

# DEATH AMONG THE DEAD

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Condensed from a pamphlet

**H**E DIED in the hold, half-naked, lying on the floor in the darkness and filth, among men who were too accustomed to death and too near death themselves to make any fuss over him. When he was dead, they stripped the body, giving what clothes he had to the living, and then they dragged the corpse into the patch of light underneath the hatchway. They left it there until six bodies accumulated.

Then the boatswain, whose duty it was, tied a running bowline around the knees and a half-hitch around the neck, looked up, and called, "All right. Take it away." The rope tightened, and the body of Carl W. J. Hausmann rose slowly up the shaft of sunlight, gaunt, bronzed, naked, while the men watched dully, wondering when they would go up that way too. The body bumped against the hatch and slid out of sight. They could hear the shuffle of feet and the jabber of Japanese as it was dragged across the deck and stacked near the railing with the other American dead.

A sailor said, "It's tough. He was a good man. He knew Ja-

panese."

Carl Hausmann died as an officer in the Army of the U. S.; the citation the government eventually sent to his mother never mentioned the fact that he was a chaplain, a priest—but he had come down into the tropics as a missionary. He had once been pastor to the lepers on Culion in the Philippines. And it was not only Japanese he knew; he could speak ten languages.

When he organized the lepers' glee club on Culion, the singers could not always understand each other, because they came from different islands and spoke different languages. But they all understood Carl. He was their bond of union. In him they were united. He taught the tenors in Tagalog, the basses in Visayan, the very old in Spanish, and the very young in English. He had a natural gift of tongues.

In the prison camps of Mindanao, merely by listening to the guards and asking them questions, he learned a little Japanese. With his Japanese grammar he learned swiftly, because his mind was calm, orderly, peaceful.

After his ordination as a priest of the Society of Jesus he was sent to the tropics. His first job was procurator and teacher of Greek in a Philippine novitiate. It was not quite the way he had dreamed it: studying native dialects at night by the light of a kerosene lamp, stripped to the waist, with a towel around his neck to soak up the sweat; balancing books and checking over bills before he went to bed; waking to stare at the white mosquito net and wonder where the money would come from to keep the novitiate going; listening to the lizards on the wall calling, "Gecko! Gecko!" He had not contemplated Mass before daylight amid a buzzing of bugs, pronouncing the words of Consecration while holding one hand over the chalice to prevent the insects from falling into it; watching roaches at breakfast crawling across the table, climbing up the coffee pot; walking in the morning sun in the white dust of a road, his sweat-soaked cassock plastered against his back, to teach catechism; chopping down the cogon grass with the native laborers, grass that grew to be 12 feet high, and blushing when he paid the men 50¢ a day. He had not looked forward to reading his office on his knees in the chapel in the early afternoon, regularly, every day, for two years, while the bright sun beat down on the tin roof and

the white heat stood still around him—immersed in heat, bathed in it, breathing it, then the darkness and coolness of the rain; teaching Greek in the evening to bright-eyed young Filipinos while the rain washed the windows and drummed on the bamboo walls—that was nice; waking to the rain for six months on end—the constant sound and smell of it as it fell steadily night and day, dripping from the roof.

But Carl liked the tropics, and the Filipinos liked him, his calmness, the humor in his eyes, his patient grin, his willingness to work and learn, the breadth of his shoulders, his gentleness in the classroom. He was a big, lean man, and strong; but in class he was as understanding as a mother, blaming himself if ever his pupils did not get the matter.

The priests who lived with him sometimes sank into chairs in the recreation room and damned the world in general, grumbling about the meals, the monotony, their schedule, rain, heat. This is the privilege of men who are working hard. They don't really mean it, and it seems to make them feel better. But in those sessions Carl Hausmann would say nothing at all. He would sit in silence memorizing Tagalog or Visayan words from little slips of paper which he carried in all his pockets. He never protested about anything.

The only thing he did not like about his job was that it was too easy.

