For Love of Freedom

Juan Hernandez

FOR LOVE OF FREEDOM
- Japanese Occupation

A Personal Account

By

Juan B. Hernandez

Sponsored by
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Seven-Lakers Post 188

And
VETERANS FEDERATION OF THE PHILIPPINES
San Pablo City Post
City of San Pablo
Philippines
1982

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Foreword

We represent the guerrillas, both the living and the dead, who resisted the enemy's unendurable tyranny during the Japanese occupation; the fighting men who, for love of country and freedom, would rather fall than yield to the unwelcome invaders. We represent the townsmen whose soul did triumph over fear and suffering, which did rise and make effort to help break the chain that fettered our people.

We knew that our underground movement would bring about increasing atrocities, more violent means of barbarity in the hand of the enemy – as narrated in this book. But our movement had to kindle the fire that the flame might blaze into a sweeping conflagration that would bother the enemy possessed with the conscienceless courage of a wild beast, those slaves of the advocates of power who were as senseless as their gun and bayonet. We would rather die in the field of honor that fraternize with the.

Indeed we are much delighted to cause the sponsorship of this book – which recalls and honors the bravery of those who fought for country and freedom. Reading about the sacrifices of these freedom-fighters, today and tomorrow's generation would have a rendezvous with

their countrymen who bled and suffered for love of country and freedom.

Our beloved leader, Brig Gen. Agustin Marking, did reflect our thoughts and feelings more aptly when he said that the youth should read this book, - “if only to inculcate in them that no country can be great without men without men who, in trying times, chose to lead others at the cost of their lives to secure our country from fear and make her free . . . to make them (the youth) realize that there were men who knew how to die for the cause of freedom.”

May the legacy of these freedom-fighters be “the inheritance of a great example.”

Elpidio M. Briñas
Post Commander
The American Legion
Seven Lakers, Post 188
San Pablo City

THE AUTHOR

Juan B. Hernandez, dean of the Laguna College has been included in the list of a dozen Worthy Sons of San Pablo, past and present, selected by the executive committee of the City Public School Teachers Association for publication in its 1961 STAA souvenir program. Thus writes Angelita M. Pulgado, association president, about him: "When Juan B. Hernandez was voted Most Outstanding Civic Leader at the City's foundation day in 1959, the local citizenry only paid tribute to a very deserving son. A 'First' in many socio-civic movements, his multi-awards include Most Outstanding San Pablo Jaycee; the Rotary's Most Outstanding Service to the Community; the Red Cross Most Outstanding Leadership and Meritorious Service; the YMCA Movement in the Community. Popular to and well-loved by his students as dean and professor of the Laguna College, he also writes when occasion demands. Educator, civic leader, public speaker, traveler, writer, a man of many talents!"

In the December 18th (1962) issue of the Coco-Rotaria, official organ of the Rotary Club of San Pablo City, Dr. Archimedes P. Brion, quondam club president and perennial civic leader in the community, writes in

his regular column: “If the most outstanding civic leader in the community for all time will be selected, Juaning Hernandez will get the honor uncontested. His record will speak for itself: founder or one of the initiators of Jayceeism, Rotary, Red Cross and YMCA. This frail-looking educator is a human dynamo when it comes to organizational activities; indeed, one wonders at the inexhaustible resources at his command when he sets his mind to undertake a civic project. When he works, time stands still: the thought of sleep and food becomes academic. It is indeed a blessing to our generation that one like Juaning has been born during our times.”

PREFACE

For some people in other lands the Second World War was just a bad dream, with nothing more severe than blackouts and headlines about far-off places. For our townsmen it was a stark and fearsome reality the terror of which had reached down into the details of our daily lives. So it was with our family which had been living in modest comfort until war come stampeding to our hometown.

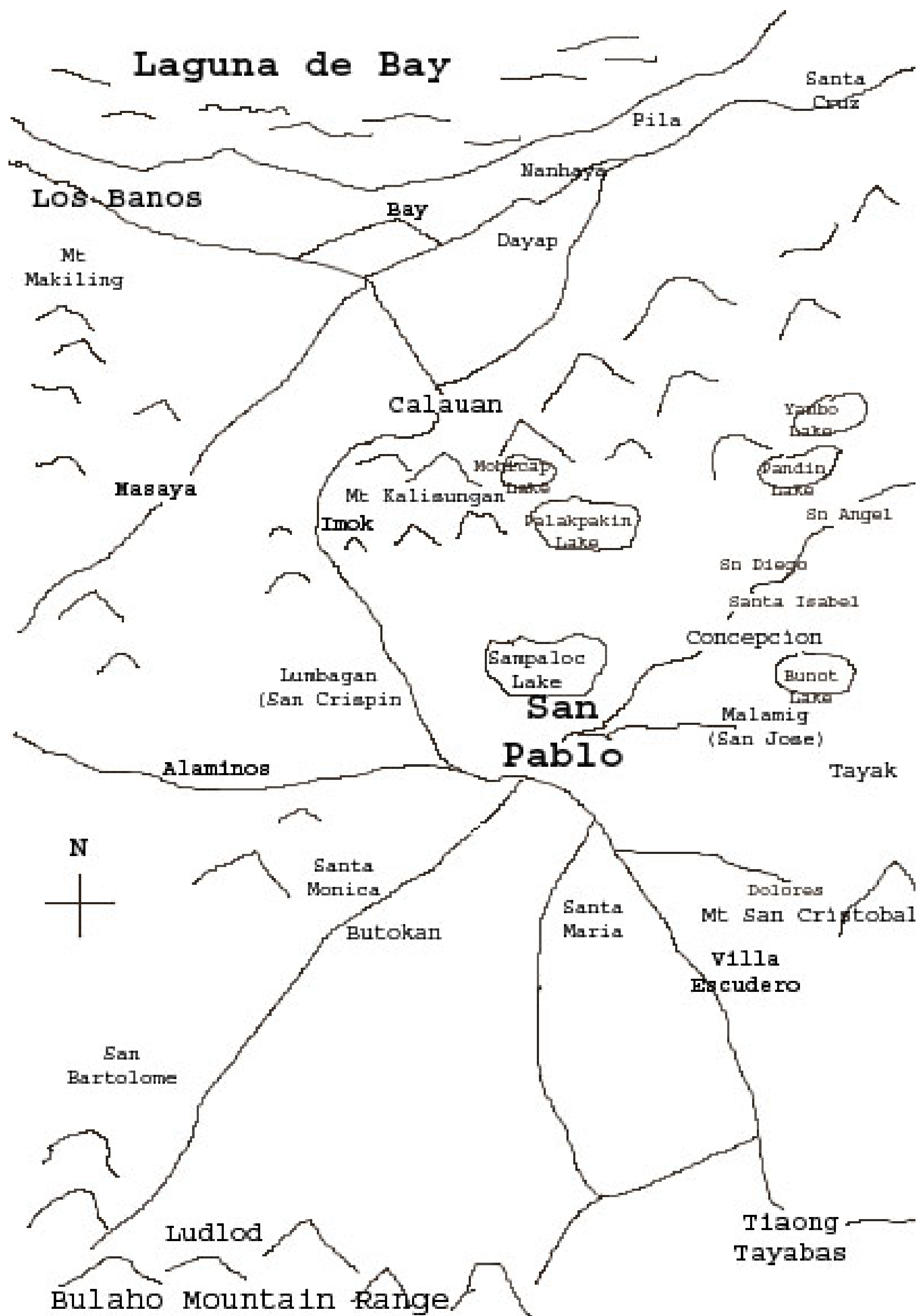
This story recounts those black years when the Japanese soldiers overran the hometown, until they were finally forces out by the victorious march of General MacArthur's forces. From the time that Japanese bombs crashed down on Christmas Day 1941, the life of our family was one of flight, terror and oppression as we sought for some measure of security in the face of continued Japanese pressure.

Indeed this personal account is more than the story of a single family. It is also the story of the hometown's entire non-combatant population, of the dread and privation into which they had been plunged during the war years. It is, likewise, the story of guerrillas who did not run short of courage in their fight against the enemy.

This piece does portray the grim horror of war which had become a brutal industry of mass murder, a violent madness that had encouraged man to kill another man who could have been a friend. It is a picture of the non-combatant population being subjected to slow death by starvation or sudden demise by bombs and machine-gun fire. Ironically, it is a portrait of the tragic contrast between people of importance who remained in safety with their increasing power, prestige and profit, while those they had drugged with lies were unfeelingly sent to death.

May future generations be spared from living through the experiences recounted here, but rather that they profit by them.

_ j.b.h.



Laguna de Bay
Santa Cruz
Pila
Nanhaya
Los Banos
Bay
Dayap
Mt Makiling
Calauan
Masaya
Mt Kalisungan
Imok
Palakpakin Lake
Sn Angel
Sn Diego
Santa Isabel
Concepcion
Sampaloc Lake
Lumbagan (San Crispin
San Pablo
Malamig (San Jose)
Tayak
Alaminos
N
Santa Monica
Butokan
Santa Maria
Dolores
Mt San Cristobal
Villa Escudero
San Bartolome
Ludlod
Tiaong Tayabas
Bulaho Mountain Range

PRELUDE TO WAR'S MOB-MADNESS

I could hardly believe it . . . . I was awakened early that morning of 8 December 1941 by excited talk outside my room. I tried to make out what it was all about as I remained comfortably in my bed and heard Father telling the family that Japanese planes had bombed some parts of the Philippines.

Could it be true?

It might have been idle talk which Father heard from passersby, mere effect of the recent blackout practices and the USAFFE's brisk preparation in the country of late. For there had been reports that an open armed conflict might break out between Japan and the United States, subsequently embroiling the Philippines. There had been idle talk.

Idle talk! I muttered drowsily, and once more pulled my blanket about me. I closed my eyes so that I might call back the dream which had passed away at its pleasantest moment.

But the neighbor's radio set had been turned on already and an excited voice was zealously broadcasting

something that seemed of importance. It was cautioning the people to remain calm in the face of emergency. Emergency? The word stuck in my throat. I rose up and hurriedly went to our radio set. The newscast was over. I dialed another station, and I was on time. This announcer's voice was excited too. Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japanese planes shortly before dawn! Davao was also bombed, and Camp John Hay, and Clark Field! That which I thought to be mere idle talk only a while past was true. War had come to the Philippines!

A casus belli was found at last, as it had been a number of times in the chapters of history, to serve as a welcome excuse for war.

"It's really true!" Father ejaculated.

"Yes," I said, almost absent-mindedly. "America and Japan are now at war. And the Philippines cannot help but be involved."

"Do you think the Japanese can come here?" Mother wanted to know.

"We cannot tell, Mother. But if they try to come, MacArthur is prepared to give them a hot reception."

I looked out of the window. There was already an unusual bustle and movement of the people in the

street. A small group had gathered in front of our cousin Victorio Cortez's bakery a few houses away, and anther coterie seemed to have been engaged in lively conversation at Teodoro de la Mar's barbershop. Many of the menfolk had gone out of their houses accosting hurrying passersby, presumably to seek confirmation of the news they had just heard.

We took our breakfast as if nothing extraordinary had happened, but Mother must be thinking of our sister Laura. She married a young man from Bulacan only a few months past and they had been living in Manila where the husband Pablo M. Capistrano held a government job as mining, geological and metallurgical engineer of the Bureau of Mines. Now war had come, and they were away from home.

"After breakfast you go to the Post Office and wire Laura and her husband to come home," Mother told me. "Your father we'll go to market to buy some canned food while Luz and Rebecca will help me pack some essentials. We have to be prepared for anything that may happen."

"Where shall we go?" Rebecca, our youngest sister , asked rather innocently.

"To the mountain," I told her with feigned seriousness, "to hide from the Japanese."

"Why?" the little girl wanted to know.

"Because the Japanese will cut your head if they see you," Father explained, "and drink of your blood. They like the blood of little ones like you."

She was hushed up, and we laughed.

"I wonder what a Japanese soldier looks like." Rebecca became more curious.

"Of course, he looks like Akibi," said Luz, the eldest of my three sisters. "He also must be slit-eyed, bow-legged, short and yellow. They are countrymen."

"The only difference is that a Japanese soldier has gun and bayonet," I said, "while Akibi has ice cream and raisin pie."

"Don't forget to buy the medicine for our first-aid box," Luz suggested. "We may have a need for it."

"And if you will see our cousin Conrado (Aquino), please remind him about the book he promised to lend me," requested Rebecca.

"You can still think of books when bombs are already falling?" chided Luz.

"What do you want me to do cry?" the other shot back. "Stop it!" Mother said, now getting excited. "There are many things to do other than to argue."

The inhabitants were aroused already. There was a big rush to market for foodstuff and the like which had soared in prices. Some had started carting their belongings, clothing and furnishings, to nearby villages for safe-keeping. Others had started digging trenches in their yard to serve as air-raid shelter. The greater number, however, seemed at a loss as to what to do. They simply moved about with queries on their lips, sometimes poking fun at those digging trenches in their yard.

"Where is the fire?" they would ask jocularly the men on the cart.

"What will you bury in there, a dead pig or your own selves?" they would tease the sweating trench-diggers.

"We shall bury the Japs and you," was the laughing retort.

Everywhere were groups of people, conversing, undoubtedly discussing the sudden turn of events. In

shops and in stores where there was a radio set tuned in loudly were bigger groups of intent and enthusiastic listeners. And near every newsstand were more people waiting restlessly for the belated morning paper. All thirsted for news and more news about what was going on abroad.

When I reached the Post Office, I came upon several more, each one eagerly desirous to be in touch with loved ones away from home. Rush letters and telegrams were being sent, all purporting the same theme: "Come home at once." Telegrams to be sent were already piled high, and more and more were being added from time to time. The postmaster occasionally snatched a few minutes from his work to explain that military and official communications had to be given priority for obvious reasons, and there were scores of them.

"It will take days before your wire could reach its destination," said the postmaster to the crowd outside. But every one was settled on taking a chance, hoping to reach loved ones away from home even if only with a few heartening words.

While I waited for the jostling crowd at the Post Office window to thin out, I loitered around from one group to another and listened to the conversations going

on. Indeed they were all agreed that what the Japanese did was down-right treachery, that such a dastardly act must have been the result of Germany's pressure successfully affected through diplomatic machinations in order to divert the attention of the United States from Europe to the Far East. But they were all confident in America's ultimate victory, in her power to defeat the enemy easily. There really was no discussion going on, no arguing. Instead an evident re-strengthening of their faith in America had clothed their every utterance.

"Only cowards hit their opponent at the back," said one. "That was exactly what the Japanese did."

"I don't believe they were Japanese pilots who bombed Pearl Harbor and some parts of the Philippines," opined another. "As I understand, the Japs are a short-sighted people, and they easily get dizzy. Besides, I don't believe Japanese-built planes can fly at such a high altitude. It must be their German instructors pilot
ing German-built planes that did the initial job for the Japs."

"They will pay for it just the same. In a month or two all their cities will be razed to the ground by America's giant flying fortresses, and then they will be begging for mercy."

“They may attempt a landing in the Philippines?”

“That’s one thing MacArthur won’t allow. They will be routed like swine’s right on the beaches, if they will be foolish enough to make landing attempts.”

“What is MacArthur and his U.S. Army here for, if they will not be able to defend our country?”

“We shall help them with our bolos and knives,” bantered another. “The Japs are afraid of stab wounds.”

“Ah! Let them come and we shall show them how we deal with bastards.”

“No bother. Ina few weeks this will be over, and we should allow no more Japs in this country.” And so on and on . . .

It took more than one hour before I got my chance to send a telegram to Laura. I wondered if it would reach her but I also hoped like the others. From the Post Office I went to the drug store to buy medicine for our first-aid box.

We experienced the first real blackout that fateful December night. We had no shades for our bulbs so we

had to turn off all the lights, thus totally darkening the house. It was so dark we had to grope in search for something by feeling with our hands and feet for we dared not strike a match or light a candle. We seated ourselves near the window. It was not too dark outside because of the starlight faint though it was. We talked of the war and other things. We waited for something which we did not want to come yet might come forcibly. Occasionally, air-raid warden and volunteer guards passed by to see that the inhabitants observed blackout regulations. But unlike in previous nights, this first real blackout was strictly observed. Not even the lit end of a cigarette could be seen in the darkness.

Still I hardly could believe it. War had come to the Philippines!

The next morning a neighbor asked if we slept well the night before. They did not. They simply were

frightened by the darkness and by the disturbing thought that Japanese planes might come suddenly and shower us with bombs and machine-gun fire. But Mother laughed; she said that every one in the family slept well. I could not tell if my folks really slept well, but it took hours before I could. For my mind was filled with unhealthy imaginings.

After breakfast Father and I went to the town hall to volunteer as air-raid wardens. The excitement of the day before seemed to have calmed down already though there still was the heavy purchasing in the market of prime commodities of household belongings to nearby villages. The menfolk still continued to flock where radio sets were tuned in loudly in order to listen to recent dispatches, and small groups still could be seen in street corners, conversing. They were in high spirit, perhaps born out of their faith in America's power to defend and protect the country. For theirs was the passionate intuition that should gather strength to keep alive the faith that was the "antiseptic of the soul."

Father and I did not find it hard to get appointed as air-raid wardens for the town had a great need for them. When we left the town hall late that morning, we already had with us our appointment papers, instructions, and armbands whereon was written: Air-raid Warden.

Later in the day evacuees from Cavite and Manila began to arrive with their bare necessities, and the local Civil Emergency Administration (CEA) unit had its hands full. Tales of horror were prominently written on their faces, and the inhabitants were generous and accommodating. Many immediately offered to share their homes with the new arrivals.

The next day we decided to move to our village of Butokan so that we might offer our dwelling to the CEA for occupancy by the evacuees. One of our farm-hands, Julian, carted our belongings which consisted of a few pieces of furniture, a few bags of essential cloth-ing, some baskets of provisions, kitchen and table uten-sils, a dozen fowls from our poultry, our pots of roses and some orchidaceous plants. We could have brought more, but the little house of Fabio Ortega, another farmhand, might not be strong enough to hold more.

Every morning, however, I walked the two kilome-ters to town to find out in the Post Office if Laura had answered my telegram, to get fresh news from both the radio and the belated morning paper, and to feed our doves and poultry. But I had to return in the afternoon because I now had a duty to perform as air-raid warden in the village where we were staying. And there were those villagers to await my coming for news and more news. I narrated to them all the recent dispatches I heard from the radio, every bit of rumors I got from other people, and translated the content of the belated morning paper. For only then would they feel relaxed and pass the night with less worries and misgivings.

Once, while I was in the Post Office waiting for an answer from Laura, An American officer dropped in to send a cable to his wife somewhere in Michigan. He

wrote: All's well don't worry love. Then he went to our cousin Meliton Brion's drug store to have his knees treated for some bruises he claimed to have sustained in a motorcycle accident. A curious crowd had gathered already.

"Damn those Japs!" snarled the USAFFE officer. "We shall finish them in six weeks – six months, at most."

He laughed scornfully.

"Any reinforcement coming?" I asked.

"Yes," empathetically. "Reinforcement coming. More men, more guns, more planes, to teach those Japs a lesson."

The treatment over, he rose up and looked around, then making the victory sign with his forefinger and middle finger, he assuringly: "Filipinos, cheer up!"

The crowd answered him with many a thank you, and as he started his motorcycle there was an outburst of sonorous "Mabuhay!"

That afternoon when I returned to the village, I told the villagers able the cable of the American officer to

his wife somewhere in Michigan and about his prediction, and they were all delighted. They became more confident, and their faith in America grew stronger still.

Six months, at most, the villagers counted. By June it would be over. By June there perhaps would be a victory parade in Manila. By June, Japan, the one and only threat to our country's freedom, would be a harmless nation of wreck and ruin. Six months, at most! We could endure till then.

I sent two more telegrams to Laura. No answer. I asked Mother to allow me to go to Manila and even as far as Bulacan, but she would not allow me. And so we consoled ourselves with the assurance of the American soldier that it would be over in six months that by June

we would be seeing our absent sister and her husband again.

Eventually passenger trips, both by rail and by bus, became more and more irregular and the telegraph service more and more busy with military and official communications. Then news of landings and more landings by the Japanese Imperial Forces in the Philippines reached us even in the village. More news came about the fierce battle raging somewhere along the Tayabas coasts. More planes flew overhead with threatening fre-

quency. More lorries laden with both American and Filipino soldiers passed by; more tanks, more guns. More people left the town for the villages. More stores were closed. More idle talk came into being. More conjectures. More excitement.

War had come to the Philippines, at last! War – that ugly spectacle, that nefarious act of violence, that barbarity which never could be refined! War – that crime against humanity, when man would kill another man who could have been a friend and bring about a hundred thousand griefs! War – that event contrary to the welfare of people and catastrophic to human progress, that event which always ends with the stupidity of victory and the vindictiveness of defeat! War – so easy to start, so difficult to stop!

BOMBS FALL ON CHRISTMAS DAY

CHRISTMAS, 1941, found us in Fabio Ortega's little house in Butokan, a village two kilometers away from the town. We had breakfast already, but there were no little children to wish us Merry Christmas. We looked around and about our farmhand's dwelling; there was not a thing to remind us that Christmas had come.

There were no curtains and draperies to suit the season's atmosphere, no fruitery with grapes and oranges and apples and walnuts, no pile of Christmas cards and beautifully-wrapped boxes received from close friends and prosperous relations, no Christmas tree, no children. Shortly after we had awakened we greeted each other in the family, but our voices seemed hollow and mocking. For war had come to the Philippines!

But war or no war, we had to make the most of Christmas which comes but once a year, and which to us is the most blissful of all holidays. We had to celebrate it the heartiest way we could. And so my two sisters, Luz and Rebecca, and I changed into better attire, and after asking our parents for their Christmas blessing, we took leave to go to town to attend the Christmas worship in our chapel. We, however, promised to return

by noontime so that we might partake of our Christmas dinner together.

On our way to town we were recipients of many a Christmas greeting shouted from wide-open windows by villagers inviting us to drop in awhile and have a taste of their rice cake. We returned the season's best wishes and promised to drop in on our way back. Then we invited them to go with us to town and attend the Christmas worship in the chapel, but they told us jokingly that they did not want to because rumors had it that the town would be bombed on Christmas Day. Idle talk, we said, and chided them for being unchristian enough to have so little faith in the Child born in Bethlehem. But the Japanese are not Christians, the replied. And we laughed with them.

Bombs to fall on Christmas Day? It could not be, it must not be. For on this day was born a Babe who was the Incarnation of infinite compassion, who would end all fears and strifes, and strengthen hope and faith; who would transform hate into brothership, and ring out the peace and oneness of mankind. It could not be. For on this day was born the Babe who would inspire every one to address his fellow being: "You are my brother!"

It was a pleasant morning walk to town. The soft December breeze was gently refreshing, and heart-warming were the Merry Christmas greetings of the villagers who bid us drop in for something to eat. The children that played in the yard of their village homes were not in their best attire, but in their faces had been reflected that ineffable brightness which only the joy of Christmastime could bring. Even the trees and the creatures along the road seemed to carol the undying song.

The worship service had not begun when we arrived in the chapel, and there were less than twenty worshiping souls present. We did not see a single kin and we were grieved, for it was the chapel built by our maternal grandfather and which the old man dearly valued till the end of his earthly days.

There were no flowers in the altar, and Rebecca hurried to pluck some clusters at a nearby garden. Luz dusted, and then played a few notes at the organ. The tune was still solemn and sweet, but our cousin Flor, the organist, was not there with her choir. There were only six children to attend the Sunday School, and there was no Christmas tree. No pastor had come from Manila to officiate, and most of the elders were nowhere. For war had come to the Philippines!

Nonetheless, we decided to make the most of our Christmas worship, war or no war. Though there were not many of us, we worshiped the Holy Babe that was born in a Manger some two thousand years ago. We sang hymns is praise of Him, we studied His Words, we prayed to Him.

It was the first Christmas worship held on Christmas Day, for blackout rules had prevented us from celebrating it on Christmas Eve as we were wont to do in the past. It was the first Christmas worship held without little children in robes of white singing the Christmas carol, the first Christmas worship without a lovely decorated Bethlehem at the foot of the altar, the first Christmas worship without a big Christmas tree bedecked with silver star and glittering tinsel, profusely laden with toys and candies and apples, and with innocent, eager eyes lovably looking on. It was the first Christmas worship when not less than twenty worshiping souls attended. Yet as we left the chapel we did experience the lightness of heart, that buoyancy of spirit, that beatific feeling which rarely comes in the lives of men.

Before we returned to the village, my sisters and I agreed that we would first go to market to buy some fruit and chocolate candies for the village children

might come to our dwelling to wish us Merry Christmas. As we passed by the house of our cousin Priscilla Lacsam, she enjoined us to drop in awhile. We would have excused ourselves but for our uncle ANTONIO Penaloza who was in the house. The business manager of the Liwayway magazine, he had a cheque for me representing payment for my Tagalog translation of Aesop's Fables which was then being serialized in that vernacular magazine with the biggest circulation in the country. Besides, he was a Manila resident and we rarely met him on Christmastime. And now was our opportunity to ask for his blessing, and so we tarried.

We are in the midst of our hearty exchanges of greetings and solicitation when we heard the roar of approaching planes. Uncle Tonio said that they sounded like Japanese planes. "That's the same roar we heard when Nichols Field was bombed, he said.

Our uncle and I were about to go out of the house to ascertain the identity of the passing planes when suddenly a dreadful succession of thundering thud, earthquake-like and horrible, dinned our ears and rocked the very foundation of the house and the earth itself.

"Lie down! Lie Down!" shouted Uncle Tonio, and all of us obeyed him instantaneously. We three our

selves on the cement floor and lay prostrate on our breasts and bellies as we softly cried to God to save us from the pandemonium of terror which had come suddenly upon us.

"My God, my God! Save us, save us!" we supplicated weepingly, while the thundering rumble of falling bombs attended by the deadly, rattling fury of machine-gun fire dinned our ears.

We saw one of the bombs directly hit the house of our cousin Barbara Belulia Mariano across the street, and it was rent asunder. Almost simultaneously we felt that another bomb hit the house of Mauro Dayan immediately north side of our cousin Priscilla's house, and still another hit Genaro Capulong's at the south side. These three bombs destroyed almost everything at our cousin's house which had been so rocked it would have crumbled had it been built of stone instead of wood. But we had no time to be alarmed, much less to despair. Ours was only to shout our supplication to God to save us from this sudden terror. The bombing continued, grumbling louder than the bolts of hell.

Moments later the bombing ceased, and the damnable machines flew away, leaving behind flaming scene of destruction and death. But the horror wrought by

those wicked monsters, the deafening detonation of falling bombs, an the shivering rain of machine-gun bullets only gave way to the weeping cry of affrighted women and children, and the fearful shouts of excited men; they only gave way to the mournful agonizing of the wounded and the dying.

We rose up. My two sisters made move to run away when they saw the neighboring houses already in flame and the street littered with fallen electric wires; when they saw men, women, and children, many of whom were bathed in blood, running, shouting at their loved ones, weeping. But I held them and said: "Not yet, not yet! They might come back, they might come back!"

"You're hurt," I exclaimed when I saw Luz's right palm bleeding profusely. I got my handkerchief and bandaged it at once. Meanwhile, Rebecca complained of pain in her left thigh. She raised her dress and an ugly bleeding wound showed itself. I immediately grabbed her belt of linen and hurriedly tied the wound with it. Then, after seeing that no one was hurt in our cousin Priscilla's family, and after bidding our uncle Tonio a hurried goodbye, we rushed out into the street.

We leaped over electric wires and fallen pieces of wood, making a vain effort not to look at the hideous sights along the way – at a body with a severed head, at

another with a shattered brain and intestine out, at a leg caught by a hedge of violet, at a slice of human flesh glued against the concrete wall of an already burning house. We were accosted by the pitiful sights of the wounded and the dying and were forces to tarry here and there to aid them a little in their dolorous plight, to mumble a word of cheer, to bandage their wounds. Not once had Luz and Rebecca torn their dresses to bandage a wounded arm or leg, not once had we guided bloody ones to what we opined would be a safer place until the first-aid and hospital personnel could come. In times of peril, fear could afford to take pity and courage must be tender when most needed. This sudden terror of flight should not alarm good feeling for the distressed ones.

We looked back once, twice, thrice, but only saw dark, ominous clouds of smoke besieging the sky, while angry flames raged groaningly as they continued to devour all things along its path. Indeed they were scenes too terrible for the sight.

We ran on and on until we reached the outskirts of the town. Then we stole beneath coconut groves and shady bowers, we crossed wire fences and jumped wide ditches, we chose the densest and most obscure spot, because like the others we did not want to dare the open road for fear that the Japanese planes might return any moment.

We were overjoyed when we saw Father half-running to meet us. He was weeping as he hugged my two sobbing sisters. That was the first time I saw him cry, and he did so like a child. It took time before he could speak. “I was thinking were I could find the dead bodies of my children,” he finally said, still panting, as he supported the weakened form of Luz. “You’re all injured?” he exclaimed on seeing the smears of blood on our clothes.

“Just bruises,” I replied, “cause perhaps by broken glasses and small pieces of wood.”

Reaching our farmhand’s house, Luz and Rebecca ran to Mother who caressed them endearingly with an almost insane kind of joy. “My children, my children,” she mumbled repeatedly.

While Mother was treating my sisters’ wounds, she discovered other injuries. A thin piece of flying splinter must have pierced through Luz’s right palm; luckily it did not hurt the bone. Luz and Rebecca’s legs and arms were pricked and scratched here and there by minor bleeding bruises caused by sharp stones and pointed pieces of wood and broken glass hurled by the explosion when the nearby houses were destroyed by bombs. But the thigh wound of my youngest sister was rather big. I could not help feeling guilty to see my two sisters

bear all the injuries while I, the big brother, did not sustain even the faintest scratch.

The treatment of their wounds over, my two sisters took turn in narrating to Mother, Father, and some neighbors about our rare Christmas experience. I had wanted to contribute my share but I simply could not. I did not feel like talking. I did not want to think. Instead I went to the window and smoked. For I had become heavy with thoughts oppressing both body and soul, thoughts which I would want to reject but could not.

Then Mother coaxed us to take a few biscuits and a cup of coffee, for it was already past three o'clock that afternoon. But the biscuits could pass hardly our throats even with the aid of hot coffee. In fact, we did not seem to feel hungry. That which we saw only in the movies and read in the paper as having happened in china and Europe had happened to us. We knew it had happened, yet we hardly could believe it. War had come to the Philippines, had reached even us!

Outside there was an unending parade of frightened ones, carrying their bare necessities with them in their hurry to find a place they believed would be safe to stay in until the dread may be over. The women carried their loads on their heads, the men had theirs slung against their shoulders, while the little children that trailed be-

hind hugged little bundles with them. They chatted nervously about the many dead and wounded ones, and about the big fire still raging in town.

I went down and accosted neighbors and relations to make inquiry, only to learn that the hospital personnel had found so far not less than a thousand dead and wounded ones, and already among crumbled ruins of concrete walls, charred wooden posts, and corrugated iron roofings of burned houses. From them I also learned that our house and the houses of all our kin on mother's side were not spared by the flame, for we all lived on the same street.

I thought of my library, of my memory chest where valued letters and portraits of friends at home and abroad were kept. I thought of the piano of Luz, of Laura's little pharmacy, of Rebecca's collection of foreign coins, of Father and mother's pictures when they were married, and ours when we were young, of our playthings of childhood days, of our Christmas tree,
they were no more, those trifling items more dearly valued than diamonds rare.

I thought of the wounded and the dead, and the orphans and widows left behind, of the many unfortunate evacuees from Manila and Cavite who left their homes hoping to finds safety in a place that only became their Calvary. I thought of the heathens who rode in their

winged, wicked machines of death and brought untold misery to thousands of innocent non-combatants on Christmas Day. I did not want to think, but still I could not help it.

O war! Thou hell-fashioned scourage of mankind!

I asked Mother if I might go to town to find out what could have happened to some of our kin who had not left town and to check on our poultry and our doves' house, but she was loud and firm against my leaving the village. I just sat down on the step of our farmhand's house and smoked as I stared blankly at the seemingly unending parade of frightened ones carrying bundles and other things on their heads and shoulders, some with smears of blood still on their clothes.

Father and I then decided to dig a trench in the back yard to serve as air-raid shelter. We had started hardly when suddenly some planes came roaring menacingly from somewhere. We could not see them very well through the dense leaves of trees, and we thought a dogfight had ensued between the enemy and defending planes. This frightened us, and we scurried away for shelter under the protecting folds of bigger trees. The planes soared up and swooped down with deadly terror, while we, depending on Him and the sheltering trees for protection, waited in breathless silence. It seemed eter-

nity indeed, this waiting for the apparently fighting planes to fly away.

When they had gone, we were so weakened by the dreadful anxiety over the misfortune which those death-messengers could have brought that it was difficult for us to leave our hiding place. We only laughed when we learned later that they were not enemy and defending planes engaged in deadly combat, but enemy planes alone that came to revisit and perhaps take pictures of the destruction that they had caused.

Father and I resumed our digging pausing only occasionally for a cup of coffee and a biscuit or two. We dug on and on, heedless of the flood of sweat that bathed us and of the hardening pain that our palms endured. Once in a while, neighbors and relations dropped in at the house to have their wounds or bruises treated, and to tell more stories of the destruction and death in town. But Father and I went on with our digging. This is to bury all the evils and devils that infest this earth, I wanted to shout, but I could not.

There was a moon that night. For the first time in my life I wished the moon would not shine. The quiet bliss which its calm beams used to bring in yesternights was all gone, for now it only held a fear that it might be our betrayer to the enemy. Its silvery presence only made prominent the gray outline of the village raid and the

roofs of village houses as though to betray us. For enemy planes were rumored to be coming back on or before ten o'clock to bomb and raze to the ground not only the whole town but the adjacent villages as well.

Father and I went about the village that night to see that everyone observes blackout regulations. Every villager did as could be expected. Not even a lit end of cigarette could be seen, though almost every home was still awake as proved by subdued voices indistinctly audible in that grim silence of night. When we returned home, the family was still awake. In fact, everyone was under the house awaiting the set of the moon, convinced that enemy planes might come any hour that night.

While waiting for the moon to set, Luz and Rebecca had time to ponder over our unhappy Christmas experience, and the thought of it struck them with a feeling of creeping fear. The rustle of coconut leaves with every gust of wind made them jump excitedly, thinking that they were machine-gun sounds. The metallic noise produced by a tin can dropped from the kitchen of a neighbor's house sent Rebecca clinging to Mother's neck. For our dreadful Christmas experience had become one of accumulated horror freezing the breast and harrowing the very marrow of the bones. For the first time we found ourselves near death's door, and we were not in love with it.

Moments later, as if consequent of a devotee's prayer, dark clouds besieged the moon. Then it began to drizzle. The dusty village road and the galvanized iron roofs of bigger dwellings blended in hue with the darkness around. Father suggested that we go up the house. The enemy planes would not see the village anymore, he said.

Mother spread the mat on the floor and we lay down. We were all tired to sleep, but only Rebecca succeeded. We still seemed to be waiting for something we did not want to come, yet might come forcibly. Rebecca moaned occasionally, and so Mother hugged her tightly. Luz was quiet and unmoving; I knew that she was still awake. Father would not lie down; he sat by the window. My eyes were closed, though I kept turning from one side to another.

Unlike in previous years when Christmas bells answered each other from chapel to chapel in the dear hometown, this time deadly cannon balls kept replying to one another with the terrifying message of destruction and death.

MAKE HASTE, STAY NOT

It was still dark the next day when Father and I resumed our digging. We just took a cup a coffee, FOR THE HOUR NEVER HAD BEEN SO PRECIOUS. Only the unwelcome frequency of the passing planes interrupted us, for then we had to help Mother and Sisters scamper away for shelter. No one could tell what those heartless heathens might do. We finished our digging late that afternoon. We had dug an L-shaped trench, bug enough for the family and some neighbors or relations who might be around when enemy planes flew over.

Our having an air-raid shelter made us feel that we were safe from the enemy, at least, from above. With concern to the invading land force, which had effected already a landing along the Tayabas coasts east of us, we were still confident that they would not reach us because reports received in the village claimed that they were being routed by the defending USAFFE, and that the distant cannonade we had been hearing since early in the morning came from the artillery unit of the defending force.

We had a hearty supper and hoped to sleep well that night to make up for the sleepless hours spent the night before. The passing by of homeless non-combatants

whose houses in town had been burned down the day before had subsided, and the terror of that tragic Christmas Day bombing had been shoved almost to the back of our mind as a nightmare which we did not want to experience even in a dream. The excitement seemed to have been over. Even the moon which shone belatedly did not appear to be a betrayer anymore, but looked like the compassionate moon which used to guide stray travelers on lonely nights.

We lay down on the mat and huddled ourselves together as though for comfort and protection. We anticipated a blissful rest despite the ache of our muscles and joints because of the day's strenuous toil. The angry rumble of cannons was getting louder, nearer. Its tremor sometimes shook the wall of the house and made it creak. Still we remained unafraid, believing it to have been caused by the USAFFE's bigger artillery pieces. Our faith in the power of the defending army to check the advance of the invading dorde and emboldened a confidence sufficient to conquer fear.

Midnight came. Our womenfolk had not lost themselves in sleep after hours of family chat. Father was sat by the barely open window so that the glowing little ember of his cigarette might not show out. I was pulling my blanket about me in preparation for a good sleep when suddenly we heard voices along the road.

"Wake up, wake up!" said an excited voice below the window. She was Aunt Maria, my Mother's childless widowed sister.

Our women were immediately roused. Rebecca cried at once, and I held her in my arms, saying: "Courage, courage, young lady."

We did not have to ask Aunt Maria what had happened for she was telling us already. The police she said that the Japanese soldiers had broken through and were now in Candelaria, a town less than twenty kilometers away. We had to move at least five kilometers away from every passable road, for the invaders hoped to breakfast in town the following morning.

The village was now alive and excited, confused, and frightened voices. The news had reached the villagers, and everyone was making hurried preparation to leave at once. Mother lighted a wick lamp and started packing a few baskets of essential clothing and foodstuff with the help of Luz, while Rebecca attended to a few kitchen and table utensils. Father, on the other hand, had asked me to divide the sack of rice for two of us to carry, while he tied together our five remaining chickens. The village road was now alive with hurrying affrighted inhabitants, with only the bare necessities they had the strength to carry.

We were about to leave when Mother remembered something and made us wait. She divided among us the cash and several pieces of diamond jewelry we had, for Mother was a retired jeweler with many articles in stock. Then she told each one of us to knot our share in a piece of cloth and tie it about our waist. “Just in case we are separated from each other,” she said, “we shall have something to spend or barter for food.”

Like the other villagers and those come from town, we started moving southward with no definite place to go trusting only in the Lord for salvation. We trod on and on, believing that the farther we went the safer we would be from the savage cruelty of war. We went on, like the others, with only the pale light of the setting moon to guide our weary way.

In the face of a common peril, we, who had been treading the same road, headed toward the same direction, with the same dread clutching our hearts and with the same prayer on your lips, had become brethren, kind and loving to one another, sharing each other’s burden, each other’s bread and medicine, each other’s light. Man never had been so near to God, and Life never had been more dearly valued. Many of us started as strangers, now we were journeying as children of the same dear God. Indeed we had become kindly endeared one to another in brotherly love.

Most of the retreating ones seemed determined to reach the mountainside several kilometers away before the break of day, so we also decided to try it. But as we trudged deep into the night, we had to change our mind. The moon was sinking fast behind those silhouetted coconut groves west of us, and my sister's wounds were telling on them. They did not complain, but even after Father had lightened their load we still heard repressed and frightened sighs. Even Mother had started to drag her legs with heavy steps, so much so that I had to grab one of her baskets.

I had wanted to show Father that, frail-looking though I might be, like him I also could take it with the half sack of rice on my back, a feat I never could have accomplished under ordinary circumstances. But I did not seem to impress him for he offered to carry the basket I got from Mother. And when I refused to part with it, he smiled saying: "You're already writing with your sack of rice. It makes me more burdened to see you thus."

"Then you may go ahead," I suggested smilingly, "so you won't see how I look like."

Father was right. I had to rest more often as we went farther, for my load seemed to grow heavier with every step I made. One moment the half sack of rice was on my back, then I was hugging it against my breast. I

wondered what funny contortions I had been making with my body to lighten my burden a bit.

I tried to be strong, I forced myself to be so that I might be able to carry more. My sisters were wounded, Mother was weak. And Father, was he man or what not with his burden? But the half sack of rice was getting heavier and heavier, and there were times when I could breathe hardly and I thought my chest would break.

Oh God! Give me strength! I shouted quietly, desperately, to myself. And damned be the enemy! Damned be the warmakers!

When the moon had set and the way had become completely dark, we stopped at a deserted shack. The others, however, continued with torches made of dry coconut leaves to guide their way. They wanted to be as far from the town as possible before the break of day, but we were exhausted and could not walk any father.

Mother hurriedly built a fire and cooked a little coffee in a kettle we had with us. Meanwhile, a young couple with five little children, one of whom was ill, begged to share the little shack with us to rest the little ones awhile. Luz immediately gave a few tablets to the mother of the sick child hoping that they were the right cure, and she was very grateful. Then Mother made every one sip some hot coffee, while Luz distributed

biscuits. The children were gladdened, and they appeared much strengthened as they partook of their light repast. The young mother and the children shared the little floor space which the lowly shack could offer with Luz and Rebecca. Father asked Mother to lie down, too, for a little rest, while he and the other man and I stayed in the dark outside and smoked. We did not talk much. We simply listened to the now nearing, rumble of cannonade coming from the Tayabas direction, where a fierce battle was reportedly being fought.

It was still dark when the young father roused his family from their deep slumber. Mother complained telling him to let the children sleep some more, but he said they had to go lest they be overtaken by the heat of the sun on the way and that would be worse for the children. They also would go to the mountain where they believed they would be safer. For the mountain appeared to have become the last refuge of the tired and the oppressed.

The young father then made a torch out of dry coconut leaves, while the younger mother wrapped her sick one with a blanket, at the same time telling the other children to be more careful with their respective baskets. The father went ahead with his heavy load and his torch, with the others trudging behind. They had no time to be tired. Fear and hope had become their only guide. I watched the light recede father and farther until

it was no more, then I lay down near Rebecca to rest my body a little and – to pray.

