

The LURE of PERIL

A West Point Hero with the Boers.

By CAPTAIN FRITZ DUQUESNE.

IMAGINE a man a little over six feet in height, straight as an arrow, broad shouldered, athletic, with the steady step of a trained soldier, a pair of keen blue eyes, a splendid head covered by a black felt hat, from under which showed black curls streaked with grey, a blue military cut suit, and a right arm that hung helplessly at his side. Every inch a soldier. He looked it, and he was, for he was Colonel John Franklin Blake, a graduate of West Point, an officer of the Sixth United States Cavalry, one time commander of the Navajo Indian Scouts, and a man with a record for fighting amongst the fighters in the Southwest and along the Rio Grande.

After making an heroic record in the United States Army he took up railroading for a few years in Michigan. Although successful he longed for the life in which he had spent his youth, and which was fast dying in the Southwest, the life of fascinating danger in a virgin country.

Just after the Matabele war, when all South Africa was in a turmoil, the lure of peril took Colonel Blake into Rhodesia, which he was led to believe was fabulously rich in gold, and which was being used to inflate Kafir stocks and South African values generally by stock jobbers in the world's exchanges. The Rhodesia boom had just commenced, and the international schemers who made South Africa their headquarters were just starting to count the money they were getting under false pretenses, when the letters of Colonel Franklin Blake to the American and British Press exposed the rottenness of the whole plot to rob the confiding public of two nations. He showed the barrenness of the Charter Company's territory, as far as gold and diamonds were concerned, and put a stop to their illegal profits.

It was while Blake was doing this that agents of the Rhodesian interests offered him a bribe after bribe, each time increasing the amount, until it reached the tidy sum of twenty thousand pounds, to cease exposing them and their scheme. Blake would not listen to them and when they found that he was incorruptible, attempts were made on his life upon two occasions.

Friendless Among Crooks.

About this time, and at all times, in fact, most of the Americans who were found in South Africa were there because it was a long way from the hand of the American law. Crooks, swarms, fakers, smugglers, defrauders, swarmed the land, and Blake, on account of his splendid honesty, had no friends amongst them. No one had ever heard of this fine specimen of American soldier telling a lie. He was recognized by all as a true and honest gentleman. Naturally the men picked out to "settle" Blake and his articles in the press were some of his own countrymen, who were willing to perform any service as long as there was a prospect of making money. Accordingly a scheme to murder Blake was hatched and nearly carried out. Had it not been for his extraordinary courage and active mentality Colonel John Franklin Blake would never have commanded the Irish Brigade in the Boer war, and the best part of this story could not be written.

One day Blake received in his mail a letter from what appeared to be a reliable firm, saying that his articles in the press had excited their attention, and that two of their mining engineers were about to examine a property in Rhodesia, and that they would give him any reasonable fee for making a report, which of course, had to be strictly correct according to his views. The arrangements were made by letter, and Blake met the two engineers in Johannesburg. They started for the property that was said to be situated at the north of Rhode-

Drift, which was on the northern boundary of the Transvaal, and crossed the Limpopo River into British territory.

Blake informed the engineers that he had been over the territory in question, and in his opinion it contained neither gold nor diamonds. A thing which struck him forcibly was the lack of real mining knowledge on the part of the engineers, who pretended to be experts, and who alleged that they had once been employed on the Comstock Lode in the States. This Lode was very familiar to Blake, and from their conversation, was evidently not familiar to the engineers. This excited the Colonel's suspicions, but why these men were trying to fool him was beyond his conception, until they crossed the drift into Rhodesia.

It is necessary here to tell of one of the most nefarious practices that ever disgraced humanity, so that the reader will understand something about the L. D. B. (illicit diamond buying) business of South Africa, and what it meant to the liberties of the ordinary individual.

When Cecil Rhodes was made the dictator of Cape Colony and the shaper of South Africa's destinies, by the clique of international freebooters, who were capable of "Jamison

literary hirelings, pressaged Great Britain into the last Boer war, he saw that laws were passed that made it a crime for a man to have an uncut diamond in his possession outside the Kimberly mines, and all diamonds inside the Kimberly mines were the property of his company. Naturally this put a stop to efforts on the part of individuals to discover diamonds anywhere in the British Territory, which was in control of the Charter Company, for that company dictated all the mining laws of Cape Colony. If a man was found with an uncut diamond in his possession and he could prove by a number of disinterested persons, or persons whom he did not know, that he was seen to find the stone, and he had not previously placed it where he found it, then the stone was declared his property.

