

**A 15-year-old neighbor of Mrs. Mascuñana
narrates the harrowing recapture of
a part of southern Manila by the U.S. in 1945**

Fely Zafra (front) with friends after the Manila holocaust.

A GROWING UP



Felicidad Zafra-Reyes

February 3, 1945

Coming home from Benediction with Paquita Berenguer, I was fairly jumping out of my skin over her piece of news. No doubt it is *kwentong kochero* again. An uncle of hers has just arrived from Pampanga and he is urging them all to leave Manila, as the Americans are already in Pampanga. But of course not. We will not leave. *Tatay's* crony, Mr. Franco always has a room ready for us in his all-concrete house with all those perfectly lovely Beautyrest beds.

There is a lot of activity in the Revilla house across. The soldiers occupying it are all packed up and ready to go. The Americans must be somewhere in Bulacan by now. Why don't they come yet? I hear a lot of machine-gun shooting very close. From our *azotea* it is a lovely picture. By the bay there is a red glow over all. Like liquid fire, tracers fill the air. I'd sure hate to be in those explosions, but they are really, really breathtaking in beauty, rising up slowly like huge silvery balls of pollen and bursting in a million flashing fragments. The Americans must be somewhere in the outskirts of Manila.

February 4, 1945

All quiet again. It's all a dream. The Japs are just as jolly as ever. Oh, we must be jinxed or something. Why, why doesn't something happen? They say Sto. Tomás was entered last night. So what? Why aren't they here now? More drudgery, more backache. Excuse me. I have to climb over the wall to Doña Paching's duplex (they have been living here since the Japs took over their big house in Colorado) and flatter her old cook, Le Tong, and get me some well water to take a bath with.

February 6, 1945

Victory is very near. When I think of strawberry shortcake, cakes, ham, *relleno* and ice water my heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains me.... The Japs are getting to be very ferocious. Today they wanted to be introduced to "*daraga*," wanted whiskey, P.I. money, chickens, pigs, etc. Our maid Simeona hid our two precious bottles of Panay rum in the pail charcoal out on the *azotea*. Our *cuartito* under the concrete staircase at the back is all decked out. We have four petroleum cans of *mongo*, rice

and red beans painfully hoarded these last three years.

February 8, 1945

What a woeful birthday for Lola! Amid shelling and amid screeching Japs we ate her chicken. The whizz of shells is now too realistically near. We are not going to sleep in the dining room any more. *Tatay* has gotten all the big sofa cushions and piled them all around the windows in the front bedroom. The mattress is down on the floor and we will sleep all together with our shoes on, bundles ready. No nightgowns for us. Situation definitely critical.

February 9, 1945

At breakfast fire broke out in the Revilla house opposite. The people beside it Don Pepe Zamora, Didi and Pinggo put it out. A last gulp of coffee and a terrific explosion. This was it. We covered our noses with wet towels and rushed to our *cuartito*. It kept getting smokier and hotter inside.

Don Ricardo Mascuñana came. Doña Paching's husband said we must leave our house. Everybody had gone to the big Mascuñana house on Colorado, which had just been abandoned by the Japs. Don Ricardo had risked his life to come back and warn us. The flames were rising high, eating up the Orense house, but this house was not going to burn. It was concrete and very strong. It would withstand anything. *Tatay* had locked all the doors and closed all the windows carefully and we walked away in silence carrying our bundles.

The Zamoras were there, the Revillas were there with a great big pushcart. The Castillos were there, much ahead of us. Lourdes Castillo waved her red, red *alpargatas*. The Morenos, the Chinese cook, Le Tong, the police dog, Lady, the other neighbors, Benita Woo, Lilia de la Paz, the Moras—all were there.

The Zamoras broke down the walls between the Mascuñanas, the Siocons and the Del Rosarios. Finding it too crowded in the Mascuñana house, we went to the Del Rosarios'. The shelling was so near that shrapnel kept falling overhead. Too unhealthy, we thought. It had started to rain and so we walked back through mud to Doña Paching's house. We could not peep out of the windows or walk on the street,

but at twilight we did peep. Our house—our beautiful house with Doric balcony columns, concrete urns and stained-glass window—was gone. Nothing was left out of the balcony and the *azotea*.

We had consumed our last drop of decent water. We were now drinking water straight from the well ... and glad of it!

