

Madagascar Ghost

by Cleo Garson, 1918-1944

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By CLEE GARSON



Into the harbor came a boat
and in it rode a passenger
who was Terror's incarnation

He drew a careful bead on the figure in the boat

Foreword

ALTHOUGH this narrative concerns the fall of the port of Diego Suarez to the surprise attack of the British in the early part of 1942, the action of that memorable battle is but a background for the weird, though authentic, story that was enacted on the island of Madagascar during the attack on that vital French naval base.

This story was gleaned in part from two British Marines who were in the action which gained a certain obscure beachhead on the coast below Diego Suarez; from the papers that were found on the bodies of three Japanese naval officers after the battle was over; and from the tragic official history of a once brilliant soldier in the army of France who learned many years too late what patriotism meant.

Parts of this narrative are supposition. The bulk of it is fact. And, the suppositions fit so flawlessly into the few breaches in the facts that it seems hardly fair to consider them purely imaginary. Certainly there is no supposition in what was told to us by the British Marines. The records of the French Military Courts will also show, beyond any doubt, the veracity of our description of the case of Colonel Jacques Chambreaux. There are volumes obtainable in any library on the rites and witchcraft still prevalent in certain tribes of the Malagasy natives who inhabit many desolate sections of Madagascar.

However, though the background of the story occurred against the struggle for the naval base at Diego Suarez in the early part of 1942, the chain of

circumstances which began this incredible narrative date somewhat farther back. It is best that we start at the very beginning therefore...

THERE were some who said that the sentence imposed on Colonel Jacques Chambreaux at the conclusion of his trial before the Military Court in Paris, 1927, was far too severe. True, the handsome colonel had been guilty of certain indiscretions in revealing matters of some small military significance to the agents of alien powers. And, true, he had been paid well for his perfidy to his fatherland.

But it must be remembered that France was not then at war, and even the thought of another war, another bloody, draining conflict with any alien power for the centuries to come was ridiculous. Had not the final war been won? Were not the enemies of France beaten so utterly that they would never rise again?

"The colonel betrayed his uniform, his country and himself," many said. "But in fact he has not harmed France. Strip him of his uniform, therefore. Sentence him to penal servitude, then exile. That will be enough."

But the military tribunal was not of this mind. The sentence they imposed upon the shaken, gray-faced ex-officer was that of lifetime imprisonment in the bleakest of France's African penal colonies. Lifetime imprisonment in such a place was the same as a death decree.

And thus, in 1927, Jacques Chambreaux, ex-colonel of the French Military Intelligence Service, looked for the last time at the land of his birth as he was taken in chains to the certain death that waited in the festering heat of an African prison hell.

Somehow, through the bitter years that followed, Jacques Chambreaux, a gaunt, sunken-eyed ghost of a man who had aged a hundred years in eight, clung frantically to life, planning, plotting, waiting for the day of his escape. And after ten endless, hellish years, that day arrived.

There were three of them; a thin, rat-faced gangster from the Paris slums; a bald, fat, pig-eyed murderer from Bordeaux; and Jacques Chambreaux.

They made their escape at dawn, and cut their way through the treacherous jungles for twelve days, seeking the eastern coastline of Africa. A crocodile tore the leg from the rat-faced Parisian thug; and Chambreaux and the murderer from Bordeaux went onward, leaving their dying companion to be eaten by white ants. At the end of the ten days the last of their water gave out. And on the eleventh day, the big-bellied, pig-eyed Bordeaux murderer, collapsed in a whimpering agony of thirst and fatigue. Jacques Chambreaux, eyes glazed with fever sheen, stumbled on, leaving his last comrade where he fell.

On the twelfth day, Chambreaux found the coastline and the small, scantily-provisioned boat that had been left there by natives who'd been bribed before the escape.

He had done excellently, succeeded in the impossible. He'd had but a small compass and a knowledge of stellar reckoning. But of course this Jacques Chambreaux had once been an officer in the army of France. His training had given him some advantage.