I had not lost myself in sleep when dawning came. My two sisters rose and helped Mother prepare our breakfast. In fact, it was not only for breakfast for they cooked enough for the whole day. It was Mother's idea again. She said that if it were urgently necessary that we continue moving during the whole day, we would not have to stop somewhere to do some cooking. We might not be able to do so, if time and event would force us to continue moving on and on.

Mother coaxed us to eat a hearty breakfast. We had to be strong, she said, for the time demanded not only strength of spirit but also of body. If we did not eat much we would weaken, and that would present another problem. She said that we should not worry about the ant of food in days to come, for there always would be a way. Mother's words seemed to have inspired Rebecca to quote from the Bible. She mused: "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" And I added just as musingly: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin . . "

We stayed in the shack of Santos Bati, my farmer friend, for a few days to wait for more news about the

war developments from those who still dared go to town. But they brought conflicting news. Some said that the Japanese soldiers were already in the boundary of Laguna and Tayabas, which meant that they were hardly ten kilometers from the town proper. Others claimed that they were driven back to Lucena. This left us undecided as to whether to return to Butokan or to move father still. But when on the night of 27 December we were awakened by the evident nearness of machine-gun fire lasting for hours, and when the cannonade became louder and more frequent, we did not sleep anymore; we decided to move on early the following morning.

When morning came, we received still more disheartening reports that the USAFFE had retreated and would resist in town, that giant tanks now lined the streets from the Roman Catholic Church down to the cemetery and the railroad track. Some of the bigger houses at the plaza had been made to serve as pill-boxes and machine-gun nests, while a few artillery pieces were set about the open spaces of the bombed area. The news scared us more so that we hurriedly left the shack without any definite destination in mind. We moved on and on, stopping only occasionally to rest our wearying legs and to ask people we met as to where we might find some of our kin. We moved on, on, trusting that the farther we went the more secure we would be from the horror and danger of conflict.

Before the sun set that day, we were glad to have reached Lulod, a village where we had many church brethren. They met us on the road, helped us with our load, and at once offered their humble homes to us.

We found out that Fabio's family and his brother Virginio's had taken refuge in this village, and we were happy to learn about it. We also learned later that mother's widowed sisters, Aunt Maria and aunt Eufemia and her children were staying in a friend's house about a kilometer away from the village road. This made Mother most happy.

For the first time since that Christmas Day bombing, we felt secure enough in this distant village at the foot of Mount Bulaho. We were already far from the town and there still was that mountain yonder where we could take refuge should it be necessary.

We retired early that night. The whole day's walk was quite exhausting, what with the heavy load on our backs and the disquieting fear in our hearts. We chatted but briefly, then tried to sleep away our tired bodies. Rebecca still complained about her thigh wound before she fell asleep, though Luz was old enough to conceal her pain. However, I was happy to note that mother, who was not used to walking distances with a heavy load, never had acted so strongly as then. She, however, still betrayed occasionally an unconscious moan. Re-

becca, of course, was always the first to fall asleep and Father the last, if he ever slept at all.

On the morning of 30 December we were roused from our sleep by excited talk of the villagers. Father and I went out to make inquiry, only to be told that Japanese soldiers were already in town. The USAFFE had decided to make a strategic retreat.

Of course, I felt bad – very bad. For now had come another alien master with another device with which to enslave our people, - good people who, for love of freedom, would be forced once more to become brutish in the eyes of sound morality and human dignity. Since when had this base law of servitude begun?

The villagers immediately prepared to leave their homes for some remoter spots in those mountain fastnesses yonder. Seeing them in their hurried preparation, evacuees from the town also decided to desert their shacks and shanties for still remoter regions. We did not know what to do. We wanted to go with them, but Father and I doubted whether our womenfolk would be able to withstand the stress and rigor of mountain climbing and live a still harder life in hiding. Fabio and Virginio also seemed lukewarm about going farther because of the many children in their families who were too young to bear more hardship. We decided to stay even if we felt quite lonely at seeing the other families

laving us behind. It was the longest day we had experienced ever, but night came only as a much longer space of time. We did not sleep that night for we seemed to imagine Japanese soldiers coming any hour to kill us.

The next day we received news that the Japanese soldiers were disgusted not to find the inhabitants of the town, so that an order was issued to the effect that if after another weektime the townsmen had not returned, the whole town would be burned. Bur our house was no more, we laughed. It was even rumored that they were interested particularly in women. The news quite alarmed us. Father and I did not relish it. It reminded Mother of what her father used to sigh about during those troubled times of the Philippine Revolution when they were young. Grandpa used to say that if he could swallow all his daughters, then vomit them out when all the trouble was over, he would be too happy to do it. Father must have been brooding over the same unhappy thought.

Fabio and Father deliberated then went away. When they returned an hour later, they said that we would move to some remoter place a few kilometers away. We crossed the softly flowing Taranka stream and a few fields of coconut, then ascended a hill. In an old deserted tapahan (coconut kiln shanty) we met old woman Honoria Barcenas, one of the elders in our chapel in town. She persuaded us to stay with her and her only

daughter Olimpia Escalona and two little grandchildren. The place was too small to accommodate Virginio's Fabio's and our family, so Fabio suggested that we stay with the old woman, while he and his brother build a temporary shelter of coconut leaves by the side of Bunbong creek a hundred meters away.

The old tapahan which we occupied had a half-crumbling roof of decaying coconut leaves supported by rotting bamboo rafters, it seemed that it would fall any moment. It was without wall and the ground was unhealthy-looking. Yet it appeared to be a much safer place in which to hide from the Japanese soldiers who were already in town. We felt a sense of security in that strange hill which we had reached for the first time.

While Father helped Fabio and his brother build a tepee-like shanty of coconut leaves by the creek, I was running errands for Mother and Sisters as they prepared the place for our indefinite stay. I went to Nato Flores, old woman Honoria's nephew, to request him to cut some coconut leaves with which to wall the tapahan so that the cold wind of the hill would not chill us to ailment. Then I went to Bunbong Creek to gather a few big stones to serve as tripods for a couple of stoves, while Rebecca and Luz prepared our supper.

When night came, the old woman begged our women to share with her family their small mattress

spread over some coconut leaves, then apologetically offered some empty sacks for Father and me to put over the coconut leaves so that we would not feel much dampness of the cold earth. Luz and Rebecca shared the only pillow that could be spared, while Mother, Father, and I used our spare clothes to rest our heads on.

That night we were huddled close together, as if to protect ourselves from the cold and the darkness, with only the faint flickering light of an oil lamp for a shield. We told each other stories. The old ones contrasted the times with those of the Revolution on inquiry from the young, then looked toward the future with mingled hope and fear. Father said that this was a horrible war, and old woman Honoria shivered with grieving over the thought of thousands getting killed. For war, if I might reiterate, had forced man to kill another who could have been a friend; for war had so heated the imagination of a people to a point of increasing hostility, making man the enemy of another man.

Outside it was very dark for the moon had not risen yet. Somewhere thousands must have fallen asleep already without seeing the moon rise, I told myself sadly. But others still kept vigil to await its coming.

After chatting among ourselves about the unhappy lot which had been befallen mankind, the old lady suggested that we offer a prayer to Him and supplicate for

the redemption of this erring world from chaos and sin. She led the prayer, and after that we sang a hymn as we retired quietly. Unlike in previous nights we fell asleep at once, mayhap because of the belief that we had found at last a really safe place of refuge, a place nearer to God than cruel men.

Almost midnight I was awakened by a chorus of voices singing hymns in praise of the Lord. At first I thought I had been hearing it in a dream; I opened my eyes and strained my ears. It was real! I went out of the tapahan. The last-quarter moon was beginning to rise from its eastern realm and the cold breeze of December was balmy and soothing with the scent of hill and dale. The singing voices came from the direction of Fabio's shanty. When I returned to the tapahan, everyone was already awake including the old woman's two grand-children.

"It comes from Fabio's place," said Rebecca.

"Yes", I agreed. "I remember now; they are celebrating New Year's Eve!"

"I almost forgot," exclaimed Luz. "Really, it's New Year's Eve!

"Suppose we join in the worship?" Mother suggested.

“You may all go,” Father said. “I will stay here to watch our things.”

And so we went to Fabio’s place, with the last-quarter moon to guide us on our way. When we reached the place, they were singing a hymn. Fabio, who was presiding, leaned against a big rock near the Bunbong Creek, while the others sat about with the thin bed of grass for their pew. We quietly took our place among them and joined the singing of hymns in praise and adoration of the Lord. We sang loudly and heartily, seemed to sing with us. Even Fabio’s dog stared at his master, wagging his tail and fanning his ears, with his mouth half-open as though wanting to sing with us. We sang loudly as if to drown the intermittent roar of distant cannonade.

Fabio read a short message in the Scripture, then gave a brief talk abut its significance. After that we sang a few more hymns. When it was a few minutes before midnight, Fabio requested everyone to hold the hand of his immediate neighbor, then forming a chain of worshipping souls, we began to pray. We prayed for deliverance, for peace, while the stream and the trees and the hillside listened and whispered Amen to our every pause.

We sang one more hymn, then ended our worship by supplicating for His benediction. After that we greeted

each other, and hoped to each other that the New Year just come would not be too hard and mean with us and with this unhappy world of mankind. Then Fabio's wife invited us to partake of the rice cake and steaming coffee that she had prepared for the occasion. To warm our hearts, I thought, in affection for Him; to eat and drink, not to hunger but to hope…

IN THAT HILLSIDE HIDEAWAY

The day was long in that distant hill away from home, sometimes we felt very much alone; even if Old Woman Honoraria was a very kind lady, and the innocent mischiefs of her two little grandchildren were a source of fun to us. The good lady's daughter Olympia who used to be Laura's classmate in the grade school always reminded Mother of her absent daughter, and she was filled with misgivings again. Then Luz and Rebecca would say chidingly that Laura and her husband were not foolish and knew what to do; Mother would be quiet and busy herself with something. The two girls would be quiet, too: sit in a corner and read their pocket Bible. Then Becky would go out and play with little Sonia and Rolando, Father would visit Fabio's place for a chat, while I would ramble about the field to gather firewood and forget a few unpleasant thoughts.

We held our Sunday worship in the tapahan with our farmhand Fabio Ortega officiating. At first only with his big family, his brother Virginio's, and we attended the service. When some of our maternal relations and other brethren who happened to be in hiding in other parts of the hill heard of it, succeeding Sunday found us more and more in number until we had to hold the service outside the tapahan. After the worship we had in-

timate chat among ourselves, and in the course of our conversation we came to learn that many more relations and neighbors in town were hiding in different parts of the hill. They were sheltered mostly in makeshift shanties along the banks of the Bunbong Creek where the outgrowths were mostly luxuriant. We also learned about the hard life they had been experiencing in their hillside hideaway, of their want of decent food to eat and clothes to wear having run away without sufficient provisions because of the Christmas Day tragedy, of the piercing cold and aching discomfort quite hard for their young ones to bear, of the dread of harmful creatures that lurked in the dark and wilds yonder, of the illness in the family and the grief brought about by the loss of loved ones during the bombing.

There was not much to do in hiding but to cook our meals and eat and chat and sleep, to get excited and to fear, to hope and wait. We had much time to spare visiting our church brethren and kinsfolk in their crudely-built shanties of grass and leaves. We tried to help them as best we could, for Mother said that we had to share the little we had with those more direly in need. We brought a few chupas of rice and three cans of sardines to sickly Regina and her little ones, - her husband was killed during the bombing; we brought one of Rebecca's dresses to Old Woman Estacia's barely-dressed daughter, and few analgesic tablets for a young boy we passed by in one of our visiting jaunts. Father kept tell-

ing Aunt Eufemia and the others not to worry over their houses having been burned, for when America return she would make Japan pay for all the damages she had done and might still do to the Philippines.

As the days rolled on, we came to realize that there were other things to do in that hillside hideaway beside cooking and eating and sleeping, besides getting excited and fearing. As days rolled on, Mother became the mother comforter of the sick and the distressed ones, Luz the obliging teacher in the art of cooking savory victuals out of anything available, and Rebecca the best playmate of the little children around and about. Father was still the strong man despite his age, and had an every ready hand for those in need of manual assistance. On the other hand, I played the role of medicine-man and treated colds and insect bites with whatever ointment I could find in our first-aid box, cuts and bruises with iodine or mercurochrome, and fever of all kinds and degrees with quinine or analgesic tablets. We did our job all right.

But Father and I, with Fabio's assistance, had another task in the hill, and a very ticklish one at that. We had taken upon ourselves the responsibility of being the self-styled commentators on war rumors and reports received every day from various sources.

Seeing planes flying overhead or hearing the distant sound of cannonade, they in hiding would come to us for comments. They looked upon me especially, since I had a higher schooling than them, as erudite enough to be able to determine the identity of the planes passing by and foretell what their mission could be, or to know by the direction and force of cannonade where a battle was raging and whose cannons they could be that we had been hearing. I would explain to them that if the planes flew at high altitude they must be American planes for Japanese needed not fly high over occupied areas. So, when a squadron of planes flew high enough over the hill, they would jubilantly shout as they waved their hands. "They are ours!" But when they saw planes flying at low altitude, they would curse them as enemy planes.

I also explained that when we heard loud reports, we could be sure that they came from the USAFFE's big caliber guns for the Japanese did not have big ones. Then gunfire might have come from Corregidor's battery aimed against enemy warships trying to approach that impregnable island fortress or it might have come from some U.S. battleships which had arrived already as vanguards to bombard enemy coastal defense and thus soften the way for the landing of the long-awaited reinforcement. We all believed that reinforcement was coming, we just knew not when.

The hill had been receiving reports from various sources about the 800-mile convoy which was supposed to be on the way already, and whenever a prolonged cannonade was heard, everyone thought that it had arrived already. More than once I had been approached and asked if it really had come, and I sometimes found it difficult to answer. Often I had to tactfully ignore it and instead talk volubly about Tokyo and other Japanese cities being bombed by one thousand flying fortresses every hour, then every quarter of an hour. But every one was more interested in the coming of the much awaited aid which would spell defeat to the invaders, so that each time they saw high-altitude flying planes or heard loud reports of distant guns; they came again and again and pestered me to telling them that America's aid had come – at last!

One late afternoon we started to hear long and prolonged cannonade again, and we were once more aroused. I was then indisposed because of a bad cold. I was feeling weak and had to lie down for a quiet rest, but when I herd the loud reports of distant guns, I also was aroused to vigor and jubilation. Moments later a small group had gathered outside the tapahan with Fabio. Father went out to chat with them. The next instant I was also outside with my road map. I laid it on the ground, as usual, and everyone gazed at it. For some moments we remained quiet to determine exactly where the sound of the cannonade was coming from, while we

stared intently at the map laid before us. Then Fabio and I began to sketch locations on the ground with a piece of stick, to adjust the gunfire; then we asked each other questions. After that we rapturously concluded that the long-awaited help had come at last, that it must have landed somewhere in Nasugbu where a fierce battle must now be taking place.

Inside the tapahan Luz and Rebecca started singing God Bless America. We stopped our conversation to listen. Regina, the widow, who came to ask for a little material assistance, hummed the tune as she cuddled her posthumous palay in a mortar nearby began swinging their pestles to the rhythm of the song. The village children who had been playing hide-and-seek stopped to listen, then after a while they resumed their play trilling the song as the chased each other rollickingly up and down the hill. The next instant Fabio and Father and I were also humming the song. The others were still quiet and in pensive thought; they, too, must be humming it deep in their hearts. They did not know what the song really meant, but somehow they seemed also to have caught the spirit in it, quietly, others loudly, while Luz and Rebecca intoned the lyrics for us. Indeed hope had become the tuneful melody of the oppressed. Reinforcement had come at last! God Bless America!

Our last three cans of sardines had been eaten and only a few gantas of rice were left, and yet no rein-

forcement had come. Even the hill now hardly yielded enough root crops, wild fruit, and green vegetables for the hungry ones, and the fish and snails were now hard to find in Bunbong Creek. Food had become more and scarcer every day, disease a frequent caller, and medical attention a thing remote. Life in hiding was getting harder and harder to bear; every passing day only added more pain to misery. However, we still hoped for we had faith. Sometime, somehow, America's aid would come, perhaps within the week, or within a month. But another week had passed, and another month was about to end, and there seemed to be no sign of help coming. There were talks but they remained rumors, careless and wild.

Indeed their patience was beginning to be furious, to be philosophic no more. They already had borne quietly the tyranny of waiting, had worn out their beggarly virtue of endurance. Now they began to doubt, to anger, to utter cruel words of disgust. For love of freedom, they had suffered much enough in hiding in their honest efforts to resist surrender, but what had become of the coming liberators?

TALES FROM BATAAN

Before hope could wither totally bright news about the almost unbelievable resistance of Bataan came fast and plenty with the heartening effect of dewdrops over thirsting flowers. Hope blossomed anew, and every one was jubilant once more. America's aid would come as evidenced by Bataan's prolonged and sacrificial resistance. While we waited for its coming, we rejoiced and gloried in retelling over and over even to those who already knew the many faith-giving, almost fantastic tales woven around Bataan's heroic stand against the formidable assault of a mightier, more powerful foe.

There was the story of the rolling bombs believed to be descending by thousands from their mountain sources bringing ten thousand deaths to the helpless enemy below. There was the story of an electro-magnetic force which was supposed to attract the soldiers of the enemy to instant death as though they were being inhaled by a monstrous suction tube the very moment they reached the dreaded area. There was the tale of enemy planes being dragged down to crushing doom by a certain mysterious power the instant they flew within an appointed circle over the sky of Bataan and Corregidor. Father, Fabio, and I also told the others about the various lines of defenses at Bataan connected to each other by tunnels bored through hills and mountains under-

neath massive rocks and boulders which served as impregnable protection from both aerial and land bombardment. All these were brainchildren of MacArthur, we told them.

Up and down the hill children ran in noisy frolic shouting in adulterated Tagalog: "Kuro lupa kuro tubig, kuro kahoy, patay!" "Land boils, water boils, tree boils, death!) They were supposed to have been uttered by Japanese soldiers who had come from Bataan on the supposed belief that some parts of that little province had been powerfully charged with electric current so that even the land, water, and trees there boiled, much to their terrible chagrin.

Villagers who dared go to town said that according to the townsmen who lived near the schoolhouse where the Japanese soldiers were quartered, they knew when the soldiers would be sent to Bataan because they cried as they left. Some of them still had enough humor to tell the inhabitants as they moved away: "Kuro lupa, kuro tubig, kuro kahoy, patay!"

We also narrated that one day MacArthur grew tire of awaiting the enemy's much-vaunted offensive and decided to order his men to make a feigned sortie just to put one over on the bragging Japanese general. He sent his soldiers to retake a few towns, stay there for some time, and then come back with a few prisoners. The USAFFE did as ordered, but in one of the towns re-

taken they were reported to have found the lifeless forms of two headless women stripped to nudity and evidently abused before they were brutally murdered. On the chemise of one was indelibly written the name Erlinda. When the report of the result of the feigned offensive was sent to General MacArthur, the story of Erlinda and the other women was said to have been included.

The general was so touched that he sadly requested his men to include Erlinda and the hundreds who met the same sad fate as she in their prayer before making any contact with the enemy. This the avenging defenders of Bataan never failed to do. As they marched toward the enemy line, so the story went, they magnified the horror of their fire with their terrifying shouts: "Remember Erlinda! Remember Erlinda!"

Since then the Japanese soldiers had begun to dread Bataan the more. Each time they made an assault against the defender's position, a wall of fire varying in flaming hues would accost and almost blind them, and they would hear weird and doleful voices, then witness a ghostly parade of headless women, of bayoneted men, of children with intestines all out. This was another reason, so the story ended, why Japanese soldiers cried whenever they left for Bataan Again after some days of rest; why they killed their officers, changed into civilian clothes, and ran away; why they preferred to be shot by

superior officers for desertion rather than return to Bataan.

They who were in hiding never wearied hearing again and again the unhappy story of Erlinda. We never wearied retelling it. It gave us strength.

"And so Bataan still stands," I finally concluded.

There were also jocose moments each time we remembered Bataan, happy moments each time we talked of Bataan. We also narrated that when Gen. Masaharu Homma, the Japanese general conducting the siege of that obscure little province could not put an end to its resistance, the big chiefs in Tokyo decided to dispatch their General Tomoyuki Yamashita, now famed for having been the conqueror of Singapore. This Japanese general was said to be a classmate of General MacArthur at West Point. Shortly after his arrival in the Philippines, he was reported to have sent a message to his friend and classmate promising safe return to America for the American general and his family, if he would surrender. "If I could silence the guns of Singapore," we quoted the Japanese general as having boasted, "There is no reason why I couldn't do the same thing with the obscure defenses of Bataan and Corregidor."

But General MacArthur was said to have answered calmly: "Singapore fell because I was not there. If you

really want to take my family and me back to America, I am inviting you to come over and do it."

We rejoiced over this brief verbal tussle, and how!

But I had my fears. The jubilation of those who believed in our yarns might not last long, because the Japanese military back in Japan could not afford to be shamed anymore by the stubborn defiance of such an obscure little province as Bataan. The Imperial forces which humbled British might in Singapore could not bear to be made a laughing stock by a few thousand soldiers unaided by aerial support. Japan had to dispatch reinforcement big enough to end at once this ludicrous comedy being conducted on the world stage at her own expense. The curtain must fall in Bataan to the satisfaction of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor.

When more powerful reinforcement came to save the Empire from further embarrassment, the brave ones defending Bataan would meet with virtual massacre, if no aid in any form would come. Bataan, despite its natural defenses, could not hold forever under the continuous onslaught of an overwhelmingly superior foe, superior both in arms and in number. Reinforcement must come on time, or Bataan would fall inevitably, and with the fall of Bataan, the fate of Corregidor would not be hard to imagine.

But had reinforcement arrived? Everyone wanted to know. Every one who had pinned his hope for redemption in America wanted to know.

Reinforcement had come, at last! All reports received on the hill once more pointed to it. Even the strategy to be made was the same in every newscast. It appeared that several transports had reached Bataan already to take care of the enemy there, while other soldiers were landed in some obscure coastal regions all over Luzon and had been marching through hills, forests, and mountains, bound for their assigned positions. Some wiseacres even claimed to have seen already some American soldiers bathing at Matanag stream only a kilometer away.

When the appointed hour come, three loud discharges from a big gun hidden somewhere in Legaspi would be fired to show that the USAFFE there had started its counter-offensive; then Atimonan and Mauban would answer with three loud discharges also to signify the commencement of their operations, to be answered along the Batangas and Cavite wilds where more USAFFE men were also supposed to have been entrenched, followed by Bataan and on to the northern regions. To further confuse the Japanese command, the big U.S. battleships hiding in some solitary islets would show up suddenly along the different coasts and subject

Japanese concentrations to severe bombardment, thus making a pandemonium of it all!

We were tempted as we loved to believe it. In fact, Father, Fabio and elaborated on the various reports to make them more picturesque, more convincing. The offensive would start within the period from February 27th to March 15th. It was not hard for them to believe us because Japanese planes had been flying with threatening frequency while, according to those who came from town, soldier-filled lorries and armored cars had been roaring along the national road oftener than in previous weeks. The Japanese soldiers appeared troubled, they said.

February 27th came at last, and held nervously on the expecting breath of every one. Nothing happened on that day. Days came and went, a week passed, and then another; March was over. Nothing happened. America failed again, and many flung diatribes, biting and cruel, to the wind. For more than once had they been made to expect that something would happen, but nothing happened. They much prefer to hear the horror of ceaseless cannonade than be ailed by the disturbing quiet of a distressed hopelessness.

Now the ones in hiding had enough. They had lost faith, so they said. They who had interpreted every grumbling sound as a sign that reinforcement had come

at least, they who had forced themselves to believe even a rolling thunder as cannon balls fired by the liberating army, they who had hoped even if it only hurt them more to hope; they had grown tired of waiting. And their indignation had become more brutally manifest when they heard news that High Commissioner Sayre, General MacArthur, and President Quezon had already left for Australia, leaving their fighting men at the mercy of the enemy. They were vociferous in their angry disgust, and they were accosted by the dejecting news that Bataan had surrendered.

BATAAN FALLS! Thus ran the wild and shocking news. Indeed it seemed as if heaven itself had fallen!

Father and Fabio took the news about Bataan's surrender rather quietly. They did not seem to want to act anymore as they belonged to the war-plans division of the USAFFE and I felt rather alone. Those in hiding seemed no longer interested in listening to our commentary. Only a few came that day when the news of the surrender reached the hill, and Father and Fabio did not seem to be in mood to talk, but I was never excited in my desire to communicate my thoughts to the others. I felt that my usefulness as a hopegiving, faith-strengthening instrument never had been more needed as then. True it was that my pro-allied commentaries did not tally with what had happened in the waterfront, but it was also true that my commentaries had helped

much to strengthen the faith in America of many, so that they might carry on courageously and confidently despite the hardship of life in hiding. They had looked up to America as the true liberator and the real bringer of security and good fortune; they must therefore, continue to hope.

Thus, while Father and Fabio took the news of Bataan's surrender rather coldly, I took it garrulously. America's strategy is still going on smoothly as planned by General Mac Arthur, I told my listeners. The apparent reverses met during the last few months, including the supposed fall of Bataan, was in reality a victory won. I tried to prove that the supposed defeat inflicted by an unworthy enemy could make the freedomfighters even more invincible and the hate-laden victory could be the enemy's undoing as later events would show. But those who came did not seem to want to listen anymore. They simply took it with pathetic humor, and instead asked us --- now that Bataan had fallen --- if we would or would not return to Butokan or to town. Many had prepared already to go down to the lowland. But we simply could not decide yet. Must we continue to hope or must we resign ourselves to this new lot? This sudden usurpation of our freedom had made us feel deprived of all external consolations.

They said that Bataan had surrendered, but it had not. They said that hope was now dead, but it was not.

Both soldiers and civilians might be returning home now, but never in the shameful defeat of conquered ones. Theirs were a heart that still remained unconquered, a spirit which centuries of foreign domination had never dampened. Theirs were a body that still could feel even free in a cage and with a will stronger that the fetters which might hold it in chain. Theirs were a soul that would always revolt against the shackle ----- for they must be free.

OF DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE

With the reported surrender of Bataan, we also thought of returning to Butokan where we hoped to build a little hut in our lanzones orchard and stay there until the war would be over. For we had wanted to live as far as possible from the Japanese soldiers, to have no dealing with them, no contact, no connection, no intimacy whatsoever. From reports we had received about their misdoings, we could not hope to trust them; we could not hope to stay in town.

In fact, if we only could get assurance that in a month or two the promised aid from America would come, we would be glad to stay that long in this our hillside hideaway no matter what the hardship and pain still to be endured. But even Mac Arthur had gone, and the fate of Corregidor was just a matter of days or weeks.

Our provisions were getting low, almost all our extra clothing had been given away to more needy ones, and our medicine box was literally empty. We had to go down to Butokan to share with our kinsfolk whatever might be in wait for us under the banner of the conquering horde, to our lanzones orchard and our fields of coconut ---- our hope for securer days.

The load we had with us when we left our hillside hideaway that early morning hour was light, though the heart that went with us was heavy and the spirit almost depressed. But courage still remained. And faith. And hope.

It was already late in the afternoon when we arrived in Butokan. We hardly had rested when our village neighbors and some of Mother's kin started coming to Fabio's house to greet us. We had not seen each other since that unhappy December night when we were forced to leave the village in frightful hurry, and so the meeting was excitedly delightful. Each one had a query to ask, a tale to tell. Stories of agony and death were retold over and over with undiminished zeal, as though the reiteration would harden the heart to its gloomy effect. Or could it be that in the retelling of those ruth-laden experiences of others, they had found the consoling thought that after all theirs were a loss painful one? Wearied listening to those woeful tales of human affliction, I went to the only bed in the house and rested away the hopeless voices of my kin with hopeful thoughts of a happy tomorrow.

The next morning Father said he would visit our lanzones orchard which was also along the village road, and then proceed to our small fields of coconut at Garabel, Ciano, Ibayiw and Kalihan. After Father had left, I asked Mother if I might go to town to see the remains

of our burnt dwelling, and then proceed to visit our relations on Father's side. Mother consented, but cautioned me to avoid meeting Japanese soldiers as much as possible. I told her that I would, and if by chance I come upon one without my knowing it, I would not look at him.

"If your eyes meet, don't forget to bow," Rebecca suggested laughably. "If you are in Japan, do what the Japanese do. Now you are on your way to Japan!"

On the way I really felt a little excited, a little scared. The thought of seeing Japanese soldiers for the first time made me sort of uneasy. What do they look like? What would they do if they see me? And how would I react to their misdeeds? I kept asking myself. If they slap me, as they want to do to helpless inhabitants, what must I do? Must I smile, or must I look sad? Must I run away? Or, must I retaliate, especially if I get badly hurt? If I retaliate, well . . . But if I smile, they might think I was being funny and slap me again. I did not know how to look honestly sad. If I tried to, I might appear surly. Then they would slap me again, thinking that I was thinking meanly of them. Mother is right, I said to myself. I should try to avoid them as much as I could. And if I meet one without my knowing it, I would follow Rebecca's suggestion. I would bow very meekly. On to Tokyo!

Reaching the gate of our town, the first road I had to tread was our street, our Southside, the little world where IO was born, where I grew up, where I spent my childhood days. When I reached it, I did not see any Japanese soldier. Instead, the lonely remains of what used to be my beloved realm greeted my eyes: an open space looking down at burnt corrugated iron roofings, darkly-charred wood which must have been too hard for the flame to completely devour, and several other scattered fragments to tell the sad story of the many dwellings once filled with happy voices of men, women, and children, mostly Mother's kin. Only a few skeletal walls of concrete stood to weep over the ashen remnants of homes they once proudly held up to the sun and rain.

The old neighborhood was no more; the houses of Grandpa's children and children's children which once upon a time were huddled together as if for comfort and protection, those homes of beloved kin that had stood shoulder to shoulder through many happy and dreary years, in joy and in heartaches and in strife.

It was one family at first, one home, Grandpa's own. Then as the years rolled on, more and more homes came into being, and Grandpa was more and more elated, prouder indeed with every coming of a new family that was to be a part of him. Every one of Grandpa's grandchildren was born on this street. Every one spent

his childhood and grew up within its loving fold, prospered at times, endured at other times, but still lived and died on this our street, our Southside of the town. A few adventurous ones left for another place to seek a better fortune, but when Christmastime came along, they showed up to attend the Christmas Eve worship at the chapel which Grandpa had built and blessed for us, to tease and joke and make merry with the younger relations, and to smoke and chat heartily with the older kin. They showed up to renew their affection for a reverence to the place of their birth. Indeed we could not order remembrance of happier times out of our mind, even if it be painful recalling them in this period of misery.

There were so many memories, so many childhood recollections connected with the home of every kin, with every little object, every bit of the old beloved surroundings. But now all was a picture of ruin, and only the asphalted road remained. Only the big chico tree back of Aunt Eufemia's house remained, badly charred though still unbent. All was gone, for the heathens came and destroyed it one Christmas Day. Only the memory remained.

I could not tell exactly what my thought was and how I felt when I saw what remained of what was once our home, of the little world where my sisters and I were born. I tried to cry, but I could not. I simply stared at the empty sight before me, stared emptily like a ma-

niac devoid of understanding. Then suddenly I felt like shouting, if only to lighten the heaviness that was inside me, but I could not. Two Japanese soldiers with bayonets dangling at their side eyed me as they passed by. I was not bothered.

I wondered how Grandpa would have felt, if he were still living, to see the homes of all his children and grandchildren razed to the ground by a heathen's fire one Christmas Day, to see his loved ones in their distressed plight. Even the old house, his own, the seat of his patriarchal authority and benevolence, was no more. Only the chapel remained, the heaven of his hope and faith, but even that was badly wrecked. Oh, but not very thing was lost! The chapel still remained, and hope and faith.

When all these troubles would be over, there would arise along this same street, and over these wastes and ruins, this destruction, new and perhaps even better homes, blest with the blessings of peace and security. I left our street and walked on to visit Father's folks on the other side of town.

Of course, our spinster Aunt Susana and Aunt Severa H. Belen, Father's elder sisters, cried when they saw me, but I laughed their tears away and they smiled after a sneeze and a few sniffs. Then they launched a barrage of queries and inquiries, and I had to heave a deep sigh

at the finish. I thought I was a loquacious story-teller only to find out, after narrating the story of our life in hiding for almost an hour that my two aunts were not yet completely satisfied. They wanted to see Luz and Rebecca to find out for themselves if their wounds had healed already; they wanted to see Mother and Father to judge for themselves how much weight they had lost in hiding. They chided us for having been scared enough to hide too long and punish ourselves a great deal, when life in town had been peaceful already since Manila was taken. I only could say, "We don't trust the Japanese well enough."

Then I went to Dona Dionisia Hernandez-Paulino, Father's only living aunt, whose home had become the seat of benevolent and solicitous love since the death of his parents. The old lad insisted on seeing the others in the family, as if my loquacity was not enough. She even wanted us to return to town immediately and stay with our Uncle Sebastian, Father's elder and unmarried brother. And when I saw my uncle, he had the same word for us that we return to town immediately. "Have pity on your mother and sisters," he said. "Imagine making them live in the farm, away from the comfort of life." But this is war! I wished I would tell him, but I did not.

Father's kin were surely more fortunate than Mother's. They did not suffer much from the invaders'

initial occupation. Their nerves might have been jolted somehow, but that was all. When they retreated to Malinaw, a hamlet nestled along the northwest side of Lake Sampalok and the home of Father's maternal forbears, they had enough provisions to last them a long time. The village was only a half kilometer from the town hall and they did not leave it. No harm had come to them. They did not suffer the hardship of climbing hills and mountain, of sleeping on the cold earth of a tapahan, of fetching heavy cans of drinking water from a brook some hundred meters away, of pounding mountain palay in mortar until the skin peeled off and bled.

When they returned to town only a few weeks after they had gone in hiding, they returned to a house unburnt and with practically nothing amiss. Even they, my kin on Father's side, had not changed like their homes. They still seemed as prosperous-looking as before, as contentfully secure in their abundance. Truly, they presented a mocking contrast to the lot which had befallen Mother's relations.

I could be sure, however, that they also had missed something which Mother's folks had gained from the calamity, a gain which could be had only after one had been tested in the crucible of pain and suffering, and a gain which only the Cross could give. Because of this I felt myself more a part of Mother's folks than of Father's kin. The loss of the endeared scene of childhood

had made the memory dear, and the loved ones with whom I now shared these great reverses of fortune without complaint had become a dearer part of me.

TO TAKE THE OPEN ROAD

Again Mother complained about sleeplessness, and I always had known the cause. She was thinking of my sister Laura. We had been missing her for more than five months now. Mother said that she had dreamt of her thrice already. So when I asked her if I might go to Bulacan to visit my sister, Mother hesitatingly consented.

The first thing I had to do was to get a traveling pass from the Japanese garrison at Banahaw compound. The thought of it gave me a bother not only because of the dread of approaching a Japanese soldier, the language of whom I could not understand, but also because of the unhappy thought of having to subject myself to the cruel whim of an unwelcomed invader. It was really revolting, the thought of it. Just the same I had to get a traveling pass if I wanted to see my sister.

One day our cousin Pepe H. Belen, who also needed a pass so that he might go to Manila, he and I went to the Japanese garrison together. We, however, did not dare approach at once the soldiers who were giving the Pass at the gate of the compound. We bided our time. We waited for some time under an acacia tree about twenty meters away, watching, observing, studying the faces and the movements of the soldiers, waiting for a

time when they would show signs of good humor. We dared not come near them in their snarling moments lest we receive a kick or a slap or something worse. We waited for almost half an hour, then dared approach when we saw them poking fun at a naughty freakish urchin.

As we came nearer the sentry suddenly stood erect, eyeing us with a devilish stare as he held both ends of his gun with his hands. The other two seated behind the small table were still in mirthful mood and we were jesting with the playful urchin. The sentry growled at us. We bowed meekly, then made known through sign language that we wanted to get a traveling pass. One of the two seated soldiers knew a little English, so we did not have a hard time making ourselves understood. He asked for our name, age, address, occupation; where we were going and why: and why we were applying too late for our pass since they had been issuing them for more than two months already. I thought we gave good answers, for they did not get angry at us: "Piripinos, Japanese, friends; Mericanos enemy." He had something more to say, but after we had received our pass and said Arigato, we graciously made another Nipponese bow followed by Sayonara, then left immediately before any one of them could change his mind about us.

The morning of the next day found Cousin Pepe and me in the town plaza looking for a bus to take us to

Manila where I would look for a Bulacan-bound truck. The only passenger bus available then was one operated by two Japanese civilians; Shioji, a former bicycle store owner, and Kananawa, a quondam bazaar control of the town's big businesses. Akibi, the quondam friendly and humble refreshment parlor owner, had become the town's big boss, dreaded and hated by all.

While during peacetime Manila could be reached in hardly two hours, it took the best means of transportation not less than six hours to negotiate the distance during these troubled times. There was the problem of overcrowding for lack of enough accommodation, and the annoyance of too many roadblocks and inspections by native police and Japanese sentries. Such petty irksomenesses were naught, however, compared to the happy prospect of meeting loved ones long missed. Besides, there were sights to be seen which one could not hope to see during peacetime.

As our bus sped along the national road, the very first thing that caught our attention was the ludicrous display of the invaders flag. Some were hung carelessly on windows of village huts and houses, others projected through green bushes of hibiscus, or were nailed on trunks of roadside trees. Sullied white rags, unevenly cut, with crudely reddened circles on the middle, they formed the rustics conception of the banner of the invading horde. They were placed there half-fearfully,

half-humorously, not to inspire loyalty but to conquer dread; and hopingly, to immunize the natives from the wrath of its worshippers.

No one among the passengers made remarks on the effusive display of these ludicrous replicas of an alien flag. It was the first trip I made in a bus where there was not much talking among fellow-passengers. The men simply stared quietly, almost blankly at the distance ahead, while the women either busied themselves with something or just fidgeted. Even Cousin Pepe and I seldom talked to each other. From time to time some soldiers would stop the bus for a free ride, adding more and more to the passengers' restless reticence.

However, from their brief talk I came to deduce that most of the passengers were parents, brothers and sisters, wives and children of Bataan veterans. They were going to Manila and even farther hoping to meet their kin somewhere, somehow. For reports had it that several USAFFE soldiers were defended Bataan rather than surrender had managed to escape with the capitulation, while those taken war-prisoners by the Japanese Military were said to have been promised full liberty and safe conduct to Manila where they might find a way to go home to their folks.

This reminded me of our cousin Ricardo Bonilla, and I wished I might meet him somewhere, somehow in this

trip. Cousin Ricardo had been a big brother to us when we were young; we thought he was our brother for he had lived with us since the death of his father and his mother, who was Mother's elder sister.

I was only five years young when Cousin Ricardo went to America to study. Mother, Father, and I accompanied him to the big ship which was to carry him to America. When the ship was already about to leave, Mother shed tears and Cousin Ricardo kissed her on the cheek. He next hugged Father, then bending to me, he also kissed me saying: "When you grow as big as I, you will also go to America." Since then I had dreamt of going to America some day, of reaching that wonderful country.

He stayed for eight years in America. During that period he kept sending me little gifts which I proudly showed to my playmates, telling them that they came from Cousin Ricardo who was in America. They were wild with envy, and the prouder I became, the more thankful I was that I had one Cousin Ricardo who was in America. I allowed the other boys to operate my toy car, and let it run about the pavement under our house. I promised them that when Cousin Ricardo sent me more playthings, I would give them each one.

One day, when I was already ten years old, I received three short, naively-scribbled letters from Amer-

ica. I was surprised. They were not written by Cousin Ricardo. They were written by American boys of my age, little pals of my cousin who had wanted to make friends with me. They were written by William and Charles and Leslie. I was most happy.

I lost no time answering those fine naively-scribbled letters, lost no time making friends with them. Then we started exchanging gifts. We began inviting each other to visit each other's country. I showed the letters and the gifts I received from abroad to my playmates, and they became even more envious. We opened our geography book, and looked for the state and the city where my gifts and my letters came from.

"There!" I said. "Chicago, Illinois. They came from this place. Cousin Ricardo and my American friends live there. When I grow as big as Cousin Ricardo, I shall go there also."

But that was many years ago.

Those little gifts and those naively-scribbled letters valued possessions all were all gone reduced to ashes by enemy barbarity. Those little things which scented of the scenes I had loved to see and of people to whom my young heart had been so affectionately attached were no more. Even Cousin Ricardo, the only one who could attest to such a friendship, had not returned. He

was a captain of the USAFFE that fought in Bataan for America and democracy, and he had not come back yet.

Thus when we passed several American war-prisoners making a wooden bridge to take the place of one destroyed by the retreating USAFFE months past, I thought not only of Cousin Ricardo but also of my American friends of childhood days. The war-prisoners had only their dirty pants on; their breasts were bare as if to show them to their Filipino friends, so they could count pityingly those ribs that seemed to want to escape the thin prison of flesh. Some of them were my age. It might have been that one of them was William or Charles or Leslie. If it be so, he should not have lived that piece of life in my country. I did not tell him in my letters of yesteryears, when we were still young, that there were many nasty Japanese soldiers here who might beat him when he come, for the only Japanese that I knew in my youth was Bingo, that kind bazaar owner at Regidor Street. I wished I could wave a hand, but there were Japanese soldiers with them, cruel-looking, with guns and bayonets. I was reminded of a man in Calauan who was flogged brutally only a few days past just because he waved a V-greeting at a truck-load of white prisoners passing by his house.

As we approached Manila's suburbs, we began to see more and more Japanese soldiers, some quartered in big mansions along the road, others in tents and all sorts

of improvised shelters distributed about vacant lots and former polo club ground. The national road, as we neared the capital, was obstructed here and there by wire barricades to prevent speeding, and sentries stood on guard hardly twenty meters apart from each other, sentries we had to salute with meek bow and hats off.

