

*Trapped in the
Jungle!*

by

F. S. Brereton

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Trapped in the Jungle!

Date of first publication: 1945

Author: Frederick Sadleir Brereton (1872-1957)

Date first posted: Jan. 23, 2021

Date last updated: Jan. 23, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210161

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



TRAPPED IN THE JUNGLE!

By
LT.-COL. F. S. BRERETON, C.B.E.

Illustrated by
VERNON SOPER

HOLLIS AND CARTER LTD.
25 ASHLEY PLACE
LONDON
S.W.1

First published in 1945

Printed by Jarrold & Sons, Ltd., Norwich

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I [THE WIDE PACIFIC](#)
- II [A JAPANESE RASCAL](#)
- III [THE MERCHANT MARINE](#)
- IV [JAPAN SEEKS AN EASTERN EMPIRE](#)
- V [WITH THE JUNGLE FIGHTERS](#)
- VI [DAVID LEADS AN EXPEDITION](#)
- VII [HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING](#)
- VIII [INTO THE LIONS' DEN](#)
- IX [A CHINESE PATRIOT](#)
- X [FILIPINO FISHERMEN](#)
- XI [JAPANESE PRISONERS](#)
- XII [THE WAY OF ESCAPE](#)
- XIII [GUERRILLAS TO THE RESCUE](#)
- XIV [DEFENDERS OF BATAAN](#)
- XV [THE ROAD TO CORREGIDOR](#)
- XVI [DOUGHBOYS AT BAY](#)
- XVII [GENERAL MACARTHUR TRIUMPHS](#)
- XVIII [THE END OF HATO](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The swimmers were stunned by the violence of the explosion

“Put her in closer, lads,” shouted the captain

“Hit! Hit! Sure ye’ve got him,” shouted Mike, beside himself with joy.

Mike floored him with a terrific blow of his fist

“Stop that Chinaman,” shouted Hato

The two were dragged from the water

A beam of light shone from the electric torch and played full upon the
three

He threw an arm round the watcher’s neck

Trapped in the Jungle!

CHAPTER I

THE WIDE PACIFIC

Mystery floats across the broad bosom of the gigantic reaches of the Pacific Ocean. But it would be safe to say that no greater mystery was ever presented to the wondering eyes of man than that which suddenly and unexpectedly raised its head at dawn of day on a certain December morn in the year of grace 1941.

A white yacht floated, as yet a mere misty shape, for the day had not yet broken, though an eastern glow heralded the coming morn. She rolled and wallowed gently from side to side, heaving as the vast ocean lifted and fell. She might have been a living thing, still asleep under the disappearing stars, yet stirring from her all-night slumber, slowly awakening to greet the rising sun.

And as the eastern glow—a purple mist it appeared—broadened and brightened, changing from purple to golden-orange, banishing the inky blackness of a tropic night which had been relieved by such glimmering from the stars as is to be seen only in far eastern places, she seemed to awaken into life, to throw off all lassitude, to rub her shapely eyes as it were, and to start into active life. She surged forward, propelled by a strong puff of wind which filled the tiny foresail under which alone she had passed the hours of darkness.

There were figures on her deck, a tall man, whose athletic frame became clearer as the light brightened, two youths, one unusually tall, and a native boy of as yet uncertain nationality. All but the native were clad in swimming-trunks and stood at the rail waiting to take their usual morning plunge.

It was at that precise moment, when dawn swept the ocean with that same suddenness with which darkness falls in the tropics, that this mysterious affair happened. Not a ship was in sight. The myriad coral islets which stud the wide Pacific, with their waving palms and their still lagoons flashing beneath the sun, were far away, many of them hundreds of miles. Honolulu, dream island of this ocean, home of the Pacific fleet and chief

garrison of the United States in those waters, was too far distant to be seen. There were three smudges of smoke on the far horizon which probably denoted ships, and it seemed that birds of unusual size were hovering and darting to and fro in that direction. But there was no sound, save for the gentle lap of water soughing against the sides of the yacht and the two succeeding splashes as the two youths dived into the ocean.

A great ugly shape reared itself as if it were some marine monster, and rose beside the yacht, the swirl it made rocking the vessel. First appeared a periscope, through which no doubt the submarine commander had kept the yacht under observation. Then the conning-tower heaved above the surface, followed by the long deck from which a flood cascaded. There was the sound of some metal latch being operated. A dome-shaped hood swung upward, and in a few moments a swarm of dusky, stocky figures tumbled out and stood at attention on the deck.

At that moment, too, a swarthy figure erected itself behind the rail of the conning-tower and shouted a sharp order. Instantly a grappling-iron or some similar sort of instrument was heaved across the narrow space separating the two vessels, and as the tall man aboard the yacht gaped and gasped and the native cowered, the yacht was dragged to the side of the submarine. The crew boarded her as another sharp order was given, and in a trice the tall man, owner of the yacht perhaps, was seized and hurried across the deck and was dragged aboard this pirate underwater vessel.

It was an astounding affair. The two young fellows who had plunged into the sea for their usual morning swim hardly grasped the situation. Indeed, it was difficult to believe that anything out of the ordinary had happened, or even could have happened. For the yacht was there, as trim and neat and graceful as ever. The figure of the native servant could be seen. Only the owner of the craft had disappeared, while beside the vessel floated the ugly form of a submarine.

“Wa-al, I never!”

“What’s—it’s a sub,” gasped the other youth, shaking the water from his eyes.

“You’ve said it,” came the drawled response. “A sub. A Jap sub.”

“But—I say, what have they done to Mr. Baines? This is a hold-up.”

“That fellow,” shouted the one who had first spluttered his astonishment. “Look at him on the bridge. The son of a gun!”

The swarthy officer who had shouted his orders reared his head again above the rail of the conning-tower and waved. An order again snapped from his lips, while the members of the crew who had swarmed aboard the yacht and had abducted the owner, hustled him to the conning-tower and then forced him to descend into the interior of the vessel. Three of the crew leaped the space between the two ships and dived into the interior of the yacht. A minute later they came racing on deck again and once more gained the deck of the submarine.

“It is done,” the leader reported. “The bomb is placed and the fuse lighted. In less than five minutes the yacht will disappear.”

An electric hooter screeched. Men of the submarine still on her deck swarmed into the conning-tower and disappeared. A solitary figure remained for only a few seconds, sweeping the surface of the ocean to make sure that he was not observed. His gaze fell on the two bobbing heads just beyond the yacht and his right hand felt for the revolver at his hip.

“In less than two minutes,” called his junior. “Perhaps——”

Casting a last swift and malicious glance at the two youths treading water within so few feet of him, the commander of this pirate submarine waved to them ironically. Then he dived into the interior of his vessel. The hood clanked to with a resounding bang, and within a few moments the subdued sound of a motor broke the silence. The smooth waters of the Pacific were churned into foam at the after end of the submarine, and gathering way with incredible speed, she suddenly dived, her slippery deck dipped beneath the surface, her conning-tower disappeared in fantastic fashion, and in a trice even the periscope had been swallowed.

“Of all the cheek,” growled one of the youths, he of the drawling, American voice.

“It’s a kidnapping affair,” gasped his companion. “A Jap submarine commander seizes the person of a prominent and wealthy American citizen, and in peace-time, mark you.”

“Peace-time!” spluttered the other. “Peace-time, eh? You say that! Why America and Japan are on the very edge of war. It might happen to-morrow.”

“Watch Chu,” shouted his friend, and then choked and coughed to get rid of the flood of salt water which had filled his mouth.

They saw the only remaining figure aboard the yacht racing towards the stern. He bent low and disappeared below the shelter of the rail. Then he appeared again, and springing on to the rail took a header into the sea. It was

all too astonishing. The sudden appearance of that sinister submarine, the abduction of the owner of the yacht, and the equally precipitate disappearance of this Japanese pirate—for Japanese she was without a doubt—would provide subject for gossip and even for heated debate for days to come. But Chu was adding to the mystery. This Chinese “boy,” boon companion of the two young fellows paddling to keep their heads above the swelling surface of the immense Pacific, was abandoning the ship.

“Why?” demanded one of the swimmers.

“Why? Wa-al—Now—say David, that gets me.”

“Saw him cutting the dinghy loose,” cried the other, trying to lift himself higher out of the water so as to obtain a better view of his surroundings. “Perhaps——”

A shattering detonation shook the air. At one moment the graceful *Mignonette* rolled and heaved ever so gently, as if awaiting their return. And then her single mast shot into the air as if catapulted. Her deck rails burst asunder. The sea around shuddered as her planks were shattered, while the swimmers were partially stunned by the violence of the explosion.

“Masters, duck,” bellowed Chu. “Quick, masters. Under the water.”

Perhaps immersing their heads helped a trifle to minimise the force of the bursting bomb. It may have saved the swimmers from the hail of debris which fell around them, all it seemed that remained of the graceful *Mignonette*. No, not all, for as the vessel burst asunder and foundered a dinghy floated clear of the wreckage, but not entirely, the boat so much used on fishing excursions or to take them ashore when the yacht lay off some island.

It was a seaworthy little craft which could face Pacific swells with confidence, and which had in fact withstood no little battering when breezes swelled almost to gale proportions and warned those aboard her to head for the yacht or for the shore in case a sudden Pacific tornado should overwhelm them. The dinghy slouched in the water, head down, part of her woodwork shattered and carried away. Not more than four inches of planking kept the water out of her, so that if the wind were to increase and the sea be lashed by something even short of a gale she would run the risk of foundering. Yet she was the only floating object within miles, save for the widely scattered wreckage of the *Mignonette*.

“We get aboard her,” shouted the American.

“Where’s that submarine?” demanded David, he with the British accent. Not that fashions of speech mattered much at such a moment, or were even to be noted. Still the few sentences which had passed between them, blown from spluttering lips, sometimes half-drowned by water lapping into their mouths, had shown that one of the swimmers was nearly certainly of American origin. Or he might have come from Canada.

His companion on the other hand had without doubt been educated amidst British surroundings. His voice was clear, as clear that is to say, as circumstances permitted, and he possessed that quaint, hardly-to-be-described inflection of voice which one so often encounters from people of British origin, an inflection which at times creates antipathies, even dislike, and which, far oftener, is found so attractive by people of America.

How often had David, the gay-hearted English schoolboy, when travelling across the great spaces of the American continent, been teased about his accent! More than a few times natives of Western America had affected not to be able to understand him, while there was at least one occasion when an American miss seated behind the reception table of an hotel had detained the lad.

“Say, go on talking for a while. My! Isn’t it queer to hear you! And say! Do all the young fellows over there speak as you do?”

“Don’t matter where she is. We get aboard the dinghy and look around. Time to think about that ruffian of a commander when we’ve the dinghy between us and this ocean, not to mention sharks, which shouldn’t be forgotten. You come too, Chu.”



The swimmers were stunned by the violence of the explosion

They struck out for the boat and reaching her side hoisted themselves aboard, taking care not to upset the light craft, careful, too, not to tip her lest water should flow through the opening in her damaged timbers.

“Trim her!” commanded the American. “You squat here, David. Chu, get hold of the bailer. What about clothes?”

What about quite a number of important items! How were they to return to Honolulu? The cluster of islands which form the Hawaiian group were many miles to the eastward and the dinghy carried just a pair of oars and a tiny sail. What about food—and water. Yes, what about water, for presently the sun would be high in the heavens, suspended in a cloudless sky, and torrid heat would spread across the ocean. David glanced at the huge, glittering red ball just peeping above the distant horizon. Then he shouted.

“That chap again! Look!”

“The unutterable blackguard. What’s he doing?”

“Master, overboard again,” sang out Chu. Closer acquaintance showed that the native was undoubtedly a Chinaman, of uncertain age, for who can tell with any degree of certainty the probable years of one of this Oriental people? Chu might have been just twenty years of age. On the other hand, he might be quite forty. However many years he had actually seen he was still just “boy” to those who employed him, and though his command of the English tongue was not a matter for boasting, it was certainly better than the pidgin English one meets amongst his countrymen in the ports, and had moreover a quite distinct American flavouring, going to suggest, perhaps, that his employers were of that nationality. Chu glanced over his shoulder, saw the black, ungainly shape of the submarine heaving itself to the surface and promptly dived overboard, followed by his two young masters.

“Get over to this side of the dinghy,” spluttered David. “That Jap commander looks an evil customer.”

“He’s one of the greatest rogues I’ve ever met,” came the answer. “He’s drawn a revolver. There are men posted in the conning-tower with rifles. Get ready to sink.”

Spluttering fire broke from the underwater vessel. Bullets splashed around the dinghy and at least one of them struck its wooden sides with a sharp clipping sound. It seemed that, having blown the *Mignonette* to pieces and abducted the owner, the commander of this Japanese pirate vessel was determined to destroy all traces of his crime and remove all possible tale-bearers. He emptied his revolver at the dinghy and only ordered his men to cease fire when the magazines of the weapons were emptied. Then, unable to see those who had been aboard her, perhaps imagining that they were still

there and had succumbed to the fusillade, he barked an order, closed the conning-tower with a bang and crash-dived.

“Time to get aboard again,” sang out David. “Even if that rascally Jap isn’t here any longer there may be sharks. There are sure to be sharks, eh? Thought I saw a fin over there a while ago.”

The American grunted. He was at home in this wide ocean. Indeed, he knew the surroundings of the Hawaiian group of islands almost as well as the average fellow knows his garden. And there were few places in the surrounding seas and even farther afield that he had not visited. But his aversion to sharks was constant. Perhaps it had been inherited, just as is the natives’ hatred and fear of alligators in the rivers of Malaya and other Eastern parts.

Sharks were to be found in every corner of this ocean. You might take a morning plunge and feel reasonably secure, for the brutes would keep clear of a splashing figure, and crowds of bathers off the beaches overawed them. But not always. They were bold and ferocious. He had seen the bamboo pens erected off some Eastern bathing beaches to make assurance doubly sure, for within the palisades bathers could not be attacked. But let a boat overturn in open water, let the occupants cling to her side to await rescue, and in a twinkling a dozen of the brutes would swirl to the attack.

“Aboard we go,” the American shouted. “Chu, lead the way and then give us a heave. Steady does it. I think the dinghy is lower in the water. The pot shots they took at it will sure have driven holes through the planks and some of them may be low down. Up you come, David.”

With all the care that was possible in such strenuous circumstances they clambered into the dinghy and shifted their positions till she was evenly trimmed.

“And now we repair damages,” said David, shaking the water out of his hair. “Here’s a nice little round hole from a Jap bullet. Their tommy-guns drove quite a wave of spray over us, and if they had turned them directly at the dinghy I reckon they would have cut her into pieces.”

Chu shivered. Not that the Chinese boy lacked courage. But he had had some experience of Japanese tommy-guns and of their ruthlessness. For years now—it seemed for longer than he could remember—these islanders had been attacking his country. Their regiments had overrun miles of it. Millions of his people had been slaughtered or driven from their homes, and

the invader was still within China, shooting everywhere, trying to reduce the people to slavery and to make them accept the law of Japan.

“In a little while, masters,” he said, speaking in that sing-song voice so many of his race adopt. “To-day, yesterday, almost for always it seems the Japs have been top dog, eh? P’raps they win more. P’raps they try to kill all the Americans and take Honolulu.”

“Kill us! My word! Let ’em try,” shouted the American.

“Yes, master. But presently they will, p’raps. But wait a little bit. You see something good. Everyone not quite so without guns and things such as airplanes same as the poor Chinees. Suppose they attack Honolulu.”

The very mention of such a possibility roused the American youth. He doubled two quite respectable fists and shook them aimlessly in the face of the Chinese boy.

“Let ’em try,” he bellowed. “I’d like to see them do it.”

Would he really? Did Elmer Roach, for that was his name, suspect that the Japanese had such an intention? Pooh! The idea was fantastic. Japan attack America, the mighty United States, the prosperous and highly developed peoples inhabiting those rich lands to west and east of the Rocky Mountains. Fantastic! Impossible! Attack a country possessing no great army it was true, but with a Pacific fleet lying for the most part at Honolulu, with other outlying islands in strategic situations out in the Pacific.

Consider the impossibility of such a dream. From south of the marvellous, land-locked harbour of San Francisco right up to the tip of Alaska, America was in control of most of the Pacific coast of North America, save for that held by Canada, and there was sworn and real friendship with that country. Dutch Harbour in the north was a bastion which might awe the Japanese and, moreover, the world knew that America desired to conquer no one. She wanted peace and good neighbourliness with one and all, even with Japan, greedy, dangerous Japan. Even then, as the Great War in Europe, led by the aggressor Hitler, and aided by his pompous satellite, Italian Mussolini, raged across that continent and Great Britain alone faced those formidable enemies, Franklin Roosevelt, wisest of Presidents, a man gifted with remarkable foresight, desired only peace for his country, and at that very moment was in conference with Japanese delegates come to Washington to discuss peace.

“P’raps. Only p’raps they attack America, master,” said Chu, wagging a wise head.

How could anyone of the three seated in that small, insecure dinghy, imagine that that “perhaps” of Chu’s was in fact a certainty. Could they be expected to guess that even at that moment, as the sun climbed higher into a tropic sky and the day broadened, Honolulu was already under fierce attack? The suggestion seemed more than fantastic. No war had been declared between Japan and America. Delegates were even then discussing friendship in the White House in Washington. Could any nation in such circumstances countenance such a rascally act, such treachery?

Japan could and did. Those smudges of smoke on the distant horizon, glimpsed in the first rays of dawn by the people aboard the *Mignonette*, came from the funnels of Japanese warships, from her airplane carriers, and even then, as the civilians and garrison of Pearl Harbour, America’s naval base, stirred from their beds, ate their breakfasts and decked themselves for the day, Japanese aircraft were hurtling to and over the place, circling the proud Pacific fleet, bombing ships and shore installations, bombing airfields and planes, sowing destruction and death, operating in fact on a pre-arranged plan designed to kill and to destroy and in particular to cripple the offensive and defensive power of America’s fleet.

What treachery! What terrible scenes of death! How helpless ships and shore against this sudden attack made while peace was under discussion! In a very few hours, when the President broadcast the news, people of America were stunned, aghast, enraged, and then set firm on a purpose. Not to avenge, though surely punishment for such treachery was merited. But to fight this Eastern aggressor, this ruthless, unscrupulous murderer. To rid the world of the growing Japanese menace. To fight for liberty, security, and peace, perhaps to do so at the side of Britain.

Fortunately David and Elmer were ignorant of those terrible happenings at Pearl Harbour. They were out of sight and out of sound of the conflict and, moreover, their own position was sufficiently precarious.

“We take stock,” said Elmer in a business-like tone of voice. “Say, taking stock won’t take much of the day.”

“Item number one,” grinned David, rummaging under the thwarts of the boat. “Plenty of sea water at our feet, but none for drinking purposes. Not a can. Not a keg.”

“Ah!” grunted Elmer. “That’s tough. No water, and these the tropics. We’ll have to get shade. Suppose we rig the sail as an awning. There’s practically no breeze, so we shall lose nothing. And shade will help our

thirst. Jingo! I feel thirsty already. Swallowing salt water doesn't help any. What about grub?"

David began to realise the difficulty of their condition. It was with anything of a smile that he reported that there was no store of food aboard.

"Not a crust," he said. "No drink. No food."

They sat for a while staring rather moodily at one another. And who could blame them? For the swelling Pacific stretched everywhere, endlessly it seemed, unbroken by even a ripple, just swelling now and again, heaving, as if in deep sleep. They were alone in that waste. A cockleshell lay between them and destruction and how were they to exist and for how long could they hold out hoping for rescue?

CHAPTER II

A JAPANESE RASCAL

So much had happened in so short a space of time that, coupled with the acute need for self-preservation, it is not to be wondered at that David and Elmer and Chu, the Chinese boy with such sparkling, squinting eyes, set seemingly at an absurd angle, had little opportunity to consider matters outside their own immediate surroundings. Vaguely at the back of their minds they were wondering what fate had befallen their friend, Mr. Baines, abducted by that raucous, stunted, unprepossessing Japanese commander.

“This water question is a teaser,” growled David, peering up into the sky and shading his eyes from the glare of the sun. “It’s hot now. We shall be roasted.”

“Then we rig the sail as I said,” cried Elmer. “Lend a hand. Here’s a bit of rope, and with that we may be able to make a job of it. Gee, I’m famished too. Think of it, aboard the *Mignonette* we’d now be sitting down to breakfast. Hot coffee, you know.”

“Porridge, perhaps,” grinned David. “Bacon and egg if Chu was clever. And jam.”

It is one of the peculiarities of the white man that he will, so far as he is able, continue the customs he followed at home however far he be removed from it. True, some wisdom has been learned. The diet chosen in the tropics is usually lighter than that partaken of in England or America. But bacon and egg is a favourite and a common dish throughout the world occupied by the white man, and from Calcutta to Bombay, even in far hotter Madras, in many parts of the Malay peninsula, in New York, Washington, Seattle and thousands of other cities and townships and country places the well-known British egg and bacon is a favourite.

“Jam,” echoed Elmer wryly. “Jam. Butter too. And—wa-al, no use grumbling. We’ve got to face matters. But about Uncle Ted. That Jap always had a grudge against him. Ever heard of Hato, Japanese naval officer, the fellow who appears to have commanded the submarine?”

David shook his head vigorously. “Never!” he grunted. “But I’d pick him out from fifty other Japs, and what’s more I mean to.”

“Him spy,” declared Chu, laconically, picking at the frayed edge of his clothing. “Him one of the thousands of officers sent to America, to Canada, to Singapore and other little places to watch.”

“As barbers, tinsmiths, photographers, anything or any trade you care to suggest. They were at Honolulu. You could have your hair cut——”

“Or get a shave,” interrupted David, grinning, for not so much as a hair adorned his chin.

“Yes, buddy, shaved, shaved all the way through the Panama Canal, shaved and photoed in any port between San Francisco and Dutch Harbour in the north. The Japs have been spying on the white man in every corner of the East. And why?”

“Getting ready,” suggested David.

“You’ve hit it first time. Getting all set to tackle the white man, to throw him out of these parts, to drive him from the Pacific, yes, even from North America.”

“And why then should this commander fellow, Hato, abduct your uncle?” asked David.

“That’s telling. That’ll have to wait for another day, for talking makes me that thirsty,” grumbled Elmer. “And what’s more, buddy, I don’t grip the whole of the yarn. It’s sort of complicated. There’s a bit of the personal hatred of Uncle Ted by Hato. Then there’s the great secret the Jap nation is after. That’ll have to wait. What do you guess has happened to uncle?”

How could anyone answer that question, that is anyone save the commander known as Hato? The sudden surfacing of the submarine, the abduction of Mr. Baines and the obvious intention of the Japanese to destroy all who witnessed this outrageous action must have some sinister meaning. As the Pacific closed for the second time over the periscope of the pirate vessel it created an even greater mystery. Why had this thing happened to peaceful yachting people? What was the object of the abduction? And where would Mr. Baines be taken?

Actually he had been hustled to the foot of the ladder leading from the conning-tower and two armed sentries were posted before and behind him.

“Move and they shoot,” growled Hato. “Tell me, who were the boys? One is Elmer, eh?”

Alfred Baines regarded the Japanese officer coldly and made no answer.

“You say nothing? Very well. Wait! Wait till I have dealt with them. Ah! There is the bomb. Return to the place,” he cried, snapping the order at his junior while he gripped the ladder and made ready to swarm into the tower again.

Alfred Baines shivered. Not that he was cold, though be it remembered he was still clad only in swimming-trunks. Indeed, it was hot in the operations room of the submarine. But he had a lively memory. He knew the Japanese, and had reason to remember Hato.

“Pretended to be a clerk,” he told himself. “Got a job in my office as such, and quite accidentally gave away the fact that he knew something of naval matters and more about metallurgy. He was fired for spying. Yes, spying. What now is he after?”

What indeed, for Alfred Baines was not the man to confide in any but the most trustworthy, and even to his oldest friends he was generally a trifle taciturn, apt to change the conversation if it reached a point beyond which he thought it unwise to go, and capable of suppressing any individual whom he deemed to be curious. Not that he himself was a man of mystery, one of those inscrutable persons known to few if to any, who hide their thoughts under a cloud of silence. He could be excellent company, and had made a host of friends as he travelled to and fro about the world. Alfred Baines had in fact visited a majority of the countries with which we are familiar, and had often stepped aside from the beaten tracks to journey in out-of-the-way places.

To his intimates he was known as a pleasant if somewhat reserved native of Honolulu, where he supervised a pineapple plantation and spent many happy hours in the endeavour to improve that luscious fruit. His father had ploughed the first stretch of land to be put under pineapples, and like Alfred had been a wanderer. But he too was a scientist, just as was Alfred. Years before Alfred had been born he had prospected parts of the great chain of Rocky Mountains in an endeavour to discover an outcrop of the famous Californian lode. Fortune had rewarded him. The Baines gold mine became notorious for the richness of its returns, and the wealth thus created had enabled him to indulge his scientific bent to the full, and as failing health and advancing age made change of air and of scene and more leisure desirable, he had sailed for Honolulu, which thereafter became his home and his headquarters.

What more natural than that Alfred, the son, should follow in his father’s footsteps? The Californian mine provided him with dollars. The pineapple

plantation gave pleasant employment and diversion, while the wonderful climate of that sunny and salubrious spot agreed with him amazingly. But the quest for metals, rare metals, took him from the slopes of the Rockies to Chili and Peru, to the vast Ural range in Russia, to the snow-bound slopes of the Himalayas, even to the centre of China, and once, somewhat daringly, to the heart of Japan. Alfred had become an authority in respect of the rarer metals. He was already credited with an epoch-making discovery. Could that be the reason for his abduction? Had his investigations led to the uncovering of a metallurgical secret which might affect the course of the great war now raging throughout Europe, and the exploitation of which might give certain victory to the nation which possessed it? Japan had waged an aggressive war against China for some years and had failed to defeat her. Only a few moments ago she had flung all the might of her air fleet against the unready and still trusting Americans at Pearl Harbour, and even at this moment the world outside Japan was ignorant of this news, of the monstrous act of treachery which had been perpetrated by a nation even then discussing peace between herself and America.

Alfred Baines winced and shivered again. This scandalous act of piracy on the high seas, leading to his abduction, to the destruction of the *Mignonette*—for he had felt rather than heard the detonation of the bomb—must have some sinister meaning. He was well aware that war between Japan and America was a possibility, even a probability, though to attack the mighty United States seemed to him and to the world in general an act of sheer lunacy. Yet Japan, too, was powerful, immensely powerful and dangerous, with fanatical millions eager and willing to carry out the orders of their war lords, determined to spread the sway of Japan throughout the East, worshippers of the Mikado who would leave no stone unturned, hesitate at no act of treachery however monstrous, and seize every and any object or person which promised to aid success.

“I think I see their design,” thought Alfred. “This means that they are determined on war against my country. It means that my secret must be wrested from me.”

His face hardened. The lips closed firmly together and his frame stiffened.

He heard the conning-tower hatch crash to, following the rattle of rifles. Then a sharp order was issued, and as Hato clambered down to the operations room the vessel dived.

“That is the end of the yacht,” snapped the Japanese. “She has been blown to pieces.”

Alfred regarded him stoically. “And the three who were my companions aboard?” he asked.

“Gone. Sunk. They will never speak again,” declared Hato, a malicious grin spreading across his broad face. Hato was not one of those highly educated Japanese one meets in European universities, come to suck learning from the white man, those polished, well-mannered individuals so anxious to curry favour with their fellows. Indeed, the politeness of the Jap in our midst has become a byword. They are punctilious, extremely formal, often good companions, given over much to bobbing and bowing. And often enough their features are straight and only their dusky complexion and their stunted figures declare them to have come from Nippon. But Hato was of Mongolian cast of countenance. Broad and short, he was like a powerful baboon, his jet-black hair tending to stand on end, his prominent cheekbones declaring his origin, his eyes aslant, a mat of untidy, bristly hair adorning his upper lip. There was nothing attractive about this commander. Rather, there was something which repelled.

“Disappeared,” he added. “They were shot through and through. Sorry!”

“For what?” asked Alfred coldly.

“For disturbing your trip,” grinned Hato. “For destroying the yacht. For the young fellows. But you are saved. Good! That is a great reward. Presently we will discuss affairs. Now I shall see to your comfort. You need clothes. Well, perhaps there are some aboard which will fit you, though few Japanese are of your height. Still, you must be clothed. Then, when you have eaten and have had time to think things over you will speak. Yes, you will tell the whole story to our intelligence department. After that you will be set free. That is a bargain, eh?”

The cool, calculating reserve of the American made Hato wilt. He knew him well, had watched him during the time he had been masquerading in his employ and had learned that he was a man of determination as well as a scientist of no mean attainment. Even now, when Alfred was firmly in his hands, and would soon be facing a group of Japanese determined to unravel any secret he might possess, Hato doubted whether they would succeed.

“Pooh!” he thought, regarding the American askance and noting the firm lines about his face. “He will speak. They will make him. They have ways. Yes, ways of making the most obstinate and the most silent eager to talk.”

One of the crew appeared carrying an armful of clothes, and selecting the most likely handed them to Alfred. They were not exactly elegant, and the trousers were ridiculously short, while the sleeves of the loose naval jacket scarcely reached beyond the elbows. Still, they were clothes, and an improvement on the slender bathing garment he was wearing. Moreover, clad in these strange, ill-fitting garments he felt more at ease, better able to endure his position, better able in fact to resist any blandishments and inducements the rascally Hato might put before him. Clothes do not make the man, as the saying argues, but they do help towards his equanimity. His swimming garb had in these strange surroundings tended towards a feeling approaching inferiority. Now he felt himself again and smiled.

“You are pleased?” asked Hato.

“Precisely.”

“And you would eat. A little breakfast perhaps, for it is still early morning.”

Alfred nodded. “Exactly so,” he answered. “I am hungry.”

“Then come.”

Hato led his prisoner to the tiny wardroom of the submarine and called the mess servant.

“Coffee,” he ordered. “And perhaps an egg. Or jam. You will forgive if there are not aboard here all the foods to which you are accustomed. Rice is the staple diet of crew and officers, with little beside. Still, there are a few such luxuries as eggs. Please give your commands.”

Alfred Baines was not exactly a stoic. But he was a severely practical man and given to accepting facts where they were inevitable.

“I’m a prisoner,” he said to himself as he crammed his long frame into the cramped quarters between the wall of the wardroom and the tiny mess table. “There is trouble ahead. Stormy days one would imagine. The best thing to do is to eat and rest and make ready. But I’m troubled about those boys. I’ve had my day. But they are mere youngsters. It is horrible, ghastly to think that they have possibly been murdered by this scoundrel Hato.”

Well might his thoughts be occupied with the fate of Elmer and David, to say nothing of Chu. For dangerous though his own position was in that submarine, he was infinitely safer for the time being than they were. Thrusting forward under water for a while, and later on the surface, the vessel gave security as it sped forward to some destination as yet unknown

to him. But contrast that condition with that of David and his American chum, adrift in the wide Pacific, in a cockleshell of a boat which because of the damage it had suffered was decidedly unseaworthy, and which, moreover, was as bare as any Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

They were indeed a forlorn little party of castaways. Huddling beneath the sail rigged from mast to thwarts, for a red-hot sun sent its blazing rays down upon them, they sat and watched and pondered.

"Ships," said Elmer after a while, pointing eastward. "Several of 'em."

Far away on the horizon were more smudges of smoke. Not the clouds one might expect from coal-burning steamers, but a wispy, smoky haze given off by the funnels of oil-burners.

"Jap warships, shouldn't wonder," he ventured. "Are those birds?"

"Airplanes, master," declared Chu, shading his eyes.

They said of the Chinaman that he could see farther than anyone they had yet encountered, and perhaps he was right. The birds, they had seen half an hour earlier swarming about the distant smudges of smoke might have been, and probably were, Japanese airplanes.

"Heard gun-fire too, masters," said Chu. "Listen now. There! Bang, bang, bang! You hear?"

Very faintly across the wide stretch of water came the sharp, staccato notes of what appeared to be heavy gun-fire, and as the minutes passed and those distant airplanes so much resembling birds swarming above what must be ships became more clearly visible, one swooped into the sky with black smoke trailing behind it.

"That proves the case," gasped David. "There's fighting going on."

"Honolulu," growled Elmer. "They're attacking Pearl Harbour. What do you think of that now? Attacking America, and only yesterday we heard on the *Mignonette's* radio that Jap envoys were talking peace to the President at Washington. Yep, talking peace. And—there she goes. That plane's dived right into the sea."

"What's it all mean?" gasped David. "It can't be——"

"You've said it," drawled Elmer. "It's war, red war between America and the Nips. I'd give a lot to know what has happened at Pearl Harbour. The people there hoped for peace. They had no thought of an attack and felt safe,

at least while peace talks were in progress. But supposing they've been attacked. Gee!"

He ended the sentence with a shrill whistle. Well he might, for that morning had indeed brought sudden disaster to Pearl Harbour. The place, the garrison, the ships and their crews and a peaceful, unsuspecting population had been mangled.

"Let's hope they don't spot us, if those ships are really Japanese," said David. "Say, Elmer, about this question of drink and food. I put drink first, for a fellow can get along without food for a time. But no drink, with all this salt water round us too. Not so good, eh?"

It was anything but good. It was a desperate situation, which had been faced already in this stupendous war by very many shipwrecked people, by the crews of vessels torpedoed by German and Italian submarines. This was a war to the knife. Ships were not called upon to surrender. They were sunk out of hand and crews which might escape into their few surviving boats were left to fend for themselves. Sometimes even they were hooted and reviled by the crews of the submarines, surfacing after the torpedo had struck home and sent the ship to the bottom. War to the knife, yes. War against women and children, for many a boatload of men, women, and children, had put off from a sinking vessel and had faced the perils of the open ocean, with little food aboard perhaps, a slender supply of water, and no rescue within sight. A ghastly band had perished.

"Wa-al, it's just bad, that's all there is to it," growled Elmer, his brow knotted as he pondered the situation. He sat there on the thwart, in the shade of the awning, staring at the distant smudges of smoke and at the airplanes still circling about their carriers. Elmer was a gallant-looking fellow. Even though only so slenderly clad he was a fine figure of youthful manhood. Or perhaps the very absence of clothes displayed his elegant and powerful proportions to greater advantage. Perhaps he was close to his eighteenth birthday, a tall, broad-shouldered, athletic-looking American. He was fair, and the tan on his face made him appear still fairer.

"Got this yellow hair from a Scandinavian ancestor," he'd say with a delightful grin when the subject was mentioned. "Good enough for him. That goes with me, too."

Elmer might be nearly six feet in height, upstanding, light on his feet, narrow at the hips, quick in movement but given to rather drawling speech. His sunny features and his ready and friendly smile helped to provide him with many chums, who soon learned that beneath the easy manners and the

happy outlook of their friend there was character, a sturdiness and a staunchness which went well with his slowness of speech.

Elmer liked to sit back as it were and debate a matter carefully, to scrutinise the pros and cons. But present him with a sudden crisis and he became a man of action. In fact he was not unlike his uncle Alfred. He was just a younger edition of that cool, calm, reflecting individual, with the same friendly outlook on life, unspoiled by his fortunate position and wise beyond his years because of the many opportunities which wide travel had given.

David was an altogether different sort of person, though to be sure his slenderly garbed exterior helped as in the case of Elmer to show to advantage his active figure. But he was lightly built by comparison, not so broad of shoulder nor so tall as yet, for he was only just turned seventeen years of age, and whereas Elmer was unusually fair, David was dark. But he had the English bloom in his cheeks, was in fact a most attractive youngster, and was withal gay and lighthearted when times were good and prosperous, and was no coward, as recent events had proved, when disaster threatened or suddenly overtook them.

“Just bad, that’s all there is to it,” grunted Elmer.

“Lots of folks have had to face the same position,” reflected David. “It might rain, eh? We’d be able to catch water in our awning.”

“Sure,” grunted Elmer. “But it don’t rain so much hereabouts, except sometimes, and then it comes down fit to drown you. It’s no water one second and oceans of it next. Yes, we could catch some in the awning and fill ourselves with as much as we can take. There’s no can aboard to store it. But there—rain—don’t look like it, does it?”

Chu sat in the stern of their rickety craft, watching, listening, now and again interjecting a remark, still picking at the frayed edge of the loose blouse he was wearing. It was of brilliant red colour, for bright things, like toys, please the happy minds of the Chinese. Presently he unravelled a brilliant strand and held it up for inspection.

“Perhaps that provide the water. P’raps food too,” he laughed.

“Now, see here, Chu——” began Elmer.

This flippant behaviour of the Chinese boy irritated him. Besides, in times of adversity, when danger threatens, it helps to soften the situation if one can indulge in sharp words.

“This thing means life and death. See? If there’s no water we’re next door to done. You get that?”

“Just a second or so,” said David, and there was a note of excitement in his voice. “This fellow Chu is up to something useful. He’s not a fool, and not the one to joke when we’re all in a tight corner. What’s up, Chu?”

The Chinaman’s eyes rolled. He smiled indulgently at his two young masters and then, turning his back on them bent and fumbled beneath the stern board. A moment or so later he turned again and once more displayed the scrap of brilliant cotton he had unravelled.

“See, masters,” he gurgled in his sing-song voice. “No water. No food. But fishing-lines on board. But no bait. Well, in China boys tie scarlet cotton to their hooks and fish. Supposing we do the same. Same as you see here. P’raps fish bite and come on board. Then there is food, eh? Food and drink. You no believe that p’raps. But it’s all true. Fish give food and drink and will keep us plenty good till someone finds us.”

The fellow proved a genius. To the highly sophisticated perhaps the eating of raw fish causes a shudder. Yet our Scandinavian friends devour iced, uncooked herring with gusto. It is a luxury they delight in. Chu showed the way to David and Elmer. He had no scruples and no hesitation; and, moreover, he was a masterly fisherman. This Pacific was packed with fish, and the brilliant strip of cotton attracted them as though it were a magnet. Then, once the first feelings of revulsion were overcome, this raw fish diet proved both refreshing and palatable, and it instantly satisfied their thirst.

The clever Chu had in fact given the whole party a new lease of life. But, artful and clever though he was, he could not lessen the danger of their situation. They were still adrift in a boundless ocean, with a shallow, rickety cockleshell between them and destruction, and days might pass, even weeks, before succour could reach them.

CHAPTER III

THE MERCHANT MARINE

“Boat ahoy! Sit up, me hearties. Ahoy, there! Ahoy!”

Chu sat upright and rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

“Masters!” he gasped. “Masters! Masters!”

Unceremoniously he kicked David, who lay on the flimsy bottom boards of the boat, his tousled head on his arms, sunk in deep sleep. The lanky Elmer was right aft, curled up under the stern seat, his skin ebony, thanks to long exposure to the sun, three weeks’ growth of luxuriant, youthful beard on his chin.

“Ahoy! Ahoy, me lads!! Stand by to be taken aboard.”

Was it a dream? Was that really a ship surging slowly towards them so that in a few minutes she would be alongside? Her bows made hardly so much as a ripple, for she was going dead slow, and already her propeller was reversing so that Pacific foam swept along her side towards the bows, frothing and heaving and already making the boat rock. David and Elmer were on their feet in a moment, gripping the gunwale, balancing the craft carefully, for long habit had now taught them to be always wary of their movements and to take infinite trouble to trim their cockleshell.

“A ship!” shouted David.

He too was as brown as any berry, burned almost black in fact, and though no luxuriant beard graced his youthful chin, flimsy, glistening hairs were budding absurdly from his lip and chin, promise perhaps of better things to come.

“Now what do you say to that,” yelled Elmer. “Hooroosh! A ship!”

“All fast asleep here,” said Chu, as if he were chiding them. “An’ no one keep watch.”

“That’s me,” shouted Elmer. “I’m the fellow to blame. Say, it was that hot yesterday and last night that I couldn’t keep an eye open. Oh, yes, I know, David did his go and called me to take my watch. But—but—wa-a-al, what’s it matter now? It’s a real live ship. Those are real men aboard her, and, say, those are the first voices besides our own we’ve heard these three weeks or more. Three weeks did I say?”

“It’s a guess,” said David. “We just don’t know. But, jingo, it is a ship, at last, the first we’ve seen within miles ever since this business started.”

During the days they had drifted in that cockleshell—how many days not one of the three could guess, for they came and went with monotonous regularity—during those days an occasional smudge of smoke had been seen in the far distance, and once a ship appeared to be steering towards them though still far away. But either she altered course or the brilliant, blinding rays of a tropic sun deceived them. She disappeared in a heat mist and for a while there was dejection on board. But, youthful spirits soon revived. While the weather held all was reasonably well with them. True, the sun was uncomfortably hot. The sail had, however, been a godsend. They sheltered in its shade for part of the day, hoisting it when there was a breeze and the sun cast a shadow over the boat in which they could lie. But why hoist the sail at all?

“Might take us farther and farther from help and oceangoing steamers,” said David.

“Yep,” agreed Elmer, laconically. “We’ve no maps, no compass, no information of our whereabouts. Seems to me that letting the drift carry us is as wise as anything.”

And so they fished and fished, and ate and slept, taking turns to keep watch. Strange that it was during the energetic Elmer’s turn for duty that rescue had arrived. Towering above them was the rail of the steamer. Men were leaning over, and David was sure he caught sight of a girl. A man in his shirt-sleeves, the garment wide open at the neck, was perched on the bridge and was using a megaphone.

“Stand by there to bring ’em aboard,” he shouted.

“Mr. Jennings, drop your ladder and get down on the end of a rope. We’ll hoist ’em aboard. Drop the slings we use when painting ship and smart with it. Stand by, men.”

It was the voice of a Scot, the familiar broad accents declaring the fact without leaving room for doubt. The engine telegraph rang as the order was sent to the men below to shut off steam. At once the propeller ceased to churn, and way having by then been taken off the ship she lay to within a few yards of the drifting boat.

“Put her in closer, lads,” shouted the captain. “Get an oar out.”

The three young fellows had been so startled, so taken aback, so stirred by the appearance of the ship that they were almost dazed. It meant rescue

when hopes of rescue had descended almost to zero. It meant security, companionship, home perhaps, an opportunity to search for Elmer's uncle.

"And it means a change of diet, don't it," laughed Elmer, as though he had been thinking aloud, for the amazing change in their fortunes and all that it might mean had been surging through his mind. "Oars, yes, that's the ticket. Paddle her over."