February 10, 1945

Last night we tried to sleep on the stairs of Doña Paching's house, where we are now. I lay down the whole length of a step and I had to fold my legs. The whole family had migrated to the dining room and slept on the cement floor, leaving two former pupils of *Nanay* on the stairs. In the wee hours of the night there was a terrible explosion. I was all for leaving, but *Tatay* said we had to stay or we might be mistaken for snipers by the Japs.

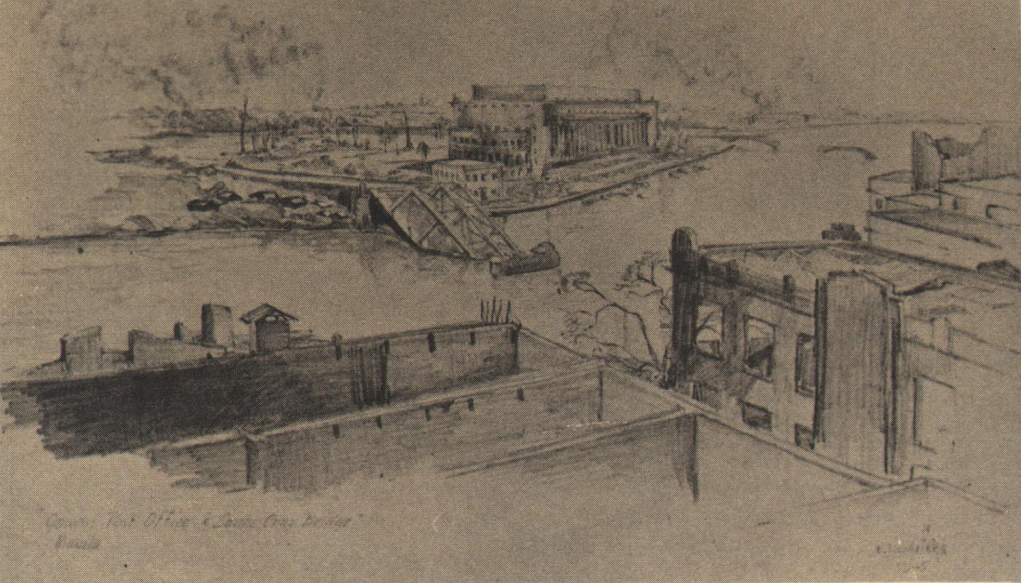
A hand grenade has caused so much noise. Doña Paching was only a few yards away from the fence where it landed and her hair is still full of earth and sand.

Breakfast was one tall salmon can almost full of soft rice and with about three slices of salmon in it. We gratefully ate it all up—the six of us—before we left to join the Zamoras and the Castillos at the Siocons.

At the Siocons' we opened a lunch of two cans of Campbell's soup for the Zamoras and us. We were 16 and—oh, yes! we had rice and one salted egg too. Everything had calmed down. We wondered about the Revillas over at the Del Rosarios'.

The calm did not last. We heard Japs shouting and then the staccato burst of machine guns. We all just lay flat and prayed. There was a long interval before anyone ventured to look out. Mrs. Zaragoza came into the house. "My husband is dead," she said very simply. "He's dead," she repeated as if to tell herself that it was true.

Reports rolled slowly in. Juancho LaO, the son-in-law of the Revillas, was wounded in the thigh and stomach. All the Martinezes were killed. All the Del Rosario men were dead too. Ernesto Lagdameo, who had escaped from Fort Santiago, was just scratched. In short, all the men taking refuge in the Del Rosario house were shot just because a dead Jap was



The banks of the Pasig River during the American campaign to recapture Manila early in 1945. Santa Cruz Bridge (center) has collapsed. The post-office building, at the right of the bridge, stands pockmarked by the U.S. artillery fire.

Alfredo Rocas

found on the sidewalk in front of their house. Some men had brought Juancho and Ernesto in secretly. Juancho was a sight with all that blood dripping. There were no bandages, no medicine, no nothing. Lourdes tore up her muslin sheet for bandages. His wife Leny, got out the last bottle of boiled water for the baby, Trinity and made her drink. *Nanay* finished all her gauze on Juancho and half our tiny supply of sulfathiazole.

Around twilight the Diaz house was burning and the Japs set the Mascuñana house to the torch. Mr. Moreno and Ernesto Lagdameo were bayoneted for attempting to put the fire out. The people started rushing out in terror. Don Pepe Zamora was even considering wearing skirts to hide himself and his boys, but we discouraged him. Anyway, I took my blue skirt out for *Tatay*... just in case!

