



INTERNATIONAL

THE HERO ON THE COVER

THE rain stopped. And then came the cadenced dripping from the tall palms. And the splitting silence of night that makes a gunner nervous. The platoon of machine gunners and riflemen lay on their bellies in saucers of mud behind their guns. They were holding the pass at Lunga Ridge, a half mile away from priceless Henderson Field, our first foothold on Guadalcanal.

Platoon Sergeant John Basilone picked up his phone. He listened. "A large Jap force is approaching your position. You are outnumbered about a hundred to one. Hold!" Johnny set the phone down. He slapped a couple of gunners on the back. "Stick around," he growled. They chuckled nervously. A runner came up. "The guns on your right flank have been blown clear out. . . ." Johnny slung a 40-pound Browning over his arm and whispered to his men on the left. "Take that gun down and follow me." They did.

Johnny Basilone led them down a jungle trail. The moon peeped between racing clouds. Johnny saw a Jap patrol. He stood still. And braced his legs. And sprayed the Nips with the gun cradled in his arms. When he and his two machine gunners got to the right flank, they found two men trying to hold the Japs off with rifles and pistols. There wasn't time to set the new machine gun up in a foxhole. The Japs were coming fast and screaming. Basilone dropped on his chest and held the machine gun before him. He held the barrel so that the bullets would barely skim the grass top. The other Marines covered him with rifles to the left, right and rear. Several Japs fell. Others turned and ran.

In a lull, Johnny reached for the "knocked out" gun and his hands traced the parts in darkness. He corrected the

"head spacing" in the dark. The Japs were firing light and heavy machine guns. Basilone's boys just got set up in time to meet a head-on Jap rush. The rain started again and the belts of ammo were caked with mud and water. But they kept firing. And the Japs kept coming. But the guns lasted longer than the Japs.

Several times, a Jap got through to crawl under the barrel of the machine gun. But Johnny—on pure reflex—always managed to pump a .45 automatic into their faces.

At about 3:30 A. M. the ammunition ran low. The Japs were blasting the barbed wire with high explosives and they were going to come through at any cost. Johnny took a short cut to his own lines—across the front of the Japanese lines. He got a hundred pounds of it. It took him fifteen minutes to snake back with his burden. "That lousy hundred yards," he says.

Before dawn, the guns ran dry. The water cans had spilled in the action. Johnny ordered the guns fired dry. Someone spotted a whole field full of Japs creeping forward. The hot guns chattered and more Japs moaned, then died. The guns got a rest. At dawn the main attack came. There were so many dead Japs piled in front of Basilone's gun that he couldn't find a field of fire. He had to move the gun. Thirty-eight bodies were counted in that one mound.

The next day, Basilone got orders to move his guns to a new position where he faced only a hundred Japs instead of three thousand. "That's rest enough for any Marine," he said.

For his work on the night of October 24 and 25, 1942, Sergeant John Basilone won the Congressional Medal of Honor. . . .

J. B.

