They Were Expendable

By W. L. White

Boat crews overhaul craft with crude devices at hand in preparation for dash to freedom—with impending fall of Bataan, MacArthur sets March 15 for departure. Everything made spic and span for girl passenger.

CHAPTER 12

"The minute we knew we were to leave Bataan soon," continued Lieutenant Kelly after a pause, "we got to work on the four boats. We knew the trip would be tough, and the boats were old now. The engines had had double the number of hours' service without their customary thorough overhaul and returning, so they were making half their original speed.

"We planned to scrape the bottoms and overhaul their struts, but this was done for only three. My boat's turn was last, and meanwhile it was used for patrol.

"Overhauling these motors without our replacement parts was a terrible job. For instance, Any tank-town garage which overhauls a flivver back in the states always replaces the gaskets with new ones. Only we didn't have any. Or any sealing compound. So those old gaskets had to be carefully removed, handled as gently as though they were precious lace, and laid back in place when the motors were reassembled.

"How much gas could we carry? We experimented—put down planks on those 318-inch plywood decks to strengthen them, and finally decided we could take a chance on piling twenty of those 50-gallon drums on each boat.

"Naturally the crews got curious about all these preparations. Since we knew so much about what the Japanese were doing across the bay, we assumed their means for finding out about us were equally good. Anyway, Bulkeley and I had decided that there is only one way of keeping a valuable secret during a war: don't tell it yourself.

"But we had to tell the men something. So we said maybe after we had exhausted all our gas here on Bataan, we would head down for Cebu in the southislands. Cebu, where there was plenty of food and more torpedoes, and where they had the most beautiful and languorous girls in the islands, and plenty of gasoline.

"We painted it as a golden spot. Only Bulkeley and I knew that when we got to Cebu we would be doomed—there was no gasoline there and only a little in Mindanao. We could never hope to get to Australia.

"But then there were the two correspondents—Clark Lee and Nat Floyd of the New York Times, and also Colonel Weng. They knew about the Chinese trip because the Admiral had authorized them to go with us. So we told them yes, we were still going to China, but we didn't know when—maybe not for a long time—and advised them if they had any other chance to get out, by all means to take it. Meanwhile we kept on the boats all that landing-gear equipment we had assembled for the China trip—so if any hint of it had leaked out to the crew, they would think it was still on.

"Meanwhile MacArthur had told Bulkeley that Bataan would fall shortly, and Corregidor would go soon after—if it didn't get help from the States immediately. No help was being sent. Apparently it couldn't be gotten to us. Then the Japs could mop up the southern Philippines.

"It was a grim picture for us. But here was our last big job. MacArthur was the brains of the organization—the only general who could take that territory back. The whole Allied defense depended on getting him to Australia.

"Bulkeley was reporting to him every other day, but MacArthur refused to set a date for leaving—he wanted to stay as long as he could. At this time the boys on Bataan were back in their strongest positions—also their last-ditch defense line—and the Japs had had about all they wanted monkeying with this line, and were waiting for reinforcements. But when news came that their General Yamashita was on his way with many transports, bragging he would capture MacArthur within a month, our departure date was set for March 15.

"But to keep the men occupied and also to keep our secret, we went right on with plans for developing our shore base at Sisiman Cove. We installed a good cook's galley, fixed up the mess hall, screened in everything, as though we hoped to live there for months.

"We even took all our clothes off the boats and moved them into the nipa huts ashore.

"On the fourth of March there came a nice break for me. Peggy got me word that she had been transferred to Little Baguilo hospital on Bataan, relieving one of the girls who had been working too long under fire, and I got the idea of inviting her down to our base for chow and to spend the evening. Dr. Nelson, who had been looking after my hand, was also on Little Baguilo, and I invited him and his girl friend, too.

"You should have seen my ship perk up when I told them. The skipper was going to bring a girl aboard! They had the ship all spit and polish, ready for the big event. My cook, Reynolds, and the Filipino mess boy were tickled pink. They were going to show the Army!

"You see the week before I'd gone over to Little Baguilo—I'd had only breakfast and arrived on foot late in the afternoon for my dressing, to spend the night and walk back. But they told me, regretfully of course, of a new ruling: rations were tightening—they were down to dried fish, plain rice, and one slice of bread—so absolutely no visitors could get food at the hospital. So I went to bed supperless, got up, watched them rat breakfast—they said how sorry they were they couldn't offer me anything back at those miles over the hills, and at 9 o'clock, sitting at our own mess table, ate seventeen hot cakes as fast as Reynolds could turn them out of the pan.

"Now their one idea was to show the Army what real Navy hospitality can be. It's true Peggy brought the coffee—we were out of that—but they rustled the rest. It started off with fruit cocktail, then a real pot roast of fresh meat with brown gravy, and in this a whole can of mushrooms, which they'd been hoarding for some big occasion. Then rice and canned peas and beans, a delicious apple pie, and then coffee like only we can make in the Navy. There was never such a dinner. Then we sat and talked, while the little waves lapped along the cove.

"I told Peggy I wanted to see her again, and soon. She said they were keeping her very busy, but she might get a night off on the fifteenth or before. There was no way I could call her, so she said she'd get to the Signal Corps field telephone and ring me up about 6 o'clock on the eleventh, when we could make a definite date.

"I asked her if she couldn't make it sooner, and she said of course she wanted to, but didn't see how she possibly could. I wanted to tell her why I wanted it sooner. Then I stopped myself. Because in a war you don't tell anybody. Not anybody. And if they have any sense, and Peggy had plenty, they understand this and don't want to be told.

