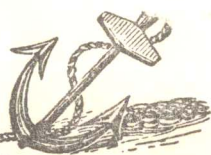


William Brinkley

# **Don't go near the water**

Random House, New York



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simultaneously in Toronto, Canada, by Random House of Canada, **Limited**.  
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56-5219  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
by H. Wolff

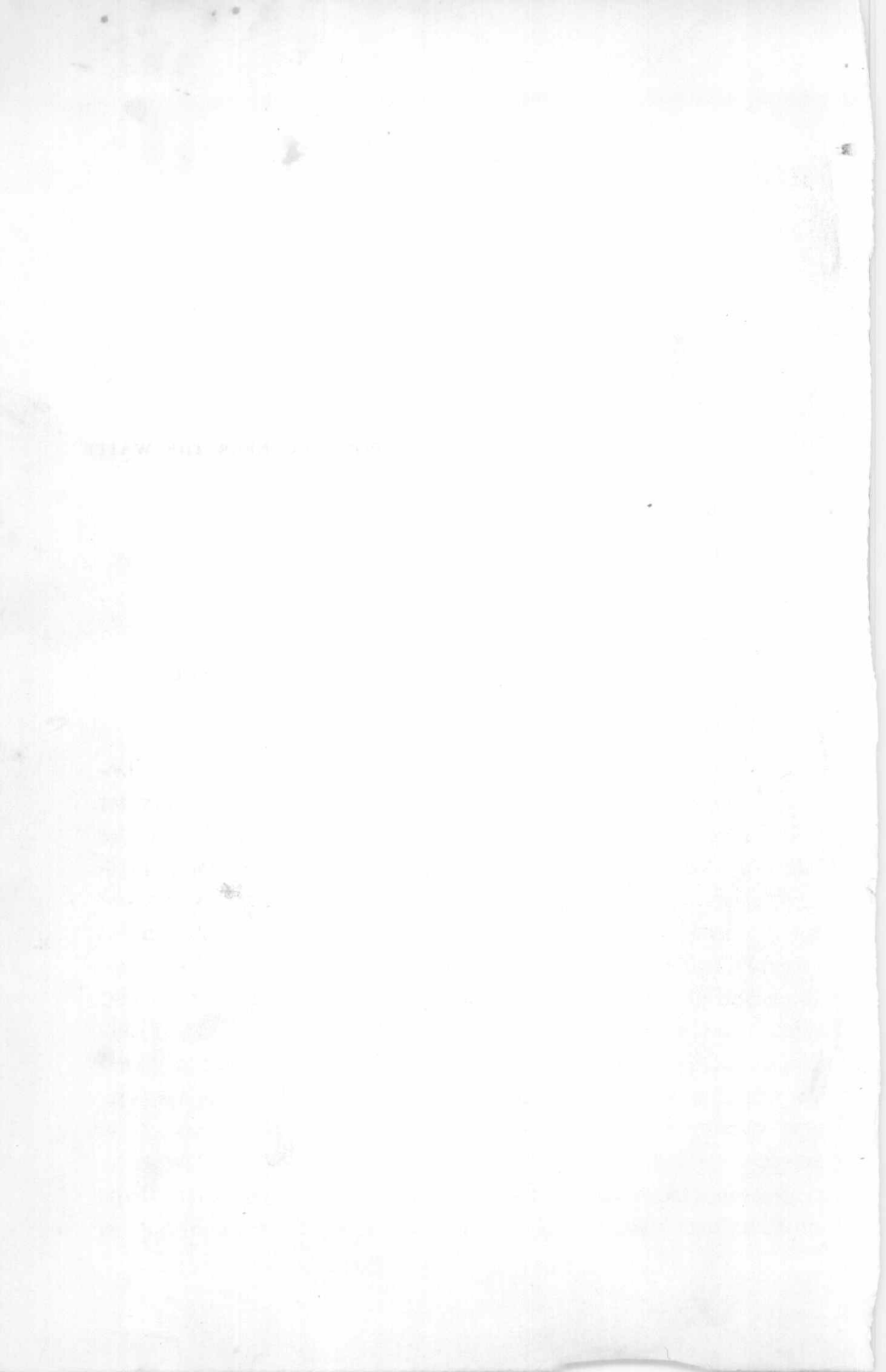
THIRD PRINTING

*To Ruth, Ann, Virginia*

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DON'T GO NEAR THE WATER



1

## Don't give up the ship



In peacetime Lieutenant Commander Clinton T. Nash had been in charge of a Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Beane office in the Midwest. Not long after Pearl Harbor he had been commissioned directly from his brokerage office without the corrupting effect of any intervening naval training. Except for a correspondence course in "Navy Regulations" this naval virginity had been chastely preserved down to his present duty on the island of Tulura in the western Pacific, where he was executive officer of the Public Relations Section of the giant ComFleets command. Nevertheless the exec's office and desk, behind which he now sat waiting for the exact moment to call in the officers waiting outside for the regular morning conference, were nautical enough to do credit to the captain of a heavy cruiser.

