



WEB OF THE SPIDER

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

The Navy had named their newest submarine the Barracuda, after the deadliest fish that infests tropical waters—that sharp-toothed killer that will attack anything for the joy of battle. Then that sub turned against its masters—and Billy “Buzz” Benson took off on the blood-strewn trail of the killer ship!

THE FLINTY-THROATED ROAR of a Vought Corsair Navy plane billowed out 3,000 feet above the Twin Lights of Atlantic Highlands as Billy “Buzz” Benson guided the government ship toward New York. A puzzling message requesting him to report to a high-ranking Naval officer at the North Beach airport had come through an hour before, and before he could make up his mind what it was all about, Benson had

found himself seated in a glistening Navy two-seater ship fitted with pontoons, machine guns and all the regular equipment for action.

Ever since his work in rescuing the airship *Dayton*, Benson had been commandeered for several governmental jobs that required secrecy, tact and not a little brass-bound nerve. His job with the *Los Angeles Mercury* had been maintained somehow, with the aid of long-distance telephone, and telegraph reports, but it was fast becoming

evident that he would soon have to give it up or evade the many tasks that the Secret Service men continued to saddle onto him.

As he raced through the stinging, salty air, he attempted to unravel the queer meaning of the message that had come through about an hour before. He drew the crisp sheet of paper out of his pocket, spread it across his thigh with long flexible fingers and stared at the typewritten lines again.

It read:

“Can you assist us in uncovering the whereabouts of the *Barracuda*? Has been missing from New London for more than a week. All efforts to locate it have failed. Fear secret will be turned over to foreign government.

NORTON.”

The more he stared at this strange jumble of words, the less he could make of it. He crumpled up the message, stuffed it back in his pocket and took up his bearings again.

“Dizzy thing,” he muttered, glaring ahead at the colorless coastline of New Jersey. “What the devil is the *Barracuda* and who is Norton?”

It was the same old stuff where government work was concerned. Half the time he was working in the dark, following unknown men, floundering with puzzling clues and having to take so much for granted.

“*Barracuda!*” he spat. “What the hell next will they think up?” But somehow, the thoughts of that darting, ferocious fish that could turn and whip a shark brought eerie chills across his broad shoulders. He had seen the barracuda fish in action in the West Indies some years before, and the reflection that he was to match his wits and strength against a man—or something—that had been named the *Barracuda* was none too cheerful.

He scanned his maze of instrument dials again and checked his course. Suddenly he realized that another Navy Corsair was coming toward him. The wide-winged fighter, powered with a roaring Wasp motor, was on top of him before he realized what had happened. With an oath he threw his stick over, rammed the rudder pedal down and just cleared the mad vulture.

“What the devil is he doing, trying to pass me on that side?” screamed Buzz.

Then before he could comment further, he realized that the ship was actually shooting at him. Twin streams of trickling tracer could be noted skipping across the sky. He turned and gave the ship another

glance, hoping to catch the service numbers, but there were none. Instead, he was astonished to see a girl struggling with a man in flying kit, in the rear cockpit.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” snapped Buzz.

FROM where he rode, Buzz could see the clear outline of a girl who was dressed in what appeared to be a camel’s-hair polo coat with a heavy fur collar. Her hair streamed back in the slipstream like a golden pennant. She fought, struggled and pounded at the head and shoulders of the man in the rear pit who was directing twin machine guns at Benson’s ship. A raging hail of lead spat all about Benson’s cockpit, but he managed to slip out of range. Probably the girl was assisting no little, for she could be seen flailing away at the gunner with all the fury of a young Amazon.

“What the devil is going on there?” bellowed Buzz. He stared at the spectacle of the screaming Corsair that was apparently trying to down him for no reason at all. With a bellow he curled over and got dead on the tail of the Corsair.

Had he cared to, Buzz could have blasted the ship clean out of the sky, but as he peered through his telescopic sight, he caught a full glimpse of the girl’s face. She was staring up into the snout of Benson’s ship, with stark terror gripping her soul. She tried to scream, but he could tell that fear had completely paralyzed her. She stood open-mouthed, unable to move. Buzz hadn’t the heart to let even a warning burst blast out.

He let his Corsair nose down until his pontoons almost rammed the tail assembly of the other machine. Then, with a close-up view of the two cockpits, he wheeled over and drew away. There was no telling whether that bird in the back seat would take another shot at him or not. As he glanced across the short space that separated the two seaplanes, Buzz caught another phase of the mad drama that was taking place. The man in the rear cockpit suddenly whirled and threw his arms around the girl, and in the confined quarters of the gun mounting, forced her down out of sight within the fuselage. At the same time the strange machine nosed down again and raced for the water below.

“Where the devil are they going with that jane?” growled Buzz, more than interested.

The unmarked Corsair was streaking down for a bobbing bell buoy that lay about three miles off the coast of Long Branch. Buzz stared at it again and noted that it evidently intended to land.

“Who’s he expect to pick up there? There isn’t a boat within two miles of him. What’s the game?” went on Buzz, staring over the side again.

The ship below suddenly wheeled into the wind and wobbled down to a shaky landing. The surf was fairly calm and the pilot was lucky. The unmarked Corsair lay bobbing about on the rolling swell as though it intended to stay all night.

Buzz was about to go down and see what it was all about, when suddenly—not twenty yards in front of the Corsair below—a greenish something rose out of the water. A long sleek shell, throwing off streams of water, slithered out of the depths below. As he curled around, Buzz realized that it was a submarine—and what a submarine!

IT WAS fully a 5,000-ton ship, a veritable steel whale of monstrous proportions. The first thing Buzz noticed was the unusual superstructure that came out of the water after the bridgelike conning tower. It loomed high and mighty above the main deck of the sub, presented a bulbous curved surface and two long, fanglike tracks that ran out over the aft portion of the grim vessel.

“Now, what the devil is that thing, and what’s the connection?” snapped Buzz, starting to put his stick forward for a dive to where he could see what was going on. Then as he stared over the edge of his cockpit, the rear portion of the bulbous section suddenly opened wide and the seaplane below was churning up to the long tracks that were now extending themselves out and sliding beneath the pontoon hull of the seaplane.

Crash! Bang! Two loud explosions rang out just to the right of Billy’s wing tips and his Corsair almost went over on its back. With a snarl, Buzz fought her back into some semblance of control and noted that a great gun was being manned by a group of sailors in blue denim. But above all that, he saw that the seaplane with no markings was riding the two tracks and sliding forward to the open hatch of the submarine’s superstructure. A mechanic was jerking at something beneath the wings, and before another shell crashed out, the wings of the Corsair below had folded back and the whole machine had slid away into the black maw of the submarine’s unusual hatch. There was a creaking and a clanking; the great doors shut again, and all trace of the seaplane was gone.

Again and again the slaty-steel gun below fanged out and blasted snarling venom at Buzz, but the flying

reporter was too amazed by the sight below to attempt to get out of range. One chunk of metal took out a wing-strut as clean as a whistle, but while he raved and swore, Buzz had enough courage to go down and give them a little of their own medicine.

