



THE TUNNEL OF DEATH

by HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

Murder and mystery stalk hand in hand in this amazing story of a dread sector at the front!

BROODING NIGHT UNFURLED his sinister mantle which settled in black enveloping folds over the shattered battlefields of Loos. Grim, spectral shapes weaved in and out the debris of No-Man's-Land, which lay, a stark area of ghastriness, a place of foul smells and wretchedness. And its worst aspect was apparent when flares and star-shells commenced to illuminate the wastes.

Sergeant Dan Maguire shuddered, strong as he was, when from a sap-head he swept the area before him. Dan had come to the sap to be alone, to try to forget the scene he had been called upon to witness an hour before. But he didn't actually want to forget the situation. No, never. His company commander, Captain Coyne, had been found lying in a pool of his own blood—fouly murdered. Coyne had been more than a good pal to Maguire. There was a bond between them which had been cemented during years of service on the Montreal Police Force and almost three years

of action together in France. Now Coyne was gone. The skipper had been shot from behind and not by a German! It was an inside job. But who? Coyne was the most popular officer in the battalion, with a heart which was always with his men.

Now Maguire ground his teeth and muttered something in a low tone. The case had been most baffling and continued a hopeless enigma. Not a solitary clue.

Dan ran over a mental roll of the men in the company. There wasn't an individual on whom he could cast the slightest suspicion. The men were rough but Dan couldn't conceive of a motive for so dastardly a crime.

"Anything new, Dan?" The sergeant turned at the voice and his eyes caught the well framed silhouette of Lieutenant Sage, now senior company officer.

"Nothing new out here, sir," drawled Maguire. "Did Intelligence locate anything in the shape of a clue, or motive?"

"A motive, yes, sergeant, but no clue. You knew that Captain Coyne was appointed acting paymaster? Well, he was, and for some unheard of reason the money was shipped up here as we get a pay in supports tomorrow night. Never heard of a pay day in supports before, but, as we're billed for a long session in the line H.Q. thought it advisable to pay out and give the boys a chance to patronize a Y which has moved up to one of the tunnels at our back. The money's gone! About twenty-three thousand francs. Bank of Calais notes, most of them; and the murderer and thief has also gone.

"As if there wasn't enough murder in this wholesale abattoir without having a case like the skipper's on our hands. You know all the boys. Can you think of any man who would—how about Dutch and Anton?" The sergeant's brows elevated sharply, then lowered in a frown. It struck him as mighty strange that the lieutenant, who had always championed those two men, should single them out. But the sergeant was an old detective and knew enough not to expose his surprise.

"Those two eggs have a pretty groggy record, sergeant," persisted the officer. "Between you and me, if they hadn't jumped with seven leagued boots about the time they joined the army, they'd never of beaten the Quebec police. Perhaps you heard of the Trois Riviere farm murder and a couple of crooks who ran in double harness under the names Fox and Weasel? No? Well, I've a notion that these two bombers of ours could fill the shoes of those aliases very neatly."

"But there was a third member of that gang, lieutenant," cut in Dan. "Seems to me his alias was—was, now I'm damned if I can bring it to mind but his crime handle was the Duke. Sort of an uppish bloke with a fair education. I remember Coyne telling me of the case. He—" Sergeant Maguire suddenly checked himself. A thought had flashed to his mind, a thought that set his heavy frame to trembling with excitement. Was it possible that the two bombers knew anything of Coyne's death? If they were the Fox and Weasel, the motive was there! More than once Coyne had got them stretches for burglary and it was Coyne who was hot on their trail when they joined up. It was reported that he had caught the Duke, but this wily leader of gangsters had escaped.

"Nope, sir," snapped Maguire, suddenly. "Those two birds would be about the hams to watch but they both went on leave to England twenty-four hours before Coyne was murdered."

For a moment there was silence. The officer moved in closer. Through narrowed eyes Dan Maguire thought he caught the flicker of a smile on the other's face. But, in the uncertain light he could not be sure.

