

# MERRILL'S MARAUDERS

*-What really Happened*



**The armchair critics have had a lot to say about Merrill's Marauders, but they were far from the trackless jungle where these men fought on when nothing was left but their gallantry.**

**Here is the true story, told by a man who was there**

**BY CAPT. FRED O. LYONS**  
**as told to PAUL WILDER**

**I WAS ONE** of Merrill's Marauders.

I was one of those who marched that thousand miles through hell to slash the hamstrings of the Japanese armies in Burma while General Stilwell's Chinese troops herded them backward and backward, finally to reopen the Burma Road, the famed life line of China.

The world is fairly familiar with the result of our march and our battles. The map of Burma is testament to that. People know that only three thousand of us started out, just three battalions, and that not all the three thousand came back. But since our return a lot of questions have been raised about Merrill's Marauders. They all add up to saying that we cracked, broke down; that our morale was shattered—even though we won the victory.



The people who say these things don't know our story, because it is in the footprints we left for a thousand miles across a never-never land of mountains and jungle, of blood-sucking leeches and chat-



tering baboons, of thundering elephants and silent Japanese. Yes, that's where the answers to all the questions about Merrill's Marauders can be found.

Well, this is the story of those footprints made across the long, terrible miles of Burma. I tell it as I remember it, as it happened to me, right from the beginning.

I had been stationed in Trinidad for almost two years and had begun to feel that the war was passing me by, when one day back in August, 1943, Colonel H. McGee, my regimental commander, called me into his office.

"Do you want to volunteer for a dangerous and hazardous secret mission in an active theater?" he asked me.

A dangerous and hazardous secret mission! My heart gave a jump. But wasn't this what I'd been waiting for?

"Sure as hell," I replied. "When do we start?"

Colonel McGee asked the same question of all the officers and men in the regiment and everyone gave the same answer, but in the end only 1,100 were allowed to go. I felt lucky, for they took me. And from then on things moved fast.

Every westbound transport plane on the African route that landed at Trinidad was detained. Passengers who had waited weeks for reservations were forced to wait some more while soldier after soldier went aboard. Finally my turn came, and I boarded a huge transport to begin the first lap of a long, long journey.

The first lap ended at Miami Beach. There, secrecy was the watchword. I was confined to a hotel along with my men and not allowed even to walk around the block or telephone my home, just two hundred miles away. Other men who had volunteered for the "dangerous and hazardous secret mission" were pouring into other hotels: cavalrymen from Jamaica,

engineers from Puerto Rico, riflemen from Panama, radio experts from Washington. They had no more information than I on where we were going or what we were to do.

The next morning we boarded two trains with curtains drawn. Five days later we were in San Francisco. At least we knew we weren't going to Europe.

Kept close in barracks at Pittsburg, California, we were given shots of vaccine against diseases in tropical or arctic climates. We thought we had learned something when we got wool clothing, but the next day we were issued another outfit of cotton uniforms. The rumor factories were put in production, but we still had no inkling of our real destination.

