



THE SUNRISE PILOT

by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

'RUSTY" WADE dropped a handful of fresh salmon eggs into the water and awaited results. From the cool depths came a score of trout. The water swirled—the eggs vanished—the trout disappeared.

Ten minutes before, Rusty had landed on the remote Alaskan lake confident that he could catch a few trout.

It had been a year since he had made a forced landing at the same spot. At that time the lanky pilot had worked on his motor while the trout leaped all about him. To a man who loved fishing as he did it was maddening.

"Well, here I am and there are the fish!" He placed a single egg on a hook and dropped it into the water with a dozen other eggs. The next instant a big trout had struck.

"Hot darn!" he exclaimed. "This is a battle worth going miles for. Hello!"

The silence of the lake was broken by the faint roar of a motor. A plane came over a timbered ridge, dipped and dropped a message.

As the message struck the water, every trout in the lake dived for the depths. "That's it, spoil the fishing!" growled Rusty. "Holy smoke! Now the one I had hooked has gotten off." The young fisherman drew the message toward him with his pole. He fished it out and read:

Rusty: Sorry to spoil your fishing trip, but the fish-trap guard at the Squaw Inlet cannery is under arrest for piracy, or should be. Proceed to Squaw Inlet and pick him up.

Milt Dean. United States Marshal.

"That's what comes of being an air deputy," Rusty Wade growled. "Still there have been times when I was mighty glad I had a deputy marshal's authority."

Attached to the note was a moose-hide poke. Rusty

opened the poke, and a warrant dropped out. This was to be used in case the fish pirate was not already under arrest. "Bert Proctor," he read aloud. "Bert Proctor! Charged with fish piracy!"

Right there the joy went out of Rusty Wade's life. Bert Proctor was Rusty's half brother. "Sent to arrest one of my own family," he groaned. "Damned if I'll do it. They can go to—"

He paused to reconsider. There is a certain oath a deputy United States marshal takes, and Rusty had taken that oath. His face was white and drawn, as he made his decision.

"I've got to do it!" he muttered.

Rusty Wade's plane left the lake at such speed that the ducks and geese for a mile around were in a panic. No homing pigeon could have taken a more direct course.

WHEN the buildings of the Squaw Inlet Cannery lay below, Rusty dropped to the calm waters and drifted to within a few yards of the float before making fast to a dolphin. A native youth came out in a dory, and immediately brought Rusty ashore.

"I'm here on the Bert Proctor case," he announced. "What's the dope on it?"

Banning, the superintendent, who had come down from his office, answered, "I'll tell you." It was evident the man was furious. "You know Bert Proctor?"

"Somewhat," Rusty replied.

"A wild kid," Banning went on. "He came to me, and asked for a job guarding our Rocky Point trap. It's fifteen miles down the coast. He claimed he was a misunderstood youth trying to make good. Well, like a fool, I gave him a chance. He double crosses me by selling about ten thousand dollars' worth of fish to a gang of fish pirates."

"Go ahead," Rusty said. "What else?"

"Then on top of that he lies to me," Banning growled. "He puts up a fantastic yarn about an armed gas boat with a machine gun that got the drop on him. That's not true! No boat in these waters is that fast, and we know them all. Well, I try to arrest him and he gets the drop on me. Orders me off my own trap, and says he's going to see it through. Well, I know what he meant—see the looting of that trap through. I wasn't going to kill off a lot of good men by attacking the fool, so we sent for you. That's your business. We'll see that he's shoved in the pen for a good long time if you'll bring him in. In the meantime, the cannery is running only one line."

"I'll bring him in," Rusty Wade said, quietly.

Later, when Banning placed food before him he hardly touched it. "That kid promised me he'd go straight and make good," Rusty mused bitterly. "And this is what I get. I knew he was a reckless kid, but I would have sworn he would have kept his word. Oh! well!" He shoved the plate back, and gulped down a cup of coffee. Then the young air marshal headed for Rocky Point.

THE beauty of the country held no charm for Rusty this twilight evening. The sun had just dipped below the mountains. Waters that were deep and blue surged through rock-studded straits, and eddied about stern points. The branches of the trees draped so low they just cleared high-water mark and presented an appearance of being trimmed. The snow-capped peaks were a soft pink; the sky was flecked with pink clouds of a soft shade.

