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## CHAPTER V

# Further Adventures

## Africa and Asia, 1905–1913

ON 14 NOVEMBER 1905 the *Rand Daily Mail* published a letter signed I Thord-Gray, Captain, conveying the gratitude of German Southwest Africa's Governor-General, Lindequist, for the numerous offers of active service in Damaraland that Thord had delivered to him that day. The governor-general wished Thord to inform the applicants that he appreciated their offers but all the same he could not accept them.

The same issue of the *RDM* reported on a big reception at the German Club in Johannesburg for Governor-General Lindequist, which was attended by the British governor as well as other local and foreign dignitaries.

Early in September 1906 he travelled from Cape Town to Swakopmund in Southwest Africa to once again offer his services to the Germans.

‘The Germans have had a very difficult time in Damaraland. It appears to me that they do not understand the situation. I hope they will accept me in the army. The tribes in South Africa are not yet, so to speak, ready for a general accommodation with the whites.

‘The war in Zululand that recently came to an end was a local uprising provoked by exclusively Zulu grievances and has merely delayed the general revolt of millions who now only wait for the right time to come.’

However, he found that the Germans only wanted their nationals involved in the war. On 13 September 1906, therefore, he embarked on the Kenilworth Castle to Durban and from there to British East Africa to search elsewhere for his destiny. Thord later wrote in a note that his papers concerning these missions had been removed from among his documents. He suspected British, German, or American secret agents – or a henchman of JB Robinson (Edith's wealthy uncle) trying to find evidence of a German connection in an attempt to blackmail Thord to go back to her. After the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 there was strong anti-German sentiment (at times verging on mass hysteria) in Britain and the colonies: Anyone suspected of sympathising with Germany risked persecution.

The theft could also have happened in London in 1915 after a dinner at the Swedish Embassy during which everyone spoke Swedish (against Thord's wishes, as he was in British uniform).

When he returned to his hotel that evening, his room had been searched. One of the waiters had reported to the police that Thord had spoken German the whole evening, when actually he had spoken Swedish. A British officer speaking 'German' among a group who all spoke 'German' would be regarded with great suspicion, given the prevailing climate of anti-German paranoia in Britain.

The voyage from Cape Town to Mombasa on a 5 500-ton Austrian ship was 'rather good'. The weather was pleasant, even if the swell from the southeast was strong until they steamed sufficiently far north to get into the lee of Madagascar. It must have felt good for the sailor Thord to be on deck again after so many years on land. For the rest of his life he always chose to travel by sea, if possible. He went ashore in Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Lourenço Marques (Maputo), Beira, and Zanzibar.

In Durban he took the opportunity to visit his friends from Royston's Horse in Pietermaritzburg and to spend a few days as a guest of the Andersson family, enjoying Durban's beaches.

Beira was less appealing.

'There is only sand wherever I go. On the streets I tread in sand up to my ankles. Horses and other animals are nowhere to be seen. The Negroes pull small trams for two passengers. Three such tramway tracks are in service. The place is a trading town that supplies skins and ivory from the African interior and imports goods from Europe to the small towns in British Central Africa. The climate is unhealthy and the summers can be terrible.'

He was inquisitive about Zanzibar's curiosities, but did not share those impressions because he wrote his customary letter before going ashore.

'They have been waiting for a long time for war to erupt in British East Africa and Somaliland. It will be glorious. You surely think that I am a rolling stone. But I cannot help it. The Viking blood is always there and fight I must, whatever the cost. It is probable that the circumstances could have been different if my private affairs had not been as they are.... As long as I can still experience some more wars. When will there be war in Europe, Father?'

He was heard from again about a month after he debarked in Mombasa on 12 October 1906. Following his plan, he had taken the railroad to Nairobi and applied for a post in the police force. On 12 November he received an offer of the rank of inspector with a salary of £250 per year. When he wrote home on 23 November he had not yet decided whether to accept the offer. He had spent the previous month exploring the wonderful forest and vast plains outside Nairobi.

The small town of Nairobi, capital of the British East Africa Protectorate, had only between two hundred and fifty and three hundred white inhabitants. Nairobi and Mombasa were the only towns in the country. Lions and thousands of other wild animals ranged freely only one British mile from Nairobi's town square. Herds of elephant, rhinoceros, giraffe, water buffalo, and others formed a

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wonderful sight. On the map Thord sent home, Nairobi was named Fort Smith. Even though the town was close to the equator, the climate was not unpleasant, as it was situated 5 450 feet above sea level.

On 17 December 1906 he had recently returned from a lion hunt on the Ahti Plains. He had brought down two lions and several other animals, the latter for meat for his little caravan. He compared the natives with those he had met before in South Africa. Here many tribes lived on fruit alone. Therefore he regarded them as weak, unable to do hard labour, and inferior to the black people in the south, who all ate meat.

The most fully documented of Thord's experiences in Nairobi is the so-called Flogging Case. The newspaper *The Star of Africa* published a detailed account of the trial in the spring of 1907. A number of persons took part in the flogging of three black youths who had insulted some white women. Thord had been an active participant and was sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment as well as a fine. He appealed and was cleared of the charges: The appeal court found that the lower court had handled the case incorrectly. The verdict was overturned because the prosecution had not presented proper proof of the allegations.

The only question that remained was whether the accused should be remitted for a trial by jury. Taking into account that he had already served time, the court refrained from instructing such a thing and freed him.