"Well, Dan," murmured the lieutenant. "It's not up to us, I suppose. It's quite a matter for Intelligence to handle. So long as we're satisfied that it wasn't done by a member of this company, I don't suppose we've—"

"But I never said I was satisfied it wasn't done by a member of this company, sir," jerked the non com. "It was done by someone who's mighty clever— someone with the inside dope, so I reckon he might have been a member of this company at that."

MAGUIRE was shooting wild. He hadn't any more idea than the man in the moon as to who the guilty party might be. For all he knew it might have been a stray German who had crawled in through a sap, or come up through one of the tunnels for which Loos was noted. But Dan Maguire was determined that so long as he was standing on his feet he'd never rest until he'd found some clue in connection with the Coyne murder. Lieutenant Sage had certainly suggested a couple of good possibilities when he mentioned Brandt and Anton, for there were no harder specimens in the Canuck Corps than these two bombers. But Dan was forced to dismiss all thoughts of their connection with the case. A man who has left the area for a London leave cannot kill someone who is seated in a front-line dugout.

To the sergeant's mind came a vision of his old pal Coyne. The skipper had tried to speak when, at the call of a runner, Dan Maguire had dropped into the dugout. But the job had been too well done, two bullets of service calibre through the back. Coyne did his best to speak with some semblance of coherence but the sergeant sighed and turned away, shaking his broad shoulders as he sought to rid himself of that sinister, haunting picture. He dived his hand into a Mills grenade box and pocketed two bombs, then turned to the officer.

"Time I was away, sir," he murmured. "I've got to take over the listening post; and while I'm out I think I'll investigate that tunnel."

Lieutenant Sage had turned to leave, but now he wheeled.

"Better not worry about the tunnel to-night, Dan," he breathed. "Just get your post established and report back to H.Q. You'll not be feeling any too grand. I'll take a run out and give that tunnel the once over myself."

Dan was inclined to thank Sage; but that tunnel job was a rotten one at the best of times. To be relieved of that was some concession, but Maguire was mighty anxious to see that tunnel, of which the scouts had spoken of in such tones of awe. There were countless rumors connected with it, one of which was that it was intended as a miles long subterranean route to the Channel ports.

However, those who had set out to make a close investigation had not come back as sound as when they entered the gruesome galleries. Two scouts had staggered back shell-shocked; two others had never returned. Dan had been looking forward to an exploration of this dreaded spot, looking forward to a night of keen adventure, although the thoughts of the trip made him shudder. Somebody must get a line on it though and he had undertaken to investigate. Now this officer didn't want him to bother, eh? There was some stronger urge than ever now in the sergeant's heart. But, he musn't let on to Sage that as soon as his post was established he was going into that tunnel in spite of hell. Let Sage go if he wished, but Maguire was going too.

"Very good, sir," he drawled. "I reckon that tunnel'll keep for a few days. I understand we come in again on this sector after two days in supports."

"You come in again, sergeant," was the light reply. "I'm taking my leave right away. Just as soon as we've been relieved. Hell, though, not being able to draw any money before I hit London. I pull out at about three to-morrow morning. Lieutenant Brett takes over and I'll be obliged if you'll give him all the assistance possible. By the way, I've had a rotten job wished on to me. Got to go and see Coyne's wife, she's in London you know. I think I'll get a padre to go along and do the spouting. Not much good at that soft stuff."

Dan mumbled something beneath his breath as he gave a hitch to the holster of his forty-five. He knew Marg Coyne well. She used to be a steno at headquarters. Little Irish red head, pretty as a picture. Marg would take it pretty badly.

As he mustered his men for listening post the sergeant was still working on the Coyne case. If only those two damn bombers had stuck around—Brandt and Anton! There was no use, it seemed, in looking any further in the company. The boys were all above that.

NOW a Maxim chattered a tone of death, driving a sleet of lead belt high across the wastes of No-Man's-Land as Dan led his detail out to an isolated crater.

