

Thord-Robinson: Soldier of Fortune

By H. W. LOMBARD

In command of a company of the famous Philippine Constabulary with which I had been in the field in the north central part of Luzon, I had been called to Manila and told that certain military steps were to be taken in Mindanao with a view to putting a stop to a general unrest which seemed to be affecting the Moros. This meant that I was to bring my company into Manila, draw new equipment and supplies and sail for the Northern Coast of Mindanao.

A short period in Manila and off we went for Mindanao. We sailed for Iloilo, on the Island of Panay, and there we were to wait for a Coast-Guard Cutter which was to pick us up and take us to a point on the Northern Coast of Mindanao and there dump us off on the edge of the jungle to shift for ourselves. The prospect was pleasing to me and when we were told pink with the prospect of field service in Mindanao. On the trip down, their principal talk was of fighting in general and more specifically of the new women whom they would conquer.

When we got to Iloilo we found no coast-guard cutter so I put my men up in the local Constabulary cuartel and myself went to live with Captain Bobby Page, the provincial commander. He was quite a little older than I and much senior. We were good friends and I settled down to wait for our boat. The following Sunday morning, Page and I were sitting on his veranda when the whistle and the sound of the arrival of the boat from Manila sounded. He lived on the main road leading from the muelle to the town and soon the passengers came drifting by all intent on getting quickly to their respective destinations.

We watched them pass, a heterogeneous kaleidoscopic crowd shading from sun blackened field hands through the paler clerk class to paler aristocrats. Page replying in kind to the friendly salutations and greetings shouted by those who knew him.

At the very last, up the road in the distance came a tall figure which we knew intuitively and instantly to be that of a white man. He strode briskly along under the blazing sun and I shall never forget the way his brilliantly polished riding boots glistened and gleamed as his legs moved back and forth. They were without doubt the shiniest boots I have ever seen. As he came nearer we could see that he was tall, erect and rangy; and that while well worn his riding breeches and khaki shirt were immaculately clean and well starched. He also wore at the correct military angle a well weathered campaign hat. He was followed by an Ilongo boy who carried a clothing and a bedding roll.

As he approached, Page stepped to the edge of the porch and called to him, inviting him to come up and have a drink. He accepted, and when he got to us it was easily seen that there was an educated man, a man of breeding and we felt that his acceptance he had conferred a favor on us. It is difficult for me to describe a man's face. His was striking, thin, weather beaten, intelligent and attractive. His voice was of beautifully modulated Oxford quality. He was, in all, a gentleman who knew how to be a guest.

Page explained over the whiskey-soda that he was the provincial commander, that he would have to report to him on the morrow and fill in a personal questionnaire, since the government at Manila insisted on knowing where all white men in the Philippines were. The idea seemed normal to him and he gave his name as Ivan Thord-Robinson. Astonishingly, however, the fact that he was thirty-four years old, single and English, he gave us no formal personal history. But later, at lunch, his conversation indicated that he had been in South America, although he left us in the air as to what countries he had visited.

Lunch that day was an enjoyable function and stands out as one of the most interesting at which I have ever assisted. I don't know why,

since nothing out of the ordinary was said by any of us. Our guest was a charming conversationalist, but aside from telling us why he had come, said nothing about his past. It was just an occasion when three strangers who found each other thoroughly congenial had met under the roof of a genial host in a far country. I shall never forget the charm of Thord-Robinson nor my admiration of his style of speech, his choice of words and his calm easy mannerism.

He seemed to be intensely interested in us and in our service. So interested that almost during the entire lunch he devoted himself to drawing us out. And we, so proud of the feats of our men, their bravery under fire, their shooting ability, their soldierly qualities, the heroism of our outstanding officers, the traditions of our corps, were led to story after story, viewing with each other, Page glorifying his Visayan troops and I my soldiers from north Luzon until his eyes were glowing, and his voice rang with a splendid toast to the men of the khaki and red.

