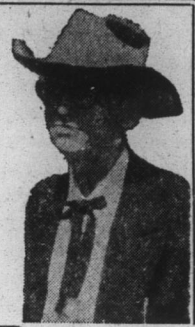


The Day Edenton Sank

by Wilborne Harrell



A CHOWAN HERALD FICTION STORY

This story is not entirely fantasy. It is a grim reminder of what can and may happen, if the big powers cannot work out some solution to the problems that beset the world today. It is imperative that the path to peace—lasting peace—be found. There is no alternative—either that or a holocaust such as this story describes will descend upon the world.

On Wednesday, October 25, 1961, the radio and television newscasts were alive with the sudden breaking off of diplomatic relations with Russia and China. Nobody seemed to know much about it. Edward R. Murrow merely stated the incident without comment—he had no information to comment on. The White House Public Relations Chief also was vague and wary. Eric Sevareid in his analysis of the news gave a scholarly and erudite and also verbose account of the diplomatic rupture that purportedly explained the situation—but actually explained nothing.

Something was afoot in the world—but nobody knew what. Also on October 25, unidentified submarines were sighted simultaneously off the East Coast and the West Coast. Unidentified, fast and high-flying aircraft were also reported over the United States. The radios crackled with the news and the commentators and newscasters had a field day. But they told

nothing and it was obvious they knew nothing.

On Thursday, October 26, at precisely 10:30 A. M., EST, out of a blue sky—literally blue, for most of the country was experiencing beautiful weather—the United States was attacked. A-bombs and H-bombs simultaneously showered down on the large cities, military installations and seaports. Then darkness fell and the beginning of a 1000-year-long night . . .

On the morning of the 26th of October, 1961, the little town of Edenton, North Carolina, was just coming awake. The local radio station gave a 7:00 o'clock newscast and repeated only what everybody knew—nothing. There was a tenseness in the air that even the prospects of a beautiful day could not dispel.

Time crawled on and by 9:00 o'clock most of the business establishments were open and ready for business. It was going to be just another hum-drum, small-town day . . . but for the vague uneasiness of SOMETHING impending. But nobody seemed to know what . . .

The Twentieth-century Barber Shop had a few early morning customers, and the chief topic of discussion was the lack of news on radio and in the morning pa-

pers. Why were diplomatic relations broken off? The official sources that should have known were as much in the dark as the man in the street.

One of the customers, getting a haircut, spoke up, "I don't think it means war. Russia wouldn't dare. Our massive retaliation would clobber them, communists good, and they know it."

"Well," said another, looking at his watch, "it's almost 10:30—I'd better be going. I got—"

The composing room of The Chowan Herald was putting together the weekly paper. Politics was foreign to these fellows—football and last night's game was being seriously and critically discussed.

"Hey, you fellows," one of them said, "time's awasting—it's 10:30. Get a wiggle on. We—"

The sun had climbed into the sky and cast long shadows on the Court House Green. At the foot of the Green the Albemarle Sound lapped quietly at the breakwater. Overlooking the Green, in quiet dignity, the Court House looked on. Atop the Court House, the old clock belfry pointed its vane spire in an almost accusing gesture into the sky. Its hands rested at exactly 10:30—

The quiet sanctity of the churchyard of St. Paul's church was broken by the twittering and scolding of early morning birds. A peace that reminded one of Grey's Elegy in a Churchyard pervaded the tombstones and the ivy-covered walls. Across the street, a car stopped in front of the Post Office and a woman alighted. She ran up the Post Office steps and into the building. Inside, she dropped a letter into the mail slot, and as she turned to leave she glanced at the clock in the lobby. Its hands were almost touching 10:30. She started out and back to her car—

The Cupola House which housed the town library had its morning quota of book lovers. To one of the patrons, the librarian said, "If you are interested in the atom bomb and what might happen here if we ever had an atomic war—not that anything like that might happen—you should read 'Alas, Babylon', by Pat Frank. It is a tremendously readable book. I recommend it."

