

I Guarded FDR

By MICHAEL F. REILLY as told to WILLIAM J. SLOCUM

PART FOUR

I WAS pretty scared when Gen. George Patton woke me up in the middle of the night during the Casablanca Conference and yelled that we had to get President Roosevelt off to a safer place. George was well scared himself. His intelligence reports had indicated that the Germans knew what was cooking at Casablanca, and an obvious inference was that they might very well send over a few bombers.

"Where'll I take him?" I asked Patton.

"Marrakech," he replied.

"That's a hundred and twenty kilometers away, General, and we'd have to move all our gun batteries, arbed wire and personnel. How about taking him out into the desert?"

"No, Mike! They'd strafe his pants off in no time!"

We argued until dawn. Finally, Patton said, "I guess we'd better keep him here and pray that those brass hats don't spend the rest of the month talking his ear off. Anyhow, you've got that swimming pool air-raid shelter right near his bedroom."

"That's right," I said, "except the Boss swears he'll never go in it."

"Mike," said Patton, "if the Heinies come over to bomb or drop parachutists, you go into the Boss' room, pick him up and carry him to that shelter, whether he likes it or not."

"That, sir, is exactly what I intend to do."

We decided to leave the matter to God and hope for the best. That's what we did, except that about once in every eight hours Patton would come popping in to offer some suggestion designed to make God's task a little easier.

As a result of the German bomber-parachutist scare, I took to wandering around Dar es Saada, the President's villa, through most of the night, personally checking the guard. One night I spotted a shadowy figure ambling along, head down. The old bloodhound in me took charge and I stalked him. I stepped from behind a bush, directly in his path, only to have Winston Churchill look up from his meditations and inquire blandly, "What's the matter, Mike? Did you think I was some person of evil design?"

You did not have to be a Secret Service man at Casablanca to know that Gen. Charles de Gaulle was doing a pretty fair job of sulking up in England. He did not like our recognition of Gen. Henri Giraud, and I've heard that he was more than slightly wounded by the fact that numbered among the millions who were surprised by our landing in North Africa was one Charles de Gaulle.

I have heard that Churchill finally persuaded de Gaulle to swallow his peevishness and fly to Casablanca to talk to the Boss. Anyway, he came. Charles was a tough customer, and when I announced to the President that he was on his way to the villa, FDR just looked at me and nodded. Rather grimly, I thought.

When de Gaulle and his party arrived, I took them in to the Boss. They were a serious lot, all of them. The general was sullen, never smiled, and he had that unmistakable attitude of a man toting a large chip on each shoulder. He and the President shook hands, then everybody else left the room—that is, everybody of any political consequence did, stayed, half hidden behind some drapes.

De Gaulle and the Boss talked in French. The President was as earnest as I have ever seen him, but he had nothing on the general. I speak no French, so I understood nothing except occasional words that were recognizable because of their resemblance to English, such as de Gaulle's continuous repetition of "ma dignité." The Boss talked on,

quietly and earnestly. De Gaulle answered sullenly. As the discussion, to give it its politest description, continued, I needed no French to realize what was going on. The President's Dutch chin was slowly but surely jutting closer and closer to de Gaulle's long nose as the "ma dignité's" poured out of the general's sulky mouth.

Before passing judgment on what I was doing behind the drapes, remember that I was just a Secret Service man charged with guarding the life of the President of the United States. I was no diplomat. I saw the President in a hot argument with a man who thoroughly despised him. The man was six feet three and vigorous, the President a helpless cripple. So Charles de Gaulle has the distinction of being the only man in the world whose deportment and my training caused me to remove my pistol from my holster and hold it unobtrusively in my hand for half an hour. Neither de Gaulle nor the Boss ever knew it.

The next day I saw the President perform a minor diplomatic coup that I know gave him deep satisfaction. Generals de Gaulle and Giraud and Prime Minister Churchill were sitting with the Boss for pictures. The generals avoided looking at each other and generally showed the same fine, trustful understanding that would mark a chance meeting between a mongoose and a cobra.

The pictures all looked as though they had been posed with each of the four statesmen wearing one of those old-fashioned head clamps that photographers used in the '90's. Sammy Shulman, the INS photographer, was in the forefront of the group of cameramen, valiantly and hopelessly trying to get a decent picture. The Boss, realizing their problem, whispered something to de Gaulle and Giraud. Both generals looked as startled as if someone had called them a dirty name.

