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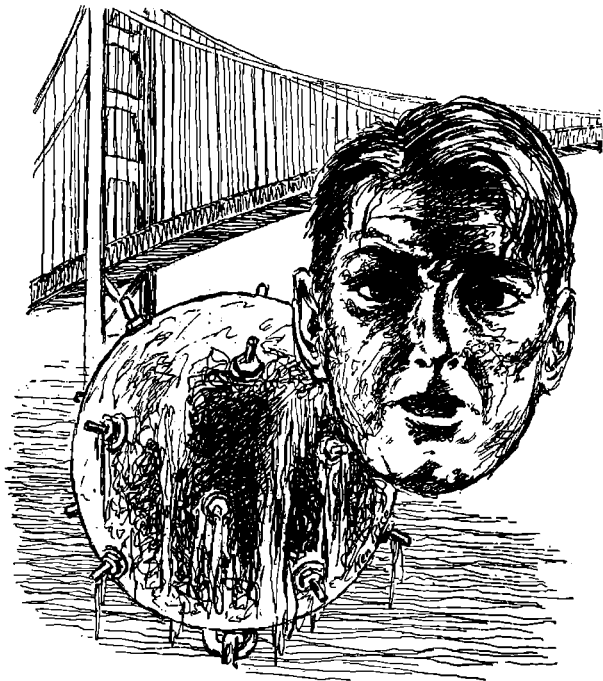
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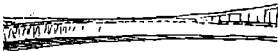
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KARL crouched in the black dripping shadows, a mere five hundred yards from the tremendous bridge, listening intently for any sounds of approaching guards who might stumble onto what was going on out there in the channel.

He shivered in the foggy pre-dawn wind which blew off the Golden

Gate. He heard the faint grating as the men on the sub lowered the mine. Clumsy fools! In the old days they'd have done the job swiftly and in silence, with fierce pride in each other's skill and reckless defiance in slipping within the very stronghold of the enemy and planting a lethal depth charge.



The masquerade had succeeded. Caught between the devil and deep blue sea, now he would have to choose between them

the

SABOTEUR

WILLIAM SAMBROT

The enemy has it. But will he deliver it? Where? How? Will it be atom stuff . . . something newer? These questions disturb millions of us, including the sea-pilots, sailors and fishermen who daily gather under Cliff House at San Francisco beach to sample rum and shoot scuttlebutt. Eavesdropping on their talk of how an attempt on Golden Gate Bridge might come, William Sambrot gives us this high-tension yarn—as timely as tomorrow morning's news broadcasts.

He opened his mouth to breathe, straining his ears for the faintest sound. His skin crawled as again he heard the clank-clank of chains from the sub, rocking out there in the swift tide race, while a group of hired mercenaries, of which he was one, made the adjustments to sensitize the great mine before dropping it into black water. From the bridge came the deep bellowing of the fog-horn, as though crying aloud a warning.

He stiffened and his hand closed

tightly about the short razor-edged commando knife. Two men were approaching from opposite directions. That was bad—this area was supposed to be meagerly guarded. He saw their hooded lights swing, poking with blank beams the jagged rocks and green-black buses which reached nearly to the great concrete pylon of the bridge. He waited tensely. Two of them, and acting cautiously. Could it be the Americans suspected something? How could they? The country which had hired

him and the others was clever. They talked peace but throughout the world, wherever a vital installation could be approached in the black of a foggy night, wherever a depth charge could be planted, or a silent, sleeping time bomb, there he and others like him had been directed to slip in, lay the charges and slip out. If Karl and the rest were caught, it would be found that they were of a dozen different nations—but none of the one which hired them.

Oh, they were clever, Karl's employers—and they paid well. But first, they tested their employes. Only those who hated with a blind animal ferocity everything that this colossus called the United States represented, only men who lived just to kill Americans, had been selected.

Karl grinned wolfishly to himself. It would be a distinct pleasure to reach out with his blade and with one swift practiced motion pierce a man's brain through the eye.

But now there were two men approaching from opposite directions—and the men on the water were making too much noise. Even these dull Yankees might detect the muffled clanging.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Karl's hair stirred at the base of his skull. The guard on his left had challenged the approaching guard on his right.

