

CHAPTER XLII



I DID NOT HEED THE WARNINGS—AND THEY WERE many—to get out of China. All three of my ships, which were used by my import and export business and traveled under the Panamanian flag, were on the high seas, my godown filled with tobacco. When I thought of moving my business to Manila as others had done it was too late.

Leonora, Willie and Jo Ann had left for the States on home leave on the President Coolidge, which, it turned out, was one of the last ships to leave Shanghai with women and children. Harry, Jr. was with the Texas Oil Company in Singapore. Bobs, Harry and their year-old daughter were in North Carolina. So, our children were safe.

On December 8, 1941, (7th, U.S. time) at 4:30 in the morning we were awakened by a tremendous burst of gunfire. The Japanese were firing on a British gunboat. We learned about Pearl Harbor later in the day.

Emma and I, along with many other Americans were placed under house arrest¹⁸ by the Japanese. Sterling Fessenden, known as Lord Mayor of Shanghai and head of the Municipal Council for 17 years was permitted by the Japanese to remain in his own home.

One morning I had a call from Judge Milton J. Helmick, Judge of the United States Court for China, asking me to meet him at the courthouse to help him burn the records of Shanghai citizens before the Japs got their hands on them.

He warned me that this was risky. Getting caught would mean our lives. Saying "no" never even crossed my mind. I met him.

One of us kept a lookout for Japs while the other burned records in the big fireplaces. We had been at it for about three hours when I spotted a carload of Japanese military men stopping in front of the courthouse.

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We ran as hard as we could to the back door and went out just as the Japs came in the front door. It was a narrow escape.

Judge Helmick was able to turn over to the Swiss Government most of the personal papers of property owners in Shanghai.

We remained under house arrest until February, 1943, when we were interned in the Chapei Civil Assembly Prison Camp.

Just before internment I was able to rush to the Swiss Embassy with Emma's jewels and other valuables. A Filipino friend took many of our valuable furnishings for safekeeping. Some items we sold.

Other things—we never saw them again—we left in the care of the White Russian chauffeur of a friend of ours.