

FEATURED BOOK CONDENSATION

Through Gates of Splendor

Condensed from a forthcoming book

ABE C. VAN DER PUY

EARLY THIS YEAR five young Protestant missionaries, impelled by the Biblical command, "Go ye . . . to every creature," offered up their lives in Ecuador's dense jungles in an attempt to win the Auca Indians—one of the most feared and savage Stone Age tribes left on earth. Their campaign was audacious, ingeniously conceived, and infused with the spirit which sent Christian faith and light flaming through the world more than 1900 years ago.

"Through Gates of Splendor," the singularly moving and exciting document which follows, is the story of that extraordinary campaign.



THROUGH GATES OF SPLENDOR

ON JANUARY 9 of this year teletypes in newsrooms all over the world began clacking out the first fragmentary accounts of one of the most daring Christian missionary exploits of modern times.

Reported missing were five young American missionaries who, deep in Ecuador's tangled jungles, had been carrying out a secret and ingeniously planned campaign to make friendly contact with one of the most savage Stone Age tribes left on earth—the Auca Indians. Three days before, they had made that contact, the first white men ever to do so. They had radioed their base, "This is a great day for the advance of the gospel in Ecuador!"

A few days later, when rescue parties finally reached the camp the

missionaries had set up on a Curaray River beach in the heart of Auca territory, the five bodies were found—pierced by spears and strewn like driftwood amid the river's debris. On their bodies and scattered over the shambled beach were water-soaked diaries detailing their adventure.

The story, occupying front pages for days, quickly took on the flavor of an epic. It was an inspiring reminder that the peculiar power and God-given courage which historically have spread Christianity to earth's every remote corner are still very much alive. And still triumphant.

"OPERATION AUCA," as the five had dubbed it, began on a brilliantly clear day back in September 1955,

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when the pilot of a Protestant missionary air group serving a string of jungle mission stations in Ecuador took off on an emergency call. The missionary at Arajuno had radioed that he had a sick Quechua Indian boy and needed an injection syringe—fast.

As he swung his tiny plane away from his base at Shell Mera, 100 miles south of Quito in the Andes foothills, Nate Saint noted with satisfaction the unusual clearness of the sky. Visibility, normally much limited by haze, was at least 75 miles—an ideal day to go exploring.

Thirty minutes of flying brought him to the pencil-thin slash in the jungle that was the Arajuno station. Strapping young Ed McCully, in charge there, was waiting for him. A football and track star back at Wheaton College in Illinois, McCully had been president of his senior class, and was studying law at Marquette when he felt called to missionary service.

Ed grinned. "Sorry, Nate," he said. "Looks like I brought you out here for nothing. Emergency's past."

Nate shrugged; it was all in the day's work. But when the routine



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supplies and mail were unloaded, he pulled McCully aside from the Quechuas milling about the plane.

"Say, Ed," he whispered. "How about going to look for 'the neighbors'?" McCully's brow went up. "Right!" he said.

"The neighbors" were the Aucas, a tribe so vicious that even the head-hunting Jivaros feared to enter their territory. Exactly where and how they lived, nobody knew for sure. Books and articles mentioning them were a confusion of contradictions. Well known, however, was the fact that they hated all strangers, that they went through the jungle like vengeful wraiths, flinging their needle-sharp hardwood spears with deadly accuracy, spreading terror among other tribes. Masters of ambush, they had a long and bloody record of killings.

The government left the Aucas severely alone; attempts to reach them had cost too many lives. Only missionaries felt any urge to get near them. But among the missionaries the desire to win the Aucas had for years been a passionate preoccupation. To Christian pioneers who took seriously the command "Go ye . . . to every creature," the Aucas' very unreachability, as well as their "lostness" without Christian light, was a continuing challenge.

Neither Nate Saint nor Ed McCully had any idea how the tribe could be reached. On hundreds of flights to the mission stations he served Nate had searched in vain for some sign of Auca habitation.

But now, on a crystal-clear day like this . . .

Nate and Ed leapt into the Piper and took off. They headed east for 50 miles, then north toward the Napo, one of the Amazon's headwaters. Faces pressed against the plexiglass, they peered down into the endless stretches of jungle, eagerly alert.

Suddenly, just as their gas was getting low, Nate caught sight of a blemish in the jungle pattern. The blemish grew into a well-defined pockmark, then into a good-sized clearing. He nudged McCully, jabbed a forefinger downward. Circling, they counted 15 small clearings and as many houses. It was the first Auca settlement they had ever seen, and it left them breathless with elation.

A few days later they confided their find to two other young missionaries: Jim Elliot, whose station was at Shandia, and Pete Fleming at Puyu Pungu. Both had shared the "Auca dream" with Saint and McCully.

On September 29 Nate made four other exploratory flights, hoping to find a settlement nearer Arajuno. On one he took along two Quechua Indian guides, not telling them the purpose of the flight. Suddenly while zigzagging through a jungle valley he spotted some clearings, drifted down for a closer look. The Indians immediately cried, "Aucas!"

To himself Nate said exultantly, "This is it!"