The place was getting too hot, so we crossed the Del Rosario lawn to meet some Jap soldiers, who said we were to remain in that house even if it started to burn. Another Jap said he would escort us to the P.G.H. We were all for that idea. The De La Paz family, the Platons and the Woos had left for the P.G.H.

A third Jap jumped into the mess and started ordering us into the Martinez yard (where the massacre had taken place and we had to be very careful not to step on the bodies. He motioned us into the house.... not to the first floor but to the second floor.

Everything about us was burning and we sort of divined that he would set fire to the place and watch us jump out of the windows. Again Lourdes spoke up. She said *hai* to everything the Jap said and he seemed pleased, so he ordered us to go down again. We were made to go on to the last two houses on the block—the Galan and Vizcarra houses.

On the way I got so peeved at the heaviness of one of Lola's bundles only to find out that it contained nothing but cheap nickel-plated silver, old doodads and Lolo's spectacles. I had fallen down so many times because of it.

We were too late in getting into the Vizcarra house. The Galan house was locked up. We dropped down beside the concrete staircase, pulled out the tickling ferns and lay down on the cool ground. I was still clad in the white silk polka-dotted dress I wore on Friday morning. It was rent in several places. The sleeves were remarkably dirty, for I had to use them whenever I wanted to wipe my face. My feet were encased in elegant black suede and the pink towel over my head was fastened at the chin with a superlarge at the pin.

Wherever I looked there were fires burning. The house was the only one standing for many blocks around with the exception of the Galan and Vizcarra houses. It looked solid and comforting amid the ruin and destruction all around. I must have dozed off while watching the rockets hurtle

through the air.

I was rudely awakened by a Jap sentry with funny-looking branches on his helmet. He was nudging my hand. I looked up. He nudged me again and pointed over to the darkness on the other side of the staircase and beckoned to me. He walked away, expecting me to follow, for I had said "*hai*" dazedly. I was terrified really and truly for the first time during that horrible period. I begged *Ate* and *Tatay* to lie on top of me and pretend that they were sleeping. They did. The Jap passed by again and, sure enough, he was looking around for me.

I dared not stay in the open any more. I squeezed myself into the Vizcarra house. Slowly I eased myself down with *Lola* beside Lourdes Castillo, Didi, Nena and Pachie Zamora. We all maintained that uncomfortable position without a murmur. Only Lourdes had the pep and vigor to keep on talking and laughing and cracking jokes.

There was a window where we were all squatting. A sentry was passing back and forth. Lourdes had the temerity to call him, flatter him and ask him to go get her some water. To our great surprise, he did. He also gave her some candy. He was the only human Jap I met during that horrible period.

The former pupil of *Nanay* who we had left on the stairs in the Mascuñana house came to me with a wild, anxious look in her eyes. She was asking me to keep her Philippine money for her. She was afraid of a Chinese who was going to kill her. I thought her a bit nuts and told her I didn't have a place to keep it in. The light of the fires around was dying out. I asked her to go back to her place or she would never find it any more because of the crowd.

Around midnight — everything seems to happen at midnight — that woman who came to me started moaning asking for food. She talked of food, of how she was afraid of the Chinese who was going to murder her. We asked the one Chinese in the group if it was true. He looked pretty harmless and honestly bewildered about it all.

Then the woman started to rant about the devilish Americans who were bombing her out of house and home. She grew poetic about it even.

She screamed suddenly that we were all mistreating her. Mrs. Zafra, she said, had hidden her Philippine money. She knew where it was. Everybody shushed her up. She was tied down and someone gagged her. The place was in an uproar. The Jap sentry came in suddenly. We could barely see the dull shine of his bayonet. Instinctively we hushed up. Hearing of the trouble, the Jap gruffly told them to remove her gag, whereupon she started to sing—literally sing—his praises to the skies. He was her love, her sweetheart, her darling *tomadachi*. Still muttering Jap imprecations but apparently mollified, he stomped out to get a tiny packet of rice and a little water.

During the interval that the sentry was gone she half-cried, half-laughed and half-shouted for her sweetheart who gave her food and wanted her to live. She implored him to speak to her. When he came she implored him to hug her. She babbled, "Why does not my *tomadachi* kiss me?" and a lot of other nauseating things. Luckily, he did not take advantage of her. Perhaps he was a little afraid of her. After all, she was a real honest-to-goodness lunatic.

