

FIVE CAME BACK

By

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THE DAY AFTER PEARL HARBOR

In the surprise attack at Nichols Field most all our planes were destroyed on the ground—then it was foxholes for four months at Bataan, and on April 9th—surrender.

THE WHITE FLAG

We had known for days that it would come! But when we saw the white flag go up, it was hard to take. Japs came in waves. The first two waves we destroyed, but the third made the beach. From dawn to noon we fought them off. We were overwhelmed. A sick and awful feeling surged through me as I saw those ape-like Nips take over. They took our precious equipment—ordered us to throw it down in a pile. They stood there leering, swaggering, boastful. Next they commanded us to hand over our personal possessions—watches, fountain pens and even pictures of our girls. In the hot noon sunlight of a south sea day, they packed us together, some in the tunnel, some lined up outside, all covered with their guns and bayonets—ready to shoot us down or run us through—if we so much as moved a limb.

SLAVERY BEGINS AT CORREGIDOR

The next day we were driven into an area called the 92 Garage. We were given nothing to eat—no water—but were to work cleaning up the battlefield and burying the dead. We had to exist on what we rummaged. As we cleared the battlefields, we would collect what good clothing we could find, slip down to the waterfront at night and trade this clothing with the natives for food, we were heavily guarded, but there was always a loop-hole.

After two weeks of this, the Japs sent the majority of prisoners to Cabanatuan, only a few were kept at Corregidor.

We worked over most of the Island on different details, always under the guard of the gloating apes. We unloaded supplies from the ships, and reloaded them with scrap iron and guns that had been put out of commission. We saw to it that some of these guns never got on the freighters. We would drop them in the bay accidentally. We got well slapped for this, but it was worth it.

Once we had a plan to escape—three buddies and myself. A twenty foot boat of ours had been left in one of the coves after the surrender. The Japs overlooked it. One of the boys had a compass, and we hid food away and slipped it to the boat until we had enough to last several weeks. We obtained knives and matches. Our plan was to slip out at night, sail for the mountainous area of Batangus on Luzon some fifteen or twenty miles distant, and if we got there, hide in the hills. With the help of the natives we could have lived in those hills a long time.

We were all set to go—our spirits were high even though we were taking a desperate chance. Then the Japs put us on work that took us out of reach of the boar. That was the end of that. This was a jolt, but we were still alive, and there would be another day.

BILIBID PRISON HOSPITAL—A STARVATION DUMP

After four months, we were moved to Bilibid Prison in Manila. Bilibid was as the hospital prison camp, but prisoners went there to die—not to get well. A half cup of sloppy rice with a dribble of near rotten fish that stunk like fertilizer, that is what fed beri-beri patients starving for vitamins. Vegetables were practically unknown in our diet. When they were served they were mixed with the rice and cooked to a pulp so that we couldn't recognize them. Bilibid is seared in my memory as one hell-hole of misery and torture and death. No antiseptics, no hospital supplies, and yet the Japs wanted men to get well so they could make workslaves of them. They are a stupid people capable of nothing but lies and theft and cruelty. They are not clever.

Our guards at Bilibid were “Tiwanese” (Fomosans). Some of them talked a bit of English. We could understand them some and for the rest an interpreter would help us or if there was one. They would plant themselves front of us and gloatingly jabber, “We will soon have California; San Francisco and New York have been bombed to the ground. Our armies occupy Florida. Ba-ha-ha. American fools will be our slaves. With a brandish of the weapons, they would add. Slaves very dumb but we make good. We knew they meant by being us. They were so stupid, they believed everything they were told by their superiors.

A LIFETIME AT CABANATUAN

After they starved us a while at Bilibid were sent to Cabanatuan. We were driven there in trucks, packed so tightly we couldn't move. We were assigned to two work details immediately—gathering and loading wood onto trucks in the woods, working on the prison far, pulling weeds breaking the ground with picks and hoes and planting. We had to carry four hundred pound litter, three to four men to a litter long distances, the pole ends cutting deep into our naked shoulders. Then working in the rice paddies, no covering except our G-strings, exposed to the boiling sun this was unbearable. The miry slime stunk like something dead, our feet would get bruised and cut by the rock and become infected until we could scarcely bear standing upon them and the Cogon grass sliced at our bodies making more cuts and scratches for infection to set in. Our stomachs used to rebel from the stench that came up from that slime and make us so sick we would want to vomit.