By October 1 he had made enough

trips over the region to mark the spot as unquestionably a sizable Auca settlement—and only 15 minutes by air from Arajuno. That night the young missionaries got together at Shell Mera and sprawled on the living-room floor with a big map spread out before them. They had decided that "the Lord's time" had come to do something more than talk and dream about contacting the Aucas.

The excited planning went on most of the night and produced some firm decisions. The first was: strict secrecy. They would finance the project from their own pockets, not draw on mission funds. Only members of the team and wives were to be in the know. Their reasons were sound: if word of the operation got abroad, droves of explorers and adventurers, newsmen and photographers might try to get into the act. Then at the first sign of Auca hostility someone would start shooting—"and set back the missionary effort among these people for decades." There had been tragic precedents which made the missionaries wary of joining forces with men who had no love or special regard for the Aucas.

To further insure secrecy they devised code terms, for use when others were around or when communicating over the missions' short-wave radio. The Aucas were to be called "the neighbors," their region "the neighborhood." The Auca settlement was to be "Terminal City"; the beach where the missionaries

would land and set up the contact camp, "Palm Beach." Moreover, each man would carry on his regular mission work up to the last minute to avoid arousing curiosity among the Indians and other missionaries.

To soften up Auca hostility, they would start with a long, cautious campaign of air-borne friendliness. Regular weekly flights would be made over the Auca village, low enough to drop gifts and shout friendly greetings but high enough to outrange Auca spears. For that, the small Piper Family Cruiser would be ideal.

For bestowing their gifts Nate had developed a tricky technique. He called it "the spiraling-line method." After long search for some simple way of making a sustained air-ground contact, he discovered it one day in 1500 feet of fishing line and a small canvas bucket. Experimentally paying out the line while circling at 1000 feet, he found to his amazement that he could make the bucket hang vertically and almost motionless. Then, by gradually spiraling lower, he could set it down with reasonable accuracy. He had already used this method for lowering medicines and mail to jungle clearings, and for picking up messages from missionaries on the trail.

Once he had astounded a missionary in a remote jungle village by lowering a field telephone in the canvas bucket. The village was being swept by a highly contagious disease, and when the incredulous missionary picked up the telephone

Nate asked for details of the situation. Then, using his plane radio, he called a mission hospital 150 miles away, asked for diagnosis and instructions, and lowered the prescribed medicines then and there. The whole operation took a matter of minutes—and the epidemic was stopped.

This simple "life line from the skies" had proved a great boon to mission outposts. Now it seemed to be "God's answer" for Operation Auca.

But how about communication with the Aucas? So far as was known, there was only one member of the tribe available who remembered the language—a girl named Dayuma, who years before had fled from the tribe after seeing her father, brother and baby sister hacked to death in an intertribal row. The girl knew the Quechua tongue, so Jim and Betty Elliot, who spoke it fluently, were assigned to assemble from her a stock of Auca words and phrases, then drill the others in their usage.

The first gift drop was scheduled for Thursday, October 6.

TO UNDERSTAND their powerful compulsion to reach the hitherto unreached with the gospel—or die in the attempt—it is necessary to know these men more intimately.

Nathaniel Saint, at 32, was the "old man" of the group. Also, he had been longest in Ecuador: seven years. He received a thorough religious training from his father, Law-

rence B. Saint, noted muralist and stained-glass artist. At 13, stricken with osteomyelitis, young Nate promised God that "if He would let me live, my life would henceforth belong to Him." Recovered, he kept his bargain.

Planes early became his passion. In high school he worked afternoons and Saturdays to earn money for flying lessons, and during World War II he served in the U. S. Air Force. When he went to Wheaton College to prepare himself for foreign-mission service his only regret was that it meant forsaking his first love—flying. Then one day news came that some ex-service airmen in California had formed a group called the Missionary Aviation Fellowship, and were recruiting pilots who were also mechanics for air supply-line service to missionaries in bush and jungle. To Nate the news was the voice of God. He dropped his college course and hurried to California.

The Missionary Aviation Fellowship needed a man to pioneer its program in Ecuador. Nate, with his wife Marjorie, flew down in September 1948, established a base for his small plane at Shell Mera, on the edge of the jungle. He soon had a network of landing strips and radio communications (with Marj at the base radio hookup and in touch with him constantly), and in a matter of months had transformed life for the mission stations. Where missionaries once had been isolated and remote, sometimes bedridden for



weeks with jungle diseases, they now were within a half hour's flying time of transportation between stations or ambulance service, and got quick delivery of mail, medicines, supplies.

Nate developed extraordinary skill in getting in and out of jungle airstrips, many scarcely wide enough to keep his wing tips from brushing the trees. He had no illusions about the dangers of such jungle-hopping. "Every time I take off," he said, "I am ready to deliver up the life I owe to God." He came close to delivering it up one day when, in taking off from the Quito airport, a sudden downdraft from the mountains hurled his light Stinson plane to the ground. In the crash his back was

broken, his eyes blinded. Yet, when his sight returned a few weeks later, he hastened back to his work while still encased from neck to thighs in a cast. Meanwhile, from his hospital bed, lest his accident prove a setback for missionary aviation he had made a tape-recording for the people back home:

"It's only logical," he told them, "for conservatives to say, 'Let's quit this foolish risk of life.' They would see it differently if they knew the chances taken for God every day by these missionaries in the jungle. We in missionary aviation must always take the safest and sanest course, never being reckless. But we cannot be less courageous than these brave people in the field."