Well, at least that silenced her. No more did she blab of hidden Philippine money.

During the night one more incident chilled me. From the window I looked out on the concrete staircase of the Galans. There were still many persons lying down by it. I saw branches move where branches never existed. Two figures stood up. They were two Jap marines with a fantastic camouflage of branches on their helmets, and leaves and vines hanging from their waists like hula skirts. There was a girl between them—a young girl. Swiftly, silently, they hurried her over to the dark side of the Galan staircase.

In vain did I watch for her to come back. She never did. Who knows? If I had stayed there I might have been the one.

February 11, 1945

I woke up again because I heard Nena and Pachi patting Ate on the back. It was her feast day. I too made my way to Ate and wished her a happy birthday. "I hope so" she answered cryptically.

One very large explosion! We were

all stunned. Shaking our heads, we saw the door smoking. They had thrown a hand grenade at it. Fortunately it was a double door and very large. We all rushed out only to be met by four fierce Japs from the Laico house on the other side of the Vizcarras. They herded us to the Galan backyard by the well. At the doorway of the *entresuelo* of the Galan house lay an old woman about the age of *Lola*. A pool of blood was around her mouth.

In the backyard the Japs made us kneel. They asked us to put up our hands and they went around inspecting us. Already they had tied up some mestizos. The leader asked for an interpreter. A woman, squat and untidy in a bright electric-blue dress, stood up. Through her he said we were all traitors, for we did not want to give up the guerrillas in our midst. Because of that, they said they had to kill us. The men were separated from the women. We were ordered to remain where we were. The men were taken to the Vizcarra backyard, facing us. We were ordered to look on and watch helplessly.

Tatay walked away without a word — without even a backward look. He just handed his shoulder bags to me silently. Those were tense moments. The shelling intensified, the women tried to repress their sobs — heartbreaking sound—and the men prayed. *Nanay* hardly cried, *Lola* for one was silent. You could see that *Ate* was praying awfully hard to her

Lady Mother for one birthday gift — *Tatay's* life. As for me,—I murmured tonelessly over and over, "Father Pro, Father Pro, now's your chance to do a miracle, now's your chance, Father Pro, please, please do something."

The machine guns arrived—three of them, with four soldiers on all sides to shoot those who would attempt to escape. The shelling became stronger and stronger. We no longer heard the hum as the shells went overhead. All we felt was a great rush of wind, an earthquake thud and the glassy tinkle—like that of tiny Christmas bells—of shrapnel falling. The Jap looked up apprehensively. That was too close. As for us, we wanted a shell to hit us all and get it over with. Death seemed so peaceful and safe after all the racket and noise we had been through.

Like a miracle, the Japs folded up the machine guns and motioned to the men to follow them inside the Vizcarra house. One Jap conducted us to the Galan *entresuelo* and everybody had to jump over the grisly corpse across the threshold. The Jap told us to keep very quiet or they would come back and kill not only the men but also the women. We were not to go to the men or we would be shot.

Lourdes Castillo, who did not hear the Jap come in, was in one corner, shaking with sobs. She thought her father was going to be taken somewhere else to be killed. "My father is a good man," she sobbed over and over. "He has never hurt even a fly." We had to shake her and almost shout to her that her father was safe and sound.

Not all had been spared by the rain of shrapnel, however, in one corner Mrs. Mora sat with her nine-year-old Lita on her lap. Dry-eyed she was watching her daughter die. Lita was bleeding profusely from a shrapnel wound at the back, just below her left shoulder. Lourdes got the cross with the many indulgences and clasped the child's hand around it. We roused the child from its apathy. "Listen, Lita," Lourdes ordered. "Repeat after me all I say." They both prayed the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" over and over. I never knew when Lita stopped breathing. Her hand in mine just got colder and colder. Mrs. Mora enveloped her

The LaO' baby, Trinita, survived the crossfire at the battle of Manila.



Felicidad Zafra Reyes

close in her arms, stood up and walked slowly to the Vizcarra house to bring the dead child to her father.

We were expressly forbidden by the Jap to go back and forth between the two houses, but Mrs. Elicaño could not resist the looks of the hungry men peeping out at us. She volunteered to go back and forth with supplies and she went around to each of us with a big basket. This was dangerous, for she was always in full view of the street and machine guns roared frequently. However, she went luckily on with her job. She was a trained nurse and she gave first aid to the many who had been hit. The timid woman who would normally never speak out loud was now Florence Nightingale, carrier pigeon and beast-of-burden, all at the same

time. The people loaded her with things for the men until she was swaying instead of walking.

