



*Dave Rogers Battles Frozen Death  
to Smash a Band of Murdering Counterfeiters!*

# COLD STEEL

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

## CHAPTER I COUNTERFEITER'S TRAIL

**T**HE LONE MOTORCYCLE took the State Road at a sharp angle, straightened to meet the full blast of the winter wind.

Dave Rogers, State Trooper, hunched his lithe body deeper over the handle-bars. His visor cap was pulled low, with ear muffs down on each side. He wore a fur-lined coat buttoned to the neck; but the glistening Sam Browne and holster belt strapped to it gave it a trim aspect.

"Boy, it's cold!" Trooper Dave Rogers gritted.

And as he felt the wind penetrating to his very marrow, he cursed himself for a fool. He had finished his patrols for the day hours ago. By rights he should be off duty, warming himself before a fire, taking it easy. He didn't have to be riding hell-bent up this bleak, windy road.

In fact, he oughtn't to be on this road at all.

His wind-reddened, goggled face went grim, his lips tight. Maybe he was doing the wrong thing, but, he felt impelled to go right on doing it. As he thundered up the road, his keen eyes swept every oncoming stretch of the deserted highway, every branch road on either side. He was looking for Bob Hall. Bob Hall, who had set out on this road in a car five hours ago, who must be somewhere in this wintry countryside, perhaps in danger, perhaps—

"He's still only a kid!" Dave Rogers gritted beneath the wind and his roaring, well-kept engine. "Even if he is a G-man now and tries to act hard!"

He had to grin then. In his mind was a picture of Bob Hall walking into the Troop office this morning. Bob Hall, looking a little incongruous in a plain grey business suit, his youthful face smiling, but his eyes alert and tense.

"Well, I'll be damned—of all people!" the grizzled captain of the Troopers had exclaimed, and Dave Rogers—the only other Trooper in the store-office—had also leaped up with a cry of welcome.

A prodigal had returned! For Bob Hall had been

an officer of the Troop, pounding the roads with the rest of them until only six months ago. Then, having ambitiously completed law studies in his spare time, the youngster had turned in his trim uniform and badge and left the office—bound for Washington and the Department of Justice.

No wonder that now, facing his old grizzled captain, Bob Hall had seemed a trifle embarrassed by his own position.

"I'm afraid this visit is official," he had explained, apologetically. "I don't want you to get the idea that I'm trying to give you any orders, Captain—but, well, the Department must have co-operation here."

The captain had shifted, also embarrassed. No doubt he was thinking of the many times he had taken this kid on the carpet, bawled him out, like a father bawling out a son. Nor did Hall's apologizing tone alter the fact that now, as a G-man, he had the authority to order around his old chief.

BUT when Hall explained his mission, both the captain and Rogers forgot all about social problems. The news that Hall had brought was a bombshell.

A huge counterfeiting ring, which had been flooding the country with queer money, was known by the Department to be operating from this state—this very part of it! And Bob Hall had been assigned to the case because of his former familiarity with the country.

"The leader of this ring is a man named Slick Crandon," the young G-man had explained, tensely. "He's the biggest in the game. His plates are perfect—even banks have passed his money. We know two more men who are with him—a former safecracker named Joe Mears, and a Chicago torpedo named Niles Rino." As he spoke he produced numbered photographs from a briefcase. "The others we don't know."

The captain looked at the photographs keenly, shook his head. "Never saw these faces," he stated at once. "They—"

"Say, wait!"

It was Dave Rogers, unobtrusively glancing over the captain's shoulder, who broke in, his voice tense. For one of the pictures had stirred a responsive chord in his memory—the photograph of Niles Rino, the Chicago torpedo.

"I could almost swear I've seen that man before!" Rogers averred, brow creased in concentration.

Instantly Bob Hall whirled upon him, and it was then that the G-man came to the fore in the youngster.

"What's that?" His voice was hard now, almost

like a prosecuting attorney's. "You saw Rino? Where? When?"

Rogers was calm under the cross-examination. "It was over the other side of Harristown, by a big meatpacking company there. I was riding past the day before yesterday. I noticed this fellow here—sort of slinking around. I stopped and pointed to a 'No Loitering' sign and he hustled away."

Bob Hall's eyes gleamed. "That just about clinches it, then!" he stated. "They must be here—probably Slick himself is remaining fully under cover. But I've a good idea where to look for their hideout."

His shoulders straightened as he faced the grizzled captain.