He volunteered for Culion. Once he had read an article by a woman traveler who had paid a flying visit to a leper colony in China. She reported in a gush of fervor that lepers were the happiest people in the world, because, having nothing else to live for, they turned completely to God. He wondered...? He arrived at the island, and it was not true. Lepers are like everybody else.

Years later his memories of the colony were not all beautiful: the eyes of the old sick ones as they watched a new shipload of patients coming; the shrewdness and greed in their high shrill voices as they tried to establish some distant relationship with a strong small boy, so that they could take him to their hut and have him work for them; the anger of the young men when the nuns set up a protective dormitory for girls; the sallow faces peering in through the bars, cursing the Sisters; the lepers on their beds who laughed at him and said, "If there is a God, then why do we suffer so?"; the leper sitting on the edge of his bed in the early morning, receiving Communion—the later startling discovery that he had not been to confession in years, and his indifferent shrug, saying, "Well, why not? You give. I take"; the sullen

lepers who went out on the sea in tiny fishing boats, working savagely in the sun, so that the fever would take them and they would die.

But there were sweet things, too: his glee club and the orchestra; the young lepers who wept for their sins and begged for a great penance because they wanted to be good; giving Communion to the little children whose heads would not come up above the altar rail—they stood with their hands folded across their breasts, with the leprosy in their faces and innocence in their eyes; the gratitude of the bad cases in the hospital when he came to them each day; the smile of the sick when he spoke to them in their own tongue; the quiet tears when he anointed them; the last pressure of their hands on his just before they died; the eyes that followed him through the wards, worshipping eyes, so grateful that there were still good men in the world; the sudden deep resolve to pray more, and work harder, to be worthy of these lepers who loved him; back home repairing the roof on his chapel as the sun went down; the little shiver of satisfaction, the feeling of strength and power that comes from working with your own hands; writing the history of the colony in the evening; writing to his mother in German; reading Greek, because he

liked it; the moonlit nights by the sea, when the children of lepers, born on the island but born clean, took his hand and asked him questions about Manila and New York and lands other than Culion.

He felt when he went to bed that the work was good, that he was doing something. He probably would have felt the same toward any souls that came under his care; it just happened that the lepers were assigned to him. Still his heartstrings were all wound around Culion when finally his transfer came. Gaunt, drawn, sick, he did not want to go. Superiors had sent him there, and superiors took him away. He stood in the back of the boat, and the children sang for him on the shore, and he watched the island until it was a line on the face of the sea, until it was gone.

Mindanao, which was his destination, is not the largest tropical island in the world, but it is very big. It has an area of 36,000 square miles and a population of nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  million. Its southern tip lies about  $5\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  north of the equator. It contains Mohammedan Moros, famous for head-hunting, and wild black dwarfs called Negritos, famous for poisonous blow-pipes. The island has cities, of course, with schools and colleges, hundreds of thousands of good Filipino Catholics. But large

chunks of Mindanao are marked on the map as unexplored. Most of the people live in tiny towns and villages called *barrios*, buried in the hills, and it is a priest's job to get to them. Some priests are able to rattle cheerfully over the mountains in flivvers which civilization has long since abandoned; some ride through the passes on horseback; the Belgians go by bicycle. Carl walked.

His new parish was all mountains and jungle, with swamps springing up in the rainy season. He could get to the villages much faster on foot through the forest paths than by the circuitous route of the roads.

It was here that the war closed in on him. The first real signs that he saw and heard were Japanese planes roaring low over the trees. For months our army fought on Mindanao coasts without air or artillery support. Then the Americans began a slow, bloody retreat back into the interior hills. In a town called Impulatao they set up a base hospital, to which they carried the wounded from Digos, Davao, and Zamboanga. The chief surgeon was Doctor Davis, newly enlisted in the army. He had been a civilian, practicing in Negros, until the war swept over the islands. The hospital had no chaplain at all. Then one morning as he was driving in toward the town, the

doctor saw a tall, lean figure striding along the road ahead of him, dressed in a white cassock. The doctor pulled up alongside, and said, "Where to?"