I must have been inspired or something by her. When *Nanay* was not looking I brought three cans full of water to the men at the window, who were so grateful for the little water I could bring them. I wanted so to bring them more, but *Nanay* saw me and motioned for me to come right away.

Late in the afternoon the shelling became so bad that we expected to wake up somewhere else instead of the Galan house. We calculated that the firing was from the Paco Cemetery and the U.P. We learned that the house on the other side of the Vizcarras—the Laico house—was the headquarters of the Jap garrison in

the area. This did not make us feel very better. Then the woman in the electric-blue dress started going around. She said she was from Kansas street—*asawa ng Hapon*. No one according to her, must pray in English or speak in English.

It was this night that I ate the whole can of salmon. After everyone had eaten I was still so hungry that I asked the maid for more rice and scraped the side of the can with it. It was revolting and nauseating, for the tin was already turning black within. Finding no other can to drink from, I dipped my greasy salmon can into the well outside and was able to down a few gulps.

Once more I donned the pink towel now so begrimed with dirt, grease and perspiration. There was a

Ruins and desolation marked the city after the battle for Manila in February 1945.



Great Eastern Hotel
Manila

cessation of hostilities. In the eerie stillness we heard a peculiar sound—that of straw and grass swishing cautiously under bare feet overhead and at the Angeles house. The smell of gasoline permeated the air. We knew what was going to happen—the pattern had been set in the other house. The Zamora and Zafra clans held a conference. We, too, would inch toward the door and leave all we could not carry. Then God willing, we would proceed to our house—what was left of it. There was a sudden blaze and the bright light became a steady glow of fire. The swollen mass of humanity surged toward the door and fought like animals to get away from the fanning heat of the fire coming closer. My sister and I got out in a hurry. *Nanay* and Simeona

got out, but Lola couldn't. For a very long time she was stuck there, pinned between the door and the people. Finally we pulled her loose. We went across the Vizcarra yard and stumbled over the jagged, half-broken-down wire fences to the Martinez gate, opening on Colorado. In our mad dash I caught sight of Doña Paching half-pushing, half-carrying a bundle that was almost as big as she. There was no one to help her.

We were a good distance away, but the sparks were still showering on us. The men hadn't come out yet. We thought of the locks that held them fast. Le Tong was the first one out. It was he who broke the door open. The men streamed out. Why did *Tatay* not come? I lost my head and started to scream his name. He was among the last to come out, so we were at the tail end of the caravan on the way back to our home.

Our group was joined by Delfin de la Paz, Jr., limping slightly with a gash over his left eyebrow. We learned his tragic story. They had been intercepted near the Union Church—the Woos, the Platons and the Diazes all together. The women were separated from the men and escorted to the P.G.H. The men were lined up in front of the Corona store. Delfin said that the Platons had absolutely no chance, since they were the ones right in front of the guns. Delfin was saved because his father had placed himself before him to protect him from the bullets. All that he got was a wound in his foot. He had to play dead while the Japs went around "tickling" those whom they thought were still alive. When they "tickled" him he got a gash over his eyebrow from a bayonet. He started crawling until he caught up with us. This all happened late in the afternoon of the tenth.

We found everything intact in our *cuartito*, even to the few American "dog biscuits" we had bought from the Morenos, who got them for a fancy price from Jap officers. Everything had been burned down except the first-floor *azotea*. I was delighted about "coming home." I undid my bundle and changed for the first time—into slacks under my dress. I tried to go up the back stairs, but it was blocked by the fallen iron railings of the window. I clambered up near

the water meter into the *azotea*. Burrowing hurriedly beneath the pail of charcoal, I came up with the two bottles of rum still untouched. *Tatay* brought down the one chair saved and he glanced at the big can of boiled drinking water that had also been saved. It was much too heavy to be brought down.

I was rich! I had water, I had rum, I had the rice and canned goods. The books of Ateneo and my music sheets were all safe with me. The Revillas had not even a piece of cloth to wrap their baby in. I gave them my spare towel. Trinita was absolutely naked. This was poverty, I thought—to have one's husband hurt, one's brother and sister missing, one's own baby without a stitch of clothing, all the jewels gone, nothing left but a bundle not more than six inches across. This was the rich, exclusive, aristocratic Leny Revilla LaO!