Reaching the city proper, our bus went about the different streets in careful observance of many traffic rules made more complicated by forbidden military zones and similar roadblocks. We saw nothing but signs of a Japanese-dominated city. Japanese soldiers had occupied practically all the big buildings, schools, hotels, and clubhouses. Japanese soldiers, slit-eyed, bow-legged, in filthy uniform peopled the streets and sidewalks, the stores and restaurants. Japanese soldiers were everywhere, and their flags decked the lamp posts and buildings and street cars quite haughtily; these filthy-uniformed ones used to looting and plunder. Thus said Julius Caesar, “It is the law of war for the conquerors to deal with the conquered at their pleasure.” And theirs was to establish a totalitarian empire on the ruins of a republican democracy.

When we reached the bus station near Divisoria Market, Cousin Pepe said that he might go with me to Bulacan for he also wanted to see his cousin Laura, if we could return to Manila the next day so he would have time to attend to his personal business. I said that

it could be done, and he decided to go with me in search of a Bulacan-bound bus. We finally got a space in a freight truck where we deposited ourselves over sacks of sugar, bars of soap, greasy cans of coconut oil, baskets of dried fish, and other market commodities. We swayed to the motion and occasional jerkings of the moving vehicle and sweltered uncomfortably under the sultry rays of the mid-afternoon sun.

We were stopped along the Meycauayan road by the local police for routine inspection. There we came upon a truckload of American prisoners-of-war. Behind the truck enclosure, they looked like a groaming herd bound for the slaughter-house. Again I thought of William and Charles and Leslie. I wished I could share with them the rice cake which Cousin Pepe and I were eating, but the Japanese guards were cruel-looking and they had guns and bayonets. Yet when those hungry prisoners-of-war stared at the cake in your hands, I had to turn away. My heart sank deep, a lump got into my throat, and I found it difficult to swallow the thing I was eating. The savor of the cake was gone, and I felt cursed. I felt myself struggling against some inner force.

"I'll throw some to them, "I told Cousin Pepe.

"Fool!" he muttered. "Go ahead, if you want to die. You have heard many stories already."

Cousin Pepe continued to eat his cake, but I simply could not. I was thinking of many things, of William and Charles and Leslie, of their happy and smiling faces as shown by the many snapshots they used to send me, of their curly blonde hair. I was thinking of the chocolate candies, the toy cars, the balls of various colors and sizes they used to send me on Christmas time, of those letters of long ago, naively-scribbled, dearly valued.

Suddenly, there was a commotion in the truck where the Americans were, followed by a chorus of shouting laughter. The Japanese guards were alerted. They growled and gesticulated and threatened menacingly, but our American friends were already gormandizing the cakes and bananas and mangoes hurled by the passengers of the other truck, our truck, and before two of the guards could approach us we already had sped away, rejoicing, exulting.

Grayish clouds began to hang over us on the way and we were afraid it would rain, but it did not for the cold wind swept the clouds away. The settling sun brightened one more, throwing shafts of pale rose and chalcedony and crimson over the thatch-roofed village huts and the quivering water of the placidly flowing river yonder. We reached Angat, my brother-in-laws hometown in Bulacan Province, before the sun retired for the night somewhere behind the upland west of us.

Laura and her husband happened to be at the window when our truck stopped in front of the house. When she saw us, she literally flew down the stairs to meet us, her Pablito following behind. My heart danced as I held my sister in my arms and kissed her cheek warmly, and I felt as light as a song.

After supper my sister coaxed me to begin my story from that fateful December 8th, 1941, and he detailed about it. I did, and my story went on and on until it reached that happy though dangerous experience which Cousin Pepe and I had only some while ago when we, together with the other passengers, hurled the comestibles we were eating at the hungry American war-prisoners, then sped away before the Japanese guards could be nasty with us. Their wartime experience in that part of the country was almost the same as ours, save that they did not have the same Christmas experience as we had!

The next day when Cousin Pepe and I were about to leave, Laura and Pablito wanted to go with us. I told them they could follow a fortnight later, for Father and I had to build a hut first in our lanzones orchard. Fabio and his big family would be coming down from the mountain in a week, and it would be unfair if we stay longer and crowd them away in their little house. Laura was a long last persuaded to wait that long, long time.

On our return to Manila, Cousin Pepe said that it would take some days before he could attend to his business, so if I wanted to go home ahead I might to do so. He, however, invited me to seem ore of Japanese-controlled Manila. I told him that I would rather go home and help Father build a little house in the orchard.

Along Taft Avenue the truck where I was riding was stopped by two Japanese soldiers. "Tagaytay, Tagay-tay?" they shouted.

Tagaytay is a mountain city in the province of Cavite near one of the quondam U.S. Navy Yard. These two Japanese soldiers must have been stationed there, but had been to Manila to spend their off-duty hours more pleasantly.

"Yes Tagaytay," the driver answered as he stopped the truck, after murmuring a few curses that amused the passengers.

"What can we do?" shrugged a fellow near me." "They're the masters now. Just how long no one can tell."

The shorter and younger soldier was a jolly fellow. He smiled at the Filipino passengers, and occasionally shouted at the young women that we passed by, saying

in adulterated Tagalog: Maganda daraga, maganda daraga!" (Pretty girls, pretty girls!)

But the other uniformed one was different guy. He was coarse and well-built and sullen looking. While his comrade laughed and made merry, he stood erect in the truck, solemn and firm, looking unfeelingly at the receding distance already covered by the speeding truck. Moments later the younger one also became quiet and seemingly thoughtful, like his countryman. Even the other passengers, who only a while ago joked and jested with him, had become quiet also and only passing wind and the restless rumble of the machine could be heard.

Life in the truck with the two Japanese soldiers had become suddenly typical of the new life in Manila, it the hometown, perhaps anywhere in the archipelago where there might be Japanese in uniform. On one hand was a clique of dirty-uniformed invaders, curious and rude-looking, and on the other were the half-restless, half-resigned inhabitants, trying hard to ease a bit the bridled existence they had been forced to live in their own home and surrounding. The invaders tried hard to feel at home in a place that was not theirs but could not quite succeed because of the mysterious reserve which characterized the attitude and ways of its rightful owners. The invaders made attempt at friendly chats and friendly gestures; the natives had to reciprocate, but somehow there remained something strange in their

ways. More often, both feigned unawareness of each other's presence and walked the same street as if there were other things more important that matted, though deep in their hearts they both held a concealed fear and a bedeviled distrust for one another.

While the two Japanese soldiers stared dryly at the swiftly receding distance already covered by the speeding truck, the Filipino passengers were gazing ahead at the panorama still to be traversed with brightening expectancy, unmindful of the cold wind that ceaselessly disheveled their hair and vainly drove the glow in their eyes. Reaching the fork of the road. "Wait truck here."

The two Japanese soldiers alighted, the younger one bidding everyone a merry good-bye, the other walking straight ahead without saying anything, without even glancing back at the truck that carried them as far as the cross-road. We left them there, two filthy-uniformed men, one sullen, one gay, but both heading toward the same direction, both uncertain as to where the other road would lead them, whether it would bring them into a deep precipice of destruction and death. We, on the other hand, knew the route we were taking. It would lead us for sure to our home and love ones.

HOME IN THE ORCHARD

Even when we were still on our way to Butokan from our hillside hideaway, we were already thinking of building a hut in our lanzones orchard where we hoped to stay until General Mac Arthur's return. At first we dilly-dallied, for where would we get the money to pay a village carpenter and the material to use in building even a lowly shanty? Since we had to have a place to lie in for the duration of the war, Father and I decided to build it ourselves with the scanty things we might find around.

We could use the burnt corrugated iron sheets which remained of our house in town for roofing and walling purposes, and the trunk of a dead lanzones tree and a few betel-nut palms might serve as framework. The flooring was a problem, for even the banks of Banadero stream that we split the trunks of a few more betel-nut palms, which grew abundantly in the orchard, to use as flooring. After all we would not stay long in the orchard, she said. When Mac Arthur returns as he had promised to return, we would go back to town and stay at Uncle Sebstians's until such time as we could have the means to build another house.

Early one morning Father borrowed a villager's cart and carabao so that we might cart the burnt corrugated

iron sheets which were left of our house in town. The stronger pieces were already taken by others in our absence for their own use. We were rather annoyed, but it could not be helped. They also wanted to have a place to live.

When we returned to the village, Nato Flores, old woman Honoria's nephew, was chatting with the family. He learned already from Mother about our intention to build a little hut in the orchard, and he had been persuading mother to postpone our plan for a week, and he would be back with wood and bamboos and carpenters. Mother and my two sisters had been declining the kind offer, as it would bother him and the other villagers.

When Nato saw us having carted some many-holed, rusting iron sheets, he was all laughter. "You can't have a house with those scraps!" he exclaimed. "Give us a weektime, and we shall \be here with everything needed to build a little house for you. Please give us the chance to pay back even a little what we owe you."

We had to give in at the end. There was no use refusing Nato; we knew him well enough. "You do him one good thing, and he pays and pays and still thinks he owes you some more," Father said.

"That's the way with simple village folks," I said.

"They are true sons of God," mused Mother.

Six days later, Nato came with ten villagers from Ludlod, and with two cart-loads of mountain timber of various lengths and sizes; bamboos already split and bundled together, all ready to be nailed into flooring. The men had bolos and carpenter's tool with them.

They greeted us cheerily that morning hour. We were acquainted already with them, for they were among us in our hillside hideaway. There was Basilio's son, the youth who used to help me carry cans of drinking water from the Taranka stream; for this kindness I never failed to give him a package of American cigarettes. There was that middle-aged farmer whose sole was cut by a sharp stone while he was fishing along the Bunbong Creek; I treated it with iodine for days. There was Dano, that fat and jolly rustic whose children used to play with Rebecca; Juan Kayakas, that reckless courier of Revolutionary days but now "civilized" by Nato's many good deeds to him; Purok, Kayakas' son; old man Berto was also there with his son Daniel. Inggo, the village barber; Nato's brother Serapio Flores, and two others I remembered by face but not by name. We invited them to come up first before proceeding to the orchard, and partake of Mother's hurriedly prepared breakfast.

After they had eaten we chatted a little, then Nata suggested that we go to the orchard so that work might be started immediately. The building of our little home was at once begun by our friends from Ludlod. Nato, with humble rustic pride, paced about poking fun and inspiring every one, acting as foreman to his village mates. But his comrades did not need it, for they worked on with playful zeal. Dano, with the help Serpio, started to cut down the dead lanzones tree to use as posts, while Celso dug holes for them. Old Man Berto and his son measured, and then sawed the timber for beams, and so on. They hacked and measured and sawed and hammered; they joked and jested and guffawed. They worked on tirelessly, mirthfully and well, pausing but momentarily to partake of the coconut jam which Luz had prepared for them.

Meantime, I went about with the big bowl of coconut jam and pitcher of water; I lit their cigarettes, I offered them lime and betel-nuts, I added spice to their jests and jokes, I ran errands for them. For these kind friends the hill and yonder hamlet were building a little dwelling for us. They left their fields and mountain clearings and climbed dense forests to cut down select mountain timber to hold the roofs that would shelter us from sun and rain.

That afternoon the roof of burnt corrugated iron sheets was raised and the flooring of bamboos was

nailed. Before they left, the kind rustics promised to return the next day to wall the hut with coconut leaves, and then to start on the proposed floorless annex. But Father did not want them to come back anymore. “This is enough,” he said. “You’ll be neglecting your fields too long. It is now planting time in the kaingin. This is enough. We can do the rest already. Many thanks for all these. We shall not forget.”

The next day Father and I, with the help of Fabio and another villager, resumed work in the orchard. Fabio and the other man attended to the waling of the hut with coconut leaves, while father and I worked on the floorless shed which would serve as dining nook, kitchenette, and other purposes. Occasionally, neighbors dropped in for a chat and lent a hand.

The work on our little home lasted for eight more days, for besides being slow and unskilled, we still had to hunt for materials to use. I had to get someone to cut coconut leaves at Garabel half a kilometer away and my sisters and I, assisted by the village children, had to drag them to the orchard. Father had to go to town from time to time to look for pieces of wood at his relations’ houses to serve particular purposes, to look for nails, window and door frames, and other things. Because of these necessary pauses, it took eight days before our little orchard home could be ready for occupancy.

On the morning of the tenth day, we moved to our orchard home. It was a happy event. When the village neighbors saw every one in the family carrying this and that belonging from Fabio’s house, they left their work to help us. The women and children grabbed the chairs and other lighter objects, while the men shouldered such heavy stuff as Mother’s sewing machine, Luz's dresser, my bed, the table we borrowed from a villager, and a few other things.

The moving reminded us of the unhappy procession of war-scared inhabitants shortly after the bombing of the town on Christmas Day because of the load which the villagers, ---- men, women, and children were carrying to our orchard home. Only instead of fear and dread, mirth and fun were written on their faces, for they were not doing it with the gloom and fright that were theirs when they left their homes to hide from the approaching yellow peril. Instead they were doing it for a family that had at last found a place they might call a home.

After resting a while we began to arrange our meager worldly belongings. I set my bed near the dining table which fronted the stove. Mother and my two sisters arranged and re-arranged the few pieces of furniture and the baskets of clothing so that there would be as much floor space as possible saved for sleeping in our four-by five square meter habitation. Father and I had to make a

hanger near the ceiling for the things that could not be accommodated anymore in the hut proper.

We celebrated our moving to the new home with a hearty meal of mongo soup, salted fish, and boiled rice. After eating the women spread the mat on the bamboo floor and rested themselves comfortably. Father went out to smoke while I ay down on my bed in the shed, gazing blankly at the charcoal hued, rusting iron sheets that formed the ceiling.

Now we are at home again! I exclaimed softly to myself.

"Look! How happy are the leaves and the trees after last night's rain!" Mother, who had risen ahead of us, was the first to go out of the hut the following morning. "And the birds, how they sing!"

We rushed out joyously, and Lady Nature greeted us with beauty and freshness and song. The birds whirled about from one lanzones tree to another, swooping, leaping, shrilling, warbling a morning song, pecking at tree trunks, breaking dry twigs of trees and causing yel-low leaves to fall in their boisterous flight. The blades of grass and the leaves of young plants, greener than ever, cheerfully cupped diamond-like dewdrops which glittered with the gradually brightening light of mom. Even the neighbor's hen had joined the cheery mirth

with its cackling call to its brood as it scratched cheerily near the fence.

We went about the orchard and breathed deep of the morning breeze and the fresh greenery around. I awoke a dreaming dewdrop with the teasing touch of my finger, and then plucked the waking floret that blushed so pinkishly. Luz sang softly with the frolicking birds, and so did Rebecca as they gamboled about merrily. On the other end of the orchard, Mother was calling us. She had found a bird's nest with four little eggs.

"Let us begin planting," I suggested, for the seeds of polo and string beans and cowpeas and cucumber and squash and eggplants and tomatoes which I bought in Manila were all ready.

"We shall do so after breakfast," Mother said. "The old ones do not like to plant when they are hungry. The yield would not be fife, they say."

"Then we better eat well so that we shall plant may blossom abundantly," Rebecca proposed banteringly.

After breakfast we started planting with playful zeal. We first planted our seeds of polo and string beans, cowpeas, squash, cucumber, and other crops which did not necessarily need garden patches or plots. All that we did was to dig small holes near luxuriant arbors and

thick underbrush where the plants might cling and flourish while they grew, but we also saw to it that they would receive enough sunlight for growth. Then we made little fences around every covered hole to identify the spot, and to protect the future young plants from the neighboring chickens. Through with these, we started digging small plots for our seeds of mustard and pechay, onions, radish, garlic and cabbage. We spent the whole day doing it. As we worked on we were also thinking of other things of raising, hogs and poultry as soon as we had the means.

That afternoon we invited our brethren in the village to a prayer meeting to bless our little home. We borrowed a few small benches from the neighbors and brought out all the chairs we had for our brethren to sit on in the front yard. Then we sang hymns in praise of Him and prayed that He bless our humble home. The worship over, our village friends felicitated us; then we treated them to a modest repast of sugared gruel with toasted mongo and coconut milk.

When the villagers had gone we stood before our little dwelling nestled beneath spreading branches of lanzones. We stood long and quietly gazing at the green wall of coconut leaves, at the charcoal-hued, rusting, corrugated iron roof, at the rusty window frames of cloudy tin. Then Mother broke the silence: “Once more we are at home!”

At home where the smiles of loved ones are sweetest; where we are merriest, where we can feel the pleasure of being spiritually rich; at home "the nursery of all domestic virtues."

It was a special prayer for us in the family that evening before we retired, a prayer that was the song of hope that one day we would regain the lost security and peace of yester times. For ours was the hope that could endure and overcome despair, the hope that was being powered by a faith that kept looking up.

Home, sweet home!

Life rolled on quietly for us in the orchard, rolled on with almost contentfully ease and security. I said almost for we knew that we were still a part of that chaotic world outside and no amount of deceit and feigned make-believe could make us hide from its harsh reality. Right within the tranquil fold of our orchard home news of Japanese barbarities in town never failed to reach us, news of slapping and blows from the butt of guns. We also knew that they were but a mild prelude to the setting aflame of the hair of one's armpit, the pulling out of one's entire fingernail or to a shower bath of boiling water; indeed a prelude to many an unthinkable torture before one was finally bayoneted down into a grave they had made him dig for his final resting place.

Even in our orchard home we learned of that poor countryman who was bayoneted to death for giving a glass of water to some thirsty American war prisoners working on a broken bridge; or of the Catholic priest who was made to kneel for an hour by the roadside and to recite all the prayers he could think of in 'contrition' for his forgetting to bow at the sentry near the church-yard; of a woman whose fingernails were wholly cut off just because a small penknife was found in her hand-bag.

News about the merciless bombing of Bremen, Cologne and other German cities, of the big naval battle off Midway; of the guerrilla activities in Yugoslavia; news about the spectacular advance of the Chinese army in an effort to regain lost territories, all reached us even in our orchard home. There were still Japanese bombers that flew overhead almost everyday to remind us of the chaos still raging beyond our orchard fence. Hence, life in the orchard, though ostensibly quiet and secure was still haunted by the shadow of creeping fear.

However the biggest news that had reached the orchard was the coming home of our sister Laura and her husband. Now I had all my three sisters. And Byronic-like I softly intoned: "My sisters! My sisters! If a name is dearer and purer it should be thine."

INGLORIOUS JULY FOURTH

The fourth of July, 1942, Father and I woke up and breakfasted early so that we might reach town before seven but not to celebrate Independence Day. There could be no feasting where there was no freedom, where the banner of Liberty itself had been stripped into ribbons to serve as knotted clothes lines for the dirty uniforms of a savage horde. We had wanted to reach town early to meet the first batch of sick and wounded Filipino war prisoners released from the Capas concentration camp and schedules to arrive at the railroad station at seven. We had hoped to meet some relations and friends from among those expected to arrive.

The Japanese Military on the pretext of "unbounded magnanimity," had decided to release little by little the sick and wounded Filipino soldiers concentrated at Capas, Tarlac. This was an act which it claimed to be "without parallel in the annals of history." But Father had his doubts and I wanted to agree with him.

When we arrived at the station it was already crowded with people who must be immediate relatives of those expected to arrive any moment. Some brought first aid boxes with them; others had bulging paper bags

presumably containing edibles for the coming loved ones.

Cousin Meliton Brion was already there leaning on the station's concrete post as he chatted with a thin man puffing his cigar rather nervously. In a corner squatted Cousin Aurelia Fernandez, grave and moody staring emptily at the crowd huddled together near an old freight truck that could be their ambulance. There was not much lively chatting, no loud laughter, only quiet smiles and light greetings.

Father approached Cousin Meliton while I went straight to Cousin Aurelia patted her head jocosely, lingered a while, then left without saying a word for I did not know what to say to her. I learned lately that her son Benito was not included in the list of those coming and here was the poor mother waiting for her son's return.

About a quarter of an hour later the whistle and the rumbling of wheels of an approaching train were heard. The crowd in the station suddenly became alive. Ina moment a long chain of freight cars filled with the seemingly dregs of humanity passed before us while every one in the crowd strained his neck and eyes searchingly for the sight of kith and kin. They who had seen and recognized the objects of their search followed the particular car where they were, bumping against the

others still looking for theirs. On the other hand, the barely open doors of the freight cars swelled with unearthly faces, weakly waving emaciated hands and hollow voices calling familiar names of folks long missed.

The long train stopped and out of the freight cars poured the most ghastly sight I had seen in all of my life. Big bulging eyes; pale, dark, and gnome-like faces; dirty shaven head; skeletoned arms that dangled so frailly; youth once alive and gay, now hideously deformed by wounds and disease; youth broken ion body, walking with empty brain; the sight of them was sad enough but sadder still was their meeting with loved ones on that inglorious Fourth of July!

Repressed expression of grief too deep for tears, too depressing even for hard hearts to behold; most pathetic interplay of tenderness and sorrowing joy! Life in its most haunting fantasy of reality!

A mother failing to recognize her son from among the unearthly crowd, was about to weep when she was hugged by a grotesque-like figure of a man. She would have screamed in fright, but when she heard the familiar voice whisper “Mother,” she wept with an insane kind of joy. “My son, my son!” They met on the Fourth!

A father descended the freight car with a helpless mass of a wretched form in his arms. He walked straight ahead, empty-faced and seemingly seeing nothing; he walked on as if in resigned oblation to an Unseen Being, the while two women trailed sobbingly behind! The son died on the way with the glory of the Fourth of July on his lips!

A sick one limping and wearied to the bones looked around searchingly for kin or friend to welcome him but they appeared to be nowhere. Anguished perhaps by the thought of it, he rested his weak body in a corner and wept quietly. The next instant I was leading him to the hospital truck; I was saying: "Courage, brave soldier; your folks do not know you re coming. Ina day or two they will know and take you home." He did not know that I was crying also inside me. He fought in Bataan for the glory of the Fourth of July and this was how he celebrated it!

Cousin Aurelia went home with a despairing look. "He will come home," I said as I dearly rested my arm on her shoulder. She did not say a word; she simply walked away.

Cousin Meliton did not know whether to grieve or to rejoice. His Aristeo came home, but his Feliciano had not returned. And when he asked Aristeo about his

brother, the boy from Bataan could not say a word. His moist eyes answered his father's query.

There were more relations and friend to greet, but Father abruptly held my arm and said: "Let's go now." He must have thought that we had seen enough.

We walked away silently. We did not speak to each other until we reached the marketplace. Father and I then agreed that he would do the marketing while I proceeded to the town hall to buy our ration of government rice. We also agreed not to wait for each other anymore.

Besides the coming home of the heroes of Bataan, something else had been happening in the hometown. A man had been tied to a lamp post at the town plaza. He committed a "crime". He celebrated the Fourth of July in wine and song. He even shouted, "The Americans are coming on July Fourth." An informer heard and reported him to the Japanese garrison. He was apprehended and tied to a lamp post; then the enemy ordered every passerby to box his face or be boxed himself. Neither water nor food for him in days to come, for he celebrated the Fourth of July!

I avoided the spot where the drunken patriot had been tied but from the distance I could see his helpless form, his head now sunk, his hair disheveled, his hands uplifted and tied. I also could see the menacing figure

of a Japanese sentry a few meters away. No one passed that way; the inhabitants chose the more distant route.

Reaching the premises of the town hall I immediately fell in line with the others. I was prepared to stay in line for an hour or two perhaps more. The personnel in charge were slow, their system was no system, and their petty graft and nasty rudeness were most annoying.

"If you will feed a sick one," said an old woman, "he's already dead but you don't have your rice yet."

"I hope a Japanese plane will fly overhead and bomb us all, hungry and evil ones alike," murmured another.

A young girl fainted before she could get her rice and a little boy shrieked when squeezed in between two rude-looking men. Nobody seemed to bother; everyone appeared preoccupied with his personal problem… rice.

At least we were free to get hungry!

I stayed in line for two hours before I could buy our four gant-a-week ration of government rice. Then grabbing my sack I left the place in a hurry. I did not want to see more of that hungry crowd; it was just as bad as that ghastly crowd which Father and I had seen in the railroad station. I hated the cause of it all. If it were

only as easy as trampling the worms in our vegetable garden or beating a thieving lizard to death, I would have done it. But I was helpless as that crowd and so I left in a hurry. I left with a vast crowd of thoughts which I wished I had not the mind to ponder over with. I left half-running as if my strides could help dismiss them away.

I was still far but Mother had seen me already and was waiting by the orchard gate. “Poor boy!” she said. “Why did you walk? This is too heavy for you to carry. Why did you not take the calesa? See how you perspire, your back is all wet with sweat.”

Father came out to get the sack of rice from me. Meanwhile Luz and Rebecca hurriedly set the table for our belated lunch. They waited for me; they must have gotten hungry waiting for me. All this loving solicitousness only made me sadder and I knew the reason why.

July fourth! I laughed quietly, mockingly.

TO TAZA DE ORO WITH TREAT & TRICK

A USAFFE war prisoner at the Capas concentration camp, twenty-six year old Gertrudo San Pedro of Barrio Santa Isabel immediately started organizing his own guerrilla outfit for attachment to Col. Hugh Straughn's Fil-American Irregular Troops (FAIT). A few months later Pedro Perez, a burly coconut plantation owner from Barrio Lumbangan (San Crispin), also dedicated to form a unit of his own under the wing of President Quezon's Own Guerrillas (PQOG). They were followed by an old man from Barrio Ludlod (Santiago ll). He was Juan Eseo, alias Kayaks, a faithful aide of Col. Luis Banaad of the Revolutionary days and the Filipino-American War. But they had to do things very quietly for the Japanese Kempetai in town had a host of collaborators acting as informers for the enemy.

By a stroke of good fortune our cousin Ramon Paulino had been encouraged into leasing the residence of our aunt Eudocia Brion-Capino, across the plaza that he might establish a deluxe restaurant which he gave an attractive name --- Taza de Oro. A fashion designer and an interior decorator, Momeng --- as his good relations nicknamed him affectionately --- always had wanted to do things the luxurious way. He had seen to it that his eating joint be favored with an elegant surrounding and unforgettable attention where one might enjoy a unique

dining experience. The warmth and charm of its provincial atmosphere added much in the enjoyment of the finest international cuisine. His place had become an idea nook for a relaxing lunch or light supper on weekdays but lavish with a vengeance on Saturday evenings when a foppishly-costumed orchestra and some invited singers were around to inspire more zest and mirth to the fun-loving townsmen.

The Taza de Oro had a wide choice of Chinese dishes. Momeng also specialized in the impressive delicacies of the sea, fresh sea food bubbling with lobster, shrimps, and crabmeat. But he still had such exotic appetizers as charcoal-broiled steaks, chicken vesuvio, meaty beef bones brushed with delectable syrupy sauce, all elegantly served. To please the Japanese Military that came to the place, he caused to be served once a week sukiyaki, sushi, teriyaki, and/or tempura style of cooking in keeping with the Japanese tradition.

Momeng might or might not have realized it but his restaurant had done much towards helping our townsmen lessen their anxiety over the troublous times by making them enjoy the harmless pleasure offered by his Taza de Oro. He was able to help imagine themselves as happy and thus enable them to take lightly the pain of hoping and waiting for the coming back of “I shall return” liberator and friend.

Just as important, our cousin's Taza de Oro had so enticed the Japanese Kempetai and their now moneyed informers into frequenting the place that they somehow neglected their surveillance over the possible occurrence of an underground resistance movement in the hometown. And this gave the local guerrillas the time getting themselves organized without being disturbed.

The most costly event in Taza de Oro took place when Dona Rosario Adap de Escudero, wife of the hometown's most affluent Don Arsenio, celebrated her birthday. It was a gala affair attended by members of the hometown's elite society. Because Don Arsenio was of Spanish ancestry, Momeng had seen to it that his eating joint be decorated with a motif emitting a Castilian atmosphere. Even the food that he caused to be served to the guests smacked of Spanish cuisine.

Don Arsenio had intended it to be a gala affair to celebrate his wife's natal day … with a purpose. Now a ranking officer of the hometown's unit of Col. Hugh Straughn's Fil-American Irregular Troops, he had hoped to divert the attention of the Japanese kempetai in the hometown to social affairs and thus enable the underground movement to build up strength without being suspected. He felicitated himself when much later the local elite coterie started patronizing Taza de Oro, even holding their birthday, wedding, baptismal receptions and private parties in the place. And he was much

gladdened to know that the kempetai officers were invited always to these social gatherings.

Further, the ordinary people had found time, especially during Saturday evenings, to saunter about the plaza to listen to good music and to watch the fashionably-attired prominence frequenting Taza de Oro. The kempetai personnel also frequented the place for some passing moments of relaxation. Indeed the Taza de Oro had become a made to order veil of gaiety to help conceal the underground movement's initial program of activities, for even the nasty informers were being entertained.

Then came the anti-climax which saddened Don Arsenio. The Japanese at first observed social amenities but time came when they began their drinking spree in Taza de Oro. And once they became inebriated they started making disgustingly amorous overtures at the ladies present, much to the discomfiture of the ladies themselves and their male escorts. Fearing that the men present might fail to restrain themselves from teaching these nasty Japs a brutal lesson on social decorum, Momeng had to close his restaurant much to the disappointment of the fun-loving townsmen.

Don Arsenio might or might not have a secret understanding with his good neighbor, our Uncle Florencio Penaloza, but the latter dared to take over. He named

his nightclub Ena Maria. Because the hometown's elite coterie had shied away from nigh life, our Uncle Florencio chose to cater to the sensual clique by inviting movie and sideshow starlets to entertain the guests with their lusty songs and dances. But the drunken Japanese habitués became even more boisterous and rude and unruly in dealing with the women present, especially with the performing actresses. Our good relation had to close shop.

Several months later a group dashing university students of pre-war days dared to form a social club which they named Tau Kappa. Because some of them became active guerrillas eventually, we also suspected that they must have aimed at deluding the kempetai to the belief that they were a peace-loving group interested only in frolic and fun, never in living the hunted life of a guerrilla. In fact during the club's inaugural dance, they invited Captain Yamaguti as guest of honor and the kempetai chief came escorted by Police Chief Avelino de Guzman and an interpreter. Don Arsenio was gladdened again.

Another group of young men and young women had been encouraged also to organize their own club which they called Sigma Chi. They likewise held an inaugural dance with the local kempetai officers as special guests. Both clubs were able to hold retreat back to the quiet of

home life. For as Shakespeare would put it, “Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind.”

During the intervening period the swains and lasses in our village had become interested also in holding dances occasionally at the village schoolhouse. I finally yielded to their request that I led to give the young men and young women of the village some relaxing hours after weekdays of strenuous toil in the field. Like the children of affluence in the publication they also deserved to be favored with the privilege of enjoying themselves. And I also thought of it as a way of deceiving the informers to the belief that the young men of the village were a fun-loving one who shunned being guerrillas. Actually many of them were already henchmen of guerrilla colonel Juan Kayakas!

In place of Taza de Oro’s foppishly-costumed orchestra, we had Marcelo Colago’s enthusiastic string quartet; in place of Taza de Oro’s extravagantly prepared cuisine, we had the native nilupak (grilled banana cookies) and kalamansi juice to serve our guests and ourselves in place of the glowing Meralco Electric Light, we had the flickering coconut oil torches. Our swains and lasses also came in their own version of party dresses while the farmers, the farmer’s wives, and the farmer’s children, still in their rugged and soiled clothes, were our rejoicing audience. Gladly there were no drunken Japs around to molest us.

The Taza de Oro and the Ena Marie were closed already; the Tau Kappa and the Sigma Chi were not holding dances anymore but our monthly social in the village was still going on and becoming merrier and merrier. Some young men from the poblacion even invited themselves and also enjoyed or at least pretended to have enjoyed, our nilupak-kalamansi as well as our string quartet offerings. They even considered our dim coco-light quite romantic.

Then the police came and strongly suggested that we forgo with our monthly social lest some Japanese patrol mistakes it as a guerrilla meeting in the guise of a harmless social and had us apprehended for questioning in the kempetai garrison in town. That would be fatal and the old folks in the village concurred with the police authorities. And so night life both in the village and in the poblacion returned anew to one of quiet and misgivings.

But the hope which had fallen asleep in a dream since the fall of Bataan and Corregidor had been awakened again. Was it because of the chilly December breeze heralding the advent of another Christmastime or was it because of the encouraging news we had been getting from the radio shortwave newscast through the set of either Cousin Antonio Azores or Cousin Serafin Fuentes?

We heard of late that while General Mac Arthur's Aussie-American forces were occupying part of Burma, one of the Japanese bulwarks of defense in New Guinea, General Montgomery's British eighth Route Army was chasing Marshal Rommel's fast-retreating Afrika Korps. Simultaneously, Marshal Timoshenko's indefatigable Russian soldiers were slaughtering thousands of German and Rumanian fighters in their colossal counter offensive. While Turin and Naples were being leveled to the ground by British and American bombers the inimitable William Winter of San Francisco's KGEI was taunting pagan Japan to prepare a rousing welcome for a big aerial parade of giant long-range American bombers over her gloomy sky in the very near future.

Were these the news which had awakened hope from its semi-drowsing dream, the news which was beginning to embolden the guerrilla fighters in their mountain hideouts; or was it chilly December breeze heralding the advent of another Christmastime?

COMES ANOTHER CHRISTMASTIME

How did we celebrate Christmas the past year? We did not want to think of it for some jealous heathens riding on wicked winged monsters swooped down upon us and showered fire and destruction and death, believing that by doing so they could destroy our faith in the Holy Babe born the Eve before. But the heathens were in error for not even fire and destruction, not even death itself could vanquish the Faith that was born in a Manger two thousand years ago.

Another Christmas was come for the heathen could not stop it from coming much less kill it. Only it was a Christmas without apples and grapes and walnuts for the heathens had gormandized them; a Christmas without toys and Christmas trees for the heathens had destroyed them; a Christmas without silver coins for the heathens had pilfered them to further their nefarious end. But Christmas still came and children also came with their smiling faces.

The orchard was however generous to this another Christmas comes. Piggie was ready to be sacrificed so that our Christmas dinner with village neighbors and relations might be more heartily celebrated. Of course it was hard to miss Piggie after watching it grow every day to the size it now was, after watching it trail behind

us as we sauntered about the orchard, lying down immediately at the slightest stroke on the head. But Piggie had to be roasted so that our Christmas dinner might be a more hearty meal.

I gazed around and about. The leaves and grasses seemed more green, the sunbeams more bright and the song of birds and crow of cockerels and cackle of hens more frolicking for they all were proclaiming the glad tiding of Christmas joy and cheer. We could not help but be filled with good and cheerful spirit for nature itself appeared happy and in its refreshing mood. Was it to shame the cruel heathens that ruled beyond the orchard fence?

Then merry greetings began to be heard from wide-open windows and along the village road, and laughing inquiries if someone had apples and grapes and walnuts were made. The village children started thronging the road; now they were coming to the orchard. Our mongrel barked at them excitedly and the children, seven of them, paused by the gate hesitating but eager to enter.

"Greto", I shouted. "Wish them Merry Christmas instead."

Greto seemed to have understood for he immediately ceased barking and ran playfully about while the seven little ones shyly entered the orchard. Some took their

seats outside the door of the hut and others boldly entered with eyes wandering around as if looking for a Christmas tree or something like it. Some would not sit but leaned behind chairs quietly. Others continued to tease and whisper something at each other's ears. As I gazed at them I thought of Christmas past of toys and Christmas trees and Bethlehem.

Mother came and blessed the children one by one. Then she asked, "What do you want for Christmas gift children?"

"Anything, Grandma," replied the biggest in the group.

"You want grapes and apples and toys?"

The children looked at each other for some time, eyes wide open, and then burst into caroling laughter. "You want apples and toys?" the big boys asked the others.

"Yes," they chorused laughingly. But there was something in an innocent laughter, something saddening.

"You know I have no apples and toys this Christmas," Mother started to explain. "The Americans and the Japanese are still fighting. The apples come from

America and the toys from Japan but now they are busy fighting each other. Next year perhaps their quarrel will be over then they will send us apples and toys again. I shall buy them for you and hang them on a Christmas tree and you shall come again."

The children gazed at Mother quietly as she talked and as I looked at them I felt like cursing the cause of it all. What could the children be thinking of?

Then Mother went away. When she came back she had a small wooden box with her and from which she drew some ten centavo coins. They would have been given to the village children the past year but the little ones did not come for some bad men schooled in the art of slaughter frightened them away. How the children exclaimed with boyish delight when they each received the ten centavo piece as a Christmas gift from Mother. They had been used to seeing and handling dirty and crumpled war notes, the sight of real coins caused a spontaneous outburst of joyous feeling.

While waiting for more little friends to come I fell into recollecting our Christmas past and then into looking forward to more Christmases still to come. But a formation of bombers passed overhead and alas! A disturbing thought assailed me once more. Instead of thinking about the shepherds watching their flocks in the gentle stillness of eventide, I was forced to think of

men and women and children agonizing in the dreadful ghastliness of night. Before it could depress me badly another merry coterie was calling out in ringing voices from the orchard gate, “Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!”

That afternoon I decided to go to town to visit some relations. As I walked my way I heard no more greetings from yards and open windows, no more jocund inquires as to whether the neighbors had grapes and apples and toys. The villagers were still there, but the mirth and lightheartedness had subsided. They seemed to have returned anew to the unpleasant thoughts of Japanese barbarity and black market prices. The spirit of the season did not stay long in them. It was only in the hearts of the little children still thronging the village road that the Christmas spirit seemed to linger long and would not leave so easily. They still seemed to be telling stories to each other about their Christmas experiences. Others were counting dirty crumpled war notes instead of silver coins and they had no apples and grapes and toys in their hands.

Came the evening hour and it was on a Christmas night like this when our parents used to narrate the merriest tales ever, about their and their playmate’s painless tales of childhood, those younger years when they were carefree and blithe; when theirs was the glory of vim and vigor, the quiver of joy, the heart of frolic and fun.

To them there was no such thing as woe and they knew not the doctrine of wrong doings. With neither past nor future they enjoyed the present as they lived their merry lives.

Our parent's recital of their childhood days always had been the wonder of the hour. And so on this Christmas night under Japanese rule, their stories had held us from thinking many unpleasant thoughts. Trying hard to ensnare in their waking dream the tender grace of days that were no more, our parents did succeed in softening our sentiments and fancy with their stories that never got lost in the telling. Indeed the merriest tales always were narrated on Christmastime!

That night we slept dreaming of past Christmases when nothing affrightened us, when our thoughts gloried running again along the hills of Galilee where the flocks were asleep in a dream while the angels kept watch with wondering love.

BUSINESS AND VILLAINY

There was not much to do in the orchard now. The plants and the hogs and the chickens could be left to themselves without much attention. The seeds of celery and cucumber and other plants were already dry and just waiting to be planted with the coming of the May time rain, while the firewood which Father and I had chopped was already neatly piled under a lanzones tree near the kitchen stove. We already had made an improvised shed so it would not get wet by the rain. The hut had undergone repair to furnish modest comfort on sunny days and to spare its occupants from too much cold and pilfering raindrops on rainy nights.

After staying with the hogs and the poultry and the plants and the family in the narrow confine of the little orchard for one solid year, I seemed to have become rather restless. I felt like getting disgusted over the tardy coming of a friend and being filled with such unpleasant feelings I feared that the orchard instead of serving as a haven might become an unhappy prison cell of discontent and frustration. So I thought of leaving the orchard home for some time to heighten fondness and make affection more endeared. I thought of engaging in a business of some sort not exactly to enrich myself with those dirty war notes but more to kill

idle time before I hoped too much and lost hope is too much hoping.

When I brought the idea to Mother she did not seem to like it. “You do not miss your meal yet son,” she said.

“I know it Mother,” I replied. “But we don’t know what the future holds for us. This war may last longer than we expect. The price of everything is getting higher and higher.”

“What little faith you have,” Mother chided me. “Have we not lived the first year of the war? We shall keep on even if the war lasts for some more years. Let us have faith in Him and He shall not fail us.”

I could not tell Mother that is was not that, not the question of having or not having faith in Him. I was getting bored with the routine sameness of orchard and farm life, of waking up early every morning to feed the hogs and the fowls, of going to the fields and gathering firewood and fallen coconuts, of attending to the plants, plants and more plants, of accompanying Mother and my sisters to wash our dirty clothing in the Banadero stream. Even the songs and flight of birds now passed unnoticed. These things I could not tell Mother, for she might not understand. “But Mother, faith won’t be

enough,” I said. “We have to do something to make it strong.”

“We could sell some of our chickens, even a few pieces of our diamond jewelry when the need comes,” she said.

“If we do so time may come when we shall have neither chickens nor pieces of jewelry left and the war is not yet over.”

“But it’s never safe to go away from home these days,” said other. I always had known that was her main concern and Father’s to. As much as it could be helped they had wished that all of us would be together always in these uncertain times. They felt a certain feeling of courage and confidence in our togetherness but an aching restlessness in our being away from each other.

“I could take care of myself Mother,” I said. “Besides, we have faith in Him. Wherever we are that faith would be our guide.”

“But what business do you intend to engage in?” Mother wanted to know.

That was an encouraging query and I lost no time in explaining to her the kind of business I had in mind.

Many of the villagers were engaged in making coconut oil and coconut lye for sale to Chinese merchants and many more were contemplating to follow suit. They would need more and more metal pans for the purpose. These big vessels were foundered in a big foundry at my brother-in-law's hometown in Bulacan. I could buy them direct from the source and sell them at prices much lower than the ones for sale at the Chinese stores in town. This would be helping the villagers and the family as well.

It would not be the first time that we would do a little business with the villagers both to our mutual benefit. When my sister Laura, a pharmacist, learned months past that malaria was rampant in the village, she brought with her during one of their trips from Manila big bottles of quinine tablets, and because she bought them direct from a Manila wholesale store she was able to dispose of them at a cost much lower that the drugstore price in town. To this business goodwill might be added also the villager's affectionate regard nurtured for us because of the little goodnesses we had rendered to them. I surely could not fail in this little business venture.

Fortifying myself with the music of the word Faith, I was finally able to frustrate Mother's occasional hints of solicitous concern. Then one day I was ready to go with the little cash money which the family had at the

time. Everyone accompanied me as far as the orchard gate.

"Take care of yourself my son," were Mother's parting words.