But that wasn't the kind of work that was so tough. It was the beastly long hours, the increasing speed demanded and the rotten meager food they gave us. A half cup of rice and a smattering of vegetable—mostly “telem” which is similar to spinach, twice a day, doesn't carry a man very far. Enough vegetables were raised for us to have all we could eat, but the Japs let them rot in the ground.

“SPEEDO” WAS THEIR CREED

“SPEEDO” they would say when they wanted us to turn out they (sic) work fast. We would hurry and maybe do a little more than commanded hoping this might get recognition-improved treatment but no, we were wrong from start to finish no matter

what we did. The more we did, the more they made use do. They never stopped prodding us. Two hundred could have done the work of a thousand with equipment. They could have supplied it many times, but wouldn't. They wanted to keep us slaving. They learned American swear words quickly and used them to emphasize their hatred for us. "Americans are dumb. You S. of B's no good" they would say. It took a little time for us to learn caution. It isn't human nature to take so much. The first few months were tough. When the Japs would swear at us and kick us around without the slightest provocation some fellow would forget himself, raise a hand as though to strike. That was out, and we soon learned not to do it.

I saw a prisoner take an awful beating for just that sort of thing. The guard in charge ripped a loose board from a shed. It was full of rusty nails, but that didn't stop him. He went at the prisoner like a mad man, beat him into a state of unconsciousness. It wasn't long before infection set in where the skin had been broken, and that fellow's body was a sight to behold.

DON'T STAND—STOOP OR BEND, DAMN YOU!

The ground was hard like granite and the vampire roots of the cogon grass went deep, the roots were devilish to extract even with good picks and ours were dull. The grass, sharp-edged made stinging cuts on our naked bodies, but we hacked away at the devilish stuff-bending low to uproot it. Some of the men had hoes, and worked with us, chopping the stubborn ground though it was only mid-morning. The glare of the tropical sun grew increasingly hotter as the day proceeded. Our backs were breaking and our feet were blistered and burning.

My mind was numbed by this damned torture that lasted for days. I was conscious only of pain all over my body, but mostly in my aching back. I had forgotten the guards were there. I'd forgotten everything for the moment. My back of its own accord straightened up—blindly obeying nature's demand for relief. I stood there stretching my body toward the blazing sun. I guess I stood a little too long. I don't know, my mind was not clear at the time. We were not supposed to unbend, this was especially so when "Web Foot" was in charge. We named him this because he had broad short feet and when he walked he plopped them down as a duck does.

Web Foot was tops when it came to speeding up the men. Before I knew what had happened, he rushed at me knocking me down with this pick handle. On my back on the hard ground, I felt the pick handle strike me again and again. Then for a change, heavy boots kicking at my face and tramping on my stomach until I thought I would die of pain. Between the pick handle and the heavy boots, there was not an inch of my body spared. That was one of the worst work-overs I ever got. After that I stooped. I couldn't very well do otherwise with my stomach caved in.

We had no desire to aggravate the Japs. The guards here at Bilibid were Tywanese a conquered people slaves from the cradle up. They were very cruel. They were treating us as they had been treated. But at times it was too much. We would make a slip of some sort. The blazing sun beating down upon us, our empty stomachs, our bowels aching from dysentery—staggering from fatigue, many of us fever-ridden we cried out for relief from this eternal agony, but it was beyond human endurance. Then always that rhythm of work-work-work and work that permeates the oriental life. It beat into our ears we breathed it, it saturated our minds, it followed us through our nights. There was no

getting away from the weird rhythm. It drove us crazy and we would forget—and then punishment.

Beatings, were many and terrible. Day by day men would fall in their tracks—and maybe the next thing we would know, they had died—some from the life sapping diseases of the tropics other from inhuman punishment and some from just plain hunger, their sagging skin and protruding bones, and their swollen stomachs making them grotesque appearing. I didn't look on either side of me to see which man might die.

NIGHTTIME A NIGHTMARE

Nighttime was one long nightmare. Bamboo strips to sleep on, creeping vermin—bedbugs, lice and other insects by the thousands. The nights were fitful and long. Always, there were some of the men up and moving about unable to stand being eaten by bugs. Other would just lie and take it too sick or tired to do anything about it. Nothing could be done anyway about the vermin. Once that sort of thing gets started in a dirty unsanitary camp of thousands of men, there's no correcting it. Sleeping on the hard bamboo slats caused pressure on the kidneys. Men were running to the latrines all night long. Five A.M. when men were just getting up to sleep, it was time to get up. Being sick didn't excuse one from work. Then there was the eternal hunger from which we were never set free. Months and months of that empty feeling, and a man gets jumpy and irritable and mean. It got to be every man for himself at Cabanatuan, we would get so damned hungry we couldn't help ourselves. If a guy got a little extra food somehow he devoured it himself, and he wouldn't share it. The Japs drove us to that.

