



Fugitives: Evading and Escaping the Japanese

Bob Stahl

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" When the Japanese Imperial Forces invaded the Philippine Islands at the onset of World War II, they quickly rounded up Allied citizens on Luzon and imprisoned them as enemy aliens. These captured civilians were treated inhumanely from the start, and news of the atrocities committed by the enemy soon spread to the more remote islands to the south. Hearing this, many of the expatriates living there refused to surrender as their islands were occupied. Fugitives, based on the memoir of Jordan A. Hamner, tells the true story of a young civilian mining engineer trapped on the islands during the Japanese invasion. Instead of surrendering, he and two American co-workers volunteered their services to the Allied armed forces engaged in the futile effort to stave off the enemy onslaught. When the overwhelmed defenders surrendered to the invaders, the three men fled farther into the disease-ridden mountainous jungle. After nearly a year of nomadic wandering, they found a derelict, twenty-one foot long lifeboat in a secluded coastal bay. Hoping to sail to freedom in Australia, the trio converted the craft into a sailboat, and called it the "Or Else." They would make it to Australia -- or else. With only a National Geographic magazine map of the Malacca Islands for navigation, Hamner, his two compatriots, and two Filipino crewmen sailed their unseaworthy craft fifteen hundred nautical miles over seas controlled by the Japanese navy, touching land only briefly to replenish meager rations or evade enemy vessels. After thirty perilous days at sea, marked by nearly disastrous encounters with hostile islanders, imminent starvation, and tropical storms, the desperate fugitives reached the welcome shores of Australia.

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