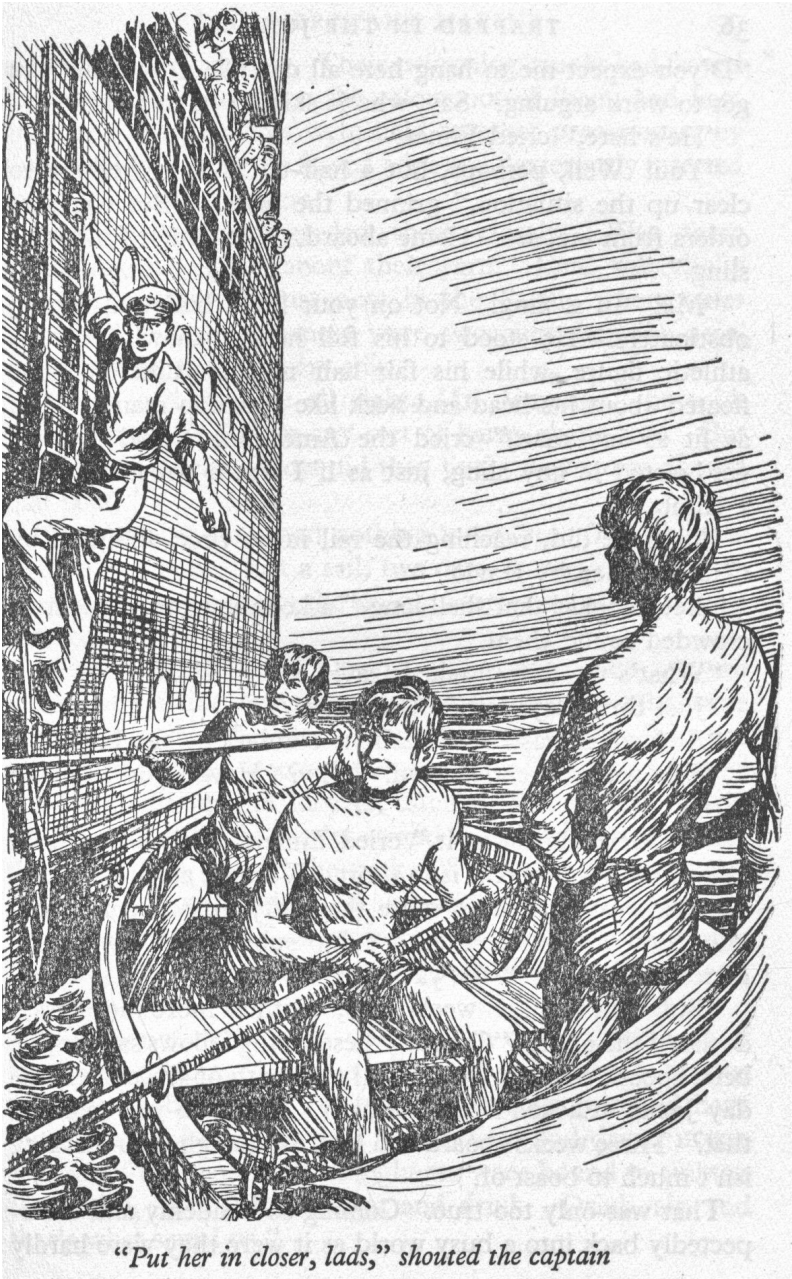
Chu had one over the stern already, and David soon had the other dipping in the water. Together they brought their rickety craft close to the towering sides of the vessel.

"Who goes first?" sang out David. "You do, Elmer."

"Not on your life, my bantam," shouted the American. "I'm heaps older than you and age gives command, don't it?"

"Depends," grinned David. "Commands go to ability first. A spot of age helps, of course."

"Heave to with that jaw-wabbling," came from the mate who had caused a ladder to be dropped over the side and had swarmed down it. He was resting there, a rope secured about his waist, standing on the lowest rung, his feet dripping in the swell of the Pacific and then lifting into the dry.



"Put her in closer, lads," shouted the captain

"D'you expect me to hang here all day like a fly while you get to work arguing. Say, who is skipper of this outfit?"

"He's here," cried Elmer.

“You! Well, perhaps, but a hair-cut’ll do something to clear up the situation,” grinned the mate. “But you take orders from me, see. Come aboard. Get yourself into this sling.”

“Me! In a sling! Not on your life,” bellowed Elmer, obstinately. He stood to his full height, showing off his athletic figure, while his fair hair now inordinately long, floated about his head and neck like a golden mane. “I’m as fit as any man,” cried the American. “And I don’t get hoisted in any sling, just as if I was a baby. No, sir, I climb.”

Climb he did, reaching the rail in no time; followed by Chu and then by David.

“Been aboard that shell long?” asked the mate, while men crowded round them.

“What’s the date?” asked David.

“Just three days left in December.”

“And when was Pearl Harbour bombed by the Nips?”

“The seventh, early dawn. Why? How’d you hear the yarn?”

“We were almost in it,” cried Elmer. “It’s a heap of a long story. But here it is in short. We were aboard a yacht, the *Mignonette*, perhaps more than fifty miles from Honolulu, and early that seventh a Jap submarine blew us up. Here’s what’s left of the yacht and its crew.”

“But that’s three weeks ago, neither more nor less,” declared the mate. “Captain, these young fellows say they’ve been aboard that old tub since the seventh of December, the day Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. What do you make of that? Three weeks aboard and look fit, though their clothing isn’t much to boast of.”

That was only too true. Coming so suddenly and unexpectedly back into a busy world as it were they were hardly more than barely decent. Their swimming-trunks had frayed badly, the sun had taken the colour out of them, and here and there the garments were held together precariously by threads picked from the frayed edge and dexterously inserted by Chu’s cunning fingers.

Captain Perkins regarded them closely. Was there something suspicious about their yarn? Care was vitally necessary, especially just now in the Pacific where spies abounded and the Japanese were sweeping the high seas, endeavouring to sink every ship.

“They look the tale all right, Mr. Jennings,” he said. “Hair-cut won’t do ’em any sort of harm, that’s true. But—but three weeks. How did they live? Any stores aboard that boat?”

“Two fishing-lines and nothing more, sir. The thing is as bare as a bone. Just a sail, two oars, a couple of fishing-lines, and many holes in the sides. Seems as if she had been gunned.”

“That’s right,” cried David. “She was. You see, we were just starting our morning swim when the submarine rose and attacked the yacht. How have we lived? Why are we as fit as ever? Because Chu—this is Chu, our Chinese boy—thought up the idea of catching fish as they do in China, with a bright scarlet strand from his togs to attract the fish as bait. It did the trick. We caught the fish every day. Could have done so all day and all night. I begin to hate the thought of eating more raw fish. Excuse me, Captain, but have you any other sort of food aboard, and—and coffee?”

“And some clothes, too. Gee! I’m tired of this sort of theatrical costume,” laughed Elmer. “Of course, it was all right in the tropics. But in the Atlantic it would have meant death, fish or no fish. As to food and drink, it was a brute of a situation. I thought we were bound to sink on that point. But fish are meat and drink. Drink, sir, and that’s what saved us.”

“Come down below. Knock a hole in that boat and sink her, Mr. Jennings. Steward! Where’s the steward?”

He was one of the men crowding about the rescued youths and led the way at once to the deck house.

“Coffee, yes,” he grinned. “It’s smoking hot this instant. Now what would you fellows like? With what can I tempt you?”

“I’d eat horse, if there was nothing better,” roared Elmer. “Say, mister, what really is there?”

“Porridge. Piping hot. Plenty of milk too.”

“Sakes!” shouted Elmer, rubbing his hands.

“And eggs and bacon to follow, eh, steward?” David laughed.

“You’ve hit the right nail. You could have a cut off a joint just to start with, to sort of fill odd corners,” grinned the steward, thoroughly enjoying the situation, of which he was certainly master. “We’ve some bully beef opened. That’s famous stuff. And eggs. Sure! How many of ’em for each? And the Chinees? Does he eat our grub?”

“Try him,” laughed David. “He’s Westernised. He’s had his fill of fish. Chu, what say to breakfast?”

They were a deliriously happy party, for even then they could hardly realise the good fortune which had befallen them. Only those who have been cast adrift in such an immense ocean as is the Pacific, could adequately comprehend what deliverance meant. Day after day David and his companions had shielded their eyes from the all-pervading glare and the terribly hot rays which were reflected from a surface almost entirely clear of ripples. A smooth, oily sheet of glistening water, dull green in colour for the most part but sometimes of a Mediterranean blue, stretched into the distant horizon, with never a ship upon it. Not one airplane came within their vision, and no breeze seemed to ruffle the water. Still, there was a breeze at times, as hot as the exhaust of a furnace, and no doubt tidal movements had swept them from the position in which they were when the *Mignonette* was sunk.

Indeed, unknown to the castaways, they had drifted very many miles, and at times, at night in particular, when the roasting rays of the sun ceased to beat upon them and black darkness swallowed sea and cranky boat, cool air swept gently across the surface wafting them invisibly and smoothly upon a westerly course.

“You could steam for days through these seas even in peace-time,” said the friendly steward, as he stood in the small saloon, arms akimbo, watching his guests devour their breakfast with appetites which he had seldom witnessed before. “It’s just huge, immense, stretches for thousands of miles and takes days, no weeks, to cross from one port to another. Now that there’s a war on and the Jap fleet is patrolling there are, of course, fewer ships around. We shouldn’t be here save for the fact that we got orders to turn round when bound for Seattle and make for Hong Kong. Perhaps that will be attacked. The old man, our skipper, you know—skippers aboard freighters are always called that—isn’t under any delusion. He knows he won’t be safe till he makes port, perhaps not even then. But he’s a clever old bird. He’s been afloat pretty well all his life, and if anyone can dodge these Nips he’s the boy. More coffee? Does it taste good?”

“Scrumptious!” laughed David, emptying his cup. “When you’ve had raw fish for breakfast, with no coffee to wash it down, eh? and raw fish for lunch, with some more thrown in for tea, don’t you know, eh?”

“And then some,” grinned Elmer, shaking his head to sweep his ridiculous yellow mane out of the way of his eyes. “Say, steward, got a

barber aboard?”

“Here? On just a freighter! On your life, no! Every man here is a barber. I cut the old man’s hair. It’s a great honour. Also the mate’s. One of the greasers does the job for the engine-room staff, and the deck hands cut one another’s hair. You’d say we make sights of one another. Not a bit of it. It’s like everything else that you set your hand to. You get expert, you know, take a pride in making a man look fancy and sometimes wonder whether you won’t, after all, settle down some day and hang out a barber’s sign. More food for anyone? We’ve heaps of it.”

There is a limit even to the appetite of youth, though he may have been starved of necessary food for quite a while. That could not be said of David and his friends. They were an excellent illustration of what could be done under similar circumstances. Not perhaps in Atlantic seas, where rough weather is common and where fish are, maybe, far less abundant. There is also in those waters the question of exposure. Men who are torpedoed and thrown into the Atlantic do not always succumb to drowning. They are more or less paralysed by the cold, and if left to fight for existence in an open boat with insufficient cover and no means of keeping their clothing dry too often suffer tortures, have their hands and feet frostbitten and succumb.

In the Pacific tropical heat has its dangers and its severe discomforts. But it does not kill so readily, though the heat induces thirst which, if not quenched, makes men drink sea water, and that means madness.

“And now for clothes,” said the steward. “You are the second bunch for whom we’ve had to search our lockers for spare togs.”

“Meaning?” asked Elmer.

“The Nips torpedoed a ship two weeks ago. She was a small freighter on her way to Hong Kong from one of the Solomon Islands. There were seven hands on board, a mate and the old man and his daughter. The explosion killed three, including the skipper. The rest got away in one of the ship’s boats and we picked ’em up two days later. The Japs just left the survivors to drown or die. That’s war.”

“That’s this devilish war,” exclaimed David, horrified.

He was too young to have much knowledge of what was known as the Great War, the intensity of which, and its bitterness and cruelty were already far surpassed by the new war in which he found himself immersed. In that earlier war the Germans, though organised and enormously powerful, were not the formidable people they now were. Their aims were not so far

sweeping and grandiose. They desired the world this time. Or rather, they aimed to subdue the greater part of Europe, and had cajoled the upstart Italian Mussolini to join forces with them. But they were not the only nation with ambition to overrun their neighbours. Indeed, Japan had not hesitated to state her case. She desired the East, all of it, for herself. China to begin with. Then the myriad islands dotting the wide Pacific, large and small—and some are enormous. Finally, she had aggressive intentions towards the Malay Peninsula, the Dutch East Indian possessions, even India itself; and rumour and the warnings of those who knew the Japanese war lords and had had perhaps unpleasant experience of the overweening conceit of the nation, indicated that, like the upstart Hitler and his German-speaking supporters, Japan had designs on the whole globe and was determined, however long the struggle might take, to subdue the white man.

David was living in adventurous, momentous times. This was a bitterly cruel war, war to the knife, war which meant life or death, freedom or slavery for Britons and Americans and a host of other nationals. It was a struggle which demanded every ounce of grit and determination and which would test their fighting and organising qualities as never before. What then was the torpedoing of a mere ocean freighter?

“Anyway,” said the steward. “We picked them up, and they, like you, wanted togs. Come along to the old man’s quarters. That’s his order.”

How often during this tremendous struggle have ships’ companies had need to ransack their lockers in search of spare garments for castaways? Generous, good-hearted fellows that they are they vied with one another to provide David and Elmer with suitable clothing. And since the tropics call for no great amount of covering it was not long before they were completely clad. Hair-cutting followed. A burly Irishman, one of the deck hands, took the steward’s place, the latter having other duties, and soon Elmer was seated on a sugar box under the awning slung across the main deck, and with a towel round his neck was submitting himself to the dexterous fingers of Mike.

“And sure it’s himself would be pleased to have a beard same as that,” sang out Mike as he stood back and took stock of the young American. “Sure he would.”

“And who’s himself, eh?” asked Elmer.

“Why, the old man, none other,” laughed Mike. “Begad, it’s a year since he set to to grow one. But is it the one he’d dare to show at home? He’d have all the hooligans of bhoys following him shouting. It’s that spiky he

almost pricks his fingers with it, and it just grows in patches. But this—this _____”

He stroked Elmer’s chin and fondled the beard which three weeks in an open boat, in a torrid climate, without razor or scissors, had caused to sprout.

“Lay off,” shouted the good-natured Elmer, grinning at some of the deck hands who were lounging near at hand enjoying this break in the monotony of ship life. “Cut the blamed thing and keep a lock of it if you like. I reckon a good bath after the hair-cut will complete the business, for though we often took a dip some fresh water would be sort of refreshing.”

“How’d you young fellows feel about taking your turn on watch,” asked the skipper when at last their hair-cutting, bathing, and general toilet were completed. “This Japanese business has made a lot of difference to the hours of duty. Every man has to do his whack. Even Miss Mary Evans does a good share. Eh, young lady?”

They had been joined by a slim, smiling girl, perhaps she might be termed a young woman. She was barely twenty years of age, petite, decidedly pretty and, one would say, a trifle inclined to be masculine. But then she had lived aboard ship with her father and had more or less roughed it for some years. She knew much about ship customs and the handling of vessels. And she had sailed to many of the ports in the Far East and knew many of the tiny islands dotting the Pacific. She was clad in blue overalls, the only reasonably suitable garment the ship had been able to supply.

“And why not?” she asked, smiling at them. “The day has passed, when a girl just sits and knits. I took a watch on the *Saucy Ann* before she was torpedoed and I’m glad to do so here. It keeps one from thinking.”

“Then the hours are two on and two off,” said the captain. “We keep a man all day up in the crow’s-nest. From there he gets a long view. Then a man is posted in the bows and the stern, and two more to starboard and port. That’s as much as we can do. Of course, every man knows his duty in case of attack. We’ve a couple of light anti-aircraft guns for’ard and aft. They were fitted when we were last in Hong Kong, where some of the hands were trained to work them. The Navy couldn’t spare any gunners to sail with us. Anyway, lads, that’s our defence against the Nips, that and our constant watching. Mr. Jennings, post these lads to their boats and put ’em wise to all the ropes. Warn ’em not to undress at night, not for the next few nights at any rate, for the Nips are out to blow every white man they can find out of what they think is their sea.”

David and Elmer were thoroughly enjoying themselves. After their long spell in the open boat shipboard life was most interesting and entertaining. They went on watch at regular intervals, stood to their boats when "Boat Stations" were ordered, and were particularly pleased to be chosen as part of the crew of the two guns.

"Just in case," said the mate. "It's always well to have reserves of men, you know. And serving these guns is hard work. Though not by any means the latest models, they are useful weapons for they can fire as Ack Ack guns or can be depressed to aim at a ship. That is a mighty good point, for we might get planes attacking us; or it might be a surface vessel. Just recollect that we are in the midst of enemy waters. It's hard for the old man to decide which way to steer. He was ordered from his course away east and is now dodging down hoping to make a north Australian port, perhaps Darwin. There's no news yet of the Nips being down there. But this war moves fast and they have their eyes on Australia just as they have on Singapore and the Dutch East Indies."

David and Elmer studied the map in the captain's cabin and saw for themselves the actual position of the ship compared with that of the many islands held by the enemy.

"We'll be almighty lucky if we slip through without being spotted, eh?" grunted David.

"Just anything may happen," agreed Elmer. "But we've had one brush with these Nips and are bound to have others."

A little after sunrise a few days later the masthead look-out hailed the deck.

"A plane," he shouted. "Flying this way too, out of the west."

"Might be from a Philippine base," said the captain. "Those devils have made a ferocious attack on the Filipinos and the Americans there. Jap sure enough," he cried a few minutes later, fixing his glasses on the plane. "A reconnaissance plane I've little doubt. He'll be calling up his home base. There'll be fireworks soon. Every man stand to!" he shouted.

Stripped to the waist, grouped round their guns or at points to which they had been posted, the crew peered out from beneath the awnings or from the open deck, sweeping the horizon and watching the surface of the sea nearer at hand lest a submarine should attack. Another plane presently appeared and for a while the two circled the ship at a distance. Then they turned and were lost in the misty distance.

“That means business,” said the captain, grimly, as he went his way, visiting the gun crews and other parts of the ship. Then he mounted the bridge and megaphone in hand waited for an attack which all were sure was coming, which indeed might be expected at any moment.

CHAPTER IV

JAPAN SEEKS AN EASTERN EMPIRE

This greatest of wars that the world has ever witnessed had already spread from Europe to Africa when David and Elmer were caught up in its toils. The German aggressor had swept through Poland till he was in touch with the Soviet Republics of mighty Russia and, turning, had in the course of a few months launched an attack upon Belgium, France, Holland and Norway, overrunning all four countries. The conquest of the French Republic, sudden and almost unforeseen as it was, had led to the driving backward on to the Channel coast of the British Expeditionary Force, some three hundred thousand of which, hemmed in by Hitler's armoured panzer forces, had miraculously escaped from Dunkirk, losing guns, tanks, every conceivable item of equipment.

But thanks to the hardihood of hundreds of sailors, some of them members of the Royal Navy but a host just fishermen or yachtsmen—and all the latter volunteers—who crossed the sea to Dunkirk in a huge variety of vessels, some mere open boats, this band of valiant men had reached the shores of England, filled with a spirit of determination to continue the fight when they were rested and re-equipped.

It was at this moment that Italy joined her partner Hitler, and these two members of the Axis Forces prepared to fall upon Britain, who alone stood between them and complete victory in the greater part of Europe.

There was still a third member of the Axis, namely Japan, whose conquests in China in recent years had been alarmingly, not to say dangerously, significant of things to come. Years before she had seized Manchuria, one of China's greatest provinces, and by a process of infiltration had been penetrating ever deeper into China elsewhere. Japan was fully mobilised for war, and provided with all the latest weapons. China on the other hand was ill-armed or scarcely armed at all and was forced to fall back before the invader, scorching the earth and retiring into the interior of her vast country.

It was Japan's opportunity for further aggression, for presently, having failed to defeat the British in the air, having indeed suffered a severe reverse in the memorable and momentous Battle of Britain, Hitler and the satellite Mussolini turned their attention elsewhere. The Italians marched through

their Libyan possessions against Egypt, with the object of cutting Britain's life-line with India by way of the Suez Canal, and Hitler, the arch aggressor, the cunning, unscrupulous leader of all Germany, turned upon Russia, with whom she had signed a pact of friendship only a few months earlier.

Japan took full advantage of Russia's weakness, or supposed weakness, on the borders of Manchuria. There was no love between these two nations, and Russia had already shown Japan that she was well able and fully prepared to protect her eastern provinces. But a formidable German host, millions of men in fact, was pouring into the western parts of Russia, rolling the valiant armies of this new opponent backward, till Moscow, seized once before, and to his undoing, by the great Napoleon, was invested and in greatest danger.

Japan prepared to strike. Her southward infiltration was causing the greatest concern in America, and while war between the two was by no means certain, it became more of a probability because of Russia's preoccupation elsewhere. Thus the American fleet at Pearl Harbour, American troops in the Philippines and elsewhere in Pacific waters, and her outspoken disapproval of Japanese aggression in China and Asia was a threat to further Japanese conquests. If she desired the East for herself, with all its vast magazine of raw materials—rubber, oil, and a thousand other commodities—she must neutralise America. Cut the claws, in fact, of the mighty United States and thus render achievement of her fullest designs possible.

She entered into peace discussions with Franklin Roosevelt, America's staunch, far-seeing, courageous President and secretly made ready for war. The hour had arrived when she should strike. That treacherous attack on Pearl Harbour was her method of declaring war. She found America unprepared, organised only for peace and desirous of securing it. In an hour she roused the whole of the United States as they had never been aroused before. They were startled, staggered, but not dismayed. Instantly they made ready to repair the damage to their Pacific fleet while the whole country mobilised for war against the rascally Axis partners. And Britain, hitherto standing alone in a warring world, promptly elected to join in the struggle against Japan beside America.

Elmer, the young American, and David, British to the backbone, found themselves therefore on the morning of 7th December 1941 not only boon companions and friends but allies, caught up so unexpectedly by this opening round in the struggle in the Pacific, a struggle which was to be

continued for long and which was to witness a succession of gallant exploits and adventures.

Hours passed as the crew stood by expecting attack, and though they scanned sky and sea, nothing appeared to attract their attention.

“But they’ll come again, sure,” said the mate. “Perhaps they’ll wait till we’re closer to their base, so that they can send their torpedo bombers. What’s their range, sir?”

“I can’t say,” came the answer. “Japanese armaments are at the moment more or less of a secret, though it is thought that they have the latest weapons. Anyway, perhaps the weather will help us. We’ll strip the awnings, Mr. Jennings, for my glass is dropping and I think we may be in for a blow. That might help us to sneak in south towards Port Moresby and so put New Guinea between us and the enemy. The wireless news is none too good. After their attack on Pearl Harbour the Nips bombed Singapore, and are now said to be on their way to Hong Kong. They’re all over the place, hang them!”

It took very little time to strip the ship of her awnings, in which condition she was perhaps in better position to protect herself against airplane attack. Meanwhile clouds were gathering on the horizon, no bigger at first than a man’s hand. But growing, becoming darker and more threatening in appearance every half-hour. A mysterious wind came sweeping across the hitherto smooth expanse of this mighty ocean till presently there was a gentle and slowly increasing swell. It was swelteringly hot, though the glowing ball of the sun was now obscured by mist.

“A tornado, shouldn’t wonder,” said the mate, who had his station with the gun which David and Elmer were helping to man.

Mike, too, was one of the gun’s crew, and the steward, supported by two more of the deck hands. Close at hand, piled in the racks, was a good supply of shells, while a tub of water had been placed in the shade so that it could easily be reached.

“Sure foightin’ and watching makes a man thirsty, that it does,” grinned the Irishman, who seemed to be looking forward to an encounter with the enemy. “Then there might be a fire, and wather’s good for that, too.”

“A plane!” sang out the man aloft. “Two of them. No, three!”

At once all eyes turned to the sky while the gun crews who had been resting beside their weapons took up their several stations. Elsewhere along

the deck men on watch swept the ruffled surface of the ocean in search of a periscope.

“They’re not so easy to spot, eh?” asked David, remembering their own encounter with an undersea boat, not so long ago. “It’s true that we had no reason to suspect the presence of a sub, and were not on the look-out.”

“Ay!” one of the hands replied. “That’s their way, youngster. They just sneak up all unbeknownst. Spot you from a long way off, savvy, then submerge, and make a course under water till they judge they’re near enough to send over a torpedo. That’s the moment when the periscope appears. Just a few moments, eh, savvy? Then, bang! You go up sky high if you’re not lucky, women and children, every man jack.”

“And don’t I know it?” shouted Mike. “ ’Tis myself was torpedoed in the Atlantic just a year past, me and the whole ship’s company, the old man, and three women and six childer, begorra! But the devils had no mercy for us. There was a sea runnin’, and when they’d broke the back of the ship and she was foundering just as quick as—well as quick as knife—do ye think they came alongside to help? They just stood off, surfaced then, you understand, and machine-gunned us, shot us up, as we launched a boat and piled into her.”

He was red-hot with indignation. Sweat was pouring down his lined and sunburned face, and at that moment Mike no longer appeared the smiling, happy, jovial Irishman his shipmates knew so well, but a raging, formidable individual, shaking with indignation.

“Say, that’s bad,” ventured Elmer. “Shot you up? They were Germans, I’ll bet, and that’s the sort of devilish thing they’ve done time and again.”

“It’s what they did in the last war,” shouted Mike. “Sure, don’t I know? Shouldn’t I be the one to spake of it, for I was torpedoed then too. Twice, me bhoys.”

“And got saved. That’s fine,” interjected one of the gun crew.

“And went to sea again. That’s better still, Mike,” declared David.

“Betther still, is it?” demanded Mike, still red-hot with indignation. “And wouldn’t any man who’s a man want to sign on again the instant he made port if only to show those devils that he wasn’t afraid? But those Germans machine-gunned us. They stood off with the Atlantic waves washing their deck and sousing against the conning-tower and laughed. Do ye hear? They laughed at us there struggling to save the women and childer. And Ireland, land of me birth, stands neutral. Neutral!” exploded Mike.

“Neutral while the rest of the world, all the decent world that wants peace and freedom and happiness for all stands beside Britain and America and Russia and China, the four biggest Allies.”

Mike was now almost a pathetic object. His raging indignation had of a sudden given way to despair. His strong arms dropped to his side and he looked almost shamefacedly at his comrades.

“That’s southern Ireland, I guess,” said Elmer, anxious to find some point to cheer the Irishman.

“And would I be from the north of the country then?” demanded Mike. “Sure me home’s in Tipperary and me heart’s with the British Commonwealth of Nations. Do you think an Irishman can hold his head high these days? It’s ashamed we are, thousands of us.”

“But thousands more are fighting with the Allies,” said Mr. Jennings. “Don’t forget that, my man. The high-ups in Dublin declare for neutrality, and even when they’re bombed they still stand aside. I’ll not say that they want Britain to lose the war. And I won’t say either that they want her to win. But that’s the high-ups. Paddy in the street is a different fellow. Wherever and whenever Britain has fought, Ireland has been with her and has provided some of her finest officers and huge numbers of her most courageous soldiers and sailors. Paddy likes a fight, Mike. Don’t he?”

The huge, sun-tanned Irishman grinned and beamed on them all. “There never was a truer tale, sir,” he said. “’Tis fightin’ suits us, not dirty shooting down of drowning men and women. That got me, sir, I’m waiting for the day when I can pay back.”

It appeared that he might not have very long to wait, for the few minutes that had elapsed since the look-out sighted planes, had brought the enemy far closer. There were four machines, flying in line abreast, and they were approaching at great speed.

“For’ard gun will shoot to starboard,” commanded the captain. “The aft guns will deal with planes on the port side. Don’t be too quick with it, boys. Our guns don’t reach so very far, and we want to entice them to come close.”

“Stand by!” came the order from Number One of the gun crew. “Shouldn’t wonder if those planes divided in a few seconds and came along two together on either side. What did I say? Give ’em another few seconds.”

It seemed that the Japanese imagined that the vessel they were about to attack was completely unarmed, for they flew directly towards her, and

coming lower made ready to bomb.

David watched them, fascinated, and then turned his attention to the gunner. He sat in his seat, his eye fixed to the sights, swivelling his weapon easily, see-sawing it from side to side and slowly elevating the muzzle.

“Give him a few seconds more,” ordered Mr. Jennings. “Then aim a yard in front of his propeller. There they part. Two to either side and there goes one of our guns.”

The tracer swept within a few feet of one of the Japanese planes, and the machine swerved violently. A moment later it was within easy range of the gun of which David formed one of the crew. At that instant he saw a dark object drop from the plane, while out of the corner of his eye he watched the second plane swerve towards the ship on a course which would take it directly above the deck. The gunner saw that movement too. Cool and with set purpose he swung his gun round and elevated the muzzle a mere fraction. Then there was a shattering concussion. A bomb had burst some hundred yards from the ship while the gun had suddenly started into life.

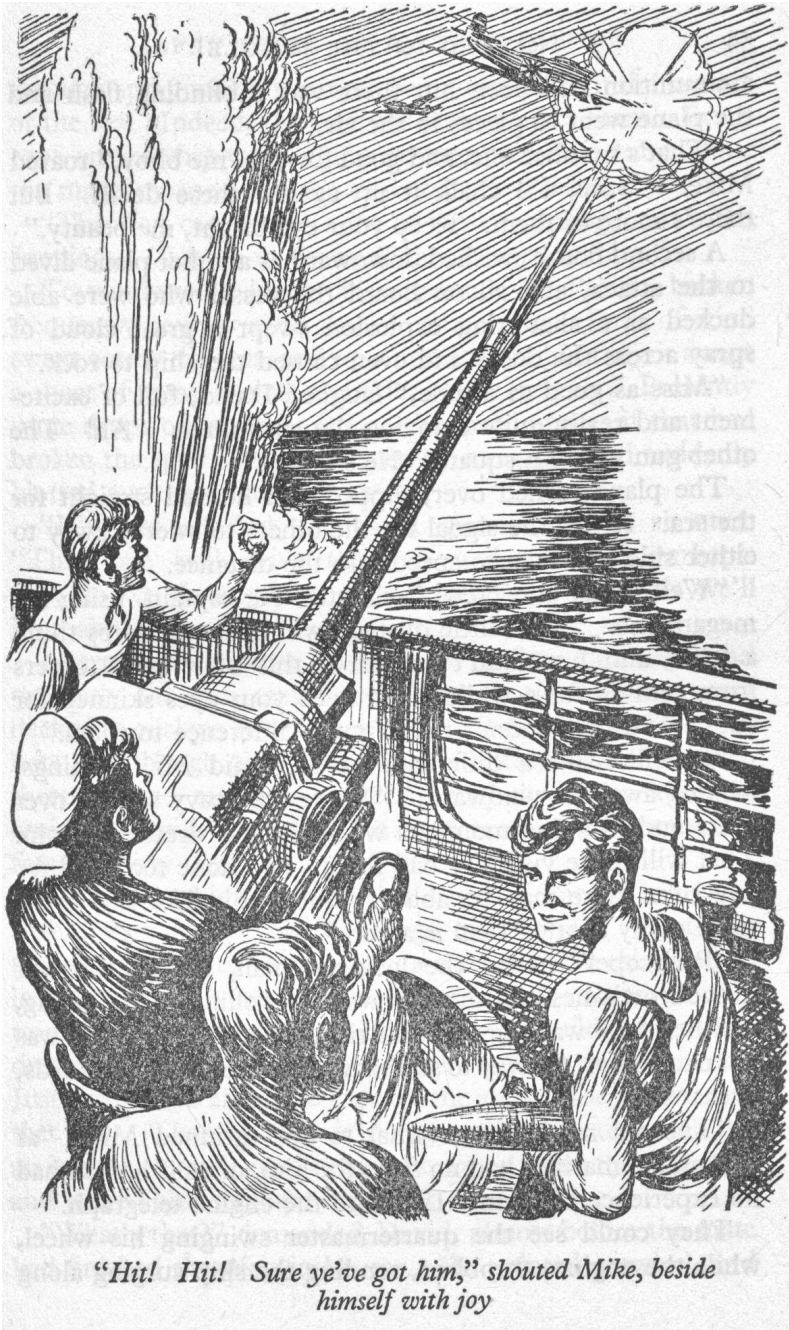
“Hit! Hit! Sure ye’ve got him,” shouted Mike, beside himself with joy. “He’s done. Keep your eye on the others. Me bhoy, ’tis proud I am of ye!”

David watched the gunner and carried out his duties of supplying ammunition with a calmness and nonchalance which surprised himself. Somehow the experiences they had had in this war seemed to have steadied his nerve. That burst not so far away from the ship had shaken the vessel and all on her, and had sent a cloud of spray towards her. But she had suffered no harm, and was steaming on as steadily as before.

“I’d be mad if I had made such a poor shot,” he told Elmer, when the gun they manned had ceased fire for the moment. “That chap will come back.”

“T’other won’t,” cried Elmer, with elation in his voice. “Say, mister,” he said, addressing the Number One, “that chap’s had all he wants. Heck! Watch him trying to pull himself together.”

The plane they had fired at had swerved violently. The pilot had put its nose up and was making an effort to get away from the ship. Then, as if some vital part of his machine had been struck, or more likely, because his ammunition had been hit, there was a blinding flash and the plane went to pieces in the air.



“Hit! Hit! Sure ye’ve got him,” shouted Mike, beside himself with joy

“That’s number one, and good for you, me bhoys,” roared Mike. “Sure, I’ll chalk it up against these devils. But there’s more of them. Keep your eye bright, me beauty.”

A second bomb swished downward as another plane dived to the attack, and all on board the vessel who were able ducked as a shattering explosion swept a great cloud of spray across the decks and even caused the ship to rock.

“Miss as good as a mile,” laughed David, full of excitement and really quite enjoying the encounter. “Ah! The other gun got him square. He’s down.”

The plane turned over, dipped and headed straight for the sea. It was the signal for the others to swerve away to either side and then to speed into the distance.

“Well done, gun crews,” shouted the captain, using his megaphone. “That little dust-up will make the Nips think a trifle, and I wouldn’t wonder if this blow keeps others from coming for a while. But keep your eyes skinned for subs. Weather doesn’t make much difference to them.”

“It will make a difference to us,” said Mr. Jennings, looking away to windward. “There are heavy squalls over there and in a few moments we shall have drenching rain. That will make visibility bad for us, and none too good for any subs there may be about. But a ship like this is far more easily spotted than is a sub.”

“Periscope!” hailed the look-out man, bracing himself in the crow’s-nest, for the ship was now rolling and plunging, and her deck was dipping and rising so that a foothold was none too easy. “Away to starboard. Fifteen hundred yards, perhaps.”

“The old man’ll know what to do,” grinned Mike, “as though submarines had no fears for him, or as if he had had no experience of them. Listen to the engine telegraph.”

They could see the quartermaster swinging his wheel, while the engines throbbed, sending the ship surging along through spray which was now being blown from the surface of the sea. Indeed, the gale was almost upon them. Every rope on the ship was singing its own particular tune, while the masts moaned and the timber-work creaked.

“That Jap can escape a lot of what’s coming,” said Mr. Jennings. “Listen to the stuff that is approaching.”

To windward a black pall overhung the Pacific, broken frequently now by vivid flashes of lightning. Puffs of wind swept across the seas, and now and again a blast of air swept a sheet of spray against the sides of the steamer. Presently some drops of moisture fell on the deck, and as if that had

broken the spell a torrent driven by a raging wind suddenly blotted out their surroundings.

“It’s not all bad for us, I guess,” Elmer shouted. “This gale will drive the sub under water, perhaps. Say, do we do anything about clothing? In a jiffy we’ll be soaked.”

Alternate men were relieved for a few moments, and presently the gun crews and those on the look-out were decked in oilskins and rubber boots. It was still swelteringly hot, and though the wind blew in fitful, powerful gusts, there was no real gale as yet, though a distant hum, an ominous sound approaching a roar, reached their ears and foretold dirty weather.

“It will be blowing a full gale, a real Pacific hurricane before very long,” Mr. Jennings told David. “But you can’t ever be sure. I’ve known a time just like this when it looked as though it would blow great guns, and torrents of rain soused about our ears. Then, all of a sudden, the wind dropped, the rain held up, and there was just a deadly silence. Just cast an eye aft at the wake of the ship. She’s bothering that Jap. The old man is doing evading tactics, steering an irregular course, and it may be we’re faster than the Nip and will be able to shake him off.”

“What’s that?” demanded David, almost before the mate had finished shouting in his ear. He pointed seaward, and there, riding the waves was the submarine, closer now, surging nearer.

“Submarine away to starboard, surfaced and coming fast,” bellowed the mate, hailing the bridge. “I think she is manning her gun.”

The rain squall had stopped, quite suddenly as he had described, and now that visibility was better, it was possible to get a reasonably clear view. The Japanese commander had brought his vessel to the surface, for there she could be driven at faster speed, and even as David pointed her out the gun spoke and a shell sped towards them, striking the surface of the sea a couple of hundred yards away and ricocheting right over the steamer.

The guns were at once slewed round and within seconds shots were being exchanged. Crash! One hit the steamer just three yards wide of the gun where David and Elmer were assisting the crew, and exploding tore a wide gap in the ironwork. Splinters flew across the deck, and one of the gun crew fell heavily and rolled into the scuppers. There was a second detonation as a shell struck the bridge, wrecking the superstructure, killing the steersman, and injuring the captain.

“Steady does it, boys,” cried Number One, his eye glued to the sights. “That’s first blood to the Nip.”

“Hooroosh! It’s second to us, so it is,” shouted Mike.

A well-laid shell from the steamer’s gun had struck the conning-tower of the submarine and even at that distance, and in spite of spray torn from the surface of the sea by another squall, it was possible to see a gaping hole in the tower.

“Steady it is,” said Mr. Jennings, cool and precise. “Well done, Number One. Lay another on them. I’ll get along to the bridge. I’m afraid the old man was hit.”

Though David’s whole attention was riveted upon the submarine, he was nevertheless conscious of some of his surroundings. He could see men carrying the captain to his cabin, for a great gap torn in the bridge rail made that possible. And nearer at hand he caught sight out of the corner of his eye of Mary Evans bending over the wounded member of the gun crew lying insensible in the scuppers.

“Want help?” he shouted.

She shook her head. “None. He’s dead,” she cried. “Killed outright. I’ll go to the captain.”

She too was cool and collected, as if warfare was nothing new to her. But then, how many thousands of her sex have shown the same grand spirit in this war in which woman power has been enlisted to the utmost limit?

“It’s just marvellous, gee! So it is,” Elmer was fond of exclaiming. “Say, I’ve read all there is to read about Britain and her war effort, of the great air battle, the Battle of Britain, when England faced the Axis alone, all alone, sir, when her air force was stretched to the utmost, when defeat of her aerial fleet meant instant invasion and nearly certain conquest. Did the British cry out for mercy, or ask the Huns to let up? Not on your life, sir. They went into the sky day and night against terrific odds and they shot the Germans out of that sky by the tens and hundreds, till Hitler and Goering and the other war lords stamped their feet with rage and gave up their attempt at conquest. The women of Britain were in that business. They stood pat while the fighting lasted. They swarmed into the factories, helped not only to make the guns but fought ’em, yes, sir, fought ’em, while the rest of the people stood fast. No running away for them. Their top man, this Churchill, called on them to fight the Hun in the streets, on the beaches, everywhere. And did they? Did the women help? You ask me, eh?”

He was apt to become quite heated. He hoped that the women and the people of America would do as well. He had no need to be fearful on that score. The two peoples are kin. The same spirit animates them. America would prove her grit in this great struggle.

A roar of cheering broke from the gun crew as another shot struck full upon the conning-tower of the submarine. A cloud of smoke billowed from it, followed by a blinding flash. When David looked again the vessel was upended, her bows thrusting fifty feet into the air. She was wrecked. On the point of sinking. And they had destroyed her. But the commander of that enemy ship was not to sink without doing further mischief. Just before the shell had made a clean hit upon him he had steered his ship directly towards the steamer, and as if with a last effort had unloosed a torpedo at her. Its white wake showed as it rushed through the water.

“Torpedo dead to starboard,” yelled the look-out, hailing the bridge.

The warning came too late. As a howling blast of air swept across the sea and lightning played about the masts, the torpedo struck the steamer, burst its way into the engine-room and exploded with terrific force. Submarine and steamer foundered and went to the bottom of the deep Pacific within a few hundred yards of one another.

CHAPTER V

WITH THE JUNGLE FIGHTERS

A stockily built young man, little more than five feet in height, as brown as any berry, and clad in a pair of ragged shorts, supported by a leather belt to which a holster was attached, emerged from the doorway of a rickety bamboo hut roofed with palm leaves and stretched his arms widely. The yawn he indulged in was just as wide. His lips gaped, his eyes were screwed tight and he looked, just as his actions intimated, as if he had only recently stirred from his bed and was scarcely awake.

“Joe!” he shouted. “Hey, Joe!”

There came an answering call, and presently a dusky-skinned native, also clad in shorts which had once been spotlessly white and which were now of nondescript colour, frayed at the edges and badly torn, emerged from the mass of trees which grew around and came running forward.

“You want?” he asked.

“Food, me lad. Food. And plenty of it. Say, how far did we foot it yesterday?”

“Fifteen, p’raps twenty miles, and through the jungle,” said Joe.

“And running sometimes, eh? Those fellows were close on our heels. But we foxed ’em all right. They must be miles behind. Heh! What’s to do with you?”

An absurd little person had joined them. He came as silently as any ghost from amongst the trees, and had he wished it he could have remained invisible till close beside them. He was a man without a doubt, but such a tiny one. In fact he was a pygmy, one of the race which inhabited this part of the world, keeping almost permanently amidst the trees which clad such an extent of the country. Like his brethren, too, he was scantily clad. One almost expected him to carry a bow and arrow. But a tommy-gun was slung across his diminutive shoulders, while an immense knife was sheathed and hung from his belt.

“Say, what?” asked the white man.

The pygmy gesticulated, pointing to the sea. “Out there,” he said, though his English was difficult. “See boat. Plenty soon come ashore.”

The forest hut, hidden cleverly amongst the trees, was within a mere hundred yards of the shore, where the land fell steeply amidst rocks and sand, on which Pacific waves lapped and boomed. The dawn had only just broken, and the huge, glowing ball that was the rising sun was not so much in evidence as it would be within a half-hour. A misty haze seemed to be wrapped round it, while there was not so much as a puff of air to blow it asunder.

“A boat? What boat? Where from?” demanded the white man, now alert and handling his revolver.

“No savvy. Perhaps from far. Come see,” gesticulated the pygmy, and leading the other two he dropped down the steep bank, leaping from rock to rock and took them to a spot hitherto invisible because of an outcrop of rock, where a tiny bay was carved from the otherwise straight coastline, forming a pool. On it floated a ship’s boat.