As the Frenchmen, giving in to the Boss, gazed stiffly into each other's eyes, FDR said, "Sammy, why don't you make a picture of the generals together?"

At Casablanca the President's argument with General de Gaulle grows so hot that Reilly draws his gun. Parachutists drop near Teheran as Big Three gather. FDR moves in with Russians, where burly "housemaids" carry Lugers.

Sammy knew his French politics well enough to look as flabbergasted as Sammy could ever look, but he raised his camera and pointed it at the two generals, who were now looking very bleak, indeed.

"No, no, Sammy, not that way," said the President. "Get a picture of them shaking hands."

The Boss spoke briefly to the generals again. Their hands reluctantly moved together and a historic picture was made, a picture that proved cameras do lie. It turned out to be a very valuable piece of Allied propaganda.

Stalin had claimed he was a little too busy to come to Casablanca at the time, so the President flew back home in easy stages. Because the Boss couldn't ascend or walk down steps, it was necessary to build ramps wherever his plane was to land. The ramps were an absolute giveaway to enemy agents, and they must have shown up in German aerial reconnaissance pictures of our airfields. With that in mind, I went out to the West Coast to contribute my ideas to the construction of the Sacred Cow, a special C-54 built for the Boss' use. The Sacred Cow had a tiny elevator installed in it, thus eliminating those giveaway ramps. It was important for security reasons that the Sacred Cow should look like any other C-54, so the elevator attachment was installed so as to be invisible from the ground.

Two and a half months later, April 13, 1943, the Boss went off on another inspection trip. This was not so elaborate as the trek from coast to coast in 1942, but it involved the first visit to Mexico of an American President.

We Secret Service men were none too happy about the jaunt south of the border, where we knew a strong pro-Vichy and pro-Nazi colony flourished. I went down to Mexico early in April to look around and make

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SIGNAL CORPS PHOTO

Why Secret Service men turn gray. At Casablanca, Mr. Roosevelt dined in the open, where one burst of enemy fire might also have hit three strategic messmates: Generals Patton and Clark, and Harry Hopkins.

arrangements for the meeting at Monterrey between the Boss and Mexico's Pres. Manuel Avila Camacho.

The Mexican Army assigned a Gen. Eulogio Ortiz to work on security arrangements. The general was a tough old hombre if I ever saw one. He had been chief of staff to Pancho Villa, in whose service he had distinguished himself in many ways, including the hanging of fifty non-co-operative characters to exactly fifty telephone poles in one afternoon. The general also loved to fight, and he was always telling me hopefully, "I weesh I could join your Army and fight with General MacArthur. He is the greatest general of all the generals."

His lust for war and his admiration for MacArthur did not keep him from being a thorough workman. He went over our lists and agreed with us that there were exactly fifty-four ladies and gentlemen in Mexico who had such marked Nazi and Vichy sympathies that we could easily spare their presence during the Boss' visit.

The general said, "Ho, Mike, thesee is very bod peoples. But don't you worry, Mikey, boy. You just leave it all to me. I'll get reed of them personally."

His eyes glittered happily as he said it. I could see the Boss' parade route littered with Ortiz's personally decorated telephone poles, so I hastily talked him into a compromise.

"Hokay, Mikey, boy, if you want eet that way, I'll lock 'em up, but it's very seelly," said Gen. Etulogio Ortiz.

FDR was headed south and due in Mexico in forty-eight hours when a terrific train wreck occurred along the route he was to follow. I immediately contacted Chief Clavis, head of the Mexican Secret Service, and a very bright gent indeed.

"Chief," I told him earnestly, "I don't like this train wreck along the President's route. Somebody might have got just a little premature."

"You're right, Mike," he said. "I don't like it either."

"I can always fly him in," I said, "but I don't like to unless I have to." Actually I had already called Gen. Harold George, of the Air Transport Command, and asked him to get a couple of his big C-54's ready, just in case.

Clavis argued, "Let's take a look at this wreck and see what happened. We're pretty proud of our railroads down here, and if you flew Mr. Roosevelt in, it would give them a black eye. And your obvious worry about a plot in Mexico makes it look pretty bad for all of us."

