HELD TO RANSOM!

THREE crazy to keep us confined to the barracks!"

"We ought to be out scouring the desert."

"Ze Legion will never be able to hold up this head again.

Barrack room 4 in the Foreign Legion Barracks at the desert town of Goulais echoed to the sound of angry voices. It was only a few minutes before "Lights Out" and every Legionnaire there was feeling bad-tempered. Even Grit Gregson, the young Britisher who was minor Legionnaire in the room, looked annoyed.

"But what could we do if we were allowed out?" he shrugged. "There's thousands of miles of desert and nobody knows where Captain Leroux is being held prisoner.

"But..."

"Buck Baxter, the burly American, scowled at Grit.

"I'd still like to be out in the desert," he snapped. "If they keep me cooped up much longer, I'll be going down with a bad attack of Le Cafard." Le Cafard was the desert madness which all Legionnaires dreaded.

For the last few months of gloom had hung over the Goulais Barracks. Exactly a week ago, Captain Leroux, the popular Commandant, had disappeared in the desert. News had then come through that the Captain had been captured by the Arabs and that a huge ransom was being demanded for his release. In addition to money his captors had demanded that the Goulais Barracks should be evacuated and then destroyed.

Nobody knew in what part of the desert Captain Leroux was being held. The Legionnaires had been confined to barracks so that, if any news came through regarding Captain Leroux's whereabouts, the whole regiment could set out at once to the rescue.

Most of the Legionnaires had already given up Captain Leroux as lost. The authorities would never agree to the abandoning of the barracks.

"There's only one more day to go," said the Legionnaire known as The Scrounger. "If the ransom isn't paid by dawn the day after tomorrow, the Captain will be killed by the Arabs."

Suddenly Pedro Alvanze, the Spaniard, looked round the barrack-room.

"What's happened to Louis Morel?" he inquired. "He's late getting back here, isn't he?"

Louis Morel, the Frenchman, was one of Grit's best pals. He'd been sent into Goulais by one of the officers early in the afternoon.

At that moment the door was kicked open, and Sergeant Shroeder of the Tenth Company appeared. He was the most hated sergeant in the Legion. The Legionnaires sprang smartly to attention at the foot of their beds.

Hans Shroeder looked down the line of beds.

"Where's Morel?" he demanded harshly.

"He was sent into the town on duty," Grit told him.

Hans Shroeder laughed; but it was laughter without a trace of mirth.

"Duty!" he mocked. "Morel should have returned to barracks four hours ago. That means he's now classed as a deserter. I only hope I'm in charge of the firing squad when they put him up against the wall.

"Grit was amazed.

"Nothing in the world would make Louis Morel desert the Legion," he gasped. "There must be some explanation.

Again Shroeder gave that mirthless laugh.

"There is—and it proves he's a deserter. Four hours ago, disguised as an Arab, he was seen joining a caravan just before it set out across the desert for Colas village.

Sneering, Shroeder surveyed each member of the room in turn.

"You were all friends of Morel and so you're coming out with me to bring him in. You've five minutes to be down on the parade square in full desert kit. We're making a forced march across the desert. You'll all do three months in the penal battalion if we don't reach Colas by evening.

There was no time for the Legionnaires to make comments. They scrambled back into their uniforms and then ran for the parade square. Grit's mind was in a whirl. Louis Morel couldn't possibly be a deserter. But why had he dressed himself as an Arab and set out for Colas village?

Sergeant Shroeder's platoon of the Tenth Company formed up. After a quick inspection of equipment, he led the Legionnaires out through the barrack gates, through the town of Goulais, and into the terrible desert.

The sand had now lost the heat of the day's sun; the air was now bitterly cold. But for hour after hour, the ruthless Shroeder forced-marched his men, who sweated hard under their thick uniforms and heavy equipment.

All through the night the small platoon marched. As dawn drew near, Grit and the others expected a rest. But instead, Shroeder ordered them to double-march and they ran for several miles across the treacherous sand.

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He Vowed to Rescue
His Kidnapped Captain

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SO HE DESERTED FROM THE LEGION!

The eastern sky was glowing red as a small Arab village came into sight.

Immediately Shroeder decided to split his command into two sections so that the village could be approached from all sides at the same moment. Shroeder chose Grit as a member of his own section.

The two parties of Legionnaires separated. And then, just as the men approached, the alarm was raised in the village.

"That's queer," Grit thought. "They must have had a sentry posted."

As usual, daylight was coming very quickly to the desert. At sound of the alarm Shroeder gave the order to charge, and the Legionnaires went racing forward.

