

THE CHILDREN OF BURMA

By
Stephen Mark Rainey

*The Manuscript of Colonel Kenjiro
Terusawa, Imperial Japanese Army:*

In January, 1942, I was appointed commanding officer of the 212 Engineering Corps, a unit of the XV Army in Burma, under the direct command of Lieutenant General Shojiro Iida. For over a year I had been the Corps' executive officer; as commandant, I was charged with the responsibility of renovating a captured British airfield near the village of Myatauki, a tiny settlement of Burmese natives on the border of Thailand, about 200 miles southeast of Rangoon. In the opening days of the new year, the army had begun its invasion of Burma, both to secure its valuable oilfields and to erect a bulwark against an advance by the British from India. Gen. Iida's most immediate goal, however, was to sever and seize the Burma Road, the only means the Chinese had to supply their few strategic bases in the Yunnan Province, several hundred miles to the north. Achieving this objective would require close air support. The 212 was ordered to be on site by the morning of 21 January, and was allotted 48 hours to complete its assignment; the invasion timetable called for an Army Air Force fighter squadron to be operating from the field by 23 January, and for the airstrip to be able to support heavy bombers as needed.

For a week, escorted by the 213 Infantry Regiment, 33 Division, my unit had traveled at high speed up the Kra peninsula from southwestern Thailand on the Tenasserim Road, occasionally skirmishing with scattered regiments of the Burma Rifles, all of which were summarily defeated. Our march took us through dense jungle and low-lying farmland along the

Andaman coast, but at Ye, we turned eastward, separated from our escort, and began a long climb into the Bilauktaung highlands on a narrow, treacherous path the British had carved through the trees and underbrush.

Our ascent took us through some of the darkest and most humid jungle we had yet experienced, but my unit's bulldozers efficiently cleared our passage whenever necessary. Along the route, we encountered a wrecked tractor and a large pile of crushed rock, indicating that the British had intended to upgrade the road prior to their departure. By midmorning of the 21st, we finally saw a thinning of the green canopy far above and ahead, guiding us toward the plateau where the airfield lay. As the bulldozers and supply trucks rolled out of the jungle, the grating rumble of their engines, no longer smothered by the

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thick vegetation, echoed across the field like the exultant roars of lions suddenly freed from captivity.

The runway was a long, rutted swath of blood-red earth that stretched into the distance. I judged it to be no more than 300 meters in length; too short to accommodate any plane larger than a Ki-43 Hayabusa fighter. The only structures I could see were an open-ended Quonset hut and a larger metal framework building that had never been completed—apparently a hangar. And off to one side lay the shells of

two Hurricane MkI fighters, probably damaged in combat and abandoned when the British evacuated the site. At the far end of the strip, tall teak and mahogany trees pressed close to the runway, effectively diminishing its usable area even further. I judged that, for our G4M and Ki-21 bombers to fly in, we would need to extend the strip by another 100 meters.

I ordered my chief engineer, Lt. Isao Tajima, to reconnoiter with his squad and provide me with a realistic estimate of the time and resources necessary to complete the project. Apparently, the British had demolished the facility before leaving, specifically to hamper our progress. But Lt. Tajima soon reported to me that the existing runway could be bulldozed and partially matted by days end, the extension area cleared by mid-afternoon the follow-

ing day, and metal matting laid over the entire surface by noon on the 23rd. Satisfied, I left Tajima to oversee his task and went to coordinate siting the fuel, ammunition, and maintenance depots with Lt. Tochiro, our construction specialist. He was one of our youngest officers, a proud and pragmatic man whose brother piloted a Ki-43 in the IJAF and would likely to be assigned to the Myatauki fighter group. Tochiro looked haggard, as did most of the men, but his bespectacled eyes still gleamed with eagerness to perform his duty.

“There are several good sites for the depots, sir,” he said. “We can use some of the material left behind by the British to supplement our own. And I will have the Quonset hut set up as your HQ within an hour.”

“Excellent,” I replied, pleased that the men seemed to have been revitalized. As the work teams dispersed to begin their tasks, I went to the Quonset hut with my aide, a stern young captain named Shindo. I admit that I felt somewhat disconcerted by the tenebrous aspect of the structure; its near wall had collapsed, and inside, the ridged metal skin was blistered and blackened. The enemy had probably tossed in a couple of grenades before abandoning the place. I was about to step inside when Shindo paused and called to me, pointing upward at something beyond the hut.

I stepped back and looked in the direction he was pointing. The wooded ridge rose several hundred meters above the plateau; for a moment, I saw nothing unusual. Then I realized that the tall trees near the top of the ridge were swaying and trembling, as if something large and unseen were passing among them, moving from south to north. “What do you suppose that is?” Shindo asked.

There was no wind, and after a few moments, I detected the faintest aural vibration—something I actually felt more than heard. It was an irregular, deep buzzing, almost like the droning of an immense swarm of bees. Shortly, though, the movement amid the trees ceased, and the barely perceptible sound dwindled and died.

“Enemy?” he asked softly.

I shook my head. I did not believe that the sound could have been from engines or other machinery, but neither did it suggest some natural denizen of the jungle. “I do not wish to have our timetable ruined by attack or sabotage,” I said. “Send three men to reconnoitre. Have Sgt. Ishida lead.”

fearlessly aggressive. Regrettably, I had been forced to have them all killed, including the women and children. Lest I be judged cruel, to my mind, the greater evil would have been to spare them to live without their husbands and sons. I took no joy in the extermination of an entire village, but their almost inhuman ferocity made them too dangerous to suffer.

Shortly, my aide returned with the reconnaissance team. Sgt. Ishida was our most capable scout, a rugged man of 33 years—two years older than myself—a veteran of the bitter China campaign. He had selected two younger men: a private named Koseki, about whom I knew little, and another private named Sakai, who had been on the team that executed the natives. He seemed a ruthless, driven young man for whom the war was but a proving ground for his cunning instincts. If he survived his tour of duty, I felt he might become a dangerous man among our peaceful people; but under the circumstances, he was a wise choice.

“Sergeant,” I said, “Take your team to the top of the ridge. I believe there may be hostile personnel in the vicinity, but take no action unless you are threatened. Report your findings to me by 1500 hours.” Ishida replied affirmatively, understanding that his party was to move unseen. I dismissed the men and watched as they quickly and silently entered the shadowy, tangled rainforest. Even after their long, uncomfortable march, they showed no sign of physical or mental dullness.

