

SIR ROGER
CASE-
MENT,
traitor



extra-
ordinary
of the first
World
War, was
executed
on evidence collected
from a scuttled ship
lying twenty-five
fathoms deep off
Queenstown Harbour.

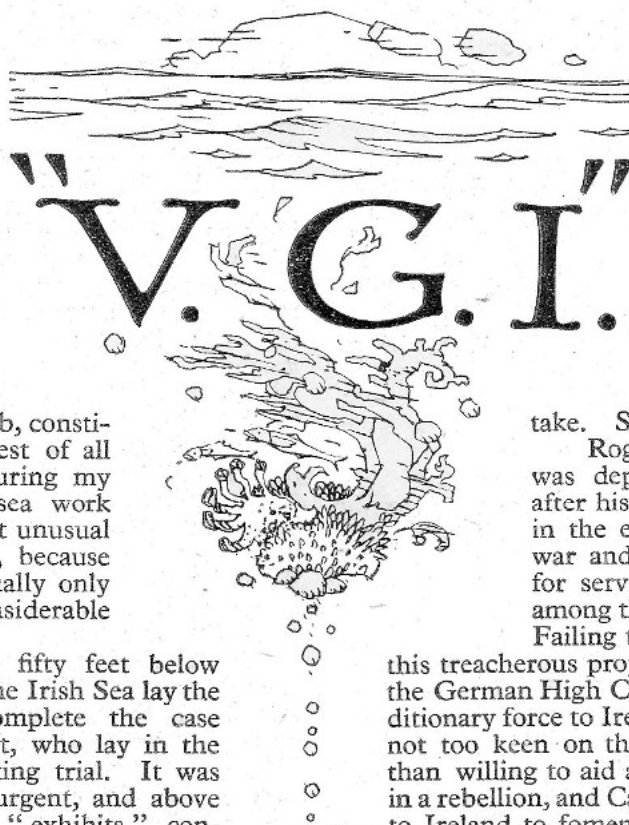
This, my first big job, constituted perhaps the riskiest of all the tasks I undertook during my thirty years of under-sea work as a diver. It was a most unusual start for a raw recruit, because such enterprises are usually only entrusted to men of considerable experience.

One hundred and fifty feet below the turbulent surface of the Irish Sea lay the evidence needed to complete the case against Roger Casement, who lay in the Tower of London awaiting trial. It was a hush-hush job, very urgent, and above all dangerous, for the "exhibits" consisted of explosives—thousands of tons of them.

The ordinary introduction to a Naval diver's life is the hum-drum business of removing wire from a fouled propeller, looking for torpedoes that have taken the wrong turning, and similar routine work. Later, I did all these jobs as a matter of course, but thanks to certain letters after my name, earned at the naval diving school, my first assignment turned out to be of first-class importance. After four months of intensive training at the Admiralty Diving School, Devonport, I had graduated with a "V.G.I." (Very Good Indeed)—the highest marking obtainable.

My name was on the draft list of divers awaiting assignment to ships when an urgent message came through from the Admiralty asking for two divers for special work—one to be a man of long experience, and the other a good young diver.

Tired of hanging about, and anxious to get busy as soon as possible, I had practically completed arrangements to change places with a mechanic diver aboard the battle-cruiser *Indefatigable*, but at the last moment I discovered that she was a "Pompey" (Portsmouth) ship. Being a Falmouth man,



By C. A. CHARD

"V.G.I." is the highest marking the Royal Navy gives to a graduate from the Admiralty Diving School, and the classification launched the Author on an under-sea career which lasted for thirty years. During that time he met with many remarkable experiences, some of the most outstanding of which are here narrated. Mr. Chard was Mayor of Falmouth for the period 1935-37.



The Author.

the idea of Portsmouth as a base was not very attractive to me: it meant a long journey when going on leave. For that trivial reason I refused the exchange. *Indefatigable* went down shortly afterwards at Jutland, with the loss of hundreds of gallant lives, including that of the man whose place I had almost agreed to

take. So I got the Casement job.