Countless salmon were jumping in the bays and small creeks. As the sun came up after its brief disappearance, Rusty could see the mighty schools of fish moving toward Rocky Point. He landed, nosed up to a dolphin and made fast.

As he made his way toward "the watchman's shack," Rusty expected trouble. The silence was alarming; the water lapping around the piling held a sinister note. He opened the shack and entered.

Bert Proctor was lying on the floor in a pool of crimson.

"Bert!" Rusty cried, thickly, "You're wounded!"

"They got me!" Bert gasped. "Fought 'em off! They got me with a machine gun. Cut a foot-thick lodo in two and—got me. I'm through, Rusty. Going out—clean—like—I promised."

The effort to speak to his half brother had cost Bert his strength. His face was deathly white, life appeared to have fled. How like a young kid he looked now—a kid who had taken on more than he could handle?

"You're not going to die, Bert!" Rusty cried fiercely. "You're going to live!"

Rusty Wade was half sobbing, as he picked Bert up, and carried him to his plane. "I'll get 'em for this," he snarled. "I'll wipe 'em out. The kid was trying to make good and they shot him. I'll make Banning take back what he said, too."

Rusty had already done what he could to stop the flow from the wound. But that wasn't enough. It needed a good doctor to do that.

He flew recklessly all the way back, and dripped

salt water from the pontoons of his plane on the tops of spruce trees, as he cut across peninsulas. His shout brought a half dozen cannery hands when he had landed.

"A stretcher!" he yelled at them.

Banning came down, rubbing his hands. "Got him, eh?"

"Wrong again!" Rusty Wade snapped the words at the superintendent. "Because the kid's story of the pirates didn't sound reasonable to your dull brain, you turned against him. Well, he was shot up protecting your property when they came back the second time."

"I'll withhold judgment," Banning answered, "but—"

"You'll do more than that. See that he's given the best care! Where's the nearest doctor?"

"At the Fritz Mine. Thirty miles up the coast!"

Rusty was off for the mine a moment later. As he landed in the bay, a dory came out from the mine and a young doctor carrying two heavy suit cases boarded the plane.

"I'm Doctor Sewall. Banning radioed me that you were coming," he said.

"Thanks for the speed, doctor," the young air marshal answered. He was too concerned to say much more.

THE round trip had taken less than an hour, but it was obvious that Bert Proctor was worse.

"A blood transfusion will be necessary," said the doctor, after a brief examination. "Then, maybe we can pull him through."

"Take all you need of mine," Rusty said.

The doctor rounded up the whites present—a mere handful. The cannery crew was mostly Orientals. From each he took a sample of blood and made an examination to ascertain which would be best.

"You've been working too hard, Mr. Wade," he informed the pilot, "I can't use yours. Nor yours," he added turning to the engineer. "You're a bit too old. Banning, yours will do. Are you willing?"

"I still believe the boy was deceiving me," Banning answered, "but I'll be glad to give him my blood."

"For which I respect you," Rusty said, quickly. "But you are wrong."

Hardly breathing, Rusty Wade watched the operation. A trace of color came into his brother's face, as Banning's color began to drain. Bert's lips moved.

"Lambuth! Toward Ryan Reef!" he muttered.

"Lambuth! Gray speedboat! Ryan Reef, Rusty! Machine gun!"

"Do you make anything out of that?" Rusty demanded.

Banning nodded. "He is mistaken. Lambuth runs a saltery. It is a floating proposition that travels from place to place. Ryan Reef guards Bidarka Harbor. No boat can enter. There is no gray speed boat in these waters. Lambuth has a twelve-mile tender, but it is painted white."

"Lambuth?" Doctor Sewall looked up. "I wish he were here. A Liter transfusion is going to be necessary, and his blood will do—if he will give it! I know the man. A big fellow—a regular giant!"

"I'll get Lambuth!" Rusty declared grimly.

Bert Proctor's lips moved. It was evident that he understood the conversation. "Don't go, Rusty. You'll be wiped out," he said. "Don't go! Machine guns."

"Very well, Bert," Rusty answered, "I won't!"

He silently left the room. The doctor followed. "You are going?" he asked.

"Of course I am, doctor! I'm not armed, but I'll figure some way of getting Lambuth. If I don't, then I'll pick up some other healthy cuss somewhere. Has the kid a chance?"