Happily, the bulldozers were able to



Shindo saluted and hurried to obey my command. Though our advance brigade had driven the British from the country, I could not rule out an encounter with another regiment of the Burma Rifles. Also, I was aware that even in the remotest jungles of this country, isolated tribes of primitive natives still thrived. Most of the Burmese people were friendly, and up to now, we had only come upon one hostile village. But the inhabitants had been of a strange, physically degenerate type—possibly a result of inbreeding—and were

quickly smooth the pitted runway and move the earth off to the sides, where the digging crews began to sculpt it into revetments for our aircraft. True to his word, Lt. Tochiro had scoured the inside of the Quonset hut and constructed a thatched panel to replace the destroyed wall so that I might have a temporary headquarters. Here, I found a single table and chair, and a small, battered file cabinet. The field radio had been placed in one corner of the hut, and outside, I could hear the low grumbling of our portable generator. Seating myself at the table, I proceeded to indulge myself in my one sacred personal ritual: from my valise, I took my small, leather-bound journal, and from it let fall a number of dried, pressed cherry blossoms—a reminder of my home in Okayama. I poured one cup of water from my canteen and dropped the blossoms in. Then, also from my valise, I took the picture frame—its glass cracked—that held the portrait of my beloved Machiko and our three children: my son, Joji, and two daughters, Hiroko and Etsuko. Placing the frame on the table, I offered a brief prayer for the safety of my loved ones to Kamimatsu, the spirit from which, according to ancestral lore, my family had descended.

About 1400 hours, Lt. Tajima reported to me that one of the bulldozers had thrown a tread; it could be repaired easily enough, though it would result in at least a half-hour's delay. Then, as Tajima consulted with me outside the Quonset hut, we heard from the distance the unmistakable crack of a standard issue Model 99 7-7mm rifle. Shindo came running, and we all gazed anxiously toward the ridge, but no more shots came. Then, from a great distance, I heard a high-pitched cry. Shindo gasped audibly.

Tajima asked in an anxious voice, "Colonel, should we investigate?" I shook my head. "Continue the work. We will learn what has happened when Ishida reports."

"Yes, sir," Tajima replied, his expression sour. I knew him to be fond of Sgt. Ishida, and I sympathized. But he returned to the stalled bulldozer and unleashed his frustration by pushing his team to work harder and faster.

At 1500 hours, when Ishida was due to

report, there was no sign of him or his two men. Tajima came again, suggesting that another small team be sent to investigate; again I denied him. As strongly as Tajima, I wished to see this situation resolved quickly and satisfactorily. But the brutal fact remained that if our work was not completed to the minute, we would fail in our duty to the Emperor, and to each and every man on my team, such a humiliation would be worse than a thousand years in Hell. I knew that, above all, even if something had happened to Ishida, he would never want the unit's failure on his conscience.

By 1700 hours, I was forced to accept that we probably would not be hearing from those men again. But I did not have the manpower to mount a search party, nor the desire to place any more men in possible jeopardy. Two hours of daylight remained, and with the bulldozer now back in operation, I was determined to press on. The crews worked furiously until the sun dropped beyond the trees; by now all of them knew that we had lost three of our comrades. Finally, as the last light faded from the sky, we broke for our meager evening meal: a few kilograms of rice, dried fish seasoned with sesame oil, and some fresh peanuts we had gathered on our journey.

After supper, the men began to set up their living quarters, and by the time the last light faded from the sky, thirteen tents had been pitched beneath the sheltering branches of the tall mahogany trees and coconut palms. A number of campfires burned brightly to dispel the deep shadows of the jungle, now alive with the sounds of nightlife: chirps, caws, and trills of unseen creatures that seemed thoroughly ambivalent about this group of humans that had infiltrated their territory.

I decided to double the watch for the night and instructed Tajima to lay a strip of landmines outside the perimeter, and to unroll a spool of barbed wire inside the nearest trees. This was accomplished quickly and expertly by lantern light, and once done, a certain sense of relief seemed to spread among the troops. I had no tent, but intended bed down inside the Quonset hut, along with Cpt. Shindo. A fatigued silence pervaded the camp as I made a quick inspection of our defenses. Tajima

himself had taken the first watch, along with seven of the enlisted men; he stood near the rear of the Quonset hut, facing the dark jungle, his hands tensely gripping his rifle. At my approach, he lowered his weapon and snapped a salute.

"It is a hard thing to lose friends," I said softly.

"I have lost many."

"As have I."

From the darkness near the most distant of the tents, I heard a low humming sound, then the voices of several men raised in a soft, melodic song. For a moment, it brought to mind the image of Machiko's face, and a whisper of breeze suddenly swept through the camp, brushing my cheek like the touch of her soft fingers.

The song went:

*We have traveled far
Each day that passes, we go farther still
I fight beside my brothers
One brother will never see home again
Another will come home broken
I would fly on the wind
To return to you again*

Tajima looked long into the darkness, and finally said, "It is a song of mourning. Ishida is gone."

"Be watchful," I said. "If any of those men come back, they will expect our defenses but will not know which way to bypass them."

"Yes, sir."

I bade Tajima good night and returned to the Quonset hut, where Shindo had laid out our beds of thin rush matting. The warm glow of a single lantern cast long shadows in the close confines of the building. I was weary to my bones, yet I knew that sleep would be a long time coming. To my delight, Shindo surprised me with a small bottle of plum wine.

"I was saving this until our mission is accomplished," he said. "But I think tonight it is more vital."

I had just finished my cup of wine when I heard a sudden rapping on the door of the

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hut. Shindo sprang up and opened the door to admit a grave-looking corporal named Torohataone of the guards Tajima had posted. He saluted me and said, "Sir, there are lights in the jungle."

I took my rifle and followed him out of the hut. Indeed, far up the ridge, deep within the trees, I could see a number of flickering lights moving slowly in a southerly direction. It was difficult to determine whether they were descending toward us.

"Torches," Shindo said. "Almost certainly natives, wouldn't you say?"

I listened intently for several moments, but could hear nothing in the distance. I realized that, apart from the soft crackling of a few nearby fires, the night had gone eerily silent. I ordered all fires extinguished and the men to assume defensive positions. Though we were a unit of engineering specialists, we were thoroughly trained in all aspects of warfare and ready to challenge any threat. Torohata slipped away to spread the word through the camp, and soon, our fires were all smothered, leaving us in darkness, total but for the distant flickering torchlight. A few moments later, Tajima joined me, his rifle at the ready.

"I count twenty individual lights," he said. "I estimate they are 400 meters distant and moving toward us."

I nodded, pleased with his expert appraisal. Just then, I noticed a faint tickling behind my left ear and, much like earlier in the day, a low, buzzing hum began to rise and fall erratically, slowly growing louder until it seemed that we were surrounded by a vast swarm of hornets. In the darkness, Shindo and Tajima's eyes darted back and forth nervously. Nothing I saw could possibly account for this almost unearthly sound.

