

Lost Continent

by

Edgar Rice Burroughs

Web-Books.Com

Lost Continent

Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	16
Chapter 3	21
Chapter 4	29
Chapter 5	48
Chapter 6	57
Chapter 6	59
Chapter 7	65
Chapter 8	69
Chapter 9	78

Chapter 1

Since earliest childhood I have been strangely fascinated by the mystery surrounding the history of the last days of twentieth century Europe. My interest is keenest, perhaps, not so much in relation to known facts as to speculation upon the unknowable of the two centuries that have rolled by since human intercourse between the Western and Eastern Hemispheres ceased--the mystery of Europe's state following the termination of the Great War--provided, of course, that the war had been terminated.

From out of the meagerness of our censored histories we learned that for fifteen years after the cessation of diplomatic relations between the United States of North America and the belligerent nations of the Old World, news of more or less doubtful authenticity filtered, from time to time, into the Western Hemisphere from the Eastern.

Then came the fruition of that historic propaganda which is best described by its own slogan: "The East for the East-- the West for the West," and all further intercourse was stopped by statute.

Even prior to this, transoceanic commerce had practically ceased, owing to the perils and hazards of the mine-strewn waters of both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Just when submarine activities ended we do not know but the last vessel of this type sighted by a Pan-American merchantman was the huge Q 138, which discharged twenty-nine torpedoes at a Brazilian tank steamer off the Bermudas in the fall of 1972. A heavy sea and the excellent seamanship of the master of the Brazilian permitted the Pan-American to escape and report this last of a long series of outrages upon our commerce. God alone knows how many hundreds of our ancient ships fell prey to the roving steel sharks of blood-frenzied Europe. Countless were the vessels and men that passed over our eastern and western horizons never to return; but whether they met their fates before the belching tubes of submarines or among the aimlessly drifting mine fields, no man lived to tell.

And then came the great Pan-American Federation which linked the Western Hemisphere from pole to pole under a single flag, which joined the navies of the New World into the mightiest fighting force that ever sailed the seven seas-- the greatest argument for peace the world had ever known.

Since that day peace had reigned from the western shores of the Azores to the western shores of the Hawaiian Islands, nor has any man of either hemisphere dared cross 30dW. or 175dW. From 30d to 175d is ours--from 30d to 175d is peace, prosperity and happiness.

Beyond was the great unknown. Even the geographies of my boyhood showed nothing beyond. We were taught of nothing beyond. Speculation was discouraged. For two hundred years the Eastern Hemisphere had been wiped from the maps and histories of Pan-America. Its mention in fiction, even, was forbidden.

Our ships of peace patrol thirty and one hundred seventy- five. What ships from beyond they have warned only the secret archives of government show; but, a naval officer myself, I have gathered from the traditions of the service that it has been fully two hundred years since smoke or sail has been sighted east of 30d or west of 175d. The fate of the relinquished provinces which lay beyond the dead lines we could only speculate upon. That they were taken by the military power, which rose so suddenly in China after the fall of the republic, and which wrested Manchuria and Korea from Russia and Japan, and also absorbed the Philippines, is quite within the range of possibility.

It was the commander of a Chinese man-of-war who received a copy of the edict of 1972 from the hand of my illustrious ancestor, Admiral Turck, on one hundred seventy-five, two hundred and six years ago, and from the yellowed pages of the admiral's diary I learned that the fate of the Philippines was even then presaged by these Chinese naval officers.

Yes, for over two hundred years no man crossed 30d to 175d and lived to tell his story--not until chance drew me across and back again, and public opinion, revolting at last against the drastic regulations of our long-dead forbears, demanded that my story be given to the world, and that the narrow interdict which commanded peace, prosperity, and happiness to halt at 30d and 175d be removed forever.

I am glad that it was given to me to be an instrument in the hands of Providence for the uplifting of benighted Europe, and the amelioration of the suffering, degradation, and abysmal ignorance in which I found her.

I shall not live to see the complete regeneration of the savage hordes of the Eastern Hemisphere--that is a work which will require many generations, perhaps ages, so complete has been their reversion to savagery; but I know that the work has been started, and I am proud of the share in it which my generous countrymen have placed in my hands.

The government already possesses a complete official report of my adventures beyond thirty. In the narrative I purpose telling my story in a less formal, and I hope, a more entertaining, style; though, being only a naval officer and without claim to the slightest literary ability, I shall most certainly fall far short of the possibilities which are inherent in my subject. That I have passed through the most wondrous adventures that have befallen a civilized man during the past two centuries encourages me in the belief that, however ill the telling, the facts themselves will command your interest to the final page.

