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ALLIED PRISONERS

(Attention is directed to the confidential classification of material in this article.)

One hundred and fifty four English and Australian enlisted men, prisoners of the Japanese for 30 gruelling months, have been rescued in the South China Sea by four U.S. submarines. The men were aboard the RAKUYO MARU, en route to JAPAN, when torpedoes brought them release from their captors on 12 September. Until the submarines again visited the scene on 15 and 17 September, however, their fate seemed more likely to be death than rescue.

Other prisoners of war were also said to be awaiting transportation to the EMPIRE. Able-bodied POWs, preferably with technical experience, are apparently badly needed to help hard-pressed Jap factories.

At the time of their rescue, conditions did not permit intensive questioning of RAKUYO survivors, but preliminary reports of their experiences have now been received.

The reports contain valuable intelligence concerning Japanese activity and conditions in SINGAPORE, THAILAND, FRENCH INDO-CHINA and BURMA. They also provide much new information concerning the whereabouts and condition of many Allied captives and the fate of others. They list the friends and foes of the Allied cause. And they present another appalling picture of life in Japanese prison camps. Although the men are now on their way to their homes, more detailed information is expected.

The RAKUYO MARU, a 9419-ton freighter-transport, sailed from SINGAPORE on 6 September 1944, reportedly for KOBE, with a cargo of tin, rubber, hemp, hides, lead, rice and canned goods. In company with her were the PRESIDENT HARRISON, carrying Japanese wounded and nurses, the URAL MARU, an unidentified maru, two tankers, a FUBUKI Class DD, two CHIDORI Class TBs and two KAIBOKAN. On the fifth night out, three 10,000-ton marus and two or more small escorts joined the convoy, apparently from MANILA.

Some 1350 Allied POWs were aboard the ships which sailed from SINGAPORE. An Australian brigadier, an English air group commander and a USAAF colonel were reported quartered in the after hold of the RAKUYO MARU, and 591 English and 717 Australians were in the #2 hold, where a sign announced the capacity at "199 third class passengers". More camped on deck. In addition, the PRESIDENT HARRISON was carrying 300 English and Australians.

Japanese respect for U.S. submarine warfare was obvious. SINGAPORE's inner and outer harbors held more than 50 ships, including a German submarine, many of which had returned or were delaying sailing because of reported submarine activity. It was said that one could walk to TOKYO on periscopes, and one Japanese remarked that only three out of five ships were expected to reach the homeland.

The convoy maintained a speed of about 9 knots during daylight and changed disposition every seven to ten minutes in response to flag hoists. During darkness,

the formation closed up, the speed was increased 2-3 knots and the signals were given by dull red light. Two float planes flew close circles around the convoy from 0930 until dark on the first three days at sea, but there had been no air cover for two days prior to the attack.

The attitude of respect for submarines proved well-founded. Shortly after moonrise, at 0210I on 12 September, U.S. submarines launched the first of a series of attacks on the convoy, at 18-42 N., 114-00 E., by torpedoing and sinking a KAI-BOKAN. Flares and gunfire broke up the attack for the time being, but at 0522I the submarines struck again, sinking the RAKUYO and another maru, the two tankers and the DD.

The RAKUYO MARU was hit both forward and aft by torpedoes. Panic broke out among the Japanese crew and they took to the boats immediately, getting off only three random shots from the forward gun. The POWs, none of whom apparently were killed by the torpedoes, followed the crew over the side and clambered onto hatch covers and rafts. Some Australian Petty Officers of the cruiser PERTH organized the getting away of the prisoners in a splendid manner. The ship did not sink until 12 hours later, but, because of her list and the unfavorable current, none of the POWs could return for supplies except two, who loaded a small boat with provisions and set out for the CHINA coast under oars.

During the day of the 12th, escorts toured the area, picking up Japs from the boats but holding off POWs with revolvers. When all the Japs had been rescued, the remnants of the convoy sailed. The submarines maintained contact and, on the following night, attacked the PRESIDENT HARRISON and two other marus.

