WARTIME JOURNEY

By W. A. FINDLAY

Geologist, Standard Oil Company of British Columbia

In the summer of 1939 the atmosphere was heavy with rumors of war to come; and we (my wife and I) started for India in the far-flung interests of foreign oil. We came home again in the spring of 1942. This is a rambling tale of our intermittent travels, largely to the exclusion of the brief intervening periods of comparatively sedentary existence.

We left Los Angeles for New York by train; thence aboard the S. S. NIEUW AMSTERDAM to Rotterdam. Tension ran high in Holland behind the casual expressions of faces. Distant explosions heard at night in Amsterdam might have been war, but they were not.

At Amsterdam we boarded a K. L. M. (Royal Dutch Airways) plane for India. The harvest was not yet in from the trim fields of Germany, far below. They looked very peaceful. War couldn't come yet because all authorities agreed that the harvest must be in first. Breakfast at the Leipzig airport was without incident. The military guards were very calm. They were too calm, but that was all. There hadn't been any Leipzig fair that summer.

Budapest at lunch time seemed nonchalant. The rough, barren Balkan mountains appeared to offer a great deal of vacant *lebensraum,* albeit of a rather forbidding type.

Athens, mildly giddy by nature, was comparatively unconscious of any impending doom. We stopped there for the night. The serene and ancient beauty of the Acropolis was deeply impressive at sunset.

The next day the very blue Mediterranean, Rhodes among many jewel-like islands, Alexandria, Palestine, vast stretches of lifeless desert, Bagdad and gray-green fertile Mesopotamia passed quickly beneath us; and evening found us in the ultra-modern, air-conditioned airport hotel of squalid Basra, at the head of the Persian Gulf.

The following day ended at our destination, Karachi, on the westernmost coast of time-worn India. Harsh, rocky, wind-swept stretches of coast line had alternated all day with monotonous expanses of the dull waters of the Persian Gulf.

Three days later war came to the peaceful landscape of Europe. Ours had been the last Royal Dutch Airways plane which would cross Germany in many years. An item probably trivial to those deciding the fate of Europe was that our baggage was still in Holland. The Mediterranean had instantly become as impassible to civilian shipping as though it had frozen solid overnight. Fortunately, it thawed presently. The coveted baggage arrived two months later.

British India dismissed the war with a gesture.

After six months in prosaic Karachi, we were again aboard a Douglas DC3 of the Royal Dutch Airways, retracing the airway by which we had arrived. At Alexandria we left the plane and took the Cairo train for a few hours across the Nile delta with its teeming canals, through the same lush fields which had soothed the eyes of Pharaohs dim centuries ago.

With the benevolence of the gods and through the good offices of friends who had not yet met us, we found ourselves in a few days at home in the very modern apartment of a couple of our wandering countrymen (serving the foreign ramifications of the rubber industry) who had returned home for long leave. Such incidents are the cream of such an existence as was ours.

Very shortly I left the fascination of Cairo for the trackless desolation of the Western Desert, with special permission of the military, to join a numerous camp of geophysicists and geologists.

Events in Europe progressed rapidly from the stage of tragedy toward that of calamity. At that time Mussolini's armies loomed huge and menacing to the eyes of Egypt. France was crumbling. Soon Mussolini, unable longer to resist the temptation of spoils and the pressure of the ally in whose tentacles he had become firmly entwined, ordered his armies to move. Overnight the Western Desert became no man's land. No man's land is a grim place even for a man bearing the weapons of war. For any civilian it is the wrong place to be, even though he is in search of that coveted commodity which is the life-blood of modern armies and over which, more than any other single item, the war is being fought.

I had been racing against time and Mussolini for three months to complete my own assignment in the Western Desert. Two days later I finished my field work; and along with all others of the numerous party, who were already on their way, left our camp-site, on a low barren knoll under the shadow of a 400-foot-high sand dune, to the fortunes of war.

A week later we were refugees from Egypt, along with some fifty other Americans of our organization. Regular air transport had been grounded in the crisis. We traveled by train to the Suez Canal and again by train to Jerusalem. After breakfast at the King David Hotel, a fleet of taxis carried our grim, resigned party over the dusty highways of Palestine and Syria toward Damascus.

France had fallen. The firm anchor of Syria's stability had given way. Damascus was confused and dazed. What might befall its people now they hardly dared guess.

The huge, air-conditioned, dust-proof, tractor-drawn trailer busses of the Nairn transportation system still ran from Damascus to Bagdad. The next morning our party fully occupied two of these units, From the clear, cool inside air, through momentary breaks in dense clouds of dust from the long, straight stretches of desert road, we watched rough, naked mountain country pass rapidly into limitless vistas of flat barrenness in the blistering heat outside.