Nate Saint had his theories on expendability, learned during the war. "God Himself set the pattern," he said, "and if He did not hold back His own Son, why should we hold back our own little lives for the sake of security? We are—and must always be—expendable." And in his diary he wrote, "The Aucas kill on sight, but someone must take the gospel to them. Beyond their territory are other souls for whom Christ died."

Like Nate Saint, the others were young, full of vigor and spiritual drive. There was nothing ascetic or anti-life about them. In college all had been campus leaders, top scholars, better-than-average athletes.

Jim Elliot, Peter Fleming and Ed McCully had many things in common. They were all products of

homes where religious faith was daily bread and spreading the gospel a divine duty; they were members of the same fellowship (Plymouth Brethren), arrived in Ecuador the same year (1952), were sponsored by the same foreign-missions group (Christian Missions in Many Lands).

Before coming to Ecuador this trio's paths had crossed often, as youth leaders on campus and in Christian youth activity. They developed a common feeling for Latin America as a place to invest their lives, and all felt, soon after arrival in Ecuador, a God-impelled urge to "get to" the Aucas.

Of the three, Jim Elliot was first to contract "the Ecuador itch," and shortly passed the enthusiasm along. Unusually handsome and well-built, and only 28 when he died, he had an exuberant zest for living. "Wherever you are, be *all* there," he once wrote; "live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God." At Wheaton College he was a champion wrestler, a star debater and public speaker, the outstanding spiritual leader on campus, and he graduated with highest honors. He went to Ecuador in February 1952, and later married Betty Howard, daughter of a former missionary, there.

At jungle mission stations, first at Puyu Pungu, then at Shandia on the banks of the Napo River, Jim and Betty not only spread the gospel but in addition did medical and first-aid work: splinting broken arms, treat-

ing malaria and snake bites, teaching the Quechuas sanitation. They also compiled textbooks in the Quechua tongue, then taught the Quechuas to read and write their own language.

But Jim Elliot was preoccupied with the Aucas, and had frankly talked over with Betty the hazards of reaching them. The last entry in his diary read: "God, send me soon to the Aucas."

Youngest of the team was Peter Fleming—only 27 when he died on the Curaray beach. Fervently religious, he was more introspective than the others. He had an impressive knowledge of the Bible. Beside his picture in his high-school year-book he put this slogan: "I don't know what the future holds—but I know Who holds the future." At the University of Washington he was an honor student. He loved the language sciences, in 1951 took his M.A. in English. At his mission station at Puyu Pungu he quickly mastered the Quechua dialects, and with his wife, Olive, had a lively literacy program going among the Indians.

But Pete, too, became intensely interested in getting to the Aucas. In college he had been a conscientious objector, seeing no way to reconcile the Christian doctrine of love with the killing of one human being by another. Yet he had no fear of death for himself; his dedication to Operation Auca was complete.

Of the four, Ed McCully had the best reasons for sober second thoughts over the Auca enterprise.

For over a year he and his wife, Marilou, had been working with the Quechuas at Arajuno—on the very doorstep of Auca-land. Arajuno was an old Shell Oil camp, abandoned when it was found that more blood than oil flowed from the site.

The Auca attacks did not subside with Arajuno's switch from oil to gospel base. To lessen the danger, McCully had cleared the jungle growth back from the mission house, erected an electric fence to discourage raiders, put up a battery-operated light that could flood the area at first sound of approach. Yet, despite all these precautions, a half dozen Quechuas had been slain by the Aucas during his stay. It was the Aucas' hostility, in fact, that made Ed McCully anxious to reach them with the gospel of love.

Such, then, were the men who, in a spirit lifted right out of the Acts of the Apostles, fashioned their bold odyssey to the Aucas. Their consecration to their task was constant. And they were eager to profit from any mistakes as they went along. As Nate Saint put it: "If we humbly seek His will in any matter, crucifying our own desires, and venture by faith and not in fear, we can't go wrong."

It was with high faith, and not fear, that Nate Saint and Ed McCully took off from Arajuno, early on October 6, to make their first gift drop. In 15 minutes they were over "Terminal City." Keeping to the downstream edge of the Auca territory

so that if they had a forced landing they could escape by water, they eventually found a cluster of buildings that interested them: a large thatched house surrounded by several smaller ones. "The main house," Nate reported later, "was about 40 yards from the stream, fronting a sand bar perhaps 75 yards long and 15 yards wide. A path showed they used this bar frequently—it would be our target. There was not a living person in sight."

Nate slowed to 55 m.p.h. while Ed lowered the gift over the side. It was an aluminum kettle, to which were attached some yard-long, brightly colored streamers. The line dropped straight and clear, and Nate began circling. The gift drifted in a small, lazy circle below them, the ribbons fluttering nicely.

There was still no sign of life below. "If no one's watching," Ed shouted, "we'd better put it in an obvious place."

They started spiraling down. There was considerable wind drift from the north, and the hills behind the stream were covered with tall trees. They made six attempts, gradually lifting the bucket against the wind until it was over the bar. Then Nate rolled into a steeper turn and the gift hit the beach right on the path to the main house.

