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ADVENTURE

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Wanted At Large

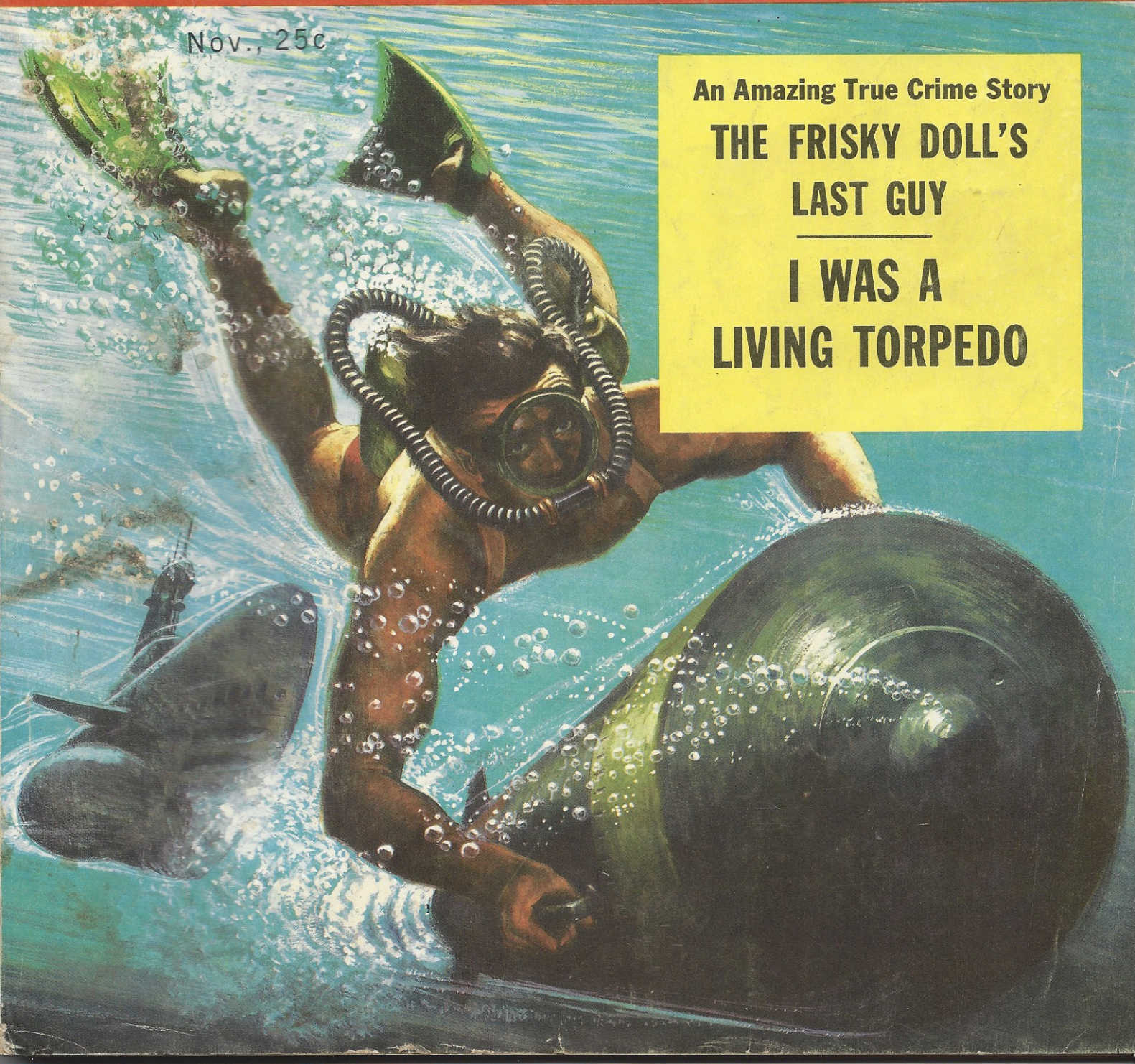
WILL YOU BE A "THIRD SEX" VICTIM?

Nov., 25c

An Amazing True Crime Story

**THE FRISKY DOLL'S
LAST GUY**

**I WAS A
LIVING TORPEDO**



A score of crimson seconds changed the greatest show on earth into a funeral pyre for 169 humans on that fateful circus day in Hartford, July 6, 1944, which has been called

The devil's ten minutes

IT WAS hot as blazes in Hartford, Connecticut, early in the afternoon of July 6, 1944. The midsummer sun was a glaring shield in a brazen sky, and unshaded thermometers were registering well over 100. The air was shimmering and uneasy, little breezes and even strong gusts springing up unexpectedly and then dying away, bringing welcome, if brief, moments of blessed respite from the scorching calm.

