

Chapter V

WAR, LIBERATION AND RECONSTRUCTION (1941-1950)

The shadows of the approaching war fell over the club starting in November, 1940 when the Navy evacuated all of its dependents to the United States. The Army made the same decision shortly thereafter, and by February 1941, Parker writes, the process was completed. The fun years had ended, and would not return until the middle Fifties. In the meantime, however, the civilians remained in the city, and during the period of daily increased tensions, service personnel, without their dependents, grew closer to the civilians, who for their part continued to look to the Army and Navy for protection. In this atmosphere, the club's social activities continued on a reduced scale down to the end. The 1941 typhoon season began early and was a severe one, battering the club and the many naval units which had been concentrated in the Manila area. Dirty weather cast a further pall over the club, as ships had to move far out into the bay where they could safely drag anchor, and the Navy personnel had to be aboard their ships. In early December, the appearance just off the club landing of the U. S. Navy's Chinese river gunboats from Shanghai (a highly fictionalized description of one of the early versions of these interesting craft appears in *The Sand Pebbles*) carried its own message of crisis:

Given the sea-keeping characteristics of these vessels, such a voyage would never have been undertaken except in extreme conditions of peril. They were designed only for river service, with a wide beam, flat bottom, maximum draft of less than five feet, and practically no freeboard. Since they had to pass through the Formosa Strait, which was stirred up by the northeast monsoon, it was some-

thing of a miracle that the gunboats reached their destination. If there had been any doubt among Club members as to the gravity of the situation in their part of the world, the appearance of these craft was enough to convince the most skeptical that something big was about to happen — and soon!

The attack on Pearl Harbor turned the club into an evacuation center and improvised bomb shelter:

A bomb shelter was improvised in the basement for both day and night accommodation. It was used by all who happened to be in the Club during the alerts and bombings which were in constant progress. The band in the pavilion had long since ceased to play. The dance floor was now stacked to the ceiling with officers' trunks and belongings from local and outlying posts. But the effort expended on them was wasted. These previous belongings were to be swallowed up by the tide of invasion just around the corner.

The club, shaken by bombs dropping nearby, was not struck. At first, even after hostilities commenced, most of the employees stayed in the club, thinking it safer than other places. When a bomb dropped on one of the buildings in the port and penetrated to the basement, however, many left for the provinces. Earlier, in the first days of actual hostilities, a grim duty had been thrust upon them as a result of the Japanese bombing of the Cavite Naval Base. The *Philippines Free Press* of December 20 described the December 10th raid:

Manila's first daylight air-raid started at 12:40 PM. Two waves of 27 bombers each, glistening like silver fish, and flying in perfect formation, flew in from the north, bombing ships in Manila Bay, Nichols Field, the Cavite Naval area, and slightly bombing Fort McKinley...

The worst damage was done at Cavite, where the naval yard was bombed. Numerous buildings were burned to the ground. Casualties in Cavite were heavy. It was estimated that approximately 200 had been killed and 1,000 wounded.

It has been explained innumerable times since the Cavite raid that there was no excuse for such a large number of casualties. If Caviteños had not grown panicky — if they had hugged the ground — casualties would have been extremely light. The Japanese used shrapnel bombs which exploded immediately on contact.

The naval yard was badly damaged. The first stick of bombs fell on the power station, making it almost impossible to fight the fires that had started.

Many of the dying and wounded from the Navy Yard were evacuated by small craft and brought to the naval landing stage at the threshold of the Army-Navy Club, where employees took on the grisly task of separating the wounded from the dead before they were taken off to hospitals or the morgue. Parker writes:

That afternoon and night tested the talent, fortitude, and patience of our Club employees, for they assisted wholeheartedly at the Club landing in the task of unloading boats of burned and butchered human flesh, which gave horrible evidence of the intensity of the raging inferno that had been Navy Yard Cavite. It was my sad duty to assist in the operation. Some of the helpless victims were friends of mine, now almost unrecognizable. Others were Filipino workmen from the yard. All had been snatched from the docks, themselves blasted and on fire. It was hard to distinguish the living from the dead — the human cargoes had been thrown hurriedly into the boats

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in a bloody heap. Those who could speak wanted water — it was hot weather, and many of the victims had bled profusely — and a cigarette. These requests were impulses only, for the wounded were generally too far gone to know what they said.

Parker's last view of the Army and Navy Club was on Christmas Eve, from a ship evacuating naval personnel to Corregidor Island, thirty miles away at the entrance to Manila Bay. While on Corregidor, soon to become a glorious chapter in the military history of both the United States and the Philippines, Parker participated in one important, if prosaic, item of unfinished club business — the disposal to be made of the club's previous stocks of whisky, reckless consumption of which by the victorious Japanese troops could further endanger the civilians of Manila. It was decided that since the Japanese had not yet entered the city, the whisky could safely be brought to Corregidor. This was accomplished in the darkness without incident, but in the end, the entire enterprise was in vain:

Under cover of darkness the "spirits" were removed. They arrived at the North landing of Corregidor on a barge which was secured astern of the yacht belonging to the President of the Philippines. Since it had been Club policy to maintain in reserve a very large inventory of Scotch whisky (the popular drink), the amount of liquor on the barge was not insignificant. The real purpose of the directors' meeting, then, was to decide what to do with it.

Some of the directors thought that we should offer the Medical Department whatever whisky they could use for medical purposes and then destroy the remainder. This was an encouraging view inasmuch as the fortress was being subjected to intermittent bombing raids, and it was felt improper to hazard the lives of working parties in unloading and transporting the liquor to a place of

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safe-keeping. The final decision was to allow the Medical Department to take what it needed and to turn the rest over to the Quartermaster Department for storage. An early bombing raid the following morning changed all our plans; the liquor-laden barge took a direct hit and the entire cargo was lost, as was the palatial yacht. The latter settled to her watery grave in an upright position, and from her masts, which remained above the surface, the United States and Philippine ensigns fluttered in the breeze for months to come.

At the club, air raids continued until December 26, when Manila was declared an Open City. Even then, there were occasional bombs dropped. Looting began, and groups of civilians held meetings to prepare for the internment they assumed would follow. On January 3, as A. V. H. Hartendorp reports it, the Red Sun flew over the Army and Navy Club:

At daylight on the morning of Saturday, January 3, Manilans awoke — those who had been able to sleep, to see the Japanese flag flying from the tall mast in front of the High Commissioner's residence on Dewey Boulevard, over Fort Santiago, U. S. Army Headquarters at the mouth of the Pasig River, and over Malacañang Palace — the official home of the President of the Philippines, as it had been of the American and many of the Spanish governors-general of the past. The Japanese flag, — a red sun on a white field, was also flying over the Army and Navy Club and the adjoining Elks Club, the large government-owned Manila Hotel and numerous other public and private buildings.¹⁸

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Liberation came to the Army and Navy Club in the form of bitter and bloody hand-to-hand fighting. Using land mines and flaming barrels of oil, Japanese defenders



L. G. Wagner (ANC Dispatch)

**TWO
PRE and POST
WAR
MEMBERS**



W. A. Chittick (Manila Times)



The Destroyed Club, 1945

(U.S. Army photo)

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President Sergio Osmeña at 1945 club opening. Left to right around table: Major J. T. Jackson, Mrs. Osmeña, President Osmeña, Mrs. Tuazon, and Jose Corominas. (U.S. Army photo)