

THE FIGHTING SCIENTIST AMONG PANAMA SAVAGES

ATTACKED by Ferocious San Blas Indians, Whose Mountain Fastnesses He Was Exploring, Dr. von Teuber Drilled Four Men with One Bullet and Fought for His Life with Their Companion

DR. F. VON TEUBER, formerly official photographer for the Isthmian Canal Commission, a naturalist and ethnologist of note, tells here the story of one of the adventures that befell him when he penetrated the wild country lying back of the San Blas coast of Panama a few years ago.

Dr. von Teuber, who is an Austrian by birth and education, first became interested in the strange San Blas Indians and their equally strange country when serving aboard the *Oriente*, Panama revenue cutter, as a physician. He has made three attempts to explore the region and is now arranging a fourth expedition.

While his purpose in entering the country was entirely peaceful, he repeatedly found it necessary to defend himself against the natives, and the incident of which he tells, which took place during his second expedition, is of the thrilling and desperate kind which should more properly fall to the lot of a fighter and adventurer than of a scientist.



DR. F. R. VON TEUBER

AN BLAS is mystery. To speak of the San Blas coast, the San Blas mountains, the San Blas flora and fauna, the San Blas minerals—particularly of the San Blas Indians, is to venture up the line where knowledge ends and hazy conjecture begins.

Science has never tabulated San Blas. Ethnologists, geologists, naturalists—explorers of all kinds who do the pioneer work in strange lands and supply exact data for those dry text books and ponderous technical volumes so necessary in the scientific conquest of the world—have never reduced San Blas to a matter of formulae, diagrams and Latin terms.

San Blas, loosely, is a strip of territory lying along the Caribbean coast of Colon in the Republic of Panama. Hedged about by mountain ranges, impenetrable jungle, treacherous shores, and inhabited by some of the wildest and least intelligent of savage races, it remains a no man's land almost at the very threshold of that great undertaking of modern civilization—the canal.

Stories of its rich gold deposits, of its invaluable mahogany forests, have tempted the treasure seeker and the explorer as keenly as its scientific possibilities have attracted the more sober investigator. But all attempts to profit by its wealth, material or otherwise, have met with failure, sometimes through the difficulties of its natural position, more often through the ferocious suspicion and untamed hostility of its various tribes.

And so I think you can see what a fascination the word San Blas has for a man with some scientific enthusiasm, with some taste for scientific discovery and with a great deal of curiosity and love of strange adventure.

I made preparations for an expedition into the San Blas region in the winter of 1907. I had had some previous experience there and I understood fully what I was attempting. My object was to obtain a complete collection of native implements and weapons, skulls from the burying grounds and information on language, customs and racial characteristics. My discoveries I intended to offer to the Smithsonian Institution.

The Panama-Playa-Chico-North Bay Expedition, as we called it, was formed in Colon in December. Under my leadership were my brother, Carl von Teuber; William Bartlett and John Bradley, of Boston, and Denon Smith, of Norfolk, Va. At the last moment we added another recruit, a Spanish American, Blanco by name, who afterward proved himself a valuable and faithful member of our party.

Our outfit consisted of Mauser rifles, with both steel and soft-nosed ammunition; Smith & Wesson .45's, United States army knapsacks, two fly tents, rice, sugar, salt, crackers, dried fish, coffee, tea and a set of medical supplies. The average weight of the packs was sixty-eight pounds to a man.

We started from Colon on January 9, 1908. In the government launch, running up the coast to Playa de Damas. After a stop here we took up our march along the palm-fringed coast and on January 19 reached San Isabel, the furthest outpost of Panamanian civil authority. Our plan was to cut inland from San Isabel and find the head waters of the Mandinga River, which we purposed to follow down to the Mosquito Gulf, thus completing a circuit through the heart of the San Blas country.

Our troubles began at San Isabel. Bradley had fallen ill of a fever that baffled my diagnosis. The news of our coming had spread through the region and had excited the natives, who are incredibly sensitive to and fearful of the approach of whites. Every attempt was made to dissuade us from our purpose. The blacks of San Isabel, descendants of Congo slaves and deeply detested by the San Blas Indians, made all kinds of objections to furnishing us with guides—the only genuine one being their dread of the mountain tribes into whose territory we wished to advance.

