

The S-4 by Semaphore

(Continued)

stopped to clap a friendly hand on the shoulder of Mark McIntyre who stood smoking a cigarette and kibitzing the card players.

"Well! The new editor couldn't keep away from the old mill, eh? What's the matter, Mark, things too quiet in Harvard Square?"

McIntyre had recently been promoted from the *Boston American* reportorial staff to be editorial manager of the Hearst paper in Cambridge, but on Saturdays he still dropped into his old office in Winthrop Square, Boston, to chew the fat with his pals, who kidded him good-naturedly about his new job.

McIntyre dished it right back and rubbed it in. "Confidentially, fellers, this being boss is O.K.! I never realized what it would be like to have a banker's hours . . . and salary!"

That sally was greeted with a chorus of expertly executed Bronx cheers, but McIntyre ignored the insult and continued in mock seriousness: "Stormy nights, when I'm snuggled down in my little beddie all nice and warm, I think of you poor palookas, impatiently waiting for a bull to break loose in the Brighton abattoir, or a three-bagger over in Chelsea. I say: 'Mark, Old Man, you'll never have to go sloshing round in the sleet and snow any more. Now that you're an editor!'"

He was interrupted by Burt Ford with a piece of pulp in his hand, on which he had hastily scrawled: "4:05 PM. Provincetown??? Short while ago. Coast Guard???"

The players looked up from their cards as Ford said: "Just got a phone call from Provincetown. Something's happened on the Cape, but nobody knows what. Coast Guard's tearing around like mad, but they're not talking.

"I'm sending Turner to make pictures, and I guess you better go along, Brockbank, in case it's a shipwreck."

McIntyre blinked, gulped and stammered: "Don't you want an old Navy man to go too? You know I did a three-year hitch in Uncle Sam's Navy!"

"Hear! Hear!" said one of the gang. "Make way for Admiral McIntyre!" But Burt Ford shook his head, went back to his desk, pulled out the assignment sheet and scribbled: "12/17/27 4:30 PM—Brockbank and Turner to Provincetown."

McIntyre leaned over Ford's desk and whispered eagerly: "Put me down too, Boss! My Buick's outside with a tank full of gas, and I've nothing to do till Monday. No kiddin', Burt, I do know the Navy lingo . . ."

Ford thought a moment and said:

"O.K. Editor McIntyre! You asked for it, and here 'tis. You'll take the boys in your car, and I don't want to see 'transportation' on three swindle sheets. If you find anything, phone me around seven, so we can flash the morning AD, then get a good follow-up for the bulldog, and if it's big, we'll want a different story and layout for Monday's *Record*. That rolls Sunday afternoon. There's your triple assignment, Mark. Watch the ice on the road."

But McIntyre was already out in the hall buzzing the elevator and yelling for Frank Turner and Burt Brockbank to get a move on. He had a feeling this was going to be something big—and his!

It was too cold in McIntyre's open roadster to do much talking, so the three newsmen sat huddled and silent, tapping their feet on the frosty floorboards and holding gloved hands over tingling ears. In spite of Saturday night crowds in Quincy, Kingston and Plymouth, they made good time, speeding up to seventy when the road was bare, slowing down for the stretches of ice. Only at Orleans and Wellfleet did snowdrifts delay them, and they pulled into Provincetown at 7:30.

"Ford'll be expecting a phone call," Mark said, pulling up to the Post Office where the Coast Guard was located.

"Burt may have asked for a call, but he knew better. Three hours to P-town is damn good going, if you ask me. Coffee?"

In the lunchroom there was buzzing comment on the commotion out in the harbor, but no definite information. As usual, rumors were a dime a dozen. The boys from the *Boston American* had hoped they were first on the scene, but they soon spied Charlie Drury and Jimmy Jones of the *Herald*, George Hill of the *New York Times*, Larry Goldberg of the *Post*, and some *Globe* men. They confirmed the earlier report that the "Navy wasn't talking" and said they'd promised to issue a statement before long.