Then, like the concussion of a bomb many miles distant, I heard a low, very deep thud, the vibrations of which crept up my legs like a horde of tiny spiders. Several seconds later the sound was repeated, this time louder, more powerful. And it continued—a heavy, almost nauseating pounding that came at regular

intervals like the beating of a monstrous kabuki drum. Tajima suddenly pointed to the ridge, saying softly, "The lights are gone."

Each of us waited expectantly as the pounding grew louder, more deafening, assaulting our senses like a barrage from the guns of a battleship. Yet these were no explosions. Just as it seemed the unseen source of the thunderous sounds were right on top of us, an overpowering, noisome odor assailed our nostrils, and I heard Tajima beginning to gag. I can liken it only to the singularly foul stench of burning flesh, mixed with the acrid sting of sulfurous fumes.

And then...it was gone.

The pounding fell silent, the buzzing faded, and only the faintest lingering echoes served to remind us that we had actually experienced some nightmarish and inexplicable phenomenon. At last, the stench of brimstone began to drift away, to be replaced by the sweet smell of woodsmoke from the extinguished fires. Yes, we were truly awake, not dreaming, for now I could hear the sounds of men coughing and choking, and several exclamations of shock and disbelief.

And then, the most terrible thing of all: the high-pitched, piteous sound of a man screaming, "Yaieee!"

Together, Shindo and I rushed into the darkness toward the source of the sound. Suddenly, golden lanternlight burst to life a few meters ahead of me, and I saw Tajima, his face a mask of unutterable revulsion. He lifted one arm and pointed to a sight that, for several seconds, my mind simply could not accept.

Three staves of bamboo sprouted from the earth at the edge of the runway, and atop them, the decapitated heads of Sgt. Ishida and his two men were mounted like bizarre trophies, their eyes open and staring, mouths open as if to scream their agony and disbelief. Rivulets of blood poured freely down the pale lengths of bamboo, indicating these murders had been committed all too recently.

"Ishida," Tajima groaned, shaking his head violently. "He was the son of my father's closest lifelong friend. I have

known him since we were children. He was like an older brother to me. Oh, my friend Tadao."

I squeezed Tajima's shoulder as he slowly dropped to his knees. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"We never spoke of it," Tajima whispered. "We both knew...that one of us might be lost. But not like this!"

At last collecting my scattered wits, I finally said, "We must continue our work. It is our duty to the emperor. But we must defend ourselves. Whatever was in the jungle must still be there. We cannot lower our guards for an instant."

Shindo gazed at me appraisingly, his eyes finally affirming that he understood my decision. I saw several of the men take up their rifles and turn away from the profane totems, their training and solemn devotion to duty overcoming their personal fears. I allowed Tajima several moments to grieve silently before telling him, "You will be in charge of removing these...travesties. See that Sgt. Ishida and his men's remains are laid to rest with the utmost honor. Do it now, and then return to your post. Whom-ever-what-ever-is responsible must not be allowed to overcome us again."

In a quavering voice, Tajima replied, "Yes, sir." And he rose, his eyes hard and focused, his body rigid and strong, no longer weakened by grief or uncertainty. He and his men performed the grim task quickly and efficiently, burying the pitiful remains of his friend and the others with whatever personal items he could find. At Tajima's side, I attended the saying of prayers at the gravesite.

The rest of the night passed uneventfully, though I am certain not a single man slept so much as an hour. At dawn, the camp came alive again, but I could tell from the men's lethargic pace that the night's ordeal had taken a dreadful toll on them. Once we had eaten our breakfast of fruit and dried beef, I transmitted a message to Lt. Gen. Iida and informed him that three of our party had been lost, guardedly expressing the opinion that the security of the region was in question.

Gen. Iida's reply came: "Continue with

the work as scheduled. XVII Tank Group is 18 hours from your position. A single element will divert to assist.”

That our operational commander would offer so much as a small group of tanks to reinforce our position improved the morale of the men so that they worked at a pace belying any deprivation of sleep. At 1200 hours, I was so pleased with our progress that it was almost possible to believe that the horrific events of the previous night were now long passed, and that from this point on we had nothing to fear. Still, at any given time, three men now stood guard at the jungle perimeter, with license to open fire at the first sign of any trespasser. However, if opportunity presented, I wanted any human that might come near to be captured and brought to me immediately.

And so it was that, at about 1430 hours, a commotion erupted not far from my Quonset hut headquarters. I went out to see Cpl.

Torohata emerge from the trees, his bayonet thrust into the back of a squat, bronze figure who was being dragged, struggling, by two other guards. As I approached, followed by a dutiful Shindo, the guards grasped the creature's arms and hurled him to the ground in front of me. I saw at once that this was a native much like those we had executed a few days before. He appeared to be roughly 130 centimeters tall, his features brutish, with opaque black eyes beneath a curiously scaly, bony brow, and an awkwardly protruding lower jaw. He wore only a loose, robe-like garment of tanned animal hide.

“I saw him watching us just beyond the minefield,” Torohata said. “I ordered Serizawa and Fuchida to take him alive. Beware, he moves quickly. He almost escaped and I thought we might have to shoot him.”

“Excellent work, corporal,” I said. Glaring at the evil-looking creature, I

leaned close, only to be repelled by the sour odor of decay that his coppery flesh exuded. Even realizing he could not possibly understand Japanese, I growled, “Do you speak, animal?”

Torohata spoke adequate, if not fluent Burmese and spouted a few interrogatives at our captive, who gazed at us with unconcealed hatred, seemingly oblivious to the words. I knew that tribes in the mountains

I took no joy in the extermination of an entire village, but their almost inhuman ferocity made them too dangerous to suffer.



often had languages of their own, and the one this beast belonged to was probably no exception.

With a smile that revealed unnaturally long, sharpened teeth, the man growled, “Mi, byong yi. Eh go me shogo na, byong mi rien.”

Torohata shook his head. “It’s not unlike Burmese, but it makes no sense to me.”

“Colonel, look at his hands,” Shindo said.

Leaning perilously close to the hissing thing, I found that the short, clumsy-looking hands were covered in coarse, dark hair and ended in sharp, claw-like nails that glistened like burnished steel. Though he bore a resemblance to those natives we had seen before, his physical degeneration was far more pronounced.

“What came to us last night?” I asked. “Who killed my men?”

Though the words might make no sense to him, the creature seemed to comprehend my meaning. His lips spread in a malicious smile and, with saliva spraying from his mouth, he hissed, “Go-go, mi ingah eh cho-chiyo gah san!”

And then, like a blazing wind, I felt the arrival of pure hatred. Lt. Tajima strode past the guards and leaned down to regard our fidgeting captive. Almost as if he recognized Tajima, the brute smiled again and said in a wickedly gleeful voice, “Ba-kai! Ong, jin yi tadami dah. Baung shagat!”

