

Through the Sky to Bacolod on an Errand of Mercy

How the Army Answered the Call for Help for a Wounded Man

Gangrene attacked the flesh of a young Spaniard wounded by a bolo wielded by a workman employed under him at Escalante, Occidental Negros, early in November, and a wire was sent to Manila for serum to save the fellow's life. But boats would be too slow in reaching Bacolod, where the man lay in hospital, so some one thought of Camp Nichols and the Army Air Service. Certainly, every time. The request was made about 10 a. m. November 10, and by 10:30 a. m. Lieutenant J. D. Corkille had Captain D. B. Howard as a passenger with him, Lieutenant D. W. Watkins had Captain R. E. Elvins, flight surgeon, as a passenger with him, and the two big Loening amphibians were winging their way to Bacolod, after an awkward



Beached at Bacolod

start because of the rough sea running at Corregidor, causing a delay of one hour.

Maybe a brief note taken by Captain Elvins will convey what this means:

"Watkins says the ship is heavily loaded with gasoline, and that we may have trouble getting off. We taxi her down the runway and let her down into the water by means of ropes, to prevent her entering the water too fast. We taxi out about a mile, and I am literally sprayed with saltwater. Then he gives her the gun and we gain speed. I get another ducking, we gain speed, the ship dips backward and forward, the hull slaps the water, and we are off." But the water got into the distributor of the other machine, and it had to be dried out, while Watkins circled overhead and finally landed until a fresh start could be made by both machines.

Nothing untoward happened on the flight, steering was by compass and map, and a perfect landing in the cove at Bacolod was made at 2:40 p. m., time of trip 3 hours and 9 minutes. Bacolod gave a grand welcome to the officers and Captain Elvins immediately conferred on the case with the hospital doctor. The serum was administered, tubes inserted to drain away the puss, the candles removed from about the

bed, and the priest and relatives and friends, grouped about for the last sacrament, requested to retire. Captain Elvins soon had the patient encouraged and fairly comfortable, with his pulse gaining and his temperature going down. There was, of course, no hope of saving the arm, as both surgeons knew, but there was a chance to save the man's life—just a fighting chance. It would be up to the Bacolod surgeon alone, after the few hours that Captain Elvins could remain with him; and he was certainly capable and grateful for Elvins' help.

After three hours, Elvins visited the patient again, noting continued improvement; and so it was after six hours, and after nine. The others motored and golfed. Bacolod was lavish in hospitality: Gifford "Giff" Jones gave up his room in the hotel to the visiting officers; the provincial commander made them gifts of antique weapons; the governor and all officials shared the appreciation of the crowds that congregated wherever the officers went. But more had been done than was realized, to get there quickly, for the straight course lay over land about half the way, including Panay island, and "hope the motor does not quit now, as we could never get down without cracking up, and the only thing to do would be to take to the chute." Of course this anxiety left the fliers when they reached the sea.

Next morning at 10:30 a. m. the officers began their flight back to Manila after Captain Elvins had again seen the patient and conferred with the hospital surgeon. Several letters to Manila afterward told of the steady improvement of the patient's condition, and a telegram spoke of his being practically out of danger, and then he suffered a hemorrhage and went west. But that the trip was vain makes it no less admirable, and so the people concerned feel about it.

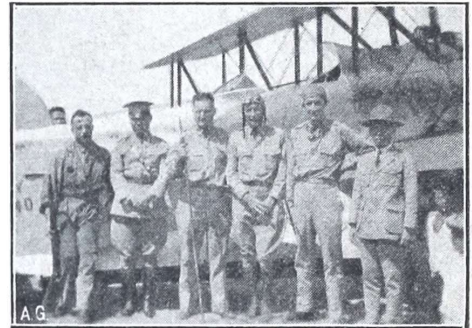
The fliers returned to Manila via Iloilo, going there to lunch with Jones and participate in the celebration of Armistice Day. As the assembled throng at Iloilo stood uncovered for a moment, gazing over the sea and paying a silent tribute to the victims of the Great War, the two planes rose over the horizon and presently landed off Fort San Pedro. (Captain Elvins was a surgeon in that war, where he learned to battle death desperately.)

Off for Manila the next morning, November 12, but just as at Corregidor going down, a heavy sea is running and a wet motor quits. One plane is up, this disabled one drifts out toward Guimaras and her companion lands for a launch to tow her back. Captain Howard and Lieutenant Corkille are really in peril. They take turns cranking the engine, standing out on the wings to do so. But they drift on, toward the shoals and rocks of the Guimaras shore—prepared to swim for it if the anchors don't take hold soon enough; or prepared to jettison the engine to keep the plane afloat. Mean-

while they continue cranking. A light sailboat passes near, and a naked boy dives overboard grasping a tow between his teeth and swimming for dear life toward the plane.