But things happened quickly inside the village. A bunch of riders, mounted on camels, suddenly burst out of the village directly ahead of Shroeder and his party.

The riders caught sight of the second party and then a very strange thing happened. Two of the Arabs suddenly closed upon a third and knocked him from his camel.

The man lost his balance as he fell. Grit Gregson gave an amazed yell as he recognised the man.

"Louis Morel!"

His pal had been travelling with the Arabs. Could it be he was a deserter, after all?

Sergeant Shroeder had also recognised the familiar figure.

"It's Morel, all right!" he shouted. "We've got him! I'm making sure he doesn't get away with the others."

He went down on one knee, and brought his rifle to his shoulder just as Louis Morel stumbled to his feet. Grit watched with horror.

Hans Shroeder was going to shoot to kill—kill one of Grit's best friends.

"This is where I take a hand," Grit gasped. As the sergeant pulled the trigger, Grit knocked the rifle up with his own gun, causing the shot to go high in the air. His life saved, Louis Morel raced towards his camel.

None of the other Legionnaires fired at him, although they must have recognised him. He was nearly rage. "You—you," he spluttered. "Gregson, I'll have you shot for this."

But Grit was now standing in front of the sergeant and covering him with his rifle.

"Drop that rifle, Shroeder," he snapped. Reluctantly, Shroeder let go of his rifle. The air was still, to break the silence. The other Legionnaires watched him, with expressionless faces.

Suddenly spinning on his heels, Grit started to run across the desert.

As he ran he knew he was in a tough spot. He had interfered with a sergeant in the execution of his duty. Now he would be treated as a deserter, like Louis Morel.

"But I couldn't let him shoot Louis," he told himself. "Louis may be with the Arabs, but he's no traitor."

Led by the furious Sergeant Shroeder, the Legionnaires began to pursue Grit. Into a sand dune Grit could not be chased, and Grit managed to make his escape.

"Zan you for saving my life," Louis half-smiled. "Now it's time it is time for you to join me."

He reached down, Grit grasped his hand, to swing up on to the rear of the camel. Then he was led away from the village—and Sergeant Shroeder. Louis Morel was the rider.

Zat mob of Arabs are well ahead of us," Louis said after a while. "And we're to follow zem—for a ver special reason." Grit frowned.

"Why?" he asked. "And what are you up to, anyway?"

Louis's reply startled Grit.

"I know where Captain Leroux is being held prisoner."

Grit questioned Louis cagerly. This was great news! Their popular Captain, held for
a ransom the Legion could not possibly pay, was soon to be killed by his Arab captors. If Louis had learnt of the Captain's whereabouts, Grit and the French Legionnaire might somehow have managed to reach him.

"I will tell you all that has happened to me," Louis went on, talking with difficulty. For the past five days the Legionnaire had been over the uneven desert sand, giving its two Legionnaire passengers a rough ride.

It was nearly nine o'clock on the day before, an officer at the barracks had sent him with a message concerning stores to the house of the baghdad merchant in town. Louis had been shown into an ante-room and told to wait.

While waiting, the voice of the merchant had come clearly from the next room. To his anger Louis had overheard a描ant was the head of an Arab spy ring. It was the merchant who had actually engineered the kidnapping of Captain Louis.

"The merchant and the Arab spies with him were talking about the ransom," Louis went on. "At that moment a man who was a prisoner in the temple at the Oasis of the Four Trees."

Louis paused to haul on the camel's reins and slow the animal to a walk.

"My one thought was to get back to the barracks as quickly as possible then," he went on, "but even as I made to turn I was struck down from behind. When I came to I was dressed in these Arab clothes. And later I was forced to mount a camel and to ride away with the Arabs. Hadji, the merchant, is among them, for he intends to be present at the killing of Captain Louis if the ransom isn't paid."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I was to be killed with the Captain," he went on, "but it was only when you approached the village this morning that I had a chance to grab a camel. When those two Arabs rode alongside me, both struck me at their knives and Hadji threw myself down to save my life. They tried to make sure I'd get no chance to tell my story."

"They must have heard Sergeant Shroeder's shot," Grit said. "They've probably took it for granted that you'd been shot as a deserter."

Grit, the Frenchman, nodded furiously. He hadn't gone further than the oasis. There weren't back to Sergeant Shroeder and ask for help to rescue Captain Leroux from the oasis. But they shot before he had a chance to explain. And there was no time to return to the barracks and call out the regiment.

"It's up to us, Louis," Grit said decisively. "We're got to save Captain Leroux."

"Only by saving him," the Frenchman nodded, "can we show zat we are not deserters!"