"Shut up, you fool. Kill that light!" The sharp authoritative voice from the other guard lashed out tensely.

"Password," the first said stubbornly, but his voice was lowered and his flashlight snuffed out.

"Margarine," the other whispered. "Who are you?"

"Corporal Allen, first reg, hundred-thirty-first recon. Sir, what are you doing here? They rushed down a bunch of us and said the walk guard—they didn't mention any others—"

The light winked briefly and Karl sucked in his breath. The light was dim, very dim; the person holding it blocked out most of the lens with his hand. But there was enough to show the silver bars. A captain!

"Keep your voice down," the captain said harshly. "I'm Andersen, Special Duty officer—there's a report of something having gone through the screen a couple of hours ago and we think—listen, did you hear that?"

The fools! The utterly incompetent fools! From beyond the jagged rocks, out in the black depths of the night, the clank of chains sounded faintly above the dull booming of the restless surf.

"Didn't hear anything, sir," the corporal said doubtfully.

Karl relaxed slightly. This captain had good ears.

"Get back on your patrol," the officer ordered. "And when you reach the end of your route pass the word along that Captain Andersen reports he thinks there's an anchored vessel off the main pylon of the bridge."

"Pretty foggy, sir," the guard said doubtfully. "Be hard to see anything out there."

The captain grunted.

"You think it's someone in trouble, sir?" the guard persisted.

"They're in trouble, all right," the

captain said dryly, "But not the way you imagine."

The corporal turned and stumbled off. The captain watched him for a moment, uttered a faint "damn it," then he said hoarsely, "Corporal—come back here."

"Sir?"

The captain hesitated, breathing harshly. Then he shrugged. "What the hell—we're all in this together. Listen, corporal—I'm not known on this post—in fact, I flew here especially because of what we think is going on out there—so when you reach the guardpost, get in touch with your officer of the guard. Tell him to contact Major Whitehall—he's head of the Post G-2. Tell him I got in too late to see him but I think the report's affirmative. Have you got that?"

"Major Whitehall—report affirmative," the corporal said slowly, but his voice had become suspicious.

"All right—on the double!"

The corporal reluctantly turned and headed back the way he had come, but the captain remained motionless. Karl could barely make out the officer, standing stiffly, facing the channel.

Karl fumbled anxiously with his tiny radio. It was imperative that he warn the others to hurry and get away. He himself could remain and rendezvous elsewhere, in some other country, even, if necessary. He had all the papers, and his English was perfect. But first this captain must be put out of the way—permanently. He was obviously in the Intelligence. His loss would be important.

Karl tensed and the knife came up slowly. The captain was bent over, his light winking curiously on and off as he examined the ground. He approached Karl, still bent over. Closer. Closer. Now!

The knife flicked smoothly, met just the right spot. It was done. Karl pulled the limp body behind the damp brush and risked flicking his own light. It had been a neat job. Right through the left eye. There wasn't even blood on the uniform. Karl grinned. Neat job.

Then he spun the tiny crank on his radio and spoke bitingly in his harsh gutturals to those on the sub, telling them that soon there would be a crowd to watch them plant the radio-controlled depth charge.

He heard the hurried conversation on board the great silent sub and then the orders came back. There was no time to wait for him so he must get rid of his landing boat, fade away into the city and wait for further instructions.

He had the list of spots, he knew the right words and signs. The country for which he worked was thorough that way. When the time came, that charge planted in the bay, and hundreds of others like it, sunk or hung or buried near carefully pre-selected spots, could be detonated by a single press of a thick thumb—thousands of miles away. And they'd bring down strategic bridges, like that one out there, and important factories, snarling this whole hated country so that when the high-flying bombers appeared, it would be too stricken to retaliate.

"This job is done," an eerie voice whispered gutturally over the midget radio-phone. "Good luck, comrade."

Karl slid down the slope to where the small rubber boat bobbed gently against the tide. With a quick jab of his knife he punctured it, then dragged the cold rubber carcass back up onto the hill. He slashed it into bits and with the shovel it carried he dug up earth carefully, buried his radio and the pieces of rubber. Behind him, the white face of the dead captain gleamed palely.