With a bellow of rage, he nosed down and put his sight full into the black speck that snarled from the muzzle of the gun and let her go. Then he drew back on the trigger releases. Twin trails of screaming lead fanged down and spattered about the deck. The big gun spat once more, but the range had been lost. In place, the clammy hand of death clapped one of the gunners on the shoulder and another hurtled off the slippery steel deck and went into the water.

Their mates, realizing that they were licked while the charging Corsair stayed at that height, dived for the shelter of the conning tower. Some one pulled a lever and the great gun began to disappear into her pit. Two grating steel doors slid over it and the deck was clear again. Before Buzz could recover from his dive and prepare for another, the giant submarine was slithering away, her propellers churning up a milky foam, and the bulbous, whalelike back was sliding beneath the greenish water.

Buzz made one more dive and put another burst into the submarine, but the spinning lead only spanked off like puff-balls from the granite sides of a mountain. As he screamed up from his dive, he caught sight of one of the gunners struggling in the water. Without another thought, Buzz whirled his Corsair around and dropped the seaplane down, not twenty feet away from the struggling man. With a couple of judicious blips of his motor, Billy brought the nose of the glistening pontoon up to where the man could reach it.

“Get on that float and stay there. Hold on to the forward strut where I can see you and I’ll get you ashore as soon as possible. No funny business, now, or I’ll shoot you off,” yelled Buzz.

“Say!” answered the Naval rating. “You don’t think I’d pull anything on you after the way those punks left me in the soup, do you? Get me to N’York, Brooklyn—anywhere, and I’ll tip you off to the lot!” The drenched man’s sun-baked complexion could not hide the pallor of his terror and pain. A trickle of blood ran down his bared chest, and it caught Billy’s eye.

“Listen, sailor,” he answered. “You’re done up. Get in the back seat there and see if you can find a first-aid kit. But remember, don’t try any funny stuff.”

THERE were no guns on the rear-pit mounting, and Buzz turned and watched the submarine man crawl into the pit and search through the canvas pockets that lined the side of the fuselage. In a minute he bobbed up with a broad grin and a wad of clean white cotton, bandage and other emergency equipment.

"Right," replied Buzz. "Fix yourself up and I'll get you somewhere where they'll take care of you right."

"Yeh, and probably can me for about ten years," returned the gob, dabbing at his chin with a soaked pad of cotton. "Bet they're raising hell about that fish, ain't they?"

"What fish?" replied Buzz preparing to take off again.

"The *Barracuda*—the big submarine that carries the seaplanes. That was it that just took the dive."

"The *Barracuda*!" gasped Buzz. "You mean to say that's the *Barracuda*?"

"Sure. You a Navy man, and didn't recognize the big whale?" demanded the gob, halting while he tied a swath of white bandage across his chest.

"No. You see, I'm not a Navy man. I just happened to be going up to New York from Philadelphia. They had sent for me to come up and see about it. They gave me this ship, but I didn't even know what the *Barracuda* was. I thought it was probably the name they had given to some guy who was causing a lot of trouble, or something."

The gob broke into a broad grin as he listened. "Well, I'll be busted," he roared. "Here you are chasing the *Barracuda*, and when it pops up out of the water, you don't recognize it. Haw, haw, haw!"

"Well, figure it out for yourself. Would you?" demanded Buzz, getting sore. "But I'll tell you one thing, sailor. If I ever see it again, I'll get it and get it right. Who's the girl in the seaplane that went aboard?"

"Aw, don't get mad. Wait until we get ashore and I'll tell you all I know. It's a long story, an' it'll keep. Get goin'. I can't lose any more claret." With a growl, Buzz fed the juice to the sizzling Wasp and nosed around into the wind and took off. Fifteen minutes later he was ploughing up to the seaplane apron at North Beach. Not ten yards away from the cradle track that brought the seaplanes up out of the water stood a government Cadillac. In it were two Naval officers, a civilian and a Petty Officer at the wheel.

As Buzz sat and watched the ground crew bring his machine up out of the water, the men in the motor car got out. Buzz caught sight of them and then noted that

the chauffeur was pointing wildly to the man in the rear cockpit.

"That's Slithers, the gunner, sir," the C.P.O. was saying. "I'd know him a mile off."

"See," said the man in the back seat. "They know me, birdman. Wait till you tell them that you forked me off the *Barracuda* and didn't know what it was. Haw, haw, haw!"

"Yep!" replied Buzz. "And wait until some C.M. slips you about twenty years for desertion. You'll look swell in a uniform with big numbers painted on the back!"

At that the gunner gob realized that perhaps the laugh was on him. He decided to take another course.

"Say, buddy, I can help you on this thing if they go easy on me. You know we weren't all in on that thing. Some of us had to go, you know. You see me through this and I'll tip you off to a lot of stuff that will help you find them."

"We'll see about that later. Who are these eggs in the big car?"

"One of them is Mr. Hansworth, the guy who invented the *Barracuda*."

Buzz whistled. He had heard of Hansworth, noted marine designer and shipyard owner.

"The other's Commander Norton—the little guy with the funny face. I don't know who the other yap is," went on Slithers. "Guess they'll be tickled to death to see me."

AS THE seaplane was drawn well out, Buzz dropped down out of his cockpit and waited until the drenched gob could get down from his. The Naval officers came forward, somewhat puzzled.

"Mr. Benson? I am Commander Norton," opened the small stocky man.

"Glad to know you, sir. I hope I'm in time," replied Buzz.

"Time? You look as though you were several steps ahead of us. Where did you pick up this man?"

"It's a long story, sir. Can we go somewhere and get him fixed up? Had to put a couple of shots into him a little while back. After that, perhaps he'll talk."

"Um. I guess we'd better. This is Mr. Berry T. Hansworth, the well-known naval designer, and this is Captain Nelson, one of my assistants in this affair. Here, Powers, take this man over to the infirmary. You'll be responsible for him. If he's able to be moved after the doctor gets through with him, bring him over to this building and report to me with him. Come, Mr. Benson."

Slithers went off with the C.P.O., and Buzz, loosening his flying kit, started across a concrete square and was guided into a long, low building. Commander Norton led the way and the others followed. In a few minutes they were sitting around a cobblestone fireplace with Norton.

"I suppose you have heard of the disappearance of the *Barracuda*, Mr. Benson. What do you make of it?" opened Norton.

"Well, sir. To tell you the truth, your message meant absolutely nothing to me until I picked up that sailor out there," explained Buzz, gravely. "Then Slithers, as you call him, told me that the submarine that had fired on me was the *Barracuda*. That was the first I had even heard of it."

"A submarine fired at you?" broke in Hansworth.

"Yes, about three miles off the coast opposite Long Branch. I went down after another Corsair that had taken a few shots at me first, and the sub's gun opened up. I dived on it and knocked Slithers off. I think another sailor went, too. The sub took aboard the Corsair and submerged."