But, when the post was established he ducked back to the line, then to Company H.Q. He wanted the company runner who had been the first to discover Coyne. He hadn't had an opportunity of talking to the man alone.

Lieutenant Sage was in the dugout when Maguire entered. Now acting officer in command Sage was handing over to Lieutenant Brett, the scout officer upon whose shoulders the burden of company command would fall during Sage's absence on leave.

"You got your post established, sergeant?" queried the senior officer looking up at Maguire. "Good. Now I'd have a good loaf if I were you. Take a run down to Battalion H.Q. Kelly's going down with a message. You can go together." Kelly was the runner and he jumped to his feet at the sound of his name.

Nothing would have suited the sergeant better and when Kelly had received the message they left the dugout and ducked for the communication trench which led back to H.Q. But Dan didn't lead far down this trench before he halted in the shelter of an old sap.

"Now Kelly," he breathed. "Just what happened? Give me the low-down on what you know."

"Hell, sarge," returned the man. "There isn't anything to it. The signaler had to go out and mend a break so I went along with him as I had to take a message up to the right half company—to Sage. Sage wasn't there. He was back at Battalion H.Q., they told me, seeing about his leave, so I beat it back an' cripes! There was ol' Coyne all shot up."

"You didn't pass anybody?" jerked Maguire.

"Nobody but a water detail, sarge. A couple of guys with water cans. Regular ration party I reckon. Too dark to tell who they were. But they were all O.K."

"H'mm—" mused the sergeant. "All right, Kelly. Beat it to H.Q. I'm going up forward to that tunnel entrance. Keep this under your hat, buddy. It's nobody's business where I am, see?"

"Get you, sarge. But cripes, I wouldn't go snoopin' round that lousy tunnel unless I had to. Not for all the gosh—" With a sickening whine a salvo of five nines screamed over to smash into the support lines. It seemed that this burst was the herald of a deadly night strafe. In ten minutes the black night cracked wide open in a flaming inferno—a hell of stabbing lights and thundering eruptions.

Dan Maguire ducked low as he scudded for the front line. Whole sections of parapet were torn away and the sweep of Maxim bullets now forced sentries down to the cover of the bottom of the trench.

The sergeant squirmed his way over into No-Man's Land and ducked under a wall of shrapnel, from shellhole to shellhole, until at last he dropped into an old abandoned German trench which led to the mouth of the tunnel.

As he crept along, he released his six-shooter. At any time now he might encounter a lurking enemy patrol. Stokes mortars opened up and their popping shells smashed in a strafe which was centered around the tunnel mouth. Maguire swore softly. It looked as though he wouldn't be able to force an entrance there, and any moment now Sage might be along.

MAGUIRE was now on the top again, writhing forward, a foot at a time. Suddenly a sharp pencil of light flashed across his vision. "What kind of a fracas have I landed into?" he thought.

Cautiously he raised his head. A blurred figure darted in front of him. There came the spiteful crack of an automatic and Dan felt a bullet clip the clay at his neck. His Colt swung up and he emptied the chamber then jumped to his feet. Arriving at the tunnel mouth, he dropped flat as a spurt of flame spat almost in his face. He felt a bullet graze his cheek. His trained ears told him that the reports of the shots fired were not Luger reports but the savage crack of British automatics. Might be a patrol, he thought.

For a moment he lay in the prone position, scarcely daring to breathe; then, an inch at a time, he wriggled over to a shellhole. There were no more shots fired, but Maguire could hear the tramp of feet. The hard clatter warned him that someone was descending the tunnel steps. Reloading his gun, he moved out of his retreat in a wide circle, coming towards the tunnel entrance from the German side.

The entrance of the tunnel was one forced by the British engineers, and not the original entrance, which was back of the German lines. A block had been placed to prevent the enemy using the galleries any longer and, save for an entrance forced by venturesome Prussian patrols, the tunnel was virtually an Allied possession, leading back to an exit at the rear of Loos. But in the past year a number of mysteries had cropped out of the existence of this tunnel—ghastly affairs which included the disappearance of two scouts quite recently.