"Thanks, Captain—thanks, Dave," he said tersely. "I probably won't have to ask you for any more help—but I must request that your Troopers give the Department a clear berth in this case. More agents are coming down later, to assist me. In the meantime, I'm going out to spot that gang before they can get on the move again. They've given us the slip altogether too many times."

And, with a brief word of departure, Bob Hall, his young face hard with purpose, had walked out of the office, climbed into his waiting coupe—and driven off.

But a moment later, a motorcycle had wheeled out and started after the coupe. Dave Rogers, despite Hall's demand for a clear berth, had decided to trail the ex-Trooper, to help him if he needed help on this perilous, momentous mission.

Rogers was an expert on trailing. He knew how to throttle his barking motor down to a minimum, how to slink behind a quarry.

But Hall evidently remembered the ways of Troopers. Hardly had the coupe started up the State Road than it had stopped abruptly and the arm of Hall had beckoned imperiously from its window.

Feeling foolish, Rogers had pulled up alongside the car. And then it was that Bob Hall's voice had lashed out like a whip, revealing the anger of tense, keyed-up nerves.

"You want to ball this whole thing up?" the G-man had snapped. "Advertise police with your uniform and motorcycle? Get back, and see that no one else follows me either—"

Abruptly he broke off, as if abashed at his outburst against this man who used to ride roads with him many times. His angry face softened, relaxed in a grin. His hand fell on Rogers' shoulder.

"Sorry, Dave," he grinned. "Guess I'm a bit on

tenter-hooks. Really, you've helped more than I can say on this case by spotting Rino up here. You'd make a good man for the Department yourself. I wish you'd join up with it. But right now, we'll each have to stick to our own jobs—and I've got to do this alone."

Dave Rogers had grinned back, gamely. "Okay—G-man," he had said. "Luck! And if your outfit needs any help rounding up that gang, don't forget the Troop—"

But already Hall, face hardening again, had released the clutch pedal—the coupe sped up the highway.

## CHAPTER II THE HIDEOUT SHACK

**D**AVE ROGERS HAD GONE BACK to his duties. He had done his two patrols, along different roads. But all the time he had thought of Bob Hall, setting forth alone to spot a devilish counterfeit gang. And now, five hours after Hall had disappeared, Dave Rogers was thundering up the State Road where he had last seen the coupe heading.

Tensely, he continued to watch the deserted highway as he bucked the bitter wind. For, despite Hall's injunctions, he was worried about the young ex-Trooper, worried and— Suddenly his goggled eyes sharpened keenly, his putteed leg stiffened down on the brake, slowing the motorcycle.

To the left of the concrete highway rose a desolate fringe of wood—a heavy copse of stiff-standing firs with a few other bare skeleton trees huddled as if for shelter amid them. Pine woods—timber land, and at this season deserted.

But what had attracted the keen eyes of the Trooper was the small gap of a branch dirt road which led straight into the forest. In summer time it was a lovers' lane for cars which Rogers had often sympathetically shied away. In winter it was unused. And yet—

Rogers had his motorcycle halted now, teetering as he balanced it with one foot on the road.

He looked at a stripling pine tree just on the side of the branch road. It was bent, cracked—and there were big scratches near the base of its trunk. Also, stones from the cold-hardened dirt road were scattered way out on the concrete State Road.

"Something has passed in or out here," the Trooper

concluded aloud. "Either too big for the road, or it was driven badly enough to sideswipe that tree."

He doubted that a light coupe, such as Hall had used, could leave such a heavy mark. On the other hand, the whole thing looked suspicious, unusual.

Rogers' face set with decision. His engine rose from its idling purr, roared as he deliberately sent the motorcycle swinging onto the hard-dirt branch road.

The road was rough. The motorcycle bucked and jounced. Pine woods, bleak and shadowy, had already engulfed him, and perhaps it was the lonely coldness of the wood that set his heart pounding so strangely, unreasonably.

He slowed down, glancing at the passing road beneath. The winter had made the earth too hard to show any tire tracks—if there were tracks. But he drove on slowly now, his motorcycle like some weaving snake balanced only by his skill in its bumpy progress. The well-tuned engine was so low it was almost drowned in the rising and falling shriek of wind through pines.

A full two miles within the wood and Rogers knew he was nearing the end of the dead road. He had found no further sign of anything.

Now, as he still went deviously on, a rearing shack loomed in the firs ahead, at the end of the road. A ramshackle affair of rough timbers, its windows were boarded; it would not be used until summer, when forestry men occupied it.