The automatic release mechanism Nate had developed worked perfectly, the line floated free—"and there was our messenger of good will, love and faith, below us on the sand bar! We had delivered the first

gospel message by sign language to a people a quarter of a mile away vertically, 50 miles horizontally, but continents and wide seas away culturally and spiritually."

Back home, exuberant at their success, Nate and Ed met some good-humored skepticism when they confessed they hadn't seen a soul. Were they sure they hadn't deposited the gift in a deserted village? But the pair's enthusiasm was damp-proof. They knew that, at long last, a start had been made.

Their second trip, a week later, dispelled any notion that Terminal City was without habitants. They immediately checked the sand bar where they had left their first offering. The kettle was gone.

This time the gift was a new machete—an item so coveted by the Aucas that they had killed to get it—and their target a house upstream from the first one. "We figured that if we specialized on any one house, the others might get jealous." When they got to the target-house, they spotted four canoes pulled up on the riverbank in front of it. Obviously, someone must be nearby.

They began circling and Ed lowered the machete, which was canvas-wrapped so that no one would be cut, and decked with gay streamers. Ed watched its descent through binoculars. Suddenly, as Nate described it later, "He let out a yell and all but crawled out the open door to get a better look. *We were seeing our first Auca.* He was running around but not hiding. Pretty soon there

were three of them out in front of their big leaf house."

They could see the Aucas watching the dangling gift as it came down. The machete fell into the stream, and instantly an Auca dived for it. Soon half a dozen of them were on the bank examining the prize. Apparently the gift idea had caught on in a hurry.

There was other evidence that "the neighbors" were interested. Back at Arajuno, Nate and Ed found the Quechuas milling about excitedly. They had found in the brush near Ed's house a number of footprints, obviously Aucas'. Said Ed, "Could be that these came from Terminal City, after our first visit." Said Nate, "They probably hid out there in the brush to look you over last night!"

Immediately the two fell to work making a wooden model of the plane, put it on a pole outside the McCully house, to identify for any future visitors McCully's connection with the operation.

Their third visit a week later revealed larger numbers of Aucas, increased excitement among them—and no signs of fear. Coming down to a lower altitude than before, Nate circled each of the four main houses of the village while Ed snapped pictures of the Aucas running up and down the stream bed laughing and shouting, apparently trying to guess where the gift drop would be made this time.

Despite a snappy northeast wind which made an accurate drop difficult, they finally set down the gift,

another machete, within ten feet of the target-house's front door. Then they circled down lower than they had yet gone, to give the Aucas a look at their faces—for purposes of identification later. A few of the villagers ran for cover, but reappeared waving as the Piper circled higher again before leaving the site.

The two returned home jubilant. "May God continue to put His good hand on this project," Nate wrote in his diary that night, "and may we abandon it when not fully assured of His direction. At present we feel unanimously that God is in it."

Now they were prepared to try out verbal communication. Nate rigged up a public-address system in the plane, and Jim Elliot, who had drilled himself in Auca phrases learned from Dayuma, the fugitive woman, went with Nate for the fourth visit.

Before making their gift drop they circled slowly over the settlement, while Jim called over the speaker, "We like you. We are your friends." This time they left several gifts—a machete, a ten-inch aluminum kettle filled with ribbons, trinkets, a shirt. The Indians converged on them with obvious delight, and one Auca cupped his hands as though calling something back. The missionaries were making faster progress than they had believed possible.

On the next trip their reception was even more favorable. McCully manned the mike to call out, "We like you. . . . We like you. . . . We have come to pay you a visit." The

Aucas danced about eagerly, and though the plane came down low no one ran away, none showed the slightest fear. When Ed held out both hands in a gesture of open friendship, some of the Aucas imitated the gesture, shouting and smiling.

Thus encouraged, the team began to consider the next step—the actual landing in Auca territory, the face-to-face contact all had dreamed of. And from then on significant signs of friendliness were certainly not lacking.

On the sixth trip “the neighbors” received their gifts with great excitement, waving and yelling at the plane circling above. When Nate and Ed pulled in the line, they discovered that the Aucas had tied something on it. It was a beautifully woven headband, made of cord and brightly colored feathers. And on the next trip the Aucas sent up two sets of combs made of palmwood, whittled and woven intricately with native cord. Even more surprising was the appearance of a model airplane mounted atop one of the houses. Perhaps it was fashioned after secretly observing the model plane at Arajuno. In any case it indicated good will—and a craftsmanship hitherto unsuspected among such primitives.

The Aucas now even attempted to match the missionaries’ bounty in kind. When Nate and Ed sent down a live rooster, the Aucas came back the following week with a large black bird, and later sent up

two parrots. When the missionaries lowered several small packages of food, the Aucas sent back cooked fish, packets of peanuts, a piece of smoked monkey tail.

The unique trading went on for another five weeks. To make their identity unmistakable, the team took photos of themselves wearing or holding the Auca gifts, made 6 x 9 enlargements tinted in lifelike colors. In the corner of each print they put the “insignia of the operation,” a drawing of the yellow Piper, and dropped them along with their next gifts.

Meanwhile the Aucas, noting the difficulty of making drops among the tall trees, felled the trees around their houses to make clearings. Going even further, they erected large platforms about 15 feet from the ground—palpably to aid the missionaries in getting closer—stationed a “traffic director” on each, and here displayed their gifts for the pickup.