The night spent hurtling across the desert was exhausting. We tumbled out onto the gravel of the desert floor to learn that the Euphrates was in flood and that the busses could not reach Bagdad, some 25 miles away. About an hour later dust clouds on the horizon resolved themselves into large numbers of small, ancient, battered taxis, careening wildly over the desert under the dubious control of their native drivers. We entered these with grave misgivings, subsequently fully justified. Eventually, however, after hours of apparently aimless wanderings about

the now burning desert, detouring the flood waters, we entered the cool date groves of Mesopotamia. Then soon we were among the narrow, fetid streets and shimmering, golden, pre-byzantine domes of ancient Bagdad.

We rested, but not for long. By pre-arrangement, a chartered Douglas plane of the omnipresent Royal Dutch Airways met us at Bagdad; and ferried the party, in two groups, on successive days, to Karachi. The exigencies of wartime continued to control our destinies. Most of the party returned to New York by boat from Bombay. We stayed on in Karachi for some months.

British India found the war no longer dismissable with a wave of the hand. These people had very suddenly been aroused to find it a matter of grave concern.

We left Karachi for Bombay en route home; but a sudden reversal of plans resulted in our proceeding instead to Calcutta from Bombay. We went on from Calcutta up into Assam, in extreme northeastern India. I spent sufficient time in the dense Assamese jungles to experience two or three midnight alarms (but no casualties) occasioned by intruding elephants—about three weeks. This was all too insufficient time in which to even begin to realize my cherished ambition to bag a tiger or two in India. An old female and two cubs had killed cattle on the great tea estate where we had our field headquarters, a few days before my arrival. Assam is the best remaining hunting ground in the world for the huge Bengal tigers.

From Assam we went on to Australia. However, during an enforced wait of a few days for passage reservations on an Imperial Airways flying boat (British Overseas Airways Corporation), we took leave to visit those seats of power of the ancient Mogul Dynasties: Agra and Delhi, in the broad valley of the Ganges. The indelible marks of those early men of power are still strong upon their chosen lands, out of the slavery of which rose the massive or exquisite monuments to that power. To experience that sense of immense serenity and involuntary awe which must be the reaction of any thinking individual in the presence of the intricate loveliness of the Taj Mahal is to question, in a most un-Christian way, whether the slavery out of which it came into being was not fully justified by the more fundamental laws of God and man.

We were back in Calcutta, that seething, age-old cauldron of human existence and its accumulated offal, where the presently-reigning huge, placid, humpshouldered, sacred Brahma bull accepts, unquestioningly and unquestioned, his sovereign right to the cool marbled main lobby of the head office of the Bank of India as the site of his mid-day siesta in the stifling heat of summer. Here the item most captivating to my own imagination was the concentrated horror of the highly publicized Black Hole of Calcutta. All that remains of this is a black marble pavement of actual floor dimensions (about 14 feet by 18 feet), surrounded by a low iron picket fence. A portion of this pavement is buried beneath an encroaching government building, on the wall of which, above the marble pavement, appears a plaque bearing the following inscription: "The marble pavement below this spot was placed by Lord Curzon, Viceroy and Governor General of India, in 1901, to mark the site of the prison in old Fort William known as the Black Hole in which 146 British inhabitants of Calcutta were confined on the night of 20th of June 1756 and from which only 23 came out alive." That was on a summer night in Calcutta.

We went aboard the Imperial Airways flying boat at Calcutta. None of the superfluous services and fripperies incidental to tourist travel hy flying boat in days of peace were left. War had become a stark matter of life or death of an empire.

The first day's flight took us across the Bay of Bengal and down its rough and verdant eastern shore, broken by another of the world's great, humanity-infested deltas, that of the Irrawaddy. There the bright gold pagodas of now-ravaged Rangoon careened in splendor among the luxuriant foliage and contrasting square-cut buildings of the city as the plane banked and circled to a landing.

We spent that night in the sultry heat of Bangkok. A faint but distinct flavor of surly belligerence was noticeable in the attitude of the Siamese toward Occidentals. They had just savored victory, what with timely Japanese cooperation, in armed operations against Indochina. Vivid impressions of the indescribably rank and penerating odor, undiagnosed at the time, of far-famed *durian fruit,* mingled with those of numberberless glimpses of the elaborate ornateness and high color of temples enclosed by high walls remain from a brief ride through the city at dusk.

Stretches of sea alternated next day with the dense tropical luxuriance of the Malay peninsula. The day ended at Singapore and the rambling sophistication of the Raffles Hotel, the same which were destined within the year to swell the gloating pride of the Jap in victory. Central Singapore is reported to have survived Japanese occupation largely intact.