"Well, I'll be damned!" snapped Norton. "And you didn't know it was the *Barracuda*?"

"No, it all happened so quickly. The attack by the Corsair, the appearance of the sub below them and the opening of the big hatch that took in the plane when the wings were folded back. I thought I was dreaming."

"I don't blame you," agreed Norton. "You say the seaplane attacked you first. How was that?"

"I don't know. It came up from nowhere, almost rammed me and then started firing on me from the back seat. I was astonished, too, to notice that there was a—"

A telephone bell jangled out from somewhere. Norton, Hansworth and Captain Nelson jerked into tense attitudes. At last Nelson went over and took up the receiver. He snapped a word into the mouthpiece, stiffened again and then turned to Mr. Hansworth.

"It's—it's for you, sir. For you," he muttered strangely.

Hansworth gulped, shook his head in a queer jerk and then walked over to the phone. Taking up the receiver, he said, "Hello . . . This is Hansworth. What is it?"

They watched him as he received a message that caused his face to go a parchment yellow. He stared past the mouthpiece like a man who is watching a serpent. Finally he muttered, "My God! They've got—they've got Doreen!"

NELSON and Norton scrambled to their feet, and stood staring at one another. Benson tried to take in the insane tableau and remain seated. But as the three men were exchanging their glances of terror, he instinctively recalled the incident of the woman in the rear pit of the strange Corsair.

"This morning—and nothing has been heard of her since? . . . Are you certain? . . . Oh my God, why didn't we act with more care?" Hansworth went on, his face betraying his every emotion.

Finally, declaring that he would get the police on it at once, Hansworth hung up and stood gazing down the long table.

"What happened?" broke in Norton.

"Doreen had been spending the weekend with the Mortlakes out at Amargansett. As she left, they say one of our cars came up and she got in. She hasn't arrived home yet, and they've had no word from her."

"What were you saying when the phone interrupted?" broke in Norton again.

"I was saying," went on Buzz, "that in the rear pit of this Corsair was a girl—or a woman, with the gunner. It was a tight squeeze, but they had her in there somehow. While the guy was spraying me with a Lewis, she was pounding him on the back with her fists. The last I saw of her was when the gunner rammed her down into the fuselage."

"What was she wearing?" asked Nelson.

"She had blonde hair—it was streaming back in the wind—cut fairly long, and she wore a camel's-hair polo coat with a big fur collar."

"That's the kind of coat she went away with," broke in Iansworth.

"Do you think Nordoff has seized her for some sort of a ransom?" asked Nelson.

"Let's get that sailor. Maybe he knows something," snapped Norton.

As he spoke, there came a rap at the door and the C.P.O. came in with Slithers. The former submarine man was dressed in a dry outfit and appeared to be in pretty fair shape. Beneath the open throat of his blouse could be seen an efficiently wound bandage.

"Here, you Slithers," growled Norton. "Who was the woman in the Corsair that landed on the *Barracuda* today when Mr. Benson shot you off?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the gob, "but I think it was Miss Hansworth. They went out to get her, I understand. She was to be picked up on Long Island somewhere and brought out to the sub. Then we were to beat it for—somewhere—and demand a ransom, I believe."

"Where is the submarine heading for?" came back Hansworth.

"I—I don't know—for sure," replied Slithers.

"You mean, you'll tell if we go easy on you, don't you, Slithers?" came back Benson.

"But why take this man's word for anything?" growled Nelson. "He ought to be in the brig, in irons—anywhere."

"But wait a minute," snapped Hansworth. "My daughter is more to me than putting this poor devil in irons. If he can tell us where they are heading, and assist us in finding her, it will be worth letting him off."

"Look here, Slithers," broke in Benson again. "I picked you up out there today when I could have left you just as easily. You owe me something, you know. Where's the *Barracuda* heading?"

"Let me go with you, sir. Let me handle the guns in the rear seat, and I'll show you where they will pull in and wait for the ransom. I've always wanted to get out of those tin fish and fly. You let me go with you and get those mugs who left me to die out there, and I'll tell you where they are. Is it a go?"

"Are you on the level?"

"As straight as a ramrod, sir!"

"This is ridiculous," snapped the captain. "This man is not to be trusted."

"You called on me to work on this affair, Commander Norton," said Buzz. "If I go after the *Barracuda*, I want to take this man. Something tells me he's a straight shooter."

"Take him away, Powers. We'll see about him later. In the meantime we'd better see about Miss Hansworth. Something must be done about getting her back," said Norton.

Hansworth sat staring at the table, his head bowed between his great hands. The shock of losing first his greatest brain child, the *Barracuda*, the giant submarine that spawned winged craft from its hull, and now his daughter who was helpless in the hands of the same men who had stolen the seaplane, was almost too much. The bitterest dregs of his cup were being tasted now.

"WHAT'S the inside on the swiping of this big craft?" said Buzz, as Slithers was led out of the room.

"Nordoff," husked Hansworth.

"Hugo Nordoff, a German designer who has been working with Hansworth for several years," explained Norton. "He helped considerably in the designing of the *Barracuda* and was a trusted employee of the firm."

"What was the trouble?"

"The old story—jealousy. Hansworth was about to be awarded a high naval honor for his work and Nordoff became sore and thought he should have come in for something. It was impossible, for the man has only been an American citizen for a few months. He has been over here since the war, and had designed submarines for the Imperial German government.

"Somehow he has evolved a plot to steal the *Barracuda*, officially known as the S.A.C.1 (Submarine Aircraft Carrier-1) and get it out of American waters so that he could sell its secret to a foreign power. We know for a fact that a South American republic—a big one—has made overtures to Nordoff to sell them the secret. He is probably on his way there now."

"But why steal the girl?" asked Benson.

"Revenge might be one motive," went on Norton, looking over at the marine designer, "but I think that money is the real background. He was always improvident and probably needs cash to pay the men who have thrown in their lot with him."

"Couldn't he do a little pirating and get what he wants that way?"

"No, that would be dangerous. In the first place, he wants cash—gold. Secondly, he will not dare take a chance of being fired on—he needs to turn the ship over in first-class condition. The girl is his only hope. He will probably warn us where to leave the money, and the girl will be released somewhere. I can't understand how he will work that, though."

"Has anything been done about looking out for him?"

"Yes, every ship in the Atlantic area has been warned to stop him. But with that girl aboard, we are hog-tied now. We can't fire on it. That was a clever move. What's your idea, Mr. Benson?"

"Well, we can't do much until we know where she is. I figure we'd better lie low until Nordoff tips his hand. But if I could get to where he's lying under cover, I might be able to do something. For instance, if this guy Slithers knows where Nordoff intended to lie away, we could go down there and establish a secret base and keep in touch with you while we watched his movements. Perhaps the opportunity to nail him would come then. If we waited here until we heard from him—supposing that he were off the coast of Honduras or Costa Rica—we probably would have to arrange to get the ransom to him by some means, and that would take time. If I were down there, you could advise me where he will be lying and I could nail him while he was waiting for the money to come through."