"Mighty slim, but he's fighting. He seems to be afraid you'll think he's not making good. He thinks a lot of you, Wade."

Rusty ran back to the sick room. "Bert, old kid, I'm going out and service the plane now. If you want me, call me You're a good kid and you made good. Here's my hand on it."

A faint pressure came to Rusty's hand, and he felt like sobbing.

"Thanks, Rusty. Only don't go after Lambuth. Machine gun."

Bert seemed to have a horror of the weapon, as well he might. He had faced one with a .30-30 rifle, and had seen a log a foot thick cut in two before the leaden hail struck him.

"Don't worry, old kid, just get well," Rusty answered.

RUSTY WADE let the tide carry the plane down the inlet so Bert would not hear the roar of the motor. Then he took off. Again pontoons skimmed treetops. He laid a direct course for Ryan Reef.

As he swung over the ragged pile of rocks that was supposed to block anything but a canoe from entering the harbor. Rusty looked down. The reef for a distance of nearly a hundred feet had been blown out. At extreme high tide a boat could be taken through. At

low tide a light-draft craft could safely cross the reef at that point.

The young air marshal set a course up the inlet to Bidarka Harbor. The surface of the harbor was unbroken, except for a wedge-shaped wave that was moving shoreward.

"A boat and a fast one made that," he growled, "They must have heard me coming and raced for cover. Hello! Business is picking up."

He caught sight of a gray speedboat against the shore. The shore at this point was abrupt: the water deep. The boat had been secured to the rocks and an attempt at concealment made by pulling the branches down from above.

The very fact that the branches were lower than the surrounding trees aroused Rusty's suspicion. He banked and circled the harbor.

In a cove a mile away he made a second discovery. A small steamer was moored to the shore and alongside lay a scow loaded with salmon. On deck men were engaged in salting the fish.

Several hundred sea gulls took flight as the plane approached. Rusty could see the white, upturned faces, as he passed over. It was plain to be seen the men were frightened.

As if to decoy him from the steamer, the gray speed boat now put off and started at full speed for the reef. Astern, Rusty could see a pile of foaming water, kicked up by the propeller. The bow was lifted from the water by the speed.

As Rusty came above the craft, he searched in vain for signs of a machine gun. There were none. The forward and aft part of the craft was an unbroken gray. Amidship was a wheel-house raised sufficiently for the pilot to look beyond the long, high bow. She was decked over astern. An American flag flapped in the wind.

"They ought to be flying the skull and cross bones," Rusty growled. "Bert was right. There is such a speed boat. There are fish pirates raiding the traps around here. It's been going on for three years now. Lambuth bought enough fish to make his operations look respectable. Nobody would have thought of looking into Bidarka Harbor because it is supposed to be closed by the reef. Bert was right except about the machine gun. I haven't found it yet, but it's around somewhere."

His faster speed took him ahead of the water craft. Rusty Wade pretended to be careless as he shot ahead.

Suddenly, a man on the speed boat scrambled

forward. In an instant, a gray tarpaulin was jerked aside, and a machine gun exposed.

"That's Lambuth!" Rusty cried. "And he knows that if I get away the game is up. But he don't know that I've got to have him. Unarmed plane against a machine gun." The young air marshal banked sharply and cleared the line of fire that would have downed him for sure, had he not been expecting something of the sort. The tracer bullets went wide, then stopped. The motor boat was turning in an effort to bring the gun to bear. The plane's pontoons tripped the tip of a tree, as he shot over a ridge.

The radio he often carried on these trips had been silent for fifteen minutes. Suddenly, he heard Doctor Sewell's voice. He was speaking on a short wave from the cannery to the mine.

"I'll be here several days, if he lives. But he's dying now. I may be back in the morning. Rusty Wade is out after a man for a blood transfusion, but I'm afraid he'll be too late. What's that? No! Only Orientals and I can't use their blood."

Rusty came down, nosed the plane up to the nearest tree, and made fast. Next, he gathered several rocks weighing from ten to thirty pounds each. Some he placed in the cockpit; others were loaded onto the wings, close to the fuselage.

"It may work and it may not, but it's my only chance in the time I have. After this I'll pack an automatic rifle with me. Wasn't expecting this sort of trouble up here!"

