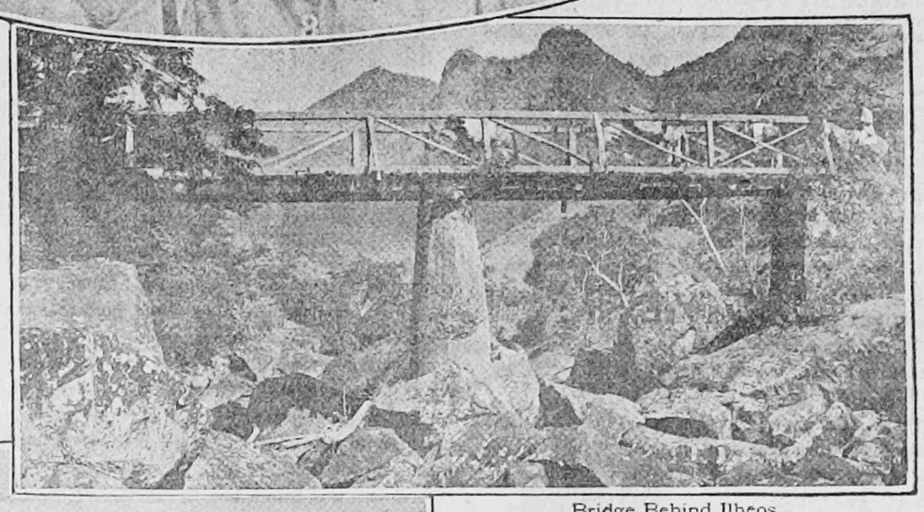
THE OGDEN STANDARD

OUR NINE MAN INVASION of BRAZIL

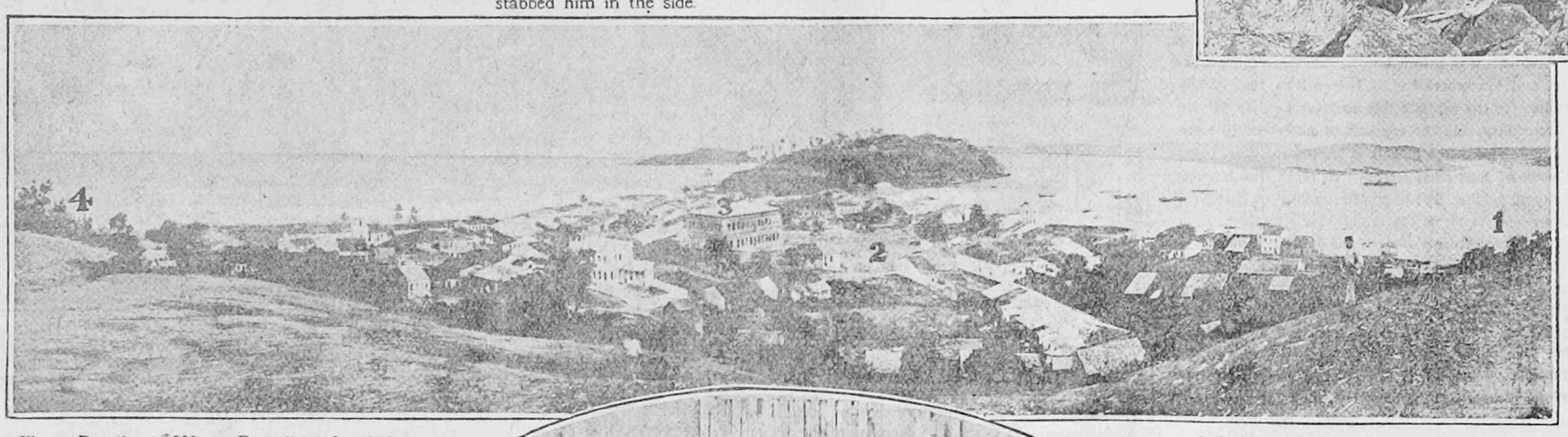
TOLD by One of the Men Who Took Part in an Adventure That Reads Like Extravagant Fiction—Desperate Fighting, Perilous Flight and Memorable Capture

A group pounced on Borer and after he had shot two of them two others got hold of his rifle, and while he was scuffling a fifth man stabbed him in the side.