FOOD OBSESSION

In 1943, we got a few hunks of meat mixed with our rice or vegetable. If one happened to get a hunk, alright. If he didn't he could go without. In 1944 the meat was stopped. Two days a week, we got two tablespoons of fish each—meat on those days. We could tell when we were going to get fish by the smell in camp. It was spoiled and alive with worms. To kill the worms, the cooks baked it before adding it to the rice. We disregarded the worms—ate it and were glad to get it. After all, it was protein of a kind—two kinds. The Lugao too, which was the rice gruel we had for breakfast was full of worms.

We were so obsessed by food that we talked about it all the time. One guy planned to have a kitchen of his own where he could cook all day long when he got back to the states. Some of them actually made up menus that they planned to try out, "How to prepare rice 1000 ways." We talked about food and dreamed about it and thought about it. Our hunger was always with us—like a monster ready to destroy our sanity.

ONE KIND OF DEFENSE

When the nights were too bad and too long, I had a kind of subterfuge, I would pretend that I was in the States going around with my friends doing and enjoying the things that Americans enjoy and do. I would drop in on my Mom and Dad and we would have quite a fine visit together. This wasn't as silly as it sounds. Men who could do that sort of thing kept their sanity.

Letters and packages from home were scarce. The Japs helped themselves to whatever they wanted. We used to read our letter from home over and over until we knew them by

heart. People here will never quite know what those letters and gifts really meant to us prisoners of war. We never felt like we were really living. We knew if this thing went on for too many years, we could never last—so many were dying around us at all times. Still a word from home or a token would bring us back, rouse us and instill determination to take it to the bitter end. Like a tie-up with home that is what those letters and gifts were they made us feel that we were not forgotten and that was a blessed comfort. A picture, a clipping from a paper, a cube of rations, (and we did need these) anything just so it came from home. Though all of it didn't get there, the amount that did helped tremendously.

HELP FROM THE NATIVES

Of course, the Filipinos brought in commissaries, but that was mostly in 1943. They didn't amount to much before or after that. With the ten centavos (5 cents per day) that we received from the Japs, we could buy tobacco and various foods in these commissaries. The officers received forty pesos a month.

For a time the underground system was operating very efficiently. Money would be smuggled in by the civilians from time to time and distributed among us. The Japs could not understand how we could spend sixty thousand pesos in the commissaries when we were only authorized to spend forty. Eventually they caught on, and then they clamped down on us. The Jap has a receiving station mind and he works it overtime. He's a good learner and because of that he thinks he's damn clever. In fact, he thinks there is no end to his cleverness. When it comes to thinking or creating he's out—unless it's some form of cruelty. In everything else, he just apes the world.

From time to time details would be sent in to Cabanatuan to work on the compost, the town of Cabanatuan was about seven miles away from our camp. The Filipinos were eager to help us. They would seize this opportunity to help us—drop a bag of food in passing brush by and hand us a gift of some sort. Sometimes they would be caught and then they would be punished in some sort of cruel way. The punishments didn't stop them. They would be right back at it the next day again.

If the Japs were ever kind, it only foreboded some evil. Charley for instance seemed a pretty good sort for a time. Then without warning he changed completely and became one of the meanest of the guards. In fact, he got so bad that after constant complaint (we were allowed to complain to the Japanese Headquarters though it rarely did any good) he was taken away and put in charge of the prisoners in the duck detail. Incidentally, these ducks were not for our consumption. Shortly before he was removed, he took care of us in good style. I was sitting on the ground taking care of a bad gash in my foot. A few days previous, I had slipped and torn my foot on the barbs in a roll of wire. I had neglected taking care of it. It was getting infected so I got busy. I suppose I should have moved, but to tell the truth I didn't see him coming until he was upon me. Being in his line of stride, he gave me a kick which didn't register very well. It didn't knock me sideways. I suppose this infuriated him because he became violent. He kicked me again and again in the face this time, then knelt on my chest and started pounding me some more yelling the while "You g---d---- American, I teach you to yell about me," and with that he gave my foot a bad twist, kicked over the water I had been cleaning my foot with grabbed up the rags I'd collected and went on his way filling the air with a string of filthy invectives. Sometimes, even though we knew we would be killed for it, we felt it would

be worth it to turn on them and beat them to a pulp. They are awful cowards at heart and don't like to die as much as some people think.