“Mr. Benson is right,” said Hansworth hollowly. “Go out and bring in that sailor again, captain,” snapped Norton.

Buzz was having a quiet conversation with Hansworth about the submarine and its peculiarities when Slithers was brought back. Norton opened the chatter again.

“Look here, Slithers. We are taking you at your word—at least, Mr. Benson is—and we’re going to let you take him to where you think Nordoff has that submarine hidden.”

“Where he will have it hidden—in a few days,” corrected the gob, with a grin. “He can’t get there for about two days, making his best surface time.”

“Well, never mind. You are free from now on, but answerable to Mr. Benson. You play the game and I’ll see that you get the transfer you want. But I’d advise you not to try any false moves. This man Benson can see out of the back of his head, I believe.”

“Don’t worry, sir. I’ve heard about him, and I’ll bet old Nordoff will get the breeze up when he hears that Mr. Benson is after him. Take it from me, I’m just as keen to slip them the works as you are.”

“Somehow I believe you,” nodded Norton.

THE rest of that day was taken up with preparing Benson’s Corsair for a trip which Slithers declared was about 2,400 miles by air. Buzz searched his maps and figured that the place was somewhere in the West Indies, but he did not ask too many questions, at first. Slithers, on the other hand, would not say until they were well on their way, and until he knew for certain that he was to be taken along.

They had planned to start early the next morning. Slithers was put up at the pilot’s headquarters along with Benson. They spent most of the night talking the trip over and the gob had another dressing put on his shoulder wound. He seemed to think that it was a great joke, his going off on a long air trip with the man who a few hours before had been shooting at him with a machine gun.

With all the excitement, they both slept well and by seven o’clock the next morning they had both breakfasted and dressed for the trip. Benson’s map was charted all the way to Key West, from where Slithers would offer the rest of his information. Norton and Hansworth came down to the apron in their staff car just before they started. There was no news of the girl or the submarine, although a Pan-American airways pilot had reported seeing an unmarked Corsair flying west from a point just off Cape Hatteras early

the night before. This much convinced Benson that Slithers was right. The *Barracuda* was on its way toward the West Indies.

“Another thing,” said Benson. “You will perhaps hear something from Nordoff from somewhere near Hatteras. He probably sent some one ashore to mail his ransom demands. You should hear late tonight or early tomorrow morning.”

“Where can we reach you, though?” broke in Norton.

“I’ll be at the Pan-American hangars at Miami tonight. From there, I can’t say until Slithers opens up and tells me where I am going. However, I’ll let you know as soon as we land.”

The Navy Corsair streamed away and fought for height over the North Beach airport with Benson at the controls and the happy Slithers huddled up in the rear pit. As soon as they were clear, Buzz whirled the nose around and hurtled the ship southward. They made two halts for fuel and rest, the first at the seaplane base on Chesapeake Bay and the second at Jacksonville. They settled down at the Pan-American base in Miami late that afternoon, and prepared to remain the night. By eight o’clock nothing of interest had come from New York. Then just as they were leaving for the second half of their flight, Buzz received a wire from Norton. It read:

“No news. Nothing of any sort. Where are you heading?
NORTON.”

Buzz showed it to Slithers.

“Tell ’em we’re going to Porto Rico. We’ll be at the Planter’s Hotel in San Juan. That’s near enough for now. Set your course, captain, we’ll head for the land of the voodoo,” grinned the gob.

BUZZ scrawled out a telegram informing Norton where they would be. In an hour they were winging away again for the dull green shore of Cuba. It was almost dark when they finally tied up their oil-streaked ship to a government buoy near the Yacht Club basin at San Juan, went into the town and put up at the Planter’s Hotel. Again there was no message, but while Buzz was out reporting to the U.S. Naval Commandant, a wire came through for him. He returned within an hour and read the following:

“Nordoff demands \$200,00 in gold. Letter came through from Raleigh, N.C. Wants money dropped on raft near submarine in non-sinkable container. Money must be there before Saturday noon. Wire us what you

intend doing. Submarine will be in Mona Passage Bay off Mayaguez for one hour at noon each day.

NORTON”

Buzz studied the cablegram again and again. Then he went over to his map-board and looked up Mona Bay. It was on the western tip of the island about sixty miles away. A railroad ran along the north coast and turned south from Aquadilla through Mayaguez and on down to S. German that lay at the foothills of the range of mountains that guarded the southern side of the island. The bay was an ideal spot for the plans of Nordoff. The thing now was to beat him at his own game.

This was the problem. Nordoff had a modern submarine with plenty of protection. He could submerge at will, send out a modern fighting aircraft, and at the same time he was protected by the knowledge that he had a girl aboard; and those who aimed to capture him and the submarine would have to consider the safety of the girl above all.

Slithers came in as Buzz pored over the map and the cablegram.

“Well, the old guy has come through with his demands,” said Buzz.

“What’s he want—about \$200,000?” asked Slithers.

“Right the first time,” grinned Buzz. “They will be waiting for it—”

“At Mona Passage Bay,” finished Slithers.

“Again you’re right. Go to the head of the class,” answered Buzz. “Where you been, anyhow?”

“Out looking around the bay for a trace of Nordoff’s gang. I figured that some of them might come down here, but no luck. There’s a cable-layer out there though. They’re putting down a new Western Union wire from New York to San Juan. Funny-looking craft, Mr. Benson.”

“Cable-layer, eh?” mused Buzz. “Let’s see, they’re unusual boats with openings in the stern through which the cable slides into the ocean, aren’t they?”

“Well, that covers it in a general way,” grinned Slithers. “Got anything in mind?”

“There’s a possibility there. I must look into it.”

And later in the evening, Buzz went out, leaving Slithers sound asleep, and turned his steps toward the waterfront, where he looked up the commander of the cable-ship. For more than three hours he sat in deep conference with the ship’s master, and before he left, they had agreed on a plan that would no doubt receive the blessing of certain naval officials of the U.S. Navy.

“I’ll send you the word in time from Mayaguez, captain,” said Buzz as he retraced his steps down the Jacob’s ladder of the ship and was rowed ashore.

EARLY next morning Buzz and Slithers roared out of San Juan harbor and climbed into the tropical blue sky and headed due west. The long white strip of shore that bordered the northern boundary of the island glinted up at them. Behind that came the heavy foliage of the Porto Rican forest and then the straight, glistening tracks of the railroad that ran through the low coastal plains past the coffee plantations, cocoanut groves and fruit farms.

Off to the south rose the blue limestone cliffs of the Cretaceous period with their foothills of volcanic and sedimentary formation. Here and there appeared the dull brown scar of an unworked gold mine or a natural cave that might give promise of Indian relics, and from all this ran the blood-red clay that covered much of the farming areas like an ominous scarlet cloak.

Buzz followed the Porto Rican railroad for about forty miles and then cut southwest and headed across the mainland for Mayaguez. Just what he intended to do there he was not certain, for it was evident that he would not be wise to give Nordoff and his gang any idea that he was in this vicinity. They would be taking too many precautions.