That was true, of course, and with the President coming to Mexico on a good-will trip, it would be a very bad Secret Service man who would complicate the President's mission by a piece of heavy-handed stupidity. I agreed to

investigate the wreck with Clavis, but I was determined to call on General George's C-54's if our investigation did not turn up a pretty sound reason for the wreck.

At the scene Clavis did a professional job of investigating. "Here it is, Mike," he said. "The fireman and the engineer had a couple of girl friends about six miles back. They stopped their train for a little amour and a lot of tequila. When they finished their dalliance and their drinking, they climbed back aboard their engine, happy, but a little loaded. They decided to make up the time they had lost, and when they hit this curve they were going so fast they ran the train right off the tracks. It was no plot—just wine, women and song."

The President came all the way by train—a train driven by nondrinking, elderly Mexicans.

The trip was concluded without incident by the end of April, and the Boss returned to the White House routine, which was now truly a grind. There was less time now for his beloved stamps, and although movies continued to be shown quite frequently at the White House, it took a pretty good one to keep FDR to the finish.

Shangri-La served him well. This vacation spot met his insistence that it be within an easy drive of Washington and the Secret Service's insistence that it be secure. It was a state park on Catocin Mountain, near Thurmont, Maryland, where there were three identical camps, all originally built for underprivileged children. It had been taken over by General Donovan's cloak-and-dagger boys from the OSS, for training. OSS kept one camp, gave one to the marines, and the Boss had the third. The OSS men were training in sabotage and other weird and unpleasant phases of underground warfare.

The OSS camp was necessarily too overloaded with dark and mysterious foreigners for our Secret Service peace of mind.

We were worried about air raids at the White House and Shangri-La, and we had a tricky setup, whereby we would be warned directly by high-frequency radio from New York's Mitchel Field if their scouts or radar picked up anything suspicious.

In May of 1943, Churchill paid another of his visits to the White House. It was generally supposed to be a prelude to the meeting of FDR, Churchill and Stalin. Later, it was decided that the Boss and Stalin would meet without the English Prime Minister. Stalin again found he could not spare the time from his armies, so it was agreed that the Anglo-American Joint Chiefs of Staff could well stand another get-together with FDR and Churchill. The Boss, with the rugged

heat of summertime Washington in mind, suggested Quebec and a date in early September.

These plans were upset, however, when the Sicilian campaign came off so well, and when, on July twenty-fifth, Mussolini's government collapsed completely. Churchill then suggested early August for the Quebec meeting and, on August eleventh, the Joint Chiefs assembled, with their eyes probably on the beaches of Normandy. The Boss couldn't make it until the seventeenth of August, so Churchill dropped in on him at Hyde Park early that month and then proceeded on to Canada to await the President.

The trip to Quebec was uneventful, although good old Fala managed to eradicate all hopes of keeping the journey a secret. The presidential train made a brief operating stop at the Park Avenue station in Montreal and a fairly large crowd was attracted by the Canadian police on duty there and by what the Canadian newspapers later called "burly" Secret Service men. Nobody in the crowd knew for certain what was up, but The Informer insisted upon taking a walk, and that was that.

After a week of upper-level conferring and arguing, we started back to Washington, dropping off at Hyde Park for four days and finally returning to Washington at the end of August. But the stay was brief. I just about got time to get a change of linen and to tell my wife to go out and buy me all the canned food she could get.

She knew that that meant another overseas trip, and that an overseas trip meant eating out of a suitcase, lest I be recognized in an American mess hall. She also knew she could not request any extra ration points from her board, because that would break security, so all our precious points departed for a lot of canned food.

The Boss told me he was going to Cairo to meet with Churchill and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Again he had hopes of arranging a meeting with Stalin afterward, but it was still uncertain. In any event, Stalin would not be at Cairo, because of Chiang's presence there.

Because of the extraordinary amount of air travel the Boss would have to undergo in Africa, it was decided to spare him at least one transatlantic hop; he was to be put aboard the U.S.S. Iowa off Norfolk with a fond hope that her great speed and her destroyer escort would be too much for any German subs that might come across the Iowa's path by accident or design.