On the desk, wedged between bookends fashioned in the shape of miniature anchors, sat a small but comprehensive library of

naval literature, including Bowditch's *American Practical Navigator*; *Naval Leadership*; *Watch Officer's Guide*; *Navy Regulations*; *Modern Seamanship*; *Naval Customs, Traditions, and Usages*; and *How to Abandon Ship*. Although the exec did not smoke, the desk thoughtfully held a brass ashtray, for the use of visitors, sawed off from a five-inch shell case which he had procured from the U.S.S. *Wisconsin* when she had visited Tulura. Alongside it was another sawed-off shell case of three-inch caliber, for paper clips. Facing the exec was a desk photograph of the U.S.S. *Yorktown*, a vessel which he had never seen but whose likeness was very attractive, being in full color. In the right top drawer of the desk was a pair of 7x50 binoculars, and in the right bottom, deeper drawer a sextant which the exec had requisitioned from the Fleet Supply officer. The binoculars he took with him, slung around his neck, on trips to the beach. The sextant was an instrument of great mystery to the exec, who knew only that it was used somehow in navigation, but he was hoping to master it with the aid of Bowditch.

Arrayed along the walls were a barometer, a ship's bell clock and a framed "Golden Dragon" diploma which proved that the exec had been aboard ship when he voyaged across the international dateline en route from San Francisco to Tulura. From a hook hung his hat, with the gold braid turned a seagoing seaweed green from prolonged soaking, in the basin of his BOQ room, in Morton's salt water. Watching him from that wall which the exec faced from his chair, and set just at eye level from the sitting position, was a varnished, yard-long legend which the exec had had a Seabee carpenter's mate carve out of wood: "Don't Give Up The Ship!" Beneath it hung another, non-nautical expression, also carved from wood: "Think Big!" One other non-nautical item decorated the wall—a framed Merrill Lynch citation with a gold seal, which had been presented to the exec for having led all company brokers in his state, in the year 1941, in the sale of securities.

The executive officer was a man of medium height, lean, almost scarecrow-built, except for a small pot belly which was grafted onto his midriff like a Dutch oven. He had a head of classi-



cally spherical shape, and it was totally hairless. The combination of this configuration and aridity, together with the nicely polished surface, was responsible for the name by which he was known, not to his face—"Marblehead." To compensate for the absence of growth on his head, the exec had grown a mustache to fill the space between his nose and his upper lip, but this only accentuated the general bareness, like a tuft of grass in the desert. But his legs, emerging from the British khaki shorts, which he had procured, these being more smartly cut than the U.S. counterpart, from His Majesty's Public Relations liaison officer on Tulura, more than made up for the upper baldness. They were extremely hairy, a black, curly growth, abundant to the point of luxuriance. With his gleaming head, and wearing shorts, he had, in the words of the correspondent Jerry Wakeley, "more skin showing than any man in the Pacific."

Coming to his feet, the exec ranged around his office, giving it a final check for shipshapeness. He walked over to the barometer, and noting a small spot on its glistening face, took out his handkerchief, wet it slightly and rubbed the spot away. Continuing smartly around the room, he gazed a moment, expressionlessly, at the Merrill Lynch citation—then a suggestion of a smile traced his lips. Moving on, he adjusted slightly the "Don't Give Up The Ship!" legend. Then he stood for a solemn moment looking at the "Think Big!" injunction below it. Circling back to his desk he sat down. Suddenly an expression of irritation crossed his face. He grabbed up his phone.

"Brownell," he shouted, "why isn't my three-inch shell full of paper clips?"

Almost immediately the door opened and a young lieutenant (jg) hurried in with a small box in his hand. "Sorry, Commander," he said apologetically. While the exec watched stonily, the jg emptied the box of paper clips into the shell. He hurried back out and the exec was alone again.

He picked up the one piece of paper on his desk—a Navy dispatch—and read it again. His eyes moved meditatively to the twin

sayings on the wall and closed for a moment. Then he placed the dispatch carefully back on the desk.

The exec noticed that he still had a few minutes left. He took out his Bowditch, and opening it to the section on the sextant, started reading studiously: "When a ray of light undergoes two reflections in the same plane with two plane mirrors the angle between its first and its last direction is equal to twice the inclination of the reflecting surfaces . . ."