Grit and Louis saw no sign of the Arabs ahead. Darkness came down and they were still travelling on the camel. Grit thanked his stars that both of them were carrying a luminous compass with him. Because of the darkness there was no danger of losing the way to the Oasis of the Four Trees.

Suddenly.

"We must be close to the oasis now, Louis," Grit said. "We'll do the rest of the journey on foot. The chances are there's a whole circle of sentries around the oasis."

Leaving the camel, they started forward. They were not surprised to be shot at again. Grit began to fear that the sun would come up and still find them far from the oasis. But at last they caught the Frenchman's arm.

"Look," he said, "I've seen the moonlight. Faintly outlined against the skyline were the silhouettes of four tall trees—the oasis! The pales dropped to their hands and knees, and began creeping among the sand dunes. As Grit took cover, the camel was iniected by sentries. But now the desert training of the Legion stood them in good stead. They wore their way undetected behind two of the sentries.

They were among the bushes that fringed the Oasis pool. They saw a small stone building—the only shelter Captain Leroux—and beyond it a large Arab encampment.

Silently they approached along the edge of the pool. The windows of the temple were just slits in the stonework—much too narrow for a man to clamber through. In front of the temple, standing one on each side of the heavy door, were two sentries.

How were the Legionnaires to get Captain Leroux out of the temple, and safely away? It would be done within an hour.

"The door will be securely locked," Grit whispered, "and I reckon neither of the sentries will have the key. So even if we can overpower them, we won't be able to get inside the temple."

"I imagine the rustling of the rushes that grew beside the pool that gave him an idea. Bending down he snapped one off—iit resembled a long, hollow tube.

"You're the same size as Captain Leroux, Louis," he said quietly. "I'm going to ask you to take an appalling risk. It's the only way I can see of freeing the Captain."

He explained. Louis Morel's eyes began to shine.

"It is je grand scheme," he agreed. "Let me first cross to the camel lines and decide which is a fast camel."

He slipped silently away into the gloom.

With the barrel only inches away from the lock he began to fire—each shot sounded like a thunderclap in the quiet oasis. At the third shot the door started to swing open, the lock shattered.

Already Arabs were pouring from their tents. "Jump to it, Louis," Grit commanded.

Louis Morel, clad in the Captain's uniform, went racing towards the camel line. At the same moment, Captain Leroux, dressed as an Arab, was walking towards the door.

"Behind the building, sir," Grit gasped. "Quickly!"

"Let's dodged behind the temple, a frantic Arab voice began to yell: "The infidel Captain! He escapes! He escapes!"

Sir was already in the sky and Louis Morel was plainly seen as he raced his camel out of the oasis. Shots were fired and then a volley was shot out. Then was followed by the angry snortings of camels.

Grit handed Captain Leroux a thick-stemmed, hollow rush.

"He's not going to get away!" bellowed Sergeant Shroeder, levelling his rifle at the man dressed as an Arab. But Grit Gregson had other ideas—he swung his rifle under Shroeder's and spoiled the Sergeant's aim! Why had Grit mutilated his face?"

"The sooner we're under the water, sir," he said, "the better."

They lowered themselves into the pool, and their heads disappeared under the surface. But they had one end of a hollow rush between their teeth and the other end was above the surface of the water. They were thus able to breathe.

Grit and Captain Leroux failed to see the great horde of riders which went racing out of the oasis after Louis Morel. When they finally lifted their heads above the pool's surface, the oasis was deserted.

They found two camels—the animals that belonged to the two tied-up sentries. And in one of the tents Grit found an Arab costume with which to cover up his uniform.

"And now, sir," he said, "all we have to do is to swim away. No one will take any notice of us. And Louis had a good start of those Arabs. With luck he'll get well away."

Grit and the Captain rode out into the desert. All the way they saw small parties of Arabs, scurrying the desert for the escaped Captain. But they weren't challenged. Darkness found them and they eluded the sentries.

A great welcome awaited them when they arrived next day. Louis Morel had turned up an hour before them. Having shown the pursuing Arabs a clean pair of heels. He had already told his story.

As Captain Leroux thanked Grit and Louis in front of the whole regiment, and granted them seven days' free leave. After the parade, there wasn't a Legionnaire who didn't want to shake the two palms by the hands of the newly freed men.

Even Sergeant Hans Shroeder congratulated them.

"Lach," he said to Grit, "for once I forgive a Legionnaire for disobeying an order."

Out in the desert unarmoured, and pursued by morose

Arab—so Grit and his pals felt with stones instead of bullets! Don't miss this terrific Foreign Legion yarn in next Monday's super LION!