He is blanched with fear as he approaches, he beckons and calls for a hand. Lifted up, he explains, as the tow is made fast, that the waters there are infested with sharks and the coastmen in the sailboat were afraid the officers would have to try swimming. Howard and Corkille can believe this, for something has lunged against one of the wheels of the craft and blown out its thick pneumatic casing with the force of an explosion of dynamite. Towed to the lea of the island, however, they presently get the motor started and fly back over Iloilo to signal their companions.

The second start from Iloilo is made at 2:35 p. m., and all goes well until the planes are opposite Mindoro, near Maestre de Campo. Here it is Watkins and Elvins who have trouble, something wrong with the generator, and they land on the water, signaling the others to go on



Farewell at Bacolod: Left to right: Lt. Corkille, Capt. Jesus, Lt. Watkins, Capt. Howard, Capt. Elvins, and Dr. Orosa, surgeon at the Bacolod Hospital.

to Corregidor; but the others land too, to give aid. Sheltering the planes in a cove, all go to the hospitable village of Concepción, where the *presidente* and the school principal and others take charge of their welfare and bed them for the night in the school house. Next morning Corkille and Howard are to make it in, and Corkille is to come back with repairs, but in the end this proves unnecessary, and Watkins' and Elvins' plane, tinkered up somehow, lands at Corregidor at 2:30 p. m., Corkille and Howard beating them in by only 20 minutes.

As at Bacolod, where he was on call constantly, Captain Elvins finds plenty to do in a professional way at Maestre de Campo. There are no mosquitoes, and no malaria. The people of Concepción, some 600 souls, taught by the same school master for 17 years, have become industrious, peaceful and thrifty. Steamers come from Romblon only once or twice a year, there is little contact with the outside world, and no immigration. The water supply from an artesian well is wholesome. Once each year the Romblon health officer is supposed to visit the place, but last year he didn't. The people cling to their customs, they were practicing for the

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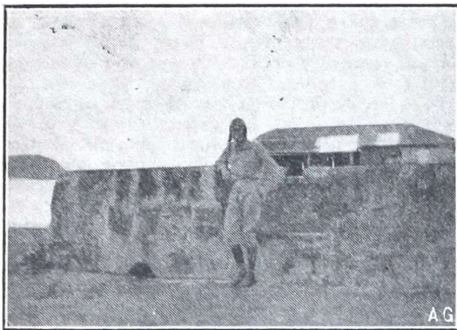
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Fort San Pedro, Iloilo.

annual fiesta on the evening the officers visited them, so the visitors went to see the moro-moro dances and hear the weird music. The music master, in red knee drawers and undershirt, was in his element. He had written the piece and wanted it well executed: one violin and two guitars comprise the instruments.

The music master stands close to each player in turn, and to each singer of the two couples in the stage parts, cocks his ear and listens. He dominates, the others getting great merriment out of his dignity, and he makes corrections, whether they are due or not. Next morning, while Watkins tinkers the motor, Elvins ruminates.

"What could be done for these people! Modern water system and sewage, teach them sanitation. Put shoes on them, and prevent the

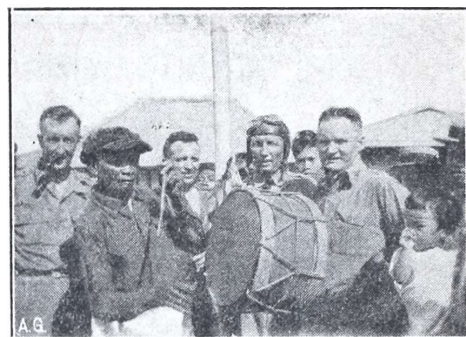
hookworm which is very common. Teach the children athletics. Set up a small hospital; operate all cases of hare-lip (which may be due to too close intermarriage); install a modern maternity ward, and cut down infant mortality. Give them dental treatment, and a balanced diet. Increase their opportunities for schooling, they only have the primary grades now. * * * It surely would be an opportunity to show what modern medicine and sanitation could do. They are isolated, so that there would be no intermingling with neighboring islanders. What an opportunity for some medical man and some money!"

Such were the thoughts of the officers, getting back from their errand of mercy. One of them is Captain Howard. But who is he? Only the fellow who, just a short year ago, when all other communications were cut off after the typhoon in Batangas, swerved down over the plaza there and caught a message held up to him on a bamboo pole! He had first dropped a message, listing the information wanted by the Red Cross in Manila and telling the people how to rig the pole. The provincial governor wanted to keep the message pouch, and it ought to be hanging today in the provincial building of Batangas, a memento of the exploit. Too many of these incidents, all in the day's work of the service, pass with but little notice of them. But the Spaniards who wanted the relief taken to their countryman at Bacolod wouldn't have things go that way; they tendered a banquet and reception, and supplemented them with speeches of international accord and esteem.

