

# GUANTANAMO

BY K. C. McINTOSH

A RICKETY wooden building like a squat barn built on piles over whispering, greenish water; a long, battered mahogany bar; a hundred white and gold uniforms at white-topped tables that are littered with remnants of salad and fried chicken, and are sloppy with beer-froth and the chill sweat of highball glasses. A hundred grinning black faces at the wide glassless windows on the street side. Lean, nondescript dogs snuffing for scraps on the floor and cringing when looked at. Target practice was over, the manœuvres were finished, and the Scout-ing Fleet was sailing for home in the morning. But this was tonight, not to-morrow morning; and everyone not on watch was ending the Winter's work with a whoop in the queer little village of Caimanera.

The tall, gray admiral's drawling voice suddenly jumped four tones higher. "My cruising is done," he almost shouted, "and after forty-two years of it, I'm telling you that there isn't a youngster of the lot of you whose responsibilities right now aren't bigger than any I ever had. This game of ours is moving faster than even the scientists can keep up with; and what we'd like to have costs too dam' much. You've got to know your jobs as we old-timers never did; and the only place to learn your job is at sea. Work, dammit, work is the only answer; and if you feel you're getting stale there's only one thing to fix your mind on and that's the country. Dammit, just Our Country! That's all we need to keep in view!"

In a storm of cheering, the admiral sat down by his table, and the wistfulness of

his half-smile contrasted oddly with the "reefed-tops'l" voice in which he had just expressed himself.

A young lieutenant at the weather-beaten piano began thumping the melody of "Row, Row, Rosie," and a red-haired youngster hopped up on the piano to lead a hundred salt-roughened voices in the roaring chorus:

The Battle Fleet can never come to Caimanera,  
Ne-ver see Boqueron!  
While they drink tequila down in Tia Juana  
We're sitting here so free,  
Swallowing Bacardi,—

In the meantime, first lieutenants, navigators and gunnery officers, all clad in white aprons, and their faces lined with the strain of the long target season just ended, were cracking ice and mixing weird drinks in pitchers so furiously that one would think their very lives depended upon it. The strains of "Caimanera" died away, and the red-haired youngster at once swung into

Put your troubles on the bum,  
Here we come, full of rum,  
Bye, Bye, Cuba!

The crashing rhythm drowned out the wail of Peanut Mary in the doorway: "Git yo' first clahss roasted peanuts, gentlemen! Git yo' lott'ry tickets! Buy this numbah, honey, it's the lucky num-bah fo' you. Trust an old niggah that knows luck!"

About eighty miles westward, after rounding the winking light of Cape Maysi, there is another lighthouse on a low flat promontory jutting out from the scrubby hillside. This is Deer Point, where McCalla Hill enters the sea. Tiny red and

black buoys mark the crooked entrance channel. As you pass the first one, the Bay of Guantanamo comes before you, and you behold a most surprising sight. It seems incredible that a coast so uniform and solid in appearance can hide so broad an expanse of placid water. The main bay, nearly four miles in diameter, stretches inland to the North and opens through a narrow strait, half hidden by Hospital Key, into Joa Bay, which is almost as large again. The curious formation of the dun-colored surrounding hills and the unvarying white shore, fringed with matted mangroves, make the bay seem to grow as ship after ship enters and anchors.

A lone gunboat fits snugly into the bight near Fisherman's Point and seems to be in the very center of the bay. Twenty battleships, scores of destroyers, and a dozen great vessels of the train have already found anchorage without difficulty, and each one seemed to her own crew to be in the center of the bay.

Only by crossing in a speed-boat can Guantanamo's immense magnitude be appreciated. As the squat bungalows and oil tanks of the naval station fade from sight against the dull green hillsides, the tiny standpipe on Hospital Key grows into a huge towering water-tank perched on a bare yellow bluff overhanging the coal-pockets. Then the key dwindles in the wake, and the red smudge to the left and the white blur to the right expand rapidly into the railroad terminals of Red Barn and Boqueron, with ocean-going steamers loading at the long wharves or anchored in the stream offshore. By that time the upper end of the bay has moved on to the long, ramshackle waterfront. At Caimanera the bay again sweeps on to the rolling soft green of the sugar country, which lies between rusty mountain slopes.