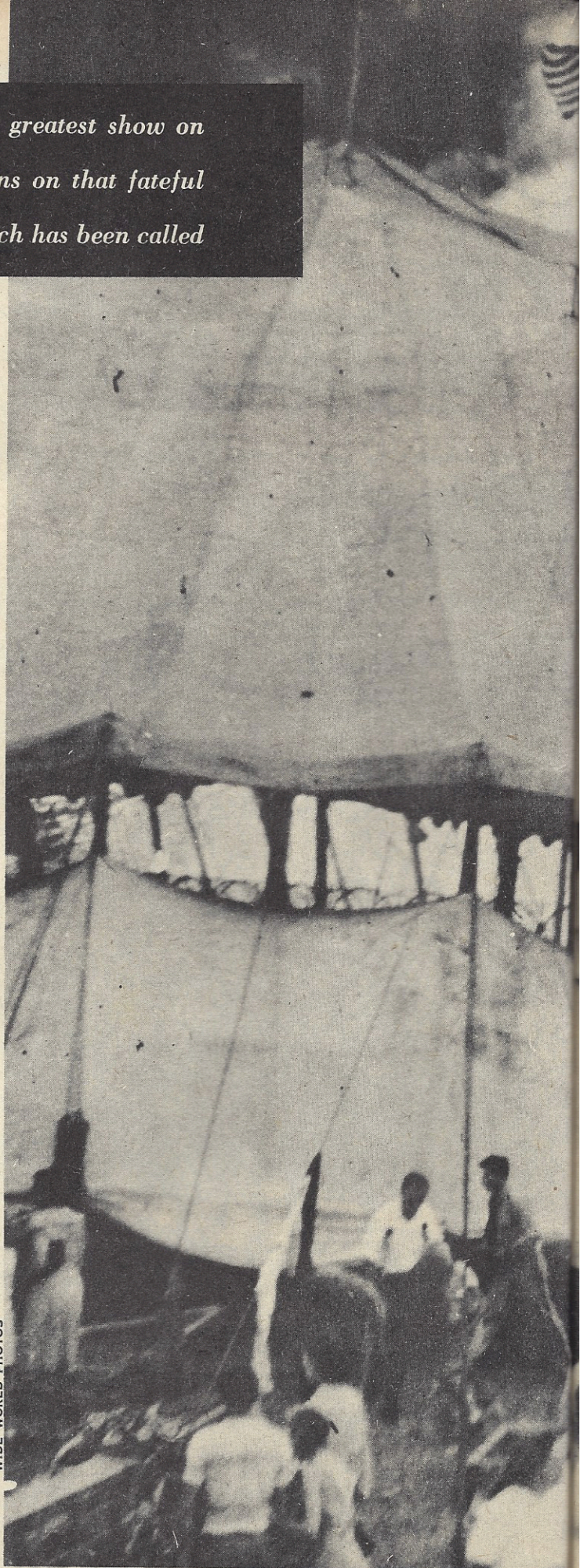
Early in the day "The Greatest Show on Earth"—The Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Combined Show—had arrived in town for its annual visit. The show had been late in arriving but had succeeded in getting set up in time for the matinee. This year the show boasted a brand-new "big top," one and one-half acres of tawny canvas that showed not a sign of the discolorations and fading that come with prolonged wear. The big top was 425 feet long and 180 feet wide. Its great weight—nineteen tons—was supported by enormous twelve-inch thick wooden poles, steadied by a maze of guy ropes.

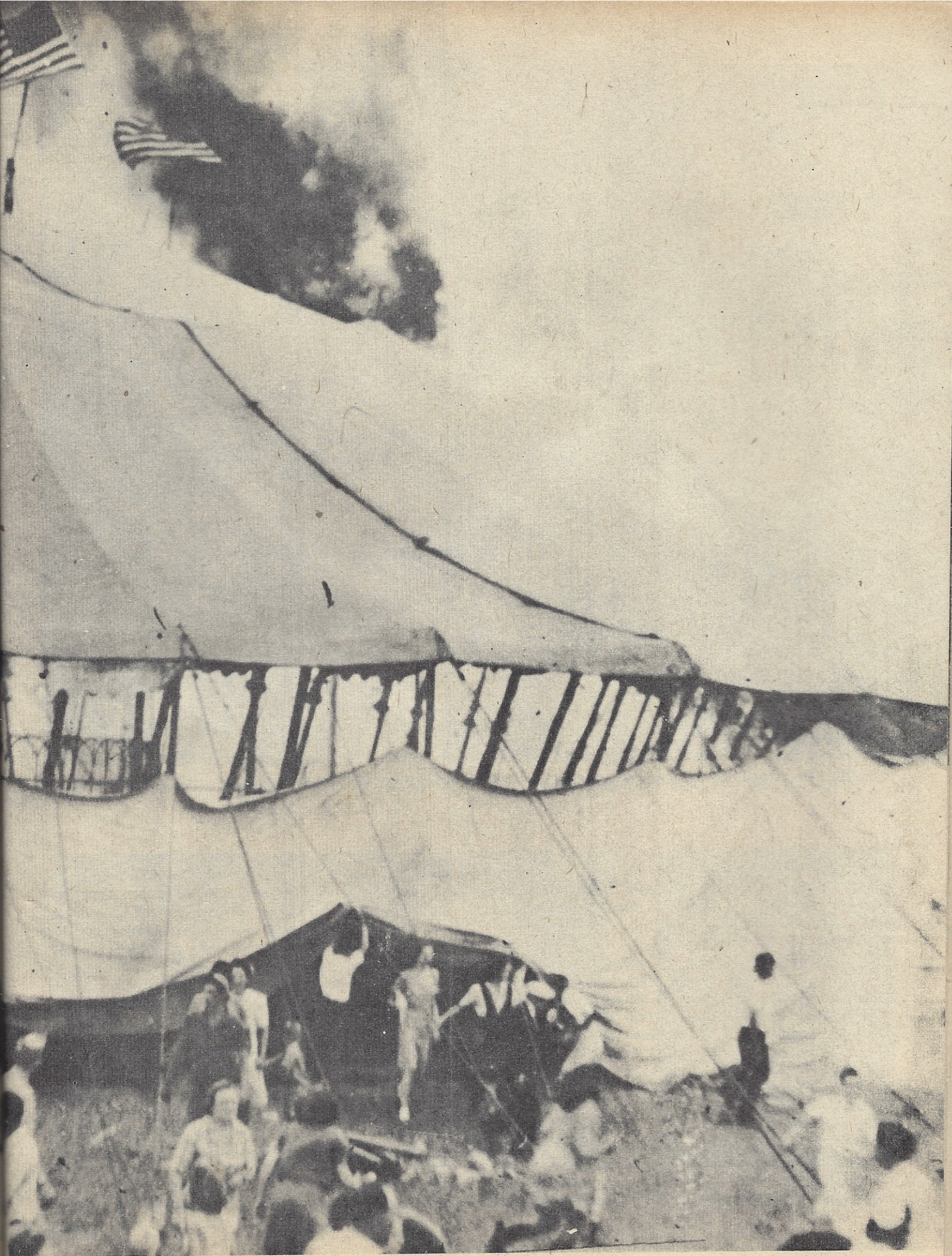
The big top was as thoroughly water-repellant as a duck's back; it had been waterproofed with a solution of paraffin and gasoline. The vertical sidewalls had not been waterproofed, since it was not considered necessary. The entire