Shortly after this development Aucas appeared at Arajuno. Early one morning a mission Quechua named Fermín suddenly spotted one of them, naked and armed with a lance, at the end of the garden path. As they saw each other, the Auca ran away. Fermín dashed back to the mission and beat on Marilou McCully’s window (she being alone there at the time save for Indian helpers), yelling for ammunition for his gun.

Marilou took the gun, which fortunately was not loaded, from Fer-

mín's shaking hands. Then, with a machete for a gift, she headed down the path, calling in Auca phrases: "We like you. . . . We like you." Fermín came after her, shouting in Quechua, "You're crazy, you're crazy. They'll kill you!"

Around the path, freshly pressed grass indicated the recent presence of a number of Aucas. Marilou tossed the machete to the ground, called out more friendly phrases, and returned to her agitated flock. There was no doubt about it: Aucas were definitely around.

Nate and Ed, hastily summoned from other stations, flew in and saw in the visit a lost opportunity to contact the Aucas. They also realized that a shooting by one of the Quechuas would ruin all they had built up so far.

The incident underscored the desirability of making an early ground contact with the Aucas. Despite elaborate precautions to keep the operation secret, the Quechuas had by now shrewdly guessed what was going on. Two of them had even found one of the gift bags, and remarked testily, "Why you give all that good stuff to Aucas?" Their jealousy was aroused, and they would certainly gossip. Action was advisable before the secret leaked further through the jungle. And after nine increasingly successful gift drops the time seemed ripe.

EARLY IN December Nate called the team together for a conference. They agreed that every consideration, in-

cluding the weather, seemed to be catapulting them toward their D-day with now-or-never exigency. Within a month the rainy season would start, flooding the rivers and making landings impossible. The ideal time for establishing their beachhead in Auca-land would be early January during the full of the moon.

They set the date for Tuesday, January 3, 1956.

The only possible landing sites were sand beaches along the Curaray River. After days of exploration, Nate and Ed had found one that looked likely, some four miles from the Auca village. It was only about 200 yards long, and the approach and pull-out would be steep until they could fell a few trees. But it was possible, and the sand seemed firm and pebbly. This, then, would be "Palm Beach."

Should they carry in firearms? It was a delicate question. They knew that the first shot fired would scuttle the entire project. Yet it would be criminally naïve to go in totally unarmed.

It was claimed that no one carrying a gun was ever attacked; the Aucas apparently had a healthy regard for this strange weapon. "The handier the revolver," Nate argued, "the less chance of a hostile encounter." The team finally agreed to take guns along—but keep them out of sight, use them only in direst emergency, and then only to frighten the savages if attacked.

They planned to allow five days

for the beachhead effort. If it failed in that time they could leave by air, barring floods, in which case a crew of Quechuas could come downriver for them in canoes. They would bring in a prefabricated tree-house and stock it with food for two weeks. This would allow a few days' margin if a state of siege developed.

Another thing: they needed a fifth man. Once the beachhead was established, one should guard the tree-house at all times, two should patrol the beach, another should attend to the supplies and cooking, with Nate on whatever in-and-out flight duty was required.

Marj Saint produced a list of available missionaries in the area. The team pored over it. Nate's finger ran down the list, stopped at the name of Roger Youderian, of the Gospel Missionary Union. "What about Rog?" he asked.

Raised on a Montana ranch, former paratrooper, a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge, later chosen as a member of General Eisenhower's honor guard, Roger Youderian was a man who would not duck danger in any form. He had not ducked it in Ecuador. No emergency that arose—and there had been a lot of them at Macuma, his mission post deep in the domain of the head-hunting Jivaros—had ever been too perilous or too difficult for him to meet with resolution and quiet strength.

"We could use a fellow like that," said Jim Elliot, "if he'll come."

The "if" was redundant. When

invited, Roger grinned cheerfully and welcomed the opportunity to share in the venture.

On Monday, January 2, the team members and their wives gathered at Arajuno. All day they worked making ready for the beachhead, preparing food, packing equipment. Before they were through, the mission grounds looked like a D-day staging area.

At nightfall, wives and husbands withdrew in couples to be alone together. Wrapped in the jungle fastness of the isolated station, they frankly faced the risks, soberly discussed their futures and what the morrow might bring.

Did the young wives intuitively sense what lay ahead? That this might be their last night together? Perhaps. In any case, they were ready.

Betty Elliot expressed the attitude of all of them when she told her husband, "I've been privileged above any woman in having such a husband, Jim. I shall thank God always for the two years of perfect happiness He has granted us. If there is to be no more, what more fitting way is there to die—at the height of your manhood, with your dearest friends, and in the attempt to reach the people so near to your heart for so long."

As for the men, they had already faced up to the dangers ahead. Nate spoke for all when he told his wife, "There is no doubt in my mind that we should go ahead. The stakes warrant it."

Next morning the young couples held a brief prayer service. And, just before leaving, they sang together the hymn which became the theme song for Operation Auca:

"We rest on Thee, our Shield
and our Defender!
Thine is the battle, Thine shall
be the praise;
When passing through the gates
of pearly splendor,
Victors, we rest with Thee,
through endless days."

