



BY WILLIAM PETERS

Rita Steeves went to New York to greet her husband after his ordeal. Later she explained why she felt obligated to go.

THE SURVIVAL OF LT. STEEVES

Fifty-four days after his plane crashed, David Steeves walked out of the wilderness—a hero. A few weeks later he was charged with "discrepancies" in his story. And his wife said that she was going to divorce him. Here is the full account of what happened to a man—and to his marriage

The shining silver jet stood poised at the end of the runway at Oakland's Municipal Airport. For a moment it seemed to lean forward; then, gathering speed, it broke from the ground, lifted above the hangars and shot into the sky. The control-tower operator watched it, then glanced away to note the time—10:43 A.M. It was the last anyone except its pilot was to see of the Air Force T-33.

Inside the front cockpit of the single-engine jet—a training version of the F-80 Shooting Star—1st Lt. David Arthur Steeves trimmed the plane for a long climb. His flight plan called for him to fly on airways at least 1,000 feet above a high overcast, using radio navigational facilities to make his way from Oakland, over Fresno, Bakersfield, Riverside

and Blythe, across the California-Arizona border, to Luke Air Force Base, in Phoenix. After refueling, he would again take off, bound for his home station, Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Alabama.

It was May 9, 1957, a hazy, gray morning, and Steeves guided his plane up through layers of thin, broken stratus cloud. At 11:12 A.M. he called Fresno Radio, reporting his position over the city at 33,500 feet. That was the last radio call he made.

Tuning to Bakersfield's radio range station, he relaxed, glancing out at the gleaming white world above the clouds. On his right was the Pacific Ocean, obscured by clouds. On his left, hidden beneath the clouds, lay the Sierra Nevada Mountains, their highest point, Mount Whitney, rising 14,495 feet above sea level. He had flown this route often,

The Story Behind This Story

The experience of David Arthur Steeves is meaningful in two ways. First, it is the story of a man who has shown great physical endurance and considerably less emotional maturity. The full story, told here for the first time, of not only his physical survival, but the difficulties in his marriage reflects some of the basic problems of all young people in our time.

But his story holds perhaps an even more important meaning. Because this man was able to survive 54 days in wild country on his own resources, our newspapers, magazines, newsreels and TV were quick to make him a national hero. And as soon as some doubt was raised about his fitness to fulfill that role in every respect, those who had cast him in heroic stature just as quickly began to tear him down with questions and insinuations.

In the accompanying article, reporter William Peters has told Steeves' story — based on exclusive interviews with Steeves, his wife, Air Force officials and others involved. Perhaps no one but Steeves himself will ever know everything that happened during those 54 days. But in the light of the painstaking investigation that went into preparing it, we are convinced that the story on these pages is the true one.

After reading it, Steeves himself said, "I can only say that this is the way it happened, that the experiences and emotions described are my experiences and emotions. If Mr. Peters has been harsh in his judgment of me as a human being, he has also been fair. He has told the truth."

We present this story, not in defense of David Steeves as an individual, but in the hope that those who read it will be reminded of the infinite complexity of human beings — and of the folly and danger of judging them too quickly and too severely.

— THE EDITORS

had seen the rock and ice of the Sierras, majestic and beautiful when viewed as scenery, terrifying and cruel when regarded as a hazard to flying.

Increasingly he had come to hold this wild range of mountains in high respect. A few months earlier a fellow pilot from Craig, Lt. Glen Sutton, had disappeared in the Sierras. His death (he was declared dead, although neither he nor his plane was found) had increased Steeves' awareness of the importance of planning for emergencies.

In January, when the military services had canceled their free life-insurance program, Steeves had ignored his wife's pleas that he buy a policy himself. After Sutton's disappearance, he bought insurance. Besides a plentiful supply of matches for his pipe, he had always carried two extra packets of matches as a precaution against going down in rough country. Now, to the paratroop-type boots he wore for flying, he had had a Selma shoemaker stitch a sheath for a small butcher knife and a holster for the .32 revolver his grandfather had given him years ago.

He was three minutes south of Fresno, cruising at a ground speed of about 425 miles per hour, when it happened. What it was, what caused it, he would never be quite sure. It could only be described, he said later, as the sound of a faint boom, like the beginning of an explosion. Then he was unconscious.

How many minutes later he came slowly to his senses, he did not know. Dazed, alarmed, he was aware of smoke in the cockpit, of being lifted against his safety belt. Instinctively, he eased back on the stick. The plane did not respond.

What happened then was pure reflex. Jettisoning the canopy, he moved his feet from rudder pedals to seat stirrups. His eyes tightly closed, he lifted the left-hand armrest, locking the seat harness. Immediately, he raised the right-hand armrest, squeezed a trigger. Beneath him an explosive charge fired the seat out of the cockpit. Then he was free of the seat, falling forward. He reached for the D-ring of his parachute, pulled hard. Almost at once there was a pop above him and his body was jolted violently. It took a moment to catch his breath; then he opened his eyes.

He was in the clouds, but within seconds he dropped out of them. Above, several of the alternating white and orange sections of his parachute showed



long rips. Below were the rugged, snow-clad mountains. As the earth came up, he saw he would land on the steep slope of a peak above a snowy basin. With his parachute torn, he dared not maneuver toward the basin.

Bracing himself, he landed hard on a bare, flat rock projecting from the side of the peak. Spinning, he fell against the side of the mountain. His feet and legs were numbed by the impact. His chute had collapsed, snagged on rocks and ice above. He unhooked the harness and sat there, catching his breath.

He had no idea where he was; it would depend on how long he had been unconscious and what direction the plane had taken after the explosion. He was sure he would be found, and soon. Someone would have heard the explosion or the crash. Still, he could hardly stay where he was.

Below, at one edge of the snow-filled basin, he saw two withered trees, a log and some rocks. It looked like a sort of cove. He tried vainly to free the parachute. Then, slowly, cautious lest a slip plunge him down the steep incline, he climbed up to the chute, untangled it and climbed slowly back down. Bundling it in its harness, seat and backpad, he threw it down the mountainside. It bounced and rolled to where the steep side of the peak flattened out, hundreds of feet below.

It must have been past noon when Steeves started down. Facing the mountain, he dug hand- and footholds most of the way, pausing often to warm his icy hands, to rest and study the path he would take. His thin kid gloves were soon worn through at the fingertips. It took hours to reach the parachute.

From the parachute, it was still a steep descent to the floor of the basin. After a rest he lifted the chute and started out. Sharp pain shot through both ankles, and he fell. For the first time he knew that he was badly injured and began to fear that he would die in the snow, unable to move. Adding to his terror, he saw that the clouds had lowered. No search plane could find him until they lifted.

He forced himself to sit, to be calm. Then, unbundling the parachute, he sat on the seat cushion, took the leg straps between his legs, dug in his heels and began to make a slow, sliding downhill progress. When the chute stretched *(Continued on next page)*



CARROLL SEGHERS II

Steeves, shown above in a recent picture, was 45 pounds underweight when he talked to newsmen (left) after keeping himself alive for 54 days in the wild, almost inaccessible, middle fork area of Kings Canyon National Park in the high Sierra.



**"When I learned that David was alive,
I was sick again with all the hurts**



Leisa, being hugged by her mother, was born in March, 1956. Steeves, who wanted a son, wept in disappointment; blamed Rita for having a girl.

full length behind him, he stopped, hauled it in and started off again.