"Hospital," said Carl.

"What do you want to go to the hospital for?"

"I thought that they might need a priest."

They did need him badly, because the Americans were losing on all fronts; more wounded were pouring into the hospital than the staff could handle, and he was the only priest. Eventually, at the request of the hospital commanding officer and with the permission of his own superior, he became a regular military chaplain. They inducted him formally. Two days later the army surrendered, the Japanese came in, and he was a prisoner of war.

Carl's career as a captive began when the stocky, confident, slant-eyed little guards marched all the Americans into a barbed-wire pen at Impulatao in Mindanao. It wasn't so bad at first. Carl had never set much stock on food. He didn't mind the rice. He built a wooden altar in the barracks, with tabernacle, and said Mass for the men every morning.

But then they were transferred to the penal colony at Davao to work in the rice fields. This was

not so good: rations down to rice and greens; constant hunger; long days in the sun, no water to bathe in, not enough water to drink; skin disease and dysentery—dysentery, the curse of every prison camp in the tropics, wasting big men down to bony frames with yellow skin and sunken eyes; hundreds of sweating men sleeping close together like galley slaves; roll call in the morning, the burial of the dead.

Here Carl began to put wine into his chalice with an eyedropper, pronouncing the words of Consecration over a small host, giving the men tiny fragments for Communion. He tried to stretch the hosts and wine, because no one knew how long the war would last. It was two years already. Then the altar breads ran out, and Mass stopped altogether.

The labor crews went into the rice fields in orderly rotation, so that each man would have regular days to rest. The major in charge of Carl's barracks, who later died with him on the boat, noticed that Carl was always in the fields, substituting on his rest days for other men. The major didn't like it. He himself was in charge of assigning men to work details, because the Japanese merely demanded a certain amount of work from each barracks, and they didn't care who did it. Because

the major thought he had made a just distribution of labor, he questioned Carl about those whose places he was taking. "They're sick," said Carl, "and they can't work."

"He said they were sick," the major repeated, months later, in the hold of the ship, "and my God, you should have seen him! His body was a mass of festering scabs from rice rash."

Late in June, 1944, the Davao prisoners were shipped north to Cabanatuan on Luzon. It was a big camp, filled with the survivors of Bataan and Corregidor. They worked on a Japanese airdrome. Carl was bearded and bronze as a native now, indistinguishable in the truckloads of half-naked men who were carried at dawn each day from the camp to the airfield. He was just another laborer in a crowd of laborers, pushing a wheelbarrow in the sun. He was just another bent back shoveling shale, one more mouth in the rice line, one more hungry American soldier climbing back into the Japanese truck at night, standing, waiting while the others packed in too, until their bodies pressed close together, jolting back to the barracks in the darkness with his arms thrown across the shoulders of his fellow prisoners, too tired to talk. At night he was like everyone else too: he prayed for freedom and dreamed of food.

But there was an altar at Cabanatuan, and hosts and wine, and every morning by candlelight he said Mass. That made him different. It left a glow within him which lasted through the day. He said Mass so reverently that even the other priests were impressed, and non-Catholics came to watch him. Catholics called him "St. Joseph." Non-Catholics called him "the Holy Ghost." They did not mean to be irreverent. It was merely their way of indicating that to them he stood for the whole of Christianity, for religion in general, for God.

When men met him, they began immediately to think of heaven and hell and their own private sins. One survivor who knew him only slightly said, "Maybe he was too much at home with God. He was so thoroughly in the state of grace that it made the rest of us feel unclean, uncomfortable. It's not natural for a man to give away his food when he is starving, to work for someone else when he himself can hardly stand up. Holiness is an easy thing to hate, and he was holy, but we liked him."

He never complained, fought back, nor cursed his captors. He never even lost his temper with the kleptomaniac in the camp who stole his Mass kit and offered to sell it back to him piece by piece.

