

"I'VE BEEN SHANGHAIED!"

by Bob Sloan



At first John Taylor was only aware that his head hurt. Then, as his other senses slowly returned, he tried to focus his eyes on his surroundings.

"It's a ship," he mumbled, "but how did I..."

He tried to recall the dozen hours that

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had passed since his arrival in San Francisco that morning on the clipper *Yankee Dream*. It had been a long rough voyage, and he had been happy to see dry land again.

Then he remembered Mr. Doberman. Almost as soon as they had come ashore, John and two shipmates had seen the fellow waiting at the landing.

"Welcome to San Francisco, lads. Let me show you a place where you can get a comfortable bed and a grand meal." It sounded appealing, and the three sailors eagerly followed their new friend.

Mr. Doberman had been true to his word, too, serving them a good hot meal at his Sailors' Home.

"I used to be a sailor myself," he had confided. "That's why I opened this boarding house—to give sailors a decent place to stay when they're in port."

Then the four friends had had a drink together . . . and that was as far as John could remember. The details didn't matter, though, because everything was perfectly clear now—he'd been shanghaiied.

"All right, you lazy cur, get aft and get to work," came the surly voice of the first mate.

"What ship is this, and where is she bound?" demanded John groggily.

"You've signed on the *Diablo*, bound for Hong Kong," answered the officer.

"I never signed any contract," protested John.

The officer quickly produced a legal-looking document from his breast pocket. "Here's your mark and the signatures of two witnesses."

John studied the paper. Beside a crude X were two names—and one of them he recognized as belonging to his good friend Doberman.

What happened to John Taylor happened to hundreds of American sailors in the last half of the 1800s. Shanghaiing was a fact of life, and many a crew was made up in part—or in whole—of "volunteers" who never knew they had signed on until the ship was safely on its way to some distant port.

During the gold-rush days San Francisco was the foremost shanghai town. Captains who called there found that they soon lost their entire crews to the gold fever. They found, too, that it was difficult to make up a new crew, especially for a long voyage. There was only one reason a man signed on a ship in those days: to make enough money, as quickly as possible, to finance his next gold-prospecting venture.

The most unpopular voyage for "gold sailors" such as these was to Shanghai, China. Whereas there were plenty of ships going from California to Shanghai, there were few making the return trip. When a man sailed for Shanghai he might be gone for several years. A ship sailing for this port could raise a crew only by paying to have sailors drugged and kidnaped.

The usual practice was for the ship's captain to "advance" to the shanghaier a portion of the victim's wages. Often it was claimed that this money was for "unpaid bills" that the sailor had run up at the boarding house. Sometimes the advance was half the poor sailor's total pay.

The shanghaiers didn't draw the line at

cheating the captains, either. Because the victim was usually brought aboard drugged, the captain had to take the shanghaier's word about the man's usefulness as a sailor.

There was, however, a shanghaier named Mike Conner who made a point of being truthful to ship captains. His specialty was shanghaiing men who had never been to sea in their lives—a feat not too difficult to accomplish. In the backyard of his home Mike had installed a ship's wheel, and he would "teach" his new friend how to handle it. Then he would place a cow's horn on the ground and have his pupil walk around it twice. Finally the new "seaman" would be drugged and carried to a ship, and Mike would swear to the captain that this was a

good man at the wheel. "He's been around the horn twice."

Sailors themselves—perhaps to while away their long, unintended voyages—enjoyed telling stories about shanghaiers. There was the one, for instance, about Calico Jim. Six plain-clothes policemen had been assigned to catch Jim in the act of shanghaiing a customer. Unaware of their identity, Jim shanghaiied *them*. When he discovered what he had done, he promptly left the country.

And then there was Shanghai Brown, who made the worst mistake of all. He awoke one morning on an outward-bound schooner—shanghaiied by his intended victims of the night before.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. John met Mr. Doberman for the first time
 - A at the waterfront
 - B in a boarding house
 - C aboard a ship
2. Mr. Doberman's real reason for running a boarding house was to
 - A provide a decent place for sailors
 - B remind him of his life at sea
 - C lure sailors into a trap
3. John signed the contract with an X because he
 - A had never learned how to write
 - B was too drugged to do anything else
 - C was trying to make the contract illegal
4. The city that was most noted for shanghaiing was
 - A New Orleans
 - B San Francisco
 - C Los Angeles
5. The men of that city signed on ships mainly in order to
 - A make money quickly
 - B escape the police
 - C see the world
6. The term *shanghai* comes from the name of a
 - A Chinese city
 - B clipper ship
 - C kidnaped sailor
7. Most of the shanghaier's money came out of the
 - A profits of the voyage
 - B wages of the sailor
 - C income of the boarding house
8. Mike Conner was noted for shanghaiing
 - A experienced sailors
 - B shop keepers
 - C nonsailors
9. The horn that Mike's victims had been around was
 - A Cape Horn
 - B an animal's horn
 - C a horn of plenty
10. Shanghai Brown made the great mistake of
 - A shanghaiing a captain
 - B shanghaiing several policemen
 - C getting shanghaiied himself