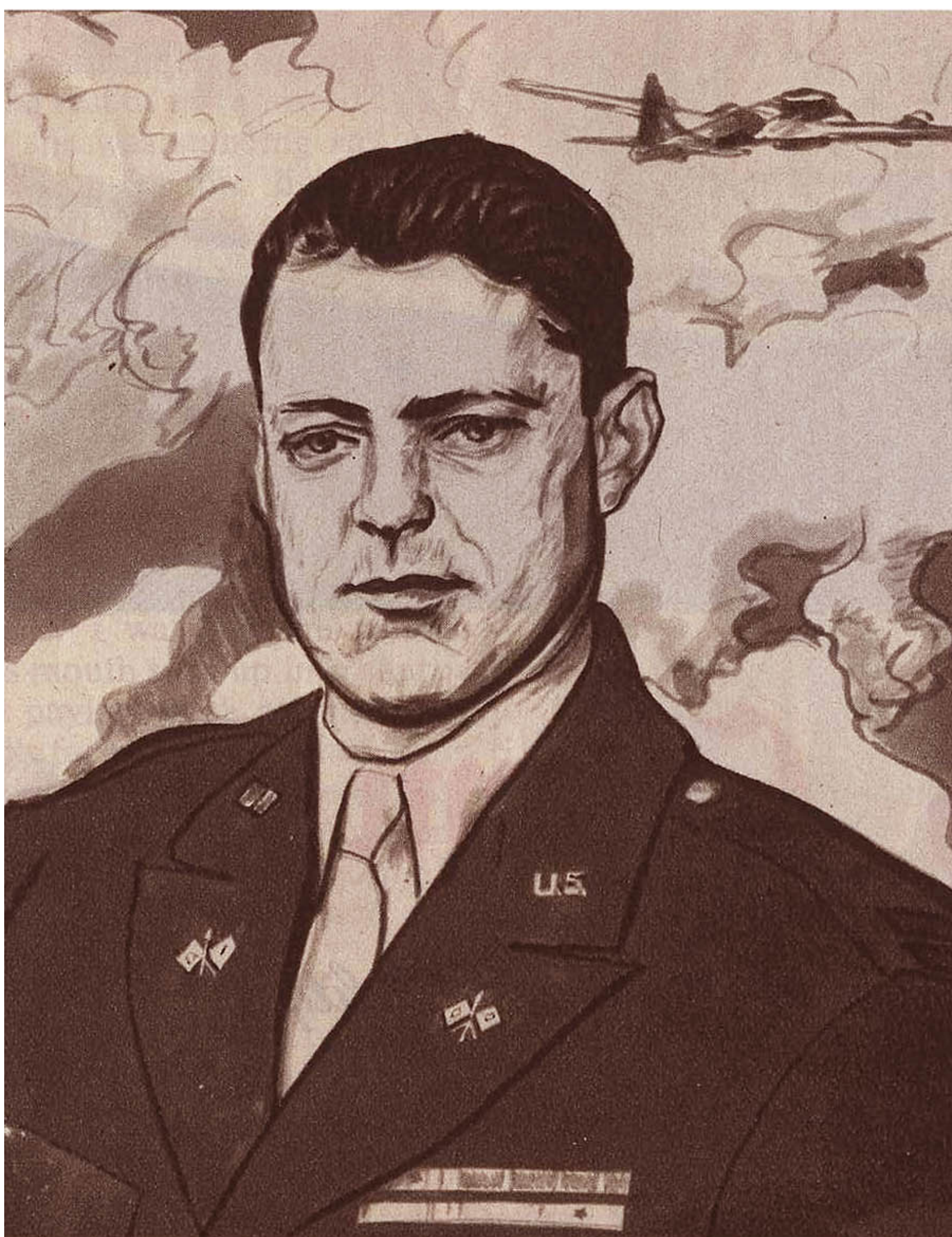


# THE Heroes



## **CAPT. TRUMAN HEMINWAY, JR.**

**A**LL heroism does not have a tragic ending in the post-humous award of a medal to the widow or the mother. Here and there in the records of the armed forces are stories of high daring in which the actors skimmed danger and death as gaily as dragonflies over summer pools. Take the case of young Truman Heminway, Jr., from Sherbourne, Vermont, who fought the Japanese from island to island in the Philippines for three long years, now the hunted and now the hunter, building himself a "navy" and a radio network between deadly encounters, and yet taking time off to marry and start a family. An aerial photographer in 1941, private first class, he came out of the jungles in 1944 to find himself a captain in the Signal Corps.

