

Coronet * June, 1952 * p. 43

Behind That Curtain

A PATROL DOG HOWLS in the night. The sweeping beam of a searchlight picks out the long, lonely shadow of a sentry, glints on barbed wire. This is the Iron Curtain, the forbidding line that cuts through Europe. Eastward lie the Soviet slave states, a vast, dark region whose silence is broken only by propaganda reports from its Red

masters. But through the chinks in the seemingly impervious wall comes another story, telling of resistance and sabotage, of a suppressed people who have learned to fight fire with fire. These stories do not herald the imminent collapse of the Red tyranny, but they prove that the will for freedom surges strong behind that Curtain.



ILLUSTRATED BY BILL FLEMING

OldMagazineArticles.com

SOMETHING MOVES in the darkness, the granary guard whirls. In that instant a shrouded figure leaps from the brush, swings his club once, twice, and the guard falls to the ground. In another moment the black night is ablaze with flames. One by one, shadowy men run up to the wide doors of the warehouse, throw burning torches into the mountains of grain, and flee. The unconscious guard is alone again; the flaming warehouse settles slowly to the ground. This was the answer of Bulgarian farmers to lines of grain-filled trains that moved steadily eastward. This was their reply to the Kremlin's dictum: "Others will starve, but Russia will never go hungry!" Nor was it an isolated blow: in Czechoslovakia great fields of ripening wheat are mysteriously swept by flame; in Rumania's Teleajen oil fields, men sweep out from behind huge storage tanks, open valves, and vanish into the night as fuel destined for Russia spills into useless pools. Everywhere, Red guards are alerted. Death is decreed for saboteurs and obstructionists. But there comes a time when men must risk death for freedom. For many behind the Curtain, that time has come.

SOVIET NEWSPAPERS glowingly describe the workers' paradise of Eastern Europe: Red radio stations tell of the solidarity of the proletariat. Yet even as they do, factory managers are using every vicious device to meet production quotas.

Democratic labor unions have been crushed. Workers are driven mercilessly. Informers report grumblings about pitiful rations, long hours, miserable pay. Then, suddenly, spying assignments are shunned by even the most ardent party agents. It may have begun in a Hungarian factory where patriots uncovered the name of a Red informer. Late one night they trapped the traitor who had sent dozens of his countrymen to oblivion. A dagger flashed, then silence. Next morning, every communist in the plant was shocked when he reported for work. There, on a stake at the front gate, was the severed head of the traitor.

IN AN EASTERN European mining town, the telegraph suddenly splutters and goes dead. A Red army captain leaps to his feet: "The line has been cut again! Every man into the hills. Find the break!" Obediently, the Red patrol shuffles into the hills, leaving the village unguarded. Swiftly and silently, three men slip past a lone sentry and file into the deserted mine. Expertly they set to work with axes and files, smashing vital machinery. In ten minutes the shaft is a shambles. Then they are gone, content in the knowledge that many days will pass before the Russians can extract any more ore. Who are they? Who are the men that cut the telegraph? They belong to a courageous, loosely organized band of farmers and workers dedicated to an unequal life-and-death struggle.