But Dan Maguire was determined to explore the corridor in spite of all its ghastly history. His mind was a storm center of thought now. Kelly had mentioned a water detail. That in itself was unusual, for water was

brought up each night under a properly organized ration party. The whole night seemed tinged with mystery.

Suddenly footsteps sounded and Dan drew down his head. A figure shot by, not more than ten feet to the south, between the sergeant and the entrance.

Maguire noticed that the man carried a long box under an arm. "Mebbe a microphone," he thought. Then he got to his feet and ducked to the entrance. Whoever the man had been he was now descending the plank steps to the gallery.

The pungent stench of rotting fungi assailed Dan's nostrils as he commenced in descend, a step at a time. Pausing now and then, Maguire chilled at the eerie sounds which echoed in the hollow ghastly tube. The plunk of dripping water and the noise of scuttling rats—a veritable chamber of horrors! Dark, pitch dark, with not the faintest hope of light. Dan's hand reached for a shrouded pencil torch which he always carried—one he had brought overseas with him. But he didn't want to use it yet.

He paused for a moment and wondered what had impelled him to make this tour of investigation. He didn't have to be here. This tunnel and the suspicions which surrounded it were matters for Intelligence. But the urge to explore had gripped Maguire's sleuth-mind; and he wished that the venture could have set him on to the trail of Coyne's murderer. Whoever had committed the crime had disappeared so thoroughly that this tunnel suggested a possible hideout. But so did any of the tunnels in the Loos area.

Down thirty more steps . . . then the sergeant halted and peered into the black void. Drawing his lamp, he carefully manipulated a pencil of light which gave him his bearings. Ahead lay the long main tube, planked and safe. He must get along now.

WITH forty-five gripped tightly he stooped and moved forward. He counted the paces: a hundred, before he paused to listen. But the squeals of the rats drowned all other possibility of sound.

Suddenly footsteps sounded at his back and Maguire ducked ahead. Was this another visitor? May be a Heinie Intelligence man, he thought. Groping along a damp plank wall Dan came to an offshoot of the main corridor and paused. He listened, with head cocked, for the sound of those footsteps, but they had ceased to thump.

An eerie cackling laugh—the cry of a maniac, rang out in the passage and Maguire shuddered. What had

caused that? Was the infernal place haunted, as it was thought to be by the French *poilus*? Dan shuddered for he was beginning to realize that the tunnel was not a mere straight-cut tube, but a network system of corridors. Again that weird laugh rang out and Dan whipped around. The sound was muffled as though it came from some chamber off the main corridor. Men had entered this tunnel, thought Dan, and never returned. Others had returned, ghastly, in the grip of nerve shock. Was there a passage through to the German lines after all? If this were so, the enemy had access to a number of points beneath the Allied lines.

Dan thought of the man who had slipped into the tunnel ahead of him. The fellow looked very much like Sage. Was it possible that the lieutenant was an enemy agent? Dan swore inwardly at the maelstrom of confusing thoughts.

Footsteps now sounded at his back and Dan started back. Someone was slumping down the side-shoot gallery. Backing cautiously into the main corridor Dan eased over and groped along the opposite wall until he found a cut-in, possibly a chamber or another gallery. Scarcely breathing, he waited with gun ready for instant action.

Suddenly a thundering report resounded through the tube—a rocking explosion which echoed with long, deep reverberations, came from some point in the tunnel between his present stand and the shaft down which he had entered.

“Ammonal tube!” he gasped. “Someone has blocked the entrance!”

Then followed the sound of hurrying footsteps. Someone scuttled past him, so swiftly that he had no opportunity to shoot. The figure might easily have been a phantom shape had it not been for the distinct clump of boots hitting the hard packed floor.

Voices sounded. Low and muffled. These came from the off-shot opposite and Dan raised his gun. He was going to challenge just as soon as anyone got close enough. He felt his heart kick rebelliously in the seconds that followed. Some one coughed, then a curse rang out and Dan thrilled. That curse was English. There were no scouts out—of this he was certain. But who else?