Roger David Casement—he was deprived of his knighthood after his trial—went to Germany in the early days of the 1914-18 war and tried to form a brigade for service against England from among the Irish prisoners-of-war. Failing to obtain any recruits for

this treacherous project, he tried to persuade the German High Command to send an expeditionary force to Ireland. The Germans were not too keen on this idea, but proved more than willing to aid and abet the Sinn Feiners in a rebellion, and Casement was therefore sent to Ireland to foment such an outbreak. He

travelled in a German submarine which acted as escort for a ship carrying arms, ammunition, explosives, etc., to be used in the projected insurrection. This vessel was named the *Aud*, and sailed under the Norwegian flag. The British Secret Service got wind of the plan, and the *Aud* was carefully

shadowed by the British sloop *Bluebell*.

At a point about ten miles off Queenstown the *Bluebell* came up hand-over-fist, cleared for action, and fired a shot across the suspect's bows as a signal for her to heave-to. It became obvious to the captain of the gun-runner that the game was up; a single shell that landed in his dangerous cargo would probably send the *Aud* and everybody aboard her sky-high. As a final gesture of defiance he ran up two German ensigns and scuttled his ship by opening her sea-cocks. The crew took to the boats.

LURKING FOES

Meanwhile, leaving his submarine in a collapsible boat, Casement effected a secret landing on the coast of Ireland at a point near Tralee, but was captured and charged with high treason. For the purpose of his trial it was essential to know exactly what the *Aud* contained,

and divers were therefore requisitioned from Devonport to perform the difficult and hazardous task of investigating her cargo. Danger threatened from more than one angle, for the Germans were well aware that salvage was in progress. On several occasions we found that the five buoys used to mark the position of the wreck had been secretly removed—presumably by a German submarine. It was really surprising the astute Boche was content with such half-hearted measures. Although the diving operations were well protected by Naval vessels, we were always wide open to an attack by torpedo. The trick of removing the buoys achieved nothing, because we could always locate the wreck easily enough from the shore-bearings we had taken, plus a little dragging of the sea-floor.

We sailed from Fishguard on the *S.S. Inniscarry*. It was one of the roughest trips in my wide experience of the sea, and the *Inniscarry* was the smelliest ship I was ever aboard. The gale, however, had one redeeming feature. There is little doubt that our passage was watched by at least one enemy periscope, but the weather was so rough that it would have been almost impossible for a submarine to attack us. That the Germans were lurking in the neighbourhood is amply proved by the fact that the little *Inniscarry* was sunk on her return voyage.