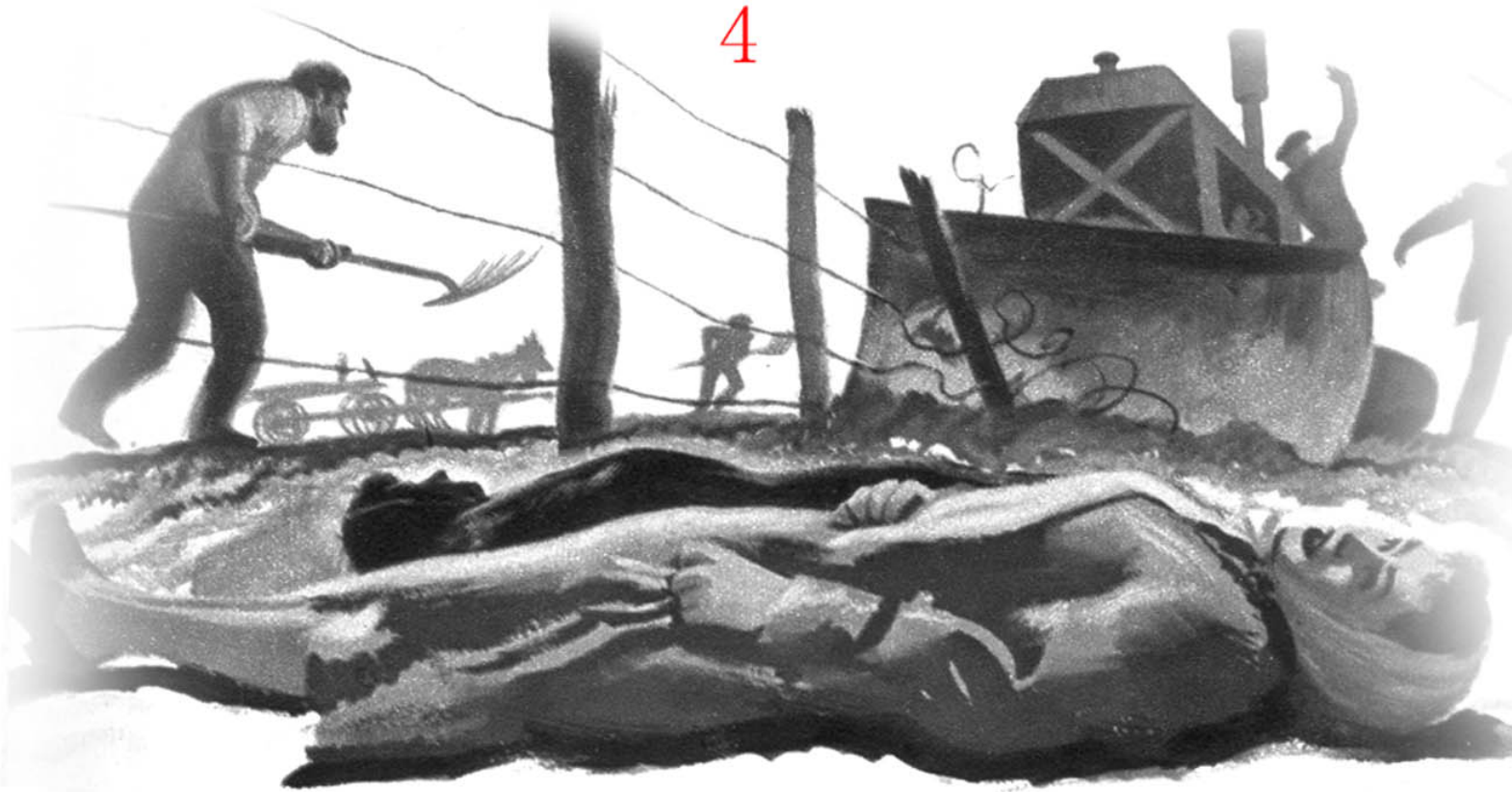
gle with the Soviet. They work in tight little groups of two and three. Even if they are captured and MVD torturers do their worst, little is revealed. In Poland, Bulgaria—even in Russia itself—these men and women of the Resistance operate secret radio stations. They set up transmitters in cellars, barns, attics. They broadcast the grim truths about police brutality and Russian exploitation. Then they move on. And in millions of darkened homes behind the Iron Curtain, the little people sit and listen. Discovery means imprisonment, but still they listen—and keep alive a spark of hope in the nations now crushed under the Soviet heel.

