

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES

GREAT IMPOSTERS

THE MAN OF MANY FACES

Ferdinand Waldo Demara had lied and cheated all his life. But he'd also helped many people. So what do you think? Was he a good man—or a sick liar?

Demara was born in Massachusetts, in 1921. His family was wealthy, and life was comfortable. At school, Demara wasn't a great student, but he read books on a great many subjects. And he also had a photographic memory, which made learning much easier.

In 1932, the Depression wiped out his father's business. Suddenly, the family was poor. Demara lost the comfortable life he knew, as well as his social status. These losses affected him deeply.

As a teenager, he left home and joined a monastery. But a monk's life was too quiet for him, and he didn't stay long.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, Demara was eager to serve his country. He joined the navy, but soon became bored with navy life. One day, he had a meeting with the base commander. When the commander wasn't looking, Demara lit a match soaked with paraffin. He dropped the match into a wastebasket and watched the papers burst into flames. During the confusion that followed, Demara made his move. He stole official stationery from the commander's desk and quickly tucked it in his shirt.

Soon after that, Demara faked his own death. Everyone thought he'd drowned. Then he wrote letters on the official navy stationery to create a new identity—Dr. Robert Linton French.

As Dr. French, Demara got a job at a college in Pennsylvania. Although he'd barely finished high school, he was now head of the school of psychology. Then, unfortunately for Demara, the navy

tracked him down. He spent the next 18 months in a military prison.

In 1950, Demara was hired as an administrator at the Notre Dame Normal School in Maine. Why not? He had papers to prove that he was a zoologist and a cancer researcher. His new name was Dr. Cecil Hamann.

Demara became friends with Dr. Joseph Cyr, a Canadian doctor. Demara promised to help him get a license to practice medicine in the United States. Give your credentials to me, Demara said, and I'll make sure they get into the right hands. But Dr. Cyr had no idea who he was dealing with. Demara took the papers and used them to join the Royal Canadian Navy—as a doctor.

Soon Demara was on board a navy ship. The Korean War was raging as the ship headed in that direction. Now Demara faced the biggest challenge of his life. He had to treat people's illnesses and injuries—without having one minute of

training or practice! One day the ship's captain complained about his three impacted teeth. Moments before taking them out, Demara grabbed a medical book and read what to do.

One night, during a violent storm, 16 South Korean soldiers came on board. All were wounded; all needed attention. Demara picked shrapnel from their wounds, then cleaned and bandaged them. He stopped arteries from bleeding. He successfully collapsed the lung of a soldier who had tuberculosis. Then he opened up a soldier's chest and removed a bullet lodged close to his heart. By then, he'd read quite a lot about medical care.

Demara admitted later that he'd prayed he wouldn't kill anyone. Yet all the while he felt a self-confidence he couldn't understand. And he found the experience tremendously exciting.

He continued working as a doctor in Korea. People loved him. But meanwhile, back in Canada, the real Doctor Cyr kept

hearing about the wonderful work he was doing in Korea, so he called the Royal Canadian Navy. Demara insisted he was really Dr. Hamann. But the navy soon realized his story was false, and Demara was dismissed.

In 1952, Demara sold his story to a popular magazine for \$2,500. He sent all but \$500 to his mother.

The magazine story caused Demara problems. Now, when he'd create a new identity and apply for a job, many people already knew who he was.

Demara then applied for a job in the Texas prison system. As references he listed Dr. Hamann and a child counselor named Fred Demara. Using the name Ben W. Jones, he got the job. He rose quickly in the ranks of the prison system. Finally, he became an assistant warden. But then a prisoner recognized him from the magazine story. Demara sneaked away in the night before he was caught.

Later, Demara was arrested for