His story was short, and after he finished we found that all we knew about him was that he had come to the Philippines because he had heard that here was a native army officered by white men and he wanted to join it.

Great was his disappointment at learning that in order to secure a commission one must be an American citizen and a graduate of an American college or university. Having heard that a railroad was being built on the Island of Panay, he had come to the headquarters of the American engineer to secure employment. That was his story and told us why he was with us.

The next morning took him over to the office of the chief engineer, where he was taken on as a time-keeper for one of the up-country grading camps at \$75 a month. We saw him off, and as the construction train rolled out of Iloilo I felt that I had seen the last of a soldier of fortune and a gentleman but such was not to be.

In due course my coastguard came, picked us up, and in a few days dumped us on a lovely beach at the edge of a jungle as beautiful and alluring as a siren—and as faithless. There followed a few months of hard and interesting campaigning and then into the "jewel town" of Zamboanga and back to our station at Daguapan to pick up again the threads of assisting in the preservation of law and order among the 500,000 souls of the great province of Pangasinan. Time went on. Except for minor disturbances of no importance and the occasional pursuit of roving bands of cattle thieves, interspersed with the regular round of drills, guard mounting and social contacts at the provincial capital, 13 kilometers away, nothing happened and I took leave and visited Manila.

Page had been to the States, married. On his return to Manila he had resigned and was now comfortably settled as the resident secretary of a large Canadian life insurance company. His home became a daily heaven of refuge at tea time.

After I had left Iloilo for Mindanao, he told me, an inspection trip had taken him up-country. He had met Thord-Robinson and had invited him to spend his week-ends at Iloilo. His invitation had been accepted and Page said that he had enjoyed the visits more than he ever had with any other man. Thord-Robinson had never told us any more about himself, but had proved to have those masculine qualities which enabled him to radiate companionship even though he and Page did nothing but sit together with their pipes and smoke.

One day, several months later, he had appeared with his clothing and bedding roll and told Page that he was away. He had heard that the French had a native army in French Indochina, that it was officered by whites and he was off to give it a whirl.

Page had heard from him several times and dug out his most interesting letters for me to read. To me they were all too brief and told a fascinating story.

He had arrived at Saigon and there found that it was true that the French had native troops, but the officers were all French. There was no room for him and nothing to do but move on, so he had boarded a dirty little Chinese trading steamer captained by an Englishman who had spent 30 years on the China coast and had gone to Java.

In some way he had found that the Dutch had native troops officered by white men and that they were being engaged in punitive expeditions against the Achmets, wild tribes of Java or Sumatra, who had made themselves troublesome. There it was the same story. It was true that the Dutch were having trouble with their wild tribes, and it was true that they had a native army. But the officers and leading non-commissioned officers were Dutch and the positions were only available to whites of that nationality.

Here was an impasse. Thord-Robinson had traveled far and long to achieve his purpose. His quest had led him across a continent and wide seas and he had met nothing but set-backs. His letters said nothing about disappointment, however, but here was action which he had determined to get in on in some way or other.

Taught by his experience in Saigon, he had not made the mistake of applying to the Dutch commandant. In conversation around town and at the hotel he had satisfied himself as to his ineligibility, but to the will to stay and see was indomitable. At first he decided to represent himself as a writer and ask to be allowed to go to the turbulent area in search of material. This impulse was stifled in time and he abandoned the idea upon learning that Dutch officialdom was unalterably opposed to publicity in connection with any other activity than that depicting industry, agriculture and the generally peaceful conditions in their overseas empire.

However, he did hear that their transport in the mountains was faulty and unsatisfactory in that they depended on *carpoadores*, which meant that all ammunitions, equipment and food supplies were carried on the backs or heads of friendly natives. Here was his chance.