At Singapore we changed planes: the British Overseas Airways flying boat for a Quantas (Australian) one of the same type. The Quantas plane was completely equipped, as in the years of peace, with a full complement of immaculately uniformed stewards and all the elaborate service, guide maps and travel-literature of tourist days; which was all very pleasant. The Australians did not know that there was desperate war in Europe and Africa. They recognized no premonition of imminent disaster in the lands and seas over which we flew. One evident concession only was made to the hazy, uncomprehended fact that the world was openly or otherwise engulfed in a struggle involving the fundamentals of its various ways of life: civilian passengers, in order of the recency of their passage bookings, must relinquish their seats in favor of military travelers and use makeshift seating facilities in what had recently been the mail compartment of the plane. This latter was devoid of that sound and vibration insulation which was so miraculously effective in the regular passenger accommodations. This one concession was undoubtedly made at the instance of military authorities much closer to the scenes of battle than Australia.

Flying on, the northeastern coasts of Sumatra and Java passed in review below. Southeastern Sumatra was a dense carpet of green; thickly interlaced with a filigree of thread-like veins of silvery water instantaneously flashing back the direct

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rays of the sun. Java, between intermittent cloud banks, was a flat plain, infinitely subdivided into the minute individual land-plots of its millions of inhabitants, all this sloping gently upward and backward from the low, gentle coast line toward the base of the island's rugged volcanic backbone with its high, jagged skyline.

We stopped that night at Sourabaya (Java) in a brief, cooling, drenching tropical rainstorm. Dutch customs authorities were tense, grimly thorough, unsmiling. The plane crew suggested to the present group of passengers that if we thought, by any chance, that we were being unduly manhandled by the Dutch authorities, we should have been present at the recent examination of a certain Japanese passenger.

The following day ended at Darwin, extreme northern Australia. To Dilli, Portuguese Timor Island, we flew over numerous, small, rough, thickly green-mantled islands, sometimes flying low, so that we could clearly see the few scattered bits of rock outcropping through the foliage. Before striking out over the many miles of open sea to Darwin, we skirted long stretches of wild, rocky, sparsely growth-covered Timor coast.

Darwin is one of those places commonly and aptly described as "the last place God made": a stifling, tropical land of tidal mudflats and mangrove swamps. The world contains a fair number of such places. The question of which one actually was last is probably of no great importance. Darwin must in any case have been relatively near the end of the sequence.

Within a few months Darwin was destined to quake, unprotected, under the impact of Japanese bombs. But now it was placid, undisturbed by serious thought of any violence to come. Desultory expansion of military facilities was in evidence from the air as we landed.

At Darwin we left the flying boat. Our schedule called for continuing down the west coast of Australia by a land plane taking off 36 hours after our arrival at Darwin. The day's rest was greatly appreciated, even in Darwin. Long trips by air are exhausting even in the comparative luxury of a big flying boat.

We hedge-hopped first westward along the north Australian coast, then far inland and again out to the coast, this time the west coast, stopping at small villages of a few inhabitants each or at headquarters of vast ranches or *stations*. At each stop all passengers were cordially served with sandwiches and tea—the eternal Australian tea, which incidentally is excellent. Between consecutive stops were long stretches of wild country unbroken by any sign of human habitation.

It was another world from that of which we had just had a true birdseye panorama, with its teeming human millions. This was a new, clean land, unsullied by countless centuries of human handling and desecration. It was indeed Australia, with its own marked individuality, which fact I am confident we would have recognized from previous acquaintance immediately upon landing even had we been carried there blindfolded and without knowledge of our destination. The land has its own unmistakable scent, from end to end—a fresh and faintly pungent, sage-like odor of some omnipresent plant, the identity of which defies definition, but which is probably either the acacia or eucalyptus or both.

Two days' flying brought us to Perth, Western Australia, far south on the western coast, our destination. We found Perth a pleasant place to live, in its quiet, comfortable setting along meandering curves of the Swan River, among congenial, gently rolling hills. However, most of my own time in Australia was spent in exploratory work far to the north in country which we had traversed by air in coming to Perth.

Within a year after our arrival at Perth, northwestern Australia had in its turn become truly no man's land, the chief variation on the theme being that this time the enemy was of the yellow races of the East. The Jap had bombed a west coast port of entry to the area of our explorations. Even to Australia, hitherto so remote from that dim panorama of events which had always seemed to have no reality, no real bearing on herself, war had grimly come.

The United States Army and Navy were moving in. They had known war only a few short weeks. In the desperate first moves to stem the Japanese tide confusion reigned, unavoidably.