"I shall return," I answered jocosely and waved my hands at them as endearingly as a soldier would to his loved ones before going to war.

The venture did not turn out to be one of thrill and excitement as I had hoped it to be; rather it was one of risk and petty annoyances with all the attendant headaches, discomfort and pain. But there was no backing out anymore. The money and the will had been set determinedly and so the venture must go on. After all the first trip was a success. I netted a good profit which if converted into rice would last us for a fortnight or more. I could have profited more even if my commodities were sold at much lower prices than those of the Chinese stores in town were it not for the exorbitant cost of transportation.

I then thought of bringing some other things to vend in future trips to Manila and Bulacan, those which would command better prices there but which could be had cheaply in the village or in town. I thought of soap and coconut oil but they were controlled commodities. They surely would yield a very handsome profit but I

did not want to get slapped and hogtied and beaten for the sake of bigger profit. So I brought instead some of the yields of the orchard; garlic, onions, ginger and other garden yields.

At first I was not serious about this little business of mine. I thought I was only doing it to escape the unvarying, almost irksome sameness of work in the orchard but with succeeding trips the thought of bigger profit began steadily to take hold of me so that before I knew it I was making more frequent trips to Manila and Bulacan, and taking along with me more and more heavy and expensive stuff. Because of the profit which was getting more and more handsome with every succeeding trip I made, I even forgot the risk and the annoyances and the discomfort brought about by the travel.

Each time I passed Manila on my homebound trip I tarried for a day or two and celebrated a little. All work and no play makes Johnny a dull boy, I would tell myself as I leisurely sauntered about Manila's busy streets. I would go to a movie, see a few stage shows, eat in better restaurants, and buy good cigarettes and some things for the folks at home. Then I would be thinking of the orchard and the loved ones waiting for me and I would wish I had wings so that I might reach them sooner. Each time I returned home from one of those trips I could feel in their faces and in their attention the

fondness heightened and the affection made more endeared by the few days of absence and the orchard would appear lovelier than before.

Then I would start narrating about what I had seen and experienced on my trip, and every one would leave his work awhile to listen to every word I said. I would tell them about that woman from Baliuag who was beaten cruelly by the Japanese sentry for concealing a sack of rice beneath some firewood in effort to bring it to her hungry family in Manila; about the old man and a little boy who were run over by a speeding army lorry along the Meycauayan road; about the half-naked American war prisoners, dirty and unshaven and emaciated, loading big posts on the trucks while their Japanese guards looked at them amusingly. I would tell them about the tell-tales whispered to me by intimates and confiding fellow passengers with regard to the progress of the war in various fronts, about the guerrilla or organizations which were now beginning to show signs of activity.

Through with my stories I would ramble one more about the orchard to gather polo beans for mealtime or look after a stray chick which might have fallen in a nearby pit, or play with our mongrel. All the while I was thinking and planning ways by which I might earn more money, more.

The following day when the villagers knew that I was back, they came to see what goods they could buy and ask what news I had about the progress of the war. In less than a week's time my merchandise was all sold out, and once more I was on my way to Manila and Bulacan. More often I received requests from villagers to purchase some things for them in Manila; a new plowshare for the farmer, a stronger brand of thread and cheaper needles for the farmer's wife, a pair of denim shorts for the farmer's son, and so on. For these I got goodwill and gratitude and that was enough reward for the little delay in my trip.

It was during one of these trips that I came across a prosperous looking high school chum of mine. I say prosperous looking for he was attired in a newly tailored shark skin suit, had a big diamond ring on one of his fingers and an elegantly shaped watch on his wrist. He treated me to one of the swankiest restaurants in the city, gave the waiter a tip that would feed a family of five in our village for almost a week, and then we smoked Camel cigarettes which then cost twenty pesos a package.

After lunch he whisked me away in his car, quite rare at the time, to his office in one of the biggest edifices in Manila's business district. The elevator took us to the fourth floor and a sharp turn to the left led us to his office, a swell commodious affair with three desks,

all new and with glossy tops. A pretty Spanish mestiza was at the typewriter when we entered. She smiled at us and I smiled back.

"Now we can talk freely," Pete Sta. Maria said. "What's on your mind? I don't have to tell you who I am, a buy-and-sell magnate."

"Let me see," I said as though in deep thought. "Yes, I know you now. You are one of those who should be hanged for causing the existence of the black market and for supplying the enemy with war material."

"No," he protested, "you get me wrong, Johnny. You don't understand."

"I do," I told him flatly. "If you think you're being charitable you are wrong. You and your kind are starving thousands of poor people because of the cost of living which you have raised with your squandering simply because you have too much money, ill-gotten money! This buy-and-sell business of yours is high treason, if you will ask me."

"Johnny, Johnny, keep calm," Pete tried to laugh away my sudden outburst. "You don't understand."

But I had not recovered. "Don't you know that by engaging in such business as selling war material to the

enemy you are prolonging the war and therefore also prolonging our people's misery and sufferings? Or don't you bother as long as you and your family are well provided for?"

"But Johnny, you're a sentimental sandwich," my former classmate laughed. "These are no times for sentiment. You've got to be practical so you and your family won't starve. This is no time for idealism; this is a race for survival. This is war. Let the saints take the bony portion but as for me I prefer the fleshier region of the broiled chicken! Well Johnny dear, I could only be very sorry for you and your crusading heart."

He laughed again then took out his pack of Camel cigarettes and we both smoked. "What are you doing in the province….rotting?"

"Raising poultry and swine and growing vegetables."

"And how come the country mouse happens to be in Manila?"

"To find out if Jones Bridge is still there, or if you have sold it already to the enemy!"

"Not yet, but from the look of things you may sell it in the near future. And you are one of those who should be held criminally responsible."

"Johnny!" he ejaculated, but that was all he could say. He changed the subject. "Look!" gazing at his pretty secretary. "I still have an eye for beauty. Shall I arrange a date for you? It can be done. I have several of my own already. After all, you're my friend."

"You are tempting me," I said.

"What are you man or mouse?"

"Man of course."

"Look here Johnny," he began again. "You're my friend. Don't make a fool of yourself. Don't bother about those silly ideas. This is war. Everybody's chief concern is to survive, that's all. If you don't help yourself, who will help you? There's money somewhere. If I don't get it, others would. So why shouldn't I get it myself? That holds true with you and with everyone. Why be foolish not to get it for yourself and your family when others will also get it just the same and you can't prevent them from doing so. If you get the money yourself you may even use it for more honorable ends."

I continued to smoke quietly. I was not making furtive glances at the Spanish mestiza anymore; I was looking straight at her, at the tempting fullness of her breasts, at the sensuous shape of her body, her lips, her

hips, her legs; I was imagining how soft and smooth were her cheeks and breasts and hips, every part of her.

"Stick with me Johnny," Pete's voice was in earnest, "I promise you that in a month's time you'll be worth more than a thousand pesos and don't you worry about helping the black market for with or without your thousand pesos the black market will still be there and thousands will continue to starve and we couldn't do anything about it. This is war. Don't you worry either about helping the Japs with the war material that we shall sell them. All Japanese ships that leave the Philippines with the cargo they buy from us never reach their destination. They get sunk on the way. Besides, why bother about America? With or without our aid, she will win just the same. And as for the guerrillas, we can help them more if we have more money. Let us bother more about our families, how we may save them from hunger. Think it over Johnny; this opportunity is too good to let pass. It comes only once in a lifetime and we live only once."

"Well, what am I suppose to do?" I broke down. "Where do I come in."

The Spanish mestiza glanced at me and I caught her with my meaningful gaze. She smiled a bit and I also smiled a bit. I only hoped my friend did not notice; he was too busy with me and I pretended to be all ears.

"Now you're talking," he commented much relaxed. "It's easy, Johnny, very easy. I give you the money then you go back to the province and buy all the iron and steel bars you can find at a price that I shall fix for you. I shall always keep you posted on the things the Japanese Army and Navy may need, like generators, dynamos, engines of specified kind. Should you come across them you will let us know so that we may inspect them with a Japanese representative. If the Japanese say yes, we are both worth a few thousand pesos more."

"It sounds easy," I said.

"It is easy," he shot back.

"Well," I said rising up. "I'll be back soon."

Before I left Pete introduced me to his pretty secretary as his new business partner and, therefore, I should be honored with a date, blind or otherwise, with her. The pretty secretary smiled approvingly, I thought, as I held her hand rather tightly. As I reached for the door Pete shouted at me, "Forget the poultry and swine for awhile Johnny." I already had forgotten them for I was thinking only of how soft was his secretary's hand, how temptingly full her breasts were, how inviting her smiles, I was thinking already of a few deleterious things.

The streets of Manila were crowded as usual with Japanese soldiers and Japanese planes had been flying overhead interminably. But I seemed not to have noticed. I was thinking busily of Pete's pretty secretary and of the nightclubs and dark corners, of his diamond ring and elegant wrist watch, of his Camel cigarettes that cost twenty pesos a package.

But also I was thinking of other things. If I do business with Pete I would be worth thousands of pesos in a few months. Then I could have a house built on our lot in town, I could buy a piano for my sister Luz and more books for my sister Rebecca. We also could have toothsome and nutritious food each mealtime. I would have enough spare money to lend my sister Laura to establish a little pharmacy and to give to Potenciana and Regina and other penurious villagers to buy rice for the family gruel.

I walked on. I took a street car. I attended to my business for the day in a hurry for my thought was in a dream. When I got the thousand pesos I would not subject myself anymore to discomforts and annoyances. I would ride in a car for comfort, I would frequent the best movies and stage shows, eat only in first class restaurants, go with Pete's pretty secretary in the dark nook of the club! I was so thrilled by the dream of it I felt I was already in proud possession of the thousands

yet in the air. I felt I was already the rich man I had painted myself in my musing.

It was already night when I reached the orchard. After partaking of my belated evening meal I started to tell the folks about some of the things and happenings I saw and those narrated to me by others, but I did not tell them about my talk with Pete and the prospect of several thousand pesos. I wanted to surprise them when it was realized.

However, before I retired for the night a conflict had begun to take place within me. My dream of the one thousand pesos, of the comfort and convenience and good times, the hope of a life of abundance had been challenged. Something inside me had started to question with gnawing persistence, to shout in angry protest. I fell asleep rather late with the conflict unsettled in my mind. The next morning I was feeling restless and weak all over. I searched myself for explanation; nothing came out. Yet somehow I felt queery even foolishly. I leaped from my bed and went out in the orchard. I breathed deep of the morning wind, once, twice, thrice, more. Then I rambled about.

Once more I was again in the company of the hogs and the poultry, the clinging plants and the trees around. Then I came to realize that the orchard was not only trees and more trees and leafy vegetation. Neither

was it all chicken's cackle and grunting of pigs and notes from trembling throats or birdies. For my sisters, Luz and Rebecca had designed it also into a blossoming realm of flowers. By the gate of our orchard home we now had a few gardenias that seemed to grin at the blushing redness of their hibiscus neighbors and dangling from the front window of our hut were lance-like stems of orchids bedecked with silken petals of violet and white. And on the pots beside them were roses, damask and yellow and red, holding their heads in snobbish pride. These orchids and roses had been our companions in good times and in want. They once occupied a favored nook in the garden of our house in town that was no more; now they smiled once more at the front window of our lowly village home.

Oh yes, there was near the kitchen stove that neat pile of firewood which Father and I axed days before I started frequenting Manila and Bulacan. We did the task in three days but unlike before my muscles did not ache anymore. In fact I enjoyed the bursting of sweat and its rolling down my face and neck to my breast and back. I felt the throb of life. Indeed the labor of the body had saved me from the pain of the mind.

I must miss them no more, the pile of wood, the hogs and the poultry, the fruit and vegetable crops, the birdies in frisking flight, the blossoming florets, the trees that gave boundless continuity of shade, indeed all

these gifts of nature casting away our years and making us children ever. Because of them how lovesome the orchard had become. I must miss them no more.

And so I was troubled no more. I now had decided on what I should not do, that I might be freer to do what I should do.

LOOK OUT AND LEND A HAND

I laughed away Pete's promise of a few thousand pesos to be earned easily only to accept a one-peso a day job as social worker in the hometown and I did not regret it. I knew that accepting it would mean walking some kilometers every day, besides waking up early and coming home late. I knew that it would mean giving up a very profitable business and the pleasure which wartime Manila could offer in favor of a daily one peso wage and full-time work. I knew and still I accepted it without regret. Even my folks did not seem disturbed when I told them about my new job in town and the pay I would get. They were even amused. At least they could keep me in the hometown, Mother said, and save me the risk and discomfort of frequent trips to Manila and Bulacan.

Hardly a week after my chat with Pete in Manila, I received a note from a certain Jose Burgos requesting to see me in town. He turned out to be a Relief Agent from the Bureau of Public Welfare assigned to Laguna Province. According to him he would have established a Welfare Station in the hometown during the early months of Japanese occupation but when he learned that Werner Schetelig was already rendering charitable work here he instead proceeded to Santa Cruz and Pagsanjan. But now when he also learned that the good

man could not go on anymore with his acts of charity, Mr. Burgos decided to come over and continue the work started by him. The Relief Agent however needed an assistant to take his place in his absence for he had the whole province under his general supervision and could stay in town only for a couple of days every month.

Recommended by Domingo Natoza the City Public School principal, I accepted the position. Was it because I felt flattered over the opportunity of being the one to continue the work started by so good a man as Werner Schetelig? Was it because I had wanted to run away again from the orchard and its now tiring sameness? Was it the thirst for and joy of service to the less fortunate ones?

The inhabitants were hungry when they came down to the lowland from their mountain hideaway the year past. Many of them had come down with diseases while in hiding. They had no work and many were even homeless. Realizing the sorry predicament into which the inhabitants had fallen, Werner Schetelig immediately requested permission to operate his oil and soap factory. The Japanese Military for some expedient reason granted the request and the good man lost no time in informing the people that he was again ready to buy their coconuts. The news was received with great rejoicings by the people of San Pablo who in war and in

peace depended largely on coconut as a means of livelihood.

In a few days every field of coconut had begun to throb with life and activity. The service which the opening of Schetelig's factory had done could well be appreciated if we would consider the thousands of happy beneficiaries; the thousands who had been given work in the farm, in the factory itself, and in other small concerns that sprang up to do business directly or indirectly with the factory and the coconut growers. With the factory's resumption of operations not only our town but neighboring towns as well began to buzz with activity.

Not yet content with the assistance he already had rendered with the opening of his factory, Schetelig even converted his office into a charity nook where he listened patiently and compassionately from day to day to woeful tales of misery and affliction and nobody left his office without a smile of quiet joy.

The good man had set aside a thousand pesos every day to feed and clothe and shelter those who had been direly in need. When he was approached by the local government for a few thousand pesos load with which to buy rice for sale to the inhabitants at reasonable price, for there was not enough money in the government treasury and the cost of rice in the market was covetously high, Shetelig immediately responded.

When he learned of the prevalence of malaria among the inhabitants, he volunteered to pay the salaries of the personnel of the erstwhile closed public hospital and of the malaria control office.

Occasionally the good man made trips on his bicycle around town and to the villages, perhaps to find out for himself if he was making good with his self-imposed task of helping alleviate sufferings; greeting and saying "Hello" to everyone that came his way, smiling at them and lighting their faces. The big heart and the greatness of souls which he made manifest in deeds of goodness had made his name a household utterance in every home from the lowliest hut in some remote hamlet or to the rich man's mansion at the town plaza.

Schetelig was a naturalized Filipino but a German in blood and complexion. He did hit best to save and glorify life, but a time came when he no longer could do what he had wanted to do. The Japanese Military suddenly controlled his factory. Mr. Burgos, the relief agent, learned about it and immediately came to see to it that the work started by the good man continued. And the job was offered to me. I accepted it.

Ina few days the Welfare Station was ready to function. I caused the appointment of my friend Raymundo Garcia, holder of a master's degree in education from

the University of Southern California, as my immediate assistant; Fidel Valdellon, a retired public school teacher, to take charge of gardening; Nicetas Atienza, a businessman, to handle the handicraft project; and my cousin Manuel Guevarra, Ateneo de Manila's quondam debating society president, to assist me in soliciting voluntary contribution for the affluent section of the local citizenry. All five of us would receive a daily wage of one peso, working six days a week.

It was already mid-1943 when we got started, a time when our one-week salary was good only for a glass of halo-halo and a piece of egg pie or cake at a refreshment parlor in Regidor Street. But the thought that we were contributing our modest share in helping uplift the unfortunate lot of the indignant ones in the hometown during these difficult times was much enough encouragement for us to make the little sacrifice.

First and above all we should have the heart, the sympathy for the unfortunate ones. Only them would we be able to understand their plight better and help solve their problems. But we should not sacrifice reason for emotion or we would likely do what we ought not to do. For example we should not depend solely from the family for the facts of the case, for very likely we would hear magnified tales of woe and want in order to assure the family a ready aid from us. We should also consult the neighbors and others who might know that

family. Their statements plus our ocular investigation would help us form a more or less valid opinion as to whether the family deserves outright material aid or something else.

Just the same we might be deceived by some but better be deceived by a few than fail to extend assistance where it might be truly deserved. Theirs always must be the benefit of the doubt. After all practically everyone was indigent these troubled times. We desired as much as possible to reach with the limited funds at our disposal, those most direly in need of material aid.

To the soldier's widows and those rendered so by the Christmas Day bombing; widows, sickly and infirm and with little children to clothe and feed; to the aged and the invalid who had no means of support; to them the Welfare Station would give outright material aid in the form of rice, mongo, dried fish, clothing and other things that we might have for them.

To the needy released war prisoners and indigent ones who could work, we would offer work. It was not exactly work that we would give them for we would teach them a vocation, and while they were learning they also would be earning a modest sum of sixty centavos. We would have instructors ready to teach them how to make baskets out of coconut midrib, fancy trinkets out of coconut shell and so forth. We would have

them taught scientific gardening and after they had learned we would encourage them to make profitable use of their learning, lend them modest capital to start with and help them find markets for their products. We also would help them find work outside if the vocational training we intend to give would not appeal to them.

The funds of the Welfare Station were limited but we would ask the opulent ones of the community to help us. We would request them to furnish our various projects with the needed raw materials.

We were going to make personal sacrifices. We would receive only sixty centavos to one peso a day, not enough for our laundry and the wear of our shoes. We would go about the city and in yonder villages rain or shine daring fierce dogs and risky clashes between the Japanese soldiers and the guerrillas who were now becoming active. Yes, we would give up the peace and security of home and overlook the meager pay. Indeed we would have to make personal sacrifices for we were also soldiers, soldiers of another built.

A couple of months later we already had in our list more than a hundred indigent ones deserving outright material aid and more were coming to our office with heartbreaking pleas for succor. And we did not have

enough funds in cash or in kind to be of help to all of them.

Finally we decided to make an appeal to the affluent ones in the hometown to help us that we might be of help to the utterly destitute families among our kababayan. With my scholarly cousin Manuel Guevara we visited the homes of our opulent relations and pleaded for the material assistance impressing upon them that giving to the poor they would receive ten times more, that in giving they also would give of themselves and with love, for "God loveth a cheerful giver." They might or might not subscribe to the thesis of physiotheology that this sentient world was being regulated by the principle of benevolence; still there would be greatness in great charity. But every family we approached claimed that it also was in dire need these hard times; they gave but little only to please us.

Then we thought of Don Arsenio Escudero, the hometown's leading philanthropist. But the Escuderos were situated in their country home known as Villa Escudero more than ten kilometers away and there was the problem of transportation to enable us to reach them. Cousin Manolo insisted that we see Don Arsenio even if we had to walk that distance. Fidel Valdellon finally got in with the suggestion that he first would contact his elder brother Melanio who was Don Arsenio's private secretary.

Melanio Valdellon took time to see us but he had a sad story to tell. Don Arsenio with his family had moved over to their Manila residence for medical attention after his one-month incarceration at the kempetai garrison in Tiaong where he was brutally manhandled for his guerrilla activities. Melanio assured us however that when the family returned to the villa he would apprise Don Arsenio about our needs. Meantime we had to make the best of what we had.

A DATE WITH THE KEMPETAI

Really being a wartime social worker had its attendant risk and sacrifices. You received only from sixty centavos to one peso a day not enough for your laundry and the wear of your shoes; you walked distances rain or shine in mud or in dust and still you were in constant danger. One day two of our lady social workers were caught right in the middle of a gun duel between guerrilla and some traitorous informers and only a miracle saved them from getting hurt. Another day a male social worker while investigating an indigent case in a remote barrio and was taken for a spy by the guerrillas and would have been killed had not one of them recognized him as a classmate in the grade school and a good boy at that. These incidents would have frightened them and the others into quitting but they were not. I too would have been frightened into quitting, but I should be the last to do it. I too had an experience of my own.

I was busy interviewing a sickly widow pleading for outright material aid for her family when Kanagawa, the Japanese interpreter and Agripino Calabia the chief informer came. I thought they were just interested in the baskets, slippers, fancy trinkets and rattan chairs being made in our vocational section, but the two came straight for my desk without even looking at the relief

workers busy on their trade. They were interested in me.

"Are you Juan Hernandez?" asked the Japanese.

"Yes," I replied. "Why?"

"You're wanted by the Military Police."

"Military Police!" I was startled. It was just as bad as being told that I was wanted by the Devil himself.

"Why?"

"I don't know," the Japanese answered coldly.

"Why?" I turned to the informer.

He shrugged his shoulder. "I don't know."

"Right now?" I asked.

"Yes."

"All right, we go."

The kempetai headquarters was in one of the elementary school buildings at the time. Since they occupied it the place had become known as a dungeon of

horror and the mere sight or mention of it did cause many a shiver in the spine. When we reached the dreaded place the two men ushered me to a room adjacent to a dark compartment which must have been the dungeon itself, and left me alone. “Wait here,” said the Japanese interpreter, and the two went away.

Left alone I had the time to conjecture on what could have been the reason for my being summoned by the kempetai. Did they want to make suggestions on the work we were doing in the Welfare Station so that it would function in close coordination with their pacification drive? Would they order me to forbid our social workers from going to the villages where there were guerrillas so that they would not be mistaken for spies, or would they give us identification passes to spare us from molestation? What could they want from me?

Morimoto came. He was a soldier attached to the kempetai. I knew him well for he used to drop in at the Welfare Station for a chat as he knew a little English. Sometimes he brought Japanese-made cigarettes for me and some candies for our lady social workers. He was surprised when he saw me. He knew what it meant for a Filipino to be there.

“Why?” he asked almost sadly.

“I don’t know.” I said. “Why Morimoto?”

"I don't know," he replied and left at once with a hurt look in his eyes.

Then came another Japanese soldier. I knew him too. He used to come with Morimoto to the Welfare Station. His name was Kawabata and he was the kempetai's errand boy. He did not know a word of English but he could laugh heartily. When he saw me he at once started laughing and even made funny faces at me. Then he stopped abruptly and was grave. He mumbled a few Japanese words seriously. He also must have asked the same question: "Why:"

"I don't know Kawabata. I don't know."

I did not know if he understood what I said but he held my hand, held it tightly then left without laughing.

Some minutes later the kempetai arrived noisily in the other room. Their footsteps were heavy and their laughter was growling, almost frightening, not like Kawabata's laughter, heartily and gay. In fact they were not laughers. They were guffaws, malicious guffaws. I waited.

The Japanese interpreter entered and told me to go to the other room. The others were leaving when I entered. Only Captain Motori, the kempetai chief and his Warrant Officer remained. I made a Nipponese bow and the

Captain answered me coldly. I was motioned to sit down in an upholstered divan in a corner while the three Japanese took theirs. The Captain sat across the table before me, the Warrant Officer in a chair to my right and the interpreter at my left.

Silence. The Captain eyed me sharply from head to foot and back but I stared at him not boldly but searchingly. He was a short fellow in a white shirt and khaki pants, firm of face, shaven head and perhaps in his early fifties. There was no answer to my silent query and so I turned to the Warrant Officer, a tall and pleasant-looking guy with luxuriant hair, a kindly face and restful eyes. His calm features presented a direct contrast to the harsh and nervous look that dwelt in the Captain's countenance but again there was no answer. Even the Warrant Officer's pleasant look revealed nothing.

Suddenly Captain Motori blurted out something in harsh Japanese and immediately the interpreter translated it into my language: "What is your name?"

"Juan Hernandez, "I replied.

"You work Welfare Station?"

"Yes."

"Since when you work there?"

"Since March 26th of this year, 1943."

"What you work before that?"

"I stayed in our farmhouse and helped my parents and sisters raise poultry and swine and grow vegetables."

"Where you live?"

"In the village of Butokan where we have a little hut in our lanzones orchard. Our house in town was burned down last Christmas, 1941."

"You no leave San Pablo?"

"I used to go to Manila on business."

"What business?"

"I marketed some of our garden yields."

"Why not sell market here?"

"They get better prices in Manila."

"Why you go Bulacan?"

Bulacan! The question quite surprised me. It was unexpected. How did they know that I used to go as far as Bulacan, if I was not being shadowed? And why must I be shadowed? How could they have suspected? It bothered me but somehow I did not show it.

"Yes I also go to Bulacan," I said frankly. "I buy metal vessels in a foundry there because it's cheaper there, and then sell to makers of coconut oil and coconut lye in our village. Besides, I have a sister married to a man in Bulacan so I visit her sometimes."

Then Captain Motori paused. He passed his hand about his face and shaven head thoughtfully.

"You made five trips Bulacan, eight trips Manila already. Why very many?" he asked again.

"I am on business."

"Why you no do business here? Good business here also."

"I want to make more profit."

"You meet many friends in your trip?"

"Sometimes I meet friends, sometimes I don't."

"What you tell them?"

"Nothing; we just greet each other."

"You know a man by the name Orentong Wenceslao?"

"This is the first time I hear that name."

"Perhaps that assumed name?"

"I don't know."

"But this man Orentong Wenceslao knows you very well."

"It is a lie if he told you so. I don't know of any man by that name."

"You know him also; perhaps you lying to me?"

"I am not lying. I don't know any man by that name."

"This man Orentong Wenceslao is captain of secret organization in this town. But he realized that he made mistake so he surrendered voluntarily to us, asked forgiveness, then promised cooperate with us in catching

his other comrades and making them realize their mistake. He told me you one of his comrades."

"That's a lie," I almost shouted. "So this is the reason why you summoned me here. You think I am a guerrilla. You are mistaken. I am not a guerrilla."

"You lie," the Captain growled menacingly, "not Orentong Wenceslao. My informers watching your steps all time making reports your activities. You making contact guerrillas Manila and Bulacan. You also tell stories not true everywhere. You no good. You work social worker so you free go around town and villages, but we know. You help guerrillas plenty. You tell them stories not true, stories America coming back. America no come back anymore. Japan strongest nation on earth. All Filipinos siding America will be killed. All guerrillas will be killed."

"You're mistaken Captain," I said. "I am not a guerrilla and I don't know of any secret organization in this town or elsewhere. I go Manila and Bulacan to visit my sister married there. I am a social worker to help poor people."

"Lie!" shouted the Captain again staring at me sternly. "You lie!"

"I am not," I replied firmly. "If I am a guerrilla you'll not catch me alive. I shall fight you and die fighting you. But I am not a guerrilla, so I am here."

"I'll kill you," said the Captain furiously.

"Because I tell you I am not a guerrilla?"

"You guerrilla, you lie."

"I am not."

I thought the Captain would slap me as he swung his arms in the air and shouted something which the interpreter did not translate into my language. Then he approached me menacingly. "Tell me truth," he pointed an accusing finger on me. "Or I kill you!"

"I'm telling you the truth Captain."

"I am not through with you yet."

The Captain said something to the Warrant Officer and then the two left. The interpreter then told me to stay and left also. Once more I was alone to myself. But now I already knew why I was being detained. I was a guerrilla suspect and that did not sound healthy enough. Because they knew less they suspected more.

The Captain's car made a sudden stop in front of the building. A soldier with a gun slung at his shoulder opened the door and the Captain went in. I thought I would be called to ride with him but the car sped away without me. Where was the Captain going? To fetch this man Orentong Wenceslao who claimed to be my comrade in the secret organization? Who could this be?

I was glad when the Warrant Officer summoned me to his room. What would prevent me from thinking a few unpleasant thoughts? The Warrant Officer knew English. He started to ask me about when and where I was graduated and what studies I finished and about the different positions I held after graduation. The answers to these queries he recorded in one of the pages of a thick notebook which he got from a nearby bureau. After that he started talking about Orentong Wenceslao and the secret guerrilla organization in the hometown, about my being a social worker and my going about town and my wandering from village to village. All these they knew he said.

"You ask for forgiveness now," he said kindly, "and you will be forgiven. But when Orentong Wenceslao comes with the captain and points at you as a guerrilla you won't be forgiven anymore."

"If I ask for forgiveness that means I have done something wrong. But I have done no wrong. Why should I ask for forgiveness?"

"You are a guerrilla."

"I am not."

"We have proofs."

"What?"

"Orentong Wenceslao."

"He's a lie."

"He has been shadowing you for months."

"What did he find out?"

"You are a guerrilla."

"I am not."

"The Japanese Army has no mercy on guerrillas."

"I am not a guerrilla."

The Warrant Officer did not answer back. Instead he offered me a Hong Kong made cigarette and we both smoked. The he fished out a small book in one of his drawers. It was a Tagalog-Niponggo dictionary. The next instant I was teaching him some of the common terms and expressions in Tagalog, how and when to use them.

"Why don't you tell the truth?" he said softly as he turned meticulously the pages of his small dictionary as though in search for the right meaning of a word. "We shall forgive you. You have nothing to fear. But if you persist in denying you will regret it."

"I have told you the truth," I said with finality. "And I am ready to face the consequences."

"You are not afraid?"

"Why should I?"

"Well!" he shrugged his shoulder coldly as he put back his little book inside the drawer. He stood up and went near the window. He smoked his cigarette as he gazed thoughtfully at the school lawn outside. Then he said something to the interpreter and the latter left. I felt rather uncomfortable. I reached for the package of cigarettes. The Warrant Officer saw me and smiled approvingly. I also smiled as I lit my cigarette. I felt better af-

ter whiffing out some curls of smoke. Then the Japanese left without a word and I was left alone again.

This being left alone to myself I considered a form of torture more detestable than being subjected to a barrage of unwholesome questionings for wile I could defend myself from their accusations, I hardly could find a way of escape from the unpleasant thoughts that came rushing in my loneliness. I tried not to think but in my effort not to think I kept thinking the more.

I thought of the tortures chamber hardly ten meters away from me. I foolishly imagined myself being thrown in that forbidding dungeon with feet and hands tightly bound. I seemed to have hard the dull thud produced as my head struck the floor and felt the oozing of blood from my badly bruised temple. Then two kempetai came, one with notorious "one by two inch piece if wood," and the other with a pail of dirty water. Suddenly the kempetai with a piece of wood started hitting me on the face, belly, legs, every part of me until my whole body was so numbed I could feel no longer the physical pain. I only could tell the injury because somehow I could feel the blood rolling down my face and neck, blood and sweat creeping coldly over the various parts of my body. Then I heard the nasty growlings of my tormentors slowly drifting away and I was lost. When I regained consciousness they were back again. This time the pail of dirty water was ready. They

began pouring it into my mouth until I could breathe hardly. The last thing I remembered was one of them kicking my face with his heavy boot and I was lost again.

They did that to Don Arsenio Escudero as narrated to us by his private secretary, Melanio Valdellon. And that was only for the first day. More tortures were inflicted on him as the days went by. If the Japanese did not hesitate to brutishly torture Don Arsenio, the hometown's leading citizen, what chance had an obscure school teacher like me to being treated kindly by the kempetai?

But Sening is a very good man, kind and generous, said sadly after I had narrated to him the Valdellon story about his childhood playmate and neighbor and friend. Then Father began to reminisce on their childhood days when Sening always shared with his playmates his winnings in cracking the egg (pukol ng itlog) contest, the sack race, hitting the pot competition, juego do anillo, and other outdoor games during Maytime festivities. Time and again he would raid the family kitchen for foodstuff to share with his playmates that he had become even more generous, always lending a hand to any one in need of succor. Indeed he manifested his love of God by serving others; that was his religion said my beloved elder.

As Father narrated his story about Don Arsenio and his other playmates of younger days, I thought I saw a gleam in his eyes and he seemed to have become young again. As I listened to him I felt that I was also one among them and sharing the innocent joy of childhood. Ah, no time for sentiment!

Though recalling Don Arsenio's wartime activities and my father's stories of their childhood years had made me forget my present predicament; had given me a breathing spell, a passing adequate defense against the impact of the rather forbidding situation under which I had been in. A God-loving man, Don Arsenio had been gifted with a faith that kept looking up. It had given me strength.

"For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hut thee…" I did not know the lyrics of the hymn which Mother used to sing to us when we were young, but I knew the tune and so I hummed it. Slowly I forgot the torture chamber, I forgot that it was already well past noontime and I had not taken my lunch.

I was still humming Mother's hymn to myself when the Japanese interpreter came. He told me to go with him to the home economics building to eat and I suddenly became hungry.

“Arigato!” I said happily and went with him. It was not a bad meal. They served me a big piece of egg omelet, a bowl of vegetable broth and a plateful of polished rice. After I had finished my chow I paid the Japanese cook with a wholesome Arigato and he acknowledged it with a slight bow. Then I returned to the kempetai’s office with the Japanese interpreter. He gave me a stick of cigarette then left.

I had just deposited the cigarette butt in the ash tray when I heard the sound of an approaching car. The next instant the Warrant Officer and the interpreter were in the room with me. The machine stopped in front of the building. The bang of the car door being shut and then the sound of approaching footsteps were heard. I still had my back to the door. I did not care to look back and find out. I felt like standing but finally chose to remain on my seat.

Captain Motori entered noisily and alone. Orentong Wenceslao whoever he was not with him. I stood up and bowed a bit. The Warrant Officer and the interpreter also did, though more meekly but Captain Motori did not seem to notice. He immediately started talking to the Warrant Officer who did nothing but nod his head in assent to what his superior officer was saying. Then Captain Motori left as noisily as when he had entered.

When Captain Motori had gone the Warrant Officers motioned me to sit down. I studied his face but found no answer as to what his superior had said to him concerning my fate. Once more he offered me a cigarette. I took one and held it between my fingers. “Light, light,” he said in broken Tagalog and I lit it. He waited for me to whiff out some curls of smoke before starting to say something for the interpreter to translate in Tagalog. I wondered why he would not tell me directly in English since he could speak the language.

“Mr. Hernandez,” said the interpreter, “the Captain said that he has forgiven you. Only you must not affiliate yourself anymore with any guerrilla organization or he will be forced to punish you. You are free to go now.”

I had wanted to protest about my having been forgiven; I did not like the sound of it. But the thought of being free to go now and the fear that I might say something they might not want and have me retained longer forced me to simply say Arigato!

It was almost six in the afternoon when I left the kempetai headquarters and that was truly an experience. I thought I never would leave the place physically whole. Past events had shown that whoever entered that most dreaded place always came out if ever he came out alive, with something broken in his anatomy. In-

deed IO left the place felicitating myself for having defied the kempetai and still coming out unharmed.

It had made me wonder for days how I could have been that lucky. A few flatteringly foolish thoughts came into my mind and I laughed them away. Then the Japanese controlled Tribune gave the answer. Colonel Nagahama, the big chief of the kempetai, had decided to adopt the policy of attraction. Be good to the guerrillas, cajole them to surrendering; do not punish anyone apprehended but treat them well. That was it that was the cause of my good luck. Would the new policy work out? How long would it last? Only time could tell.

HEAT THE IMAGINATION

The kempetai suspected me of being a guerrilla. Of course I strongly denied it. But I was a guerrilla. Father was a guerrilla. Practically every Filipino was a guerrilla. Save for a few dirty cliques of opportunists, profiteers, bandits, scamps and scalawags who would sell their country and even their souls to the Devil, Jap or no Jap, every Filipino was a guerrilla. For who would not rebel against serfdom, who would not fight to be a free man?

Thus while thousands roamed about the hills and mountains defying the invaders at every opportunity snaking down into the lowland whenever possible to get their intended victims; others remained in their homes apparently living peaceful lives and seemingly unconcerned over the tumult and strifes abroad, yet secretly spying on the enemy and reporting whatever information they thought might be of value to their more daring countrymen. Others both in the rural districts and in towns and cities had been trying to find ways and means of sending food, medicine, clothing and arms t their fighting countrymen. Others also waited and hoped sometimes hungered and bled, guerrillas only at heart, defiers only in spirit, for that was all that their helplessness could do….for love of freedom.

Father and I were also guerrillas in our own self-styled way. We had no skirmishes with the enemy to brag about, no records of sabotage accomplished, nor of valuable information transmitted across the seas. Neither had we guns which to kill the enemy much less a band of armed men to command. But we had thousands and more followers who instinctively obeyed what we wanted to do.

We were broadcasters of rumors that always took flight not with the swiftness of fusillade yet with as much certainty of hitting the intended target. We were broadcasters of seemingly idle talk which had as much destructive effect upon the enemy as the sabotaging of military installations or the harassing against isolated garrisons and encampments. For ours were rumors that gave courage to hearts that wanted to weaken rumors that emboldened rumors that strengthened hope and faith. We started to broadcast something that fit the time and events and thousands of tongues started to wag with light-hearted delight. Then some filthy-uniformed ones were trouble but there was nothing they could do about it.

We came to think of the effectiveness of this one weapon during the early days of the war when we were still in our hillside hideaway somewhere in Ludlod. During those days we came to realized that the Japanese soldiers were not the only enemy to the poor non-

combatants but also fear and growing hopelessness. The sickening of their hope over the failure to return of a temporarily vanquished friend and the sad thought of being under the reign of tyranny and greed for long were beginning to unnerve them.. Then we started to use our garrulous weapon and the result was encouraging and immediate. At first the effect did not last long enough but through constant sharpening and enriching we were able to prolong the effect much longer.

Indeed hope must endure and overcome my townsmen's misfortune. It must be their medicine in misery their bread in their hungering for peace and freedom. We had to sustain their flight from hope to hope that they might find fleeting joy in it.

As if consequence of all this talk of hope more and more resistance movements were born more and more left for the mountains, more clashes with the enemy patrol were told, more ambushes, more sabotage. The time came when the Japanese Military had to divert more of its fighting man from the warfront to do some "internal cleaning of misguided elements." Still more guerrilla bands came into being.

One day Cousin Alfonzo cornered me in his law office in town. He confided to me about their secret organization. It was affiliated with Hugh Straughn's Fil-American Irregular Troops, he said. Hew talked about

the plans of the underground movement. The members would not resort to violence but would be the eyes and ears and suppliers of the bold and daring comrades that now roamed the mountain fastnesses beyond. The members would furnish them with arms and food and medicine and clothing, everything they might need to keep them strong enough to go on with their heroic mission. All these the members of his secret organization could do, for they were composed of the town's prominent coterie; teachers, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, wealthy landowners, government officials and college students.

All would continue t go about their daily chores with peaceful seemingly unconcerned attitude toward what was going around, endeavoring to live as peacefully as they could despite the troubles that lurked about. The members should make the enemy believe that they were harmless and friendly and cooperating that they loved peace and order, to enable them to go on with their underground assistance without being suspected.

Since Cousin Alfonso had taken me into his confidence I also confided something to him. I also talked about my weapon and he agreed with me that it really was a good one, too. And in recognition of my weapon's worth he took me in as a "captain" in their secret organization. I would have asked him by what authority was he empowered and who gave him that au-

thority to give rank so easily to a prospective recruit, but I did not say anything anymore. I just took it for granted just for the fun of it. Now as a captain of the secret organization I had to do nothing at least for the present but to continue with the old game. I even would be assisted by the other members in the dissemination of my war commentaries and hope-strengthening interpretation of local happenings.

It went on pretty nicely for months. In fact I even extended it farther during my occasional visit through Manila to Bulacan to see my sister Laura. Fellow passengers bound for various places had a share of my meanderings through casual, seemingly thoughtless remarks and passing innuendoes. Leaving Manila and Bulacan I also left behind not a few tales of guerrilla exploits somewhere in my hometown and the neighboring regions, not a few anecdotes to ridicule the enemy and various conjectures as to when and how Mac Arthur would return.

When I decided to stop my occasional trips away from home because of a reason all my own, I accepted the job of becoming a guerrilla suspect. To think that I was being shadowed during all those days that I was felicitating myself for the success of my little scheme believing that the enemy was a bunch of idiotic guys that I was too smart for them! The laugh was really on me when I was apprehended in my office at the Welfare

Station by Kanagawa and an informer. Of course no harm was done to me thanks to Colonel Negahama's attraction policy. But could it be that they were only biding their time in their desire to catch bigger fishes? I was beginning to suspect they were getting wiser. Could it be that they were being true to their native proverb. . . "The man who makes the first bad move loses the game?" And they would not want to lose this very important game.

MURDER SHRIEKS OUT

Something unhappy had begun to happen again. Remember Lulod, that little village at the foot of the hill which sheltered us when war came stampeding more than a year past? Something unhappy had happened to its villagers. They were awakened shortly before dawn by loud rapid-fire discharges which lasted for more than an hour. When morning came there was fear and confusion in that once peaceful village. They already knew what had happened.

The hideout of guerrilla Colonel Juan Kayakas in a nearby hill was discovered by the Japanese kempetai and a surprise attack as launched. Some of Kayaka's men were killed; Dano was one of them. Others were able to escape. The kempetai also suffered casualties and this infuriated them the more. They burnt all of the huts they could find in the hill and shot and bayoneted all the hillfolks they overtook. Then they came down to Ludlod with terror in their eyes.

The Japanese officer ordered all the villagers men and women and children to assemble along the village road. Then he told them. "Villagers here no good. Protect and feed guerrillas. No report to us. Bad ones must be punished."

But the villagers of Ludlow were all kind to us during our stay in their village. They helped pound our palay, brought us root crops and vegetables fresh from their mountain clearings and ran errands for us. Indeed they made us feel at home in their little realm and when we returned to Butokan they helped us build a hut in our lanzones orchard. Now the Japanese were after them because Kayakas had become a guerrilla chieftain and Dano was one of his leading henchmen. Children of the hill, reckless and free, they always had been jealous of their freedom and so the Japanese hated them. They killed Dano that jolly and stout-hearted fellow who always had a song for us when we were still in Ludlod and now they were after Kayakas and our other Ludlod friends.