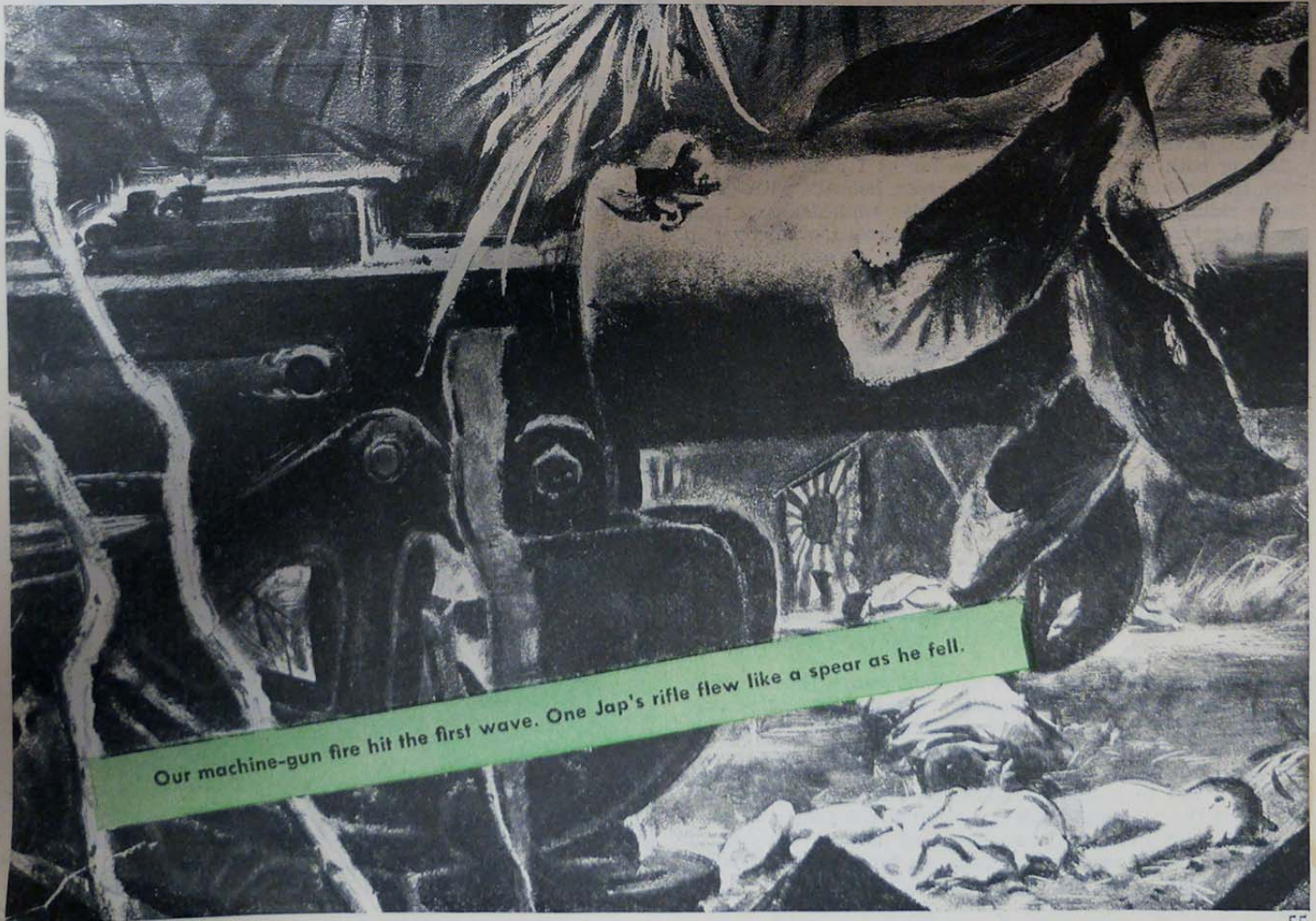
At last, just before the time came to sail, I was allowed to make a telephone call. I called my mother in Florida, but all I could tell her was that I wouldn't be seeing her for a while, and not to worry. She said, "All right, son; take care of yourself." If she had believed in medals, I'd have given her one.

At sea on a converted luxury liner, I found that we were to be given plenty of training for our mysterious mission. Day after day on the wide decks we jumped and crouched, slashed with bayonets and parried with gun butts. We shot at bobbing Japanese cardboard faces, peered at cardboard models of Japanese tanks and airplanes. We had to learn a lot about fighting the Jap, and every minute counted.

At New Caledonia we met new members of our outfit, leather-faced veterans of Guadalcanal and New Guinea. On



At sea, on a converted luxury liner, we were given plenty of training for our mysterious mission.



Our machine-gun fire hit the first wave. One Jap's rifle flew like a spear as he fell.

board ship the veterans were assigned places in our units, to give weight and experience to our novice ranks. By then we knew our goal wasn't the South Pacific.

At other ports, we were ashore only a few hours. The most welcome sight in years was India, for it meant the long sea voyage was over.

A clanking, snorting train carried us to a rest camp, and after three weeks we moved to training camp. There we learned for the first time where our battleground would be.

It was the now-legendary General "Sword and Bible" Wingate who broke the news to us. He told us every detail of his famous Raider campaign in Burma the year before, so we could profit by his experience and come out of the jungle alive. I can see him now, his hawklike face animated as he warned us never to speak above a whisper in the jungle, never to try to pull away a blood-sucking leech, never to drink jungle water without sterilizing it.

For two months we trained in the maneuvers of the jungle. We were issued jungle clothing—not the splotted camouflage uniforms of the New Guinea boys, but solid dark green outfits that offered even more complete concealment in the bush. Our fatigue blouses and our pants, our undershirts and drawers, even our handkerchiefs and matches were green. Day and night we marched, ran, hid, fainted, learned all over again the lessons that first had been learned by American frontiersmen in their struggle with the Indians. Right along with us was Brigadier General (now Major General) Frank Merrill, learning too. We became hard as our green helmets, tough as our green GI brogans. I weighed 146 pounds and there wasn't an ounce of fat on me. I could run for twenty miles and still enjoy a brisk walk in the cool night air of an Indian village.