In the level bowl of the basin he tried again unsuccessfully to walk. Of his ankles, the left was the more painful, and after several awkward attempts at crawling, he adopted a technique of walking on all fours, using his hands, his right foot and his left knee. Slowly, dragging the parachute behind him, he made his way to the cove.

The trees were dwarf pine, 10 or 12 feet tall. One had fallen and wedged itself against the other. Snow drifts covered everything. Kneeling, he dug with his hands until he had made a shallow cave underneath the log. Spreading the parachute over it, pushing the seat cushion and backpad into the icy cave, he lay down on them. He took off his crash-helmet, took his flight cap from a pocket and pulled it over his head, folding the cuff down over his ears. Then he put helmet and oxygen mask back on, lowering the helmet's sun visor for added protection from the cold.

It was growing dark, and he knew he must start a fire if he was to live through the night. With his knife he hacked at the stump which held the log above his head. It was damp, rotten wood, but with a copy of his flight clearance papers and scraps of wood cut

from the stump, he succeeded in starting a tiny fire in a hole in the stump.

Lying in his icy shelter, feet against the smouldering stump, David Steeves began to face the probability that he was going to die. He had done what he could; he knew it was not enough. For the first time in many months he forced himself to look inward, to analyze the life he had been living. He was not an introspective man, and it was difficult. He had not often considered his actions in terms of their effect on others. Now, looking back over the most recent of his 23 years, he knew that he had failed again and again. He had failed his wife, Rita; his 14-month-old daughter, Leisa. He had failed himself.

He saw his recent life—for the first time clearly—as an unending struggle to make money, to please his vanity by skimping on essentials to buy showy, expensive cars. He knew he was not demonstrative, and he wished desperately he had somehow shown Rita how much he loved her, how much he loved Leisa.

And then, shivering violently from the increasing cold, a bitterness almost of self-hatred spreading inside him, he began to pray. . . .

The life that seemed almost certain to end in a makeshift shelter in a snowy Sierra basin had begun in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on January 16, 1934. The Steeves family had lived in Fairfield, a suburb, and it was there in an eight-room frame house that David Steeves had grown up. The road in front was winding, and there were vacant lots and woods for a young boy to roam. David's brother, named Harold for his father, was five years older and, thus, an inhabitant of another world.

From the age of six-and-a-half, David attended Stratfield Grammar School. When the principal wanted him to repeat sixth grade, his parents transferred him to Fairfield Country Day School, an exclusive private school. Physically well-developed at 12, with obvious potentialities as an athlete, he caught the eye of the school's headmaster and was allowed to enter at reduced tuition. When he was graduated from the eighth grade in 1949, he won a prize for scholastic improvement. Still, he was only an average student. Athletics were something else. He made the varsity football team his freshman year at Fairfield's Roger Ludlowe High School.

"David always had a mind of his own," his mother says, "and he was always full of plans. Because he was patient and determined, he usually got what he wanted. His ingenuity convinced his grandmother he'd be an inventor. When he was quite small, he made tiny parachutes for his lead soldiers. Later he learned to trap small animals—woodchucks, raccoons and squirrels. Somewhere he learned to skin them, cure their hides and make holsters from their skins."

The Steeves were a religious family; meals were begun with a prayer; they neither smoked nor drank;

I'd thought were over"

the church they attended as David grew up was a fundamentalist, evangelical church, teaching a literal interpretation of the Bible. It was through David's friendship with the "Youth for Christ" leader of his church that he met an upstate New York farmer and spent his 15th summer working for him.

"I always wanted to be on my own," Steeves says now. "I thought my parents were too strict, and in the summers I could hardly wait to get away. I loved hard work and good food, and that summer I got plenty of both. I was in wonderful shape for football that fall and I had learned to do every kind of farm work there was, from plowing to butchering animals."

It was also through the "Youth for Christ" group at Bridgeport's Black Rock Congregational Church that David, 16 and a freshman in high school, met Rita Lundstrom, two years his junior, also a freshman, although at another high school. Rita was pretty, a bright student, the daughter of Swedish parents. Her father, a sculptor and woodcarver, had died when she was an infant. Her mother, to support her and an older brother, operated a beauty shop. From their first meeting, David and Rita went out together regularly.

David's father, Harold W. Steeves, is something of a mechanical and technical genius. Since he began cleaning and repairing typewriters for Remington Rand in 1921, and with little formal education, he has worked his way up to his present position as a technician with the company's South Norwalk, Connecticut, laboratory. "I used to monkey with my cars," Harold Steeves says, "and Dave and young Harold got interested. Dave was always good with his hands, and from the time he was old enough to drive, he's always had a car. Beginning with an old Ford we helped him buy in 1949, he horse-traded up, always fixing up the car he owned and then swapping it for a better one."

The summer David was 18—a strapping, muscular youth of six feet—he arranged with a friend working on a farm in Alberta, Canada, to invite him there. With the promise of a ride as far as Chicago and the understanding that he would take a bus from there, he set out. Once out of reach of his parents, he began hitchhiking. Before the summer was over he had been all the way to Alaska, had worked with a road-tarring crew; as a stevedore, gas station attendant and salmon canner and had served as a crew member on a 100-foot ex-Navy cutter carrying salmon to Seattle.

That fall, Steeves took advantage of his parents' vacation to begin private flying lessons. He paid for them with money earned at an afternoon job in the shipping department of the Bridgeport Metal Goods Manufacturing Company. When his parents returned home, he had soloed and acquired seven hours of flying time. Reluctantly they allowed him to continue.

Albert Remar, a heavy-set, muscular man, was



Rita agreed to go back to Kings Canyon with Steeves while he retraced his survival route with a writer. She hoped there might still be some way to renew their love and save their marriage.

David Steeves' foreman at Bridgeport Metal. "Dave was a fine boy," he said recently, "clean-cut, intelligent and strong as an ox. He kept himself in shape with bar-bells and exercises. We used half-inch steel hooks to drag our work around, and one day this other fellow, Andy, took the straight handle of his hook and bent it like a U. He asked if Dave could do it. Dave said he didn't think so, but he took his own hook, put it behind his neck and bent it around like a collar. I've never seen anything like it in my life."

In September, 1953, Rita Lundstrom began a two-year course in dental hygiene at the University of Bridgeport. David entered Norwich Military University in Northfield, Vermont. That Christmas, they became engaged. During the fall Steeves had learned about the U. S. Air Force's Aviation Cadet program. After Christmas, he applied, passed mental and physical examinations and left for Lackland Field in San Antonio, Texas, for preflight training. On June 15, 1955, after 15 months' training, he received his pilot's wings and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve. Five days later at their church in Bridgeport, David Steeves and Rita Lundstrom were married. He was 21; she was 19. Rita, meanwhile, had become a qualified dental hygienist.

Early in July the young couple reported to Webb Air Force Base in Big Spring, Texas. A month later, Steeves was sent to Craig for T-33 instructor's training. In three months they were back in Big Spring, living in town in a garage apartment, happy in the knowledge that Rita was pregnant.

From his first day back on the base, Steeves encountered trouble. Assigned to instruct in a propeller-type trainer for the three months until the base shifted completely to jets, Steeves made no secret of his disgust and his opinion of Air Force inefficiency.

At home, as the time for the baby's birth drew near, Steeves talked of the things he would teach his first son. "I knew David wanted a boy," Rita says. "I guess it's natural for a father. But he was absolutely convinced it would be a boy. Time and again, I told him it might be a girl. He wouldn't consider the idea."