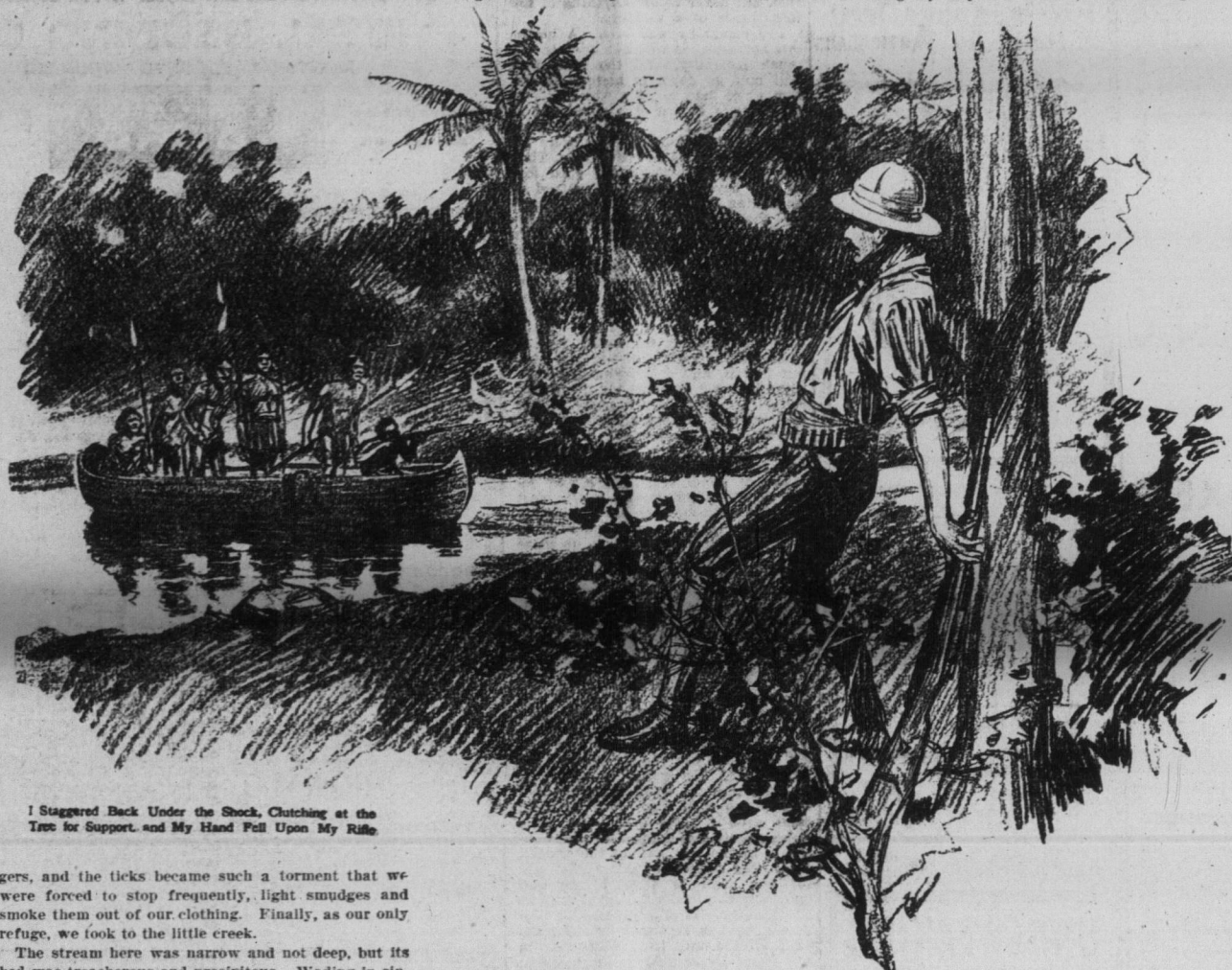
On January 22, however, we made a start with two negroes who took us inland some miles by canoe and were finally induced to lead us into the jungle. Many a futile effort has been made to convey in words some idea of a virgin tropical forest, with its heart-breaking barriers and hopeless density, a steaming, fetid hell of lush vegetation where men go mad in their frenzied contest against perverse nature. My own must remain inadequate. Suffice it to say that we were plunged into torment such as only the trackless wilds of Central and South America can inflict upon intruders. We heaved our way literally foot by foot, stumbling among pitfalls, enmeshed by stout creepers and waylaid by clouds of ticks and other insect pests until our strength waned from us and we could have wept from sheer weakness and despair.

Our way led upward at a stiff angle, as we were now climbing the coast range. There was no vestige of a trail. We were all soft, for our tramp up to San Isabel had been more strenuous than this. Our packs weighed upon us grievously. Bradley's temperature

had gone up again and he was delirious at times. Bartlett showed signs of the same trouble. All in all we were in pretty bad shape when we conquered the ascent and the negroes, pushing over a last stretch, brought us to a little creek, which they said was a tributary of the Mandinga.