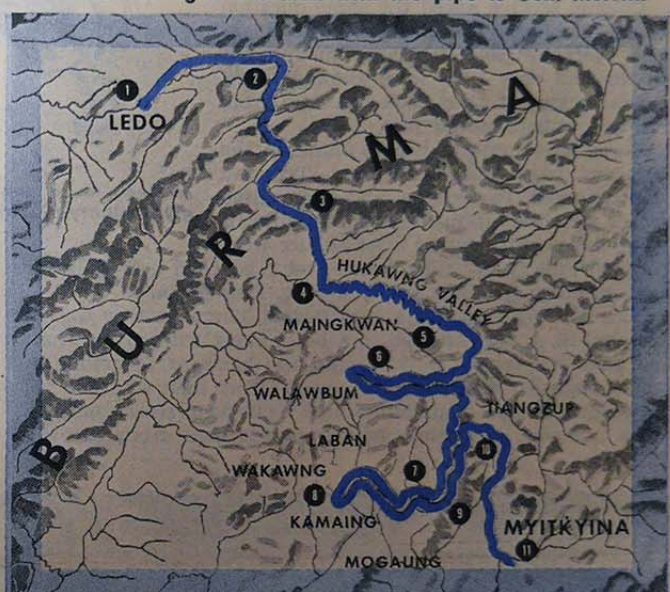
At last the day came when we were considered ready. Another rocking, rolling train carried us to a little Indian town some eight miles from Ledo near the Burma border. Supplies were waiting for us; mules and horses were milling in a fenced field; airplanes were on landing strips ready for supply hauls. The staff work of General Stilwell's headquarters had prepared everything for the jump-off. It came at dusk on February 7, 1944.

One after another, men and animals pulled into line and marched off down the Ledo Road, a twisting forty-foot-wide expanse of hard-packed earth stretching from India down into Burma and linking with the famed Burma Road snipped off by the Japs. That was the reason for the march: to help push the Japs away from the connecting link between India and China, the life line that could turn the trickle of supplies to beleaguered China into a torrent.

Lining both sides of the road as far as I could see ahead were the bobbing heads of men in green helmets, with green packs riding high on their backs. Mules ambled along, their packs lurching from side to side in rhythmic movement with the marching feet. Behind me stretched an endless line of



On Myitkyina Airfield after its capture from the Japs. Gen. Stilwell at right. The man with the pipe is Gen. Merrill.



KEY TO ROUTE OF MARAUDERS

1. Left Ledo Feb. 7, '44. 2. Hell's Gate Pass. 3. Tagap Ga. 4. 137 miles. Left Ledo Road Feb. 17. 5. Rest 2 days. Leeches started.
6. 1st road block Mar. 5. 7. Crossed river 49 times. 8. 2nd road block. 9. Nhpum Ga. 10. Airfield. 11. Myitkyina Airfield. Left May 28.



All I wanted was unconsciousness.

faces chalky white in the iridescent light from a Burma moon. The conversation was in snatches. "I hope this thing's over with in a hurry," said Sokolowsky, a sergeant from Pittsburgh. "I have a feeling this is going to be no jaunt."

But for ten nights there was nothing to bear out his feeling. All there was to it was marching. As dawn approached, we pulled off the road and made our camp in the jungle till sundown. For 137 miles, we were disturbed only by the dust of 100-truck convoys roaring past with provisions for the Chinese Army hacking at the Japs in North Burma.



In Burma, the Marauders' path through ten-foot Kunai grass is lined by two dead Japs slain by another patrol.

Then we came to the end of the Ledo Road. We struck out over a three-foot-wide trail in the jungle and changed to traveling in the daytime, for we could scarcely inch ahead in the jungle at night. Even though the moon was bright, the light that seeped through the tangled mass of vines, banyan trees and verdure was hardly enough to make a tree visible two feet away.

Each man passed back to the one behind him the information on what to expect for his next step. "Root," Doc Henry Stelling, a medic from Augusta, Georgia, would jerk back over his shoulder to me, and a moment later I would step high to avoid a gnarled banyan root sticking across the trail. "Root," I would pass on in a stage whisper to Sokolowsky behind me, and so on down the line.

We were nearing the area at the head of the Hukawng Valley where we knew Jap forces to be. Occasionally a flock of chattering baboons, startled by our approach, would start leaping through the trees and I would listen to their screeching receding in the distance.

"Damn those monkeys!" Sokolowsky said more than once. "They'll tip off the Japs we're here."

Sometimes we carried on short conversations in whispers, but most of the time we marched in silence, automatically following the winding trails made through the centuries by Burmese natives moving from town to town. For miles at a time I would just think about one subject, such as a bowl of spaghetti.