February 12, 1945

Just another day of monotonous shelling. Some bright people had made a lean-to of iron sheets against the wall. The Zamoras, the Revillas and the Mascuñanas were now all in one row under galvanized-iron sheets. The garage had been reroofed by the Moras and the Castillos, but it was unbearably hot.

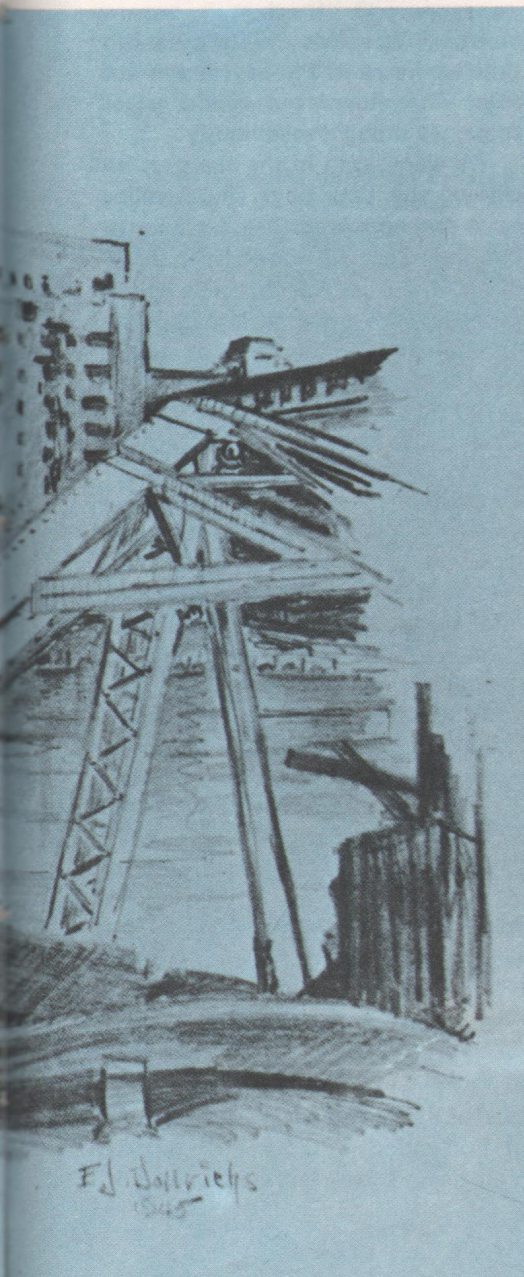
Nena was boiling—and how! Shall we stay like this forever—crouching, living like animals, grateful for the half-burnt fruit of the withered banana tree and gulping it down like hungry dogs? With a horribly bitter conviction she suddenly cried out, "I believe—I believe the Americans will never come! Why did they start coming in the first place and give us all this misery? Why—why don't they come? What's taking them so long?"