As if in mockery the weird laugh he had heard twice before rang out with a suddenness that sent a shiver down his spine. It sounded right at his back. Then, before he had an opportunity to get complete hold on his nerves, another thundering explosion seemed to blast the very vitals of the tunnel.

He almost gasped aloud as he sensed the true situation now. A mobile charge had been shot at both main exits, and all chance of escape cut off—unless there was another channel known only to the operator of those ammonal charges.

While Dan was busy wracking his mind for a solution, two figures rushed the tube. A light flashed, then the crack of automatics rang out with deathly echo. There came a shriek of pain from somewhere down the tunnel towards the point of the last explosion, then a grim silence, save for the occasional clump of feet.

Maguire’s teeth hammered shut with a click. He must get to the bottom of this. Sage might be in the tunnel. Perhaps in making a reconnaissance, the lieutenant had fallen foul of spy agents.

With gun at the ready he crouched and moved to his left, and almost choked as a coil of fumes rolled to meet him. Rats scurried by him—scores of mangy creatures, whose cries were more akin to the eerie cackle of laughter. Dan flattened to the wall as a light blinked not more than twenty yards away. He glimpsed a figure stooping in the corridor. It was the form of a khaki-clad private, or—then Dan swore softly for the light snapped out.

In all, three men had shot past him. By the light of that flash he had glimpsed but one.

DAN had forgotten for the moment the fact that the exits to this tunnel of death were blocked. His mind was bent on the matter immediately in hand. Not twenty yards away was someone who was in some way mixed up with shooting, possible murder, and the sergeant was determined to fathom the mystery in spite of the devil.

Footsteps sloshing towards him, sent Dan’s gun arm up. Someone was stepping in close, and Maguire timed his move as best he could.

“Halt!” he roared, and ducked with lightning rapidity. It was well for him he ducked for an automatic cut loose murderously and a figure shot by. Dan’s Colt went into action and belched four shots in rapid succession. He heard the bullets strike and then a curse which ended in abrupt groan. He caught the slumping of a body. He had winged the man at least. Keeping flat against the dripping clay and plank wall he advanced with infinite caution. Now he paused and listened. There came a scraping sound as though someone was slithering away, dragging a limb. Then Dan took a chance and switched on his light. For a

split second he swept the area ahead and caught a movement, but the shaft of light caught something else which arrested the sergeant's keen eyes—a flat package lay on the floor ten feet away and Dan stepped forward and snatched it up. Drawing close into the shadows of the wall he flashed his pencil light and gasped.

“My Lord—francs!” he exclaimed. In his hand lay a package of fifty ten franc notes. “The skipper’s pay money,” he thought. “Yes, this is the sort of packets the dough comes up in. By Caesar!” Dan trembled with emotion. So that scoundrel ahead was in on Captain Coyne’s murder, huh? Must be, for here was the evidence, and Dan crumpled the franc notes into an almost unrecognizable mass in his large hand. Now, by thunder! He must get that slinking devil ahead. Noises, weird cackles and the general ghastliness of his surroundings were forgotten. He was on the man trail now; there was a crook to get. And, with lips drawn to a hard set line and Colt ready with six chambers full, he moved on.

Suddenly an automatic spewed flame and Dan felt something pluck at his left shoulder. The shot came from his left rear and as he flattened to the floor he turned. He had gone past the off-shot entrance, from which the shot had been fired. For a moment he lay still, scarcely daring to breathe, then he took his steel helmet and flung it from him. It landed fifteen feet away with a resounding clatter. A hard curse rang out, accompanied by the rapid burst of three shots from an automatic. This was just what Dan had wanted and he drew down with his Colt.

Cr-ack! Cr-ack! There was a cry of pain, which dwindled to a moan and Dan ducked forward. With Colt held menacingly forward he yelled then flashed his pencil light. With a gasp he drew back as he glimpsed a huddled khaki-clad figure sprawled on the floor. Dan was quick to note that the automatic had fallen from the man’s hand, then he dropped to a knee and rolled the figure over.