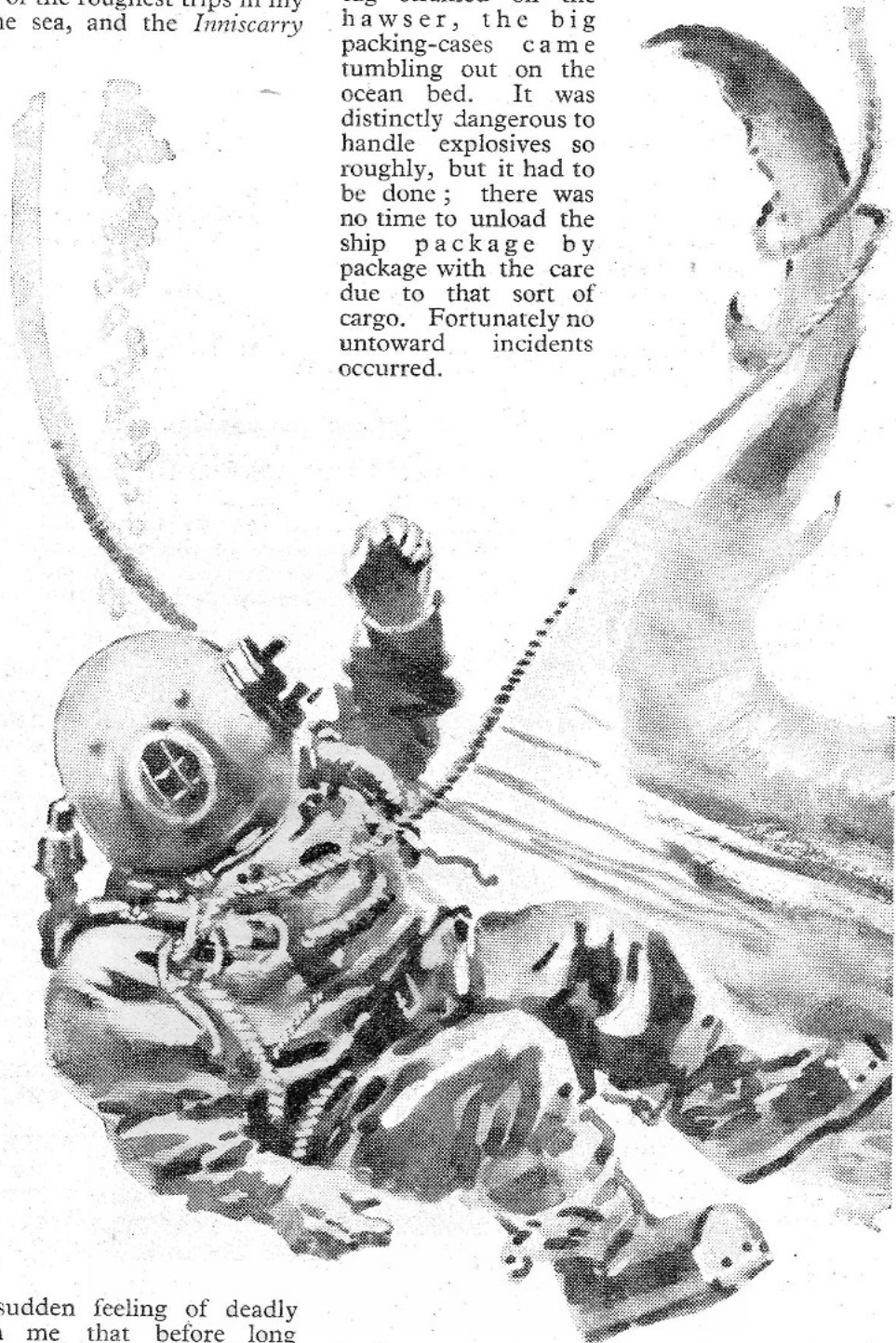
Diving on the Casement job was a wonderful experience; the deep blue colour of the water made the under-sea scene weirdly beautiful. The sea-bottom was clean and firm, mostly sand and small shingle. There was ample light, although in the ship's hold it was as black as Erebus and, having no torch, I had to work by touch.

Outside the wreck, however, the light was so strong that it occasionally caused me to forget the depth, with the result that I went about my work too vigorously. Then a sudden feeling of deadly tiredness would warn me that before long I should be overcome and liable to commit the diving solecism of floating to the surface feet-

first. At such times immediate rest is imperative in order to ward off a threatened spell of unconsciousness.

Speed was the essence of the contract; the authorities wanted a wide variety of cargo-samples in the shortest possible time. A preliminary examination of the *Aud* showed that she was lying on her side. The diver's job was to enter her hold, fix a large grapnel in position round a case, and then stand clear while the tug above hauled on the wire hawser attached to the "grab."

You have probably seen the gaming-machine called the "Rotary Merchandiser," in which the player tries to pick up articles by manœuvring a miniature grapnel. That game was played in deadly earnest in the black hold of the *Aud*! As the tug strained on the hawser, the big packing-cases came tumbling out on the ocean bed. It was distinctly dangerous to handle explosives so roughly, but it had to be done; there was no time to unload the ship package by package with the care due to that sort of cargo. Fortunately no untoward incidents occurred.



"I was being dragged"

THE "INFERNAL MACHINE"

The most interesting exhibit I found in the *Aud* was packed in a case about eight feet high by six feet square. This proved to contain a great metal cylinder, six feet by three, fitted with numerous dials and gadgets. Its mechanism was obviously very intricate, and I knew enough about engineering to appreciate that it represented a remarkable piece of construction. Actually, it was a big "infernal machine," probably the largest of its kind ever made. It had evidently been intended for the demolition of some famous building—perhaps the Dublin Law Courts—as a signal for the start of the projected Irish rebellion. In any crowded area its explosion could not have failed to cause terrible loss of life, but luckily it was not destined to function.

