They Were Expendable

By W. L. White

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P. T. Boat Tackles Enemy Cruiser In Dead of Night at Subic Bay to Protect Shore Forces; Heroic Torpedoman Saves Lives of Crew When Ejector Jams. Lieutenant Bulkeley Wins DSC For Courageous Feat. Second Crew Escapes After Boat Grounds in Treacherous Waters.

CHAPTER 8

"It was a job we did for the Army," explained Lieutenant Bulkeley describing the historic attack of his P. T. Boat in Subic Bay mentioned in the closing paragraphs of yesterday's chapter. "A couple of Jap ships, one of them an Imperial Navy auxiliary cruiser with six-inch guns had been shelling our 155-millimeter emplacements on Bataan—blasting them with heavy stuff. The major in charge had been wondering how to get rid of them and had phoned Admiral Rock—well, who gave us permission to tackle the job. We knew they were based in Subic Bay, probably in Port Binanga. Subic is on the west coast of Luzon, just north of Bataan. I decided to send two boats—the 31 boat, which was Lieutenant DeLong's, and the 34 boat, which was Kelly's, now commanded by Ensign Chandler. I went along in it for the hell of it.

"We tested everything — tuned the motors, greased torpedoes, and got underway at 9 o'clock, chugging north along the west coast of Bataan. It was very rough. We throttled down to 30 knots, and even then we were shipping water, but we got off the entrance to Subic Bay about half an hour after midnight. Here, according to plan, the two boats separated. DeLong in the 31 boat was to sweep one side of Subic Bay and I the other. We were to meet at Port Binanga, at the end, if something happened and we didn't meet there, then we were to rendezvous at dawn just outside the mine fields of Corregidor.

"So we separated, expecting to meet at dawn. It was the last I ever saw of the 31 boat. But here's what happened on our 34 boat in Subic Bay. First, remember it was darker than hell, and the shore line was loaded with Jap field guns. None of us had ventured in there since the Japs took over. We had got in just a little way when a Jap searchlight spotted us and blinked out a dot-dash challenge, asking who we were. Since we didn't know the Jap code reply, naturally we didn't answer, but changed course, veering away. But the Japs were getting suspicious now, and from over by Ilinin Point a single field piece opened up. None of it fell near us — maybe they were shooting at DeLong in the 31 boat.

"When we were about abeam of Sueste light another light came on to challenge us—this time from a ship maybe that cruiser. We changed course to go over and have a look, but she was small fry—not worth a torpedo—the hell with her—we were headed for Binanga and the cruiser.

"By this time the Japs over on Grande Island realized something funny was going on — their light challenged us, but of course we didn't answer. Then they broke out some 50-caliber machine-gun fire at us from Ilinin Point. We could see the tracers feeling for us, and then the fun started—big three-inch shore batteries rumbling all over the bay and lights feeling for us. We could hear the shells whistle over our heads in the dark, and could have done without some of them. But the lights and flashes from the shore batteries were a real help, for they enabled me to pick out the shore line, so, in spite of the fact that it was blacker than hell, we knew where we were.

"By 1 o'clock we were off the north entrance to Port Binanga, where we were to meet DeLong in the 31 boat and go in together for the attack, and when he didn't show up, I began to be afraid something might have happened, yet I couldn't be sure.

But there was nothing to do but go on in alone. To make the sneak, we cut the speed down to eight knots, skirted Chiquita Island, rounded Binanga Point, and entered the little bay on two engines at idling speed. Everything was quiet, no firing down here, and then we saw her ahead in the dark not 500 yards away. Creeping up on her, we had just readied two torpedoes when a searchlight came on and in dot-dash code she asked us who we were.

"We answered, all right — with two torpedoes—but they had hardly been fired when I gave our boat hard rudder and started away. It isn't safe for an MTB to stay near a cruiser. One torpedo hit home with a hell of a thud—we heard it over our shoulders. Looking back, we saw the red fire rising, and presently two more explosions which might have been her magazines.

