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SECRET

HE LOST A GRAND PIANO

Ex-Ambassador David Bruce has handled many tough jobs for Uncle Sam. Here's the only mission he ever fell down on

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CPYRGHT

FORMER ambassador David K. E. Bruce is one of this country's most distinguished foreign-service men. Chief of the OSS's Europe office, ambassador and now special consultant on European affairs, his career has been a star-studded one. Very few persons, even among his government colleagues, are aware of an early blot on his diplomatic record. Mr. Bruce once lost a grand piano.

To make it worse, this was the only lost shipment ever charged against the U.S. Courier Service. It is also possibly the only grand piano ever mislaid by an agency of the U.S. government, but this is not certain.

Meeting in Paris

THE story begins in Paris, just after the Armistice in 1918. David Bruce, then a 21-year-old artillery lieutenant, was strolling along the boulevards, thinking sadly of his impending departure to the boredom of civilian life. Suddenly he spotted a friend, a young diplomat named Allen Dulles, whose brother, John Foster, was on Wilson's staff at Versailles. Bruce told Dulles how he hated to go home without having really seen Europe.

"Well, David," said Dulles, "if

you want to stay over here, there's a job open. We've just created a diplomatic courier service to deliver secret documents all over the world. There's a lot of adventure and some danger too."

Two days later Bruce was in Trieste, waiting for his orders. One week later he was in a private compartment on the Orient Express about to take off on his first adventure as a courier.

As predicted by Allen Dulles in Paris, a dispatch case of secret documents was chained to his left wrist and a Colt .45 strapped to his right hip. As not predicted, were two sacks of mail, weighing about 50 pounds apiece, addressed to the Embassy in Constantinople. But Bruce was young and strong, and a trusted courier delivers the mail, whatever it weighs.

He leaned back for a smoke, gazing curiously at the throng of Italians, Serbs, Greeks and Turks on the platform. And then, a few minutes before departure, he saw on the platform the grinning face of another agent, seated on a truck, on top of a huge crate. The agent waved Bruce outside and presented him with the consignment receipt: one grand piano, new, to deliver to the YMCA in Constantinople.

"And don't lose it," the agent wisecracked as he walked away.

The piano obviously couldn't go in his compartment, as regulations required, so Bruce had it loaded in the freight car. The Orient Express pulled out, agent Bruce locked in with his mail sacks, fretting about the piano two cars away.

Bridge Gone

FIRST stop, Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Bruce jumped out on the platform, dragged his mail sacks to the freight car, and made sure his piano was still intact. He sent a porter for sandwiches and coffee, and dined atop the piano crate.

Next stop, Budapest. The war and Red Revolution had torn up the city. The bridge across the Danube was down. To continue on to Bucharest, Rumania, passengers had to travel across town, ride a ferry, and pick up the Orient Express on the other side. Bruce negotiated a horse-cab and trailer, made his way to the river with the crate. No room on the ferry. Finally he found a fisherman. Together they uncrated the piano and moved it aboard a flat Danube scow.

Next stop Bucharest, and a two-day layover. Bruce got the piano

over



LAST LAP: Danube bridge was out, so courier Bruce took cargo across on a raft

to a hotel and into the lobby but could not get it upstairs. He slept underneath and lunched on top of it, to the great amusement of the other hotel guests.

On they went through Rumania and into Bulgaria, where they had to recross the Danube. Again, no bridge. On the other side, the village of Rustchuk, last rail link on the road to Constantinople.

Ride on a Raft

THERE was no boat big enough for his piano but he found two woodsmen and worked feverishly with them to build a rough raft. All morning they toiled. At last it was finished, the piano loaded and they pushed off into the swirling current, Bruce praying all the way. They made it, found a farmer and a wagon and rode merrily into Rustchuk, with one of the woods-

men playing a rollicking waltz all the way.

That night a caravan of Gypsies rolled into town and a great festival began. Bruce sat on his piano watching the festivities, and finally joined in, dancing and singing. The piano was the star of the show and they played all night. As day began to break, the celebrants, cheering the "Amerikanski," lifted the piano and carried it to the waiting room of the railway station for Bruce. Warily he waved them good-by and curled up under it, to await his train.

Strange Goings-On

WITH much puffing and snorting, amid clouds of smoke, the Orient Express pulled in, and Bruce woke up. He stretched, looked up at the grimy ceiling, groaned at the thought of a hot bath, and then suddenly realized he should not be seeing the ceiling, since he was sleeping under a grand piano. Only he wasn't. The grand piano had disappeared from over him. Gone. Vanished.

His dispatch case was still chained to his wrist. His mail-sack pillows, hard as rocks, were under his head. But no piano.

He jumped to his feet, drawing his Colt, and ran to the station master. Much shouting and pointing brought a crowd and an Army officer who could speak some French. As Bruce explained, the officer began to laugh. The angrier Bruce got the more the officer roared. When he could finally stop laughing, he told Bruce:

"My dear colleague, it is ridiculous to try to deliver a piano across country like this. I can perhaps

my troops to scour the countryside, but it will take a day at least. Meanwhile you will miss this train and will have to stay in Rustchuk for another week."

The officer paused and then added, looking meaningfully at the dispatch case and sacks, "Now you might have more important things to do. Would you like to wait for your piano, or deliver your mail and documents?"

A Salute

BRUCE thought for a moment, as he looked at the crowd of staring faces, dozens of eyes on his sacks. "I'll go ahead," he said, "but please try to find my piano anyway."

A few days later, in Constantinople, he received a wire: "No trace of piano. The fourth battalion salutes you."

The piano was lost, all right, and David K. Este Bruce was almost lost to the diplomatic service as a result. But his record was good, and it was admitted finally that delivery of a grand piano was not exactly a proper mission for a single courier and that he had shown good judgment in not delaying the documents. His name was cleared, his job saved, and a great public servant began to climb the State Department ladder.

But even today, the sight of a grand piano causes him a slight inner twinge.

The End



BRUCE: Today he's a top State Department expert