Like many other folk, I have occasionally thrown a baited hook into the sea and dragged up a struggling fish at the end of a line. It never occurred to me that the day might come when the positions would be reversed and I should be dangling at the end of a line held by a fish. The idea is almost too fantastic even for a nightmare, yet such an experience actually happened to me!

Deep-sea diving is full of sharp contrasts; one moment you may be bored to tears, performing a job that requires no intelligence and little skill; the next instant you find yourself in imminent danger of losing your life. At the time of my adventure with the shark, having retired from the Navy, I was engaged on a most prosaic task—the laying of a

sewerage pipe in to the sea off St. Ives, Cornwall. It would be hard to find anything more unromantic.

It was essential to have the seaward end of the pipe in a prearranged position against a large rock on the sea-floor, and to make quite certain that it would be in exactly the correct spot, I laid the last section of piping first. The job then moved backwards, so to speak, so that I could link up with the shore end of the construction. The routine consisted of laying a bed of concrete by arranging bags of cement in the shape of a cradle. As soon as a sufficient length of bed had been completed a section of pipe, twelve feet long by two feet in diameter, was lowered to me. Each section then had to be bolted on to the pipe already laid.

On land, such heavy sections of piping would require the combined exertions of a gang of labourers to jockey them into position and get the bolt-holes aligned. The deep-sea diver, however, has to learn how to perform such jobs single-handed, using brain instead of brawn. The weight of the pipe was taken by the ship above, so there was little muscle-work to be done, but since every movement of the ship, as it rode at anchor, imparted similar motions to the pipe, a considerable amount of juggling was necessary to get each section into position.

The work was further complicated by the heavy ground-swell peculiar to St. Ives; after every twelfth wave, or thereabouts, there would come a series of three big ones, of which the middle wave was the biggest of all. It was an essential part of the job to count the waves, so as to utilize a reasonably quiet period for the crucial task of fitting the pilot-bolt. Otherwise, just as this was being fixed, the ground-swell would come along and lift ship and pipe three or four feet, after which the latter would have to be carefully moved into position once more.

SHARKS!

I was working on this job during most of the summer of 1938, and from time to time we received reports of sharks in the vicinity of St. Ives. My "topside" men (attendants) in the boat saw a shark on



about the sea-floor!"

several occasions, and holiday-makers at St. Ives actually looked down on one from the pier. Presently it was established beyond reasonable doubt that there was only one shark—a big fellow about 14 feet long—which seemed to have selected St. Ives as its holiday resort. The fish became quite a familiar figure in the neighbourhood, and for reasons best known to themselves the local fishermen christened it "Lizzie." To my way of thinking, however, Lizzie was no lady!

Personally I had never set eyes on the shark, but for about a week before the surprising incident which converted me into a hooked fish, the topside men observed Lizzie cruising about round a broken-down breakwater perhaps a hundred yards from where I was working. Each time I came up they asked me whether I had seen anything of the creature, but the water down below was so cloudy that visibility was limited to about ten feet.

One day the contractor's son asked to be taken "down under" and after he had been dressed up I piloted him to the sea-floor and metaphorically held his hand while he inspected the progress of the work. Apparently, like many novices in diving, he secretly came to the conclusion that there was "nothing in it." A day or so later my civic duties as Mayor of Falmouth necessitated my attendance at a meeting, and during my absence the adventurous contractor's son had himself dressed up in a diving suit again and did a little solo diving.

Hearing of his exploit the following day, I took him to task for his foolhardiness, little dreaming that within an hour or so I was to provide him with an object-lesson worth hours of lecturing.

At 11 a.m. I went down and carried on with my now monotonous job of pipe-laying. The topside men were not very experienced in the work of attending a diver, and one of their faults was to allow too much slack in the life-line and air-hose. This is not particularly serious, but there is always a possibility that the connection may get snagged around some obstacle. On this particular morning my air-hose was actually lying on the sea-floor, and once I nearly tripped over it. The circumstance was not worth a special signal, but I made a mental note to remind them of it. At that very moment disaster befell me!