It was starting to get light. Karl broke into a faint sweat. He hadn't figured on getting stuck here with daylight approaching.

Mentally he reviewed the map of this terrain—the Presidio of San Francisco. It sprawled over hundreds of rugged acres—and it crawled with soldiers. He flicked his light briefly on the dead officer and then his hard mouth slid into a smile. As simple as that!

It took about five minutes to change clothes with the corpse. He buried his own things, first making sure to remove all papers. It wouldn't do to have them fall into American hands. Code books, location of other mined spots, radio frequencies—

He had just thrown the shovel into the fog-shrouded water when he heard the sound of boots scraping against rock and brisk authoritative voices. He whirled. God! He'd forgotten the guard—the other guard. Figures loomed out of the thinning fog, coming directly toward him. At least half a dozen soldiers, with the corporal in the lead.

But couldn't he bluff this out? After all, the corporal hadn't got even a glimpse of the captain. This uniform was sufficiently soggy to explain why it hung badly—and best of all, the captain wasn't known on this post. It should be a comparatively simple matter. All it took was nerve and soon he'd be out of this and in the city.

Suddenly he was ravenously hungry. A hard night's work in dully air gave a man an appetite.

In command of the group was a bleary-eyed, stubble-chinned young kid with gold bars gleaming dully on his shoulders. He looked curiously at Karl, and then, as though it had just occurred to him, he saluted half-heartedly.

"Captain Andersen?" Karl nodded, returning the salute. "We got in touch with Major Whitehall—he said your pilot reported you in at Fort Baker and he'd been trying to raise you down there." He looked expectantly at Karl. Karl's mind raced back to what the dead captain had said. He smiled coolly.

"I told the corporal to explain I'd got in too late to see him." He stared hard at the corporal.

"I relayed your message, sir," the corporal said. "Report affirmative, too."

"Is—will the major be out?" Karl asked the lieutenant.

"He didn't say," the young officer replied. "He seemed excited. He said," he smiled wryly, "he said when this is cleared up he'd like to meet you. Said he wants to shake the hand of the gutsiest guy in the service."

Karl nodded, but behind black eyes his brain churned. So far, so good. Apparently even the head of the area intelligence hadn't met Captain Andersen before.

It was obvious that somehow or other the project had leaked. Top intelligence must have been suspicious about this particular area and Captain Andersen had been detailed here to check. A great joke! The very man responsible for finding saboteurs was being impersonated by a saboteur! It would be quite simple to confuse everyone—and it would be a pleasure to do so. It was hard to keep the contempt from his eyes as he looked at the young bleary-eyed officer. Missed a few hours sleep and look at him!

"Is this the approximate spot you heard the sounds, corporal?" the lieutenant was saying tiredly. Karl tensed slightly as the non-com gave a brief searching glance all around. Dripping eucalyptus trees and shrubs stood out sharply now. It was quite light, but the corporal's glance slid past the grave of the dead intelligence officer and he nodded.

"I believe it was about here, sir," he said. "The captain said he heard chains or something out in the channel—I didn't, though."

Karl smiled. Here was his first opening.

"I may have been a bit hasty, Corporal," he said smoothly. "After you left I listened intently but failed to hear it again." He laughed shortly. "Probably a bit keyed up."

"Too late now," the officer said sourly. "The major said to tell you

he was dispatching a sweeper." He turned abruptly and gave a few low orders. Karl's jaw tightened when he saw the men begin to set up a field transmitter.

"Ship to shore," the young officer said laconically. He leaned closer. "We're to keep in touch with the sweeper from here and if we get a report affirmative you're to take over." He looked searchingly at Karl. "Mind telling me what it's all about, Sir?"

Karl smiled tightly. "It's a nuisance, that's all I can say. But I'll let you in on this much—I'm starved. If you'll hold down the post I'd like to get a bit of food in me."

The lieutenant looked doubtful. "We might get that report—I'll tell you what, sir. There's a jeep road just above. I'll send a man for some chow." He looked steadily at Karl. "I think that's best—don't you?"

