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...Edgar was standing just next to Ravioli. So that was what was causing that shaking sensation. Poor Ravioli, Edgar thought, and was about to make some up-bucking remark when Ravioli moved to the other side of the boat without carrying off that shaking with him. Golly, Edgar thought, it's me.

...That searchlight's got me bothered," Buck said. "Only way to get rid of it is to shoot it out, and the barrage from the ships won't start for half an hour yet." Buck went on to explain that if they got picked up by that light, their only concern with anything that might happen thirty minutes later would be purely a posthumous one.

...Look!" Edgar said. "Isn't that per-

...Then Ravioli, who had joined the audi

...le, said, "Club."

...How was that?" Buck said.

...He said 'Club,'" Edgar reported.

...Look," Ravioli said, pointing.

...They looked in the direction in which he was pointing off the starboard stern and saw a large shape swinging in behind them. You could tell which way it was traveling by its white wake. It was moving in behind them and cutting them off from the ships.

...Enemy patrol boat," Buck said, his voice tight and tense. Instantly he shut off his throttle to do away with the wake the scout boat was making.

...Nice and quiet now," Buck said. "Just take it easy and load up everything we've got that'll shoot. Be ready, but don't start it. They've got much heavier guns and are going to blow us out of the water, once it starts."

...When Buck had stopped, so had the patrol boat. Now it began inching up on them, and Buck gave the scout boat just a touch of throttle and set her creeping in toward the shore.

...Oughtn't we be sort of oozing back toward our warships?" Edgar ventured.

...No. We've got to locate that radio tower. Once we do and send back flashes with our light gun, they'll know where it is, will mark the bearing, and we can go over the side and head for the brush."

...But won't these people in the patrol boat wedge us in against the beach and have us just where they want us?"

...No. We draw less water than they do."

...Hardly had Buck spoken when the patrol boat put on full throttle and made for the scout boat. Buck did the same, and the chase was on, with both vessels heading straight for the shore. Here the water was smoother than it had been farther out, and the scout boat could run, however bumpily, at full speed.

...There's land a hundred yards away!" Edgar yelled. "You're going to ground her!"

...Another twenty-five yards and I'll heel her over! If they wait that long to turn, they'll stick on the beach!"

...Then, only seventy-five yards from the land and going full tilt, Buck brought her hard over to the right. He'd come in from the ship a few degrees to the left of his probable bearing, so that he could be sure his landmark would not lie on his left.

...Almost at the same moment the patrol boat turned. Hardly had the boats turned on these parallel courses when a searchlight beam stabbed out through the night from the patrol boat and focused on the side of Buck's head.

...Don't look into that light!" Buck yelled. "Watch for that tower over on the land!"

...I see it," Edgar yelled, "there against the stars! It's on that hill almost abeam of us!"

...Now the patrol boat was opening up with its 20-mm. tracer shells, and Buck had to yell to be heard. "Get the light gun, Ravi, and signal the convoy that the tower's here! You other guys let 'em have it!"

...Edgar popped inside the swivel ring of a .30-caliber machine gun and set it chattering, while the other fellows manned other weapons.

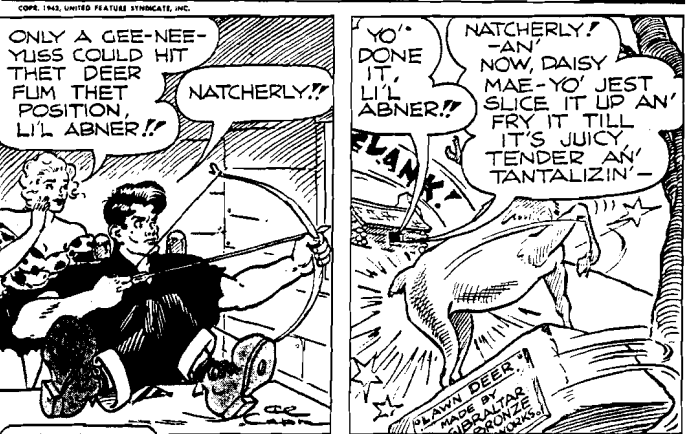
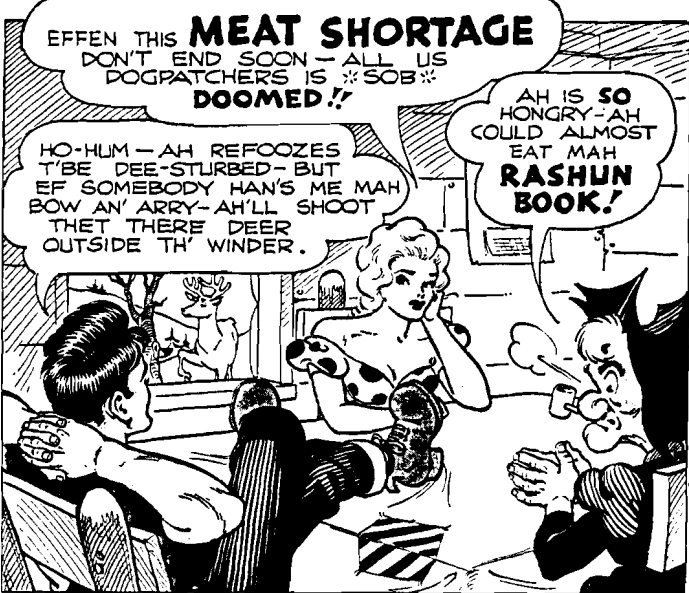
...Yell when the message is sent!" Buck shouted. "Because I'm going to beach her when it is!"

...A few seconds later, Ravioli yelled, "They got it!" and Buck came hard over on the wheel, but the turn never materialized, because just then four of those 20's tore into the forward part of the boat and blew the bow off, and Buck yelled, "Jump to port!" and everybody did. But Edgar saw that Ravioli had had to push off with one leg, and that the other had been dangling.

...As Edgar's head came out of the water

# LIL ABNER

by AL CAPP



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