With controlled rage, Tajima raised an arm and slapped one bony cheek with enough force to send the brute reeling backward. The thick lips parted in a gasp as he fell upon his still-bleeding bayonet wound. With an effort, the squat man managed to get back to his knees, and for the first time, I saw a hint of pain in those black, impenetrable eyes.

“Colonel,” Tajima said in a somber voice.

“We are wasting our time with this. beast.”

Every officer in the Imperial Japanese Army carries with him a sword, which is a sacred symbol of his honor. I now drew mine, its long blade gleaming before the pained eyes of our captive. Some of his defiance seemed to melt, but his lips curled into a feral snarl. Speaking in a tone that I was certain he would comprehend, I said, “You are useless, animal. Whatever pit you crawled from, you will not return to it alive.”

I raised my sword, making clear to all my intention to use it. But then, seeing the dullness of disappointment in Tajima's eyes, I paused and lowered the weapon. Tajima glanced at me in surprise; but then I nodded to him, and he understood. He unsheathed his own sword and drew it back slowly, his muscles coiling. Now, peering straight into the brute-man's eyes, he growled triumphantly, “For Ishida.” Then with all his strength he brought the sword down and around, crying, “Aiiee!”

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The kneeling creature's eyes flashed with terrible realization, just as the blade bit into the flesh of his neck, sweeping through muscle and bone like a scythe through stalks of grain. The head toppled from the body, and a fountain of blood spurted from the gaping wound. We watched with grim satisfaction as the headless body struck the ground with a thud, the purple blood mingling with the dust until it formed a vile-looking pool of thick black mud.

Lt. Tajima took a white handkerchief from his coat pocket, wiped the blade, and with a smooth motion resheathed his sword. Then, with cold deliberation, he picked up the head by its long, coarse hair and carried it to one of the blood-drenched staves that still stood nearby. He lifted his trophy and firmly forced it down onto the sharpened bamboo tip, stepping back to regard his handiwork. With a hiss, he spat at the unseeing, coal-black eyes beneath the bony brow; then, unleashing a heartfelt sob, he turned and walked away, his thoughts all too clearly focused on the memory of his lost friend.

And now, knowing my duty, I ordered the men back to work, including Tajima. While this unpleasant episode had been unavoidable, we had lost precious time. There were clearly more of these debased tribesmen in the jungle, and I expected some sort of retaliation. And not a one of us could forget the indescribable horror of the night before, of the monstrous pounding of the earth, of the gut-wrenching odor that had swept over our compound. My greatest fear was that, whatever otherworldly evil reigned here, it might be somehow allied to the subhuman children of this dark country.

We had only been back at work for a short time when Cpt. Shindo approached me, his demeanor uncharacteristically furtive. In a near-whisper, he said,

"Colonel, there is something up on the ridge. I have been unable to get a clear view of it. But I know that it is there."

He led me past the line of new revetments to the edge of the runway, where we had a clear view of the ridge's crest. Without pointing, he said, "Look toward the top, just to the right of its highest point."

I did as he suggested and, at first, saw nothing unusual. But as I started to look away, something at the corner of my eye turned my head.

It seemed little more than a heat haze rolling from the jungle. When I looked

**His eyes were closed,
the mouth open and tongue
lolling from slack lips.
Black blood still dripped
from the torn neck, pooling
like oil on the ground at the
base of the bamboo stove.**

straight at it, it disappeared. But as I focused my gaze to one side of it, I could see an indistinct, blurry mass, almost like the illusory dark pools that sometimes appear on a road beneath the hot sun. But from this patch of discoloration, I could see what appeared to be thin tendrils of shadow wriggling and creeping down the mountainside. Above, a few cirrus clouds crept across the sun, their wispy shadows undulating over the side of the ridge to mingle with those unnatural, barely visible streamers.

"Shindo, have Sgt. Hikaru order up his gun crew."

Shindo replied in an equally low voice,

"Yes, sir," and left to fetch Hikaru, who would be working on the revetments. Our unit, like most of similar size and composition, was equipped with two 70mm Howitzers, which were ideal for shelling over ridged and mountainous terrain. I found my mind clouded with doubt, for how could I be certain that we would not be firing at a mirage? But Shindo had seen it; if I looked away from the crest of the ridge, I could still see it. And the more I tried to view this thing that had no place in the rational world, the nearer I came to breaking into wild, panicked flight. Only my well-honed sense of duty and years of military discipline kept me rooted to the spot.

The four gun crewmen reported within moments, each eager to have a shot at whatever target I might order. Some of them scanned the ridge with questing eyes, but none apparently saw what Shindo and I had seen. When I glanced back, I confirmed that the wavering blur still hovered menacingly above the tallest trees. But from the disturbed expressions that suddenly stole over the men's faces, I judged that they, too, perceived something awry.

"Men," I said, "I want you to lay down a series of shots along the very top of the ridge. North to south, starting there" I pointed to the steeply angled summit, off to my left, "and finishing about twenty degrees to the south."

The heavy Howitzers required both of it's crewmen to wheel it out to the edge of the airstrip, which afforded a clear shot at the ridge crest. Hikaru ordered four more men to bring up the crates of ammunition. Though the men still working the field were curious about this new flurry of activity, they continued without breaking their pace. At the southern end of the field, the crews were laying down the metal matting, which meant we were

maintaining our schedule.

Turning to Hikaru, I pointed at the ridge. "I estimate it's 450 meters to the summit. Lay down your fire within ten to thirty meters of the crest."

As the crewmen cranked the stubby barrels into firing position, one of them, a private named Gondo, began peering at the summit with an apprehensive frown, as if doubting his senses. He glanced at me questioningly, obviously hoping I might confirm or deny his vision. I merely nodded thoughtfully, and his face grew pale with the realization that we were surely challenging some ominous unknown. I was certain that we must have shared the same unspoken thought: that by unleashing our weaponry upon this thing we might be inviting our own doom.

Casting aside that unseemly notion, I stepped away to let the gunners do their jobs. Hikaru made a quick calculation on a small notepad, then called out, "Number one, set your target bearing 74 degrees, trajectory 40. Number two, set target bearing 79 degrees, trajectory 38. Lock and prepare to fire."

The first crewman waved to signal his readiness. Hikaru's arm rose, hovered for a moment, then fell. The cannon erupted with a boom, recoiling angrily on its locked wheels. I heard the scream of the shell as it arced over the ridge, where it exploded violently, just a few meters to the left of the lurking, phantom watcher. A moment later, the second Howitzer unleashed its shell, which threw up a pillar of black smoke and the debris of several trees. But this time, as the smoke rolled upward, I saw it curling around a previously unseen contour, defining a strange, alien figure that now could be viewed by all.