“Ahoy!” shouted the white man. “Ahoy, there!”

A long, emaciated figure was lolling in the stern of the boat. Much of his body was in the water which almost filled the craft. His feeble hands gripped the thwarts, and he turned his head just a fraction and made an effort to raise it as the hail reached him. Then he slumped into the stern.

“Get along in there, Joe,” called the white man. “Bring the boat close ashore and we’ll see what’s doing. Here, my lad,” and he motioned to the pygmy. “Get a move on. Get water. Savvy, water. That chap’s near done.”

There was a splash as Joe plunged into the creek while the pygmy disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived, his tiny figure being lost amidst the undergrowth. Indeed, it would not be difficult for anyone to disappear amidst the wooded surroundings on that part of the coast. True, rocks jutted out into the sea, tumbled into huge masses as though thrown there by a giant. The Pacific, now calm and unruffled, as David and Elmer had so often known it, could come roaring in upon this coast, crashing upon the rocks and driving salt spray high up amongst the trees which grew to within a few yards of the shore.

They were not just the palm trees which wave above so many islands in those parts, particularly above the many coral islets which abound in this great ocean. They were of many varieties. In fact, there was magnificent timber everywhere. And beneath the overhanging, often matted, branches amidst which great creepers and vine stems clambered and hung dangling, often bearing wonderful flowers, was a tangled mass of vegetation which

made progress almost impossible. A man needed a great, heavy-bladed knife to assist him in threading a path through this tropical jungle, unless of course, he happened to be just a pygmy.

The pygmies found no difficulty. They could pass from place to place at incredible speed, ducking beneath fallen trees and diving into long, green tunnels, probably paths used by wild animals. To the pygmy the forest was an open book. The sun might be hidden by the leafy canopy overhead. Indeed, clearings were few and far between. But these strange people had developed an additional sense, and just as the carrier pigeon wheels when liberated, circles as if scenting the air and then lays, marvellously, a direct course for home, these pygmy inhabitants of the jungle could thread a way through unknown forest land and reach any objective they sought.

But there must have been some settlement near at hand, for within a few minutes of Joe's plunge into the creek the little man who had first caught sight of the boat was back on the spot, carrying a capacious tin filled with water. Meanwhile Joe had reached the half-swamped ship's boat, and reaching over the gunwale for a rope, seized what remained of her painter and towed the craft towards the shore.

"Say! There are more aboard," cried the white man. "Here, lad, get a move on. Fetch some of your fellows. We'll want a bit of help."

As the boat was drawn close inshore it became possible to see into her. There was the long, lanky figure slumped in the stern, almost a dead man it seemed. And in the bottom, soused by water, for the craft was half filled, were two other figures, lying in grotesque attitudes, appearing to be dead. At least, they did not move, and did not respond to the voice of the white man.

"Alive," said Joe, clambering into the boat and going to each of the three figures. "But almost dead. No water. No food. Big storm lately out there."

That hurricane which had burst upon the Pacific as the Japanese torpedo hit the ship in which Elmer and David were sailing had crashed its way to this part of the world. Great, surging billows of water had swept fiercely down upon the coast, as if determined to wash it away. But the land had stood there for centuries. Those vast rocks, tumbled in such an abandoned manner, had shattered more waves than one could count, and had weathered more Pacific tornadoes than any man could remember. The forest trees might bend before the terrific blasts sweeping across the surface, as indeed they often did. Great numbers might be uprooted. But in that climate, with an abundant rainfall and humid heat trees grew almost like mushrooms, and the ravages of a gale were repaired by generous nature in next to no time.

“Bring ’em ashore. Hi! Every man give a hand. Lay them under the trees. Then give ’em sips of water. But they can’t drink. No. I just clean forgot that. Here’s a bit of my shirt. Soak it and put it between their lips.”

“This man move,” cried Joe after a while, when drops of water had been fed to the lanky fellow who had been in the stern of the boat. “He trying to sit up.”

“Bring the can then,” shouted the white man. “Put it to his mouth. He’s a strong ’un. He’ll recover. T’others are youngsters, eh? Looks like to me, though, they’re burned mahogany with the sun and are so thin and wrinkled that they might be any age.”

The lanky one moved an arm and attempted to roll over. Then his lips opened and he attempted to speak. But only a cracked, grating sound came from his parched mouth.

“Give him a few more drops then,” commanded the white man. “And look to the others. They’re white, p’raps Americans. You can’t say. They could be taken for Red Indians. Here, where in thunder is that Fuzzy-Wuzzy?”

The pygmy was at his elbow, skinny, of a deep mahogany colour, with thin legs and arms and an almost naked body on which every rib was visible. But he was strong and active enough, as his quick movements had told. And he answered the description given, for a mop of unoiled black hair surmounted his diminutive head, while under it was the face almost of a negro. There were the thick lips of that race, and the flattened nose. The eyes were unusually bright and when he spoke his teeth, a wonderful array, glistened.

“Here,” he lisped. “Me ready.”

“Then where are the others? Savvy. We want help.”

“They comin’. Look. Now.”

Half a dozen figures were running from the jungle towards them, a strange mixture. One was a pygmy, and behind him, shy and half-hidden amidst the growth of leaves was a young woman of the same race, whose head like that of the men was covered with a mass of fuzzy hair. Two more were tall natives, reddish-brown in colour, active, fine-looking men, both carrying tommy-guns and armed with immense knives. The remaining persons were undoubtedly Chinese, not so tall, perhaps, as the two natives, but strongly built, bounding forward eager to help.

“You, Chong, and you, me lad, whatever’s your name,” said the white man addressing one of the natives and a Chinaman. “Get down to the boat and help to lift these castaways ashore. The others set-to to make a stretcher of sorts. You savvy, a litter? Eh? What in thunder’s the name for that in this country. Chong, you savvy, eh?”

The Chinaman wagged his head understandingly. “Me know,” he grinned. “Make bed to lift. Put them on bed and carry to the camp. Yes, me savvy.”

They formed a procession from the boat into the forest, following a path which appeared to be well-worn. And presently, having passed the hut from which the white man had first emerged they reached a small clearing, where a tornado, perhaps, had swept the trees and the bush to one side.

There was a larger hut there, built of boughs cut from the forest and thatched roughly with palm leaves, that useful commodity which provides the native in the East with building and roofing material, with a substance so easily stripped and woven that he can within a brief space of time build walls for his house and mats for floor and bed. A fire burned in front and an iron pot was suspended over it from a tripod, also made of boughs. As they reached the clearing the pygmy woman was seen to be stirring the contents with a spoon, and from the open top came the savoury smell of a stew. The white man scented it and his nostrils dilated.

“Food!” he said. “Good! Perhaps these lads will be able to have some of it. And there’s one here who can help. Now, boys, lay them down here at the hut door where the sun can reach them. They’ve been roasted, no doubt, but also they’ve been cold at nights, and a little warmth just now will do them good. See how you can manage with the stew. Chong, get a mug of gravy from it and feed some of it to them.”

The long, lanky stranger who had come so unexpectedly to this rocky, tree-clad spot turned and sniffed, actually sniffed. He lifted his great head, with a tousled mop of red hair on top descending to bushy whiskers and an unkempt beard of the same colour. His cracked lips parted. Then he seized the cup Chong offered and gulped down some of the contents.

“More, if ye plaze,” he managed to say. “And the other two?”

“Comin’ round,” answered the white man. “Say, who are you?”

“Me? Mike.”

“Mike what?”

“Why, sure, just Mike,” the cracked lips managed to fashion while a wry smile seamed the wrinkled face. “Mike to me friends. Mike O’Calleran on the ship’s register. Mike to you, begorra! And what’s your name?”

The white man grinned. He was glad to see that this shipwrecked stranger was recovering and he liked his replies, though they were rather in the form of gurgles.

“I’m Jim Nolan,” he said. “My people were from Ireland long, long ago. I’m a Yank. I’m a marine, one of the fellers they call Leathernecks. You were sunk by that tornado, eh? It looked like blowing this great bit of land away.”

“It’s torpedoed we were,” answered Mike, a little bitterly, beginning to recover the powers of speech as the liquid he had imbibed softened his cracked throat and the soup sent a comfortable feeling of warmth to his stomach. “But I’ll tell all later. How’s the other two?”

They too were coming round. Chong went first to one and then to the other, feeding a few drips of cool water to them at one time, followed by soup. Their lips moved. The expression on their wrinkled, parched faces even changed. There began to spread across their cracked features an appearance of contentment. Soon they attempted to move, and within an hour were sitting up. They were David and Elmer. Not the two young fellows who had helped to man the gun aboard that steamer and who had assisted in sinking the Japanese submarine. At least, not recognisable as those two. For they had been buffeted by a frightful gale. For days they had been soused by green, hot seas which threatened to swamp their boat, and as the gale died away they had lain in a craft into which water leaked in many directions, so that there was no dry spot, and baling had to be continuous.

At the end of days, a nightmare time, none of the three could continue the work, so that it was a waterlogged boat which finally floated into the creek. Of food and water they had had none, and this time there was no line aboard the boat, if even fishing had been possible. There was no can in which to store water, and not so much as a crust or a ship’s biscuit. Still, it was David without a doubt, as thin as a lath, emaciated and weakened but, as the soup restored his strength, as plucky as ever. His chum Elmer lay beside him, thin too, ridiculously fine drawn, matted again about the face with a vast growth of hair, and with one arm dangling helplessly.

“How’d it happen?” asked Jim, some hours later when the trio had rested and had again eaten. This time it was a hearty meal, washed down with copious draughts of water.

“Just feel myself swelling,” grinned David. “This food and water will make a heap of difference.”

“If the supply lasts,” laughed Elmer. “Say, that kettle sends out a gorgeous smell—Um! Tho’ we had a bite only an hour ago I could eat again. Say, Jim?”

“That’s me. Well, buddy?”

“You’d think us greedy, eh?”

“Me! Never! You’ve just a heap to make good on. You’ve been starved. You want all we can give and as often to swell out those thin shanks of yours and cover your ribs. Food, yes. We’ve a heap, just as it happens by a piece of luck. Sometimes we are hard put to it to get a breakfast. But there are wild pig hereabouts and old Fuzzy-Wuzzy brought one in last night. Smells good, don’t he! Chong, dish up more helpings. But, say, lads, how did this arm happen. Broken, eh?”

“The wrist,” answered Elmer. “We were torpedoed as a tornado burst on us. We’d had no end of a scrap with planes, and then with a sub. And, Christopher! we sank her.”

“ ’Tis one I owe them,” cried Mike, sitting up in his excitement. “Me bhoy, I’ll live to sink more of ’em. But the arm of the lad here. That torpedo burst in our engine-room and she foundered in just a twinkling. It was each for himself. I saw the captain and mate and a few more, including a girl, get away in one of the boats. Chances are they’re sunk. Gone to Davy Jones’s locker, ye know. But there’s no saying. They might have weathered the storm and be safe now aboard some bit of land.”

“If there’s real safety around these seas,” answered Jim. “When the Pacific don’t do all it can and a bit more to swamp a man, there are always the Japs, millions of the little hoodoos popping up in every quarter, all out to capture the whole of the ocean and its islands and mainlands so as to make a huge co-prosperity sort of company, in which the Nips will be the top dogs, savvy, and all the rest just slaves. Reckon it’s that fellow Hitler’s policy repeated. Conquer the whole of Europe, you know. Rob the people of all they possess. Throw them into factories, or put ’em on the land, and let ’em do all the work under the wonderful German. You can guess what he does. He’s the lion. He sits back and directs and roars when things don’t go right. He just scares the life out of them all, and lives in luxury, the chosen race, you know, true Aryan, as they like to say, better than British. Yes, me lads, heaps better, and better you take your oath, than Americans. So it’s the

shiny, the East for the Japs, and Europe for the Germans, and no one else anything but slaves. Do we sit down under that?"

Mike clambered drunkenly to his feet and as promptly collapsed. David raised himself on one elbow, while Elmer glared, his eyes peculiarly shiny in the surround of his luxuriant beard.

"We do not, indade," shouted Mike, indignation colouring his cracked voice. "Did ye say better than British?"

Jim nodded. He was beginning to like these castaways. Mike was a man, it appeared, after his own heart. While the youngsters were game.

"Better'n anyone else. British ain't in it with Huns. Americans are just scum. And the Irish——"

There was a twinkle in his eye. He liked rousing Mike. Here was an Irishman after his own heart, for in the United States of America the millions out of Ireland or descended from that race have immense pride in their nationality and love of their native land. They have all the warm-hearted generosity, all the humour and much of the pugnacity of the Irish, leavened perhaps by a greater sense of responsibility.

"Did ye say the Irish?" asked Mike sharply.

"Sure. Why not?"

"Slaves, ye said?"

"That's the ticket. There to do Hitler's bidding. With fat Germans lording it in every corner in the West, and stumpy, skew-eyed Japs out here in the East, polite, you bet, bowing right and left to one another, but driving the natives with whips, living in luxury while what they term the common herd slave to provide food and wealth for the Mikado and his nation. Fine prospect, eh?"

He was grim. Mike raged. David could scarcely speak. For the facts were put bluntly before them, and they knew that they were correct, that Jim was not exaggerating, that this greatest of all wars that the world had ever experienced was being fought for power, for domination, so that the British Empire might be finally extinguished, and the mighty United States of America absorbed, to the end that Germany, defeated in the great war of 1914-1918 might at last prevail and rule all Europe. To conquer the world was too great an undertaking. But British power in the Far East must be broken, and America driven out.

The Japanese were the people to do that. They had already invaded China. They were a warring race, with immense ambition. As allies they would distract the attention of the English and the Americans, while Hitler and his satellites smashed them in the West. Japan would secure enormous territory and loot. The yellow race would, in fact, presently rule the East. But wait until Hitler had consolidated his Western conquests. He could then turn to the Orient, and his allies now, his enemies later, the Japanese, could be thrown back to the islands and Germany could be master not of Europe alone but of the world.

“But let’s get back to your torpedoed ship,” said Jim. “The vessel foundered and you three got away in one boat and some of the others in a second.”

“Sure. And this lad, Elmer, was thrown sky high by the burst of the torpedo and hurt his wrist. It’s been painful and useless since. That’s the whole story, so it is. We just drifted and baled, baled day and night, and starved and prayed for help.”

“And here you are with friends,” cried Jim.

“Friends, yes, but where?” asked David, curious to know where their boat had drifted after the storm. This might be anywhere in the great Pacific, even New Guinea for which they had been steering.

“It’s the Philippines,” explained Jim. “The main island. It’s American. At least,” he corrected himself, “it was till Pearl Harbour was treacherously attacked. Then the Japs came in full force to this part of the world which the United States have held and governed ever since the Spanish-American war. There’s terrific fighting at Bataan away west of us. Those of the Filipinos who escaped from Manila and other places and refused to knuckle down to the Japs have fled to the forests. We’re one of many bands, being chased day and night by Nips. It’s a restless life, boys. But it’s exciting.”

“And you?” asked David. “Why not at Bataan?”

“Because I’m one of the garrison of Wake Island. The Japs attacked us there in great force immediately after attacking Pearl Harbour. We marines, Leathernecks, you know, held out. I’ll say my buddies and their officers fought like demons. But those Nips are ferocious fighters, and there were swarms of them, with guns from their ships to help, and planes and bombs. They beat us down by numbers and took the place.”

“You became a prisoner then?” asked Elmer.

“That’s right. I was shipped aboard an old barge. Three days later, when we were in sight of land I cut adrift from her in a sampan we were towing. A junk picked me up, and in time we reached the Philippines. I joined one of these bands.”

“So there is fighting ahead?” asked Elmer, his eyes sparkling.

“Sure.”

“And American troops are not so far away?”

“Fifty or more miles,” said Jim. “They’re commanded by one of our finest soldiers, General MacArthur. He’s putting up a tremendous defence with his doughboys. Maybe you’ll hear the guns some time. The wind carries the sound to us.”

“From Manila?” asked David. “That is the capital, isn’t it?”

“Sure! That is, it was. The Nips have blasted it with their guns and bombs, and a heap of it has been burned. Those hoodoos ran amuck. They came in swarms, landing from special barges. I heard it said that they were fully prepared for this war and had been practising barge landings for months. That and jungle fighting. Anyway, they were too strong for the Yanks, for, you get me here, we wanted peace and did all we could to keep it. They say we were under agreement not to fortify Manila and the fortress island of Corregidor in the bay. If our troops had stayed in Manila and nearby they would have been overrun.

“But General MacArthur had seen the storm coming. He had made preparations to hold a neck of land close to the city, known as Bataan. It’s high land, surrounded and covered with jungle, with the sea on one side, the bay on another, and the third joined to the mainland. It gave him a short line to defend, though he had few men, not too many guns, enough ammunition for a time, but scarcely a plane. So the Nips have had it more or less their own way. But they can’t down MacArthur. No, siree! He and his men are putting up a magnificent fight. Those troops who couldn’t make Bataan, and lots of civilian Filipinos who hate the Japs as we do, took to the forests. The Japs are after them as if they were rats. They’re after us too. Will there be fighting, did you ask? Heck! We’ll see no end of it.”

CHAPTER VI

DAVID LEADS AN EXPEDITION

Rest and plenty of food did wonders for David and Elmer and Mike. They lay in the open, sometimes in the shade, while at other times they strolled to the coast, there to watch great billowing rollers sweeping in upon the rocks. A week of peace and good surroundings did wonders, and Elmer's wrist made great progress.

"I'll carry the arm in this sling for a while longer," he said. "But if there any fireworks I can make a bid to use it. Say, Jim, what news?"

The marine had been away from camp for two days, taking a pygmy with him, two of the Filipinos and a Chinaman.

"The little man is a wizard at finding tracks through the jungle," said Jim. "And he seems almost to smell Nips. One day we all but bumped into a party not twenty miles from here. They're after us, of course, and had moved camp some hours before and come along by forced marches. The idea was to take us unawares. But I could see old Fuzzy-Wuzzy sniffing. He stopped dead in his tracks and held up one of those skinny arms. 'Jap,' he said. There. Not so far."

"Many of them?" asked Mike.

"Thirty or more, under an officer. They're trained jungle fighters, you know, which means that they can creep through thick cover and like more than anything to climb into a tree and snipe unsuspecting Filipinos. We caught a dozen of them like that two weeks ago. They were waiting for a party to come along a forest track. We shot daylight into 'em."

"And brought them down bang!" asked David.

"You'd think so. Not a bit of it," replied Jim. "You get lively to their tricks after a while, though I'll say their camouflage is just the last word. They're rigged out in green togs, just shorts and a sort of coat, you savvy. But their faces, arms, and legs are painted green. They get into trees, you'd say for a sort of rest cure, for blowed if they ain't tied there. Yes, sir, roped to the tree, and when a bullet finds 'em they just swing free and dangle."

"You mean they take to the trees for hours?" asked Elmer, sitting up, for this was a new or almost new form of warfare.

“Days,” Jim told him, extracting the rank native cigar he was smoking and waving it in the air to emphasise the answer. “Days, me boy. Why not? They’ve all the ammunition they want. And a Nip lives on air.”

“Meaning?” asked David.

“Waal, just rice. He has a bag slung round his neck, and that holds, so I’ve heard, a week’s ration. So when he’s ordered to take cover and snipe he takes to the trees as a monkey might, and some of ’em ain’t at all unlike those little blokes, and he just stays put, shooting when there’s a chance, sleeping and eating. That’s the Jap jungle man.”

“Do you think we’ll see some of ’em?” asked David.

“You bet. They’re after us and other bands, and we’ve got to keep moving, for there are precious few weapons in our hands, just a few tommy-guns and a couple of rifles. We want ammunition and more weapons. Then we’d be able to put up a show.”

That night, as David lay beside Elmer, he was thinking of the tale Jim had brought them.

“Awake, eh, Elmer lad?” he asked.

“ ’Tis asleep he is,” said Mike, who was close handy. “What’s the worry, me bhoy?”

“I was thinking of this question of our need of weapons and ammunition.”

“Begorra, ye were? And for why?”

“Because if we had as many as we wanted of guns and so on, and plenty of bullets, we wouldn’t need to be on the run all the time. If there were very many Japs on our trail we could disperse, disappear, you know, and guided by the Fuzzies make for a quieter spot. But we are in this war, aren’t we, Mike?”

“Indade we are! We’ve something owing to the Huns, and something more to the Nips. Didn’t they kidnap your Elmer’s uncle? What’s happened to him? And did they sink us out there in the Pacific, and we not doing a thing to annoy them? Did they for sure?”

David nodded energetically. “They did,” he replied, with emphasis.

“Then we’re in this war to the neck and higher,” Mike declared. “What then?”

“There is a party of Japs hunting us. Why be hunted?”

“But—but sure how can a man help that?” asked Mike, puzzled.

“By hunting the Nip ourselves. We’ve wonderful scouts in these Fuzzy-Wuzzies. We can track down a band of Japanese out to shoot up fugitives. They can’t be hoisted in trees and lashed to them all the time. They’ll camp, perhaps. Supposing we attacked and took their weapons and their ammunition?”

Mike sat up abruptly. “ ’Tis a lad ye are!” he cried. “And for why not, to be sure? Wid guns and bullets we could drive off other Nips. And wouldn’t that be helping the war. Sure it would. Say, Jim.”

He prodded the marine with his toe. “Did ye hear the plan this your man has put over?” he asked. “He’s for foightin’ it out with the Jap and not for runnin’.”

The marine turned over and raised himself on an elbow. He was only just visible in the gloom, for though there was a bright moon the trees cast shadows, and these hunted men were always careful to get under cover. Nor were they content to sleep unless their camp was guarded.

“There’s never any saying when the Nips will move,” Jim had explained. “They know it’s hard to get to close quarters with us in daylight. So they often make a forced march at night. And, of course, they have Fuzzy-Wuzzies, fellows they captured at their landing and who have to scout for them whether they like it or not. The Jap is no soft sort of person. He’ll shoot a native as quick as knife, and he’s done it with the Filipinos and the pygmies, though he ain’t often been able to lay his hands on those little fellows. They’re too artful. They can slip through a hole that would almost bar a cat. That’s why they rope ’em to one of the band.”

“What’s this idea?” he asked, stifling a yawn.

“It’s David has a broth of a scheme,” cried Mike, for he had seen much of our young friend, and had formed a great opinion of him.

“It’s easy to see you are of the officer class,” he had said, when they were aboard the steamer. “The likes of me can spot that sort the instant we set eyes on him. Been to a fine school, eh?”

“Cranleigh,” was David’s reply, for indeed he had been a scholar at that celebrated Surrey school. “But I’ve been a bit of a globe-trotter, you see, Mike. My father was in business in China. He was one of the men who lived in Shanghai and was prosperous till the Japanese invaded that part of China.

He is a prisoner, and has been for many months. I used to make the trip across America for my holidays, for otherwise we'd have been parted for long periods, and I'm all he's got. Mother died some years ago and I'm the only child. I'd fly to America, get a plane across to Frisco, and from there make across the Pacific by plane again. Once father and I went to Honolulu, where we met Elmer and his uncle. I took a whole term off for that trip. Again, three years ago, we met in Singapore and motored up to Penang and thence into Siam and Indo-China. But that's all ended now. As to being of the officer class, officers are born, Mike, though I'll admit that a good school helps to make and train them."

"Say, what's this great idea," yawned Jim. "It ought to be something mighty big or you wouldn't be waking a man who has been marching most of the day in sweltering heat."

"It's just simple, just a crazy thought that came to me," said David. "I've asked, why be hunted by Nips? Why not turn the tables on them?"

"You're daft," shouted the marine. "There ain't any 'why' about it. We have to run and keep on running, for the Nips are strong and well-armed. Killing them is no easy matter. I'll say they are for killing us. They have our doughboys hemmed in on Bataan, and the rest of this great main island of the Philippine group of islands—more than a thousand islands in the group 'tis said—are in their hands. That is, the Rising Sun floats over Manila and other towns and settlements, and thousands of Filipinos and white people living thereabouts have had to surrender. But there are more thousands who have taken to the mountains and the forests, thousands of them."

"All on the run, eh?" asked David.

"You've said it. All hiding, and getting as far from the Nips as they can, and only coming in to surrender when they are famished. What else can they do?"

"That's the point," said David coolly. "Thousands of them, you said?"

"Sure! Perhaps a thousand separate bands, each fending for itself."

"Unarmed, too, I suppose?"

"Now and again a tommy-gun, or a shot-gun. Perhaps a rifle or so, and sometimes revolvers. The natives mostly have knives, wicked-looking things they are too, and the Japs know it. But where's ammunition to come from, eh? Before you get putting over new ideas," added Jim, a trifle sourly, "and waking a poor marine up from his beauty sleep, you've just to weigh up all the points. There ain't too many in our favour."

“Except numbers and fine scouts,” cried David.

“That’s the ticket,” burst in Elmer. “Just you cock an ear, Jim. This young David fellow wasn’t born yesterday. He’s got something worth listening to.”

Jim sought for a cigar, one of those rank native affairs he seemed to have clenched between his teeth most of the day, and since a light might have betrayed them he had to be content with chewing the end. He listened then in silence as David outlined his scheme. At first he sat up impatiently, and then flopped back on to his elbow. A minute later he was standing.

“We stop running, eh? That’s the great idea. And because we haven’t ammunition and the tools with which to use it we go and take them. Christopher! This is something we hadn’t thought of. I’ll say, those Japs came here in their thousands, just swarming, and everyone outside Bataan had to run or surrender. What were the fugitives to do? Ask the Japs to be gentle, eh? They would have been shot out of hand or hanged. That’s the Jap. He’s here to make some new-fangled co-operative affair of the East. He wants to rope in all of the Philippines with China, Indo-China, Siam, Malaya, yes, and Australia and New Zealand, not to mention India and the rich Dutch Indies, all just nicely into his bag. He’d then have all the raw materials of the East, rubber, quinine, oil, a thousand other commodities that don’t happen in Japan, and he’d have millions of slaves to work for him. Think of it, the Nip, who’s always been just tolerated by Americans and seldom liked, and not often trusted, would be top dog in the East, and this Mikado of theirs would have an empire bigger than that held by you British. But about this idea. Sakes, I like it. Why run?”

“All the time,” interjected Elmer. “When there are thousands of fugitives. Why not organise resistance? David says let us start in a small way. There’s a group of Nips close handy. Supposing we get busy on them?”

The subject kept them awake for a long time, so that it was unusually late when they turned out the next morning.

“I’ve been lying there thinking it over,” said Jim, as they ate their breakfast. “It’s your idea, David. You get busy with the scheme and put out the orders. We’ll put you in command for the occasion. Of course, if it flops, you’ll be for it, as we say in the marines. If it comes off, well, boy—well that would be grand.”

“Then I suggest we move camp to-night,” began David. “If the Japs have Fuzzies, they will know, perhaps, that we are here, and if we broke camp

now they'd get to know. But if we act as though we were secure, and thought ourselves hidden and safe there would be all the more chance of stealing upon them unawares. Our pygmies can keep in touch with them and lead us in their direction to-night. We shall want to study their surroundings, and perhaps the following night we might attack, or better still, in the early dawn of the following day."

The moon was up when they left their camp that night and guided by the pygmy stole away into the forest. For some miles they threaded a path between the trees, climbing most of the time, for there are many hills, mountains too, in that part of the world. Each one of the party carried food and a can of water, though it was usually an easy matter to find the latter, particularly in the company of the pygmies.

At the head of the procession was David, with Mike and Elmer at his side, and two Filipinos armed with tommy-guns. Jim brought up the rear, while several Chinese and Filipinos were mingled with the party, which numbered fifty. Some had antique weapons. The remainder were armed with knives, while David and Elmer and the Irishman were completely unarmed.

A mile in front of the procession one of the pygmies scouted, and every now and again gave vent to a weird call, which might have been an imitation of some forest animal.

"Rather like our Red Indians," said Elmer. "There isn't the call of a wild beast that they can't imitate. Jupiter! How the fellow scared me."

The pygmy seemed to rise from the ground at their feet. "Stop!" he whispered. "Devil Jap near. Someone come."

"Then you take charge for a while, Elmer," whispered David. "Halt the column here and wait. I'll go along with the Fuzzy."

They crept forward, the pygmy a few paces ahead. It was not so gloomy beneath the trees that David could not distinguish his figure, while in the few open glades to which the moonlight penetrated it was almost as light as day. Stepping with great care, indeed, appearing almost to glide along, the tiny native now and again halted to lift a fallen branch which he placed with great care on one side.

"Make noise. Crack!" he whispered. "Jap devil hear easy in silence. Feel ground with toe every time."

It was hard to discover his meaning, for his command of English was rudimentary. This diminutive pygmy had not even the vocabulary possessed by a native of the East accustomed to contact with the white man. Still,

David understood, and followed his guide with every care, feeling the ground before he put a foot down firmly, and like his leader, removing an odd branch when it impeded his silent progress. They moved forward in this fashion at very slow speed, and ages seemed to pass before the pygmy again came to a halt. He did so suddenly, lifting a skinny hand, and then bent forward in the act of listening.

“Voices. As plain as possible,” thought David. “I suppose the forest carries sound, particularly in the silence of the night. Ah! What’s that?”

The crash of something moving through the jungle startled him. Having no weapon, he crouched ready to spring at the throat of a Japanese should one appear. But he was soon reassured. It was no enemy as yet, but some beast, probably a wild boar which, disturbed by their coming, headed away through the forest at lightning speed. A challenge followed. It was a Japanese sentry.

“Who goes?” he cried.

“Only a pig,” came an answer from another point. “I still hear the brute running.”

The pygmy touched David on the shoulder and pointed aloft. “Up in tree last one sure,” he whispered. “Find plenty soon. Other on ground.”

Though the sudden interruption had been startling and had sent his heart beating and a surge of hot blood to his face, David could realise that it was a lucky occurrence.

“We might have walked right into their camp,” he thought. “But, that’s just stupid. This Fuzzy would have found them long before. He’s moving on. We must be very close.”

There was a clearing ahead. The deep gloom of the forest was giving way to a wide patch of light, and presently they were at its fringe, and peering from amidst the trees they were able to see a number of figures, some seated about the smouldering ashes of a fire over which they had cooked their evening ration of rice, while others sat cross-legged and gossiped. David counted them. “Forty-five I make it. But, yes, there’s a canvas shanty at the far edge. That will be the officer.”

A few minutes later his guess was proved to be accurate, for a figure crawled from the bivouac tent and approached the men. They leaped to their feet at once, for discipline is strict in the Japanese army.

“Listen. He ask what the noise about,” whispered the pygmy.

A voice called across the clearing from a point not a hundred yards from them, and it became evident by the way in which the officer cocked his head and peered upward that this was the voice of no ordinary sentry marching to and fro on his beat. It was a Jap soldier slung in a tree.

“Him say pig,” whispered the little man. “Me understand Jap little. Officer saying sentry good man and all awake. Presently all lie down and sleep.”

“Except the sentry.”

“Two men guard,” answered the pygmy. “Devil Jap up in tree and other below, near, but not sure where. Wait, master, little bit. Soon find.”

He was gone with the silence and swiftness of a ghost, and for fully five minutes David crouched at the edge of the clearing watching the Japanese soldiers preparing to turn in for the night. At a sharp order one of them, probably the orderly on fatigue duty, stamped out the ashes of the fire and reported that all was safe. Then ground sheets were stretched in the centre of the brightly illumined patch and in twos and threes the men lay down till all were prone on the ground.

All, that is, save one of their comrades who, undoubtedly, was aloft in one of the trees, and another doing sentry-go on the ground. He was there. David could see him. He marched across the camp, halted, turned swiftly as a well-drilled soldier might, and marched off in the opposite direction. Presently he reappeared, and while David, now joined again by the pygmy, watched and noted every possible point, he continued his beat, to and fro, to and fro, his tommy-gun slung across his shoulders.

“He takes about three minutes each way,” said David. “Just three minutes. We shall have to be slippy. Unless——”

His wits were working at lightning speed, for undoubtedly wits must be employed if he and his companions were to improve the dangerous position in which they found themselves. That it was dangerous there could be no manner of doubt, for as Jim the Leatherneck had told them, swarms of enemy soldiers had been brought to the Philippines, in the main to Luzon, the biggest and most important of the many islands in this giant archipelago, the island in fact where Manila the capital city stood, and where General MacArthur and his American troops were quartered. That garrison of gallant men had been driven on to the peninsula of Bataan, where a host of Japanese were assaulting them without respite.

But there were still more of the enemy to browbeat civilians, to hunt those who, choosing liberty rather than be prisoners and slaves of the Japanese, had plunged into the forest country stretching to many parts of the island. These bands of fugitives were being surrounded and liquidated almost daily. They were just helpless in a majority of cases, without arms or food, and without any plan for the future. But a few bands existed, like the one which David and his friends had joined, which were not disposed to surrender, and would sell their lives dearly. But they lacked equipment. Give them arms and ammunition and they would put up a fight. In this forest country, the mountains existing in many parts, even the extinct volcanoes offered opportunities for defence, while it was obvious that could a few bands come together and secure the necessary munitions as well as food, they might become a serious thorn in the side of the invaders.

“We’ll do it, and within a few hours,” thought David, as they retraced their footsteps.

Presently they were within hailing distance of their friends, and though David had no exact idea as to their position, the pygmy knew and having sent out his call, an agreed signal, an answering challenge greeted them.

“So what?” asked Elmer. “We fight now, eh? Or we camp and wait for another day? Or—or what?”

“Sure he’s been planning all the while, he has,” said Mike. “Just let the bhoy speak. Is it foight, Mr. David?”

“It is, and now, within a couple of hours or so. When does the moon fall?”

“Very early,” said Jim, who had now joined them with the remainder of the party. “It will be dark, I reckon, pitch dark that is, for perhaps an hour. Then the dawn’ll break.”

“That’s the very ticket,” cried David. “Now, see here. My plan is as follows. If you don’t approve it, say so at once. If you do, we fight those Japs just as the dawn breaks.”

They listened in silence as he outlined his plan for an attack, and not once was he interrupted. At length Jim spoke up.

“It’s sure a scheme that’s good to listen to,” he declared. “I’m for it all out.”

“And ’tis meself will be happy to have a hand in it,” said Mike.

“You could be sure I was with you, David, just all the way,” Elmer told them. “The plan looks well. It should succeed. Gee! I’m just all eagerness to get moving.”

They rested for two hours and moved off, led by the pygmy. Every man in the band knew exactly what rôle he was to play in the forthcoming attack, and when at length they reached the neighbourhood of the moonlit Japanese camp, and separated, all went to the stations David had allotted to them, eagerly awaiting the signal which would unleash them from their hide-outs amongst the trees and send them against the enemy.

“In just about an hour now,” thought David. “If we win we’ll make these forests a death-trap for the Japs.”

CHAPTER VII

HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING

An uncanny silence surrounded the camp of sleeping Japanese and the dense forest through which David had led his little band of fugitives, the pygmy being close at his side. Not so much as a sound came from the enemy, while every man in the column had been specially warned to take the utmost pains to avoid even a whisper.

“Because that sort of thing carries on a still night, I’m told,” David had said before they set out, wagging his head wisely. “Of course, I’ve had no actual experience of forest work, but I’ve heard tales from those who have.”

“You’ll hear lots of that in America,” smiled Elmer. “Vast numbers of our people go camping in the summer and they love hunting. We sometimes went off into Idaho, where a half-caste Indian was our guide. He was the real type, you know. Tall, thin, seldom smiled, toes turned in, so that he made the narrowest track, and eyes which seemed to be fastened on the ground, but which saw everything. If a twig snapped that guy heard it.”

Each member of the little band crawled into the position allotted to him, and, thanks to the drilling and the warnings they had received, no challenge came from the Japanese sentries. No doubt those who had been on duty when David and the native visited the camp had been relieved. The two now doing sentry-go occupied the same positions. One stumpy individual marched briskly to and fro, right across the centre of the camp, while the second was undoubtedly posted in a tree to the far side for they heard him cough.

And though the moon had now disappeared the open space was relatively light, for brilliant stars filled the tropic sky. The contrast between the deep gloom, indeed, the almost impenetrable darkness of the forest and this camping-site was remarkable, so that the watchers spread around the rough circle could see the sentry come and go, turning about with soldier-like precision, and could discern the canvas shanty which housed the officer and the men sleeping in a tight group in the centre. Their weapons were piled in neat array at their feet, and doubtless their reserve ammunition was close handy.

One of the sleepers awakened and sat up of a sudden. Had he heard any suspicious sound? He appeared to be listening intently, and presently they

saw him in the dim light stretch out a hand and touch his neighbour. Then, as the sleeper turned on to his other side, grumbling, the man lay down again just as the sentry came into view and marched past the sleepers.

“Chap snoring next to him,” said David, his lips close to Elmer’s ear. “In just ten minutes we move.”

How those minutes dragged! They were like hours almost. And try as he might David could not still his heartbeats. They thumped against his ribs, seeming to make so much sound that the sleeping Japanese must be awakened. And in those few minutes how acute were his thoughts.

“Supposing the thing’s a complete flop?” he thought. “Supposing we’re spotted? And—and if our men are killed I’d feel terrible. I believe others who have to plan an attack and take the responsibility feel just as I do. Well—ah—time.”

A shrill whistle broke the silence. A rifle cracked within fifty yards of him. Then a scuffle could be heard at the point where the marching sentry had reached the end of his beat. The man seemed to disappear. At one instant he was marching smartly, his figure easily to be seen. The next there was no sentry.

“At them! Charge!” shouted David.

“Remember Pearl Harbour,” bellowed Elmer, springing to his feet and careless of the fact that he carried one arm in a sling, dashing into the clearing. From every point of the compass men of the little band of fugitives commanded for the first time by David, hurled themselves towards the centre where the Japanese soldiers, awakening at the first shot, had sprung to their feet and dashed to seize their tommy-guns. Some, quicker than their fellows, were at the stands before the attackers, and seizing their weapons opened fire, sending a hail of bullets sweeping across the clearing. One of David’s men doubled up like a rabbit and went rolling over and over till he tumbled into a heap almost at the feet of the Japanese.

At that instant the officer came scrambling out of his shelter, buckling a sword as he ran. David rushed towards him, to be met with a shot from his revolver. The bullet caught him on the point of the shoulder, and its effect was one which might be likened to the kick from a horse.

Our hero shot backward and fell prone on the ground. But he was on his feet a moment later and, dashing at the officer, gripped the hand which held the weapon. Then commenced a struggle which might have continued for minutes, for the Japanese was a muscular fellow, short but stout and in

perfect training, whereas David had not so long ago experienced hardships which, though he pooh-poohed the idea, must have sapped his strength. Mike came to the rescue. The lanky Irishman bounded towards the couple wrestling in the centre of the clearing and tore them asunder. The officer was a mere weakling in his powerful hands. Mike had him by the collar one moment. Then he released his grip, stood back half a pace and floored him with a terrific blow from his fist.

“The baste!” he shouted, red-hot with indignation. “Did ye see him trying to kill our commander? Bad cess to the likes of him and to all Japanese.”

Meanwhile there was strenuous fighting in the camp. These sons of Nippon are nothing if not formidable. There is a fatalistic streak in all of them, and sooner than surrender a great majority would die. This was to prove a major difficulty in the great Eastern campaign now commencing.

These Japanese, at first sweeping all before them because America was unarmed and anxious for peace, and Britain fully occupied with the Nazi enemy in the West, were soon to discover that enemies were collecting about them. As in the case of Germany and Hitler, the dastardly, maniacal leader they had elected to follow, all the efforts of the Japanese nation has been turned to war, and factories throughout Japan and in Manchuria and elsewhere were creating arms, more and more arms, weapons of every description with which to pulverise the white man. No wonder that at the onset, following that treacherous attack upon Pearl Harbour and the American Pacific fleet, these men of Nippon had carried all before them.

Hitler had done precisely the same. He had found work for a multitude of unemployed by opening vast undertakings whose sole purpose was to manufacture arms. Much of this was done secretly. Some of it was known to the Chancelleries of Europe. But the world, outside Germany and Italy and Japan, wanted peace, wanted it so much, for not yet had the nations recovered from that Armageddon which raged between the years 1914-1918. But Hitler and his war lords cared nothing for peace. They took full advantage of the peace-loving outlook of Britain and continental countries. They were determined to wipe out the defeat they had suffered in the Great War, and, led by the monster Hitler, aided and abetted by Mussolini of Italy they aimed at the conquest of the British Empire together with all the continent of Europe, and had designs when that was accomplished, on America itself and her millions of peace-loving peoples.

It suited them well that Japan had the same aggressive instincts, the same desire for conquest. Hitler overran the continent of Europe, but Britain and her Empire held firm. Japan was to overrun the whole of the East, save India and Ceylon. But there again outposts of the British Empire were to hold fast, while America stood beside her. We shall see how, struggling manfully against enormous odds and an enemy prepared for all eventualities, Britain and America stemmed the overflowing tide from Nippon, and in time turned the tables on this treacherous nation.



Mike floored him with a terrific blow of his fist

“You saved my life, Mike,” gasped David, for the struggle had winded him. “I owe you a heap for that.”

“Bejabbers,” the Irishman began to expostulate, and then roared out a warning. “ ’Tis more fightin’ there is. Watch the hathen.”

There was no doubt that the Japanese were game soldiers. Those who had been able to reach their weapons were now bunched in a group almost in the centre of the clearing, and having thrown themselves on the ground were pouring in heavy fire against the attackers.

“Scatter,” shouted David. “Get behind trees. Those who have snatched guns get busy with those fellows.”

“See here,” said Elmer, wriggling to his side, and both taking cover behind a tree. “Look at this. Gee, if it isn’t a box of grenades.”

“Call Jim,” ordered David. “He’ll know how to handle the things. Unless you know, Elmer, boy.”

“Heard of them often,” grinned the American. “But never handled one. Our grenades have a safety-pin, much like that used by the British. But the Nips may use some other sort of gadget. Say, Jim.”

“Comin’ over,” called the Leatherneck, completely in his element, for the Marine Corps is one of the crack fighting units in the American forces, and their record in former wars—and already in this struggle with the Japanese—was one to be proud of. At Wake Island they had put up a desperate resistance against overpowering odds, and had held fast for days.

“Say, what’s doing?” he panted, wriggling his way through the trees till close beside David and Elmer. “Those Japs will hold us till their ammunition is done. How long it will last you can’t guess. But they have the best of the firepower at this moment.”

“Feel this,” said Elmer. “Say, Leatherneck, know them things?”