A muscle flickered in Karl's jaw and almost instinctively he touched the little knife strapped to his forearm. He nodded.

"While we're waiting," he said, "I'll show you the spot from which I first heard the sounds." He led the group a good two hundred yards away from the body.

The hot coffee, when it arrived, was good—better, in fact, than what he'd been fed on the sub. He sighed and relaxed, eating scrambled eggs out of a borrowed mess-kit. This whole business was getting better and better.

Now and then gray shreds blew past as the breeze sweeping in off the Pacific continued to dissipate the fog.

He suddenly realized the fog-horn on the Golden Gate bridge had stopped its hoarse bellowing. The reddish spires of the bridge poked above the gray curtain, and from below he heard the quick sharp blast of a ship's horn.

The group of soldiers, clustered around a radio, were listening while one of them talked. Then a small, trim vessel, a little three-incher pointing jauntily skyward from her bow, edged cautiously into view, bucking the small waves of the tide rip as it nudged toward the bridge pylon.

Karl leaped to his feet, the blood cold in his veins. It was uncanny, but they seemed almost to know what had happened during the night's dark hours; that somewhere beneath the choppy gray waters slept a round spiked object loaded with destruction and primed to detonate when a certain radio frequency was sounded.

He had been undisturbed when the young officer had mentioned "sweeper." His knowledge of English was good, but not that good. But now, seeing the minesweeper below him, he knew it for what it was.

He saw the anchor go down and then the small boats put out loaded with dungaree-clad men. They were obviously about to drag the deep waters off the pylon.

He swallowed, took a deep breath and looked down at his soggy uniform. This was his protection. But not against an explosion. If those fools down there were using heavy

chains or cables to search for a primed mine—well, it would be premature—but the damage would be done anyway.

For the first time he noticed the small raised castles on the brass insignia on his uniform. So the Captain had been an Engineer!

He stiffened as he saw one of the small gigs pass directly over the spot where the mine should lay. He waited tensely.

The tiny gig, bobbing like a cork, made a slow circle about that particular spot, churning up bubbles of white until the entire area was marked by the white splotch of foam against the dark green.

Karl relaxed, remembering that there was such a thing as a sonic depth recorder. They could find it, after all, without exploding it. He was ready when one of the men shouted.

"They've found something," the lieutenant said, and his eyes had lost their all-night's tiredness.

One of the men came dog-trotting up.

"The sweep relays its compliments, and if there is a Captain Andersen ashore, to inform report affirmative, and would the captain speak with the skipper on the ship-to-shore?"

The warning bell of his sixth sense was pounding in the back of his head now. The sweeper had moved until it was approximately in the dead center of the great white ring the gigs had made about the mine location. They obviously expected him down there.

He shrugged. Any time he couldn't

outwit these people he deserved the worst. He picked up the ordinary telephone receiver. His tone was non-committal when he spoke into it. The voice at the other end was sharply authoritative but unexcited.

"We've had all the necessary gear ever since that Philly deal," the voice said. More gibberish. What was a "Philly deal"? "Boy, oh boy, Captain, you sure put your finger smack on it this time!" He smiled grimly. That at least made sense.

"There's a flat beach just beneath you—you'll get a little ducking but it's better than going all around to Fort Point," the voice rattled on. "We'll have a gig over there for you in nothing flat. It'll be a real pleasure to have you aboard, sir."

Karl glanced down onto the water and already a gig was bucking along, its prow digging green water and throwing white back, as it headed for the small patch of beach directly beneath them. He turned and saw the lieutenant regarding him quizzically.

For the first time he noticed the heavy 45 hanging at the other's waist. His mind raced. He was expected aboard that damn minesweeper. He could hardly beg off without bringing inquiries. This was a big rugged area; if he suddenly broke and ran it would take days to find him—but find him they would. No man could live in that racing channel and the Presidio was a tiny peninsula jutting out from the greater peninsula that was the city.

It was a neat trap—but there was little those on the minesweeper could

do. He smiled secretly at the thought. Six hundred pounds of super-explosive left damn little room for argument. They'd be fools to tamper with it—and as Captain Andersen, engineer and intelligence officer, he'd tell them so in no uncertain terms. He turned to the officer.