On 15 September, two of the submarines who had attacked the convoy and were returning to their patrol area entered a heavy diesel slick and debris extending over 10 square miles, near 18-30 N., 113-50 E. The first group of shouting, beckoning survivors was sighted at 1831I, an hour after sunset. The submarines immediately sent out rescue parties in the dusk. One picked up 72 and the other 54 men. Two other submarines were dispatched to the scene and arrived on 17 September, one rescuing 18 and the other 14 men. How many more may have survived the attacks cannot be estimated.

The survivors of 30 months' imprisonment and a torpedoing were taken on board in a deplorable condition, 20-40 pounds below normal weight. The majority were unclothed except for life jackets, and the fuel oil on their bodies had been scant protection against the blistering sun. Two were unconscious, two were semi-conscious and the remainder were suffering from shock, fatigue, exposure, immersion, thirst, hunger, conjunctivitis, open sores and lesions. Despite heroic nursing by submarine personnel, four died before they could be hospitalized at SAIPAN.

Although 15 English and Australian officers had been aboard, all rescued POWs were enlisted men. Most of them had been among the 65,000 who surrendered at SINGAPORE on 14 February 1942. A few had been captured in JAVA and MALAYA and one in TIMOR. Two were seamen from HMAS PERTH, CL sunk in the Battle of the JAVA SEA on 27-28 February 1942. Included among the unrescued POWs in the PRESIDENT HARRISON were survivors from HMS PRINCE OF WALES and HMS REPULSE, BB and CC sunk by aircraft off MALAYA on 8 December 1941.

During the first months of their internment, the POWs had remained in camps near SINGAPORE, working on construction projects and as stevedores. In May, 1942,

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the Australians were taken to BURMA and the English to THAILAND to work with coolies laying 300 miles of track through jungle to complete the MOULMEIN-BANGKOK railway. The Australians worked east from THAMBUZAYAT and the English west from NONPERDUK toward a projected meeting place.

The project was begun in June, 1942, and completed in October 1943. A slight miscalculation on the part of Japanese engineers, which left the two parties three miles apart when they reached their projected "meeting place", delayed the completion considerably.

During this time, the POWs lived under miserable conditions in the jungle and literally thousands died from cholera, dysentery, tropical ulcers, beri beri, malaria and malnutrition. Estimates of the deaths ran upwards from 15,000 despite tireless work by the Allied doctors, who performed miracles with no anesthetics and few supplies or instruments.

The men lived almost entirely on rice, with some fruit and fish. When ill, their ration was reduced 25%. No clothing was issued for over two years and many were without shoes. Work normally started at 0800 and ended at 2000, although sometimes the men worked 24 hours or more at a stretch. Initially, the pay was 10¢ a day, but this was increased to 25¢ for privates and 30¢ for non-coms. At the time, cigarettes cost \$2. a package, coconuts and pineapples \$1. each, chickens \$8., bananas \$2.50 per hand, eggs not available and jackets \$80. POWs received mail about four times in two and one-half years, and few of them had been fortunate enough to share a Red Cross bundle.

Treatment differed in the various camps. Some commanders had POWs killed without trial for offenses; others were reasonably considerate. Many of the guards were Koreans, and it was generally agreed that the Koreans were the most brutal of all. Occasionally, Japanese officers ordered Koreans whipped for particularly brutal, unprovoked assaults.

Following the completion of the railway, some remained as maintenance workers and others were taken to camps near KANBURI, THAILAND. In March, 1944, the most fit physically were selected for transportation to JAPAN, reportedly to do factory work. They first went to SAIGON, then down the river to CAPE ST. JACQUES for embarkation. After they were aboard ship, however, the plan was abandoned because of the submarine menace and the men were returned to SAIGON, where they worked on the docks and airfield until 5 June. Eventually it was decided they should go to SINGAPORE for embarkation. They arrived there, via PHNOMPENH and BANGKOK, on 4 July, where they worked on the waterfront until their embarkation on the RAKUYO MARU on 4 September. Among the projects on which they worked was a 525' x 100' drydock on an island in SINGAPORE harbor.

In addition to a considerable amount of intelligence, the rescued POWs also brought back a vast amount of information concerning other POWs, living and dead.