On the night of March *(Continued on page 46)*

Lt. Steeves



(Continued from page 25)

17, 1956, Leisa Steeves was born. "I was fully awake when they took me to my room," Rita says. "I knew David would be disappointed, but I wasn't prepared for what happened. He came into the room and stood looking at me, tears rolling down his face. The next day, holding my baby for the first time, I sat and cried for hours. All the joy of having her was gone."

"I can't explain how I felt," Steeves says. "I know it was childish, cruel—stupid, even—but inside me I blamed Rita for having a girl. I tried to pretend I was happy; I visited them daily in the hospital, but I kept making blunders. Once, without thinking, I asked if the baby had been circumcised. I could have shot myself."

Two weeks after Leisa's birth, confused and depressed, Steeves opened a private car-polishing business to make extra money for his growing family. The business robbed him of every spare minute, stole from Rita the chance to reconcile her husband to his new daughter. Because—by putting the business in Rita's name—he had evaded seeking the permission of the base commander, the new venture led also to further difficulties at the base. Suddenly, it seemed, he was surrounded by problems. From a private haze of mental and physical exhaustion, Steeves saw a hostile, harrying world around him. It was, without doubt, a world of his own making. To escape it, he plunged into solitary petulance, started going out with bachelor officers, drinking, avoiding his family still more.

Throughout the spring and summer the business thrived. In early fall it began to collapse. At the same time pressure at the base to force him to give up the business increased. In October he sold it. Meanwhile he had begun a series of flights to Hamilton Air Force Base, near San Francisco. He had met a girl, enjoyed the escape of her company, flown back again and again. By October his involvement was serious; they thought they loved each other. Early in November he told Rita.

"David's never been able to talk seriously with anyone else," Rita says, "and when he told me, he told me everything—her name, what she looked like . . . everything. When I broke down and cried, he said he'd end it. Coming after the hurt over the baby, it hit me hard. I was completely unprepared. I had never doubted his love; I didn't doubt his promise now. Weeks later, when I found a draft of a letter to her (David always wrote first and final drafts of his letters), I was hurt all over again."

Steeves blundered on; Rita brooded alone. Soon after Leisa's birth she had found a woman to care for the baby and had taken a job with a Big Spring dentist. "I resented Leisa as the cause of my

trouble," she says, "and I resented being tied down. In the hospital I had started knitting some argyle socks for David. Six weeks later I still hadn't finished them. I remember crying my heart out, wondering if I'd ever be able to do things for David again. And then this happened."

Just before Christmas, 1956, Steeves accepted a transfer to Craig Air Force Base. At about the same time he received a promotion to first lieutenant. On leave between assignments, he drove Rita and Leisa to Connecticut. "On the way," Rita says, "he said the affair was over. I believed him, and we had a wonderful leave. We accepted the Steeves' offer to lend us money to buy a house trailer, and we towed it back."

Steeves' reputation as an officer lacking somewhat in respect for authority had no doubt followed him to Craig's T-33 instructors' school. In any event, his check-out was more elaborate than most. Resentful, he passed the test with only a "minimum satisfactory" rating in the ground check.

At home with Rita and Leisa, things were better. "David took a real interest in the trailer," Rita says. "And he was much better with Leisa. It was obvious that he loved her. Then, in February, he flew again to San Francisco. When he came home, he admitted seeing the girl."

"He asked for time to get over the girl. I was frantic. For three months her name was a common word around the trailer. David would sit and talk about her. Often I'd encourage him, wanting to know what she was like, what she had that I lacked. Meanwhile, David made more flights to San Francisco."

On one of them, in March, a student questioned his flying judgment. It was Steeves' word against that of the student, a captain. In the ensuing discussion, Steeves was relieved as an instructor, re-assigned as adjutant of a maintenance squadron.

In April, while he was absent on another flight to San Francisco, Rita decided to leave him, planning on his return to tell him she no longer loved him. Before she could, he told her the affair was over, that he had decided to end it. He said he loved her and Leisa, that she could believe him this time.

"When I said it was too late, he was hurt," Rita says. "Really hurt. He admitted he hadn't told the girl it was over, but he said he'd see her once more and let her know. To write her a letter, he said, would be too cruel—she loved him. And then in May he flew to Oakland. It was to be the last time he'd see her. After he left, I began thinking of them together. The more I thought about it, the more bitter I became."

Steeves left Craig on May 6th. Before he left, it had been arranged for Rita and Leisa to spend two or three weeks in Connecticut later in May. Now, with her husband gone, Rita decided not to return from Connecticut. "Instead," she says, "I decided to write to David, telling him I wouldn't come back until many things had been changed. I had begun to see things about him I'd been blind to before—his immaturity, his self-centeredness, his vanity. I knew he had fine points—patience, ingenuity, determination, but he had hurt

me too much, too often. I was willing to try again, but only after he made some pretty big changes in himself."

Rita Steeves had no chance to carry out her plan. On May 10, after picking up tickets for her flight home with Leisa on the 15th, she returned to the trailer to receive the news that her husband was missing. . . .

With the first light of dawn, David Steeves took stock of his situation. The sky was overcast, and a fine snow was falling. In the distance he heard water running. He found he could crawl without too much pain. Walking was impossible. It was bitterly cold.

In addition to his helmet, cap, oxygen mask and gloves, he wore wool socks and calf-length boots. His T-shirt and undershorts were covered by a summer flying suit and jacket. His revolver, an Allen and Hopkins six-shot .32, was fully loaded, and there were four extra bullets in the pocket of his flight jacket. Besides his two emergency books of paper matches, he had others, including a box of wooden ones for his pipe.

He had lost his tobacco, his air map and a small New Testament in the jolt when the parachute opened. In a thin wallet he had four pictures of his wife, a dollar bill, his Social Security card and his driver's license. In other pockets he found his sun glasses, intact in their case; a pen and pencil set; comb; nail clippers; some small change and a "Radia Detector," the small disk for measuring radioactivity issued to all Air Force personnel.

Crawling from the makeshift shelter, he shook the snow from his parachute and decided to wrap up in it for warmth. There was nothing to do but wait, hoping the skies would clear. For two more days and nights, Steeves lay rolled in his parachute, waking always to overcast skies and intermittent snow. There were times when he told himself he had gone mad, that he was dead and this was some form of icy hell. In waves of panic he felt he was being punished for his sins; he prayed for forgiveness, despaired, then prayed again.

In wakeful moments his mind ran back and forth over his life. He recalled with an ache how he and Rita, first married, had tried to make God the center of their home—their grace before meals, kneeling together at night. It had all faded away; they had drifted from God. And it had been so easy; seeing friends drink and smoke, the restraints of his religion withered. Little by little his convictions had slipped away, too.

He awoke in the morning of May 12th and tested his ankles and found he could stand. His mind lucid, he decided he must leave the basin, find food, shelter and warmth or die. The parachute he would have to leave; in his condition, it was impossible to carry. The heavy helmet, the oxygen mask, his pipe—everything he didn't desperately need—would be left.

It was nearly noon when he was ready. Limping, snow cushioning his steps, he picked his way to where a series of tiny ponds pointed toward a break in the peaks. He felt better walking; the exercise warmed him; snow around his ankles numbed them comfortably. He rested often. By dusk he had crossed the

rim of the basin and started downward. He spent the night in a hole dug in a snowbank.