It was a vaguely mushroom-shaped mass that I judged to be at least forty meters tall, from which sprang dozens of wavering, curling streamers that seemed to flicker and dance like filaments of black flame. As the smoke cleared, the silhouette once again became an indistinct blur that dared me to pinpoint its location. But I pointed to where it had materialized and called to Hikaru, "There! Concentrate your fire on that spot!"

The Howitzers spoke again, hurling their lethal loads unerringly to their target. This time, as the explosions shattered the air, I saw something rising above the smoke and flame: a questing, unfurling arm of shadow, the tip of which widened like the mouth of a trumpet. Suddenly, above the ringing echoes of the explosions, I heard the hornet-like buzzing that had previously come down from the ridge, only this time with such volume that I could actually see the limbs of the nearest trees quivering with the vibrations. Swarms of ants seemed to rush over my skin, and my ears felt as if spikes were being driven into them. I could not suppress a pained cry, and Hikaru gasped with shock, but he immediately cried out for the guns to fire again. The cannons loosed another volley and the shells struck home, hurling huge pieces of the ridge into the air that rained noisily into the jungle like black hail. The buzzing began to soften and moved into the distance, and I knew that any further shots would be futile. I ordered gun crew to cease fire.

We watched with a feeling of grim helplessness as the smoke began to clear and silence returned. I knew that, whatever was up there, our weapons had not touched it. Worst of all, I felt that, if this thing behaved in any fashion like the higher denizens of our world, it might return with a new, vengeful purpose when we were the most vulnerable: with the coming of night.

I knew that, somehow, I must persuade Gen. Iida to relinquish this particular airfield and reassign my unit to another location. Any other location. At the same time, I knew the chances of such a feat were nonexistent. No matter that I might argue that the British were gone, that the Myatauki airfield could not possibly be used against us, I would be accused of insubordination and cowardice—the most heinous offenses of which an officer might be found guilty. Yes, I—as well as every man in my outfit had pledged my service and my life to my country, to my emperor; but where, I wondered, was the honor in sacrificing our lives to complete a task that would simply open the way for more of our comrades to be destroyed?

Inside the Quonset hut, I found Cpl. Okada, our radio operator, at the set,

speaking into the transmitter. When he saw me, he called out, "Colonel, it is Lt. Gen. Iida for you."

I sighed deeply. The timing could not have been more—or less—propitious, for I had no time to consider my options further.

"This is Col. Terusawa," I said into the microphone, taking the headset from Okada. "Go ahead, General."

The voice on the other end sounded a million miles away, reminding me of the vast distance between this haunted plateau and the disciplined, regimented world beyond. "Col. Terusawa," Gen. Iida said, "Fighter Group IV is to arrive at 1100 hours tomorrow. You will be ready for them?"

"We are on schedule, General."

"What of the difficulties you reported earlier?"

I hesitated. I knew I must speak now, or not at all. "We have engaged an enemy," I finally stammered. "We've suffered no further losses, but at this time I believe our position is not secure. We do not have the manpower or weaponry to repel an attack, should it come."

Several seconds of silence followed. Then: "And this enemy? Who is it?"

I swallowed hard. "It's true nature has not been ascertained, General. There is something...deadly...in the jungle, sir."

"I do not follow you, Colonel." Iida's voice had a harsh edge.

"Sir, I ask you to trust my word that an air group will not be secure at this site."

I heard a muted voice speaking to Iida, and silence followed for several moments. Finally, he replied, "You are an excellent soldier, Colonel. Your record is exemplary, and I am sure I made the right choice in assigning you this mission. An element of tanks arrives in the morning to assist you, does it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do you feel this is insufficient for you to complete your assignment?"

"I am certain I can complete my assignment, sir. But I believe that to do so is ill-advised. This is my most prudent military judgment, General."

Iida seemed to ponder the point briefly. But then he said, "Col. Terusawa, your orders are to complete the renovation and be ready for Fighter Group IV to arrive as scheduled. Do you have any other questions or comments?"

My heart sank. His decision was final. "No, sir. I do not."

"Very well. You will be pleased to know the campaign in Malaya is succeeding beyond all hopes. Gen. Yamashita has routed the British to Johore, and expects to occupy Singapore within ten to fifteen days."

"That is excellent news, sir."

"I anticipate similarly excellent news from you tomorrow."

"I understand, sir."

"Until I hear from you, then." The receiver went dead.

I turned away and dismissed Okada, telling him to spread the news about our victories in Malaya, which would hearten the men somewhat. I was truly pleased for Gen. Yamashita, whom I had met before. He was considered by many to be a somewhat neurotic, but highly capable officer.

As I went to fulfill my duty, a new, numbing fear began to overcome me, nearly trivializing all that I had experienced up to now: that, officially, I myself might have just been labeled "neurotic" by none other than Gen. Iida himself.

For the rest of the day, I pushed the men almost cruelly, and, though fatigue showed on them like a cement, they obeyed my orders with a quiet desperation, aware of the fate that might await us in the coming night. The tractors had laid matting over the existing runway, leaving only a portion of the newly extended strip yet uncovered. I knew that we would be finished well in advance of the fighter

group's arrival. As the sun touched the treetops in the west, Cpl. Okada brought me the report that, less than a hundred miles to the north, 55 Division was streaming across the border from Thailand at Kawkareik, bound for Moulmein on Burma's western coast. The news of our advances should have brought us reason to rejoice, but faraway victories could scarcely assuage the dread that simmered in the aging afternoon.

Once the purple and gold streaks that mourned the daylight began to dim, we went to our evening meal. We had so far been frugal with our rations, but tonight I ordered extra portions of sesame-seasoned rice and dried beef for all. The guards rotated, and fires began to spring up among the trees, creating a bastion of light against the menace that lurked somewhere beyond. But the camp was unnervingly silent, for not one man called to another, no one spoke above a whisper; even the jungle's night songs seemed muted, as if its creatures shared our fear of what the Burmese darkness mirthfully hid.

At about 2030 hours, as I sat with Shindo before a reassuringly bright fire, I heard the erratic jungle rhythms falter and cease. We immediately took up our rifles, as did every other man within our sight. I almost regretted having allowed the fires, for they blinded us to anything beyond their short range of illumination, but presented us to our enemy with merciless clarity.

It seemed ages we remained frozen, thwarted by the stillness that mocked our vigilance. And then, with a terrific boom and a blinding flash, a landmine exploded some fifteen meters away, its light revealing something that stretched out of the jungle like an onyx serpent: a thin ribbon of uncoiling, solid shadow. I heard screams far to my left, from the northern end of the camp, and another landmine blew up with a dull thump-crack, followed by another, and then another. A volley of rifle fire came from my left, their muzzle flashes creating a strobing effect by which I could see an ambiguous thrashing among the trees. Another landmine exploded, and in that moment of brilliance, I saw three or more men being dragged, struggling and screaming, through the barbed wire into the void beyond the minefield. I lifted my rifle and blindly emptied its five shots,

lamenting the futility of the gesture even as my finger squeezed off the rounds.