The villagers were made to stay under the sun from that early morning hour till late in the afternoon without eating. Meanwhile they kicked the children who innocently cried of hunger and beat with the butt of their gun whoever stared at them. They entered every house in the village and burned every dwelling where they found stocks of palay believing that they were supplies for the guerrillas. They shot every animal that they could see and made vulgar and lusty overtures at the village lasses.

Before they left that afternoon the Japanese soldiers picked up several men of the village whose look they

did not like and took them along. Nato Flores, the village lieutenant was among them. He was accused of non-cooperation. “You no report guerrillas in your village,” said the Japanese officer. “You no good.”

Some villagers did not reach town anymore that fatal afternoon. When they reached the banks of Matanag stream, they were bayoneted to death and pushed into a pit which they had been made to dig for the purpose. The rest reached the kempetai garrison in town but only a handful were able to return to their home and loved ones after weeks of absence. They who returned were badly maimed; they had the same story to tell. Fortunately, Nato was one among them.

The villagers since then had become apprehensive. Many had begged for temporary lodgement in houses of friends and relatives in town and in other villages. We had to take care of a few families those we had come to know in hiding. I sent word to as many as could be reached. They might come to the Welfare Station in town where they could have a modest share of rice and mongo and used clothing. They were grateful for the assistance rendered; they needed it very much.

Because the village of Butokan is only a few kilometers away we also shared though a lesser degree, the same feeling of apprehension as the Ludlod villagers. The incident seemed to have ruffled also the peace of

the orchard. Our women started imagining a few unpleasant things and becoming nervous and easily excited. It also could happen in Butokan.

It took several days after the Ludlod incident before the villagers were able to dare go a little farther away from the back yard to gather something for food. Everyone was beginning to relax after days of fear and excitement when one Sunday something happened again. This time the source of gunfire was not from the direction of the hill south of the village but from the town proper north of us and this time we heard it ourselves. The apparent exchange of gunfire did not last long but we were bothered just the same. We waited for news from those who came from town.

We did not wait long to find out what happened. Hardly a quarter of an hour later some of the villagers who went to town returned, pale and frightened and excited. There was an encounter between two guerrillas and some informers. The guerrillas were able to escape after killing one and wounding another and the other informers in fit of maddened rage because they were bested, started threatening innocent inhabitants and shooting the air. The kempetai came late but not late enough to seize some innocent bystanders whom they found at the scene of the encounter. Only a few of these unfortunate ones returned to tell their story.

These were only the beginning for the guerrillas had come at last. Their minds now glutted with s many tales of tyranny and tortures, their hearts own aching for re-venge, the guerrillas had come at last, what mattered be their inferior weapons to fight back without counting how much they and their countrymen had to pay be-cause of their reckless daring.

These were only the beginning of the hunted lives they had to live, the beginning of a series of guerrilla-kempetai encounters bound to be more frequent in days to come; indeed the beginning of a long line of am-bushes and sabotage and other underground activities designed to annoy and harass the enemy.

Colonel Kayakas and his men were mot alone for Colonel Gertrudo San Pedro of Malamig also had seen to it that the enemy is made conscious of his existence in the wilds of Lumbangan. For these guerrilla chief-tains there could be no shortage of courage for they were fighting for love of freedom. They were all mis-chief-making cliques of bold and daring ones and the kempetai had to condemn them as disturbers of "peace and order."

The guerrillas had come at last and there must be those to pay and pay . . .

ZONA . . . . A KIND OF WILD JUSTICE

On 8 August 1943, at two o'clock in the afternoon, a truckload of Japanese soldiers rounded up all the people in the cockpit, more than a thousand of them, and brought them to the neighboring little mountain town of Dolores. It took the soldiers until one o'clock the following morning to bring them all to the other town for concentration. During the night while the soldiers were engaged on the job, the townsmen with kin among those apprehended in the cockpit formed an endless procession to the police station to see Police Chief Cristeto Brion and to the house of Mayor Manuel Quisumbing to appeal for help, to plead that they intercede on behalf of their relations. They knew what it meant to be brought in that little mountain town which was then in a state of zona.

The word zona was coined by the Filipinos for that form of mass punishment practiced by the Japanese soldiers in town, the inhabitants of which they considered not to be cooperating with the Japanese Imperial Forces, as shown by the presence of misguided elements, guerrillas to us. This was affected by apprehending all male inhabitants of the town from fifteen years of age and up, and crowding them either in the town church or in the schoolhouse. They usually did this before daybreak and without notice so as not to give them

a chance to escape. They crowded them inside the church or schoolhouse and kept them there under heavy guard and without food for days. Sometimes they were not allowed to do their toilet nor talk among themselves nor sleep at night. Occasionally they were marched outside and exposed to both sun and rain while the unhappy mothers, wives and children gazed helplessly from a distance holding their lunch baskets for the starving kin hoping to deliver them someway, somehow.

During these days of hunger and sleepless nights some of the frail of health got sick and died. Others, the weak in spirit became mentally deranged and were only tortured the more. A few bold ones maddened to uncontrollable frenzy, rushed at sadistically-inclined guards only to be shot or bayoneted to death. The majority endured it all for the sake of loved ones.

After about a week or more of forced fasting some masked informers would come and the now weakened inhabitants were required to pass in the line before them. Woe to him upon whom the fingers of an informer might rest; he was already doomed. Those who were pointed at by the filthy fingers of the masked informers were separated immediately from the others and taken somewhere. Many of them did not return anymore. The few who returned were generally maimed and sickly; some of them never did recover anymore.

Those who were not picked up were sent home after receiving frightening counsels never to be guerrillas but to lead peaceful lives or else! It took weeks before they could be restored to their former selves again.

Thus when the townsmen apprehended in the cockpit were brought to Dolores it seemed as if a calamity of the most terrible kind had visited the homes they left behind. Everyone knew what it meant to fall under the terrible clutches of zona. Horrid and mournful tales about it had reached us for nearby towns had already such unhappy experiences and news of its dreadfulness was quick in reaching the hometown.

The next day wild conjectures as to the probable cause of the cockpit incident were the talk of the town. Some said that the Japanese soldiers found only a few men when they zonified Dolores and when they asked the women where their menfolk were they said that they were in the cockpit in San Pablo. Others believed that the Japanese soldiers received reports about the presence of guerrillas in the cockpit but because they did not know who they were they decided to round up all the people there. Other probable causes some interesting some ludicrous was surmised by the townspeople but before the day closed all the rationalizing gave way to fear. San Pablo might meet with the same terrible experience as had befallen Dolores and the other towns. San Pablo might be subjected also to zonas.

Now the townspeople had set their mind to more painful thoughts. The Japanese soldiers meant business. They already had become serious with putting an end to guerrilla activity. They had to do it before the guerrillas become strong enough to hamper their military operations. The townspeople also realized that the enemy was doing it systematically. The Japanese soldiers were almost through with the mountain towns of Laguna and Tayabas provinces and they were moving eastward and westward. After Tiaong and Dolores it would be San Pablo. There was no doubt about it.

The townsmen became more affrightened, more restless and uneasy. Even the city officials were troubled. Every one talked fearfully of zona-zona-zona. The local garrison had been reinforced. The collaborators were jubilant. They had waited for this opportunity so they could point accusing fingers at their enemies of prewar days, point at them as a guerrilla. It frightened the townspeople the more.

Came August tenth the inhabitants were awakened by a most unwelcome news. Four villages of San Pablo were already in a state of zona. At about four o'clock in the morning the menfolk of the villages of Santa Isabel, Concepcion, San Diego and Santo Angel were forcibly roused and rounded up by the Japanese soldiers and herded to the village schoolhouse without giving them a

chance to get properly dressed. The news alarmed the whole town almost to the point of being panicky.

The town officials thought fast. They had to save their townsmen from zona. The Mayor and the Chief of Police immediately conferred with Captain Yamaguti of the kempetai now situated at the Escudero mansion in Rizal Avenue. They promised him that to show the townsmen's loyalty to the Emperor they would hold a big parade in his honor the next day, and to further make manifest their love of peace and order every parade participant would have with him a bamboo spear and would pledge to use it against anyone, bandit and guerrilla alike, who might disturb the peace of their home. After the conference with the kempetai, the Chief of Police immediately sent a notice to all barrio lieutenants telling them about the promise made to Captain Yamaguti and which must be fulfilled if they want to save the town from zona. And who would not want to be saved from zona? The next day 12,000 men, each with a bamboo spear gathered in the plaza all ready to march in a loyalty parade and to shout "Banzai" till their throats become hoarse just so the town could be saved from zona.

The paraders however came prepared. They should not be taken by surprise so they stuffed their pockets with some things which the opined could drive hunger away incase they were zonified. Father and I were

among them. Before we left the orchard that early morning hour, Mother and sisters made us wear two layers of outer garments to protect us from rain and cold and filled our pockets with biscuits and ginger and salt. They got it from others that ginger and salt were the best antidote to hunger and thirst though Father and I believed cigarettes were the best and we bought a few packages in a nearby store.

"We shall return!" I shouted to Mother and Sisters as we left them by the orchard gate.

The parade lasted for a couple hours. Then we were made to assemble at the open space in front of the town hall. It was one of the biggest gatherings in the town's history. How fear could drive people into a frenzy of obedience! Speeches were delivered by politicians of pre-war days followed by Captain Okada who was in charge of the zona in the four villages, and Captain Yamaguti, new chief of the kempetai in town. The Filipino speakers talked cajolingly of zona and prayed that the town be spared of its horror. The two Japanese officers on the other hand advertently overlooked the subject and instead gave due emphasis to peace and order, emphasizing that guerrilla activities had been the cause of all the troubles. The paraders were, of course, disappointed not to hear an assuring hint that the town would not be zonified.

At any rate the parade had some sedative effect on the nerves of the townspeople for we were allowed to go home that day. If they would zonify the town, why did they not do it then when even less than a hundred soldiers could have done the job? The fact that we were allowed to go home made us believe that we already were saved from the dread of zona.

Hardly a week had passed when other fearful news reached us in the orchard. The kempetai had started apprehending several prominent townsmen suspected as leaders of the hometown's underground movement. They were (arranged alphabetically): Ruben Alcantara, Dalmacio Aquino, Santiago Avanzado, Fernando Baustista, Andres Biglete, Alfredo Borja, Restituto Briñas, Crispin Calabia, Ceferino Catipon, Pedro Cayamanda, Pablo Cornista, Bayani Dumaraos, Panfilo Estrellado, Alfonso Farcon, Dominador Fernandez, Buenaventura Fule, Virgilio de Gorostiza, Eugenio Gutierrez, Santiago Gutierrez, Luis Kasilag, Romeo Maghirang, Jesus de Mesa, Silvino Penaloza, Felix Romulo, Domingo Ticzon, Juanito Ticzon and Vicente Valbuena. The group urged Romeo Maghirang, the youngest, to act as spokesman. After some intensive interrogations these prominent ones were released that evening, except Romeo Maghirang who was detained overnight on the belief that he was the leader despite his age.

Reports we received later the following day revealed that the apprehended ones had been recalled and tortured to confessing. When the others heard of this, some fled to the mountain at once while others took the first available transportation and escaped to Manila and distant towns where they had friends or relations. Our secret organization had been discovered, at last!

I was absent in the Welfare Station that day because of a headache. I stayed by the orchard gate and stopped every villager who came from town to tell me more news. I received only disheartening reports. So-and-so had been apprehended. So-and-so could bear no longer the torture and squealed the names of his comrades. So-and-so fled and was being hunted. So-and-so resisted and was bayoneted to death. All disheartening news.

Then the kempetai after a few more days was reported to have changed its technique. The suspected leaders of the underground movement were forgiven and made members of a Pacification Drive Committee. Captain Yamaguti promised them that San Pablo would not be zonified if they would help in the peaceful surrender of their comrades. He also gave his word of honor that all guerrillas including those long-wanted by the kempetai would be forgiven! No questions would be asked. All that they had to do would be to sign an oath of surrender.

Thus fifteen among the prominent residents who had been apprehended, feigned themselves as honest-to-goodness members of the committee, sent word to their comrades in hiding to come home to save the town from zona. They were: Dominador Fernandez, Romeo Maghirang, Domingo Ticzon, Alfonso Farcon, Ceferino Catipon, Fernando Bautista, Buenaventura Fule, Pablo Cornista, Rubin Alcantara, Jesus de Mesa, Andres Biglete, and Silvino Penaloza. Of course the communication was directed only to the members of the home guard organization, not to the combat units that roamed the mountains and remote hamlets.

When I returned to the Welfare Station five days later I learned that many among those who ran away had returned and were supposed to have been forgiven. They were, however, asked to help restore peace and order in the town and in outlying villages. The punitive drive against the misguided elements would be stopped to give them the opportunity to make the necessary contact.

After three days the Pacification Drive Committee with the assistance of several others who already had feigned surrender was able to make possible the peaceful surrender of more than five hundred more but these were not the daring ones of the mountains; they were really the genuine guerrillas to satisfy the enemy and consequently relax his hunt for the daring comrades in

the mountains who needed some respite and more time to organize themselves more effectively.

Captain Yamaguti had still something up his sleeve. He good-naturedly told the committee that they and their men could not have been the guerrillas if they had no arms for what was a guerrilla if they had no arms, for what was a guerrilla for if he had only his nails to fight with? So he once more requested the committee to see to it that the guerrillas surrender six hundred fire-arms also!

There was really no such number of firearms in the possession of the organization. Theirs was not to harass the enemy. Theirs was but to supply with food, clothing and valuable information those who were doing the fighting. They were home guards living quiet and peaceful lives with their loved ones.

Where would we get the arms the members of the committee asked each other? They were all regrets. They now felt that they had been tricked. One demand but let to another. Now they feared that more would be made from time to time, and there was nothing they could do but obey for they were "surrender guerrillas." They got to have six hundred firearms. So they went about the town and from one village to another, climbed mountain hamlets and visited remote farmer's shacks, hoping to find useless native-made firearms even in

those isolated places, for they would not deprive their fighting comrades of the better weapons they had in their possession. They had to procure six hundred fire-arms, but arms which the enemy could not profit with. They had to procure them to save the town from zona. They also went to some smiths they knew and made rush orders for paltiks, native guns that fire single shots. Ina few days the kempetai received the six hundred firearms of various makes and conditions of wear and uselessness. The gulled Captain Yamaguti was delighted and the committee members sighed a deep breath.

All appeared well now between the kempetai and the townspeople. The local Guerrillas were supposed to have surrendered peacefully and about an equal number of arms had been turned over. There were frequent meetings and drinking sprees between the kempetai officers and the committee members. Every one was optimistic that there would be no more zona for the committee had been playing the role well. Captain Yamaguti had made a promise and that would be fulfilled. Once more the townspeople breathed a sigh of relief and resumed their affairs with calmer nerves.

I allowed the social workers to go out again and the Welfare Station once more buzzed with activity. I say once more for during the past days the social and relief workers would not report for work and the indigent

ones would not get their ration. Fear seemed to have driven even hunger away! But was the trial of nerve for the people of San Pablo already over?

A week later and without notice a big contingent of Japanese soldiers suddenly came to town. They arrived very early in the morning and occupied the school buildings and the big residences nearby. They forced the school children to move to other places where to hold classes and the residents to leave their houses and look for temporary dwellings for themselves. The townspeople were alarmed again. It was the biggest and the cruelest-looking contingent that had come to town since the occupation. What could this mean? The fear of zona was revived once more and even magnified when news came around that the lakeshore towns of Los Baños and Pila were already in a state of zona.

The committee immediately made consultation with the Mayor and the Chief of Police. Then they conferred with their friend Captain Yamaguti but the captain was very sorry. The town had been declared a part of the war zone and therefore the regular Army had begun to have the ascendance over the kempetai as far as local affairs were concerned. Some of the more influential residents event went to Manila for advice and assistance from among the higher government officials but they were told that not even Laurel could save the people of San Pablo from zona if the Japanese Army so desire it.

Again the town officials and the committee thought of a parade, a much bigger loyalty parade as a last desperate resort to save the town from zona.

The next day 20,000 men with bamboo spears marched in what every townsman believed to be the biggest parade San Pablo had witnessed ever. After the parade there were again speeches. An improvised platform beautifully embellished with leaves and flowers was erected in front of the town hall for the Japanese guests. Among them was Colonel Yoshioka, commander of the newly arrived contingent in town, and Colonel Watasse, chief of staff of the Laguna garrison. Some even claimed that there was a general in the group who preferred to remain unidentified for security reason.

The most important feature of the gathering was the oath of allegiance sworn by the surrender home guards and the biggest disappointment was the cold attitude of the Japanese officers who made speeches on the subject of zona. What was the business of a big contingent in town if it were not to zonify the inhabitants? Everyone wanted to know. Yet why did they allow the paraders to go home? Was it not the most opportune time for them to coral the twenty thousand men of the town?

Three more nights were spent sleeplessly and three more days idly passed away. On the fourth day a ban-

quet was given by the committee in honor of the officers of the kempetai and the newly arrived Japanese Army unit. The committee members had not yet finished their meal when they were summoned to the garrison headquarters for investigation. Another garrison force had arrived the very one which zonified the town of Dolores, the one responsible for the apprehension of the men in the cockpit. Captain Izumi, the head of the newly arrived garrison force said that he did not trust the committee. He said that there were more guerrillas who had not surrendered, more arms still unaccounted for. Such a big town as San Pablo could not have only six hundred guerrillas, only six hundred arms! No. He must see these members of the Pacification Drive Committee, these organizers of the resistance movement, these prominent ones, these majors and colonels of the organization. So he sent for them immediately and the soldiers found them at the banquet table in the city hall.

Captain Izumi of the garrison detained some of the committee members till midnight while others were not released until the following morning. He gave them a piece of his mind. There were more firearms still unsurrendered, more guerrillas must surrender with their arms or else! The committee members must see to it or else!

Wholly disheartened the committee members one more left for somewhere they knew not exactly where for they had no more idea where they might get more firearms. Now they left with a fear that their good intention might be misinterpreted by their comrades who preferred to fight it out with the enemy that kowtow with them even if the kowtowing be but feint to achieve something.

A few days later they returned to the garrison with a couple of rusty shotguns and a determined heart to take whatever consequences might befall them. Whatever happen they thought they had done their part. They were bawled out by the captain for their poor showing. A few were even slapped and kicked for not knowing how to answer questions the way Captain Izumi liked it but they were sent home just the same and the town had not been zonified, not yet!

SPIRITUAL REJUVENATION - - -- NIPPON WAY

A WEEK OF QUIET MISGIVINGS PASSED. Then one afternoon a policeman went about the town stopping at street corners to read an order to the effect that all the home guards should report in front of the town hall with their bamboo spears the following morning at exactly 6:30. The order caused no little amount of excitement among the townspeople. Will the home guards be zonified at last? Some of them thought of escaping to the mountains, to Manila or elsewhere but when they found out that most of their comrades had decided to gamble with fate, they also decided to stay and face the inevitable. Father and I were among them.

The Japs wanted us again. The others believed that to follow was the better thing to do under the circumstance for if we would not, the enemy might make reprisals and the townspeople would be the ones to suffer. We agreed with them. At least we had the consoling thought that we would be doing this to save the whole town from zona or whatever monstrosities the enemy might omit should we decide to run away. Besides our pretending that we were the genuine guerrillas now surrendered would spare the daring ones from immediate molestation while they were yet in the progress of gathering more strength, more followers and more arms. We

must be the screen, the scapegoat, the sacrificial lamb, if need be.

Once more Father and I had seen to it that we wore thick clothing and that every pocket of ours was stuffed with salt, ginger, bread, medicine and cigarettes. Mother and sisters could not help being sad. But Father and I were both optimistic and in high spirit. “We shall return,” I again said banteringly as we left them by the orchard gate.

At exactly 6:30 that following morning about six hundred home guards were assembled in front of the town hall hoping for the best yet ready for the worst. No one seemed fearful nor afraid for there was nothing around to merit fright that early morning hour. The breeze was soft and caressing, the sky was blue and almost cloudless, the east was being painted with the colors or rainbow and there were no Japanese soldiers around.

Half hour later a Japanese officer came riding on a bicycle. He was tall and tough-looking and he had a warrior’s gait and a Kaiser’s moustache. The sight of him reminded me of Huns and Tarters and when I heard how cruel and harsh his voice was, I concluded that he was either Hun or a Tarter! He was of course a Japanese soldier but that was all the same to me. Those who had seen him already said that he was Captain Izumi,

the terror of the garrison which zonified Dolores. That was enough to silence us all and to make us expect the worst. But he was alone!

Captain Izumi climbed the stairs of the town hall then situating himself conspicuously on the platform, he surveyed us with fierce eyes. Meanwhile we already had fallen in line to receive instructions from him as though he were our Commanding General. Then he came down brusquely and approached us menacingly. As he passed by he eyed us fiercely while we half-nervously shouted our full name as ordered. Several times he bawled out some of our comrades for not being able to utter their names loudly enough to satisfy him. The whole thing over, he ascended the platform again, looked down upon us for some moments, then climbing down once more he leaped on his bicycle and left without a word. Soon as he was out of sight, we fell out laughing and joking at each other.

What a show he made! We commented among ourselves. We feared him all right but he impressed us too. He was the first showman we had seen in the whole Japanese Army and he did his role well.

Hardly fifteen minutes later another Japanese soldier came. They said that he was Captain Izumi's interpreter. Unlike his superior officer, he looked civil and with a sort of pleasant disposition. The first thing he did

was to teach us how to make a thrust with our bamboo spears. “This how kill guerrilla,” he demonstrated. “And this how kill Japs,” the home guards said softly as they followed him. The Japanese seemed to enjoy his teaching for the home guards had become a merry coterie.

“This how to kill guerrilla,” the Japanese once more shouted in English as he made a thrust with his borrowed bamboo spear.

“This how kill Jap,” muttered the entertained home guards as they followed suit.

Then the Japanese gave us a recess and we went directly under the shade of a tall mango tree behind the town hall for the august sun was already getting warmer. Some of us smoked while others ate bread fished out of their pockets. Moments later, the wives, sisters and children of the home guards started coming with lunch boxes. The lone Japanese did not bother and the home guards took their lunch very much earlier than usual. What if they were zonified? At least they already had taken their lunch.

That afternoon we were instructed to ascend to the top floor of the town hall. We thought that we were at last being set for what we had long expected but no one among us seemed a bit alarmed anymore. We had long

prepared ourselves for it so that the anticipation of a few days without food could now make us laugh away such a grim prospect. We had learned to talk lightly of zona now even to talk jestingly about it. After all we had our pinches of salt, our pieces of garlic, and our bread and cigarettes ready in our pockets. There at the top floor of the town hall we waited for Colonel Yoshioka who would make an important announcement.

We thought the Japanese colonel would come with a company of soldiers to zonify us but he also came alone to give a lecture. The highlights of his talk were: (1) In the past trade inequality existed between America and the Philippines, with only America on the profiting end; (2) America did not encourage the Filipinos to develop local industries for it would mean the loss of a good market for American-made goods; (3) The white race through political machinations made the colored races fight among themselves so they would not be strong and sufficiently unified to check the encroachment of the white and (4) all the Oriental peoples should be awakened now and should united among themselves against the common enemy.

Before the colonel closed his speech he dealt on the subject most dear to our hearts and to all the inhabitants of San Pablo. He said that "in appreciation for the voluntary surrender of the home guards and because of the enthusiasm they showed in helping maintain peace and

order as shown by the surrender of about six hundred firearms, San Pablo would not undergo anymore the sad experience of the neighboring towns. San Pablo will not be zonified!"

The announcement evoked loud sonorous outbursts of Banzai and Mabuhay. "We did it," many of us cried unashamedly. "The home guards did it!"

There was great rejoicing when the inhabitants heard about this welcome news. The tension and the excitement which had reigned over the town and the villages since that one Sunday afternoon when a thousand townsmen were rounded up in the cockpit and brought to Dolores were at last relaxed.

The next day the home guards were again assembled at the top floor of the town hall to hear another lecture. This time tough-looking Captain Izumi was the speaker. He was in good humor and the home guards felt at ease. He made us squat on the floor in the absence of seats and allowed us to smoke. He was full of jokes and laughters in the course of the intimately-spoken lecture. We were all surprised. We did not expect it to be as easy as that, the change from the brutish warrior to a fatherly schoolmaster.

Captain Izumi started his lecture by asking questions about the colonel's speech the day before. To those who

could not answer well he said that they might have been asleep when the colonel was speaking. Then he came to the independence questions. What is independence? Freedom said one. What is freedom? Answers were practical. Why do you want independence? Sentimentally answered. Were there were sacrifices and pitfalls? Never mind; we want independence!

Then he asked, “Why do we study history?” A teacher of history answered. Not satisfying. Too bookish. I too was not satisfied. The Captain answered his own question. We study history so that we can foresee what would happen in the future and thus be prepared for it. Then he made a prediction:

Another World War would come and this would be the last. In this war the weapons of destruction would have been so perfectly devised as to enable a small air force to destroy all the cities of Europe in a single day.

After this war which would be the last Mankind would ever witness, progress in all branches of learning would reach its height. Food and other necessities of life could be had easily and in abundance and comfort and convenience always ready for the taking.

Captain Izumi concluded: “We Orientals must live not to enjoy but to prepare ourselves for this future war which might start here in the Far East. This would be the last and most horrible of all wars. We must live to

prepare so that our children's children might have the "human peace" which could be attained only in victory."

"Whose victory?" we asked our "spiritual rejuvenation" training as the Japanese Military called it was over. We were now free from the obligation of reporting daily but it had to be understood that the home-guard organization was no more and no attempt should be made anymore to resurrect it, or else! Instead its former members should be instrumental in helping in the pacification drive to prepare the country for the coming "independence." Then pamphlets were distributed to us with instructions that we explain their content to our relations and neighbors and friends so that they would not be misguided by America's propaganda which they admitted could find ways of getting into the country.

We did explain the content of those pamphlets to the others and how!

THE BAMBOO ARMY AND INDEPENDENCE

When the local guerrilla organization affiliated with Hugh Straughn's Fil-American Irregular Troops was discovered and its leaders were apprehended, the ranking members at once excused themselves by telling the Japanese Military that they were not guerrillas but home guards and that the aim of their organization was never to obstruct the mission of the Japanese Imperial Forces in the Philippines but rather to protect their homes from unwelcome intruders. The Japanese Military did not fall for it and so the home guards were spiritually rejuvenated.

Whether it be a guerrilla or a home guard organization the Japanese Military did not like the sound of it. Instead a "bamboo army" was ordered to be organized in every neighborhood association in town and in every village, and instructions were passed around requiring all male inhabitants from sixteen to fifty years old to carry bamboo spears whenever they went with the supposed aim of protecting themselves from both bandits and guerrillas.

Several bamboo armies were immediately organized and every male inhabitant both in town and in the village would not leave his home without his Bamboo Spear Battalion under the command of Johnny Kapalad, the village guerrilla chieftain. Because the village

school ground was rather small we went to Castila's coconut field to drill. There we were to march every Sunday afternoon and execute commands given in a lingo which we could not understand, execute them with feigned though playful seriousness. This we had to do to show to the Japanese Military that we were collaborating, that we were helping give "body and soul" to their so-called Co-Prosperity Sphere idea.

But we had other ideas about our army. On Sunday afternoons we did march with bamboo spears on our shoulders, laughing over our tired limbs and bodies, so that the women and children and old ones of the village might watch us amusingly. Seeing them much amused, we felt happy for after days of toil most often accompanied by unhappy thoughts of woe and want, it was nice for them to amuse themselves occasionally. We had at least found one source of entertainment for them in our bamboo army.

Our bamboo army was among those that marched in a parade in town in honor of a certain General Sato and party. Ours was the only one with a band made up of six drummer boys and a bugler and with Fabio as the band leader and we were proud of it! We did march heartily to the tune of our band and I thought we did it well as evidenced by the plaudits we received from the crowd. Some of the children were so thrilled that they even followed and marched behind us.

That was the way it should be for we of the village, soldiers of the soil, had come not to invade the town and spread terror and destruction but to amuse, to entertain everyone including the Japanese general and his party with our marching and our band. We marched to the even tempo of drum beats and the resonant trumpeting of bugle so that the children might trail joyously behind us, the women might titter with delight and the other bamboo armies might look on with envy and admiration. We marched on and on sweating the scent of the fields and the woodland glorying the earth and the peaceful arbor, glorifying and not destroying.

Even Father, grey-haired and wrinkled, marched with the old ones of the village of which he was the Captain. They marched behind us seeming to inspire the more, these venerable ones of our army. We called them our veterans but the crowd called them the toothless youths, the bended teens. They also marched on.

The bamboo army marched on and on if only to gull the enemy into believing that its soldiers were for the Japanese Imperial forces, for the kempetai, for the sons of the "Son of Heaven," for the Co-Prosperity Sphere! The bamboo army marched on and on if only to show that it was all for the coming Made-in-Japan independence, for the Tokyo sponsored Republic! The bamboo army marched on and on, indeed so that the fighting comrades in the mountain fastness might have the time

to consolidate their strength again while the Japanese Military was being entertained by its marching!

It had been promised by Uncle Sam but because he was not around them who were around would do the giving. What kind of independence we did not know. We were not supposed to know we only were supposed to receive it whatever it might be. We must not ask questions; we must just be or appear to be grateful for everything had already been set for the grand occasion. The Constitution, the President, the Flag and even the Anthem were all ready. All the Bamboo Armies must also be ready to march on “Independence Day>” What kind of independence? No such question must be asked or else!

And so on 14 October 1943, the day we were supposed to receive our “independence” through the benevolence of the “Emperor of the Rising Sun,” we were supposed to celebrate. It was still four o’clock in the morning but they who had come from distant hamlets were already on the way to town. They feared that they might not come on time and therefore be guilty of not celebrating. The women wore native costumes and the men had their bamboo spears with them. Captain Uga of local Japanese Military Administration and Captain Yamaguti of the kempetai would be on the platform to find out which villages were most cooperative as shown by their attendance in the parade.

Unlike before when only our bamboo army had a band, in this parade several others had theirs too. The armies also vied with each other in the uniforms their soldiers wore. One outfit had coconut leaves for helmets and belts and campaign bags, another wore sandals made of coconut scarves and so on. There were also floats and all of them had the same theme: that of Mother Philippines, with dark flowing hair, in the costume with colors of her flag being released from the shackle fettered tightly round her crossed wrists by a Japanese soldier while Uncle Sam scampered away in fright! Quite amusing. In fact the inhabitants slyly whispered to each other, evidently entertained by its comicality. It was a swell show if one forgot the ludicrity of it.

There had been speculations shortly after the Made-in-Japan independence was granted to the Philippines. Those who never had trusted the invaders claimed that it was but another political maneuver to force the Filipinos to declare war against the United States when Mac Arthur returned, and thus conscript Filipinos to fight the Americans. On the other hand those who preferred to hope rather than to distrust consoled themselves into believing that the Japanese Military gave the Philippines independence to gain the honor of having granted her freedom and at the same time to be spared the humiliation of not having been able to hold on to the fruit of their conquest. For according to these wise-

acres the Japanese might leave the country anytime before the return of General Mac Arthur knowing full well that they would not be able to withstand the avenging onslaught of the returning liberators.

But weeks rolled into months and the Japs were still around and they had not bated a bit in their greed and cruelty. Independence was really a sham muttered the whilom hoping ones, nothing but a political maneuver to drag us with them into their pre-destined doom. And so many among those who had found temporary respite in the fold of the bamboo army had to break their bamboo spears and take up their guns again for that was the only way.

Colonel San Pedro of Malamig, Colonel Perez of Lumbangan, Colonel Kayakas of Ludlod and other guerrilla bands were on the warpath again. Once more they resumed their dangerous business of waylaying soldier-filled lorries, ambushing Jap patrols, sabotaging military installations, "picking up" informers wherever they could get hold of them for that was the only way.

The Japs and their dirty clique of bastards tried to do something but they were up against a more agile and cunning foe. They always returned from their futile manhunt only to make the poor inhabitants pay and pay for the "crime" which they did not commit. Indeed the

guerrillas fought and ran and the poor inhabitants had to stay and pay for that was the only way.

These also had become the times when the cheats, the profiteers, the scamps and scalawags, the thieves and bandits had made good use of their filthy lives. They cheated the more, they enriched themselves as fast and as avidly and crookedly as they could, worshiped the Devil's money by sacrificing not theirs but the flesh and blood of their fellow beings. They were the gainers in war, they who alone had the devilish wish that the war would be waged as long as the Devil desired it, for they were the children of the Devil himself. And there were those who had to pay and pay and they could do nothing but cry: "Peace, peace, peace!" But peace was still remote for the liberators were still in the Solomons!

During these hard times Don Arsenio, heedless of the fact that he already had been garrisoned and was still under close watch by the kempetai, had continued rendering material assistance to all the guerrilla outfits operating within his reach as well as to the destitute families frequenting the villa from time to time for succor. He knew the great risk to himself and to his family but he did not bother.

I wished the Welfare Station could still function. It could at least be a palliative to these suffering ones but

it had to close fore lack of funds. I wished I could send them to Don Arsenio but the villa was so far away. And so Barcilisa's three children died for want of nourishment and our laundress almost became insane. Cousin Pedro Aquino made a trip to the Bicol region with his son hoping to do a little business there. He came home penniless and without his son who died in a train accident. Cousin Victorio Cortez tried the strange hillside of Lala-o with his family; they also came back without a son. He died of a strange malady. Tales of hunger and death had become daily occurrences.

Cousin Nito Azores was still in the garrison because he was caught listening to William Winter's short-wave newscast. Cousin Meliton Brion was also there for supplying the guerrillas with medicine. Many said that cousin Cristeto Brion must now be dead. The kempetai picked him up five months past and since then one could only conjecture as to what had become of that former chief of police.

It dragged on from month to month. Pseudo-guerillas and other bad men being hunted by true patriots, true patriots being hunted by angry Japs. Profiteers and thieves and fellow-opportunists had been having their criminally bounteous time. More sabotage, more murder, more hunger, more tortures without name. And there were always those who had to pay and pay but they wearied not in their prayer: "Peace, peace, peace!"

For peace was really approaching. The liberators were already bombing the Marianas!

BEHOLD A BABE IS BORN!

The local kempetai celebrated 8 December 1943 with a terrific attack on a nearby hill suspected as a guerrilla hideout while a small band of ill-armed patriots contributed to the significance of the day with a daring ambuscade of a truckload of enemy soldiers along the national; road hardly ten kilometers away. But we in the family showed little concern for we also were celebrating not the second year of the so-called Greater East Asia War but the coming of a cute little babe in our midst.

Leaving Father to attend to the orchard chores, the others in the family went to town that day for Laura was to have a baby at Uncle Miguel's house. Early that evening our sister showed signs that the blessed event was at hand and so we hurriedly fetched a doctor and a nurse.

After attending briefly to my sister, Dr. Ricardo Raymundo whispered to my brother-in-law to have a candle lighted at the altar of San Vicente de Ferrer, the patron saint of expectant mothers. Our paternal Aunt Severa owned the holy image and so her son, Cousin Pabling who happened to be around, was requested to do the errand. Meanwhile I noticed Miss Syquimsian,

the Presbyterian nurse gazing at our chapel across the street. I was delighted.

The doctor and the nurse entered the room where our sister was and started preparing. I could hear the sound of medical instruments being placed on a table, the laughter of the good-natured doctor teasing my sister and my brother-in-law, and the sweet-natured nurse. My two other sisters were in the kitchen preparing something to eat when all was over, while Mother kept going about inwardly agitated though feigning calmness, I felt rather excited too and I knew why.

Moments later we heard a cry of pain from Laura again and again. Mother and my two sisters entered the room but I did not. A cry of pain came again. Rebecca came out; she got hold of her book and started to read. I went about the house but knew not what to do; I smoked. I sat on the window sill and stared at the darkness outside. I went down into the garden only to return to the house anew.

Another cry of pain and Rebecca closed her book and went to the kitchen, to the back porch then back to her book only to close it once more. I did not know but Cousin Pabling had returned. I challenged him to a game of Chinese Checkers. A cry of pain, more prolonged, more agonized. I lost the game.

Luz came out; her face was not pleasant. She said to me curtly. “Go in and tell Mother to come out. She wants to stay but her whole body shakes. She may only frighten Laura.” She started at me chidingly and left.

I quit the checker game and went to the back porch. I was thinking how hard was the ordeal of motherhood, how hard the trials of a growing babe! And yet how easy to snatch dear life away, especially in these troubled times! How easy indeed to produce bullets and bombs and cannon balls only to destroy a life so enduringly and so affectionately brought up! I thought of many other things, all unpleasant.

All was quiet now. I went to the kitchen and heard only the laughing of the flame as it teased the ebony bottom of a boiling kettle. I went to the living room. Rebecca was still fingering the pages of her book. Cousin Pabling was still in the dining room playing with marbles on the many-holed checkerboard. “Let’s play again, “I suggested.

I had just lost another game when an infant’s crying aroused us. We stood up, but Luz had come out already laughing. “It’s a girl!”

Rebecca rushed to the room almost bumping against Mother who was coming out. “It’s a girl, a very good sign!” she said. “During the Revolution when baby girls

began to be born your late grandfather used to say that the war was about to end and it did end." Then Mother named some village mothers who like Laura had of late given birth to baby girls.

I also entered the room with Cousin Pabling to greet my sister and my little niece, the first in the family. My brother-in-law had not left the bedside and was still rubbing his wife's hand. My sister was pale but already smiling and the babe in the crib was crying. I held my sister's hand then approached my little niece to greet her. I touched her arms and cheeks with utmost reverence and tenderness and I was reminded of rose petals!

"Because the babe is born on December 8th," Cousin Pabling started to say, "she may be named Purisima Concepcion, as suggested by your Aunt Severa," And the doctor, a devout Roman Catholic readily agreed.

"Looks like she's a Greater East Asia child," remarked Rebecca banteringly.

"But she's going to be a One-World Babe," I said with a seeming air of finality. And I advanced many a reason but the others did not seem to understand me and my wonderful thoughts. I gazed at my sister and her babe again then left the room thinking of Christmastime.

Days later we were back to our orchard home to celebrate Christmas. It was however just like any other day in the village this year. No children came for gifts and the season's victuals; no older folks dropped in to greet us. Everyone seemed content to celebrate Christmas quietly among immediate loved ones.

These December nights we dreamed of better food and pretty dresses and a cozy home for our little niece. We dreamed of pigtails and primer books, of ballet shoes and ivory keyboards, of rouge and blushing cheeks, of travel and exotic costumes, of earth, good will toward men.

Came January 1944, February and March, but there was no peace, no good will and we were still in our lowly orchard home with our little niece. For the carnage of war still reigned beyond the orchard fence.

Good Friday came but Easter seemed remote. For man still betrayed his fellow being for a handful of silver vile, still denied him thrice and even bore false witness against him, still smote and pierced him with the sword.

Two thousand years had passed since the story of the Cross was first enacted yet they were years of brutal strifes, of murder and plundering, and there was no peace. While man talked of brotherhood, down deep in

his heart he muttered hatred and revenge. He talked of blissful days yet secretly he made designs of a havoc that could be more severe and horrid still.

Man had not moved a single day from his dark age of savagery and neither had he ceased to worship the glory of fire and power. He had not learned a bit the lesson of the Cross, had not profited from His sufferance that he might be saved from his uncounted centuries of sins. Man had not yet learned that it was not the sword that would enable him, for a man could not seem to understand. And there was no peace. .

Distressing thoughts indeed! But always I referred myself to my little niece and to the orchard; it was easier that way. Their presence always had been very refreshing; they made me forget many unwholesome thoughts.

Another Maytime was with us again. Once more the flowers in the orchard began to bloom and the trees began donning new raiment of green, and the songbirds to be frequent callers again. Who could stop the earth's fresh blossoming and the poesy on wings in flight? Who could stop the smiling blushes of a glowing babe? Not even the sword of the enemy could do it.

Cousin Armando Reyes dropped in one day to tell us that the Allied Forces had unleashed their spring offen-

sive in Europe but Father and I had our doubts, for we had not as yet heard of any landing in the Continent. I was then playing with Baby yet somehow something in our cousin's report had hit me….spring offensive! That would mean more destruction, more death, more misery, more tears. But might it not mean something else, something more ennobling and glorifying?

Spring offensive! And the urge to write had engulfed my whole being. I would write about it and dedicate the piece to Baby and to the orchard and to us all. Yes, it would be another kind of spring offensive, one in which all of us would be the winner.

I was on it the whole day and Rebecca took notice. "Nothing has happened," she said. "Why has it taken you that long to write today's diary?"

"It's poetry this time!" But I hastily corrected myself, "Oh just plain doggerel lines."

"And since when have you deluded yourself into believing that you are a poet?" she wanted to know.

"Since the coming of our little niece," I replied.

She left without answering back and I went on writing my doggerel lines. The following morning I was

ready to read my piece to Baby. I also invited Rebecca to listen:

SPRING OFFENSIVE

A songbird squadron fleet and gay
Swoops down upon a garden realm
Of scented blooms and foliage green,
And thus begins the onslaught of Spring
The songbirds whirl about with mirth;
They soar and swoop, they leap and shrill.
They warble forth a tuneful battle song;
Pecking nigh and prowling yon,
Now breaking twigs and causing leaves
To fall in frisking flight.

The lilacs hide their purple heads in fright,
The shy mimosa shrink with coying dread,
And yellow violets do cringe with fear.
The passion flowers bow in gentle prayer,
While kneeling piously with them
Are trembling hyacinths.
But a bold regiment of roses gay
Of damask hue and white and red attire,
Meets the winged foe without fear,
And shoots forth wave after wave of gaseous fragrances.