"Thanks for the breakfast," he said. The officer nodded.

"I suppose I should accompany you—it's my detail," he said, excitement glinting in his eyes. Karl shrugged, covertly searching the lieutenant's face for some sign of suspicion.

As they slid down the hill, Karl braced his elbow against the bulk of the packaged code-books made. He'd be in a hell of a fix if he lost them—and even worse if these Yanks found them on him. But then, if they did, it meant he was found out—and Karl was too smart for that. Wasn't he Captain Andersen, U.S. Engineers?

On the minesweeper, the skipper waited at the head of the ladder, big rough hand outstretched to greet him.

"By God!" he said gruffly, but his keen eyes were frankly admiring. "I never thought I'd ever meet *the* Captain Andersen—but let me tell you—a pleasure!"

Karl smiled politely and shook the hand. He glanced warily about the compact vessel, and all along the narrow deck he saw heads peering out at him. That race-hammer note of warning began to pound at the base of his skull. Something was up, something not calculated by the careful planners who'd paid him to sink that

load of death which even now bobbed on an anchor chain far below them. Up ahead there was a bit of subdued cheering and a creaking of winches.

Karl spun and saw the grotesque bulbous helmet of a diver just breaking water. He came up in a sling contraption, attached to the forward boom.

The skipper watched with an uneasy smile as they twirled the helmet on the diver. The diver sucked air, and his face was peculiarly gray.

"It's bobbing on the end of a long chain," he croaked, after someone had lit a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth. "Biggest ugliest god-damned thing I ever saw. I'm glad my part of it's over." He craned his neck and peered out onto the water, grinning sickly when he saw a small bright orange buoy bobbing up and down on the swells. "There she is, boys," he said grimly. "X marks the spot."

But this time the whole ship's crew had gathered around, staring solemnly at Karl.

The young lieutenant gazed at the buoy and then he tapped the skipper's shoulder. "What is it, sir?"

The skipper looked at Karl. "It's top classified," he said doubtfully. Karl nodded.

"Why not tell him?" he said casually. "He's one of us."

The skipper shot him an admiring glance. "We got the tip a couple of months ago that they had started planting those things," he said moodily, looking out at the buoy in fascinated horror. "You've got to hand it to G-2," he said softly, turn-

ing and looking with respect at Karl. "I heard about the job you did at Philadelphia! I guess it'll make this one that much easier—but I wouldn't have the guts."

KARL nodded noncommittally, but his heart pounded like thunder.

The word "Philadelphia" rang a bell, loud and clear. He *had* done a job at Philadelphia—precisely the same job he'd done last night, right on this spot. It was frightening to stare at this keen-eyed devil and hear him say he'd heard about it.

"What happened in Philly?" the kid officer was asking.

"Mine planted—same as here," the skipper grunted. "Divers went down, took pictures of it. They discovered it was an entirely new type of mine—any tampering would set it off. Fortunately there were three or four ordnance and engineer lads who were familiar with booby-traps and such devices—" The morning was chilly but the skipper's forehead was glistening.

"Captain Andersen here," he said, motioning at Karl, "went down in a diver's suit. They cleared the area for two miles around the piers. It took him four hours—but he disarmed it." He spat into the water. "Thank God there's still a few men left with guts in this country," he said in a low voice.

Karl's heart was choking him. He fought with all his skill to maintain a poker face. What was the man saying? The mine at Philadelphia had been *disarmed*? Impossible! But what was more impossible, they ex-

pected him to go down there into that gray ominous water, to descend into the depths and tinker with six hundred pounds of sure death.

He felt the sweat sliding down his legs and running into his shoes. Out of the corners of his eyes he measured the possibility of swimming to shore—knowing it was foolish even as he did so. The gigs would catch him before he could make ten yards. Think. Think. There had to be a way out. There was always a way.

"Some night - bombing crews thought they'd spotted a sub the other night on a practice run—just about sundown," the skipper was telling the kid. "So G-2 put two and two together and sent for the captain. Right, sir?" Karl nodded stiffly, his mind racing.

