CHAPTER VIII

WE had been encouraged by the Germans to think—they had in fact de-
definitely told us—that the “Igotz Mendi” with us on board was to be sent to Spain when the Germans released her. This news greatly rejoiced the Spaniards, who had naturally become very depressed, more especially as they knew that if no news were received of them for six weeks after the date on which they were due at Colombo, a requiem mass would, according to Spanish custom, be said for them in their churches at home.

On December twenty-ninth, all of which and the previous day, together with many succeeding days, were spent in transferring our cargo coal to our bunkers, the Germans on our ship and on the “Wolf” ostentatiously bade each other good-bye, and letters from prisoners on the “Wolf” were brought to
us to post in Spain when we landed. The idea of the “Wolf” remaining out till the war was over in six months was abandoned, and we were told she would now go home to Germany. Why we were told this, the first time we had been informed of the “Wolf’s” plans, we never knew, except that it might have been an excuse to keep dragging us over the seas, for the “Wolf” would never have allowed us to get ashore before she reached Germany. Now that we knew the Germans always intended taking us to Germany, it is obvious that it was quite immaterial to them if they told us their plans. They wished to keep us, and having told us of their future plans, it is plain they could not afford to release us.

But at that time we really began to think we were going to be landed in Spain, and the news raised the spirits of all of us. Those who had been learning Spanish before now did so with redoubled energy, and some of us even marked out on a pocket atlas our railway route from Bilbao or Cadiz—for the Spanish Captain thought it most likely we
should be landed at one of those ports—through Spain and France. We even got information from the Spaniards as to hotels, railways, and sights to see in Spain. It seemed as if the end of our cruise, with our freedom, were really in sight, especially as the Captain had told some of us on December sixteenth that in six weeks our captivity would be over. Some of us, however, still inclined to the belief that the Germans would release the ship and order her back to Java or Colombo or Calcutta; while others believed we should ultimately be landed in Dutch Guiana or Mexico, two of the few remaining neutral countries left.

On the last day of the year a rumor went round the ship that we should be taken far north—about 60° N.—to a point from which the "Wolf" would get to Germany before we could reach Spain. That, in the opinion of most of us, put an end to the prospect of landing in Spain. The Germans would run no risks of our giving information about the "Wolf." But this scheme would have left uneliminated one very important risk. After
the ships would have separated, there was still a chance of the prize being intercepted by an Allied cruiser before the “Wolf” got home, and if that had happened, the “Wolf’s” goose would have been cooked indeed. So Spain looked very improbable. I approached the Captain on the last day of the year and spoke to him on the point. He confirmed the rumor, and said we should be sent back and landed at a Spanish island, most probably Las Palmas. I made a vigorous, though I knew it would be quite a useless protest against this scheme. I pointed out that the ship, which by then would be almost empty, was not a suitable one in which to carry women and children into the North Atlantic in mid-winter, gales, and that people who had spent many years in the tropics would not be able to stand such weather, unprovided as they were with winter clothing (although the Commander of the “Wolf” had certainly sent over some rolls of flannelette—stolen from the “Hitachi”—for the ladies to make themselves warm garments!) Also that in case of distress we could call
A CAPTIVE ON A GERMAN RAIDER

for no help, as our wireless would only receive and not send messages. The Captain brushed these complaints aside, saying the ship was in good trim and could stand any weather, that it would only be intensely cold on a very few days, that arrangements would be made that we should suffer as little from the cold as possible, and that there was very little likelihood of our being in distress.

I then pointed out to him that our own Government prohibited our women from traveling through the submarine zone at all, but that he proposed to send them through it twice, and to give us a double dose of the North Atlantic at the very worst time of the year. He replied that going north we should go nowhere near the submarine zone, that he was just as anxious to avoid submarines as we were, and that when we parted far up in the North Atlantic, the "Igotz Mendi" would be given a "submarine pass" guaranteeing her safety from attack by the U-boats, and special lights to burn at nights. I replied that I failed to see the use of a "submarine pass" as U-boats torpedoed at sight,
and would not trouble to ask for a pass. He replied by asking me if I had ever heard of a neutral boat being torpedoed without warning. I answered that I had heard of such being done many times, and reminded him that the "Igotz Mendi" was painted the Allied gray color and therefore would not be recognized as a neutral but regarded by the U-boats as an enemy ship. He ended the interview by saying that he was carrying out the orders of the "Wolf's" Commander, and had no choice but to obey. This news of the "Wolf's" intentions angered us all, and we all felt that there was very little chance of ever seeing land again, unless an Allied cruiser came to our aid. We regarded this plan of the Germans as a deliberate one to sink us and the ship when they had got all they wanted out of her.