Chambreaux lay there on the beach for a day regaining his strength. It was all the time he could allow, in spite of the fever which was now raging through this parched body. He was not foolish enough to think that pursuit didn't follow. And so he dragged himself into that small, leaky, open boat, and with nothing but his pocket-compass, set out to cross the Mozambique Channel to Madagascar, a distance well over two hundred miles.

THE voyage that followed could not be counted in days. Agony of fever, the broiling brutality that was the sun, a storm in which the small remaining water cask was lost—these things were each an eternity of torture for Jacques Chambreaux. It was through chance and nothing more that his small boat was blown into a desolate cove on the western coast of northern Madagascar. And it was also by chance that boat and occupant were discovered by a band of scarcely civilized Malagasy jungle tribesmen.

Chambreaux was beyond delirium when these natives carried him from the beach cove into the jungle. He'd been unconscious for many hours before they had discovered him.

And so the penal fugitive, the bearded skeleton who had once been a colonel in the army of France, was beyond knowing or caring what was happening to him as these Malagasy tribesmen, eyes weirdly a gleam in the torchlight, carried him along the jungle pathway to the throbbing drums sounding forth from their distant campfire.

Chambreaux was dying. The natives were aware of that. But the drums boomed, and around the fires the tribal witch doctors waited. This spectre of a white man must be brought to them. For had not the tribal Gods given this creature to them?

The Malagasy hurried on through the jungle blackness toward those booming drums, carrying ever so gently this strange offering from the Gods. The witch doctors would know...

CAPTAIN MATSUKI of the Imperial Japanese Navy was impatient. The blundering fool was already several hours late, and even though the distance from Diego Suarez through the jungle to this meeting point was considerable, the idiot should have reckoned with it and started on time to arrive as scheduled.

The captain was tall for a Japanese, lean and stiff-backed. His face was clean-shaven, even though he had been here in the jungle for a number of weeks. He wore glasses, a pith helmet, brown military shirt and brown military shorts. His legs, to just below his ludicrously skinny brown knees, were encased in expensive leather boots.

Around the captain's waist was strapped a cartridge-belt and a holstered automatic pistol. A canteen, slung from his shoulder, dangled at his waist on the side opposite the holster.

From a distance, and ignoring the pistol, Captain Matsuki would give you the impression of a bewildered oriental Boy Scout. But that smooth-shaven face was hard, and his thin lips viciously sadistic in their set expression of anger. Even the thick lenses of his spectacles could not completely hide the arrogance and fanaticism that burned in his button eyes.

The captain had two companions, both lieutenants in the Imperial Japanese Navy. As befitting their lower rank they stood apart in the jungle clearing, watching their captain silently and with a little fright.

"The time passes," hissed the plump one of the two lieutenants, a short, moustached young Jap named Kushamo. "The time passes and that person is not yet here. Our captain's anger grows great."

The other lieutenant, small, dapper, and as young as Kushamo, nodded fearfully. "Perhaps he has been apprehended."

Lieutenant Kushamo shook his head. "It is not possible," he said firmly.

The dapper lieutenant, Tokamo by name, sucked his breath doubtfully and said nothing to this.

In the foreground of the clearing, Captain Matsuki turned in impatient irritation on his young lieutenants.

"Fools!" he snapped. "Must you hiss and gossip like younger sisters?"

Dapper little Lieutenant Tokamo coughed, averting his eyes. Fat young Lieutenant Kushamo removed his pith helmet and mopped his brow with his sleeve, concentrating his gaze on the trees overhead.

Captain Matsuki turned his attention back to the jungle pathway, reaching for a cigarette, lighting it, and glancing again at his wrist watch.

And at that instant the breathless messenger stumbled from the trail into the clearing.

The man was older man than the captain and the lieutenants. He was small, almost incredibly thin, with flesh that was arriving at the dryness of parchment. He was Japanese.

