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KON-TIKI

ACROSS THE PACIFIC BY RAFT



THOR HEYERDAHL

Kon-Tiki

Across the Pacific by Raft

Thor Heyerdahl

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War Comes

A Theo

ONCE IN A WHILE YOU FIND YOURSELF IN AN ODD situation. You get into it by degrees and in the most natural way but, when you are right in the midst of it, you are suddenly astonished and ask yourself how in the world it all came about.

If, for example, you put to sea on a wooden raft with a parrot and five companions, it is inevitable that sooner or later you will wake up one morning out at sea, perhaps a little better rested than ordinarily, and begin to think about it.

On one such morning I sat writing in a dew-drenched logbook:

—May 17. Norwegian Independence Day. Heavy sea. Fair wind. I am cook today and found several flying fish on deck, one squid on the cabin roof, and one unknown fish in Torstein's sleeping bag. . . .

Here the pencil stopped, and the same thought interjected itself: This is really a queer seventeen of May—indeed, taken all round, a most peculiar existence. How did it all begin? a

If I turned left, I had an unimpeded view of a vast blue sea with hissing waves, rolling by close hand in an endless pursuit of an ever retreating horizon. If I turned right, I saw the inside of a shadowy cabin in which a bearded individual was lying on his back reading Goethe with his bare toes carefully dug into the latticework in the low bamboo roof of the crazy little cabin that was our common home.

“Bengt,” I said, pushing away the green parrot that wanted to perch on the logbook, “can you tell me

how the hell we came to be doing this?"

Goethe sank down under the red-gold beard.

"The devil I do; you know best yourself. It was your damned idea, but I think it's grand."

He moved his toes three bars up and went on reading Goethe unperturbed. Outside the cabin three other fellows were working in the roasting sun on the bamboo deck. They were half-naked, brown-skinned, and bearded, with stripes of salt down their backs and looking as if they had never done anything else than float wooden rafts westward across the Pacific. Erik came crawling in through the opening with his sextant and a pile of papers.

"98° 46' west by 8° 2' south—a good day's run since yesterday, chaps!"

He took my pencil and drew a tiny circle on a chart which hung on the bamboo wall—a tiny circle at the end of a chain of nineteen circles that curved across from the port of Callao on the coast of Peru. Herman, Knut, and Torstein too came eagerly crowding in to see the new little circle that placed us a good 40 sea miles nearer the South Sea islands than the last in the chain.

"Do you see, boys?" said Herman proudly. "That means we're 850 sea miles from the coast of Peru."

"And we've got another 3,500 to go to get to the nearest islands," Knut added cautiously.

"And to be quite precise," said Torstein, "we're 15,000 feet above the bottom of the sea and a few fathoms below the moon."

So now we all knew exactly where we were, and I could go on speculating as to why. The parrot did not care; he only wanted to tug at the log. And the sea was just as round, just as sky-encircled, blue upon blue.

Perhaps the whole thing had begun the winter before, in the office of a New York museum. Or perhaps it had already begun ten years earlier, on a little island in the Marquesas group in the middle of the Pacific. Maybe we would land on the same island now, unless the northeast wind sent us farther south in the direction of Tahiti and the Tuamotu group. I could see the little island clearly in my mind's eye, with its jagged rust-red mountains, the green jungle which flowed down their slopes toward the sea, and the slender palms that waited and waved along the shore. The island was called Fatu Hiva; there was no land between it and us where we lay drifting, but nevertheless it was thousands of sea miles away. I saw the narrow Ouia Valley, where it opened out toward the sea, and remembered so well how we sat there on the lonely beach and looked out over this same endless sea evening after evening. I was accompanied by my wife then, not by bearded pirates as now. We were collecting all kinds of live creatures, and images and other relics of a dead culture.

I remembered very well one particular evening. The civilized world seemed incomprehensibly remote and unreal. We had lived on the island for nearly a year, the only white people there; we had of our own will forsaken the good things of civilization along with its evils. We lived in a hut we had built for ourselves, on piles under the palms down by the shore, and ate what the tropical woods and the Pacific had to offer us.

On that particular evening we sat, as so often before, down on the beach in the moonlight, with the sea in front of us. Wide awake and filled with the romance that surrounded us, we let no impressions escape us. We filled our nostrils with an aroma of rank jungle and salt sea and heard the wind's rustle in leaves and palm tops. At regular intervals all other noises were drowned by the great breakers that rolled straight in from the sea and rushed in foaming over the land till they were broken up into circles

of froth among the shore boulders. There was a roaring and rustling and rumbling among millions of glistening stones, till all grew quiet again when the sea water had withdrawn to gather strength for new attack on the invincible coast.

“It’s queer,” said my wife, “but there are never breakers like this on the other side of the island.”

“No,” said I, “but this is the windward side; there’s always a sea running on this side.”

We kept on sitting there and admiring the sea which, it seemed, was loath to give up demonstrating that here it came rolling in from eastward, eastward, eastward. It was the eternal east wind, the trade wind, which had disturbed the sea’s surface, dug it up, and rolled it forward, up over the eastern horizon and over here to the islands. Here the unbroken advance of the sea was finally shattered against cliffs and reefs, while the east wind simply rose above coast and woods and mountains and continued westward unhindered, from island to island, toward the sunset.

So had the ocean swells and the lofty clouds above them rolled up over the same eastern horizon since the morning of time. The first natives who reached these islands knew well enough that this was so, and so did the present islanders. The long-range ocean birds kept to the eastward on their daily fishing trips to be able to return with the eastern wind at night when the belly was full and the wings tired. Even trees and flowers were wholly dependent on the rain produced by the eastern winds, and all the vegetation grew accordingly. And we knew by ourselves, as we sat there, that far, far below the eastern horizon, where the clouds came up, lay the open coast of South America. There was nothing but 4,000 miles of open sea between.

We gazed at the driving clouds and the heaving moonlit sea, and we listened to an old man who squatted half-naked before us and stared down into the dying glow from a little smoldering fire.

“Tiki,” the old man said quietly, “he was both god and chief. It was Tiki who brought my ancestors to these islands where we live now. Before that we lived in a big country beyond the sea.”

He poked the coals with a stick to keep them from going out. The old man sat thinking. He lived far in ancient times and was firmly fettered to them. He worshiped his forefathers and their deeds in an unbroken line back to the time of the gods. And he looked forward to being reunited with them. Old Tei Tetua was the sole survivor of all the extinct tribes on the east coast of Fatu Hiva. How old he was he did not know, but his wrinkled, bark-brown, leathery skin looked as if it had been dried in sun and wind for a hundred years. He was one of the few on these islands that still remembered and believed in his father’s and his grandfather’s legendary stories of the great Polynesian chief-god Tiki, son of the sun.