"Ding!-Ding! . . . Ding!-Ding!"

Glancing up at the ship's bell, the exec closed the book with a sigh of relief. He picked up his phone and spoke to his assistant, Lieutenant (jg) Calvert Brownell, in the outer office.

"Four bells, Calvert," he said briskly. To the exec it made sense for a Navy officer to use Navy language. "Let them in."

Flowing into the room, the Public Relations officers took seats in front of the exec's desk, arranging themselves rank-wise, with the lieutenant commanders in the first row of chairs, backed successively by the lieutenants, the lieutenants junior grade and, in the last row, the ensigns. The exec, calling the conference briskly to order, listened to the regular reports of the department heads—the number of correspondents and visitors who had arrived since yesterday morning's conference, the press conferences, interviews and round-the-island trips arranged for today, a vigorous complaint by a CBS correspondent that NBC was being shown favoritism on radio transmission time, a demand by a correspondent named Gordon Ripwell that he be given a corner room in the BOQ, and like matters. Usually the exec handled each problem as it arose, but this morning he cut off each with a curt declaration, "What say we navigate that one tomorrow?" The department heads, sensing that their executive officer had something special on his mind, speeded up their reports and soon had them over.

"Routine department head reports received," the exec said crisply. "Now, stand by for something important."

Collie-like the exec lifted and scratched his bare, hairy leg. Replacing his foot on the floor, he moved his swivel chair circumferen-

tially several times in a way he had before announcing something big.

"Sailors!" he said. "We received a dispatch from Washington this morning. It seems that a really large name is on his way out here!"

This was nothing much. Public Relations Headquarters was always overstocked in large-name visitors.

The exec leaned forward, pulled the huge *Navy Regulations* from between the miniature-anchor bookends and with both hands banged it on the desk. The sound crashed deafeningly through the room and the two shell-case trays jumped.

"Tarzan," he said, "is on his way here!"

"Tarzan!" The name came echoing out of the chief of the radio section, Lieutenant Commander Arnold Gladney.

"Tarzan!" cried the chief of the photographic section, Lieutenant Commander Wayne Hereford. The two lieutenant commanders were as alike as two plump and happy little pigs from the same litter and were known as the "Echo Twins." It usually took any newly arrived officer a couple of months to be able to distinguish one from the other.

"Roger," the exec said, relaxing back in his chair. "Tarzan. That is to say, Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator and author of Tarzan—and therefore the same as Tarzan for our purposes, has left the mainland for Tultura. He's coming out as a correspondent."

"A correspondent?" said Lieutenant Commander Gladney. "Who for?"

"What difference does that make?" the exec said impatiently.

"I think the whole idea is four O!" Lieutenant Commander Gladney said suddenly.

"I think the idea sparkles!" said Lieutenant Commander Hereford.

The exec selected a paper clip from the three-inch shell. Cocking his arm, he let go at a metal wastebasket eight feet away. The paper clip hit home with a sharp ping. A pleased look crossed the exec's face.

"Tarzan is so world-wide famous," he said, "that the idea immediately impels me Navy public-relations-wise. But the dispatch just arrived this morning"—he tapped the piece of paper on his desk—"and what with one thing and another I haven't been able to give the matter its merited thought. So I'd like to throw the conference open to a top-of-the-head discussion on this entire matter. 'Tarzan! There's something enormous there or my name isn't Joe Blow. Okay, Sailors, who'll fire a torpedo?'"

No one fired one for a moment. Then Ensign Christopher Tyson III, a Correspondent's Aide, spoke up from the back row. Tyson, a handsome youngster with a pouty, almost insolent face, looked as if he should still be in prep school, though actually he had obtained his degree from Princeton the day before he entered the Navy. His poutiness came from the fact that being so young and such a junior ensign he got all the odd jobs nobody else wanted.

"What's Burroughs—or Tarzan—going to cover out here, Commander?"

"Cover?" the exec said blankly. He aimed another paper clip for the wastebasket. It was a near miss, and the exec frowned slightly. "Why, I don't know, Tyson. Nothing especially, I guess. But, you know, the name is associated with islands . . ."

"I haven't read him in quite a while," Tyson said. "But let's see. Tarzan, as I recall, operated in Africa."

"Anyhow he's associated with the jungle, native life, that sort of thing," Lieutenant Commander Nash said impatiently. "Heaven knows there's enough jungle on these islands. Jungle . . ." he repeated, his eyes blooming wide with an air of discovery. "That's probably why the Navy is shipping Tarzan—that is, Burroughs—out here. All this jungle in the Pacific. He's got millions of readers. Any time he mentions the Navy, there's a ballast tank full of high-octane publicity."

