

SPORTS

A Treasure Buried Deep

BY HANK BURCHARD

One of the odder collections of men and women in the world will get together in Washington Saturday to tell tales that may or may not be true about a buried treasure that may or may not exist.

For 15 years the Beale Cypher Association has been in hot and not-so-hot pursuit of tons of gold, silver and jewels said to have been buried in Bedford County, Virginia, about 1820 by a party of adventurers led by a rascal named Thomas Jefferson Beale.

The treasure, so the story goes, is 2,921 pounds of gold and 5,100 pounds of silver, plus jewels then worth \$13,000. The present value would be anywhere from \$5 million to \$15 million, depending upon the fineness of the metal and the quality of the jewels.

The gold and silver are supposed have been mined — or looted — near Santa Fe by Bell's party. To save weight they traded some of it for precious stones in St. Louis, and brought the rest back by wagon train to Bufords, now Montvale, Virginia, along the flank of the Blue Ridge. A couple of wagon trains, actually, one in 1819 and the other two years later.

Although such a treasure would have made rich men of them all, their lust was unslaked and they followed Beale back West for another haul. Beale left behind a strongbox, which he entrusted to tavern-keeper Robert Morris with instructions that it was to be opened if unclaimed for more than 10 years.

Beale never came back and Morris forgot about the box for 23 years. When he opened it he found two letters to him from Beale, plus three long texts in number codes. The letters told of the treasure and said the code keys were in the mail; they never arrived, and Morris spent 17 years trying to figure out what the hell.

In 1862, half nuts and half dead, Morris passed the papers to James B. Ward, then a prosperous and respected citizen of Lynchburg. Ward cracked Code No. 2, which turned out to be a substitution cipher based on the Declaration of Independence. It described the alleged treasure and said directions for finding it were in Code No. 1 and that the next of kin of the adventurers were listed in No. 3, in case the finder of the treasure should want to look them up and give it away.

For the next two decades Ward sought the key texts for the other ciphers, trying out every document he could lay hands on that Beale might have used. In 1885, no longer prosperous and by then sick of the whole damned thing, he published the codes and an account of their provenance.

Devote only such time as can be spared from your legitimate business to the task, his pamphlet warned, and if you cannot spare the time, let the matter alone.

For nearly a century that very good advice has been ignored by hundreds if not thousands of treasure-hunters ranging from jerks to judges. In libraries, at work, alone in garrets, they have pondered the ciphers. Singlehandedly or in cabals, with bulldozers and dynamite in daylight or stealthily shoveling in the dark of the moon, they have dug up virtually every likely piece of ground from the Peaks of Otter to the pigsties of Roanoke area farmers (who are so fed up with the nonsense that most will no longer talk about it and some are reputed to shoot trespassers on sight).

The Beale Hoard waxed and waned in popularity among treasure hunters over the course of several generations until Carl



THE PEAKS OF OTTER, DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE BLUE RIDGE.

is director of computer sciences for Sperry Univac and a puckish person; besides wearing out a series of computers on the Beale numbers, he has drawn no end of other computer types, cryptanalysts, retired spooks, historians and crazies into the search. To impose some order on the thing they organized the nonprofit ("Boy, are we nonprofit!") Beale Cypher Society.

Saturday Hammer will host the society's second international symposium at Sperry Univac headquarters, 2121 Wisconsin Avenue NW. It will be open to the public because, Hammer said, "You never know what insights and special knowledge you might get from strangers. Half our members just walked in off the street, so to speak. And anyway, I have contracted with a caterer for a bunch of box lunches with cheese and wine, and if they don't get eaten I get stuck for it. The registration fee of \$15 includes lunch; if more people show up than we can feed, we'll give them \$5 back and they can go down the street for hamburgers."

Hammer is sure that, just as at the 1972 symposium, several people, among them retired Army person J.J. Holland of Florida, will announce that they have solved the ciphers. He knows that the solutions will disagree, and that the arguments will be fierce. He knows that sitting to the side, listening to everything and saying nothing, will be a number of ferret-faced men who use variable names and no fixed addresses.

There may be one or two others who talk all the time, in languages that are vaguely

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NG LIFE

Up in Bedford County



By The Associated Press.

up and prove, using the same logic somebody else just used to "solve" the Beale mystery, that T.J. Beale never existed, that the earth is flat, and that the room is empty. With a little luck there may be fistfights.

Hammer doesn't know but what the whole thing is a hoax, and doesn't give a damn whether there is a treasure or no. But he has fed the Beale numbers into computers often enough, using a host of highly sophisticated programs, to be persuaded that they are in fact codes rather than random numbers, and he will not rest until those numbers are made to cough up the words they conceal.

"We have played games with these numbers that would take a million men a billion years to duplicate with pencil and paper," Hammer said. "We have searched out just about every scrap of the historical record that might give a clue. And a number of us have been over the ground very carefully, although I am convinced that cryptanalysis is the only fruitful line of attack."

"There is a message in those codes, and if it turns out to be something like, 'April Fool, Sucker,' so what? If Tommy Beale has played a trick on me, I've come out ahead, because this whole affair has been fascinating and just plain fun."