Also they can be bribed; they love money. When we had a few pennies, we could bribe the guards for food some of them. They have no sense of honor and it is impossible to shame them. The thing that turned us was when they would beat us up with our own equipment, our guns that they had confiscated. We would feel like tearing the damn monkeys to pieces. The memory of our indignation would return—when they stripped us of all we possessed, and the old wound would reopen fresh and bleeding, it never really healed. Donald Duck was another cruel man. When he talked it sounded like the quack of a duck. He made such a noise that we always knew he was coming. We tried to keep out of his way. Air Raid wore big round-rimmed glasses. He had one tooth that protruded over his lower lip which made him look vicious. He would snarl around and look for trouble. The better we behaved the crueller he became. He was the meanest of all the guards. One time he tortured one of the prisoners for several hours for no reason at all except that he had taken a dislike to him. He beat him and then made him stand with his arms raised holding heavy rocks in his hands. The prisoner would play out but he would put him back at again as soon as his arms could take it. Beetle Brain was just nor right. He used to boast a lot about his good looks and tell us how fond the ladies were of him. His obscenity was pretty terrible. One of his eyes was crossed in such a way that he was horrid to look at. When Beetle Brain started working a man over, there was no telling what he would do.

CAMP LIFE

A band was organized. There were some fine musicians among the men. The Filipinos brought in an old piano and one of the boys made a drum from a caribou hide there were a few other instruments such as a trumpet, a sax and a trombone. Even though we were dead tired from the slave-driving when that band started up it did something for us. We lived again for a time our tired minds took hold and thought and planned and hoped there would somehow be a way out. There was still music in the world and that was something to live for.

RUMORS WHOLESALE

There was no end to the rumors that circulated in camp. One that made everyone feel pretty good was that Ford had promised all the prisoners of war a car-in fact had them delivered to their homes already. I believed this story so thoroughly that when I wrote home, I said, "Take care of my Ford." As I had not owned one before I left home, my family thought maybe I had "gone loco." General Electric too was going to give each of the men a radio, and Acme Beer was allotting enough beer to the men to keep them well under for the next five years. A big hotel in Florida was going to do things up in fine shape, five each one of us a three months vacation on the Florida beaches. We thought a lot about that because it sounded like a double decker. We knew the beaches would be filled with bathing beauties. One man went so far as to draw pictures of all the different types. We drew for the pictures. He wasn't much of an artist through. He couldn't draw a picture to save his soul. He used the men for models. They looked like a bunch of Amazons when finished. Mine was crosseyed so I gave her to Beetle Brain. There was another type of rumor the kind that could lift a man sky high one day and let him down

the next, if he took the rumor too seriously and a lot of men did. It would be reported that General MacArthur had landed on Mindanao or that the American Navy had sunk the Japanese Fleet. Immediately there would be a lot of excitement in camp. In men's faces could be seen that joy and exhilaration that comes from renewed faith. Then gradually it would develop that the rumor was false. Some of the men lived on these rumors—some of them died on them. As for myself I accepted them much as I had accepted Santa Claus when I was a kid.

TO KEEP BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER

We did everything possible to get extra food. Our diet lacking vitamins, we craved vegetables. The cooks would sometimes throw away the ends of egg plant or casabas if they were tough. We'd pick them up and eat without hesitation—garbage pickers that's what we were. We made hollow wooden heels for our shoes that we could take off easily that we could take off easily and we would fill them with food. We would cut the bottoms from our canteens and cram them with vegetables from the garden or anything that we could get hold of but always sooner or later the Monkeys would catch up with us that meant punishment and a change of tactics. If conditions were bettered in any way in the camp it was through the ingenuity of the prisoners. The Japs would donate nothing nor help us in any way. We planted papaya trees around the camp. They grow and bear fruit very fast and both the tree and fruit can be eaten. The tree is cut into slices and boiled and with a little salt this makes a very tasty dish. The Japs didn't stop this because they felt it would improve the land. We got a few little patches of garden stuff started, but this is what happened to one industrious fellow. We were ordered to keep certain distance from the fence at all times. In fact there were two fences enclosing the other. We were all very careful to obey this ruling because we knew it meant sure death. Joe had a neat little patch of Okra. When it matured, he was very happy and pleased with the product. For weeks he had watched that Okra grow and he planned to treat a few of us. He wasn't going to keep it all to himself. One Sunday morning he stood gathering it preparatory to putting it in some rice for dinner. The first thing we knew a shot rang out and then another. We saw Joe fall to his knees, then to the ground. It was hard to believe, but there he lay dead with the okra clutched in his hand. The prisoners called the Jap officers in to take note of this crime, they could see we were pretty hot about it. It bothered them some when we showed spirit. They didn't like to see Americans mad even though they knew they had power to kill every last one of us. Poor Joe was carried away to be buried and finally the guard said to the chaplain, "Very sorry he got too close to the fence." Of course that wasn't true, for Joe was in his garden at least ten yards away from the fence which was ample distance. They knew too, that we knew differently. It was their old lying policy again, having to invent an excuse for their deliberate crime. They didn't like the looks of things very well (we were all pretty hot under the collar) so the next day they brought in a cariboa to pacify us. Hungry as I was I couldn't eat the dirty meat. I could still see poor Joe, so pleased and happy with his little patch of green stuff that he had tended for weeks, lying there dead with the okra clutched in his hand.

