

# **SAHARA**

## **ADVENTURE SERIES**

### **38. Under a Blazing Sky**



**MEIRING FOUCHE**



# UNDER A BLAZING SKY

*by*

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## SUMMARY

The narrative commences at Fort Jacques, a French stronghold in the Sahara, where a tense atmosphere prevails. Legionnaire Emil Tredoux, a member of the Secret Army Organisation, is bound to a post. Captain Cordier, the commander, announces that Tredoux will be executed for treason. The Secret Army Organisation desires Algeria to remain part of France, contrary to the French government's decision to grant independence. Cordier fears that Tredoux's propaganda could sway the entire garrison and intends to make an example of him. He requests volunteers for the firing squad, yet no one steps forward. The silence is broken when Teuns Stegmann, a South African in the Foreign Legion, steps forward.

Teuns's decision is rooted in a conflict with Tredoux months prior. During a private conversation in the washroom, Tredoux attempted to recruit Teuns to join the Secret Army. Teuns refused and subsequently threatened to report Tredoux. After Teuns informed Captain Cordier about Tredoux's actions, Cordier confronted Tredoux, leading to the planned execution. The atmosphere within the fortress grows more sombre as the time of Tredoux's execution draws nearer. Following the execution, a sense of impending doom pervades the fort. Zelda Tredoux, Emil's twin sister, learns of her brother's death and swears vengeance. The Secret Army elevates Emil to martyrdom and seeks retribution.

Theuns and his comrades, Podolski and Fritz Mundt, are dispatched back to Fort Jacques with a reinforcement column. Upon their return, they observe vultures near the fort, signalling trouble. Just outside the fort, Teuns and the rest of the garrison discover a gruesome scene. They find the corpses of legionnaires executed there. The reinforcement column is led into an ambush and captured by members of the Secret Army Organisation. Zelda introduces herself as the new commander of the fort. While Teuns devises plans for escape, he quickly realises the only recourse involves betrayal and deception, to save the fate of his



comrades. Executing his plan, he finds himself engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with his captors. Teuns must employ all his skill and ingenuity to escape the clutches of the Secret Army and put an end to Zelda's cruel future schemes. Will Theuns succeed in destroying the Secret Army and preventing the execution of his comrades, or will the secrets buried in the sand remain sealed forever?



## EXTRACT

It is then that Neger Moreno makes a decision. For a moment, he finds himself in a bitter dilemma. Is mademoiselle Zelda Tredoux outside the fortress or is she inside the fortress? Moreno decides she is outside the fortress, and as it happens, he decides correctly.

He steps unnoticed a few paces closer to the ruined flag tower. "Legionnaire," says Moreno, "you are deceiving me. Pick up the mademoiselle and show her to me. Then I shall believe you. Show the mademoiselle to me, or I shall give the order for the firing squads to shoot. I give you ten counts, Legionnaire."

With that, Moreno turns and returns to the firing squads. They still stand ready. They are still aiming at the forty-three men against the wall.

Teuns Stegmann feels that he stands on the edge of an abyss. Just one short command from Moreno, and those forty-three men die.

Moreno begins to count slowly, downwards from ten to one.

When he reaches eight, Teuns addresses him again.

"Give me a chance, Moreno. I will pick up the mademoiselle and show her to you."

Moreno continues counting while Teuns ducks behind the broken wall of the flag tower. "Five... four... three..."

When Moreno says two, Teuns Stegmann quickly straightens up. Moreno looks at him, but it is not the mademoiselle the legionnaire holds in his hands. It is a brand-new rapid-fire rifle.



## 38. UNDER A BLAZING SKY

### Chapter 1

On the clock face of Fort Jacques in the Sahara, it is precisely a quarter to seven.

The quadrangle of the small French fortress presents a singular scene. An entire garrison of 120 men stands at attention, all save one.

That man is Emil Tredoux. He is a short, dark Frenchman, and his hands are bound behind his back to an upright post against the inner wall of the quadrangle.

Emil Tredoux looks up at the clock face. He looks intently at the time and with a dreadful sense of finality.

For Emil Tredoux has precisely another quarter of an hour to live.

Before the garrison standing stiffly at attention, stands the commander of Fort Jacques, Captain Jaeme Cordier.