"So!" Captain Matsuki snapped. "At last you come!" He glared at the breathless, scrawny older man who stood gasping before him.

"I could not help myself, honorable Captain," the messenger gasped pleadingly. "Much happens in the port of Diego Suarez. Rumors are everywhere, and the French have doubled the guards throughout the city."

The captain's lips went flat against his teeth in an expression that was not intended for a smile.

"The Americans," he said. "They expect them, eh?"

The messenger shook his head doubtfully. "None know," he panted. "Some say it will be the pig English who will come. But attack is expected, and soon. Of that there is no doubt."

"Then we cannot leave too quickly," Captain Matsuki declared. "You arranged for the boat that will pick us up?"

The messenger nodded. "That has been arranged."

"How far distant from here will it be?"

"A day and a half journey," the messenger said.

The captain turned, waving his hand for Lieutenants Kushamo and Tokamo to join him. To them he repeated what the messenger had told him.

"It is therefore imperative that we return with the information we have gathered," the captain concluded, "before any such attack by either the British or American dogs is made on Diego Suarez. Had my suggestions before the Imperial Strategy Board but a month ago been heeded, Japan would at this moment be

ready to strike before the dogs of the United Nations. Madagascar would then be ours."

"You think the attack is coming, honorable Captain?" plump Lieutenant Kushamo had the temerity to ask.

Captain Matsuki turned on him with biting sarcasm. "Do you think the words of this fool messenger are jest?" he demanded. "Do you think the fact that I persuaded my superiors to permit me this secret mission was based on anything else than the assumption that the United Nations will try to seize Madagascar? Do you think that the refusal of the French swine at Diego Suarez to accept Japanese or German troops to help them should such an attack be ventured was based on anything more than their own realization that the attempt is near?"

Lieutenant Kushamo bowed before the lash of the captain's words, not venturing reply.

But Matsuki continued, apparently releasing some of the rancor that he'd felt at the stupidity of his superiors in not realizing the clarity of the picture as well as he had.

"But you could be excused for your ignorance, Kushamo. You are after all but an underling. My superiors were inexcusably negligent in not heeding my advice. Through their deafness, they will find that the United Nations will seize this island before our forces have time to act."

"But our very mission," put in dapper young Lieutenant Tokamo, "that of finding suitable territory for parachute invasion, has been successfully accomplished. When we supply the information we have gathered here to our superiors, they will be pleased."

Captain Matsuki glared at his underling. He had long considered Lieutenant Tokamo almost insolent and far too ambitious. It occurred to the captain that perhaps he had been unwise in criticizing his superiors before one as likely to talk as Tokamo. But his anger forced him to snap a reply.

"They will be pleased," he said, "and able to take this island from the United Nations at great cost and at a later date. But had they planned to beat the British or Americans to its seizure, they would have found the cost incredibly small, the capture easy."

Dapper Lieutenant Tokamo said nothing to this. He smiled slightly, and the Captain's irritation and suspicion was increased by that smile.

The captain turned on the messenger.

"It is decided, then, that we start at once for our meeting with the vessel which will take us from this accursed island before it falls into completely hostile hands. You will guide us."

The messenger nodded. "As you wish, honorable Captain. But perhaps if we were to wait until nightfall, we would find that we'd time our journey so as to pass through a slightly dangerous marsh section by day."

"We will start immediately," Captain Matsuki declared in cold irritation. He turned to the Lieutenants Kushamo and Tokamo, as if defying them to suggest any other course.

"I shall break our camp, Captain," Lieutenant Kushamo said meekly. Lieutenant Tokamo merely smiled faintly again, to the growing irritation of Captain Matsuki...

THE British Marines on the deck of the low-slung little troop carrier, sat with backs against a series of starboard hatch covers, cupping their cigarettes in their palms as they smoked, in compliance with general dim-out orders aboard the ship.

Tension had been high throughout the carrier all that day, for all the men were completely aware that they were very close to their destination.

A wiry little cockney corporal voiced the sentiments of his regiment conversationally.