“Does a child know its own father?” grinned Jim. “Sure, it’s a grenade. Jap, eh?”

“You bet. I hit up against a box of ’em out there where the reserve ammunition was stacked. It sent me down on my face when I tripped against it. Brought it along here for it seemed a likely box of tricks.”

“Sure! Likely ain’t the word. It means we’ll down those guys. See here. Feel the pin, eh? Take care you don’t draw it till you’re ready to throw the grenade. Then pitch one right into the middle of the bunch. But, just this more. Better order our men to take good cover. A grenade splinters a heap and they fly far.”

Elmer's proved a lucky find, for though the first surprise attack had gone in favour of David and his band, the opposition of the Japanese who had managed to reach and secure their arms was serious. Indeed, crouched close to the ground as they were, they were not an easy mark for those of the attackers who also had contrived to snatch tommy-guns from the piled weapons.

True, some of the enemy had already suffered wounds or lay dead in the clearing. But fifteen at least were firing at the flashes from the surrounding trees, and to make matters still more difficult their officer, recovering from the terrific blow Mike had dealt him, had crawled to the side of his men and was directing their fire. It was therefore touch and go. The grenades might make a vast deal of difference.

"Sing out to the men," David said. "They know your voice, Jim, and you can make them understand."

"Listen, buddies," yelled Jim. "You boys who can follow this lingo warn all men to keep well behind cover. A tree for choice. There's fireworks coming."

"We'll throw in turn, eh?" said David. "First Jim. Then you, Elmer. I'll pitch a grenade last."

"Then here's for it. Over she goes."

Jim stood behind the tree near which he had taken cover and launched a grenade at the Japanese. Then he dropped to the ground, flattening himself as close to it as possible.

The missile seemed to reach within a few feet of the enemy, and for a few seconds nothing happened. Then there was a deafening detonation, while a shower of metal splinters swept across the clearing, striking the trunks of trees and bringing a shower of leaves down on the heads of the attackers.

"Go to it, Elmer," cried David, as cool in the midst of the attack as might be an old campaigner.

"One! Two! Three! There she goes!" cried the American.

"Bang in the centre of them. Oh, boy!" shouted Jim.

"And now for our captain," said Mike, standing up in his excitement.

"Down with you," yelled David. "Good for you, Elmer! See if this will beat it."

Furious fire had burst from the Japanese who survived the first grenade. Watching them and in particular the officer, David saw that they were about to charge. It was his turn to launch a grenade at them, and standing erect he lobbed it so that it fell directly in the patch they had taken, in fact almost at the feet of the officer. As the crash of the explosion died down he shouted an order.

“Charge! Into them, boys,” he bellowed.

“Charge! Charge, me bhoys,” yelled Mike, springing into the open.

“Out knives,” shouted Jim, while Elmer found himself racing forward, shouting at the top of his voice.

It was as if an avalanche had fallen upon the remaining Japanese. Those who still lived made frantic efforts to leave the clearing. They raced for the surrounding trees, and could be heard tearing away through the matted jungle.

“Send our men after them,” ordered David. “If we can destroy all of them the better, for then the enemy in Manila will have to guess what has happened. But they’ll learn sooner or later that an attack has been made, and no doubt will take suitable measures.”

“Meaning?” gasped Elmer, for he was winded by his exertions.

“Just what one might expect. They’ll send out a punitive expedition to mop up bands of men such as ours. If they don’t know rightly what has happened here the expedition may be of no great size. If they do, no doubt they’ll invade our territory in force. But we’ll go into all that later on. Let’s count the arms we’ve taken. And Jim, what about stripping the Japs of their clothing. It’s too dark yet awhile to make sure of the kit they have. But it is more than likely that it is designed for jungle warfare. That’s the stuff we want, that and guns and ammunition. Anyway, there is no hurry. Our scouts tell us that there is no other group of Japs within miles of this, and those fellows who have bolted are not likely to want to return.”

“They’ll run as if the old gent himself was on their tails,” laughed Mike. “Sure, this has been a great business.”

“We’ll make it better still,” boasted David. “Here we’ve shown how a small band can surprise and defeat a well-armed enemy. We can go on doing what the Chinese guerrillas have done. They began against the Japs with just knives and a few out-of-date weapons of no real use. They won weapons by making surprise attacks. They secured such a mass of them that presently

they were able to face a pitched battle. That's what we should do. Win weapons and ammunition. Then bring the bands together."

"It's a fine scheme," agreed Elmer. "And when you come to chew it over it really is the only sensible thing people in our position could do. If we don't fight we shall be hunted down like rats. If we don't secure arms we can't fight. Eh? Ain't that the way it looks to you? A guy out in these forests wants to live. Right! He must fight, and, gee, if that isn't what we'll do."

Shouting could be heard from the forest, and now and again a tommy-gun sent its faint staccato rattling amidst the trees as one of the pursuers, or one of the fleeing Japanese opened fire. Then there was silence, save for an occasional sharp crack as a man returning to the band crushed a broken and rotting piece of tree trunk.

"Which just shows how true it is that even a small sound travels in forest country and warns of one's approach," said David. "What's the report, Jim?"

The marine had been amongst the returning men and now joined his fellow whites.

"They reckon three or four of the Nips got away," he said. "The rest—well—just didn't. The Chinese boys with us saw to that. I'll say, if there's fighting away in these trees, trust a China boy to be in at it. Recollect that Japanese have been shootin' them up these years past, burning their villages, squatting on their land, trying to master the whole of it. And have they been tender-hearted with the Chink and his women and his children? I'll tell the whole truth. They've murdered them where and when they could. If they captured guerrillas, it was death for them boys. If they took soldiers of the line, dressed in uniform, you know, did they treat 'em as prisoners of war? No, sir. They looked on 'em much as vermin. And the Chink remembers. Give him a gun and the dough to shoot out of it and he'll be after the Japs till the cows come home, and until he's driven every one of 'em out of his country. But what say to a bit of food? Fightin' makes a guy real hungry."

It seemed quite certain that David and his friends had nothing to fear from the enemy for the time being, at any rate, for as Jim had said, always with such emphasis, the pygmies with the band were past masters at scouting. If a Red Indian was the index of wide-awakeness, and his scouting prowess, his hunting skill, and his cunning in the fight have won him long since world-wide notoriety, the humble, seldom or never-heard-of pygmy, this forgotten race of some few thousands only, living in the forest country adjacent to Manila, had all the skill, all the forest lore, every art possessed by his prototype to be found in the forests of Africa. These men and women,

carrying massive heads of woolly hair, could outwit the Japanese invader, and could lend vital aid to bands such as that which David and Elmer and Mike had joined.

They sat down in the centre of the clearing from which members of the band had dragged the bodies of the enemy killed in the recent encounter, and in spite of such grim surroundings enjoyed a hearty meal made all the more palatable by the fortunate discovery of rations of canned beef in the shanty recently occupied by the Japanese officer. A little later, when the dawn had broken, they assembled every surviving member of the band. Three had lost their lives in the fight, and five had been wounded, including David, who, though he had fallen violently had only a superficial wound, for the bullet had struck a glancing blow, so that he was not seriously hurt.

“A small dressing and a little time will mend it,” he grinned, as Jim examined his shoulder. “What we want is a first-aid kit. Look around amongst the Nips. Perhaps they carry something in their kit.”

A search amongst the bodies soon produced a number of packages, neatly wrapped, such as are issued to every Japanese soldier, and in a few moments Jim and Elmer had dressed David’s shoulder and then turned to the other wounded. Numbers of useful items were discovered in the camp, and as they had suspected, every one of the enemy was equipped for jungle warfare. They wore only light shoes, shorts, and a cotton jacket, all dyed green, so that when amongst trees their figures were almost invisible. And every man carried a tommy-gun and reserve ammunition, besides a bag of rice, some anti-malarial tablets and other small etceteras which would make him independent of outside supplies for some days. A handcart was also discovered, a converted rickshaw, in which reserve ammunition was carried, including another box of grenades.

“Enough to arm every man in this gang,” said David eagerly. “It’s a first success.”

“I’ll say it’s real fine,” declared Jim, enthusiastically. “That idea of yours of attacking the Nip and snatching arms is the ticket. You’ve done well, mister. I’d follow you again just as I would one of my own officers, and they’re lads, they are!”

“Then it is sure settled,” cried Elmer, warmly championing the suggestion that his chum should continue to lead the band. “What orders?”

“Return to camp and reorganise the band. Then shift to new ground so as to throw the Japs off our scent. We must get hold of other fugitives and train

them to act with us, and we should send out scouts to watch the neighbourhood of Manila. When the Nips move against us we shall get foreword and can make our preparations. See here, Jim. What we must look for is a spot that is easily defended. Where there is only a short line, and a place which can't be approached save from one direction and that most difficult."

They set out on the return march a few hours later having meanwhile buried the dead. That night they were back at their own camp and on the following morning were engaged in what David termed a pow-wow, when two of their scouts returned from the forest bringing a stranger with them.

"A Chink. Where from?" demanded David, as a tall Chinaman, in ragged clothing, looking as though he would drop with fatigue, was led before him.

"Scouts say he's from Manila," said Jim. "More than one of our boys know him. He's to be trusted."

"What news?" demanded David. "Sit down. I can see that you are almost dropping."

"No rest for two days and nights, master," the Chinaman said. "Run and run and keep on."

"From Manila?" asked David.

"From internment camp where plenty Chink and plenty white men. You know young Chink name Chu, master?"

"Chu?" shouted David.

"Chu Ling, our boy," cried Elmer.

"Same Chu," said the stranger. "He swim ashore near Cavite from boat. He make friends with Toong."

"Toong?" asked David, puzzled.

"That me," grinned the Chinaman wanly. "Chu Ling escape with me. He go into Manila. He send message in case I meet two white men he know, two who his masters. One David."

"That's me," declared our hero with a nod.

"And Master Elmer too," said the man.

"It's sure our Chu," shouted Elmer excitedly.

“And this is what he say, master,” said Toong. “Tell masters that I see Hato in these parts and watch him. If they come plenty soon perhaps we catch him and save my first master. Perhaps he here too. Not know yet. But watching.”

“Where is Chu to be found?” demanded David.

“In little while, when have sleep, me show you,” said Toong. “Plenty tired now and want food.”

“Look after him,” cried David. “Now, Elmer, let’s talk. Or rather, let’s act. We go to Manila. At least, I do.”

“Not on your life. Not you alone. I’m in this business more than you are,” cried Elmer, indignantly. “Of course we make for Manila. One of our jobs, our most important one, is to stalk this Hato blackguard and rescue uncle. Eh?”

They left the camp two days later and set their faces toward enemy-occupied Manila.

CHAPTER VIII

INTO THE LIONS' DEN

Another dawn was breaking as three Chinamen made their way through the forest towards the great bay of Manila. A steamy haze arose from the wide stretch of water, almost completely blotting out its natural features, the great, rocky island of Corregidor, lying within easy reach of the Bataan peninsula, and the naval harbour of Cavite, where in times of peace many of America's giant warships lay at anchor surrounded by smaller units such as destroyers, submarines, and various naval tenders.

An hour later the rising sun had lifted sufficiently for its brilliant rays to overtop the heights to the eastward of the bay, and the mist floated upward in white wisps at first and then disappeared all of a sudden.

"Gun-fire," said one of the Chinamen. "And there's a plane over the bay. Jap, eh?" He was of medium height, of indefinite age, and appeared to be of humble station. His native clothes fitted loosely, and the cotton-soled shoes he would wear when he entered the city of Manila dangled now from a string over his shoulder.

"That Jap, all same," declared one of the trio. "Have plenty of plane. Americans only very few. Bombs falling on Corregidor."

"And that'll sure be one of our guns firing at the guys," cried the third Chinaman, a lanky, scrawny individual who because there was nothing distinguished about him, and therefore little to attract attention might pass without notice in any crowd. It was Elmer's voice, with a ring of subdued excitement in it.

"Member," warned Toong, the only genuine Chinaman of the three. "No speak same as usual to Jap. He not understand our tongue, but know Chinese English. Speak same as Toong. And make little bow to every Jap. Same like this, masters. Not salute, or wave, or hold up head and stare. But keep face down and bow stiff from waist like Toong show you. Now, suppose me a Jap policeman, or a soldier, p'raps officer. I come towards you. S'pose this in the town of Manila. You step off sidewalk, like this, 'cos Jap a special person and want all the room. And Chink no good. None good anyway. So Chink step off sidewalk and bow stiff, same as this."

The situation would have been ludicrous anywhere else or at any other time. But these were no ordinary times, and Manila, the great city erected so many years before by the Spanish conquerors of the Philippines, lay before them, and perhaps harboured the ruffian for whom they sought, and certainly gave shelter to Chu. Perhaps even Alfred Baines, Elmer's abducted uncle, lay a prisoner there.

One thing was certain. Though very little news had reached David and his friend, they knew that the Japanese had attacked Luzon, the biggest island in the great group of the Philippines, and they had learned that General MacArthur, that gallant and accomplished American officer, had made the most of an impossibly difficult situation by withdrawing all his men on to the peninsula of Bataan, where, with the island of Corregidor, he flew the American flag, and indeed hoped to keep Old Glory fluttering until help and reinforcements reached him from the United States.

The city of Manila had perforce been abandoned to the enemy, who, having bombed it severely, had the place now under complete control and were industriously listing every one of its numerous and polyglot inhabitants. Their age, their appearance, their names and habitations were duly recorded, and a card of identity issued to every person, even to every member of the swarming Chinese inhabitants who, in the Philippines, as in a hundred other far-flung parts around the China seas, had left their native land and its almost impossible overcrowding, to seek their fortune elsewhere. They are, indeed, the hewers and drawers of the East. They man the rickshaws, those comfortable two-wheeled conveyances which take the place of taxis and speed hither and thither manned by fleet-footed Chinese. They are the laundrymen, the carpenters, the market gardeners, in fact, they fill every sort of useful place amidst the teeming populations of Eastern parts and they are to be discovered in Singapore, in Penang, indeed in every corner of Malaya. They throng in the various huge islands of the Dutch East Indies. There are more in Borneo, sometimes working on the rubber plantations or conducting their own stores, or acting as garage proprietors. Indeed, there is no end to their activities, to their industry, their intelligence and their good temper. And many have won great riches and are highly educated, so that amongst the younger generation one may meet handsome Chinese who speak excellent English, dress as the white man does, in immaculate tropical white, and display the most polished manners.

At any other time David would have been doubled up with mirth, for Toong was a most amusing person. With set face, making sure that the two

young Chinamen were really watching his every movement, he came towards them slowly, sauntering as police on patrol duty do.

“This side walk,” he grunted, pointing to the forest path he was treading. “Now look close at you. Chink no good, you savvy. So Jap look more and more when he see one. But every Chink almost same to a Jap. Same sort of clothes, same face. Still, he stare, and if Chink not notice him, not hop out of way, not bow same as any Jap, then——”

“Fireworks,” grinned Elmer. “He’s right to give us the drill, eh, David. Let’s practise it a little. See here. I’ll watch you performing and tell you what I think of the show. You can do the same for me. You know our lives might depend on how we act.”

“To say nothing of your uncle’s,” answered David. “Go ahead. I’ll tell you off if you don’t do the act properly, and you can do the same for me. Now, here’s Toong approaching along the pavement—sidewalk as you Yanks call it. Good. Off you get. No. No. No! You’re staring back at him. A Jap would be curious at once.”

“Jap say to hisself ‘what cheek,’ eh, master?” laughed Toong. “’Member as I said. Chink no good. Chink just mud, that what you say, eh? If he stare he proud. Not like Jap, and show it.”

They practised this supposed passing of a Japanese policeman time and again, always serious, for ridiculous though the whole thing seemed, their mission was too important to be risked by lack of every care. Then they made ready to enter the city.

“But not go together,” warned Toong. “One go long first. Then other master. Toong in front. Then you see how Toong do. You follow. Jap think him is very fine feller. Great guy. But stupid. Yes, just silly. Too cocky, you savvy.”

It remained to be seen whether the enemy patrolling the streets of Manila were quite as stupid as Toong imagined. That they must be encountered and passed if David and his chum were to meet Chu and hear of Hato there was no denying. But the practice they had had gave confidence, while the small card which each carried made them believe that they should pass muster even if a Jap policeman called for their papers.

“We can’t do more. We must now chance it. We go to meet Chu and his friends,” said David.

“Ho Ling being the friend,” replied Elmer, grinning at David, for though times were serious, David was indeed a queer sort of person. His baggy

clothing, of thin linen, fluttered about his half-developed limbs. The floppy straw hat covering his head was scarcely attractive, while his lined face might have been that of a man of more than middle age. For Toong was a master artist. He had not scrupled to apply a smearing of clay to David's fresh complexion, so that the cheeks appeared hollow, there were dark lines beneath the eyes, and in some cunning manner, by a mere movement of one heavily daubed finger, he had given the young Englishman a mouth far wider than he normally possessed. As for Elmer, his height and lankiness helped towards a safe disguise. He was the likeness of a hundred and more Chinese coolies one might pass within any hour. Perhaps he was just a young labourer. But there was no plumpness about the limbs or face, and he appeared now to be of almost middle age, a trifle bowed by constant hard work, for he had received strict instructions from their teacher to be careful not to hold himself erect as was his wont.

"That annoy Jap," he told them, a humorous smirk curving his lips. "Not like see Chink march through streets like soldier. Only Jap fit to be soldier, eh?"

Elmer grunted. "Only Jap," he cried. "We'll see all about that as the war goes on. And don't forget that though there's been no declaration of war between Japan and China, yet there's been a ferocious war in progress in China itself for the past four or five years, and in Manchuria, a Chinese province, don't forget, for years before that. And did the Nips meet Chinese soldiers?"

"Met men armed with clubs, with knives and scythes," said David. "But those guerrillas were soldiers all right."

"You've said it, boy. Soldiers all. And a fine fight they've put up. But the little Nips don't like anyone else to be a soldier, eh, Toong. So I've to drag my weary feet. Bend my long back too. That'll be a job, that will. And look humble when I stumble across one of these little cock sparrows from Nippon. Waal, it'll be worth it if we can get into Manila and perhaps catch that guy Hato. Perhaps too, find uncle. That's more gun-fire. Listen to it. They're tuning up this morning. Sounds as though the Japs were attacking."

From distant Bataan came the boom of guns, and later the crackle of musketry and the rat-a-tat-tat of machine-guns. Then more planes appeared in the sky and the deeper boom and crash of exploding bombs came sweeping across the broad bay.

Toong signalled that the time had come to make the attempt to enter the now awakened city of Manila, and the three set out, walking side by side at

first, and later separating so that a considerable interval existed between all of them.

“Safer like that,” thought David. “If one of us gets into a fix, the other may get through, and, of course, he would try to help his friend later. Here we are at the outskirts.”

Manila is like any other Eastern city, similar, in fact, to any city to be discovered elsewhere. Attractive bungalows, the residences of business men who worked in the city, were scattered about the outskirts, forming in fact suburbs, from which they could gain any part of the city, either by car or by rickshaw. Behind them lay forest country for the most part and in the farther distance, hills rising in places to a great height.

Presently Toong was entering the city itself, and David and Elmer followed. Filipinos were making in the same direction, while some were on their way out. At first there were only a few. But presently and in increasing degree as they went towards the centre of Manila, more pedestrians were encountered, and amongst them a considerable sprinkling of Chinese. Toong saluted each one of them gaily, and David and Elmer did likewise.

“Looks as though they took us for granted,” thought the American. “Gives one confidence in this disguise. Gee, what an awful guy I must look. It would be great to get a picture of this outfit. That would cause fun in days to come. That is, if——”

If they were not suspected. If the Japanese, no fools be it remembered, failed to penetrate their disguise. Then, certainly, a photograph of Elmer and David dressed as down-at-heels Chinamen, would cause immense mirth amongst their chums.

They were approaching a cross-roads, and in the centre stood the stocky, attenuated figure of a Japanese soldier. He was a military policeman, and was regulating the car traffic with magnificent and supercilious waves of his arm. The passing Filipinos ignored him, unless they happened to cross the street just at that point, so that they came within a few feet of him. Then they bowed, a stiff, hasty, almost imperceptible bob, and went on their way. But the Chinese who passed that way were more careful of their conduct. They edged as far from this Japanese as they could. But when their direction took them across the street almost beneath his feet David noticed that they bowed in unmistakable manner.

“Looks as though the Nip had one law for the Filipinos and another for the Chink,” he thought. “Well, it will hurt no one to flatten these little

beggars. We've got to best them somehow."

Toong crossed the street and made his bow. Elmer followed, stooping like an old man, and attracted no attention. The Japanese military policeman barely deigned to glance at him. It was then David's turn.

Did the little man in the centre of the cross-roads suspect this down-at-heels Chinaman? He did more than glance at the tattered coolie passing. He stared. He moved a pace towards him, as though to question this Chinaman. But the honk of a motor-horn diverted his attention, and a second later he stiffened and briskly saluted as a Japanese staff car swept by.

David moved on unhurriedly. It was only by a tremendous effort of will that he forced himself to dawdle. If he could, he would have taken to his heels and run. But common sense, the urge for caution, and the feeling that he wore a perfect disguise and therefore need not be unduly alarmed, halted his steps and kept him moving on at a slow pace in the wake of Elmer and Toong.

It was the first of many such experiences. As they neared and in the end gained the centre of the city they passed a number of military police. They also almost rubbed shoulders with Japanese officers. But not one of them so much as looked at the three Chinamen. Why should they in fact? There were scores of their nationality in Manila, and each and every one had now been checked off, listed and marked, like so many bales of merchandise. Any Chinaman so reckless as to enter Manila without authority, and in particular, any foolhardy person, particularly a white man, who dared to come into the place, would be detected if not at once, then in a very short space of time. And for such fools there was short shrift. A provost-marshal's order, a firing-squad and death to all such people.

Toong led the way through the city and soon approached the waterside. The great Bay of Manila flashed in the rays of the sun, and yonder was wrecked Cavite, the naval harbour, so trim and picturesque such a short while ago. There too was Corregidor, the rocky islet set in the midst of this enchanting spot, and above it Old Glory floating in the tropic breeze.

It was thought until the Japanese descended so swiftly and so treacherously upon this one-time peaceful spot that Corregidor was impregnable, tunnelled in every direction, bristling with guns and prepared to stand any length of siege and to provide protection to a reasonable American garrison. But in point of fact this was not the case, for America had honestly complied with the gentleman's agreement existing with Japan, the only power of any consequence in those Pacific waters. While America

held to the agreement, Japan secretly armed the many islands she held in those parts while making ready to descend in full force upon the Philippines.

Corregidor did offer shelter to General MacArthur and his troops. But the place did not carry a great weight of guns. There was little ammunition, and her anti-aircraft weapons, again with small supplies of ammunition, were, because America like Britain honours agreements, defended and sheltered by gun-pits and sandbags only, insufficient shelter for the crews where bombing was likely to be intense. The crash of hurtling bombs which Elmer and David had heard that morning showed that the Japanese were making the most of this situation, so favourable to them, while the Americans had only a very few airplanes to counter such attacks, and they mostly out of date.

There, too, was the tip of the Bataan peninsula, a great mass of rocks and jungle, and at its northern end were the American defenders, sheltering in fox-holes in the dense and malarious jungle, outnumbered, but as yet invincible.

Toong turned along the waterside, and Elmer and David followed. There were more sailors now, short, stumpy little fellows, so different in appearance to American and British naval men. They were streaming from the few jetties which had survived the bombing, and were coming on shore leave or on some errand from the many units of the Japanese navy lying out in the bay.

A naval barge was thrusting its way towards one of the landing-places, sending up spray from its bows for it was being driven at speed by its powerful motor. David watched it as it swung to the side of a jetty and its engine was reversed. Men sprang from it and scattered. An officer stepped ashore with more deliberation, and acknowledging the salute of the guard left aboard, turned to the highway and came towards them. He ignored Toong. The Chinaman might not have existed. He scarcely glanced at Elmer, and came swinging along, a short, broad figure dressed in tropical white.

Then he halted abruptly and turned about to stare after the retreating Chinaman. Was there something about the stooping, lanky figure of Elmer that caught his eye? Had he observed something about this particular Chinaman which at first escaped his notice, and then, of a sudden, struck some chord of memory in his mind? David continued on his way wondering and fearing. To have stopped, to have appeared to notice would have been fatal.

“What’s he wondering about? He’s staring after Elmer. It’s—yes, it’s that ruffian Hato!”

“Stop that man, that Chinaman,” shouted Hato, for he it was without a doubt. There was no mistaking the stocky, baboon-like figure, the high malar bones, the mop of black hair and the heavy moustache bristling on his lip. Not that the wearing of a moustache was sufficient by itself to mark the man who had abducted Alfred Baines. The Japanese navy boast hundreds of officers and men who carry such an adornment. But a bristling moustache, the figure of the man, his general appearance, there was no mistaking him.

“Run!” shouted David, for as yet Elmer had not quite gathered what was happening. “Run for your life. It’s Hato!”

Toong had heard that shout and had swiftly recognised the situation. He beckoned to the two Chinamen following him. Then he dived into a narrow road leading in amongst the houses and away from the water. Elmer’s long limbs took him to his side in a few seconds, while David joined them very shortly, swinging past Hato and pretending that he was chasing Elmer. There were shouts from many quarters now. Hato drew his revolver and fired at the retreating figures. Then shouting to some sailors near the spot he set off in pursuit.

“In here. This door,” said Toong, as cool as possible. “Now through the house and out at the back. Then do again. Yes, plenty time more. Now this way. Plenty Chink see us but no say. Chink hate Jap.”

He led them through half a dozen houses, and not once did the owners attempt to stop them. Some were Chinese waterside men. Two were Filipinos, but they too had no cause to love the invader. Wide open doors, so necessary in a hot climate, made the road an easy one, so that they passed swiftly from one street to another. Then Toong turned down towards the water again.

“Now walk same as before,” he said. “And ’member bow if pass Jap. We near Ho Ling.”

They reached a warehouse standing within a hundred feet of the bay and entered without ceremony. A Chinaman stood just inside the doorway, as though he had been expecting them. It was Chu—Chu at last, trembling with eagerness as his eyes fell upon his young masters.

CHAPTER IX

A CHINESE PATRIOT

The city of Manila was in a condition of unusual turmoil. It had been bombed and machine-gunned by Japanese airmen when the first attack upon the islands was made, and its inhabitants had cowered before the masses of enemy troops who presently swarmed ashore and occupied the place. Thereafter matters had quietened down, though there was heavy fighting in the neighbourhood of Bataan, where General MacArthur and his gallant men were holding the Japanese at bay. But now the streets were filled with shouting troops and police flooded the place, swarming down at the docks.

“There is no time for introductions,” said a cool, immaculately dressed individual who greeted David and Elmer and Toong. “I am Ho Ling, storekeeper, purveyor of almost every commodity. At least, I used to deal in a vast variety of goods. But these rascally Japs have seized most. So you were discovered?”



“Stop that Chinaman,” shouted Hato

“That fellow Hato spotted Elmer,” answered David, taking stock of the dapper Chinaman who had accosted them in the warehouse within a few moments of the meeting with Chu. “There was something about him which attracted the Jap’s attention.”

“Perhaps his height. Perhaps some other point, some simple thing,” said Ho Ling. “And this Hato is a naval officer?”

“Submarines,” answered Elmer laconically. “He’s the guy who ambushed our yacht off Pearl Harbour and went off with my uncle. We’re after him.”

“And all the enemy police here are after you,” smiled their host, unruffled by the shouts which reached their ears from outside. “This place will be searched, and so you had better disappear.”

“Disappear,” gasped David, for that seemed an impossibility. Indeed, there was little doubt that they were in a tight corner. “Into the street again? They’ll be arresting every Chinaman.”

“And many others,” smiled Ho Ling. “Out there you would be held up within a few minutes. But in here, in my warehouse, or godown as it is known, we may be able to throw them off the scent. This way.”

In prosperous times no doubt the warehouse was crammed with goods of all descriptions. But Ho Ling’s stores had been sadly depleted by a rapacious enemy. However, there were still many bales and chests of three-ply wood, piled neatly one on top of the other, but filling now only about a quarter of the warehouse. Ho Ling led them towards the heap and signalled to Chu.

“Show the way,” he said. “And quickly too, for those shouts are getting nearer.”

“This way, masters,” urged Chu. “Up here to the top. Then move one chest, and see this hole. Now climb in. There are boxes to help to the ground. Chu come too, for a little moment. Then get back, because Chu one of the workers here and police think him all right.”

The boxes had evidently been piled for a purpose, but with such cunning that no one would suspect it. Footholds had been contrived so that, though the goods were not arranged in order, yet they presented a number of corners and ridges, often scarcely an inch in width, yet sufficient to give the necessary assistance to an active man to mount to the top. There a couple of bales were flung carelessly on the boxes. But Chu jerked them aside and exposed a hole, a yard across perhaps, ample for the purpose.

“Now down, same way,” he said. “See not fall, for this pile twenty feet high. Now we reach the bottom. Suppose Jap devils suspect and climb up there and find hole. Good! You not found yet. This box easy to move. See.”

They couldn't distinguish anything down there in that strange wooden pit. But they could feel their surroundings and soon tumbled to Chu's meaning. Cunning brains had devised this hide-out, and had foreseen the possibility of discovery. A way of escape had been provided, but even that was carefully and skilfully conceived. For the box which must be moved was not on the ground tier. It was some feet up the pyramid of merchandise, and dragging it aside on to a second conveniently placed to receive it, David and Elmer found a tunnel into which rays of light penetrated from the doorway of the warehouse.

"So if Jap devil find and want to come down here, you slip through the tunnel and out by the door. Suppose he not find, then plenty food and drink soon."

He was gone, for shouts were echoing from the street outside and they could hear doors being banged and orders given. Then one voice, familiar it seemed, reached their ears.

"Hato. That tough guy," declared Elmer in tones of disgust. "What's he saying?"

"That Jap," whispered Toong. "Not know what he say, but giving order. P'raps he think we here."

A short, stumpy figure darkened the doorway and for a few moments cut off the brilliant rays sent into the warehouse aslant by the rising sun. Hato entered without ceremony, followed by a number of his crew and by other seamen whom he had collected to help him in the chase.

"A tall Chinaman," he rapped out. "Recollect, a tall one, and thin. He's American. I want that man. Search this place. Where's the owner?"

Ho Ling was at the far end of the huge warehouse, bent over his desk, oblivious it seemed of the entry of these intruders. But he came forward now, bowing with native politeness.

"You need?" he asked. "Goods, perhaps. But I have few and already your friends have taken all that they required. But if there is more that you require, take it."

"Fool! Stop that!" shouted Hato, speaking in English, for like thousands of his countrymen he knew the language well, though to be sure he spoke it with more than a trace of the familiar and well-liked American accent. On the other hand Ho Ling, the polished Chinaman, spoke English as she is spoken in the universities. "Where are those Chinamen?" demanded Hato,

his moustache bristling. “They came in here. They have been traced to the door. One at least is an American.”

Ho Ling bowed once more. He was the very essence of politeness. And he was cool, unruffled, unperturbed by the violence of the Japanese.

“Chinamen, you said,” he replied suavely. “But, of course. Many Chinamen enter my warehouse door. But they are registered. They are known to your police. They have no knowledge of America. They are my servants.”

Hato eyed the cool owner of the warehouse and strode towards him in threatening manner. “You beggarly Chinaman,” he shouted, his temper completely out of hand. “As if I did not know that you are allowed to continue to employ your countrymen. But there were three Chinamen coming through the dock area. Chinamen! Spies!! Spies, I say. I recognised one of them, tall, thin, an American. I was associated with his people and saw the brat often. He is here.”

Ho Ling shrugged expressive shoulders. If the Japanese officer was in a temper, and he was more than a trifle ruffled, the owner of these premises, a shrewd business man, was undaunted. And besides, he was well aware that coolness was the only thing he possessed, the only commodity which could assist David and Elmer to escape detection.

“Here,” he smiled, spreading his palms. “In this warehouse? But where? And why, commander? Why should an American dressed as a Chinaman come so suddenly and so unexpectedly to the warehouse of Ho Ling, a trader well known to the Japanese?”

“Stop!” bellowed Hato, beside himself with rage. “You are hiding these rascals. Well, we shall see. If they are here, you know what happens?”

Ho Ling bowed and smiled. Again those expressive shoulders shrugged and the palms of his delicately shaped hands were exposed. “Know, commander,” he answered, and there was a glint in his eyes as he spoke. “But certainly. Japan and China have been at war—an undeclared war it is true—for almost five years, and even before that there was warfare. Certainly I know what happens.”

The boldness and the coolness of the answer further enraged Hato. He was determined to discover Elmer. Something about the chin of the lanky Chinaman who had passed him in the street close to the waterside had caught his attention. It had made little or no impression at first. But within a few seconds the Japanese submarine officer had recollected a something

which had often set him wondering in other days when he was in Alfred Baines's service.

The chin was long and square. It gave an impression of sternness to the face, belied as a general rule by the merry smile Elmer was accustomed to display. But, regarding the young American quite casually, that chin would certainly call for notice. It spoke of resolution, of courage, of something more than sternness, and appearing in one so young it was decidedly unusual. Elmer in fact was not just one in many hundreds, with a familiar cast of countenance. There was this distinguishing feature, and seen even casually it arrested attention and caused even the inattentive to ponder.

Hato regarded Ho Ling as though he would gladly kill him. His hand went to his holster, and for a few moments the fingers played with the butt of the weapon. He went a pace nearer to the cool Chinaman and if he had been of sufficient height would have thrust his perspiring face within an inch of the man he questioned.

“Stop fooling!” he ordered hoarsely. “These rascals were seen to enter this warehouse. They are here. You are shielding them. Where are they? Speak or I shoot——”

It was an ugly situation, and seeing that the Japanese had no particular regard for life, and certainly not for that of a Chinaman, there was no doubt that Ho Ling was in extreme danger. Yet his coolness never deserted him. Ho Ling was accustomed to emergencies. His whole life had been made up of them. Trading in these Eastern parts was not always the easiest of business. There were thieves and rogues to deal with, and the Japanese were amongst the worst of them.

Under the British flag he had nevertheless accumulated riches, and what he valued more than all else, a name for correctness in all affairs, for fairness in his dealings, for help to those less fortunate than himself. His stores in Malaya were known the world over. His agents met the ships as they arrived at Singapore and at Penang in Malaya, and whatever the commission given by a white man, be it the mere posting of a letter or the sending of a pressing message up country, Ho Ling's agents carried out the mission without failing and for small reward. The same tale could be recorded in the Philippines, for under the flag of America Ho Ling received the same protection, the same fair treatment. And thousands of American officers and civilians posted to Manila, or leaving the great bay for home waters, had reason to bless this honest Chinaman.

“Sir,” said Ho Ling, and a smile curled his lips. “Shoot if you so desire. But that will gain nothing for you. Who saw these people enter? You say that they are here. Then search for them. I cannot prevent you, and I will assist as far as I can.”

Hato swung round and glared into every corner of the warehouse. It was merely a wild guess on his part that the men he was pursuing were in the place. But where? The huge shed was almost empty. Where could fugitives hide?

“Those boxes over there,” he shouted nonplussed by Ho Ling’s coolness and refusal to be frightened. “What is stored in them?”

The Chinese owner of the store exasperated the heated little Japanese. “Those,” he smiled, waving an expressive hand at the piled-up bales and boxes. “Now let me reflect. There is sugar, yes. But you have plenty. Your commissariat has been here, and have taken all that they wanted. Look! Come to the desk. Yes, here are the notes with which they paid me, Philippine notes printed in Japan.”

Hato winced. He knew that his country had made every preparation for the invasion of the Philippines. They came laden with paper money printed months before in Tokyo, but an exact copy of Philippine money, and they had paid with this paper for all the commodities they had seized.

To the uninitiated this appeared at first sight to be a perfectly correct procedure. But the money was after all merely paper, backed it is true by the Japanese, to be honoured or paid in full some day just as they decreed. And supposing these little islanders from Nippon won the day and carved out and kept the huge Eastern empire they desired, those notes would probably be cashed in the course of time. But, on the other hand, if Japan were defeated where then would be the value of all this paper money, paid out so lavishly and so thoughtfully prepared long months beforehand by the invaders? It would be just paper, no more, no less, and the recipient would be the loser. However, the Japs were at the moment in the ascendant, and could and did commandeer whatever goods they liked, paying, often with a smirk, one imagines, with these notes printed on Japanese paper and on the printing presses of Tokyo.

“And here is the list of contents of the goods left to me,” said Ho Ling suavely, a grim smile on his lips. “Sugar we have mentioned. Brushes. Ah, yes, I obtained a large consignment from America just before—before you and your men came to visit us here. Then there is crockery.”

Hato tore the invoices from his hands and cast them on the floor. Swinging round he eyed the piled-up goods at the far end of the warehouse. Could this American brat be harboured there amongst the boxes and bales? It seemed an impossibility. But nothing was out of the question when dealing with Chinamen. They were at once the most cunning, the most cool, the most far-seeing people Hato had ever met. And he knew well that every Chinaman's hand was against the Japanese, and would be raised at the first opportunity. He walked across the floor of the warehouse, and peering through the narrow chinks left between some of the boxes David and Elmer could see his stumpy figure as he moved round the heap.

"Looks like having to make a bolt from here," Elmer whispered in David's ear. "That guy has his suspicions."

"If he spots us we'll pass through the tunnel and rush his men at the door," said David. "Wait, though. If there's no chance of escaping observation why not arrange to upset the heap, levering the boxes towards the top of the pyramid. There'd be a chance to get away in the confusion."

Hato snapped an order. "Pull this heap to pieces," he commanded. "But wait. Two of you get to the doorway and stand ready to shoot. A third come here and stand beside me. If they rush—well, you'll need no order."

There were smug grins on the faces of the sailors. They would want no further instructions, for hunting Chinese was nothing new to them.

"But it would shorten the business, sir," said one of the men, a petty officer in Hato's command, "if we just fired into the heap. At this close range it would go right through."

"Down on the floor," David cautioned Toong and Elmer. "One of the men is pointing his tommy-gun at the heap. Some of the bullets are bound to reach this hide-out."

"Shoot then," shouted Hato, and at once the warehouse was filled with the rattle of the gun while bullets tore their way through the boxes, some of them undoubtedly penetrating to the spot where the three were sheltering. But they had crouched close to the boards and were uninjured. There they waited breathlessly for what was to follow.

"Shoot again," cried Hato. "Make sure this time. Here, you two at the door, train your guns on the heap and fire."

The great warehouse reverberated as the guns spluttered and sent their charges ripping through the boxes. And meanwhile Ho Ling looked on, apparently disinterested, as cool as ever, yet filled with misgivings, for how

could anyone hidden in the wooden cavern so cunningly constructed in the centre of the heap escape such a fusillade?

“Commander,” he ventured at last. “If these men are there, then surely they are dead. But my poor goods are suffering. Perhaps——”

“Dead or alive it makes no difference,” shouted Hato. “Your goods can go hang. What I want, what I mean to have, is this young American. Pull that heap to pieces,” he commanded. “Start at the top. Throw the boxes down. No matter what damage you do, get the whole lot torn asunder.”

Three of the half-dozen men who had followed him into the warehouse flung themselves on the mass of goods, while the others posted themselves at the doorway and one close to Hato. These active sailors made nothing of the climb, and in a few seconds they were at the top of the heap. Yet even sailors may not always be footsure. The petty officer who had suggested the shooting and now led the attack upon the pile of goods heaved at one of the boxes and one of his feet slipping from its narrow hold upon the one directly beneath he fell backward, striking the man immediately below him. They crashed together down the steep side, followed by one of the boxes and thudded heavily on the floor below where the petty officer lay motionless, a dark stain welling from his head. Hato strode to his side and jerked his arm.

“Get up!” he commanded brutally. “You clumsy fool!”

“He has cracked his skull,” said Ho Ling, now close at hand. “Perhaps I may send for my men to assist?”

“You can go back to your desk,” shouted Hato, exasperated by all that was happening. “I’ll ask for your help when I want it. Come, pull the heap to pieces,” he ordered. “I’m positive that our man is hidden somewhere in there.”

“Get ready to bolt,” whispered David. “Let’s climb up about half-way, and when they have got some of the outside boxes off and have lessened the load we’ll heave, all together. Then we’ll bolt as the mass crashes.”

“For the door, eh?” asked Elmer, climbing with David and Toong till they were some feet above the boards. “They’d shoot us right off. Those beggars are still at the door.”

“The other way. Right into the far end of the warehouse,” answered David. “Now, in a few minutes we’ll heave. Then rush.”

They were in a tight corner and well knew it. Waiting there some ten feet from the floor Elmer agreed that David’s advice was worth following. For

what else could they do? The door was firmly held. Men armed with tommy-guns were ready to open fire. The far end of this vast warehouse might provide some loophole. The light scarcely reached it, and there must be an exit in that direction. Still, the chances were all against them, and this obstinate Hato had made up his mind to probe the secrets of the mass of boxes, and doubtless he would continue the search till he discovered them.

The thud of boxes flung from the heap drowned the sound of their voices. Some of the three-ply receptacles burst as they struck the floor, and soon a miscellaneous pile of goods littered the place. Once again, too, one of the sailors lost his footing and went crashing downward. But though dazed he appeared to be unhurt, and driven by Hato's bullying orders he again tackled the work.

"Ready?" asked David, bracing himself in the shaft which led to the top of the heap. "Now start to heave ever so gently."

"Moving," grunted Elmer, his long frame stretched across the shaft and his shoulders hard up against the side nearest the Japanese. "I feel 'em going. One more heave and she totters."

A shout echoed from the street outside. One of the men guarding the doorway stepped into the open. He was back in a few seconds, waving violently.

"They have been found. Those Chinamen," he bellowed. "Our men saw them down by the dock and are chasing them at this moment. Over there. Not far."

Hato swung round and rushed to the door. He could see a mob of Japanese speeding past him, for numbers had taken up the chase, though few knew exactly who or what they were chasing. Yet it was generally understood that a Chinaman was wanted, even three of them, and a Chinese hunt was great sport, the sort of entertainment which attracted the invaders.

"Stop them!" they shouted. "Chinese."

"One very tall," bellowed Hato, joining the throng. "A spy. An American dressed as a native. Tall. Thin. A coolie. Stop the rascal. I want him."

In a minute the warehouse was clear of the enemy and David and Elmer and Toong emerged from their hiding-place.

"Wooh!" ejaculated Elmer. "Say, that was touch and go. A little longer and all these boxes would have crashed and we with them."