“Dutch Brandt! By the holy dora,” he gasped. The man’s head lolled, then stiffened and the glassy stare brightened somewhat.

“Got me, huh, sarge?” he groaned. “Well you done a good job. Right in the guts. But—I got that lousy hound, got him clean too, after he’d bumped Anton. Cripes, but he’d four-flushed us to a fare-ye-well.”

“Lie up against the wall there you bum,” snarled Maguire. “You got him, of course you did, Mister Fox. But, you had to pay for it, huh? Got the best officer in the corps you did, blast you. Now you ain’t dead yet,

Dutch, and I’m going to see you pass out in a fitting way. You’re going to spend the rest of your time in Ibis death tunnel see? Maybe you’ll get so you can laugh like that ghost cackler. You got Coyne, my best pal, blast you and I’m—”

“Just a minute, feller,” cut in Brandt in a tone that already had a rattle. “I—we, me an’ Anton never got Coyne. What do you mean?”

“Then who in hell did?” jerked Dan. “You’ve got his francs on you now. I can see it all now, blast your hide. You were sore at Coyne for that Trois Riviere job and were out to get him. If you didn’t actually get him you know who did. Who?”

“Sage!” was the quick return. “The Duke, sarge. Had you—you man-hunters all beat to a fraz, didn’t he? Not even the skipper knowed him. But go back up the tunnel wit’ a bucket of water an’ some soap. Wash off his dye and shave that mustache. Cripes, it was hard for me an’ Anton to reckernize him.”

Sage! So he was the Duke, huh? A clever front-line officer, respected for his nerve and ability.

A gurgle from the wounded gunman snapped Dan to action. He loathed Dutch for his part in the Coyne case, yet, believed now that neither Anton or Dutch took any active part in the killing. But the man was slipping and Dan was anxious to get the full story. He ripped out two field dressings and made the man’s wounds as comfortable as possible. Then Dutch asked for a smoke.

“LOOK’S like you’re going out, Dutch,” breathed Dan, in a low tone. “Better give me the yarn on Coyne’s passing. I’ll see you get packed out of this and get a decent burial. Just what happened?”

“Gimme a drink, sarge,” pleaded the crook. “Cripes, but I’m on fire.” But Dan shook his head. He mustn’t give the man water, much as he’d willingly have walked ten miles to get him a drink. Water would have sent Dutch out horribly.

“Try not to think of water, Dutch. It would only hurt you more than the thirst. Better have a smoke instead.” Dan lit a cigarette and placed it between the bomber’s fevered lips. “Now pry loose with the story.”

“They ain’t—much—to it, sarge. We was all in on the robbery. See how nice Sage planned our leave? We—me an’ Anton, went out twenty-four hours ahead, see? But we come back. Sneaked back as a water detail, then come to the tunnel where we was to get the dough. We was gonna take over the francs in case the Duke couldn’t get away after the shootin’. Then later,

in London, we'd split the mazuma an'—an'—cripes, sarge, I'm burnin' up." Dan jerked out his water bottle and wet the man's lips.

"We'd figured on jumpin' a tramp an' beatin' it through to the States," continued Dutch, somewhat revived. "But—tonight, that lousy sucker, the Duke, blowed in the exits o' the main tunnel a purpose to trap me an' Anton." Dan started and shuddered. Sage had been fiendish.

"But I got the double-crosser, sarge," chuckled the crook. "He thought he'd grab the dough an' leave us in this rotten hole along o' that damn shriekin' ghost. Gawd, there it is again!"

The man shrank against the sergeant's side in terror as a long peal of maniacal laughter rang out to echo weirdly in the tunnel of death.

Dan stiffened his upper lip. He must find out just who was responsible for that cackle.

"Square yourself up, Dutch," he snapped. "Why, that's God's truth, man. I'll bet you it's some poor devil got himself trapped in a chamber. Don't worry. There ain't any ghosts around. There's a full grown human making that row. Now tell me, since Sage blew in the exits how did you figure you were going to get away?"