"The blinking zero hour's creeping up on us, m'lads. We'll have our spot of action before another night is over."

A Canadian youth grinned at this.

"I've wondered what sort of scrap those Frenchies are capable of putting up. Well know damned soon."

"Blimey, they'll fight orlright," the cockney corporal promised. "They'll fight to beat hell, for the principle of the thing if nothing more. We'll have a tiff of it."

"They made a mess of it in France," the Canadian youth ventured. "I can't see how they'll do much more here."

The cockney corporal shook his head. "In France they was sold down the river by their own politicians, my boy. They was too confused to know right from left, an 'itler's panzers ran over 'em before they found out. 'Ere it's different. These 'ere are French colonials. The best French fighters. You'll find out."

"If you ask me," persisted the Canadian youth, "they ought to be glad to see us coming instead of the Japs."

The cockney corporal grinned. "If you ask me, they will be glad to see us as is coming, instead of them Japs. But they'll fight nonetheless. Them Frenchies is all tangled up in their minds. They've been sold out at 'ome, and 'aven't got it quite clear now as to wot they're fighting for. But they'll fight."

The Canadian youth grinned. "I hope so. I'm itching for a real go," he declared.

"You've not long to wait," the cockney corporal promised...

GASTON PRÉNEAU, soldier of France, lounged nonchalantly against the side of a machine-gun emplacement just at the fringe of a remote Madagascar beach.

Préneau was calm enough for a man who had listened more than two months to the rumors of a possible attack on this colonial possession of his country.

From his superior officers Préneau had learned to scoff at such rumors and, although admitting their possibility, deride their probability.

"Not right now," he told himself. "Not at this time. We are not a strong garrison, but we are well defended. There are the shoals, and mines and reefs to protect any possible landing beach-heads from invasion."

Préneau told himself this again, as he turned lazily to peer out at the heavy fog-mists that shrouded the beach. Told himself again, while wishing with all his heart and soul for the simple pleasure of a cigarette.

Ever since the entrance of the Jap dogs into the world conflict, when the British blockade of Madagascar had begun, Préneau had felt increasingly the lack of such luxury-necessity items as cigarettes. True enough, there were occasional cigarettes to be had in the shops at Diego Suarez itself. But here on outpost duty, one had

little chance to keep a sufficient supply on hand. And now, with his own stock already exhausted over a week, Préneau found himself rather wishing that somehow all this would end. The fever point of excitement in Madagascar had lasted too long already. The speculation as to who would strike at them, and when, had gone too far for mere speculation.

As for himself, Préneau felt more and more with each passing day that perhaps an invasion—by forces other than the hated Jap—would be a welcome relief.

There would be the necessity of defending French honor with battle, of course. Préneau knew this. He had been a colonial soldier of France too long to think of smokeless surrender.

"Yes," he thought aloud, "we will fight if the British come. If the Americans come," he shrugged, "perhaps not. But in any case, we fight to the death should the yellow Jap come."

Préneau speculated on how good a cigarette would taste, and realized that the coming of either the Americans or British would mean a dropping of the blockade and a return of plentiful supplies for the garrison and the people in Diego Suarez.

He sighed and stretched, and turned completely to gaze down at the beach cove, leaning on the sandbagging of the emplacement with his elbows.

To his ears, faintly, came the throb of jungle drums. He frowned. The Malagasy tribe in this locality had been hard at their stupid rites for over two days and nights, now. He'd heard those drums off and on ever since then.

"At least," he told himself wearily, "we have no trouble from them. A small boon for which one can be thankful."

And as if in answer, the drums continued to throb dully in the distance. Gaston Préneau sighed. Such an annoyance to one who slept as lightly as he...

THE small party had halted for rest at a fork in the jungle trail. Captain Matsuki, sitting apart from the rest, fixed his guide, the Jap messenger of that afternoon, with a contemptuous gaze.

"Tell me, my muddle-head," the captain asked sarcastically, "why is it you find territory you are supposed to know well so confusing?"