"I think it is fair to say that this effort has engaged at least 10 percent of the best cryptanalytic minds in the country, and represents much more than the value of the treasure even if it should be just as described. And not a dime of it should be begrudged; the work — even the lines that

paid for itself in advancing and refining computer research."

There is, for instance, a young man of whom Hammer and Beale Society executive director Per Holst (chief of research at Massachusetts Foxboro Laboratories) are very proud. He has made a lot of progress on the ciphers using "relaxation algorithms," which perhaps he invented. Weekend's correspondent could not follow the explanation, but anyway Hammer and Holst are high on the fellow, and are looking forward to feeding him to the crazies Saturday.

David Kahn, author of *The Codebreakers*, has investigated and thought long about the Beale Hoard, and is persuaded that it's a clever, elaborate and thoroughgoing hoax.

The middle cipher is the only genuine one, he says, and was constructed to whet the appetite for the others. "I don't think they're real; the reason people keep coming up with solutions for them is that they want solutions so badly that they force the numbers rather than following them."

Kahn told the society's members as much in 1972; they listened politely, applauded warmly, and went on with the hunt.

WHERE THE LOOT LIES, MAYBE

Here's the first of the three Beale Ciphers, which supposedly gives the location of the vault and its treasure:

71, 194, 38, 1701, 89, 76, 11, 83, 1629, 48, 94,
63, 132, 16, 111, 95, 84, 341, 975, 14, 40, 64,
27, 81, 139, 213, 63, 90, 1120, 8, 15, 3, 128,
2018, 40, 74, 758, 485, 604, 230, 436, 684,
582, 150, 251, 284, 308, 231, 124, 211, 486,
225, 401, 370, 11, 101, 305, 139, 189, 17, 33,
88, 208, 193, 145, 1, 94, 73, 416, 918, 263, 28,
500, 538, 358, 117, 136, 219, 27, 176, 130, 10,
460, 25, 485, 18, 436, 65, 84, 200, 283, 118,
320, 138, 36, 418, 280, 15, 71, 224, 961, 44,
16, 401, 39, 88, 61, 304, 12, 21, 24, 283, 134,
92, 63, 246, 486, 682, 7, 219, 184, 360, 780,
18, 64, 463, 474, 131, 160, 79, 73, 440, 95, 18,
64, 581, 34, 60, 192, 807, 400, 17, 51, 12, 103,
320, 82, 116, 97, 108, 862, 70, 60, 1317, 471,
540, 208, 121, 890, 346, 36, 150, 59, 568, 614,
18, 120, 63, 219, 812, 2160, 1780, 99, 35, 18,
21, 136, 872, 15, 28, 170, 88, 4, 30, 44, 112,
18, 147, 436, 195, 320, 37, 122, 113, 6, 140, 8,
120, 305, 42, 58, 461, 44, 106, 301, 13, 408,
680, 93, 86, 116, 530, 82, 563, 9, 102, 36, 416,
89, 71, 216, 728, 965, 818, 2, 38, 121, 195, 14,
326, 148, 234, 18, 55, 131, 234, 361, 824, 8,
81, 623, 48, 961, 19, 28, 33, 10, 1101, 365, 93,
88, 181, 275, 346, 201, 206, 86, 36, 219, 320,
829, 840, 68, 326, 19, 48, 122, 85, 216, 284,
919, 881, 326, 985, 233, 64, 68, 232, 431, 960,
50, 29, 81, 216, 321, 603, 14, 612, 81, 360, 86,
51, 62, 194, 78, 60, 200, 314, 676, 112, 4, 28,
18, 61, 136, 247, 819, 921, 1060, 464, 895, 10,
6, 66, 119, 38, 41, 49, 602, 423, 962, 302, 294,
875, 78, 14, 23, 111, 109, 62, 31, 501, 823,
216, 280, 84, 24, 150, 1000, 162, 286, 19, 21,
17, 840, 19, 242, 31, 86, 234, 140, 607, 115,
33, 131, 67, 104, 86, 82, 88, 16, 80, 121, 67,
95, 122, 216, 548, 56, 11, 201, 77, 564, 218,
66, 887, 890, 236, 154, 211, 10, 93, 34, 119,
56, 216, 119, 71, 218, 1164, 1496, 1817, 51,
89, 210, 86, 3, 19, 540, 232, 22, 141, 617, 84,
290, 80, 46, 207, 411, 150, 29, 38, 46, 172, 85,
194, 86, 261, 543, 897, 624, 18, 212, 116, 127,
931, 19, 4, 63, 96, 12, 101, 418, 16, 140, 230,
460, 538, 19, 27, 88, 612, 1431, 90, 716, 275,
74, 83, 11, 426, 89, 72, 84, 1300, 1706, 814,
221, 132, 40, 102, 34, 858, 975, 1101, 84, 16,
79, 23, 16, 81, 122, 324, 403, 912, 227, 936,
447, 55, 86, 34, 43, 212, 107, 96, 314, 264,
1065, 823, 328, 601, 203, 124, 95, 216, 814,
2806, 654, 820, 2, 301, 112, 176, 213, 71, 87,
86, 202, 35, 10, 2, 41, 17, 84, 221, 736, 820,
214, 11, 60, 760.

BEALE TREASURE SYMPOSIUM — Begins at 8:00 Saturday at Sperry 100.