He obeyed superior officers immediately and without question. General Sharp testifies that he was a splendid soldier.

Once he resisted the guards. It was a gray morning late in November, 1944, in the stone courtyard of Old Bilibid penitentiary, Manila. He was saying Mass. It was his fourth prison camp and his 31st month as a prisoner. He had no shoes, but he still had vestments and a missal, and a Filipina woman had sent wine and hosts through a Japanese colonel. Barefoot, bearded, with the men kneeling behind him on the stones, and his corporal spread on a packing box, he had just begun the Consecration when the siren sounded. It meant they were under air raid, that American planes were over the city, and prisoners should get to their cells.

The men scattered reluctantly, while Carl went on with the Mass. A guard barked at him, but he stood with his eyes on the Host and did not move. The guard came up, barked again, and struck him with the butt of his rifle. Carl would not move. A seaman who saw the thing says the guard flew into a sudden wild rage and began to club the priest, beating him with the rifle butt for a full ten minutes. The sailor's estimate of time during a crisis like that is probably not reliable; such a ten-minute beating should have killed

him. Other prisoners ran shouting into the courtyard, and the angry guard left the altar to drive them back. When he had gone, Carl finished the Consecration of the chalice, consumed the Body and Blood, and went back to his cell.

Toward mid-December, 1944, the Japanese shipped 1,619 prisoners of war out of Manila bay, out into the China sea, in a liner called the *Oroyku Maru*. It was bound for Japan, but American submarines sighted it before it had cleared the mouth of the harbor. American planes bombed and strafed it for a night and a day, driving it in toward shore, until it ran aground off Olongapo in Subic bay. There the planes came in low and planted three bombs squarely in the rear hold. There was panic below decks, and the prisoners made a bolt for the ladders, swarming one over the other up to the hatchway. The terrified Japanese turned machine guns on them, firing point-blank, forcing them back into the bowels of the ship.

Then the *Oroyku Maru* caught fire, the ammunition exploded, and the Japanese began to push off in lifeboats. At last the prisoners were allowed to abandon ship too, and they poured up into the morning sunlight, wild-eyed, half-starved, most of them wounded. They went over the side into the

sea. The water was cool, calm, green in the tropic sun, and Carl Hausmann swam easily through the oil and wreckage, feeling the smart of the salt water in his wounds, cheering as the American planes dove and fountains of flame sprang from the *Oroyku Maru*.

It was a swim of only 500 yards, and some of the men dreamed of escape into the hinterland. But a division of Japanese infantry was encamped on shore. When Carl crawled up on the beach, they had already set up a perimeter around the strip of white sand; and wherever he looked, little yellow men sat silently behind their machine guns, waiting for someone to make a break. It was sinister and dramatic, like a moving picture, only it was real.

After a while, they were marched off to a tennis court, where they stayed for a week without cover, roasting in the sun by day and shivering on the cement by night in the swift temperature change common in the tropics. The heat and cold seemed only a little thing, but it is what those who went through it remember most. It was worse than hunger and thirst. Four times during the seven days each man received one tablespoonful of raw rice. There was no other food and very little water. They buried their dead in the soft dirt beside the court.

The living were packed into a

freighter; Carl was assigned to a spot low in the stern, above the propeller shaft. It was a lucky position.

Off Takao in Formosa the bombers came again, and scored a direct hit in the forward hold. The Japanese looked down at the bloody mess, at the welter of wounded and dying and dead in the hold. Then they locked the hatch and kept it locked for 48 hours as the ship limped into port. The forward hold was filled with agony. At night it was pitch black, with the living pinned beneath the corpses, and the blood of the dead running down over them, and the wounded crying for help, and no one able to help anyone else.

At dawn the light trickled through cracks in the deck; but with it came the sight of bodies, the sight of open wounds and the faces of the dying. With the sun came the heat and the stench. Men wept with pain and crept up the steel ladder and beat on the cover of the hatch, begging to be released. That is why the papers called this a hell ship.