As we advanced into the valley, the foodstuffs we had packed with us ran out, and we called for an air drop. That first supply drop was quite an experience. I assigned men to look after the company's supplies, then went up on a rock to watch. Right on the scheduled time of two o'clock, the planes came roaring over. Down and down they came, seeming to skim the tree-tops. Then out of their big bellies rolled boxes and packages, crates and sacks. The boxes jerked and dangled on the parachute strings like marionettes, but the feed sacks for the animals plummeted earthward with a thud like the sound of our mortars.

After a two days' rest while supplies were sorted and divided, we started the march again. We were climbing and climbing, going up into the Himalayas to avoid the Japanese in the valley and outflank their lines. That was when the going really began to get tough. We could make no more than a mile or two an hour, and then we were in constant danger of falling from a cliff, a sheer drop of two hundred feet. Most of the trails were built on the ridges with only gorges on either side. At night we moved into our wheel-like camp, with the animals, heavy guns and other equipment in the middle, and the machine guns and gunners forming the circular rim. Every night we were just a little closer to the Jap area. Finally we started down into the valley again. According to our scouts and information from General Stilwell's headquarters, we had outflanked the Japs, and we were now ready to march into their rear.

General Merrill explained in a staff meeting that we were to block the road so as to stop the flow of Jap supplies northward and to hold as long as we could, then pull out. The spot picked by Colonel McGee was a low part of the road near Walawbum, where an encampment of Japanese had been detected. I sent out a patrol party to look the place over, and thirty-six hours later we followed the trail cut by the point unit. Coming into the valley, we left the tangled jungle behind and walked through waving seas of elephant grass, like sugar cane, towering above our heads. The men ahead had pushed stalks aside and cut them with Gurkha knives, but we had to be careful not to brush against the stalks and cause ripples along the way.

I was going into my first battle action, and I was scared. As

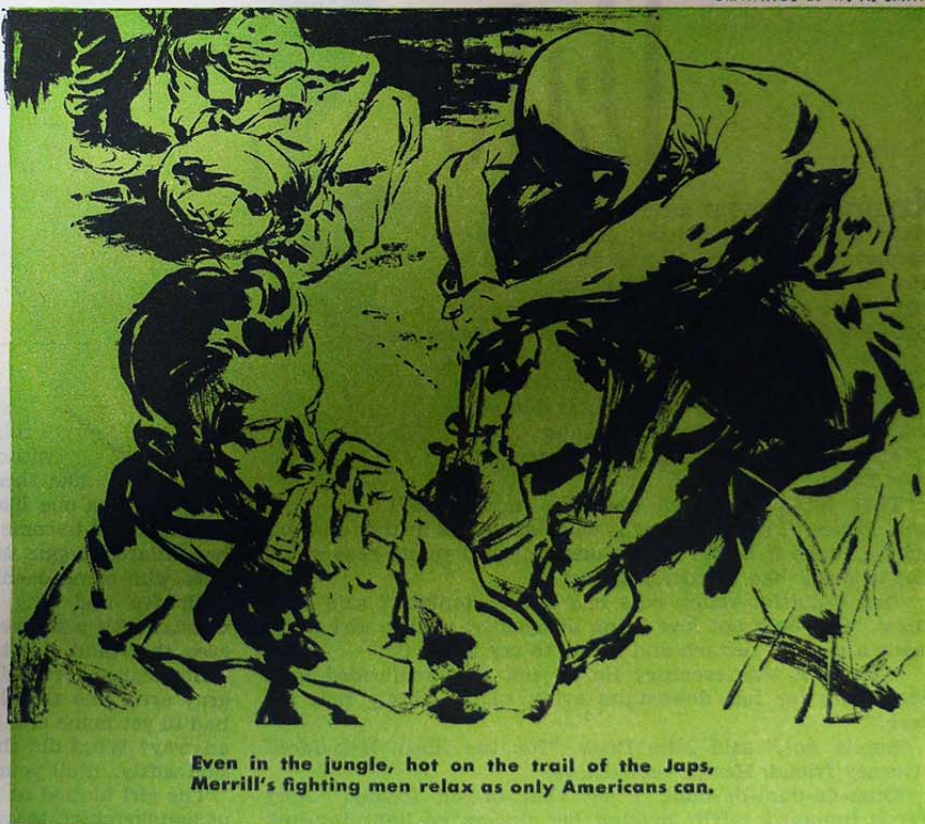
I picked my way along the wavering patch of grass, I thought of all the things I had to do. I thought how I would set up the mortars on the edge of the road ready to pour shells into the Jap emplacements; how I would group the machine guns to hit from all sides at once. As twilight grayed into night, we moved to within a mile of the road and grouped in the familiar wagon wheel for the night.