When we crept to bed that night in our little pile hut, old Tei Tetua’s stories of Tiki and the islanders’ old home beyond the sea continued to haunt my brain, accompanied by the muffled roar of the surf in the distance. It sounded like a voice from far-off times, which, it seemed, had something wanted to tell, out there in the night. I could not sleep. It was as though time no longer existed, and Tiki and his seafarers were just landing in the surf on the beach below. A thought suddenly struck me and I said to my wife: “Have you noticed that the huge stone figures of Tiki in the jungle are remarkably like the monoliths left by extinct civilizations in South America?”

I felt sure that a roar of agreement came from the breakers. And then they slowly subsided while we slept.

* * *

So, perhaps, the whole thing began. So began, in any case, a whole series of events which finally landed the six of us and a green parrot on board a raft off the coast of South America.

I remember how I shocked my father and amazed my mother and my friends when I came back from Norway and handed over my glass jars of beetles and fish from Fatu Hiva to the University Zoological Museum. I wanted to give up animal studies and tackle primitive peoples. The unsolved mysteries of the South Seas had fascinated me. There must be a rational solution of them, and I had made my objective the identification of the legendary hero Tiki.

In the years that followed, breakers and jungle ruins were a kind of remote, unreal dream which formed the background and accompaniment to my studies of the Pacific peoples. Although the thoughts and inclinations of primitive man can never be rightly judged by an armchair student, yet he can, in his library bookshelves, travel wider beyond time and horizons than can any modern outdoor explorer. Scientific works, journals from the time of the earliest explorations, and endless collections in museums in Europe and America offered a wealth of material for use in the puzzle I wanted to try to put together. Since our own race first reached the Pacific islands after the discovery of South America, investigators in all branches of science have collected an almost bottomless store of information about the inhabitants of the South Seas and all the peoples living round about them. But there has never been any agreement as to the origin of this isolated island people, or the reason why this type is only found scattered over all the solitary islands in the eastern part of the Pacific.

When the first Europeans at last ventured to cross this greatest of all oceans, they discovered to their amazement that right out in the midst of it lay a number of small mountainous islands and fringed coral reefs, isolated from each other and from the world in general by vast areas of sea. And even on every single one of these islands was already inhabited by people who had come there before them—tall, handsome people who met them on the beach with dogs and pigs and fowl. Where had they come from? They talked a language which no other tribe knew. And the men of our race, who boldly called themselves the discoverers of the islands, found cultivated fields and villages with temples and houses on every single habitable island. On some islands, indeed, they found old pyramids, paved roads, and carved stone statues as high as a four-story house. But the explanation of the whole mystery was lacking. Who were these people, and where had they come from?

One can safely say that the answers to these riddles have been nearly as many in number as the works which have treated of them. Specialists in different fields have put forward quite different solutions, but their affirmations have always been disproved later by logical arguments from experts who have worked along other lines. Malaya, India, China, Japan, Arabia, Egypt, the Caucasus, Atlantis, even Germany and Norway, have been seriously championed as the Polynesians' homeland. But every time some obstacle of a decisive character has appeared and put the whole problem into the melting pot again.

And where science stopped, imagination began. The mysterious monoliths on Easter Island, and all the other relics of unknown origin on this tiny island, lying in complete solitude halfway between the easternmost Pacific islands and the coast of South America, gave rise to all sorts of speculation. Many observed that the finds on Easter Island recalled in many ways the relics of the prehistoric civilizations of South America. Perhaps there had once been a bridge of land over the sea, and this had sunk? Perhaps Easter Island, and all the other South Sea islands which had monuments of the same kind, were remains of a sunken continent left exposed above the sea?

This has been a popular theory and an acceptable explanation among laymen, but geologists and other scientists do not favor it. Zoologists, moreover, prove quite simply, from the study of insects and snails on the South Sea islands, that throughout the history of mankind these islands have been completely isolated from one another and from the continents round them, exactly as they are today.

We know, therefore, with absolute certainty that the original Polynesian race must at some time willingly or unwillingly, have come drifting or sailing to these remote islands. And a closer look at the inhabitants of the South Seas shows that it cannot have been very many centuries since they came. For, even if the Polynesians live scattered over an area of sea four times as large as the whole of Europe, nevertheless they have not managed to develop different languages in the different islands. It is thousands of sea miles from Hawaii in the north to New Zealand in the south, from Samoa in the west to Easter Island in the east, yet all these isolated tribes speak dialects of a common language, which we have called Polynesian.

Writing was unknown in all the islands, except for a few wooden tablets bearing incomprehensible hieroglyphs which the natives preserved on Easter Island, though neither they themselves nor anyone else could read them. But they had schools, and the poetical teaching of history was their most important function, for in Polynesia history was the same as religion. The people were ancestor-worshippers; they worshiped their dead chiefs all the way back to Tiki's time, and of Tiki himself it was said that he was son of the sun.

On almost every island learned men could enumerate the names of all the island's chiefs back to the time when it was first peopled. To assist their memories they often used a complicated system of knots on twisted strings, as the Inca Indians did in Peru. Modern scientists have collected all the local genealogies from the different islands and found that they agree with one another with astonishing exactness, both in names and number of generations. It has been discovered in this way by taking an average Polynesian generation to represent twenty-five years, that the South Sea islands were not peopled before about 500 A.D. A new cultural wave with a new string of chiefs shows that another and still later migration reached the same islands as late as about 1100 A.D.

Where could such late migrations have come from? Very few investigators seem to have taken into consideration the decisive factor that the people which came to the islands at so late a date was a pure Stone Age people. Despite their intelligence and, in all other respects, astonishingly high culture, these seafarers brought with them a certain type of stone ax and a quantity of other characteristic Stone Age tools and spread these over all the islands to which they came. We must not forget that apart from single isolated peoples, inhabiting primeval forests, and certain backward races, there were no cultures in the world of any reproductive capacity which were still at the Stone Age level in 500 or 1100 A.D., except in the New World. There even the highest Indian civilizations were totally ignorant at least of the uses of iron, and used stone axes and tools of the same type as those used in the South Sea islands right up to the time of the explorations.

These numerous Indian civilizations were the Polynesians' nearest neighbors to the east. To the westward there lived only the black-skinned primitive peoples of Australia and Melanesia, distant relations of the Negroes, and beyond them again were Indonesia and the coast of Asia, where the Stone Age lay farther back in time, perhaps, than anywhere else in the world.