"I don't see where Edgar Rice Burroughs' mentioning the Navy in a Tarzan comic strip is going to help the Navy," Tyson said. Tyson was one of those combat-itchy, eager-beaver types of which

there were a couple at Public Relations Headquarters, and had even requested duty on a ship. Maybe he figured this querulous attitude was one way to get it. "To me . . ."

"Belay that attitude!" the exec shouted, banging *Navy Regulations* on his desk. "You rarely see anything where real Public Relations is concerned, Tyson! I don't expect much out of an ensign, especially a young and inexperienced ensign, but I hate negativity as the mortal enemy of Naval Public Relations. Anyone with a drop of IQ," the exec said, eying the ensign intently, "ought to see the fantastic possibilities in this!"

The exec brusquely flung a fresh paper clip. "Let's think big!" he said. "It just might be one of those great ideas. If it isn't, what have we lost? I for one will be glad to have Tarzan aboard!"

"I will too," said Lieutenant Commander Gladney.

"So will I," said Lieutenant Commander Hereford.

"Why, a million dollars wouldn't purchase your way into a Tarzan comic strip!" the exec exclaimed. "And here the Navy has a chance to get in for free! With a name like Tarzan, and with an oceanful of Tarzan-like jungle around us—if that isn't a natural my name just isn't Joe Blow and we might as well close up shop right now and go to sea! Now, let's do a little creative thinking."

Opening the bottom right drawer of his desk, the exec carefully removed his sextant. He sat back deep in his chair, cocked his feet on the desk, and hoisting the sextant began to squint through its telescope at various objects in the room.

"Tarzan . . . Tarzan . . ." The exec, while sighting through the sextant at the ceiling, began to sort of chant the name: "Tarzan . . . The jungle . . . native life. Okay, Sailors, what do you say we lay down a bombardment that'll rattle their teeth back in Little Falls, Michigan."

This was the exec's birthplace and, in these conferences, a kind of mythical guinea pig for any public relations idea.

"Commander!" Lieutenant Commander Gladney said. "I just got a flash. How about putting Burroughs on an LST and having him do a beaching on an island? Maybe this next operation, hunh?

Burroughs is connected with the islands, anyhow with the jungle, which in the public mind is associated with islands. An LST is the Navy way of coming to islands. Get it?"

The exec looked a moment from his sextant to the radio section chief. "I'm afraid that won't do, Arnold. Burroughs is too important a person to put on an LST in a combat operation. It'd have to be a cruiser at least."

"Well, that's out then," the radio chief said sadly. "You can't beach a cruiser on an island."

Raising his sextant again, the exec peered with absorbed concentration through it. "All right, Sailors," he said. "Steady as you go. Keep it coming."

"Commander!" said Lieutenant Commander Hereford. "I'm getting one now! Maybe we could get Burroughs to do a series of strips of just Tarzan going along on LST operation. Burroughs wouldn't have to make an operation himself to do that. We could fill him in—or bring some LST officer up from Muranu to fill him in on the technical junk."

The photographic officer sat forward excitedly on the edge of his chair.

"Burroughs wouldn't have to go anywhere but Tulura," he took off. "Just have Tarzan make the operation in the strip. Show Tarzan with the crew, a few breeze sessions—Tarzan and the crew arguing whether it's tougher to fight a crocodile barehanded or land on a beach full of Japs—naturally, the Japs'll be tougher. Tarzan watching the whole business of the LST going on the operation, seeing this through Tarzan's eyes, the whole welter of the war through the eyes of Tarzan. If Tarzan says it's tough, the American people'll know it's tough, they'll take Tarzan's word for it, quicker'n they will ComFleets' even—no disrespect intended," the photo chief added hastily. "Throw in a couple of air raids and a submarine attack, and when D-day at last comes, have Tarzan hitchhike along in an assault-wave LCVP to the beach. He steps out of the LCVP and starts to strangle a Jap, only the Jap slips it and gets Tarzan down and is about to let him have it—that'll show what a

formidable enemy we're up against, anybody who could get Tarzan down—when a Marine and the boat coxswain rush up out of the LCVP and give the Jap the business, saving Tarzan's life," the photo chief said breathlessly, "and making him—and the millions of Tarzan's admirers—forever grateful to the Navy."

"That works in my original LST idea!" Lieutenant Commander Gladney cut in. "And don't forget the famous Tarzan yell as he reaches for the Jap."

"You just have Tarzan step out of the LCVP," Lieutenant Commander Hereford cut back in, "grab for the Jap's throat . . ."