Near me, I saw Lt. Tajima unsheath his sword and run, crying defiantly, toward our useless barricade. His sword swished back and forth as if in battle with some invisible assailant, but suddenly he was cut down. As more gunshots lit the night, I saw his body being pulled across the ground and through the coil of barbed wire. He screamed shrilly as his flesh was shredded; then his voice was stifled, and he was gone.

Something small followed Tajima's figure into the darkness: a grenade. Seconds later, it exploded with a muffled thump, as if its force had been absorbed by something solid. The now-familiar hornet's buzzing suddenly swirled angrily out of the jungle, again assaulting my eardrums like stabbing needles. But seconds later it ceased again, and I detected no further movement amid the trees. I lifted a hand, signaling the nearest men to hold their fire.

We stood like frozen Noh-players until, finally, a single insect somewhere to my right chirped for a mate. From my left, one answered tentatively. And the jungle came to life again. I ordered Shindo to take a head count, and he rushed away to comply. When he returned two minutes later, his face was stricken with disbelief.

"Eleven men are gone," he said. I choked back a sob. Never in my entire career could I have witnessed such useless death. "Every man will remain vigilant tonight. There must be no sleep," I said.

Shindo said softly, "None of us will close his eyes tonight."

I nodded and began to walk among the men. They were dutifully gathering spent clips from the ground, reloading their empty rifles, picking up the dropped weapons of their lost comrades. Though each man's hands shook, and each face bore the ghastly pallor of fear, they performed their duty like soldiers. A small tremor of pride passed through my body, for, in spite of the horror we had just faced, my men remained steadfast and valiant.

I finally returned to the dim interior of the Quonset hut, fully aware that tonight's ordeal might have only begun. I looked at

the radio set our one link to the proper world we had left behind. It seemed a pitiful, laughable device that had no relevance in this haunted place. Without pausing to consider what I was doing, I lifted my rifle and fired, and the radio set exploded, its components clanging loudly against the sides of the hut.

A second later, Shindo rushed through the door, his eyes wide, jaw agape. He paused to regard the damage I had done, and for a moment I thought he was actually going to strike me. But soon, the burning in his eyes cooled, and he lowered his head, shaking it uselessly back and forth.

“So, you think we are finished?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

“Not finished. Lost.”

Shindo turned up the lantern so that its golden glow threw hideously foreshortened shadows on the walls. I sat down at the table and, as before, he brought out a bottle of plum wine. “It’s the last,” he said.

He took two small cups from his personal kit and filled them for the both of us. We drank silently, watching our movements mimicked by the unnaturally long, thin black shadow beings on the wall.

“Whom did we lose?” I asked.

“Tajima. Okada. Torohata. Adachi. Gondo....”

“The men we most need to complete the work.”

Shindo nodded, unable to continue. Finally, he whispered, “What kind of world does such a thing come from?”

“A dead, black world,” I said. “It must have a black sun, that burns horribly in the night. And the sounds...the very air must be forever filled with its evil song.”

“Why is it here?”

“It is somehow connected to the people here. I regret destroying that village, for the ones on the ridge are surely their cousins. But more than that, I only regret that I cannot kill each and every one of them myself.”

“But sir, if we can hold out until the air group arrives, we may get reinforcements,

and then we can destroy them utterly.”

I shook my head. “Shindo. Do you believe that any number of our men could do more to that black-hearted thing than we have already done?”

He sighed. “No, sir.”

“Shindo,” I said. “Have the men move to the edge of the runway. We are too near to the trees.”

“Yes, sir.”

He left to do as I ordered. And I watched the lamplight, the little caged star with the power to spell the difference between courage and cowardice. Take that little star from the night, and what did we have left? I twisted the knob and doused the flame. The darkness came complete, and I laid my head on my arms on the table, aware that my body was a spent ember. I did not dare close my eyes. But I could not keep them open.

Sleep washed over me like an ocean tide, tugging me far away, so quickly I could not even realize what was happening.

I opened my eyes to a darkness so pure I that might have been closed within a coffin. My muscles were frozen, and I could not even move a finger. After a few moments, I realized that my head lay on the tabletop, cradled by my arms. Something was tickling my left ear; an insect, perhaps. I wanted to bat it away, but I could not move.

A sharp buzzing sound began, like the whirring of a beetle’s wings. But it rose steadily in volume until it became far louder than any insect. And then the buzzing took on a strange, articulated quality, rising and falling in a terrible imitation of speech. Eventually, I could make out words, though they had no meaning to me:

“Michi kyong mi, ghia da cho-chiyo....”

A stab of sheer terror broke my paralysis, and I bolted upright, batting frantically at my left ear, certain there must be something resting there, but my fingers touched only air.

And the sound continued.

“Kyo-gha baung, balah kai... We... we... watch...we...win.”

I cried out, hands flailing. One of them struck the lantern, and it fell to the floor with a crash. As the echo died, the buzzing voice also went silent. The tickling behind my ear remained, though, as if legs of chitin had grasped the flesh of my earlobe. I called Shindo’s name, but received no reply. Stumbling blindly toward what I hoped was the door, my hand struck the ridged wall of the hut so fiercely that pain charged up my arm like an electrical shock.

Finally, my questing fingers found the door, and throwing it open, I lurched outside, desperate even for starlight to break the terrible blackness. I could see the dying coals from several fires, and above, a few stars twinkled in a hazy sky. There was no moon. None of my men was in sight. I wanted to call out, but now I feared to raise my voice—for again, the night was bereft of sound. To my left I could see the dark hulk of a bulldozer, and I went toward it slowly, picking my steps carefully over the rutted earth.

When I reached the machine, I glanced up at the ridge, only to see a single, flickering point of flame near the darkened crest. The light was stationary, as if the torchbearer were simply watching and waiting, knowing that it had nothing to fear. Had I brought my rifle with me, I would have opened fire, though it was far beyond the range of my puny bullets. Instead, I merely rested my weight on the cowl of the bulldozer and glared defiantly at the torch. I sensed that whoever held it was laughing.

At last, I turned to gaze upon the runway we had labored so diligently to complete. In the pale starlight, a few meters away, I saw something that struck me as out of place. As I went toward it, fingers of cold nausea began to wriggle up from my stomach. It was a tall and spindly thing, with something large and bulbous perched atop it. Taking a few steps closer, I peered closely at it, trying to establish the identity of the dead.

It was Shindo. His eyes were closed, the mouth open and tongue lolling from slack lips. Black blood still dripped from the torn

neck, pooling like oil on the ground at the base of the bamboo stave. I groaned miserably, no longer repulsed or sickened; simply finished. How long had it been since we had shared the last bottle of wine? A few hours? Only minutes, perhaps?