I first saw the bay in 1906. Only last year I spent seven months there, traveling all over the place. Fish Point, and Deer Point, where the Marines live, and the cable station, which hides behind papaya trees; the great stretch of the target range and

the immense recreation field where ten baseball games may be going on so far apart that one can barely hear another's cheering. Hicacal Beach, where the airplanes tune up and the commandant plays golf; Toro Key, Hospital Key, Smallpox Point—all these I know. I have been miles up the Freshwater river hunting non-existent crocodiles. I know the hot, spiny brush of the Eastern hills, where tradition says deer-hunting used to be worthwhile. I know the three towns of the upper bay, and can put my finger on the exact spot on the chart where the scurrying, coughing motorboats leave United States territory and become foreign visitors in Cuba. I am familiar with all these places, and yet I do not know how big the bay is. I have, in fact, hardly scratched its surface. Anchored under Toro Key I have seen big battleships hoisted high above the horizon by the early morning mirage, though the entrance to the bay lay nearly a mile beyond them. From McCalla Hill, where the old Spanish gun crouches, I have seen a tiny huddle of ships in a great expanse of water, and that huddle was the whole fighting sea power of America. The roar of the *Colorado's* anchor chain, a ton to each massive link, sounds thin and insignificant in the vast placid stillness. Were all the Navy's Guantanamo plant collected and dropped on Staten Island, the Borough of Richmond would be appreciably larger. But the Navy youngster, entering the bay for the first time, remarks in amazement, "Hell's bells, there's nothing here!"

On the steep shores of a ragged inlet, cut through the mangroves, is the naval station. Here are the target range and recreation field, the oil tanks, power plant and storehouses. Along the cliff-top the low green bungalows of the quarters nestle in a tangle of palms and trumpet vines, a flowery oasis in a desert of scrub and thorn. Here and there a blue-jacket will be clattering a typewriter by an open window or languidly overhauling a motor-boat engine. The crew of the oil

barge are scrubbing clothes on the deck, one of them whistling thinly through the still heat. Here and there a handful of officers, bleached as white as their uniforms under their wide pith helmets, plod doggedly along at their duties. If the day is not too hot, their wives are riding lazy ponies over the hill to call on the ladies of the Marine Corps at Deer Point. Chinese coolies methodically tend the boilers of the power plant or push tiny flat cars under the somnolent direction of a brown Cuban foreman.

Once a month the *Kittery* comes in with passengers and freight for Haiti, Santo Domingo or the Virgin Islands, and the station gives a tired dance at Caimanera. Four times a week the mail comes overland from Havana. Fresh water costs twenty-five cents a hundred gallons. Old Civil Service clerks thankfully close their desks as the shadows start to lengthen, and scramble into motor-boats to go home and loll on their breezy porches on the bare yellow crest of Hospital Key. A shout or a loud, hearty laugh would be as noteworthy in Guantanamo as it would be in a church. There is just enough tennis to keep in condition, just enough swimming to keep moderately cool, just enough bridge of an evening to exhaust the conversation of your neighbors, and an occasional ride up the bay for a cocktail on Pablo's back gallery or a cold bottle of beer in Jim Beauzay's or O'Brien's. Even babies seldom break the drowsy routine, for expectant mothers usually hurry home to the States.

## II

Then the Fleet comes steaming in, a long gray line. The stolid battleships drop ponderous anchors near the naval station. Trim, lean cruisers in double row take position just beyond, and then come the clumsy, squat vessels of the train: store ships, repair ships and tankers, their gray formation broken by the startling white of the floating hospital. Farther up the

bay scores of destroyers cling to the skirts of their plump, businesslike "mothers." Over by Hicacal—known to the Navy as "High Cackle"—the aircraft tenders ride between long rows of anchored scouting and torpedo planes. The glassy surface of the bay is crisscrossed with the droning wakes of a hundred busy motor-boats. Gigs and barges speed back and forth carrying seniors on official visits. Gunnery officers gather the battery officers into wide-eared groups and lay down the law. The arrival of the Fleet has spread a broad smile on every face in the station. In the Fleet itself there is a smile here and there, but the dominant thought is first of work, work, and more work.