1—George Gordon. 2—Hubert George Kincaid. 3—Herbert T Fannebecker 4—Everitt Wyche Wilson. 5—Sebastino de Magali. 6—Samuel Richard Parker. Jr 7—Cecil Borer 8—George Holloway Vice 9—Dr. Arthur Luiz Affonso de Carvalho.



Bridge Behind Ilheos



Ilheos, Brazil.—1 Where Expedition Landed. 2 Where Major Davis Fell. 3 Building from Which Government Troops Opened Fire. 4 Where Invaders Left the Town

Some of the Men We Fought

BY LIEUT. GEORGE H. VICE

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IN all history there are few stories of more desperate endeavors than the one hereafter related. Fragments of it have appeared in the newspapers during the period that has elapsed since 1907, when nine reckless adventurers from New York and one Brazilian Portuguese invaded Brazil with a view to overthrowing the government, but the full story is told here for the first time. Nothing could be more typical of the true spirit of adventure pure and simple, and the reckless courage of the men is almost surpassing belief.

NONE of us knew in the beginning, and those of us left alive have no knowledge now, of just what the reasons were for our invasion of Brazil. The one man who might be able to tell something, Sebastio H. L. de Magalli, is ending his days in a madman's cell in Estado de Bahia. If he represented some ambitious politicians in Brazil we never knew who they were, and it may have been that he was insane when we first met him. The whole expedition, reviewing its incidents now, was merely the futile dashing of a handful of human pebbles against the stone wall of a great and resourceful nation. We made things lively for a time, however.

In September, 1907, there appeared in various New York papers advertisements for men of adventurous nature and military experience who would like to join an expedition. I answered one of the advertisements and received in reply a long typewritten prospectus, in which the sender said he was commissioned to raise a regiment of colonists who might be called upon for military service. I was ready for anything, and enlisted after a conference with Mr. Magalli, who had sent me the prospectus.

We were to equip ourselves, each with a Remington carbine, four hundred rounds of ammunition and the standard cavalry accoutrements for tropical service, the whole cost to each individual being $200. After some little time Magalli said he had been instructed to pick out thirty-five men to send in advance to Brazil, his group to go to the interior as commissioned officers to take charge of bodies of men.

I went aboard the steamship Byron, of the Lamport & Holt line, in New York November 4 to sail with the thirty-five, and found that we numbered but nine. The others could not raise the money. Then was the moment of decision. We could have backed out just as well as not, but we were unanimous in our decision to go ahead and see what we could do. The nine men, including Magalli, were as follows:—

Cecil Borer, an English actor and former lieutenant in the Boer War.

Major Davies, a Welshman, retired from the British army.

Hubert Wilson and George Kincaid, Irish boys, late of the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Northwestern Mounted Police.

Samuel R. Parker, a typical young New Yorker, an electrical engineer.

Herbert Pfannebecker, of Brooklyn, N. Y., a tall, slender youth with a genius as a marksman.

George Gordon, a Scotchman.

George H. Vice, Hackensack, N. J.

We were still blind as to our real object and destination when we arrived at Bahia November 19, save that Magalli said he had decided that we should go to Ilheos from Bahia by water if we could get away without being interfered with, traverse the State of Bahia peacefully and get into the State of Minas Geraes, where we would issue a declaration of revolution and begin to take possession of the country and the mines. He said he believed we could raise a sufficient following after two or three victories to get a revolution properly under way. We would have to capture a few garrisoned towns before we could expect to be taken seriously.

First we bought good mounts for all of us and then Magalli made an arrangement with the captain of a little bark, the Unione, to take us to Ilheos. To try to get aboard surreptitiously might mean failure at the outset, so we marched down to the custom house, carrying our arms, went straight through after passing regular inspection and got aboard without one word of a suspicious nature being said to us or one finger lifted against us. We were so few in number that to have regarded us as a revolutionary expedition would have been absurd. Some of the officials paid dearly for their carelessness later, however.

Mistaken for Circus Men.

When we debarked at Ilheos we camped on the beach, and as the town had been expecting the arrival of the yearly circus we were taken at first for an advance section of the same. The town of Ilheos is built in a sort of semi-circle on an island. The new city hall, a two story affair, is built on a ridge in the centre of the town, which runs to a sharp rise of hills at the back and out into a jut of land, shaped like a gigantic loaf of bread, in front of the city. This jut of land makes the shelter for the harbor.