The next few days and nights became confused in his mind. In the mornings he would awaken, soaked to the skin, freezing with cold, to scoop up snow to quell a hungry stomach. Then he would walk, stumbling through brush and rocks, slipping into deep snow. His days were short, beginning late, ending early, measured by his dwindling strength. His nights were spent against a rock, in a pile of brush scraped together by a landslide, against a dwarfed tree too wet to burn.

He made it to the woods on his third day of walking. In a clump of firs he built his first real fire and slept beside it. By noon the next day, except for his soggy boots, he was dry. Following a river now, he moved slowly downstream. In a swampy grove where grouse tantalized his empty stomach, he found a sign: SIMPSON MEADOW 10 MILES.

Encouraged, he pressed on, only to lose the trail in deep drifts, to scale huge rocky cliffs overhanging the river. He saw deer, like the grouse, safe from the short range of his small revolver.

Waking one morning, he saw the sun. The sky was clear and blue, a sign of hope. He counted back. Was it possible 14 days had passed? Two weeks without food? He forced himself to his feet. Within a few hours he came upon a campsite, a storage cache high in the trees, fireplace, corral and a garbage pit filled with rusted cans. A syrup can seemed cleaner than the rest. Opening it with his knife, he found a thin layer of syrup, licked it clean. The cache was too high to climb to in his weakened condition; it could hardly contain food anyway. He pressed on.

At noon he stopped, his legs too heavy to obey him. Dropping to a log, he held his bearded face in his hands. He looked ahead and then looked again. There, through a break in the trees, he saw a cabin. In a few breathless moments he reached its locked door.

It took hours of fumbling, frustrating labor with a strong pole to break the sturdy hasp. When it finally gave, he all but fell inside. The cabin was little more than a shed, 10 feet square, packed ceiling-high with the tools and equipment of forest rangers and alive with mice.

Nailed to a wall was an inventory of the shed's contents. His eye fell immediately on one word: FOODSTUFFS. A few minutes of frenzied searching—breaking into locked metal boxes of tent canvas, first-aid equipment, papers and records—brought a box of food—a can of beans; one of hash; another of tomatoes; two packages of gelatine; a half-filled box of lump sugar; a coffee can one-third full of rice; another half-full of pinto beans; two packages of dehydrated soup; small stores of tea bags, cut tea and corn starch; a bottle of ketchup and a wide assortment of spices and condiments—mustard, salt, pepper, garlic, Tabasco sauce, curry powder.

He gulped ketchup hungrily from the bottle; with a can opener from the box, he opened the hash. He dug in, chewing slowly, knowing he would have to ration himself until he was sure of more—much more. As he ate, exhaustion swept over him, and with a third of the hash still left,

he forced himself to stop and hobbled to the river to fill a large canteen with water.

Returning, he found another campsite—fireplace, picnic table, tent platform—and a sign: SIMPSON MEADOW RANGER STATION. It was impossible; this—Simpson Meadow? Sick with disappointment, he limped toward the shed, dragged equipment from it, leaving room for a makeshift bed of mouse-eaten mattresses.

He pulled tent canvas to the bed, slumped to the mattresses and, for the first time, took off his boots. The pain was instantaneous and excruciating. He screamed aloud. Freed from boots and socks, his feet swelled almost before his eyes. Fighting for control, he forced himself to look at the blue and orange discoloration extending halfway to each knee. Then, with a final effort, he pulled the canvas over him, screamed again as its weight touched his feet. Moaning uncontrollably, he sank into a feverish sleep. . . .

As soon as she learned that her husband was missing, Rita Steeves telephoned her father-in-law at his office. Mr. and Mrs. Steeves, with Harold, left early the next morning for Selma. They arrived Sunday evening, May 12, to find Rita staying with Captain and Mrs. John Mapa in the next trailer.

"My first reaction when I learned that David was missing," Rita says, "was shock, grief. I thought of all the little things I'd miss, things we'd done together, most of them dating back before the trouble began. I just broke down completely.

"Phyllis Mapa knew the whole story; I had confided in her for months. She tried to console me and, later, tried to make me see that it might be for the best. David had not been happy; I'd been miserable. She said I was still young, that I might have a whole new life.

"Then David's family arrived. Eventually I had to tell them everything. A letter from the girl in California had come to the base. I didn't—I couldn't—read it. Phyllis did, thinking if it showed that David had broken off the affair, I should know. It was clear from the letter that he hadn't.

"After that, I couldn't even cry. I felt robbed even of a widow's natural grief. I know Mr. and Mrs. Steeves were shocked that I seemed so controlled. I couldn't help it. I was bitter, dazed, drained of emotion. In a week, Mr. and Mrs. Steeves went home. I stayed, mostly to be with Phyllis. After 19 days, David was declared dead. I felt in my heart it was so."

At the end of May, Rita returned to Connecticut to live with her mother and stepfather (her mother had remarried a year before). In June, determined to seek a degree in psychology, she enrolled in summer school at the university. David's sister-in-law, Ruth, took Leisa in the mornings while Rita attended classes. "I made the adjustment to a new life," Rita says. "I put the months of unhappiness out of my mind. I was happy, almost carefree, in school, and when I let myself think of it, I knew for the first time how shallow our marriage had been, how much had been missing from it."

Meanwhile, the Air Force search for Steeves and his plane, begun a few hours after his flight plan had run out, was

abandoned. Hampered by heavy rains and an accumulation of more than 92 inches of new snow during the 17-day search, planes had located the wreckage of three planes. One, a bomber, had been sighted before. The others were unidentifiable. Ground search parties failed twice to locate either from air sightings made in bad weather. . . .

For two days, David Steeves lay in the shed at Simpson Meadow. His legs radiating heat, he was delirious. Each night, snow fell; each day, by noon, it melted. In lucid moments he finished the hash, ate dehydrated soup straight from the package, devoured powdered gelatine and munched uncooked pinto beans, fighting the urge to stuff himself. He licked salt from his palm, finished the ketchup, consumed a jar of mustard with a spoon, hopeful that it contained some nutriment. When he could stand the hunger no longer, he took sips of Tabasco sauce, washing them down with water from the canteen.

The third day, the pain receded. Steeves crawled to the outdoor fireplace, cooked rice and pinto beans. Scouring the cabin for more food, he found a signal mirror, ranger's documents and, finally, a map labeled SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS, CALIFORNIA.

The map was discouraging; crammed with closely spaced contour lines, covered with notations of peaks and mountains, its central area was unmarked by anything resembling a city or town. Simpson Meadow, near the map's center, was a small clearing on the middle fork of the Kings River, 6,000 feet high, surrounded by mountains ranging up to more than 12,000 feet. Less than 35 miles southeast was Mount Whitney, the highest point in the United States.

Two trails led out. One, following the river downstream, went to Tehipite Valley, halfway to a ranger station at Hume, some 20-odd miles away. The other, a steep climb over Granite Pass, at 10,677 feet, led to Cedar Grove Ranger Station, about the same distance. Of the two, following the river seemed most reasonable and the next morning, again able to walk, Steeves stuffed a knapsack with a large piece of canvas, kindling, paper, matches, a first-aid kit, dehydrated soup and his signal mirror. The remains of the pinto beans he put in his pocket with some sugar lumps. Leaving the too-heavy can of tomatoes in case he was forced back, he set out, carrying a sturdy walking stick to ease the load on his ankles.

