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Strange But True

By F. M. MacArthur

**Chapter VII
SIXTY DOCTORS AND A
GUINEA PIG**

When the news of my accident appeared in the paper I'd worked with, letters began to shower down upon me from my former friends and acquaintances. What a comfort it was to hear the nurse read the kind messages they conveyed! Later I received many parcels containing tidbits and gifts. These were greatly appreciated. One has to be hospitalized in a strange city to fully appreciate such thoughtfulness. But the nurses, orderlies and my fellow patients got most of the acts, as I was then living mostly on air.

"That's a good omen," my doctors told me the day I felt needles and pins in my spine. They were right. It was a good omen for me and soon I was wiggling the toes of my sound foot and moving my fingers, and breathing like a normal person. What a happy day! For the time being I forgot the padded plank under my back, the cast on my leg, and the pain in my throat.

But my joy was short-lived. When the feeling came back into my numb body the pain was almost unbearable. Like Job, I cursed the day of my birth and prayed that God would let me die. It seemed to me that every time I opened my eyes a nurse would be coming my way armed with a hypo syringe to give me a shot of morphine or a heart stimulant.

Once I overheard one of the nurses say: "Mac's sure a guinea pig." Her words gave me the idea of naming this chapter.

Months of taking morphine developed a craving for the dope that beggars description. Try as I would, sleep deserted me until I was given that 11 p.m. shot plus 2 1/2 to 4 grains of nembutal.

Then I would drop off to sleep to dream of devils, drugs, and doctors, or sometimes headless people and animals too horrible to mention.

At this stage of my hospitalization my throat began to cause me real trouble. A lump about the size of a pullet's egg decorated my left jaw and by applying pressure to the swelling the peculiar tasting puss would drop into my mouth.

Visions of T.B. and cancer came to my mind. The doctors kept sharp eyes on the new enemy but said little about it in my presence. Thus I lived and suffered and grew weary of life; but the grave was not yet ready to receive my broken body.

After eight months of lying flat on my back the plank was removed and a spinal brace put on to keep me from getting hunched-back, so the doctors informed me.

That same night when the lights were dimmed and we patients had been given our sedatives, I put into execution an idea I'd thought up shortly after the doctor and nurse had poured me into the brace. I turned over on my side. The action occupied some time, as I had lain so long in one position I was pretty useless. The change gave me a lot of relief and soon I fell into the only natural sleep I'd had in months.

When the day nurses returned to duty they told the supervisor and the supervisor told the doctor and the doctor gave me hell. But in spite of his warnings I repeated my side turning act every night afterward. I just had to. And to this day I never go to sleep lying on my back. The only time anybody will get me on my back again will be after I'm dead.

A couple of weeks later I was allowed to sit up for a few minutes. That was long enough. And I was glad when the nurses put me back into the nest. I was shaking all over from weakness, though I never admitted it. To do so would, I thought, keep me longer in the hospital.

Aboard H M C S Magnificent



PO Douglas C. Edgar of Swift Current, Sask., (left) and Lt. G. Guindon of Charlottetown, P.E.I., check a weather chart in the meteorological office on board the aircraft carrier H.M.C.S. Magnificent. The carrier encountered phenomenally low pressure and accompanying rough weather off Iceland when she was with the NATO Blue Fleet units during Exercise Mariner. PO Edgar, who is in charge of the meteorological mates, has been with the navy for 14 years. This is his second stint in the carrier. Lt. G. Guindon has been with the navy five years, and has spent seven months of that time in the Magnificent. (National Defence Photo.)

After I'd been getting out of bed onto a chair for a week or so, I felt the time had come for me to approach my doctors about getting out. I might as well have been calling on heathen gods to save my soul. They "need" me right out of it and boo-hooed the idea.

"Why, you can't even stand on your feet yet," they told me.

For a couple of weeks the subject lay smoldering in silence. Then I pleaded my case again. "I can't stand it any longer," I

told the medics. "Life in a hospital is driving me nuts." It wasn't the hospital that was driving me nuts, it was the unbelievable doses of dope I'd taken. I didn't realize it then but I do now, for believe me, morphine is a hard thing to beat once it gets into your system in quantities. Finally my release papers were signed. An ambulance called, and with a final shot in the arm, everybody said, Good-bye Mac, and the best of luck!

A bed with two thin mattresses and a board between them was set up at my cousin's place. The board was to keep the bed from sagging.

How quiet it seemed around home. No more rattling of dishes and pans; no more chatter of day nurses relieving night nurses; no more moans and groans; no more washing of faces and hands at 6 a.m. Ah, me! No more routine. At long last I was on my own or nearly so.

Everything would have worked out fine only for the morphine. I just had to have more of it. The sleeping pills had little if any effect.

"You'll have to fight this battle alone," my doctor told me. "From now on I'm going to reduce your doses. Unless you are ready to play ball with me you could easily find yourself a dope addict."

I did play ball with the doctor, but it was a tough game. Often I cried myself to sleep, or went into a bit of a rage over nothing in particular. But I was determined to win the battle and I did, though not quite for some time after I'd left the hospital.

I was still wearing the spinal brace and it was still cutting into my flesh and hurting cruelly. One night while I lay awake—I seemed to be always awake—I got a bright idea.

"Get me a maternity corset," I said to my cousin next morning. "I'm going to take the brace off and put the corset on in its place, or either you're going to do it for me."

"Not me," he said. "What will the doctor say? Besides, you'd be the laughing-stock of all who came to visit you. No, Mac, that's asking too much—that is unless the doctor orders it."

We argued the matter pro and con. I won my point. Eddie bought the corset, helped his wife to lace me into it and everybody was happy because it proved the real McCoy. Now I could turn from side to side, or on my tummy without straps cutting into my flesh and, best of all, the brace fitted and felt like a glove on a lady's hand.

When Doc called that afternoon I was all smiles. "Well, old man," he said, pulling a chair up to my bed, "with a grin like that you must be feeling mighty good today."

I assured him that I was really going places and doing things heretofore unheard of.

"What for example?" he asked. I pulled the bedclothes of my body and let him see for himself.

"Whose idea?" he grinned.

"Mine," I said. "I was always full of ideas ever since I was a little fellow down on the farm. Don't you think it's a honey?"

He admitted it was and said, "I don't think you'll be needing me much longer. A patient who is able to sprout ideas like you shouldn't require too much doctoring from now on."

Doc's last words were: "Massage that leg morning and night, and get him on his feet at least twice every day."

We massaged and massaged, but still we couldn't get the leg to function for the toes drooped like a rooster's tail after a rainstorm. There were times when I thought I'd never walk again. But in the end victory crowned our efforts and I was able to take off by the aid of a crutch and cane.

(To Be Continued)

HUNTERS ACTIVE

SYDNEY, N. S. (CP)—Hunters in Cape Breton woodlands increased when the rabbit season opened two weeks before the deer season closes. While the deer season runs until Dec. 1, the rabbit season lasts until Feb. 22.

GALGARY, (CP)—Forty-nine per cent of the social workers in Canada are men, it was reported here by R. E. G. Davis of Ottawa, director of the Canadian Welfare Council. Previously, he said, this field was considered mainly the responsibility of women.

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The new wing at Sunset Lodge will soon be ready for additional, elderly lady guests.

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