As a prospector cannot afford to take a half-dozen disinterested or unknown persons with him to prove the legitimacy of his find, he was forced to smuggle his find out of the country, even if he discovered it on his own farm. Such laws naturally were broken and all over the country L. D. B. men, who would take the chance, bought the uncut stones and smuggled them out. Barney Barnato, whose real name was Harris, and who was known by half a dozen other names in different places, laid the foundation to his fortune in the L. D. B. business.

To prevent the L. D. B. there was a well organized secret service maintained, like the Pinkertons, apart from the state police, by the diamond interests. This led the way to horrible and unjust abuses. The diamond detectives, who were recruited from every nationality, kept their jobs by making arrests, and they saw that any man whose activities opposed the diamond interests, politically or otherwise, was found with an uncut diamond in his possession.

How the Frameup was Arranged.

The objectionable individual was arrested by a couple of detectives who searched his clothing, and of course, found prima facie evidence in the shape of the fatal uncut stone, even if the arrested party had never seen one in his life. He was tried by a jury of his peers, selected by the interests, the detectives supplied the evidence, and the unfortunate victim was invariably sentenced to work on the Breakwater at Cape Town for fifteen years, an effective elimination, and an ideal way to prevent competition. I never heard of a man proving that he had found a diamond, to the satisfaction of the court, although the precious carbons exist in many parts of South Africa.

Each man knew it was a struggle for life.

It was the gentlemen who made this system who engineered the Boer war in the "interests of justice," and dividends, and it was the same system that tried to eliminate Colonel Blake and his attack on their stock jobbing schemes.

In Rhodesia the engineers examined maps and dawdled away their time. Blake knew that he was with them for no real purpose, and he decided to see it through for the fun of it, and he kept a keen eye on the actions of his companions. One morning when he was shaving before a mirror that was hanging on a tree trunk, he saw reflected in the glass the suspicious actions of Engineer Max Echeinsteine who was fumbling with Blake's hunting coat, which was hanging on a bush at the rear of his owner. Distinctly he saw the engineer thrust something through the lining of the garment. He said nothing, and when he finished shaving he put on the coat and went behind some bushes where he examined it.

At first he found nothing, but on a further search he found a used cartridge with a cork at one end, in the lining of his coat. When he opened it he was dumfounded to find half a dozen uncut diamonds. In a second he saw through the whole thing, and he knew he was in for trouble, and also that he was far from the Transvaal border. He threw the diamonds away and returned to the camp, keeping still but ready to fight on the slightest indication of danger.

Wherever he went he kept his eye on the engineers. He was sitting at the campfire boiling coffee with the two men, who were examining maps before him, when a moving shadow of a head and upraised arm from the rear fell across the ashes. He whipped out his Luger and springing forward turned to defend himself. "Too late, for the native policeman who was behind him felled him with a rifle butt. When he regained consciousness he was a prisoner, handcuffed to a tree. Before him there was a prospect of fifteen years on the Breakwater, for the knew that his captors would go to

any extreme to secure his conviction. It would do him no good to protest to the American Consuls in South Africa, for they were the supine tools of the financial clique, and a complaint from a citizen of the United States was never heeded when it happened to be against the financial rulers of the country.

There was one way out of it and that was escape. The engineers had left whilst he was unconscious, and he was guarded by the Kafir policemen and a trooper who had arrived in the meantime to take him to the nearest prison. The blood that had flowed from the wound in his head made by the Kafir rifle, had dried on his face, and flies were swarming around him to feed on it. He called the attention of the troopers to this and asked to be allowed to wash. The trooper loosened one of his handcuffs, called the Kafir policeman and told him to take the prisoner to the river and allow him to wash his wound.

Blake walked to the stream with the black man behind him. One handcuff was still on his wrist, the other dangling from the end of a connecting chain. This was a splendid weapon if he could only get near enough to use it on the guard. At the river bank the guard stood within two yards of him as he washed his face wound. A crocodile watched him through the clear water. In apparent fear he pointed to it and cried for the guard to shoot. The guard only drew closer to him. He was within arm's length. Blake watched his chance, and swinging his handcuffs he struck the Kafir a terrible blow across the head. The rifle fell from the black's hand as he was momentarily stunned. In an instant he recovered and seized Blake around the body. Blake fearing he would cry out and alarm the trooper, caught his antagonist by the throat. Each man knew it was a struggle for life and each determined

on the death of the other. Below them in the river the crocodiles waited to pounce on any living thing that came within their reach. Both the antagonists feared the river edge, and as they fought back and forth each tried to throw his enemy into the fatal water. At last Blake got the hand free that had the swinging metal cuff and he brought it down on the head of the Kafir time after time in rapid succession.