The Trooper had slowed almost to a stop, was ready to turn back and—

Suddenly his fur-coated frame stiffened in the saddle. And then, eyes narrowly alert, he again brought the motorcycle to a complete halt.

His gauntleted hand reached for one ear muff, pushed it down. But the move was unnecessary. Strange and sibilant, a hissing noise sounded over the whine of wind. A hissing noise—coming from that ramshackle cabin!

Puzzled but apprehensive, the Trooper swung agilely off his motorcycle. He leaned the stalled machine against a tree trunk. Then, cautiously, he moved on foot toward the cabin. The hissing filled his ears as he got closer. And now, through cracks in the boarded windows, he saw a weird flickering light—and a peculiarly acrid stench assailed his nostrils.

Instinctively, Rogers' hand moved down to the butt of his .45, resting in his holster at the end of the gold-braided halter. He circled, quietly, to the door of the shack. Even as he reached for it, noting that it was



unlatched, the hissing within the shack stopped, the weird flicker died out abruptly.

Rogers waited no longer. With his left hand he pulled open the door wide.

And even as he peered into the almost dark interior, he saw a single, shadowy figure whirl toward the doorway. A huge brute of a man whose evil eyes gleamed with hate at the uniformed Trooper.

With a snarl of rage, the man whipped up an automatic.

*Crack! Crack!*

Two crashing reports blended almost into one—two livid streaks of orange flame in the murky cabin.

But the deeper roar of Dave Rogers' .45 had sounded an infinitesimal instant before the crack of the other weapon. All in that split-second Rogers had drawn and fired.

The bullet of his would-be murderer went crazily wild, gouging into the logs of the wall. A strangled cry broke from the big man across the room. For a moment he stood there, rigid in the darkness. Then slowly, like a falling tree, he toppled, crashed to the floor, and lay inert.

Breathless, gripping his smoking .45, Rogers' eyes swept the dark one-room interior. And now, on the floor where the other man had been standing, he glimpsed a strange sight. On a carpet of protective covering lay a mass of half-molten metal. Near it, attached to an upright tank by a rubber hose, was an acetylene torch.

THE hissing noise—the flickering glow—were explained.

All this Rogers saw in one swift comprehensive glance which also told him there was no one else in the shack. Now quickly he leaped forward to the prone man on the floor.

He had out a pocket flash, its beam flickering down on the man. Dead—shot through the heart. But if the Trooper had felt any regret, it was wiped away by a close, flashlight illumined look at the man's features.

His heart leaped as full recognition came. His mind went back to the photographs Bob Hall had shown at Headquarters. He had identified one picture there—that of Niles Rino.

And now he was identifying another.

"Hell!" he gritted. "This is the one called Joe Mears—the former safe-cracking member of Slick Crandon's gang!"

The realization stunned his brain. He had killed

one of the big counterfeiting ring, a man who had been engaged in melting down metal with an acetylene torch.

Pulse racing, Rogers whirled his light on the cooling melted down mass. And though it was almost shapeless, he knew he was looking at the remains of a steel printing press!

Hunting for more evidence, he moved about the shack. It was empty—even an old bureau in one corner revealed only empty drawers.

But on a table he found cigarette butts—different brands which had obviously been smoked by different mouths. And a broken whiskey bottle lay on the floor.

No doubt about it now!

"This is the hideout!"

The thought jerked his nerves tense as springs. Apprehensively now, he moved toward the door, left the dead man inside, and went out into the grey afternoon, gun in hand.

He skirted around, stealthy as a cat, peering at the surrounding trees. Nothing there—no others of them around.

"Lammed!" he gritted. "And left this Mears, who would know how to use acetylene, to clean up—which he did!" he mumbled ruefully.

And then an icy wire tightened about his heart. What about Bob Hall? Bob Hall, who had said he knew where to find the hideout—and for whom Rogers had been searching when the peculiar road-signs led him here?

Rogers began to scour the place now, grim anxiety in his eyes. He raised his voice in the icy air.

"Hall!" he called out. "Bob Hall!"

### CHAPTER III FROZEN DEATH

ONLY THE WHISTLE OF ICY WIND through trees answered his shouts. He saw no evidence of Hall's coupe either. Then, remembering the broken sapling at the other end of the road, he went to the road, again looking at the hard earth, which still failed to reveal any trace of tire tracks and—

Suddenly he was brought to an abrupt halt, every nerve tensing. His foot had stumbled upon something limp, yielding. He looked down.