THE LOYAL GUERILLAS

Cabanatuan Prison Camp was established on a prairie-like stretch of country surrounded by mountainous hills. We knew those hills held some guerillas—not many, maybe—but they were sprinkled here and there, and they were making trouble from the Japs from

time to time. We often dreamed of making a break and joining those guerillas. There were a few guns in camp and some knives strange as it may seem, the men, mostly the officers had somehow smuggled them through. These weapons (there were not enough to do us any actual good) gave us an odd little sense of security* freedom to dream though we knew the dreams were futile. We used to talk about making a break—several thousand prisoners turned into guerillas could do a lot of damage. It was a nice little dream. Had we ever attempted a break, there would not have been a single man left to tell the story. Only one prisoner got away while I was there and he was found dead in the rice field later. This prisoner's mind had been deranged for a long time previous, or they probably would have tortured a number of us because of his escape. We never found out whether he died or had been killed by one of the guards. It may seem strange that these weapons in camp were not discovered by the Japs, but they were kept pretty well hidden and then we always knew just about when we would have an inspection. The night before inspection the men who owned weapons could be seen digging holes in which to bury their priceless possessions. It was nicely done. They would smooth over the ground perfectly and the next day the inspectors might walk right over it never realizing what treasures it held. It was a rather funny site watching the men on their knees digging away like a bunch of moles in the semi-darkness and all this only to dig them up again the next day—for what—Dreams.

NO ATHEISTS AT CABANATUAN

I never knew an atheist in Cabanatuan, and I don't believe there were even any agnostics. To some of them God wasn't very clear—they had no opinions, but they believed. The Red Cross supplied a lot of bibles and they meant so much to the men, we would have services on Sundays and on Christmas and Easter Sunday, something special. The chaplains made an effort to have these services, especially the Christmas and Easter ones attractive. It was tough. They had nothing to work with—no candles, no potted lilies—nothing, but just the same when we attended the Christmas Morning Service and the Easter one too, nothing was missing. Someone had built a manger and one of the Chaplains had a doll that was used for the Christ Child, for Easter we gathered the flowers that we had grown and some of the men painted some colorful pictures, it was all very crude but it helped our morale a lot.

FROM PURGATORY TO HELL

It came to an end for us. Cabanatuan and Bilibid. Every week or so around two hundred men were crowded into trucks and taken to Bilibid from Cabanatuan, and a few from the other camps. I was among the last group to go to Bilibid, so I only spent one night there which was lucky for me. For nearly two months those fellows had been on a starvation diet. One half cup of rice twice daily was all they got to eat. They wanted to get out of there and were glad they were going to board a prison ship. We were all glad of the prospect of a change. A prison ship would be rugged we had no illusions about that, but it couldn't be any worse than Cabanatuan or Bilibid, it might even be a little bit better. We presumed we were going to Japan, and though we were not exactly yearning for the sight of cherry blossoms one place was as good as another. So on October 11, 1944 soldiers, sailors and marines—mostly Americans—and including two hundred civilians (1,805 in all) were herded down to a prison ship. All hope fled however when we

reached the ship. During the loading an air raid warning sounded and we were quickly thrown and packed into the hold of this 5000 ton freighter, jammed so close that we couldn't stand decently, let alone sit down and such a stinking place that no one could have been comfortable. Yet there were 1,805 of us crammed together like sardines in a can—not even room for the sick to lie down decently. Men went stark crazy and upon being taken on deck jumped overboard. They were shot by the Japs. After two days traveling, we anchored at islands near the Mindora area—remaining in hiding there for several days. At no time were we allowed on deck. After the second day six hundred of us were taken out of the main and put in a coal bin hold. The oil and coal dust got smeared on our bodies and caused infection. There was no way of stopping it, in the wallow of filth and dirt.

