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*The Officer Put a Counter-Spell on the
Filipino Bandit's Anting-Anting*

The Contra-Talisman

By GEORGE BALLARD BOWERS

THE sentry guarding my quarters called my attention to the great clouds of smoke that had suddenly appeared on the horizon in the direction of Suay, a few miles west of Hlog, Island of Negros, where I commanded a platoon of Filipinos. I was coming in from early morning target practise, and my field-glasses were in my hand. One look was enough. Suay was in flames. Twenty minutes later I was on my way with fifty soldiers, marking a trail with a streak of puddles and mud six inches deep. By noon we had reached Suay, marked by piles of fluffy white ashes where once stood homes of bamboo and nipa.

Rufo, the famous bandit chief of the island, had struck where least expected. I was three hours behind him. A few of the villagers had already returned and like dumb animals silently watched the whirlwinds of ash and smoke.

Rufo's band, I learned, had consisted of thirty-five men, armed with bolos, two rifles and three fowling pieces. During their visit of three hours, they had killed fifteen natives and four Chinese, and wounded a score more. The five Chinese stores had been sacked and burned and the ninety shacks of the village fired.

The villagers appeared reluctant to speak of the calamity that had befallen them. Rufo had warned them against informing the authorities. As no information could be obtained from the people as to the whereabouts of

the marauders, there was nothing left for me to do but to return to my station.

I began to wonder what my captain would say to me if he happened along, as he surely would. The Island of Negros had had no outbreak for almost a year. It was ill luck that Rufo should strike so near my station. Panic seized me. My only thought was to avoid the captain.

After a sleepless night I was off at daybreak, no particular place in view except a mountain pass twenty miles inland. As my real objective was to avoid my captain, I marched leisurely. At 11 I halted for lunch. Leaving fifteen of my men at our resting place, with five I started out to examine the trails for fresh footprints and a clue. After an hour we came to a fork; both branches had been equally well traveled, but in the left branch I noticed a piece of clean white string, which proved to be the end of a ball of yarn that had been trampled into the mud. The robbers hurrying through at night had lost a piece of loot.

We followed the trail cautiously for an hour without success. It had long been my custom never to stop to rest in an enemy's trail but to draw off to the side. We had no sooner settled when we heard talking and laughter from the direction in which we had been going. We waited breathlessly while five bandits rounded the bend. Two carried rifles, the others baskets of loot, which I later

identified as having come from the Chinese shops of Suay.

The five bandits were easily taken and bound with thongs of green rattan. We marched our prisoners back to where our comrades waited. We were happy, though silent. My heart was light. I had two rifles, five prisoners and some baskets of loot to prove my efficiency. I would have been willing to meet the general himself.

MY PRISONERS admitted membership in Rufo's band. They proudly called themselves patriots fighting for independence. I coaxed and threatened for hours to induce them to divulge the whereabouts of their chief. Finally one who appeared to be a leader spoke. He explained the futility of the information I sought.

"Chief Rufo has an *anting-anting* that warns him of any impending danger. Even now he knows that ill luck has befallen us. His *anting-anting* would inform him at once were I to betray him to thee."

That speech piqued my curiosity. I wondered how Rufo would be able to get such a message.

"I can explain to the lieutenant," interrupted Sergeant Amuyo. "Each of these prisoners had his own *anting-anting*." He put in my hand five two-ounce bottles filled with a mixture of water-beetles, centipedes and some very fine roots over which had been poured coconut oil to fill the interstices. The bottle was a talisman, or as called in Malayan, *anting-anting*.

We had been talking in Malayan. The sergeant turned to me again in English so as not to be understood by the prisoners.

"You see these fools believe that the bugs and things in the bottle move in the oil when danger is near, and that Rufo's *anting-anting* does likewise. Naturally when the oil is exposed to the hot sun or to the heat of

the body it kind of boils and moves the bugs and things in the bottle. If the lieutenant will hold one of the bottles in his closed hand a minute, the bug will move."

I tried the experiment. The sergeant was right.

"How're we going to make 'em talk, sergeant?"

The sergeant motioned to the guards to take the prisoners away; then he and I talked far into the night before we hit upon a satisfactory plan to extract the desired information.

EARLY next morning the five prisoners were brought before me. I began with the leader.

"Art thou ready to lead us to the camp of thy chief, Rufo?"

He stood mute.

"Sergeant Amuyo, let this man be executed by stabbing. Firearms must not be discharged here lest Rufo hear."

The sergeant saluted gravely, then named Private Masida executioner. I believe that any one of the twenty men would have been willing to serve. It had rained during the night, ill humor was evident, and blood-sucking leeches swarmed over the wet leaves of the jungle.

Two minutes later there were blood-curdling shrieks and groans out of the brush into which the prisoner had been led for execution. Before another two minutes had elapsed the sergeant was back for the second victim. I selected the next strongest. He, too, stood mute. Again there were shrieks and groans out of the jungle. The grinning executioner returned with a bloody dagger. A third prisoner was led away. The fourth was left in the jungle. The fifth, a weakling, ashy with fright, agreed to guide us to Rufo's camp if his life were spared.

Without further ado we set out, the guide, the sergeant and Private Ma-

sida leading the way and thirteen soldiers following me. We marched steadily until the tropic sun burned straight overhead. It was time to eat the lunch we carried. But when we were ready to start again our guide balked.

"What's the use? Rufo already knows we are coming. See!" He exposed to the sun the *anting-anting* I had returned to him. "It moves!"

True, the oil appeared to be boiling, so active were the dead bugs in the bottle.

I looked at the sergeant. His face wore a sickly grin. We were beaten.

"Let me see that *anting-anting!*" The sergeant angrily snatched the talisman from the prisoner's trembling hand. We sat down on the bank of an icy stream we had been about to cross. Mountain streams of the tropics are icy cold notwithstanding the blistering sun. While the sergeant and I talked he dangled the bottle in the water. That gave us an idea.

"Come here." He motioned to the prisoner to come nearer. "The American officer here," pointing to me, "will put a counter *anting-anting* on thy *anting-anting* as well as on that of thy chief."

Although the bandit was pagan at heart, I knew that he had great respect for the symbol of Christianity. Gravely I picked up two sticks, tied them to form a cross, and knelt before it. My memory had not failed me. I began twenty-four of the most piquant verses of Virgil. After each

verse I changed the position of my cross. At the twenty-fourth I had completed a circle; the charm was perfect.

"Now, fool," shouted the sergeant triumphantly to the prisoner-guide, "thy *anting-antings* are impotent. Look!" He held up the dripping bottle. "Thy *anting-anting* will boil no longer." It did not, as the sergeant was careful to keep it out of the sun. "Now I shall break it; the spell is complete."

THE guide was convinced of the potency of our counter-talisman. An hour later we had successfully surprised Rufo's camp, making a complete capture.

Rufo demanded an explanation from our guide-prisoner. I let them talk.

"O master," he began, "they killed my four comrades. I was forced to come along. It was not until after the *Americano* had made a contra *anting-anting* that I led them here."

Rufo appeared to be satisfied and convinced that he had been shorn of his power. He conversed cheerfully through the entire journey back to our camp of the night before, where the five soldiers, with the help of the four "executed" prisoners, had ready a piping hot meal.

That night around the noisy camp-fire Private Masida, formerly a vaudeville actor, entertained us with dramatic acts of assassinations, his dagger crimsoned with blood drawn from his leech-bites.