They were on the brink of the river bank; blood flowed from the wound in the black's head but he showed no signs of weakening.

Blake had almost expended his strength when the edge of the bank they were struggling on crumbled, and down they both went into the river. For a moment they struggled. A tail splashed through the water, a huge pair of jaws opened beside them, and the struggling Kafir was tugged out of his antagonist's grip by a man-eating crocodile. Blake made for the bank as fast as his exhausted condition would allow. The blood was dead but the trooper remained. Now to get his horse and escape over the border.

By this time the trooper became impatient at the delay of his prisoner and the guard and he whistled. Blake could not answer him for his mouth had been terribly battered in the fight and some of his teeth were missing. He heard the trooper coming toward the river through the bush. He seized the rifle the Kafir had dropped and waited. A little later the leaves opened and the trooper stood in full view, a splendid mark at the top of the bank. "Hands up!" cried Blake. The trooper knew he was at the end of a gun that stood for no arguments and he obeyed the command. Blake marched him back to the camp, made him tie his own legs, and throw the handcuff keys behind him. Blake was now able to remove the chain letters from his

hand. This done he placed them on the trooper, whose arms he took and threw into the river. Then mounting his horse rode towards the Transvaal border. He had recovered his Remington repeater and Luger pistol, and so was well prepared for trouble, although he did not expect it.

He was within sight of the Kopjes, South of the Limpopo, and within an hour's ride of the frontier when the thunder of hoofs behind him told that he was being pursued. He listened, and there were more hoofs than he could count, beating the ground, probably ten. He put his heels into his horse's sides and set off at a gallop across the veld which was becoming more open as he rode south. It was no use making a stand, numbers were against him, so there was nothing to do but ride and get inside the Boer territory before he could be overtaken.

Once in the open country he was seen by his pursuers, who redoubled their efforts to overtake him, and were gaining on him for his horse was commencing to show fatigue.

He could see that the horsemen were B. S. A. police, two of whom rode exceptionally good mounts which were leaving the others behind and reducing the distance that separated them with disquieting rapidity. Blake's poor mount frothed all over as he urged its wild gallop. On, on, he went but slowly and surely the two horsemen behind closed in on him. He was one thousand yards ahead of them when a bullet whistled past him and fountained the dust ahead, followed by the crack of a rifle. He turned in his saddle in time to hear a second bullet pass him. His horse staggered and he turned in time to see the blood pouring out of a wound in its neck. This was seriously close, and halting he sprang from the saddle and took a kneeling shot at the troopers. A horse staggered and fell, throwing its rider. A second shot emptied a saddle. This halted them and Blake emptied the magazine of his Remington into the ranks of the men behind as they returned his fire. The bullets shot around him and not caring to risk being outflanked he mounted, and once more urged his horse toward the border and safety. It was a wild ride on a bleeding horse, as shot after shot followed him from the trooper's rifles. The level ground showed before him. What luck. Half a dozen heavily armed Boer police were camped on the opposite bank. He dashed through the water at the drift and was in the Transvaal. The troopers galloped into the stream and were nearly across when the stern voice of a Boer commandant cried "Halt!" and his command was supported by six threatening rifles, they dropped the pursuit.

Organizes the Irish Brigade.

When war broke out between the Boers and the British, Blake volunteered to fight for the African cause. He hoisted a green flag and called for all the able-bodied Irish in South Africa to stand in line with the persecuted little republics which he likened to Ireland in their struggles against Great Britain. Before a week passed he had raised the famous Irish Brigade, which was destined to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Boers and inflict many a bloody defeat on the British. These would fill a volume, and as I am not writing the history of the Irish Brigade, it is impossible to tell of all Blake's extraordinary deeds.

Before Ladysmith, the British had been defeated in a number of fights, and were making a last stand before they were to fall back, and allow themselves to be besieged by a sixth of their number. The fighting was furious. On every side before us the British dead were lying in heaps mixed with the carcasses of their horses. Shells screamed through the air and sent their whistling fragments burning into the quivering flesh of the opposing forces. Rifle bullets thudded and splashed against the rocks, sending up clouds of smoke like dust, that blinded and choked the fighters. The bugles of the British blared orders, and the mouths of the Boer officers roared commands above the thunder of the cannons. Men were backed to fragments by the invisible messengers of death and the smell of blood mixed with the chemical effluvia from the Lyddite shells.

There was a lull around the Boer "Long Tom." The ammunition was expended and the way to the fresh supply was raked by the British shells and raged by their infantry. They thought that the big gun was silenced and prepared to charge.

