

THE S. S. MACTAN COMES THROUGH

The full story of how Filipino and American wounded were evacuated by the Red Cross on the mercy ship, "S. S. Mactan," from Manila to Australia, a few hours before the Japanese occupation of the Philippine Capital.

SHE was an old-fashioned little ship, perhaps, but friendly and familiar to thousands of Filipinos. They recognized her black hull and her white superstructure, her single funnel with the feather of smoke drifting skyward, her prow slitting the waters at a proud twelve knots.

Twenty years ago, she was the fastest inter-island ship in the Philippines. She used to make trips out of Manila, down through the curling blue waters to the Visayas, to Mindanao, as far as the Sulu islands, carrying schoolbooks and sewing machines, students coming home for the holidays and business men out to line up a deal in Cebu, and government officials coming down to Zamboanga on an inspection trip.

HER name was the *Mactan*.

She had served out her time well, and she was tired. But her career had not ended. One day in December, 1941, planes came out of the sun and poured death onto the Philippines. The bombs pitted Manila, aimed especially at the strategic docks. They plunged through the docks of anchored ships, they tore through masts and rigging, they ate great gaping holes in fat freighter hulls. One after another, the trapped vessels settled to the bottom. By December 29, only one ship was left: the *Mactan*. Her very name recalled valor and defiance for Mactan is the island where, in 1521, freedom-loving Filipinos killed the invader Ferdinand Magellan, who discovered the Philippines for Spain.



—Courtesy of The Philippines Star Press

Filipino doctors and nurses from the Mercy ship "Mactan." These were the men and women who nursed the wounded soldiers from Manila to Australia. At present they are detailed to various military units by the U. S. government. Front row, left to right: Mrs. Visitación C. Rodriguez, Mrs. Salud Valencerina, Mrs. Miriam Fowles, Miss Basilia Hernando, Mrs. Maxima C. Aspiras, Miss Dolores Bolante, Mrs. Elisa Domingo. Second row: Mrs. Mercedes Santos, Doctors Manuel Escudero, Conrado Topacio, Gregorio Chua, Francisco J. Roman, Bernardo Limlingan, Ireneo Pantangco, Miss Maria Perez. Last row: Dr. Benjamin Setias, and nurses George Golookeff, Pedro Carpio and Apolinar Sanchez.

There was violence in Manila Bay on that day. The capital had been declared an open city. Filipino and American forces had evacuated before the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. President Manuel L. Quezon, with his family and official staff, had moved to Corregidor. The gallant defense of Bataan under General Douglas MacArthur was soon to begin.

IN MANILA were 224 wounded soldiers, 157 of them Americans and 67 Filipinos. To leave them to the Japanese—who would be within the city gates any time now—might mean consigning them to death. The Philippine Chapter of the Red Cross took over the old *Mactan*, called for volunteers to care for the wounded en route to an unnamed destination. Volunteers had to be unmarried and obviously expendable.

Six young doctors, twelve nurses and two attendants came forward. Manila-born were Dr. Gregorio Penafior Chua and Dr. Irineo Enriquez Pantangco. Dr. Francisco Jose Roman came from Batanes, in the northernmost part of the Philippines, and Dr. Manuel Miguel Escudero from Zamboanga in the far south. Dr. Conrado Stuart Topacio was from Cavite and Dr. Aguilus Limlingan, from Pampanga. In addition, there was an American medical officer, Colonel Percy G. Carroll, commandant of the U. S. army's Sternberg Hospital in Manila.

OF THE twelve nurses, ten were Filipinos, also from the various provinces. Two of them, Apolinario G. Sanchez and Pedro Carpio, were male. The others were Basilia Dunapay Hernando, Elisa Nava Domingo, Mercedes V. Santos, Maximina Corpus, Salud Ferrer Valencerina, Dolores Alacantara Bolante, Visitacion Cortes and Maria Alcantara Perez. The two attendants were also Filipinos.

By the afternoon of December 31 this group had become a closely-knit, hard-working unit. From the various military hospitals they had transported the wounded soldiers and carried them aboard the *Mactan*.

They worked until long after nightfall, when the *Mactan* began its odyssey, under the command of Captain Julian Tamayo, with a crew of eighty Filipino seamen.

The ship was jampacked. Eighty of the wounded were bedridden, and the other 144 were suffering from shell-shock. There were wounded men everywhere from stern to stern—three to a mattress—on decks and below decks.

THE FIRST stop was at nearby Corregidor for military orders. Since the *Mactan* was an inter-island steamer, she had no ocean charts. But at Corregidor, the Captain got hold of a map from a geography textbook.

Before dawn the ship again weighed anchor. A pilot boat guided her through the mine-infested bay out into the open sea.

The China sea was rough. It tossed the wounded men around mercilessly. Doctors and nurses were on 24-hour duty during the whole voyage.

One of the patients was Salvador Deyem, a Filipino soldier from the Ilocos. Deyem had seen action in Lin-

gayen during the first Japanese landing attempts. His left arm had been amputated in a Manila hospital, and on board it was necessary to operate again, amputating at the shoulder.

DEYEM's last thoughts were about the war and the enemy, "I wish I could kill more Japanese," he whispered. "They are easy to kill. They do not seek for cover."

Several days later, the *Mactan* reached Macassar in invasion-threatened Celebes. The Dutch officials furnished much-needed food, water and medical supplies. Here the ship picked up an additional patient, an American sailor afflicted with poliomyelitis. Here also Salvador Deyem and another Filipino patient were buried.

Fifteen days out of Manila, the *Mactan* reached Darwin, Australia. Here the Red Cross workers presented a complete medical report to the Australian Army Medical Corps. Captain Tamayo was ordered to proceed to Sydney, by way of Townsville and Brisbane.

BETWEEN Townsville and Brisbane, fire broke out in the engine room. While the medical staff was reassuring the patients, Private Jose Senarosa, a wounded Filipino soldier, offered to go down into the engine room. Armed with a gas mask and a fire extinguisher, he braved smoke and flames to put out the fire.

Between Brisbane and Sydney, an 18-year old Filipino patient, whose left arm had been amputated, and who apparently could no longer stand further suffering, jumped overboard. His body was never recovered.

Twenty-seven days after leaving Manila, the *Mactan* arrived at its destination. The patients were transferred to an Australian Army Hospital.

"After the novelty of our 'heroism' wore off, we found ourselves billed in a Sydney hotel and subjected to a long period of enforced idleness," said Dr. Roman, senior member of the medical staff on the *Mactan*. In his report to President Quezon.

AFTER six months in Australia, the Filipino doctors and nurses arrived in Los Angeles aboard a United States Army transport.

The Filipino doctors, except one who became seriously ill, were commissioned in the United States Army as first lieutenants, and assigned to the First Filipino Infantry Regiment now training in California. Later they were sent to the Medical Field Service School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, over whose main entrance is carved a quotation from Jeremy Taylor: "TO PRESERVE A MAN ALIVE IN MIDST OF CHANCES AND HOSTILITIES IS AS GREAT A MIRACLE AS TO CREATE HIM."

Four of the women nurses are now serving at the Henry Street Settlement in New York. One is working at the Methodist Hospital in Los Angeles. The two male nurses are with the California University Hospital in San Francisco.

And the old *Mactan* when she was last heard of some months ago, was in war service in the Southwest Pacific.