Suddenly his eye caught the sheen of a long narrow lake. It lay a few miles outside of Mayaguez between the railroad and the coastline. If only it was deep enough to get the Corsair in, things would be great.

Benson glided down and skimmed over its surface. From above, it looked safe and offered plenty of protection on all sides. He made a trial landing and looked around. On one side was a natural cove that would suit them fine.

“We’ll work from here, Slithers,” he yelled. “I’m going off now and see if there is any trace of that pig-boat anywhere. We’ve also got to make some contacts for fuel. We have about three hours left.”

“O.K. with me, boss,” grinned Slithers, fingering his guns.

“Hello! What’s this?” snapped Buzz staring off into the west. “Cripes! It’s the other Corsair. Quick, lay low in that cockpit. We must nail that guy this time. Don’t pop up until I rap on the combing.”

Slithers ducked down and listened to Buzz giving his ship the gun. In five minutes they were meeting the oncoming ship almost dead over the long narrow lake. Buzz roared up to it and became pretty curious.

In an instant he knew that this was the machine from the *Barracuda*. The rudder was painted with special experimental markings of a Navy ship. It had no squadron markings, nor was it marked with the usual naval insignia.

"That's the baby," grinned Buzz, curling around and flying almost alongside the renegade ship. There was a strange tenseness in the roaring sky as the two machines, crashing through the air like winged thunderbolts, were held in readiness for any trick move. Suddenly the unmarked Corsair whipped around and fanged out with a burst of bitter fire that screamed and ranted in the mid-tropical sky. Buzz was waiting for this, and with a flip of his stick had slid out of the way. Then before the other pilot realized what had happened, Buzz was on his tail, preparing to send a torrent of lead into them.

The Corsair below wriggled and fought to get away. Buzz kept his position, but held his fire until the enemy ship was well over the long, narrow lake below. Then a crashing spray of sizzling metal spanged out and blasted the controls to ribbons.

For an instant the Corsair below staggered like a man who had been plugged from behind. Then there was a sickening flutter as the pilot fought to regain control. The nose went down and the ship started a flat spin. She came out of that with a jerk and Buzz went in again and sent another burst into a wing tip. An aileron flipped up agonizingly, and he watched the enemy pilot struggle to get the seaplane down safely into the confines of the lake. It was his only chance, for the edges of the lake were fortified with stubby foliage, tall, spiky bamboo and waving cocoanut palms.

"Now Mr. Corsair, we'll soon see who, you are and what you're up to. So you didn't have a gunner in the rear pit this time, eh? What a surprise you are going to get when Slithers pops over and puts his Lewis guns on you!" grinned Buzz.

THE Corsair was fighting for control now and tumbling in a series of wing-down glides, half-spins and sickening stalls. At last the pilot made a game effort to get her nose up to a safe gliding angle, and before Buzz realized what had happened, the ship hit the water with a crash, buckling her pontoon, bounced once and wound up with a spray of water and splinters about five feet from a shallow bank of the lake.

Like a swallow, Buzz put his Corsair around in a wide curling glide and dropped his ship down a few yards from where the other machine had cracked up.

He called to Slithers to get up, and the surprised gob rose off the edge of the Scarf mounting to see the other machine, a grotesque, heap on the edge of the lake.

"Watch him!" screamed Billy. "Don't let him get away, and keep him away from his guns."

Buzz jazzed the seaplane up as close as possible, but there was no sound or movement from the wrecked ship. Gradually he got the craft around so that he could switch off and hop down on his own pontoon. In two seconds he was across on the crumpled wreck of the other ship. Scrambling up to where the trim cockpit had been, he yanked and pulled on splintered struts, bent metal and finally came upon the pilot, who was a gory, snorting mess.

"He's through," mused Buzz, taking in the extent of the man's injuries. "Too bad, but he certainly asked for this. Have to get him out somehow I suppose."

"Twist that switch off, Poke!" yelled Buzz. "Then throw me a line. We've got a lot of work here before we can do much. This guy's finished." They tied Benson's ship up safely and then worked like mad to get the dying pilot out of the tangled wreckage.

"Who is it?" asked Buzz.

"A guy named Volker, a German war-pilot. Nordoff brought him aboard the day we cleared off with the *Barracuda*," explained Poke.

"Gosh, he certainly has slipped since the old days. He certainly couldn't fly this boat."

They went through the man's pockets when they had brought him ashore and discovered little of interest except a note which he was evidently to transpose into a cable to be sent to New York. It read:

"You have until Saturday to deliver goods. Miss Hansworth is safe. Float will be available from noon until 1 o'clock Porto Rican time Friday and Saturday. NORDOFF."

"Well, we know a little bit more about what they hope will happen," said Buzz. "Today is Thursday and we'll have some heavy work to do. First get the short spade out of your cockpit and bury this bird. Next, we'll change rudders and I'll dope my ship up to look as much like the one that just crashed as possible."

FOR two hours they worked. Slithers swore about flying to Porto Rico to become a grave-digger. Buzz got soaked trying to get the rudder off the wrecked ship and transferring it to his own. With some paint used for plugging up leaks in the pontoons, he smeared out

all regulation markings and when he got through, it would have taken one well versed in the outlines and silhouettes of aircraft to have told the difference.

“Now,” snapped Buzz, preparing to take off again. “We’re going to get that girl off that submarine. I have a hunch she is pretty free aboard. We’ll look for the ship and fool them with this daubed-up craft of ours. You’ll lie low again and if they act queer when we start to move up, give it to them, but be sure the girl does not get hit. They’ll probably beat it without bothering about her, anyway.”

“You mean, I might really get a shot at those thugs?” grinned Slithers.

“Plenty. And if you ever learned to shoot a Lewis gun, do it today. But hit the right guys,” warned Buzz, just before he gave the Corsair the throttle and roared down the long lake.

Cutting wide of the sleepy town of Mayaguez, Buzz guided the two-seater seaplane out over the brilliant blue, surf-flecked ocean and began a systematic but not too obvious search for the *Barracuda*. Below on his left lay the natural cove of the Mona Pass Bay. There was comparatively little shipping activity about, for the Porto Rican and Spanish sailor men were enjoying the mid-day siesta.

Skirting the coastline, Buzz continued on, feeling like a man groping in the dark. Finally he consulted his map again and caught sight of the blunt promontory jutting out from the mainland and pointing a stubby finger at Mona Island that lay like a jewel in a bed of amethyst. Something about the grim promontory, as viewed from the air, gave Buzz a presentiment that between its stony point and the glittering island would be found the *Barracuda*.

Whirling around, he set his nose on a dead bee-line between the two points and started across the stretch of easy rolling ocean for Mona Island. He had hardly settled down for a ten-mile flight when out from below suddenly appeared the whale-back of a submarine.

“Quick, Slithers! Get down out of sight. Here she is!” he yelled, shutting the motor down to tip the gob off.