The colonel sent me out to check the perimeter. As I moved gingerly through the elephant grass, I could hear Japanese laughing and shouting in the distance. I figured they were getting sake'd up for a drive against our other battalion, for they certainly would not have risked being heard had they thought we were near. It gave me little chills down my back, but I shook the feeling off, and thought again about the layout for the attack. It was going to start at dawn, so I decided to get a little sleep. I asked one of the men standing guard to wake me at five o'clock, and lay down on the ground with my head on my pack and dozed off. I didn't need a second call when the guard nudged me.

In the still darkness of pre-dawn, the men stepped quietly about getting their packs ready, their ammunition packed, their bayonets fixed, the tommy-guns slung. Single file down the trail we moved. Slowly we reached the depression lining the road. Then to my amazement a scout called back on the walkie-talkie, "They're pulling out."

That's how we took our first road block, without firing a

DRAWINGS BY W. A. SMITH



Even in the jungle, hot on the trail of the Japs, Merrill's fighting men relax as only Americans can.

shot. The Japs had moved down the road during the night to attack our other battalion at Walawbum, leaving their foxholes wide open and inviting.

We set to work digging the foxholes deeper, so two men could occupy one at the same time. Meanwhile the gunners were setting up their pieces and the mortar men were putting their three-piece stovepipes together. I was moving around, checking to see the cross-fire covered all the approaches and the guns were in firing order, when we found out that the outfit which had left its foxholes to us was coming back. We got ready. We crouched in our foxholes. I could feel my muscles trying to cross in cramps and the blood pounding in my face as I gingerly moved my position and peered down the road. This is it! I thought. Then from the stillness of a Burmese plain came the sudden chatter of a machine gun. It startled me, and it angered Sergeant Cadamo beside me. He dived to the next hole to grab the (Continued on page 106)

gunner's shoulder. "What the hell you shooting at?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper.

"What the hell you think?" the gunner shot back, and pointed down the road.

Cadamo shook his head and came back all excited. "What did the fool kid do?" I asked.

"Hell, he got seven Japs in a row walking up the road in as pretty a set-up shot as I've ever seen."

Then the firing began in earnest. More Japs ran into view, so close you could see the bronze star shining dully on their bouncing little hats. The tommy-guns paused only for reloading as one after the other the Japs ducked and melted away into the grass. The boys must have killed a hundred, but it was all over in a hurry.

The whole Japanese Eighteenth Division was going to move back down the valley, we learned, so that night we pulled the men out and headed for the hills. We hadn't done badly on our first road block.

A two days' rest awaited us in the Himalayas, where we reoutfitted from provisions dropped by parachute, and then we started the trek again. We found our job wasn't half done.

High along tortuous mountain trails we climbed and descended. One ridge was so steep we had to chop steps in the rocks and sling ropes to give ourselves handholds. I stationed men at the bottom to help boost the animals up the steps, but even so, several fell to death in the canyon below.

Reaching a gorge holding the Sumpa Hka, a river not more than waist deep, we found our most difficult terrain to date. We'd cling to one bank for a little

way, then find there was no more room for travel and wade across to the other side. I'd step in a little hole and sink almost to my armpits, grab a mule's tail to keep from going under, then empty my shoes of silt and pebbles and wade on. Back and forth we waded, until I was so groggy I didn't even think about the number of times we'd crossed. But as we neared the end of twenty miles of river, Sokolowsky piped up.

"Do you know how many times we've crossed this thing?"

"About thirty, I guess," I groaned.

"Hell," he said, "I've been keeping count on my sleeve. It's forty-nine." Forty-nine times we had crossed that river just to make twenty miles.

Nearing the Jap road where we planned to throw in the second road block, we were moving carefully and quietly. Once again came that tense feeling of nervous expectancy. Then the order came back down the line: "Fire at point, fire at point, fire at point." I reached around and grabbed the radio-telephone off the hook where it was hanging from the signalman's pack.

"What's going on?" I asked. But the air was too busy. Battalion headquarters was issuing orders to spread out in formation, and the column was splitting up ahead to move off the trail. Finally I learned what had happened. The point men—lead scouts—had run into four Japs riding an elephant. They had killed three, but one had escaped. We knew then the Japs would have us spotted. We circled into our wagon wheel and dug the holes for the coming scrap. We knew it was coming, for all night long on the road we could hear the bang of truck tail gates and the thud of feet landing on

the ground. Every bang meant another truckload of Jap soldiers unloading.

