
Operation Red Jericho

*Those who have taken upon them to lay down the law
of nature as a thing already searched out and understood . . .
have therein done philosophy and the sciences great injury.*

Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620)



Chapter One

Clipping from the March 29, 1920, edition of the *Shanghai Post*



SHANGHAI

MARCH 29, 1920

SHANGHAI: The international accord signed today sees an end to the six-month trade war which has halted 75 per cent of cargo shipments by sea and left freighters stranded in harbours all over the world.

In a surprise turnaround, Theodore da Vine, President of the powerful All American Conglomerate, said: "I'm proud to stand here knowing I'm amongst new-found friends, whom only last week I was calling thieving, protectionist, money-grabbing sharks, and double-crossing sons of rattle-snakes! I see this as the beginning of a cavalry charge of commerce that will spearhead the recovery of the global economy."

Mr da Vine has been singled out as the main obstacle to a settlement of the long-running trade dispute. The European, Asian, African and American delegates have been at loggerheads for the last three months in negotiations to

Becca's diary: April 2, 1920
In taxi from Nanking to Shanghai

I have solved the mystery of the savage stink in this taxi. It's my brother Doug's lucky socks. The heat of China has given them a new and remarkably pungent smell. He's snored his way through this afternoon and keeps trying to stretch out and take up the whole back seat. I've only given ground because I don't want him anywhere near me. In case I should die of asphyxiation, here is everything I know about the lucky socks, so he can be brought to justice.

DESCRIPTION: heavy knitted walking socks, grey, with a red band at the ankle

CONDITION: huge hole in one heel; a yellow talon (possibly his big toe) hangs out of the other

SMELL: curdled milk on a hot summer's day

HISTORY: a Christmas present from Father four years ago for our trip to Bhutan and the Himalayas. They have never been washed. Doug wears them for sporting activities (where they gain their so-called luck, apparently) as well as taking all exams in them. Today he is wearing them to meet our uncle, Captain Fitzroy MacKenzie, who is to be our new guardian.



BANG! An incredible explosion shook the taxi.

"Is it the engine?" Doug asked. "Is it the crankshaft?" He looked anxiously at Mr. Ying, their Chinese driver.

"If you please, no." the driver replied, waving and pointing toward the night sky over Shanghai. "Fireworks party tonight."

"Is it a Chinese holiday?"

"No. The Shanghai Shipping Syndicate celebrate because international shipping treaty is signed. No cargo can move for weeks. Very bad. Ships stay tied up. So big conference is called. Then this man, how you say . . . T-he-o-dore . . ."

"Theodore?" deciphered Doug.

"Yes! Mr. da Vine arrive with his big cigar. Big so he can't turn corners easy. Luckily, he solve dispute. Then ships start moving again. Everyone is happy so we throw big party—like big cigar!" Mr. Ying laughed. Becca had lost interest when talk turned to politics and simply wished the journey would end.

A second explosion shook the cab; Doug wound down the window and peered out. They were nearing the center of the city, and ahead lay the sweep of the Bund, a broad thoroughfare that fronted the Huangpu River with fine European-style buildings. Across the river, a shimmer of light caught his eye, and he watched a third firework flare up and explode in a flash as bright as the sun, showering fountains of burning scarlet and azure earthward.

"Lethal!" he shouted. "Double lethal!"

Doug, his dark hair tousled and in need of a cut, had the same high cheekbones as his sister, Rebecca. At thirteen he didn't really fit the clothes he was wearing, and what's more, he didn't really care. In the last six months, he'd become idle and awkward. But Doug was, by his very nature, inquiring, inquisitive, and highly concerned with getting to the root of things he didn't



Douglas MacKenzie

His school reports stated that "Douglas's undoubted intelligence sleeps under a blanket of idleness." Doug was an artist and a lazy scientist, but above all a freethinker. He never let rules or regulations get in the way of his quest for knowledge.

understand. At the moment it was crankshafts; last week it had been the mystery of where all the rubber from car tires goes when it wears off, and the week before that, why bricks at the bottom of tall buildings don't crack. These subjects had the ability to consume him utterly until he encountered the next unfathomable problem, and he could display knowledge on some extremely obscure topics. The trouble was that these pet interests were as erratic as his wash days and seldom crossed into any of the formal academic curricula. For a person with so little direction in life, it was surprising that his most cherished possession was a compass set within a silver pocket-watch case; he carried this gift from his father at all times.