Penetrating the Wilds.

At this point the guides refused to go farther and we allowed them to return. We made camp as best we could in the thicket, slept the sleep of exhaustion and with daybreak attempted to resume the trail breaking. Without the assistance of the blacks we found progress impossible. Lacking their subtle instinct of direction and jungle travel we were helpless in the maze of giant ferns, bamboos, hardwoods and palms, interlaced and grown about with poisonous vines and thorny shrubs. Snakes added to our dan-



I Staggered Back Under the Shock, Clutching at the Tree for Support, and My Hand Fell Upon My Rifle.

gers, and the ticks became such a torment that we were forced to stop frequently, light smudges and smoke them out of our clothing. Finally, as our only refuge, we took to the little creek.

The stream here was narrow and not deep, but its bed was treacherous and precipitous. Wading in single file, we sometimes sank to our waists in quicksands, sometimes descended sheer, rocky slides, where the water overwhelmed us and shot us, drenched, bruised and gasping, to the pool below. Fallen trees impeded us, lying breast high across the water course. Through and over these various obstacles we dragged ourselves, constantly exposed to ambush and attack by hostiles on either flank, but sacrificing caution in our desire to reach the Mandinga.

For three days we followed this wretched creek, suffering terrible hardships, with never a dry stitch of clothing upon our bodies, living on soggy crackers and black coffee and such tiny fish as we could scoop up with our hats in the shallows. Our camp each night was pitched where a strip of sand or rock offered room for a fire. Our spirits were none too high. Bradley and Bartlett continued to show signs of intermittent fever. On the twenty-eighth, our supplies having been rendered almost useless by water, Smith was so fortunate as to bring down a wild boar and we had our first meat meal.

Soon afterward we came upon a faint trail opening upon the bank of the stream. Owing to the windings of the creek, which we had not dared to leave, we had made a direct advance of some seven miles only, according to my observations, and I decided to follow the trail in the hope that it might prove a short cut between two loops of the water course. Such, in fact, it turned out to be, and in the afternoon we were again on the creek. In climbing down the steep em-

bankment Bradley fell with his pack and accidentally fired his rifle, the shot narrowly missing my brother. Another interval of wading brought us to a point where the creek flowed into a considerable river, undoubtedly the Mandinga.

We had now reached our objective, but our situation was not much improved on that account. Bradley was down with a temperature of 101, Bartlett was in little better shape. We had no craft nor the means of making any, and the Indians, with whom we had expected to treat, remained obstinately hidden. The shyness of the savages worried us as promising trouble. We could not doubt that we had been observed and that a gathering of the tribes would result.

The very night of our arrival at the Mandinga brought the first alarm. We were encamped on the shore of the creek, on a bed of dried palm leaves alive with scorpions and red ants, whose attentions were adequately reinforced by mosquitoes and sand flies. Sleep was hardly to be thought of, and when there came a rustle in the thicket, followed by a pinging shock through the tent, we were up and under arms on the instant. We found that a poisoned spear had been launched at us, penetrating the canvas and burying itself in the tent pole. There was no indication of the whereabouts of the enemy who had sent this sinister message, but we took good care to insure ourselves against further surprises of the kind. With our

I tried to tell the interpreter that we did not wish to touch the sand, that we could not return the way we had come, that we were ill and must hasten down the Mandinga to the coast. They remained sullen and hostile.

"You no go 'way, we kill," was the ultimatum of the interpreter, and on these terms the conference closed. My party was greatly disheartened by our failure to get the friendly aid of the Indians in procuring a canoe or a raft. Our diet now consisted entirely of rice and coffee. There seemed no chance of obtaining any of the relics for which we had come among these people, and all of us were eager to reach the coast.

Attacked by Indians.

I started next morning from the camp and made my way along the shore of the Mandinga to determine our chances of continuing the journey on foot. Retreat was out of the question. It was equally unthinkable that we should remain where we were. I did not want to come to open warfare with the savages. The only solution seemed a hurried disencampment and a forced march.