The routine is scandalized the first day after arrival. At eight in the morning, seventy-five long minutes ahead of normal time, the bugles begin to blare "Get yer sword on, get yer sword on!" and junior officers gulp their coffee and hasten to their stations cramming toast into their mouths as they run. Hardly is muster over and absentees reported when the general alarm gong breaks the long silence it has maintained through the overhaul period just past.

"Bong! Bong! That's all we'll hear between now and April," yelps a turret officer. "Come on, gang, let's go!"

The anchors clank and grumble as they break out of the soft mud. Ship after ship turns slowly on its heel and heads out to the drill grounds. The gunnery officer is in his thick steel tower, telephones on his ears. "Turret One ready, sir!" "Spot One ready, sir!" "Plot ready, sir!" Motors grind and rattle as the great crouching turrets swing their massive guns from side to side.

Up and down the coast steam the lines of ships. Up and down plods the little tug dragging the target screens. Up and down swing the guns while sub-caliber blank shells bark a record of "pointer drill" in the turrets and a spatter of rifle blank comes from the rows of five-inch guns of the broadside as buzzers give the

firing signal. . . . Drill, drill, coach your men, teach your men, speed up your loading time! Keep your crosswires on! Don't fire unless you're steady on the bull! Do it again and again. A hasty wash and a clean coat for lunch, where the talk is of guns and nothing but guns. Back into dungarees and at the guns again by one o'clock. Drill, drill, coach your men, teach your men, speed up your loading time.

The afternoon wears on, and sweating, oil-smutted faces begin to peer anxiously through open ports between loads. "Where are we now? Will we get back in time?" "Hell, it's three-thirty now,—we won't be anchored by five o'clock!"

In the still long glare that precedes sunset, the ships slip silently into the bay again. The talk at dinner is again of guns, but on the faces of all is a shadow of annoyance. In the fourth ward, where junior officers congregate, the mental capacity of the Fleet Staff is commented upon in rather biting terms. "We didn't do a damn thing the last hour out. We could have made the last run off Deer Point easy as not. Just wasted time! We could have been anchored by four o'clock easy!"

A youngster hailing from the West Coast asks mildly, "What's the difference? Four or five o'clock look alike here, don't they?"

"Goof!" draws the mess treasurer from the foot of the table. "It takes half an hour to clean up and get the boats in the water. It takes half an hour to get to Caimanera. It takes another half-hour to get back. And you gotta be back by six-thirty. Think it over."

Knowing that he is irretrievably in the wrong, the youngster nevertheless sticks to his guns. "Why go to Caimanera?" he demands.

Through a chorus of groans he learns why. "Because, fool, Caimanera is in Cuba and so is Red Barn. Why did you San Diego loafers go to Tia Juana on a warm night?"

"To get a drink," replies the youngster, seeing a great light.

"Humph!" grunts the treasurer.

Next afternoon the youngster is one of the first to hate the Staff as the lowering sun slants across ships still far out at sea. Little does he know that on the flagship's bridge there are faces as long as his, and that the admiral himself, perhaps, is crisply admonishing the Fleet gunnery officer in words like these: "We didn't gain a damn thing by staying out the last hour. We could have planned to finish the last run off Deer Point. Wasted time and fuel! We could have been anchored by four o'clock easy!"

### III

A few days of clanging alarm gongs and sweating turrets, and the new routine is perfected. The last mud-hook has gone crashing down into the thick oily water by the time the bells have rung for four o'clock. With the splash of the disappearing anchor, booms swing out, gangways clatter into place and cranes drop small boats alongside. Scrubbed, whiteclad officers, still purple from long hours in the close hot turrets, collect at the gangway and implore the officer of the deck to make haste.

