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THE SAGA OF SANDY McLEAN

Man Who Makes Literature and History on the Pacific.

ORIGINAL OF JACK LONDON'S "SEA WOLF"

Tales of Opium Smuggling and Escapes from Cruisers—One Expedition in Search of a Gold Brick.

Before the Pacific ocean is bridged by the wireless telegraph and before the circuitous paths of many ships have made its wilderness as familiar as the Atlantic and uncovered to the eye of a humdrum world its secret places, the saga of its romance days should be written and the thousand and one tales of its venture lands put upon record. And when this has been done one Alexander McLean, who is known from Punta Arenas to Honolulu as Sandy, will have come to his own.

For Sandy McLean is a maker of romance. That is not his business, but a by-product of his activities. Where Captain McLean drives his ship there is going to be truth stranger than fiction and fiction that passes for truth.

Along the Pacific coast of America and across the water from Saigon to Hakodate there has sprung up a cycle of legend and of fact about the doings of this skipper, whose invention is beyond belief and whose courage is above the normal. The late Frank Norris knew him and in his stories of the "Three Black Crowes" the chronicles of Sandy McLean are made more than once to serve the end of fiction. Jack London has publicly announced that McLean is the prototype for his savage Wolf Larson of the "Sea Wolf" and London says that he once sailed under McLean's (monstrous) Central American flag as a seal poacher.

Sandy McLean is still living and he is for many reasons a modest man. For many reasons, also, he now makes Victoria, B. C., his headquarters, though he is an American by adoption, and he studiously avoids American waters except those that are very remote.

San Francisco knows Sandy better than does New York, and Yokohama has more than once been his refuge. In his temporary retirement on Vancouver sound he cannot take offense if the record of some of his achievements real and apocryphal, is set forth with a wholesome partiality for truth. He has suffered much at the

hands of Mr. London and of some of the San Francisco papers.

Copra and Opium. Sandy McLean says he was born in Nova Scotia and that he is of Scotch parentage. He was brought up on the deck of a fishing smack and the salt of the sea was the savor of his youth.

When he left the North Atlantic and began to make the Pacific his familiar working ground is not known. Sandy himself does not say. But it is a matter of record that about fifteen years ago this big man with the tremendous moustaches and the muscles of a Scotch heaver of the stane began to run in and out of San Francisco in what seemed to be legitimate business. The reservation in this statement is made necessary by the fact that it is not known when McLean began to indulge in business which the laws of this country and of the nations have condemned as illegitimate.

About ten years ago the customs officers in San Francisco began to find this of opium buried in sacks of copra. The copra was shipped from Samoa, where at that time there was only a duty of 2 per cent upon opium from China. Sometimes the customs inspectors found as much as \$3,000 worth of opium in one consignment of copra.

Sandy McLean was then running between San Francisco and Samoa and the islands of the sea, carrying a general cargo. After the customs officers had begun to make an investigation into the matter of emuged opium Sandy McLean gave up the South sea regular run and went in for adventure.

There was never a warrant got out against Sandy nor did his name appear in the papers. Some noticed as a coincidence the fact that he went off on the South sea treasure hunt at about the same time that the opium began to be found in the copra.

Gold Brick for McLean. This treasure hunt was unique for the big Scotch captain, because it was the first and only time in his life that he was ever caught with a gold brick. There are men who still marvel at the fact that anybody could ever hand "Sandy McLean anything," but on this occasion he certainly was deceived.

McLean had built for himself a beautiful schooner. It was three-masted, low in the foremast, and it possessed a finer run of line than any other schooner on the Pacific. Speed was spelled in its every curve, and speed was the requisite that McLean demanded in his business.

Shortly after McLean had built the boat Customs Inspector Foster of San Francisco sent a letter to the American consul general at Apia, Samoa, warning him that a notorious skipper by the name of McLean was about to leave San Francisco for the South sea, together with a party of sixteen landmen, and that a rumor had been spread that the schooner, the *Sophia Sutherland*, had arms concealed aboard of it. The expedition was ostensibly bound for an island in the western Pacific to hunt for gold, wrote the customs agent.