His sister, Rebecca, was two years older than him to the day, but apart from sharing a birthday, they had little in common. First of all, Rebecca cared very much what she looked like and owned three matching suitcases, whereas Doug had

only a shabby canvas travel bag. She was known by her family nickname of Becca. She liked *Becca*; *Rebecca* sounded too formal to her. If Doug had grown wild in the last year, she had become withdrawn and serious, largely confining herself to diary writing, practicing ancient German swordsmanship techniques, and indulging in her growing passion for music. Her dark hair was cut as short as Doug's had grown long, but despite her natural reserve, her eyes were alive with a burning spark of interest that marked her as a thinker.



Rebecca MacKenzie

A formerly first-class student who had become "ungovernable, unruly, obstinate, and mutinous" after the disappearance of her parents. Her chief interests were music and fencing.

Doug pushed his bangs back and waited expectantly for another rocket, but none came. He hoped there would be more. The Bund started to fill with people looking skyward, chattering and pointing. The taxi driver slowed and tooted his horn as the numbers swelled, surging toward the river. Soon there were so many bodies that the line of cars, rickshaws, and streetcars could barely move.

Mr. Ying pumped the accelerator and shouted for the crowds to clear the way, but nobody took any notice. Excited faces pressed against the windows. Grinding into first gear, the taxi had no choice but to limp behind the throng at a crawl.

"Mister, miss," Mr. Ying urged. He pointed toward the ships and junks moored on the opposite bank of the river.

Suddenly dozens of rockets were launched into the sky and exploded simultaneously with a noise like the crack of Doomsday. Then more rockets, then more, erupting in a perfect sequence of bangs and cascades of color. The noise was deafening, and smoke hung heavy in the night air. Doug had seen large fireworks displays before—indeed, he prided himself on his understanding of gunpowder-based rocketry. But there was something different about this: something majestic, grand, and unique.

The percussive effect was so strong that with every deafening thundercrack, the taxi seemed to tremble like a nervous dog. The fireworks rose twice as high as Doug had ever seen fireworks go before, bursts of vivid vermilion, gold, and sapphire blue exploding in perfect pinpricked spheres of light. The rockets burst into myriad shapes and patterns: extraordinary star constellations, then a snake wriggling and changing color as it fell to earth. Monkeys performed acrobatics; tigers



From Doug's sketchbook¹ (DMS 1/14)

prowled through a jungle of green light; crocodiles circled and snapped their jaws at one another; a strutting peacock unfolded a fan of blazing feathers; a procession of dragons, each more beautiful than the last, appeared to consume the one before in great flashes of orange and blue flame.

As the taxi squeezed through the crowds, Becca and Doug could see every detail of the ships moored alongside the Bund, lit up by searing splashes of color. Gradually the display built to a final crescendo. The fireworks rumbled and rolled, vibrating every fiber of their bodies. Despite his excitement, Doug felt a pang of fear—the fireworks were so big, so loud, that he held on tight to the torn seat to steady himself. He noticed that Becca too was bracing herself, clutching the door handle as the cab began to rock with an

uneasy motion. She was shouting something, but he couldn't hear a word.

Then, as abruptly as the display had started, it stopped. The last rumblings echoed away, leaving the city silent. The night faded back to its natural darkness, but the crowds lingered, hopeful there would be more. Mr. Ying had completely given up: he had stopped the taxi and had his fingers stuck in his ears.

After half a minute, one final rocket surged up trailing a lazy amber tail and erupted with an astonishing tearing boom far louder than the rest. It formed the shape of a ram's head with downturned horns. Mr. Ying roared with laughter, hit the ignition button on the dashboard, and inched the car forward once more. "Those Sujing are crazy!"