Thus both my suspicions and my attention were turned more and more away from the Old World, where so many had searched and none had found, and over to the known and unknown Indian civilizations of America, which no one hitherto had taken into consideration. And on the nearest coast due east, where today the South American republic of Peru stretches from the Pacific up into the mountains, there was no lack of traces if one only looked for them. Here an unknown people had once lived and established one of the world's strangest civilizations, till suddenly, long ago, they had vanished as though swept away from the earth's surface. They left behind them enormous stone statues carved in the image of human beings, which recalled those on Pitcairn, the Marquesas, and Easter Island, and huge pyramids built in steps like those on Tahiti and Samoa. They hewed out of the

mountains, with stone axes, stone blocks as large as railway cars and heavier than elephants transported them for miles about the countryside, and set them up on end or placed them on top of one another to form gateways, huge walls, and terraces, exactly as we find them on some of the islands of the Pacific.

The Inca Indians had their great empire in this mountain country when the first Spaniards came to Peru. They told the Spaniards that the colossal monuments that stood deserted about the landscape were erected by a race of white gods which had lived there before the Incas themselves became rulers. These vanished architects were described as wise, peaceful instructors, who had originally come from the north, long ago in the morning of time, and had taught the Incas' primitive forefathers architecture and agriculture as well as manners and customs. They were unlike other Indians in having white skins and long beards; they were also taller than the Incas. Finally they left Peru as suddenly as they had come; the Incas themselves took over power in the country, and the white teachers vanished forever from the coast of South America and fled westward across the Pacific.

Now it happened that, when the Europeans came to the Pacific islands, they were quite astonished to find that many of the natives had almost white skins and were bearded. On many of the islands there were whole families conspicuous for their remarkably pale skins, hair varying from reddish to blond and blue-gray eyes, and almost Semitic, hook-nosed faces. In contrast to these the genuine Polynesians had golden-brown skins, raven hair, and rather flat, pulpy noses. The red-haired individuals called themselves *urukehu* and said that they were directly descended from the first chiefs on the islands who were still white gods, such as Tangaroa, Kane, and Tiki. Legends of mysterious white men, from whom the islanders were originally descended, were current all over Polynesia. When Roggeveen discovered Easter Island in 1722, he noticed to his surprise what he termed "white men" among those on shore. And the people of Easter Island could themselves count up those of their ancestors who were white-skinned right back to the time of Tiki and Hotu Matua, when they first came sailing across the sea "from a mountainous land in the east which was scorched by the sun."

As I pursued my search, I found in Peru surprising traces in culture, mythology, and language which impelled me to go on digging ever deeper and with greater concentration in my attempt to identify the place of origin of the Polynesian tribal god Tiki.

And I found what I hoped for. I was sitting reading the Inca legends of the sun-king Virakocha, who was the supreme head of the mythical white people in Peru. I read:

.... Virakocha is an Inca (Ketchua) name and consequently of fairly recent date. The original name of the sun-god Virakocha, which seems to have been more used in Peru in old times, was Kon-Tiki or Illa-Tiki, which means Sun-Tiki or Fire-Tiki. Kon-Tiki was high priest and sun-king of the Incas, a legendary 'white men' who had left the enormous ruins on the shores of Lake Titicaca. The legend runs that the mysterious white men with beards were attacked by a chief named Cari who came from the Coquimbo Valley. In a battle on an island in Lake Titicaca the fair race was massacred, but Kon-Tiki himself and his closest companions escaped and later came down to the Pacific coast, where they finally disappeared oversea to the westward....

I was no longer in doubt that the white chief-god Sun-Tiki, whom the Incas declared that the forefathers had driven out of Peru on to the Pacific, was identical with the white chief-god Tiki, son of the sun, whom the inhabitants of all the eastern Pacific islands hailed as the original founder of their race. And the details of Sun-Tiki's life in Peru, with the ancient names of places round Lake Titicaca, cropped up again in historic legends current among the natives of the Pacific islands.

But all over Polynesia I found indications that Kon-Tiki's peaceable race had not been able to hold

the islands alone for long. Indications that seagoing war canoes, as large as Viking ships and lashed together two and two, had brought Northwest Indians from the New World across the sea to Hawaii and farther south to all the other islands. They had mingled their blood with that of Kon-Tiki's race and brought a new civilization to the island kingdom. This was the second Stone Age people that came to Polynesia, without metals, without the potter's art, without wheel or loom or cereal cultivation about 1100 A.D.

So it came about that I was excavating rock carvings in the ancient Polynesian style among the Northwest Coast Indians in British Columbia when the Germans burst into Norway in 1940.

* * *

Right face, left face, about face. Washing barracks stairs, polishing boots, radio school, parachute- and at last a Murmansk convoy to Finnmark, where the war-god of technique reigned in the sun-god's absence all the dark winter through.

Peace came. And one day my theory was complete. I must go to America and put it forward.

AN EXPEDITION IS BORN

*Among Specialists — The Turning Point —
 At the Sailors' Home —
 Last Resource — Explorers Club —
 The New Equipment — I Find a Companion —
 A Triumvirate —
 One Painter and Two Saboteurs —
 To Washington —
 Conference at the War Department —
 To Q.M.G. with Desiderata-
 Money Problems —
 With Diplomats at UN —
 We Fly to Ecuador*

An Expedition Is Born

SO IT HAD BEGUN, BY A FIRE ON A SOUTH SEA ISLAND, where an old native sat telling legends and stories of his tribe. Many years later I sat with another old man, this time in a dark office on one of the upper floors of a big museum in New York.

Round us, in well-arranged glass cases, lay pottery fragments from the past, traces leading into the mists of antiquity. The walls were lined with books. Some of them one man had written and hardly ten men had read. The old man, who had read all these books and written some of them, sat behind his worktable, white-haired and good-humored. But now, for sure, I had trodden on his toes, for he gripped the arms of his chair uneasily and looked as if I had interrupted him in a game of solitaire.

“No!” he said. “Never!”

I imagine that Santa Claus would have looked as he did then if someone had dared to affirm that the next year Christmas would be on Midsummer Day.

“You’re wrong, absolutely wrong,” he said and shook his head indignantly to drive out the idea.

“But you haven’t read my arguments yet,” I urged, nodding hopefully toward the manuscript which lay on the table.

“Arguments!” he repeated. “You can’t treat ethnographic problems as a sort of detective mystery!”