This was in the spring of 1898. When the American consul general wanted to see the English and German consuls. He found that the German consul had received the same warning as he from the German consul in San Francisco. It was decided by the three agents that the American consul general should be left to handle the shady affairs of his nationals.

The Treasure Hunt. In due time the *Sophia Sutherland* appeared at Apia and the American representative got out his boat and went out to the schooner's side. McLean met him. McLean, the big, bluff, good natured fellow, who could be a gentleman when he put on his high hat to go ashore.

Besides McLean there were sixteen

healthy mechanics and small traders on board. They all impressed the consul as respectable citizens who had embarked innocently on a treasure hunt for the pure love of adventure. In short, Sandy McLean's boat could have flown the crossed palm flag of the London Missionary society's schooner and not be out of character.

The consul bluntly told McLean that he must look below for arms. The bluff captain heartily assented to the search. The skin of the *Sophia Sutherland's* hold was taken up in several places and not a rifle nor a round of ammunition was found. McLean said that there were three revolvers on the boat and that was all they had in the matter of weapons of defense. The consul invited McLean up to his house for dinner and the skipper put on his frock coat and silk hat of ceremony with great good humor.

Over the kava McLean told the consul what his schemes were. On the water front in San Francisco, he said, he had met a Dane by the name of Sorensen who had a tale to tell of a tremendously rich gold ledge on an island in the Solomon group. Sorensen possessed a rough chart of the location of the gold ledge which he himself had made on the spot, and Sorensen alone knew how to get to that island and how to decipher the chart.

The Dane Identified. McLean said that he believed the story of the Dane was genuine and that a stock treasure hunting company had been formed by the Dane and himself for the purpose of seeking out the gold. His contribution to the enterprise was the *Sophia Sutherland* and his services as skipper, said Sandy.

The consul gave full credence to the skipper's story. He had seen Sorensen on the occasion of his first visit to the schooner and there was something about the Dane's face that was familiar to him. For several days he went over in his mind the voyages that he had made through the South and West Pacific and the men he had met in strange islands, trying to associate the island face of Sorensen with some past event. He compared notes with an old South Sea skipper one day after McLean had been in port about a week. The skip-

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per supplied the missing link in Sorensen's identity.

He was a man, so it was agreed, who had once taken a Frenchman from Melbourne off on a pearl hunting expedition in the New Hebrides banks on just such a story of secret treasure that McLean was following. Sorensen directed the expedition, which was financed by the Frenchman, to Vate, an island inhabited by cannibals.

There on some pretext he got the Frenchman and all the whites on board ashore. Then with the aid of the blacks among the crew he sailed off with the boat, gathered in a herd of blackbirds, or natives, from another island and set off for Cooktown to sell his human cargo to the planters.

Sorensen was captured, tried and sentenced to a term of years. A British gunboat went up Vate and took off the luckless Frenchman and his white associates, who had had a narrow squeak at the hands of the man-eating natives.

Fate of Sorensen. This story the consul told to McLean when he was sure that it was right. McLean said off in another week, destined to give Sorensen a chance to make good, but only under the closest watching.

When in four months the *Sophia Sutherland* put back to Apia it was without Sorensen. The Dane, so McLean said, had tried to play his game on the *Sophia Sutherland's* crew after making a fruitless hunt at finding the mythical treasure island. So while the schooner was touching at a little bay of the almost uninhabited island of Boagaville of the Solomon group the treasure hunters had taken Sorensen ashore, tried him up to a palm, beaten him into insensibility and then sailed away.

This treasure hunt was McLean's last. After he had returned to San Francisco he began to go in for the Alaskan business.

Call on a Lonely Garrison. The story of the South Sea treasure hunt is from the lips of the man who was the American consul general figuring in the tale. Miles Reilly, one time captain of the Sprockels tramp *Montara*, is authority for two more.