Calling on the chief quartermaster, he told him of the wonderfully satisfactory work done by mules in other armies. Working desperately against apathy, indifference and disbelief, and carrying his fight to higher quarters he finally persuaded them to try it out in a limited way. This meant employment in a civilian capacity, a short trip to China with a Dutch officer to buy the mules, and their training, together with personnel, on his return. Altogether he had spent about 9 months, had visited and worked in the troublesome sector and was now ready to seek other fields wherein he could be active as a beligerent.

About this time Italy was having trouble with her colony in Algiers. Among her troops was a foreign legion and there in the first contingent to leave for African shores was Ivan Thord-Robinson, gentleman and soldier of fortune. His letters did not say how long he had been in Africa, nor how long a legionnaire. But they did contain a small photo showing a field piece, a few spiggatty soldiers lined up, and out in front our friend, now a captain in Madera's army in Mexico.

Back to my station. The interesting and busy routine of company administration; formations, patrols, inspection and supervision of the 23 municipal police forces in my district together with hunting and sports absorbed my time and I thought infrequently of our gentlemen adventurer. Others had swum in and out of my life and his memory dimmed.

Came 1914. The drums of war were beating and I felt that we were losing out. The jungle of accomplishment, the roll of the guns, the smog of the powder, were incessantly with me in our peaceful country and when in 1917 America went in I was soon a civilian en route to the

Stocks: Stocks in the U.K., U.S., Cuba, Java and European statistical countries were reported on June 29th as 7,671,000 tons, compared with 7,764,000 tons in 1932 and 7,634,000 tons in 1931.

Centrifugal Sales: Sales and resales of P. I. centrifugal sugar were reported in New York during the month as follows:

	Cents per lb.		
	Long Tons	From	To
Sales	17,725	3.40	3.50
Resales	21,500	3.45	3.50

LOCAL MARKET: Although exporting houses raised their quotations to ₱7.80-₱8.15 per picul, very little business was transacted at this level during the first three weeks owing to scarcity of present-crop sugar. During the last week, however, large sales of centrifugal sugar aggregating over 7000 tons were made to an ex-

porter at ₱8.00 per picul for delivery up to October 31st.

Crop Prospects: The locust menace in the sugar districts, particularly of the southern islands, has not abated in spite of the active campaign being conducted by the government entities, and it is feared that the growing crop may suffer serious damage from the winged pest.

The production for the 1933-34 crop, according to the preliminary estimates received from the individual Centrals, as cabled to Washington by the Philippine government authorities, is placed at 1,327,564 long tons equivalent to 1,486,871 short tons.

The 1932-33 crop which has already been harvested except in the case of five Centrals, which are still grinding, will probably aggregate 1,149,044 long tons equivalent to 1,286,929 short tons. The production of each individual Central is tabulated in the attached statement compiled by the Philippine Sugar Association.

PHILIPPINE CENTRIFUGAL SUGAR PRODUCTION FOR 1932-33

(Compiled by the Philippine Sugar Association, July 11, 1933)

Centrals on Negros

	Piculs	Long Tons
1. Bacod-Murcia Milling Co.	722,343	44,967
2. Binalbagan Estate, Inc.	664,719	41,379
3. Central Azucarera de Bais	769,971	47,931
4. Central Azucarera del Danao (*)	220,000	13,695
5. Central Bearin	167,280	10,413
6. Central De la Rama	85,000	5,291
7. Central Leonor	60,000	3,735
8. Central Palma	141,096	8,783
9. Central San Isidro	166,500	10,365
10. Hawaiian-Philippine Co.	1,060,221	66,000
11. Isabela Sugar Co., Inc.	449,680	27,993
12. La Carlota Sugar Central	1,209,296	75,290
13. Lopez Sugar Central Mill (*)	500,000	31,126
14. Ma-ao Sugar Central Co.	700,522	43,608
15. North Negros Sugar Co. (*)	1,279,000	79,619
16. San Carlos Milling Co., Ltd.	696,867	43,381
17. Talisay-Silay Milling Co.	823,910	51,280
18. Victorias Milling Co.	936,065	58,271
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	10,652,470	663,126