“Why not?” I said. “I’ve based all the conclusions on my own observations and the facts that science has recorded.”

“The task of science is investigation pure and simple,” he said quietly. “Not to try to prove this or that.”

He pushed the unopened manuscript carefully to one side and leaned over the table.

“It’s quite true that South America was the home of some of the most curious civilizations of antiquity, and that we know neither who they were nor where they vanished when the Incas came into power. But one thing we do know for certain—that none of the peoples of South America got over to the islands in the Pacific.”

He looked at me searchingly and continued:

“Do you know why? The answer’s simple enough. They couldn’t get there. They had no boats!”

“They had rafts,” I objected hesitatingly. “You know, balsa-wood rafts.”

The old man smiled and said calmly:

“Well, you can try a trip from Peru to the Pacific islands on a balsa-wood raft.”

I could find nothing to say. It was getting late. We both rose. The old scientist patted me kindly on the shoulder, as he saw me out, and said that if I wanted help I had only to come to him. But I must in the future specialize on Polynesia or America and not mix up two separate anthropological areas. I reached back over the table.

“You’ve forgotten this,” he said and handed back my manuscript. I glanced at the title, “Polynesia and America; A Study of Prehistoric Relations.” I stuck the manuscript under my arm and clattered down the stairs out into the crowds in the street.

That evening I went down and knocked on the door of an old flat in an out-of-the-way corner of Greenwich Village. I liked bringing my little problems down here when I felt they had made life a bit tangled.

A sparse little man with a long nose opened the door a crack before he threw it wide open with a broad smile and pulled me in. He took me straight into the little kitchen, where he set me to work carrying plates and forks while he himself doubled the quantity of the indefinable but savory-smelling concoction he was heating over the gas.

“Nice of you to come,” he said. “How goes it?”

“Rottenly,” I replied. “No one will read the manuscript.”

He filled the plates and we attacked the contents.

“It’s like this,” he said. “All the people you’ve been to see think it’s just a passing idea you’ve got. You know, here in America, people turn up with so many queer ideas.”

“And there’s another thing,” I went on.

“Yes,” said he. “Your way of approaching the problem. They’re specialists, the whole lot of them, and they don’t believe in a method of work which cuts into every field of science from botany to archaeology. They limit their own scope in order to be able to dig in the depths with more concentration for details. Modern research demands that every special branch shall dig in its own hole.”

It's not usual for anyone to sort out what comes up out of the holes and try to put it all together."

He rose and reached for a heavy manuscript.

"Look here," he said. "My last work on bird designs in Chinese peasant embroidery. Took me seven years, but it was accepted for publication at once. They want specialized research nowadays."

Carl was right. But to solve the problems of the Pacific without throwing light on them from all sides was, it seemed to me, like doing a puzzle and only using the pieces of one color.

We cleared the table, and I helped him wash and dry the dishes.

"Nothing new from the university in Chicago?"

"No."

"But what did your old friend at the museum say today?"

"He wasn't interested, either," I muttered. "He said that, as long as the Indians had only open rafts, it was futile to consider the possibility of their having discovered the Pacific islands."

The little man suddenly began to dry his plate furiously.

"Yes," he said at last. "To tell the truth, to me too that seems a practical objection to your theory."

I looked gloomily at the little ethnologist whom I had thought to be a sworn ally.

"But don't misunderstand me," he hastened to say. "In one way I think you're right, but in another way it's so incomprehensible. My work on designs supports your theory."

"Carl," I said. "I'm so sure the Indians crossed the Pacific on their rafts that I'm willing to build a raft of the same kind myself and cross the sea just to prove that it's possible." "You're mad!"

My friend took it for a joke and laughed, half-scared at the thought.

"You're mad! A raft?"

He did not know what to say and only stared at me with a queer expression, as though waiting for a smile to show that I was joking.

He did not get one. I saw now that in practice no one would accept my theory because of the apparently endless stretch of sea between Peru and Polynesia, which I was trying to bridge with no other aid than a prehistoric raft.

Carl looked at me uncertainly. "Now we'll go out and have a drink," he said. We went out and had four.



My rent became due that week. At the same time a letter from the Bank of Norway informed me that I could have no more dollars. Currency restrictions. I picked up my trunk and took the subway over to Brooklyn. Here I was taken in at the Norwegian Sailors' Home, where the food was good and sustaining and the prices suited my wallet. I got a little room a floor or two up but had my meals with all the seamen in a big dining room downstairs.

Seamen came and seamen went. They varied in type, dimensions, and degrees of sobriety but they all had one thing in common—when they talked about the sea, they knew what they were talking about. I learned that waves and rough sea did not increase with the depth of the sea or distance from land. On the contrary, squalls were often more treacherous along the coast than in the open sea. Shore water, backwash along the coast, or ocean currents penned in close to the land could throw up

rougher sea than was usual far out. A vessel which could hold her own along an open coast could hold her own farther out. I also learned that, in a high sea, big ships were inclined to plunge bow or stern into the waves, so that tons of water would rush on board and twist steel tubes like wire, while a small boat, in the same sea, often made good weather because she could find room between the lines of waves and dance freely over them like a gull. I talked to sailors who had got safely away in boats after the seas had made their ship founder.

But the men knew little about rafts. A raft—that wasn't a ship; it had no keel or bulwarks. It was just something floating on which to save oneself in an emergency, until one was picked up by a boat of some kind. One of the men, nevertheless, had great respect for rafts in the open sea; he had drifted about on one for three weeks when a German torpedo sank his ship in mid-Atlantic.

“But you can't navigate a raft,” he added. “It goes sideways and backward and round as the wind takes it.”

In the library I dug out records left by the first Europeans who had reached the Pacific coast of South America. There was no lack of sketches or descriptions of the Indians' big balsa wood rafts. They had a square sail and centerboard and a long steering oar astern. So they could be maneuvered.

Weeks passed at the Sailors' Home. No reply from Chicago or the other cities to which I had sent copies of my theory. No one had read it.

Then, one Saturday, I pulled myself together and marched into a ship chandler's shop down Water Street. There I was politely addressed as “Captain” when I bought a pilot chart of the Pacific. With the chart rolled up under my arm I took the suburban train out to Ossining, where I was a regular week-end guest of a young Norwegian married couple who had a charming place in the country. My host had been a sea captain and was now office manager for the Fred Olsen Line in New York.

After a refreshing plunge in the swimming pool city life was completely forgotten for the rest of the week end, and when Ambjörg brought the cocktail tray, we sat down on the lawn in the hot sun. I could contain myself no longer but spread the chart out on the grass and asked Wilhelm if he thought a raft could carry men alive from Peru to the South Sea islands.