There was a swirl in the cloudy water above me, and a violent tug on my lifeline. The next thing I knew was that I was being dragged about on the sea-floor at lightning speed! I quickly guessed what had happened. Lizzie the shark must have been prowling around, and had either caught her tail in a loop of the life-line, fouled it with her open mouth, or perhaps taken a snap at it in mistake for an eel. Whichever it was she could not rid herself of the incubus, and was now dashing about like a mad thing in an effort to shake me off.

The shark jerked me this way and that, first banging me up against the pipe and then snatching me away; I had no chance to get at my knife and cut the rope. Finally, after a vicious tug that sent me spinning a dozen feet, the commotion ceased and I found myself sprawling on the sea-floor wondering whether I was still in one piece or not.

Cautiously I picked myself up and gave a tentative signal on my life-line. There was an ominous slackness on the rope. I pulled the line

down, and after I had gathered in about ten feet the broken end came into view. Luckily, my air-hose was intact, because I was still receiving air, and I blessed the carelessness of the topside men in giving it so much slack. Had the air-hose and life-line been together, as they often are, I should have provided an unexpected meal for the spider-crabs that swarmed all around me. As it was, I escaped with minor injuries, mainly bruised knees and barked shins.

The tight corners that divers get into are not generally caused by fish or other denizens of the deep, but by the mechanics of their apparatus. I shall never forget a most unpleasant adventure that befell me at the bottom of a Cornish clay-pit, caused by a simple matter of air-pressure.

Things were looking up in the kaolin (china-clay) industry and owners of abandoned clay-pits in Cornwall were taking stock of their properties with a view to putting them into production again. My services were requisitioned to find out what was wrong with the drainage-pump attached to one of these old workings.

I must explain that a clay-mine consists of two shafts, one of which is the working itself; the other, sunk to a deeper level, is merely a drainage shaft. The two are connected by a tunnel, and the water which seeps into the main pit runs off into the drainage shaft, whence it is extracted by pumping.

In this particular instance a "pole pump"—something like a glorified village affair—was used, and the shaft was partitioned from top to bottom with timber. One-half contained the suction pipe, pole, and other apparatus pertaining to the pump; the other half consisted of a series of platforms, connected by ladders and manholes, to enable workmen to travel up and down.

DOWN THE MINE

There were seventeen ladders to descend before water-level was reached, so there was no point in donning my clumsy diving-dress on the surface. All the gear was accordingly taken down to the chamber just above the water-line. As a dressing-room the place was certainly not luxurious, but divers aren't particular, and by the light of candles which would scarcely burn owing to the thickness of the air, the topside apparatus was set up and my diving-dress put on.

The series of ladders and manholes continued right down to the bottom of the shaft. The manholes were only about two feet square, and it proved quite a job to wriggle through them, handicapped as I was by my bulky dress. After descending five or six ladders, by which time I was about eighty feet under water and some 330 feet from the surface, I found further progress checked by a large baulk of timber.

Straddling this, I decided to test my life-line before going any lower. I found, as I had half-feared, that the criss-cross method of descent had rendered it useless as a means of communication. Save for the air-hose, I was completely cut off from the outside world, sitting in Stygian blackness on a great length of wood about sixteen inches square. The failure of the life-line did not worry me unduly, and all divers are thoroughly accustomed to working in darkness. Hitching myself along the baulk, I began to explore the lay-out of the shaft with my hands.