A furry grey body lay at his feet. Evidently it had been run over, for it was flattened down, split open and stained with crimson gore. Red entrails strewed out. The head was crushed to a pulp, but from one long ear the Trooper recognized the animal for what it was.

A large rabbit.

For a moment the Trooper stood staring at it. Then, his mind on Bob Hall, he was stirred toward action. Somewhere, Slick Crandon and the rest of the gang must be on the lam. He must get back to Headquarters, give the alarm.

With a final glance back toward the shack where the corpse of the gunman Mears lay, he hurried down the road to his waiting motorcycle.

He drove out like a bucking streak, stopped only to look again at the bent stripling at the end of the road, then turned down the State highway and took the wind full tilt.

But even as the road led him into Harristown, even as he neared the Troop station, he saw a sight which widened his goggled eyes.

Racing away from the Troop store-office, hurtling down the highway—was a whole squad of motorcycles! The Troopers, *en masse*, six of them—and in their lead, hunched over his motorcycle, the familiar figure of the captain!

“What the devil?” gritted Rogers. For he knew that only something momentous could have drawn out that cavalcade. Hastily he turned open his own handlebar throttle. His machine shot after the others—he must catch up to them, if only to make his own report to the captain.

But though he knew how to make more speed than any of them, they had a good head start. He gained slowly. Now the cavalcade was ascending a steep, winding hill—here the road went up over Storm Mountain, high and snow-capped.

And close to the very top of the mountain, with Rogers close behind, the cavalcade came to a halt. The captain and his men leaped from machines, left them on their stands or against trees, and dashed off the road onto a down-sloping, snowy field.

Rogers drew to a stop among the other machines in the next instant. Dismounting, he, too, rushed down the snowy field.

The Troopers were standing in a little, shivering knot on the icy mountainside. Their cold faces were grim. And beside the captain stood two men—both of whom Rogers recognized. One was the Harristown

sheriff; the other the town coroner.

Tensely, Dave Rogers pushed through the group. He came alongside the captain—and his eyes followed the riveted gaze of that grizzled officer, down to the snowy ground.

And an exclamation of horror burst from Rogers’ lips. His heart stopped.

SPRAWLED on the snow, arms outstretched, lay Bob Hall! The youngster’s body was horribly stifflooking. His face was contorted in a ghastly grimace of death; the flesh was bluish, with mottled red patches. There was a bruise on one side of his hatless head.

“Froze to death,” Rogers dazedly heard the voice of the coroner explaining. “Dead when the sheriff and I got here—after the filling station man reported it. He must have fallen, struck his head on a rock, and lay here, because it would take hours to freeze even in this weather. And he ain’t been dead long.”

The captain’s face was bleak. He was taking from the sheriff the G-man’s credentials and gun, both of which had been found on the body.

“What a rotten break for the kid!” The captain’s voice was husky, his eyes dim. “To die like this. He must have cached his car somewhere, come hunting up here for the gang hideout.”

Dave Rogers, who had been staring down at the corpse of the ex-Trooper, jerked up his own dimmed eyes.

“But that’s impossible, Captain!” he gritted out.

The captain swung to him with surprise—seeing him for the first time. “Rogers!”

“I say that Bob Hall couldn’t have been looking for the hideout in this neighborhood if he knew where it was, Captain! Because the hide-out is way over in Pine Woods—fifteen miles on the other side of town!”

And while the captain stared askance, he quickly recounted his own experiences.

“Then you got this one named Mears!” the grizzled chief approved grimly. “And the rest were gone? We’ll have cordons on every road—maybe we can still do Hall’s job for him!”

But Rogers wasn’t listening. He turned to the coroner. “Are you sure, Doctor, that this man died up here?”

The coroner was sure. He explained that only up on this mountain would it be cold enough for a man to freeze to death in just hours. It was his opinion that Hall must have been up here all day, judging from the time he had set out.

Rogers' face was tight, grim. He bent once more over the body of Bob Hall. His eyes sharpened, as they fell upon the back of Hall's overcoat.

The coat was strangely wrinkled, the cloth forming cold-stiffened, horizontal pleats, close together. Rogers straightened. Something clicked in his mind, like pieces of dovetailing falling together. And when they clicked they sent a flaming, volcanic rage surging through his very being. His eyes narrowed to slits. Grimly he faced the captain.

"Bob Hall didn't die by accident!" he rapped out, with fierce conviction. "He was murdered—in cold blood!"