Another squadron of invaders blithe,
The buzzing bees and princely butterflies,
Now join the battling throng;

They bruise the silken petals bright,
They bomb with pollen gains,
And loot the honey nectar sweet.
Meanwhile, the caterpillar kin
Filch into the defense,
Brave tiger orchids brandish lanky lances,
And mignonettes with swords of orange hues;
Hibiscus hurl forth pollen cannon balls,
And tuberoses shoot more scented fusillade,
Indeed! They form such picturesque array
In battlefield of color and of song.
    The battle rages on,
The battle of sweet perfume and of tune,
Of beauty and of loveliness.
The music-missled fighters hover on
With their symphonious weapons loud,
While the defending blooms hold firm their ground
With tinted darts and fragrant cannonade.
    The battle rages on,
And more azure the sky becomes
And earth a riot of refreshing melody.
    "We win!" the leading songbird warbles forth,
And winged soldiers soar in frisking concert bithe.
    "We win!" declares the reddest rose,
And lovely blossoms hold their heads with pride.
    And they prepare to recommence
Their seasonal Springtime contention;
But then a Child's cute voice is heard,
And Man and Woman's laughter. A pause!

“They win!” the songbirds sing at last,
And with the insects leap in frolic gay.
“They win!” agree the flow’rs
And hold their springthly heads with mirth.
And this is how the onslaught of Spring
Has e’er been fought and won!

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Rebecca. “Why, that would make an excellent Walt Disney cartoon show in Technicolor.”

“You flatter me sister,” I felt complimented. “But may it not also be a good theme for a delightful symphony?”

We both laughed, much amused. Baby also laughed with us. I wanted to swear to that.

Another kind of offensive was said to have begun really beyond our orchard fence. For our cousin Amando Leonor, the village guerrilla chieftain, came to the orchard to appraise up that General Mac Arthur had started a long-waited tri-dimensional offensive on air and sea and land to liberate the country and to punish the enemy. And we always believed the reports of our guerrilla leader. He rarely showed up in the village but each time he did he always had something important to pass on to the villagers so that they might be prepared.

We were bothered. For awhile news of the rumblings of war were becoming more and more frequent, Baby had to be taken to Bulacan to be introduced to her paternal relations there.

LET THE VILLAGE REJOICE

When the police acted as town crier and informed the inhabitants that henceforth thee would be no more ringing of church bells save as air-raid alarms, everyone in the village began to suspect. One of these days bombs would start falling again. Rumors had taken wings that Japanese positions in the southern regions of the Philippines were now being subjected to intensive bombing by American carrier-born planes, and these were belated admitted by the Japanese controlled Tribune when it began to publish brief, piece-meal reports about the bombing of Davao, Zamboanga, Leyte, Cebu, Negros, Cagayan, Misamis and other military installations in the South. Cousin Jose Azores, who was in possession of a radio with re-installed shortwave, even claimed that Davao had been bombed for the nineteenth time already.

About ten o'clock in the morning of 21 September 1944, after almost three years of waiting, we began to hear again the sounds of falling bombs. It was true that we had been crying for peace, peace, peace! And we loved it. We had waited for it for that was one instant when the falling of bombs meant to us the near-advent of a heard-earned peace, for that was the only way. Indeed unlike the bombs which fell upon us one Christmas Day three years past, the bombs which had started

to fall this time were a thundering purveyor of the coming liberator. We were roused to excitement but were nevertheless gladdened by it.

The villagers ceased with their daily chores for some while and gathered in groups about the village road and in some village yards. Neighbor Isko and his wife Agueda came to the orchard in a hurry to get assurance that it was Manila which was being bombed. The couple was looking happy though evidently excited.

"It is Manila," I said. "The American planes must be bombing Nichols Field."

"May this mean that the end of the war is already approaching," sighed Agueda prayerfully. "So we could breathe a little better."

"May it be so," seconded Mother. "Mankind has suffered enough."

Meanwhile Father was hurriedly dressing up to go to town to see that my sister Laura and her family did not get alarmed. They arrived from Bulacan only some days past with their babe but could not come to the village for the orchard home was too cool a place at night for my sister's little one who had a slight cold.

Four o'clock that afternoon we heard a prolonged drone of planes in flight somewhere in the direction of the Japanese-made Lipa airfield. A few minutes later there was a succession of thundering thud. The village was very much alive again with voices of shouting children, jesting men, and chiding women.

"Keep 'em flying, keep 'em flying! Shouted the village urchins as they ran about the village road in sprightly frolic. "We want apples and chocolate candies; we want apples and chocolate candies."

"Hurry up, Cano, hurry up!" loudly coaxed Ludin, the village swain, as he climbed the roof of his house, as if he could see the planes beyond the mountain ranges of Bulaho. "Hurry up! We are already having stomach trouble eating too much coconut meat."

"Don't you be alarmed," Elias laughed with a sneer, "it is only target practice."

Meanwhile the women continued to chide, though in vain, their men and children for being too loud and open in their rejoicings. "Suppose some Japanese soldiers happen to pass by," said Agueda who had come to the orchard again. "They may harm us all."

"And we may not live to see the days of apples and chocolate candies," I teased her.

"It doesn't matter if I don't taste apples and chocolates anymore as long as I live," said our frightened neighbor; "all that I am praying for is for everyone of us to live to see the end of the war."

Regina came also, pale and trembling, murmuring the names of the Holy Trinity. "I am glad it is happening," she said. "But-but-I don't know why I am trembling, I am not afraid. Oh God, deliver us all from harm!"

That evening Mother scolded my sisters Luz and Rebecca, for singing "God Bless America" loud enough to be heard at the orchard gate. The girls did not stop their song, they only sang it softly. I also joined them with a hum.

Suddenly Father told us to cease singing for awhile. He seemed to be hearing sounds of distant cannonade from the direction of Tayabas. "Might they be making a landing?" Mother wanted to know. We all kept quiet and strained our ears, but heard only the droning sound of some nocturnal insects. Father also had begun to imagine things and we knew the reason why.

We continued to hum the song until we fell asleep. Past midnight I was awakened. I thought I too heard sounds of distant cannonade fro the direction of Tayabas. Could they really be making a landing somewhere

in Mauban or Atimonan? I laughed and tried to fall asleep again.

About nine-thirty the following morning, the sound of falling bombs was heard once more from the Manila direction and the village was once more alive and exulting. Half an hour later Laura's family arrived from town with their belongings. They also had stories to tell about the confusion in the marketplace when the townsfolk heard the sound of falling bombs, about the scared Japanese soldiers who were the first to take shelter, about the subdued delight on the faces and behavior of the inhabitants, and about the sky-rocketing of the prices of prime commodities, especially rice and sugar.

The next few days the villagers heard no sound of falling bombs and they were disappointed. Everyone in the family was disappointed too. From morn till late in the afternoon we would wait for the droning sound of planes in flight and the subsequent exploding of distant bombs, but for days we waited in vain. We waited until we began to be disgusted to utter words of chiding contempt.

"They only make the Japanese soldiers angry," said Father, "and the Filipinos are the ones who pay for it."

The bombing of Manila on September 21 and 22 only made life much harder. It immediately raised the

prices of prime necessities to considerable heights. Several vendors even closed their stores and would not sell anything more. Some would, if one would pay with Philippines currency instead of Japanese war-notes. A number of villagers would not work anymore, hoping and believing that the Americans would be around already in a week or two; so why work for money that would be worthless in a couple of weeks? They opined that the little stock of food they had would be enough till Cano's return with better victuals! And so many idled and waited hopefully because bombs had been dropped in Manila already. Many hungered but waited faithfully. When and where would the liberator's bombs start falling again? When and where would the liberator make a landing? When and how might we be liberated?

They were days of watchful waiting and petty disappointments before we experienced again that rare and wild delight brought about by the sight of friendly planes passing overhead. Yes, we not only began to hear the sound of falling bombs again, we started seeing friendly planes flying overhead once more after all these dreary years of waiting!

One morning we heard the sound of passing planes anew but this time the sound was different from the sound we had been hearing during the past three years. It was like that of a top spinning. We loved to hear it, to see the source of it. We were having our breakfast then

but we left the table and ran to the village road where we could have a better view. We looked up and lo! Sixteen big bombers, silvery and glistening in the sun, escorted by eight springthly fighters frolicking about playfully, showed up over Mt. Bulaho and flew gracefully almost gliding towards the direction of Manila. The sight of them had caused a rapturous kind of delight among the villagers.

Some of the men even climbed tree-tops and roofs of bigger houses so that they might see more of those harbingers of freedom, even if they had flown already over us and could be seen no longer along the village road because of the forest of tall coconut trees around. Their shouts of Victory were so hearty and loud that they frightened the old ones who feared some Japanese soldiers might see and hear them in their rejoicings and punish the whole village.

Moments later we heard detonations and once more the village rang with hilarious Mabuhay and Victory and other heart-warming words. For now the falling of bombs had so many wonderful meanings; in fact it had become music to our ears!

The hope which had been watered to freshness these last three years could not be lost and neither could it be weighed down by the burden of woe. Hoping for the best we were nonetheless also ready for the worst.

Since then American planes had continued to fly over us on an almost regular schedule so that the villagers had come to know when to expect them. From nine to ten in the morning and about four in the afternoon the villagers were already on the watch. If they heard nothing in the morning they would wait till four in the afternoon. If they failed to see friendly planes fly over or failed to hear the sound of falling bombs, it was a bad day for them and they hoped the morrow would be better.

While the Americans were conducting air-raids on various military objectives in the Philippines the Japanese soldiers were also raiding the hogs and chickens of the villagers. They would come to the village with big sacks, force themselves into village homes and stores, and grab every edible they wanted; eggs, chickens, hogs, bananas, papayas, chicos, everything they might want. Because our orchard home was hidden from the village road by a thick growth of cassava and banana plants and creeping, clinging vegetation, the Japanese soldiers always missed us.

Just the same we started to regularly relish fried eggs for breakfast, boiled chicken for dinner and suppertime, and to roast a little pig every fortnight. Also we began to send more and more fat pullets to Aunt Severa and Susana and Eufemia and Maria as well as to Grandaunt

Dionisia. Others we bartered for kilos of sugar, gantas of rice and packages of cigarettes.

One day Mother said, “Now is the time to eat our hogs and chickens and be strong. Let us eat and eat, and let tomorrow take care of itself. These are uncertain times. Let is live fully. Let us share what we have with those who need it most. Better be eaten by those poor ones than be grabbed by the enemy.”

More American planes flew overhead, more bombs were heard falling, more frequently they fell in various directions. More Japanese soldiers came to the village to grab the now scanty food of the villagers. More vendors closed shop and would not sell anymore. More angry, disgusting words were uttered because the liberators only flew overhead but would not land yet to deliver us. To make life still harder to bear for the noncombatants, besides confiscating work animals and foodstuff, the enemy ordered compulsory labor in the repair of damaged airfields and other military installations and in the construction of secret roads to some secluded dumps. The enemy had become more and more cruel for the guerrillas were becoming more and more daring . . . . and the helpless, peace-loving ones were still and always there to pay and pay . . .

MAC ARTHUR RETURNS

We now began to hear rumors of landing operations in Leyte which the Tribune denied, though the Japanese-controlled newspaper admitted in later issues that the coastal regions of Leyte had been subjected to intensive bombing and shelling from American warships. But more and more rumors came into being and before I could ascertain its authenticity, I was already at it again telling and re-telling the daily raid that was going on in Manila and in various parts of the archipelago; of landings not only in Leyte but also in Cebu, Iloilo, Mindoro, Catanduanes and Legaspi; that one morning we might wake up to hear reports of landings in Mauban, Atimonan, Lucena and along the Batangas coast. Mac Arthur had returned at last! They were only rumors I knew, but I retold them with the force and strength of truth, because I knew they could strengthen hope and faith. We needed them in these most uncertain times.

Unlike those heroic Bataan days, my war-commentaries seemed now to be backed up by events which even the Tribune and Reverend Nakada's Board of Information had found hard to deny.

Late one night a few days after the rumored Leyte landing a police crier had to awake the town people

with his shoutings and the dull beats of his companion's drum. Shouted the crier, as he referred to American casualties in the supposed abortive Leyte landing operations: "Sunk . . . two cruisers, one destroyer, five transports, and seventeen landing barges; heavily damaged there battleships, two aircraft carriers, two destroyers, three transports, two landing barges . . . burning eleven transports."

Three nights later the crier awoke the inhabitants again with his shoutings and his companion's drum bats: Rejoice, rejoice, you all. Leyte is retaken. Leyte is retaken."

We had prepared already the villager's mind for it that once Mac Arthur started a thing he always would finish it and that we should guard against wild propaganda from a desperate loser. Mac Arthur started a landing in Leyte, he would finish it, and he would not stop there. He would make more landings, for the day of our liberation was come!

"It may have been that he is making already other landing operations at this very hour," I said. "Perhaps in Legaspi, in Mindoro, or even in Pangasinan, the Ilocos or Cagayan the Americans would land. You never can tell what Mac would do. He always showed up where he was least expected."

During the days that followed hundreds of trucks filled with soldiers, trucks carrying boats and crudely-made water rafts passed by the town all southward bound. They must be bringing more and more soldiers to Leyte or perhaps to the Bicol regions. We could hear the noise of their passing until late in the night.

The Japanese soldiers knew that we shouted Mabuhay and Victory each time we heard rumors of landing operations. That was why they were getting more and more angry, more and more threatening.

"Yes, 'Mericans coming," said one of them, "with plenty food. But no Filipinos eat."

"All Filipinos guerrillas. We all die fighting 'Merican soldiers. We also kill all Filipinos."

More frightful talks. More brutish threats but we all remained unafraid because the liberators had made already a landing in Leyte and perhaps somewhere else. They had returned!

However for every American bomb that fell more Filipinos were rounded up to repair the damage, more Japanese soldiers frequented the village to grab the already scanty foodstuff of the villagers, and more harm was done to the townspeople. The guerrillas struck wherever and whenever they had the chance and mad-

dened because they were always bested, the angry Japs bent their wrath on the helpless non-combatants.

It had become the same story from day to day. Bombings, rumors of more landings, Japs getting more cruel, guerrillas ever avenging, and the non-combatants were always around to pay. There were times when the villagers felt like weakening but for the strength of their faith and perhaps the music of my tales.

"Leyte has fallen!" I announced to them with finality weeks after we heard the news of the landing. "See! The Japanese soldiers are now moving northward."

They really were the townspeople said so. They were no longer riding on speeding trucks and lorries. They were retreating northward on foot and they did so at night. Thousands of them passed by and they were literally dragging themselves with evident tiredness. By daytime they stopped at the town and confiscated all kinds of vehicles, carabao carts, horse carts, push carts to carry their equipment.

These were fertile subjects for commentaries. I lost no time passing my thoughts to the villagers, guerrillas and peaceful ones alike and they enjoyed them even if life was getting harder t bear.

Christmas 1944 was all right with us despite the troubles around and abroad. At least we received two Christmas presents. One was the Tribune's confirmation of the landing in San Jose, Mindoro and the other was a Christmas card dropped perhaps on the evening of either December 22nd or 23rd. It said: "The Commander-in-chief, the officers, and men of the American Forces of Liberation in the Pacific wish their gallant allies, the People of the Philippines all the blessings of Christmas and the realization of their fervent hopes for the New Year. Christmas 1944."

Father found it early in the morning of December 23rd in our coconut field at Ciano. A few villagers were also proud possessors of this Christmas greeting which they proudly showed to envying kin and friends on Christmas Day.

But New Year was sad for us and the villagers for the day before the American planes raided the town for the first time and Cousin Ligaya Leonor was hit on the head by a machine-gun bullet while she was on her way to the air-raid shelter. She died instantly.

No one in the family was able to go to town for the funeral. We knew that the Japanese informers would want to see Father and me but we would not give them the pleasure of seeing us and neither would we allow the other members of the family to be seen by them. We

only attended the chapel service for it was Sunday under the house of a villager and prayed with the others for the repose of Cousin Ligaya's soul.

It was hard to imagine the effect of the raid in town. The Japanese soldiers became more cruel and the guerrillas bolder still. It also made me more loquacious with their retelling of tales narrated to them.

The Japs apprehended Cousin Nito Azores and his radio was taken while Cousin Armando Reyes was now busy with his comrades spying on the enemy's movement and destroying bridges and communication lines that he had no time to see me. Now I had to depend solely on wild rumors given by traveling merchants and smart wiseacres, though I always knew what to do with those bits of information. Besides, the Japanese controlled Tribune was still in circulation and three years had made me a sort of an expert in the art of reading the newspaper "between the lines."

One day some of us in the village came into possession of some more things to talk about. It appeared they were flying from Mac Arthur's headquarters somewhere in Leyte. They came one cool, cloudy, drizzling day. We had just finished our lunch when all at once we heard the droning of approaching planes then the sound of machine-gun fire so it seemed. All at once our women hurried to the air-raid shelter in the backyard

while the menfolk looked through the thick leaves of trees hoping to catch a glimpse of the fast approaching planes through the breaks of grayish clouds. The planes flew over in a hurry. They were dark colored, I thought perhaps those which Cousin Armando used to call Hell Cats. They hardly had passed when we heard sounds, as of machine-gun fire. It lasted for a few seconds then the planes were gone.

Moments later a farmer's boy came rushing to the orchard. "The planes dropped something sir," he told me breathlessly. "The boys have gone already to the fields to look for them. They are very many sir. They are being carried by the wind southward and the boys are running after them."

Father and I and Pablito and the farmer's boy went out at once. On the way we met several men and children with their newly found treasure. "We found several in your field at Garabell," said one. I took a look at them. They were of two kinds: one was a colorful handbill with a glorious heading, MAC ARTHUR RETURNS, and the other was a proclamation by the then President Osmeña.

We proceeded to Garabel. There was a drizzle but the villagers did not bother. They combed almost every nook and isolated spot in the field for the much-coveted

prize. We found two copies of the proclamation and six of the Mac Arthur handbills.

On our way back to the orchard we met another group of villagers coming from another direction. They were displaying several Japanese war notes, all brand new. What was really new about them were the big bold letters written on one side, CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE, WHAT IS IT WORTH?

“What does this mean?” they asked me.

“It means that those notes are worthless as far as the Americans are concerned,” I told them.

THE MASSACRE COMMENCES

President Osmeña had issued his Proclamation. The guerrillas, the non-combatants, and even the Japanese Army got their copies at once. How did it affect them? Quite well, and in many ways.

The people were happy to learn of the destruction of the enemy in Leyte, the liberators established control over Mindinao, and of the news that they had landed already in Luzon and were now within striking distance of Manila. But the President's eloquent call to every Filipino to do his utmost so that the liberator's burden of battle might be lightened worried us much. We knew this would madden the Japs the more thinking that the hour had come for every Filipino to strike at them. Believing thus, they had to strike first and most barbarously. The poor Filipino non-combatant could not "rise to noble heights" as enjoined by the President for a bolo was his only weapon against the enemy's mortar and machine-gun.

The armed guerrillas on the other hand had become bolder still. They heard the call, the call they had been waiting for three long years. The voice of Bataan and Corregidor now lived in them again. Their hearts now began to beat more warmly and faster. Their whole being became filled with courage, and their souls rose to

noble heights. Gone were the aches of the body and the spirit, gone were the fears, doubts and hungering.

But the Japs were not gone yet and worse they had grown madder than ever. They knew what was coming, and they prepared for it. When they could not get their hands on the guerrilla bands, they bent their wrath on the helpless non combatants. It was the same old story though now it was being told in a more brutal way.

Men of violent passions, drunken by the blood of beasts, they committed murders that defied imitation. They slay utterly without pity for theirs was the vengeance of the Devil and was therefore without mercy. But they would not sleep in safety because of their diabolical acts, for they knew that the guerrillas were delaying their revenge that they might deal a heavier blow.

The Japs started fairly well. They started burning the neighboring little towns of Calauan, Bay, Santo Tomas, Tanauan and massacred the inhabitants. The guerrillas swooped down upon the murderers of their unfortunate countrymen. For sometimes they were masters of the situation, but when Jap reinforcements arrived, they had to retreat back to their mountain hideaway. The Japs burned more houses and massacred more inhabitants.

Even Reverend Nakada, supposed to be a Christian with Christian attributes, had metamorphosed from a

God-fearing pastor who used to preach Christian love on Sunday mornings into a cruel, inhuman adherent of his other god, the Emperor. Said he to Cousin Ruben Belulia one day. . . "For every Japanese killed, one hundred Filipinos will be taken and tortured to death and the whole village or district where our countryman was killed it will be burned to the ground. There shall be no mercy." Indeed the air had become full of Damoclean swords.

When no Japanese got killed in town and no excuse could be found to justify the atrocious acts they had wanted to commit, the Japanese Military started to find ways. One night the burning of the villages of Lumbangan, Ludlod and Malamig was ordered for the reason that they were homes of the three "notorious" guerrilla chieftains, the villagers there must be their followers so they massacred many of the menfolk of the three villages.

After ordering the burning of a few more villages and the killing of many of their inhabitants on the excuse that the guerrillas driven from their former haunts had taken shelter in those places and were taken care of by the villagers, the Japanese Military threatened to order the burning of all the villages of San Pablo. The guerrillas would have no dwellings to hide in and so there would be no villagers around to help procure food an other necessities for them. If the villagers wanted to

avoid this impending calamity they had to move over to town.

But the town was being subjected to intense bombings by American planes, and besides, the villagers were beginning to suspect. The Japanese Military was affecting a systematic destruction of life and property in the town proper and adjacent villages of San Pablo. Firstly, all the villages would be burned to force the villagers to move to town. Those who would not leave the village would be declared guerrillas and hunted as such. When most of the villagers were already in town, an assembly of all male inhabitants might be called on the excuse of discussing ways and means of preserving peace and order for the seeming benefit of the people; then, when they were gathered already in the town plaza or elsewhere, a wholesale slaughter would not be difficult to execute. Yet if the villagers would not leave their village homes, they would be hunted just the same as guerrillas.

The villagers were in a dilemma. They did not know what to do, and I did not know what to tell them either. It was getting more and more serious and I was getting more and more restless. It was a latter of life and death. Something had to be done. The villagers always had looked up to us as a barometer of safety. Whatever we did, they also would do on the belief that it must be the right thing to do under the circumstance.

To go to town or not to go to town, that was the question. Many depended on our decision, almost the whole village with more than a thousand inhabitants. Father, Pablito and I talked it over one night. There was no arguing. Everyone was determined to stay in the orchard, happen what might. There was no escape in town, no safer place to run to when Japs suddenly got set on their murderous frenzy. The village, the forest, the hills and the mountains yonder were still wide and friendly. There would be a chance. We informed the villagers of our decision to stay in the orchard, and how we had arrived at it, Most of them decided to stay because we had decided to stay though a few families thought it better to go to town and spend some days with relations there until life in the village would be settled, for barrio life had become ruffled by one threat after another from the enemy. No one could tell where the Japs would strike next to satisfy their arsenic and homicidal mania.

One night the villagers were aroused. Rumors came about that the Japs would come shortly before dawn to burn the village and massacre every one they could find, because they were reported to have suspected that after the burning of Ludlod, Kayakas and his men moved their quarters somewhere in Butokan. We took the rumors calmly. All that our women did was to wear four layers of clothing each, and to have in readiness the baskets and bundles of food and other essentials to

take along just in case there would be a need to move away. These they did with a good laugh.

A few minutes after midnight we heard sporadic reports of machine-gun fire punctuated here and there by loud detonations of exploding grenades from the direction of the town. As the firing became intense we became excited. Mother at last hinted about our going to the air-raid shelter but Laura was against it. “It’s very cool outside,” she said. “And Baby is asleep.”

Pablito and I started making conjectures as we sat smoking. “The guerrillas must have invaded the town,” my brother-in-law opined.

“But the firing seems to come from the same source,” I said.

“The Japs must be having some fireworks to frighten the townspeople so they will hide in their shelter and not know what the Japs intend to do,” according to Father who had joined us. “For all I suspect they might be leaving the town now and retreating somewhere.”

I went out in the backyard so that I might have a better idea about the machine-gun fire but the first thing I saw was the many torches moving farther away towards the thick fields beyond and ending at the Bañadero stream. It was at once evident that they were villagers

leaving their homes along the village road for more secluded nooks to escape what they thought might be a prelude to the burning of the village and the killing of its inhabitants.

The firing ceased after about half an hour but sleep was a difficult thing to do. Instead Rebecca narrated some fairy tales to herself, Mother and Luz chatted over postwar plans, Father played with Baby who had awakened, while Laura and her husband talked in undertones. I lay down on my bed and smoked.

When Baby was asleep and the others were now quiet, Father lay down with me and we chatted in the dark. Father was getting disgusted with Mac Arthur's strategy. He was blaming him for all of the enemy's acts of barbarity. "Why did he concentrate all his forces in the Central Plain of Luzon?" Father wanted to know. "If he only made a landing in Tayabas or Batangas, the Japs here would have been so occupied they wouldn't have the time to harass the civilians."

"He has to do it," I explained. "It is there where he can make good use of his mechanized units because the Central Plain is a vast open land, but our region here is quite hilly and wild and that is very ideal for the Jap's treacherous tactics. They are tough jungle fighters. Had the Americans landed in Tayabas they would have suffered heavy casualties. The Japs were expecting them

there; see how many soldiers have passed by already moving northward?”

“But why doesn’t Mac Arthur drop enough arms for the guerrillas?” asked Father. “Arms not only for the guerrillas to fight but also for the civilians. Everyone is ready to fight but now men are dying like pigs without a fight.”

“Perhaps Mac Arthur doesn’t want to take a chance,” I said. “He fears that these three years under Japanese rule might have changed our loyalties already.”

“I wish I could do it,” said Father harshly. He did not say anything more after that. We continued to smoke for some time then made an effort to fall asleep.

Deep in the night we were awakened by loud reports of cannonade from the direction of either Tayabas or Batangas coasts coupled with them seemed to be the deep distant sound of many planes. The whole neighborhood had been awakened also. We could hear their voices.

“It happened at last!” Father exclaimed. “I am certain that a landing operation is now going on somewhere in Tayabas or Batangas. What time is it?”

“Three o’clock,” Rebecca answered.

“They may be Japanese coastal guns firing at an approaching convoy,” Pablito opined.

“Or a naval bombardment from Uncle Sam’s big battleships preparatory to landing operations,” I added.

The sound of what seemed to be a cannonade did not last long and we were much disappointed. We waited for more reports but fell asleep without hearing another salvo.

Wee were most disappointed to wake up to a quiet cloudy morn. We had expected to hear more good news and noises of conflict that would end it all but only heard disappointing talk and angry complaints from the villagers. Still we continued to hope that the morrow would be better for ours was the hope that could endure and overcome misfortune.

THE ENEMY BURNS THE HOMETOWN

Manila was liberated already and the liberators were now pushing southward which meant that our liberation was also approaching. The news created an almost insane kind of joy among the villagers. More news came later. The liberators were now in Cabuyao, a little town hardly fifty kilometers northwest of us. It was not hard to believe it because even in the daytime we could hear the intermittent sound of cannonade and the liberating planes were getting more and more active.

Meanwhile the Japanese Military in town was getting more and more men to work somewhere and many of them did not return anymore. More foodstuff were confiscated, more vehicles taken, and more flimsy pretexts were thought of to serve as excuses to apprehend more townsmen who were seen no more.

Then came news of the daring rescue of the American civilian internees in Los Baños by paratroopers with the aid of guerrillas and amphibian tanks coming from Laguna de Bay. Now the American soldiers were already in Calamba and making preparations for their final dash which would mean our liberation.

But the liberation stayed too long in Calamba!

The Japs knew that the Americans were already very near and they already had known long, long past that the Filipinos were never on their side and never could be trusted. One morning an order was issued to the effect that all male inhabitants from fifteen years up must assemble inside the town church to discuss ways and means of preserving peace and order. Whoever would not follow would be considered as guerrilla and would be treated as such. Upon hearing the order, several male inhabitants still in town immediately made for the mountains but those who were too slow to make a getaway had to follow or else! Among those who were assembled in the church about six hundred Chinese and two hundred Filipinos were picked up presumably to work in some military installations. Most of them were not herd of anymore. A few who managed to escape in spite of their many bayonet wounds had gruesome tales to tell. The liberators stayed too long in Calamba!

There were not many people in town anymore. Of the fifty thousand inhabitants hardly a few thousand still dared to stay for reasons of their own. The others had managed to outwit the sentries posted in various exits of the town. They had crept through by night and succeeded. The enemy's scheme had failed and so he must think of another one.

Early in the morning of 8 March 1945, anther order was issued. All inhabitants must leave the town not

later than seven o'clock in the evening. Whoever would be found in town after that hour would be shot as guerrilla. The order also provided that the inhabitants should go to Butokan or Bulaho for they were the only villages declared as "safety zones" by the Japanese Military. Any one seen in town or any other village would be considered as guerrilla and be shot on sight.

The whole day long a seemingly endless parade of evacuating townsmen passed by the orchard. Wearied and deeply worried, they trod on with the bare necessities which they could carry on their heads, shoulders, and with their hands. Even the children, as long as they could walk, had to have their share of the family load.

Before nightfall our orchard had become a little community by itself with little shanties made of coconut leaves scattered all around to house the families of kin and friends from town. Aunt Maria and Aunt Eufemia and her three children were able to have a meager space in our little hut. "Had we known that this would happen, we would have built a bigger house," Father said teasingly as he dropped from one shanty to another.

At first we took the order with happy optimism. We opined that the Japs in town did not want to be seen by the inhabitants in their retreat so they ordered the townspeople to leave. But when days later the Japs

were still in town looting and plundering homes and digging more trenches, everyone became fearfully apprehensive and the villagers and those who evacuated to Butokan began to doubt, to fear the more. Why must the Japs want the inhabitants to be concentrated and crowded in such limited areas as the villages of Bulaho and Butokan? Why didn't they give the people the freedom to hide anywhere they thought to be a safe place in the event of an encounter between the two fighting forces?

Midnight of the third day after the order to leave the town was made I was awakened by the sound of something which I could not make out. I went out to find the sky over the town in smoke and flaming red. The Japs had started to burn the town and I did not have to tell the family and the others in the orchard about it for everyone was awakened already. The enemy had destroyed in one night what would take a generation or more to rebuild. Another fifty thousand lives would be without homes when all this would be over I thought. The liberators stayed too long in Calamba!

Father and I went about the shanties of kin and friends in the orchard to drop a word of cheer and encouragement, but we did not have to. They were not much grieved over the loss. They were praying that they live to be able to start all over again, that the Americans hurry up a bit before it is too late.

Shortly before noon the following day, the severest raid ever conducted in town was made by a squadron of fighter bombers. The bombing was so intense that the trunks of our lanzones shook with every thundering thud but we were unafraid. We were hoping that it was already the prelude to the liberators coming; that their air arms were preparing already the way for them by softening the enemy's defenses. A little later in the afternoon nine double-engined, black looking planes raided the town again.

Our hopes were soaring high once more and we were being filled with good spirit. With the approach of night we were all expecting to hear the loud and terrible noise of battle. We prepared for it. Mother had told already the other families in the orchard to prepare enough food to last them for some days, to bundle enough pieces of clothing, and to have other necessities in readiness for any eventuality. "The orchard is yours," said Mother. "Get anything you want, pigs, chickens, anything. They are for all."

The air-raid shelter was readied for the women and children and the men were all alerted. We knew what to do just in case anything untoward befall the orchard. The men did not sleep that night but nothing happened.

The next day hundreds of Japanese soldiers with their Filipino informers and other bastards passed by on

the way to Bulaho. On the way they picked up some villagers and made them carry their cartloads of food, munitions, and other supplies. Many of the bastards, well-armed and haughty in their traitorously usurped power, tarried in the village, evidently to acquaint themselves with the place. Their presence evoked an ebullition of anger and repugnance worsened by fear from among those who were in hiding. Some bolder ones had wanted to kill them were it not for the counsels of clear-headed ones who made them see that the deed would cause only more misfortune to the whole village.

The movement of troops towards our direction and the presence of these spying bastards in our midst worried us much. It suddenly reminded us of the sad news we received days past about the tragic fate met by the dwellers of Manila's Walled City and the other civilians who were driven to the place by the Japs for reason that it was Manila's "safety zone," but which only became the Jap's last rampart of defense. The enemy tried to make the civilians a shield and both enemy and civilians met death.

It was now evident that they were preparing to effect the same wicked scheme. They declared Butokan and Bulaho "safety zones" where the civilians should go. Then as now they were moving with evil in their mind. Indeed there was a system and a system of treachery at

that. But Butokan and Bulaho must not be another Walled City of unhappy death for innocent ones. The villagers and all those who had hoped to find refuge in these two villages must know of their approaching doom. They must be warned they must leave as soon as possible.

I might be wrong with my thoughts and apprehensions. Where we were now might be really the safest place to be in such terrible times. Who could tell? I might be sending thousands of innocent lives to certain death just because of my foolish imaginings. Were they really foolish imaginings? I did not think so. I still believed that the Japs were acting on a preconceived scheme of barbarity patterned after what had happened in Manila's Walled City and others must know.

At once my newly concocted tales took wings: It happened in the Walled City, it would happen in Butokan. There could be no way of avoiding the calamity except to leave and at once. Some acted at once and dared cross the line to Maitim; days later, news about their having made it inspired the others to follow. Some guerrillas took the responsibility of guiding and protecting these innocent ones from roving enemy patrols. There had been occasional encounters with a few casualties, but he convoy always managed to go through the line. Many families continued to are because the rumors

had become more and more frightful to bear. It had to be so to encourage more to leave.

Mother was one of the few who would not be affrighted rumors of impending doom, one of the few villagers who would not leave the place of her birth. “I was born in this very orchard,” she said. “If the Lord wills I will also die here. There is death anywhere. If the Lord wills that we died, it is better to die here in our own home. Our dead bodies may still be found and are given a Christian burial. If we leave this place and meet death somewhere, who will find our bodies? We stay here and give ourselves to God. All these three years God has delivered us from hunger and harm. Let us continue to trust in Him.”

“But God helps only those who help themselves Mother,” I said.

“You have little faith,” she chided.

Mother’s relations had to leave us. Aunt Maria and Aunt Eufemia with her children went with the others. Mother cried silently when they left but that was all she could do. She did not want to be on the way for no one could tell where the really safe place was. Every family had to decide for themselves. Mother had decided to stay and so we had to.

Father, to satisfy us with Mother's decision, had advanced other reasons about the feasibility of staying in the orchard. Said he, "There's danger anywhere we go but here in the orchard we are at least assured that we will not die of hunger. If we go to Maitim we shall be able to bring just the food that we can carry and it may last us only for a week at most. Besides, our women may not have the strength to carry on. We shall have to climb stiff hills and cross dangerous streams which are sometimes crocodile-ridden." Because they were growing older it was difficult for our parents to be scared. And we, the children, had also to conquer fear lest we become a coward . . . a slave.

We had to stay.

At any rate I had one consolation over our prolonged stay in the village. It gave me the chance to broadcast more frightful tales to frighten more and more villagers to leave at once. I still believed that the enemy had a preconceived scheme of affecting a mass slaughter of civilians, if not to use them as a shield. If God should will that we be sacrificial lambs offered that the villagers and our kith and kin might be delivered, His will be done. I continued to spread more dreadful tales while the family, just as much affrighted, only prayed and hoped for the best. The news of our relations and more villagers having reached the hill of Maitim safely made

us happy though it saddened us somehow to hear that they wished that we had followed.

The village was getting lonelier. Every break of dawn found more families gone. We had deserted the village road to choose the densest spot at Garabel to build a hideaway shelter for ourselves for the Japanese soldiers had been frequenting the village in search of more men to transport their supplies to some unknown destination.

Late one afternoon rumor came around that the Japanese soldiers were getting madder because they could not find any more men along the village road to carry their supplies. The rumors further stated that they would comb the river banks for they knew that most of the inhabitants were in hiding there. Several families were so affrighted that they left their riverside shanties that very night.

That night we slept at Garabel with the coconut leaves and the green grass for our mat and the open sky for our roof. It was so cold we feared Baby might get sick. Deep in the night we heard the intermittent exchanges of cannonade between the Japanese artillery at Mt. Kalisungan and the Americans somewhere in Los Baños. For the first time, too, American planes subjected enemy positions in nearby places to an intensive night raid. The tremor produced by the falling bombs

made the earth where we lay quake a bit and the raiding planes even reached our sky in their flight. How we had loved to hear their droning sound!

The menfolk of the family spent the whole of the following day digging an air-raid shelter big enough to serve as sleeping quarters for the women. Before we could finish our work threatening rumors reached us one after another. There still was that persistent rumor that the Japanese soldiers would again get more men to carry their supplies but many of those they got never returned. We received reports that the guerrillas were given only three more days with which to help evacuate the civilians to Maitim; after that the villages of Butokan and Bulaho would be subjected to as fierce a bombing raid as had been done to other enemy positions. The Americans were convinced that the enemy had been concentrating in their villages.

The most frightening rumor however was the reported killing of a Japanese soldier and two informers somewhere in the village by a band of reckless guerrillas. The latest yarn so affrighted those in hiding that several families immediately bundled up and left in haste for still remoter regions. It was also too frightful for Mother to bear and so she said that if we still wanted to, we might take a chance and go even if only as far as Uncle Manuel's place at Masaya. Mother however was not much saddened by her acquiescence for all

her sisters and nearest of kin were already at Uncle Manuel's. Only the thought of the misfortune that might befall us on the way troubled her quietly. But we had to take the chance and let the Lord be our Guide and Protector.

There was no time to lose. We had to leave before the break of dawn the following day. We already had contacted the remaining families in the village to go with us. A small band of guerrillas would meet us in an isolated sport somewhere in the village of Magampon. They knew the shortest and presumably the safest route to take. God allowing we would be able to make it.

Those were tense moments. The Japs and their vicious followers were now roaming the village road and breaking into village houses with evil in their eyes. With the approach of dusk the men in the family crept into the orchard. While I busied myself picking up as many chickens I could reach from their roosts for the night, Father and Pablito were hurriedly hiding and camouflaging some of our valuables in the many air-raid shelters and fox-holes which we and our relations who stayed in the orchard had dug. Then we bundled and basketed as many prime necessities as the family could possibly carry. During all these hours we had to cease activity time and again lest we be discovered by passing Japanese soldiers and their vicious followers,

now much angered because they hardly could find a soul in the village.

Returning to our secluded nook at Garabel Father and Pablito started dressing the fowls for we had to bring them already cooked. Meanwhile Mother and Luz subdivided in baskets and bundles the food, clothing and other accessories for assignment to carry by each member of the family. Only Laura would be exempted because she already had her baby to attend to. Besides, she was gain in the family way. We did not sleep that night. We even wished we had started moving already.

But we had to wait; the time had not yet come for us to start. Before the break of dawn was the appointed hour. We had a destination in mind; a place which we hoped could be a refuge of safety and peace for tired bodies and wearied hearts. We did not know where the dawn would overtake us, if it ever could reach us at all. We only knew one thing. We were making a desperate effort to leave this now odious and oppressive region for a kinder, freer realm.

THE DARKEST HOUR BEFORE DAWN

We left Butokan a few hours before dawn with the other families. It was the darkest hour for us. We were never so unhappy in all our life. It was a desperate gamble, we knew. The path ahead was dark, ominously dark, and indeed fraught with danger.

The hours before dawn seemed darkest; we had to feel the dust and the furrows made by cartwheels to be sure we did not wander away from the right pathways. Occasionally we looked up to the sky, for the stars and the wide partitions made by coconut leaves to tell us that we still were on our track. We trod on a silence. Only the sound of our feet treading dry leaves could be heard. There was however the infrequent call from our guide to make sure that the others were trailing behind him. We trudged on.

What if some night patrol would discover us; what if we lost our way? Foolish thoughts! How long would it take us to reach Masaya? And would our woman be able to make it? They must.

We crossed the Balatwin Creek without much difficulty for its banks were not stiff and the water was only knee-deep it being summertime. After climbing to the

other side we passed through a few more fields of coconuts and then we were in the village of Santa Monica.

We rested for a few minutes in a yard of a little hut near the village road. Santa Monica like any other village not declared a “safety zone” by the Japanese Military was deserted much earlier. But for the ghostly howlings of frightened, hungry dogs left behind there was no sign of life. The funereal stillness of the night being broken time and again by the ghostly howls of frightened dogs and the eerie tunes of the nocturnal creatures in the deserted village gave the creeps to our women,, though it was the thought that some enemy patrol might discover us which we dreaded most. After a few minutes rest we again resumed our trek without bothering about the distance and the heaviness of our hearts and loads.

We crossed the Magampon stream. The banks were so still and high we had to hold to each other. The water was deep in some places; we had to feel for shallower spots. After climbing to the other side we followed the guide as he crept towards some denser growth near the riverbanks. Many sharp pointed things bruised our arms and bodies and badly hurt the legs of our women as we crept and crawled and pushed through thick growths that led us into a small open space with a lighted hut. Here we would wait for the others; here we would wait for the break of dawn.

The dawn found us in one of the guerrilla's many hideouts and the armed men, nine of them, were guerrillas themselves. The small open spot was near the river banks but its dense surroundings so concealed it that not even a seasoned forester would suspect that there could be human beings within its bosom. The guide who led us hardly an hour ago had done it so dexterously that we simply could not tell how we entered the place and how we might get out. He was a guerrilla himself, a member of that small band of five riflemen, three pistoled ones, and another with a gun which they called "carbine". That was the first time we saw such a weapon and we could not help admiring it. It looked so handy and reliable. All the nine men had a grenade each attached to his belt, and all looked bold and confident. We also felt bold and confident.

We shared our modest breakfast with our guerrilla friends then we smoked and chatted. "You have fed us in the past years," said Pablo Belen, the guerrilla chieftain; "now it is our turn to pay back. We shall do our best to guide you to a place of safety. We shall protect you on the way even if it costs us our lives." It was one of the most eloquent statements I had heard ever!

One group of families came after another. Before the sun could climb as high as the tallest coconut tree yonder, the secluded spot was filled with hundreds of eager, hopeful men, women and children, all attired in

hurried fashion and each with a bundle or basket of immediate necessities which he hoped to have strength to carry as far as where fate might take him. There was sadness in everyone's eyes; there was fear, apprehension, but there were gleams of hope and faith.

The sight of the magnitude frightened me at first for how could we cross the enemy line without being noticed? Considering our number and the noise we would create on the way, what chance had we to evade the enemy patrol which lately had infested every nook and corner of this troubled region? Consolingly we told ourselves that our number might at least scare the enemy that might come upon us. How could he tell that we were not armed considering the bold venture that we were risking? How could the enemy tell that despite our number we had only nine armed guerrillas to protect us? Of course there were hundreds of bolos and knives and daggers, all sharp and keen, and there were hundreds of determined hearts ready to die for loved ones.

