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mine is just about the hottest corpse you ever stuck yer beak into."

Sam crouched as if dodging a blow, but Scotty stalked past him, and went on to the stable and helped to hitch up the mules. The lenience of the liveryman about the feed-bill caused him to take a more cheerful view of things in general, and he came dangerously near breaking into a whistle, as he hopped over the wheel to his seat.

Just as he rattled across the railroad-tracks he saw a cloud of red dust flying toward him from the other end of the town. In the van rode eight troopers from the fort in command of a lieutenant, the hoofs of their horses sounding a drum-beat on the hard-baked roadway, and their carbines jolting heavily at their saddle-slings. Behind them galloped four mules drawing a lumbering army-wagon, stained by wind and dust, but nevertheless a shop-new counterpart of the service-work vehicle in which Scotty sat.

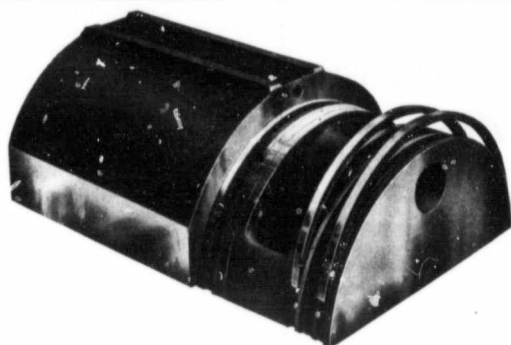
He drew aside to let them pass, and watched them thunder up to the station with the flourish of a battery of field artillery. The west-bound flyer was due in twenty minutes, and all St. Marcial was at the depot to watch the transfer of the boxes containing the soldiers' monthly pay from the express-car to the wagon. A few of the timorous half-expected to see Scar-Faced George step forth and hold up the troopers on the spot.

It was getting toward the hot part of the day, and Scotty let the mules make their own pace. He was in no hurry to get back to his partners, and his brain fairly whirled with suggestions as to the best method of presenting the story of his failure. As the miles dribbled slowly behind his sense of depression deepened. He had made seventeen kinds of a fool of himself. He thought hard things of his behavior. He expressed them in low, grim oburgations between clenched teeth. He uttered them loudly in the virile and vivid vernacular of the trans-Missouri. Again he became obsessed by the idea that a final bullet was the best means of ridding the earth of such long-eared misfits as himself. But he didn't even have a gun. It sure was hard luck.

He roused himself to prevent the mules from taking the fork of the road which led to the fort, and put on the brake to check the speed of the wagon down the "hogback" over which the trail ran. Just as he reached the bottom of the hill one of the leaders shied at a clump of mesquit. Scotty brought him about with a sharp jerk.

"Hanzuppi!" The voice and the admonition rang familiarly.

From behind the mesquit stepped a man bearing that deadliest of short-range weapons, "sawed-



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