FROM THE DAY the Russians lowered a shroud of silence and fear across Europe, there has been a secret but steady exodus from the East. No Iron Curtain could halt the flow of men who must be free. Yet even more galling to the communists is the tiny trickle of humanity that runs against the familiar current. On moonless nights, men and women steal across heavily guarded frontiers, bearing priceless spare parts for radio transmitters. Others land on deserted Baltic shores and disappear into the forests nearby. Days later and miles away they emerge, with money for Resistance groups and the one message of hope that money cannot buy: the free world has not forgotten. Those assigned to this perilous shuttle willingly surrender comfort and safety to battle Red slavery. They are the men most feared by the communists.

Hour-long harangues from communist propaganda stations decry American “war-mongering” and

“imperialism.” But freedom-loving people know the truth: their only chance to throw off the Russian yoke hinges on the strength of the democracies. Thousands have enlisted for the perilous task of keeping the West informed about troop movements, weapons, production, bases. For days, men lie silent and unseen on the crest of a hill, in a wood. Then a cloud of dust heralds the approach of a Soviet column. Quickly they note its size and equipment, and flash the news to anti-communist organizations. All the sentries, searchlights, and barbed wire that make up the Iron Curtain cannot halt this flow of vital information from the East.


A RUSSIAN LORRY loaded with newspapers brakes to a stop on a deserted road, a felled tree in its path. Two men leap from a ditch and overpower the driver. Next day, Red Army men open newspapers that look just like the *Sovietskaya Armiya*—and gasp. Inside, replacing official lies and bombast, news stories tell of Kremlin treachery. The underground has struck again. Often they operate deep inside Russia itself. They play on fear and jealousy in high places. Cunningly they alternate psychological warfare with violence. One night, the raucous laughter in a Potsdam officers’ club was interrupted by a shattering explosion: 15 Red leaders killed. When two men were arrested and charged with the crime, the underground boldly demanded their release. The Russians refused. Days later, two vital bridges were blown up—another score for the hidden forces of freedom.



A CROSS SOVIETIZED Europe, men have risked death to emblazon the legend, "H.T.C.," for all to see. Now, every man, woman, and child in the East knows the significance of these Russian letters. Scrawled on a Red army barracks, painted in glaring colors in the town square, they shout defiance at those who have trampled on justice. "Death to the tyrants!" they say to the communists, but to those who long for freedom, they have another message: "You are not alone. There are others in the struggle to end this curse. Take heart." And therein lies the great strength of the underground. That they can strike and strike again against the brutal tactics of the secret police is fervent proof that the communists can never destroy man's basic belief in human dignity. Sabotage in Poland and assassination in Hungary have only a whittling effect on the Soviet Union and its slave-state satellites. But each act of resistance is a surface ripple of a deep, swelling undercurrent. Together, they give men strength

and courage to fight back. Recently, the Reds sent tractors to plow up farm boundaries for collectivization of a Czech village. The underground urged resistance and formulated a strategy. When the tractors appeared, women threw themselves in the path of the lumbering giants. The moment the drivers halted, they were attacked and beaten by farmers armed with pitchforks and clubs. To date, that tiny Czech village remains uncollectivized.





OUTSIDE AN industrial town, a lookout peers skyward. Next moment he is shouting into a telephone: "Balloon above! Drifting eastward!" Soon the high-pitched whine of a fighter plane sounds overhead. Machine guns clatter—and the lookout gapes, dumbfounded. The balloon has burst, but instead of merely falling, it is spewing forth thousands of pamphlets. Once more the underground has outwitted the foe. Months will pass before all the pamphlets are collected and destroyed. By then, every

worker in the town will have seen the underground's message. Other balloons will drift on, deep into Russia itself. Then they will explode and shower Soviet villages and towns with words of truth. In the grim and implacable fight for right, no means of defying the despots is overlooked. And each act, each word of resistance, is an ominous message to the Kremlin: "We are preparing. We will be ready." Each thought is a promise that, some day, the Iron Curtain will collapse and Eastern Europe will again be free.