The ram hovered, changed color from crimson to cyan and back to crimson again, winked its right eye, then burst into the four points of the compass and was gone. Raucous cheers and laughter echoed from the crowds. At almost the same moment, with the guidance of one or two sailors, Mr. Ying drew to a halt by the side of an aging ship. Doug peered up at the smooth pearly stern of the vessel and could just make out the rust-streaked words high above him: RESEARCH SHIP EXPEDIENT. They had reached their destination.

"Welcome, Miss Rebecca; welcome, Master Douglas," came a very clean-cut English voice. "My name's Ch-Char-Charlie. The captain sends his . . . compliments and asks you come aboard ship im-im-immediately."

The door to their left swung open, and Charlie offered his hand to Becca. She brushed it away. "I don't need any help, thank you."

Doug scrambled out behind her, eager to get a better look

1. The picture above is from one of Doug MacKenzie's sketchbooks. Most of Doug's sketches were drawn from memory, and consequently may not be accurate representations of the people and events in this account.

at the *Expedient*. The dark hull loomed over him. The vessel was a steam-powered freighter with a long cargo hatch forward. The superstructure—boat deck, wheelhouse, bridge, and funnel—rose from the halfway point and ran all the way back to the poop deck at the stern. Although she had two sizable masts, these were in fact nothing more than derricks for lifting cargo in and out of the holds.

Becca looked up with disapproval. “Is that it?”

A stream of white-hot sparks from a welder’s torch sprayed out from high on the ship’s bridge.

“Is the ship damaged?” asked Doug. “Is it the crankshaft?”

“The . . . the crankshaft?” repeated Charlie with incredulity. “Up there?”

“Ignore him,” said Becca. “He’s been obsessed with crankshafts ever since our airplane force-landed four days ago in Indo China.”

“We nearly came down in the jungle!” Doug explained. “We limped into Saigon on one engine, throwing out seats to lighten the plane. Since then, I’ve decided to make certain—”

“Why can’t you just shut up?” hissed Becca.

“You’d better a-a-ask the chief engineer,” said Charlie with a laugh. “The c-c-crankshaft is usually k-k-kept in the flag locker after dark.”

“In the flag locker? Are you sure?” wondered Doug, almost to himself. He could sense the presence of others on the deck and overhear a muttered conversation. But suddenly the world seemed eerily silent; the crowds were melting away from the quayside in twos and threes, and Doug realized that he was about to board a ship commanded by an uncle he’d never met, bound for destinations yet to be revealed.

“Is our luggage safe?” asked Becca rather haughtily, trying

to hide her nerves. “There should be three suitcases, a travel bag, and my mother’s correspondence box.”

“Your luggage is being shipped and stowed this minute.” Doug recognized this sailor’s accent immediately: he was a New Yorker, his voice low and breathy as a foghorn. “Get our new passengers aboard, Charlie. Hurry now—the ship’s about to sail.”

As they climbed the steep gangway, Doug felt a rush of panic at the thought of stepping into this new and unknown world. Below them, the dark, oily river looked as unsettled as he felt, and he hesitated for a second as he saw Mr. Ying drive away. Becca gave Doug a rare sisterly smile and encouraged him up the last few steps. When they reached the deck, the ship proved to be reassuringly solid underfoot.

“Lethal!” whispered Doug, taking in all the equipment and hawsers around the fo’c’sle.

He was distracted by an impatient jangle of bells as an ambulance swerved through the thinning crowds on the quayside and screeched to a halt beside the gangway. The rear doors were thrown open and two sailors jumped out.

“S-stand clear,” Charlie advised them in a friendly tone.

They watched the sailors pull out a stretcher and carry it up the gangway. The casualty was so heavily bandaged that it was impossible to see his face—but he appeared to be handcuffed to the stretcher.

“A most impressive fireworks display,” boomed a voice from above, making Becca and Doug spin around and gaze up in unison. “I thought the gates of hell had opened. I am your uncle, captain of this ship. Welcome aboard.”

The dark silhouette crowned the bridge, the welder’s sparks lending him an alarming, fiery aura. His face was difficult

to discern in the half-light, the collar of his heavy sea coat curving up to his bearded chin. Doug shielded his eyes from the glare of an arc lamp and saw that their uncle had a patch over his left eye and carried a walking stick in his left hand. Were the two injuries related? he wondered.