“Soldiers of Fort Jacques,” says Captain Cordier, “we have an unpleasant duty this morning. Our duty as soldiers of the French Foreign Legion dictates that we put a comrade to death, Private Emil Tredoux. It is important that I speak to you about it. I want you to know all the circumstances before we proceed with this unpleasant step.

“Private Tredoux has proven to be a member of the Secret Army Organisation. For those of you who do not know who the Secret Army Organisation is, I shall tell you. It is an organisation of hot-headed Frenchmen who refuse to accept the decision of the French government that the entire populace of Algeria shall decide on the future of Algeria. The Secret Army Organisation prefers that Algeria remain exclusively French. It is unnecessary for me to state how much blood has already been shed between the French and the Algerians in Algeria. It is also unnecessary for me to tell you that the French government has decided to grant Algeria independence. You all know this. It is against these



decisions of the French government that Private Emil Tredoux has opposed them here in Fort Jacques. Private Tredoux has admitted to me that he attempted to persuade men in this fortress to join the Secret Army Organisation, against the Foreign Legion and against the French army and government. As far as I am concerned, legionnaires, this is treason of the highest order. It is treason against the French state, treason against the French army, treason against the Foreign Legion. I deem it my responsibility in the circumstances to execute Private Tredoux immediately.”

Captain Cordier surveys the men. Slowly and attentively he surveys them, for he has no conception of how far the propaganda of Tredoux has already permeated this garrison. Perhaps the majority of these men are already favourably disposed towards the Secret Army Organisation. Perhaps most of them have already become disloyal to the French Foreign Legion. That is why he takes this drastic step this morning. He must make an example of Tredoux, otherwise, he will later be faced with a garrison three-quarters of which is no longer loyal to the Foreign Legion.

Captain Cordier is a loyal Frenchman and a staunch supporter of the Foreign Legion through and through. Almost his entire life he has served in the Foreign Legion. He is proud of it as a mother is of her child, and he is surely the last man who would allow anyone to raise a hand against the Legion. Let alone a member of the Legion itself.

“I have told you the story of Legionnaire Tredoux,” says Captain Cordier. “This morning he is going to be executed. I ask for six volunteers to step forward as members of the firing squad. Will six volunteers please step forward? Time is short.”

An intense silence descends upon the quadrangle. Not a single man stirs. It seems as though they have not heard Cordier, for at this moment every man in this quadrangle wrestles with his own conscience. It is a bitter thing to kill a colleague and a comrade. Conversely, there is the issue of military discipline. When you are a soldier, you do as you are



told.

There is one man in particular here in the line who is currently thinking deeply. He is a tall, blond, athletic fellow with clear eyes and a powerful body. He is not a Frenchman or a Spaniard or a German or an Italian. He is a South African from the old Boland. His name is Teuns Stegmann.

Teuns Stegmann has special reason to think deeply. This business with Emil Tredoux did not start today or yesterday. It began several months ago already. One day in the washroom of the fortress.

Coincidentally, Teuns and Tredoux were alone that afternoon in the washroom. It was then that Tredoux approached him. "Legionnaire," Tredoux had said then, "I wish to speak with you. I wish to ask for your support for the French Secret Army Organisation."

Teuns had become very quiet and stared at the man aghast.

"What are you talking about now, Tredoux?" the South African had asked. "This is the French Foreign Legion. The French Foreign Legion is, as far as I know, loyal to the French government. The Secret Army Organisation opposes the French government. Are you asking me to commit treason?"

"I am asking you to keep Algeria for France," Tredoux had answered. "I ask for your support so that France will always govern Algeria."

"Look here, mate," was Teuns's reply. "I am a soldier, a soldier of the Foreign Legion. I have nothing to do with politics. If the French government wants to give all the Mohammedan inhabitants of Algeria also the right to govern their country along with the French, then that is their affair. I have no issue with that."

Emil Tredoux is a short-tempered man. From childhood, he has been accustomed to getting his own way, which is why he became angry with Teuns Stegmann that day.



“So,” he had said, “then you are also one of the yes-men who just always do as they are told. You have no ambition to possess freedom. You have no feeling for the French people in Algeria.”

One word led to another and eventually Teuns Stegmann was furious. It was then that he uttered the warning towards Emil Tredoux which he still remembers so clearly.

“I warn you, Tredoux. If you do not cease this subversive activity of yours, I will be obliged to report it to the commanding officer of this fortress.”