Eyes stared at him askance. The captain looked dazed. "Murdered? But how—"

Rogers was already galvanized toward savage action. "Give me just a couple of hours' time, and I'll show you how!" he crisped. "Do I get it, Captain?"

And a few minutes later, goggled eyes two gleaming slits, Dave Rogers had his motorcycle racing down the State highway, hell-bent, its motor blasting against the icy wind. Down the mountain he went like a streaking arrow, and as he reached the lower lands, the darkness of night descended to engulf him.

He switched on his headlamp and went on through the gloom, following the road. He knew that the highway made a clear, uninterrupted stretch for almost two hundred miles, over to the next state line. If his hunch was right, his timing correct—

Gritting his teeth, he turned the handle-bar throttle until it would go no further. The rush of wind became like a wall of ice, which he was pushing through. But the roaring engine sent up a relieving blast of heat in defiance.

He began to pass traffic, scant because of the weather. Cars he gave no heed to, even when they were going fast. But whenever he passed a truck, his eyes went grim again, he slowed down to give the vehicle close scrutiny—then, shaking his head, he raced on through the gloom.

Deep night now, and a full hundred miles left behind. Still the Trooper continued his mad chase, a fierce, gripping fury spurring him on. The image of Bob Hall, lying stiff and dead in the snow, fueled his body even as he fueled the motorcycle. Mustn't give up, mustn't get discouraged—

He fought to get still more speed until the motorcycle seemed to leave the rushing road. He went shooting past a small closed car, sliced around a curve. A red tail-light loomed—the vague outlines of the rear of a truck.

Rogers cut the throttle as he gained on the vehicle.

Another false alarm, no doubt. But then, as the truck loomed clearer, fierce hope soared in him. It was a big closed van, and in the darkness it showed a dull white color.

## CHAPTER IV ICE-BOX FOR MURDER

**T**HE TROOPER BECAME WARY. Using a trick which no less expert rider could have performed, he got up enough speed to coast—let his motorcycle roll silently to the right of the truck, alongside of it.

Now he could see the dashboard-illuminated cab—two men in it, with caps, unfamiliar-looking faces. He was already losing pace as his coasting motorcycle slowed. As the truck began to creep by, he eased it beside it, eyes straining across the intervening gap. He could just make out the letters:

### ACME MEAT COMPANY

His goggled eyes lit up savagely. For only an instant he hesitated. Then, deliberately, he opened his engine—spurred forward. His hand reached the siren button, pressed it.

Screaming its imperious warning, the motorcycle pulled alongside the cab. The Trooper waved, yelled. "Pull over!"

His hand was already on his gun-butt. But the driver of the truck promptly obeyed. The truck slowed to the side of the highway, stopped with a hiss of compressed air brakes. The Trooper leaned his motorcycle against a side fence, hurried to the cab.

"Let's see your license!" he demanded.

He was eyeing the two men in the cab. The driver, in a mackinaw, had white apron clothes underneath—he was a big, husky fellow. His companion, in regular topcoat and cap, was equally big, surly-looking.

The driver handed down the license. "What's the matter?" he demanded. "We ain't violated any speed limit."

Ignoring the protest, Rogers asked routine questions, all of which brought convincing answers. The license, too, was bonafide. The driver was a truckman of the Acme Meat Company, and he was driving a shipment.

"Let's see your load!" the Trooper demanded then, his voice belying his inner tension.

Both men climbed from the cab. The driver's companion was still silent, his surly face immobile. The driver, however, began to show signs of nervousness.

The Trooper walked with them around to the rear of the truck. He already had his flash in his left hand, while his right still clung close to his gun.

The rear doors of the truck occupied only a portion of the big rear wall—heavy-looking doors, padlocked from the outside.

The driver hesitated. "We ain't got an overload," he said.

"Open it up!" the Trooper commanded. "Where's the key?"

The driver felt in his mackinaw pocket. Then, suddenly, a defiant snarl broke from him. Instead of a key, a glinting automatic snaked out of his pocket!

Rogers' own gun was out in a split-second, whipping on the driver and the other man.

But even as he had them covered, the Trooper was aware of a movement on the road behind. Cursing, he half-whirled. He caught a glimpse of two new shadowy figures who had materialized out of nowhere. He saw a revolver butt coming down like a club, heard it swishing through the air.

Madly he ducked. But the blow grazed his visor cap, the glancing impact stunning his brain. He felt his knees buckling as he fought to regain consciousness.