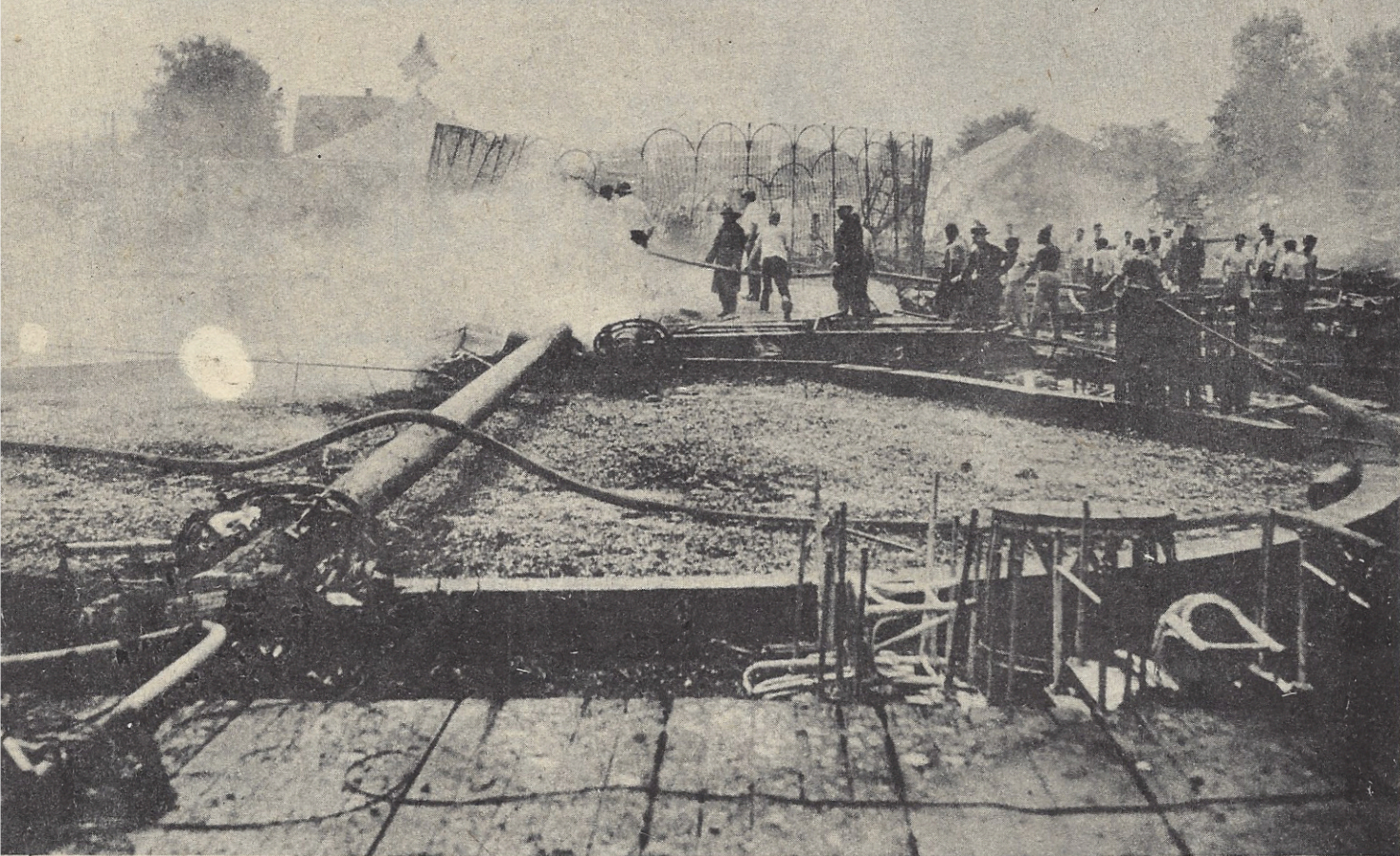
by **THORP McCLUSKY**

FORMERLY PUBLICATIONS EDITOR, ACCIDENT PREVENTION DIVISION, ASSOCIATION OF CASUALTY AND SURETY COMPANIES

WIDE WORLD PHOTOS







Minutes after small fire was discovered, gasoline and paraffin treated big top exploded into a blazing torch.