Beyond thirty! Romance, adventure, strange peoples, fearsome beasts--all the excitement and scurry of the lives of the twentieth century ancients that have been denied us in these dull days of peace and prosaic prosperity--all, all lay beyond thirty, the invisible barrier between the stupid, commercial present and the carefree, barbarous past.

What boy has not sighed for the good old days of wars, revolutions, and riots; how I used to pore over the chronicles of those old days, those dear old days, when workmen went

armed to their labors; when they fell upon one another with gun and bomb and dagger, and the streets ran red with blood! Ah, but those were the times when life was worth the living; when a man who went out by night knew not at which dark corner a "footpad" might leap upon and slay him; when wild beasts roamed the forest and the jungles, and there were savage men, and countries yet unexplored.

Now, in all the Western Hemisphere dwells no man who may not find a school house within walking distance of his home, or at least within flying distance.

The wildest beast that roams our waste places lairs in the frozen north or the frozen south within a government reserve, where the curious may view him and feed him bread crusts from the hand with perfect impunity.

But beyond thirty! And I have gone there, and come back; and now you may go there, for no longer is it high treason, punishable by disgrace or death, to cross 30d or 175d.

My name is Jefferson Turck. I am a lieutenant in the navy-- in the great Pan-American navy, the only navy which now exists in all the world.

I was born in Arizona, in the United States of North America, in the year of our Lord 2116. Therefore, I am twenty-one years old.

In early boyhood I tired of the teeming cities and overcrowded rural districts of Arizona. Every generation of Turcks for over two centuries has been represented in the navy. The navy called to me, as did the free, wide, unpeopled spaces of the mighty oceans. And so I joined the navy, coming up from the ranks, as we all must, learning our craft as we advance. My promotion was rapid, for my family seems to inherit naval lore. We are born officers, and I reserve to myself no special credit for an early advancement in the service.

At twenty I found myself a lieutenant in command of the aero-submarine Coldwater, of the SS-96 class. The Coldwater was one of the first of the air and underwater craft which have been so greatly improved since its launching, and was possessed of innumerable weaknesses which, fortunately, have been eliminated in more recent vessels of similar type.

Even when I took command, she was fit only for the junk pile; but the world-old parsimony of government retained her in active service, and sent two hundred men to sea in her, with myself, a mere boy, in command of her, to patrol thirty from Iceland to the Azores.

Much of my service had been spent aboard the great merchantmen-of-war. These are the utility naval vessels that have transformed the navies of old, which burdened the peoples with taxes for their support, into the present day fleets of self-supporting ships that find ample time for target practice and gun drill while they bear freight and the mails from the continents to the far-scattered island of Pan-America.

This change in service was most welcome to me, especially as it brought with it coveted responsibilities of sole command, and I was prone to overlook the deficiencies of the Coldwater in the natural pride I felt in my first ship.

The Coldwater was fully equipped for two months' patrolling-- the ordinary length of assignment to this service--and a month had already passed, its monotony entirely unrelieved by sight of another craft, when the first of our misfortunes befell.

We had been riding out a storm at an altitude of about three thousand feet. All night we had hovered above the tossing billows of the moonlight clouds. The detonation of the thunder and the glare of lightning through an occasional rift in the vaporous wall proclaimed the continued fury of the tempest upon the surface of the sea; but we, far above it all, rode in comparative ease upon the upper gale. With the coming of dawn the clouds beneath us became a glorious sea of gold and silver, soft and beautiful; but they could not deceive us as to the blackness and the terrors of the storm-lashed ocean which they hid.

I was at breakfast when my chief engineer entered and saluted. His face was grave, and I thought he was even a trifle paler than usual.

"Well?" I asked.

He drew the back of his forefinger nervously across his brow in a gesture that was habitual with him in moments of mental stress.

"The gravitation-screen generators, sir," he said. "Number one went to the bad about an hour and a half ago. We have been working upon it steadily since; but I have to report, sir, that it is beyond repair."

"Number two will keep us supplied," I answered. "In the meantime we will send a wireless for relief."

"But that is the trouble, sir," he went on. "Number two has stopped. I knew it would come, sir. I made a report on these generators three years ago. I advised then that they both be scrapped. Their principle is entirely wrong. They're done for." And, with a grim smile, "I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing my report was accurate."

"Have we sufficient reserve screen to permit us to make land, or, at least, meet our relief halfway?" I asked.

"No, sir," he replied gravely; "we are sinking now."