We have been enjoying the courtesy of the Army and Navy, in a submarine and in an aeroplane. Lieutenant-Commander Hans, with lieft of Commander McCormick and officials above them, took us diving in a submarine. We saw the waters rise above us, as we twice plunged toward the bottom, and we glanced through the periscope at the traffic on the surface. Two big Diesels hurled us along the surface, and huge batteries took care of us under the surface. It was thrilling but all right * * * so long as it was all right. Hans' men told us privately that he is one of the great masters of the game, all carried on in mathematics. They felt safe, so did we.

Then Lieutenant Woodruff, with the consent of the officials above him, took us flying from Camp Nichols to Stotsenburg in a bomber.

We have signed releases from responsibility and donned parachutes and climbed into the rear cockpit. In an emergency we are to jump, count five and pull the cord releasing the chute. There is the run down the field, the take-off, the banking, quite steeply, into the course; and as we mount higher the city and all the country round about lie like a colorful mosaic pattern of a toyland beneath us. People appear like ants, motors like crawling flies, rivers like silver ribbons on green baize. The air is bumpy, the head wind strong, but we fly on safely, from 86 to 92 miles per hour and arc there in 35 minutes. This is man's mastery of the last unconquered element. We think Woodruff is flying low, but 2100 feet isn't really low; and we think he is flying slow, but the speedometer says no. On one side the sea, on the other the delta lands and meandering streams and ditches with the salt beds and fish farms and rice and sugar fields in

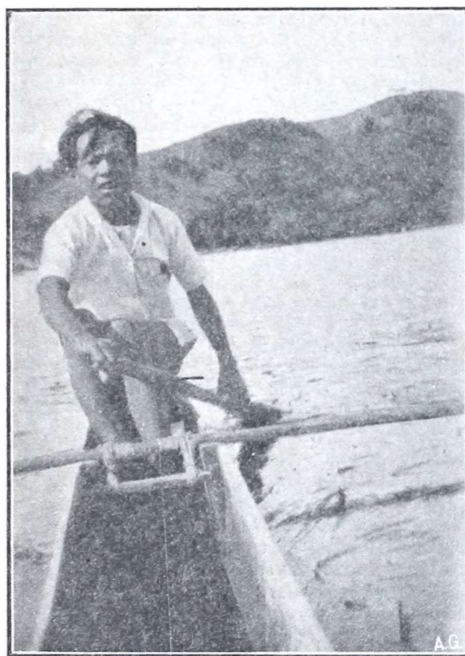


At Concepción: The drum assembles the people in meetings. Left to right, Americans: Elvins, Corkille, Howard, and Watkins.

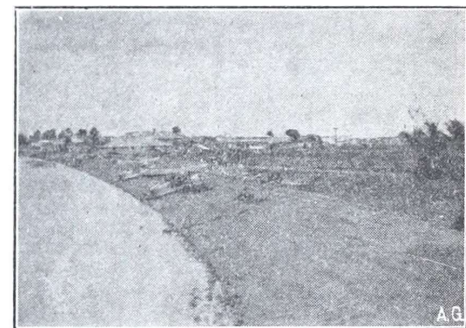
between, and the towns with their toy houses and their plazas and churches—all appearing insignificant and blended into perspective.

Presently there is only land, walled in by mountains. And we do fly lower, over only sugar fields and sandy roads where we can distinguish footprints from wheel tracks. We have already passed a sugar mill, the trains in the yard are toy trains on toy tracks, and pigmy men are moping (so it seems) at puny jobs—as if mechanically moved. This low flying disturbs us, there would not be space in which to jump clear and pull the cord. But lo, we are landing! The trip is over, and without stopping the engines Woodruff wheels around, takes off and returns to Manila, the round trip in little more than an hour.

Flying is soon to become very common in the Philippines, and convenient: it's the logical way to get from Iloilo or Cebu to Manila with mails and passengers whose time is money. Additional landing fields are needed, though, as a factor of safety for even the amphibian type. Once begun, commercial flying should develop rapidly. Try a flight and you'll be for it. And you'll have a better appreciation of what it means. How excellently, by the way, our fliers have been performing; only two serious accidents in two years. Talking accurately about it isn't being done, but think of all the flying in that time, flying to all points of the islands, often on sheer errands of mercy. It's modern chivalry.—W. R.



He rowed the aviators ashore at Maestre de Campo.



Beached at Iloilo

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