“Come this way,” said the calm voice of Ho Ling. “You need food, and perhaps a change of disguise. But first food.”

“And then Hato,” exclaimed David. “He’s here. We know that for certain. Then where is his prisoner?”

It was a problem left to be unravelled. But for the moment, they were in the enemy’s camp and yes, certainly, they were hungry.

CHAPTER X

FILIPINO FISHERMEN

The great Bay of Manila lay placid and shimmering beneath the early rays of a tropic sun, and the surrounding coastline with its backing of forest and jungle seemed utterly peaceful. In the far distance, looking eastward, mountains reared their heads towards the sky, but far less grandly than in many other parts, for they are of no great height. A blue haze covered them save where the rising sun sent its beams slanting across a rocky slope, tingeing it golden-yellow; or lit up some deep and wooded recess where perhaps Filipino refugees were hiding from the ferocious enemy who had invaded this hitherto peaceful island. And the city of Manila glistened in the morning light, its fine buildings, erected since the Spanish-American War, when the United States took over the country, covering a wide stretch on either bank of the sleepy Pasig River.

Here and there towards the centre of the bay native boats lay sleepily on the surface, their occupants engaged in fishing. And now and again a Japanese motor-driven barge swirled across the water on its way from the harbour of Cavite in the south to the bombed and wrecked waterfront of Manila. Those barges gave Corregidor and the great peninsula of Bataan a wide berth, for American marines and doughboys lay in wait there, prepared to resist any attempt at Japanese invasion, and ready and willing to fire at any unwary strangers who approached too close. Cavite itself was a shambles. On the 7th of December, when the Japanese made their treacherous attack upon Pearl Harbour, so very many miles away, the naval base of Cavite was a picture of peace and efficiency. Its naval barracks were spick and span. Marines and American sailors passed busily to and fro, and the Stars and Stripes floated proudly over the headquarters office. A day later it was attacked and wrecked. Fires blazed for days. Ships were sunk. The few units of an American fleet lying there lay now beneath the surface.

But the harbour was not entirely deserted now. Japanese barges were anchored close to the wrecked front. A destroyer was tied up to the remains of a pier, and a couple of submarines floated lazily in the fairway leading to the entrance.

“Might be one belongs to that Hato,” drawled a languid-looking, lanky Filipino who lounged, in a fishing-boat which was drifting past the spot. “Say, a guy would spot him a mile off. But though I’ve spotted members of

the crew moving about the decks of both subs, there's never been a sight of that rascal."

"But patience will be rewarded. That's the idea," replied the other member of the crew of the small native boat. "How long is it since we began to watch?"

"Seems a year, buddy. But I guess it's no more than two weeks."

Who would have guessed that Elmer and David were actually the occupants of that boat? A while ago they had been camouflaged in Chinese clothing, and looked what they were supposed to be, that is, coolies, humble fellows ready to kow-tow to any Japanese.

"But that disguise would no longer hide you," Ho Ling told them. "You must realise that while the Chinese resist the Japanese, as indeed they have so gallantly done for years past, they are treated as dangerous enemies when met with outside China. But the Filipino is a different person. A little time ago he acknowledged Spain as owner of these islands, and had been under Spanish rule for a great number of years. Then, of a sudden the United States became ruler, and set about improving conditions in the hope that very soon the Filipinos would be free and independent and would manage their own affairs. And now comes this detestable Jap. He desires to win over the Filipino, and therefore already shows a desire to treat them less severely than men of my country. Now suppose you two become natives of Luzon. A disguise is simple. A permit to use a native boat can be obtained through one of my agents, while Chu and Toong can also be granted a permit, for there is no charge against them, and a small bribe to the Japanese under officer charged with issuing the permits will successfully arrange the matter."

A shirt of variegated colour which had decidedly seen better days and was wide open at the neck, together with a pair of rather tattered and soiled white shorts covered Elmer's many inches. His legs and feet were bare and already burned a mahogany colour. The rest of the costume was made up of a slouch hat, tattered and frayed like the rest of his outfit, but serving the purpose of shadowing his face. His fair hair was dyed black and the budding moustache which adorned his upper lip was jet black in colour.

"Gee! What an unutterable sight!" roared David, when Elmer appeared for the first time in this new guise. "I'll swear no Hato will ever recognise you. You look thirty at least, and a dirty thirty at that," he grinned, walking round his chum so as to examine every angle. "Yes, a decidedly grubby individual. But you'll pass."

“Say, don’t you get too fresh, young fellow,” gurgled Elmer, pretending anger. “Dirty, did you say? Now listen to this. What are you in those togs? Descendant of some ancient British family you’d say. With a pedigree going way back to the days of Adam. Or, rather, came across to England with that Conqueror, eh? Most every Englishman one meets travelling seems to have had folks at that battle of Hastings. Or, at any rate, they guess they had or ought to have had. Now none of those guys of those days would want to recognise David at this very moment. Dirty, did you say? So I am. What’s the harm? Wait till I get a little more soiled with fishing. But you’re supposed to own the boat and hire me out. Do you look all that fine to be an employer? I’ll say you don’t. If you wore boots, which you don’t seem to be able to run to, you’d be down at heels. But your togs! Don’t you shy bricks at mine, for if I was to make a snatch at yours they look as though they’d fall to pieces.”

He stood away from David and walked round and round him, grimacing, muttering uncomplimentary remarks and grinning. “But, say, it’s a dandy outfit,” he laughed. “This fellow Ho Ling is a real friend and a clever one. You’d pass muster anywhere. Your own folks wouldn’t know you. They’d pass on the other side of the walk and turn up their noses.”

There was huge merriment and yet much serious thought. For Elmer and David were in the heart of the enemy’s camp, and if discovered would most certainly be tried by court martial and shot, or, more likely, executed on the spot. But fear of such a happening did not enter their heads. They were determined to track down Hato if that were possible, for common sense told them that only by doing so could they hope to learn of Alfred Baines’s whereabouts. Hato must know. What had the rascally submarine officer done with his captive? It was as clear as daylight that he wished to secure his prisoner for himself, for otherwise why be so anxious to destroy those who had witnessed his dastardly attack upon the yacht and the utter destruction of that dainty vessel?

“There’s sure a scheme at the back of the fellow’s mind,” Elmer had said, over and over again. “Uncle has a secret. Many Americans know that and this Hato had cottoned on to it. What’s the secret? I don’t know. But it’s something big, and Hato is after it. But he’s thinking of himself first of all, and then of his country. He’s one of those spy guys sent out by the war party in Japan to sneak secrets from the States, and he hides the fact that he’s an officer while he creeps around trying to unearth something. That means living like we do. He’s Westernised of course, for Japs have absorbed a lot of our ways and customs. But most of them who have not travelled would

give all, even their lives, for the Mikado and their country. That's not Hato's sort. He's more Westernised. He's got an eye for the main chance. He believes that he can serve himself first and then this Mikado. Make a pile, you understand, and then unload the secret on the country."

Someone was hailing the boat, and the shout rang across the still waters of the bay. A man aboard one of the submarines was waving, and at the signal Elmer plunged his paddle into the sea and urged the boat towards the spot.

"Say, buddy," came from the deck of the submarine as the fishing-boat drew near. "What's the price of fish to-day? You got any? Boy, we want a change of diet. See?"

It was the voice of an American, yet the man was undoubtedly a Japanese.

"Lived in the States," said Elmer, thrusting his paddle still deeper and propelling the boat nearer. "Remember, we're Filipino boys. We don't speak too good English, only the stuff we've picked up in the port from Yanks."

"You want fish, mister," he shouted back. "We got plenty fine. And cheap, yes. How much?"

David bent double in the boat and lifted a huge fish from a number lying on the bottom boards. The bay was kind to those who went there to fish for a dinner, and there was little difficulty in securing a catch, even in the worst of weather. As for the crash of bombs and guns and the rattle of rifles, it all seemed to help the fishermen. And there were days when bombs fell in parts of the bay. There was a scramble then. Native boats raced to the scene, for there were sure to be fish floating to the surface, stunned by the blast and the concussion.

"How much, buddy?" shouted the man on the submarine.

"You been in America, eh?" asked Elmer, doffing his ragged hat to the sailor.

"Sure! That's a safe bet," came the answer. "Not me only either. There's plenty more of us who've lived over there. Even the commander."

"That fine," grinned Elmer. "Same as this fish. You like him, eh? Supposin' you give little cigarette. Money no good in Manila. What you say?"

"You're the freest guy I've met in these parts," said the man, leaning over the rail which guarded that part of the submarine deck. "Cigarettes you

said. Then it's a deal. You wait long here, see, while I go get."

He made for the after hatch which stood wide open and disappeared. Almost at the same instant a head bobbed up from the hatch of the conning-tower.

"Hato!" exclaimed David in warning tones. "Suppose you sit down, Elmer. You're too lanky and he might recognise you. Pretend to be sorting the fish. I'll deal with him."

"Stand off there, you!" commanded Hato, swarming to the deck from the conning-tower. "Where's the deck guard? On whose orders did you leave your post?" he exploded as the sailor reappeared from the hatch, bearing a packet of cheap Japanese cigarettes in his hand.

It appeared for a few moments as though the affair would hardly be of benefit to David and his chum, and as though this unexpected introduction to a member of the crew and the information he might have imparted would all end in fiasco. The sailor, a swarthy, active little fellow sprang to attention and stood there as stiff as a ramrod. Hato stepped slowly towards him, scowling, his arms raised as though he would strike the man. Then, quick as lightning, David intervened.

"You want fine fish, mister?" he called out, holding one up at arm's length. "Him say so. That sailor boy ask for fish for crew and boss. You boss, eh? Good! You have fish for cigarettes same as him."

The interruption came in the nick of time, and indeed the offer of a change of diet was decidedly acceptable. For ration issues aboard Japanese war vessels do not err on the side of liberality. Or rather, they are of a sameness which while they appease the appetite and bring pleasure to the palate of the average man, they lack the variety to which Westerners are used, and which are enjoyed to the full by all the sons of Nippon who have lived in the United States or in other Occidental countries.

"I'll deal with you later," rasped Hato, addressing the sailor. "Stand easy! Continue your watch. And now. Cigarettes you say. That's better than some of you rascals, who want to charge high for anything sold to the Japanese. Stand by there while I go for them."

"Wait a little bit," called David, as he made for the conning-tower. "This guy here want to buy too. He offer cigarettes for other boys on the ship and for you. Not his fault if he go below for them. Not like him to find trouble. We go elsewhere with our fish."

Elmer took the hint promptly and plunged his paddle into the water. It looked as though the fishermen with the catch would move away to other vessels lying there at anchor. Hato shouted. "You come back right now. Hand over two or more fish. He can take one, a big one, see, for himself and the rest of the crew. I'll want one too."

"And the cigarettes?" David said, as if suspicious, while Elmer took the boat a little farther from the submarine.

"Wait there!" ordered Hato. "I'll go get."

"You're fine guys," declared the sailor, lowering his voice as the commander disappeared. "He'll forget that I skipped my watch for a moment. Say you come along other days, eh. The grub aboard this tank makes a man sick. It's rice to-day. Rice to-morrow. Rice for every meal. Sometimes there's a bit of meat. I like an American steak, I do. And the next best thing is fish. Pitch over the biggest of them, buddies, and here are the cigarettes."

He was given two of the largest of the catch, and grinned his pleasure.

"You sure are the cutest lot of dirty Filipinos I've struck," he laughed. "It's not many of your sort that'd give even a shoelace to a Jap. Pah! When'll this war get finished?"

He dropped the fish upon the deck and once more sprang stiffly to attention as Hato appeared.

"Two," exclaimed the latter, seeing the fish on the deck. "And just for cigarettes?"

"Yes, sir. And they'd have given them free if I'd asked long enough. Seems they're wanting to be friendly with us."

Hato lent on the rail and looked keenly down at the two in the boat. An idea had crossed his brain and he wanted a few moments in which to develop it.

"You hate the Yanks, eh?" he asked. "You want Japs instead?"

David grinned widely. The conversation was going splendidly.

"Yanks, pah!" he grunted. "See, mister, we do fine trade down the coast till Yanks stop us. They say that smuggling. So send us to clink and we ruined. Yanks! I hate 'em, the guys!"

Elmer flourished his paddle as if to emphasise his own dislike of Americans. But never once did he raise his head, and saw to it that his

slouch hat shaded his face and partly hid it from the commander.

“And you know the coast hereabouts?” asked Hato. “You could take a message to a spot not twenty miles away, and then forget that you’d done it?”

David lifted his hat obsequiously. “Mister,” he said. “How much? Yanks not able to stop native boatman now. But Jap police, yes. Shoot first and ask poor Filipino after. Not like to get killed by same fellow. How much, mister? We take message, yes, and then keep quiet all time. Twenty miles you say. That nothing to boatmen. Go away at night. Back next night. Yes, we carry message for mister.”

One of the crew appeared of a sudden through the conning-tower hatch and saluted.

“A message, sir,” he announced. “From Truk.”

“Wait there,” Hato ordered. “I will return in a few minutes. Here, take the cigarettes and hand the fish over to this man.”

He swarmed up the side of the conning-tower and a moment later his baboon-like figure and his hideous face had disappeared below the hatch.

“Say, boys,” sang out the sailor, instantly taking advantage of the absence of the officer. “You’ll be in luck. This commander of ours has something good on. He’s sweet on some spot away from Manila. But why, I’ll not guess. You make him pay big money. He’s got it. Or at least he says he’ll have it. I heard him bucking like that to another officer a while ago. Sheer off now till he bobs up again. It wouldn’t do me any good to be found having a yarn with you fellows.”

David and Elmer pushed away from the submarine and sat facing each other out of earshot of the vessel. They hardly dared to think what might be about to happen. For two weeks they had shadowed the submarines lying off Cavite. But never before had they been so close to them. This appeared to be a heaven-sent opportunity. What could be this mystery at which Hato hinted? Had it anything to do with Alfred Baines?

“I’ll say yes,” grunted Elmer at last, his paddle dipping in the water and his thoughts far away. Indeed, he seemed to be addressing no one in particular. “The guy has a date with someone twenty miles away outside Manila, and he don’t want anyone to know about it. Now what’s the big idea? Uncle, do you think. Or——”

“Keep the boat drifting well away from the sub,” cautioned David. “We mustn’t appear too eager. Let this Hato run after us, rather than we after him. That’ll make him all the keener. Yes, Elmer, I’ve a hunch, as you Yanks say, that this affair has some connection with your uncle. But what? That’s the conundrum. Do you really think Mr. Baines possesses a secret of real value?”

Elmer stared across the shimmering bay and swept the whole of its wide surroundings with his eyes before he answered. He seemed to be deep in thought, and though his gaze fastened upon Corregidor, standing rigidly at the entrance of the bay, as if it were a sentinel, and then turned towards the great peninsula of Bataan, the jungle-covered stretch of land which the defending Americans had seized and fortified to the best of their ability, his eyes appeared to be unseeing. His brow was puckered. That idiotic black moustache twitched.

“Does uncle hold a secret? Is it of any value?” he said at last. “Now, see here, David boy. You know Uncle Alfred, eh?”

David nodded. Indeed, he was very well acquainted with that distinguished if somewhat silent person. Mr. Baines was an ideal companion for young people; for he forgot himself, was genial, indeed jolly and took a vast interest in all that interested and concerned the younger generation. At times he was taciturn, and it was plain to see that his thoughts were far away. Besides, the man had the reputation of being a scientist of distinction. He was sought by learned bodies. His word was almost law in some of America’s scientific institutions, and metallurgists the world over were wont to quote the name of Alfred Baines as one whose authority in all matters concerning alloys, rare metals and in particular undiscovered and undisclosed formulae was unchallenged.

“I’d say,” began David at last, speaking slowly and with conviction, “that your uncle is the last man to seek notoriety. I’ve little doubt that he himself has never even hinted at the fact that he possessed a secret.”

“That’s true,” declared Elmer. “He’s a modest guy. He doesn’t want fireworks, and he’s not out to sell something big for a pile of dollars. I believe he’d be happier far away on his Honolulu pineapple plantation, cutting the roots, doctoring them with stuff he’s made in his laboratory, and just waiting for results. But then there’s his other laboratory. It’s what claims most of his time and interest, and the Press sometimes splashes a notice about his results. They call him the metal wizard. I don’t know. But he’s got a secret sure, and it’s a whale of a secret if you ask me. The sort of thing that

might revolutionise manufacturing process, and might even decide the outcome of this war. That's what Hato believes. He's after the secret and the money it will bring. He's determined to become a big noise in Japan, while in the background of his cunning mind there is always the idea of the service he can do for his Mikado and his country. He's out like all the rest of the Nips to smash America, not forgetting the British Empire."



The two were dragged from the water

Elmer gasped. His ridiculous black moustache twitched. It was quite an outburst. But he felt deeply about his uncle and had never wavered in his determination to discover his whereabouts and to rescue him from the clutching hands of Hato.

There was sudden movement aboard the submarine. Whereas her deck had been deserted save for the man who had first hailed them, sailors were now tumbling up the hatch and were hurrying to and fro. There was the rattle of machinery, the bows of the vessel swung round, her anchor was hoisted from the oozy bottom of the entry to Cavite Harbour and she floated free. A moment later she was heading out across the bay in the direction of Corregidor.

“That’s bad luck!” exclaimed David. “Just, too, as we were getting along nicely. Anyway, we know now where to find Hato.”

“Who’s that guy in the conning-tower?” asked Elmer, pulling the tattered flap of his hat further over his eyes to shade them from the sun. “Hato, I guess.”

There was the glint of light on the lenses of a pair of binoculars. The man leaning on the rail of the submarine’s conning-tower was Hato without a doubt, scrutinising the occupants of the fishing-boat. He gave vent to a sudden exclamation, dropped the glasses on to the sling about his neck and beckoned to his signaller.

“Wireless the shore,” he ordered. “Tell the port officer to put out in a launch and arrest those two who’ve been speaking to us. Filipinos, eh? One, the lanky fellow, is an American. This time I have them.”

As David and Elmer paddled towards the bay front of Manila they caught sight of the wash of a fast launch steering in their direction. Ten minutes later it swerved in a circle about them and then deliberately rammed them.

“Filipinos, eh?” shouted the officer in command, as the two were dragged from the water. “Spies! One American for sure. Tie them up. Now head for the shore.”

CHAPTER XI

JAPANESE PRISONERS

There was consternation at Ho Ling's godown when Toong raced there with the news of the arrest of Elmer and David. Chu dashed into the street and watched with his heart in his mouth as his two young masters were handed over to the Japanese police. He saw them bundled into an army truck in which they were whirled away along the edge of the waterfront in the direction of the largest of the enemy camps pitched in the surroundings of Manila. Then he returned to the godown, filled with anxious forebodings as to the fate awaiting them.

"It's not gone quite as we hoped," said David at last, as the truck bumped over the cobbled streets and took the more open road towards the north. "This means a whole bucketful of trouble."

Elmer shook the water out of his ears and peered out beneath the flapping curtain at the back of the truck. "It's sure likely to be a tight spot," he grunted. "That Hato fellow must have had his suspicions from the first. It is my lanky body, I suppose. Burr! Jap prisoners. To be tried as spies. Not such a rosy outlook, buddy."

It was in fact a desperate situation, for the Japanese had shown themselves not long since as ruthless invaders. They regarded the life of a Filipino as of little greater value than that of a fly, and though their aim and object was to encourage friendship with the natives of Luzon, as with all who inhabited the Philippine archipelago, with the idea of encouraging them to join whole-heartedly in that Japanese co-prosperity scheme which they hoped would soon include the whole of the Far East, they were prepared ruthlessly to exterminate all who opposed them. And, of course, a spy was an altogether different affair, and an American posing as a Filipino, just a danger to Japan, to be removed without hesitation.

"Sit still," grunted the Japanese military policeman riding in the truck with them. "Stop talking, and do not attempt to look out."

As if to emphasise his words he dropped the muzzle of his tommy-gun across his knees and directed the weapon at them. "Sit still," he growled. "Or——"

There was silence in the truck, broken only by the rattle of the brake rods and by the subdued scream of the tyres as they met the many obstructions and irregularities of a road which in the past few days had been worn by the passage of hundreds of army trucks and cars, by an occasional Japanese tank, and by thousands of invading soldiers. Some minutes later the brakes screamed and the vehicle was brought to an abrupt halt which almost jerked the prisoners and the guard from their seats.

“Get out. March!”

They were hauled from the truck and directed into a native hut, outside which a Japanese notice was nailed, stating that it was police headquarters. Presently the two prisoners were ranged before a rickety table behind which sat the squat figure of the chief of police.

“So. Spies,” he smiled, regarding the two, and using excellent English. “One is an American. Which one?”

“That’s me,” answered Elmer, boldly. “Sure, an American.”

“And for the moment a Filipino,” grinned the officer. “But only for the moment, for a few more moments perhaps. Then you?” and he pointed an ominous finger at David.

“British. British every time!”

“But, like the other, Filipino.”

There was a cruel glint in the steel-grey eyes of the officer. This Japanese chief of police could be as smooth as silk when the occasion demanded. But in the exercise of his duties he could be cruel and ruthless. For more than a minute he regarded his prisoners, treating them in turn to a stony stare which was intended to intimidate. And well it might, for this squat individual had the power to order them out of his presence to instant execution. Maybe he would have done so, for admittedly they were enemies of Japan, and moreover, enemies masquerading as Filipinos, spies, to be dealt with summarily. Then his glance fell upon a scrap of paper lying on the rickety table, and he read again the Japanese characters scrawled upon it.

“Message from Commander Hato. Hold the American prisoner and his friend. I have need to cross-question them. They are dangerous spies. Guard them till I return. My orders are to proceed to sea at once. In a week, perhaps earlier, I shall require to have these prisoners brought before me.”

Evidently the commander of the submarine was an officer of some distinction, whose request or command was not lightly to be overlooked.

The police officer grimaced. He rather resented this interference from an unknown naval officer with his special duties. But there must be some special reason for Hato's order, and it was known that the arrest had taken place because of information given by the commander.

"You wish to say anything?" asked the police chief, looking first at Elmer and then at David. "You have some explanation to give?"

Elmer smiled. Though his heart had sunk deep, as deep as his shoes had he worn any, and though he recognised how desperate was their position, yet his coolness and pluck never deserted him.

"Nothing to say," he replied, with a jerk of his head. "Nothing to excuse. But a request to make."

"And that?" asked the officer sharply.

"Release my chum. He's no spy. For that matter nor am I. But he's done you no harm. Let him go."

"A spy! Release a man who poses as a Filipino and wanders about seeking for news to send to our enemies! The suggestion is sheer madness. See," shouted the officer, letting exasperation get the better of his coolness, "he, and you too, are, by the report I have received, discovered in the act of spying on our shipping. You were apparently just innocent fishermen plying your calling in the Bay. Strange that you lay off Cavite, where our war vessels are anchored. Release this friend of yours! I shall hope to have the pleasant duty of marching him before a firing-squad. But that must wait. You will be shut up till Commander Hato returns to Cavite. Then—yes, then you will get what is due to you and to all spies. March them out!"

The four Japanese soldiers who had stood stiffly at attention beside the prisoners turned to the right with military precision.

"March!" commanded the officer who was in command, and promptly Elmer and David were taken from the hut and hurried along the rutted, dusty road which led through the camp.

There were rows of miniature tents on either hand. Hundreds of Japanese soldiers, most of them wearing only shorts—for this was their off-duty time and they could dress as they pleased—were bustling in and out of the tents or lounging in the open, basking in the sun, idly gossiping the time away. They scarcely deigned even to glance at the Filipino prisoners being marched through the camp. For Filipinos were a common enough sight, and never interesting. There were, in fact, swarms of these natives of Luzon to be seen on either hand, for Japan had need of their labour. Here and there

they were repairing the rough tracks which gave access to different parts of the wide-sweeping camp. Some were erecting bamboo and palm-leaf huts, while yet again others were unloading trucks which throughout the day came rolling to the place laden with stores and ammunition.

“If we could just get amongst that crowd we’d have a chance,” whispered David. “One Filipino is much like another.”

“Only they’re not all as long as I am, buddy,” came Elmer’s answer. “Now you could and would sure pass in a crowd. You’re the right height, you guess. But I—I’m the fellow who has brought all this trouble to us.”

“Stop talking,” commanded the officer, and though they could not understand his words, his threatening attitude was sufficiently convincing. “Now swing to the right. The prison is up there.”

Presently, having clambered up a steep track, they came to a tumbledown house built of stone. It was perched on the summit of a hillock of some height, and glancing round David found that he could survey almost the whole of this great enemy camp, and could see objects in the far distance.

The city of Manila was plainly visible, and in its centre, close to the shattered waterfront, and within easy distance of the great shimmering bay which provided this, the capital of Luzon, largest island in the great Philippine archipelago, with magnificent anchorage was the Manila Hotel, till so lately the centre of all that was gay, now damaged by Japanese bombing, and flying above its broken roof the great Rising Sun, symbol of Japanese authority.

“Enter. Your quarters are here,” signed the officer. “Attempt to break out and you will be shot. Close the door.”

They could hear his further orders as he posted a sentry in front and one behind the house. Then, as they listened, they heard the slither of the remaining guards as they marched away from the prison.

“First thing is to take a look around,” said Elmer. “They’ve put us in a shell which wouldn’t take much breaking out of. Only we’d have to silence those sentries.”

“And then what?” asked David, peering out of a narrow window, innocent of glass and so small that a man could scarcely creep through it. “We’re perched high up, overlooking the camp. But it lies between us and Manila. Supposing we did break out. What then? We’d jump plumb into a hornet’s nest. But something like that has to be done, and quick too.”

For more than an hour they ranged round the interior of their prison. The house was a one-roomed affair, with a small shed attached to one side. There was a narrow window in each wall, similar to that through which David had peered, and from any one of them a wide-sweeping view could be obtained which on any other occasion would have proved all absorbing. Hundreds upon hundreds of tiny figures moved over in the camp. Motor trucks came and went, stirring up huge clouds of dust. An occasional staff car raced along the half-made roads, and once an aeroplane swept across the place with its engine roaring and coughing.

“That will be Bataan, I suppose,” said David, after a while, when they had looked out from all the windows, and had surveyed their surroundings on every side.

“Guess so, Bataan. It’s said that General MacArthur has near a hundred thousand people there. Not all troops, you’ll figure,” declared Elmer. “Crowds of fugitives who couldn’t get away into the forest country, or didn’t want to, crossed to the peninsula. They’ll take a heap of feeding.”

“And protecting,” agreed David. “The peninsula appears to be covered in jungle, and to be overlooked by heights to the seaward side. What do you make of this, Elmer?”

“Guns. Guns in two long rows. And stacks of ammunition beside them.”

From the height it was possible to discern many batteries ranged between two bands of forest trees, and yet so much in the open that a reconnaissance aeroplane would promptly discover them. But the Japanese invaders of Luzon had no fear of that. Their attack upon Manila and its surroundings had been as sudden and unexpected, and just as treacherous, as that on Pearl Harbour, and within a few hours had resulted in the complete destruction of all the available airfields and practically of every airplane possessed by the Americans. Only a few out-of-date machines remained, which were useless for they were hopelessly outclassed by Japanese fighters. It followed therefore that the invader had no need to fear either a bombing attack on his camps by General MacArthur’s air force, or discovery of his preparations for attack.

“Guns ranged side by side. Gee! That looks like preparations made to swamp the defenders of Bataan,” declared Elmer. “Look at the piles beside the batteries. Shells, I guess. That means preparation for a smashing bombardment. Say, boy, it’s something our folks ought to know about.”

It seemed indeed that the Japanese were making ready for a large-scale attack upon Bataan, already desperately hard-pressed by the enemy. General MacArthur in fact, was for the moment a thorn in the side of the Japanese invader. For while he held the malarious, jungle-clad and swampy peninsula hemmed in between bay and sea he was a brake on Japanese progress. Before the enemy could sweep south through this vast Philippine archipelago and turning east could invade the many islands to east and north of New Guinea, American forces in Bataan must be liquidated. Did those massed guns within sight of the prison, with the many piles of ammunition beside them, disclose plans for an all-out attack? It seemed probable, and the thought set David and Elmer pondering.

“See here,” said Elmer at last, squatting on the flagged floor of the prison with his back against the wall, “a guy feels like a bird in a cage here. You can see out. You can watch what’s going on. But can you move? You can just flutter your wings against the bars, and that’s all.”

“For the moment, yes,” agreed David, after a long pause, during which he went from one of the slit windows to another. “But a bird just keeps on fluttering helplessly, till it drops exhausted. That’s not our way. Beating wings won’t help, will it?”

Elmer grunted an answer. “You’ve said it. Then?” he asked, almost sourly.

“We put our heads together and see what else can be done.”

“That’s sense. That’s like David,” cried Elmer. “Always scheming something. Hunting for a way out of what looks like an impossible difficulty. Say, boy, what’s in your mind?”

“Nothing!” exclaimed David sharply. “But perhaps just something,” he added. “I’m thinking of that lean-to shed outside.”

“Waal,” drawled Elmer, shaking his lanky form and rising to his feet to step across their prison to one of the windows from which the shed could be seen.

It stood perhaps eight feet in height and was constructed partly of stone, though mainly of rough-sawn timber. It may have been a tool shed, for the entrance to it was not from the house itself, and was, if anywhere, on the far side and out of their vision. “This place is none too strong,” he said, as if thinking aloud. “You and I, buddy, could kick our way out in quick time, even though we don’t happen to have boots on our feet. But there are always

those sentry guys watching, and they're wideawake enough. Say, what's the great idea?"

"There isn't one—not yet," smiled David. "But it wants thinking up. To begin with, we have to find a way to reach the shed, and that in dead silence. This wall could almost be picked to pieces with one's hands."

"It sure could. That's a clear cinch," whispered Elmer enthusiastically, dropping his voice as though he feared someone might overhear them. "The mortar has dropped away from the stones. Now if we shifted this top course, and so could get a grip of the next, we'd make a hole that would lead into the shed in no time. This is something to go on with, boy. Stand by while I have a try."

The slither of feet on the track outside reached their ears at that moment, and at once they squatted down against the far wall, opposite the entrance to their prison. Then they heard a word of command and someone fumbled at the lock of the door. A second or two later it was thrown open and a Japanese soldier, armed with a tommy-gun, his feet shod with a species of sandal which provided a separate compartment for the big toe, entered and beckoned to someone to follow. A Filipino appeared, carrying a flat tin and a can and, giving one sharp look at the prisoners, deposited them on the floor.

"Your food and drink," he said. "A little fish. Some boiled rice, and water. So long, friends."

"Get out," growled the soldier, in Japanese. "Talking to prisoners is forbidden."

They were gone in a moment, but not before the Filipino had smiled at David and Elmer. The door was banged, and the bolts shot. They were alone again.

"That guy would help us if he were able," observed Elmer. "See him smile? Guess he's been roped in by the Nips and can't help himself. He's some sort of prisoner. But food, boy. A guy can't live without it, and though these Nips seem to be able to keep life and soul together on just rice, and rice to it, a white man wants something more solid. He said fish."

"And fish there is," laughed David, opening the flat tin. "What's more there's plenty of it; and—um—yes—it's eatable. It's fresh, and cooked. I'm hungry."

They squatted about the tin container, and using their fingers, for no forks were provided, they soon made short work of the food placed before them.

“A Nip would use chopsticks, I suppose,” smiled David. “Though I’ve tried them many a time I’ve never succeeded in making a job of it. Still, they’re practical implements, and anyway they take up little space and are easy to stow away in a pack. Now about this business of the shed.”

“It has to be worked so that a visitor to the place can’t spot what we’ve been doing,” said Elmer. “That means that we shall have to sweep up any bits of mortar and hide them. Say, they’d go through one of the windows and no one be the wiser.”

Shaky though the walls of their prison were, it proved no easy matter to loosen the top course of stone immediately opposite the shed. But by dint of patience it was at length broken away from the second and the debris it left gathered and tossed through one of the windows.

“Now pop the stones back,” advised David. “We might have to do it in a hurry, you know. Seems to me that one of us would be well employed watching the approach to this place, while the other works. We could see a Jap coming up the hill long before we could hear him, and that would give time in which to set everything here shipshape. Just a moment while I take a look.”

There was no doubt that caution was necessary if they were to elude their guards, for as Elmer set to with a will on the second course of stones, while David posted himself behind the slit-like window which commanded the track leading to the prison, a platoon of soldiers suddenly appeared at the base of the hill, and swinging at the command of the non-commissioned officer in charge, began to make their way up it.

“Stop!” warned David. “Put the stones back. I’ll lend a hand. Now let us squat against the far wall, with the empty ration tin close, and pretend to have been sleeping.”

There was a sharp command outside, and stealing for a moment to one of the windows Elmer saw the platoon drawn up close to the door of the prison. Then one of the men shouldered his rifle and led by the non-commissioned officer, he marched to the rear of the hut. An order brought the sentry there to attention. He and his relief faced one another for a few moments. Then they exchanged places, and the man to be relieved was marched ceremoniously back to the platoon. A minute later the second sentry had been exchanged and the platoon was retreating down the hill, leaving the two prisoners to carry on with their plan of escape.

“That’s finished course number three,” said Elmer, puffing with his exertions. Removing the stones was no easy job, and the prison walls seemed to have increased the humid heat common in the region of Manila. “Another two will be enough. Then I guess we’ll have a hole big enough to let us slip into the shed. I can see right into it already.”

An hour later their task was completed. The removal of five courses of stonework had provided a gap some eighteen inches wide, and more than that deep, through which they would have little difficulty in wriggling their way into the shed. And though the interior of the latter was so dark that they could distinguish only the bare outlines, it seemed to be empty, save for a pile of rotting bamboos in one corner.

“They’d be better than nothing,” whispered David. “With a stout bamboo to act as a club we should each of us have some sort of weapon, though we shall be wise to slip away without so much as a sound and without disturbing the sentries. Where’s the door of the shed? And supposing it is bolted from the outside.”

“Soon see to that, buddy. Just take a look down the hill and at the sentries. If all’s clear let me know. I’ll be through this hole in a jiffy.”

His lanky form disappeared and David heard the movement of his bare feet as he reached the floor of the hut, though the sound was so slight that no sentry, however alert, could have heard it. That the men outside had no suspicion was clear, for they were marching to and fro, one of them whistling and his fellow gazing listlessly down the hill, rather as though he wished himself anywhere else than doing sentry-go in that out-of-the-way spot.

“Bamboos, yes,” said Elmer to himself, groping about in the dusk of the shed with both hands. “Good stout ones too. And here’s the door. Just latched. The cage can be opened with ease the moment darkness falls. Wait a bit though. Is there anything the other side of the door to keep it from opening? Now if that isn’t just thoughtful of the Nip. The thing is free to swing outward, and without a sound. This is all just too splendid!”

He came wriggling back into the prison and stood there brushing the dust and grime from his ragged clothing, while sweat poured from his face and hands.

“It’s real hot in that shed, buddy,” he told David, exultation in his voice. “It’s been closed for weeks perhaps and the air is baked. But all’s well. The

trap is wide open. Just as soon as darkness comes we'll slip our cable and get going."

"And meanwhile replace the stones and make things look shipshape," cautioned David. "I'll watch while you finish the job."

Shadows outside the prison were growing longer. Dark clouds were hanging over the glistening bay, while the great mass of the Bataan peninsula had assumed a sombre colouring now that the direct rays of a burning, overhead sun failed to reach it. Hidden amidst that wide-stretching matted jungle were thousands of American and Filipino troops, hemmed in by many more thousands of relentless invaders, and even then guns were speaking while, peering through one of the windows David and Elmer saw a number of Japanese bombers swooping in the direction of Corregidor, the island fortress lying at the southern end of the peninsula. The flash of their bombs cast great streaks of brilliant light across the water and the jungle-clad coastline, to be followed quite a while later by the boom of distant explosions.

"That is what is happening at the southern end of the American defences," observed David. "But one hears that it is the northern line which is vulnerable. Supposing those massed batteries we've spotted began to open up. Supposing there are more guns we've not been able to see. And then, let us imagine that the Japs have massed more thousands of men. What then?"

"Guess it has to come some day," Elmer admitted grudgingly. "These Nips swarm. General MacArthur is outnumbered, outgunned and by all accounts short of food and munitions. You think the Japs are massing for an attack?"

"Can't say. I can only guess, and that seems the most likely event to expect. I'd like to hunt round and see more. Then I'd make for Bataan with all the news I'd gathered."

"With me, boy," exclaimed Elmer. "America's my country. Don't forget that. Say, it seems to me we've got to get out of this cage not so much because we'll be sure shot if we stay here, but because we believe we've news for the defenders of Bataan. Waal, the moment is just here. In half an hour perhaps."

Far to the west the sun sat low in the clouds, a gleaming, golden orb, still flooding that side of the great island of Luzon with its hot, breathless rays. It hung as if suspended in the mists of coming night, and presently without

warning, as happens in the tropics, it would drop from the sky as if it were a stone, and in just a few minutes darkness would cover land and sea.

“Men coming up the track to this place,” warned David, who had posted himself again at a window. “There are three of them, two Japanese soldiers and the third is that Filipino. What’s it mean?”

There was the clatter of the bolt of their prison being unlatched. The door was dragged open and one of the soldiers entered.

“March him in!” he ordered. “Now you follow. You understand your orders?” he demanded of the soldier.

“Yes. I stay here throughout the night. I guard these prisoners. The Filipino stays in case there is need to interpret. Good! I am ready.”

The door banged. David and Elmer sat down aghast. Their plan of escape so carefully made and so complete, ready in fact for an immediate attempt, had been defeated.

CHAPTER XII

THE WAY OF ESCAPE

Intense darkness had swept across land and sea. The romantically beautiful Bay of Manila, with its sleepy Pasig River entering it so stealthily and smoothly, the bridges which American enterprise had provided to give an easy crossing, and Manila itself, that once-flourishing city, so vastly improved since its capture by the United States, were all of them blotted out by the pervading gloom.

Within the narrow and shaky walls of their prison David and Elmer were crouched on the floor in Stygian darkness, so dense indeed that you might lift a hand within inches of your face and fail to see even the outline. But lights flickered here and there in the neighbourhood. Fireflies hung in the scrub at the foot of the hill and twinkled in the far distance in the jungle growth covering Bataan, for all the world like a subdued firework display. Darkness and silence reigned, though now that night had come the hum and buzz of a myriad insects reached the ear, seeming to accentuate the deathly silence.

Elmer felt mechanically in his pocket and extracted a broken packet of cheap native cigarettes. A battered box of matches followed, and presently he struck one of them and set light to a cigarette. The flame showed the outline of the prison, the Filipino squatting close at hand, David hunched beside the wall, tense, pondering, brooding over their ill fortune, his brow furrowed. And cross-legged, exactly opposite, was the soldier, his almond eyes blinking in the light, his hands gripping the tommy-gun nursed in his lap, and a couple of grenades dangling from his waist-strap.

“Have one,” said Elmer, jerking his arm forward. “A smoke.”

The man grunted and leaning forward took one of the cigarettes. Then Elmer struck another match against the box, the rasp sounding peculiarly loud in that tense silence, and held the flame forward. The two of them, this prisoner on the point of making a dash for liberty and life, and the soldier sent there to prevent escape were within a foot of one another. Would Elmer strike? David was alert. In the few brief moments since the first match was struck his attitude had changed. His muscles were braced for a struggle. He had lifted himself a trifle from the floor, and if his friend moved, if he flung himself on the soldier, David was ready. Then, as the flame died down, its

dying flicker serving to show a cloud of smoke issuing from the soldier's lips, the Filipino spoke.

"Friends," he said. "The man understands only one thing. That is his duty. I have spent other nights here with him, guarding prisoners. Indeed, I was once held here for several nights, till the Japs found me of use. This man knows no English. But his gun is always ready, and in a moment he can release the pin of a grenade and kill all within the prison."

There was silence again, but the inky blackness within the prison was lightened by the smouldering ends of the two cigarettes. Those faint gleams of light enabled David to measure the distance between himself and this silent Japanese soldier, to note exactly how his hands gripped his weapon, and to calculate how long it would take to throw himself across the narrow intervening distance and seize those hands.

"Just can't be done. That is, not yet," he said, as if thinking aloud. "Suppose he gets sleepy."

"That, too, is hopeless," came from the Filipino. "This is a Japanese, sir, he has his honour to defend. He will sit there the night through, blinking in the darkness, thinking of his home away in Japan, intent on one thing only, that is his solemn duty. Some there are who would forbid speech. We are therefore lucky, for this man is more easygoing. But permit you to escape is the last thing he will do, and should you attack him he will put up the toughest fight possible, and will sacrifice his own life rather than permit you to succeed."

The voice was cultured. The English used by this native of Manila was well chosen and correct. He was obviously not one of the many thousands of Filipinos to be seen in normal times crowding the streets of Manila, lounging in the shade perhaps, or fetching or carrying for someone.

"I was a professor at one of the schools set up by the Americans," he explained. "I was sent first to a university in the United States, and later to Japan, to help promote trade with that country. It was there that I learned their language. They knew me in Tokyo. They had marked me down as one who might be useful to them when the Philippines were invaded, and though I made every effort to reach Bataan, they were too quick for me. I am a prisoner, allowed the run of the camp. But a prisoner nevertheless, and when Americans are taken I act as prison warden, interpreter, ration carrier and so on. Believe me, no prisoner has yet escaped from this place."

Elmer's cigarette burned redly as he puffed hard at it. "That so, buddy," he growled. "No one escaped? Not one?"

"None! Where could they go, supposing they broke loose?" asked the Filipino. "The great camp below swarms with troops, and there is a strong force of police there. It lies directly between this prison and Manila, and bars escape in that direction. True, there is forest country near at hand. But there are also other camps, sentries, police, watch-dogs everywhere. And beyond, over there"—and he waved a hand, as though it were possible to follow his directions in that Stygian darkness—"yonder is Bataan, jungle covered, swarming with beasts, swampy, malarious, filled with Japanese infiltration troops, tree-top snipers, every sort of obstruction to keep an escaping prisoner from making his way through."

It was cold comfort. Yet neither David nor Elmer could deny that there was truth in every word of the statement made by the Filipino. The situation was hopeless. Or was it?

"You can never say till the very last moment," came from David at length. "I'm not satisfied that we couldn't smash this tough fellow placed here to guard us. Tell me, my friend, would you help? Do you desire to join the American forces? Or have you decided that you will remain a Japanese prisoner for all time?"