"Have you anything further to report?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said.

"Very good," I replied; and, as I dismissed him, I rang for my wireless operator. When he appeared, I gave him a message to the secretary of the navy, to whom all vessels in service on thirty and one hundred seventy-five report direct. I explained our predicament, and stated that with what screening force remained I should continue in the air, making as rapid headway toward St. Johns as possible, and that when we were forced to take to the water I should continue in the same direction.

The accident occurred directly over 30d and about 52d N. The surface wind was blowing a tempest from the west. To attempt to ride out such a storm upon the surface seemed suicidal, for the Coldwater was not designed for surface navigation except under fair weather conditions. Submerged, or in the air, she was tractable enough in any sort of weather when under control; but without her screen generators she was almost helpless, since she could not fly, and, if submerged, could not rise to the surface.

All these defects have been remedied in later models; but the knowledge did not help us any that day aboard the slowly settling Coldwater, with an angry sea roaring beneath, a tempest raging out of the west, and 30d only a few knots astern.

To cross thirty or one hundred seventy-five has been, as you know, the direst calamity that could befall a naval commander. Court-martial and degradation follow swiftly, unless as is often the case, the unfortunate man takes his own life before this unjust and heartless regulation can hold him up to public scorn.

There has been in the past no excuse, no circumstance, that could palliate the offense.

"He was in command, and he took his ship across thirty!" That was sufficient. It might not have been in any way his fault, as, in the case of the Coldwater, it could not possibly have been justly charged to my account that the gravitation-screen generators were worthless; but well I knew that should chance have it that we were blown across thirty today--as we might easily be before the terrific west wind that we could hear howling below us, the responsibility would fall upon my shoulders.

In a way, the regulation was a good one, for it certainly accomplished that for which it was intended. We all fought shy of 30d on the east and 175d on the west, and, though we had to skirt them pretty close, nothing but an act of God ever drew one of us across. You all are familiar with the naval tradition that a good officer could sense proximity to either line, and for my part, I am firmly convinced of the truth of this as I am that the compass finds the north without recourse to tedious processes of reasoning.

Old Admiral Sanchez was wont to maintain that he could smell thirty, and the men of the first ship in which I sailed claimed that Coburn, the navigating officer, knew by name every wave along thirty from 60dN. to 60dS. However, I'd hate to vouch for this.

Well, to get back to my narrative; we kept on dropping slowly toward the surface the while we bucked the west wind, clawing away from thirty as fast as we could. I was on the bridge, and as we dropped from the brilliant sunlight into the dense vapor of clouds

and on down through them to the wild, dark storm strata beneath, it seemed that my spirits dropped with the falling ship, and the buoyancy of hope ran low in sympathy.

The waves were running to tremendous heights, and the Coldwater was not designed to meet such waves head on. Her elements were the blue ether, far above the raging storm, or the greater depths of ocean, which no storm could ruffle.

As I stood speculating upon our chances once we settled into the frightful Maelstrom beneath us and at the same time mentally computing the hours which must elapse before aid could reach us, the wireless operator clambered up the ladder to the bridge, and, disheveled and breathless, stood before me at salute. It needed but a glance at him to assure me that something was amiss.

"What now?" I asked.

"The wireless, sir!" he cried. "My God, sir, I cannot send."

"But the emergency outfit?" I asked.

"I have tried everything, sir. I have exhausted every resource. We cannot send," and he drew himself up and saluted again.

I dismissed him with a few kind words, for I knew that it was through no fault of his that the mechanism was antiquated and worthless, in common with the balance of the Coldwater's equipment. There was no finer operator in Pan- America than he.

The failure of the wireless did not appear as momentous to me as to him, which is not unnatural, since it is but human to feel that when our own little cog slips, the entire universe must necessarily be put out of gear. I knew that if this storm were destined to blow us across thirty, or send us to the bottom of the ocean, no help could reach us in time to prevent it. I had ordered the message sent solely because regulations required it, and not with any particular hope that we could benefit by it in our present extremity.

I had little time to dwell upon the coincidence of the simultaneous failure of the wireless and the buoyancy generators, since very shortly after the Coldwater had dropped so low over the waters that all my attention was necessarily centered upon the delicate business of settling upon the waves without breaking my ship's back. With our buoyancy generators in commission it would have been a simple thing to enter the water, since then it would have been but a trifling matter of a forty-five degree dive into the base of a huge wave. We should have cut into the water like a hot knife through butter, and have been totally submerged with scarce a jar--I have done it a thousand times--but I did not dare submerge the Coldwater for fear that it would remain submerged to the end of time--a condition far from conducive to the longevity of commander or crew.