"So instead we talked about the war, and how they were low on quinine now—just had enough to give the worst malaria cases a light slug which would last only a short time—and how tired the soldiers were, how uncertain everything looked.

"It's uncertain for us in the Navy, too," I said. "One of these days—even I am liable to disappear, without telling you good-by."

"We were silent for a minute, and then she said, sure, she realized that—she always had known it might happen. But there was no use talking about it before it came—lasting it didn't make this thing easier. But if I did have to leave suddenly, without telling her good-by, where would I go?

"'Almost anywhere,' I said, trying to sound vague and careless. I don't know whether it fooled her or not. But she was smart and may have guessed that either I really didn't know, or if I had orders, I should not talk about them. Anyway, after that we both sat looking out over the water in the dusk, and it was a long time before I could look at her or she looked at me."

"We were measuring out our gas drop by drop now. Our boats can use only the best 100 octane airplane grade—the same the P-40's needed. To save it I would tie my boat up to the buoy at the entrance to the mine field. A Diesel-powered launch would patrol, and only if they saw anything worth chasing would they signal us to go out and run it down. Also, MacArthur said absolutely no more offensive raids for the MTB's—he couldn't risk the boats or spare the gasoline.

"On March 10 Bulkeley made his usual trip to see MacArthur; this time he brought along all his plans and charts for the trip. The General went over and approved them, and also told Admiral Rockwell and his chief of staff that they were going along, which was the first they had known of the trip—they had thought we were going to China. There was also an ominous bit of news—some big Jap formation was reported coming down the west coast of Luzon in our direction. If it was true, it could only be the convoy bringing General Yamashita and his reinforcements. General MacArthur told Bulkeley we might be leaving very soon, and to come back the next day.

"That would be the eleventh of March. Bulkeley went over early in the morning and returned to us at noon. He called in not only me but the other officers, Akers, Cox, and Schumacher, and for the first time showed them copies of our secret orders and the charts he had worked out for our route. He made the point that we should all keep together, but if one broke down, the rest would go on, leaving it to make its way the best it could."

"If we met the enemy, we were to avoid them if possible. But if they gave chase and were gaining on us so that an attack was necessary, the 41 boat, in which he would carry the General, his wife, and his son, would turn and run, and my boat, since I was second in command, would lead the attack to give the others time to escape.

"It was an unusual situation for Bulkeley to be in. Always he had gone along on every fight and led the way, but now it couldn't be that way.

"The last thing he told us was that we were leaving that very night. He left us hard at work on last-minute preparations but would return soon to complete his own.

Next Chapter: MacArthur's historic flight.

Today's News Today
Why Wait 'Til Tomorrow?
The Charlotte News

WISHING WELL

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HERE is a pleasant little game that will give you a message every day. It is a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is six or more, subtract four. If the number is less than six, add three. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner of the rectangle and check every one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

OUT OUR WAY

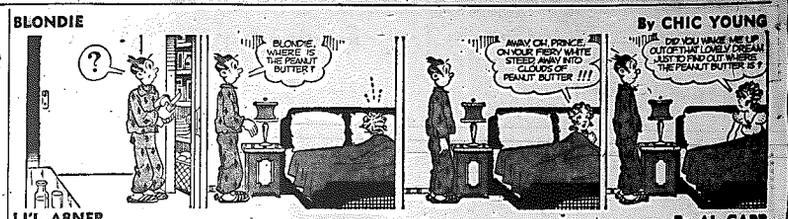
By J. R. WILLIAMS

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With MAJOR HOOPLE

BLONDIE

By CHIC YOUNG



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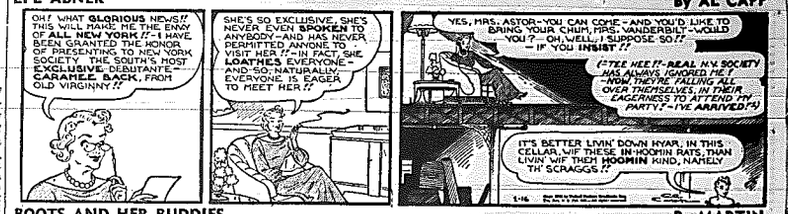
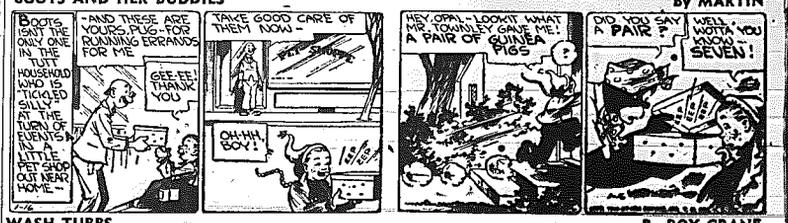


BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

By MARTIN



WASH TUBBS

By ROY CRANE

THIMBLE THEATER

STARRING POPEYE

RED RYDER

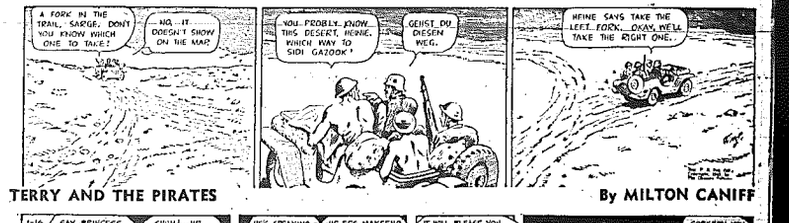
By FRED HARMAN

SUPERMAN

By JERRY SIEGEL and JOE SHUSTER

GASOLINE ALLEY

By FRANK KING



TERRY AND THE PIRATES

By MILTON CANIFF