"It would appear that the SSS knows how to throw a party. You will dine with me at luncheon tomorrow, when we can meet properly. At present I am organizing our departure from Shanghai. Mrs. Ives will look after you. I'll bid you good evening. Is all a-taut down there?" This to the deck. "All aboard. Ship the gangway and stand by to slip!"

"Who are the SSS?" asked Becca.

"The Shanghai Shipping Syndicate, the outfit the taxi driver told us about," said Doug. "I'd like to know how they do all that tricky stuff with their fireworks. Those rockets weren't gunpowder-based. Couldn't have been."

"How do you actually know that, Doug?" said Becca scathingly.

"Well, the smell was wrong, for a start—"

"Oh, please, not another one of your ridiculous theories."

A plump woman wheezed down the starboard bridge ladder, muttering to herself. "Filthy racket a-wakin' the dead." She was wearing a large flowery apron and sensible shoes scuffed at the toe. Her face was friendly, if a little flushed. Mrs. Ives clutched the gunwale and blew her cheeks out. "Evenin' to you both."



Captain Fitzroy MacKenzie

With eye patch and walking stick, Fitzroy MacKenzie was noted for his piratical appearance. He was as enigmatic as the research ship he commanded. Picture caption reads: Aboard Expedient. Approaching Antarctica, 1919.

Doug looked up again, but the captain was bellowing more orders at the crew. "Ship that hawser, and look lively about it. Stop waltzing with it, man! This is an oceangoing vessel, not a blasted tea dance!"

"Come along, you two. It's best to go below when we're leavin' 'arbor," said Mrs. Ives, ushering them in the direction of the poop deck. "The deck's like a cat's cradle with ropes a-goin' this way and that. Trip over one of them and it'll 'ave your leg off."

"Can we go directly to the engine room, Mrs. Ives?" asked Doug.

"Whatever for, my love?"

"I'd like to discuss the state of the engines with the chief engineer, particularly the crankshafts."

"I should keep that sort of talk stowed, my lad," scoffed Mrs. Ives, hustling him toward a watertight door.



Becca's diary: April 2, 1920

Onboard *Expedient*

Our new home is better than I'd imagined. We have cabins five and six; Mrs. Ives describes it as a suite, but it is just two small rooms connected by a narrow door. She thought we'd like to be close to each other. I think when I know her a bit better, I shall ask for a different cabin, as far away from brother Doug and his lucky socks as I can get.

My cabin is self-contained, and I rather like it. I felt a small pang of homesickness for my bedroom in Lucknow, but this will be fine until Mother and Father return from their expedition to the Sinkiang. A mahogany bunk curves along one side. Underneath it

are three drawers for clothes. There's a small desk beside the door, which is where I'm writing this, with bookshelves jutting out above. All the fittings are beautifully finished, and the wood gleams in the soft glow of the oil lamp (there is no electric light in this part of the ship). Doug's cabin is the mirror of mine, but he's furious because I have a brass plaque on my door that says GUNNERY OFFICER!

We both have a present from the captain. Mine is a gramophone and some records. Doug has got some paints and watercolor paper, which he's mucking around with now. Our interests are known to our uncle, it seems—I suspect via the dreaded Aunt Margaret. Perhaps life aboard ship won't be as bad as I feared.

We are housed in what used to be the officers' quarters. It's a small corridor with eight cabins off it, all polished to an astonishing sheen. Mr. and Mrs. Ives occupy the cabins opposite ours. The rest of the crew are in the mess deck at the other end of the ship, so it's quiet down here—just the steady heartbeat thump of the engines.

Mrs. Ives is the ship's cook and is married to the ship's coxswain. She's left us an enormous tray of pies and puddings.