I took off for Oran and Cairo by air about a month before the Boss left and was ~~staying~~ staying around both cities by October, 1943. It was the same old story of living in moth-eaten flea bags,

eating out of my suitcase, cajoling or arguing with local Army geniuses and military-police officials. I learned the wisdom of at least 50 per cent of Fiorello La Guardia's familiar recommendation of "patience and fortitude."

While I was at Oran awaiting the Iowa, we got reports of a submarine pack off Gibraltar which, of course, was right on FDR's course. It was tentatively decided to change the port of destination to Dakar, only to have a sub pack discovered near there. The Iowa finally got into Oran at daybreak on November twentieth, after she had come through the Strait at night, blacked out, but silhouetted neatly by powerful searchlights operated by the Spanish.

The Secret Service men on the Iowa were in worse shape than I was. They hadn't liked the transfer of the President from the tiny Potomac to the giant battleship, nor had they been much pleased when, in mid-ocean, Capt. John L. McCrea, of the Iowa, practically turned his ship on her ear to avoid a torpedo that had accidentally been set off by one of the escorting destroyers. Had the Iowa failed to make the turn, she would have been hit by the torpedo right under the President's cabin, Navy people said. The President, upon the Iowa's arrival at Oran, was lifted into one of her whaleboats and lowered by davits into the water. That was a painful scene for the Secret Service too.

We flew from Oran to Tunis, accompanied by a very welcome fighter escort. After two quiet days in Tunis, we flew to Cairo, arriving two and a half hours late after a night trip. United States Ambassador Alexander C. Kirk turned over his villa in the Mena district to the Boss. That night—November twenty-second—Churchill, FDR, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the Chiefs of Staff met. Madame Chiang presented her husband to the Boss and acted as interpreter throughout the meetings which lasted for five days.

The morning after we arrived in Cairo, the Russian First Assistant Commissar for Foreign Affairs, A. Y. Vyshinsky, talked to the Boss, and in no time at all I was flying to Teheran, to arrange things. Marshal Stalin was now willing to leave his desk, although evidently he didn't want to get very far from home base.

The Boss wanted to fly to Basra, Iraq, some 400 miles south of Teheran, and to go on by train—a decision he made at the behest of our medical adviser, Rear Admiral Ross T. McIntire. The country south of Teheran is terribly mountainous, and Admiral Mac did not want to subject some members of the party to the rigors of high-altitude flying. The Boss was not one of those members, by the way.

With Maj. Otis Bryan, my pilot, I

took a look at Basra and went on to Teheran, where I got a little incidental intelligence that sent Bryan and me scooting back to Cairo. At Cairo I laid it out for Admiral Mac. I did not want the President to stop at Basra and entrain for Teheran for the following reasons: first, I had seen Basra, a dump. Second, Molotov himself had informed Ambassador Harriman at Moscow that the Germans were dropping paratroopers in the area, and I wanted no part of 400 miles of railroad winding through mountains; especially mountains heavily inhabited by characters who could be persuaded to assist the well-heeled Nazi jumpers in sabotage efforts. Third, Major Bryan was sure he could fly from Cairo to Teheran without ever topping 8000 feet altitude. McIntire said "Okay," and so did the President.

Bryan kept his word. He never got above 8000 feet, but he had to snake that big plane through an awful lot of mountain passes. We arrived without incident at Teheran in the middle of the afternoon, and went immediately to the American Legation on the outskirts of town. Stalin was already at Russian headquarters, and the Boss invited him over for dinner, but Stalin sent word that he was much too tired to accept.

My friends of the NKVD told me that they had captured some of the parachutists Molotov had spoken of. The NKVD chief said that in all thirty-eight Nazis had been dropped around Teheran.

"Are you sure it was thirty-eight?" I asked.

"Very sure," he replied. "We examined the men we caught most thoroughly."

The way he said it made me happy I had not been present when the Nazis were questioned. The examination had disclosed that there were at least six German paratroopers still loose in the vicinity with a radio transmitter. Both the Russians and the English were pressing hard for the President to move from the isolated American Legation to either the British or Russian embassy, which were side by side in the heart of town and were both heavily walled. Stalin himself sent a personal message requesting the transfer. I thought it a good idea, and told the President so. I pointed out that Stalin and Churchill would be subjected to unnecessary danger when they came to visit him, and also that the Russian NKVD men felt that FDR was not only risking his life but theirs, too, by living outside town. If anything happened to the President of the United States, I told the Boss, we of the Secret Service would be deeply embarrassed, but the Russian secret agents would be dead before nightfall.