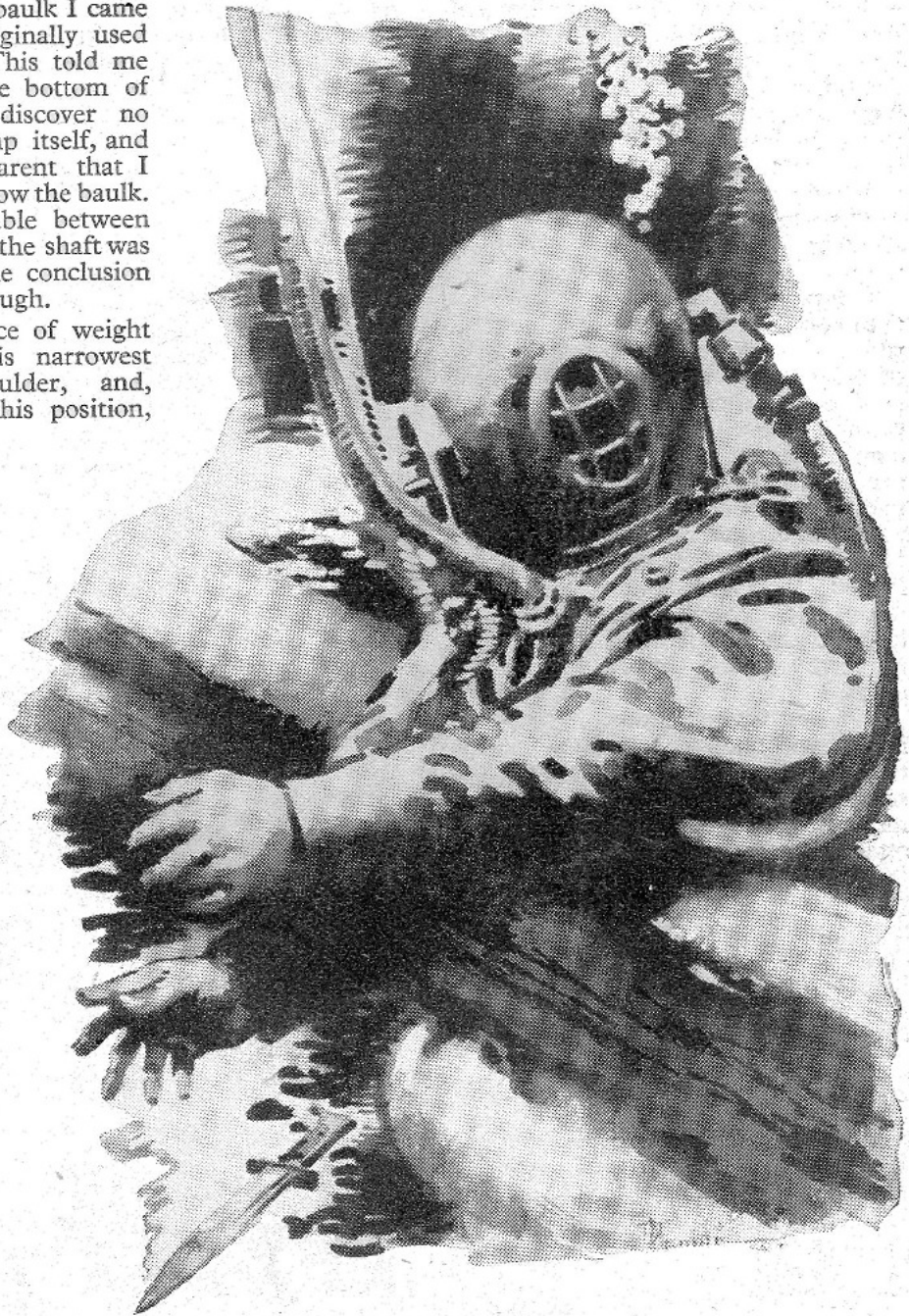
At one end of the big baulk I came upon a tank, probably originally used for priming the pump. This told me I was somewhere near the bottom of the shaft, but I could discover no means of access to the pump itself, and it eventually became apparent that I should have to descend below the baulk. Although the space available between the timber and the side of the shaft was very small, I came to the conclusion I could just squeeze through.

Owing to the presence of weight on his chest, a diver is narrower from shoulder to shoulder, and, manœuvring myself into this position, I began to edge my way through the gap. Being out of touch with my topside men, it was difficult for me to judge the passage of time, but I estimated that half-an-hour was occupied in squeezing past the baulk.