He was down on the road, helpless, while his gun was snatched away, and a sudden blinding glow from twin headlamps bathed him. He saw that the glow came from a car parked down the road a way, remembered bitterly that it was the closed car he had passed just before he came to the truck.

The two men, who had obviously sneaked up from the car to make the attack, were looking down at him with the truck driver and the latter's companion. Stalling for time, Rogers played unconscious—closed his eyes to slits through which he could still see.

And his heart jumped as he saw the faces of the newcomers. One he recognized immediately—for he had actually seen it before. The sallow, evil face of Niles Rino—torpedo of the gang—whom Rogers had driven away from the "No Loitering" sign the other day. Rino, slouch-hatted, was gripping a tommy gun.

The other man, taller, also slouch-hatted, gripped a revolver—he must have struck the blow. He had a hard, angular face, with shrewd, ratlike little eyes. And by recalling those photographs, Rogers identified him.

Slick Crandon himself—leader of the gang!

IT WAS Crandon's voice which rose now, a harsh, raspy voice. "You fool!" he was snarling at the truck driver. "What did you want to lose your head for and start panicking? You coulda let him take his look—he'd never be the wiser!"

The driver spoke shakily. "I—I was scared he knew somethin'. I told you we couldn't get by with—"

"Shut up!" Crandon snarled. "We got no time to stall!" His anger subsided then. "Guess we're lucky at that. If Rino and me had been in the truck instead of you guys they haven't mugged, the copper wouldn't have asked questions. Lucky we got the G-man's car."

A wave of enraged despair swept through the prone Rogers. The coupe—it was Hall's! And he had gone right past it unsuspecting! But then it was like a million other cars in the night—nothing to attract suspicion.

"Well, we can't leave this copper here," Crandon said grimly now.

The torpedo, Rino, instantly swung down his tommy. Rogers, out of his slitted eyes, saw the black muzzle pointing right down at his head.

"Can I finish him off, Boss?" The nasal voice was eager. "I'm pretty sure he's the lousy copper who spotted me the other day. Let me give it to him now and—"

Crandon broke in. "Not that way! We fixed the G-guy who found our hideout so they'll never get wise. Now we'll give this Trooper the same dose!"

Rino shrugged, and the tommy swung up again. The four men drew closer around the Trooper. And at that instant, every muscle in his body fired by rage and hate, Rogers hurled upward with all his strength. His arms shot out, closing around the legs of Rino. The gunman howled furiously as he tripped, sprawling. Madly Rogers tried to wrest the tommy still in the man's grip.

And then Rogers' whole head seemed to explode. Quickly, deftly, Slick Crandon had swung that automatic again. This time the blow landed square and full force. Blackness engulfed Dave Rogers. He sank into a limitless void.

It was cold. Not only the windy coldness he had known before, but a still coldness that he could feel creeping into his very heart. He stirred, felt a rough, slatted floor beneath him, jouncing his body from side-to-side.

He was in the dark interior of the truck, and it was going at full speed.



A faint light flickered in the interior. It came from a tiny crack in the closed rear doors—growing brighter and dimmer at intervals. Headlamps behind the truck, following close. That would be Slick Crandon and Rino, trailing the truck as before in Bob Hall's coupe—and doubtless Rino had the tommy-gun ready for any emergency.

Rogers, with the cold filling his very being, looked around the interior in the faint glow from the following headlamps.

The interior was much smaller than the size of the truck would have indicated. Evidently the walls were thick, or double. Hanging from the ceiling were swaying chunks of meat, huge portions of beef. And rabbits! Grey, furry rabbits—exactly like the one he had seen in Pine Woods!

The walls, he saw now, were made of slats. And through the slats Rogers caught a glinting flicker. Ice. Cakes of ice, piled in the hollow of the walls on both sides, and even more of it occupying the front of the van.

"Must be three tons back there alone," he found himself saying through chattering teeth.

Nor was he surprised. It was the coupe which had turned the tables on him, not the truck. He had known all about the truck before he saw it. He had known that it was a refrigerating truck, carrying meat.

A REFRIGERATING truck—and colder than winter air could be. It wouldn't take a man long to freeze to death in here. He knew it had not taken Bob Hall any longer to freeze to death than it would have required for the truck to get from Pine Woods to Storm Mountain.

Young Bob Hall had found that hideout. And for that Bob Hall had died on this slatted floor, which had left furrows on his coat. And now Rogers, who had set out to avenge the ex-Trooper, was doomed to the same horrible, freezing death.