A canal cuts off the island, and it is spanned by a bridge over which runs the road to the interior. To leave the city we must move from our camp on the beach directly through the heart of the town, ascend and cross the ridge and descend to the bridge on the other side. It was a nasty trap and a bad move at best, so we debated the matter twenty-four hours endeavoring to allay native curiosity concerning us.

It appears, however, that we succeeded in arousing their suspicions all the more. At last Major Davies, who was a brave, gallant and capable man, insisted that to remain where we were meant our certain capture, and if we were going to invade Brazil we might as well start out and do it right. First we cut all the wires running out on our side of town. Brazil has telegraph lines where it will not have railroads for another fifty years. Political information is very necessary.

We broke camp and rode slowly and guardedly into the city, seeing, to our surprise, that a part of the company of infantry garrisoning the place was making haste to occupy the city hall. We were compelled to move directly toward it, however, and to move up hill in the open.

The Battle.

When within easy range and apparently moving along peacefully they began to fire on us, which was unwarranted, as we had made no offensive move. In ten seconds the battle was on, however. Gordon had his horse killed under him before he could dismount. All we could see were Brazilian rifles protruding from the windows, and getting proper cover we began a most interesting duel in marksmanship in which we bested them nicely. We learned afterward that we killed one soldier and wounded a large number of others, but we decreased the fire to such an extent that we were able to work around where we could make a dash for the bridge.

Gordon, being unmounted, ran with us, hoping to be able to pick up a horse, as horses were usually plentiful, but when he did not find one he called to us to go ahead and we went. He walked up to the home of a Brazilian colonel of militia in the residential section, pursued at a respectful distance by some of the colonel's men, and when he tendered the colonel the surrender of his revolver the gallant commander of the district turned a back somersault to get out of the window, his feelings not permitting him to stay and receive it.

A perfect torrent of bullets began to pour into the windows of the room in which Gordon was left standing, and dropping to the floor he emptied his revolver into the mass of his assailants and then writhed in pretended death agony, at last lying still. They then ventured into the room and he got up and surrendered. He died not a great while thereafter, however.

Our fight was a bitter one, but we had succeeded in our manoeuvre, suffering one terrible loss. Major Davis was shot in the eye and died before we could get him back on his horse, so we went on to the bridge, leaving his body behind us.

When out of range we cut the remaining wires. At least we thought we did, but there was one that ran off in another direction through a chain of villages, and very shortly a message was gotten through to Bahia that revolution had broken out at Ilheos and the revolutionists were bound into the interior. A gunboat and a large body of troops were despatched at once. Here again the Brazilians moved too rapidly. We had proclaimed no revolution and our actual status was merely that of a body of armed and mounted travellers of foreign birth and citizenship.

The tropical Brazilian road is a terrible, terrible thing. When the rainy season obtains it washes holes in the clay and in the dry season these ridges, ruts and pits become as hard as rock. It was over such a track that we rode fast and furious for the next twenty-four hours.

The Flight.

We knew there would be pursuit and there was but one hope—to forge our way as fast as possible into the interior. We were few in number, lightly equipped and therefore much more mobile than any military troop they could send after us. We rode till ten o'clock at night, when we struck a big town, which we learned was Aguas Prietos, or the Black Falls of the Rio Cachoeira.

Announcing that we were on our way to an interior plantation, we obtained rest and refreshments, but blood stains on us and bullet scratches on our horses alarmed the hotel keeper, and we left none too soon. To cross the river we were compelled to dismount, unsaddle and swim our horses, while our arms and equipment were taken over in canoes. This proceeding was almost as dangerous as fighting.

It was very fortunate, as I have hinted, that we left when we did, for the commandant at Ilheos was cunning if not overcourageous. He sent his cleverest officer in a well manned canoe up the river to the falls and that worthy landed very shortly after we were on our way inland once more.

Four stages more we pressed ahead until men and horses were nearly ready to drop from fatigue. The country was desperately wild in some places and once we heard the distant clangor of a drum. Moving quietly we came upon a settlement of naked natives, who were holding an arrow dance, which we could see through a gap in the tropical growth.

Pfannebecker took a picture at long range of the scene, which shows the character of the country perfectly. Through the little gap in the jungle one can see the natives in their ceremony, unobserved, as they believed. Making a detour we went on our way, coming again to a more civilized region, passing through a number of small towns and reaching Macumba at last, where we were so tired that it was decided to rest.