Below, the giant submarine came out gradually, throwing off the boiling waters from its black back. The conning tower came out clear, cut a swath through the water and was followed by the hump that covered the seaplane chamber. In a minute more, she was completely out, her sleek sides glistening with small rivulets of water that streamed past metal supports, gun mountings, guard rails and catwalks.

Buzz felt a strange sensation as he sat over the grim floating fortress below. Somehow he felt that he was in danger, and that his attempted ruse would be discovered. A few shots from that grim gun that lay beneath the secret compartment doors would be enough to blast him to eternity at this height. Still, he had come this far and he would have to go through with it now. To attempt to turn back would give the game away completely.

“Well, I’ll make out I’m in trouble,” he mused, glaring down at the submarine below.

At that the Corsair began some strange evolutions. Her wings wobbled, she struggled for a reasonable gliding angle. Once her motor stuttered and conked, but Buzz dove her again and recovered. At last he brought her around, skimmed over the top of the submarine and noticed that members of the crew were standing along the upper superstructure deck, apparently unable to make out the strange behaviour of the ship. Among them, Buzz noticed, was the girl, still in her long polo coat, and her hair still streaming in the gentle ocean breeze. He shut the engine off again, and half-turning, advised Slithers to watch out for her.

“She’s walking down the deck, well forward. The crew are preparing to run out the launching tracks. They haven’t caught wise yet.”

OPENING up again, Buzz brought the ship down and instead of running it up to the rear of the submarine, he placed it at an angle off the port side of the submarine and allowed his prop to stop.

For a minute the crew aboard stood puzzled at the low rail. Then from the upper portion of the conning tower came an order from a man in civilian clothing. He was a short, broad barrel of a man with a small Naval cap sitting on his round apple face like a bottle cap on top of a melon. He snarled his orders in broken English, his piglike eyes flashing out jets of strange, compelling fire. This was Nordoff, the guiding light in one of the most daring Naval coups in the history of crime.

“Get a boat out and see what’s the matter with that man! Sharp, now, we can’t stay up here all day. Tell him to destroy the ship if it can’t be flown. We can’t waste time!” he jabbered out with a throaty rasp.

Buzz saw what they were doing. Most of the men were in the center of the superstructure, about to unslung a portable boat. The light fluttery Corsair was drifting slowly toward the great steel fish. Buzz, still

with his goggles and helmet on, started to wave his arms. As he did so, he spoke out the side of his mouth to Slithers.

“Ready now. Clean the lot out around the conning tower. Watch out for the girl. While you pepper them, I’ll start the motor again and try to pick the girl up if she has brains enough to leap. They’re not watching her at all. Guess they let her up for some air. Let ’er go now!”

The submarine men were just slipping a light boat over the side when a bellow went up from the man leaning on the conning-tower rail.

“*Gott!* Look, Volker has betrayed us. Quick, you men—back here! He’s opening fire!”

As he ducked beneath the shelter of the conning tower, Slithers’ gun spoke and poured a deadly fire into the scrambling men aboard the superstructure.

Buzz slipped out of his cockpit and stood on the wing to wind the inertia starter. As Slithers opened and closed his trigger, Buzz yelled across at the girl.

“Leap over, Miss Hansworth! Take a jump!”

The girl was startled by the sudden torrent of fire that was sweeping the center portion of the deck. She saw men scream and roll off. Some scrambled to the low superstructure guard rail and hung on, cursing. Then out of the tornado of fire, screams and bellows of men, came her own name. The pilot of the strange machine was yelling to her to jump.

Buzz leaped back and before releasing the starter spring, roared out again,

“Jump, Miss Hansworth!”

That was enough. Two sailors were crawling along the bullet-swept deck after her. They had had no time to break out their own guns, and with the torrent of hail coming from the plane, they had to make the best of a bad job. Nordoff was screaming from a squatting position for some one to grab her. In the same voice he was bellowing orders to clear the decks and prepare for submerging. No one knew which order to obey. With a last glance down the bloody deck, the girl took a header over the side of the low rail and disappeared.

AGAIN and again Slithers poured a murderous fire into the yelling group on the deck. There were more orders and the last of the men scrambled down the conning-tower hatchway. There were several metallic clankings, and before Buzz could get his motor started, a foamy churn bubbled up from the rear of the submarine and she started to move away.

“My God!” snarled Billy. “Those propellers will cut that girl to pulp!” Out there in the bluish-green sea he

could see a coat and a fur collar bobbing about and swaying with the swell. Speechless, he watched the submarine swing its stern as if to catch the helpless girl. The coat and fur collar were lashed about in the milky whirlpool and then disappeared.

“She’s gone, boss,” yelled Slithers as the Wasp engine cut down to idling speed and drew the Corsair toward the madly rolling breakers that bubbled back from the stern of the disappearing submarine. Out of it all suddenly came a sickening scarlet patch. Blood—the blood of an innocent girl—blood that stood out in that milky surf like the scarlet lining of an ermine cloak.

The two men in the Corsair stared down at the telltale patch, and Buzz guided the ship away from the swirling waters to keep it from capsizing. Suddenly, he drew the throttle back again and set the motor at idling speed.

“Look!” he bellowed, pointing out through the wings.

Slithers looked. “Why, that’s her! How’d she get there?”

“The Lord only knows. Come on, let’s get her.”

Buzz swirled the Corsair around again and shot the pontoon over to where the girl was struggling in the water. They brought the blunt nose of the float as near as they could and Slithers climbed over and helped her get aboard.

“Come on, get her aboard. We can’t stay here. That sub will be on the surface again in a minute and throwing steel at us like mad!”

The girl, completely exhausted, managed to reward them with a smile and for a minute rested her head on the cold Scaarf mounting ring and got her breath. Meanwhile, Buzz took off again and climbed the Corsair like mad to get out of range of the submarine, should it rise again. He was right; he had hardly forced the seaplane 1,000 feet when a crash echoed out overhead. Another and another rent the sky and sent fragments of burning steel in all directions. But Buzz cleared, dived low and skimmed the blue, rolling waters, and it was almost impossible for the gunners to get a range on him. Two more shots that went high and wide ended the short barrage and they turned to see the submarine slither out of sight again.

Like a winged dart, the Corsair roared away and headed for the lake near Mayaguez. Buzz rushed his landing to give the girl assistance, and again the Corsair streamed its way up to the flat bank where the remains of the folding-wing ship lay.

THEY helped her out, provided some emergency restorative, and in about fifteen minutes she was able to talk rationally.

"Wherever did you come from?" she asked.

"New York. I followed you right after the ship you were flying in opened fire on me. I went to New York first and met your father and Commander Norton. This is Poke Slithers, one of the gunners on the *Barracuda*. I knocked him off when they took yuh aboard. Now he's my gunner. He has it in for old Nordoff," explained Buzz.

"You saw Father?" cried the girl. "How did he know where I was?"