The messenger, eyes fixed on the ground, answered without looking up.

"I have tried to explain, honorable one, that something has been changed in the trail markings. The Malagasy tribe in this vicinity obviously is engaged in some strange rites. And on such occasions they sometimes unaccountably—perhaps to hide their tribal camp—tamper with trail markings. I am forced to go more slowly than usual because of this fact."

"Your hide will be worthless should you so delay us as to miss contact with the boat," Captain Matsuki said angrily. "Keep that in your slow mind, fool."

Captain Matsuki saw his lieutenants, Tokamo and Kushamo, whispering together a few yards away. His anger grew greater. He rose to his feet and stepped swiftly across the trail until he stood above them.

"I shall find much to report on the aides assigned me when we return!" Matsuki flared. "Neither of you has been capable of anything but stupidity and woman gossip since we have been here!"

The captain wheeled to the old guide.

"We must get on again. There is no chance for rest since you are so slow. I cannot risk missing that boat."

Suddenly, as the others rose, from deep in the jungle came the throb of native drums.

"The Malagasy rites again," the old guide said. "The drums sound nearer than before."

"We have not time to be concerned with the ignorant monkey ceremonies of natives!" Captain Matsuki snarled. "Please remember that. And speed your doddering steps, ancient one!"

Wordlessly, the lieutenants fell in behind their captain, who in turn had stepped behind the old Japanese who guided them along the trail. The night had deadened some of the oppressive heat of the jungle, but inside of a hundred yards each of the party was once more drenched in sweat.

The drums continued to throb ceaselessly during the next two hours of their trek; and on two occasions the old guide stopped, as if listening, gulping nervously before going on.

Another hour passed, and it was shortly after this that the old guide at their lead stopped suddenly in a small clearing, his eyes wide with fear as he turned back to face Captain Matsuki.

He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

"Well?" Matsuki spat.

The old man found voice. "The drums, honorable Captain. Do they not seem louder, clearer than before?"

Captain Matsuki's lips went tight.

"Of course, fool! What has that to do with our route?"

The old Japanese seemed to choke on the words he stammered. "I am afraid, honorable Captain, that we are lost!"

Captain Matsuki stared at the old man for fully a minute, his eyes flashing cold hate behind the thick lenses of his spectacles. Save for the drums in the distance, throbbing more loudly now, there was nothing but silence.

"Dog!" Captain Matsuki hissed. "This then is the climax of your ten bungling years on this island as a secret servant to the Son of Heaven?"

"The tribal—" the old man started.

But the captain had his pistol from its holster in a split second. He fired from the hip, twice, both shots burying themselves within a quarter inch of each other in the old man's forehead. The old man fell face forward to the jungle path.

CAPTAIN MATSUKI replaced his smoking gun in its holster, his eyes flashing wrath as he turned on his open-mouthed lieutenants.

"We have our compasses," he grated. "They will serve us better than the fool of whom we are now rid. If we reach the coastline we can follow the beaches to the rendezvous arranged. The old fool told me its location."

Lieutenant Tokamo answered him. "We have our compasses, truly, honorable captain. Nonetheless, between the coastline and ourselves lie swampland and many lagoons. It might have been wiser to let the old man live, since at least he was aware of the terrain."

Captain Matsuki blinked at this arrogant defiance. Then his lips went tight, and his hand slipped toward his holster. His dapper young lieutenant, however, imitated the gesture, dropping his hand to his own gun.

"The captain will forgive my *suggestions*," Lieutenant Tokamo said silkily. "But I believe you have needlessly endangered our mission and our cause."

Captain Matsuki's eyes were fixed on his underling's gun hand, still held inches from his holster. He wet his lips, his eyes moving to the plump, round faced, moustached Lieutenant Kushamo. Young Kushamo's expression, somewhat frightened, nevertheless indicated that he was playing a strictly neutral role.