Reilly had the misfortune to be captured by a Japanese cruiser while trying to run a cargo of goods into Petropaulovsky on the Kamtschatka coast in the summer of 1906. While he was awaiting the action of the Japanese prize court in Yokohama he told the writer of how he had twice struck close to the trail of Sandy McLean on the blockade running trip to the Okhotsk.

Reilly said that in avoiding the Japanese fleet that was cruising about the Kurile Islands in search of men like himself he put into the one little inhabited settlement on Copper Island, a Russian possession off the southeast coast of Kamtschatka. Here the Russian government had a fur station and there is usually about a half company of soldiers to guard it.

Reilly said that when he arrived he found only ten soldiers, under the command of a sergeant, the rest having been removed in the general panic that seized the Russians when the island of Saghalien was threatened with invasion. These mountain men, marooned there on the bleak island, had a strange tale to tell.

In the month of April, so they told Reilly, just after half of the garrison had left for Saghalien, a schooner flying a strange flag such as they had never seen before put

into the bay. The captain of the schooner, a big American with a tremendous moustache, came ashore to get water.

Russians Wined and Tricked. The captain was an affable man. He was jolly. They had not seen any stranger for many months and they were glad to meet this big captain and his crew and to have a jolly time with them.

The American captain brought two cases of champagne ashore and that night they had a big drinking bout. The captain could drink more than anybody else. Everybody got blind, stone drunk.

The next morning when the Russians awoke they found themselves triced up like fowls for the basting, each to his bedpost, and the big captain and all of the sailors had vanished. When they had loosed themselves the guardians of Russia's furs discovered that the storeroom lock had been forced and that between \$15,000 and \$20,000 worth of seal pelts were gone—all the store of Copper Island.

That is one of the tales of Sandy McLean that Reilly told; and this the other, passing in strangeness even the first. When he put into Petropaulovsky just three days before the Japanese cruiser came down on him, Reilly was told of how one Alexander McLean, a sea pirate and seal poacher sailing under a Mexican flag in the auxiliary schooner *Acapulco*, had put a Russian revenue cutter out of commission in the summer of 1906 and escaped under the guns of that same cutter under cover of a fog.

McLean's schooner had been caught by the Russian cutter poaching off the Kommandorsky Islands, northeast of Kamtschatka, caught fairly and with bloody evidence of guilt below decks. McLean tried to run, but he surrendered when a shot was fired through his rigging and he gave up. His papers showed that his craft was the *Acapulco*, Matatlan register, his flag Mexican.

Escape of the Acapulco. The Russian revenue boat took the *Acapulco* to the nearest port of the Kommandorsky group, where McLean was to be tried and sentence passed upon him. When the little harbor was reached the Russians uncoupled the auxiliary engine of McLean's boat and took some of the parts on board their own boat to prevent the escape of the *Acapulco*.

Two days McLean and his crew remained on the schooner, anchored a short distance away from the Russian boat. The American captain seemed ready to take his medicine.

The third night a heavy fog settled over the bay just after sundown. The commander of the revenue cutter was preparing to send a guard on board the *Acapulco* at 9 o'clock. He heard the sound of hammering coming through the fog from the direction of the captured schooner and decided to hasten the sending of the guard, who suddenly there was a heavy explosion just under the overhang of the cutter, followed by the splash of oars.

Then the Russians heard the rattle of a windlass and the excited coughing of an engine. Orders were given to get the cutter under way and investigate the state of the *Acapulco*. At the first turn of the engines the revenue cutter's tall shaft spun frantically and the machinery raced.

The propeller and part of the rudder had been blown away by the explosion of a bomb and the revenue cutter was helpless as a log. While the Russians stamped and swore, they could hear the puffing of McLean's engines as the *Acapulco* felt its way through the fog out to the open sea.

McLean must have had extra parts for the engine concealed somewhere in the hold of his boat for use in just such an emergency. He had coupled up in the fog and then rowed over in a boat and set off

a bomb under the Russian's stern.