Crossing a footbridge to the north bank of the river, he picked up the trail, grinning with confidence at horse droppings along the way. If a horse could make it, he could. He walked at a pace he would have thought impossible, giving his ankles frequent rests. By late afternoon he had reached Tehipite Valley and the end of the trail. Ahead lay sheer cliffs dropping hundreds of feet to the river. Across the river, the bank looked passable.

Stripping to shorts and T-shirt, Steeves jammed his clothes into the pack and tied his boots by their strings around his neck. As a last thought, he took off the underwear, stood momentarily, horrified at the sight of his protruding ribs, his wasted
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body. Then, hoisting the pack, he took the underwear in his teeth, the stick in his hand and waded into the rushing torrent. The frigid water took his breath away. Numbed, he plunged further, lost his footing and fell. Caught up by the boiling river, he was swept downstream over a waterfall six or seven feet high. Coming up, the boots and knapsack still secure, he clutched at a protruding log, caught it and, gasping, pulled himself out on the opposite bank.

In a pocket of his rolled jacket he found matches still dry, and after a rest, he built a fire, dried his clothes, put them on and fell into a deep sleep, the canvas over him. The next morning he saw deer, too far away to shoot. He struck off cross-country only to be forced back to the river by sheer cliffs. By noon he had reached a dead end. Unwilling to give up, he began scaling the cliff. Halfway up, he admitted he was beaten. Thoughts of the shed, of the can of tomatoes, at Simpson Meadow tantalized him, and he turned back.

Defeated, spent, he forced himself past his campsite and recrossed the river where it was more peaceful. The next day he limped back to Simpson Meadow, racing an oncoming snowstorm. Arriving in late afternoon, he was exhausted and discouraged; his ankles again were painfully swollen. Staggering to his bed, he opened the large can of tomatoes, bolted them and fell back on the mattresses as the snowstorm began.

For five days the weather was bad, and Steeves stayed close to the shed, sleeping for hours at a stretch, going out only

for water to cook his few remaining scraps of beans and rice. He decided to try the other trail on the first day of good weather. On the sixth day after his return from Tehipite, in clear weather, he started out, carrying no food except spices, hoping to make the trip in two days. Halfway up the steep trail he wallowed in snow to his waist, lost the trail, turned back, stumbled and slid his way to the shed, exhausted.

The days of his struggle ran together. He made a calendar, counted backward as well as he could, decided it was June 8, a month since he had dropped from the skies. Scrounging the campsite for food, he found a fisherman's pouch, mouse-gnawed and rotted. Inside were two tiny, rusted fishhooks. With a length of heavy thread, a short pole and woodgrubs dug from a rotten log, he set off upstream to a quiet pool where trout were visible. An hour later he was back at the shed cleaning two six-inch trout.

The next day (Steeves' calculations proved later to be two days off; it was really June 7), he caught seven trout and, fearful of losing a precious fishhook, quit. The same day, he rummaged through the rangers' documents. From them he learned that the National Park's trail crew had not reached Simpson Meadow until June 22 in 1953, July 3 in 1954. Assuming the best, he had two weeks to wait. At worst, he might be stranded a month.

Food was the major obstacle to holding out—food and retaining his sanity. Already he talked aloud constantly; more than once panic had seized him. There were whole days when his depression seemed intolerable. As for food, he could only pray not to lose his fishhooks. The

next day, after three hours' hovering over a pool, he came home with only four small trout. He had stopped cleaning them the second day. Now he cut out only the lower intestine, cooking the fish whole, eating the head, eyes, gills and fins, sucking the brains, leaving only the backbone.

The next day he caught only two fish, and he pondered a way to get close enough to kill a deer with his revolver. He had found a block of salt, the kind used for salt licks, and remembering the tree cache upstream, he saw himself perched on it, firing down at deer lured underneath by the salt. He set off at once.

On the way, he stumbled over two logs with deer tracks between them. Looking closer, he saw that the logs were notched, that one already held a salt lick. At the tree cache he found dynamite, saw no use for it and returned to the salt lick. Studying the placement of the logs, he tried to visualize a way of rigging his revolver to fire when a deer licked the salt. Eventually it came to him, and with thread, screening, nails and wire from the shed, he spent hours constructing a trap.

Completed, it consisted of the cocked revolver wired to aim just above the salt block. With branches and screening, the opening to the salt was narrowed to admit only the nose of the deer, centering its head to receive the bullet. Through a system of weights, a slight pressure on a thread across the opening would trigger the gun. Test-firing it, Steeves found that the bullet hit the second log. Unsure of his contraption, he wired sticks of dynamite together and secured them over the bullet hole, hopeful of detonating the dynamite if he missed the deer.



Redbook Recommends

... *Timesaver Beverages. A variety of recipes to on special occasions in every season*

Tea Party Punch. Pour 3 cups of hot, strong tea over $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar; stir until dissolved. Add 2 cans frozen lemon juice (*not concentrated*), 2 cans frozen concentrated orange juice, undiluted, and 5 cups water. Mix well. Pour over ice in punch bowl. Garnish with cherries or other fruit. Serves 12 to 16.

Pink Lemonade Punch, simple and glamorous for a teen-age party. Blend 2 cans frozen lemonade with water, following directions on can. Pour into large punch bowl over ice cubes. Stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup grenadine (*it's nonalcoholic, of course*). Float sliced strawberries on top, and serve to 12.

Hot, Spiced Lemonade for a cozy family evening by the fire. Combine $\frac{3}{4}$ -cup cold water, 1 stick cinnamon and 10 whole cloves. Cover; boil 10 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons sugar and boil 1 minute longer. Pour 3 cups boiling water into preheated teapot or pitcher. Add a 6-ounce can concentrated frozen lemon-

ade, undiluted, spice water, including spices; stir well to blend. Serve immediately. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Hot Nuttled Chocolate Milk, a combination snack-beverage that will satisfy after-school or after-sledding appetites until dinner time. Put 1 cup peanuts in a food blender; cover and run blender until peanuts are finely chopped. Add 2 eggs and 2 cups of bottled or cartoned chocolate milk; cover and blend until well mixed. Heat to serving temperature. Makes about 1 quart.

Low-Calorie Hot Spiced Mocha for weight watchers. Place $\frac{1}{3}$ -cup cocoa in a saucepan. Combine 1 tablespoon Sucaryl solution and 1 cup strong coffee; blend into the cocoa to make a smooth paste. Add 1 quart skim milk, scalded, and 2 sticks of cinnamon; bring mixture to a boil. Pour into mugs and, if you wish, top with low-calorie whipped topping. Use sticks of cinnamon for stirrers. Serves 6, at 76 calories each.

For two days the trap produced nothing. Meanwhile, the fishing grew worse. The third day, weak from lack of food, he trudged the quarter-mile to the trap and found a young buck, its belly and one leg devoured by other animals, lying beside the log.

Restoring the dynamite to the tree cache, he rolled the deer onto the log, hoisted it to his bony shoulders and staggered back to the shed. With a rope and pulley from the shed he rigged a hoist, lifted the deer by its hind legs, skinned and butchered it. It took two days to cook the meat in a makeshift oven made of a metal tool box. After it was cooked, he wrapped it first in tinfoil, then in canvas and stored it in a metal box set on stones in the river. The job done, Steeves felt secure for the first time. Passing the box in the stream, he would cut off a hunk of meat, savor it for an hour. It seemed a great deal of food, but the temptation of plenty was too great; in five days more than half the meat was gone.