"A night patrol thought they'd raised a ping last night," the skipper said tonelessly, "and well, it wasn't hard to figure what they were up to."

The lieutenant looked at Karl with awe in his eyes. "And now you're going to go down to disarm that thing!"

Karl smiled flintily. There was no way out. If he'd had time to throw that body into the ocean—it was a simple matter out here to get rid of the damaging code books. But once they discovered he wasn't the captain—and started looking for the captain—. The circle was being pulled tighter and tighter. What was this fool saying?

"—you make me proud to be in the service," the kid was saying, one hand extended. Karl automatically took it. "I hope everything goes off

all right, sir."

And like a red hot ball in his stomach the relief exploded, sending warm streamers through his body, he went limp. It was that simple. He felt like laughing in their stupid faces.

He snapped his cigarette out into the channel and smiled at the lieutenant. "It's simple when you know how it's done," he said.

He strode forward toward the diving gear. He would get in the suit, allow them to lower him near the mine, and then quite simply say that he needed some special tool which he had left at the Post. Once back on land it would be a matter of hide and seek—and there were few to match him on that—especially if he had a few hours start without suspicion attached to him.

The skipper himself helped him into the gear, his seamed face pale under the reddish tan.

"Everything's up to you, Captain Andersen—and God be with you," the skipper said softly, then he screwed on the helmet.

Karl grinned as he swung high above the water and then began a swift descent. But he stopped grinning when his downward motion halted abruptly and he slowly swung back toward the deck. He saw the skipper pick up the black mike and his voice sounded tinnily. Beyond him, a crewman was trotting up, carrying an odd assortment of objects attached to a belt.

"For God's sake," the skipper croaked. "We plain forgot to hitch your tools on!"

"My tools?" Karl said faintly.

"Your pilot brought the bag down to the dock. Said they were the ones you'd used on the Philly job. Now how could you have forgotten a thing like that?"

He hung suspended, his lead-shod feet so near and yet so far from the deck while they strapped the belt of tools about him. Beyond the rail the gray-green water ruffled up in small whitecaps. And beneath that enigmatic surface a spiny iron object swayed with the tide-motion, waiting for the thumb to press the proper button, to transmit the exact wavelength which would erupt it into lurid destruction.

He swung out above the water, and just for an instant caught a glimpse of the low blue and brown hills, dappled with dark shrubbery. Over there a brave man lay dead—a man who knew how to pull the fangs of what Karl had planted—and as the icy water closed over him, Karl knew the circle was complete.

The water became colder; darker. The pressure mounted on his body. He had difficulty in breathing; the bulk of the codebooks pressed against him. He had refused, up above, to take off the G.I. jacket and pull on the warm sweater the skipper had offered.

Now below him he saw the ball that was the mine. His lead feet pulled him down, down, heading directly for the iron shell that was as sensitive to touch as a bubble—a deadly shell, swelling hungrily for the impact of heavy, leaded shoes.

"Take your time, captain," the harsh voice whispered shakily in his

ear. "The other diver already has a line down there—when it's disarmed, lash a loop about it and we'll pull the damn thing up so fast it'll sizzle."

Closer and closer came that implacable evil thing he had helped plant. How long could he stay there, hung between two deaths? Until he lied and said "Pull it up—it's disarmed"? Why, the slightest tug would detonate it—smashing harbor, minesweeper, Karl. He was so close now he could reach out and touch it if he dared.

He hung there, swaying in rhythm with the great globe which dwarfed him, looming dark and terrible in the cold alien water. His mind raced like a rat on a treadmill. He thought of his knife, strapped to his forearm. No succor there.

He peered through the water, deepening from purple to velvet black. He suddenly began shivering uncontrollably. How long could he hold out? One hour? Two? The water was cold. Cold.

He hung there, between two deaths, knowing at last that life was sweet, and his, the sweetest of all, hung between two choices. Which should it be? Down here, in the silent cold depths, or up there, where a brave old man waited, while another brave man lay dead beneath a dripping green bush.

He took a deep breath.

"Pull me up," he croaked.

"What's that? Up? Man, man, are you through so soon?"

"I'm through," he said bitterly.

"Pull me up—I have a statement to make."