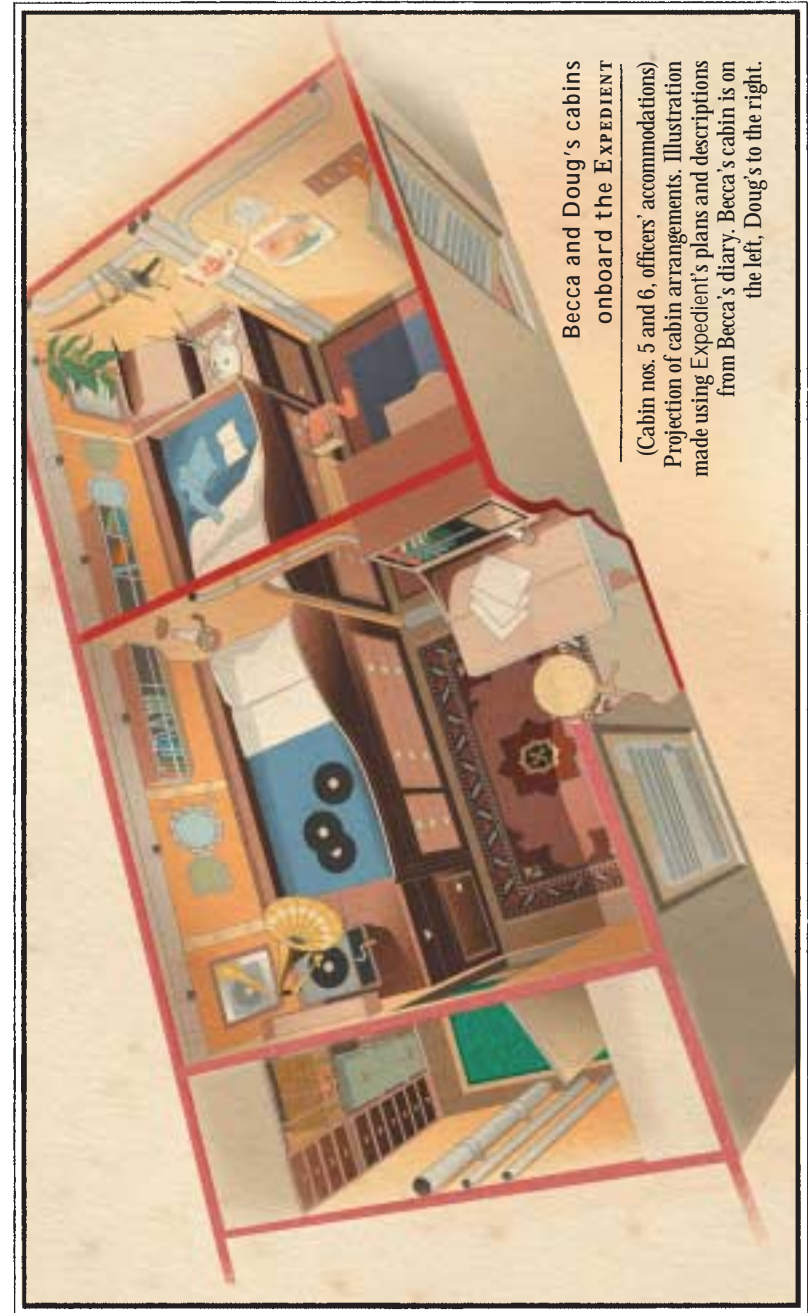
Unfortunately this heat has made me thirsty rather than hungry, but Dustbin Douglas has made light work of his share and is eyeing up mine.

Before leaving us on our own, Mrs. Ives repeatedly warned us that we are not allowed to wander off, as there are many dangerous parts of the ship. I think she couldn't wait to get her hands on the bandaged man we saw being stretchered aboard, who, she told us, was now resting in the sick-bay. So we've been left to unpack and settle in. One small triumph is that we at least



Mrs. Ives

After the captain, Mrs. Ives, the ship's cook, considered herself the highest authority aboard ship—she was certainly the only member of the crew allowed to argue with the captain without fear of reprimand.



Becca and Doug's cabins
onboard the EXPEDIENT

(Cabin nos. 5 and 6, officers' accommodations)
Projection of cabin arrangements. Illustration
made using Expedient's plans and descriptions
from Becca's diary. Becca's cabin is on
the left, Doug's to the right.