We would dare cross the enemy line from behind to reach a place where we had hoped to breathe free air. We were conscious of the risk we were taking, of the danger on the way. We were al determined. If we failed at least we had tried. But ours was the mighty hope that had made us men.

Before we left that sheltered hideout, the guerrilla chieftain ascended a mount and delivered a brief speech. “Comrades,” said Pablo Belen, “you had fed us during the past years. Now is our turn to pay you back. We shall do our best to guide you to a place of safety and to protect you even if it costs us our lives. But now that you have intrusted your lives to us, we demand that you obey our orders for your own sake. We shall move on quietly in single file and fast enough that we may reach our destination earlier. May God protect us all. Now we go . . . “

Led by the guerrilla chieftain, we started to move in single file and quietly. Despite our number one could hear only the heavy thud of hurrying feet. As we neared the village of Magampon, which was along the national highway, the guerrillas cautioned us to be more quiet and to hurry, even to run as we crossed the road. This was one place where the guerrillas had occasional encounters with the enemy. We crossed the road in silence and in dreadful hurry while the nine guerrillas dispersed about some distance from us, ready for anything.

The loud sound of cannonade told us that we were fast approaching the side of the Japanese artillery emplacement; this was meant that we were about to pass through the enemy’s line of defense from behind. The earth quaked with every discharge from the Japanese position at Mt. Kalisungan for now we were hardly two

kilometers away. We also felt the tremor each time the grumbling messenger of death from the other camp hit its mark somewhere in that mountain fortress. The exchange of artillery barrage lasted for some time and we feared that the Japanese soldiers might have dispersed to escape enemy fire and in so doing discover us.

After covering a kilometer distance from the road we were told to rest a little. It was well past noontime and we were hungry. We took advantage of the rest period and partook of our light meal. In their hurry to leave their homes many were not able to prepare their meal and we had to share the little that we could afford to give. We kept only a small bottle of water for Laura's babe and passed the rest to the other little ones now complaining of thirst. The sun was exceptionally hot and there was not a breeze to drive off a bit of ache of our limbs and shoulders and whole body. We did not rest long because we had wanted to cover as much distance as possible before the sun set. We resumed our journey again. At least the brief rest and the light meal had given us added vigor and life.

We passed through more deserted villages in some of which we could smell the foul odor of death as a result of massacre and in which the alerted barkings of stray, emaciated dogs were the lone sign of life. We crossed more creeks and streams; we climbed up hills and down still ravines. The baskets and bundles which

we carried on our heads and shoulders got heavier with every step we made. Still we plodded on and on with dominant thought that somehow we would manage to reach that haven of safety. Indeed these hopeful thoughts had given strength to our body, strength to our faith. They continued to sustain us.

There was one more long and hazardous ascent only to end suddenly in a sharp, much stiffer descent, a long zigzagging one-man trail bordered on the right by a mountain wall and a deep ravine on the left; then a crossing of a crocodile-infested river, another climb and we found ourselves in a plateau with the Japanese guns looking down menacingly upon us from their mountain encampment not more than a kilometer away. It was good that the dark of the evening had crept in already to hide us from them.

We had crossed the enemy line from behind! We had pierced through what was the enemy dubbed and boasted as the invulnerable southernmost end of the so-called Yamashita Line!

Now we could breathe deep sighs of relief and walk slowly and leisurely and joke and tease each other. Now we began to feel how really heavy our burdens were and wondered how we were able to carry them this far. Now we began to feel how honestly tired we were, so tired that many of the families had decided not to go

any further but to spend the night in some wooded spots and resume their trek the following morn.

We in the family however agreed to keep going on until we reached Uncle Manuel Peñaloza's country home at Masaya. We must not relax until we reach our goal. We walked the remaining distance rather leisurely for the fear and the dread in our hearts were gone. Ours were only the happy feeling that we now were treading friendly ground; only the dark of night and the heaviness of our load bothered us a little. But they were nothing for the heart was light and the spirit gay.

We entered a small field of young coconut trees, waded across a little rivulet and after walking a few hundred meters we began to hear occasional shouts of men, some loud and unguarded laughter from feminine throats, and shrill cries from suckling babes. We at once knew that we were but a stone's throw from Uncle Manuel's.

We were greeted with cheering joy by our kin and friends and fellow-villagers. They rushed forward to relieve us of our loads. Immediately a hearty supper was prepared for us. While we waited for our meal to be cooked we were confronted by an avalanche of questions which had to be satisfied. Everyone in the family had no less than four interrogators and their questions demanded long replies. These questionings and answer-

ings would have gone deep into the night had not one of the elders reminded every one that we had come from a long, long way and must be very tired. We needed rest said the old lady. The story-telling could be resumed the following day.

VICTORY! VICTORY!

I rose up early the following morning, crossed a brook immediately behind Uncle Manuel's house to find myself in a rice field ready for harvest in a month time. I breathed deep and full of the morning air. I hummed the tune I always had wanted to sing as I walked through rice paddies and I almost leaped into a dance. I walked on and on now stopping to hurl pieces of stick into a sea of ripening palay to find out if there were birdies there, now to be greeted by a winged coterie of chirping ones as they scampered away in warbling flight. I tarried time and again to pluck some berries on the way. I turned to the left and came upon a small field of corn. The ears were now ready for the picking as shown by their drying whiskers. I walked on with the breeze playing on my disheveled hair. I came upon a shady mango tree. I leaned against its massive trunk while I surveyed the fields still before me. Such an idyllic realm, I thought.

The sun was getting bright. I had gone far enough. Then I came to think of it; why had I not thought of it? These luxuriant fields of rice and corn and chirping birds and bright sunshine were a dangerous No Man's Land! To my right hardly two kilometers away was Mt. Kalisungan, looking down menacingly upon me. To my left was Los Baños about three kilometers north and the

American encampment. Between me and Los Baños was a portion of Mt. Makiling still occupied by well-armed, well organized enemy snipers.

Indeed there could be only one place where we might go to assure ourselves of complete security and that was to cross this No Man's Land to go through and far beyond those uneven, alternating fields of coconuts and open lands, to cover another strenuous and perilous journey of about fifteen kilometers. Nearby was the guerrilla-occupied Nanhaya, a prosperous little village along the coast of Laguna de Bay. From there many families had taken sailboats that brought them to the liberated towns of Calamba, Cabuyao, Santa Rosa, Biñan, and even as far as Manila and freedom.

We were not safe yet! The patrol from Mt. Kalisungan could reach us and the snipers from Mt. Makiling could do us some harm. Should a heavy encounter take place between the two forces the wrath of conflict could reach us at Uncle Manuel's. Indeed I returned to my folks that bright morning heavy with ears of corn, heavy with something else, but I shared only the ears of corn with the loved ones. They were still too tired. The mere thought of another exodus would be too much for them. They must be given time to rest both mind and body.

We stayed for four days at Uncle Manuel's. The place had become a small community of about a hundred families, mostly Mother's kin and fellow-villagers from Butokan. Seeing them build shanties beside rippling brooklets and easy flowing streams which surrounded Uncle Manuel's little realm, seeing them dare confidently the No Man's Land beyond the harvest ears of corn for dinner, seeing them live a life stripped of most of the quondam cursing fear that for years had preyed upon them gnawing persistence, seeing them live this life with evidently rejoicing abandon, I simply could not have the courage to start another broadcast of frightening talks. I could not.

Instead I delighted with them watching the raids being conducted over Mt Kalisungan by P-39's and other types of U.S. planes, marveling with them at such dexterous maneuvers at such bullet-like swiftness. How we cruelly delighted to hear the fierce rattle of machine-gun fire and the thunderous detonations of falling bombs. Occasionally, too, we would witness an exchange of artillery barrage between the two camps. More than once we were caught in No Man's Land by these occasional exchanges of deadly compliments and we did hear the whistling sound as the fusillade passed over our heads to cause a loud explosion and subsequent cloud-burst of rising smoke as they hit the targets. We enjoyed the cannonading better at night for then we could see the flying metal fire more visibly as it trav-

eled overhead only to explode somewhere. There could be no greater morale-booster, there could be no greater joy for the moment than the sight of all these things. “It seems as if we are occupying a balcony seat in a movie,” Cousin Robin Malabuyo said. “Only this is too real.”

The liberators seemed to be rather content with their occasional cannonade and daily bombing raids. They seemed to ant to liberate our town with, if possible, no loss of American lives. “Why don’t they give sufficient arms to the guerrillas and send them over,” said one, “if they don’t want to die?”

The guerrillas had wanted to fight. Not only the guerrillas but every Filipino had wanted to fight the common enemy but they did not have arms. They could not do it with their bolos alone, if they only would be given a chance.

Every day more countrymen were getting killed on the other side of the mountain. A few who had managed to come through from behind the line rather belatedly had attested to this. Cousin Meliton Brion and his wife and four children had been murdered coldly and Cousin Pepe Belen and his three nieces, and Cousin Josefa too. There were many more, hundreds continued to be killed. We continued to receive distressing news com-

ing from the other side of Mt. Kalisungan. The liberators tarried too long in Los Baños.

Then late one afternoon a big group of affrightened families showed up at Uncle Manuel's. We knew then. They were among us when we left the guerrilla hideout near Magampon Stream some days past, but instead of continuing their journey with us they decided to settle down at a hillock a kilometer south. A Japanese patrol discovered their hideaway and surprised them. Some of their companions were killed. The affrighted group rested only for some minutes at Uncle Manuel's and then proceeded in haste to Maitim. They could not afford to stay for our hideaway was barely a kilometer from the scene of the massacre. That the Japs, inspired by their recent successes, might creep into our place and murder us could happen any night.

The guerrilla headquarters at Maitim dispatched fifty men to contact the enemy but the cold-blooded murderers were nowhere to be found. All the men at Uncle Manuel's were alerted that night. They were divided into groups, each group to guard an assigned sector. Only three had firearms but every man had a bolo or knife. Besides, the guerrilla headquarters had sent two squads to patrol the place. Nothing happened that night.

The next morning everyone was feeling restless and apprehensive again, now convinced that after all Uncle

Manuel’s was not as safe a place as they thought it to be. There were many thoughts of going to Maitim but were rather hesitant for the place had become very unsanitary. There were approximately fifteen thousand people there and the only source of water supply was a small slowly-flowing stream now made filthy by the washing of dirty clothes and the dumping of all sorts of foul matter.

Just the same we left for the hill of Maitim with the others. We crossed two more streams, one of which had very stiff, slippery banks; passed through a couple of scarcely peopled hamlets, then ascended a hillock that finally led us to a big hill which had become a large bustling community of people who dwelt in shanties of leaves and grass built in varied style. The hill was bare liberally of shady nooks for practically every leafy branch had been cut to serve various purposes and the ground emitted a rather dry and offensive odor. With all those clear rippling brooks and easy-flowing streams in its immediate surroundings, those cool shades of young coconuts west of us, and the refreshing breaths of harvest wind coming from the fields of ripening ears of corn and Riceland east of us, Uncle Manuel’s place at Masaya was truly paradisal compared with this dry, unsanitary, crowded Maitim Hill. Still we could forego all those comforts and abundance for safety’s sake.

That we could be much safer in Maitim than in Masaya we had no doubt, especially when we saw groups of armed guerrillas going about the hill in confident and emboldened abandon. It was here where we came upon our tough little guerrilla Cousin Remo Brion, whose fixed-bayoneted rifle was taller than him. We also knew that there were about a thousand guerrillas, but after some talk with many of those we knew the conditions in the hill, we began to have misgivings.

It was true that there were about a thousand guerrillas, but hardly a hundred had arms and they did not have enough bullets to resist a few hours' encounter. If the enemy would learn of their strength and suddenly launch a surprise attack, they would not have the strength to defend the fifteen thousand literally helpless civilians. Before reinforcement could come from the guerrillas in Nanhaya, if it would come at all, thousands would have been killed already and the attackers would have retreated wisely by then. That could happen. For all we knew, it might have been that amount this moving crowd was informers of the enemy, sent to spy on the guerrilla's strength and to map out the topography of the hill for the intended assault. After staying for hardly an hour in Maitim, we began to entertain some misgivings again and there were many who shared them with us.

Luckily there was a band of well-armed guerrillas from Nanhaya that happened to be at Maitim. They had come to fetch their wounded comrades whom they left behind the day before after an encounter with some snipers somewhere at Mt. Makiling. This was the first bunch of guerrillas we had seen that possessed types of American weapons which we used to hear about even while we were still at Butokan but which we had not seen as yet. Now we saw how a Thompson, a Garand, a Carbine and a bazooka looked like. They were also the first group of guerrillas we had seen to have so many rounds of ammunition strung about their waists and shoulders, and they had the biggest American flag I had seen in all of my life. Just where they got it I did not know. They must be Mac Arthur's favorite group, I thought. How the guerrillas at Maitim gazed at them with envy as they marched about singing a patriotic song of their own making.

They made it known that they would be too glad to convoy those who would want to go to Nanhaya with them. They also made it known that Nanhaya was much safer than Maitim, for it was already a virtually occupied territory. They said that the guerrillas there were well-armed and better organized because they were already under the general supervision of American officers who used to go there in launches and amphibian tanks from Manila. One now could buy canned foods, chocolate bars and American cigarettes in every store in

Nanhaya. If one desired to go to Manila to assure himself of complete security, he only had to pay the boatman ten pesos of a sack of palay. Encouraging words indeed they were and more than worth the fifteen kilometers more of sweating and hardening pain. Besides, the trip could not be any more dangerous than our trek from Butokan to Masaya, and now we had about fifty fully armed guerrillas to protect us. We had started to gamble; we had to finish it. We decided to go with them to Nanhaya.

After staying at Maitim for a little more than two hours we were again ready to move. Because this would be a longer trek we had to reduce our individual load. Immediately we figured out what items we would leave behind. Each one should have only an extra piece of clothing but enough food to last for a couple days. We had only twenty pesos in genuine Philippine currency but we were able to bring with us several pieces of diamond jewelry. Any Filipino family with more rice than it could consume or more money than they could spend would not object to having some articles of precious stones at a bargain.

There were almost a thousand of us who decided to go with the guerrillas that early afternoon hour. The big American flag swaying gloriously with the breeze of the hill led the long parade of freedom-seekers. Immediately following by twos were the fifty well-armed

guerrillas singing loudly the patriotic song of their own making. Then came the half dozen wounded comrades, each carried in a hammock by hired men, also singing to their heart's desire, and last were the one thousand seekers of peace and security, burdened but not depressed, trailing faithfully behind.

There were no ore stiff hills to climb, no more deep ravines to dread falling into, no more crocodile-infested rivers to cross for it was a vast stretch of open land that was ahead of us. It might be distant but our legs had not failed us yet. There might be enemy patrols hiding among those fields of rice and corn and sugar cane, but with those bold men with us we could not be afraid. Besides, we were all ready to fight with our bolos and knives.

Indeed we were crossing No Man's Land but we had no fear. There was no doubt that we would be seen easily with the aid of field glasses by the bad men at Kalisungan and if they had wanted to, they could have sent a few volleys of deadly missiles and snatched life out of many of us. Perhaps they had wanted to but luckily while we were crossing the vast open space of No Man's Land, a lone friendly plane happened to be on patrol. We were certain that the pilot saw us, saw the big American flag, for it did not fly away but instead hovered round and round until we were swallowed by a small field of coconuts yonder. Of course, the bad men

at Kalisungan could not have fired at us with that lonely plane around, lest their position would have been discovered. When we came out into the open again it was already dark.

A little past midnight we reached the village of Dayap. All the villagers, we were told, had gone already to Nanhaya where life was more secure but the village was not deserted, for it had become the temporary quarters of about three hundred heavily-armed Chinese guerrillas, with the number “48” on their shoulder-patch. They looked fierce and cruel but they were kind. They attended to every family and saw to it that everyone was given proper accommodation in the village. They even gave food to some and confidently told all never to fear for they were in a safe and friendly fold.

When we saw the various types of high-caliber guns slung at their shoulders as they basked hilariously under the pleasant beams of moonlight with not a bit of alarm over the sudden coming of enemy intruders, we were convinced and we shared in their confidence. A Filipino aid to the Chinese guerrillas ushered us to a little house along the railroad track and hospitably asked us to tell him our every need and he surely would gladly do the errand.

We requested for a little bottle of coconut oil with which to make an oil lamp and in a moment the boy was back with a big bottle. Then we prepared our belated supper with his assistance. Two o'clock past midnight we were having our supper with the new friend. Minutes later three Chinese guerrillas came up to find out if all was well. The boy said all was well and the three left after bidding us goodnight (not good morning!).

We were awakened early that morning by the high-strung voice of someone in command and the heavy thud of marching feet. We looked out of the window to find the three hundred guerrillas, divided into platoons, doing their morning exercise. We also noticed three machine guns manned at three strategic points, aimed threateningly towards the direction of Mt. Kalisungan. Through with their morning routine, they went about the village visiting the recent arrivals for some friendly chats. "We expect more comrades to come," said one of them to us. "When they arrive we attack Japanese soldiers in San Pablo. We make them pay for the massacre of six hundred of our countrymen in the church; we make them pay well."

After we had broken our fast, we rested a little. Then we were again ready to move. The Filipino boy rushed us to the guerrilla headquarters for processing so we might get a pass that would entitle us to enter guerrilla-

occupied Nanhaya. After obtaining the necessary papers we were again on our way. This time we were walking along an asphalted road without fear of anything. For, according t the guerrillas, between the villages of Dayap and Nanhaya neither enemy patrol nor snipers had dared to roam as it would spell certain death to them. The area had become the guerrillas' undisputed territory, so much so that the natives we met on the way went about their usual chores with easy gait and without a whit of apprehension on their faces. They might not have looked gay and happy but they seemed to appear relaxed and unworried.

It was a five-kilometer walk to Nanhaya but because we did not bother to hurry the morning sun was already hot as we neared the village. We were resting under the shade of a roadside tree when we saw a horse-cart coming toward us with two familiar faces as passengers. But before I could tell the others, Cousin Jaime had already started shouting, "Americans, Americans!"

Yes, there were two American soldiers inside the horse-carts. As they passed us we greeted them rapturously. We did not say anything but the word "Victory" as we made the sign with our fingers and leaped into a dance! We were so happy that we actually cried. We never had felt so happy in our life. It seemed that the aches, the misery, the pain, everything terrible experienced during those three long years had vanished away.

We took one long and mocking look at the now distant Mt. Kalisungan and then once more headed for the village of Nanhaya.

As we entered the village we were accosted by a guerrilla sentry who asked for our pass but before I could produce mine the officer of the guard had rushed to me shouting, Mr. Hernandez, Mr. Hernandez!" He fondly hugged me while the others gathered around waiting for their chance to express their joy of seeing me. "Why, it's Floro Bartolome!" I gasped. Then Floro let me go only to be assaulted endearingly by the rest of them.

I told my folks to go ahead while I chatted with these eager-looking youths whom I knew too well, for they were all my students in the high school in Santa Cruz, the provisional capital, where I used to teach before the war. It gave me a sort of flattered feeling to see them thus sun-tanned and virile-looking with all the zest and vigor of life, bold and confident. They were all guerrillas with experience in hunger and disease and strife written vividly on their faces.

"Boys," I said seriously, "I am very proud of you." And I felt like weeping when I said it.

"Thank you sir," they said almost in chorus.

“We did our part well sir,” said one.

“We cold have done much better sir had you been our leader during those difficult years.”

“You know I’m too frail and weak to fight,” I said.

“We would do the fighting sir as we had done. You only would have done the thinking sir.”

“Your presence alone is more than enough for us sir.”

“Nuff said, my boys. I know you did well. I always shall be proud of you. Indeed I wish I had been with you during those difficult years.”

“Then perhaps many of our comrades would not have died just like that,” said one morbidly. They narrated to me how three of my former students were killed when they should not have been killed. There had been blunders somewhere and that was another story to tel.

As I walked about the village I was a happy recipient of more fond greetings from familiar voices, all bidding me to drop in and be at home in their dwellings. Young high school girls of three years past, now pretty maids rushed from their houses and held me by the arms push-

ing me toward their door, while their old folks shyly said words of humble and hospitable welcome. I promised to be back. I would come back, I kept repeating.

I found my folks already established in a little bamboo chalet owned by my brother-in-law's college chum. Seeing them comfortably housed and now sprawled on the clean looking bamboo floor, I decided to stroll around the village, to find that Nanhaya had become a little San Pablo. There was a family from the hometown in almost every house. We briefly chatted with comical relish about our varied and perilous experiences. Some dropped in a few remarks on the probability of sailing as far as Biñan in some future time, but we were for the present so content with the newly-arrived at security that we did not give any serious thought to the idea of going still farther.

We slept that night with anticipation of a happier dawn. It was not exactly so. For something happened again. Father had gotten very ill. Without breaking my fast, I hurriedly went about the village inquiring for a doctor. A brother of a former student of mine was one and he immediately went with me. Two of my former students also went with me hoping to be of some help. The doctor had something for them to do. One was sent to go to a drugstore with a prescription and the other to go somewhere to get some kind of herbs needed.

News of Father's illness reached my other former students through the two youths and before noontime many had come with some things which might be good for the sick man; chocolate bars, American biscuits, mangoes, bananas, watermelons and even yams. Some of our townsmen also came and dropped a few comforting words. We were not so disheartened for we were among friends; somehow Dame Luck seemed to be still playing some mischief on us.

We were not disheartened but only for a short time for bad news had followed us from Masaya and Maitim. Some of the recent arrivals from those places had some grievous stories to tell. On the night after we had left Masaya Uncle Manuel's little community of evacuees was suddenly attacked by Japanese snipers. Four were killed and several were wounded. Cousin Venancio was killed and his eldest daughter wounded at the very shanty which we built and occupied and to which they moved after we had left. What if we had not left Masaya?

Rumors also came around that the guerrilla force at Nanhaya was no longer as strong as it used to be. The guerrillas were being used to clean Mt. Makiling of its snipers. Many were getting killed while those that remained were running low of ammunitions. To aggravate the situation further the Chinese guerrillas guarding Dayap were reported to have left already thus mak-

ing Nanhaya rather vulnerable to sudden attack from Mt. Kalisungan. Should the Japs there get wiser and send a few hundred soldiers, the attackers would succeed in effecting a mass slaughter before help could be sent from the nearest liberated areas of Calamba and Biñan on the other side of the bay. The people of the village would have no avenues of escape except the open sea of the Laguna de Bay, and there were not enough sailboats and bancas to carry even a tenth of the village dwellers.

Indeed several townsmen who formerly had signified their decision to stay in Nanhaya till the liberation of our town were found to have sailed already for the liberated town of Biñan from where they might proceed to Manila each morn greeted us with news that this and that family had left already. Biñan would be much safer than Nanhaya, so why not go to Biñan? But Father was still ill.

On Good Friday Father said that he was already well. Hence, if the family desired to go to Biñan something might be done about it. Convinced that Father was already well and could now make the trip, we decided to leave early the following morn. We immediately made preparation. Mother with the aid of a neighborly village housewife did not find much difficulty in selling a piece of our jewelry with which to pay the boatman. Before afternoon came we were all set to leave at three

o’clock the next morn. That would be the ideal hour according to the villagers for then the sea was clam and the trip not warm. We hoped to breakfast in Biñan for it was only a three-hour sailing.

Hardly an hour after midnight everyone was awake. We even doubted whether we really slept at all for the thought that by the next day we would be not merely in a guerrilla-occupied territory but in a truly liberated zone afforded rich subjects for pleasant, wakeful dreams which made sleep a difficult thing to do. Mother and Luz immediately prepared the breakfast food we would take along while my brother-in-law and I went out t make sure that the boatman was ready.

Three o’clock and we were ready to sail; at four we started sailing. There were eighteen of us in the big banca including Aunt Maria, Aunt Eufemia and three children, and Cousin Archimedes Brion and his family, and the boatman and his aide. The breeze was soft and caressing and the setting moon reflected its beams upon the rippling wavelets. Our boat glided on with soothing ease. Far ahead of us and behind, we could see the dark outlines of other seemingly unmoving sailboats, all Biñan bound. We tried to identify Mt. Kalisungan, Maitim and Masaya from among the dark, lengthening mass of highlands southwest of us. There still slept our enemies and our kith and kin. We were leaving them all behind us.

It was a beautiful night indeed! Moonbeams on the water, gentle breezes kissing our faces; soft night, serene and quiet, and I and all those dear to me in a smoothly gliding sailboat, bringing us farther, still farther away from the region of cruelty and violence, and nearer, coming nearer to the land of the free. It was a beautiful night indeed!

Then I got myself engrossed in darting my not so keen eyes of contemplation into futurity. An obscure school teacher of pre-war years, I always had advocated the elimination of war as a heroic theme of literature. I might be thinking rather dramatically, but mankind must be made to possess the idea of eliminating was as a walking thought that knew no sleep. For its destiny was dependent largely on it.

There must be a change in the attitude of literature towards war. It must celebrate war no more in song and story just to give martial glory to national pride. Instead literature should portray the grim horror of combat which had become a brutal industry of mass murder with all the mechanical and chemical resources of science. It should grieve over whole noncombatant population being subjected to slow death by starvation or sudden demise by bombs and gas. It should picture the tragic contrast between people of importance who remained in comparative safety with their increasing

power, prestige and profit, while those they had drugged with lies were unfeelingly sent to death.

National or racial pride was another stimulant to the maintenance of war that should be eliminated. No more must the Japanese child be whipped by the war spirit abut their "Divine Destiny," nor must the Chinese youth be made to think that they lived in a "Celestial Empire." The Hebrews of old called themselves "God's Chosen People," and Hitler's swastika-waving Germans had been deluded into believing that they were "Born To Rule." Indeed many wars had been waged by prideful nations for no other reason than in support of their "I am better than you" theory. No more of this.

Also there was that continuing competition in preparation for war with every nation making the disputable statement: We may be attacked and therefore we must be ready for defense." And thus the expansion program in the manufacture of war material had continued over and over. This must be stopped.

Indeed there should be a peace movement to establish health centers to heal the disease of war. The achievement of a world peace should demand as lifelong vigilance as the achievement of human health. Efforts should be made to deliver mankind from the scourge of war; indeed there should be a campaign towards that end.

But we were still in the middle of Laguna de Bay under the mercy of waves and wind and sun and I was only an obscure school teacher of pre-war years!

The boatman was complaining about the breeze. He said it blew very softly. He feared that we might not reach Biñan in three hours as he had expected. We had to reach it by seven or eight or we would be overtaken by the big waves which usually showed up at nine and went on rolling until the set of sun. We did not want to be in the boat when those big waves come around for Mother would surely not be able to stand them. Cousin Archimedes who happened to join us with his family physician, but when Mother started to feel bad we doubted whether he could do anything to make her feel better so we prayed that the breeze would blow a little stronger so that we might reach Biñan at the hour expected.

Instead of blowing a little the breeze left us for its cavern somewhere and the dawning found our boat at a virtual standstill near the tip of Talim Isle. We aided the boatman in cajoling the naughty breeze to come back, we whistled, we teased, we bantered, we even sang just to flatter the absent one into coming back, but all efforts were in vain. And as the sun began to shine more and more brightly and warmly, some of us began to mumble words of disgust.

“We thought we already had left all the bad luck at Maitim,” said Rebecca. “It is not so.”

We were not however disheartened. It was not so grave a thing as compared with what we already had experienced. After all while we agreed that the darkest hour was shortly before dawn, others must agree with us also that the hottest hour was shortly before liberation! We took our breakfast not in Biñan but in the middle of the bay just near the tip of Talim Isle where the naughty breeze must have been in hiding.

Eight o’clock, the time we had hoped to reach Biñan and we were still halfway and our boat was still unmoving. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve . . .

The sun was already very hot and Baby had already been crying for almost an hour complaining of thirst, we supposed. Then Cousin Archimemes’ little son Oscar also started to cry, and there was a duet. We were now getting hungry too. But where might we cook? We thought we should have our lunch of bread and butter and canned food somewhere in Biñan or perhaps Manila. We were still in the middle of the bay, and we knew not what destiny might still be in store for us.

One o’clock and Baby had not stopped crying. We were getting worried; something might happen to her. Her father was already desperate. We helped the boat-

man and his aide paddle but we made no appreciable progress. The paddles were too small and the boat was too heavy. We tried to make the most of it; we had to paddle on despite the turtle-speed our paddling was able to make.

"Before we left Nanhaya Mother kept praying that there be no strong wind on the trip," reminded Rebecca. "Her prayer is well answered."

We paddled on until we reached Biñan at almost three in the afternoon of that Saturday before Easter. Its beaches had become like a summer resort. Hundreds of people roamed about, some bathing, others waiting for new arrivals hoping to get news about kin and friends left behind. There were also a few freight trucks awaiting passengers who might want to proceed to Manila rather than sty in Biñan.

We asked a driver for the fare, and then counted our money. Why, we could go to Manila. We still had enough money to pay for the fare. Once there we knew what to do. One of my brother-in-law's sisters had a rented apartment in Manila's north district and we could sell a piece or two of our diamond jewelry for our subsistence while I looked for work. There was no need for further consideration for my sister Laura and her baby were already in the truck. The rest of us boarded

also before the others could crowd us out. Half an hour later we were on our way to Manila.

As the crowded, roofless vehicle sped along the national road, Manila-bound, we began to behold with our own eyes those things about which we had delighted to hear while we were still in Masaya. Now we saw American soldiers guarding bridges, riding in motor vehicles of various built sizes, walking about the road leisurely, all merry and carefree and happy. We shouted Victory to all of them as we made the sign with our fingers and they returned our greetings with laughing cordiality. The bus sped on.

Now we saw their camps in open spaces on both sides of the road; tents, tents and more tents. We saw hundreds of tanks, lorries, and little cars which somebody in the bus called "Jeep." Now we came upon mountains of boxes that scented of something that made us hungry. Ah, canned food! Mountains of them! Canned food!

Our truck sped on, each roll of the wheels bringing us nearer to Manila. And Manila meant everything to us, everything. The next day would be Easter; we would go to the chapel to sing praise to Him, to give thanks. Oh, we would do many things more. The truck sped on. The sun was no longer hot and the breeze that kissed our cheeks was as refreshing as could be. As if

with one voice we continued shouting Victory; indeed, we wearied not a bit shouting that beautiful word.

Victory! Victory over tyranny and oppression. Victory over greed and avarice, Victory over death, Victory . . .

As we neared Manila we saw more liberators, we shouted more Victory. As we neared Manila, our hearts grew wilder with shouting joy, our enthusiasm more boisterous, and our rejoicings more uncontrollable. Victory . . .

And then we became quiet. We were tired, very tired. We wanted to rest a little, just a little. Victory!

GERTRUDO SAN PEDRO Y PASCO

The hometown was never wanting in freedom-fighters who would rather die than surrender to the enemy; men and women who believed that to be slain in the field of battle was to be lain in the bed of glory, great lovers of freedom who were confident what the might of the enemy would make them even braver and stronger.

Indeed the hometown was never wanting in freedom-fighters who regarded with bitterness the defeat inflicted by an unworthy enemy, freedom-lovers who subscribed to the apocryphal adage that defeat would make them even more invincible, men and women who were daring and proud in their courage. So were the youthful Gertrudo San Pedro and his young wife Rosita Briñas from the barrio of Santa Isabel.

Upon his release as USAFFEs, prisoner-of-war on 15 August, 1942, twenty-six year old Gertrudo San Pedro joined Hugh Straughn's Fil-American Irregular Troops (FAIT). He started recruiting ex-USAFFE's, ex-Philippine Scouts, ex-Philippine Constabulary, Philippine Army reservists and trainees, and civilian volunteers, including professionals to constitute his outfit. His guerrilla unit came to be known as the FAIT's 2nd Division of the III Army Corps under the immediate

command of guerrilla colonel Justiniano Estrella, alias Alfredo M. David, who dubbed his corps David's Command. With the death of Colonel Straughn, Col. Marcos V. Marking took over the FAIT's command which he drummed up as Marking's Fil-Americans.

San Pedro and his men aimed at ambitiously accomplishing the following objectives: (1) to send intelligence reports on enemy activities to General Mac Arthur's headquarters in Australia thru higher guerrilla command; (2) to help promote mutual understanding and assistance with other guerrilla outfits so that a united front could be effected against the enemy; (3) to harass or ambush enemy troops each time an opportunity arises, provided however that the action would not affect adversely the security of the non-combatant population; (4) to obstruct the successful consummation of the enemy's economic program in the hometown; and (5) to counteract enemy propaganda designed at winning the good will and trust of the local citizenry.

San Pedro appointed three key men to handle the intelligence work, namely: guerrilla Captain Antonio Azores, 1st Lt. Vedasto Gesmundo, and 2nd Lt. Santiago Arcilla. Among their responsibilities were to gather information on (1) the exact locations of enemy garrisons, detachments, fuel and munition dumps, gun emplacements, communication lines and other enemy installations; (2) the concentration of enemy troops, its ap-

proximate strength, its movements in the hometown and nearby localities; (3) the activities of the enemy-controlled business and industrial concerns; (4) the enemy's operational plans, tactics, and strategy as would affect the security of the guerrillas and the non-combatant population; (5) atrocities, tortures and massacres being perpetrated by the enemy; and (6) or gather maps, sketches, documents, and other papers of military significance.

During the first year and a half while still in the process of building up combat strength, the San Pablo outfit had made it to a point not to confront the enemy which possessed with superior weaponry. If they had to, San Pablo and his men resorted to hit-and-run tactics. Meantime they had been busy with their intelligence work as well with their counter-propaganda to keep intact the faith and confidence of the local citizenry in the ultimate victory of America. Theirs was to ridicule the news items appearing in the Jap-controlled Tribune, and to spread William Winter's newscasts broadcasted via shortwave through San Francisco's KGEI.

The real thing began for Col. Gertrudo San Pedro's 2nd Division when the bombing of the different places in the home country started, followed by the Leyte landing of General Mac Arthur's liberating forces. They now had the daring to confront the enemy frontally occupying ambush position calculated to put the enemy

on the defensive and then they struck. They commenced raiding supply trains, patrols, and small detachments.

The fiercest encounter between the enemy and the guerrillas in the hometown took place in Barrio Santa Isabel early morning of 22 November 1944, when about 400 Japanese soldiers encircled and launched a surprise attack on San Pedro's temporary encampment a kilometer away from the national road. Only 96 in number, they had no time to be scared for to e so would expose themselves the more to danger. Because they no longer could avoid it, they had to see it through, to fight and fight well. In the subsequent havoc and confusion of battle, theirs was to hit hard regardless of danger.

Colonel San Pedro and his men were able to break through the cordon but the 16 dead and one seriously wounded. On the enemy side, San Pedro's undercover followers working for the kempetai in town reported much later that about 100 Japanese soldiers were killed in the encounter. The enemy, fighting recklessly, never expected to be confronted by a guerrilla band now possessed with sophisticated weaponry. For weeks before the battle of Santa Isabel, San Pedro's men had received already from General Marking's headquarters such potent firearms as Thompson sub-machine gun, carbine, automatic rifles, Springfield rifles, high-powered pistols, and scores of hand grenades.

Among the 16 killed in action were Rosita Briñas, wife of guerrilla chieftain San Pedro and Alfonso Paulino, nephew of former Laguna Governor Marcos Paulino. Two other women serving as nursing aides were killed also. They were Natividad Corabo and Bella Exconde. The other casualties who also belonged to the hometown's esteemed families were: Gil Balcita, Rosauro Briñas, Anastacio Cornista, Eulogio Fernandez, Isabelo Maghirang, Domingo Recto. Felimon Villanueva, Jose Villanueva, Felipe Turno, Private Fred, Major Tejadas, and Felimon de Torres.

It might be mentioned in passing, that among those who survived the encounter were children of prominent Manila families that instead of joining the guerrilla outfits in the capital city, chose to adventuringly attach themselves to Colonel San Pedro's 2nd Division. Headed by Francisco Teodoro, younger son of Don Toribio Teodoro of the famous *Ang Tibay* shoe manufacturing establishment, the others were Dondoy del Rosario and Jose Tabora of the well-known Quiogue funeral parlour, and Walter Olson, son of Major Olson, retired U.S. Army officer and pre-war general manager of Laguna-Tayabas Bus Company (LTB).

San Pedro and his guerrilla fighters retreated to the village of Malamig (San Jose) after that historic Santa Isabel encounter. The following morning a big enemy force invaded the place. When they failed to make con-

tact with the guerrillas, the Japanese soldiers burned all the houses in the village and massacred 58 inhabitants who were not able to make good their escape.

Still frenzied to maniacal rage because they suffered heavy casualties during the battle of Santa Isabel, the Japanese bent their wrath on the villagers for shielding and supporting the guerrillas in the area and burned the villages along the national highway near the scene of the encounter; Concepcion, Santa Isabel, San Diego and Santo Angel; slaughtering all the barriofolks who failed to escape the crazed heathens' diabolic lechery.

The freedom-fighters, on the other hand, chose to avenge rather than mourn over the death of their fellow townsmen. When they saw the smoke of burning houses from their camp at Tayak hill, they descended down the hill and occupied ambush position somewhere in Barrio Concepcion along the national road where the Japanese soldiers would pass after accomplishing their mission. After waiting for an hour, the guerrillas saw three truckloads of enemy soldiers coming toward them; they commenced their rapid fire discharges on the oncoming enemy soldiers. San Pedro's men would have burned the trucks and grabbed the firearms of dead Japs but they were subjected to intense mortar barrage and machine-gun fire from the lorries trailing behind that they had to withdraw. Reports received from their undercover men at the kempetai headquarters re-

vealed that 68 enemy soldiers were killed in that ambuscade.

Then the kempetai ordered all the male inhabitants to convene inside the Roman Catholic Church. Once they were in some masked informers started pointing at several townsmen who were separated from the rest, ostensibly to work at some military installations. Among those pointed at 600 Chinese and 200 Filipinos were bayoneted to death somewhere in the Barrio Concepcion. The few who survived the massacre were discovered by San Pedro's men and were attended to by nursing aides.

Early morning of 1 January 1945 the hometown experienced the first bombing raid by the liberating forces and which was to be followed recurrently in days to come. San Pedro immediately sent word to his townsmen to seek refuge in the hamlets of Lagaslasan, Piit, and Bitin in Tayak hill where his men would protect them. He promptly assigned guerrilla captains Godofredo Contemplacion, Brigido Cabrera, and Francisco Pulutan and their men to guard the evacuees.

There were approximately 10,000 evacuees from the poblacion and neighboring barrios who took refuge in those hillside hamlets, prominent among them were the Paulino, Azores, Fule-Almeda, Evangelista, Gorostiza, Baustista, Mariño, and other families.

San Pedro's men had three encounters with the Japanese soldiers who attempted to penetrate the evacuation center and three times the enemy soldiers were repulsed. In these three encounters five of San Pedro's men were killed. They were guerrilla Captain Perfecto Alvarez, Lt. Dominador Martinez, Corporal Gregorio Arrogancia, Sgt. Urbano Magnaye, and Sgt. Ciraco Alvero. Captain Godofredo Contemplacion was wounded in action.

Early part of January, 1945, fifty of San Pablo's men were assigned on a mission to destroy the bridge linking Cavinti, Laguna. San Pedro's men suffered no casualty; instead they were able to get hold of several guns and hundred rounds of munition left by retreating enemy.

On 24 January 1945 Colonel San Pedro and his men were able to rescue three American airmen whose plane soft-landed in the barrio of Nanhaya in Pila, Laguna, after it was hit by anti-aircraft fire during the bombing raid of Manila. They were Major Charles Howe, CA; Major Thompkins, AC; and Sgt. Bretain, AC, of the 5th Attack Group, U.S. Air Squadron.

That these Americans might be returned to their base somewhere in now liberated Mindoro province, San Pedro and his men caused the construction of a taxi strip and airfield near his headquarters in Tayak hill,

which was completed in a couple of weeks. It was also in this airstrip where Mrs. Virginia Llamas Romulo took off to join her husband, General Carlos Romulo, in Mindoro. On the strong suggestion of Major Charles Howe, the U.S. Armed Forces started dropping war material and food supplies in this airfield on 22 February 1945.

On 17 February 1945, four intelligence operatives of Colonel San Pedro were detailed with the Alamo Scouts under 1st Lt. Tom J. Hounseville. They were guerrilla 1st Lt. Antonio Carpio, platoon leader; Lt. Romeo Briñas, Sgt. Bayani Cabrera, and Sgt. Pablo Garcia. They were sent on a special mission of determining the enemy position in Kalisungan hill, west of the town, where there was situated a heavily-fortified artillery emplacement. Returning to their base of operations after a successful mission, they were waylaid by a roving Japanese patrol. Sergeant Cabrera was killed and platoon leader Carpio was seriously wounded.

On 23 February 1945, on order of the U.S. Sixth Army, San Pedro's 2nd Division participated in the liberation of the 2,100 civilian internees in Los Baños by paratroopers. There was no resistance encountered for the liberators were able to surprise the Japanese garrison of 233 soldiers in their morning calisthenics. Nonetheless, Major Gen. J.F. Swing, commanding general of the 11th Airborne Division, sent a letter of gratitude to

Major Jay D. Vanderpool manages mainland, guerrilla commander during the operations, for transmittal to San Pedro's unit.

On 7-11 March 1945, on order from Marking's III Army Corps, Colonel San Pedro's 2nd Division participated as SPEARHEAD of the combined guerrilla forces that liberated Santa Cruz, Laguna's provincial capital. In the absence of available transportation facilities some of San Pedro's men even constituted themselves as a labor battalion that hand-carried the munitions, food and other supplies from the liberated town of Pila to the warfront. In this encounter Pvt. Rosauro Desamero was killed in action and five other San Pedro followers were wounded.

On 27 March 1945, San Pedro's 2nd Division was finally attached to the 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division of the Sixth Army Corps of the U.S. Armed Forces. From then on San Pedro's outfit attesting in bold letters to the fighting ability of the 2nd Division striking ALWAYS AS SPEARHEAD among the guerrilla forces operating in Laguna, Tayabas, and down to Bicol region.