The sick lay piled around on the floor and on the coal—no room to lie down full length. The coal dust worked deeper and deeper into the lesions of these sick men until they cried and prayed to die. The third day they issued each of us a canteen full of dirty water, but it did no good in this desert of thirst. We could have drunk gallons of water. We knew now that there were worse things than Japanese prison camps. Some of the men would have temporary fits of insanity. We would hold them down but we couldn't stop their yelling and screaming, which created greater excitement and panic among the men. After eight days out, we returned to Manila, news filtered down to us from the cooks on deck. Manila had been bombed, a lot of ships had been sunk in the bay. We dared not hope, yet we did—just a chance that the Americans would return—bomb our ship while it lay in the harbor. We hoped and prayed for this—listened and listened—our ears strained to the point of breaking for the sound of wings in the air. They did not come. We were only there long enough to take on rice and water, then sailed north and then northwest to Japan for three days.

More men went out of their minds. Some died beside us the stench from the bodies was terrible to endure. After a time they took these men on decks and disposed of them, but the stench was still there. The dysentery had become so bad the men could control themselves no longer so that the stinking mess we had to exist in grew viler each day. Killing us would have been kinder, but the Japs love torture and dead men can not be tortured. There were few of us left who wanted to live. The horror of thirsty and famished raving men, the hot sweating closeness of putrid bodies, the stench of the offal, the blistering heat of the tropical sun that made this ship a bake oven, the empty stare in the eyes of those who were going crazy, the horrible fear in the eyes of those who had not--fear of losing what little sense they had left. Fourteen days of this unforgettable torture, each day a lifetime. We were now about two days from the coast of Formosa.

THEN THE BLOW CAME

The torpedo hit! But first there was frightened yelling overheard—a crushing of many feet from stern to bow, then back again. We knew from this the Navy was here, but the torpedos had missed. We heard the shooting of the guns on deck, and we held our breath. A strange unearthly stillness prevailed. We crouched together waiting—waiting. Then it came!! The ship buckled in the center and nearly split in two, each half slanting to the water's edge. We could hear a lot of commotion the Japs were yelling and shrieking orders, getting ready to abandon ship. But first they rushed to our hold, cut the rope ladders and closed down the hatches of the main hold, cut the rope ladders and closed

down the hatches of the main hold—trapping us all like rats so we couldn't escape. No. 2 hold was on a higher level and the men could walk up the stairway to the deck. We were all intent on getting out and there was little talking until we saw the Jap cut the rope ladder. Then we all let loose, and did we blast that Son of Heaven who used the knife. The chaplain tried to quiet us and told us not to worry, we would all get out of the hold somehow. Then we saw we could shimmy up the stanchion, so we went five or six of us. When we got to the deck the Japs were all gone. A Jap destroyer had come into view and was dropping depth bombs trying to get the submarine. The Japs had taken to the life boats, rowed to the destroyer and were being taken aboard. We found a rope on deck threw it down and hauled up the severed rope ladder, making it fast so the men could come up. The chaplain was still talking to the men, telling them to take it easy one at a time. His quiet influence calmed the men and kept them from getting panicky as they climbed the ladder. It was surprising how little disorder there was. Some felt that the end had come and appeared to be greatly relieved. They seemed to just want to be left alone and go down with the ship. Freedom for them had come too late. They sat and waited. A few of them smoked cigarettes. Others looked around for food and water—"frisked the ship for chow" Some dived immediately into the water. Many looked for means of support.

A young fellow and myself looked about for something substantial to hold us up in the water. Down at the foot of the stairs we found the one available hatchway cover. We had to struggle to get it to the upper deck, but we made it—threw it overboard and made a move to jump in after it. Then some impulse held us back—we turned a second, looked each other straight in the eye and introduced ourselves. "Listen, bud," he said. "I don't swim, but I'm going to dive over and stick it out as long as I can. If I don't make it home and you do, will you go see my ma and pa, or write them, tell them what you can. They would be glad to see you. They're swell people."

"I sure will," I answered, and will you do the same if I don't make it?" "You bet I will," he smiled and with that we exchanged addresses and then jumped overboard.