tent had not been flameproofed, due to the fact that flameproofing chemicals were high on the list of military priorities. Because of what was to happen this afternoon, however, they were to be released to circuses, carnivals, and other tent shows the very next day.

The big top had a seating capacity of 9,048 persons in tiers of stands that ranged up to a maximum height of ten-and-a-half feet, close to the top of the sidewalls. Some of these tiers were of wood, while in the reserved-seat sections there were many folding chairs which were not secured to the terracing underneath. The presence of these loose chairs, which in the event of panic might easily be knocked over and block the walkways, was contrary to recommendations of the Building Exits Code of the National Fire Protection Association, which called for secure fastening when more than 200 seats were provided.

In front of the stands and enclosing the three rings in a long oval was the main aisle, twenty-six feet wide at its narrowest point. On this aisle were customarily presented such spectacular attractions as the "Grand Parade," Wild

West riders, chariot races, and so on. On the sun-dried grass underfoot were sawdust, straw, and other flammables. At one end of the tent was the main entrance, a little more than twenty feet wide at its narrowest point. At the opposite end was the bandstand, flanked by exits each a little more than fourteen feet wide. There were also three narrow exits on each side of the tent; these were available to the public but in practice were used almost exclusively by the performers.

To get a clear idea of what happened that afternoon, it is necessary to understand the orientation of the big top to the points of the compass. The main entrance faced to the west, the bandstand backed up to the east. On the north side of the tent were reserved seats accommodating 3,000. These reserved seats were in two sections of 1,500 seats each. There was a similar setup directly opposite, on the south side. The general admission seats were at opposite ends of the tent, where the view of the three rings was poorest.

Outside the big top and to the north were grouped the cages and tents housing the performing animals. For the protection of the public, these (Continued on page 59)



169 people, mainly women and children, died when wooden tiers of seats ignited after flaming canvas fell.



Heart-rending work of removing bodies to temporary morgue begins. Clowns in their gaudy costumes wept while helping to rescue children.



Woman returns from morgue after identifying two relatives.

animals were customarily brought into and out of the tent through two runways or "chutes." Each chute was of steel caging, about four feet high and three feet wide, and so contrived that it could be erected and taken down quickly. The chutes, as well as the big arena cages for the animal acts, were customarily put up just before use and taken down immediately after each animal act was completed. When set up, the chutes blocked two of the three side exits from the northside reserved-seat section, and also the north aisle that led from these seats to the main entrance. Also, when set up, these chutes were bridged by stiles five steps high and five feet wide. The stiles, however, were much too narrow to accommodate a crowd in the throes of panic.

In addition, a metal railing encircled the arena in front of the seating sections, permitting the passage of only a narrow file of persons laterally. Even the main aisle was encumbered from time to time during each show by performing animals and people.

The circus executives were not unmindful of the possibility of fire, and had taken certain precautions against it. After all, there had been numerous tent fires in the past, and of these both Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey—separate and combined—had had their share. For instance, on August 5, 1901, Ringling Brothers had lost a side show tent through fire in Kansas City, Missouri. On May 21, 1910, with 15,000 spectators at the matinee performance, the Barnum and Bailey big top had burned in Schenectady, New York; fortunately there had been no loss of life. On August 12, 1912, fire had consumed the Ringling Brothers big top in Sterling, Illinois, again fortunately just prior to matinee time. On October 28, 1916, fire had destroyed the Ringling Brothers baggage-and-horse tent at Huntsville, Alabama: forty horses had died in the flames and forty more had been so severely burned they had to be destroyed. At Cleveland, Ohio on August 4, 1941, fire had raced through the menagerie tent of the combined shows killing forty animals of varied species, some of them very valuable.

THE circus had attempted to get the big top flameproofed but had been thwarted by wartime chemical priorities. It maintained four watertank trucks, each manned by two men during performances. There were also buckets located about the tent and men assigned to watch for fires. There were fire extinguishers on some of the circus vehicles, but they had not been brought to the big top this afternoon. The circus employed no fire chief, fire marshal, or professional firefighters.

According to Warren Y. Kimball, N.F.P.A. engineer, "Preparations for fire safety at the circus would appear to have been somewhat meager considering the magnitude of the crowds handled and the many fire hazards which obviously were present . . ."

The big top was not quite full when the matinee got underway; there were only 6,789 paid admissions and probably another couple of hundred gate-crashers and "Annie Oakleys" in the audience, indicating a crowd of around 7,000. This was World War II, and Hartford's industrial plants were going full-blast while its thousands of insurance workers were at their nine-to-five jobs as usual. Most of the afternoon crowd consisted of women, children, and men over draft age. Children outnumbered all the others by perhaps three-to-one.