At 8:02, only two minutes behind schedule, Nate lifted the Piper into the air. A few minutes later, after a hazardous landing and equally hazardous take-off from the beachhead sand, he had left Ed McCully (who had drawn straws for the privilege) as the first occupant of Palm Beach. Then he returned to Arajuno for another load. Altogether he made five trips to the beachhead that day, ferrying in the men and supplies. There was not time for a sixth, so Peter Fleming had to remain at the mission overnight.

Next morning, Wednesday, when Nate and Pete flew to the beachhead, they circled over Terminal City on the way and, using the loudspeaker, invited the Aucas to visit their camp. The Aucas waved in a friendly manner and seemed to understand. An hour later, when they again circled over the village to repeat the invitation, Nate saw that all the men had disappeared. Did this mean that they were already on their way through the jungle?

At the beach, where the tree-house had now been set up and routine organized, the missionaries made every possible gesture of friendliness. They mounted a model airplane on a pole, placed a gift machete at the edge of the jungle, and at intervals throughout the day marched up and down the beach shouting Auca phrases of welcome.

But no Auca showed up. From the jungle came only strange bird calls and the protesting squawk of parrots.

"Perhaps they'll come tomorrow," Pete said. And remembering the absence of men from the village, he added, "It's plain that the Aucas are looking for us somewhere."

Thursday, however, was equally unrewarding: flights over Terminal City still revealed no male Aucas; the calls into the jungle still brought no response. Yet the gift machete left out the night before was gone, and the men felt sure that, from behind that thick jungle curtain, "we are being watched."

Slowly the day passed, with intervals of fishing and swimming, reading, making notes. By 4:30 that afternoon all agreed that the Aucas probably were not coming that day. Yet they were determined to "sweat it out" until the savages could locate their camp and show themselves.

That evening Nate and Pete went back to Arajuno to sleep, since the tree-house was uncomfortably crowded for five people. On their way they flew over the Auca settlement. As they spiraled down, an

Auca climbed up on one of the platforms, knelt toward the direction of the camp site, pointed with both hands. It was an encouraging sign, and that night Nate wrote in his diary: "We find we have a friendlier feeling for these fellows all the time. We must not let that lead us to carelessness. It is no small thing to try to bridge between the 20th century and the Stone Age. God help us to take care. . . . *But may we see them soon!*"

See them soon they did. The long-awaited contact occurred the next morning, Friday, January 6.

Confident now that a delegation of some sort was on its way, the team had arisen early to begin the verbal bombardments of the jungle. At midmorning Ed McCully was on one end of the beach, Jim Elliot on the other, with Roger Youderian, Nate and Pete in between—all taking turns shouting phrases and waving gifts.

Suddenly, from directly across the river, a strong masculine voice boomed out, and immediately three Aucas stepped out in the open. They were a man and two women—one about 30 years of age, the other a well-formed girl of about 16. They were naked except for G-strings about the waist and large wooden plugs in distended ear lobes.

The missionaries, temporarily struck dumb by the surprise appearance, finally managed to shout simultaneously, "*Puinani!*"—Auca for "Welcome."

The Auca man replied with a ver-

bal flood, pointing frequently to the girl. His language was unintelligible, but not his gestures. "He's offering the girl for trade," exclaimed Pete, "or maybe as a gift."

Jim Elliot yelled, "I don't know what they've come for. But they've come—and that's enough for me!" He yanked off his outer clothes and began wading across the shallow river.

At Jim's impulsive plunge, the Aucas shrank back a trifle toward the jungle. But as he approached them, hands extended, the girl edged forward and stepped off a log into the water. The man and the other woman followed slowly. Jim seized their hands and led them across.

With broad smiles, many *puinani*s and much reference to their phrase books, the five conveyed that their visitors had "come well" and need not be afraid. The Aucas' uneasiness fell from them, and they began jabbering happily to themselves and the men, "seemingly with little idea that we didn't understand them."

Roger brought out some paring knives, which they accepted with cries of delight. Nate presented a machete and the model airplane. The others, suddenly remembering the guns in the cook shack and treehouse, went back to hide the weapons beneath their duffel. They dug out cameras and shot dozens of photos, while the women looked through a copy of *Time* magazine and the man was being doused with insecticide to demonstrate civiliza-

tion's way of dealing with the swarming insects.

Presently the girl drifted over toward the Piper, rubbing her body against the fabric and imitating with her hands the plane's movement. The Auca man followed. He was completely unafraid and self-possessed—but obviously curious to know more about the "big bird." The missionaries promptly named him "George," and the girl "Delilah."

By sign language George made it plain he wanted a ride in the Piper. Finally Nate agreed, and the Auca eagerly climbed in. Nate taxied down the strip and took off, with George shouting all the way. Suddenly Nate realized his opportunity to use his passenger for propaganda, and headed for Terminal City. George chortled with delight, leaned out to wave and yell at his fellow villagers, whose mouths fell open at sight of him in the plane.

Back on the beach, the missionaries demonstrated for their guests such modern marvels as rubber bands, balloons, a yo-yo; served them lemonade and hamburger with mustard. Then they tried to get across the idea that an invitation to visit the Auca village would not be scorned. For this notion George displayed no enthusiasm.