Meanwhile he had reset the trap. Day after day, visiting it, he found it sprung, the gun fired, fresh blood on the ground, but no prey. Three days after he killed the deer, at either end of Simpson Meadow he set up signs calling for help—in the event he should get hurt or fall ill.

While the deer meat lasted, he didn't fish, fearful of losing a hook. To supplement his diet, he ate dandelion stems as they ripened in the warmer weather, and one day, killing a small grass snake, he skinned and fried it, flavoring it with Tabasco sauce. To him it was delicious. Later, finding strawberries in the meadow,

he spent hours picking enough for a meal. Although no day passed without some food, he felt himself grow steadily weaker. Soon it was an effort to walk to the deer trap. Fishing—never easy because his tiny hooks required that he hook and land the fish with a single swift motion—became a wearisome chore.

It became necessary for him to rest more, and he read the scraps of a half-dozen paper-bound books he had found near the tree cache. He became obsessed by thoughts of food, dreamed whole meals, then menus for a day, a week.

Constantly, more with each succeeding day, he prayed. Always he began with a prayer for Rita and Leisa, for their safety, their happiness, their love. He prayed for his family and home, for faith and strength to stay alive, for food.

Thinking of Rita, of Leisa and of his life with them, it came to him suddenly that there was nothing of real value in that former life—in any life—except love. Money, advancement, possessions—all were nothing without love. To love and be loved, to be worthy of love, to know how to foster and cherish it, these were the things worth having. At the knowledge of how he had misused Rita's love for him; of his blindness; his blundering, needless cruelty, he paled with horror. What bothered him most was that Rita still didn't know what had happened in San Francisco. Unable to tell the girl to her face that he no longer loved her, he had made up his mind not to go back, not to write. He had been flying home to tell Rita when the plane failed.

One day, visiting the deer trap, he found it sprung, his last bullet gone. The next day he ate the last of the deer meat; fishing, he lost a hook, caught but two fish.

On the morning of June 24, Steeves woke before dawn, alert, tense, to find the earth shaking, the shed rocked by violent shudders. For a split second he saw the world coming to an end, heard words from a sermon preached in his childhood flood through his mind. Then, abruptly, the tremor stopped, silence returned, and he moved from his mattress to look outside. Nothing was changed.

He carried on with the work of the day. For hours he lay fishing with his remaining hook—caught only one fish. The next day, he picked strawberries and caught two small fish. As he rose to carry them to the shed, he felt suddenly dizzy, his knees weak. Caught by the horror of surviving this long only to die before help came, his mind worked desperately for a solution. In the end it came back to an idea considered and rejected many times before; he would start a forest fire across the river from the shed. Someone would see the smoke.

Steeves had many objections to the plan; the fire would frighten away the game; out of control, it might jump the river and endanger him; if rangers saw it and used parachutists to reach it, someone might be hurt, even killed. Now, walking to the shed on wobbly legs, none of these possibilities seemed important.

The next morning he felt even weaker. A wind had come up, the only encouragement he needed. It took several hours to start four fires. Once the wind caught the flames, they spread rapidly.

By afternoon, back on his own side of the river, Steeves watched with hope and horror as the blaze leaped from tree to tree.

For five days and nights the fire raged. On the third day, a plane flew high above the mountains. Steeves signaled frantically with his mirror, but the plane flew on.

Fishing again four days after he started the fire, his luck changed. With two trout beside him, he felt excitement rising. Speaking aloud, he asked God for a sign. "If you let me catch more, Lord," he said to the stream, the trees, the sky, "it will mean I should leave." Almost at once he hooked another fish, a fourth, a fifth. At the shed he cooked the fish, ate one and wrapped the rest to eat in the morning before starting out. In the meadow, he picked strawberries until he was dizzy with fatigue, packing them into an instant-coffee jar. These he would take with him to eat on the second day. If he failed to reach Cedar Grove in two days, he would have to go on without food—or die on the trail.

The next morning, Steeves was up before dawn. After eating the fish, he felt remarkably well. His ankles and legs, while frighteningly thin, seemed in good condition. He lifted the knapsack, took up a walking stick and began picking his way up the steep trail. The snow was gone, except from the peaks, and the trail was a steady climb to a height of 10,000 feet before it leveled off. He rested often. By daybreak he was well up the mountain; by noon he was at the top. From here on, it would be easier, up and down at high altitude until he crossed Granite Pass, then downhill most of the way. Physically exhausted, his rising spirits kept him going. Nothing could stop him now.

At a place marked on his map as Dougherty Meadow, he drank from a creek and found a trail sign pointing to Cedar Grove. Mosquitoes, suddenly thick, drove him on. Approaching the pass, he met snow; at its deepest it was just above his knees. He pushed on, amazed at his ability to keep going, determined now to stop for the night only when he reached a clearing called Tent Meadow. From there he was sure to make Cedar Grove in a day.

With the assurance of success came a relaxation of rules; he decided to eat some of the strawberries. Sitting on a rock near the top of a gentle rise, he unslung his pack, opened the jar. As he reached for some berries, he experienced a shock that left him speechless.

From nearby came a woman's voice, "Hello there."

Looking up, he saw her, on horseback, just topping the crest of the hill, 10 feet up the trail. He stood up, stammering wildly, to see three other riders behind her, two men and another woman. As the first woman rode past, he found his voice. "Am I glad to see you! I've been up here almost 60 days! Have you got any food?"

The second horse passed him, the man astride nodding a greeting. For an instant, Steeves thought they would all go by, leaving him alone again. He sensed that they were afraid of him, suspicious; then he knew why. With his filthy clothes, his scraggly beard, he must appear some sort of desperado.

The second man dismounted and in-

...for young adults at home

serve your family and friends

Instant Ice Cream Soda for all ice cream soda lovers, any time of year. Combine $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup instant cocoa mix, $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup light cream and 1 teaspoon sugar. Mix well. Pour an equal amount of this mixture into each of 4 tall glasses. Add a scoop of ice cream, then carbonated water and stir. Serve at once to 4.

Coffee Milk Punch, a rich, festive drink you might serve guests on New Year's Day. Combine 3 tablespoons sugar and 4 teaspoons instant coffee in a large bowl. Add 4 cups milk, well chilled, and $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup bourbon. Stir well. Top with whipped cream; sprinkle with nutmeg. Makes 10 half-cup servings.

Strawberry Frappe, a refreshing drink that can double for dessert. Pour 3 cups milk into a bowl or electric food blender. Add 1 12-ounce package frozen strawberries, defrosted. Beat with rotary beater or blend in blender for about 1 minute. Top each drink with a scoop of strawberry ice cream. Makes 1 quart.

troduced himself. He was Albert Ade, of Squaw Valley, California, a guide. One of the women was his wife; the other couple was Dr. Charles Howard, a dentist from Fresno, and his wife. Fighting to control his excitement, Steeves stumbled through his story. They listened, astonished. Again he asked if they had food. They had. Suggesting he spend the night with them a mile up the trail, Ade promised to take him on horseback to Cedar Grove the next morning. Steeves accepted eagerly, mounting Mrs. Howard's horse when she insisted on walking.

They asked about the snow in the pass, told him they were always the first to open this trail each year: it had become a sort of hobby. As he answered their questions about Simpson Meadow and the trail, their doubts vanished and their awe at his survival increased.