"Do you care which embassy I move to?" the Boss asked.

"Not much difference, sir."

"All right. It's the Russian then. When do we move?"

That conversation ~~took~~ place the morning after we got to Teheran; that afternoon we made the move. I had no stomach at all for sending the Boss through the crowded streets of Teheran. It was a tough enough job normally but, with six Nazi paratroopers around somewhere, it was a real headache. We could line his entire route with soldiers, but a half dozen fanatics with the courage to jump from airplanes could probably figure out some way to get in a shot.

Nevertheless, we lined the entire route with soldiers, shoulder to shoulder. We set up the standard cavalcade, with gun-laden jeeps fore and aft, and it traveled slowly along the guarded streets. But, as soon as the cavalcade left the American Legation we bundled the President into another car, put a jeep in front of him, and went tearing through the ancient side streets of Teheran, while the dummy cavalcade wended its way slowly through the main streets, with Agent Bob Holmes accepting the cheers of the local citizens and, I hope, the curses of a few bewildered parachute jumpers from Germany.

The Boss, as always, was vastly amused by the dummy cavalcade trick and the other cops-and-robbers stuff. I was glad it amused him, because it didn't amuse me a bit.

The Russians made the Boss very comfortable, but some of the things they did weren't any too comforting to a Secret Service agent. All of us were wryly amused by the servants in our part of the embassy. Everywhere you went you would see a brute of a man in a lackey's white coat busily polishing already immaculate glass or dusting dustless furniture. As their arms swung to dust or polish, the clear, cold outline of a Luger automatic could be seen on every hip. They were NKVD boys, of course. In fact, there were about 3000 of them on hand for the meeting. We were outnumbered about 100 to 1, and the Scotland Yard men with Churchill were similarly outnumbered. The NKVD really tossed men in.

The Boss was resting in his bedroom when I told him that Stalin was on his way over.

"I'll talk to him in the sitting room, Mike," he said. "Stall him a second while I get ready."

No stalling was necessary, actually; FDR was sitting there waiting by the time the Russian strong man arrived. Seeing him for the first time was indeed a shock. He walked into the room—well guarded, I might add—with an engaging grin on his face. He approached the Boss very slowly. Later I was to learn he always walked that way, deliberate and slow. As they shook hands, the Boss grinned and said, "It's good to see

you, marshal," and the marshal burst into a gay laugh. Joe may or may not be a great many things, but he certainly is not dour. He laughed almost as much as the Boss did, which was plenty.

I think the Boss liked him on sight, and I also feel that the happy first impression was completely mutual. Stalin was a very small man, indeed, but there was something about him that made him look awfully big. He and the Boss got down to the baffling business of carrying on a conversation through interpreters while the NKVD boys and I exchanged long, rude stares. The staring contest resulted in a draw.

The Boss gave a banquet that night for Stalin and Churchill. Our Filipino cooks ran off a small-size miracle, building ranges in a few hours and serving a first-class spread for the bigwigs. I saw our own Filipino boys working on our own food in our own kitchen. You get that way in the Secret Service after a while.

Everybody at the banquet had a fine time. The Boss was host, and he had been well briefed on Russian hospitality customs and demands, so the bourbon flowed like vodka and FDR was every bit as canny as the Marshal in the business of handling the endless stream of toasts. And, of course, His Britannic Majesty's First Minister could easily drink toast for toast with any given battalion of Russians.

The Boss broke up the party early, and Churchill and Stalin accompanied him to the door. When the President left, I saw Churchill say something to Stalin. When the interpreter had passed it on, Stalin answered. The answer was translated and Winston burst

out so loudly and angrily that it was quite easy for everybody to hear him.

Facing Stalin and waving a finger, Churchill said, "But you won't let me get up to your front, and I want to get there."

Stalin smiled calmly through the outburst and its interpretation; then, still grinning, he answered, "Maybe it can be arranged sometime, Mr. Prime Minister—perhaps when you have a front that I can visit too. Good night."

Editors' Note—This is the fourth of five installments. The fifth will appear next week.