"Slithers, here, told us that they had gone out to get you for a \$200,000 ransom. He led me down here where he knew the *Barracuda* would be hanging around, waiting for the money. We are supposed to drop it on a raft, out there in the Mona Passage Bay."

"And now they won't have to pay it?" asked the girl.

"Um, no. I'd forgotten that," mused Buzz, rubbing his chin. "Now I wonder how we'll get that guy to bring the sub into the passage again."

"But Nordoff thinks it was Volker who rescued me. I heard him say so," said the girl.

"I can understand that. You see, we daubed our ship up to look like the one that took off from the sub. If ho figures that I was his pilot, Volkor, who had turned renegade, he will still make one try tomorrow and see if the money is put where he can get it. He'll have to come in all the way with the *Barracuda* then. The rest will be easy."

"You're one of them optimists, ain't you?" grinned Slithers.

"Well, I figure he will give it one try tomorrow. If the ransom does not come through then, he'll know that Miss Hansworth was rescued by her own friends, and he'll beat it to Chili or somewhere in South America."

"An' the guys on the fish will get the old run-around for their money, eh?" offered Poke.

"Well, we can't waste any more time. Poke. Get some gasoline out of this cracked-up ship and swab all that paint off our ship. I'll replace the regular rudder. We've got to look like we did before if we want to get away with this tomorrow. You take it easy, Miss Hansworth, and tell us how you got out of that big coat and cleared the propellers of that sub. You know, we saw some one all cut up there in the water. We thought it was you, but I guess it must have been one of the crew that Slithers knocked off."

"That was the first thing I thought of when I went over," said the girl. "I'm a fairly good swimmer and while I dived I managed to get out of the coat and keep on going. I guess that saved me. I don't know how long I stayed under but when I carne up you were charging around, evidently looking for me. I was well on the other side when you finally saw me."

An hour later, the plane had been restored to its original markings; a suit of coveralls that were dry had been found in the wrecked ship, and Miss Hansworth was able to slip away and get into something a little dryer and more comfortable for the trip back to San Juan. By late afternoon they were back at the Planter's Hotel, scribbling out a message telling Hansworth the good news concerning his daughter. Another, a full detailed account of the rescue of the girl whose photograph graced every daily in the United States and Canada, was sent to the Los Angeles Mercury.

Billy "Buzz" Benson was still a newspaperman, in spite of the arduous activities of a Secret Service operator.

BENSON had another long conference with Captain Teagle, old John Teagle of New Bedford, who commanded the *Sea Spider*, the cable-ship that wove an unseen web across oceans and connected continents. Old John had listened for hours to the strange story of the *Barracuda* and the rescue of the girl.

Would he help capture the submarine, if possible? Would he? Hadn't the Teagles fought at Lake Erie? Hadn't one of the Teagles spilt blood on boarding parties from the decks of the old *Constitution*? Why, certainly he'd give a hand with the *Sea Spider* if the United States wanted him. The cable between New York and San Juan was all the way in now; the last few hundred yards lay in the loops of the chain of barrels awaiting the connection with the mainland station cable. What did Mr. Benson want?

"Well, here's my idea," explained Buzz. "This man Nordoff will put out a raft at this point, and we are supposed to come down from New York and put \$200,000 in a non-sinkable container on the raft. This will be done between noon and one o'clock tomorrow."

"Where we going to get the \$200,000?" asked old John.

"We're not. We'll fake it with an old gasoline drum, or something, fitted inside a life preserver. You get down there about that time and let out a fake cable

just as though you were working. I'll time my arrival so that we'll both be there at the same time. If the raft is out, that'll mean he is still expecting the ransom. I'll drop down and put the fake container on the raft and fly off. You stand by and when the sub comes up, you do your stuff, as explained."

Old John chuckled in glee. His beady eyes inspected the depth charts of the small Mona Passage Bay again.

"You see," he pointed out, "if he comes in here, he'll have to stay in this channel. It's the only way in to this point where he'll most likely put his raft. The rest of the bay is not deep enough to take a chance on submerging, as he probably expects to do. That's where we can get him. I'll have the boys get the cable ready right away. They'll love this. Great boys, mine! Always ready for a fight or a frolic."

"Well, if we figure this out right, they'll have plenty of both. Get your marlin-spikes oiled up, captain," grinned Buzz as he left the comfortable quarters of the old sea captain.

"I'll be leaving right away. It'll take me until about noon tomorrow, by taking it pretty easy. I'll look out for you, Mr. Benson."

Next morning, Buzz and Poke Slithers fretted and fumed around the Corsair, preparing the faked container and fitting it inside a round life-preserver. The metal tank was painted a bright red and the life-preserver a glaring white, so that it could be seen with ease. Miss Hansworth was on hand, looking much better for a good night's sleep.

"You take care of that ship, Mr. Benson. I want to fly back with you to New York," she called as they were getting aboard.

"What about Poke?" grinned Buzz.

"Oh, he can go in the *Barracuda*. He's used to close quarters," replied the girl, with a grin.

"There's gratitude for you," growled Poke. "But I'll give my place up to her. She's a pippin. If she wants to fly home, it's O.K. with me, but I'm through with them tin fish after this. Old Norton's got to get me a transfer."

"You'll get it.. I'll see to that," replied Buzz. "Let's get going."

"I'll see that he gets it too. I know Commander Norton well," encouraged the girl.

"Well, I ought to make it, with all this pull," replied Poke.

DOWN the apron they rolled and were soon roaring out across the bay. Below, the water was as smooth as a mill-pond. Out from the northwest came

four U.S. Navy cruisers, bearing beautiful ostrich plumes of spray across their bows. Buzz gazed down upon them and realized what had happened. Norton had received his message and had ordered these ships to rush to San Juan to give assistance if necessary. They were of no use now. They could not make the Mona Passage Bay in time, but if they were tipped off, perhaps, they could help out later.

Ripping off a message form from a pad, Buzz scribbled off the details of his planned coup. Then giving all other details, he identified and signed himself. Ten minutes later the message had been dropped aboard the leading man-o'-war. As Buzz climbed to regain height, he saw the three ships suddenly turn and take up a new course along the northern shore of Porto Rico.

"I only hope we have the *Barracuda* all tied up when they get there. We don't want any of those nine-inchers plowing shells into her," he mumbled to himself.

It was almost noon when Buzz caught up with the old cable-layer. She was plowing along at about twelve knots just off the point west of Mayaguez. Along her black sides, he was able to pick out the white letters that read: "Cable Layer—Keep Clear."

Buzz grinned as he figured just what old John would have his crew working on now. But there was no time for reflection. They had to find that raft, somehow. Their whole success depended upon it. Back and forth over the narrow-necked bay he roared, and at last caught sight of something flashing like gold. It was a new yellow pine float that had been placed square in the middle of the lifeless bay.

Buzz swept back and forth over it twice and finally discerned the grim outline of the submerged *Barracuda* as she lay just beneath the surface of the water, her glistening periscope flashing out in all directions, watching the movements of the craft in the vicinity.