The two ships had parted on the evening of the thirtieth, both going north, and we did not see the "Wolf" again till the morning of January fourth. She was then seen to be overhauling a ship on the horizon. We followed at a short distance and before long
saw a ship in full sail. The “Wolf” approached her, spoke her, and to our intense astonishment released her. It seemed too good to be true that the “Wolf” would leave any ship she met quite unmolested, but so it was—for a short time. It was between ten and eleven when the “Wolf” and her prize proceeded on their original course and the sailing ship crossed our course astern. About one-thirty p.m. however, we changed our course and turned about. We were all mystified as to what was going to happen, until we saw a sail on the horizon. The “Wolf’s” purpose was evident then. She was going back to destroy the ship whose existence she had forgiven in the morning. Imagine the feelings of the crew of her prey; seeing the “Wolf” bearing down on them in the morning, their suspense as to their fate and that of their ship, their joy at their release, and—here was the “Wolf” again! What would their fate be now? The “Wolf” did not leave them long in doubt. She came up to her prize about five p.m. She was a “Wolf’s” shipping register that she was
four-masted bark in full sail, in ballast from the Cape to South America, and made a beautiful picture as she lay bathed in floods of golden light from the setting sun. Before dark, however, preparations had begun to remove her officers, crew and provisions, and this was completed in a few hours. We were invited by the Germans to stay up and see the end. We waited up till past eleven and saw lights flitting about the doomed ship, as the German sailors were removing some things; making fast others, and placing the bombs to blow her up. But none waited up for the end, which we heard took place after midnight. The ship first canted over, her sails resting on the water, righted herself and then slowly disappeared. It was a beautiful moonlight night for the commission of so dark a deed. The Germans afterwards told us that when the “Wolf” first spoke the bark, she gave her name and said she was a Norwegian ship, and so was released. The Germans had later discovered from the British owned before the war, and therefore to be destroyed.
The Germans told us that on the bark they had seen some English newspapers, and in them was some news of the two men who had escaped from the "Wolf" near Sunday Island. One of them had died while swimming ashore—the other, after some weeks alone on the island, had been picked up by a Japanese cruiser. The news this man was able to give was the first that the outside world had known about the "Wolf" for many months, and the Germans realized that their enemies would be looking out for them and trying to prevent their return to Germany. This man would also be able to give an exact description of the "Wolf," the names of the ships she had captured before his escape, and the probable fate of other vessels since missing. This, we felt, would bring at least a little comfort to our relatives, who might conclude we were on the raider and not hopelessly lost, as they must have feared.

We had hoped our captors might have put us all on the sailing ship and sent us off on her to South America, as the "Wolf" would have been well away and out of danger be-
fore we could have got ashore. But they did not entertain any such idea. Some of us requested that the lifeboats of the sailing ship might be sent over to our ship, as we had only two lifeboats, a couple of small dinghies, and an improvised raft, not sufficient for sixty-five people; but the Germans would not send us these lifeboats, as they said they were leaky!

The question of baggage had to be again considered. It was evident we should be able to save very little, perhaps not even a handbag, if the ships were sunk by the Germans, and the prisoners put into the lifeboats. However, we ourselves packed in a handbag our most precious treasures we had brought from Siam. But in case it was impossible to save even so little, we collected the most valuable of our letters and papers and had them sewn up in sail cloth to put in our pockets. The King of Siam had conferred a decoration on me before I left—this was carefully packed and sewn up. I was determined to save this, if nothing else, though it seemed hopeless to expect to save many
treasures, parting presents and addresses presented to me by my Siamese friends. Earlier in my service, the King of Siam had conferred another decoration on me, and I was carrying with me His Majesty’s Royal License for this, signed by him, and also King George V’s Royal License with his sign manual, giving me permission to accept and wear the decoration. Both of these documents, together with others highly valued which I was also determined to save, were secured in water-tight cases, ready to be put in my pockets at the last moment.