"If you imagine—" Matsuki began, turning his eyes back to dapper Lieutenant Tokamo.

Lieutenant Kushamo's gasp cut off the sentence his captain had started. The eyes of both Lieutenant Tokamo and Captain Matsuki went to the plump lieutenant.

Kushamo was pointing, jaw agape, at a figure standing in the darkness of the trail bend just ahead of them. Pointing and staring in wide eyed horror.

They stood there, all three of them, numb with astonishment as a figure advanced, lurching toward them, as if operated puppet- like by wires.

The figure was a creature of rags and filth, a bearded skeleton of a human being; a staring, expressionless spectre of a man. And as he moved toward them, his lurching robot-like walk seemed to have affinity to the rhythm of the jungle drums in the distance.

Captain Matsuki was the first to speak.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who are you? Identify yourself!" Forgetting himself he spoke in Japanese. Now he repeated his command in French.

The creature continued toward them, apparently unhearing, and the captain, his voice rising a notch, squealed his command in English.

But the strange figure didn't halt. His deep, sunken hollows of eyes stared straight ahead, his shambling steps lurched ever forward, the death mask that was his face fixed vacantly on nothingness.

He was less than a dozen yards away when Captain Matsuki whipped his gun from the holster at his side, pointing it dead bead on the tattered spectre.

"Halt!" Matsuki shrieked, "or I fire!"

IT WAS Lieutenant Tokamo who stepped quickly in between his captain and the advancing stranger. Stepped in between to knock the barrel of Matsuki's gun aside.

"Do not be a fool, captain!" young Tokamo grated. "This strange person is unarmed. He cannot harm us. He looks to be the ravages left of a white man long gone jungle-mad. We can force him to guide us to the coastline!"

The captain glared at his lieutenant, lips working in wrath and indignation at what amounted to open rebellion by young Tokamo.

"He is right, captain!" It was fat little Kushamo's voice that broke forth now. "This strange person can well guide us to the coastline, through the stinking lagoons and past the worst swamplands."

Captain Matsuki did the only thing he could; he nodded, shoving his gun back into its holster.

"Perhaps you are right, Tokamo," he said. "I will question this person." But the captain had lost face, and all three of them knew it.

Matsuki turned to the still slowly advancing tattered stranger, holding up his hand.

"Halt!" Matsuki shouted in French. And for the first time the gaunt, filthy travesty of a human being seemed to hear. The shuffling, robot-like steps of the creature slowed draggily, then stopped. He stood there in the clearing, perhaps six feet from the three Japanese, swaying slightly, those sunken eyes staring unseeingly straight ahead.

"Who are you?" Matsuki demanded.

There was no answer. The creature still swayed stupidly before them, his death mask of a face expressionless behind the filthy matting of white beard.

"Who are you? Speak up!" Matsuki cried again.

There was a sudden croaking, half-human noise rattling in the throat of the tattered parody of a man. That was all.

Matsuki turned on Tokamo. "What did he say?"

The dapper young lieutenant shook his head.

"I could not understand."

"It matters not," Matsuki decided. "Can you direct us to the coastline, idiot?" he demanded.

The creature swayed there, unanswering, apparently uncomprehending.

Again Matsuki repeated his question. The result was no better the second time. Tokamo stepped up.

"We might make signs," the dapper young lieutenant said, "to indicate to this mad person what it is we want."

Slowly, then, with infinite patience, Tokamo began a sign ritual before the stranger. He repeated his gestures perhaps a dozen times, until at last the sunken eyes of the thing seemed to be aware of what he was trying to convey. There was another rattling, unintelligible croak from the throat of the mad person, and a gesture that seemed to mean a nod. Tokamo turned triumphantly to his captain.

"The mad person understands," he said. "We must follow him. I am certain he will lead us to the coastline."

Matsuki was about to open his mouth in protest, when the weird creature turned and started across the small clearing in the direction from which he had originally come. He had gone some ten feet, then stopped, swaying, looking back over his shoulder.