"Gotta get the gig off first," replies that harassed official. "The old man's going to Boqueron with the admiral. Can't you birds wait a minute? Gee, just my luck to have the watch the first time we've been in early! There's your boat, gentlemen. She's got to wait for the commander, so don't get impatient."

There is hardly time for impatience before the commander runs down the ladder and drops into the boat with a cheery "Well! Is *all* the bunch going shopping?" The boat starts up the bay at top speed. Half a mile ahead, in a flying black barge, the admiral is telling his chief of staff that he wants to take up the plan for the first phase of the coming manoeuvres "as soon as we get where it's comfortable."

The black barge heads for Boqueron, where Manuel's cool adobe walls house iron tables where admirals and captains may get long cold drinks without having to cramp the style of their juniors.

The gray boats race onward. Junior officers stop at Red Barn—"you get there ten minutes sooner"—while ward-rooms carry on to Caimanera, where the tables are literally over the bay and the breeze rustles lazily through the slatted awnings. Pablo and Pepe and Jim and Chico have huge pitchers of frosty *daiquiris* already mixed and waiting, and as the speeding boats are sighted there is a cracking of ice. The little boy with the ukulele begins to tune up, and Peanut Mary clears her throat.

"Git yo' peanuts, gentlemen," she shrills in her high Jamaica voice as a cargo of thirsty Americans leap out of the first boat. "Git yo' first clahss peanuts!"

"Hello, Mary," calls a grizzled officer, "you're looking young as ever."

Mary's black face flashes teeth and eyes, and she chuckles, expectant of the next remark. Sure enough it comes, the question you must always ask her: "Well, Mary, are you still a virgin?"

"No, thank God!" is Mary's invariable reply, while her gray-wooled aunt bays with wolf-like laughter and adds, "Not these forty years!"

The thin brown urchin who is Mary's competitor shouts "Comprami! Comprami!" and the little boy with the ukulele rolls his crossed eyes and sings, "Why did I kiss that girl?" But these are only preliminary efforts. There are no customers as the boats come in. Between six and six-thirty, as the swarming launches fill up with home-going Americans, many peanuts will be sold and many a nickle will rattle inside the battered uke. Now there is no time.

Scattered over the waterfront, at white-topped tables for four or five, conversation, after the first long "Ah-h-h!" is again of guns, guns, guns. During the half-hour's ride back to the ship, the chatter is lively

but it is all of guns, too. Those who have been merriest in the Cuban village are the first to gather after dinner with books and scratch-pads and plotting-sheets and plans to dispute over guns and gunnery far into the night. Six in the morning sees a party leave the ship for a hasty plunge from the swimming-float. By eight the ship is under way and headed out to sea.

Teach your men, coach your men, speed up your loading time, drill, drill—

For the youngsters, both officers and men, comes the great day when the first real firing is done. And it comes all too soon for the gunnery officer. "If I were only sure they'd remember their safety precautions! After all they've been told, when I stuffed canvas down the muzzle of Number Fifteen yesterday, the dam' fool plugman yelled 'Bore clear!' just the same!" His face is set and pallid from long days and nights of work. He will get some of the credit if the ship shoots well, and he will get the blame if a flareback kills a dozen men this morning. He has done all he can. He waits.

"Coming on the range! Stand by!"

The whistle roars "Commence firing!" and from the broadside leaps a rolling sheet of yellow flame. An eternity after the crash of the discharge, white splashes fly up around the moving target-screen.

"Down one double-O!" howls the fore-top. Sights are hastily reset, checked and rechecked. At monotonous intervals the firing buzzers drone. The sweating pointers tug feverishly at their wheels to "get her on and stay there."

Then another salvo belches forth. Again there is the interminable wait for the splash. As Spot One yells "No change!" the crews of guns not firing on this run begin to cheer. The forced calm of the battery officers' voices changes to a staccato bark; "You've got it, pour 'em in!"

