

Food and ammunition are dropped by parachute to Merrill's Marauders behind Jap lines.

Notes from a Burma Diary



BEHIND JAPANESE LINES IN NORTHERN BURMA—Odds and ends from the battered diary of a footsore YANK correspondent after his first 500 miles of marching and Jap-hunting with Merrill's Marauders:

VOLUNTEER. One of the Marauder mules balked at the bottom of every rugged Burma hill. The driver had to coax, cajole, cuss and tug at his animal constantly. Finally on one hill the mule stopped dead and lay down. That was the last straw.

"Get up, you sonuvabitch," cracked the driver, who had answered President Roosevelt's call to join the volunteer Marauders. "You volunteered for this mission, too."

UNWELCOME VISITOR. When the Marauders reached the rugged hill country of the Mogaung Valley, their columns started to string out as pack mules tumbled off ridges and bogged down in muddy ravines. Frequent messages were passed verbally from man to man up the column to keep the point platoon posted on the progress of the rear.

Usually these messages were "The column is broken behind the —th platoon" or "Lost contact with the pack train." Occasionally, however, the wording was varied, with confusion the usual result.

One rainy night, on a forced march through enemy-infested jungles, a message was passed up the line. "There's a gap in the column" was the way it started. But when it reached the front, it had changed to "There's a Jap in the column."

The front, unperturbed, sent back word to throw him out.

THEY SATISFY. In an enemy supply dump we found packs of Silver City cigarettes that showed the Jap flair for imitation. The packs were similar in size and design to those of popular U. S. brands. According to the English wording on each pack, they were manufactured by the "Eastern Virginia Tobacco Company." And there was a familiar ring to the blurb: "Silver City cigarettes are a blend of the finest Turkish, American and domestic tobaccos, manufactured by expert craftsmen and guaranteed to satisfy the most exquisite of smokers."

BOOKS OF THE MONTH. For weeks the Marauders hadn't seen a piece of mail or a scrap of reading matter. Every time transport planes roared over to drop rations and ammunition by parachute, the men sweated out a few books or magazines. Then one wonderful day after an attack on the main Jap supply route near Laban, the unit I was with finally received manna from the sky—an airdrop of books. Not many—just one book to a platoon. Eagerly we scanned the titles.

They were a "Pocket Book of Etiquette," "Children's Book of Wild Animals," "Boy Scout Handbook" and—last but not least—a "Rhyming Dictionary of Poetic Words and Phrases."

POETS: 1 QUICK, 1 DEAD. Speaking of poetry, they say that when a GI starts composing verses he's been in the jungle too long. The Marauders and the Japs they fought each had at least one jungle-happy poet laureate among them.

Representing the Marauders was T-5 Stanley

L. Benson, a gun-repair man. Here's his first effort as a poet:

*Four thousand dead Japs behind us—
A hell of a stinking mess.
The live ones now around us
Soon will join the rest.*

*When Tojo gave his orders
To kill us one by one,
He didn't know Merrill's Marauders
Would sink the Rising Sun.*

(Benson took a slight poetic license in his first line. The Marauders were credited with killing 2,000 Japs in six weeks.)

The Japs' weapon in this battle of poets was a hymn of conquest found on the bullet-riddled body of a dead Son of Heaven. It doesn't rhyme in English, but it still possesses undoubted literary merit:

*With the blood-stained flag of the Rising Sun,
I'd like to conquer the world.
As I spit on the Great Wall of China,
A multi-hued rainbow rises above the Gobi Desert.*

*On the Ganges River at the foot of majestic
Himalaya Mountains,
Sons of Nippon look for some crocodiles.*

*Today we're in Berlin,
Tomorrow in Moscow,
Home of snowbound Siberia.*

*As the fog lifts we see the City of London,
Rising high, as the ceremonial fish of Boys' Day
does.*

*Now we're in Chicago, once terrorized by gangsters,
Where our grandchildren pay homage to our
memorial monument.*

*Oh, governor general of Australia and South
America,
Only in Japan sweet odor of fragrant blossoms
permeates.*

*When I die I'll call together all the devils
And wrestle them in a three-inch rivulet.*

*I've set my mind on making my home in Singapore,
For there my darling awaits my return.*

MAIL CALL. For security reasons the Marauders could neither write nor receive mail while behind enemy lines. After two months of marching and fighting, however, they were pulled back for a rest and got that long-awaited mail drop and a chance to write V-mail replies.

In a stack of letters from the gal back home, S/Sgt. Luther S. Player of Darlington, S. C., came across this remark: "I'll bet you're seeing plenty of action." Player's unit had been cut off for 10 days while the Japs shelled and counterattacked constantly. He answered his gal's letter as fully as censorship would permit. "Baby," he wrote, "you ain't kiddin'."

T/Sgt. Joe Diskin of Hoboken, N. Y., received a letter from a pal who didn't know Diskin was overseas. Joe is a veteran of the first World War who's been in the Regular Army for 27 years and was sent back to the States from Pearl Harbor as "unfit for foreign service" because of 1918 wounds and age. His pal's letter read: "I am in Italy and have been in action. Believe me, this war is too tough for you old guys. No wonder you're back in the States." Diskin had just led his platoon against a fierce Jap counterattack. His reply is not for publication in YANK's sacred pages.

—Sgt. DAVE RICHARDSON
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One of the tough Chinese soldiers compares Tommy-gun models with Sgt. Louis Reid.



T-5 George Drugotch and a Kachin scout learn "How to Get Along with the Kachins."



Capt. Ossie Burch watches Sgt. Morris Anderson making flapjacks on a trench shovel.

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