We remained in company of the “Wolf” for the next few days, and at seven p.m. on the tenth the “Wolf” again came alongside in the open sea and coaled from us till seven p.m. on the next day. Conditions were slightly better than on the previous occasion, but still quite sufficiently unpleasant. More fenders were lost and the “Wolf” was further damaged. The great uproar caused by the winches going all night, the periodic emptying of ashes dragged in iron buckets over the iron decks, the shifting of coal from
the bunkers immediately underneath our cabins, and the constant bumping of the ships made sleep quite out of the question, and we were very glad indeed when the “Wolf” sheered off. On this occasion the way in which she came alongside and sheered off was a beautiful piece of seamanship. On the eleventh we again saw and spoke to our “Hitachi” friends on the “Wolf”—the last opportunity we had of doing so. On the next day we crossed the Equator and then for some days we saw the “Wolf” no more.

About this time I experienced a little trouble with one of the German sailors. Most of them were courteous and kindly disposed, but one, a boorish, loutish bully who served us with drinks at table, was a painful exception to this. I complained to him once about not serving me properly. He waited outside the saloon and cursed me afterwards. “I, a German sailor,” he said, “not your steward!” I told him that if he had any reason to complain of what I had said or done he should report me to his Captain, and that if he had not done so by six that evening, I
should report him for insolence. Needless to say, he said nothing to the Captain, so I reported him. The Captain at once thanked me for doing so, called him up at once, and gave him a good wigging. I had no more trouble from him afterwards.

On January fourteenth I approached the Captain and asked him if the Germans on the "Wolf," when they got to Germany, would have any means of finding out whether we on the "Igotz Mendi" had safely arrived in Spain. He replied that they would. I then asked him whether, if we were all lost on the "Igotz Mendi" on her return voyage to Spain, the German Government would inform the British Government of our fate. He replied that would certainly be done. I further asked him whether we might send letters to the "Wolf" to have posted in Germany in the event of our not arriving in Spain. Most of us had to settle up our affairs in some way in case we might be lost at sea, and wished to write farewell letters to our home people. We ourselves had to write a farewell letter to our daughter, born in Siam,
from whom we had been separated, except for short periods of furlough spent in England, for twelve years. It seemed very hard that after this long separation, and just when we were looking forward to a joyful and fairly speedy reunion, we should perhaps never see her again.

The Captain said we might write these letters, which would not be posted if the "Igotz Mendi" with us on board got back safely to Spain. "But," he added, "we have changed our plans, and now intend that you should be landed in Norway. It will be safer for you all, and you will not have to risk meeting our submarines in the Atlantic again. When we arrive in Norwegian waters, the German prize crew will be taken off the ship after the "Wolf" has got home, the ship will be handed over to the Spaniards, and you will all be landed in Norway, from where you can easily make your way to England. Here was quite a new plan—how much truth there was in this declaration will be seen hereafter. From now onwards definite promises began to be made to us concern-
ing the end of our captivity, "in a month you will be free," "the next full moon will be the last you will see at sea," etc., etc.

We were now of course proceeding north every day, keeping in mid-Atlantic—always well off the trade routes, though of course we crossed some on our way north. On the nineteenth the Captain again thought he saw distant smoke on the horizon, and we careered about to avoid it as before. But on this occasion we were running away from a cloud! The next day we left the tropics, and with favorable weather were making an average of about 180 knots daily. On several days (about this time) we passed through, large masses of seaweed, drifting from the Sargasso Sea. We did not meet the "Wolf" on the twenty-second as our Captain evidently expected to do, and we waited about for her several hours. But next day we did meet her, and we were then told that in eighteen days we should be ashore. We were then about 30° N. and we parted from the "Wolf" the same afternoon. It was always a great relief to us all when
we parted from her keeping our ship’s company of prisoners intact. For the men amongst us feared we might all be put upon the “Wolf” to be taken to Germany, leaving our wives on the “Igotz Mendi.” This, so we had been told, had been the intention of the “Wolf’s” Commander when the prisoners were first put on the Spanish boat. He had ordered that only women, and prisoners above sixty and under sixteen should be put on the “Igotz Mendi,” but the German doctor, a humane and kindly man, would have nothing to do with this plan, and declared he would not be responsible for the health of the women if this were done. So that we owe it to him that wives were not separated from their husbands during this anxious time, as the Commander of the “Wolf” had inhumanely suggested.