Some of the press boys were trying to collect \$100 to hire a fishing boat and sail out to investigate, but McIntyre had his own idea. "No soap. I guess I'll stay here." Far out in the darkness toward Wood End, he had spotted a cluster of moving lights which, to his practiced eye, looked like one Navy ship towing another. As soon as the crowd moved off he drove to the municipal pier, and backed his Buick into an open shed that faced the harbor. He tossed a blanket over one headlight, and stood in front of the other.

For a chap only twenty-six, McIntyre had had a varied career. At sixteen he had run

away from home to join the Navy, and when the first units of the Atlantic Squadron sailed for Europe in 1917, Mark was a member of the overseas Armed Guard. He was soon promoted to signalman, and at the end of his first year he could send and receive so fast he was transferred to the submarine service, and saw plenty of action at Azores, Bizerte, Casablanca and on the English Channel. When he was later transferred to the destroyer squadron, he was one of the fastest semaphore men in the whole outfit.

Now, as he stood stamping his freezing feet on the snow-covered wharf in Provincetown, he figured the distant lights were on a ship which had anchored. He removed his hat, took a good grip on the brim, and held it in front of the headlight of his car. Then he yanked it rapidly back and forth, covering and uncovering the headlight, spelling out (with two dots, two dashes, two dots) the customary code interrogatory flash, followed by: "WHAT SHIP? WHAT SHIP?"

His heart gave a jump when immediately the yardarm blinkers on the distant craft opened up and winked back. "U.S.S. PAULDING. WHO INQUIRES?"

Now, this was a delicate spot for an ex-Navy man to be in. Should he try to kid the operator on the *Paulding* into thinking he was a Navy official or a ship in port, or should he tell the truth? To gain time while he made this decision, Mark repeated his question: "WHAT SHIP? WHAT SHIP?" And back from the answering blinkers came: "U.S.S. PAULDING. WHO WANTS TO KNOW?"

Mark decided to play fair. To indicate the message was private and not official, he prefixed his answer with the letters "P.V.T." and with his old felt hat flying to and fro,

he sent his message. "THE PRESS. WE WOULD LIKE DETAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED. MARK MCINTYRE."

No answering flash came back from the destroyer, so Mark switched off the headlights to save the battery, climbed into the car, and lit a cigarette. He knew it would take several minutes for the kid in the shack to take his request to the C.O. As he smoked and waited and watched and smoked, he had a horrible thought—suppose the Navy had already broken the story up-town? Should he return to Coast Guard headquarters, or stay on the wharf?

He played his hunch and waited. When half an hour had slipped by, he turned on the lights and sent his message again, changing it to sound more formal and official. "TO COMMANDING OFFICER U.S.S. PAULDING. PLEASE GIVE BRIEF DETAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED."

Immediately the yardarm blinkers split the darkness with a terse: "WHILE RETURNING FROM MANEUVERS OFF PROVINCETOWN 3:37 PM TODAY WE RAMMED AND SANK SUBMARINE S-4. BELIEVE CREW OF 40 ABOARD." Without taking his eyes from the rapidly flashing signals, Mark scribbled the message on the back of an envelope, and it wasn't until he reread that tragic dispatch that

the full import struck him.

Forty men—boys, many of them—helplessly trapped in a sunken sub on the floor of the ocean. Mark had been on too many subs not to realize what they were going through at that very moment. A cold, intense blackness. Silence broken by sobs and the sound of seeping water. The stifling stink of the batteries. The skipper's tired voice: "Take it easy, Men, and don't move around. They'll be after us soon." A groan, a curse, mumbled prayers.

Mark didn't feel any better when he realized that probably by now the reporters on Main Street had the news, and were blubbering into telephones while he sat freezing his fanny on that fish pier. In his mind's eye he could see the big presses, vomiting big black headlines—and the bylines were his rivals'. He said to himself: "Smart guy, eh? Cambridge editor!" and he jumped from the roadster and walked rapidly toward the center of Provincetown.

A blank stare and a straight face may fool the average person, but it seldom works with a dick or a trained reporter, and the boys pounced on Mark as soon as they saw him. "Hey! Where yer been? Whaja dig up? Come on. GIVE!"