"You see?" said Tokamo excitedly. "He means for us to follow him!"

Matsuki muttered something unintelligible, and the three started out after the filthy, tattered spectre that was the new guide. The mad person, on seeing that they followed, turned again and lurched onward, his steps still strangely in time with the cadence of the booming jungle drums in the distance...

SEVERAL hours had passed, and the three still followed their strange guide through the tangled trail forks of the jungle. For the past two hours the drums had been growing increasingly loud in their ears, until even cocky young Tokamo had exchanged several pale, speculative glances with his captain.

The mad person, still shuffling at that awkward gait, remained ahead of them, pausing only so often to see that they still followed. And the route over which he took them was rapidly exhausting the three Japs.

It was Matsuki who at last expressed their fears in words.

"If this route leads to the coastline," he grumbled suspiciously, "it is a roundabout one. And those drums grow far too strong to suit me." He glared accusingly at Tokamo, as if all this were his fault.

The dapper lieutenant returned Matsuki's accusing stare. "You were able to choose or not, honorable captain."

It was then that the drums ceased booming. Quite completely. The utter silence in the jungle was suddenly nerve shattering.

All three halted, staring at one another wordlessly. A few yards ahead of them, their spectre-like guide had paused also, as if listening.

And then Kushamo spoke, excitedly.

"Hear it, ever so faintly, the noise of surf in the distance? We are somewhere near the coastline!"

Captain Matsuki bent his head. "Yes, I think, but—"

The savage whooping yells cut him off. In fact they blanketed the trail section in a bedlam of noise and confusion. Shriill, wildly blood-lusting, the shrieks came from everywhere around them.

And then the Malagasy were all around the three Jap officers. Malagasy, bearing knives, spears and clubs.

Matsuki only had time to grab frantically for the holstered pistol at his side. And in the corner of his vision he saw their mad guide, the tattered, filthy, half-human jungle creature, swaying there on the trail ahead of them, staring blankly at the ambush he had led them into.

Captain Matsuki cursed, and went quite a little mad himself. His gun was in his hand, kicking back with each of the three shots he sent crashing toward the tattered madman.

Then stinking brown arms were wrapped tightly around Matsuki's body, and he was hurled heavily to the earth. The shouting and shrieking were even louder than before, and the Jap captain knew that Tokamo and Kushamo were also buried beneath the avalanche of brown fury that had descended on them.

Hideous, painted faces leered down at Captain Matsuki, and thongs bit deep into his legs and wrists and ankles. And then he knew that they were not going to kill him—yet. He knew, and wished to his Shinto gods that he had saved for himself the shots he'd sent crashing into the mad one.

The drums began to crash loudly all around them again, and Matsuki, Tokamo and Kushamo, trussed helplessly to poles carried by painted Malagasy, were carried off into the jungle darkness.

At the side of the trail, those sunken eyes still staring blankly, his filthy, tattered body bent just a little forward, swayed the mad person who had guided them.

In his chest there were three separate holes, bullet holes from Matsuki's shots. A black ooze seeped from each of them. An ooze that was not at all like blood...

THE small landing boats slipped silently into the coastal beach cove. The British Marines, crouching low in the gunwales, peered through the soupy fog as best they could, holding their breaths and counting off the passing seconds. Any moment now. The guns of the French behind the emplacements just back on the beach were not in action yet, proving that they were still unaware of the coming attack.

It was the hour just before dawn. The hour when the fog was thickest, steaming up from the jungle and in from the sea. The cockney corporal nudged the young Canadian beside him.

"All set, lad?" he whispered.

The Canadian youth, now unsmiling, face taut, merely nodded. The boats slipped on through the water. Now they were inside the cove harbor itself.

And then the drums boomed forth.

Drums, shouting, savage yells, and suddenly three flaring fires shooting skyward on the beach, as if from three gigantic torches. The machine guns on the beach emplacements began then, chattering a sudden angry staccato of death. And the men in the small boats slipping up toward the beach caught their first glimpses of the brown, painted, leaping figures around those gigantic flaming torches.