Suddenly, Shindo's eyelids flew open, and the dead eyes turned to look at me, shining with terrible cognizance. With a gasp, I backed away, unable to tear my gaze from this sickening desecration, unwilling to accept the indisputable proof of my own sight. The living eyes followed my every movement, their gaze horrified and pleading. No! No awareness could possibly remain in that ruined case of flesh and bone.

I turned and ran toward the row of tents that now lined the earthen apron beside the airstrip. I tore open the flaps of the first one I came to and poked my head inside, only to find it empty. I ran from tent to tent, rewarded with the same result at each and every one. Where? Where were they? Every man in the camp could not have disappeared. It was impossible.

But I was alone.

I cried out to the night, to the burning light at the top of the ridge, to the unseen horror that I knew lay in wait somewhere in the vast darkness. I cared little that it might reach out to take me, for at least I would be where I belonged: with the men of the 212, who had lived and worked and died in my charge. I screamed until my voice faltered and went silent, my throat raw and tortured. On the ridge, the torchlight continued to burn indifferently.

At some point, I stumbled back to the Quonset hut and in the pitch blackness settled myself in the chair at my little table. My fingers found the framed photograph of my wife and children, and I squeezed it to my chest with such strength that not even the hideous clutches that had pulled my men through barbed wire could have loosened it from my grasp.

The darkness held its breath, and I wept.

The sun could have been up for moments or for most of a day before I became aware of it's light creeping through the still open door of the hut. It was not the light that had drawn me from the secret place where I had retreated and that I could not recall; it was a sound: the low whining of distant engines.

My first thought was that the tanks had arrived, for they were scheduled to precede the fighter group. But the sound I heard was not the deep grumble-clank of motors and treads. This was the distinctive drone of airplane engines. I rose from the chair and crept into the daylight. The sun had risen halfway to its zenith, which meant the fighter squadron was arriving on schedule.

But where were the tanks?

Stiffly, I walked down to the airstrip. The first thing I noticed was that Shindo's piteous remains had somehow been removed, with only a repugnant dark stain left behind. Looking skyward, I could see no sign of the planes as yet; but the sound of their engines grew steadily louder, echoing through the jungle so that I could not determine the direction of their approach. They would have been trying to contact us—unsuccessfully, of course.

At last, I saw a trio of dots veering in from the east. They quickly grew larger until I could recognize the graceful profiles of the Ki-43 Hayabuses. They roared low overhead, dipping their wings as the pilots regarded the airfield curiously, the brilliant red balls of the rising sun gleaming from their forest green fuselages and the gray undersides of their wings. One of the pilots saw me, and I raised a hand in greeting, for a moment feeling a strange sense of normalcy, as if all that had happened here had been swept away by the arrival of my countrymen.

Five more vee-shaped formations followed, and behind them, a trio of Ki-57 transport planes appeared, carrying the squadron's supplies and ground crew. The lead Hayabusa swung back to the east to set up its approach, and the other fighters fell in close behind. A lump of joy and relief rose to my throat, though some whispering voice inside warned me that

my most difficult task might yet lie ahead—once the pilots discovered the awful truth of what had happened here.

Despite a conscious effort to avoid doing so, I chanced a look toward the top of the ridge. Suddenly, my blood went frigid and my heart began clanging like a gong in my ears. There, as on the previous day, a wavering heat haze marred the sky above a cluster of swaying trees. I could feel the thing watching me.

Then, as the fighters began to descend, I heard a deep, buzzing sound, like a swarm of mad hornets. Yet this was different from the sound that had become so horribly familiar to me; this had a deeper, more mechanized timbre. And then, when the truth of this new reality began to dawn on me, despair again gripped me and I ran out to the runway, waving my arms frantically, trying to make the fighter pilots understand and veer away.

From over the top of the ridge, a swarm of dark, roaring silhouettes appeared, buzzing rapidly toward the descending fighters. The lead Ki-43 had already dropped its gear and was only a few hundred meters from the end of the runway when it disappeared in a ball of flame, accompanied by a deafening boom. The wreckage hit the ground and splattered like liquid fire, sending debris spiraling into the nearest trees. The pilot of the Hayabusa behind it firewalled the throttle, and barely avoided dropping into the inferno itself. I saw the plane's gear starting to raise and heard its engine straining to lift it out of harm's way.

But even that heroic effort gained the pilot nothing. An olive drab Tomahawk dropped onto the Ki-43's tail, its .50-caliber machine guns blazing, tearing chunks from the Ki's wings. The stricken plane rolled slowly onto its side, and I saw something—an aileron, perhaps—whirl into space. The Ki-43 suddenly nose-dived and smashed into the ground a mere hundred meters from where I stood, the horrendous impact knocking me onto my backside.

Looking up, I saw at least eight P-40s, their noses painted with the distinctive fanged maw and glaring eye insignia of the so-called Flying Tigers. The AVG—American Volunteer Group—must have

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retained a squadron at Toungoo or Rangoon, which were the only remaining Allied airfields close enough to accommodate the fighters. With deadly, unified purpose, they swung around to pounce again on the low, slow Hayabuses, who, in preparing to land, were at their most vulnerable. I saw a few of the trailing Ki-43s pulling up into desperate climbs, their pilots hoping to gain some advantage on the enemy fighters; but it was to no avail, as four of the P-40s banked away to pursue. Within seconds, three more of our fighters had been blown from the sky, and I saw one of the Ki-57 transports totter in the air and spiral down as it attempted evasive action. The pilot had turned too sharply and stalled the plane, too low to recover. It disappeared behind the nearest trees, and a moment later, another thunderous boom shook the ground. A column of black smoke rolled skyward from the site.

Our Ki-43s were far more maneuverable than the P-40s, and at least two managed to swing around to attack the Tomahawks. My heart leaped as I saw one of them open fire at the trailing P-40, causing a plume of smoke to erupt from its engine. But no sooner had he taken his shots than two more P-40s dove onto his tail and, in an instant, sent him whirling to his death. High above, atop the ridge, the roiling heat haze seemed to regard the tableau as a cold, calculating monarch might watch two enemies struggle to the death for its own amusement.

A few moments later, I heard two more deep explosions in the distance: two more Hayabuses lost. I saw the single, stricken P-40, trailing smoke, climbing toward the ridge, finally disappearing over its crest as it retired from the fight. And shortly afterward, the remaining enemy fighters reappeared from the southwest, seemingly all intact, with nary a Ki-43 in pursuit. Then, to my horror, the lead P-40 banked toward the runway and me. I saw bright flashes from its wingtips as its guns opened fire; before me, twin rows of earthen splashes homed unerringly on me, and I felt a stab of indescribable agony as my left leg was hit. My lower leg buckled at an awry angle, blood spurting through the fabric of my trousers. I toppled to the ground, seeing white bone protruding from a jagged rip in my skin. For a brief time, I went completely numb, feeling only surprise and disbelief at the sudden strike against

me.

