CHAPTER II

ESCAPE in any way was obviously out of the question. At last the raider got under way and began to bear down on us. Most of us thought that the end had come and that we were up against an apostle of the “sink the ship and leave no trace” theory—which we had read about in Colomoo only a couple of days before—the latest development of frightfulness. Our minds were not made easier by the seaplane circling above us, ready, as we thought, to administer the final blow to any who might survive being fired on by the raider’s guns. It was a most anxious moment for us all, and opinions were very divided as to what was going to happen. One of the ladies remarked that she had no fear, and reminded us that we were all in God’s hands, which cheered up some of the drooping hearts and anxious minds.
Certainly most of us thought we were soon to look our last upon the world—what other thoughts were in our minds as we imagined our last moments were so near, will remain unrecorded.

However, to our intense relief, nothing of the sort happened, and as the raider came slowly nearer to us, an officer on the bridge megaphoned us to come alongside. This we did; three boats went astern, and the one in which we were remained near the raider’s bows. An officer appeared at the bulwarks and told us to come aboard; women first, then their husbands, then the single men. There was no choice but to obey, but we all felt uneasy in our minds as to what kind of treatment our women were to receive at the hands of the Germans on board.

The ship was rolling considerably, and it is never a pleasant or easy task for a landsman, much less a landswoman, to clamber up a rope ladder some twenty feet up the side of a rolling ship. However, all the ladies acquitted themselves nobly, some even going up without a rope round their waists. The little
Japanese stewardess, terrified, but showing a brave front to the enemy, was the last woman to go up before the men's ascent began. Two German sailors stood at the bulwarks to help us off the rope ladder into the well deck forward, and by five-twenty we were all aboard, after having spent a very anxious two hours, possibly the most anxious in the lives of most of us.

It was at once evident, directly we got on board, that we were in for kindly treatment. The ship's doctor came forward, saluted, and asked who was wounded and required his attention. Most of the passengers—there were only twenty first, and about a dozen second class—were in our boat. Among the second class passengers with us were a few Portuguese soldiers going from Macao to Delagoa Bay.

Some of us were slightly bruised, and all were shaken, but luckily none required medical treatment. Chairs were quickly found for the ladies, the men seated themselves on the hatch, and the German sailors busied themselves bringing tea and cigarettes to
their latest captives. We were then left to ourselves for a short time on deck, and just before dark, a spruce young Lieutenant came up to me, saluted, and asked me to tell all the passengers that we were to follow him and go aft. We followed him along the ship, which seemed to be very crowded, to the well deck aft, where we met the remaining few passengers and some of the crew of the “Hitachi.”

We had evidently come across a new type of Hun. The young Lieutenant was most polite and courteous and attentive. He apologized profusely for the discomfort which the ladies and ourselves would have to put up with—“But it is war, you know, and your Government is to blame for allowing you to travel when they know a raider is out”—assured us he would do what he could to make us as comfortable as possible, and that we should not be detained more than three or four days. This was the first of a countless number of lies told us by the Germans as to their intentions concerning us.

We had had nothing to eat since tiffin, so
A CAPTIVE ON A GERMAN RAIDER

we were ordered below to the 'tween decks. We clambered down a ladder to partake of our first meal as prisoners. What a contrast to the last meal we enjoyed on the "Hitachi," taken in comfort and apparent security! (But, had we known it, we were doomed even then, for the raider's seaplane had been up and seen us at eleven a. m., had reported our position to the raider, and announced three p. m. as the time for our capture. Our captors were not far out! It was between two-thirty and three when we were taken.) The meal consisted of black bread and raw ham, with hot tea served out of a tin can. We sat around on wooden benches, and noticed that the crockery on which the food was served had been taken from other ships captured—one of the Burns Philp Line, and one of the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand. Some of the Japanese officers and crew were also in the 'tween decks—later on the Japanese Captain appeared, (we had not seen him since he left the saloon after tiffin) and he was naturally very down and distressed—and some of the German sailors came and
spoke to us. Later on the young Lieutenant came down and explained why the raider, which the German sailors told us was the “Wolf,” had fired on us. We then learnt for the first time that many persons had been killed outright by the firing—another direct result of the “Hitachi’s” failure to obey the raider’s orders to stop. It was impossible to discover how many. There must have been about a dozen, as the total deaths numbered sixteen, all Japanese or Indians; the latest deaths from wounds occurred on October twenty-eighth, while one or two died while we were on the “Wolf.” The Lieutenant, who we afterwards learnt was in charge of the prisoners, told us that the “Wolf” had signalled us to stop, and not to use our wireless or our guns, for the “Hitachi” mounted a gun on her poop for the submarine zone. He asserted that the “Hitachi” hoisted a signal that she understood the order, but that she tried to use her wireless, that she brought herself into position to fire on the “Wolf” and that preparations were being made to use her gun.
The Germans professed deep regret at this, and at the loss of life caused, the first occasion on which lives had been lost since the "Wolf's" cruise began. The "Wolf," however, they said, had no choice but to fire and put the "Hitachi's" gun out of action. This she failed to do, as the shooting was distinctly poor, with the exception of the shot aimed at the wireless room, which went straight through without exploding there or touching the operator, and exploded near the funnel, killing most of the crew who were running to help lower the boats. The other shots had all struck the ship in the second-class quarters astern. One had gone right through the cabin of the Second Steward, passing just over his bunk—where he had been asleep a minute before—and through the side of the ship. Others had done great damage to the ship's structure aft, but none had gone any where near the gun or ammunition-house on the poop. I saw afterwards some photos the Germans had taken of the gun, as they said they found it when they went on board. These photos showed the gun with the breech
open, thus proving, so the Germans said, that the Japanese had been preparing to use the gun. In reality, of course, it proved nothing of the sort; it is more than likely that the Germans opened the breech themselves before they took the photograph, as they had to produce some evidence to justify their firing on the “Hitachi.” But whether the Japanese opened the gun breech and prepared to use the gun or not, it is quite certain that the “Hitachi” never fired a shot at the “Wolf,” though the Germans have since asserted that she did so. It was indeed very lucky for us that she did not fire—had she done so and even missed the “Wolf,” it is quite certain the “Wolf” would have torpedoed the “Hitachi” and sent us to the bottom.