I had my machete, with which I made myself a path, and carried my Mauser, loaded with a clip of steel jacketed ammunition. I had gone perhaps a mile down the stream and was hewing through a thicket when I caught the sound of voices out in the stream. Working my way to the bank, I saw a large canoe,

I fired once. I heard the savages scream, saw the standing group melt in a heap of writhing bodies and outflung arms and the canoe tilted as the four who had been standing amidships fell across the gunwales. A violent trembling seized me, and deadly sickness. I leaned against my tree, feeling that the hand of death was upon me. When I looked again the Indians were struggling about the overturned canoe in a ruddy froth. Two were floating away upon the current. Two others, one coughing his last breath with a punctured lung, clung to the dugout. Another, he who had shot me, was swimming down stream with his weapon and powder horn held high. The last, the man who had paddled at the stern, was coming straight for me.

Such is the San Blas Indian. He fights like the jaguar, against all odds and without knowledge of fear. This savage, who had seen four of his companions drilled like beads for a string with the deadly steel bullet of my weapon, hurled himself toward me with a face of demonic rage, exposing himself to my fire while he swam shoreward. He carried a jagged spear in one hand and when within his depth lifted himself, all dripping, and charged with the yell of a wild beast through the shallows and up the bank.

I was scarce conscious, what with pain and the intense nervous excitation of the attack and the terrible effect of my fire. I do not believe that I was afraid, but I was all of a jangle. I certainly thought that my side was shot away. I had slid to the ground behind the tree, clutching my rifle in a shaking grip.

That dreadful cry aroused me and by the time I swung my weapon around the distorted face of the Indian danced before my blurred vision. He was within striking distance, his tense, muscled figure thrown back for the spear cast, the wet hair plastered over his staring eyes, when I blotted out the apparition, pumping desperately at the trigger and yelling I know not what primal yell of rage and defiance.

I must have thrown myself backward into the thicket immediately afterward. All my impressions of the deadly affair came to me through a red haze, like glimpses caught from a fantastic dream. I remember crawling through the underbrush, pausing to press my hand against my numbed side and to look stupidly at the red stains on my hand when I brought it away. But no more than a minute or two could have passed before my last enemy was upon me.

It was the one who had fired the musket; he who had paddled in the bow. He had swam ashore, reloaded and tracked me. He was crouching to draw upon me again when I dodged away around a close grown clump of palms.

Men do strange things, play strange games, at the tensest and most desperate moments of life. There in that lonely jungle of the San Blas hills a child might have laughed to see the naked warrior and the white man play at tag among the trees. I discovered an unexpected agility. My opponent was no fireball or trickier than I. I clawed around to the right, circling swiftly as he followed, but checking and turning back as he sought to outwit me.

I do not know why I fled him, unless it was that I was sick at heart with the slaughter. But we played the senseless game around the palms until my anger came back to me at being chased hither and yon, and with a spring I came to meet him.

I knocked up his ancient musket as he did my rifle and each with a hand upon the other's weapon we wrestled for a space. He bore me backward with the grip of his naked feet on the earth and dashed my shoulder painfully against a trunk. But here I had a purchase and I buried him back, releasing my hold upon the musket and bringing down the muzzle of my own rifle. With the last shot in the clip I killed him.

The Race with the Canoes.

Staggering back to the shore I waded out to the overturned canoe. The wounded savages had all disappeared. Whether any of them reached shore or not I shall never know. It had come to me suddenly that here was the craft we had all wanted. I had the dug-out righted and partly bailed out before I thought to look at my wound again. I found that the charge had inflicted no injuries more serious than bruises and lacerations. The musket had been loaded with insufficient powder behind a collection of pebbles, nails and metal slugs.

I attempted to paddle the waterlogged canoe up stream, but made slow work of it, and was presently aware of a whole fleet of similar craft far down the river coming up. I made haste to get to shore again and to press on toward the camp on foot. The canoes passed me in spite of my frantic efforts to keep the lead and warn my companions. Stumbling through the jungle, running, falling, running again, I was forced to keep out of sight from the water and in my haste I made but poor progress. As I neared the camp I heard firing ahead of me and was certain that the fleet of canoes had attacked the party.

As I came out into the little clearing where our tents stood I found my brother, Smith and Bartlett plugging away with rifle and revolver across the water. The canoes were in plain view and were crowded with natives who were standing up and popping with their muskets. But they were firing at the opposite bank of the creek, not toward us.

For a moment I could not understand, until, seeing puffs of smoke from a hostile shore and observing the stature and costume of the natives in the canoes, I knew that these new arrivals were acting as allies instead of foes. They were coast Indians on an inland expedition. The mountain Indians, their hereditary enemies, had made an attack on the camp, and the newcomers had joined heartily in the fray, through no friendliness for the whites, indeed, but through the bitterness of their ancient feud.