"But we had no time for staring, for we were into plenty of trouble. One of those torpedoes had failed to clear its tube and was stuck there, just at the entrance, and was making what we call a 'hot' run.' Its propeller buzzing like hell, compressed air hissing so you couldn't hear yourself think. But worst of all, a torpedo is adjusted so that it won't fire until its propeller has made a certain number of revolutions—I shouldn't give it exactly, but let's say it is 300. After that, the torpedo is cocked like a rifle, and an eight-pound blow on its nose would set it off—blowing us all to glory.

"So what to do? Somehow that torpedo propeller had to be stopped and stopped quick, or else a good hard wave slap on the torpedo's nose would blow us all to splinters. And at this point our torpedoman, Martino, used his head fast. He ran to the head and swiped a handful of toilet paper. He jumped astride that wobbling, hissing torpedo like it was a horse, and, with the toilet paper, jammed the vanes of the propeller, stopping it.

"We'd stopped for all this, but we couldn't afford to wait long. The cruiser's fire was lighting up the bay behind us. Ahead, all over Subic, hell was breaking loose. So we started up, gave her everything we had to get through that fire.

"With three motors roaring, and us skipping around in that rough water with everything wide-open, I guess we made considerable commotion. Anyway the Japanese radio in Tokyo, reporting the attack next day, said the Americans had a new secret weapon—a monster that roared, flapped its wings, and fired torpedoes in all directions. It was only us, of course, but we felt flattered. We got the hell out of there, and that was all there was to it."

"Well," said Kelly, "MacArthur wouldn't quite agree. He gave you the D. S. C. for what you'd done."

"But DeLong has the real story," insisted Bulkeley. "I pulled up outside the mine field off Corregidor to wait for him. Neither of us could go in until it got light, because otherwise the army on shore, hearing us in the dark out there, would think it was Japs and set off the mine field. But when the sky got light and I saw my boat was alone, I realized DeLong was in trouble. And since he's now a prisoner of the Japanese—if he's alive—we'd better tell his story for him.

"After we parted company at the entrance to Subic Bay, he started around its northern rim as we'd planned. But just before midnight he developed engine trouble—the saboteur's wax had clogged his strainers. He cleaned them and had just got under way when another trouble developed—the cooling system went haywire. They stopped, and were drifting as they repaired it when there was an ominous grinding sound under the boat—they were aground on a reef in Subic Bay. At any minute a wandering Jap searchlight might pick them up and artillery fire would blow them to bits.

"They rocked the boat, and finally started the engines to get themselves unstuck. But the noise now attracted the Japs, and a 3-inch gun on Ilinin Point opened up on them—splinters coming nearer and nearer. They worked frantically, finally burned out all reverse gears so that the engines were useless. DeLong gave orders to abandon ship. They wrapped mattresses in a tarpaulin to make a raft, and all got aboard but DeLong, who stayed to chop holes in the gas tanks and blow a hole in the boat's bottom with a hand grenade before he jumped. That was the end of the 31. Then he couldn't find the raft in the darkness, and being afraid to call out, swam to the beach.

"The raft had shoved off with all twelve aboard at three o'clock.

"He waited on the sands until dawn. Then, in the gray half-light, he picked up the tracks of nine men. He followed these until they led into a clump of bushes, where he found most of his crew. They explained they had stayed with the raft until dawn was about to break. Fearing sunrise would expose them to the Japanese, they had decided to risk a swim to the beach, where they could hide. But Ensign Plant and two others, who couldn't swim very well, decided to stay. What became of them the nine didn't know, and no one knows for sure to this day.

"But the first thing DeLong did was to post lookouts, and all day they stayed in that clump, with an eye on the Jap observation planes which flew over them in relays, watching a hot little skirmish between the Americans and the Japanese on the far shore of the bay. At one point the Japs were falling back, and there seemed to be a chance that they could make a run for it in daylight, rejoining the American lines. But never was it quite posible, and in the meantime they had spotted a couple of bancas, native boats, farther down the beach.

"Two men, who were sent out to investigate, crawling on their bellies through the grass, returned to report the bancas were in fair condition. So when the sun had set they crawled to them and started getting them in shape. For rowing they had two paddles, a couple of spades, and a board. They had to work fast and quietly, for the Japs were all around them—just as they were launching the bancas they heard Japanese voices not two hundred yards away.