In the morning they struck. I had heard of *Banzai* charges before, and now I was in the middle of one. I was crawling through the underbrush to a gun post when I saw the first wave. They were big Japanese marines, fully six feet tall, wearing yellowish khaki uniforms that seemed to envelop them like gunny sacks. They had a sort of waddle as they ran, because their legs were short. There's not much expression to a Japanese face, but I could plainly see the strained and twisted look about them that turned to sudden shock and surprise as our machine-gun fire hit. One Jap's rifle seemed to fly like a spear as he fell. Another sank to his knees, hit in the stomach; he tore open his shirt and let the sun shine on his smooth bare chest, then clumped in the dirt, coughing and grunting. Then in another burst of tommy-gun fire he quit grunting.

I crawled on toward the perimeter and moved into a new foxhole. Down the incline, I looked on a strange scene of mortal combat. A Jap had jumped into a foxhole with a boy named Ryan. Ryan grabbed the Jap's rifle, and they wrestled and hauled and tugged, unmindful of the other fighting near them, or of the waves of Japs that were being mowed down on the other side of the clearing. First Ryan fell on the side of the hole, then the Jap was underneath, both straining and pulling to break each other's grip. No one dared shoot at the Jap for fear of hitting Ryan, so it was up to him.

Suddenly it happened. Ryan gave the gun a twist and the Jap fell free. Divested of his arms, he leaped upward to get out of the way. As he jumped, a hail of machine-gun slugs caught him. I was so winded from the excitement of watching I felt as if I myself had been wrestling.

Jap bodies were piled so deep after the fourth wave had been cut down that, during a lull in the fighting, Cadamo had to sneak out and kick some of them out of the way to clear the range for his gun. In front of another gun I counted bodies seven deep.

At last came a wait that stretched into hours with no more Japs coming up that bloody hill. Cigarettes were passed from hand to hand, and the strain began to tell as the men flopped back into their holes. The fight was over. Before it could start again, we pulled out once more and headed back toward the Himalayas, rising in peaceful majesty 6,000 feet above that place of death and suffering. Going back over the Sumpa Hka, we made forty-nine more crossings. As night fell, once more in the rocky crags, we learned that the main Jap body was again falling back from the thrust of Stilwell's Chinese and from our constant rear stings.

More nights of mountain bivouacs, more days of trudging along ridges. Two months had passed since we left Ledo, and still no end was in sight. We were headed for a supply drop when the battalion reached Nhpum Ga, the ridge that almost spelled doom for a third of Merrill's Marauders. The Japs caught us on that hill, cutting us off from the rest of the Marauders. There were 1,100 of us, and we were trapped.

The sneaking, crawling Japs weren't so bad, for we eventually could spot them, but the mortar fire lobbing inside the wagon wheel was raising hob with our supplies and killing off animals and men. Without a stream, we soon were in need of water. We cleared the bamboo inside the perimeter and cut open the joints,

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"There ya' go again, Johnson—always thinking of a post-war job."

getting as much as a cup of water from each joint. But the bamboo didn't last long with a thousand men. There was some water in elephant tracks, and I tried to skim off the scum and drink that. Although I put halazone in the chalky-tasting stuff, tried to doctor it with lemonade tablets and even tried coffee and cream, it still tasted just like what it was, wet mud. Back in Ledo they rushed supplies in answer to our radio pleas, and in the first parachute drop were plastic casks with aluminum screw tops. When I saw those dangling sausage-like bottles come floating down on the parachutes, I breathed a fervent prayer of thanks. We had water!

Day and night we were under attack. Everyone had to stay at his gun. I made the rounds regularly, for it made the boys feel less deserted. I called for cigarettes from Ledo, and the next drop brought them in abundance. The packages had little tickets on them saying they had been donated by American Legion posts and civic clubs back in the States. It sort of made us feel for a while that there was such a place as the United States.

From the strain and lack of sleep, the men's eyes became glazed and staring. Even the simplest remark was made in a way that, as I look back, was just like a melodrama. One of the men would ask me in a slow, creaking voice, "Where's the water?" And I would answer just as desperately and deliberately, "Right over there." The conversation was slight, yet there was still wry humor. I thought I'd split when one of the boys said to another, "My, you're looking fine this morning. Who's your undertaker?"

The boys began to call the ridge Maggot Hill as the carcasses of horses inside the perimeter decayed and the stench of dead Japs outside it became more and more violent. Shells pounded in, and we kept pouring it out. In one supply drop we were scheduled to get hand grenades. The parachutes fell wide, and pretty soon our own hand grenades began popping at us. Snipers crawled into the very trees above our heads, I had gone out to lay a line of telephone wire when the puff of an explosive bullet kicked up the dirt a couple of yards from my feet. I flopped and looked around but could see nothing. Another puff kicked up the dirt. I wriggled and twisted, pulling my wire with me. Still another puff. Five times the sniper, concealed in a tree somewhere near the clearing, shot at me, and five times he missed. I thought: What a lousy shot you are—if I couldn't do better in five shots I'd turn in my bars. Then as I jumped into my foxhole I thumbed my nose at where I thought the sniper ought to be. I had lost my fear of battle.