The seamen from HMAS PERTH reported that 300 survivors of the USS HOUSTON had landed on JAVA and been taken prisoner. The PERTH, a CL, and the HOUSTON, a CA, were attempting to transit SUNDA STRAIT on 1 March 1942 with little or no escort. The PERTH had no ammunition for guns over 4". Several hours after dark, a DD opened up on the PERTH and was sunk. Other DDs then attacked, however, and sunk the PERTH with three torpedo hits. The HOUSTON was sunk by torpedoes and gunfire shortly afterward. The survivors were taken to SERANG, then to BATAVIA and SINGAPORE. Some later went to THAILAND and SAIGON. Senior officers went on to JAPAN.

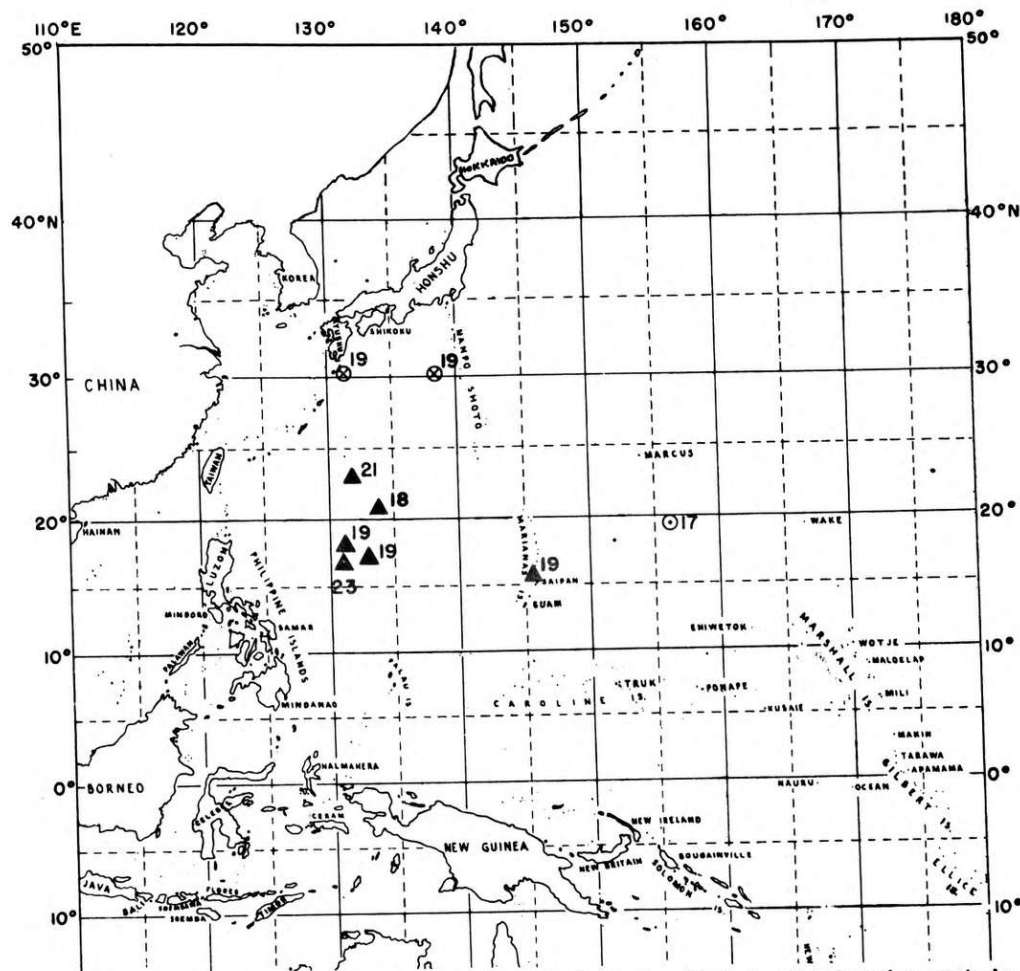
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SUBMARINE SITUATION OCT. 16 - OCT. 23

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LEGEND

- ▲- SIGHTING
- SOUND CONTACT
- ⊗- R D/F FIX



A study of the submarine chart this week indicates that a new submarine pack is enroute from the Empire to the PALAU-PHILIPPINES area. This movement very possibly portends increased submarine activity in the area of current operation. Japanese submarine policy appears to be to retain the bulk of their submarine force in the Empire, sending them forth to active areas only when attack or occupation impends.

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