All this flashed through his mind in those first seconds while his brain still struggled to full consciousness.

Now, with the penetrating chill already beginning to numb his flesh, he lurched from the floor, got to his feet. The ceiling was just a little over his full height.

He staggered down the swaying floor, toward the rear doors, colliding with the hanging chunks of meat. He got to the doors, hurled at them, banged at hem despite the tommy-gun in the trailing car which could riddle him if he succeeded.

But the doors wouldn't budge. Thick, heavy, they were locked from the outside.

His teeth were chattering crazily now. He could feel his clothes going stiff around his numbing body. Keep moving, his every sense told him. Keep blood circulating.

If he could only find something to force that door!

He lurched back through the truck, searching. He examined the hanging carcasses, thinking something might be concealed in them. But they were just meat and nothing else.

A careening lurch of the truck sent him staggering against the icy, slatted wall. Groaning, he recovered his balance. He mustn't fall down—the cold would get him quick then. His breath was coming in gasps now.

Suddenly, as the headlamps again flicked through the rear, he caught a glint of metal on the floor. He stooped, grabbed up a pair of steel ice tongs. Hope soared in him.

He went back to the door with the tongs, tried to apply them to the crack.

It was futile! The crack was too small. There was no way by which he could make the tongs take hold. And the lock was outside.

He was trapped, trapped in this horrible ice box on wheels!

The swaying forward motion continued. The numbness grew upon the Trooper. He stood up, swinging his arms, slapping his own face viciously, banging his chest. He jumped on both feet. But the numbness grew—he could almost feel his own blood congealing.

## CHAPTER V VENGEANCE

**T**IME PASSED. From his knowledge of roads and the speed of the truck, he knew the van must soon be nearing the state line. Before it crossed that line, the gangsters must know he would be dead—they'd throw him out, get through the unsuspecting police.

And Bob Hall would be unavenged. His murderers—the men whom the Department of Justice had sent him to track down—would go scot free!

Even with the thought, Rogers was again thrown half off balance as the truck floor inclined sharply



upward. Going uphill, a long hill. He knew this hill, knew that it was close to the state line.

And now a lassitude was creeping over him, making it more and more difficult for him to move. Exhausted he could scarcely keep on his feet.

The truck roared up the long hill. A faint creaking sound of protesting wood reached the Trooper's ears. The slats in front of the van were straining as the tilting floor brought the full weight of the tons of ice blocks upon them.

That was when the desperate inspiration came. With sudden effort, the Trooper rallied his weakening muscles, gathered his strength. He still had the ice tongs.

Now, though he felt as if he were moving through air as thick as syrup, he struggled to those slats. Hurry! Hurry! before the truck got to the top of the hill, before his own body resigned itself to the cold.

He applied the ice tongs to the lowest of the slats, got a grip on one end, and tugged madly. There was a squeak of loosening, ripped-out screws. The slats came out.

Fighting against time and death, the Trooper continued his work. Hope alone kept him going, and the knowledge that he must keep active. Slat after slat he ripped out, until he was nearing the top of the barricade. There was a groaning sound as the ice on the bottom began to shift now. Already he had exposed a wall of it which reached his shoulders—he was standing right in front of those tons of shifting ice.

In the faint light from the rear chink, he looked at the ceiling, measuring distance, time. Then he got the ice tongs on the top slats—three of them at once. Once more he yanked, desperately.

And hell broke loose.

With the booming roar of an avalanche, the entire mass of ice came crashing out of the fully opened gap, rushing upon the Trooper.

But at the same instant Rogers, dropping the tongs, leaped bolt upright, caught a cross-bar on the ceiling. Exhausted and numbed though he was, he frantically pulled himself up, doubling up his legs beneath him—just in time!

The ice went crashing past below him, fanning him with its chill breeze, flattening him up against the roof of the truck as it pounded and bruised his body.

Down the floor of the inclined truck it slid, gathering terrific momentum. And then, with a mighty crash, it hit the heavy, locked doors, in the rear.

There was a sound of rending wood and metal.

Both doors were burst open wide by the solid mass of ice. The winter air rushing into the truck seemed almost warm.

The Trooper had dropped to the floor, to rush down the truck even as the full glare of the trailing coupe's headlights filled the interior. The tommy-gun—he was going to be riddled.

*Crash!* The fresh impact split the night. Dazedly the Trooper saw the coupe collide head-on with the sliding mass of ice that roared down the hill upon it. With ice slewing past and piling up in front, the coupe came to a dead stop—wrecked and smashed, its two occupants apparently too stunned to move for the moment.