We paddled toward the destroyers. We had put on lifesavers so this chap was able to make it with me. A lot of other men were going in the same direction, but the Japs immediately began jabbing us with long poles pushing us under the water and injuring some of the men.

After this we kept our hatchway cover. Several others joined us. I could see this was not so good for our weight was too much. It was dusk now. The sun had gone down. I looked for something more secure. There were hundreds of men every way I looked—some hanging on to crates, some to tin cans, or anything that would float. A sailor paddled by me hanging onto a huge wooden lid. I noticed that both his arms from the shoulders down to the wrists were tattooed. "Hey there," he shouted. "We'll get a good bath out of this—if nothing else." I laughed. "We sure need it." About this time I located a light plank. It was split down the center, but for the time being it would do. I could still see the hatchway cover from where I was it was sinking with so many on it. I kept wondering about my friend. Tough not being able to swim. What chance had he? The sea was getting rough, too. I could see the ship still afloat. The water was close to the deck. It couldn't last long. Darkness came on fast now. A bitter wind blew up and the cold went through me chilling my very blood. It was a dark night—no moon, and the stars were faint and far away. I could see no one, but I could hear men screaming and

calling to one another—someone cried out in pain and the next minute a very large contraption, probably a piece of the ship floated by with about fifty men on it. They were singing and yelling at the same time. Men were going down-now. The sea was getting rougher. It was a strange bereft feeling with so many of my friends drowned all about me, and a great numbness came over me and I felt for a moment as though I would be better off just to let it go. A sinking feeling took possession of me I felt myself slipping. This only lasted a second. I shook it off and began to swim to get my circulation started. I felt weak and could only swim a few strokes. The waves were washing over me and they were loosening my hold on the board. Now the board split in two and I had only half of it. Remnants of prayer that I had as a kid kept coming back to me and ran through my mind over and over. If I could only find something more secure. I peered round and round in the darkness, and saw not far from me a collection of wreckage. I made for this and found when I got there another fellow hanging onto several pieces of bamboo. The first thing he said was, “What kind of chance do you think we have getting out of this?” “Fifty, fifty, I answered, but a wave banged over just then, he didn’t hear me so I yelled again, “fifty, fifty” and then seeing the bamboo strips spread apart. “Let’s get this stuff worked into a raft,” I said. “That’s the stuff, buddy, he yelled. We went to work collecting pieces of wreckage that floated by. We slid them under the bamboo strips. He had tied the strips at one end with a piece of rope. We fastened them tighter, and little by little we had it strong enough to hold us up. We were glad to see each other and decided to stick together the rest of the night. Our life preservers which were made of cotton had long since been discarded. We wished we had put on the cork ones. This was a queer looking raft we had. We would no longer get well lodged upon it than a breaker would wash us off and destroy parts of it. Then we would look for more wreckage to support it—ship brooms, boxes, boards, anything and everything went to make up that float. All night long this went on. It got to be a reflex action as we grew numb with cold. We were sure the ship had long since sunk—that hell-ship of awful memories. The night was pitch black now. We could see only a very short distance away. We saw a boat, or thought we saw one. We started swimming toward it. Our strength failed and the boat disappeared. May be it had not been there anyway. The yelling and screaming had grown fainter and fainter. It had had been a long time since we heard anything but the pounding of the waves. Would we go down too with the rest of them? What would happen to us out here? As we got deeper into the night, the sea grew steadily wilder. Three times we were completely under—the raft partly broken and gone—clutching wildly at nothing. Each time we thought it was the end, then some how we would come back. We couldn’t think clearly now—just struggle blindly. We hadn’t talked for hours. Words were a waste of strength. It was the longest night I had ever known. It was better than lots of nights always the feeling that I was fighting with something clean, something I didn’t mind touching, something I didn’t mind touching, something that belonged to God, the other that we had left far behind was dark and slimy like rats creeping over one’s face.

MIRACLES DO HAPPEN

Strange how the daylight breaks in the south seas, one moment it was all dark, we felt we still had a long time to wait. Then without warning, daylight! Just like that, looking right at us. There was a boat too! Had I gone crazy? It couldn’t be a boat. My mind was deranged. “Say, bud, is that a boat?” “Sure it’s a boat,” he said. “Come on let’s go.”