Nautical terms and expressions

abaft: <i>behind</i>	hawser: <i>strong rope of hemp or steel; secures ship to mooring</i>
aft/after: <i>section of ship toward stern</i>	inboard: <i>inside ship</i>
belaying pin: <i>wooden pin used to secure ropes</i>	junk: <i>Chinese sailing vessel</i>
bilges: <i>very lowest part of hull</i>	kedg anchor: <i>light anchor</i>
boat deck: <i>deck where ship's boats are stowed (only referred to as lifeboats after captain has given order to abandon ship)</i>	midship: <i>center section of ship (midships: order to center rudder and so straighten course of a turning ship)</i>
bosun: <i>crewman in charge of setting sails and efficient running of ship</i>	moored: <i>having two anchors set; secured head and stern to harbor quay</i>
bow: <i>(rhymes with now) front of ship</i>	poop deck: <i>raised deck at stern of ship</i>
bridge: <i>where ship is commanded from; located above wheelhouse</i>	port: <i>left-hand side of ship when facing bow</i>
bul khead: <i>solid partition within ship</i>	rudder: <i>hinged flat steel frame positioned at stern of ship below water line; connected to ship's wheel, allowing it to steer vessel</i>
bunkers: <i>compartments for stowing coal or oil</i>	sampan: <i>small Chinese boat</i>
coaming: <i>raised boundary around a hatchway or door; prevents seawater flowing in below deck</i>	scuttles: <i>round holes in ship's sides, also known as portholes</i>
coxswain/helmsman: <i>crewman who steers ship</i>	shelter deck: <i>main upper deck of ship</i>
deadlights: <i>steel covers that block scuttles from inside</i>	stanchion rails: <i>safety rails around edge of deck</i>
derrick: <i>crane for hoisting cargo</i>	starboard: <i>right-hand side of ship when facing bow</i>
fo'c'sle: <i>(pronounced folk-sull) space at farthest forward part of ship (from the old term forecastle, when ships had a crenelated tower built over the bow, from which sailors could fight)</i>	stern: <i>rear of ship</i>
fore/forward: <i>area near bow</i>	stow: <i>to bring equipment or cargo aboard ship and secure</i>
gunwale: <i>(pronounced gunne) planks directly above deck level on either side of vessel</i>	transom: <i>vessel's stern timbers</i>
halyard: <i>rope for hoisting or lowering</i>	voice pipe/speaking tube: <i>pipe network within ship enabling communication by voice</i>
hatchway: <i>opening in deck allowing passage from one deck to another</i>	wheelhouse: <i>enclosed cabin from which ship is controlled; located on boat deck</i>
	wireless telegraphy office: <i>archaic term for radio cabin</i>

now know where we are headed—Mrs. Ives told us we are bound for the South China Sea on some sort of research expedition. Researching what exactly, she wasn't clear. Suddenly I realize how little we know about our uncle and his curious ship.

Through my scuttle, I can see the twinkling lights of Shanghai slipping away as we steam downstream for the Yangtze and the open sea.

I can't stop thinking that our expedition should be heading toward western China and the Sinkiang, not the South China Sea. The precise whereabouts of our parents has been uncertain for a year now. Doug doesn't say it, but I think he has decided that Mother and Father are dead.



A little after midnight, Doug woke Becca with a gentle shake. For a moment she was confused, wondering where she was, but Doug's excited face made her sit up promptly.

"Shush," he whispered, pointing at the door.

"What?" But then Becca heard voices in the corridor and knew that something was happening. They opened her door a fraction and peeped out.

Captain MacKenzie stood in the open doorway of the cabin next to the Iveses', talking to a man slumped on the edge of the bunk. It was difficult to make out much detail, as the cabin had only a single oil lamp and the man's face was obscured by the captain's arm. Their new neighbor had a bandaged hand, and from his posture he looked haggard and ill. Becca tuned into their conversation.

". . . and your other wounds are healing. The ambulance ride wasn't too rough?"

"No, Captain. Mrs. Ives is an excellent nurse. She re-dressed this wound, but it is not as bad as she has made it look." The new guest had a soft voice with a French accent.

"Is that the man who was stretchered aboard?" whispered Becca.

Doug nodded, his suspicions growing. "It must be."

"But he couldn't walk a few hours ago. He was bandaged from head to toe. Look at him now."

"A surprisingly fast recovery," agreed Doug.

