

PT 32 was preparing for action—against us. I knew we would have to move fast to keep MacArthur from losing his life to his own boats.



ILLUSTRATION BY ISA BARNETT

action, and I knew we'd have to move fast if we were going to keep General MacArthur from losing his life to one of his own boats.

Our crew and passengers yelled and waved at 32 as it pressed on. I swung about to present less target and, I hoped, a more familiar silhouette. The PT 32 seemed to rise out of the sea as it gathered momentum for a hit-and-run punch. I started to try gunning us out of his path when I saw 32's wake subside and its bow slip rather shamefacedly into the sea. We cut back our engines and idled there, dazed at our close call.

Everybody was hoarse by then. Everybody but me, and when I got through telling off the 32's crew I was hoarse, too. But we had too much work to worry about what-might-have-beens. Boats 34 and 35 came in, and we hugged the beaches hoping we would not be sighted.

The MacArthurs stayed by themselves: Mrs. MacArthur calm and busy as ever, the General silent and withdrawn, the child and *amah* bewildered and pitifully ill from the sea. The night had taken a physical toll, and as the day progressed I guessed we were in for worse.

"The weather will be heavy tonight," I told the staff officers. "We'll leave at dark, though, and with luck we'll be at Mindanao by dawn."

Adm. F. W. Rockwell and some other officers disagreed. "It will be calm—just look at the day! And there shouldn't be any Japs this far out. Let's leave while we have some daylight."

Before we had left Corregidor, MacArthur had told the admirals, generals, and colonels that they'd take orders from Bulkeley, even though I was only a lieutenant. Anything they had to say would be advice only. But such high-echelon opinion made me doubt my estimate, and I compromised. Leaving the 32 boat behind to rendezvous with a submarine in the area, we roared out of Cuyo in the late afternoon, hoping for good weather for our last dash through open seas.

It was a picture-book sunset, and Mrs. Mac-

Arthur came up for a breath of air. The General was resting, and for the first time there was a feeling of security. Then a lookout yelled: "Enemy cruiser one point on the port bow." There she was, right off Panay Island.

I caught a glimpse of a grim, low shadow in the distance, and spun the wheel hard. The sun was blazing on the horizon, and I raced to get between it and the cruiser. The choppy sea might obscure our wake and the sunlight blind the Jap lookouts. We had to hope so, anyway.

Mrs. MacArthur stood expressionless and watched our evasive tactics for a while. Then, with surprising agility, she stepped across the pitching deck and went below to her son. The General sat silently in his wicker chair, an almost academic observer.

For long minutes my job was simply to cling to the eye-stinging ribbon of sunlight and sea. A single cloud obscuring the sun could have been disastrous. Both the sun and the cruiser seemed motionless, and I began to wonder if either would ever drop behind the horizon. The lookout kept reassuring us, "She's holding her course. She can't have spotted us." At last I noticed a blue haze gathering around us; the sea was darkening, too, as night closed in unhurriedly. There were whispered words of relief from the passengers, but I didn't share them.

And Now a New Enemy!

The passengers had been too occupied with the cruiser to notice the seas we were plunging into. We had guessed wrong about there being no Japs around, and now, as I fought the wheel, I knew we'd guessed wrong about calm seas.

By the time we were between the Sulu and Mindanao Seas, the waves were some 12 feet high. The PTs' hulls groaned under the blows, and we wondered if we'd hear the splintering sound of cracking wood that would signal the end. We bumped along, though, spotting dim mounds of

land that guided us on our course, but even that was an ordeal since the salt water had burned our eyes until they were only slits. We had not slept in two days, and the passengers clung helplessly to the rolling decks, many not caring whether they lived or died. Now it came down to navigation: if I had plotted our course right, we would be safe at Mindanao at dawn. If not, I wondered if either men or boats could keep going.

A gray light began to filter down around 6 a.m., and I saw the top of a point of land. As the dawn light came further over the sea, I knew navigation had beaten the odds and we were on target. Somebody said: "Rouse the General. We've made it—God knows how!"

The Ramrod Carriage—As Always

MacArthur had wrapped himself in a field coat and tried to sleep. Now he meticulously shook salt spray off his famous gold-braid cap and began to show the first signs of impatience. On a long wooden dock at Cagayan, officers were waiting for us, their faces as anxious and gray as ours.

Mrs. MacArthur came from her cabin, unsteady now but still very much occupied with her household. She told me the *amah* was helpless, so I went below to carry young Arthur to a car.

There wasn't time for lengthy farewells. The General had to be whisked off before anybody realized who he was. The ordeal had left the 62-year-old man drawn and weary, so I was surprised to see him a few minutes later on the dock. The old ramrod carriage was as always, and so, too, the sonorous voice and piercing eyes. He had only a few words for the PT crews, but we aren't likely to forget them:

"You have taken me out of the jaws of death, and I won't forget it. God bless you."

Then he walked off, a jaunty spring coming back in his step. He has remarkable powers of recovery, I thought wearily, and, as history proved, that was a darn good observation.