After this exploit Captain McLean fell foul of the United States in transactions that were various and productive of worryment to four executive departments at Washington. The suspicion that the captain had been guilty of poaching on the American herd of seals up around the Aleutians had long been in the minds of the revenue cutter men on the Pacific coast, but they had not been able to get any evidence against McLean.

Foiled Uncle Sam. Early in 1904 McLean took out the schooner *Carmenita* from San Francisco and started north. Complaint was made against him to the Department of Commerce.

The case was submitted to the Department of Justice, and on evidence submitted by the secret service McLean was indicted in San Francisco. Then began a merry chase all over the Bering sea and north Pacific. Two revenue cutters were instructed to bring McLean back to San Francisco, dead or alive.

McLean had evidently got wind of the search that was being made for him, for following his old tactics he had put into the Mexican port of Mazatlan after leaving San Francisco and had again registered his boat under Mexican laws, changed its name back to the *Acapulco* and hoisted the Mexican flag. So when after a year's dodging and doubling in the northern seas McLean put into Victoria with 500 skins aboard in September, 1905, the appeal that had been sent to the British Columbia authorities to arrest him could not avail.

His registry and his flag were Mexican; the American government could not arrest a man under the Mexican flag for pelagic poaching without special arrangements with Mexico. Strong effort was made by the agents of the State department to get rid of the stumbling block the crafty Sandy had thrown in the path of American justice, but the diplomatic snarl could not be unraveled and the captain of the *Acapulco* went free.

The last chapter in the romance of Sandy McLean does not lack the spice of irony. He was lauded as a patriotic American by counsel for the United States in the joint commission of this country and Canada called to settle claims made against the United States through the enforcement of the pelagic sealing regulations.

This commission, passed upon him by Don M. Dickinson, the counsel, did not appear until the judiciary committee of the house in March, 1906, passed favorably upon a bill providing for an examination by the Ninth circuit court into the rights of American sealers under the Paris arbitra-

tion. The judiciary committee reported that at the time of the dispute between this government and the government of Canada over the rights of Canadian and American sealers the American sealers organized themselves into a committee of investigation, with a view to reducing the claims of the Canadians before the commission.

Evidence offered by them carried weight and the Canadian claims were cut from \$1,285,008 to \$62,541. In commenting upon this act, Counsel Dickinson said:

"Conspicuous among the Americans was Alexander McLean. He owned a half interest in two ships seized by the United States, for which Great Britain demanded indemnity.

"His co-worker, a British subject, had sworn before the Paris tribunal that he was the sole owner. The registry of the ships did not disclose Captain McLean's interest.

"Under the stipulations nothing could be awarded to him, an American. But a full award to the two ships would have benefited him to the extent of his equities in them.

"Under the circumstances this brave and honest man made oath before the commission to his part ownership when by silent assent to the perjury of his partner he would have benefited himself.

"Not only did Captain McLean lose by his truthfulness, but his activity on behalf of his government, but has earned the unpleasant experiences and personal risk at the hands of the British claimants and their friends in Victoria. Surely such a man—and his countrymen, the American sealers who joined, defended and sustained him—not only deserves the consideration of his government, but has earned the praise of the Parliament given to 'him who swears to his own hurt, and changes his lot.'"

Thus in the records of congress remains this tribute to the virtues of Sandy McLean, treasure hunter and gentleman adventurer of the western seas.

Oldest Triplets. Perhaps the oldest triplets in the world celebrated their 61th birthday in Jackson, Miss., last week. These triplets are J. F. Price, a well known hotel man of Jackson for the last twenty years; his brother Henry of Jackson and Mrs. Nancy Phillips of Calhoun county. They are, to all appearances, good for several years to come, being hale and hearty and perfect specimens of physical manhood and womanhood. Henry Price is a bachelor, but Frank and Mrs. Phillips have been married many years and have grandchildren. They first saw the light of day in Cumberland county, North Carolina.

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