Most of my officers were older men than I. John Alvarez, my first officer, is twenty years my senior. He stood at my side on the bridge as the ship glided closer and closer to those

stupendous waves. He watched my every move, but he was by far too fine an officer and gentleman to embarrass me by either comment or suggestion.

When I saw that we soon would touch, I ordered the ship brought around broadside to the wind, and there we hovered a moment until a huge wave reached up and seized us upon its crest, and then I gave the order that suddenly reversed the screening force, and let us into the ocean. Down into the trough we went, wallowing like the carcass of a dead whale, and then began the fight, with rudder and propellers, to force the Coldwater back into the teeth of the gale and drive her on and on, farther and farther from relentless thirty.

I think that we should have succeeded, even though the ship was wracked from stem to stern by the terrific buffetings she received, and though she were half submerged the greater part of the time, had no further accident befallen us.

We were making headway, though slowly, and it began to look as though we were going to pull through. Alvarez never left my side, though I all but ordered him below for much-needed rest. My second officer, Porfirio Johnson, was also often on the bridge. He was a good officer, but a man for whom I had conceived a rather unreasoning aversion almost at the first moment of meeting him, an aversion which was not lessened by the knowledge which I subsequently gained that he looked upon my rapid promotion with jealousy. He was ten years my senior both in years and service, and I rather think he could never forget the fact that he had been an officer when I was a green apprentice.

As it became more and more apparent that the Coldwater, under my seamanship, was weathering the tempest and giving promise of pulling through safely, I could have sworn that I perceived a shade of annoyance and disappointment growing upon his dark countenance. He left the bridge finally and went below. I do not know that he is directly responsible for what followed so shortly after; but I have always had my suspicions, and Alvarez is even more prone to place the blame upon him than I.

It was about six bells of the forenoon watch that Johnson returned to the bridge after an absence of some thirty minutes. He seemed nervous and ill at ease--a fact which made little impression on me at the time, but which both Alvarez and I recalled subsequently.

Not three minutes after his reappearance at my side the Coldwater suddenly commenced to lose headway. I seized the telephone at my elbow, pressing upon the button which would call the chief engineer to the instrument in the bowels of the ship, only to find him already at the receiver attempting to reach me.

"Numbers one, two, and five engines have broken down, sir," he called. "Shall we force the remaining three?"

"We can do nothing else," I bellowed into the transmitter.

"They won't stand the gaff, sir," he returned.

"Can you suggest a better plan?" I asked.

"No, sir," he replied.

"Then give them the gaff, lieutenant," I shouted back, and hung up the receiver.

For twenty minutes the Coldwater bucked the great seas with her three engines. I doubt if she advanced a foot; but it was enough to keep her nose in the wind, and, at least, we were not drifting toward thirty.

Johnson and Alvarez were at my side when, without warning, the bow swung swiftly around and the ship fell into the trough of the sea.

"The other three have gone," I said, and I happened to be looking at Johnson as I spoke. Was it the shadow of a satisfied smile that crossed his thin lips? I do not know; but at least he did not weep.

"You always have been curious, sir, about the great unknown beyond thirty," he said. "You are in a good way to have your curiosity satisfied." And then I could not mistake the slight sneer that curved his upper lip. There must have been a trace of disrespect in his tone or manner which escaped me, for Alvarez turned upon him like a flash.

"When Lieutenant Turck crosses thirty," he said, "we shall all cross with him, and God help the officer or the man who reproaches him!"

"I shall not be a party to high treason," snapped Johnson. "The regulations are explicit, and if the Coldwater crosses thirty it devolves upon you to place Lieutenant Turck under arrest and immediately exert every endeavor to bring the ship back into Pan-American waters."

"I shall not know," replied Alvarez, "that the Coldwater passes thirty; nor shall any other man aboard know it," and, with his words, he drew a revolver from his pocket, and before either I or Johnson could prevent it had put a bullet into every instrument upon the bridge, ruining them beyond repair.

And then he saluted me, and strode from the bridge, a martyr to loyalty and friendship, for, though no man might know that Lieutenant Jefferson Turck had taken his ship across thirty, every man aboard would know that the first officer had committed a crime that was punishable by both degradation and death. Johnson turned and eyed me narrowly.

"Shall I place him under arrest?" he asked.

"You shall not," I replied. "Nor shall anyone else."

"You become a party to his crime!" he cried angrily.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