Was it possible they didn't know? His spirits rose slightly as he shrugged them off. "Wait till I get some smokes."

In the drugstore, he made sure no one followed him as he slid into a phone booth, dropped his nickel and whispered: "Long distance. Liberty 4000, and make it snappy, Sister!" Before the clink of coins had ceased, he was asking breathlessly: "City Desk? This is McIntyre in Provincetown. Listen—have you had any report of what happened here this afternoon? YOU HAVEN'T? Well, here it is! And official! Ready? At 3:37 this afternoon the submarine S-4 was returning from maneuvers. She came to the surface off Wood End Light and whango! the destroyer *Paulding*, PAULDING, P as for *Peter* yep, *Peter*, and PAUL-DING. You know, DING-DING-DING, P-A-U-L-D-I-N-G that's it. Well, the *Paulding* slammed into the sub and sent her to the bottom. Got it?" Then his voice choked as he added: "There's forty men on board the S-4. Yeah, looks pretty bad, poor devils. No, I haven't talked to headquarters yet, but I will right now. Sure, I'll keep calling. Goobye!"

Ex-Navy man Mark McIntyre had completed his first assignment. He turned his mind to the second.

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The next few days were trying ones for the reporters and photographers.

The only information from the Navy Department concerned the plans for rescue, and even a personal trip in an open boat, three miles out from Provincetown, in a heavy sea, availed almost nothing.

What was the fate of those forty men, trapped like rats in their steel coffin 200 feet below the surface of that angry sea?

Were they still alive?

Would the Navy reach them in time?

These and a thousand other questions were constantly before the newspaper boys, who suffered terribly from exposure and seasickness, as they braved the elements in

open boats in order to make their last editions.

On Sunday afternoon, the sister ship of the S-4, the S-8, dropped her signal devices down alongside the S-4 and reported that some of the crew were still alive.

A buoy was attached to mark the final resting place of the submarine and then on Monday, as the storm increased to hurricane force, the ships rolled and pitched so violently that it was not safe for the divers to work. Mud hooks were dragging, and rather than lose additional lives, the Navy Department ordered all ships into port until the storm had passed.

With the first streak of dawn the next day, two Navy boats were seen patrolling the harbor. Back and forth they passed.

From the press boat, the reporters inquired if the S-4 had been lost, but Admiral Brumby had given orders that no more information was to be given out and the reporters did not dare to say that the sub had been lost, unless they were sure of it.

Every news hound on the job tried to think of some way of getting the Navy to talk, but to no avail. So they stood on the deck of the rescue ship *Falcon*, watching the divers as they prepared to go below.

There was Lieutenant Commander Ellsburg, who was awarded the distinguished service medal for raising the S-51, and Michaels and Eadie, two of the greatest divers that ever lived and with them, Jimmie Ingram, a Navy diver, and a personal friend of Mark McIntyre.

Jimmie was getting ready to go down and look for the S-4. Just before they put his helmet on, McIntyre caught his eye and slowly moved his hands in front of him.

If any of the press boys noticed Mark, they thought he was buttoning his coat or putting his mittens on, but to the trained eye of a Navy man, the maneuvers of Mark's mittens meant much.

Over and over again, as he apparently fumbled with his coat, he was slowly spelling in Morse code the question, "Is she lost?" One of the Commanders picked up a megaphone and yelled, "Down Stage." The heavy diving helmet was lifted from the deck, and for a moment McIntyre feared that Jimmie Ingram would not have a chance to answer him.

But Ingram decided to stretch his tired muscles before he descended into that cold, green water. He stretched his arms and kicked his legs and lifted his hands high above his head, three or four times, and each time that he did it, the movements of his arms spelled Y-E-S.

When the water had closed over his friend, the diver, and a stream of bubbles marked his passage down into the darkness where forty men were slowly dying, McIntyre shoved off from the *Falcon* and went ashore. He said he was going "to get some dry mittens and a cup of coffee."

He had a lump in his throat and an ache in his heart when for the second time in forty-eight hours, he called his office in Boston and gave them a scoop on the S-4—there would be no survivors. ■■