"Why is it he's so reluctant whenever we broach the subject?" one of the five demanded. Another replied, "Maybe he lacks the authority to invite us on his own."

As the day wore on, Delilah

showed signs of impatience. Once when Jim Elliot left the group to go to the tree-house she leapt up and followed. She seemed downcast when he turned and rejoined the others.

The rest of the day was spent in rampant friendliness. When the Aucas showed signs of wanting to spend the night on the beach, the missionaries hospitably offered them a small beach shack they had constructed, motioning that it was theirs to occupy if they wished.

Suddenly Delilah wheeled and walked off down the beach. George called to her, but she kept going. He followed her into the forest, and the older woman left later.

When Nate and Pete got back to Arajuno that night, they held the waiting wives agog with an account of the day's adventures. They were in high spirits. Months of prayerful preparation and years of dreaming had brought their reward. The three days' nerve-racking vigil on Palm Beach had paid off. For today they had accomplished what no white men had ever accomplished before them: they had stood face to face with the fearsome Aucas—and on friendly terms.

The next day, Saturday, was anticlimactic. They waited hopefully, expecting the Aucas to return momentarily with an invitation to their village. But none came.

During the day Nate made three calls over Terminal City. On the first he was puzzled to see the women and children run for cover. Only

two men appeared, and they seemed frightened. But when he called over the loudspeaker, "Come . . . come . . . come!" and threw out gifts of a blanket, a pot and a pair of nylon shorts, "they seemed relieved."

On the second trip over, the Aucas manifested less fear. This time there were several men in the clearing—"George" among them. An old man pointed toward Palm Beach "and seemed friendly, though not exuberant."

On the third flight all evidence of fear seemed to have vanished. Nate reported, "I got some good smiles from 'George' and another young man who, one can imagine, probably aspires to ride in the plane."

That night, again at Arajuno, Nate tossed sleeplessly, in hindsight thinking of devices they might have used to detain their Friday visitors. But Sunday morning before taking off he confided to Pete, "I have a hunch that things will happen today."

He and Pete climbed into the Piper at 8:45. Pete called to the wives: "Good-by, girls, pray for us—for I believe today's the day."

Back at Palm Beach, they found that Ed, Jim and Rog also had spent a restless night. They, too, sensed somehow that "today things will happen."

When nothing had happened by midmorning, Nate took off to scout the situation. Over the Auca settlement, he again saw only a handful of women and children—no men.

On the way back, however, he

suddenly spotted figures moving along a river beach. He came down for a closer look, counted ten Auca men. They were heading toward the Curaray.

"I believe they're coming, fellows!" Nate shouted before his wheels had stopped rolling. The four set up a yell. They held a brief song and prayer service, ate a quick lunch and fell to work arranging the beach and shack for company.

Promptly at 12:35 p.m., their pre-arranged radio-contact time, Nate transmitted the tidings to the wives. Breathlessly, and still using their code words, he told of spotting "a commission of ten" on the way from Terminal City, adding, "Looks like they'll be here for an early-afternoon service. Pray for us. This *is* the day! Will contact you next at 4:35."

The contact was never made. Before 4:35 that afternoon all five had fallen beneath the lances and machetes of the Aucas, their lifeblood mingling with the soft sand and muddy waters of the Curaray.

ALONG THE Curaray all was quiet. Yet hovering over the scene were a host of unanswered questions. When did it happen? The only clue was Nate Saint's damaged wrist watch, found on his spear-pierced body days later. It had stopped at 3:12.

Had there been a struggle? Later examinations of the beach and the tree-house offered no such evidence. Had the ten Aucas first feigned friendliness, then turned on their unwary victims? It would seem so,

for all were slain on the beach—indicating that even the one set to cover any approach from the tree-house had come down.

The little yellow Piper stood forlornly on the beach, pierced by several spears, its yellow fabric stripped—as though the Indians, regarding the plane as some evil bird, had felt they must kill it too.

But even more mysterious than what happened is: Why? Why did the savages, who had shown such cordiality during the gift exchanges, and again two days before in face-to-face encounter, revert to type? Had "George" returned to the village with accounts of that friendliness, with perhaps urgings to pursue it—only to be overruled by the head men of the village whose ingrained fear of strangers had not yet been quite conquered? Or had the Aucas been affronted by the missionaries' rejection of Delilah—in the form she had obviously been offered—and come to avenge the insult?

One can only speculate. The questions remain.

Back at the mission stations that Sunday afternoon the wives waited eagerly for the 4:35 contact. When it didn't come, they concluded that perhaps the men were busy entertaining the Aucas, or maybe having trouble with their transmitter. Then, at Shell Mera, Marj tried calling. No answer.

The hours dragged by. The wives remained glued to their radios. Said Marj Saint wistfully, "This is the first time since Nate started jungle

flying in '48 that we've been out of contact for even an hour."

The suspense was the sharper because most of their missionary friends in the network were unaware that Operation Auca was in progress. Should they call for help, and thereby divulge the secret? They decided to wait until they were sure something serious had happened.