By this timely aid the mountain natives, whose fellows had attacked me, were driven off. After some chattering the coast Indians agreed to take our party down to the Mosquito Gulf. We surrendered our rifles and supplies, installed Bradley as comfortably as possible on the bottom of one of the dugouts, and embarked, quite willing to escape the jungle on any terms.

We were taken, against our will, to Mandinga Island and later to Card Island, off the coast, being held treacherously in captivity at each place for some days. Finally, by threats and pleading, we were allowed to proceed to San Isabel.

Bradley died while on his way to Colon with Smith and Bartlett in a small sailing vessel. Blanco was shot and killed at San Isabel when some of the Mandinga natives, who had followed us there and were lingering in the vicinity, attempted to burn the hut where I had stored such relics as I had been able to collect while in captivity. My brother and I finally won fear of the San Blas country in safety, having failed of the success we had hoped for, but bringing with us what is still the most satisfactory collection of scientific data and curiosities so far gathered in that wild and inaccessible region.

Behind the Mask of the Girl Bohemian.

NEW YORK is full of mes. We talk about our ubiquitous selves in ladies' magazines and Sunday supplements, with illustrations showing a few Flatiron buildings and a border design of tight skirted lady journalists and Brooklyn bridges.

We prate that art is long, funds are short and hall rooms small; we sigh whole windy columns of career stuff and rave of the professional woman and her rewards, even while we cry ourselves to sleep on our lonely and dingy pillows.

Back in our native Xenia, Ohio, and Brownsville, Pa., our erstwhile friends rock their babies and read our latest contribution to the Home Comfort. We are made honorary members of the Ladies' Aid and Literary Society, and the Daily Gazette eulogizes us frequently and fondly as "a former Brownsville girl."

Meanwhile we write continuously, and occasionally we sell; we sleep in fourth floor backs and dream of Xenia's wide verandas; we feed our careers with all our energies and starve our stomachs. We eschew marriage, date on platonic, address our men friends as "pal" and "old boy," but read Robert W. Chambers; we wear tailored shirt waists and pink ribbon in our under bodies.

Whole boxes of us haunt the theatres and hotel lobbies, ghoulish for "Why I am a Suffragette" or "The Stage as a Career" interviews from the latest divorcee or millionaire wifebeater. The following morning we slip long coats over our flannellette kimonos and hasten to the newsstand for a paper. A dynamite explosion has killed our headliner and the scoop is reduced to half a stick beneath the death notices. We accordingly reduce breakfast to an egg boiled over the gas jet and fish up a tin of crackers from the trunk.

We frequent tea rooms and are much given to "finding places." The "find" is usually a suburban done in weathered oak and with an atmosphere of Bohemia and spaghetti, but in ultra-Bohemian moods we ferret out a sixty cent table d'hôte dinner where we drink water tumblers of pale pink sherry and have our choice of Hungarian goulash or boiled halibut.

We speak lightly of interviews and important editors, but fail to remark that we have waited five hours for five minutes of curt editorial attention. We write home of fashionable New York as if we too gave monkey dinners and enjoyed annual nervous breakdowns. We send picture postals of ourselves luxuriating in sixty horse power limousines, but fail to note that the picture was taken in a dimly-lighted English avenue gallery and that the sixty horse power is latent cardboard.

We write of opera, drama and art, talk intimately of the masters and discuss "The Blue Bird" in detail—

this is, after we happen to meet the dramatic editor in the subway and ride as far Forty-second street with him. We inform our second cousin who lives in St. Louis that all the new spring hats are small and that flowers are used entirely, omitting the fact that our own is proving an exception and is a large flat with a ribbon bow from two seasons before.

Sometimes we "arrive" we write a book or a play. Sometimes the book is a best seller, but not often; sometimes the play is a success, but not often. Then we buy Long Island swamp lands, afford a Japanese chef, and earnest young men in Spillville, Iowa, write for our autograph and tell us that ours is the book which has most influenced their lives. Paradoxically enough, we may write to-day and awaken to-morrow rich in royalties and fame. But then we write back to Xenia in the spirit of the lowly and talk of egg omelets and interior decorating.

Sometimes we marry; it may be the sporting editor or the man who picks up our umbrella on the elevated—we may marry shamefacedly, but we stow the pad and pencil pretty far down in the tressouzeau trunk.

Often we just plod on, flashing our tin foil at Xenia and Brownsville, cold creaming the wrinkles and writing morosely "From My Garden" stories. We are chosen godmothers to the first baby of the girl who used to do back sitting on the Star, and we try not to wish things. When we do, we turn the photograph of one of the "old pal" species, race downward and sob it all out to the dingy pillow.