He looked at me rather than at the chart, half taken aback, but replied at once in the affirmative. I felt as much lightened as if I had released a balloon inside my shirt, for I knew that to Wilhelm everything that had to do with navigation and sailing was both job and hobby. He was initiated into my plans at once. To my astonishment he then declared that the idea was sheer madness.

“But you said just now that you thought it was possible,” I interrupted.

“Quite right,” he admitted. “But the chances of its going wrong are just as great. You yourself have never been on a balsa raft, and all of a sudden you're imagining yourself across the Pacific on one. Perhaps it'll come off, perhaps it won't. The old Indians in Peru had generations of experience to build upon. Perhaps ten rafts went to the bottom for every one that got across—or perhaps hundreds in the course of centuries. As you say, the Incas navigated in the open sea with whole flotillas of these balsa rafts. Then, if anything went wrong, they could be picked up by the nearest raft. But who's going to pick you up, out in mid-ocean? Even if you take a radio for use in an emergency, don't think it's going to be easy for a little raft to be located down among the waves thousands of miles from land. In a storm you can be washed off the raft and drowned many times over before anyone gets to you. You'd better wait quietly here till someone has had time to read your manuscript. Write again and stir the pot up; it's no good if you don't.”

“I can’t wait any longer now; I shan’t have a cent left soon.”

“Then you can come and stay with us. For that matter, how can you think of starting an expedition from South America without money?”

“It’s easier to interest people in an expedition than in an unread manuscript.”

“But what can you gain by it?”

“Destroy one of the weightiest arguments against the theory, quite apart from the fact that science will pay some attention to the affair.”

“But if things go wrong?”

“Then I shan’t have proved anything.”

“Then you’d ruin your own theory in the eyes of everyone, wouldn’t you?”

“Perhaps, but all the same one in ten might have got through before us, as you said.”

The children came out to play croquet, and we did not discuss the matter any more that day.

The next week end I was back at Ossining with the chart under my arm. And, when I left, there was a long pencil line from the coast of Peru to the Tuamotu islands in the Pacific. My friend, the captain, had given up hope of making me drop the idea, and we had sat together for hours working out the raft’s probable speed.

“Ninety-seven days,” said Wilhelm, “but remember that’s only in theoretically ideal conditions with a fair wind all the time and assuming that the raft can really sail as you think it can. You must definitely allow at least four months for the trip and be prepared for a good deal more.”

“All right,” I said optimistically, “let us allow at least four months, but do it in ninety-seven days.”

The little room at the Sailors’ Home seemed twice as cozy as usual when I came home that evening and sat down on the edge of the bed with the chart. I paced out the floor as exactly as the bed and chest of drawers gave me room to do. Oh, yes, the raft would be much larger than this. I leaned out of the window to get a glimpse of the great city’s remote starry sky, only visible right overhead between the high yard walls. If there was little room on board the raft, anyhow there would be room for the sky and all its stars above us.

On West Seventy-Second Street, near Central Park, is one of the most exclusive clubs in New York. There is nothing more than a brightly polished little brass plate with “Explorers Club” on it to tempt passers-by that there is anything out of the ordinary inside the doors. But, once inside, one might have made a parachute jump into a strange world, thousands of miles from New York’s lines of motorcars flanked by skyscrapers. When the door to New York is shut behind one, one is swallowed up in an atmosphere of lion-hunting, mountaineering, and polar life. Trophies of hippopotamus and deer, big game rifles, tusks, war drums and spears, Indian carpets, idols and model ships, flags, photographs and maps, surround the members of the club when they assemble for a dinner or to hear lecturers from distant countries.

After my journey to the Marquesas Islands I had been elected an active member of the club, and as a junior member I had seldom missed a meeting when I was in town. So, when I now entered the club on a rainy November evening, I was not a little surprised to find the place in an unusual state. In the middle of the floor lay an inflated rubber raft with boat rations and accessories, while parachute rubber overalls, safety jackets, and polar equipment covered walls and tables, together with balloons

for water distillation, and other curious inventions. A newly elected member of the club, Colonel Haskin, of the equipment laboratory of the Air Material Command, was to give a lecture and demonstrate a number of new military inventions which, he thought, would in the future be of use on scientific expeditions in both north and south.

After the lecture there was a vigorous discussion. The well-known Danish polar explorer Peter Freuchen, tall and bulky, rose with a skeptical shake of his huge beard. He had no faith in such new-fangled patents. He himself had once used a rubber boat and bag tent on one of his Greenland expeditions instead of an Eskimo kayak and igloo, and it had all but cost him his life. First he had nearly been frozen to death in a snowstorm because the zipper fastening of the tent had frozen up so that he could not even get in. And after that he had been out fishing when the hook caught in the inflated rubber boat, and the boat was punctured and sank under him like a bit of rag. He and an Eskimo friend had managed to get ashore that time in a kayak which came to their help. He was sure no clever modern inventor could sit in his laboratory and think out anything better than what the experience of thousands of years had taught the Eskimos to use in their own regions.

The discussion ended with a surprising offer from Colonel Haskin. Active members of the club could, on their next expeditions, select any they liked of the new inventions he had demonstrated, on the sole condition that they should let his laboratory know what they thought of the things when they came back.

That was that. I was the last to leave the clubrooms that evening. I had to go over every minute detail of all this brand-new equipment which had so suddenly tumbled into my hands and which was now at my disposal for the asking. It was exactly what I wanted—equipment with which we could try to save our lives if, contrary to expectation, our wooden raft should show signs of breaking up and we had no other rafts near by.

All this equipment was still occupying my thoughts at the breakfast table in the Sailors' Home next morning when a well-dressed young man of athletic build came along with his breakfast tray and sat down at the same table as myself. We began to chat, and it appeared that he too was not a seaman but a university-trained engineer from Trondheim, who was in America to buy machinery parts and obtain practical experience in refrigerating technique. He was living not far away and often had meals at the Sailors' Home because of the good Norwegian cooking there.

He asked me what I was doing, and I then gave him a short account of my plans. I said that, if I did not get a definite answer about my manuscript before the end of the week, I should get under way with the starting of the raft expedition. My table companion did not say much but listened with great interest.

Four days later we ran across each other again in the same dining room.

"Have you decided whether you're going on your trip or not?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I'm going."

"When?"

"As soon as possible. If I hang about much longer now, the gales will be coming up from the Antarctic and it will be hurricane season in the islands, too. I must leave Peru in a very few months but I must get money first and get the whole business organized."