Crash! "Bore clear! Ready three!"

Crash! "Bore clear! Ready four!"

"Shift pointers! Stand by!"

The tug stolidly drags the targets, the



black screens now peppered with bright holes. Like clockwork the ship turns, countermarches, and heads in again from astern of the tug. "Coming on the range! Whistle!" Turret after turret hurls its roaring rain of steel at the checkered canvas screens. As the last gun coughs and returns to battery, perspiring umpires gather and tot up long columns of hastily scrawled figures. How many hits? How fast? Any casualties? Penalties? Percentages? Battery officers drift into the wardroom, jubilant or dispirited according to the way their guns have performed. Only the gunnery officer's face remains set.

"Congratulations, Billy," cries a senior. "She shot mighty well."

"That's one down," answers the gunnery officer. "Eight more practices to shoot before we can say she's done well."

#### IV

Clean ship, scrub, paint, repair the damage done by the jar of guns—these begin all over again. This time the problem is one of night firing, with a moving gray target in the dark which must be found with searchlight or star-shell. There are no afternoon boatriides now, for the ships go out late in the afternoon and work until midnight. Still the bugles blare at eight in the morning and the gongs clang. Pointer drill is less frequent now—we are checking directors all day, drilling ships half the night, and working up the reports in our sleeping time.

The impatient ladies of the station who have planned a round of dinners and dances protest violently. "You haven't been to see me yet! You've forgotten me entirely!" The ship's officer tries to smile and makes lame excuse. Doesn't the woman know he's busy and tired? Drill today, drill tomorrow. God send Saturday without a casualty!

Saturday comes, and there has been no casualty. The decks gleam white in the naked sunlight. Far up the bay a crowd of small boats mill about like a herd of

cattle. A saluting gun barks from the flagship, and from each forecandle comes a sound of cheering. The racing cutters are out and twelve lean, desperate boys from each battleship are breaking their hearts and backs to bring the historic Battenburg Cup home to their own ship. Motor launches loaded with rooters and blaring bands pursue the racers down the three miles of the course, the Cuban sun beating mercilessly down on sweating brown backs. "Come on, *Utah*!" "Come on, *Wyoming*!"

Baseball teams spill over the recreation field, and on Hicacal Beach are hundreds of swimmers. By avoiding the eighth hole altogether and shooting from the ninth tee to the seventh green, officers may get a round of exasperating golf. Spring tides roll inches deep over the fairways and the bare greens are full of crab-holes, but you can't expect everything.

On Saturdays, Caimanera "liberty" begins at one o'clock and lasts until half-past eleven, but only a few avail themselves of the broad privilege. "No-o, Jimmy, I guess not. I gotta get a shut-eye. I gotta work up my Night Battle A dope. Maybe I'll come up tonight after dinner." But always there are some who go, and their brisk chatter at dinner wakes those who stayed on board from their mealtime apathy.

Night Battle A and B slide into the past as the yellow flame of the guns slashes through the velvet of the tropic night. The gunnery officer checks them off his list. Five to go, and nobody hurt as yet.

"Better come up with us, Billy," say the old-timers of the first ward as the daily 4:30 boat again begins to run. At first the gunnery officer says, "Can't—I'm too busy." As the days go by this changes to "Can't,—I'm too tired—." One day the Marine orderly salutes in front of the chair where Billy is wearily going over his plans for the hundredth time. "The Captain's compliments, sir, and he would like to have you go to Boqueron with him today." As the orderly departs,

Billy groans, "Hell, I've too much to do to go gallivanting!" but the skipper's invitation is an order and Billy goes. That night he laughs aloud and talks Progress and Anarchy at dinner, and he also gets the first solid night's sleep in weeks.

Spotting practice, main battery. Spotting practice, secondary. Long range day battle, turret and broadside. Advance practice C. Life is one combination of crashing guns after another. Fire, clean, ship, drill, drill, teach your men, coach your men, check directors, fire—an interminable round. We do not talk about the mail or the States any more. We can talk only guns, and we are sickly stale on that subject. "Make John go to Caimanera today. He needs it—he's getting goofy."