They heard next the shrill screams of pain from those leaping painted brown men, screams of pain and death as the machine guns continued to chatter.

"Something on the beach," the cockney corporal gasped, "something looking awfully close to native trouble. Those machine guns aren't firing at us. The Frenchies are firing right into that swarm of 'owling natives!"

It was all over amazingly soon. The savages still alive fled in confusion to the jungle, leaving their dead littering the beach. The machine-gun fire changed to tommy-gun pursuit as the French soldiers on the beach emplacements chased the Malagasy back into the jungle. The drums had stopped completely, and the gigantic torches burned high, giving the British Marines perfect assistance in landing on the beach-head.

When the French returned from their chase of the Malagasy, the British had landed and had their garrison very well in hand. A few sporadic exchanges of shots—for the purposes of honor—and it was at an end.

It was then that they turned their attention to extinguishing the huge ceremonial torches which had been set on the beach by the Malagasy. The cockney corporal and his young Canadian friend were part of the detail assigned to this task. The job didn't take long, but it proved extremely sickening when the torches were removed from the tops of the poles.

The torches had been human bodies. Scarcely recognizable bodies now, true enough, with just enough left of the charred remains to show they had once been the bodies of three Japanese.

Papers found in the clothing, stripped from the three human torches and left on the beach, identified the Japanese as naval officers in the service of the Son of Heaven. There was a Captain Matsuki, a Lieutenant Tokamo, and another Lieutenant Kushamo.

And scarcely fifteen minutes after this unpleasant task had been concluded, the cockney corporal and his young Canadian friend were assigned to either side of the cove-heads, just in case there was any further mopping up to be done.

It was the corporal who sighted the decrepit little open boat with the useless, tattered sail. It was drifting almost without direction just off the end of the cove harbor opening, and there was someone in it.

The corporal shouted three times for the occupant of the boat to rise with both hands above his head. But the dimly outlined figure in the small drifting boat seemed only to crouch lower in the stern.

So the corporal was forced to fire.

FROM a range of twenty yards he couldn't miss. Two shots, each boring into the skull of the boat's occupant, did the trick. And then the corporal managed to bring the little craft into the bank.

It was then that the corpora! almost lost his dinner for the second time in half an hour. The corporal was hardy, and a soldier, but the charred bodies which had served as torches were gruesomely sickening enough—and this decaying, tattered, long-dead shell of a human being that he found in the stern of the little boat was almost too much.

For the body *must* have been dead for some time. The stench was hideous. The corporal identified his own two bullet holes in the skull of the creature, and another three holes in its chest.

"Oo else 'as shot this bloody, bloomin' corpse?" the corporal shuddered.

And then he wondered aloud: "And 'ow did it get here?"

He found the small wrist band, then. Green and moldy, and he had to close his eyes when he removed it from the corpse. Later, when he scraped it off, it proved to be an identification tag.

But by the time the corporal had dragged the body in the boat around to the beach for the inspection of his superior officers, it had quite impossibly decomposed.

The corporal's protestations were in vain. His superior officers knew better than to believe that this body, obviously dead for a matter of at least four years, could have been in the state of preservation the corporal said it was when he first found it.

"Dead men can't be kept alive for that long, old boy," one officer told the corporal kindly. "What you saw in the boat was just the same decayed human rubble you brought to us. You must have been the victim of an optical illusion."

Quite possibly, the superior officer was correct. Dead bodies shouldn't remain in the state of living bodies for that many years then suddenly decompose. They shouldn't, even though written legend has it that certain tribes of the Malagasy natives practice the black witchcraft of zombie-ism and death suspension.

But later, when the corporal told his tale in the bars at Diego Suarez, displaying the green molded identification tag he'd taken from the corpse before it crumbled in decay, there were some who blinked in astonishment at the name on it.

The name that read:

Jacques Chambreaux, Col. M.I.S.