THERE were many family groups in the north-side reserved seats. Mrs. William Franz was there with her three-year-old son and her two sisters. Mrs. Joseph Donizzo was there with her year-old son, her sister, and her sister's two daughters. A machinist named Alden Crandall, who worked a night shift, was there with his wife and their six children. Unknown to their father—Detective-Sergeant William Dineen of the Hartford Police Department—two of the Dineen children, a girl of fourteen and a boy of eight, were also there.

Among the circus employees was a roustabout named Robert Dale Segee, who went by the nickname "Little Bob." He had a propensity for violence and for setting fires . . . He thought he didn't have a friend in the world and that every man's hand was against him.

Scattered about the big top was a small detail of municipal police; after all, not much violence is likely to develop at a circus. There were no city firemen officially on hand since the Building Department, which had issued the circus its performance permit, had not yet notified the Fire Department of its action and as a consequence the latter, again officially, did not know that the circus was in business in Hartford. According to Mr. Kimball, there was no subsequent indication that the building inspector "gave any consideration to such matters as width of exits or flameproofing of the canvas."

This was the general situation as the matinee got underway. The first act was the Grand Parade, a colorful spectacle featuring thirty elephants, many horses and plenty of bespangled girls. Next came two animal acts for which the chutes and central cages were used.

It was only a few minutes after 2:30 p.m. The big top was gay with the polite applause of older persons and the delighted squeals of the children as May Kovar finished her animal act and the Flying Wallendas, one of the world's greatest aerial acts, came into the center ring and started to climb aloft to their perches.

The band, led by Maestro Merle Evans, was galloping through some transition music to cover the brief delay. The lions, leopards, tigers, and pumas had all slithered back through the two chutes to their cages outside the big top, and the job of knocking down the chutes had begun. But

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their steel ribs still extended along the exits at opposite ends of the north-side reserved-seat area.

Resplendent in gleaming satin, the Flying Wallendas—Herman, Carl, Joe, Helen, and Henrietta—were posturing at the top of the tent, holding the attention of the audience before commencing their act. At the southwest side of the tent, near the men's toilet which was to the left of the main entrance and backed up against the sidewall of the big top, a veteran circus hand who had been firewatching there left his post and his waterbuckets and went over to where the chutes were being dismantled; he was afraid that bungling roustabouts might knock loose some of the seat jacks. There was a firewatcher on that side but he was a greenhorn with the circus.

Nobody knew the exact second, but it was probably about 2:35 when a woman's voice called out, "Look, fire." She didn't sound excited or fearful, and others who looked didn't seem worried either. There was a tiny patch of flame, perhaps two feet wide and four feet high, visible in the tent wall in back of the men's toilet, about twenty feet south of the main entrance. It did not seem to be growing particularly; the side-walls had not been impregnated with gasoline and paraffin. Three buckets of water that were thrown on the little fire failed, however, to put it out completely.

STILL nobody appeared worried. "Take it easy," called a man's voice through the sudden, fascinated quiet that had fallen over the crowd; the band was playing but it was at the opposite end of the tent. Other voices took up the cry, "Take it easy," and some added the suggestion, "Walk out quietly." Here and there people started to rise and move toward the exits.

All day there had been those fitful, erratic breezes, some of them quite strong. At just this instant, as though by diabolical whimsy, a strong gust from the southwest struck the tent. It sent a tongue

of flame about two feet wide slaving up the sidewall to touch and lick hungrily at the highly flammable big top.

It was almost like setting off an explosion. With a sound like a hurricane, fire roared northward and eastward across the top of the tent while great geysers of flame and smoke spurted skyward. It was probably no more than forty-five seconds before the entire big top was ablaze, despite the fact that on the south side the flames had to fight their way backward against the breeze. The fire spread so rapidly that, again according to Mr. Kimball, ". . . had the entire fire department been stationed at the circus grounds there is little likelihood that the outcome would have been any different once the top canvas became ignited."

Unbelievably, in the first few seconds as the fire roared across the canvas overhead, many of the spectators gazed upward at the blaze in entrancement, believing it to be a part of the show. This delay probably proved fatal to quite a few who, seconds later, found their way to safety blocked by a close-packed wall of human beings who could have been out of the tent by that time had they moved promptly.

The Flying Wallendas, high in the top of the tent, knew instantly what was going on. They slid down the nearest available ropes like plummets and got out by climbing over a cage at the side of an exit, since a frantic crowd already blocked the passageway itself. "That was easy for us," said Herman, "we're performers. But the crowd couldn't get out that way . . ." Even so, Helen Wallenda's satin tights were ablaze as she escaped.

