because he still retained his uncanny knack of balance.

"Brocco," he was asked once, "do you ever get a desire to be back in action—be a soldier of fortune again?"

He laughed. He had a queer little laugh.

"No," he said in his accented voice. "I'm getting too old for that kind of thing. Oh, I know there

are older men than I who still serve in the French and Spanish Foreign Legions, and others who are manning machine-guns in the Central American wars. But not for me. This racing business is quite rough enough."

"How old are you, anyway?" was the query.

He winked.

"You would like to know, wouldn't you? Well, I'm not telling. When you get past forty you begin to get a little touchy about that question, *mon ami*. Shall we say nothing more about it, eh?"

"Well," his interested observer wanted to know, "what's the biggest thrill you ever had in racing on this side of the water? That's a fair enough question, isn't it?"

"*Absolument!* It was the Madison Square Garden race in nineteen-twenty. I had not been out of the army long, you know, and that wound in my shoulder still bothered me a little. I wasn't sure how well I would do. There were many great American, as well as foreign riders, in that grind—Goulet and Grenda, Egg and Van Kempen, and McNamara. They paired me with Willie Coburn. We worked well together. While the better favored teams were fighting each other we—shall I say?—sneaked out in front and won the race. I have won a lot of races, including several others in the Garden, with Goulet and the Belgian, Buysse, but none elated me so much as the one I took with Coburn. I like to achieve things when everyone says they cannot be done."

That was typical of Maurice Brocco. He never hesitated to attempt the impossible, and many times he proved that it was not impossible at all.

"Well," was the next question, "what is the biggest thrill you've had outside the bike racing game. That may be tough to answer, considering that you have had so many of them—but come through."

"You'd think, maybe, it was that time I delivered the dispatches and was shot off my motorcycle?"

"Well, it ought to be close to it."

"But it wasn't," said Brocco. "It

was when I was a youngster in Africa. I was out on sentry duty in the desert. The *Legionnaires* were lying in their blankets, asleep. They looked like corpses in the moonlight. Being just a boy I was a little nervous. I kept my eyes wide open. And off, by a small clump of palm trees, I saw something crawling along the ground—crawling, crawling. The Arabs came in like that, and slit throats, and died with the shout of '*Allah, il Allah*' on their lips.

"For a moment I was frozen with terror. Was it a lone marauder or the leader of an attacking band? I took a step forward, and lifted my Lebel rifle. My finger was on the trigger. Another instant and I would have fired. And then I saw that it was an Arab woman—a girl, rather. She lifted herself to her knees, and the moonlight showed me a face that would stop the heart of any man, an oval, olive-colored face, with eyes like the Sahara stars.

"I went over to her. She spoke a little French; I a little Arabic. There was romance in the moon. I never found out why she came crawling into our camp. It may have been with the hope of killing one of us. She stayed to kiss me."

"And that was your greatest thrill?"

"None like it," he said. "But to get practical, the sergeant caught me. I was sent to the most terrible of the Legion outposts as punishment. But it was worth it. Things like that don't happen often to a man."

THAT was Maurice Brocco all over. His fighting and his riding days are over. He has gone back to his home, and quite likely when there are six day races in Paris he drives over to see them. Brocco is well enough off. He has nothing to fear of the future—but then the weazened little warrior of the Marne never did fear the future—not when he was seventeen and a *Legionnaire*—not when he was thirty and a soldier on the Western Front—not in any of his countless races. So, in these quiet days, he'll fear nothing. You can be sure of that.