There was no relief for ten days. Then in the harbor a barge came alongside with a boom and tackle and cargo net, and the Japanese opened the hatch. Of the 500 men who were in that hold, only seven were still alive.

Carl lay on the deck in the sunlight and watched the wire net rise out of the hold, filled with the naked bodies of his friends. The net swung over the side and down to the barge, dumping its load in a tangle of arms and legs and upturned faces. It came back empty, throwing its shadow across the deck, and dipped again into the hold. The barge was overloaded when finally it made for shore, where the prisoners who were living tied ropes around the ankles of the dead and dragged them up on the beach, leaving them there for Japanese cremation.

Actually the rest of the voyage was so ghastly that solid, sober citizens have to read four accounts of it by independent witnesses before they begin to believe it. The deliberate starvation, each man receiving every three days half a cup of rice and a quarter of a cup of water; naked men sleeping in sitting posture, with their heads down and their arms around their knees like Indian fakirs praying; the boatswain making the rounds in the gray light of morning, putting his hands on each man to see if he was alive or dead; the bodies being hauled out of the hold; old grudges coming to the fore in the darkness; suicide and murder.

A young pharmacist's mate crept over to a cluster of warrant officers and said, "Look. I've lost

my nerve. The fellows in my bay are plotting to kill me." They told him it was his imagination, a case of nerves, that he must follow the general order and go back to his bay. He shook his head and said,

"It's not my imagination." But he went back. And in the morning they found him dead, with his stomach slit open.

A navy chaplain kept reading aloud from his Bible. If ever you have had this done to you when you were under strain, hour after hour, you know what a torture it is. The men around him cursed and gritted their teeth and stopped their ears. But suddenly the chaplain screamed, began to tear the pages out of the book, and throw them around the hold, wildly. He bolted for the ladder and got halfway up before the men pulled him back and tied him down.

A sailor tried to slip up that ladder at night. There were three quick shots from the guard, and the body slumped back into the hold.

Flies and stench and festering wounds. The four cans which the Japanese had given them to use, as latrines were filled and flowing over, dysentery, diarrhea, filth everywhere. Father Cummings standing up in the hold, strong and praying; Father Cummings too weak to pray any more; Fa-

ther Cummings dead, his body being hauled out of the hold, up into the light; Father Duffy delirious in a corner, demanding they bring him ham and eggs; heat, suffocation, fever—a man going mad with thirst and knifing his neighbor, slashing his wrists and sucking his blood before the boy was dead; the bodies being hauled out of the hold—hunger and thirst, madness and blank despair.

It was in this dark hold, where he had absolved so many sinners, that Father Hausmann made his own last confession, was sorry for all his sins, blessed himself, and died.

In the pocket of his ragged shorts, after the body had been hauled up on deck, they found his

rosary and his stole, the only things he had saved.

It is not certain that he was buried in the Japanese sea. At one moment the corpses were stacked near the railing; a little later, when one of the men was brought up on deck, they were gone. There was no sign of them, not even in the sea. Some of the bodies were long dead and should have floated. The man saw streaks on the deck from the spot near the railing to the hatch which led to the boiler room. Perhaps the Japanese, who needed fuel badly, used the bodies to stoke the ship on toward Japan.

It was a strange ending for such a gentle, quiet priest.

## MISSION UNACCOMPLISHED

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The class, composed mainly of veterans, was taking a psychology exam. One Bright Boy, who literally knew all the answers, began tapping them out in Morse code.

But seconds later on answering tapping came from the instructor's desk. "Too bad, boys; I was in the Army, too."

The Mundelein College Review

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Joe Stalin reported his pipe had been stolen. The next morning the secret-police chief announced with pride that 12 suspects had been arrested.

"Well," said Joe, "I found the pipe in my other coat, so you can release the lot."

"But we can't," said the police chief in horror, "they've all confessed."

—Ceylon Messenger