AS HE got high enough into the air to look over the ridge into the harbor, Rusty noticed that the surface of the cove was covered with salmon. The scow had been sunk. And judging from the smoke pouring out of the stack, the steamer was making a hurried attempt to get up enough steam to escape. The speed boat was a mile off the reef. Rusty decided its part in the past had been to watch approaching steamers and handle trap guards while the scows and slower motor craft did the heavy work. Again to his ears came the doctor's voice over the radio.

"His vitality is amazing. I had to operate to stop internal bleeding. Pretty low! He would have died, though, any way. He's calling for his brother, Rusty. I'm afraid Rusty has bumped into more than he can handle."

Rusty dropped down once more. With pontoons twenty feet above the water he approached the gray craft. He could see the gunner working desperately to

bring his gun to bear. He knew, as Rusty knew, unless the pilot accomplished his purpose he would fly within close range.

The gunner gripped an automatic pistol and emptied the contents at the plane. Rusty could hear the thud of bullets against the fuselage. He was dangerously close to stalling speed as he closed in.

Leaning over the cockpit rim he hurled his rocks upon the speed craft and finished by tossing the wing rocks after the smaller stuff. Then he roared away at full throttle, expecting to hear the thud of bullets, hardly daring to look back.

Presently he swung back. The speed craft was drifting helplessly in the channel. Two men were standing with upraised hands signaling help.

Rusty came down and taxied close. The last rock had turned the trick. It had smashed the machine gun and the shock of its impact had opened a seam through which the water was pouring.

"I want you, Lambuth!" Rusty snapped. "Easy now! Get onto the wing and sprawl out flat. I'm taking no chances of your getting the drop on me while we're flying. Tell your partner to take the other wing. It's up to you to hang on."

"It's worth a lot to us for you to forget this," Lambuth ventured. "What's your price?"

"More than you can pay. Hang on!"

They roared back to the inlet and dropped beside a float. "Get off! Make it snappy!" Rusty ordered.

He turned the other man over to a group of Orientals. With an automatic pistol in his back, Lambuth was hurried into the cannery hospital. "How is he, doc?" asked Rusty.

"We'll hope for the best," answered the doctor. And this, as Rusty knew, was another way of saying, no hope. He tensed as he looked at his brother. Rusty had seen men die before, but never a young man. He recognized the signs.

SENSING Rusty's presence, Bert's eyes flickered open. "I'd like to—stick—around," he whispered.

"You're going to stick around!" Rusty answered grimly.

"Lie down beside him," Doctor Sewall ordered, addressing the captured fish pirate.

"What does it mean?" Lambuth demanded. His face was pale.

"It means," Rusty cried, "that you're going to give some of your blood to help the man you shot live."

"What! Take my blood?" Yellow to the core, the big man trembled at the thought of draining away his life's blood. It was as though enemies were taking his strength before killing him. He felt like a man disarmed. "I refuse!" he cried passionately.

"You have that right!" The doctor spoke in a tone of disgust. "You have that right, but what a creature you are!"

"Then I can't be forced to submit?" asked Lambuth.

"No!"

"Is that so?" shouted Rusty. It was hardly a query. It was a snarl of fury. Rusty drove the pistol muzzle into Lambuth's side. "You'll submit or I'll kill you like a dog. Men wouldn't call such an act murder. Take it, doc! Drain his worthless body if need be." As the doctor hesitated, Rusty swung the pistol toward him.

"Very well," answered the doctor with ill-concealed satisfaction, "since you force me."

Rusty stood there, swaying from the very force of the drama of which he was an important actor. What a contrast between the boy and the man. The peace of approaching death was on the boy's face. On the man's, stark terror. He licked his dry lips and began to mutter.

"Not too much! Not too much!" he cried in a trembling voice.

"Take it," Rusty ordered. "All of it! Say, doc—is the kid—dead?"

"The doctor did not answer. He was completing the operation.

"Yes—doc—I know now—he's dead! I was too—late." Rusty hurled the gun from him. "I'll kill Lambuth. Take it away. Too—late! Doc! Doc! Is that color in the kid's face. It's like a sky long after sunset. Yeah, sunset—then—darkness. Why did I think of it?"

"Or," the doctor spoke softly, "sunrise! Then the color comes stronger. I think it is the dawn of a new day." The kid's lips moved. "Rusty—I've been—somewhere," he whispered. "I'm back. I guess—I'll stick—around."