"I would seize upon the first opportunity," came the immediate answer. "I have no desire to join this new scheme of the Japanese, who preach a plan to include the whole of the East. They desire an Empire which shall include every one of the many thousands of islands in this immense Pacific Ocean, and have the intention of conquering Burma, India, and the Dutch East Indies. That will give them millions of subjects, and millions more might fall into their bag if their conquests stretched to New Guinea, even to Australia. No. I have seen America arrive in these parts, and every Filipino has watched the enormous progress in our well-being and health. Point the way to escape and I am with you."

"We could count on you if there's a tussle with this Jap?" asked David.

"Say. Would you make for his grenades?" demanded Elmer, a note of grimness in his usually placid and musical voice.

"You can count on me. I am no fighter. But liberty is dear to every man. And besides, I have a mission to perform. Somehow, by hook and by crook I must get information across to Bataan."

“To General MacArthur? What news,” asked David, for he and Elmer also had decided already that they too had a mission.

“News of a forthcoming attack. I hear these Japs talking. They forget that I speak their language, and only yesterday when I was near their headquarters I overheard two senior members of the staff discussing arrangements. These invaders of my country have been beaten back from the approaches to Bataan not once, but many times. They are eager to overrun American defences, for until Manila and its surroundings are captured entire and all opposition from regular troops here suppressed, a large force of Japanese is held in Luzon. It is wanted, and wanted quickly to the south and the east. These cunning people from Japan have planned to seize and fortify all the many places I have mentioned before America and Britain can arm. That would place them in an immensely strong position. Thousands of Japanese garrisons would be ready to repel invaders, and thousands of miles of the Pacific would need to be crossed before a single American or Briton could attack them.”

It was information which had hardly occurred to Elmer and David. They had been so immersed in their own adventurous affairs since the sinking of the yacht that they had scarcely given a thought to the tremendous events taking place all about them. Only a few weeks ago—though it appeared to be months, for so much had happened—all the news was of grim fighting in Europe, of Britain standing all alone in the midst of warring nations, of the German aggressor overrunning Poland, Norway, Holland, even France, and well-nigh trapping the whole of the British expeditionary force. There was that wonderful withdrawal from Dunkirk, the slaughter of the Luftwaffe over England, and Hitler’s gigantic attack on Russia. And now here was more. Another aggressor broken loose. The ferocious and powerful Japanese intent on carving out an Eastern empire.

“News of a forthcoming attack,” said David, after a long pause. “Even we noticed from the windows here the massing of guns and ammunition.”

“Hundreds are being put in position, or are already trained on the forward and the back areas of Bataan. Thousands of officers and men have been briefed for the coming attack,” declared the Filipino. “Lines have been taped right up to the outposts of Bataan, so that men can creep forward in the darkness. In just over forty-eight hours a storm of shell will be poured on the American defences. Every divebomber will be sent into the battle. Mortar batteries already in position in the forward Japanese area will add their storm of shell. And then the infiltration troops will move in, followed by those detailed to storm the defences.”

Once more there was a pause. The cigarettes had been consumed, and only the glistening stub of one of them glowed faintly on the floor. Mechanically Elmer groped once more in his pocket, extracted the torn packet, helped himself, and handed the packet to the Japanese sentry with one hand, while the other held the lighted match.

“Here, you guy,” he said, almost savagely, as if he resented having any sort of dealing with the man. “Just have another. That’ll be the last but one, for my store is almost finished.”

They watched, as if fascinated, while the soldier moistened the end of the cigarette with his tongue, tapped it on the butt of his gun to shake a flake of tobacco clear and then drew at the flame. The almond eyes still twinkled. Were they understanding eyes? Did this guard guess the nature of the discussion taking place at his feet? Was he aware that an attack upon his person was in contemplation? And if so, was he unnerved, anxious, ready to shout a warning?

“He’s just content,” said the Filipino, as though he had guessed what was passing in their minds. “Recollect, he has acted as sentry here before, and has passed several nights with prisoners who have had the same thoughts and ideas we have. A Japanese is not easily frightened. It makes no difference that the sentries have been withdrawn from outside this prison. They will come back again. As dawn breaks they will mount the hill. Till then, there is just his duty.”

“And there’s just ours too,” David began, emphasis in his voice. “This mission compels us to act. We have got to get clear of this place, and somehow we must get news across to General MacArthur.”

“That’s sure all there is to it,” drawled Elmer, just a faint tremor in his words, for where the safety and the success of his countrymen were concerned this lanky American was a determined supporter. “Let’s get down to the point. Say, stranger, you’re certain you’re on our side? You’ll fight?”

“I’ll risk all. You can trust me. I’m a man of peace, a professor of sorts. But I can and will fight for my country. And remember my friends, American troops are men of my country. I am a citizen of the United States.”

“Then you’re one of us,” declared Elmer. “Shake hands.”

The glow of the cigarettes gave just sufficient light to show the two palms meeting in a hearty shake. “I’m with you through anything,” declared the Filipino. “And now, before we make a move, let me tell you more about these Jap preparations. There will then be three of us who are informed,

though of course, having been around and about I am better able to describe the precise position of batteries and other weapons made ready for the attack. The main thing, however, is to know that an onslaught is preparing, that it is planned to launch it at dawn, just over forty-eight hours hence, and that it is to be flung at General MacArthur's Bataan defences."

He drew a wordy picture of their surroundings, of the camp through which they had passed on the way to the prison, and of the position of the peninsula of Bataan in relation to all.

"We won't talk of failure not yet," he added. "But it is just as well to be prepared so that, supposing only one of us three gets clear away, he will have sufficient information to act as a warning to the Americans."

The cigarette-ends lit up the gloom fitfully. The sentry smoked on in tense silence, and if an arc light had been played upon his placid features there would have been nothing to gain. The slanting eyes were serene. The high malar bones seemed to stamp an atmosphere of happy contentment. This Japanese must know that he was in the way, that the three seated at his feet could well do without his company, that he stood between them and safety. That indeed he did, for whereas the Filipino had little to lose, for he was of value to the enemy, the case was entirely different with Elmer and David. When Hato had done with them they were finished. There was only one end for a spy, and how could they hope to prove that that was not their vocation?

"Then we get down to this question of the sentry," began David. "From where I sit I could reach his right hand in a jiffy."

"And I guess I'd be right on top of him at that instant. See here, David. We'll divide the job and all act on one signal. Let's fix the signal first."

"Something that doesn't make so much as a whisper. You've got a cigarette left?"

The lanky American rummaged in his pocket once more and let his fingers dip into the packet. "Thought they'd almost all gone, but find there were two loose in the pocket and two in the paper. What then?"

"Give it another half-hour," said David. "He's only just now finished the last smoke. He'll think we're too generous to be really genuine, and will become suspicious. Then offer him another, and as you lean forward with the match and he starts to draw at the flame jump for his grenades. I'll be on to the arm and our friend here will tackle the other."

“And then?” asked Elmer, drawing a deep breath. “He’s wriggling like any worm. He’s shouting the house down. They’d hear him in the camp. See here. I don’t have any sort of feeling against this Nip. In his own country, along with his own people he may be one of the very best sort of guys. But he’ll sure shoot anyone, or all of us if we get up to tricks, and seems to me we’re free to do the same. Not just put his gun to his head, you know,” he added. “That sort isn’t our sort, is it? But a bang there would put him to sleep for the time being and would save no end of fuss and worry both for him and for us. If not, we have to gag him, and what with, I ask. And tie him up like a bundle. And will he squirm and fight! You bet, there’ll be the most almighty wrestling match right here that ever you imagined.”

It was true enough. This almond-eyed soldier, so harmless he appeared, could and would without doubt prove an ugly customer when attacked. He would fight tooth and nail, and since silence was imperative, to permit a mêlée there was just out of the question.

“It is clear that he must be disarmed and silenced. Listen to me,” said the Filipino. “At the signal you secure his right arm and the grenades. I will seize his head and bang it against the wall.”

The minutes dragged by as they waited in the darkness, and though the situation was tense David found himself actually nodding. Then he felt Elmer move and guessed that he was searching in his pocket.

“Say. A cigarette, buddy. One more. That’s pretty well the end of the packet.”

He was holding it out towards the sentry and they heard the rasp of the match while the flame lit their immediate surroundings so that they could see every feature of the soldier. Still those almond eyes flickered serenely. The man was wide awake, alert, his hands still on his gun which he nursed in his lap, and the grenades were within easy reach of his fingers.

“Just one more,” said Elmer, and it appeared to David that there was the merest catch in his voice. “A light too, son.”

All three were poised for action. The man would stretch one hand out to take a cigarette and would bend his head ever so little that he might suck at the flame. That was the instant for which they were waiting. It was there, now, immediate. They gathered their limbs beneath them and made ready for the fight. And then they sank back again. For the Japanese had declined this extra smoke. He was shaking his head. He said something to the Filipino.

“Trust a Jap to be polite,” the latter told them, controlling his voice, for the disappointment had been acute. “If his orders were to shoot you at this second, he’d pause to thank you for your offer of a cigarette. He says he would prefer to smoke later, in the early morning, when a man easily fails in his duty by falling asleep.”

Hours passed in gloomy silence. It appeared that the moment for action would never come, and indeed the actions of the sentry made any sort of attempt upon him practically impossible. He had got to his feet and patrolled to and fro along the length of the prison, as though he too, like David, felt like nodding and was determined to force himself to keep awake.

“Then do we rush him?” asked Elmer impatiently. “Time slips by. It’ll be dawn very soon, and then good-bye to escape. I’m feeling just crazy and desperate. Suppose we chance it. He’ll shout, sure he will. But it is still dark, and with that to help us we could make a getaway.”

The first rays of a tropical dawn were streaking the black sky. A pinkish haze hung in the far east, so that the tree-covered heights of Luzon stood out starkly silhouetted against it. Men were beginning to move about in the camp far below, while sentries counted the minutes before relief would be brought to them. And still the Japanese soldier, alert, watchful, perhaps suspicious, patrolled the prison in which David and Elmer and the Filipino were shut.

David sauntered to the window and gazed out at the track leading upward to the prison, and at the great space below, wrapped in a cold mist as yet, looking void and empty, but packed with sleeping troops. The light was coming swiftly. That pinkish glow was already a bright orange. Gleaming rays were piercing it from some spot thousands and thousands of miles away. And advancing out of the misty haze which swallowed the foot of the track were figures, some Japanese soldiers, sentries about to relieve the man who had been so watchful all through the night, and another figure. David peered hard. He beckoned to Elmer. They stared at the man advancing up the hill towards the prison.

“Thunder!” gasped Elmer. “Hato!”

“It’s now or never,” whispered David. “Ready?”

They threw themselves upon the sentry. David gripped him round the neck with one arm, and held his right arm firmly. Elmer kicked the man’s feet from under him and dived for the grenades. In a trice the Filipino had joined the scrimmage. But there was no need to seize the soldier’s head and

bang it against the wall. The kick which had sheered his feet from under him had brought him to the ground like a stone, and his forehead had struck heavily against the hard paving. The fellow was silenced, for a while at least.

“Pull the wall open,” commanded David. “I’ll watch. They’re half-way up the hill now. That gives us perhaps three or four minutes. Take one of the grenades,” he told the Filipino. “I’ll have the gun and his drum of ammunition. Ready, boy?”

“All set,” declared Elmer, curtly, the clatter of falling stones almost drowning his voice. “Back door wide open. Carriages waiting outside.”

There was a wide grin on his thin face as he waved to his comrades. Not that it was easy to see him there in the gloom of the prison. But the light was coming, swiftly, with all the suddenness to be expected in those parts. There was no intervening, long-drawn-out period such as heralds a dawn in Europe, no twilight, one of the glories of the West. In less than a quarter of an hour there would be broad daylight, and a roasting sun would be swamping this jungle-clad land with its scorching rays.

“You were ready, then?” exclaimed the Filipino, astonished, for though they had told him something of their preparations, darkness had hidden the details.

“We go,” said David. “Quick with it.”

They squeezed through the opening in the wall, dropped into the shed, and pushed the door open with much caution. No one appeared to be in sight. But the relief sentries were already at the door. They heard the noise of the bolt being disengaged. Then Hato shouted. He roared his disappointment. The cage was empty. The birds had flown. A solitary, unconscious Japanese sentry remained to greet him.

CHAPTER XIII

GUERRILLAS TO THE RESCUE

Pandemonium had broken loose in the hill-top prison until so lately a place of silence and gloom. Hato was staggered by the discovery he had made. To be again defeated and at the very last moment in his efforts to lay his hand on the lanky young American, nephew of the prisoner he had abducted from the *Mignonette*, now so many weeks ago, enraged him. His cap had tumbled from his head, and he tore at his stubbly, cropped head of hair in his exasperation. He seized the half-conscious form of the sentry and shook him as a dog does a rat. Only then, dripping with perspiration because of his anger and the effort he had made, his eye fell upon the tumbled courses of stone and upon the rugged gap in the wall.

“The way of their escape,” he shouted, rushing across the stone-flagged prison and thrusting his ugly head through the hole. “There is a shed outside. Search it.”

He bellowed the order at the men who had accompanied him to the place, and dashing through the doorway led them round to the back. They found the shed open and empty save for a few mouldering bamboo stakes in one corner. There was no one there, no one in sight. Not only was the cage empty, but the birds had flown and were lost to sight.

“They must have made for that jungle cover below,” shouted Hato, sweeping the surroundings. “One of you men double down to the camp commandant and give the alarm. Let the camp police know that the prisoners have escaped. Take my order to them to send out search parties. Even yet we shall be able to round them up, for our bivouacs are in all directions and our trackers will soon pick up their trail. Hurry! Hurry!”

Meanwhile David and Elmer and the Filipino had wasted no time and had not troubled to listen to the commotion in the prison.

“First thing is to get cover in the jungle,” said David, breathing heavily after the excitement of their escape and their struggle with the sentry. “Down the hill we go. Then we’ll stop to look about us and decide the next move. There will be swarms of these Nips in all directions.”

“Thousands,” agreed the Filipino. “Listen to the noise down in our camp. One of the men sent to relieve the guard is shouting as he runs. Then

which way, my friends? Between us and Manila lies the biggest camp of all. To the west there are others. To the east there are hills and forest country.”

“Just the direction for us,” agreed Elmer, his voice full of exultation. “Say, boys, this is not our first getaway from that commander. Our Filipino friend here hasn’t heard the story. And this isn’t quite the right or the healthiest moment to give it to him. But, stranger, we’ve done something of this sort of thing before, and gee, we’ve got to repeat the business. Here, David boy, you take over control. You’ve done so before and carried the show through. Get to with it.”

“Then strike north through the jungle. I inspected this side of the country yesterday, and though I could see a Japanese camp, it was some distance away. Let us get a little farther from the prison. Then we’ll swing to the eastward and make for the forest. What’s that?”

A head appeared in the jungle through which they were pressing their way. Then a second could be seen, directly in their path, and the risen sun penetrating the straggling cover glinted on the barrels of weapons. Elmer grunted his disgust. All three came to an abrupt halt. David levelled his tommy-gun, and the Filipino and Elmer, seeing the preparations he was making, each seized a grenade and prepared to make use of it.

“We’ll have to shoot our way through,” David declared, desperately. “This time we simply must get clear of the Japs, for we have to take that news to General MacArthur. Get your grenades ready. I’ll open up with the tommy-gun. Then rush ’em.”

A man was waving from the scrub and jungle ahead. Only a head covered with a flapping, tattered hat, an arm raised above the tangled green holding a strip of torn white material in the fingers, and the barrel of a rifle were to be seen. But at least one other armed man was there.

“Japs, eh?” asked Elmer. “But the guys wouldn’t raise a flag. Then what?”

“There is a Chinaman. I caught sight of him for just an instant,” declared the Filipino. “Yes, and one of my country too. And—and others.”

A stocky little fellow, dressed in tattered shorts, the man whose head had been seen and who had waved to them, stood out from the jungle as David covered him with his gun. He cupped his hands over his mouth and called to them. Then the Chinaman emerged beside him and raced towards them. It was Toong. Behind him came Jim, the Leatherneck, while from a point some little distance to the right Mike burst his way through the jungle, his red hair

and beard flaming in the sun, his rifle at the trail, terrific elation shown in his bronzed features.

“Oh, boys, boys!” gasped Elmer, gripping their hands. “Say, if this isn’t just too good.”

“ ’Tis the foinest day in me life,” cried Mike, tears of joy trickling down his honest, furrowed face.

“It’s simply stunning,” gasped David. “But——”

“There’s a but right enough,” declared Jim. “This ain’t no sort of healthy spot in which to dawdle or to make explanations. I’ll just say we’re glad, and just as hit-up as you are at what’s happened. But listen to them Nips. Yelling, eh? They’ll be after us in next to no time. What’s doing, captain? You just take over from this very instant. Here are some of the boys. There are a few more back there in the woods. Reckon our way lies over towards them.”

“What of the pygmy?” asked David as they prepared to move off. “He would choose the safest route, and this time we shall want to be extra spry. Just hearken to those Nips! It seems we have managed to upset them very thoroughly. Ah, your Fuzzy-Wuzzy, Jim.”

“The very same guy. The one and only guide and faithful fellow,” grinned the stocky Jim. “I’ll say, this little bit of human flesh and blood has saved us time and again. Get busy with him, captain.”

The tiny little native came sliding out of the thickest patch of jungle as though it were clear ground and offered no obstacles. His mop of hair was as tidy as one could wish, for the pygmies were proud of the ample adornment which crowned their miniature heads. For the rest, he was almost nude, clad in a loincloth only, while a tommy-gun was slung across his shoulders and a curved, unsheathed knife hung at his belt, ready to cut a path through the thickest cover.

David shook the little fellow’s hand.

“Which way?” he asked abruptly. “You can see for yourself what’s happening. Those Nips tell us plainly what they are after and what line they are taking.”

That was indeed true enough. The sentry who had been sent down the hill from the prison had roused not only the police stationed there but the whole camp. Men had come swarming from their bivouacs carrying their arms. Officers had hurried to lead their companies, while a senior officer,

following the directions of the sentry, had raced to the door of the prison where he stood blowing hard after his exertions, listening to Commander Hato's tale.

"Cut it short," he said crisply, looking askance at the uniform of the naval officer. Indeed, but for the obvious urgency of the matter he would have been more than curt. Not because he disliked this Commander Hato personally. As a matter of strict fact he had never before set eyes upon this heavy-jowled fellow. But he disliked the navy. Not that he had any particular reason, save the underground thought that the navy were favoured by the War Lords in Tokyo. He was just like so many of his brother officers. The navy appeared to be a more spectacular service than was the army. News of its prowess filled the headlines more often than seemed fair. And—well, perhaps jealousy had something to do with the matter, and in any case this commander's personality didn't attract him. He was far too excitable.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "The prisoners have escaped. Yes, yes, I am aware of that, for the place is empty. And they went through that hole. That too is easily understandable. But who were they? How did they happen to interest a naval commander? And how comes a naval officer to be here at the prison?"

Hato felt like tearing his hair again. He sensed dislike and opposition. How could he answer all those questions when seconds were of such importance? Every moment that passed would give the escaping prisoners a longer start.

"There's an American spy and a Britisher," he almost shouted. "It was I who detected them, first in Manila, and when they slipped through our fingers, then out in the bay. I handed them over to the military police. And look at this."

He flung his baboon-like arms into the air. "Gone!" he shouted.

The roar of a motor-cycle deafened them. The rider rushed his machine to the side of the prison and ran to the officer.

"Orders from the brigadier, sir," he said. "Three parties have assembled at the foot of the hill. He desires that you take charge of them and issue your instructions."

From the top of a tiny ridge which cut its way through the jungle and was heavily clothed in scrub, David was able to see the three columns of Japanese soldiers paraded at the foot of the elevation on which the prison stood. By his side stood the pygmy, and for a few moments the two watched

to see which direction the columns would take. They were in motion within a very short space of time, one swinging westward in the direction of the thick, jungle-clad country approaching Bataan, while a second came at the run up the hill and evidently were to march to the north. The third column turned abruptly eastward.

“That’s our direction, too,” said David. “It leads to the forests. Eh?”

“Then we stop little while farther on,” the little man said, or rather indicated by word and sign.

“Stop! But surely,” began Elmer, who had joined the two, “boy, ain’t that just asking to be surrounded.”

“Not if he suggests it,” David told him. “Has he made mistakes before. What would happen to him if the Nips did surround us?”

The incorrigible Elmer drew his hand significantly across his throat. “Good for you,” he laughed. “He’s a wise little cuss. What’s his game then?”

They pressed on for nearly a mile, each member of the band choosing his own road through the jungle, hacking roots and creepers with the heavy knives they carried whenever the path was obstructed. Once they came together at a small clearing where David and Elmer were able to see every member, Chinese, Filipinos, natives of the back lands of Luzon who feared the invader, and hidden amongst them all, the tiny pygmy. A motley band they looked, dressed as they were in ragged clothing, a majority barefooted and with bare heads, and carrying an assortment of weapons. But tommy-guns predominated, for they had secured a store, with ample ammunition, in that action in which David had led them.

“They’re not too beautiful to look at, I guess,” grinned Jim, coming across to David. “But are they tough? I’ll say that these boys are just itching for another scrap, for they’ve got the way of things, and know they can stand up to the Nip. What’s the move now, captain?”

“We’re sitting down here to let that Jap column cross the track we shall take in a few minutes. When we get to that point, we’ll swing due south. It will take us behind the enemy, and once they’re well ahead we can swing east and push on through the forest and jungle. This is one of the occasions, Elmer boy, when we don’t launch an attack. We just disappear into thin air, or rather into forest country, just as soon as we can.”

Hidden by the thick mass of vegetation which clustered in every part it was not difficult to evade either of the three columns which had been so suddenly launched in the hope of recovering the prisoners. But the Japanese

are not only formidable and fanatical fighters. They are highly trained, tough troops, in first-class condition, able to accomplish long marches under a hot sun without more than a few moments' rest. Indeed, during their training they cover great distances without rest or food, and towards the end of what would be an ordeal to the best of troops, even to the magnificent paratroops and commandos the British Empire and the United States have trained, they complete the last few miles at the double, and this when carrying the heaviest packs. But no packs weighed down the punitive forces sent so hurriedly from the Japanese camp on this occasion. They were platoons collected at a moment's notice, and unhindered by weight, halted only by the jungle, they made rapid progress in the direction each one of their leaders had selected.

"If it ain't queer sitting around and watching while them Nips march by," laughed Jim as he seated himself on the root of a fallen tree. "Gee, it isn't the first time either, for since you and this lanky Yank left us we've had to change camp more than a few times. I'll say, that fight we had and the losses they suffered roused the Nip. It was like giving a guy a punch on the end of the nose. It just hurt, buddy. And that's what caused them to send a couple of columns away after us into the forest."

"Then what?" asked Elmer, lounging near him.

"What? Is it what we did you're asking," chimed in Mike, his fingers caressing the gun he carried. "I'd have set-to at them. It's a fight I want all the while. But Jim was right, sure he was. We just slipped away, so we did, and the Nips were left to take care of that part of the forest."

"We moved across closer to Manila," explained Jim. "There we were in touch with Toong, hiding way in the city itself, and telling us what you two young guys were up to. That was a smart bit of work in Ho Ling's godown. Gee, this Hato must be red-hot with rage. You gave him the slip that once. Then he laid his hands on you again, and boys, when Toong came racing along to find us and said that you'd been juggled close up to the Jap camp, in a prison on the top of a hill, it looked as though Hato was going to win right through."

At that the honest little fellow burst into loud laughter, suppressed an instant later as Mike admonished him.

"Would ye spoil all, you Leatherneck," he growled, "Isn't it yourself that has said over and over again that sounds carry far in forest-land? Hoorosh, man, will ye be silent," and he lifted his fingers to his lips.

“That’s me all over,” Jim said at once, dropping his voice. “But, boys, did you best them in that prison? I’ll say you did. We up sticks the moment Toong brought us the news. That lad Chu had shadowed you two right to the prison. Then he came over to us, before making his way back to the godown. The pygmy did the rest. He’s the sort of little cuss who’d find a needle way off in this jungle, where the ordinary man gets lost. He brought us here, and we were puzzling what to do, how to rush the prison, when there’s a rumpus at the place, and as the light came we saw three men creeping away from the back of the place. Gee, if it don’t make me laugh all the time!”

Mike shook him by the shoulder, fearful of another burst of laughter. David shook his fist, while Elmer smothered a roar of exultation. For indeed, there was much in all that had happened to fill them with satisfaction. Not that they had reached safety, for indeed danger surrounded them. But the contrast between their position a bare hour gone by, and that which now existed was sufficient to fill them with elation.

“We’ll give you the whole jolly yarn one of these fine days,” said David, when he had taken another view of the Japanese column. “But we shall now have to get moving again, I fancy, for those Nips are well ahead of us. Now, Fuzzy.”

The diminutive man answered promptly, a broad smile wreathing his pinched, lined face, the face indeed of a very old man though in point of fact this little fellow was in his prime. No doubt the primitive existence he and his fellows led, the struggle at times to find sufficient food, but more than all, perhaps, the fear of attack from warlike natives of the forests implied a hard life and premature old age.

“Come,” he signalled. “Enough far away now. We turn.”

The band followed through the jungle and, swinging to the east made their way uphill till they were well away from the Japanese camp, though the distance was so slight that they could detect every movement there. Then they turned to the south and took a course through the forest which would bring them within a few hours to the outskirts of Manila itself.

“Stop!” The pygmy lifted a hand and warned them. He seemed to be sniffing the air, and presently he pointed to a spot half a mile away, in the direction of the camp.

“Men come,” he stated. “Twenty. More. Double that number.”

Though his English was almost non-existent, his hands and his face were expressive enough, while all could follow the direction and could see for

themselves. Some forty men were mounting the rise below them and were taking a path which would bring them within close distance of them.

“Police,” exclaimed Toong. “Plenty easy to see them.”

“And a native at their head,” said David, peering through the jungle at this fourth column of pursuers. “That is probably a native tracker leading them. It means that our tracks will be found.”

“Then it just means a fight,” declared Elmer, grinning his pleasure. “I’ll say I’m just hit-up with all this running away from Nips. Let’s face them.”

“But farther away from the camp,” warned David. “We’ll hurry on, and if they follow we’ll see what can be done.”

Led by the pygmy who had nodded his agreement with their plans, they plunged onward and upward through the jungle. Now and again their line of retreat took them through a clearing, and presently they reached the lower edge of the paddy fields ranged about Manila on that side, where much of the rice consumed in the city was cultivated. The fields spread upward in an irregular pattern, each one bordered by a curling, serpigenous wall of mud in which a lagoon of liquid mud was enclosed. Here and there natives were wading thigh deep in the ooze of the fields, driving an ox which drew the primitive wooden plough still in use in this as in a thousand other parts of the East.

The pygmy never hesitated, but taking a rough track leading through the paddy fields, continued in an upward direction. A mile or more farther on they crossed the stream which brought water to the fields, and then encountered a wall of rock, as if the hill had split at that point, the lower part sliding downward. Still onward they went, the rocks walling in their path on one side till at length they reached a narrow gap. It offered a bare foothold here and there, though a man needed his hands also to worm his way upward. It led to a steeply shelving bank above the rocky obstacle they had encountered and to dense forest country. They were on a sloping shelf of rocky land which appeared to have been abruptly broken, and so far as it was possible to see, the cliff extended to right and left for a considerable distance.

“This is where we stop to get our breath,” panted David, when he was sure that the last member of the band had gained the shelf. “Those Jap police are sure to follow, and when they reach the cliff they must swarm up the rough path which we took. That’s just where we begin operations. Elmer boy, do I still lead this gang?”

“Sure you do,” came the hearty answer. “By all accounts leaders in this war can be almost of any nationality. Sometimes it’s a Britisher, with Yanks and British under his command, and British stands for any men of their Empire. And Yanks lead their own men and every other sort of friendly people. Look what you’ve got. Yanks, that’s me and the Leatherneck. Chinks, plenty of them. Irish—you’re of that breed, eh, Mike? And all the rest. Carry on, boy.”

“Ay. Go ahead,” shouted Jim. “What then?”

“Mike takes a couple of the band away to the left and finds cover. He’ll stop any Nips trying to outflank us there. Jim will do the same to the right, so that we can’t be easily taken in the rear by men climbing this cliff at some spot lower down. The rest of us will settle down in cover on the slope, placing ourselves so that we get a view over the edge and can see the ground below. It’s down there that we shall want to shoot. Got a whistle, Jim?”

The sturdy marine tossed him one which had dangled round his neck.

“And then?” he asked. There was a grim smile on his lips. Jim the Leatherneck, of the famous Corps of Marines, felt that he had a personal interest in the coming combat. Like the British navy, he spat into one hand before gripping his tommy-gun. “I’m remembering a place called Pearl Harbour,” he called out to them. “I’m thinking of my buddies slaughtered there in cold blood by the Nips. I’m out to pay off a score. When the whistle goes, captain, we get busy with them.”

In less than a quarter of an hour the Japanese military police force sent out to recapture the prisoners had gained the rough path leading up between paddy fields, and had waded the stream. They halted there for a while to gain breath, for even men trained for the hardest exercise and for climbing needed an occasional rest in such hilly country.

From the slope above where David and his band of guerrillas were sheltering under cover it was possible to watch every individual in the force, and to see its leader in close conversation with the native tracker. Nor was it surprising to discover that the man in command was the chief of police who had first interrogated the prisoners. In normal times he would have sent a junior officer. But the irate Commander Hato had dashed from the prison to his office, and had there roundly accused the police of carelessness and their commander of incompetence. His furious shouts and the accusations he had hurled at the police in general and their leader could be heard in the neighbouring camp, so that the Chief felt that his honour as well as his capacity was challenged. At any other time he would have fallen upon this

insulting, explosive naval officer. But discipline, as stern in Japanese forces as in any other, caused him to control himself. He dashed from his office and rapidly collected a force of his men more than sufficient to arrest three prisoners, indeed, sufficient to round up a dozen or more. Then, at the run, his men, led by the tracker, sped off into the hills.

“There are more than the three of whom you have spoken,” the tracker told him. “See, there are footprints in the soft earth. There are marks left by barefooted men. There are others left by people shod with boots. See! there are heel-marks. This print was made by the shoe or boot of a big man, tall, heavy, active. See the length of his stride. He is a man far taller than any Japanese.”

The chief stared at the prints and pondered. Could it be that the tracker had led him astray, and that his small force were on the track of natives of those parts, perhaps workers in the paddy fields?

“But—but more than three, some shod,” he said, tilting his cap back from his head and dashing the sweat from his forehead. “You must be on the wrong trail. These are old tracks.”

“They were made within half an hour, chief. See here again. A small man, as short as your people, and on his feet a soft shoe without heel. He is no native. And the print is still filled with water squeezed from the soil by the weight of his foot. The escaping prisoners have friends. They are there. On the ledge above.”

They were certainly there, David and Elmer and their friends, Mike itching for an encounter, Leatherneck Jim hoping against hope that the enemy would attack, and the remainder of the band of irregulars, determined to keep out of the hands of this ruthless invader. And there were Chinese with Toong at their head, men who recollected that the Japanese had already slaughtered hundreds of thousands of their countrymen and had brought fire and sword and starvation to great areas in China, they and natives of Luzon, to say nothing of the diminutive pygmy.

Yes, they were all there, these men so ill-armed, so unprepared, so ridiculously small in numbers, yet a band of determined fighters, ready to sell their lives rather than become slaves of this Oriental people who had swarmed across the Pacific and who aimed at wide conquest. The Chief of Police caught the glint of weapons. Opposition was almost unheard of on the part of the natives of Luzon, that is, unheard of yet, though bands of natives were to resist this aggressor for many weeks to come. He cast an eye upward

and rapidly assessed the difficulties to be encountered. Then he swung towards his men and gave a sharp order.

“Scale the rock,” he shouted. “There is a gap along here which will help. Half a dozen men stay down here and cover the attackers.”

The pygmy was pulling at David’s sleeve and pointing away to the left. “See,” he said. “Other men come this way.”

From that elevation it was possible to view a wide stretch of country, much of it covered in jungle, some by forest trees, and quite an expanse carved into circling rice paddies, running like gigantic and muddy steps downhill. The Japanese column which had crossed their path and had been allowed to move ahead in that direction while David and his friends halted, had swung in their tracks, and were now approaching at the run.

“Time we moved,” cried David. “We’ve still time in which to beat these fellows off. Then we’ll retreat as fast as we can and disappear in the forest.”

He lifted the whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast. At the same moment the men of the police rushed at the cliff, and a number of them selecting the gap came swarming up, an agile band, used perhaps to steep climbs.

Jim and three of his men covered the Japanese told off to aim at the defenders. Mike, roaring a battle-cry, left the post to which he had been allotted and came charging for the gap. The remainder of the band lay flat and opened heavy fire. For five minutes a furious engagement was fought. Some of the enemy managed to gain the higher ground by way of the gap. But none passed the Irishman. A tommy-gun seemed to be too poor a weapon for Mike. He let his dangle over his shoulder and flinging himself on the first arrivals struck out with both fists and then seized two of them, each by the arm, and swinging them as though they were dolls threw them away over the edge of the cliff. Again and again others of the attackers rushed the gap. But Mike was there always, dishevelled, his long, red hair blowing about his face, sweat streaming from every pore in his body. Mike the gallant Irishman, true to breed, glorying in the fight.

The enemy were retreating down the rough track. The Chief of Police, nursing a wounded arm led them. They went helter-skelter, leaving a number tumbled in the mud.

“Their tommy-guns would be of use,” cried David, watching every move of the fight, and having done a goodly share of it. “Toong, take a couple of men with you and pick up all that you can. Anyone hurt?”

The Filipino was the only casualty. A bullet had ricocheted from the rocky edge of the cliff and had caused a deep arm wound.

“It’s nothing,” he cried, as he held one end of a strip torn from his shirt in his mouth and wound the other about the arm. “It will be well in a week. What now?”

“We move off in double-quick time. We just melt away in the jungle and forest. Everyone ready? Then march.”

Long before dusk they were at a spot well behind the city of Manila, which they could see clearly, standing on the fringe of the glistening bay. Over yonder was the wrecked harbour of Cavite and the island of Corregidor, little more than a stone’s throw from the peninsula of Bataan.

“That’s where we go next,” David told Jim. “That so, Elmer?”

“You bet,” came from the American. “We’ve a job. Say, Jim, we’ve news of a coming attack on General MacArthur. You know how hard-pressed he is. Waal, our duty is to hand on the information we’ve got.”

“So we part here,” David continued. “You and the band will get back to the spot you’ve chosen, within call of Manila. We’ve other fish to fry after getting across to Bataan.”

“This guy Hato, eh?” asked Jim, grinning his recognition of their plan.

“You’ve said it,” laughed Elmer. “After General MacArthur and his doughboys, then this Hato. Stand by to help with that. So long!”

The band melted away in the forest. Elmer and David watched the last of them dive in amongst the trees. Then they turned towards the city of Manila, and, satisfied that their disguise was good, boldly entered the main street. Ho Ling’s godown was still a safe place to approach, and a haven where rest and refreshment could be obtained. They swung along the bay front, looked carefully about them to make sure that they were not observed, and in a twinkling were under his hospitable roof.

CHAPTER XIV

DEFENDERS OF BATAAN

An eerie silence hung about the jungle-clad slopes and the morasses in the northern part of the great Bataan peninsula. Trees clustered thickly together so that a giant felled by some sudden blast of air or rotted by time and exposure could not in its ponderous fall contrive to reach the ground but was suspended by a myriad branches in mid-air. Vines clambered to the heights and dropped a curtain of tendrils the diameter often of a man's wrist, so sturdy in fact that each would support a great weight. And underfoot an occasional alligator slithered across a patch of deep marshland and plunged into a pool with a splash which for a moment broke the uncanny, nerve-destroying silence. At that, mud fish would climb on to some rotting stump protruding from the water and lie there, as if listening, till the sudden rustle of a wild pig scampering through the undergrowth caused them to dive back into their natural element.

Yet this expanse of wild country was by no means deserted, though the many hundreds crouching beneath the canopy of green above, or hidden under patches of scrub, made scarcely a sound, but crept from post to post on hands and knees and when they met never raised their voices above a whisper. For this was no-man's-land. Filipino scouts and sharpshooters in the service of America formed a screen behind which the main forces were assembled. Their observation posts, the O.P.'s so often referred to in official communications, were dug as deep as possible into ground as far removed from swamp land as possible, though at times the O.P. was merely a slit trench or a shallow groove dug perhaps with the hands only, or perhaps helped by a tin hat. In it lay one of the signals branch, and behind him a line trailed through the matted green of the forest back to one of the forward report centres.

Fences of barbed wire trailed through the green, in and about the trees, nailed to some, twisted about the trunks of others, the whole, repeated more than once, forming an almost impenetrable barrier, capable in any case of putting a peremptory stop to a mass attack by infantry, and calling for slow and painful advance on the part of the Japanese who must send patrols ahead to cut the wire, and must do so with such care that scarce a sound was made, hardly a blade of grass or a bush shaken. Otherwise those Filipino sharpshooters would interfere. There was evidence of their work and of their

wide-awakeness in many a spot along that long, winding, irregular wire fence. A burst from a Browning machine-gun had laid a dozen attackers low here, just as their cutters were applied to the wire. Elsewhere a single Japanese had assayed the task and a sniper's bullet had found him. He lay crumpled up against the fence, his limp body suspended on the wire.

Behind this forward protecting line, which was in fact no line at all, for swamps broke its continuity though it stretched for some fifteen miles, was the great mass of the peninsula, extending southward for some miles till it reached the sea at the very entrance of Manila Bay, while the rocky island of Corregidor stood a short way off it. To left and right was water, the bay to the east, and the China Sea to the west. All within was jungle country, save for occasional clearings and a rugged, uneven stretch prepared as an airfield. Hutments were hidden beneath the trees. Tents painted and camouflaged were under a leafy, living cover or were sheltered from observation of Japanese airmen by branches and leaves liberally thrown over them.

Here was a gun park, its weapons disposed ready for action, and like the tents, hidden beneath a thick canopy of foliage, while the relative small supply of ammunition was piled near at hand under similar cover. American gunners had need to be niggardly with their shells. For Bataan was closely invested. No supplies could reach it. The American fleet was to all intents destroyed, for some of its finest units had been sunk at Pearl Harbour, and thus the seas were closed to them. The hundred thousand people, more or less, soldiers, airmen, civilian refugees from Manila and natives, were dependent for their food upon the supplies General MacArthur had had the forethought to send to Bataan, and those supplies, like the ammunition, were already sadly depleted.

A muffled explosion shook the air and every man amongst the forward patrols sat up tensely. The calm voice of an O.P. operator reached one of the forward report centres.

"O.K.," said a cheerful voice. "One of them Nips got inquisitive. We've been watching him and his chaps this half-hour. They thought they'd found a hole in our wire. So they had, the guys! We left it for 'em. But not all by itself. No, sir. There was a tidy mine there. That's been the end of some more of them Japs!"

It was war, when no softness can be expected, and when, as here on Bataan in particular, every one of the defenders knew well that he was fighting and had to ward off a fanatical crowd of Japanese from whom no quarter was to be expected. It was war to the knife. Mines had already

claimed a number of these insidious invaders. For the first time Japan had to fight with men who had tumbled to their cunning infiltration tactics, and who were as clever at tricks and stratagems as they were, and who, taught by bitter experience, were just as ruthless.

Back behind the lines smoke arose from cooking-stoves erected, like everything else on that dangerous spot, beneath a leafy cover. A savoury smell permeated the air, and men assembled to draw their quota of rations for the troops they represented, sniffed appreciatively.

“If it don’t somehow remind me of a good, fat steak,” laughed one of them, a merry fellow, though he looked underfed and fine-drawn. “Now that, with onions—and I like ’em well frizzled, mark you—would just suit, more particularly as this is my very own birthday.”

“Steak. Um! Yes, it’s as near the right sniff as you could get in a day’s walk. But that ain’t the menoo this time, chum. That’s carabac, or whatever these guys out here call those big buffalo animals that help ’em to plough, even pull their carts. It’s got its own pretty little smell, aroma perhaps you’d like to call it. Its carabac to-day, chum, carabac to-morrow, shouldn’t wonder, and lucky if it’s the same tough fellow the very day after.”

It might have been horse or mule, with perhaps a cup of rice thrown in, the only ration now available for troops and civilians. It was the only food that the nurses could obtain for their hundreds and hundreds of patients, for the hospitals were crammed with wounded and with sick. A straitened diet, without vegetables, a grilling hot sun and surroundings notoriously unhealthy were doing their insidious work, doing it remorselessly. Those brave nurses were grossly overworked, and yet continued almost throughout the day and night tending the wounded, and sick, attempting to make life less desperate for those under their charge. But the enemy saw to it that they were not unmolested. His shells reached those hospital tents pitched beneath the trees. His airmen scattered bombs amongst them. Men were killed in their cots. Nurses, now reduced to wearing soldiers’ kit, for immaculate white was no longer possible, died beside them. It was war to the knife. Neither women nor children could expect mercy.

Worse than all perhaps was the shortage of drugs and dressings. Every single Japanese soldier carried with him the correct drugs to ward off malaria and dysentery, while his food was of the best and to be had in plenty. But those malarious swamps surrounding General MacArthur’s gallant doughboys were poison to their ill-fed, weakened bodies. They were falling a prey to malaria by the hundred. Not a man but looked and was half-

starved, weak and unfit for the grim business before them. Yet not one flinched. The tale of the defence of Bataan is a tale of heroism against tremendous odds both because of the numbers and the ferocious fatalism of the enemy and also in part because of disease, often a greater enemy to the fighting man than are the bombs and gun-fire of those opposed to him.

As the tropical night closed in of a sudden as is its wont in Eastern parts, and darkness swallowed Bataan and its approaches, and the city of Manila, Elmer and David made ready to carry the vitally important information they had to the garrison holding that stretch of jungle country across the bay. Little more than twenty-four hours later the enemy were to launch a gigantic attack, and if possible they would take General MacArthur by surprise, and since surprise is of vast importance in warfare of almost any sort, the enemy were taking no chances.

“Seems a boat across the bay is out of the question,” said David at last, as though repeating his thoughts aloud. “The waterfront swarms with military police.”

“And boats are hauled up and under guard. It’s a real teaser,” grunted the American. “Say, we couldn’t swim the distance, eh?”

It was a possibility and for a while they debated the matter.

“With some sort of a raft to help it might be done,” said David. “But the Nips have patrol boats out in the bay. Besides, what about sharks?”

“I’d chance the brutes. But those patrol boats would beat us. Suppose we couldn’t cut in on one of their airplanes and fly it across?”

“Ever piloted one?” asked David dryly.