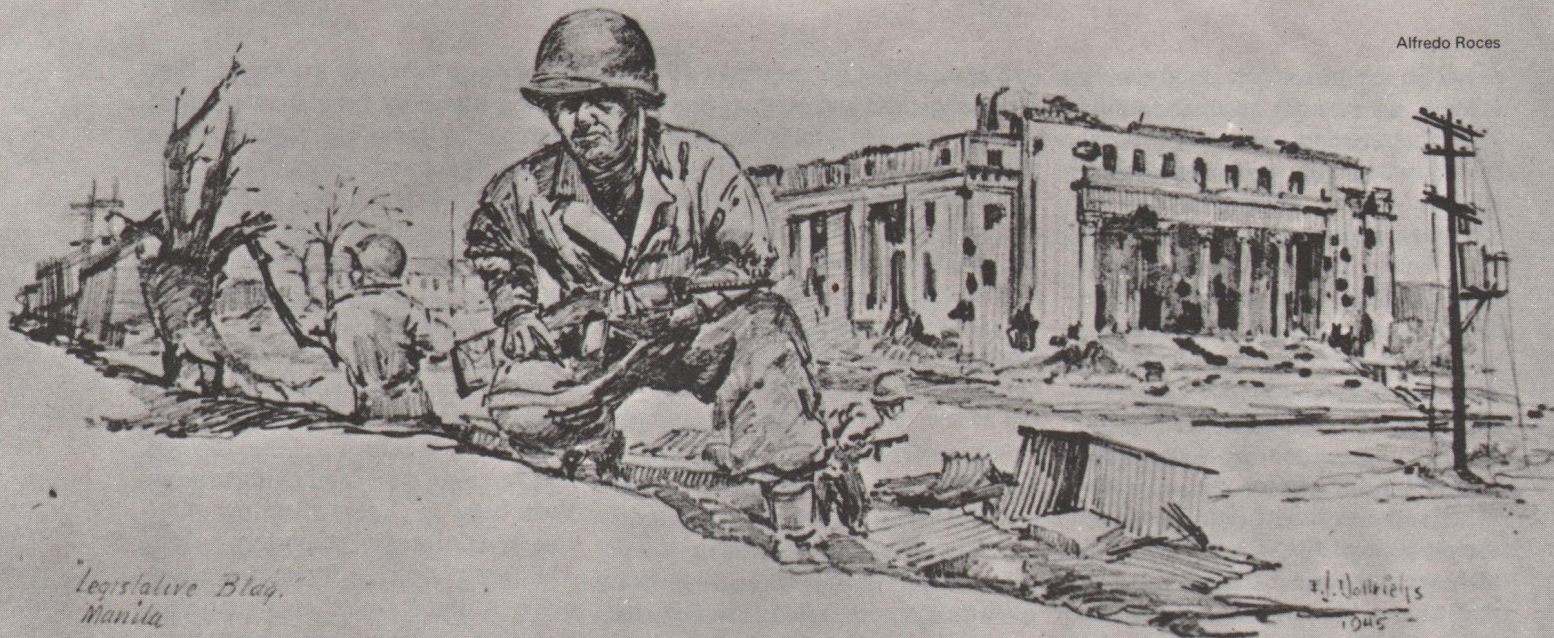
I could say nothing. It was all true. We were despairing. Don Ricardo's well, from which we all got water, was much too overworked. Several times it got too muddy to give any water and we had to wait until there were signs of clearing up. Even then there was a long wait before the water looked like water in the bottle. Well, anyway, we were past squeamishness now.

At noon a strange man was seen cautiously peering over the stone wall that divided us from the Caros.

A hissing sound. Like a slow-motion picture, flying blue-white

Collection of Alfredo Roces





An American dogface watches the enemy scrambling for cover behind the walls of Intramuros. Behind him is the legislative building, which American artillery has damaged heavily in the effort to exterminate the Japanese troops hidden inside.

smoking fragments of a hand grenade floated down on us. We all watched dumbly as it fell on the garage and the whole Adriarte family. A moment of silence before everyone started screaming and scrambling to move out. The greater majority ran across the street but was stopped by a fresh burst of shelling. Our family did not run, for *Tatay* got mad and stood pat. I did not heed him. I started running toward the gate with *Ate* and *Nanay*. I carried my bundle and the big *palayok* (clay cooking pot) half-filled with rice. I could not run with it, so I put it down for a moment. I turned back to see why *Tatay* wasn't following. Coming back, I found the *palayok* gone. This made me furious. There were still a lot of Chinese huddled up together under an iron sheet. Unceremoniously I dropped down and started looking around. Sure enough it was there. I shouted with fury "You fools!" We are already in danger and we all share it and yet you want to steal from your neighbors! I tugged at my *palayok*, but that awful old man wouldn't let go. No, no, it was his, he found it. He would give it back, but first he must get half of the rice in it. I was too speechless with mingled fury and amusement to protest.

Mrs. Adriarte and a waiting Patrick came to ask for help. Mr. Adriarte could not walk. Irene was too stunned to do anything. She was a bright

pink, peeling everywhere, with badly singed hair and a rawness of skin like briefly roasted pork. Patrick looked just as pitiful. We could hear Mr. Adriarte and his wife talking nearby. He said that he was expecting to die and was remorseful about having treated his wife badly at times. It was pathetic to hear him. Lourdes declared that she would like to die like the Little Flower—not more than 24 years old. She was 23 now. *Nanay* came in. She had lost control of herself and was getting hysterical. The *cuartito* was no place for us, but *Lola* wouldn't let *Nanay* leave. She wanted badly to sleep with the Castillos in their shelter for the night. *Lola* beckoned imperiously and wouldn't have it, so we had to go back.