When the battle for Luzon ended on May 10, 1942, General Wainwright surrendering to save the men on Corregidor from massacre, Heminway and five comrades were on Mindanao, miles to the south. Soon seven others came along, and the Lucky Thirteen, as they styled themselves, took to the hills and planned their own little private war against the Nips. For the first few months, it was not much of a campaign, but finally Heminway and his gang established contact with an American submarine that crept in under cover of night. Along with arms, they were given a lot of radio sets.



## CAPT. TRUMAN HEMINWAY, JR.

What the aerial photographer did not know about radios would have made a hefty book, and even after mastering the technique, there was the job of getting them around to the various islands. The need for a "navy" stood plain, and the Lucky Thirteen, after long search, salvaged five or six launches that the Japs had abandoned as utterly worthless. These were tinkered into shape, and the problem of power was solved by extracting a substitute for Diesel oil from coconuts.

Somewhat sluggishly, but still proudly, the "fleet" took to sea, and soon every neighboring island had its radio station, enabling native guerrilla bands to keep in touch with one another. Not an easy or safe task, for the waters were thick with enemy craft, and typhoons blew with ghastly regularity, but Heminway came through without the loss of a "ship." The crews, to be sure, spent almost as much time overboard as on board, due to leaks, and sharks made mending a hazardous occupation.

Always, of course, there was a desperate shortage of arms and ammunition, but the Lucky Thirteen gave the matter of logistics their usual brisk and successful study. Whenever a boatload of Japs came offshore, a Filipino boy would row out, bearing a bunch of bananas and waving friendly greetings. Tucked away in the bunch, however, was a nice fat stick of dynamite, and as the youngster drew close, he would light the fuse, and give the bananas a lusty toss. On one occasion, Heminway recalls, forty-eight Nips were blown right up into the arms of their ancestors. Before the smoke of the explosion cleared, the natives were diving for guns, knives, ammunition and even the engines.

Food was another continuing problem for the Lucky Thirteen, for while the hospitality of the natives was generous and ungrudging, there were many weeks when hot pursuit drove the Americans into the mountains or the jungle, far from human habitation. *Camotes* (a stringy type of sweet potato) and locusts, caught on the fly, were often all they had to eat, sustaining life at the cost of appetite. After a fashion, however, the diet helped the fugitives to measure time.

"The first six months," reports Truman Heminway, "we threw food away when ants got in it. The second six months we picked out the ants and ate the food. The third six months we ate the food, ants and all. The fourth six months we grabbed the ants when they got away, and put them back in the food."

It was in the jungles of Samar that Heminway met Catherine Barbara Krebs, daughter of a Manila lumberman, who had fled the sack of the city to find refuge with native friends. Which one looked worse is still a matter of dispute, for Miss Krebs was tattered and torn, and bewiskered Heminway's bare feet struck fire from the rocks. Anyway, the two fell in love and were married in a village church at midnight, the best man and the ushers standing armed guard outside in case of a Jap attack.

Now the Lucky Thirteen became fourteen, for Mrs. Heminway shared their perils as the gallant little band moved from cave to cave, from thicket to thicket, and in course of time, the number increased to fifteen. The baby was born on Leyte, and down from the hills came every American for the baptism. Unhappily, a detachment of Nips also poured in just as the Filipino padre was about to perform the ceremony. Mother and child fled in one direction, and father and godfather in another, yelling to draw off pursuit, and it was three months before all of them got together again.

Nightmare months followed in slow, heartbreaking succession, but the Lucky Fifteen fought on, as gaily, as doggedly. At last, in November, 1944, General MacArthur radioed the news of victory, ordering Captain Heminway to report to him in Tacloban. And there the gaunt, sun-blackened Vermonter and his wife sailed for home. Just in time, too, for a second baby was born on the ship. . . .

GEORGE CREEL

# Collier's

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