The brakes of the big truck hissed wildly, and the van also came to a stop. There were running feet—the plug-ugly driver came into sight outside the open rear. He was drawing a gun. But now the Trooper's strength had been revived by the turn of events—all his pent-up rage and hate exploded into savage action. With a gritted oath he leaped through the truck doors—landed in a flying tackle upon the driver before the latter could aim his gun.

He dragged the driver sprawling to the ground. His fist, bringing a short blow to the gunster's jaw, knocked consciousness out of the man.

But now the driver's companion had appeared. Cursing, he was aiming his automatic toward the Trooper.

Rogers snatched at the gun in the inert driver's hand. He got it, aimed it, pulled the trigger with cold-stiffened finger, all in split-seconds. The automatic was vibrating in his hand as it spat flame.

The driver's companion dropped like a log.

At the same instant, out of the wrecked coupe, the sallow-faced figure of Rino lurched upward—the tommy-gun in his hands. Before he could swing the menacing weapon upon Rogers, the Trooper whipped around his borrowed automatic, again squeezed the trigger.

The tommy-gun went flying out of Rino's hands. Screaming, the torpedo doubled up, fell, badly wounded.

And now the momentary surge of strength which desperation had given Rogers had ebbed. The awful exposure to cold was taking its toll. The Trooper saw a haze swimming before his eyes—his head felt light.

Then, through the haze, he saw Slick Crandon raising his evil head like some cobra across the pile of ice. Slick Crandon, murder in his eyes, leveling his automatic at the groggy Trooper.

In that instant, weak and faint, Rogers thought once more of Bob Hall, the ex-Trooper for whose death this vicious gang leader was responsible. He thought of Bob Hall—and his gun arm moved, even though it seemed made of lead. Up, up it moved—while Slick Crandon took careful aim.

And then the Trooper pulled his own trigger, and the roar of the gun became thunder which enveloped him completely.

FIVE minutes later, a squad of motorcycles came tearing to the scene. The captain and his men had been hunting for Dave Rogers, only now having caught up with the mad chase.

Their eyes went grim as they saw the sprawled figures strewn near the truck with its open rear doors. The driver was unconscious—Rino, the torpedo, lay writhing in his own blood. The other man from the truck was dead.

And sprawled across the pile of ice in front of the wrecked coupe, the corpse of Slick Crandon grew prematurely cold. The eyes of the Troopers went to that ice. There were gasps as flashlights were turned on it.

Within the ice, having been put into cut slits, were plates of steel with strange engraving on them.

All this the Trooper saw before they saw Dave Rogers—lying unconscious just in front of the ice pile, but grinning even in his insensibility.

His grin was wider, and his eyes were open and gleaming as he sat propped up in the cozy warmth of the hospital room. The captain was there. Five G-men, all looking awed, were there.

“It’s clear enough,” the captain was saying. “Crandon

and his gang knew they might have to make a quick lam, and must find a clever way of getting across the state line. Down at the meat-packing company one of the drivers happened to be an ex-convict, still doing petty racket stuff. They got him to hijack his own truck while it was supposedly en route and drove it to their hideout. Bob Hall showed up, and somehow they spotted him. Figuring the heat was on, they stuck the plates in the ice, put in Hall—” He shuddered, his eyes misty. “Then they went on, leaving Mears to destroy the presses.”

One of the G-men nodded. “That’s fine. But how did this trooper figure it all out?”

Rogers’ air was modest. “It wasn’t much to figure for any Trooper, who’s supposed to understand wheels and roads,” he maintained. “I didn’t really get the idea until I was looking at Bob Hall’s body.” For a moment his eyes, too, misted. “I knew Bob Hall wasn’t the kind to chase a false trail, or he wouldn’t be a G-man. My guess was he’d found the hideout—yet the doc said he couldn’t have been there and still frozen on Storm Mountain.

“When I saw the wrinkles on the back of his coat, though, I had it! I remembered that dead rabbit which had tripped me—whoever saw a rabbit this time of the year? And I remembered spotting Rino by a meat-packing plant. That gave me the answer—a refrigerating meat truck!”

The G-men looked awed.

“Say, Trooper, why don’t you come in for Uncle Sam like Hall did?”

But Trooper Dave Rogers shook his head. “No, thanks! Don’t think I could take to this G stuff. My line is just plain road work.”