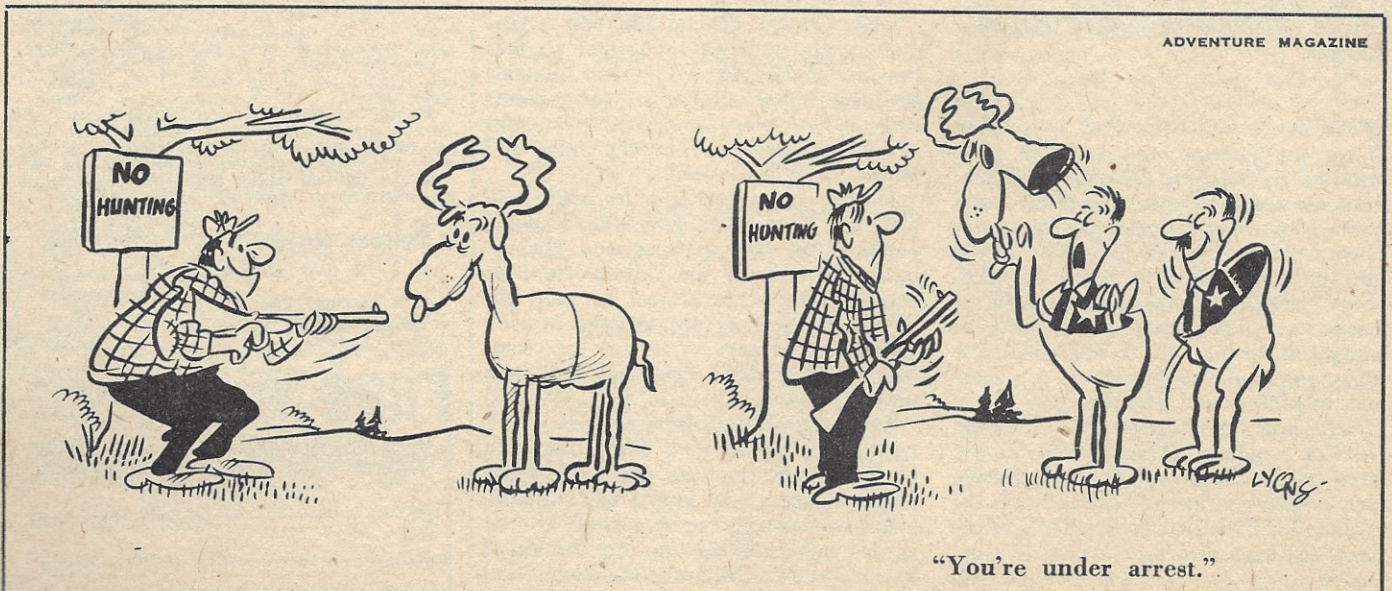
In an attempt to avert panic, the circus band went on playing loud, gay, and fast. It kept on playing until one of the great poles, its guy ropes burned through, crashed down onto the bandstand. Then the bandmen dived for their lives through the performers entrance, the bass-drummer still pounding his instrument.

There was surprisingly little panic among most of the crowd, who walked

out of the tent in orderly fashion in the four or five minutes before the heavy guy ropes burned through. Far different, however, was the situation among the throng in the two north-side tiers of reserved seats. When the fire started flashing up the slope of the canvas ahead and to the right of them they automatically started moving away from it toward the left. But inside of a few seconds they were a ravaging, struggling, screaming mob. At the north rear quite a number succeeded in dropping from the topmost tier of seats and scrambling under the sidewall to safety. At the north front the crowd began jamming up against the arena's iron railing, and many who saw that escape was hopeless that way turned and clambered all the way back up the slope of seats they had just descended, to leap to the ground. But by far the greatest congestion and horror occurred at the chute which still remained in place at the eastern end of the reserved-seat area.

THE best description of what occurred there was given by Thomas E. Murphy, star editorial writer on *The Hartford Courant*, who had taken his little boy to the big show. "I saw one woman fail to make it as the crowd surged forward to climb over the steel barrier," he said. "A man tried to fend the crowd back from her, but the pressure was too great. I was slammed against the steel barrier and my knee caught momentarily between the bars. Then, taking my five-year-old son in my hands, I tossed him over the barrier to the ground below. The flames at this point were nearly overhead and the heat was becoming unbearable . . ."

Hundreds of panic-crazed humans were scrambling madly at the animal chute. Women whose high heels caught in the steel mesh tripped and fell and were trampled underfoot instantly. Six of the nine municipal policemen who were in the tent at the time the fire started had anticipated the pileup there and had rushed to the two chutes; where they grasped at outstretched hands and



dragged women and children over the barriers by the score.

People were fighting to escape at both chutes, for although the major movement of this part of the crowd had been toward the east at first, many had turned and gone in the opposite direction when they realized that escape to the east was impossible. From overhead great shards of blazing canvas were dropping onto the heads of the crowd, setting their light summer clothing and the wooden seats afire.

As the guy ropes burned through the great wooden poles collapsed with sickening thuds, killing several persons outright and maiming others. With the collapse of these supports down came a multitude of equipment used by the aerial acts, together with masses of heavy block-and-tackle that added to the carnage. A maze of fine steel wires lashed the crowd, inflicting wounds as severe as any ever made by the cat-o'-nine-tails.

Hundreds succeeded in getting over the steel chutes or were dragged over. But when the blaze cooled sufficiently for firemen to enter the charred, smoking wreckage, they found bodies piled four deep against the easterly animal chute. There were also many others who were horribly burned and dying, in various areas of the tent. Curiously enough, the fire was "spotty" at ground level, some of the seats and poles being deeply charred while on others the paint was not even blistered.