"Here we are, Poke," warned Buzz, yelling above the even purr of the throttled motor. "You pop off and put the container on the raft. I'll keep my nose into the wind so that we can take off O.K."

Poke slipped over the side and dropped down onto the pontoon. In a minute he had unleashed the fake container, and as the pontoon nose bumped gently against the bobbing float, he heaved it. It landed square in the middle of the raft.

"Right! Get back quick," snapped Buzz. "Here comes the *Sea Spider*."

Poke looked up and saw the grim cable-layer curling around the low promontory. She had speeded up now. With a leap, Poke was back in the rear pit, and Buzz was gunning his engine for the take-off. In five minutes he was well away and roaring off beyond the sleepy town of Mayaguez, and the *Sea Spider* was coming well into the picture.

Out in the middle of the bay, the float with its strange container bobbed about in the easy swell. Down in the control compartment of the *Barracuda*, a pig-eyed man stared into the lens of the periscope. His eyes glistened as he caught sight of the red-and-white something that lay on the float. Then suddenly his gaze caught the movement of the ship that had apparently come from nowhere.

"Gott!" he snarled. "What is that?"

Then his tenseness relaxed as he caught the warning painted on the side of the *Sea Spider*.

"Don't worry, my friend," he cackled. "We'll look out for you. Just keep away from us."

He turned away and barked an order into a wide black mouthpiece.

SLOWLY a strange light crept into the oil-filmed compartment from above. The *Barracuda* was emerging from the deep to claim its ransom. The great engines, muffled and well-controlled, hardly made a sound. The great ship slid out into the clear, and metallic clankings indicated that the conning-tower hatchway was being opened. Strange drafts of air swept through the craft and assailed the nostrils. Ears rang and noses seemed stuffed. Footsteps rang on the metal shell above. They were putting a light boat over again to get the metal container from off the raft.

All eyes of the men on the submarine were focused on that red container. They watched every stroke of the oars that pulled the boat forward the raft. None saw the cable-layer suddenly whirl and cut across the stern of the long undersea boat. None heard the great reels inside the *Sea Spider* begin to unreel a double cable from the great hold. None aboard the *Barracuda* saw the twin-cable net that was being spun for them.

Suddenly some one in the conning tower yelled. He pointed to the string of glistening floats that curled out from the open stern of the *Sea Spider* and ran in a semicircle around the stern of the *Barracuda*.

"Keep clear!" screamed the little German on the *Barracuda*. "You will foul our propellers!" He was bellowing through a megaphone.

"Can't help it, sir," replied the master of the *Sea*

Spider. "Got to carry this cable in to the connection buoy-over there. You'll have to stand still until we can release it. Won't be long."

"Damn!" swore Nordoff.

The *Sea Spider* was off their port bows now. The man was just reaching out for the red container on the raft. The men on the submarine watched the cable-layer, puzzled. Then just as they had turned their attention back to the man in the boat, the *Sea Spider* made another sharp turn. The net had been closed.

"Look out, man!" screamed Nordoff again. "You'll foul our propellers. Get back, we've got to get out of here at once!"

"Go ahead. Try and get out, Nordoff," bellowed old John. "There's two cables out there—one to get you if you come out on the surface and the other if you try to submerge. You're licked, you old devil. And Old John Teagle did it. Go on. Try and get out!"

With a bellow of rage, Nordoff turned and called to the man in the boat. He was pulling back for the submarine like a madman.

"Get those guns out," snapped Nordoff. "We'll blast that hound and his barge clean out of the bay!"

Muffled clankings. Low squeals of compressed air cylinders. Shouts and snapped orders. The great blackmuzzled three-incher came out of its bed.

"Will you drop or release that cable?" bellowed Nordoff.

"Wouldn't do any good," replied Teagle. "That cable will stay there because it's held up by landing casks. Go ahead—shoot, but you'd better take a look up above first."

NORDOFF turned and stared upward. With a snarl, he caught the flashing wings of a Navy Corsair. He tried to get out another order, and as the gun crew attempted to swing the weapon around on another target, a blistering hail of lead spattered all about the deck. The gun crew melted from the sight, laying wheel and breech like jelly. Nordoff ducked down the conning tower and shouted an order.

The *Barracuda's* engines were started. She started to swing around, but the *Sea Spider* swung across her bows, playing out yard after yard of double cable. The *Barracuda* tried to rush out, leaving the man in the small boat. Then she caught. The great propellers fouled the steel cable that old John Teagle had stretched for him. The engines bit and choked. Yards of wire spun around the shaft. The great knife blades twisted and broke. The *Barracuda* had had its teeth

drawn. The engines spluttered, chugged and groaned. The movement only made the great boat flounder and shake from stem to stern.

The crew, frantic with fear, rushed back on the deck and tried to get clear. Another torrent of hail came down on them from a roaring falcon that streaked across the tropical sky and battered them to shreds. Now more boats took to the water. The crew of the *Sea Spider* were going to board the sub with marlin spikes at the alert position.

The next few minutes were portions of naval history repeated with a vengeance. Grim-faced whalers clambered up the sleek sides of the *Barracuda*, and crowded the treacherous submarine men clean off the superstructure. Heads were bashed in; men were battered to the steel deck, screaming and groaning. Others tore down steel ladders in an effort to get away, but the action-seeking cable-layer men went after them, brought them out one by one and tied them up for safety along the sleek deck of the sub. In fifteen minutes the capture had been complete. Benson in his Corsair sat bobbing alongside, demanding that Nordoff be taken aboard the *Sea Spider* for safety. He went under the urge of guns handled by Poke Slithers.

Meanwhile, the skeleton crew left aboard the cable-ship were winding in the cable that had been lowered. In twenty minutes they peered through the stern and found that they had drawn the *Barracuda* up to within towing distance of their stern.

The convoy went out of the bay and started along

the coast for San Juan. Benson sat aloft over the old cable-layer until the three steaming men-o'-war roared up and took over the captured *Barracuda*. Then after a hearty handshake with Poke Slithers, Buzz headed out for San Juan, where an anxious girl awaited the news of the fate of her father's invention.

All's well that ends well. Old Captain John Teagle got a magnificent reward from the U.S. Government for his part in capturing the *Barracuda* intact. He purchased a new ship with the money and laid the foundation for a coastal-packet company that within a few years will be one of the most important lines of its kind in the world.

Nordoff got a fair trial and his just deserts. His crew went to jail for varying lengths of imprisonment. They rounded up the rest of the gang that had worked with him from shore and had assisted in kidnapping Miss Hansworth. Mr. Hansworth got the contract for several more submarines of the *Barracuda* type. Norton got a promotion. Poke Slithers went to Pensacola and took a special aviation course and passed with high honors as a pilot.

Benson? Oh, he spent a few days getting caught up on his newspaper work, deposited a check received from a grateful government and sat back to await the next call. It came a lot quicker and more unexpectedly than he thought.

"It's a great life, if you can keep your wings on," he mused.