A battalion was trying to push to us across the ravine, but they were losing men too. Hearing of our plight, the cooks at the rear echelon in Ledo stayed up all night to fix us something special. Sick of K-rations, we lived on coffee and cigarettes for eight days. Then came, floating down under great white folds of silk, box after box of fried chicken. With the fighting under way only 300 yards off, it was a strange sight to see a bunch of battle-worn GI's elbowing one another to be first for the leg or the breast. Just as the feast was being passed out to the second line, Jap artillery fire began lobbing in, and the boys scattered. In the next lull, those who returned found somebody had risked his life for one more taste of that chicken, for there was none left.

The days dragged on. Men so weak with stomach ailments they couldn't stand up lay against the boxes and bales,

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The medics rushed around trying to tend the wounded, and shallow graves were dug for the dead. One moment seemed like hours and hours like weeks. Actually it was just fifteen days when the relief of Chinese troops got through on April ninth. I remember the date because somebody said it was Easter Sunday. And on that day we filed down from the hill. With our few remaining pack animals—eighty-nine of the original 400—we made our way back to a new area for a rest.

We had to build another air strip, though, before the wounded could be evacuated. The little mud retaining walls of a Burmese rice paddy were knocked down and smoothed over, the trees at one end were chopped away, and an earthen bank at the other end was cut into before we had a runway long enough to take even the little grasshopper planes. The buzzing of their dinky motors was sweet music to the ailing, and one by one they were taken up and flown back to the hospital.

Although I had managed to keep my strength for the two months of our journey, it was taking more and more effort to keep moving. I had amoebic dysentery. The medics were of the opinion I had contracted it when I drank water out of the elephant tracks, for halazone kills all germs except amoebae. Then, too, I had lost a considerable quantity of blood to leeches, those horrifying grayish-brown parasites that bury their heads in your veins and suck till they are bloated several times larger than normal size with your blood.

I had learned how to get rid of leeches by touching a burning cigarette, iodine or salt to them, but they were always to be found under my blankets at night. It got so that I began every morning with an examination to see how many leeches had been living off me through the night. Once there were nine, swelled to the size of half sausages with my blood. Some of the boys got them into their ears and noses, and then the medics made use of a special technique. It seems a leech will reach down to put its tail in water that's near, so the medics would hold a cupful of water under a leech sufferer's nose or ear. As the leech reached down, the medic would tie a loop of string to the tail and pull tight. Then he would touch the end of a burning cigarette to the leech, and it would immediately come loose. But if you tried merely to pull it out, its head would break off beneath your skin and cause an infection.

Other illnesses broke out among the men—yellow jaundice, malaria, stomach disorders—but we kept plugging on. Our goal was Myitkyina, and we hated to quit before we got there. When our rest was over, we went back to the mountain trail to start our march for the final drive.

It seemed then as though I couldn't last another day. As we'd reach the crest of one hill, maybe a mile high, we'd look down and see another valley a mile below, and another hill beyond. Maybe the crest of the next hill would be only half a mile away, but we'd have two miles of walking before we'd get there. Driving, driving, driving ourselves forward, we inched up one hill and down another. Going up, the blood pounded in my head from the strain of hauling on vines and helping pull a mule up the trail. Going down, my heels pounded right up to my backbone, and every step was like beating an open wound. I couldn't think of anything but: *We've got to make it; there can't be much more to go. Then would come another hill.*

Sometimes I'd look ahead at Doc Henry Stelling, who carried a pack twice as big as anybody else's, and I'd wonder how in the world he could make it. Then

Doc showed what a man he was. On a supply drop a parachute with his medical supplies caught in the top of a tree. It must have been fifty feet high. The drop contained all the supplies we could get for two days. Doc didn't hesitate. Not even asking anyone else to help, he got a rope, fixed a sling and started shinnying up the tree. From below we watched and cheered him on like rooters at a football game: "Come on, Doc, you're getting close!" "Not much farther now!" "That's it, Doc!" When he finally reached the parachute and cut loose the shrouds, a loud cheer went up, Japs or no Japs near by. Doc waved and grinned, then began the descent. He had saved his precious supplies, and it may be that some lives were saved by that climb.