Centrals on Luzon

19. Bataan Sugar Co.	73,000	4,544
20. Calamba Sugar Estate	748,222	46,577
21. Central Azucarera de Calatagan	75,743	4,715
22. Central Azucarera de Tarlac	1,193,571	74,301
23. Central Azucarera del Norte	45,000	2,801
24. Central Azucarera Don Pedro	463,802	28,872
25. Central Luzon Milling Co.	464,343	28,909
26. Hind Sugar Company	51,210	3,188
27. Luzon Sugar Company	87,872	5,470
28. Mabalacat Sugar Co.	98,577	2,402
29. Mount Arayat Sugar Co.	176,543	10,990
30. Nueva Ecija Sugar Mills, Inc.	50,991	3,174
31. Pampanga Sugar Development Co.	1,130,433	70,371
32. Pampanga Sugar Mills	1,172,405	72,983
33. Paniqui Sugar Mills	167,648	10,436
34. Philippine Sugar Estates Dev. Co.	80,303	4,999
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	6,019,703	374,732

Centrals on Panay

35. Asturias Sugar Central, Inc.	293,391	18,264
36. Central Lourdes	15,000	934
37. Central Santos-Lopez (*)	266,000	16,559
38. Central Sara-Ajuy	109,027	6,787
39. Philippine Starch & Sugar Co.	141,910	8,834
40. Pilar Sugar Central	224,010	13,945
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	1,049,338	65,323

Central on Mindoro

41. Philippine Milling Co.	163,053	10,150
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Centrals on Cebu

42. Bogo-Medellin Milling Co.	208,904	13,004
43. Cebu Sugar Company	174,788	10,881
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	383,692	23,885

Central on Leyte

44. Ormoc Sugar Company (*)	190,000	11,828
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TOTAL..... 18,458,256 1,149,044

(*) Latest estimates, still grinding.

Philippine Exports: Export statistics for the month of June as reported to us from private sources are as follows:

	Long Tons
Centrifugals	33,847
Refined	6,395

Total for the month..... 40,242
Exports of these two grades of sugar from the Islands to the United States for the first eight months of the current crop year from November 1, 1932, to June 30, 1933, are as follows:

	Long Tons
Centrifugals	929,052
Refined	46,351

Total exports to date..... 975,403

It has been reliably estimated that a total of approximately 1,073,000 long tons equivalent to 1,090,000 metric tons will be exported to the United States from the Islands during the calendar year 1933. The amount exported from the Islands to the United States during the first half of the calendar year totals 746,124 long tons, indicating a balance of about 327,000 long tons still available for export to the United States during the last half of this year.

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naval station at Cavite to enroll for active duty in my old outfit, the navy.

Upon arrival at Manila, I phoned Page who insisted that I come out to the house to stay overnight. After a wonderful dinner, to me, Mrs. Page said, "Well, I know you boys want to wade around in blood awhile and wave the banner, so I'm leaving." She had hardly gone when Page passed me a large envelope containing a folded sheet which read as follows:

Major Ivan Thord-Robinson
and Officers
of the

Fourteenth Battalion, Sherwood Foresters
cordially invite you to be present at
Field Sports to be held on the Plains
of x x x x x at Cairo, Egypt

I cannot remember the name of the plains nor the date but the salient point was that he must at last have realized his dream; and I felt that he was back in the service from which I had always felt he had come.

In 1921 I was back to the Philippines under orders for duty ashore at Otongapo. Page was still in Manila. We had corresponded some during the war. I had hardly gotten settled when he came into my room with an Illustrated London News, on the back cover of which appeared a three-quarter length picture of a splendidly military looking officer in dress uniform. Beneath was the following:

"His Majesty, the King, has been graciously pleased to brevet Major Ivan Thord-Robinson a lieutenant colonel in the Royal Fusiliers."

Page and I filled our glasses and drank to Major Thord-Robinson's continued good fortune.