"But a heavy wind came up, and at nine o'clock at night, both boats capsized. They righted them, but the shovels and the board were lost, and they now had only one paddle for each banca. Yet with these they continued to fight the head wind until three in the morning, when they were so exhausted that they decided to try the shore. So DeLong landed on what he hoped was Napo Point. They picked their way through the barbed-wire entanglement on the beach, and then found themselves up against a steep cliff.

"They kept very quiet until dawn, not knowing whether daylight would find them surrounded by American or Japanese. But when it became light, the first thing they saw was a Filipino sentry.

"'Hey, Joe—got a cigarette and a match?' They called out. And an hour later they were telling their story to Captain Cooke, in the Ninety-Second American Infantry's field headquarters tent. The nine were back with us at Sisiman Cove the next evening."

"But we'd never really expected to see them again," said Kelly. "And when I heard only one boat had come back from Subic Bay, I got hold of my doctor.

"'Now you've got to let me go!' I said. 'Here we've lost the third officer of the squadron. There's a war on, and I've spent all the time I intend to nursing a sore finger.'

Next Chapter: Running Down Landing Barges.

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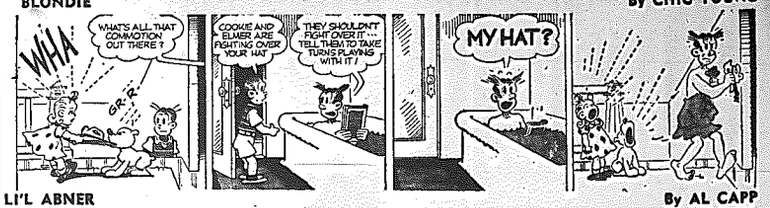

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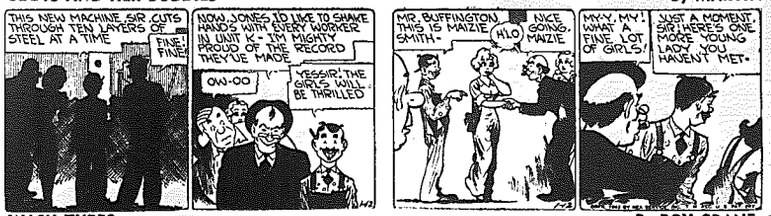

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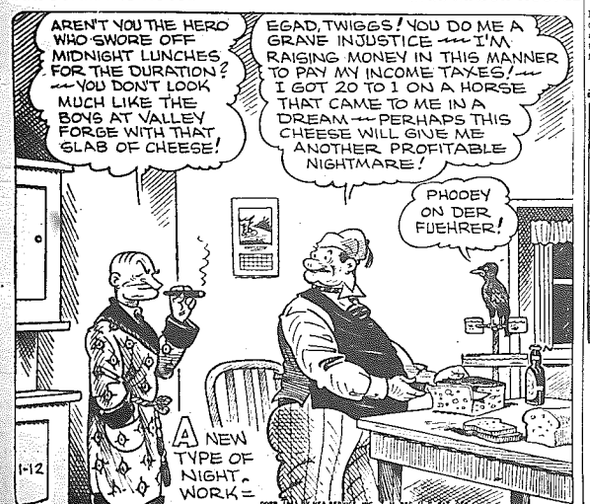

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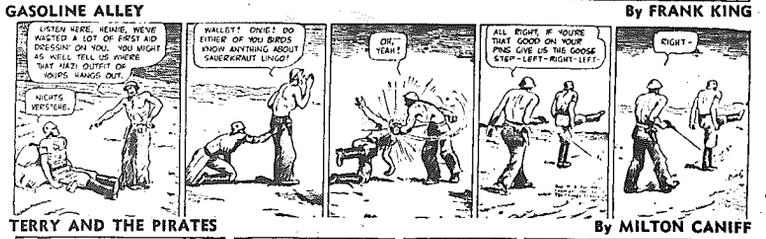

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