All I could do now was shout and point to the devilish haze atop the ridge, praying that one of the enemy pilots would notice it and initiate an attack. At least one of the Americans saw my frantic waving, but he merely offered me a mocking salute; then his plane disappeared over the ridge on its way back home. Pain began to creep up my leg again, and a disturbing amount of blood was pooling on the dusty ground beneath me. I could not last much longer. But at least I could now be satisfied that I had died in combat, in defiance of an enemy who had insidiously attacked our hapless fighter group.

After a time, I again heard the buzzing of hornets from direction of the ridge. The heavy pounding began, as on that first night, so deep that it shook my body to the point of nausea. And as the horrid buzzing rose in volume, it once again articulated itself into some language I could not understand. But finally, the syllables began to become clear to me: "Cho-chiyo ich byong mi...Remember...Remember the children."

I lay back on the ground, all my energy spent. I expected now to simply fall asleep and not wake up, for the pain in my leg was simply a dull, distant thing with little meaning. The persistent buzzing no longer frightened me. It seemed an almost soothing, lulling background voice to accompany the final release from my pain.

But sometime later, I heard the deep, droning whine of airplane engines. Craning my neck backward, I saw a lone Ki-57 slowly lowering itself to the runway, barely avoiding the wreckage scattered along its edges. As the plane slowed to a stop, its doors opened, and a pair of frantic-looking crewmen came running toward me. I realized that one of the transports must have survived the attack, and its crew had come to render whatever aid they might.

I recall being carried to the plane by four able-bodied men. But though their limbs were strong, their movements well-practiced, I could see in their eyes the unmistakable look of confusion, and in some cases, outright horror. Even if they could not actually see the thing that watched from somewhere on the ridge, I knew they

felt its presence as profoundly as I did. By the time they carefully loaded my near-ruined body into the cargo hold of the transport, I could again hear the distant hornet's buzzing from the ridge. Glancing out the door, I saw the trees swaying and bending as the thing began to descend steadily toward the field. I cried out for haste, and though the pilot and my attending rescuers probably misunderstood, it was my fear for them that drove me to fitfully scream, "Get us out! Get us out now!"

After that, I recall nothing until I woke in a hospital in Bangkok, and even then I had only a few lucid moments. The doctors were able to save my leg, though the damage was severe enough that I will never regain full use of it. My physical condition improved rapidly, but I remained in a kind of mental fog, the memories of which are disjointed and often frightening.

Throughout this experience, I could never explain to the doctors, or to the officers who came to debrief me, exactly what had happened at the Myatauki airfield. But through them, I learned that the tank group that had been sent to assist my unit had simply vanished as if it never existed. Furthermore, when army investigators arrived at the airfield, they could find no trace of anyone from the 212 Engineering Corps, either alive or dead. Though I cannot recall saying it, I understand my explanation was simply, "They were taken by the children."

The wreckage of the air group showed all too plainly that we had been attacked by the AVG, and my "valiant resistance" earned me a meritorious discharge, despite the unexplained loss of my entire unit. I was questioned personally by Lt. Gen. Iida, who pointedly asked me if the catastrophe was related to the "unexplained threat" that I had reported on more than one occasion. To this I could only answer, "It must have been," and no amount of interrogation could draw from me any elaboration.

Finally, after two months, I was sent home. And though my memory of the events in Burma has finally returned to me unclouded, under no circumstances could I reveal to the army, or to my family, the

extraordinary truth of my experience. To do so would undermine whatever honor I have remaining, and subject my beloved wife and children to undeserved disgrace. Here, in the security of my home in peaceful Okayama, I have been able to bury the horror of those days beneath the support offered to me by my loved ones. My sweet Machiko has always been unquestioningly faithful, but even to her I could not speak of the things that happened in that dreadful place. It upsets her that I am silent about this matter; she loves me and knows me well enough to understand that some secrets must be held in a man's heart until the day they are released by his death.

Though the army has publicly maintained that I was released from the service with honor, I shall never forget the look of contempt on Lt. Gen. Iida's face as he presented my discharge papers to me. I am certain he felt that I am to blame for the disappearance of my unit. Indeed, I am shamed at having been overcome by that awful thing and its brutal minions, yet I am confident that I fully and honorably performed my duties as a soldier. Despite the grievous loss of the 212 Engineering Corps, the task of renovating the airfield was completed, under my leadership, to the exact specifications of the operational commander.

Sadly, I have been informed that a second regiment sent to the Myatauki airfield to insure the security of the region vanished under similarly bizarre circumstances. But due to the minor strategic value of that particular airfield, and now that the Allied bases at Mergui, Tavoy, Moulmein, and Toungoo have fallen to our forces, I have been informed that further efforts to hold the Myatauki region have been abandoned. Yes, I am relieved that no more of my countrymen should perish in that forsaken shadowland; but I am also galled that so many men's lives were wasted in pursuit of a meaningless goal.

Now, as I write, the Burma Road is in our hands. Rangoon has fallen. Burma belongs to the emperor. It is a day to rejoice, and to forget the dream voices that have followed me for all these months.

How I love to sit beneath the cherry blossoms of my home in beautiful Okayama. Machiko tends to me when my injury precludes me from even the simplest

tasks. I enjoy watching over my children, who are half-oblivious to the dark lines and shadows that mar my face. They are old enough to understand that war changes men and have accepted that I returned a different person than they knew before. Yet, they still love me with all their hearts and know that I am, forever and always, their father. And they will always be my children.

Administrative note: The preceding manuscript was discovered among the belongings of Colonel Kenjiro Terusawa, formerly of the 212 Engineering Corps, XV Army, and forwarded to Operational HQ, Rangoon, for investigation following the slaying of his young son and two daughters. The details are particularly brutal, for the once-honored officer had apparently decapitated all three of his children and mounted their heads on bamboo pikes in front of his home. The only words that the subject has since uttered are, "Remember the children."

Terusawa's wife, Machiko, was reported to have committed suicide shortly after discovering the murders.

Col. Terusawa has been confined for the remainder of his life to an institution for the criminally insane in Hiroshima.

--Gen. Shibata Ryuichi
Operational Commander, XV Army
June, 1944

△

Stephen Mark Rainey is co-author of the Dark Shadows novel Dreams Of The Dark with Elizabeth Massie. His short fiction has appeared in over 80 magazines and anthologies. He lives in Greensboro, NC, with his wife Peggy and three cats. His daughter, Allison, is a senior at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC.



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