Once through, I decided that, before going down any farther, it would be just as well to make sure that I could get back again fairly quickly, for I was not favourably impressed by the condition of the shaft walls. Having learnt the exact angle at which it was easiest for me to get through the hole, my return progress was rapid—until I was about half-way through. Then, too late, I realized that I had overlooked one small but vital factor.

While squeezing down through the gap, the constriction of my suit had tended to force the air into the upper part, but the pressure did not cause any ballooning because more air was forced out of the exhaust-valve. When I came to wriggle my way *upwards*, however, the inevitable constriction forced the air down into the lower half of the suit. There being no exhaust-valve at my feet, considerable ballooning occurred; in fact, the more tightly I wedged myself the more I "blew up" my extremities. After a long struggle, which considerably exhausted me, I was forced to accept the unwelcome conclusion that I could not get through—not in that fashion, anyway.

Deciding to rest awhile, I tried to think out the position. Obviously it would be necessary to reduce the air-pressure in my suit to a minimum. So far as air coming in was concerned, my faithful topside men were pumping steadily, and would continue without variation until they received a signal from me. With the life-line snagged up, however, I could not send such a signal! It might be possible to reduce the



"Then I dropped the knife!"

pressure a little by opening the exhaust valve to its fullest extent. Adjusting the valve accordingly, I made another attempt to get through. Once again I failed.

TRAPPED!

The whole business seemed fantastic. It was ridiculous that a full-grown man should be hopelessly trapped by so trivial a thing as a slight difference in air-pressure. But there it was, and there I was—imprisoned in inky blackness under eighty feet of water, with no one aware of my plight and no means of conveying the news.

After a time, of course, the topside men would begin to get anxious and would communicate with the workers at the mouth of the shaft. Then much time would be wasted in futile efforts to establish communication with me, and finally they would begin to rush round looking for another diver. That would mean sending to Plymouth and—short of chartering an aeroplane

—a relief diver could not possibly arrive until the following day. By that time I should probably be too exhausted to do anything to help myself.

In any case, the only way another diver could help me would be by sawing away the obstructing baulk. In view of the state of the shaft I had grave doubts as to whether this would be wise.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that it was useless to wait for outside help; my only chance of salvation depended entirely on my own initiative. Racking my brains for a plan, I suddenly conceived an idea. The timber-lining of the shaft, water-logged for years, was fairly soft. How about digging some of it away to give myself more room?

When diving I was never without a keen two-edged knife, and now I drew this from its sheath and began to attack the wooden wall of my prison. Progress was slow, and the work most tiring, but necessity drove me on, and as the hollow in the timbering grew larger my hopes began to rise.

Then I dropped the knife!

I look back on that moment as the blackest of my whole life. Heaven alone knew what depth of soft mud lay at the bottom of the shaft, and directly my feet started stirring it up the knife would gradually sink. My chance of finding it again was about a million to one.

But down I went again, very cautiously, prospecting every inch of the way with my bare hands. Suddenly, on a projecting ledge of wood, my groping fingers encountered the lost knife,

nearly knocking it off before I realised what it was! That millionth chance had come off!

How I gripped the haft of that knife thereafter! Determined not to risk losing it

again, I tightened my grip till my hand ached with the strain. Eventually, after another spell of laborious scraping, I managed to squeeze my way past the baulk of timber. Once clear of it, I lost no time in getting to the surface. The topside men were in a state of panic, having received no signal from me for over two hours.

Forthwith I discussed the question of the timber baulk with the manager of the works. He believed it had merely been placed there as a support for the priming-tank, and suggested that I should saw through it. Not being satisfied that this was the real reason for introducing so large a timber, I put forward an alternative idea—that the baulk should be pulled out after I had fixed a wire hawser around it. If anything untoward happened then there would be no danger to human life.

After some discussion this method was agreed upon. I dived again and fixed a wire to the beam, but it broke directly the winch began to haul on it. A week elapsed before a new wire could be obtained, and then the baulk was duly dragged out—with the result that the whole shaft collapsed!

After this touch-and-go experience I began to appreciate that the hazards of deep-sea diving are far less tricky than those which arise from diving on land!



The Author in diving kit.