Our choice of camp was exceedingly poor. It was on the level beyond the town in a cocoa grove and was not at all a fighting position. The towns people were very friendly and did not seem to notice the signs of the battle at Ilheos.

We turned in at once for a good sound sleep. Pfannebecker insisted on standing guard, though no one but him imagined that there was any possible danger from pursuit then. We did not know that Magalli had left a declaration of the revolution in the city behind us, to be published after we had crossed the river. This put us in the field as revolutionists to all intents and purposes and under the law laid us open to any loyal Brazilian's attack.

There were two approaches to our camp, one from the east and one from the west, as the river was on the south and there was an impenetrable forest on the north.

Awakened by Shots.

I was awakened by hearing shots and leaped to my rifle, hearing Magalli cry, "Get into the woods with the ammunition." I caught up two belts and plunged out among the trees with the others.

Pfannebecker had been standing guard when suddenly, about fifty rods in front of him, a whistle sounded in the bush and a force of five hundred men leaped out. Running backward and firing his revolver into them he actually held them in check long enough to sound the alarm. The force was composed of pursuers from Aguas Prietos and reinforcements from Macumba.

Then began as desperate a fight as any man could wish to see. Selecting individual positions behind trees or hummocks of earth, fern or fallen logs we opened fire on them and began marksmen's work. For a while we had things pretty much our way until a part of the force worked around behind us, coming in from the other direction, and then disaster overtook us.

A group pounced on Borer and after he had shot two of them two others got hold of his rifle and while he was scuffling a fifth man stabbed him in the side and another one struck him a swinging blow with the butt of a gun that mashed his face out of all recognizable shape.

Parker and the Kincaids fought like demons until they were overwhelmed, one of the Kincaids breaking two men's arms simply with blows. I was doing the best I could, but began to receive one wound after another, then a full charge from a slug loaded gun struck me and I fell with a total of forty-two wounds. Strange to say, though I was stabbed and shot in the abdomen, was shot through both thighs, both arms were helpless and the bones of one wrist half shot away, I did not lose consciousness and remember cursing Pfannebecker because the worst that had happened to him was a large number of bullet holes through his clothes and a sprained wrist from knocking down Brazileros.

Jubilant Captors.

When we were all under guard and disarmed the victors began a mad demonstration of joy. Their braggadocio was laughable to see and they headed us straight back for Aguas Prietos. Not satisfied with the way in which they had done us up, they tried to make me walk, but I could not, and then they forced my comrades to carry me, but that was an awful ordeal for them and I chose to try to ride a horse without a saddle.

Wounded as I was I stuck for twenty miles over the rough roads and was then placed in a canoe, taken down the river to Ilheos and eventually to the hospital of Santa Maria at Bahia. I did not leave there till taken in a stretcher to Ilheos for trial, which resulted in practical acquittal, though Baron Rio Branco, Brazilian Minister of War, appealed on behalf of the government. He succeeded in getting a second trial, to which I was not taken, so that I was not liberated until the spring of the present year, reaching New York on May 8.

It was a sorry crowd that was dumped into the prison in the basement of the city hall at Ilheos. Their different experiences would require much more space than I am allowed. Every one of them had been cruelly beaten and maltreated by the captors, who, once they had them disarmed, had mobbed them and tried to kill them. Magalli was badly wounded in both legs and in the head. Two of the soldiers guarding the prisoners were shot by bullets aimed at the prisoners.

At Aguas Prietos the populace had received the "insurrectos" with open arms. The fact was apparent that if the revolution had been declared before we left the story might have been a very different one. The fight we had put up made us friends on every hand and during the two years and two days that they were in jail they were showered with gifts and attentions and in the second trial there was no difficulty whatsoever about their acquittal. Parker became an engineer on the new railroad building in the State of Bahia. Pfannebecker will return to the country to assume an excellent position. The Kincaids are off adventuring elsewhere. Magalli is insane and there is an end of the story.

One interesting thing is the hero that the people made of Magalli. Things were named for him as they were named for Trilby in the Trilby craze in America. One of the new stores that was christened, as South Americans christen their places of business, has "Republica Magalli" in big letters on the wall of it. He, poor fellow, is in no condition to enjoy his celebrity and it will be a long time before I myself can move without wrenching a wounded part.