"How many men will there be?"

"I've thought of having six men in all; that'll give some change of society on board the raft and

the right number for four hours' steering in every twenty-four hours."

He stood for a moment or two, as though chewing over a thought, then burst out emphatically:

"The devil, but how I'd like to be in it! I could undertake technical measurements and tests. Of course, you'll have to support your experiment with accurate measurements of winds and currents and waves. Remember that you're going to cross vast spaces of sea which are practically unknown because they lie outside all shipping routes. An expedition like yours can make interesting hydrographic and meteorological investigations; I could make good use of my thermodynamics."

I knew nothing about the man beyond what an open face can say. It may say a good deal.

"All right," I said. "We'll go together."

His name was Herman Watzinger; he was as much of a landlubber as myself.

A few days later I took Herman as my guest to the Explorers Club. Here we ran straight into the polar explorer Peter Freuchen. Freuchen has the blessed quality of never disappearing in a crowd. As big as a barn door and bristling with beard, he looks like a messenger from the open tundra. A special atmosphere surrounds him—it is as though he were going about with a grizzly bear on a lead.

We took him over to a big map on the wall and told him about our plan of crossing the Pacific on an Indian raft. His boyish blue eyes grew as large as saucers as he listened. Then he stamped his wooden leg on the floor and tightened his belt several holes.

"Damn it, boys! I should like to go with you!"

The old Greenland traveler filled our beer mugs and began to tell us of his confidence in primitive peoples' watercraft and these peoples' ability to make their way by accommodating themselves to nature both on land and at sea. He himself had traveled by raft down the great rivers of Siberia and towed natives on rafts astern of his ship along the coast of the Arctic. As he talked, he tugged at his beard and said we were certainly going to have a great time.

Through Freuchen's eager support of our plan the wheels began to turn at a dangerous speed, and they soon ran right into the printers' ink of the *Scandinavian Press*. The very next morning there came a violent knocking on my door in the Sailors' Home; I was wanted on the telephone in the passage downstairs. The result of the conversation was that Herman and I, the same evening, rang the doorbell of an apartment in a fashionable quarter of the city. We were received by a well-dressed young man in patent-leather slippers, wearing a silk dressing gown over a blue suit. He made an impression almost of softness and apologized for having a cold with a scented handkerchief held under his nose. Nonetheless we knew that this fellow had made a name in America by his exploits as an airman in the war. Besides our apparently delicate host two energetic young journalists, simply bursting with activity and ideas, were present. We knew one of them as an able correspondent.

Our host explained over a bottle of good whisky that he was interested in our expedition. He offered to raise the necessary capital if we would undertake to write newspaper articles and go on lecture tours after our return. We came to an agreement at last and drank to successful co-operation between the backers of the expedition and those taking part in it. From now on all our economic problems would be solved; they were taken over by our backers and would not trouble us. Herman and I were at once set about raising a crew and equipment, build a raft, and get off before the hurricane season began.

Next day Herman resigned his post, and we set about our task seriously. I had already obtained a promise from the research laboratory of the Air Material Command to send everything I asked for and more through the Explorers Club; they said that an expedition such as ours was ideal for testing the

equipment. This was a good start. Our most important tasks were now, first of all, to find four suitable men who were willing to go with us on the raft and to obtain supplies for the journey.

A party of men who were to put out to sea together on board a raft must be chosen with care. Otherwise there would be trouble and mutiny after a month's isolation at sea. I did not want to man the raft with sailors; they knew hardly any more about managing a raft than we did ourselves, and I did not want to have it argued afterward, when we had completed the voyage, that we made it because we were better seamen than the old raft-builders in Peru. Nevertheless, we wanted one man on board who at any rate could use a sextant and mark our course on a chart as a basis for all our scientific reports.

"I know a good fellow, a painter," I said to Herman. "He's a big hefty chap who can play the guitar and is full of fun. He went through navigation school and sailed round the world several times before he settled down at home with brush and palette. I've known him since we were boys and have often been on camping tours with him in the mountains at home. I'll write and ask him; I'm sure he'll come."

"He sounds all right," Herman nodded, "and then we want someone who can manage the radio."

"Radio!" I said, horrified. "What the hell do we want with that? It's out of place on a prehistoric raft."

"Not at all—it's a safety precaution which won't have any effect on your theory so long as we don't send out any SOS for help. And we shall need the radio to send out weather observations and other reports. But it'll be no use for us to receive gale warnings because there are no reports for that part of the ocean, and, even if there were, what good would they be to us on a raft?"

His arguments gradually swamped all my protests, the main ground for which was a lack of affection for push buttons and turning knobs.

"Curiously enough," I admitted, "I happen to have the best connections for getting into touch by radio over great distances with tiny sets. I was put into a radio section in the war. Every man in the right place, you know. But I shall certainly write a line to Knut Haugland and Torstein Raaby."

"Do you know them?"

"Yes. I met Knut for the first time in England in 1944. He'd been decorated by the British for having taken part in the parachute action that held up the German efforts to get the atomic bomb; I was the radio operator, you know, in the heavy water sabotage at Rjukan. When I met him, he had just come back from another job in Norway; the Gestapo had caught him with a secret radio set inside a chimney in the Maternity Clinic in Oslo. The Nazis had located him by D/F, and the whole building was surrounded by German soldiers with machine-gun posts in front of every single door. Fehmer, the head of the Gestapo, was standing in the courtyard himself waiting for Knut to be carried down. But it was his own men who were carried down. Knut fought his way with his pistol from the attic down to the cellar, and from there out into the back yard, where he disappeared over the hospital wall with a hail of bullets after him. I met him at a secret station in an old English castle; he had come back to organize underground liaison among more than a hundred transmitting stations in occupied Norway.

"I myself had just finished my training as a parachutist, and our plan was to jump together in the Nordmark near Oslo. But just then the Russians marched into the Kirkenes region, and a small Norwegian detachment was sent from Scotland to Finnmark to take over the operations, so to speak, from the whole Russian army. I was sent up there instead. And there I met Torstein.

“It was real Arctic winter up in those parts, and the northern lights flashed in the starry sky which was arched over us, pitch black, all day and all night. When we came to the ash heaps of the burned area in Finnmark, frozen blue and wearing furs, a cheery fellow with blue eyes and bristly fair hair crept out of a little hut up in the mountains. This was Torstein Raaby. He had first escaped to England where he went through special training, and then he’d been smuggled into Norway somewhere near Tromsø. He’d been in hiding with a little transmitting set close to the battleship ‘Tirpitz’ and for ten months he had sent daily reports to England about all that happened on board. He sent his reports at night by connecting his secret transmitter to a receiving aerial put up by a German officer. It was his regular reports that guided the British bombers who at last finished off the ‘Tirpitz.’