One day there comes a startling whisper from an officer on another ship. "He's been bats for a week—under observation—got away from the Hospital Corps man and—no use to him in this damned hole—clean off with a safety razor blade—found him before he bled to death—" A stunned silence greets this news, broken by the dry voice of the senior surgeon. "Won't he be surprised when he gets home and finds they're still fashionable?" There is

a cackle of strained laughter and the subject is dropped. Guantanamo has added one more to the bay's long list of broken men.

Only thirty days more now,—“four weeks and a butt,”—we must hang on. And finally, almost unexpectedly, the target season ends.

The bartenders, soaked with perspiration and the splash of upset glasses, pass out the last round. Lean, nondescript dogs, their eyes glazed with unaccustomed gorging of chicken-bones, lurch under the tables. The red-haired youngster on top of the piano raises his seidel and his high full tenor voice rings out.

We're sitting on top of the world,  
Just steaming along—

A hundred salt-roughened voices crash through the low-hanging cigarette smoke as the crowd joins in:

If you'd like to know the reason  
We're making all this row,  
The target season's over;  
We're starting home right now!

In the doorway Mary calls unceasingly: "Git yo' peanuts, gentlemen! Git yo' first clahss peanuts!"

# REUNION

BY CARTER BROOKE JONES

CROSSET was one of the first to arrive. He stood around the hotel lobby until he saw a group of young men lounging in a corner. He approached them tentatively, and while he recognized no one, their talk made it apparent that they had belonged to the regiment. He started away, then turned back, ill at ease. One of them touched him and named the regiment inquiringly.

"Sure," said Crosset.

"D Company."

"A," returned Crosset.

They exchanged names, and Crosset joined the crowd. Soon it was augmented and became more animated. They were re-viving episodes familiar to him. Now and then a silence brought a trace of constraint, and they fidgeted and looked around. Others came, one and two at a time, and new knots collected. A heavy murmur filled the lobby. Crosset was aware of a faint fear of disappointment: perhaps he had expected too much of this dinner.

A hand descended on his shoulder.

"How the hell are you, anyway?"

It was Thompson, of A Company, as thin and eager as ever. On Thompson's heels came Byrd, elegant in a gray suit with red stripes, a purple handkerchief peeping from the pocket under the lapel. Byrd always had managed to keep himself looking a little neater than any one else; even in the mud, somehow, his uniform had been the least spattered.

Somebody punched Crosset in the ribs. It was little Dahlgren, grinning in the ingratiating way that used to be so infuriating. Yet it was good to see even him. They had been through something, all

these fellows. The experience they had shared. . .

Plop! A poke in the back, this one so hard Crosset winced. Why couldn't at least one of his old comrades think of a more congenial approach? He turned around, not mollified by recognizing Patterson, whom he had disliked more violently than any one else in the company. Patterson had been the best boxer in the regiment, inclined to be a bully, and particularly contemptuous of Crosset because of the sorry figure he cut with gloves or at rough-and-rumble. Oh, well. This was no time to harbor grudges.

"Hello, Pat. How's the old kid?"

They shook hands. This was the first time he had seen Patterson in mufti. Somehow, the fellow seemed less belligerent. The punch was an expression of his old arrogance, yet in his face and speech there was a baffling trace of humility. Perhaps the sentiment of the occasion had melted him, though it was hard to think of Patterson and sentiment in the same breath.

A broad Irish smile announced O'Hara. Crosset thought of a night in a café at Coblenz when O'Hara, immersed in Rhine wine, had confessed that the blackjack game he and J. Smith had been running was crooked—which had not been news to Crosset. But he had always liked O'Hara. The man's geniality was not forced, nor was it automatic, like a dog's; it was selective.

Others of Company A came, perhaps three dozen. Not many out of the two hundred and fifty who had boarded the transport at Hoboken on that bleak