Baguio

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Being operations officer in a medical supply depot in the Philippines was one job I thoroughly enjoyed, for it kept me very busy keeping a check on all the depot's operating activities. In order to do this, I had to make frequent visits to all parts of the installation to see first hand how the work was progressing. It was during one of these trips that our civilian chief storekeeper, Manual Picardo, stopped me, pointed to the sky and said, "Baguio." I looked up at the sky and noticing nothing distinctly different about it, I asked him what he meant by "Baguio." He said, "Typhoon, Sir, typhoon." When I asked him why he thought we would have a typhoon, he insisted he could tell by the faint clay color in the clouds. It was only then that I, too, noticed this peculiar color. However, it was a nice sunny day and being a typical "know it all" American, I was not particularly impressed by Manual's prediction. But, knowing his deep sense of pride, I told him that the air corps would notify us if there was really a storm brewing. This incident happened around nine o'clock in the morning; I had forgotten about it a short time later.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day that our switchboard operator brought me a message from higher headquarters that a typhoon of mild but increasing intensity was located approximately three hundred miles east, at approximately fifteen degrees north latitude and was advancing at the rate of fifteen miles per hour. In other words, if that typhoon did not change its course, it would hit Base K in approximately twenty hours. I then suddenly realized that perhaps Manual knew a little more about the weather than I cared to admit.

Later he told me these typhoons originate along the east coast of China in the area around Tonquin, and as far north as Ningpo, in the vicinity of Formosa, Luzon, and islands immediately south. There are many theories as to why the geographic conditions of this area induce these destructive wind forces, but the definite facts are not known. The most favorable typhoon weather exists from May to November and they occur most frequently in July, August and September; however, they have been recorded in every month of the year except February.1

I knew none of these facts and very little else about these dreaded typhoons before receiving that message. The telephone operator notified each section in our depot. We had not been caught off guard as just a month before we had assigned our two hundred and fifty Jap prisoners to the task of "typhoon conditioning" our installation. Every other warehouse brace in all our five warehouses and headquarters building had been anchored to the ground with a double strand of number ten wire, and a "dead man" buried three feet in the ground to hold these wires. A similar method was used to tie down all tarpaulins in our open storage area. I noticed, too, that they had recently completed tying down all the tin roofs with the aid of number fourteen wire and bamboo. As I glanced about wondering if we had done all we could, I can remember how my pulse quickened when I thought of what might happen if a piece of roofing three

1"Typhoon," *Enc. Am.* 1943 ed.

feet by nine feet would be ripped off by the fierce wind and come hurling at me. And, my thought immediately recalled how easily a bulldozer, working in our area, had pushed over some palm trees, and I wondered if the wind could not do the same.

I knew that every one in the depot was taking preliminary measures. Braces were being tightened, drainage ditches were checked, rain curtains on all buildings were being lowered and secured, and windshields on trucks were being removed. In the offices, the records were placed in water proof chests, and desks were pushed against the wall. After the depot itself was made ready, the men would return to the detachment area, place all their possessions in their duffle bag and strap it to the top of their bed. They would then nail down the sides of their tents and report back to their regular place of duty. Every man knew what he was expected to do and I knew the best thing I could do until they were ready to have their area checked was to keep out of their way.

At the end of two hours, the sections started to call into depot headquarters stating they were ready to be inspected. As I checked each area, I was amazed at what a thorough job the men had done. It seemed their chief concern was that the typhoon might possibly miss us. They were anxious to see just how effective their precautions would be.

The radio kept broadcasting the progress of the storm and by nine o'clock the next morning we were certain that the men weren't going to be disappointed for we had a typical typhoon coming straight at us. It was proceeding from east northeast to west southwest and as do all storms in the Northern Hemisphere; due to the rotation of the earth, it was whirling in a counterclockwise direction. We knew it could travel from five hundred to seven hundred miles and we were only three hundred miles from its origin.

None of us seemed to know the exact physical makeup of a typhoon; however, Manual had attended meteorological classes at the Far Eastern University at Manila and he explained it to us. He said that a typhoon is a mass of whirling wind gaining a width of from fifty to one hundred and fifty miles. The rotation is in circles not returning on themselves, nor opening outward by their centrifugal motion, but tending to blow somewhat inward upon the low pressure area that is confined to the center of the typhoon. It is this fluctuation of barometric pressure in the center that gives it is destructive energy. As the barometric pressure is lower in the center, the wind swirl thus gives cause for the ocean to rise and accounts for a tidal wave that forms and accompanies the typhoon. The intensity is also increased by the large quantity of heat released in the condensation of the vapor of the atmosphere into a deluge of rain which falls during the storm, as from ten to twelve inches frequently fall in one day.2

And when it started to rain it really came down. The rice paddy adjacent to our detachment area rose two feet during one hour. As I watched the water rise, I noticed hundreds of bright and shiny objects bobbing in the water. They had me puzzled for sometime until approximately thirty minutes later I finally recognized them as empty beer cans. It did not take a genius to figure out how they got there as I noticed that the distance from the edge of our detachment area to the middle of the rice paddy was about as far as from home plate to second base.

Then the wind started to blow and things began to happen. The first tree to go

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2*Ibid.*

down had all the wires leading from our diesel generators to the warehouses nailed to it. It missed the blood and biological refridgerators as it came down, but hit the oxygen cylinder platform and immediately two thousand oxygen cylinders started to fall over. I prayed that the protective cap over each cylinder would hold, for if one broke it would send a cylinder across the ground like a torpedo. However, they all held, but I'll never forget the noise they made.

Sheets of tin started blowing off the No. 2 warehouse, but we could not see where they went for they seemed to go straight up. We found only one piece of the tin later. Some of the large tarpaulins in the open storage area took off like big birds, but we recovered most of them later.

After the wind died down and as each section sent in a report of its damage, we found that the total extent of the damage included two tents down in the detachment area, the main power line to the warehouses was down, No. 2 warehouse had lost half its roof, and twenty-five per cent of the tarpaulins in the open storage area were off or partally off the stocks; the oxygen cylinder platform was also destroyed. I then realized what a constant menace the typhoon is to the livehood of the people living in this area and wondered how they retain their patience to build and rebuild time after time. There have been as many as four hundred and forty-one typhoons in the Philippine area in one ten year period.3

The next day, the sun came out and things gradually returned to normal, that is the water went down taking the beer cans (a threat to our reputation) down into the high grass, and the tarpaulins were recovered and the wire restrung. The men even admitted that one typhoon was enough for them. I didn't feel really normal until I heard a voice say, "It looks like we'll have a beautiful day, doesn't it, Sir?" I turned around and smiled as I said, "If you say so, Manual, if you say so."

3J. Algue, *The Cyclones of the Far East*, (place and date of publication unknown), p. 86.