"Take the gun out of range!" cried General Lukas Meyer. "Leave her!" cried Colonel Blake. "We'll get the shells," and acting on his word he rode through a storm of bullets and bursting shells followed by some of his brigade and the Boer commando he was attached to. As the brave fellows rushed across the danger zone, one-half their number fell but the gun was served and the charging British were driven back in a panic behind the defenses of Ladysmith. Blake would have been rewarded with a medal for bravery had the

Boers such a thing, but as they were expected to be brave under all circumstances, and generally were the crystallized but conspicuous boast of a sartorial medal, he appealed to them and was left out of their civilization. Blake got his reward in the confidence of the Boer leaders for there was never a desperate venture decided on that his advice was not asked. The most picturesque act he took with an English officer, was a duel with an English officer. The siege of Ladysmith dragged on days went into weeks and weeks went into months. The monotonous fighting went on with the exception of Sundays, when the Boers prayed and the British strengthened their defenses or made a sortie which was un molested until their shots fell amongst the praying burghers.

The British got so used to this Sunday inactivity of their enemies that they pulled themselves together on Saturday night, had a good feed of horse flesh and prepared for their Sunday recreation, shooting at the praying Afrianders.

Early one Sunday morning Blake and some of his Irish Brigade, who a dozen or so of the sacrificial burghers decided to give the "Long Tom" a lesson, so they sneaked out of the laager, and made their way toward the besieged town.

As they expected, a host of colonial sharpshooters marched steadily out of the protection of their trenches into the road that led to the nearest Boer position. From the different Boer camps around Ladysmith came the soft chant of the morning prayers. Silently the British crept on under the vigilant eyes of the Boer men, who were positioned on each side of the road. As soon as they passed, some of the waiting burghers stepped into the road, cutting off all possible retreat. A tinge of crimson in the eastern sky, a hymn rose high in praise of God. The British sneaked on. Blake raised his hand, and a needle of flame and a report from his Luger pistol signalled the doom of the British sortie.

The British Surrender.

A shower of Mauser bullets sped across the veld, spreading sudden death amongst the British. The shooting was splendid and the enemies were almost wiped out before they recovered from the panic of the first fatal shots. Resistance was hopeless. A few shots came in reply from the British, and then they lay waiting for the revealing light of day to tell the story. The soft hymns still came from the Boers' laager as the morning shot its long beams through the kopjes. The hiding British did not move. A sword on which was not a white handkerchief was poked above a rock. Blake walked down to it and he signalled to some of his men to come on. The British surrendered and gave up their arms. The colonel of the surrendered men gave over his sword.

Blake refused to take it, saying: "Give it to one of the burghers as a souvenir, we've no use for it." This enraged the British officer. "No, you Yankee dog, you can't shoot at men from a mile, but could steel itself in your hands, it's too heroic." Blake looked at him. "That you are a prisoner protects you," he said, "and you know it."

"I don't! I'd give my life to run you through. Take a sword, if you have it in you, and we'll settle it now." Blake walked away, seeing his captive was in a very volcanic state of mind and inclined to be insulting. "You turn your back, you son of a—"

"Stop!" said Blake, quickly but calmly. "I wish I could fight you with this!" said the Englishman, holding up his sword. "You dare not!"

"Give him his wish, Colonel!" cried one of the Irish Brigade. "Yes, give him his wish," cried the rest. "Give him his wish!" "I haven't a sword, boys, or I would!" answered Blake. (The Boers did not carry swords or bayonets.) A Boer who had been taking the identification cards from the dead gave the information that a lieutenant who was carrying a sword had been killed. He ran off, and in a moment returned with a brass-handled sabre and handed it to Blake, who smiled. "Right! Show your pluck!" cried the British Colonel.

"Yes," said Blake, smiling. "I'll fight and show my pluck, on these conditions, that if I lose, the prisoners shall be allowed to return to Ladysmith free men, so that you, Mr. Englishman, will be fighting for more than your personal vanity. Their prisoners were drawn up on one side of the road and their captives on the other.

Prayers still came from the Boer laager. "Ready!" cried Blake. Facing each other on the dusty road they measured swords. For twenty minutes the men fenced and tested each other's ability and then opened the fight in earnest, each calmly determined on the other's destruction. The swords flashed and in the morning sun as they chopped and guarded and hacked.

Backward and toward they worked. A cry went up from the Irish when a quick blow from the Englishman's sword brought blood from Blake's arm. A smile swept over the Englishman's face. "I win!" he cried. "Like hell!" said Blake, and came lightning stroke his weapon came down on his enemy's forehead. "They're your prisoners, boys," said Blake, and the hymns rose higher in the Boer laager. Copyright, 1910, by Metropolitan Newspaper Syndicate.



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