Dutch squared his shoulders and shuddered. Dan could hear the man's teeth chatter and realized the gunman wasn't long for the land of the living.

"Right where we're at, sarge, is—is—the real death tunnel. Foller this gallery an' you'll come to a part block, just a few sandbags which you can knock down. You'll find a small sap which brings you in right almost beneath H.Q. dugout. Sage was—a—clever devil. Right at the back o' H.Q. dugout where they's a ol' cupboard is where at this gallery ends. You can see now how the Duke got Coyne from behind and made a getaway. That's—" Dutch's voice trailed off in a muffled shriek of terror as the haunting wail echoed again from down the gallery. Dan held the crook's body close and a wave of pity surged through his being as he felt the thick-set frame shudder, then stiffen out. Dutch flung up his arms and crumpled to a lifeless heap.

LEUTENANT BRETT jerked around and reached for his automatic as a cupboard at his back crashed to the ground. A signaler, on duty, tore off his headphones and sprang to his feet. Then into the dugout crawled the disheveled frame of Dan Maguire.

"God alive, sir. I might have got a slug in my ribs, huh?" sang out the sergeant. Then he reeled and

swayed dizzily. The dugout seemed to rock beneath him and the walls swirled. He tottered forward, then Brett reached out and held him. Dan slid to the floor, where he lay shaking and unconscious, while Brett yelled a command to the signaler.

When Dan came to he found the medical officer bending over him.

"Better, Maguire?" asked the M.O. Dan nodded and drew the back of a hand across his lips, which burned under the bite of issue rum. "Just what happened? You've had quite a shock, eh?"

Dan sat up and shook his broad shoulders. He shuddered as he glimpsed the gap through which he had crawled into the dugout and a memory of that ghastly tunnel of death gripped him for an instant. But his strength and nerve were coming back now.

"I found Coyne's murderer," he snapped. "Here's the dough. Mebbe not all there, but near enough." From the blouse of his tunic and his pockets he tossed out flat packages of French currency before the amazed eyes of the watchers.

"Great heavens, sergeant," jerked Lieutenant Brett. "Who got Coyne? Was it—"

"Sage!" returned Dan. "Sage got him and the money was to have been split three ways. Anton, Dutch Brandt and Sage. They got their signals crossed, however, and now they're all stiff down in that hellish tunnel below." Then Dan told them the whole story and officers and men gasped in amazement.

"But what do you make of those screams, sergeant—that weird laughter? Have you any idea just what that could be?" asked the medical officer.

"Can't say for sure, sir. But I believe there's a devilish gruesome situation there. Perhaps we'd better get a work party an' go dig that ghost out, then—I'd advise having the engineers up and just naturally stuff those damn holes tight. It's the worst underground chamber of horrors I've ever seen."

Brett got busy immediately and soon a work party was ready to crawl into the gallery at Dan Maguire's back. Dan shuddered as he stepped over the stiff body of Dutch Brandt. The M.O. who accompanied the party bent down and by the light of a flash made a hasty examination.

Suddenly the eerie cackle rang out and a man dropped his shovel and scuttled back.

Now a number of torches flashed and the shafts of light, penetrating the black void, seemed to awaken a host of hideous shadow-shapes. Dan Maguire led his party to the point against which he had previously

stood when the maniacal laughter had rung most clear. Now the electric lamps played on the dripping walls and Dan located a corridor which terminated abruptly in a pile of cave-in debris. Here the sergeant halted and sized the situation up with professional eye. A breathless silence had settled in the tunnel, gripping, ominous silence, unbroken save for the muffled shriek of rats and the steady drip of seeping water. Men breathed deeply and the lieutenant's eyes stared in a wild gaze at the sergeant, whose face was clouded in a deep frown. Then a deep moan came from the hidden fastness beyond the cave-in, and the work party shuffled and fidgeted.