"Belay it!" The exec halted it, bringing his sextant down. "I've heard worse ideas—Wayne, Arnold. But it has one fatal fault—we can't tell Burroughs what to write in a comic strip. There's nothing correspondents resent more than being told what to write."

"You could tell him it's just an idea, Clinton," the photo officer said disappointedly. "They don't necessarily resent ideas, provided you're real tactful about it."

The exec reflected a moment, then shook his head decisively. "No, I'm afraid that's out. Definitely out. You just can't tell a correspondent what to write. They're very sensitive about that. It's all right to use Burroughs but he mustn't know it. Get the difference? Well, let's get on with Burroughs from there. I've got a feeling we're beginning to target in . . ."

The exec resumed his sextant squintings and, simultaneously, his chanting.

"Tarzan . . . Something tells me there's *something*, if I can just think of it. It's too great a natural to miss—Tarzan . . . islands, jungle life, natives . . . By Jupiter!"

The exec started from his chair, holding to the sextant. Laying the sextant down, he plucked the big Bowditch from his desk library and banged it, in an ear-piercing noise, on the desk. "*Natives*," he shouted. "By Jupiter, Sailors, I've got it, I've got it!"

The exec's eyes glared into the "Think Big!" injunction on the wall dead ahead.

"Why don't we take Burroughs down to some atoll-like island,"

he said, "and photograph him with a bunch of these natives like they have in Tarzan . . . Get it? He's gathering material for his strip!"

"Say!" said the photo chief, who saw a way to keep a four-man camera crew busy for a couple weeks.

"But where does the Navy angle come in?" the radio chief asked.

"Navy angle!" the exec exclaimed. "Jumping Jupiter, man, where's your IQ?" He picked up his sextant and started jamming it into the air like a cheer leader. "Navy men standing with the natives! Navy ships in the background in the harbor! Natives leaning against a Navy Quonset or a Navy LST! Navy angles unlimited! Movies and stills. And, Arnold. . . !"

"Yes, Clinton," the radio officer said meekly.

"You might as well lay on a broadcast. Have these natives jabber a little over some national network. Then the interpreter can interpret how happy they are under Navy administration."

"I'll see if I can sell any of the boys on it," Lieutenant Commander Gladney said. "Personally it sounds like a four O natural."

"I think NBC might be better than CBS," the exec said. "The natives could chorus the NBC signature. Bongo, bongo, *bongo!* Heh, heh."

"Pretty funny, Commander." The radio chief laughed appreciatively. "But we've got to be careful not to show partiality, Commander," he cautioned. "Give NBC an exclusive and CBS screams like you were throttling their maternal grandmother. And vice versa."

The exec bunched his lips. "That's a point. All right then, belay the exclusive. We'll throw it open to all the networks!"

The exec sat back limply in his chair, and lifted and scratched his hairy leg happily. His face and head were shining.

"Well! That's a load off!" He laughed briefly and placed his sextant carefully back in the drawer. "I was beginning to get worried there, fear we wouldn't think of something. Burroughs is too much of a natural out here to pass up, I was sure of that. Well!"



The exec looked across at Lieutenant Commander Hereford. "You really think my idea will ride, Wayne?"

"Commander, it's *picturable*," the photo chief said. "One of the big four that're sure-fire always picture-wise—babes, children, dogs, natives."

"Arnold?"

"Sound-wise," the radio chief said, "it's four O. Natives jabbering away—considering that people don't understand a word they say, it's a baffling thing why they always eat it up," he said reflectively. "But they do. You take *Trader Horn*, for example . . ."

"Now," the exec said, cutting off this disquisition on basic public relations principles, "we've got one more extremely important item to settle on this Tarzan thing. Who," he said, "is to command it?"

The exec scratched the heavy underside of his leg and continued. "It's a big job! We need an officer to follow through, take charge of the project, script it, unify it, lay on still-picture, motion-picture and radio crews, arrange transmission lines, pick the atoll on which to go on location, line up the natives, conduct the briefing sessions, requisition the necessary Navy props—ships, sailors and the like, take Burroughs down there. In a word, run the whole show—coordinating everything with me, of course.

"What officer have we," the exec posed the question again, "who is brilliant and experienced enough to do all this?"

The exec's eyes flashed like a chicken-hawk's across the rows of officers and came to roost on an officer in the third row.

"There's just one man, I mean officer, for this job," the exec said decisively. "Ross!"

Lieutenant (jg) Ross Pendleton smiled condescendingly. He was a figure with Hollywood-leading-man looks and black wavy hair, who before the war had been a radio-network producer of the famous daytime serial "For the Love of Elaine." Now he was one of several "radio correspondents liaison officers," which involved him about two hours a day, making arrangements for radio