Somehow, we got down out of the

## ANSWERS

(To Observation Quiz on page 16)

### THE MONTH IT HAPPENED:

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. July.      | 5. March.     |
| 2. August.    | 6. October.   |
| 3. June.      | 7. June.      |
| 4. September. | 8. September. |
| 9. April.     |               |

Six correct answers is a good average.

mountains and near Myitkyina. Once more we set up the wagon wheel, and sent out patrols to feel out the Japs. We soon made contact. The other battalions, moving in by different routes, came up, and soon we were in the thick of sniping and fighting again.

I took out a patrol along the railroad. By now my dysentery was so violent I was draining blood. Every one of the men was sick from one cause or another. My shoulders were worn raw from the pack straps, and I left the pack behind, carrying only my rifle, ammunition and belt. The boys with me weren't in much better shape, but we moved up along the railroad and set up a tommy-gun near the tracks. A scout moving ahead suddenly held his rifle high in the air. That meant "Enemy sighted." Then he started moving the rifle vigorously up and down. That meant "Enemy in force."

We hunched back into the bushes to watch. I felt almost indifferent to the outcome. Then at last we saw them, coming down the railroad four abreast. The Japs had no idea we were in the neighborhood. The gunner crouched low over his tommy-gun and tightened down.

Then the gun spoke. Down flopped a half-dozen Japs, then another half-dozen. The column spewed from their marching formation into the bush. We grabbed up the gun and slid back into the jungle. Sometimes staggering, sometimes running, sometimes dragging, I made it back to camp. I was so sick I didn't care whether the Japs broke through or not; so sick I didn't worry any more about letting the colonel down. All I wanted was unconsciousness.

"I've got to call it a trip, fellows," I told the medics. They looked at me and said they guessed I was right. So I lay down and waited for the plane to come and take me back to Ledo.

I was one of the last of the Marauders to leave Myitkyina. I left because I couldn't go any farther, no matter how much I wanted to. I was sick, exhausted,

whipped down mentally and physically. I know the others were the same way.

The breaking up of the Marauders was not from any one cause. All along the march men dropped out one by one—no, they didn't drop out; they dropped down. At first there were accident casualties—men who broke their legs in falls on the ridges; men whose ribs were smashed in by kicks of cantankerous pack animals.

After the first road block, disease began to take its toll. After the second road block and then after the battle of Nhpum Ga, the need for air evacuation grew more insistent with battle wounds and ailments. As we finished each job it looked as though we were to be relieved; then we'd have one more job to do.

But the battle for Myitkyina Airfield was the straw that broke the Marauders' back. We just couldn't take it any more. Faster and faster our men began dropping—from wastage of disease, yes, but mostly from exhaustion. The transports flew in and were loaded time after time with men who could scarcely lift a hand.

By the time my endurance finally gave out, reinforcements were coming in by air to the captured Jap air strip. They were green, brave as hell, thrown in because the battle for Myitkyina was reaching the crucial stage and we needed men—any kind of men. The newcomers grasped at every chance to talk with the Marauders, seeking advice even as we were being loaded into the transports.

Not a man of the Marauders went back to India a walking, well man. Every one was ordered out by the medics; every man who marched into Burma so proudly and confidently three months before either went out as a medical casualty or was left in a Burma jungle grave.

At the hospital I was in bed a week before I even wanted to look at my accumulated mail. We had got mail twice in supply drops, but I had a torrent of it spilled onto my bed. The month was June, but the boxes were Christmas gifts from the folks. Other boys coming back by air got their delayed presents, and it was almost like Christmas again.

And then we learned that some of us not even up from sick beds were being called upon to return to the hell of the jungle. We knew the battle for Myitkyina had reached the critical hour and the need for men was desperate, but we couldn't believe they were calling upon our men. When calls came in for 100 volunteers to return, there were none.

Thus there gradually came about what has been called the "crack-up of Merrill's Marauders."

In the hospital rooms the men lived over again those weary hours of moving upward and downward, around and across, back and forth over the Burma hillsides. They relived those days with the flies, the leeches, the ripping undergrowth, the rains, the mud, the moldy stench of ancient jungle and dead Japanese, the ever-present terror of ambush, the occasional grim gulp. And this comprehending couldn't include return.

Finally came orders for us to return to America. And we came home—five officers and about 400 enlisted men in the first batch, others as their condition warranted. We came home to hear it said of us that we had cracked up.

But we didn't. Yes, the men who had to go back did grumble and a lot of them didn't make it out there on the line, but that was not because our morale had cracked or we had fizzled.

Merrill's Marauders—all of us who can still walk—would march another such thousand miles to meet the Jap, if that were our mission. No, the morale of Merrill's Marauders never ended. We never backed down. We just wore out.