Mrs. Howard began feeding him as they unpacked—a cupcake, a box of raisins, a chocolate bar, an orange. Babbling of his experience, answering questions, he continued to eat as they made camp—half a loaf of rye bread with peanut butter and jelly. For dinner he ate a large steak, fried potatoes, bread and butter, three cups of coffee, four pieces of cake. Then, because Dr. Howard, bothered by altitude, was not hungry, Steeves ate his steak and potatoes as well.

They had given him a package of cigarettes, and he smoked constantly, puffing between bites. Long after the others had finished, he ate, ignoring their warnings not to stuff himself—two dishes of canned peaches, more coffee, another orange. Then, exhausted but excited, bloated but still hungry, he lay on a bed of saddle blankets and slept.

The next morning there was another earth-shock, recalling the one a week before, and Steeves learned it had been a fission bomb test at Frenchman Flat, Nevada, that had jolted him from sleep with thoughts of the world's end.

At breakfast, Steeves again put away a formidable meal. He left with Ade on horseback, and during the four-and-a-half hour ride, the former guide and packer, now a rancher, swapped stories of the mountains with him. At a parking lot, they left their horses and picked up a ride to Cedar Grove, a tiny settlement composed of little more than a ranger station and general store. After explaining his story to a skeptical ranger, Steeves used the telephone to place a collect call to his parents. He heard his mother answer, heard her gasp as the operator said the call was from Lt. David Steeves. He spoke, and his mother answered, "Oh, David, thank God!"

His father was at work; Rita was not there. They talked for 15 minutes. The telephone rang a moment after he hung up. Rita had driven in the driveway; his mother had had the operator ring him. He sensed Rita's shock when she spoke; words came with difficulty from both of them. "Rita," he asked finally, "Rita, do you still love me?"

There was a pause. Then, her voice forced, "I don't know, David . . . I don't think I can come back."

When I learned that David was alive," Rita says, "the whole new world I'd carefully constructed fell to pieces. I

was sick with shock, sick again with all the hurts I'd thought were over. I tried to warn him that it was over, but he seemed so sure he could change my mind that I knew he still had no understanding of what he'd done to me. I didn't think of him, of what he'd endured. I didn't care.

"And then the calls from reporters began. David was a hero, a celebrity, and I didn't know what to do. I talked to a man who has been like a father to me; he said, if I failed to play the part of a loving wife, my reputation would be ruined. No one would understand because no one knew what had happened before. I knew he was right and, frightened, hating it, I decided to try."

While David Steeves waited at Cedar Grove for a staff car from Castle Air Force Base in Merced, California, he went over his story with the rangers, convincing them by his detailed descriptions and the map he carried that his story was true. At a restaurant in the general store, he ate a meal every hour, bought a pipe and tobacco, and then, as reporters and photographers appeared, he gave interviews, answered questions, posed for photographs until he could stand it no longer. Several times he disappeared into the men's room and stayed for what seemed like hours just to be free of the questions.

His next few days were the same. Driven to Merced that night, he was examined at the base hospital and found to be down 45 pounds from his normal 195, still suffering from swollen ankles. Fed again, his stomach bloated and queasy, he had time for a shower and three hours' sleep before a scheduled press conference. He went through the press conference in the filthy clothes he had worn for 54 days. Later he was told that magazine and book publishers in New York were bidding for his story, and for the first time he realized that he might profit from his experience.

That afternoon, with a new uniform and some back pay, he was flown to Los Angeles where other Air Force public-relations men took him in tow. Two television appearances and, a day later, he was on his way to New York for more press conferences, interviews, television shows, dickerings with publishers—and his long-awaited meeting with his wife and family. Five days later, on convalescent leave from the Air Force and having agreed to work with *Saturday Evening Post* editor Clay Blair, Jr., on both a magazine and book manuscript dealing with his experience, Steeves, still bearded at the *Post*'s request, was on a plane for California, bound for the shed at Simpson Meadow. Rita went with him.

"We had had only minutes alone in New York," Rita says, "and I wasn't sure how I felt. David asked me to come only if I intended to stay with him. I just couldn't tell him that. Finally, when I had to decide, I told him I thought we could make a go of it—that at least I'd try."

For both Steeves and his wife, the trip had good and bad moments. To Steeves, going back with Rita, Blair, photographer Ollie Atkins, Albert Ade and his wife and 10-year-old granddaughter, with horses, mules and plentiful supplies, it was a lark. To Rita, riding hours at a time, it was hard work but beautiful country. Steeves, excited at showing his wife the scenes of his ordeal, found her

apathetic, uninterested. Rita, resentful of her husband's easy assumption that he could win her back, feeling bitterly that she had been through an ordeal worse than his—one he had made no effort to understand—turned a deaf ear to his story.

There were moments, though, in which they slipped almost thoughtlessly back into old ways, moments when each made an effort to understand, to share. To Rita it seemed that, when she tried to rekindle her love for him, he turned a cold shoulder. To Steeves, Rita seemed changeable, different, uninterested.

And beyond this failure of either of them to get beneath the surface resentments and hurts which separated them, to grapple with the harder, more basic problems underlying them, there loomed another cloud. At the ranger station on their way in, the rangers had told of finding a forest fire blazing across the river from the Simpson Meadow shed two days after Steeves' escape. Satisfying himself that the fire was out, that no one had been hurt, Steeves, fearful of censure, denied all knowledge of it. Since the evidence indicated a fire of more than two days' duration, the rangers were skeptical. Blair, sharing their skepticism, asked Steeves repeatedly about the fire. Steeves stuck to his story.

The trip over, Rita, Steeves and Blair settled at a motel in Fresno to work on the *Post* article. By mutual agreement, the girl from San Francisco was invited down. "I thought, if Rita met her, if she told Rita it was over, I might win Rita back," Steeves says. "I was desperate, and I saw all my struggles to survive as futile unless I could somehow make Rita love me again. I couldn't understand her attitude. Everything had been fine between us for almost a month before I left for Oakland on that last trip. She had known I intended to end the affair, and she had agreed to my making the trip."

The meeting of the two women was not a success. "We all had dinner together," Rita says. "It was horrible. When the men left us alone, I had nothing to say. I felt cold, dead. I felt then that it was over, that I could never love David again."

At the motel, investigators of the Air Force Office of Security Investigation, conducting a routine probe of the case, interviewed both Steeves and Blair. Skeptical, like Blair, about the forest fire, they asked Steeves. He admitted having started it, told the story in detail. Later, he told Blair the true story.

On July 26, after nearly two weeks in Fresno, Rita and Blair flew back to New York. Steeves, despondent and bitter over his loss of Rita, finished his talks with the O.S.I. investigators and followed the next day. For a week Steeves stayed with his parents in their new home in Trumbull, Connecticut; Rita and Leisa stayed with her family in Fairfield. On August 6, without warning, Steeves received a letter from *Post* editor Ben Hibbs terminating the magazine's agreement to pay \$10,000 for his story. The reason: ". . . substantial discrepancies and inconsistencies between the facts as developed by our Mr. Clay Blair, Jr. . . . and the facts as originally related by you . . ." At the same time, a contract providing for a \$5,000 advance payment to Steeves for a book by the two men was also canceled.

Within a week the story was made public. Closely following a news report that Rita Steeves was planning a divorce, it created a new sensation. What had been, for more than a month, the heroic story of a pilot's winning battle against the Sierras became, overnight, the front-page story of a possible hoax. To the *Post's* charge of "discrepancies" were added the speculations of anyone who cared to speculate. Almost everyone did.