Tatay used the kitchen chair and some iron sheets to build an improvised barricade in front of the *cuartito*. We could not close the door, since we were deafened by the blasts of shells.

That night it was our maid Simeona's turn to get hysterical. I was both exasperated and frightened—frightened because she was acting just like that girl at the Vizcarras'. I wheedled, cajoled and scolded her into sleeping. A man came around and told everybody not to pray in English, not to wear rosaries around their necks, not to talk, not to let the babies cry, not to walk around. The Americans, he said, were coming to-

morrow. Was this the thousandth time we heard it? Phooey! It was not true. The Americans would never come, we thought rebelliously.

We were seven in the *cuartito*, including the Lara boy. The Castillos came and entrusted their *Lola* to us, but they decided not to stay themselves. Then the Revillas came apologetically with a shivering baby, Trinita. Pretty soon the Zamoras arrived with Marissa fretting. *Ate* and I had to get out. After all, who were we to squabble with babies for safety? So *Nanay*, *Tatay* and I lay in a row, with Simeona and *Ate* horizontally across us at our feet. I was determined to sleep well. For three nights we were almost sleepless. The men averaged only about one or two hours of rest. Drowsily I opened my eyes against a radiance. It was a tiny parachute lighting the whole place up. At first I thought it was fire. I was so relieved when it dropped in the next lot.

February 13, 1945

I woke up again and saw four Japs with guns walking around us. I thanked God that stillness prevailed. Not even the usual fretful wail of Marissa broke through the air. As silently as they had come, the Japs left.

A third time I started from my sleep and was almost deafened by the roar of a shell close by and the sound of pottery, tiles, etc., falling. I was lying down on my left side. Suddenly

a great big chunk of coal fell on me, burning hot. I brushed it away and I was surprised to find that there was nothing to brush away. Then I found that I could not breathe. "Nanay" I called urgently between laborious gasps for air, "I'm hit! I'm hit!" I felt I was screaming the words, but they came out soft as a whisper.

I was not the only one hurt. *Tatay* was also hit and his wound seemed to be more serious than mine. *Nanay's* dress was covered with blood spurt-ing from his torn hand. *Nanay* lost all her nervousness. Coolly she cut a strip from *Tatay's* blanket and ap-plied a tourniquet.

I was almost crying now with ve-xation and pain. No one was doing anything to help me. *Nanay* could not find anything wrong with me. There was none of the stickiness of blood and the "lump of coal" that I had described. "*Nanay*, please!" I winced, "I'm hurt!" She answered, "You've got to wait until there's more light. I can't see anything. Your father is suffering terribly so be quiet

for a minute."

Slow as a funeral procession, the minutes passed. With each shuddering intake of breath I felt an iron glove squeezing me inside. Through the pandemonium that reigned I heard Nena shriek, "*Tomadachi! Tomadachi!*" Hysterical idiot, I mut-tered angrily within me. I had forgot-ten that we had shared all the mis-e-ries and hardships up to now, that she was my beloved teacher, who had taught me geometry, that she was my good friend. All I could think of was that she might direct some Jap to us and us finished off. I tried to shush her, but I had to lie back, struggling for breath, without even the energy to say "oh!"


February 13, 1945

With that slowness the light came —and with it relief. It was a pretty day. The nurse Mrs. Elicaña fashion-ed a *micha*, dipped it in iodine and thrust it into my gaping side. While she was working on me Mrs. Castillo came tearfully, begging for medicine,

gauze and cotton. "Why," Ate asked. Lourdes is dying." she said.

And so the sun rose. A new day.

There was a hole in the wall be-tween our lot and the Woos. It wasn't very big—only two feet across. Through the hole, a pair of green trousers hove into view. Quiet! "Japs! Japs!" the word went around. A wild, frightened cry burst from the people as the owner of the green trousers bent over and casually looked around, whistling softly all the while. A cry of fright and then ... and then ... oh, joy! An American! Can ever a sight so sweet come to us again? America, we thank you.

Ernesto Moreno, unashamedly wip-ing away the tears from his eyes, hugged the GI unrestrainedly. Then he sat down abruptly and cried for joy. We too, were crying. He asked us all to be quiet and move as soon as possible to the American lines. We would all go—and how! 

FELICIDAD ZAFRA-REYES

The residential district of Ermita was in flames all the while that the American soldiers were ferreting out the Japanese hiding in the debris of ruined buildings.

Collection of Alfredo Rocas