"This is it, sir," murmured Maguire. "Better have the men start clearing away. If I don't miss my guess, we're going to settle this tunnel mystery once and for all."

THE men were glad to get to work, for the strain of waiting was telling. Maguire then suggested to the lieutenant and M.O. that they move along and examine the bodies while the men worked away but Brett was glued to the spot and refused to move and the expression on his face was pitiable. Dan and the M.O. moved on.

"Hell of a situation for the scout officer, sergeant," breathed the M.O. when they were out of earshot. "One of those scouts who failed to return was a young kid brother of Brett's wife, a kid who enlisted under age. There is no question that there is a human being alive behind that cave-in but will it be the kid or—well, there have been some strange stories about this place. Why, they say the French couldn't get their scouts down here at all. One section of *poilu* scouts was swallowed absolutely. Superstitious beggars—some of those who did explore. Claimed the lost section was down here playing cards, but dead. H'mm, so this is the Duke, eh?" The M.O. dropped to a knee alongside the lifeless form of the former Lieutenant Sage.

"That's right about the dye, sergeant. Look, now that rigor mortis has set in, it is obvious." Dan examined the brows of the Duke and nodded. He felt no pity for the form of Sage, who had been shot down by Dutch. Here was Coyne's murderer. Dan turned away disgustedly.

Just then a man from the work party trotted up and advised that the cave-in was almost clear and Lieutenant Brett wished their advice, and the two returned eagerly.

Dan discovered that the clay had been removed

from what resembled a heavy plank door and gave the order for pick men to hammer away.

"Don't anyone get panicky," he ordered. "There's liable to be anything behind this door. Here you, give me that pick and go sit down, buddy. Don't worry if you feel sick. Nobody'll accuse you of being yellow." The man who handed over the pick was glad to do so and retire, then Dan set to with heavy, smashing strokes. Came a crumpling of wood and minor rush of clay as the doorway caved, then the doctor's light shot forward through the gap.

Men gasped and drew back and Lieutenant Brett tottered against the side of a wall, for as the light beams flooded a chamber they revealed a ghastly sight. Seated at a rough hewn table were the ghastly skeleton forms of four *poilus*, while, face down in the stagnant clay of the floor lay the wretched figure of Private Tom Herbertson, Brett's kid brother-in-law. In a far corner of the death chamber lay the dead body of the kid's scout buddy.

"Look at those Frenchies, Maguire," breathed the M.O. The medical officer was fearless and advanced to make closer examination. He touched a *poilu's* shoulder and the shape rattled to the table a mass of dust and bones.

"Gas, sergeant," jerked the doctor. "Trapped here and gassed by a deadly poison which, had it not been for cave-ins, might have run through to our lines." Then the doctor darted to the figure of Herbertson, which just then moaned.

"He'll live, Brett," he jerked. "But, man, we've got to be careful of the poor kid. He and his chum must have got in here and got trapped. What a horrible experience! Stretcher-bearers! Get this man right out. Careful, see?" Then the captain turned to Sergeant Maguire, who stood leaning against a wall, trembling violently.

"Brace up, Dan boy. You've done some really wonderful work here. But try to forget it all. Don't let it get a grip on you. I'm going to pass you out to London. You're the very man to call on Mrs. Coyne, and—understand this: I don't want to see you back in France until you've forgotten all about this hellish experience."

Then Lieutenant Brett strode over and squeezed the sergeant's hand.

"Thanks, sarge," he breathed. "That's all, just now. While you're in London I'd like you to call on Mrs. Brett and explain about young Tom. I—well, sarge, you'll know what to tell her."

Dan shook his broad shoulders and waved a hand to the work party, who were eager to evacuate the ghastly tunnel, and they all crawled forward, Dan Maguire bringing up the rear. They carried with them the identification of the French soldiers together with that of their own troops.

That night a party of engineers moved up and blasted the death tunnel out of existence, and as Dan heard the muffled crumps of their explosive charges he clenched his fists tightly and raised his head as though in defiance. It took nerve to pull through that night.