“Torstein escaped to Sweden and from there over to England again, and then he made a parachute jump with a new radio set behind the German lines up in the wilds of Finnmark. When the Germans retreated, he found himself sitting behind our own lines and came out of his hiding place to help us with his little radio, as our main station had been destroyed by a mine. I’m ready to bet that both Knut and Torstein are fed up with hanging about at home now and would be glad to go for a little trip on a wooden raft.”

“Write and ask them,” Herman proposed.

So I wrote a short letter, without any disingenuous persuasions, to Erik, Knut, and Torstein:

“Am going to cross Pacific on a wooden raft to support a theory that the South Sea islands were peopled from Peru. Will you come? I guarantee nothing but a free trip to Peru and the South Sea islands and back, but you will find good use for your technical abilities on the voyage. Reply at once.”

Next day the following telegram arrived from Torstein:

“COMING. TORSTEIN.”

The other two also accepted.

As sixth member of the party we had in view now one man and now another, but each time some obstacle arose. In the meantime Herman and I had to attack the supply problem. We did not mean to eat llama flesh or dried *kumara* potatoes on our trip, for we were not making it to prove that we had once been Indians ourselves. Our intention was to test the performance and quality of the Inca raft, its seaworthiness and loading capacity, and to ascertain whether the elements would really propel it across the sea to Polynesia with its crew still on board. Our native forerunners could certainly have managed to live on dried meat and fish and *kumara* potatoes on board, as that was their staple diet ashore. We were also going to try to find out, on the actual trip, whether they could have obtained additional supplies of fresh fish and rain water while crossing the sea. As our own diet I had thought of simple field service rations, as we knew them from the war.

Just at that time a new assistant to the Norwegian military attaché in Washington had arrived. I had acted as second in command of his company in Finnmark and knew that he was a “ball of fire,” who loved to attack and solve with savage energy any problem set before him. Björn Rörholt was a man of that vital type which feels quite lost if it has fought its way out into the open without immediately sighting a new problem to tackle.

I wrote to him explaining the situation and asked him to use his tracking sense to smell out a contact man in the supply department of the American army. The chances were that the laboratory was experimenting with new field rations we could test, in the same way as we were testing equipment from the Air Force laboratory.

Two days later Björn telephoned us from Washington. He had been in contact with the foreign liaison section of the American War Department, and they would like to know what it was all about.

Herman and I took the first train to Washington.

We found Björn in his room in the military attaché's office.

"I think it'll be all right," he said. "We'll be received at the foreign liaison section tomorrow provided we bring a proper letter from the colonel."

The "colonel" was Otto Munthe-Kaas, the Norwegian military attaché. He was well-disposed and more than willing to give us a proper letter of introduction when he heard what our business was.

When we came to fetch the document next morning, he suddenly rose and said he thought it would be best if he came with us himself. We drove out in the colonel's car to the Pentagon building to the offices of the War Department. The colonel and Björn sat in front in their smartest military turnout while Herman and I sat behind and peered through the windshield at the huge Pentagon building which towered up on the plain before us. This gigantic building with thirty thousand clerks and sixteen miles of corridors was to form the frame of our impending raft conference with military "high-ups." Never, before or after, did the little raft seem to Herman and me so helplessly small.

After endless wanderings in ramps and corridors we reached the door of the foreign liaison section and soon, surrounded by brand-new uniforms, we were sitting round a large mahogany table at which the head of the foreign liaison section himself presided.

The stern, broad-built West Point officer, who bulked big at the end of the table, had a certain difficulty at first in understanding what the connection between the American War Department and our wooden raft was, but the colonel's well-considered words, and the favorable result of a hurricane-like examination by the officers round the table, slowly brought him over to our side, and he read with interest the letter from the equipment laboratory of the Air Material Command. Then he rose and gave his staff a concise order to help us through the proper channels and, wishing us good luck for the present, marched out of the conference room. When the door had shut on him, a young staff captain whispered in my ear:

"I'll bet you'll get what you want. It sounds like a minor military operation and brings a little change into our daily office peacetime routine; besides, it'll be a good opportunity of methodical testing equipment."

The liaison office at once arranged a meeting with Colonel Lewis at the quartermaster general's experimental laboratory, and Herman and I were taken over there by car.

Colonel Lewis was an affable giant of an officer with a sportsman's bearing. He at once called the men in charge of experiments in the different sections. All were amicably disposed and immediately suggested quantities of equipment they would like us to test thoroughly. They exceeded our wildest hopes as they rattled off the names of nearly everything we could want, from field rations to sunburn ointment and splash-proof sleeping bags. Then they took us on an extensive tour to look at the things. We tasted special rations in smart packings; we tested matches which struck well even if they had been dipped in water, new primus stoves and water kegs, rubber bags and special boots, kitchen utensils and knives which would float, and all that an expedition could want.

I glanced at Herman. He looked like a good, expectant little boy walking through a chocolate shop with a rich aunt. The colonel walked in front demonstrating all these delights, and when the tour was completed staff clerks had made note of the kinds of goods and the quantities we required. I thought

the battle was won and felt only an urge to rush home to the hotel in order to assume a horizontal position and think things over in peace and quiet. Then the tall, friendly colonel suddenly said:

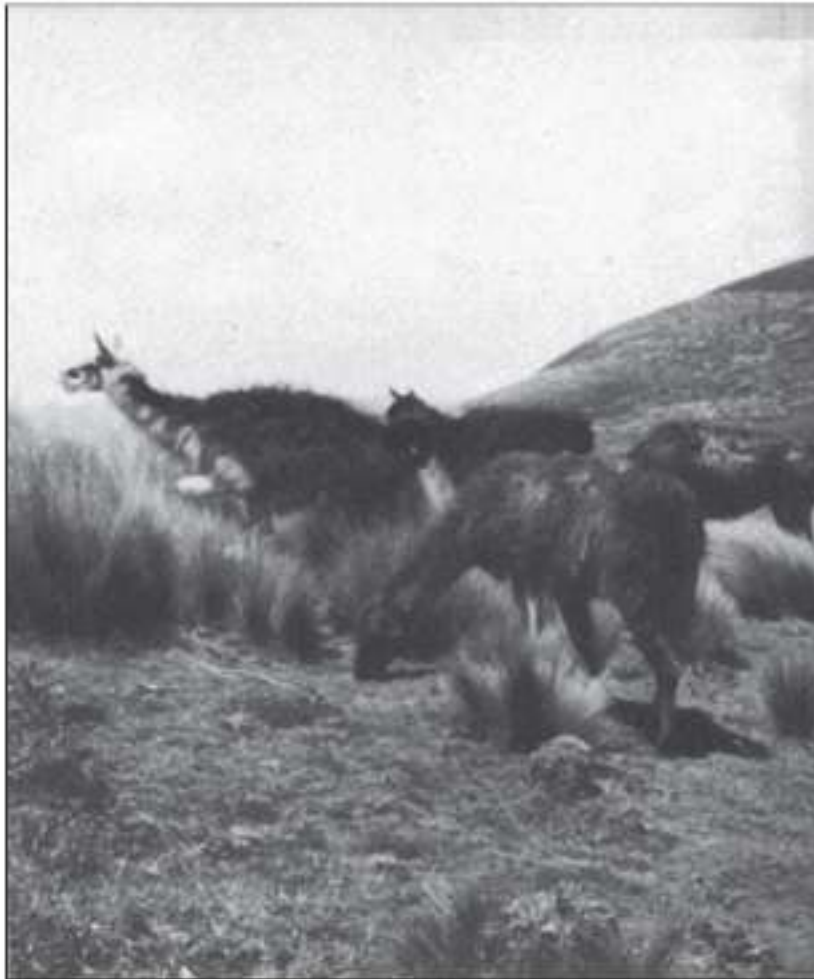
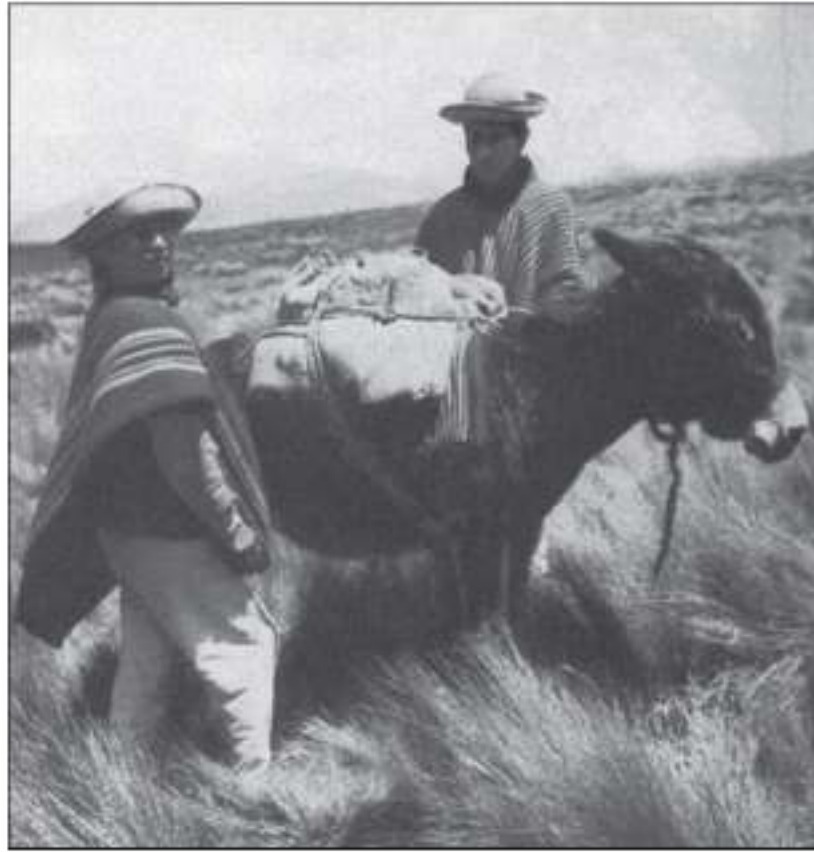
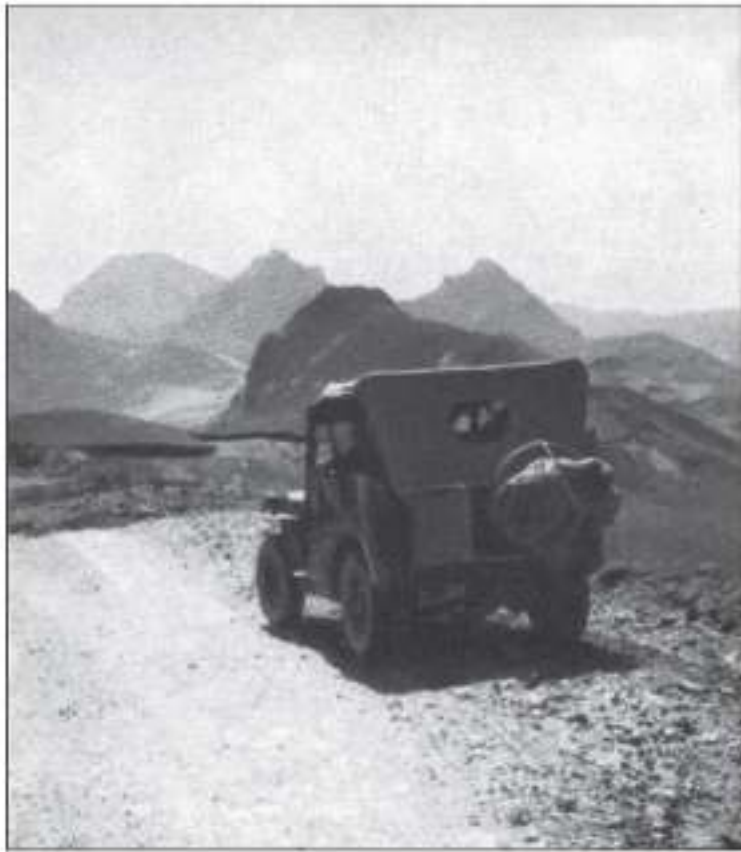
“Well, now we must go in and have a talk with the boss; it’s he who’ll decide whether we can give you these things.”

I felt my heart sink down into my boots. So we were to start our eloquence right from the beginning again, and heaven alone knew what kind of man the “boss” was!

We found that the boss was a little officer with an intensely earnest manner. He sat behind his writing table and examined us with keen blue eyes as we came into the office. He asked us to sit down



Plans being discussed before the start in the Explorers Club in New York. From left to right: Chief of Clannfhearghuis, Herman Watzinger, the author, Greenland explorer Peter Freuchen.



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