Both the circus fire fighters and the Hartford Fire Department went into action swiftly, but the blaze spread so rapidly that inside of ten minutes nothing remained of the canvas, the poles were all down, and about all the firemen had left to do was put out the blazing stands and play cooling water on the piles of dead, dying, and those who were badly burned but still not beyond hope of rescue. Outside the smouldering ruins were scenes of heart-rending horror; persons wandering about in a state of shock, many of them severely burned, and fathers, mothers and children fighting to make their way back into the still-hot embers to search for loved ones who had failed to escape.

ONE frantic woman whose right arm was charred almost to the bone had lost her four-year-old son; it took the combined strength of six detectives to restrain her from rushing into the still-burning reserved seats. A man wandered about dazedly clutching a small boy by the hand; suddenly he realized that the boy was not his own son and sprinted toward a vast bed of glowing embers. Police caught up with him in time to save his life. Detective-Sergeant Dineen arrived just as his fourteen-year-old daughter emerged from the blazing tent; the officer was one of the first to venture into the hot ruins where he found the body of his eight-year-old son Willie; this was the first body to be identified. The soul-sick sergeant kept right on with his rescue work.

Alden Crandall escaped with his wife and five of his six children. His little boy Timmie was missing. Crandall went back

into the smouldering hell time after time, brought out about fifty small bodies, some of them dead, some still alive. None was Timmie. Finally giving up hope, the Crandalls went to their automobile, where they found Timmie in the back seat, very much alive and unharmed, waiting for them.

Mrs. William Franz, her son, and her two sisters all perished. So did Mrs. Joseph Donezzo, her son, her sister, and her sister's two daughters. In several instances, holders of life-insurance policies and their beneficiaries died together.

AN improvised morgue was set up in the Connecticut State Armory, but due to their horrible burns almost two-score of the dead were still unidentified twenty-four hours after the fire was completely out. With the exception of those who had been crushed by poles and other falling objects, almost all of those who had perished died of fourth-degree burns; even those who had been trampled had been killed, for the most part, by fire. Very few had been suffocated due to the fact that there was always plenty of oxygen present. This was in striking contrast to the Cooanot Grove night-club fire, where most of the deaths were from suffocation.

The total dead were 169, of whom 115 were already dead within the tent area when rescuers reached them; fifty-four died subsequently in hospitals. The death toll would undoubtedly have been much greater except for the fact that, due to the war emergency, the city's hospitals were plentifully stocked with blood plasma. Some of the attending doctors estimated that without plasma more than 1,000 would have perished. Several thousand of the survivors bear the burnscars of the fire to this day.

Immediately after the fire, five circus officials were indicted on charges of manslaughter, but these charges were ultimately dropped. After all, conditions similar to those that prevailed when the fire broke out had been commonplace in tent shows for years and were considered "routine." Since this fire, however, steel seats have replaced the wooden ones, stringent regulations have been adopted providing for adequate and obstruction-free exits, and flameproofing of tents has become mandatory.

This most terrible of all circus fires nearly put The Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows out of business permanently. Death and injury claims aggregating \$3,946,355.70 were brought against The Greatest Show on Earth. It was not necessary for a single one of these to be threshed out in court; the circus was not only willing, but anxious to pay to the fullest extent of its ability and pay off it did, although the job required almost ten years.

Weirdly enough, in July of 1950 "Little Bob" Segee, following his arrest on a charge of arson in the State of Ohio, confessed to having set numerous fires, among them the Hartford holocaust. He drew two, two-to-twenty year prison sentences, but whether or not he started the circus fire is uncertain. That fire may have

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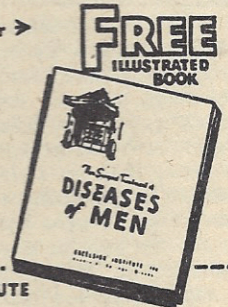
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been started by a lighted match or cigarette carelessly dropped in the dry grass above which the men's toilet was erected.

Three dramatic circumstances connected with this fire stand out above all the others:

One was the mystery of "Little Miss 1565." Of all the horribly charred bodies, only six finally remained unidentified. And of these six, five were identified "within reason" by comparisons with lists of missing persons.

"Little Miss 1565" was different. Strangely enough, her face had not been touched by flame, and she was a pretty child, as the official description shows:

"Age, about 6 years; race, white; sex, female (blue eyes); height, 3' 8"; weight, 40 pounds; build, moderately developed; head circumference, 20½ inches; hair,

shoulder length, blond or light brown, curly."

Her description was spread far and wide by means of radio broadcasts, circulars, telephone calls, newspaper advertisements, checks with public schools, and by numerous other devices. Yet nobody ever came forward to identify and claim her. Numerous reasons come to mind as possible explanations of this reluctance; she may, for instance, have been a stolen child. Or her parents may have been too poor to pay for her burial.

"Little Miss 1565" was buried in Grave Number 1565 in the nonsectarian section of one of Hartford's cemeteries. Three times yearly, on Memorial Day, Christmas Day, and the anniversary of the fire (July 8th), the Hartford Police Department decorates her grave with a wreath

bearing the only name by which she will ever be known—the name that commences this paragraph.