Three other men were in the boat. They helped us in and we lay exhausted for a time. They had found the boat, one at a time, and they had been in it a good part of the night. We introduced ourselves all around and then discussed what was best to do. The boat belonged to the Japs, had broken loose from where they had fastened it. We were lucky. There was a water keg in it with a few inches of water and a box of hard tack. I had tied a water canteen to my leg and a sack of dried corn. The corn was soaked with salt water, so I threw it away. The water in the canteen we drank and ate some of the hard tack. There were no oars in the boat, but a box had floated by in the night, the boys dragged it into the boat, and (more magic) found it contained a sail. Not so bad. We started rigging the mast, eager to get started. Just then a destroyer loomed up. That was bad. We thought our end had come. Only one chance, we slumped down in the boat, pretending to be dead. The destroyer circled us twice, then once again. We could make out men on deck, one Jap looking at us through glasses. We watched and prayed. We must have looked very dead, because suddenly they left. Relieved greatly we continued our rigging and hoisted the sail. Fortunate for us that the sail wasn't up when they came upon us. We were now close to Formosa, not such a hot spot. A still wind prevailed. Providence seemed to be with us. Hope filled our hearts as we sailed along. About dusk of the second day we sighted a fishing boat. We did not change our course, but approached the first one we came to. They were either Chinese or Japs a fifty-fifty chance, not as good as that even, for we realized the Chinese might turn us over to the Japs for a price. We yelled as we got close. They piled out of the cabin, gaping at us, three or four families men, women and children. It was a big junk, one of the biggest there. It was their home and their living. They lost no time helping us aboard and the bigger boys started to strip our boat of anything movable even chopping it up to get the wood to burn, the rest they sank. The sea was rough, but they were strong active kids and knew how to work.

WE EAT AND HOW!

The women had some hot tea for us. Water was heated, and we bathed and they gave us clean clothes. The women cooked rice for us the Chinese way, so different, and fish, fresh fish right out of the ocean, no worms this time. They gave us paper and tobacco, Chinese tobacco not Jap. We rolled cigarettes and smoked them. We tried to tell the captain of the junk that we wanted to get to the Americans. We mentioned Chiang Kai Chek (sic) and at once he understood. He put up his two thumbs, the victory sign, as we found out later. He got the men to pull up the nets and we were soon on our way, but another meal was coming up. We must have looked hungry. Then they brought us blankets. We rolled up in them and slept on the deck. The sea was so rough, we had to hang onto one another to keep from rolling overboard. When we awakened in the morning, we were anchored a couple of miles from the shore. Another boat came alongside had fresh bananas, and never did bananas taste so good. At the conclusion of the jabbering, we were given to understand that we had better get going or the Japs would be on our tails. They brought a small rowboat from the other junk towed by two coolies, and we go aboard. The big Chink got in with us. When we landed the whole population of the small town gathered around us.

FOOD DRINKS AND SPEECHES

The mayor of the town soon made his appearance and then there were speeches and food and drinks of Chinese wine. They set up quarters for us in a hall. The next day a Chinese general came with an American corporal, a radio man, and now we could talk for we had an interpreter. We told them we wanted to get to an American air base as soon as possible. The next day, we started walking in our under wear, which the captain gave us. We had to return the pants and sweaters, they are too scarce and irreplaceable. We were able to get outfitted as soon as we came to a big city. The firecrackers went off as we marched over the cobblestone street behind a Chinese brass band. Every town we came to there were cake and rice and tea and other things to eat. In the big towns we had banquets and we were entertained by the mayors and other celebrities.

NEWS WENT ON AHEAD OF US

Somehow they were always ready for us. There was no radio or telegraph, but the word got through. Perhaps by runners, there were telephones further up, but none here. It was just one big banquet after another with continuous eating in between. The second day we were carried in sedan chairs, two coolies carrying each of us. When the general caught up with us he arranged to get bicycles peddled by coolies. We rode behind on extensions—"buddy seats." This was hilly country. There were places where the bicycles had to be carried. In one district, we passed through country where bandits were active. We just didn't happen to meet them. We were ready to protect ourselves with a rifle and a couple of ancient pistols. It was doubtful if these bandits even knew there was a war on. We were almost shot by one of the Chinese guards, but we called out the Chinese name for Americans just in time. At last we reached a large city where we could have shoes and clothes made. Then we did the town. We met a number of important Chinese people, both men and women. We toured the shops in the daytime and the night clubs at night. At last we reached a landing field which has since been taken by the Japs. We remained at the base three days, eating American food cooked Chinese style, served on white table cloths with real silverware. No more chop stick.

We boarded a plane homeward and after four days there were the blazing lights of New York City. How we did shout.

At last this was OUR COUNTRY!

This was Mom and Dad—HOME.