“Waal, can’t say that I’m much of a flyer. I’ve done a bit, same as every other guy in our country, for the younger folk are stark crazy about the air. But I’ll admit it would be a chance. And the Nips are spry enough to have a sentry posted around their planes, and others at the approaches to the airfields. Say, that won’t wash, that scheme won’t. The morning after tomorrow, David. That’s what we’ve got to keep in mind. The dawn that’s so near at hand.”

Nearly a hundred thousand Japanese troops were already moving out of their camps, stealing through the darkness towards the posts they were to attack. Each man was fully equipped and self-contained. A bag slung over his shoulders contained his ration of rice which would last him in case of need for well-nigh a week. He would find water in abundance in the swamps, and had his own particular method of filtering it. And if a twinge of

fever assailed him, he had compressed drugs and had been schooled in the method of dosage. For the rest, he was dressed in the skimpiest of clothing, much of it camouflaged so that it was hard to pick his figure out once he was surrounded by jungle, and he carried ample ammunition for the light tommy-gun with which he was armed.

Behind these forward units who would advance singly or in small groups, and who must feel their way, overcoming the forward screen of sharpshooters thrown out by the Americans, were men armed with heavy and light machine-guns, and others whose work it was to swarm into convenient trees and snipe at any and every figure seen amidst the tangled green of the jungle.

They advanced by various routes which had been marked for them, and leaving their massed guns which were to open the attack and were to pour shells upon the forward lines and the back areas of the defenders, they passed the mortar companies and spreading out amongst the trees, unrolled their ground sheets and lay down to sleep.

A deathly silence settled down upon jungle and the now deserted camps, deserted save for staff officers, and other units essential to a camp, and the many sentries posted about the place. A mile away perhaps, there was the faint slither of many feet, for the Filipino civilians conscripted by the Japanese and forced to labour in their camps were being marched back towards Manila. David and Elmer heard them as they pattered in their bare feet past Ho Ling's great godown.

"Reckon they're dead beat," remarked Elmer. "Those Nips are just slave drivers. Of course they pay them, and feed 'em too, I wouldn't wonder. But it's sweated labour for all that, and they have to help to defeat the Americans whether they want to or not, and most of them know already which nationality they prefer. I'll allow there were plenty of them grumbling at the United States before Pearl Harbour. They just wanted independence and hated to be ruled by anyone. But were they ready? I'll say no. They've to learn a lot about administration before they can run a country of the size of Luzon and its surrounding islands."

"Supposing," began David.

"Supposin' what?"

"I was just trying to work something out."

"You're a schemer, you are," grumbled Elmer. "What's the racket?"

“Supposing you and I formed part of that gang of slave-driven Filipinos,” said his friend.

“There’s many a one who’d change places with us,” commented Elmer. “What then?”

“We join the band at dawn to-morrow. We slave all day. When the time comes for the march back to Manila we slip away in the darkness while still close to the Jap camps. Then we try to make our way through the jungle to the American lines.”

“It’s just a sheer crazy scheme,” growled Elmer. “See here. Joining the gang would be easy. Working for the Nips would be easier still. And I don’t say that we wouldn’t be able to give the enemy the slip in the dark. But make our way through the jungle in the dark and cross to the American lines! It’s a plumb crazy scheme!”

“Then suggest a better,” smiled David, not in the least vexed by the exuberance of his chum. “Remember, in twenty-four hours.”

Elmer puffed furiously at the rank native cigarette he was smoking and stared out towards the bay, where a few twinkling lights were visible. In times of peace there would have been a great number, flashing across the still water and some of them would be moving at some speed, for small motor-propelled passenger boats crossed the bay incessantly from one point to another. He was thinking of them at that very moment and suddenly started.

“I’ll allow there might be just a chance of our getting through to the American lines the way you’ve figured,” he said at last. “But it’d be a mighty slim chance, and one would then have to let our folks know. There will be hundreds of tommy-gunners ready to shoot the moment a sound is made. Let’s talk along another line. Remember the passenger boats? Fast they were. I saw more than one this very day, perhaps licensed by the Japs, more likely manned by them too. Now if we could seize one of those craft and make off——”

David brought his open palm down upon his thigh with an emphatic spank. He was on his feet a second later.

“You know where those boats are moored?” he asked sharply.

“Some of them, yes. Not all, for there are a heap. That is, there used to be in peace-time. No doubt the Japs have commandeered a lot. But I saw some of them closing in to their moorings as dusk fell. There’s a pier away

to the north of the city, and boats used to make across from there to Corregidor. What's wrong with our trying to follow the same course?"

Chu came silently towards them at that moment.

"Dinner served, masters," he lisped. "Mr. Ho Ling waiting."

"Then we just think it over while we eat, and then——"

"Guess we act," grinned Elmer. "You'll allow the idea looks as well as your jungle scheme, eh?"

"It sounds to me to be a hundred per cent better," admitted David. "Anyway, it means that we get to work almost at once, the sooner the better. Let us keep the idea to ourselves, but we would be wise perhaps to take Chu with us. He's to be trusted and he can show his teeth when he wants to."

"Sure. He can fight. He'd be useful in a tight corner. This very night we'll put the thing to the test. Remember, in just about twenty-four hours those demons will attack in huge force, so the sooner General MacArthur gets the news the better. He'll need time for preparation."

They partook of a hearty meal at the hospitable table of the wealthy Chinaman who had befriended them, and later sat chatting for a while in the compound behind the bungalow. Then Elmer yawned widely.

"Sleepy," he laughed. "This hot, steamy atmosphere tires a guy. I'm off."

They excused themselves and departed to their room, calling Chu to follow.

"We're going across to join the Americans," explained David, when they were alone. "Care to come, Chu? It means a fight to start with, and the chance of being shot if we manage to get within distance of Corregidor."

In a few words he explained the plan they had discussed. "We just sneak out right away and make for the place where those boats are moored. We then try to capture one, silently of course, if that's possible. After that we trust to luck and our wits. You don't have to come, Chu. You choose for yourself."

A broad grin stole across the face of the Chinaman.

"Chu very much frightened of Jap devil," he grinned. "But like to kill one or more as soon as possible. Chu come, master. Now. All ready."

They left the godown and plunged into the darkness of the streets.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROAD TO CORREGIDOR

A crescent of the moon hung over the wide-spreading city of Manila and its attendant bay, the beams reflected palely from the surface of the water. The same eerie hush which swallowed the surroundings of the Bataan peninsula, with its tangled, all-pervading jungle and its noisome swamps, seemed to have enveloped a city once noted for its movement. Not a boat could be seen on the Pasig river. No one was about in the streets, and the bridges across the water carried no passengers. Overhead, to help the feeble rays of the new moon were innumerable stars, such as one sees in the tropics, though they seemed rather to accentuate the darkness and the surrounding hush and gloom rather than to relieve it.

David and Elmer, with Chu at their side, stole from Ho Ling's godown and went softly along the street close beside the waterfront. Their footsteps made not so much as a sound, for to help their disguise as Filipino natives of the fishing class David and his friend went barefooted, no easy accomplishment at first, but now that their soles were hardened a matter of little inconvenience. Yet a bare foot is vulnerable, and presently as they stole along the waterside towards the moorings of the motor-boats, one of which they hoped to secure, Elmer of a sudden stubbed his toe against a projecting stone and gave vent to an exclamation.

"Thunder!" he gasped. "My, if that didn't hurt!"

"Halt. Stand where you are till I reach you. Move and I fire."

It was a Japanese policeman of the military branch. They heard his boots scraping on the cobbles, and presently he was directly before them. Dark though it was they could tell that he was a stoutly built little man; over his shoulders was suspended a tommy-gun, but so loosely that he could swing it into his hand in an instant. A second later a beam of light shone from the electric torch he carried and played full upon the three.

"Two Filipinos and a Chinaman," he said. "Where bound? Where are your passes? What is your business on the street at this hour? Civilians are forbidden to be abroad."

The light went out as he swung his weapon into his hand and lowered the muzzle.

“The passes,” he commanded. “Quick!”

Elmer stepped a pace forward, feeling in his pocket as he did so, as if to discover a pass. Then, quick as lightning, his fist shot out and caught the Japanese policeman full in the face. His head went back, his body toppled, and a moment later he crashed to the ground.

“Get his torch,” whispered the American.

“And his gun,” said David. “And any ammunition he carries. Just switch the light on to him for a moment. See! He hit his head on the cobbles. Dead, do you think?”

“Him not talk for a long time, masters,” grunted Chu, bending over the unconscious man. “But s’posing another police come this way and find him. Stay little bit here for Chu. Back in two minute when finished with Jap devil.”

He heaved the man on to his shoulder and was swallowed by the darkness. A little later there was a splash, and soon Chu was back again, panting a little, but cool and collected.

“Not find that Jap devil,” he grinned. “Him keep quiet for long time.”

“Then on we go,” whispered David. “It’s about a mile on, I think. But, say, you’ve got the torch and the ammunition, Elmer. I’ve shouldered the gun. Supposing I have the ammunition also. If shooting begins I can get reloaded.”

“Plenty fine knife, this one,” laughed Chu. “Master feel this one.”

It was the bayonet which the policeman had carried in the frog of his belt, no doubt to give him a weapon extra to his tommy-gun, though the bayonet did not appear as though it could be fitted. These arms made a fine addition, for Elmer carried the electric torch and that of itself might be of greater value than any gun or bayonet. It might in fact, be of vital interest to them to have the wherewithal to inspect their close surroundings though the flashing of a beam in the open would be next door to suicidal.

Once more they continued their journey, stealing along the deserted and silent street which hugged that part of the waterfront. They had accomplished almost a mile, and judged that they must now be near the spot for which they sought when the sound of a man coughing caught their ears.

“Stop! Another policeman perhaps. Where?”

Elmer nudged his friend. “Way across the street,” he said, his lips close to David’s ear. “Think we could pass him.”

“We can try,” came the answer. “Let’s creep on.”

“Hist, master. Him crossing to see what over here. Wait, master.”

It was Chu, wide awake as ever, his ears tuned to catch the smallest sound and his eyesight far more acute than that of David and Elmer. He was close beside them at one moment, and then he was gone, disappearing like a ghost into the darkness of the street. There was a thud. A man groaned, and something soft flopped to the cobbles. Then Chu was back.

“ ’Nother Jap devil not speak,” he lisped. “Plenty more knife for others.”



The gentle purr of a motor reached their ears and now and again there was a phosphorescent glint from the waters of the bay where they lapped on to the shore. A boat was coming in, it seemed to the very spot for which they

were aiming, for dimly seen under the feeble rays of the moon were two other boats, lying twenty yards or more offshore, secured to their moorings.

“If that ain’t just convenient,” whispered Elmer, a note of excitement in his whispered words. “Motor running. Nicely warmed up and ready to go all out. Next thing is to find out whether she’s going to tie up like those other two, or whether she’s just dropping a passenger.”

They edged closer to the spot through the darkness and watched as the motor-boat drifted close to the edge of a shattered pier. Someone gave a sharp order and a figure stepped ashore. Instantly a man waiting on the pier switched the beams of a torch on him. It was a Japanese naval officer.

“Boy!” gasped Elmer, “if it isn’t that son of a gun, Hato!”

The officer turned. He was short, as are the great majority of the sons of Nippon, stockily built and what hair was to be seen beneath his cap was jet black. But there was no stubbly moustache. The man had not the appearance of a baboon. It was decidedly not Hato.

“Snakes!” whispered Elmer. “If it had been.”

“But it isn’t. He’s shown his pass and the policeman has let him march off. Watch the policeman. Keep an eye on the boat.”

The torch went out as the officer walked swiftly away from the pier. But the military policeman remained. They heard his boots on the concrete and presently discovered that he was peering down into the boat, which was tied up to a broken post, all that remained of one of the bollards along the edge of the pier. Then a man’s figure, dimly seen in the dusk, arose from the after end of the boat, and the two chatted in low voices. Ten minutes elapsed and still these two Japanese were engaged in amiable conversation, and neither appeared to wish it to come to an end, nor did the policeman look as though he would resume his beat.

“Time we did something,” whispered David, stretched flat on the ground from which angle he could see the two heads silhouetted against the starry sky. “That officer may return at any moment. It looks as though he came across here on a visit and the boat is waiting for him. Stand by while I heave a stone over the heads of those two so as to draw their attention away.”

“Then what?” asked Elmer. “They’ll be startled, you bet. But that isn’t enough. They’re still there.”

“We rush them,” was David’s answer. “I suggest you and Chu board the boat and deal with the motorman. I’ll see to the policeman. If he shows

fight, and I haven't been able to floor him, I shall shoot."

"That would wake the neighbourhood and set a hundred police on our track," argued Elmer. "The fellow is sure to carry arms. A tommy-gun, no doubt, besides the rest of his equipment. He'll shoot, sure."

"Master," broke in Chu's gentle voice. "S'pose stone heaved and those two Jap devils look and listen in other direction. S'pose masters jump aboard the boat. The guy there not carry arms, very likely. Chu deal with the police Jap devil same as other time. That suit, masters? Then give Chu one little minute to get nearer."

He went squirming off along the rough concrete of the broken pier, the naked bayonet gripped between his teeth, his limbs grouped beneath his agile body so that he could make a sudden spring. David sought for a chunk of smashed concrete, waited a full minute and then standing so as to give his arm all the swing that was possible, he flung the piece right over the head of the gossiping policeman. It landed with a crash some thirty yards beyond, bouncing from the hard concrete surface and setting up a great clatter made all the more noticeable by the silence which reigned everywhere and by the suddenness of the interruption.

"What is that? Halt!"

The policeman swung round and moved a few paces along the pier. The motorman, perhaps believing that the officer was returning, dived into the small engine-room and swung the handle of his engine, setting it in motion. The lithe figure of the Chinaman with all four limbs gathered beneath him for a spring, leapt forward. Then once more was repeated the affair which had happened with the first of the policemen who had accosted and cross-questioned these two suspicious Filipinos and their Chinese attendant. There was a dull thud. A man coughed hollowly. There was a splash.

"Number Three Jap devil," lisped Chu. "No speak any more. Thank you, Jap fellow, for tommy-gun."

Meanwhile David and Elmer had rushed to the spot where the boat lay tied to the broken pier where, assisted by a momentary flash of the lamp, they leaped aboard and flung themselves upon the motorman. He was a sturdy sailor, brave like all his countrymen, indeed brave to the point of fanaticism which accepts death rather than surrender. He shook off his attackers and retreating to the far end of the engine-room sought for a weapon. But Elmer was too quick for him. His toes struck against the starting handle, and in a moment he brought it down on the head of the man.

A flash showed that the fellow was stunned, perhaps even killed, for the blow had been a hard one.

“Overboard with him,” he gasped. “We can’t be carrying Japs with us. Where’s Chu?”

“Here, master. Same Chu all the time.”

“And that policeman?”

“He float in the bay,” grinned Chu. “Not like way Chu handle Jap bayonet. So die quick. Chu mark up on his score number three Jap devil.”

“Take the tiller, David,” sang out Elmer. “Cut that painter, Chu. I’ll see to the engine.”

The throb of the machine grew to a roar. The water astern was churned into a boiling mass of phosphorescence. As if pushed off from the pier by a giant hand the boat shot away into the bay and gathered speed as Elmer opened the throttle wide, the motor roaring as full power was called from it.

“What’s that? An officer going off?” asked a Japanese sailor of his companion aboard one of the moored boats. “Show a light.”

They switched the small searchlight aboard on to the fast retreating motor-boat.

“That’s queer. There’s a Filipino at the helm. There’s a Chinaman aboard that craft. Hi! There’s something wrong about this.”

His companion was so convinced that he snatched his tommy-gun and poured a flood of bullets after the fleeing motor-boat, while the other man cast his painter loose and went to the engine. Almost at the same moment a squad of men came running along the pier, led by an officer.

“One of my military police has disappeared from his beat,” the latter shouted. “Where’s the man who should be here?”

“I saw him only a few moments ago,” came the answer. “There’s something wrong, sir. That boat went off with a Filipino and a Chinaman aboard. They’ve stolen the craft.”

The officer leaped aboard, ordered his men to follow and urged the crew to get the craft in motion.

“Switch on your light. Pick them up if you can. You men get ready to cut them up with your tommy-guns.”

The motor started into life. The boat moved, and soon it was racing away into the bay, its searchlight beam swinging this way and that as it sought for the runaway.

“Just keep her headed for the direction of Corregidor,” said Elmer. “We may have the legs of those fellows. Chu, get the two tommy-guns aft and lay them ready. I can leave the engine any time to lend a hand in holding those fellows off. David, boy, sing out if they are overhauling us.”

It was a mad race. The roar of the motors awoke the echoes in silent, subdued Manila. People abed, gasping in the humid heat of this tropical night, turned and sat up to listen. Motor-boats moored at other spots along the bay shore cast off and joined in the chase, their commanders knowing nothing of the circumstances but conscious of the fact that some of their compatriots were endeavouring to overhaul another boat out on the water. True, they could not see the craft which David steered, for miraculously enough the searchlight beam had so far failed to cast its blinding beams upon them.

But the roar of the motor indicated roughly her position, while a surge of phosphorescence heaped itself at her bow, and a sheet of light, made all the more brilliant by the rays of the moon, flashed in her wake. Nowhere else perhaps in all the world is such a phenomenon so marked as in this China sea. Pleasant to watch in times of peace, it could be a menace in days of war, and that phosphorescence was likely to prove of extreme danger to David and his companions.

“She’s there! Shoot!”

Bullets followed the fleeing boat. Shouts echoed across the water, and as the craft reached a point midway across the wide bay and entered upon its final run towards Corregidor, sentries on that rocky island, and men posted along the jungle-clad eastern shore of Bataan peered into the darkness and listened.

“What’s them Nips up to?” growled a hardened, war-stained Leatherneck, perched on a jutting rock beneath a cover of green. “First one motor coughing as though it would break its heart. You can hear nigh anything on a quiet night like this. Then another starts up, roaring as if to bust. And now there are more.”

“Coming this way, towards Bataan or Corregidor. Looks as though someone was trying to make a break to join us. Send word back to the officer.”

“It is certainly a boat steered and driven by someone anxious to evade the Japs,” decided the latter when, roused from his bivouac he had scrambled down to the bay shore.

“Anyway, there can’t be any secrecy about it. The whole of Manila must know that someone wants to get over here, and that the enemy don’t want ’em to do so. Stand by to receive them and to hold off pursuing boats. Signaller, give them a call at the battery. Perhaps a shot might stop this racket.”

A louder, deeper roar swept across the bay. An engine of greater power than that aboard the boat which David and Elmer had seized, and with an open exhaust so that it sounded more like a machine-gun of big calibre, was driving a craft as yet invisible but judged by the sound, a speedy affair which was overhauling the vessel making so gamely towards Corregidor. A searchlight somewhere on Corregidor winked. A beam shot forth from the rocky shore, and the operator, careful to avoid casting the beams on the boat he thought was bearing friends, or at least people anxious to reach the rock, presently directed the light upon a launch driving through the water at high speed, with her bows lifted from the surface and a seething wake of phosphorescence following her. Instantly a gun was fired, the explosion reverberating along the rocky coast. A shell struck the surface of the bay a few hundred yards from the enemy and ricochetting passed directly over her, to the huge disappointment of the gunners.

“Bad cess to it,” shouted the layer. “Now this time.”

But the boat had swerved. It had dodged the searchlight, and though she could be heard, and her barking exhaust filled the air she was, for some while at least, out of sight of the watchers. But David could see her.

“She’s closing in,” he sang out. “Get your fire-irons ready, boys.”

Elmer popped up from the engine-room and stepped the few paces necessary aft to the stern. There he and Chu lay flat ready to open fire when the Japanese craft drew nearer.

“She has the legs of us all right,” shouted David. “I believe she means to come up on one or other side and try to shoot us up. You fellows open up on her the moment she is within range. Don’t forget those Jap tommy-guns use a small charge and small bullets, which don’t cover a great deal of ground like the ordinary rifle. Hooray! We’ve friends on the rock. That shell might have hit the Jap, and there goes another.”

It splashed into the bay a few yards behind the pursuer, and a third threw spray over the occupants. Then the firing ceased, for in that light, with the combatants so close to one another a shell might easily have struck and destroyed the craft judged to be friendly, roaring towards the rock. Elmer jerked the throttle lever of his engine in the vain effort to squeeze a fraction more horse-power from it. But the note given off by the exhaust did not change and the pace of the little craft was not altered. She was driving ahead perhaps at greater speed than she had ever attained before and no more could be expected of her. The reverse was the case with the pursuer. The roar of her powerful motor rose to a scream as she hurtled through the water. She easily drew level with the smaller boat, and as she did so half a dozen rifles were levelled at the occupants.

“Keep low and open up,” commanded Elmer, his body sunk in the well of the craft and only his head appearing above the shallow deck. “Shoot, Chu!”

The tommy-guns spluttered, setting the echoes awake with a startling rattle which outdid the scream of the enemy motor and almost drowned that of the escaping boat. Bullets swept amongst the enemy just as they were making ready to open fire, and from his station beside the tiller David saw at least two of the Japanese crew slump and tumble out of sight. Then rifles cracked. Flame burst from the muzzles of the weapons directed by the enemy, and bullets zipped past his ear or struck the planks of the boat with sharp, metallic taps. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Elmer of a sudden grab at the tattered hat he wore, which a bullet threatened to tear from his head. Then, as another of the Japanese sank on his knees and collapsed out of sight the pursuing craft swept on beyond the smaller boat and steering away a trifle made ready to cross her bows and come back on the far side. It was clear that she had the legs of the smaller boat and could make rings round her. Worse than that, the overtaxed motor handled by Elmer began to cough. Though he was now again in the engine well, jerking frantically at the controls, the machine was back-firing, and loud reports came from her exhaust.

“How far from Corregidor?” yelled David. “Look! That’s the rock, eh?”

Elmer poked his head out of the well and peered through the darkness.

“Sure! That’s it,” he replied. “A short rifle-shot off. Five hundred yards perhaps. Get a trifle closer and these Nips will never dare to follow.”

“Watch out!” David warned him. “The fellow over there is going to cut clean across our bows and looks almost as though he intended to board us.”

“Ram him!” shouted Elmer. “Cut right into and through him. How’s that?”

He was at the controls again, and whatever may have been the cause of the trouble he appeared to have for the moment cured the engine. It gave a final splutter and back-fire. Then the rhythmic roar of the exhaust was heard, while the boat gathered speed as though for a final struggle.

Meanwhile the Japanese had swung off a trifle so as to give their boat a wider turning circle, and now came nosing back, the bow higher than ever out of the water, a crested wave of foam swirling along her planks and flames breaking from her exhaust. Her steersman swung her directly across the bows of the boat steered by David and judged that he would clear that craft by only some twenty feet. Then he would push his tiller hard over and complete the circle, bringing his vessel on a parallel course but in the opposite direction. His remaining crew had been warned to be ready. They were packed along the shallow rail, rifles in hand, while one had the coil of a rope with the boat’s anchor attached, and evidently hoped to use it as a species of grappling-iron.

“Stand by!” shouted David, becoming of a sudden nautical. “We’ll ram.”

He let the nose of the boat pay off a trifle, in the same direction as that taken by the pursuer, thus forcing her steersman to widen his circle. Then he steered a course which, if the motor held and their speed did not slacken would take them bows on against the side of the enemy.

There was a crowd of doughboys and their officers ashore, attracted by the shooting, exhilarated by this sudden diversion, for life on the rock was monotonous, except when the Japanese bombed the spot. Here before their eyes was an amazing sporting event. Whoever might be the men aboard the smaller boat, they were putting up a game effort to reach the rock, and shots from the Japanese would not deter them.

“Snakes! They’re going to ram,” bellowed one of the men. “If that don’t win it! What’s to prevent us lending a hand? If the boat gets scuppered by the collision those guys will want someone to bring them in.”

“Launch the boat in the cove here,” came a sharp order from an officer who had joined the men. “Take two or three men with you. You others stand ready to cover with your rifles.”

There was a resounding crash from across the water and loud shouts of alarm from the Japanese and of excitement and triumph from David, Elmer, and Chu. Gripping his tiller, careless of the bullets which swished through

the air, David steered with uncanny determination and precision. Aiming for the bows of the pursuer as she rushed across his course, he actually struck the boat a little aft of amidships, and as she was lifted high out of the water ahead, and her stern was low, the bows of his own, smaller boat lifted as they met the side, and smashing the shallow rail actually rode up on to the low deck.

There was a rending crash. It seemed that the smaller craft would topple over, and in any case her mad rush had been checked with such suddenness that he was thrown heavily against the tiller while Chu, swinging round with his tommy-gun to repel possible boarders slithered from his perch in the stern and slumped into the well. Then a strange thing happened. The larger boat broke in two.

David's craft slogged back into the water and gathering speed went rushing forward. A twist of the tiller and she was heading again for Corregidor, now plainly visible, and in the course of a few minutes covered the intervening distance. At that moment as though the boat had aided them as far as might reasonably be expected of it, it filled and sank like a stone, the impact with the pursuing craft having ripped a large hole in her side.

But Corregidor was there, close at hand. A dozen or more Americans of the Marine Corps reached out to rescue the three, and in a little time David, Elmer, and Chu stood dripping upon the rock, tremendously flustered by all that had happened, more than a little elated, and eager now to hand over to General MacArthur's staff information which they rightly judged to be of vital importance, so vital indeed that they had been ready and willing to sell their own lives in the effort to get through the enemy lines. They had in fact exchanged the life of excitement they had lived in and about the city of Manila, where they had been hunted from pillar to post, for residence in territory which they knew well was about to be assailed with all the ferocity of which the Japanese were capable.

"Jest shake yerselves, boys," cried one of their rescuers, helping them from the edge of the bay up the steep slopes of the great fortress island of Corregidor. "Bring them in here, you guys, where we can turn a light on them and see what they are."

It happened that close at hand was a shallow dug-out with a masked entry, and at once David and his friends were pulled in behind the blanket which covered the opening and found themselves in a wide space dug out of a patch of soft rock. A soldier approached with a lamp swinging from his wrist and held it up so as to throw its light full upon them.

“Gee now, what do you buddies say to that!” cried the marine who had first spoken. “Drowned rats ain’t in it. They’re just scallawags, they are. Filipinos who’ve cut their cables and come across the bay in search of safe quarters.”

Elmer stuttered and shook the water from his head and eyes. “Filipino,” he shouted indignantly. “I’m an American citizen.”

“No offence, buddy. Don’t you get pulling your wool out. I’m not saying that a Filipino isn’t a good sort of guy. And of course he’s an American citizen.”

Elmer exploded. He was too short of breath after the ducking he had had to be able to express himself as he would have wished, and he had completely forgotten that he was in fact dressed as a native of Manila, and a very ragged example of one, to be sure.

“But, but,” he began to splutter. “You boys are all adrift. Just because we’ve come across the bay it don’t say that we’re Filipinos. I’m a true-born American.”

“A very fine effort,” said a staff officer, entering the dug-out at that moment. “It was a near thing for you three, but you made it, and there are not many who can run away from a fast Japanese launch. How did you lay hands on that boat? Who steered her? That was just the one and only manoeuvre to make this shore when you swung straight in and rammed the Jap. Gentlemen, where from?”

He was smiling broadly, for indeed David and Elmer looked very little like gentlemen. They were dirty and drenched, and while two were undoubtedly natives of the big city across the bay, the third was a Chinese coolie.

“Say,” gasped Elmer turning to him. “We’ve news. Terrific news.”

He pointed a finger at David and drew in a deep breath.

“Yes, news,” spluttered David, as short of breath as his chum. “News of an attack to be made on Bataan.”

“That is nothing new,” observed the officer, regarding them closely in the rays of the swinging lamp. “We are always under attack by the Japanese. But we have noticed some unusual activity of late. What then?”

“We were in their camp,” David told him, catching his breath and squeezing the water out of his ragged clothing. “We saw some of their

preparations. Their massed guns, and their men by the thousand moving up for the operation. There was a lot more.”

“Then you have indeed brought us information which may be of vital importance. Gentlemen, you have risked your lives to get here. That is clear,” declared the officer. “And who are you?”

“He’s Elmer Baines,” answered David.

“And this guy is just David, a Britisher,” interjected Elmer. “And the Chink is Chu, an old and valued servant. Say, mister, I’m a born American. I’m no Filipino, only the Nips have been after us and a disguise had to be found.”

There was a pause while the officer still regarded them closely, and the men crowded around, listened eagerly.

“No scallawags, you bet,” observed one. “They risked a lot to get here, and gee if that wasn’t a fine fight they put up.”

“Find shoes for them, and some dry clothing,” snapped the officer. “We’ll take them into the tunnel. Then we’ll get them across to the peninsula where we can have General MacArthur’s orders.”

They were taken from the dug-out across the bomb-swept slopes of the island and entered a tunnel hewn out of the rock, the only shelter the island afforded. Indeed, whereas it was generally thought that Corregidor was bristling with guns and honeycombed with caves and tunnels to give protection to the gun crews, this was not in fact the case. America like Japan had given an undertaking not to fortify the Pacific islands, and whereas the Japanese had flagrantly broken the agreement, and had armed a hundred and one Pacific posts, many of them mandated to her after the war of 1914-1918, the United States had honourably observed the pact, so that Corregidor was unprepared for an assault. Such guns as were there lay in the open, with sandbag protection only, and since Japan had wrecked General MacArthur’s ships and airplanes in the very first assault, the island, Bataan, and the surroundings of Manila lay at her mercy.

Half an hour later, dressed now in dry clothing, with shoes on their feet, and having partaken of a scanty meal, David and Elmer and Chu, with two of the staff were ferried through the darkness across to the peninsula of Bataan, there to meet the General Staff and lay their information before the generalissimo in charge of the defence of the Philippines.

CHAPTER XVI

DOUGHBOYS AT BAY

In the centre of a pool of light cast by a couple of swinging

lanterns hanging from the ridge of a tent stood a tall man, a clean-shaven, cool, determined-looking officer of the American staff. His headquarters that night were in a tent hidden beneath a canopy of trees, so that Japanese airplanes could not detect it, and save for a rickety table and a couple of chairs it was bare of furniture. He was General MacArthur, sometime Governor of the Philippines, and commander-in-chief of all the forces assembled there.

No heroic figure has appealed more in this global war to

the millions engaged in it or watching its progress than has the soldierly form of this great American. His wisdom and foresight were obvious to all who cared to examine conditions existing at Manila on the eve of the great and treacherous Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. War was imminent with this Oriental aggressor. That was a fact plain to all. That when the conflict began Manila and its surroundings would be the centre of attack was just as obvious to General MacArthur. Should he remain in the city and just hope for the best? Or should he make use of his local knowledge and of the information he had gathered in weeks past when examining the surroundings of the city? Defence of Manila was an impossibility with the forces at his command. He must find a spot far more easily defended, within close reach of the sea, so that American ships could reach him with supplies, and there he must hold out, a bastion against the onslaught of the enemy.

The peninsula of Bataan offered such a stretch of country,

the only suitable stretch indeed. It was jungle covered, marshy, overlooked, and malarious. But it was possible of defence, and promptly he chose it and made all preparations to carry his staff and his troops there at the very onset of war. For weeks now those gallant men had resisted and held off the Japanese.

“I understand that you gentlemen have risked much to

cross to Corregidor,” he said, when David and Elmer were shown into the tent. “One is an American?”

“That’s me, sir,” declared Elmer.

“And one British?”

David nodded.

“Further, I hear that you have news of an impending Japanese attack. In what way can you help us?”

As briefly as possible first Elmer and then David gave an outline of their recent movements, of their imprisonment in that hill-top house just beyond the main Japanese camp, and of the massed batteries they had observed, and then of the information imparted to them by the Filipino.

“This is all of the utmost value,” said the General.

“There is no doubt that the Japs are about to launch the heaviest possible attack. You could put the situation of those guns on a map perhaps?”

Elmer and David looked at one another swiftly. It had dawned upon both of them that whereas they could have made a sketch map of Japanese dispositions, so far as they had seen them and had heard of them from the Filipino, the plan began and ended on the enemy side of the Bataan defences. All would be reversed now that they were actually on the peninsula.

“If one could get aloft in a plane, yes, sir,” said David at last. “We could give more than a rough idea, of course. But a plane would help.”

“And a plane would be shot out of the sky the moment we put it up,” smiled the General. “It is one of the things from which we suffer. Aerial reconnaissance is out of the question, for all our machines that were at all worth while were destroyed at the opening of this fight, and the very few we have left are mere crates, out of date, unarmed, useless . . .”

A staff officer stepped across to speak to him, and for

a while they chatted in low voices. Then the General turned to them again.

“We have observation posts right forward where this

attack will be launched.” He smiled. “Some of them are in trees. One is a mast, erected near cover, and so high that it stands well above the jungle. Of course, all are under fire from snipers. Now, if——”

“We’re game,” cried David.

“Sure, if it’s a case of getting the right plan, why, of course,

we’ll visit those O.P.’s,” said Elmer. “Say, sir, this David and I have been under fire quite a heap since we got dragged into this war. If it’s just snipers, waal—it’s just them, that’s all.”

There were smiles on the faces of the General staff.

They liked the freshness of outlook and the quiet ways of this couple so strangely cast up from the bay. And they felt sure that, come what might, they would risk all to complete the task they had undertaken, and make the hazards of that exciting trip across the water to Corregidor worth while by getting into the front line and giving all the aid they could.

“Then at dawn to-morrow,” said the General. “My

officers will conduct you, and just as soon as you have satisfied yourselves that you have a complete plan, your report will be handed to me. Gentlemen, I have to express my admiration of your conduct and your patriotism. Thank God, courage and intense patriotism are two amongst the many virtues possessed by the defenders of this peninsula.”

They boarded a jeep and took the road for the front,

bumping along a rutted track which skirted the jungle or ran through it wherever possible, so as to give cover during daylight. During the hours of darkness the machine carried only the smallest headlight, which could be switched off the moment the drone of an airplane engine was heard.

“Sometimes we run off the road,” laughed the driver, a

dour, powerful fellow, who seemed to take the situation lightly. “I’ve been head over heels into a new shell crater, and more than once we’ve had to switch off light and engine and get away under the trees. Them Nips are

watchful. They come snooping around with their air buses, and just drop out of the sky with the motor shut down, so that we can't hear them. Then, does the dust fly? I'll say it does."

Some miles farther on, when the jungle had increased

in thickness, and after they had passed a number of shadowy groups, the bivouacs of men in reserve, who could be rushed forward to reinforce a part of the front line which was being more heavily attacked than others, they halted beside a line of camouflaged tents half-hidden beneath the trees and almost invisible in the darkness. But dawn was about to break. There was a dim, pale-blue fluorescence in the sky away to the east above the towering central masses of Luzon. The colour was changing as they stood there, from that gentle blue to purple, and now to golden-pink.

In a very few minutes stronger rays would pour down upon

this harassed land, upon the hundred thousand Japanese preparing for an all out attack, and upon the hard-pressed, emaciated, and fever-stricken American doughboys defending the peninsula. In less than half an hour the glittering orb of the sun would have topped the tree-lined heights over there, and the sleeping bay, scene so lately of their hazardous escape from Manila, the white city of Manila, the smooth-flowing Pasig River, wrecked Cavite, and the China Sea hugging the westward side of Bataan would be flashing in its breathless rays.

"We must make the most of the darkness," said the staff

officer accompanying them. "We are now less than half a mile from the front line, though in places where there are pockets, it is nearer still. There are Jap snipers all along their front, and at night-time they like to play the same old game which has paid them so handsomely in the past. They are past masters at infiltration, which means that they creep forward past our outposts, and if possible get behind them. Every morning there are skirmishes, and sometimes fierce hand-to-hand fights, for our men have learned this infiltration trick. Here we are, at the commencement of one of the communication trenches. Keep your heads low, for the marshy ground makes it impossible to dig deep, and heads can be seen above the edge."

He led the way to a cutting which descended into a trench

and then thrust onward into the jungle. At first it continued without a bend. But soon it twisted and turned off at right angles. Here and there too,

trenches branched from it, and men could be seen, all armed with rifles, standing ready in case of a dawn attack.

“The hour when the Nip likes to hit out at us,” laughed

the officer. “We’ve learned to know most of his tricks, and we’ve punished some of his morning raids pretty severely. Say, my friends, you’re sure prepared to go right forward?”

Elmer grunted his impatience. David grinned.

“Sure prepared,” he drawled. “What would be the use

otherwise of all the trouble we’ve been to? Besides, we’re keen to spot all the places we have in mind and to give you a correct picture. What’s more, I’m keen, and I guess he is too, eh, Elmer? to be in at the fighting when to-morrow’s dawn breaks.”

“You’ve said it,” echoed the American. “I want to find

out what front-line work is like for our doughboys. They’re tough, they are. Everyone way home knows that. But how tough, sir?”

“Then you’ll presently see,” came the answer. “I’ve

spent days up here. You’ll not be disappointed. Though our men are more than half-starved, and are riddled with malaria, and some of them almost helpless with dysentery, they’re game, they’re real tough, as you say, and they’ll fight off the Japs like demons. Now under this tree trunk and away to the right. Our highest O.P. is over in that direction.”

The deadly silence which had overhung their surroundings

as they advanced was now broken fitfully, for the light made it possible for outposts to peer through the matted jungle and to detect objects at some distance. Here and there the figures of men could be seen, though only a glimpse was to be obtained, for all were hidden behind fallen trunks, or sunk as deep as the nature of the ground would allow in narrow, slit trenches dug perhaps overnight so as to give protection from snipers’ bullets. There came the crack of rifles, and once the racketing, roaring tat-a-tat of a Browning machine-gun as one of the defenders, perhaps fancying he had located attackers, opened heavy fire.

A huge tree reared its massive shape before them, and

they saw that a ladder constructed of sawn-off branches roughly nailed together was secured to the trunk. At the summit of this forest giant a mast had been cunningly lashed amidst the topmost branches so that it reared itself many feet into the air, while stout wire stays ran from its top to adjacent trees. High up towards the crown of the mast a narrow platform had been cleverly built about this stout support, and that again was reached by a rough ladder.

“Not so very pretty to look at,” laughed the officer.

“But I’ll say it’s useful. Since we built the O.P. here we’ve sent some of our Filipinos into adjacent trees which obstructed the view. Those guys climb like monkeys. The fact that this exists is of course known to the Nips. Time and again they’ve turned their mortars on it, and there’s scarce an hour passes that snipers don’t fire into it.”

“That so?” reflected Elmer dryly. “Say, sir, what happens to the guy who happens to be the observer at that moment?”

“You’ll see,” came the smiling rejoinder. “We’ve learned a thing or two since we occupied this swampy place. Let’s get aloft and take a peep over the country.”

He led the way up the rough ladder, and David and Elmer swarmed to the crow’s-nest at the summit of the mast, arriving a few seconds after the officer.

“Take a breather for a few moments,” the latter said.

“That climb wants time and strength. Ah. That startled you, boys?”

There was a loud clang and the shelter in which they found themselves shook. Elmer bobbed up to look over the side, but was pulled back instantly.

“Say, that’s just suicide,” admonished the officer. “There’s a Jap sniper somewhere within view and the chances are he caught a glimpse of us going aloft. Keep heads down while I call up the ground.”

There was a telephone in one corner of the rough, square

box in which they were, and the line led to some hidden spot down below.

“There’s a Nip after us. You boys look out for him.

We’ll give you a few minutes. Tell the scouts to keep their eyes skinned, for we’ll have to do a lot of work with glasses.”

There was another sharp clang against the side of the crow’s-nest, and chips of wood flew across the top of it. The officer grinned. “That’s one of the little things we tumbled to,” he said. “It was just plain as your nose that a Jap would take this spot for a target and make observation impossible. So we hunted up a piece of old boiler plating way down in Lingayan Gulf and fixed it so as to turn a bullet. Reckon it has saved a deal of lives.”

There came to their ears the sound of a fusillade from the ground, and then shouts. A moment later the telephone rang.

“O.K., sir,” they heard a voice. “That Nip was fixed fine in a tree like he was a crow. He’s swinging good and proper now. You can see him.”

They got to their feet and stooping low peered over the edge of the look-out. From that vantage-point, a huge sweep of forest and jungle country could be seen, for as they had been told, trees which might have obstructed the view had been decapitated or felled, while the hillock on which the O.P. existed gave added distance to the prospect. A sea of tree-tops spread to the distance. Far to the east great forests covered the heights behind Manila, extending towards the interior of Luzon. The whole of Manila Bay was visible, and to the west the China Sea, stretching into the far distance, away to the horizon. Doubtless, below them, amidst the trees and the jungle, wallowing along the foetid edge of swamps, smeared thick with greasy mud and caked with dirt, men lay in fox-holes, or crawled through jungle patches, always seeking cover, silent, lest a sound betray their presence to the enemy, and listening always for the snap of a twig, the sound of a voice, the sudden crack of a weapon.

“Look!” the officer pointed. A bundle suspended from

a rope swung into view amidst the trees a hundred yards or so away, and then swung out of sight again. It was for all the world like the bob of a pendulum, to and fro, to and fro, but unlike a pendulum, losing momentum, with a lessened arc on each occasion, till presently it merely gyrated from side to side. It was a Japanese sniper, lashed to a tree just a while before and now discovered by the bullet of one of the defenders.

“Just war,” observed the officer. “Horrible, no doubt,

but war, the sort of war we’re fighting, war to the knife. I’ll tell you young fellows something I wouldn’t dare mention down below, though every mother’s son on Bataan knows the story. This is the last war most of us here will fight. We’re just tied up and hemmed in by immense Japanese forces, and the U.S.A. hasn’t a single fleet she can send to relieve us. That followed the attack on Pearl Harbour. So no reliefs can come, no rations for us and the civilians who sought safety with us, and no ammunition to replace what we have to fire to keep these demons away, can possibly be landed. We’re down on rations already, we’ve little enough ammunition, and there’s never a man to replace those who go. But, to use the words the Britisher used so often in the other great war, ‘are we downhearted?’ I’ll say we’re not. Though the outlook is black, there’s no want of courage here, and officers and men, yes, and the women, the nurses, the wives and children will see it right through.”

He smiled. “But that’s enough of growling. Let us pick

up our bearings. I’ve a map of this end of Bataan here. Now, this is just where this O.P. stands. Over there, northwest is Lingayan Gulf, where the Japs made their first landing. Were we ready for them? I’ll say we were. Though we hadn’t a plane that could fly against theirs, and were under the direct fire of their battleships, we held them for a time and smashed up their landing barges. Now, can either of you two pick out a landmark that will help?”