The Frenchman's voice suddenly rose in desperation. "I didn't do it, Captain! I swear to you, I did not murder him. I did not murder the professor!"

"The newspapers have convicted you, that's for sure. However, I read through the evidence at the time and was far from convinced of your guilt. I apologize for the handcuffs, but I was unaware of your exact condition and under instruction to treat you with . . . care. To my mind the only suspicious thing you did was to disappear so soon after Zorid was killed."

"I was kidnapped, Captain! Kidnapped in Paris, taken to China, and compelled to create monstrous torpedoes for that . . . that venomous cobra Sheng-Fat! I was framed. Set up!" The Frenchman's voice became muffled as he buried his face in his hands.

"You are still unwell."

"The opium Sheng-Fat forced on me to break my spirit has weakened me; it played tricks with my mind. But, Captain, I insist I am innocent of Zorid's murder. You have to believe me."

"I do believe you."

"It gives me hope to hear it," said the Frenchman, slumping

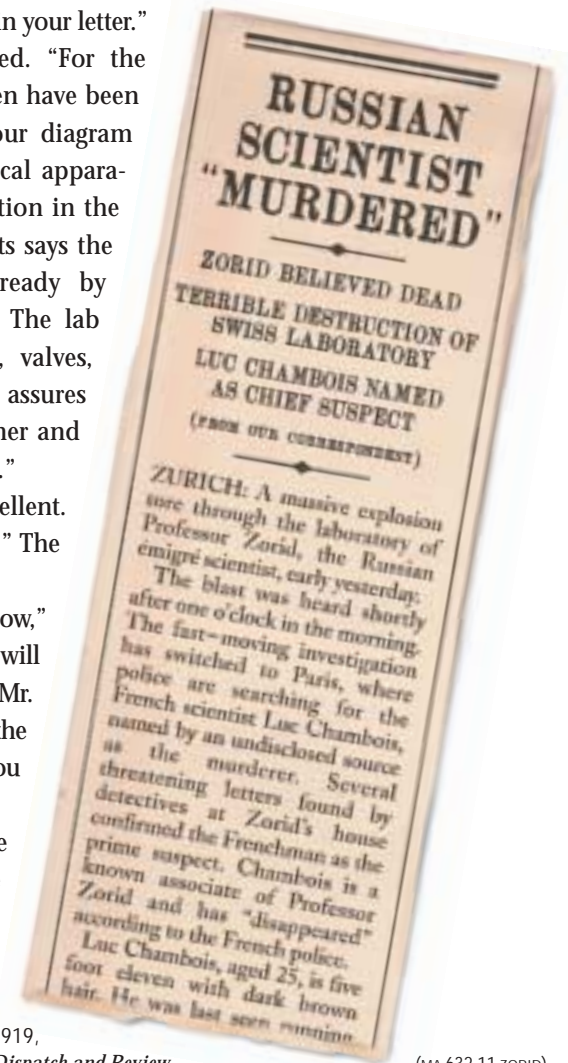
forward out of view. "Has Madame Zing Zing forwarded to you my drawings for the towed magnetometer? It is a new design—much more powerful than the one your ship is currently equipped with, as you described in your letter."

The captain nodded. "For the last three days, my men have been building it just as your diagram instructed. The electrical apparatus is nearing completion in the ship's laboratory. Watts says the guts of it will be ready by lunchtime tomorrow. The lab is strewn with wires, valves, and switches, but he assures me they will fit together and not endanger the ship."

"Excellent . . . excellent. I should like to see . . ." The injured man faltered.

"You should rest now," said the captain. "We will speak in the morning. Mr. and Mrs. Ives are in the cabin next door if you should want anything."

Captain MacKenzie turned and shut the door behind him. He paused in the corridor



Clipping from the March 3, 1919, edition of the *International Dispatch and Review*



From Doug's sketchbook: The view into the Frenchman's cabin (DMS 1/21)

to straighten his tie. Unnoticed, Becca closed her door, only releasing the handle when their uncle had walked past.

"Kidnap? Murder? Torpedoes?" gasped Doug.

"I think, Douglas, our uncle may turn out to be a rather more interesting guardian than Aunt Margaret ever was."