Lt. Col. Peter H. Dahmlow, commanding officer, 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment, gave a commendation to Colonel San Pedro's outfit attesting in bold letters to the fighting ability of the 2nd Division striking AL-

WAYS AS SPEARHEAD in the Southern Luzon campaign. He wrote:

"There have been numerous Filipino Organizations attached to this organization during the Leyte and Luzon campaigns, and although we have received valuable assistance from each, I would not hesitate to say THAT THIS UNIT SURPASSES THEM ALL IN FIGHTING ABILITY. They have been cool and disciplined under fire. THEY HAVE PROVED THEMSELVES WILLING AND ANXIOUS TO CLOSE WITH THE ENEMY, and have accomplished their mission in an enthusiastic manner."

In passing, for valuable information about enemy activities acquired and transmitted to Army authorities concerned in their capacity as Colonel San Pedro's intelligence operatives, Captain Antonio Azores, 1st Lt. Vedasto Gesmundo, and 2nd Lt. Santiago Arcilla's accomplishments had been acknowledged under certificate of service issued by Special Agent Charles L. Michod, 214th CIC Detachment, and by 2nd Lt. Louis C. Duncan, Commanding, CIC, Area No. 3.

REFERENCE: Sgt Elipidio Briñas, San Pedro's brother-in-law.

Col. Gertrudo San Pedro, Adelaido Abaña, Emilio Abalos, Dominador de las Alas, Rosauro Alvarez, Benjamin Amatos, Cirilo Anlacan, Felizardo Aquino, Victor Arañez, Alberto Arrogancia, Aido Avanzado, Herminigildo Baliton, Cesar Bañagale, Jacinto Evangelista, Galileo Barina, Augusto Briñas, Elpidio Briñas, Maximino Bravo, Prospero Bumagat, Silvestre Bumagat, Ambrosio Cabance, Julian Calalo, Nemesio Calayag, Joaquin Capsa, Fernando Caro, Maximo Celerio, Bayani Ciar, Bayani Cecerio, Lorenzo Cornista, Pablo Cornista, Jr., Pelagio Cornista, Apolinario Exconde, Tirso de la Cruz;

Romeo Dichoso, Pedro Evangelista, Andres Felicedario, Marcelo Fernandez, Elpidio Garcia, Genito Gesmundo, Pedro Latoza, Vicente Lopez, Crisanto Lozada, Braulio Luga, Romeo Magampon, Federico Magnaye, Rufino Mamiit, Deogracias Marasigan, Plating Mariano, Walter Olson, Little Pancho, Ricardo Pasco, Mateo Pascual, Daniel Primo, Ponciano Redor, Pedro Reyes, Dondoy del Rosario, Vicente San Pedro, Rufino Sangkap, Jose Tabora, Jose Talisayon, Francisco Teodoro, Andres Ticson, Pastor Tiquis, Ernesto Tubig, Anselmo Velasco, Captain Vega, Conchita Zeta and Marclinio Zeta.

To recall and honor the bravery of these freedom-fighters who fought and died in defense of liberty and democracy, one of its surviving members, Sgt. Elipidio

Briñas, executive vice commander of San Pablo City VOP Chapter, initiated ands spearheaded in 1970 a move to hold an annual reunion of all surviving members of the Battle of Santa Isabel on the very spot where the encounter occurred and to cause the erection of a shrine on the site with the help of the late Col. Placido Escudero II, Vop chapter commander, and the other officers of the local chapter of the Veterans Organization of the Philippines (VOP) headed by Brig. Gen. Agustin Marking.

PEDRO PEREZ Y PONTANOZA

The Japanese occupation had been a time of terror, when the oppressed countryman had to conquer fear with his daring, when he had to fight like a wild beast and rejoice in murder for the death of the enemy could make him feel better. It was a time when courage had to be strong, even fashionable. This must have been the thought of Pedro Perez of Barrio Lumbangan (San Crispin), that rugged freedom-loving farmer who used to live a life free from external impediments in his farmland.

As early as 31 October 1942, he caused the organization of an underground resistance movement against the enemy. Among those who joined him were Cipriano Cologo, Felipe Alcantara, Marcelo Mendoza, Maximiano Cosico, Pablo Belen, Primo Balverde, Martin Bondad, and another surname Pampolina. The following year (1943) more got themselves enlisted in the movement. Among them were Esteban Biglete, Ernio Biglete, Dionisio Aquino, Victorino Pasco, Marcial Catipon, Simeon Biglete, Fidel Biglete, and youthful Remo Brion.

Eventually the Perez group attached itself to the bigger resistance movement headed by Vicente Umali and Primitivo San Agustin, who named it President Que-

zon's Own Guerrilla (PQOG) to honor their illustrious provincemate, Maula L. Quezon. This big organization affiliated itself with Brig. Gen. Wendel W. Fertig of the United States armed forces.

The first series of wartime activities and a continuing one of the Perez outfit was to run after and gun down those collaborating countrymen acting as enemy informers as well as the bandit gangs preying on the helpless non-combatants during these troubled times. Their activities having been known already to the enemy, they had to move their headquartered encampment in Tiaong, Tayabas.

On 19 March 1943 Captain Pedro Perez and some of his men joined other guerrilla Captain Pedro Perez and some of his men joined other guerilla outfits under Gen. Vicente Umali's PQOG Command in the Barrio of Laiya in Batangas Province to procure their share of arms and munitions being unloaded by U.S. submarines. With Perez were Esteban Biglete, Rustico Biglete, Pablo Belen, Marcos Martinez, Hermogenez Colube, Rafael Añonuevo, Gabriel Aquino, Jose Deomano, Felix Maralit, Elpidio Ladra, Pedro Alcantara, Bertino Alcantara, Jaime Rivera, Nemesio Cosico, Francisco Devanadera, Isaac Guia, Narciso Belen, Leodegario Cosico, and Eusebio Aguirre.

Returning to their respective headquarters, the different PQOG outfits decided to rest at the remote Mount Tulos somewhere in Rosario, Batangas that they might exchange impressions about their respective wartime activities. Among those in the group were the fighting men headed by such guerrilla chieftain as Captains Pedro Perez and Juan Eso, alias Kayakas, of the hometown; Major Marcial Punzalan, Colonel Avanceña, Col. Pedro Umali, alias Caballero, and Colonel Sulit.

Their meeting place having been discovered by Makapili informers and reported to the Japanese Military, the enemy soldiers launched a massive assault at the guerrillas' well-entrenched mountain position. Underestimating the freedom-fighter's fire power, the enemy daringly confronted the guerrillas in frontally regular formation and thus suffered heavy casualties.

The Perez guerrilla band was much gladdened when the hometown's Mayor Manuel Quisumbing and his son, Manuel Jr., joined the outfit for they were both physicians. Dr. Quisumbing and his son would have been picked up by the kempetai had they not been wise enough to make good their getaway before they could be apprehended. City Fiscal Luis Kasilag assumed the mayorship in an acting capacity until the appointment of former Congressman Tomas Dizon. Months later an-

other physician, Dr. Leon F. Castillo, also joined the Perez guerrilla unit.

Their temporary encampment in the hamlet of Balumbong near the railway bridge of Palikpik-ayungin having been located because the radio signal produced by their radio transmitter had been pinpointed by the enemy's direction finder, a big Japanese contingent assaulted their hideout resulting in the death of Carlito Perez, the guerrilla chieftain's nephew. The now Col. Pedro Perez had 28 men with him which included Dr. Quisumbing and his son. The others were: Cipriano Cologo, Esteban Biglete, Pablo Belen, Miguel Gonzales, Ariston Cortina, Herogenes Colubi, Elpidio Ladra, Marcos Martinez, Rafael Mendoza, Simeon Simbahan, Mario Enriquez, Primo Balverde, Rosmini Baldeo, Mauricio Puntanuza, Sesinando Bondad, Aurelio Deomano, Turias Bondad, Nestorio Pasco, Eusebio Aguirre, Fausto Gapaz, Eugenio Gamaro, Mauricio Cosico, Felix Dayohon, Marcing Veluz, Carlos Rivera, and Felimon Deomano.

Colonel Perez was so maddened by the death of his nephew that, with a handful of men, he ambushed the enemy soldiers guarding the bridge of Palikpik-ayungin killing six Japanese during the encounter. The guerrilla band that participated in the ambuscade consisted of: Pablo Belen, Esteban Biglete, Rafael Mendoza, Aurelio Deomano, Narciso Belen, Rosmini Baldeo, Felix Dayo-

hon, Marcing Veluz, Turias Bondad, Sesinando Bondad, Marcos Martinez, and Marcelino Biglete.

The order from General Umali for all the guerrilla outfits under his command to send representatives to Bacoor, Cavite that they might make their intelligence report to the Sixth Army command of the U.S. Army of liberation. Headed by now Major Cipriano Cologo, the other Perez officers were Marcelo Mendoza, Esteban Biglete, and Hermogenez Colubi. Gregorio Bicomong and Pablo Belen. Three men from Col. Juan Kayakas outfit also joined them. They were Juan Kapalad, Amando Leonor and Abdon Millares. During this meeting the hometown guerrillas were introduced by Gen. Umali to such leading guerrilla chieftains from other regions as Gen. Vicente Raval, Gen Romeo Espino, Gen. Mariano Castaneda, and Gen. Ismael Lapuz.

While those hometown guerrillas were still in Bacoor Lieutenant Curry and another officer of the Sixth Army requested for a guerrilla boy to act as their personal orderly and bodyguard. Esteban Biglete immediately volunteered to serve Lieutenant Curry in that capacity while Gregorio Bicomong made himself available to the other officer. This gave Biglete and Bicomong the opportunity to participate in the liberation of Los Baños, Bay and Calauan in Laguna Province.

Learning that the Sixth Army was already in liberated Calauan town Major Cipriano Colago, with 25 men decided to join the 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division of the Sixth Army of the American armed forces. They were attached to the G-troops under the command of Capt. William Johnson and Lieutenant Curry. In addition to Colago, Bicomong and Biglete, the other Perez men who participated in the liberation of the hometown were Francisco Devanadera, Hermogenez Colubi, Elpidio Ladra, and Delfin Biglete. Leonardo Decano, Wenceslao Federizo, Jacinto Hunar, Melecio Montero, Ernesto Barcenas, Faustino Gapaz, Hospicio Dionglay, Ariston Cartena, Mateo Gamaro, Isauro Castillo, Ernesto Avenido, Margarito de Torres, Dionisio Altovar, Zosimo Linato, Juan Ariola, Rafael Mendoza. No one was killed in action but two were seriously wounded; Nery Dalisay and Elpidio Roxas.

The fierce encounter they had experienced took place on 29 March 1945 when the aforesaid Sixth Army unit, aided by the guerrillas, boldly attacked the almost impregnable position of the Japanese somewhere in Mt. Kalisungan, that forbidding enemy stronghold between Calauan and the hometown. For six days and six nights they fought the enemy soldiers strongly entrenched in their formidable mountain fortress where their artillery pieces had been concealed in dug-in concrete emplacement not visible to patrolling American planes.

Acknowledging the contribution of Major Colago and his men to this encounter, Capt. William R. Johnson wrote:

"This is to acknowledge the excellent service of Major Colago and his guerrillas in the fighting in and around Imok, Luzon. Major Colago and his men assisted greatly with, as well as participating actively in the fighting. Their performance of all duties was always cheerful and with the spirit of complete cooperation. These men were all from PQOG."

During the intervening period about a hundred men of Colonel Perez divided into teams, had been busy evacuating thousands of non-combatants to places of safety, among them to Maitim hill along the Makiling mountain range, where about 20,000 civilians had been evacuated by the men of Colonels Perez and Kayakas, both of the PQOG command. One of these teams was headed by guerrilla Major Pablo Belen who, with his men escorted more than a thousand non-combatants which included this writer and his folks. These gallant freedom-fighters with Belen were Telesforo Bunyi, Inocensio Bunyi, Conrado Sarmiento, Camilio Villanueva and Ruben Belen.

The hometown having been liberated by the Americans, Major Colago and his men were attached to the 801st CAC Detachment headed by Capt. Harry S. Myers

and Lieutenant Inwood. Commending Colago's guerrilla unit, Captain Myers wrote:

"This guerilla unit has been instrumental in channeling to the Office daily reliable intelligence information, Makapili suspects and other subversive elements. As interpreters and as informants, they have demonstrated superior ability in obtaining facts.

Each member of Major Colago's unit has been both willing and capable of performing all duties assigned. In addition, since the arrival of the Americans, they have voluntarily patrolled the North San Pablo Area in the mopping up of enemy remnants. In this work they subjected themselves to the greatest risk. The personnel of this Guerrilla Unit have proved far superior to members of other Guerrilla units utilized by this Headquarters, especially in intelligence work."

REFERENCE: Esteban Biglete, Felix Cortez and Pablo Belen.

JUAN ESEO, ALIAS KAYAKAS

Juan Eseo, alas Kayakas, was a vete4ran of both the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine-American War. Having served as a freedom-fighter under the bold and reckless Col. Luis Banaad of bygone years, Kayakas, as he was popularly known, was still noted for his pugnacity despite his aging years. His combative spirit was still his by name in the southern barrios of the hometown.

After the bombing of the hometown on Christmas Day, 1941, he opined that the superior armed forces of the invading Japanese Army would succeed eventually in landing and occupying the home country, the hometown for that matter. A great lover of freedom that he was, Kayakas thought of organizing an underground resistance movement with his valorous wife, Prima Gapyangan. He had the foresight to move his family from their house in Barrio Santiago II (Ludlod) to the remote hamlet of Atisan somewhere in Mt. Malipunio. There they began clearing the land of the Katigbak family that they might plant upland rice and sweet potatoes. With the fall of Bataan, Vicente Umali and Prinitivo San Agustin, close friends during their student days at the University of the Philippines, started organizing an underground resistance movement which they named President Quezon's Own Guerrillas (PQOG) to honor

their illustrious provincemate, Manuel L. Quezon. Umali immediately instructed his younger brother, Pedro Umali, alias Caballero, to contact Juan Kayakas and invite him to join the Umali outfit.

The old man who was sick at the time delegated his eldest son, Sofronia Eseo, alias Purok to see Caballero. In company with Hermogenes Dipasupil, Livy Dalisay, Rodolfo Magtibay, and Gregorio Ibabaw; Sofronio Eseo conferred with Caballero. Won over into joining the Umali movement, Sofronio was inducted promptly as 1st lieutenant and all his companions as staff sergeants, Juan Kayakas was inducted as Captain in absentia.

Within five days Sofronio Eseo was able to win over ten of his friends into joining his guerrilla unit. They were: Santiago Belsonda, Gaudencio Manalo, Teodoro Dalisay, Leonardo Cuello, Arcadio Marco, Prudencio Marco, Alfonso Aguila, Dominador Katigbak, Iglecerio Katigbak and Severion Gonzalez.

Having recovered from the illness, Capt. Juan Eseo, alias Kayakas, started going from one barrio to another with his wife enrolling membership to his guerrilla band. In Barrio San Bartolome, he won over Proceso Belen and Blas Abril; in Barrio San Miguel, Julian Perez, Macario Sanchez, and Joaquin Race; in Barrio San Gabriel, Juan Kapalad, Antonio Gonzalvo and Nar-

cisco Mulimbayan; in Barrio Santa Maria and Santisimo Rosario, Mamerto Palo, Pio Osorio and Julio Marasigan; in Barrio San Isidro, Federico Roño and Amado Alimagno. The valiant couple even went as far as the Barrio of San Gregorio (Talaga) in the nearby town of Alaminos, Laguna where they enlisted Jesus Marasigan, Teodorico Sahagun, Ramon Sahagun and Diego Inalindo.

The Kayakas couple also dared to go to the town proper to contact some persons to do some intelligence work for them. They were Amando Leonor, Solon Alimario, Joaquin Gesmundo, Honorato Quisumbing and Pampilo Roño. On the way back to his Bulaho home, Capt. Juan Kayakas dropped in at the hut of this writer in Butokan San Gabriel) with the invitation that he serve as propaganda officer of the Kayakas outfit. This writer agreed to perform the duties inherent in the position, but the official designation should be given to another person that he might profit from it with the ending of the war.

Meeting with Gen. Vicente Umali at the sito of Gabo in Tiaong, Tayabas, Juan Kayakas was assigned the South San Pablo sector while Pedro Perez, the Western sector. Both guerrilla chieftains were promoted to the rank of Major by General Umali. The Kayakas outfit erected its temporary headquarters in the hamlet of Atisan somewhere in Mt. Malipunio, overlooking San

Pablo City proper and the Barrios of Santisimo Rosario, San Isidro and the Sitio of Gabo in Tiaong.

The first encounter with the enemy took place somewhere in Malvar, Batangas when Major Kayakas sent a small group on a mission. Headed by his son, now Capt. Sofronio Eseo, the others in the group were Palas Alvarez, Delfin Villanueva, Francisco Villanueva, Domingo Eseo, Narciso Malimbayan and Isidro Condora. Greatly outnumbered by the enemy patrol, Captain Eseo had to give only token resistance and then they dispersed to various directions to confuse the pursuing Japanese soldiers.

About 5 o'clock in the morning of 17 February 1943, a big contingent of Japanese soldiers launched a surprise attack on the temporary headquarters of the Kayakas outfit in the village of Ludlod (Santiago II). In this first major encounter two were killed in action, Julio Manguerra and Primo Sanchez, and five were captured, Juan Flores, Juan Esique, Pedro Dones, Pedro Esique and Sevillano Flores. They were hogtied and brought to the nearby sitio of BA-I where they were made to dig their own open grave before they were bayoneted to death. Those who were able to make good their escape and to reach Mt. Anahawan safely were Captain Kayakas himself, his wife and two sons, Sofronio and Domingo, his nephew Pedro Eseo, and his trusted aide Narciso Mulimbayan, Proceso Belen, Mario Cataag.

Eligio Flores. Macario Hernandez, Isidro Cordona, Macario Peza, Generoso Gabanuran and a Chinaman named BeNga.

On 5 April 1943, Major Juan Kayakas and some of his men joined other guerrilla bands under Gen. Vicente Umali's PQOG Command somewhere in the coastal barrio of Laiya in Batangas to procure arms and munitions being landed there by U.S. submarines. Having received their respective share they decided to rest and exchange impression about their respective wartime activities somewhere in Mt. Tulos in Rosario, Batangas. Among those in the group were guerrilla Major Juan Kayakas and Major Perez, both of the hometown; Major Marcial Punzalan, Colonel Avanceña, Col. Pedro Umali, alias Caballero; and Colonel Sulit.

Without the guerrillas knowing it, their location was pinpointed by Makapili informers and reported to the enemy. A big contingent of Japanese forces launched a massive assault at the well-entrenched mountain position of the freedom-fighters. Without knowing that their protagonists were now possessed with sophisticated weapons, the Japanese soldiers daringly confronted the guerrillas frontally, and thus suffered heavy losses. In this encounter Proceso Belen and Leonardo Cuello of the Kayakas outfit were wounded.

Hardly a month later, 7 May 1943, some of Kayakas' men headed by his son, Sofronio Eseo, had contact with the enemy in the Sitio of Bubuyan in the Barrio of Neing, Tiaong. Thinking that they were outnumbered, the enemy the enemy retreated.

Beginning to run short of munitions and therefore rather hesitant to confront the enemy in regular formation, some daring youngsters often headed by Narciso Mulimbayan would enter the town proper and gun down Makapili informers roaming around town. But a time came when they had to forgo with these maneuvers for while they could elude the kempetai after accomplishing their mission, the curious inhabitants who happened to be still in the scene of the shooting were apprehended by the kempetai and made to pay for the daring of their fighting countrymen.

Running short of foodstuff, Major Juan Kayakas assigned some landed proprietors among his men to solicit for the needed supplies. They were Honorato Quisumbing, Amando Leonor, Armando Reyes, Pedro Averion, Wise Alimario, Bol Laurel, Florencio Guerra, Paulino Bulaclac and Pedro Eseo. While they were discussing their plans at the Quisumbing coconut plantation in Barrio Baustista, they learned there were Japanese soldiers hardly 300 meters away and decided to ambush the enemy somewhere in the nearby creek of Sitio Bunbong. Thinking that they were outnumbered,

the Japanese soldiers retreated but after wounding Paulino Bulaclac. Parenthetically, it was the very spot where this writer and his folks evacuated two years before.

While in the course of soliciting food supplies, principally rice, somewhere in Barrio Santisimo Rosario, some of Kayakas men had an encounter with the Japanese patrol. They were Honorato Quisumbing, Wise Alimario, Proceso Laurel, Armando Reyes and Teodoro Bueser.

With the arrival of the Eighth Troops, Seventh Cavalry of the U.S. Army in the hometown, General Umali ordered the Kayakas outfit to attach itself to the liberating unit as it moved south to liberate Tayabas Province. Headed by now Major Sofronio Eseo, they were Mamerto Palo, Solon Alimario, Lauro Averion, Pedro Eseo, and Mariano Elecion, Rubin Alvarez, Roberto Bati, Narciso Mulimbayan, Blas Abril, Macario Sanchez, Candido Pinales, Eugenio Mendoza, Mateo Gamaro, Eugenio Gamaro, Isidro Ramos, Enrique Esique, Leonardo Dausin, Bol Laurel, Orlando Alcantara, Wise Alimario, Pedro Moreno, Arsenio Dalisay, Dominador Katigbak, Cesario Guerra, Florencio Guerra, Jesus Marasigan, Joaquin Race, Pedro Averion, Julian Cataag, Aurelio Desamero, Fernando Banatalao and Isidro Cordora.

Those who were killed in action were Candido Pinales, Solon Alimario, Cesario Guerra; those who were wounded were Mamerto Palo, Julian Perez, Macario Sanchez and Mariano Elecion.

While some of Kayakas men were attached to the Eighth Troops of the U.S. Army, the others were busy evacuating the non-combatants to Maitim hill in Mt. Makiling's mountain range. The others occupied themselves helping the U.S. Army troopers in the mopping up operations in Mt. Lipong, Mt. Bignay, Mt. Anahawan up to Atisan and Mt. Napayong of the Bulaho mountain range. They were able to capture several Japanese snipers and stragglers whom they turned over to the American garrison in the hometown.

By 31 August 1945 Gen. Vicente Umali ordered all the troops under his command to demobilize and prepare their respective roster of membership to transmittal to the U.S. Army Headquarters in Manila.

REFERNCE: Isidro A. Cordora, Narciso Mulimbayan, Honorato Quisumbing.

ROMEO MAGHIRANG Y MARASIGAN

On pages 221 -222 of the book titled “They Served With Honor: Filipino War Heroes of World War II”, Col. Uldarico S. Baclagon thus wrote about Capt. Romeo M. Maghirang:

“One officer who distinguished himself in combat action in Quezon Province was Capt. Romero M. Maghiring. The particular action which earned for him the Gold Cross medal took place in Polillo and is briefly narrated as follows:

‘With 130 men, he attacked the garrison at Burdeos, Polillo, a Japanese stronghold well-dug in pill boxes surrounded by a wall, two lines of trenches on the outside and another line in the inside and with machine gun emplacement at the main gate, the south wall, the southeast and southwest corners and a movable machine gun within the compound. All the trenches, building and pill boxes were connected by tunnels converging on the school house in the middle of the compound. By mid-day the two outside trenches were occupied and three machine guns were silenced. By nightfall, Captain Maghirang, personally leading the assault, was the first man to climb over the southwest corner of the wall and enter the enemy compound under intense machine gun,

mortar and rifle fire. In the debris of the struggle were found 70 dead Japanese.'

In another book titled "Soldier Heroes: *A Handbook On The Winners Of The Major Medals Awarded By The Philippine Constabulary And The Armed Forces Since 1902*." Published by the National Media Production Center, Manila, 1981; Captain Romeo M. Maghirang's name also appears as Gold Cross awardee:

Capt. Romeo M. Maghirang 0-28669
Infantry, Philippine Army
Awarded June 6, 1946, GO 224
For leading an assault on an entrenched Japanese garrison in Burdeos, Polillo, on February 21, 1945. Ranged against five machine guns and pill boxes, he and his 130-man group occupied two outside trenches and silenced three machine guns killing 70.

On page 302 of Appendix I of the book titled "Roll Of Honor: Defense of the Philippines," Capt. Romeo M. Maghirang's name has been listed as having been recipient of the Gold Gross Award. The Gold Cross medal is being awarded to members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines for gallantry in Action.

Indeed Capt. Romeo M. Maghirang was on freedom-fighter who had found stern joy volunteering on dangerous missions for his outfit, for to him the greater the

danger the greater the glory. After all, there was a necessity for success to his every mission, and this necessity did make him strong and willing to endure hardship. He was one man who would risk even needless danger and be ready to die even bedeviled martyrdom to attain his objective, one man who would prefer to live one day as a tiger that to exist as a lamb for a hundred years, one man who would delight in the smell of a dead enemy.

After passing the Bar examination in 1941, Romeo M. Maghirang was called to active duty in the Armed Forces of the Philippines and assigned with the Philippine Constabulary then headed by Brig. Gen. Guillermo Francisco. He was detailed with the 3rd Infantry Regiment (PC) under the command of Lt. Col. Francisco Donesa with station at camp Keithley, Dansalan (now Marawi City), Lanao. When the Japanese Imperial Forces invaded the Philippines in 1941, he saw action with his unit in Davao, Cotabato, Bukidnon, Oriental Misamis and Agustin

After the fall of Mindinao and the disbandment of his unit, Maghirang was able to return to Luzon with five other officers after weeks of hazardous sailing from one island to another in the Visayas.

Early morning of 4 July 1942, he was sent for by his Grand Uncle, Judge Pablo Cornista, who said that they

needed his help in organizing an underground resistance movement in the hometown and he readily consented to be among them. With Dr. Domingo Ticzon, Dominador Fernandez, Alfonso Farcon, Judge Buenaventura Fule, Dr. Fernando Bautista and Dalmacio Aquino; their first meeting was held at the resident of Ceferino Catipon at T. Azucena Street. It was then decided that their group would engage in intelligence activities while recruiting for possible members for affiliation with High Straughn's Fil-American Irregular Troops (FAIT).

During the year 1942 the group was ale to recruit 600 members and the following year it was agreed that Maghirang whose headquarters was situated somewhere in the mountains of Rizal Province. As a precautionary measure, Maghirang decided to commit to memory the names of the 600 prospective members of their guerrilla organization. Their contact with Colonel Straughn was a certain Wenceslao Olitan, the colonel's adjutant general and whose non de guerre was 'O. Cruz' and 'Orentong Wenceslao.'

Asked by Olitan to prepare the roster of membership that an appointment paper might be issued to each one of the members, Maghirang had to rush its preparation. Then he and Fernandez were escorted by Olitan to the headquarters of Colonel Straughn, an unsuspecting nipa hut somewhere in the remote region of the high Sierra

Mountain ranges. Their outfit was designated as Santa Fe Brigade.

Sometime in May 1943 a courier from Colonel Hugh Straughn's headquarters came to the hometown. The Grand Old Man of the movement was badly in need of financial assistance. Judge Cornista said that the only man he knew in the hometown who could produce the cash money promptly was Don Arsenio M. Escudero., the hometown philanthropist. It was believed that contact with Don Arsenio could be effected through his close friend, Dr. Ricardo Reyes. In two days time Don Arsenio was at a drugstore of Doctor Reyes in A. Flores Street with ten thousand pesos in Japanese war notes. The exchange rate at the time between the pre-war Philippine currency and the Japanese war notes was still one-to-one , and Colonel Straughn was jubilant about it, so jubilant that he immediately gave the rank of Major in his outfit to Don Arsenio M. Escudero.

Months later the Sante Fe organization was discovered by the local Japanese kempetai and 25 prominent members, mostly the well-known professionals and affluent ones in the hometown, were picked up for interrogations and subsequent detention at the Escudero residence in Rizal Avenue, the kempetai headquarters. Maghirang was able to escape. But as one of the leading members of the organization, he had to join the group of detainees. Being the youngest, with the talent

and military experience, he had become the top suspect in the group. In fact, when asked if he were a guerrilla, Maghirang answered affirmatively. He told them flatly that he had to join the guerrilla movement for the Japanese were not true to their protestation of brothership with the Filipinos as evidenced by the many atrocities which they had been committing against his countrymen.

Said the most dreaded Captain Izumi of the Japanese Military: "I rike you, I rike you, you are brave. You are not afraid. I have a son rike you, also brave. He study Tokyo Military Academy, maybe, few years more, I am under him!" A brave man that he was, Maghirang had become the Number One suspect in the group, and he knew it. Thus after his release, he immediately left the hometown and went to Nueva Ecija not only to escape the kempetai in the hometown but also for amorous reason. He had a sweetheart over there!

Col. Hugh Straughn having been captured and reportedly killed by the Japanese, Romeo Maghirang joined the USAFFE guerrillas in Southern Luzon under the command of Capt. Bernard L. Anderson of the U.S. Army Air Force. Though food was plentiful in Bulacan and Nueva Ecija, the USAFFE guerrillas' field of operations, their contact with the submarines landing war material along the coastal region of Tayabas Province was quite difficult. Hence, the Anderson outfit had to

move its headquarters in the mountain fastnesses of the high Sierras.

It was here where they got their carbine and Tommy-guns to take the place of their Springfield and Enfield rifles, their powerful radio sets, more guns and munitions, cigarettes and food supplies, medicine and more.

At one time while the Anderson guerrillas were unloading supplies from the submarine, Maghirang came across two friends from the hometown, the Azada brothers (Teddy and Pianing) who had been assigned to procure supplies for their guerrilla outfit. They were accompanied by one Agripino Gonzales of the nearby town of Infanta, Tayabas. A week later Maghirang came upon another two brothers from the hometown, the Quisumbing brothers (Napoleon and Honorato). The also had been assigned by their guerrilla outfit to request for arms and munitions. Both the Azada and the Quisumbing brothers had the rare opportunity of boarding a U.S. submarine during the war. Then Maghirang thought of recommending the four youthful townsmen for commission as officers of the U.S. armed forces, but they already had left.

Finally, on 5 January 1945 came the order that they commenced operations against the Japanese wherever they might be found. The Anderson guerrillas decided to move to the direction of Infanta, Tayabas, where the

biggest concentration of enemy forces were. At dawn of 9 January 1945 Maghirang and his 65 men were ordered to attack the 200 enemy soldiers encamped at Barrio Batagan. They were armed with one 81-mm mortar, two 50-caliber machine guns, four 30-caliber machine guns, automatic rifles and some Carbine and Tommy-guns. They were able to silence the enemy. From then on they went on attacking Japanese garrisons in different barrios of Infanta almost everyday.

It might be mentioned that when Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita, the "Tiger of Malaya", was assigned to the Philippines to relieve the fun-loving Shigenori Kuroda, he had to bolster the Japanese defenses against the mounting American offensive. In the weening days of Japanese occupation (December 1944), Yamashita ordered the army evacuation of Manila and the consolidation of all defense efforts in the mountains. An estimated 30,000 to 50,000 Japanese soldiers were believed to be swarming all over the jurisdiction of Infanta.

Now attached to the Sixth Army under General Krueger, the outfit where Maghirang belonged was too small to continue confronting the big enemy forces in Infanta. Hence, they were ordered to transfer their operations to Polillo Island. It was one of their encounters against the enemy in Polillo where Romeo M. Maghirang was awarded the Gold Cross.

REFERENCE: Romeo M. Maghirang. He is the youngest and the only one still living among the five (5) leading freedom-fighters from the hometown during the Japanese Occupation in World War II.

DON ARSENIO ESCUDERO Y MARASIGAN

The only son of a freedom-fighter (Don Placido) who was brutally maltreated by the American soldiers for his wartime activities during the Philippine-American War, Don Arsenio M. Escudero was one man who chose to be slave to nothing in his farmland known as Villa Escudero, one man who always did things freely according to the dictate of his conscience, one man who would disturb even high heaven with his daring more specially if his fortune was at stake. Indeed his boldness did fascinate his scores of farmhands who would not hesitate to troop with him in times of confusion.

Then came an enemy to molest the piece of his realm, an enemy whose beverage was the blood of beasts, an enemy who would hinder him from doing whatever he might will to do. Don Arsenio felt that the audacious man in him would be mad if he would not rebel against the fear and horror brought about by the new menace to the peace of his surroundings. His conscience could not afford to take a vacation, could not allow him t be condemned for his obliquities. And thus with instinctive determination, he joined the underground movement.

On 24 January a Japanese patrol entered the Villa Escudero for the first time. Headed by a certain Captain Yamamoto, the patrol was able to confiscate many more firearms which Don Arsenio M. Escudero failed to hide when they ran to their hideaway after the Christmas Day bombing of the hometown. Since then Japanese patrol would drop in almost weekly and grab anything that might interest them, . . . rice in the bodega, gourami in the fishpond, hogs and poultry, even cattle pasture. They did impress upon the Escuderos that the villa now belonged to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor and they, the Japanese soldiers were his custodians.

Despite the order by the Japanese Military for the surrender to the Tiaong kempetai garrison of all Filipino soldiers as well as Americans, soldiers and civilians alike; Don Arsenio continued to shelter them, giving food, clothing and money before they left the villa. More that 100 USAFFE soldiers who were able to escape the infamous Death March to Capas concentration camp had been the recipients of Don Arsenio's kindness. Among the Americans who received aid and comfort from him were Edwin and Walter Olson, children of a retired U.S. Army officer, and Lt. William E. Lamb of the U.S. Navy.

Don Arsenio also continued sending to the Filipino and American prisoners-of-war in Capas, Tarlac, truck-

loads of such prime necessities as rice, sugar, salted fish, medicine, cigarettes, soap, clothes, etc. He also offered truck service to the Federation of Women's Club of the Philippines that said organization might transport food and medicine to the sick soldiers in the concentration camp.

When the Japanese Military ordered Don Arsenio to resume the manufacture of coconut oil in his COCPI factory, he said that he could not do it in the absence of expellers (which he hid). The Japanese soldiers angrily divested the factory of all its equipment, the machine shop and every piece of iron they could find. Then they raided the villa, grabbing a few truckloads of rice, hogs, poultry, fish and cattle.

This sudden and violent usurpation of his freedom had made Don Arsenio quite indignant. Having lived as a free man, he was much disturbed to be forced to act against his will. He in conscience could not bear to be subjected to the unpredictable and arbitrary action of the Japanese Military. Thus he promptly accepted appointment as Major of the Fil-American Irregular Troops (FAIT) under Col. Hugh Straughn sometime in October 19432. Months later, because of his accomplishments as Chief Finance Officer of the FAIT's Santa Brigade unit, Don Arsenio was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.

Don Arsenio, an affluent man that he was, received a request from Col. Hugh Straughn to render aid t any guerilla organization that might have a need for his assistance. As early as 19 December 1942, Lt. Col. Marcos V. Agustin, commanding officer of the FAIT's famed Marking's Guerilla, received financial aid from Don Arsenio. Thus wrote the guerrilla chieftain: "Your favor of changing ONE HUNDRED TEN PESOS worth of war notes into cash is deeply appreciated. The money arrived at the main base yesterday." The P110 is a code name. The actual amount received by Colonel Marking was considered a restricted matter.

Justiniano Estrella (alias Alfredo M. David), over-all commander of FAIT's III Army Corps better known as David's Command, executed a sworn statement to the affect that on 27 May 1943 he received P10,000 from Don Arsenio; on 25 August 1943, P50,000; on 10 October 1943, P20,000. From 29 September 1944 to 23 February 1945 Colonel David's 1,500 men stayed at the vicinity of Villa Escudero and depended principally from Don Arsenio for their supplies, especially foodstuff.

By authority of Gen. Douglas Mac Arthur's general headquarters, Southwest Pacific Command (SWPC), Gen. Macario Peralta, Jr., commander of the Sixth Military District (Panay), ordered an intelligence officer to establish an intelligence officer to establish an intelli-

gence network in Southern Tagalog region for the Sixth Military District. This unidentified intelligence officer caused the network to be situated at the Villa Escudero compound and he depended solely on Don Arsenio for financial assistance. The successful operations of the network had been made possible through the financial support of Don Arsenio who expended P274,000 for this project alone.

The record of his private secretary, Melanio Valdellon, revealed that Don Arsenio had given away a total of P1,082,012 in support of the guerrilla movement alone, broken down as follows: Col Hugh Straughn and Col. A.M. David, P215,570; Fifth Infantry Division, PQOG, P225,152; USAFFE Guerrillas, P98,328; 46th Infantry Regiment, 44th Hunters, ROTC, P268,995; and Sixth Military District, (Panay), P274,000. The cash doled out to the indigent non-combatants who flocked to the villa from day to day could have mounted to just as much, if not more, as the sum given to the guerrillas, according to Valdellon.

Don Arsenio's private secretary also recorded the other kind of material assistance accorded to the USAFFE soldiers at the start of the war and then to the different guerrilla outfits in later years. They were: 6,621 cavanes of rice, 109 cows, 58 carabaos, 94 pigs, 195 chickens, 765 gourami fish, 44 goats and 8 horses.

Again, the record did not show those given to indigent families.

But the Japanese kempetai were not sleeping. Don Arsenio had been under close surveillance. They were only biding their time. Causing the harvest of his extensive Riceland, Don Arsenio hid only a few cavanes for his family, then divided the harvest between his farmhands and the guerrillas operating in the region, leaving nothing to the Japanese garrison operating in the nearby town of Tiaong. The act of Don Arsenio so angered the Japanese kempetai that they immediately apprehended him on 13 July 1943. He was without food during the first four days of his incarceration. Instead he was subjected to varied forms of torture to make him reveal the names of his comrades in the movement; they got nothing from him. Of the 13 guerrilla suspects in the garrison at the time, only Don Arsenio came out alive on 13 August 1943, thanks to the intercession of a Japanese friend named Goro Kasai of the Japanese Signal Corps.

During the succeeding months Don Arsenio had to gull the Japanese Military into believing that he was already spiritually rejuvenated and now ready to co-labor with them through his food production program to supply the needs of the enemy.

Then one day Don Arsenio begged of the Japanese kempetai to allow him and his family to transfer resi-

dence to Manila that he might undergo medical attention for he was a sick man; his appeal was granted.

President Jose P. Laurel sent for his compadre, Don Arsenio, to see him at Malacañang Palace. Laurel gave a pass to Don Arsenio to enable him to transport truckloads of rice to Manila without being molested by the Japanese sentries and patrols along the national highway, for the rice was supposed to be delivered to Malacañang Palace. Actually the rice had been intended not only for the families of Don Arsenio and his compadre but also for some of Laurel's followers and a few guerrilla outfits operating in the Manila area.

Laurel also persuaded Don Arsenio to sell his fellow guerrillas the idea of appealing to General Mac Arthur to bypass the Philippines and proceed straight to Japan to save the country from destruction and countless death for its people. With the surrender of Japan, the American soldiers would enter the country peacefully to disarm the Japanese soldiers. Sold to the idea, Don Arsenio promised to take it up with his fellow guerrillas when he returned to the hometown.

Returning to the villa with his family, Don Arsenio received reports that a big Japanese contingent was planning to assault the villa and completely destroy all life and property, for the kempetai had been informed already about Don Arsenio's wartime activities. At last

Don Arsenio ordered his boys to confront every Japanese soldier that might come close to the villa. While before he hesitated he decided to strike first and strike hard.

His boys were no other than his able-bodied farmhands constituted his private guerrilla unit. Coming from the plow and were never warlike, but possessed with fortitude under fatigue, his boys did make good soldiers. For their attachment to the land had generated in them a feeling of patriotism, a patriotism that dreaded to see the peace of the villa, their lifeblood, disturbed by tyranny and oppression. And so they were ready to purchase the peace even with their own blood.

With the coming of the American liberating force in the hometown first week of April 1945, Don Arsenio provided the Americans with guides, interpreters, bridge guards, combat patrols and a labor battalion, all directed toward the support of the combat operations of the U.S. Army in the area.

After a few weeks of mopping up operations with the aid of the local guerrillas, the American GIs considered the war over in the hometown, and thus they began to sit it out it the town proper, helping provide food and clothing and build makeshift shanties for the impoverished citizenry. All the while, the young men and the

young women had started sponsoring musicale and informal dances to entertain the liberators.

But to Don the war was not yet over for there were still several Jap stragglers roaming about the countryside. Defeated and disgraced, the Japanese soldiers had become children of vengeful hate, desperate marauders who would fight and ill like the devil. From mid-April to mid-June 1945, Don Arsenio's boys were able to kill 73 Jap stragglers and captured one machine gun, one anti-tank mortar, 32 rifles, 7 pistols, 4 sabers, 1 bayonet, 46 hand grenades as well as some Jap banners and military documents in Nippongo. Don Arsenio turned over all these captured war materials to the American Military in town.

On one of the military maneuvers of Don Arsenio's boys, they came upon 25 Makapili collaborators somewhere in Barrio Santa Ana and captured them without resistance.. The group included their two top leaders Graciano and Agripino Calabia, the most notorious father-and-son duo who had caused the death of many prominent citizens in the hometown and had initiated the burning of the entire poblacion after they and their followers had looted every home of its valuables. Instead of receiving wild justice from their eager captors and despite the gnashing protest of the local citizenry, those felonious malefactors were turned over unharmed by Don Arsenio to the American Military in town.

Major General George F. Moore, commanding general of the Philippine-Ryukyus Command (PHILRYCOM), wrote to Don Arsenio M. Escudero: "Informed about the outstanding service you have rendered to the internees and to the cause of the United States, the Philippine Commonwealth, and the Allies during the war, I personally desire to express my appreciation for the splendid service you have rendered."

The service rendered by Don Arsenio M. Escudero to our country was recognized by the Philippine Government through the award of the PHILIPPINE LEGION OF HONOR, Degree of OFFICER, as approved by the President (Ferdinand E. Marcos) and announced in General Order Number 260 of the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and duly signed by the Chief of Staff, General R.C. Espino. The PLOH, degree of OFFICER, "is awarded to civilians who have rendered outstanding service to the Philippines that merit official recognition by the Government. Person(s) awarded are "civilian personages of utmost prestige whether in or outside the government service."

REFERENCE: Melanio Valdellon, Don Arsenio's private secretary.