“That’s the hill on which our prison stood,” cried David

after taking a long look. “See, Elmer, there is the track leading to it, and there the Jap camp. That range of hills behind, with the paddies dropping down to the level, is where the police attacked us.”

“Police? Jap police?” asked the officer.

“You bet. Nips all right. We’d given the guys the slip,”

grinned Elmer. "They'd put us in that house up there, where David has pointed. We broke out and they got on our track. The chief of police and quite a few of his men won't worry us again. But it's a real long yarn, sir. One of these days perhaps we'll be able to tell you of the band of scallawags we joined away there in the forests, after we'd got washed ashore on the east coast of Luzon. But it will keep. Sure that's the prison, and within a dead line of it from this point is one of their massed batteries."

They bobbed down to consult the map, and fortunately missed another sniper's bullet. Indeed, the twang it created against the steel plate outside was almost startling. It caused the officer to stretch again for the telephone and ring up the men below.

"Say, there's another trying to hole our boiler plate," he called out. "What are the boys doing?"

The drumming roar of a machine-gun almost cut the question, and presently the phone tinkled.

"O.K., sir. That one got him. We shot off the branch to which he was lashed. Sorry. Hope you won't be disturbed again."

For more than an hour the three occupied the crow's-nest, peering through glasses, picking out every possible point, and endeavouring to make sure that the Japanese dispositions were accurately marked on the map.

"You'll hear the result as dawn breaks to-morrow," said the officer, significantly. "Our guns will be laid then in the right direction to smother the Jap batteries and their mortars. Our ground troops will work like slaves to-day and through the night to make all ready to hold off that hundred thousand Nips now hidden, no doubt, way down there in the jungle. Boys, you've brought General MacArthur and all of us a wonderful present. This news you've rustled into us should help us to break the contemplated attack. And you want to see it through?"

"We do," Elmer told him without hesitation. "It's like

this, sir. We're not attached to any of the armed forces, though we hope to be before long. Once this show is done with we hope to get back to the United States, or to Britain perhaps, anyway, to join the Allies. It will be fine to be able to give them first hand, as it were, news of the doings of our troops in Bataan. America should know of the desperate situation you face. The people of the United States have got to learn that this is, as you've just said, war to the death. Seems to me that American safety, her very independence, is threatened, and that everyone has to fight, fight hard for liberty and freedom."

The officer sat back on the floor of the O.P. with his

shoulders against the boiler plate and regarded Elmer and then David for quite a while. He rather liked the sense and balance of these two, and he had already gathered that they too had seen service. That they were determined to stay in the front line to face and observe, and perhaps even to fight, this impending enemy attack was obvious. There was no attempt to boast. To shout aloud, and then perhaps to retreat from an uncomfortable situation. He took a battered cigarette from his tunic pocket and set it alight, puffing a cloud of smoke at them.

"It's dandy to hear and to look at you two," he laughed.

"I'm staying way up here too, so we'll pass the time together. But make no mistake. These Japs are ferocious, highly trained, and splendidly equipped troops. And Bataan, General MacArthur, and the American forces stand in their victorious path. They've come across here from Formosa. They have a huge army now in Singapore."

"Singapore!" shouted David. "That's British, one of our very strongest naval stations."

"Was," grunted the officer curtly. "These Nips are past

masters at infiltration. They slipped into Malaya by all the back paths, in disguise often, swimming the creeks, paddling sampans down the rivers, always creeping in behind British defenders. Singapore was built to repel a naval attack. The Nips took it by infiltration tactic from the landward side. They're now overwhelming the Dutch possessions in the East, Java and Sumatra and other great islands, and they're swarming towards the northeastern corner of New Guinea. That means an attack on Australia. Yes, the Nips were ready for war. They'll want a lot of stopping. I reckon General

MacArthur and the men fighting on Bataan are doing great work in holding them up. We're fighting for a cause, my friends. We must hold and smash them to-morrow, for much more than our lives depends on our success. And now we'll get down to earth. We'll take the road back to headquarters, for the General may want to question you. Then, as night falls, we'll move up here again. It won't be all honey. You're dead sure you want to see it through?"

"Sure," they told him. "Dead sure."

CHAPTER XVII

GENERAL MACARTHUR TRIUMPHS

The drone of airplanes overhead, circling in the inky sky broke the deadly silence above and about the fateful jungles of Bataan. In half an hour a golden dawn would sweep the heaven, and all the surroundings of tropical Manila would be clear, blushing in the rays of a new day. But as yet gloom surrounded all, and one might imagine that but for the millions of insects, amongst them the malaria-bearing mosquito, countless frogs booming from the marshes and those fireflies hanging like brilliant scintillating candles in the tangled mass of green, the whole of this fateful area of land and sea was untenanted.

Thousands of men bent on killing one another were lurking in every part of the jungle. From the moment when David and Elmer had been motored back in a rattling jeep to General MacArthur's headquarters intense activity had swept through the scattered ranks of the gallant officers and men under his command. For they knew that the greatest attack they had yet been called upon to meet, the most ferocious that could possibly be mounted, was not only in course of preparation, but was in a state of full preparedness for launching. The massed batteries were there, with piled ammunition beside them. Mortars by the hundred had moved forward so that the advanced lines of the defenders might be blown to pieces, and crouching in the jungle, all eagerness for the kill, were some hundred thousand Japanese veterans, baulked hitherto by the gallantry, the patriotism, the fighting skill, the steel-hard determination of the famous doughboys, and confident now that victory lay well within their reach.

"I thank you, gentlemen," said the General simply, as David and Elmer and their escorting officer stood before him. "The plan which you have prepared gives us information of first-rate value and importance. We shall make instant dispositions to meet the danger. And now, gentlemen, you will wish to eat, no doubt. The choice of food is strictly limited, for rations are scarce. But something will be found for you. Then a native boat will be put at your disposal so that you can cross the bay to join your friends."

David and Elmer looked at one another. "Say, sir," said the latter, a wry smile curving his lips. "Waal, yes, hungry. That's us all the time. But a native boat to take us away home when our folks here are to fight the battle

of their lives. We'd like to stay right here. At least, not just in this spot. But forward, where the fighting is to be."

"That's the truth, sir," David chimed in. "We've had skirmishes with the Japs. But sooner or later now we're bound to be right in this business of war, and here's a chance to learn about it first hand. With your permission, sir, we'll go back to the front line so as to see what steps are taken to beat off the enemy."

There was a broad smile on the pleasant, determined face of the General. Here were young fellows after his own way of thinking. There was no more gallant officer in the whole of America's varied forces, and very few as experienced. General MacArthur had never shunned the dangerous spots. He could understand that there were others of the same way of thinking, and indeed, this vast, world-wide war was to prove, had indeed already proved, that whole nations, America, Britain, Russia, and gallant China, not to mention others, were sending men into the line, into the air and across and under the seas who far from shirking danger were seeking it, for all were filled with the determination to crush the aggressor nations and to save the liberty of the world. Ay, and their womenfolk were following suit. They too were setting an example of courage which had astonished all.

"I shall not attempt to discourage you," came the General's answer. "Indeed, I like your spirit. We are all in this war. Everyone is involved in this tremendous struggle, and there is no place for the faint-hearted. Captain Nolan will look to your wants and return you to the front. I am glad to have met you, and grateful for your gallant assistance."

An hour later the three were back in the forward areas where, crouched in a long slit trench amidst the matted jungle they awaited the huge assault about to be delivered on them. All three were now armed with rifles, to which bayonets were attached.

"A tommy-gun will be of no great use," said the officer. "By the way, I'm Captain Nolan, Bill Nolan for short, Bill for shorter still. You're Elmer, eh? Well, you'll see your countrymen in the rough here. They're a dogged lot of men, and you'll see what you will see."

Everywhere men were moving to and fro on the peninsula, each man and each group for some special object. In the back areas gunnery officers and their squads were moving their batteries into new positions, and with the help of torches beneath the thickest leafy covering officers were studying maps and were pin-pointing the targets on to which their guns were to be ranged. If Elmer and David had been accurate in their description and the

defenders were quick enough, they might be able to swamp those formidable Japanese batteries and, instead of engaging in counter-battery work, which would be to the advantage of the enemy, for he had very many more guns and ammunition than the Americans, the defence might crush and smother the Japanese even before they had begun their bombardment.

Nearer the straggling front men were sweating in the humid heat as they struggled to rearrange the mortar batteries. Their officers too had maps to guide them, with red-pencilled lines showing the supposed position of the opposing mortars.

“If they’re there, waal, say they won’t stay there long,” grinned one of the crews. “These mortars of ours should get them and strafe them good and strong before they get moving.”

The same bustle was to be observed in all directions. Yet the darkness of a tropic night hid all, and there was scarcely a sound. Men spoke in whispers. They knew that unusual sounds would reach the enemy listening posts and would make him suspicious that his plan of attack had been discovered. Forward patrols therefore did not venture into the jungle in front of their wired lines. For all knew that the ground out there, with its covering of creepers and tall grass was swarming with creeping figures, with Japanese infantrymen slowly infiltrating, remorselessly moving into position for the opening rush and, as they hoped and expected, the final victory. They could hear no sound, and see no patrolling defender. Yet light-footed Filipinos had been out in front of the line for some hours, sowing the soft ground with sharpened wooden stakes which, with those already planted, would make a forest with which to obstruct the attacker and tear and puncture his feet.

It was getting near zero hour. In a little while the darkness would lift, that glowing, burning sun, so inevitable in the East, would be flooding the land and casting long shadows through the jungle.

“I guess we’re just about ready for them,” whispered Captain Nolan, as he and Elmer and David crouched in the trench. “We’ve planted extra machine-guns way up here, and heaps of ammunition has been issued. The first thing the Japs will do will be to open up the most terrific bombardment ever. Their batteries will be ranged on our back areas so as to swamp our guns and to throw everything into disorder. They aim to make it impossible for men to move about, for reserves to come forward and for the High Command to direct operations. I guess that’s why those planes are humming and buzzing up there in the darkness. They’re waiting for zero hour. In just a little while they hope to be right over the peninsula, spotting for their guns.

And of course, we haven't a plane to hold 'em off. Only there's this to it. This thick jungle hides a heap from them, and they can't bomb us, and gee, if that isn't some sort of comfort."

"Supposing," began David, as he peered over the edge of the narrow, muddy trench and endeavoured to distinguish their surroundings.

"Supposing what?" answered Captain Nolan grimly.

"It makes a fellow begin to doubt himself, I mean this uncanny silence, this waiting for the moment to arrive," said David. "Supposing we have made errors. I believe we have given correct information to your staff. If not _____"

"Ah," grunted the officer. "If——"

"If what?" whispered Elmer breathlessly, for there was much that was awe-inspiring in their surroundings. The very silence of this jungle-clad land, the knowledge that their matted surroundings swarmed with enemies shook him. Even the exuberance, the high courage of this lanky young American were subdued in such circumstances. For here, at their own wish, he and David were face to face with the grimmest of grim facts. They were about to take part in a battle for life itself.

"But there's more to it than that," he said, as though speaking to himself alone. "There's our country. There's Britain to be thought of."

"Ay. And there is the liberty of mankind," Captain Nolan chimed in, fully understanding the trend of Elmer's thoughts. "It shakes a man, buddy, this waiting, these Nips out for conquest, the knowledge that General MacArthur and his boys stand between the Japs, the Germans, and the Italians and the rest of the whole world. It's that that shakes a man's courage for just a second or so. It's the immensity of the responsibility, I guess. But only for a moment. These doughboys mean real business. Wait till the light comes and the band begins to play. You'll see, you will. They're the toughest crowd any general ever commanded. America can trust them right up to the hilt, even though they're more than half-starved and worn out by illness and ceaseless fighting."

Dawn was breaking. The Stygian blackness which had hidden all, so that men crowded in slit trenches could not distinguish their neighbours, and scouts crouching in the bush were invisible, was lifting, lifting, at first imperceptibly, and then with a rush. In ten minutes slanting rays would be penetrating the malarious mist clinging to forest trees and jungle, and in a

flash the air would be clear. Zero hour was upon them. The greatest battle for the fateful peninsula was about to open.

A thunderous roar came from behind them. General MacArthur's guns were in action, not battery by battery, but every available weapon, all laid on particular targets, sending a storm of shells whistling and hurtling over the heads of the defenders. David started. Elmer almost sprang from the trench. For the mortar batteries hidden close at hand and along some fifteen miles of the forward defences were in action, and they too were ranged on particular targets, those areas ringed with red pencil upon the maps of their officers. Pandemonium had broken loose, and yet an ordered pandemonium. The crash and burst of shells and mortar bombs filled the air. Great splashes of flame amidst the enemy's lines rent the breaking light of dawn, while observers in a hundred cunningly hidden posts behind the American front line watched the effect of this sudden check to Japanese ambitions, and sent gloating, excited messages back to the guns over their telephone lines.

"Dead on the spot, boy. Shootin' true to the map," came a husky voice, sounding cracked and muffled to the ear of the receiver away back in his dug-out close to the guns.

"Hold it! Hold it!" came from another post. "You're right on the pimple, and say, though I can't see the target you're making a mess over there amongst the Nips."

There was in fact something amounting to consternation amongst the enemy batteries. As zero hour approached gun crews had assembled about their weapons and all was in complete readiness for a bombardment the like of which had never yet been attempted. This was to be a great, an overwhelming surprise, and that day would see the end of the defenders of Bataan, and the taking of Corregidor. It would sweep aside this last stubborn barrier, which had cost the Japanese so dear, and which had so unexpectedly held up and delayed their victorious progress through the China Seas and the Pacific. The Emperor called for a last, a final effort. The Rising Sun must flaunt itself that very night above the Bataan peninsula.

Amidst the shell-bursts, efforts were made to return the American fire. Mortar batteries hidden in the jungle made vain attempts to subdue the mortars pounding them. That the defenders of Bataan had in some way learned of Japanese dispositions dawned in a flash upon the brain of their commander. But the orders he sent to his gunnery officers were useless. That cascade of shells was swamping his guns. His mortar batteries were silenced even before they could open up.

All that was left to the attacker were those thousands of veteran troops who had slowly and silently wormed their way towards the American front line and who even then lay full length waiting for the order to advance, an order to be delivered only after half an hour's intense bombardment of Bataan. It remained the only hope of victory on the part of the attackers, and yet a formidable hope. Forthwith the whole mass was launched to the attack.

“Stand by for them,” came a sharp order from an infantry officer occupying a trench adjacent to that occupied by David and Elmer. “Wait till they fill the open lanes we have left, and then let 'em have it.”

What men those doughboys were! Every one of them was now clearly visible, that is to say, their faces could be distinguished in the strong morning light, though dulled here and there where slanting rays cast the shadow of trees across them. Their bodies were hidden in the shallow trenches in which they sheltered. Strong faces they were, deeply lined, covered with stubbly beards, grimed and dirty, cheeks sunken by sickness and semi-starvation. But the eyes shone, hands gripped rifles with determination, and men shook the weapons as if to make sure that their bayonets were firmly attached and ready for the hand-to-hand encounter which was coming, was in fact right upon them.

A motley crowd of human beings they were, dressed in ragged, mud-stained and tattered uniforms, their heads protected by steel helmets, only that and their individual courage and their will to win this unequal battle standing between each one of them individually and the world of liberty they stood for, and defeat, annihilation, subjugation at the hands of a ruthless Oriental enemy determined to oust the white man from his possessions in the East.

The jungle was full of rushing figures. Snipers swarming into trees at some distance were firing at the doughboys. But the mass of the attackers were on their feet, or on hands and knees, as obstructions in the jungle met them, clawing their way forward, pouring bullets from their tommy-guns, eager to get to close quarters.

“Take it steady, boys,” came the cool voice of their neighbouring officer. “Pick 'em off as you see them, and be lively when the word comes to leave the trench and start in on them. Hey! Those stakes are worrying them some.”

Japanese soldiers were floundering as they rushed to the attack. That forest of sharpened stakes worked havoc amongst men whose feet were protected only by native sandals. And the fire of the defenders, as yet by no means intense, was taking its toll. The time was close at hand when other

obstructions to the approach of the Japanese would have been removed, when the men told off to sever wire entanglements with their cutters had done their work. Marksmen amongst the Americans were picking them off all along that jungle line as they made to cut the wire. But the Japanese is nothing if not persistent, and if the doughboys under General MacArthur were full of courage and fighting spirit, the enemy was equally equipped. These Japanese were not the untutored nation of scarcely sixty years ago. They had absorbed all that the West could teach them. Their weapons were up to date and in abundant supply, and believing in their Emperor as in a god, indeed, regarding him as of divine origin, one and all were eager and prepared to face certain death if only they could thereby carry out his orders—orders conveyed to them by the great War Lords of Tokyo.

A Browning machine-gun ten yards away opened up of a sudden, and though David imagined he had secured a tight hold over his nerves, he started violently. The shattering rat-a-tat-tat was disconcerting. It seemed to have broken the weird, oppressive silence of this ghostly land as no other sound had done. He peered across to find the position of the gun post, and soon saw it, half-hidden in green, a bank of clay thrown up as protection before it, and at the breach the figure of a doughboy, his tattered shirt-ends broken loose from the belt, his tin hat, perched well back on his head, his shoulders hunched as he peered along the sights, while his hands gripped the mechanism. And what hands! They shook as he dropped them to his side. His flanks were quaking, so that his shirt fluttered. Sweat was pouring from his deeply lined and fever-haunted face, and it appeared that he might fall forward in a helpless bunch. But a word from a member of his gun crew caused him to sit up with a start. Those shaking hands went once more to the breach. Then for a moment he raised one to dash the sweat from his eyes.

“More of ’em, buddy,” said his mate. “You can stick it, you can.”

The rat-a-tat-tat of the weapon was the answer. Stick it? Of course he could, though he, like so many hundred more of the defenders, was shaken in every limb by malaria. What was the use of reporting sick and perhaps going to hospital way back behind the line? That meant there was one man short in the front line. Someone must be found to man that Browning. And then, there was no quinine left on Bataan. A man who went down with malaria in that fever-haunted jungle must just stick it.

“Stick it. You’ve said it,” he stuttered between the shivers. “Better be up here talking good and plenty to them Nips than skulk back there waitin’ for the next shiver. How’s that, buddy, for a bull’s-eye!”

The courage, the tenacity, the self-sacrifice of those men and their gallant officers! Will America ever hear the full story? Will folks leading a peaceful existence far from the sound of war even comprehend? Will they conveniently forget the heroism of those doughboys, of their great commander, of the staunch, sturdy staff which faced death on Bataan. Will America and the world ever forget the glorious defence of that haunted jungle?

The wire had gone two hundred yards to the left of the trench in which Elmer and David were crouching. A swarm of Japanese soldiers were bursting their way through. The soldier shaking with fever was pouring a devastating fire into their ranks. But they came on, and as they did so figures hitherto hidden either behind convenient trees or in slit trenches suddenly emerged, a ragged band they looked, yet upstanding, defiant, eager for the word to charge. It came as David looked, and to his intense surprise he found himself, with Elmer and Captain Nolan beside him, lined up with these defenders.

They were charging, a mad rush, bayonets ready for close order fighting, men shouting, hoarse cracked voices sounding through the bush, that machine-gun still filling the air with its staccato rattle. And then they were amongst the enemy, a furious, swaying mass of ferocious humanity, shrill cries coming from the Japanese, big men grunting as they thrust their weapons home, wounded falling in their tracks, the groans of men hurt in this titanic struggle, and in the centre of it all a gigantic man, an American lieutenant, a very lion of a man, massive and hugely built, with great broad shoulders and swelling neck fully displayed by his wide-open shirt. Roars came from his throat, the bellow of a soldier raised to the height of fury. He was lunging to left and to right, and while the enemy came at him at first with equal *élan* and fury they were backing away from his formidable figure, all but a few of the hardier and the most fanatical.

One ran at him, head down, firing his tommy-gun. The butt of the officer's weapon met him with a dull crash, and the Japanese was felled. Two more ran in, and it seemed that with others encouraged by this, and now also charging, this bold defender stood little chance. But he shouted as if with glee. A holy elation seemed to have taken possession of him. With a dexterous kick he sent the feet of one flying from beneath him, and a moment later ran a second through with his bayonet. Then the officer's powerful shoulders heaved. The Japanese soldier's feet left the trampled ground. He was flung with a mighty heave right over the head of this lion, and lay crumpled on the ground.

“Forward! They’re giving. Hey, boys, finish the job.”

It was Captain Nolan, with Elmer and David at his side, racing forward into the jungle, that huge man near at hand, dozens of the doughboys assisting.

“Look out,” shouted David, for a dozen of the enemy had picked Captain Nolan for a target, and one of them firing his tommy-gun from the hip sent a bullet ripping past the officer’s head, tearing the skin and stunning him. Bill Nolan was out. His gallant figure slumped, and a number of the attackers raced in to end the work.

“Give a hand,” David shouted to Elmer. “Open up with your rifle.”

The snap of the weapon answered the call. Then some of the Japanese were upon them, and for two or three minutes there was close fighting. To his intense surprise again David found himself transfixing a Japanese. The man clutched at him as he fell, and drawing a long knife attempted to renew the attack. But a doughboy intervened. He kicked the knife aside and shot the man.

“Never leave a Jap that can move,” he cautioned David. “They’ll lie doggo for an hour and then skewer you. Say, you boys seem to like this sort of business. So did I—once,” he gasped. “But there’s been a mouthful of it.”

The fighting was dying down. The rattle of machine-guns was less pronounced. Rifle-fire was still to be heard, that and the hoarse, raucous cheers of the defenders. For though the Japanese had managed here and there to throw the defenders back, and seemed perhaps within measurable distance of a success, the tenacity of the Americans had first of all taken the sting out of the assault and had then thrown the attackers back. Those thousands who had crept into the jungle in the hope and expectation of massacring the Americans were creeping away, running away here and there, in full flight, leaving a host of their comrades lying still in the jungle. And in the lines of the defenders stretcher-bearers were already at work, careless of the bullets which flicked past their ears and occasionally wounding one of them, picking up their injured comrades and carrying them back to the jeeps and the improvised ambulances which would take those who were most hurt back to the hospitals.

Captain Nolan was sitting up as a hospital orderly staunched the blood from his head. He was actually laughing.

“Of all the fire-eaters,” he guffawed, while doughboys within hearing roared. “Here, are you coming along to just take a look at front-line work.

And then, gee, if you don't get warmed up so much that you get right in front of the charge. But, boys, am I grateful? I'll say I won't forget the way you stood around to protect me. You saved my life."

"That's sure," burst in one of the men. "If this young fellow here—Britisher, ain't he?—hadn't skewered that Jap you'd have said good-bye to Bataan for keeps. And this here Yank," he added, pointing a stubby finger at Elmer, for the rest of his hand was swathed in a bandage, "this here American bantam, what's he do? Stands by. Shoots like an old 'un. Backs his pal. And sure, sir, they saved your life between them."

The fighting had died away. That gallant fellow manning a machine-gun sat on the bank which gave him some protection and shivered, while sweat poured from his racked body. Near at hand men were eating a scanty and none too appetising meal. Hardly a word passed between them. They were too exhausted to merely sit there and chat. And behind them lay others, resting, not as fit men rest after violent exertion, but as men tried to the point of breakdown, men worn out by the need for constant effort, half-starved, sick in body yet obstinately clear in mind, still the determined band who had faced a horde of Japanese for weeks past and would face them to the end.

Elmer and David accompanied Captain Nolan to one of the many hospitals sheltering beneath the jungle trees, and saw something of the strain placed upon the hospital corps in times of severe action. Wounded officers and men were arriving in a stream. Bearers and surgeons bustled to and fro, while the operating theatres, improvised affairs, were in sad request. And moving amongst them all were the hospital sisters, devoted women, dressed now in soldier's uniform for the neat white garb of the nursing service was no longer possible. They knew full well the stake for which their men were fighting. They comprehended that if Bataan fell, if these gallant defenders were overrun, if the jungle and the rock of Corregidor were captured little clemency was to be expected of this Oriental and savage enemy.

"You boys, I'm right sorry to say good-bye," smiled Captain Nolan, as they shook his hand in farewell. "Let's hope we meet again and pretty soon. But I'll say something. The Japs have the whip hand for the moment. See, they were ready. They'll drive America and Britain out of the Pacific. But we'll come back. Till then, boys, so long."

That night they crept down to the edge of the bay and embarked on a native boat put at their disposal. They took with them the hearty thanks of that gallant officer commanding this dour, staunch band of defenders. It was the last they were to see of that garrison, for in little time overwhelming

masses of attackers overthrew the forward lines on Bataan, and the enemy swept down the peninsula and flooded into Corregidor. At a terrible cost they had swept this bastion aside. They had isolated the last corner of American opposition.

Nothing could now control their sweep into the very edges of the Pacific. They could now follow out a plan long since formulated in Tokyo. Those thousand and many more islands of the Philippine archipelago would provide an inner wall of defence to the East. Farther in that direction were hosts of islands, the Marshalls, the Carolines, the Solomons and many others which, with the northern coast of New Guinea would, when captured, provide stations for other defence forces, a chain of airfields linking with their own great naval base at Truk, in the Carolines, the whole providing a network, an outer defence through which an enemy must break before he could come at the China Sea, the great Dutch Islands, such as Java and Sumatra, and those many other huge conquests of this war, such as Burma.

“It’s a mighty proposition, boys,” Captain Nolan had said. “Until Uncle Sam has built a new fleet to replace the ships lost at Pearl Harbour, we can’t move. And then think of the distance we have to cover before we come at those outer defences. But what has to be done will be done. Give it time.”

Paddling across the bay in dead silence, with the keen eyes of Chu ever on the look-out for enemy boats, they finally reached the waterfront not far from Ho Ling’s godown. There they found Toong waiting for them.

“Masters,” he said, his usually calm voice trembling with eagerness. “This Hato man.”

“Waal?” demanded Elmer swiftly. “What?”

“You’ve seen him again?” David chimed in. “Where? Aboard his submarine?”

Toong nodded violently. “Submarine all right,” he said. “It come in while I fish off there by Cavite. Hato seem in a great hurry, and as soon as the anchor dropped he called a native boat. He gone up the Pasig River to a big house. He there still. My Chinese brother send me word at nightfall.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF HATO

A long, white bungalow stood on the steep slope leading upward from the River Pasig and shone in the rays of a brilliant moon. Great shadows cast by surrounding trees hid part of the building, though in that light one could easily distinguish the wide veranda skirting the front, supported on bamboo stilts, the steps leading from it to a path, and the latter as it ran downward to the water, where a pier jutted from the bank with a native boat tied to it.

Tiny arrows of light were filtering from between the louvres of a shuttered window, and if one turned towards the river the reflection could be seen, rippling pleasantly on the water as it flowed towards the great Bay of Manila. For the rest, the place appeared at first to be deserted. There was not a sound from the house and no one appeared to be outside it. But wait! A dusky figure was stretched on the veranda. He sat up on his blanket and looked about him suspiciously, snuffing the air as though he might scent an approaching stranger, and as though some sound had caught his attention. But there was only the hum of those millions of insects always so alert in the hours of darkness, invisible as a rule, but now seen in droves and clouds as they floated by in the moonlight, that and the gentle tinkle of water as the river wound past the banks out towards the sea.

A head appeared at one end of the veranda. A man, bent double, raised his form with infinite care and peered at the figure on the veranda. Then the head bobbed down again and he was gone into the shadows cast by the house. Not a sound had betrayed his presence. And yet the form stretched on the veranda appeared to wriggle uneasily. The fellow, whoever he might be, appeared to be suspicious. Perhaps he was possessed of acute hearing, for he got to his feet and stood there listening, peering into the moonlit surroundings, waiting, watching.

Of a sudden, a loud screech from the undergrowth on the edge of the clearing in which the bungalow stood, caused him to start nervously, and stepping to the edge of the veranda he peered out into the open, while his figure came into strong relief against the pale rays of the moon. He was a Filipino, barefooted, dressed in cotton, a native knife slung to his waist, and one hand gripping the handle. He shook himself and muttered. The cry of that wild beast had startled him. Even the flight of a bat flitting by just then sent his heart beating a trifle more rapidly. He muttered and shook his head

angrily, as if displeased with himself and with the task of watchman which he had undertaken. Then as if reassured, he stepped back and spreading his blanket again lay down.

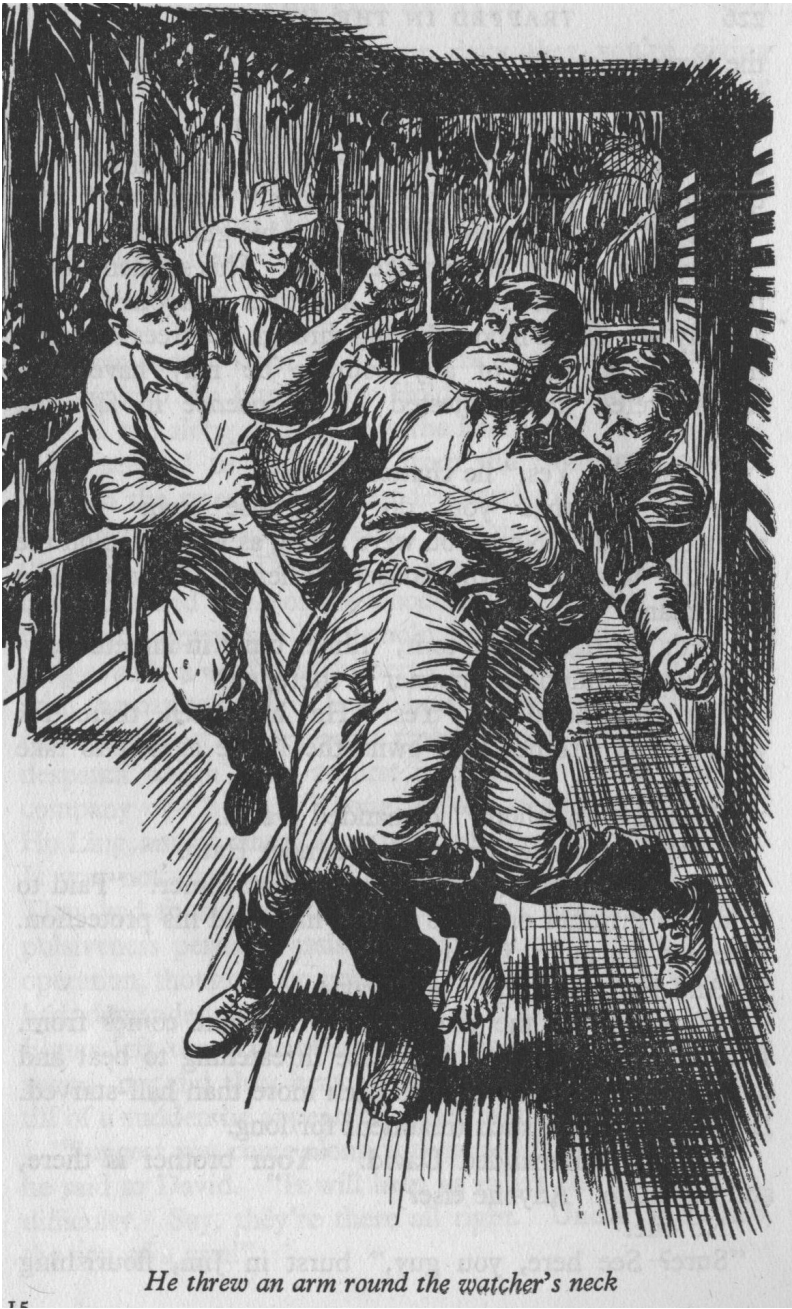
A tap came from the far end of the veranda. The dry wooden boards carried the sound as a drum might have done, and instantly the fellow was on his feet again and moving in that direction. As he did so the head of a man was raised once more at the opposite end. A figure leapt softly on to the boards, and advancing swiftly threw an arm round the watcher's neck, and gripped his face. It was the signal for two others to reach the veranda. They seized the watcher, pulled a sack over his head, disarmed him in a twinkling, and rushed him from the veranda down the steps and away to the back of the building where the shadows were deepest.

“Bring him along still farther from the house,” said David.

“And just let him know that making a fuss won't help any,” growled Elmer. “Jim, you're sure the guy to scare any sort of Filipino. You stand in front of him when the sack gets lifted and show him your gun.”

Jim, the gallant Leatherneck might indeed have sent a flutter of fear through the frame of any stranger. For he looked the perfect mountebank. Life in the jungle did not make for fine clothing, for clean-shaving, for that spick and span appearance for which the American Marine Corps was famous. Not that his comrades in that corps were always the comely, magnificent fellows one could see in the piping times of peace on some parade ground. The Leathernecks had always led America's forlorn hopes. If there was fighting to be done, they were always in the thick of it, and in the foremost ranks. It was then that marines often took on the same appearance as Jim. They might perforce go for days without shaving. They might be dressed in tattered uniforms. But outward appearances, the dirt and dust and stress of a campaign made no real difference to these gallant fellows. They were still, each and every one of them, Leathernecks, with all the dash and prowess that familiar and endearing term implied.

Jim grinned. He pulled his tattered hat down over his eyes, screwed his laughing face into an ugly grimace and standing with legs wide apart dropped the muzzle of his tommy-gun.



He threw an arm round the watcher's neck

“Take off his blinkers then,” he laughed. “I’ll guess he’ll be glad to talk. Say, buddy,” he went on, as the sack was drawn from the man’s head. “See

this gun,” and he tapped the barrel with the fingers of one hand. “Well, you keep your eyes fixed on it. Savvy.”

“Listen to this,” said David, joining Jim and casting a sharp look at their prisoner. “If you talk, and answer our questions you won’t come to any harm. If not——”

“Say, if not,” growled Jim, shaking his gun again.

The Filipino was shaking like a jelly. This sudden attack, these strange men around him, and their weapons flashing as stray rays of the moon filtering through the trees fell upon them robbed him of any courage he may have had. He stuttered and protested his innocence in faltering tones.

“I’ll speak. Yes,” he chattered.

“And see that you do not raise your voice,” warned David. “Now, you were acting as watchman on the veranda. Who is in the house? Where is the need of a watchman?”

“Let’s get right down to it,” Elmer burst in impetuously. “You’ve an American prisoner in there, eh?”

The man nodded. “Yes. He has been there for weeks. My brother who owns the house agreed to take him.”

“Agreed with whom?” demanded David.

“With a Japanese officer, Commander Hato.”

“And your brother is paid, eh?” asked Elmer. “Paid to hold as a prisoner one who should have had his protection. Where is this guy? In there?”

“And Hato, the Jap?” said David.

“In there. In the room where the light comes from. I will tell all, masters. They are threatening to beat and to kill the American. He has been more than half-starved. He cannot survive such treatment for long.”

“Listen,” commanded David. “Your brother is there, and this Hato. Anyone else?”

“No one.”

“Sure? See here, you guy,” burst in Jim, flourishing his weapon. “You stake your davy that you’re giving us the truth. There’s no one else along with those two?”

The prisoner shook his head and protested his honesty. "No one. No one," he declared.

"Armed?" asked Elmer, swinging the tommy-gun he carried loose from its sling.

"Yes. Armed."

"Then I'll take a peek at them," Elmer told David. "If light can escape from those shutters a man should be able to look into the bungalow. Hold on here a few moments while I nip along and see how the land lies."

He seemed to melt away from the company collected beneath the trees, for the last few weeks of adventure and movement had had their effect on this lanky American as they had had on David. They seemed unconsciously to have absorbed some of the woodcraft so naturally practised by that tiny pygmy. They could move through the thickest jungle with a swiftness hitherto impossible, and if armed with the native bolo, or heavy knife, they could hack a path through almost impenetrable creepers with a directness and despatch which were at first impossible. Then too, the company of Chu and Toong, of the wealthy and friendly Ho Ling, and of other Chinamen had conveyed other lessons. It was not so much that they had learned to be crafty. They had found that care, forethought, planning, less impulsiveness perhaps, assisted towards success in almost any operation, though to be sure some of their recent experiences had demanded instant decisions and the swiftest action. Elmer left those members of the gallant band without a sound, nor did they hear so much as a murmur from him till of a sudden he appeared in their midst again.

"Suggest you come along with me and take a peek also," he said to David. "It will help us to get the better of this difficulty. Say, they're there all right. Uncle, and Hato, the son of a gun!"

"Then, Jim, take charge for a moment. See that this Filipino doesn't attempt to rouse his friends. Better still, send him back to our station amongst the trees out there, in charge of a couple of the men. They can wait for us there till we call them. And where's Mike?"

The great big Irishman was within sight of them, and came running as David beckoned.

"And what's the news, chief?" he demanded eagerly. "That Nip there? Sure I'm just waitin' to get even with him."

"Stand on guard at the back of the bungalow," David told him. "Is there a door there?"

“Faith, and there is. Just a single one. A window too. There’s a light behind the shutters.”

“Then the room extends from front to back of the bungalow, and that’s where Hato and his prisoner are. Keep an eye open, Mike. The Nip is armed.”

The Irishman thrust his long fingers through his flowing red hair and then doubled them to form a formidable fist. “Is it armed he is?” he growled. “Then it’s ready I am. If he makes for the back door there’ll be something waitin’ for him.”

Those narrow chinks between the louvres of the shutter through which stray rays of light were escaping gave ample opportunity for a watcher to discover what was passing within the house. It was rather like applying an eye to a keyhole, only the view to be obtained was more expansive and more varied seeing that there were many apertures. David fixed his eye to one, and Elmer took post at another. Within the room they could see a table, on which was set a large oil lamp, with a globular-shaped glass shade about it. It was one of those pressure lamps which heat an incandescent mantle and give off a flood of light, so much so that every corner of the room was illuminated. The polished wood floor shone in the warm rays. Every outline of Hato’s unpleasant features was emphasised. The rascal was lounging in a wicker chair, his feet on the edge of the table, a glass and a bottle near his hand, and a revolver within a foot of him.

To the far side of the Japanese was a Filipino, a hangdog To the far side of the Japanese was a Filipino, a hangdog individual, who looked askance at his employer from moment to moment, and was evidently in fear of him. Indeed, he glanced nervously at the weapon on the table, and then from that to the prisoner.

And Alfred Baines was indeed a sorry figure. True, there was the same coolness as before. The steady eyes watched his captors without a flicker, and there was a scornful smile on his lips. But this was not the uncle Elmer had known in the old days, austere at times, given to long silences, but genial and friendly and always in excellent health. Alfred Baines was now almost a skeleton. His limbs were shrunken, his cheeks were hollow, and there were dark patches of unhealthy colour beneath his eyes.

Hato was staring hard at his prisoner. The fingers of one hand were toying with his revolver, while David noticed with a start a heavy bamboo cane lying at the foot of the table within easy reach of the Filipino.

“And so you will not speak,” he was saying to Mr. Baines. “You still refuse to give Japan your secret? We have need of that information. We must have it, and now, I have the Mikado’s orders.”

He bounced to his feet at the mention of the Japanese Emperor and bowed low. Then he plumped into the chair again, stretched out a hand and lifting the glass drained the contents, the muscles of his thick throat swelling visibly as he swallowed the fluid.

Mr. Baines made no movement and did not deign to answer. But the face stiffened. That obstinate chin was strongly in evidence.

“So! No answer. You refuse. Then much against my wishes we proceed to compulsion. Hand me that cane.”

“Come,” whispered David, plucking Elmer by the sleeve. “Time to put an end to the matter. Call Jim and the others.”

They met just out of earshot of the house and rapidly formulated plans. Two men were sent to join Mike at the back door. The rest assembled on the veranda, some at the shuttered window while others went to the closed door. David gave vent to a shrill whistle at the very moment when Hato was lifting the cane to beat his prisoner. A loud crash followed as Mike and his helpers beat in the back door. David and Elmer pulled the shutters apart and sprang into the room, while Jim and Toong smashed a path through the second door.

“Uncle!” shouted Elmer, rushing to his side.

“Don’t attempt to touch that revolver,” David commanded. “Put your hands up in the air.”

Hato swung round to face the window. He turned swiftly to look towards the back door and then, seeing men in that direction and hearing others breaking in at the front and realising that his weapon was out of reach, he seized upon a sudden idea and reaching out gripped the pillar of the lamp. His intention was obvious. He would send this, the only source of light, crashing to the floor and attempt an escape in the ensuing darkness. But Mike was too quick for him. As the broad shoulders of the Japanese bent backward the Irishman’s fist landed square on Hato’s jaw, and the man went backward driven by the force of the blow into the extreme corner of the room. Indeed, Mike’s punch was like the kick of a horse. It knocked the senses out of his opponent, who lay, hunched up, motionless, almost lifeless.

Tense moments followed. As Chu ran in and beat the Filipino over the head with the stock of his gun the lamp exploded, and seething flames

enveloped the place.

“Bring your uncle along,” David shouted. “Jim, call the band together and get ready to move. This fire will attract hundreds of the enemy to the spot. Toong and Chu lend a hand to help with Mr. Baines for one can see that he is too weak to keep up with us. Now march.”

They left flames licking around the corners of the bungalow and bursting already from the roof. The surface of the Pasig River appeared to be on fire as the red-hot flames were reflected from it. And sparks and dense smoke were pouring upward so that the light of the moon was almost smothered. Plunging into the jungle, they soon reached the spot where others of the band were waiting for them, including the pygmy. Here they set their Filipino prisoner free, while Toong and Chu with willing hands to help them hacked suitable branches from the surrounding undergrowth and rapidly fashioned a stretcher on which Mr. Baines was placed.

Two hours later they were beyond the enemy’s reach, safe in the haunts which had given the band security since its formation. They were on high ground now, so that they could see far to the west. There lay the great Bay of Manila, heaving gently in the moonlight. The beams shone upon Corregidor, looking so peaceful in that light, and upon the great peninsula of Bataan, clad in its coat of matted vegetation.

“You’d hardly believe that both places are packed with men and women,” ventured David, while Mr. Baines, now standing weakly on his feet, leaned forward eagerly to view the scene.

“I have listened to the sound of the guns,” he said. “I know what terrible things are happening over there. It is a forlorn hope. General MacArthur and his very gallant men are gamely resisting impossible odds, and I fear that, sooner or later, they will be overwhelmed. But their duty so nobly done will, like that historic Battle of Britain fought by David’s people, help to save the freedom of the world. And in due course Uncle Sam will have rebuilt the fleet sunk by Japanese treachery at Pearl Harbour. Fleets of the United Nations will join them. Then will commence that struggle for possession of the Pacific and all its lands, and our certain progress along the road, however hard it prove to be, which will lead us all the way from Pearl Harbour to Tokyo.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Page numbers have been removed due to a non-page layout.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Trapped in the Jungle!* by Frederick Sadleir Brereton]