Early Monday morning Johnny Keenan, Nate's teammate at Shell Mera, who had been in on the operation from the beginning, took off in his Piper for Palm Beach. Presently he radioed that Nate's plane seemed to be stripped of its fabric, and that there was no sign of the men. The wives, quickly flown to Shell Mera from their isolated stations, conferred with heavy hearts. Something, plainly, had gone terribly wrong. By midmorning they'd made their decision: they would appeal for help. Marj relayed the facts to radio station HCJB at Quito, known as "The Voice of the Andes," which then put the news on the air.

SEARCH OPERATIONS were begun at once. A detachment of Ecuadorian soldiers, missionaries and Quechua Indians was dispatched to the spot; planes and a helicopter were sent over. But the searchers could report only tragedy—a rifled camp, a stripped and broken plane, spear-pierced bodies floating in the river. Four of the bodies were recovered. Ed McCully's, brutally mutilated by a machete slash, was seen and

identified by a party of Quechua Indians who had come down the river ahead of the search party; but it disappeared beneath the muddy waters, and was never found.

That afternoon the wives were informed of the day's grim discoveries. Observers were moved at the quiet fortitude with which they received the news. "We expected hysteria," one reporter commented. "We are seeing instead an eloquent testimony to the power and beauty of the faith for which these men gave their lives."

At the request of the women, their husbands' bodies remained at the site and were buried in a common grave dug beneath the tree-house. One said quietly: "There they lived for six wonderful days. There they preached, by word and action, the gospel of God's salvation for all—even Aucas. There they should rest until the Resurrection."

The day after the burial, the five women asked to be flown over Palm Beach. From the plane, looking down wistfully at the beach, they saw the rough mound beneath the tree-house. "It's the most beautiful little cemetery in the world," murmured Marj Saint.

While the plane circled over the site, they read from II Corinthians 5, then knelt together on the corrugated floor of the plane, commending their loved ones to God, pledging in prayer that "we too may be faithful in all that God asks of us."

Someone started singing the "theme song" they had sung with

the men on that last breakfast together. The others picked up the refrain:

"We rest on Thee, our Shield
and our Defender!
Thine is the battle, Thine shall
be the praise;
When passing through the gates
of pearly splendor,
Victors, we rest with Thee,
through endless days."

ON FEBRUARY 16 Dr. José Maria Velasco Ibarra, President of Ecuador, posthumously awarded the slain missionaries the "Order of Merit in the Rank of Commander" for "sacrificial service in behalf of the inhabitants of the eastern jungles"—the highest recognition ever awarded Protestants in Ecuador. And in the United States a fund was started to provide emergency aid for the five wives and education for their nine children. Money flowed in, and within a few weeks \$50,000 was subscribed—mostly in small sums.

The death of the five did not end Operation Auca. Within three weeks Johnny Keenan, Nate's companion pilot at Shell Mera, was continuing the flights and gift drops over the settlement. Meanwhile, mission groups back in the United States were processing a score of applications from fliers anxious to take Nate Saint's place. The effort to reach the Aucas, far from being abandoned, now promised to be intensified.

The weeks immediately follow-

ing the tragedy brought astonishing response. Evidence quickly accumulated to prove that the drama on the Curaray was shaking the Christian Church back in the United States as it had not been shaken in a generation. From widely spread colleges more than 1000 students volunteered to enter the foreign-mission field. Mission boards announced new plans to reach not only Aucas but others of the yet-to-be-contacted tribes—such as those in New Guinea, the Philippines, Indo-China, the Amazon Valley, north central Africa.

Even more astonishing were the reactions at the mission stations the men had served. Attendance at schools and church services reached record levels. From Shandia, Betty Elliot reported that within a few weeks more Indians had come into the Church than in many months before the five died. One of the converts had turned into an evangelist of exceptional talents—"a long step toward Jim's greatest desire, namely that spiritual leadership here would one day devolve wholly upon the Indians themselves."

Two Christian Quechuas at Arajuno, formerly as fearful of their "neighbors" as the rest of the Quechua tribe, volunteered to devote their lives to converting the Aucas. From Macuma, Barbara Youderian reported that when Roger's sacrifice became known to the Jivaros, ten stepped forth to say they loved their Lord enough to die for Him in like manner. One Jivaro, whose father had been a witch doctor responsible for many raids on a rival tribe, volunteered to go at once to the enemy with a message of Christian good will. He did so, bringing the first peace between the tribes in years.

To the wives, such results, so much greater than they or their husbands had dared dream, were a revelation of God's larger design.

At Shell Mera, Marj Saint said humbly: "His plan seems to have reached much farther than the Aucas—for whom alone the fellows were willing to die. That He should use this to His greater glory is none of our doing.

"But isn't that His way," she added: "using the small things to confound the mighty?"



Listen, the Wind

IF YOU LISTEN closely, each kind of tree is a musical instrument: the apple a cello, the old oak a bass viol, the cypress a harp, the willow a flute, the young pine a muted violin. Put your ear close to the whispering branch and you may catch what it is saying: the brittle twitter of dry oak leaves in winter, the faint breathing of the junipers, the whirring of hickory twigs, the thrumming of slender birch clumps, the mild murmuring of the sugar maple, and behind them all the thunder of whole bare trees in a headlong tide of air.

—Guy Murchie, *Song of the Sky* (Houghton Mifflin)