Time magazine reported the *Post's* discrepancies as, "His boots seemed in remarkably good shape; Steeves at first sturdily showed no knowledge of a small forest fire discovered in the area where he said he camped, later said that he started the fire." On its own, *Time* added, "The biggest puzzle of all: Air Force investigators could not find remnants of the jet plane . . . This raised another question. Was it as severely damaged as Steeves said it was or did it continue to fly on its preset course until it ran out of fuel?"

Life reported the speculations of others—Albert Ade; Kings Canyon National Park's Superintendent Thomas Allen; Sheriff C. M. Howard of Inyo County, California; pack driver Dudley Booth, who had meanwhile found Steeves' parachute in 14,400-foot-high Dusy Basin, precisely where Steeves had told of leaving it. *Life's* score: two believers, two skeptics. The *Life* article also raised some new questions. Why trap deer in Simpson Meadow when they are tame? Why leave behind a parachute which could provide warmth? Could a man live 15 days without food? Why was a book of matches found at the Dusy Basin shelter? Why was a tree near the shelter charred a foot above the ground when the snow in early May was six feet deep? How did Steeves, on \$6,000 a year, pay for a \$3,700 Jaguar?

While no one publicly questioned Steeves' bailout over the Sierras, his 54 days alone or his survival of the experience, everyone suddenly found a detail to question, a "discrepancy" of his own or even reasons to explain why Steeves might have deliberately subjected himself to the life-or-death test.

While the guessing continued, Steeves took complete mental and physical examinations at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D. C. Their results, according to a Pentagon spokesman for the Air Force, "Lt. Steeves' mental and physical condition is excellent. The doctors feel he would make a good combat fighter pilot."

On August 26, Steeves reported back to Craig Air Force Base and resumed normal duties. On September 2, at the request of the Air Force's Vice Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. LeMay, he reported to Stead Air Force Base in Reno, Nevada, with instructions to study its survival training program and make recommendations based on his experience.

Meanwhile, in an exclusive interview granted this writer by Colonel Leo F. Dusard, Jr., Commander of the 3615th Flying Training Wing at Craig, and Steeves' commanding officer, the colonel revealed that he had studied the report of the Office of Security Investigation on the Steeves case. "All O.S.I. reports are classified," Col. Dusard said. "I cannot reveal the contents of this one. As for my personal opinion, I do not doubt Lt.

Steeves' integrity. I believe he bailed out of his plane where he said he bailed out. I accept his statement as to the explosion. Naturally, I would like to know what caused it. An explosion which immediately affects the cockpit is unusual in a T-33, and without the plane, we're baffled. I believe Lt. Steeves was in the mountains for 54 days, survived and walked out, and I consider it a remarkable feat."

As for the questions raised by the *Post* and others, Lt. Steeves, himself, has answers to most. "It's true I denied knowledge of the fire at first," he says. "I guess I was afraid and ashamed to admit starting it. My boots are available for anyone to see. For Clay Blair to say they show too little wear must mean he's an expert in such matters. It's hard to argue with a self-appointed expert."

Albert Ade, whose familiarity with the Sierras dates back to 1912, has had some thoughts on Blair's authority as a mountaineer. In an interview with the New York *World-Telegram and Sun*, he said, "The writer just couldn't stand the trip. He never should have been in the mountains. It was all new to him. Every step his horse took, he looked as if he were going to fall off." Declaring that "everything Lt. Steeves said checked perfectly," Ade added, "I'm upset about the whole business because the story is so true. I'm a tracker and a guide. I followed his tracks all the way back to the cabin."

Time magazine's "biggest puzzle of all" (the whereabouts of the plane) is perhaps the easiest to answer. An official report of the search showed three downed aircraft sighted, one immediately identified as an old B-25 crash, the others unidentified—some indication of how easily a crashed plane can remain lost in that area. As late as September 19, more than four months after Steeves' bailout, the Air Force reported, "Efforts are continuing to relocate and identify the reported sightings. There is a possibility that Lieutenant Steeves' aircraft could be one of these."

To *Life's* story of tame deer, Steeves has his own question. "Do deer which have not seen a human being for ten months remain tame?" As for living 15 days without food, Steeves answers simply, "I did." The book of matches *Life* reports as found in Dusy Basin Steeves cannot account for. "I had plenty of matches," he says. "I suppose it's possible that in three days of lying in the snow I might have lost one package. I know I lost my handkerchief up there."

But *Life's* question about the tree charred a foot from the ground when, *Life* reports, the snow was six feet deep intrigues Steeves most. "How," he asks, "does *Life* know the depth of the snow in Dusy Basin in early May? Do they have a correspondent there? Even if it was that deep—and it could have been—have they never heard of drifts? The rock I landed on was swept clean of snow."

The charred tree, as well as the partly burned parachute, harness and other belongings found by packer Dudley Booth, raises a second point. "As far as I knew," Steeves says, "the smoldering fire I lit in the tree stump that first night went out. I suppose it could have continued to smolder, to dry out the wet, rotten stump until, some time later, whipped by the wind, it burst into flame. That would

seem to me a reasonable explanation."

It is still too soon for David Steeves to have fully assessed his fantastic experience. "To be a subject of hero-worship for having saved my own skin was strange enough," he said several months after the experience. "But to lose everything I loved—my wife and child—and then be thought a liar . . . well, it was rough."

Once again, though, Steeves' patient persistence seems to have paid off. Late in October he and Rita were reunited; Rita canceled her plans for divorce. Steeves, delighted at their reunion, said, "For me this makes everything worth while. This is what I have been hoping and praying for over the past few months."

Neither Steeves nor his wife believes that merely resuming their marriage will solve all of their problems. "We're determined to start fresh," Steeves says, "to put our marriage on a firmer basis. We both feel that having a real home after living in garage apartments and trailer camps is essential. That's why I have applied for release from active duty with the Air Force. I've been assured that I can be out of the Air Force before January. It is my hope to fly for an airline."

Rita reveals, at least in part, the basis for her decision to return to her husband. "Marriage and a family are too important to be jeopardized by clinging to selfish mistakes," she says. "Their importance demands a new attempt if one can possibly be made. After talking seriously about it, both of us feel we can and should make the attempt. We hope to be happy together and we hope, also, that we'll be left alone to live our lives the way others do."

The story of David Steeves is a story of two men. One of them, physically mature, strong, ingenious, patient and determined, is a man well fitted to survive in a struggle against nature. Able to withstand great hardship, adept with his hands, canny as the woodsman must be to make do with what is available, he saved his life against great odds.

The other man—the social man—is quite different. Proud, stubborn, immature, he has blundered in human relationships, seeing but dimly the effect of his actions on others. Having no great understanding of himself, he has had even less of the people around him. He is shy without knowing it, covers his shyness with bluster, offends sometimes when he means to please.

It is David Steeves' tragedy that the two men are one, that although one matured early, the other lagged behind. If there is a lesson for him in his experience, it is that he must somehow bring both men together, reconcile them. His success in establishing the basis for resuming his marriage may well be an indication that this process has already begun.

It is the irony of David Steeves' great adventure that, for some men, at least, survival in society is more difficult than survival alone, in nature, where the elements can be squarely faced, where social relationships and emotional adjustments have little meaning. There are times, of course, when society finds such men out and punishes them for their weakness. For David Steeves, this was one of those times. . . . THE END