The second dramatic circumstance is that the circus clowns, grotesque in their sweat and smoke-grimed garb and with the greasepaint dribbling down their faces, wept unashamedly as they lugged pails of water and dragged out the living and the dead. This was the day that has gone down eternally in circus history as "The day the clowns cried."

The final dramatic circumstance is the starkest of all; the ghastly speed with which the fire took its toll. Fewer than ten minutes elapsed between the time the first tiny flame was glimpsed by an unalarmed woman and the collapse of the big top. Truly, this was "The Devil's Ten Minutes." ■ ■

THE FRISKY DOLL'S LAST GUY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

siren again and went to question the motel owner.

"When I got up this morning," the man said, "I noticed this Ford parked way over there. I couldn't remember registering anyone with a car like that but it might have come in after I went to bed. This lousy business, you go twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and for what?"

"Okay," Clark said. "What happened?"

"That's the point," said the motel-keeper. "Nothing happened. By eleven o'clock everyone had checked out and this car was still here so I went to have a look—and there she was . . ."

And there she was, just like the man said. She had on slacks and saddle shoes, a white blouse that wasn't white any more. She was curled up on the back seat of the five-passenger Ford coupé and she might have been asleep except for the hole in her head.

Clark spent a minimum of time inside the car, for the sun was hot and the car was stifling. Among the many qualities a good cop needs is a very strong stomach. He came out with the lady's purse, went to the patrol car, and called in to his chief.

"We got us another murder," he said. "A Mrs. Evelyn Tyler."

The cops swung into the usual routine—pictures, coroner, trying to find witnesses, getting the idle, morbid curiosity seekers to move on, and sending someone to notify the next of kin. The most difficult job in this instance was notifying the next of kin. Wayne Tyler wasn't at work because he had the day off. He wasn't at home, either. This could be suspicious but it needn't mean a thing, either, because the car in which Evelyn had died was not the Tyler's car. It belonged to a young man named Everett Phelan who worked for the U.P. He was quite a buddy of Wayne Tyler's. His family didn't know where he was; he hadn't been home all night but they didn't consider this remarkable, for Everett frequently slept out. He never said where. Evelyn might know where he slept but she was dead. Everett should have been at work, but he wasn't.

At this point, the police were not ready to draw any conclusions nor were they aware that the two murders might have something in common. However, the detective who went to tell Wayne Tyler the sad news talked with the landlady and got a story which was to be repeated in essence by many sources.

HEARD them last night," the landlady said, "but I haven't seen them for some time. Oh, I see him now and then but that wife of his avoids me."

"What do you mean?"

"She knows I'm on to her."

"On to her what?" said the cop.

"Just on to her. I could tell plenty if I had a mind to."

"About this morning, the arguing," the cop said, taking a new tack. "What time was that?"

"Well, must have been three or four. They came in then and they kept on arguing until they went out. I was mad and I'm going to tell them off good the next time I see them."

"Did they argue often?"

"All the time. Like he wants to move to Idaho and she wants to stay here. Everyone except Wayne knows why she won't leave."

"What do you mean by that?"

"She's got too many boy friends. And if I was Wayne Tyler—which, thank the good Lord I'm not—I would kick that Everett Phelan out so fast it would make your head swim. I run a respectable apartment house—or I did until she moved in."

Other detectives investigating the case began to bring back similar stories. If even half the gossip was true, Evelyn was about the hottest thing since Cleopatra and a great deal busier. And one of the men linked to Evelyn was, of course, Wayne's friend Chet Dyer. It was pretty well established that they had been seen whooping it up in various gin mills on nights when Wayne was out on a run. Much more conclusive was something else they had in common: the bullets which killed them had been fired from the same .32 revolver.

Now a jealous husband is a most logical suspect when his erring wife and a philandering friend are both knocked off in a short space of time. However, this case was just crazy enough that one of Evelyn's lovers might have been the jealous one bent on revenge. For example, Everett Phelan was a cocky kid known to have this big crush on Evelyn, something she did nothing to discourage. However, she wasn't any more faithful to him than to her husband and it was conceivable that Phelan could have become jealous about her sleeping around.

Or, it was just possible that Evelyn, who had the use of Phelan's car whenever she wanted it, had picked up a wrong guy in one of the pubs. But the type of creep who gets his kicks in any way but the normal one doesn't usually use a gun; they strangle, or have a knife, or torture with lighted cigarettes. And there was none of this indicated.

"It has to be Phelan or Tyler," Clark said early in the investigation, "and I have my own idea which. Either way, I'll bet we find only one of them alive."

By midday, the entire force was out digging up every scrap of information which would fill in the background on the victims and the suspects and to trace their movements the previous night. Some interesting things were discovered.

Wayne and Evelyn Tyler and Everett Phelan had been out together the night before and had stopped in several of their favorite gin mills, the type of place patronized by the local citizenry, not the showy spots where the visitors went. Bits of conversation and little incidents, which meant little by themselves, began to fit into a pattern when funneled into police headquarters. The bartender at one place remembered that the three had come in about ten or eleven. They were a little high but no more than would be usual for ten in the evening. The detective asked how they were acting, whether friendly or not.

"They were all right," the bartender said. "Evelyn was throwing it around as usual but it didn't seem to bother them." The bartender, a fat, bald, red-faced man