It was very hot in the ’tween decks, and after our meal we were all allowed to go on deck for some fresh air. About eight o’clock, however, the single men of military age were again sent below for the night, while the married couples and a few sick and elderly men were allowed to remain on deck. It was a cool moonlight night, and armed guards
patrolled the deck all night. We had nothing but what we stood up in, so we lay down in chairs as we were, and that night slept, or rather did not sleep, under one of the "Wolf's" guns. Throughout the night we were steaming gently, and from time to time we saw the "Hitachi" still afloat, and steaming along at a considerable distance from us. Soon after daybreak next morning, the men were allowed to go aft under the poop for a wash, with a very limited supply of water, and the ladies had a portion of the 'tween decks to themselves for a short time. The Commander sent down a message conveying his compliments to the ladies, saying he hoped they had had a good night and were none the worse for their experiences. He assured us all that we should be in no danger on his ship and that he would do what he could to make us as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. But, we were reminded again, this was war. Indeed it was, and we had good reason to know it now, even if the war had not touched us closely before.

Breakfast, consisting of black bread, canned
meat and tea, was then brought to us on deck by the German sailors, and we were left to ourselves on the well deck for some time.

There seemed to be literally hundreds of prisoners on and under the poop, and the whole ship, as far as we could see, presented a scene of the greatest activity. Smiths were at work on the well deck, hammering and cutting steel plates with which to repair the "Hitachi," mechanics were working at the seaplane, called the "Wölfchen," which was kept on the well deck between her flights; prisoners were exercising on the poop, and the armed guards were patrolling constantly among them and near us on the well deck. The guards wore revolvers and side-arms, but did not appear at all particular in the matter of uniform. Names of various ships appeared on their caps, some had on them only the words "Käiserliche Marine." Some were barefoot, some wore singlets and shorts, while some even dispensed with the former. Most of the crew at work wore only shorts, and, as one of the lady prisoners remarked, the ship presented a
rather unusual exhibition of the European male torso!

Some German officers came aft to interrogate us; they were all courteous and sympathetic, and I took the opportunity of mentioning to the young Lieutenant the loss of my wife’s jewels in the lifeboat, and he assured me he would have the boat searched, and if the jewels were found they should be restored.

The Japanese dhobi had died from wounds during the night and was buried in the morning, nearly all the German officers, from the Commander downwards, attending in full uniform. The Japanese Captain and officers also attended, and some kind of funeral service in Japanese was held.

Officers and men were very busy on the upper deck—we were much impressed by the great number of men on board—and we noticed a lady prisoner, a little girl, evidently a great pet with the German sailors and officers, some civilian prisoners and some military prisoners in khaki on the upper deck, but we were not allowed to communicate
with them. There were also a few Tommies in khaki among the prisoners aft. It was very hot on the well deck, and for some hours we had no shelter from the blazing sun. Later on, a small awning was rigged up and we got a little protection, and one or two parasols were forthcoming for the use of the ladies. During the morning the sailors were allowed to bring us cooling drinks from time to time, and both officers and men did all they could to render our position as bearable as possible. The men amongst us were also allowed to go to the ship's canteen and buy smokes. We were steaming gently in a westerly direction all day, occasionally passing quite close to some small islands, and banks of sand, a quite picturesque scene. The sea was beautifully calm and blue, and on the shores of these banks, to which we sailed quite close, the water took on colors of exquisite hues of the palest and tenderest blue and green, as it rippled gently over coral and golden sands.

Tiffin, consisting of rice, bacon and beans was dealt out to us on deck at midday, and
the afternoon passed in the same way as the morning. The "Wolf's" chief officer, a hearty, elderly man came aft to speak to us. He chaffed us about our oarsmanship in the lifeboats, saying the appearance of our oars wildly waving reminded him of the sails of a windmill. "Never use your wireless or your gun," he said, "and you'll come to no harm from a German raider."

By about five o'clock the two ships arrived in an atoll, consisting of about fifteen small islands, and the "Hitachi" there dropped anchor. The "Wolf" moved up alongside, and the two ships were lashed together. Supper, consisting of tinned fruit and rice was served out at five-thirty and we were then told that the married couples and one or two elderly men were to return to the "Hitachi" that night. So with some difficulty we clambered from the upper deck of the "Wolf" to the boat deck of the "Hitachi" and returned to find our cabins just as we had left them in a great hurry the day before. We had not expected to go on board the "Hitachi" again, and never thought we should renew acquain-
tance with our personal belongings. We ourselves were particularly sad about this as we had brought away from Siam after twenty years' residence there, many things which would be quite irreplaceable. We were therefore very glad to know they were not all lost to us. But we congratulated ourselves that the greater part of our treasures gathered there had been left behind safely stored in the bank and in a go-down in Bangkok.