The patron picked up the book and perfunctorily scanned its pages. Then she looked at her watch. "Goodness, how time

flies. I promised Mary I'd meet her in the drugstore at 10:30. It's almost that now. I'll pick up this book next time I'm in—"

Broad Street was busy. A bus was just rolling in, a little ahead of its scheduled time, which was 10:30. Cafes and drugstores were doing a booming coffee break and Coke business. People threaded in and out of stores and cars moved up and down the street, each about his own business. But each human carried on his person or on his wrist his own individual destiny—a watch. Each was hurrying toward an awesome rendezvous, and time was running out. And at precisely 10:30 time stood still, and all the watches were stilled . . .

At 10:30 A. M., on October 26, 1961, an A-bomb intended for the Norfolk Naval Base area wavered from target a few degrees and landed in the Albemarle Sound bay, a half mile offshore from the foot of Broad Street. A gigantic column of water and smoke and fire rose into the air topped by the familiar mushroom shaped cloud. Instantly in the flash area of Edenton everything was atomized. The water tank on the shore of the bay disappeared, and the buildings were razed as though a huge hand had swept them from the face of the earth. Then the concussion that followed the flash extended the area of devastation still farther. The waters of the Albemarle Sound overran its banks and Edenton became a lake. The town had disappeared. Hundreds of years of history, a noble background and what the lifetime of thousands of people and their ancestors had built up now lay destroyed.

The countryside was blackened and marred by blast and fire, houses flattened and crops leveled. And even the ground became a menace when fallout made it radioactive. All bridges spanning the Albemarle Sound and Chowan River, railroad and vehicular, vanished. Hayes and all Soundside plantations ceased to exist. The waters of the Albemarle was pushed up into the Chowan River, overflowing its banks. What the bomb hadn't destroyed the waters inundated.

Bandon plantation, although out of the flash area was completely demolished, its fields and grounds blackened and much of its acreage claimed by the waters of the Chowan River. Dead fish floated upon the surface by the thousands, and the stench floated upward to mingle with the smoke and fire of the burning forests.

A town, a people and a way of life lay dead, irrevocably destroyed. Armageddon had struck; all was primeval.

were witches with broom sticks. During the morning session forums were held separately for the extension agents and the 4-H'ers. In this program we learned how the Home Service Department of the power companies can aid us in the 4-H electric project, and what they have to offer in the teaching field of electricity.

The highlight of the luncheon on Friday was the address, "A Catalyst for Youth," given by Dr. Alfred P. Haake, consultant of General Motors. Dr. Haake told his listeners that, "Faith and work still make miracles; with them boys and girls can save our country."

"In my judgment," he said, "4-H Club work is tremendously important in doing the one job that is necessary to preserve this country and the freedom for which it stands."

Dr. Haake praised 4-H leaders for helping build "a new generation of new men and women who are dedicated to the same principles upon which our founding fathers wrote our Constitution and built this nation."

Dr. Haake won a standing ovation by the group of agents and 4-H members.

After the luncheon, the group toured the Biltmore Estate.

The program on Friday night formally ended the Congress.

Following the banquet the territorial award winners were named. The winners from this area, served by VEP Company, were: First place girl, Anna Joyce Dunn, Halifax County; second place girl, Sally Ann Benton, Perquimans County; first place boy, Robert A. Glasgow, Halifax County, and second place boy, Allen Ray Sutton, Beaufort County.

After the awards were made the group was entertained by "Pan Handle Pete," a one-man band, and by a square dance group from Buncombe County. Some of the agents and 4-H'ers then enjoyed dancing to the music of Reddy's Frolic group in the West ball room, while some people participated in games in the East ball room. The curtain then closed on the 1959 State 4-H Electric Congress.

Saturday morning we left Asheville on the chartered bus and arrived in Edenton around 7 P. M. Emmett reports having

come tax deductions for 1960. This check list for taxpayers may be obtained from the society, by sending 25c to cover cost of handling and mailing to Post Office Box 5995, Dallas 22, Texas.

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NOTICE!
To Chowan County TAXPAYERS

The Tax Books for the year 1959 are now in my hands for the collection of taxes. We urge you to pay your taxes now and avoid the penalty which will begin on February 1.

A PENALTY OF 1% WILL BE ADDED ON 1959 TAXES NOT PAID BEFORE FEBRUARY 2. ANOTHER 1% WILL BE ADDED MARCH 2 AND AN ADDITIONAL 1/2 OF 1% WILL BE ADDED FOR EACH ADDITIONAL MONTH TAXES ARE UNPAID.

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