Added to the consternation inherent in its own people and army and the confusion of the preliminary local United States naval and army mobilization moves was that incident to the flood of refugees from Malaya and the Indies. For a short period the more farsighted of these arrived in hordes at Perth, in every conceivable thing which would float on the seas. Foresight appears to have been a rare quality indeed, among these people. The more fortunate ones carried suitcases.

The most novel of the authentic refugee stories which I encountered was that of the little, flat-bottomed Yantze River cattle boat which had somehow got to Java and was lying in one of her ports when the Jap arrived in the Indies. She had accommodations for about a dozen persons. Some two hundred desperate souls crowded aboard. An officer of the late lamented prize battleship *Prince of Wales* took command and they put to sea with a page from an atlas by way of a sailing chart. Barely out of the harbor a Jap submarine surfaced nearby off their beam. They could clearly see the trace of the torpedo, aimed irrevocably amidships. All watched in dumb horror as the infernal thing slid under the ship's side. Dead silence continued—indefinitely. The ship drew only six of the ten feet or more of water for which the torpedo was set. The sub turned her disgruntled attention to bigger game.

Again it was clearly a situation of having to leave the field to the armies. Our organization decided to do this, and we were instructed to return home.

About a week previously I had put my wife on a train out

of Perth, with the family of the local American consul, also bound for home. It proved impossible for me to reach the eastern Australian coast in time to sail with them, by returning army transport.

By now rail passenger traffic was congested beyond hope. After numerous frustrated attempts to obtain passage by ship to eastern Australian ports, another of our staff and I succeeded in arranging for passage with the captain of a freighter under charter to the U. S. Army. With little faith in her scheduled sailing, we climbed aboard. If she failed to sail, well, we could always go ashore again.

To our amazement, within 24 hours we cleared the harbor and joined a convoy with about eight other transport vessels and an escort of a half dozen small naval vessels. The second day out the convoy suddenly began to zigzag more violently in its course and two of the escort vessels instantly became involved in a frantic search for some mysterious undersea creature, raising huge geysers with their depth charges. At length they rejoined the convoy. No report was ever heard as to the success or failure of their hunt. The third day out our ship pulled out ahead of the convoy, limited in speed to the 8-knot pace of its slowest vessel. Our ship reached Melbourne four days later, alone.

There we beheld, with great relief, signs of mobilized order. Comparative calm and grim determination were beginning to grip the Australian effort. We booked passage on a returning U. S. Army transport due to sail for home about four days after our arrival. She sailed exactly on the hour announced something over 24 hours in advance.

We sailed a course obviously designed to circumvent the farthest wanderings of the Jap submarines, far, far off the normal steamer track. The ship was designed for 21 knots maximum speed. We averaged nearly 25 knots, making the trip to San Francisco in 19 days. Speed is the essence of safety from submarine attack; our peace was undisturbed.

My wife had arrived without mishap a month earlier. San Francisco seemed a very excellent place to be.

THE TRAFFIC ENGINEER . . . .

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to take extreme conservation measures to avoid an absolute breakdown in our transportation system. Mileage is now rationed by gasoline restrictions, and the nation-wide top speed limit set at 35 m.p.h., while in the 17 eastern states, all pleasure driving is prohibited.

Normally we in this country used about 650,000 tons of rubber per year; 220,000 tons for auto tires, 240,000 tons for truck and bus tires, and the remainder for other purposes. Thus we consumed about 460,000 tons per year for tires. At the turn of the year, we had 578,000 tons of crude rubber on hand, according to the Baruch Committee report. We could expect only about 53,000 tons more from other sources until 1944, making a total of 631,000 tons available till that date. But the expected military demand alone is 842,000 tons! Before we start we are confronted by a shortage of 211,000 tons by January 1, 1944. This shortage will have to be met before any synthetic stock can be made available for civilian use. It appears that if the scheduled construction of synthetic rubber plants is attained, some relief will be felt by the middle of 1944, but under no circumstances will there be sufficient rubber available before that time to meet the demand.

It is evident that strict conservation of tires is the only means of preventing a collapse in our transportation system. President Franklin D. Roosevelt informs us, "The demands of war on our national resources make it imperative that unessential travel be eliminated for the duration."

In every industry over 100 employees, OPA has made it mandatory that a labor-management transportation committee be set up, to promote group riding among the employees, and to certify to certain requirements which an applicant for supplemental gasoline rations must meet. If an employee needs additional gasoline (above the "A" allotment) or tires, to allow him to drive his car to and from work, he must carry 3 or more passengers regularly, or prove that it is impossible to carry passengers because of irregular hours of work, or absence of fellow employees living near him. His plant transportation committee