

CHAPTER 4

THEY REACHED THE HILLS OF SHONA MUCH FASTER THAN Allnutt had expected. He kept throwing wood into the furnace to make sure that they would move swiftly through the rapids. Rose was at the tiller and Allnutt shouted instructions to her whenever it was necessary.

When the Askaris (the local African soldiers) at Shona village saw the boat coming, they immediately ran to inform the German commandant. The commandant quickly climbed the wall that surrounded the village and checked the river with his binoculars.

He smiled when he saw the African Queen. Von Hanneken had ordered him to keep an eye out for the steamboat; the Germans had been tracking the boat ever since she'd left the mission, but had lost sight of her when she'd entered a backwater. The commandant assumed that the mechanic and the English missionary had decided to surrender. The German was pleased. He was looking forward to telling von Hanneken that he had successfully captured the runaways and was sure he could make good use of the African Queen.

The commandant continued to watch the boat. Soon, however, it became clear that Rose and Allnutt had no intention of surrendering at all. The commandant had no idea what the pair were up to; all he knew was that they had to be stopped. He ordered the Askaris to open fire on the boat. The soldiers took up their positions and began to shoot.

But the boat continued on its course, untouched by the bullets.

The commandant looked through his binoculars. "Again!" he shouted.

The soldiers opened fire once more, but the African Queen carried on down the river. The boat was about a kilometre away and was apparently out of range of the rifles.

The commandant was frustrated. He grabbed a rifle from one of the Askaris and began to shoot at the boat himself. He missed. He fired, reloaded and fired again, but the reflection of the sun on the water made it difficult to take aim.

The commandant watched as the boat disappeared down the