This made Private Tredoux so furious that he almost came to blows with Teuns. If it were not that the South African was so much more powerful than he, Tredoux would certainly have attacked him, for Emil Tredoux is an embittered man. He is actually more politician than soldier. Before he came to this fortress, while he was still in the barracks in Algiers, he often slipped away to the mass rallies of the Secret Army Organisation. There he listened to the inciting speeches and to the wild intentions of the organisation.

He uttered a dreadful warning to Teuns Stegmann. “Go report me if you wish, Legionnaire,” Emil Tredoux had said back then, “but then just be prepared to bear the consequences. I can assure you that your fate will be a bitter one once the Secret Army Organisation gets hold of you.”

It was then that Teuns Stegmann told Emil Tredoux the truth straight out. “Legionnaire,” were his words, “I don’t think I am going to delay. I am going to the commander immediately, today. It is my duty to tell him what is going on here. It is my duty to warn him when I see a sign of treason within a fortress of the French Foreign Legion.”

Thus Teuns Stegmann and Emil Tredoux parted ways that day. Teuns went to Captain Cordier that same afternoon. Cordier was shocked to his core by what Teuns told him. He wandered around his quarters without knowing what to do. So upset was he that he completely forgot about Teuns who was there with him. After standing before the window



for a good ten minutes, he finally turned around and saw Teuns standing there.

“Thank you, Legionnaire, for coming to tell me,” were Cordier’s words. “I will attend to it.”

But Captain Cordier did not quickly attend to what Teuns Stegmann had come to tell him. For him, a time of deep anguish ensued. Days and nights Cordier pondered what to do. He had just received specific instructions from high command that all fortress commanders must keep their eyes open for the subversive influences of the Secret Army Organisation.

It was pointed out that the secret organisation had a considerable number of supporters in the regular French army and even in the Foreign Legion. This brought Cordier sharply to the realisation of his duty, but on the other hand, he wrestled with the terrible decision whether he should do something against this legionnaire.

Captain Cordier began to investigate covertly. He did it very carefully and very thoroughly. The result thereof was that he stumbled upon a dark conspiracy. A conspiracy within the small fortress about which he could discover nothing, yes, literally nothing further, except that Tredoux was a supporter of the Secret Army Organisation. Cordier determined that something was brewing in Fort Jacques, and this brought him to the bitter decision. It made him decide to do something almost unheard of. It brought him to take the law into his own hands and mete out the punishment himself, and moreover, to administer the ultimate penalty.

One afternoon, Cordier summoned Tredoux to his quarters. He asked him straight out if he was a member of the Secret Army Organisation, and without batting an eyelid, Tredoux confessed that he was not only a member of the organisation but an enthusiastic organiser for it. The man’s passionate indifference and his incredible zeal utterly dumbfounded Cordier. It also frightened him. It prompted him to ask



Tredoux a direct question. "How many supporters does the organisation have in Fort Jacques?"

But there Cordier miscalculated with Tredoux. Tredoux bluntly refused to give even an indication of how many men in Fort Jacques were supporters of the Secret Army Organisation.

Actually, it was Tredoux's refusal that brought Cordier to the bitter decision, the decision to make an example through drastic action against the Secret Army Organisation.

So it is that Emil Tredoux, a popular, brave soldier of France, now stands tied to the post here in the quadrangle of Fort Jacques.

Although it is early, the first heat of the Sahara is already clearly perceptible. The men standing there so stiffly at attention feel the sweat run out from under their kepis. They feel the sweat against their ribs and on their upper lips.

They see the shadow of a vulture circling high above the fortress, as if the wretched bird of prey has a premonition of what is to take place here today. Some of them shiver as they look at the shadow. Most of them regard it as an omen of misfortune, of blood, and of death.

Captain Cordier finds it necessary to speak to the men once more. "Legionnaires," he says, "I ask for six volunteers to serve in the firing squad. Must I ask it once more?"

There by the post, Emil Tredoux smiles. He looks at the few ranks of men standing so neatly at attention. He knows his friends in those ranks. He also knows his enemies. He looks at the tall man in the front rank, Teuns Stegmann.

Tredoux takes heart. If Stegmann is not prepared to step forward, who else then would be willing?

At this moment, each one of those men wrestles with a dark decision. Your comrade versus the law, your personal feelings versus the