On a folder containing documents from the Flogging Case, Thord noted that somebody had removed practically all correspondence in connection with his visit to East Africa.

He thought this was probably because of his friendship with John Bayez, the Kikuyu tribe's white king, and his later association with the Duke of Mecklenburg while they were together in the lowland in the Voi area. But some information can be gleaned from a letter home and from interviews with him on various occasions. Much of it concerns hunting experiences.

*The Adventurer*, a monthly publication of the Adventurer's Club in New York, printed in their September issue of 1957 a rather over-dramatised story written by Thord during his stay in East Africa.

It is reproduced here as originally published.

'One day when I was out to sneak up on edible wildlife, I heard a peculiar sound. It was short and cutting and came from a glade close by. It was the hitting of a heavy whip against a naked body. What was going on? I padded towards the glade and the rifle carrier followed close behind. Tied to a tree stood a magnificent black youth – a Masai. Behind him were three white men, and not one of them looked to be among God's best children. I was sure they were ivory smugglers, slave traders, or other suspicious individuals; white trash as they call them. One of them was flogging the Masai youth's back with a whip twined from rhinoceros skin. A few well-aimed lashes can render the strongest man unconscious, and after a few more he would be dead.

'I thought the boy looked pleasant. He had an unusually fine appearance. I suspected that he had been the subject of a cruel injustice.... I waved forward the

rifle carrier to come abreast of me. We swiftly stepped forward and covered the men and I asked what was going on.

“He has stolen a rifle,” answered one of the ruffians – clearly taken by surprise. Now it is like this that theft of a rifle was a very serious crime at that time in Africa. It was something as bad as horse thieving in the American Wild West, and the punishment was usually executed fast and rigorously. At all times it would end with the sinner paying with his life.

‘But now I found it hard to believe that this Negro boy had stolen anything. He was not the type. I turned to him. “They say that you have stolen a rifle. Is it true?” The boy looked spitefully at me.

“What I answer is of no importance. You are white.”

‘However, I succeeded in getting him to understand that I really wanted the best for him, and then he told me the truth. He was the one who had been stolen from. One of the three men had stolen an elephant rifle of which the Negro youth was the caretaker. And there was nothing else he could do than to take it back.

‘The boy sounded convincing. I cut him loose and told the three accomplices to get lost. That they did unwillingly, but they had no choice.

‘From that time on the black youth became my second shadow and my bodyguard, but he did not want to serve as a rifle carrier. He was brave, silent, loyal in all conditions, and totally invaluable when out on safari; a fine Masai of the old school and a descendant of chiefs.

‘He followed me on hunting trips every day and never wavered from my side. He showed me the way to the vast marshlands northwest of Mount Elgon where they believe “the elephant’s cemetery” in East Africa to be located. Many are sure that here lie heaps of ivory, worth the ransom of an emperor tenfold.

‘The boy was so fearless that I called him Simba – or lion. He was always armed with a long spear with a point of iron, a Masai spear – and never under any circumstances did he carry a rifle. I knew the reason very well. I knew that in many African tribes, especially the Masai, a young man did not get permission to marry before he had killed a lion with his spear.

‘A few weeks passed. One day in the thickets I encountered a grand “cat” – a magnificent lion with a big black mane. The distance was not greater than twenty-five metres. We walked against the wind and were neither seen nor scented. I immediately raised the rifle. At the same moment I felt a warning pressure on my elbow. It was Simba.

‘He knew the same as I – that it is very unwise to shoot a male lion in the thickets before making sure whether there is a female around as well. Before an attack the male always sniffs on his fallen female, at least once, if it is she that has been shot. The hunter has time to reload or to take a new weapon from the carrier. The female does not hesitate for one minute in the same situation: she jumps onto the hunter with the speed of lightning.

‘Of course I knew something so common. But the temptation was too great. It was such a strange, grand sample I had in front of me. I shot, the lion fell stone dead, and then... yes, before I could wink, a large yellow body was in the air

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towards me. I got a glimpse, and then I got hit in the neck so I blacked out. I fell and lost consciousness for a moment.

‘When I opened my eyes I came to witness something very dramatic. Simba’s long spear had been planted firmly in the ground exactly where I just had been standing; the spear was leaning with the point towards the attacking lioness. In the jump she landed on the sharp iron and became speared like a fish. The agile Simba ran to her side and cut in with his long sharp knife. By the time I staggered to my feet the lioness was already dead.

‘The boy looked at me. He was as calm as usual, not the slightest shaken. He looked me right in the eyes and said, “I have paid my debt to you!” And then he went away after a gesture of farewell.



‘Approximately one month later he came to see me. “My friend,” he said. “I have a small gift for you, a necklace. Carry it around your neck, always. It brings you luck!” He gave me a rather clumsily made necklace. It looked to be put together with finely cut but untanned leather pieces.

““What a strange thing!” I exclaimed. “I have never seen this kind of skin. What is it made off?” His white teeth shone when he smiled a bit. And then he answered in a tranquil tone:

““It is made of the skin of the white man that flogged me. Carry it – it is good medicine.” The gift seemed so strange that I followed his advice and wore the necklace for many years, except on three occasions.

‘The first time I was really badly wounded. The second time I was captured by the Bolsheviks in Siberia. The third time – well maybe we should not get into this – I got married.’

In a letter home on 25 April 1907 he talked about a proposal that he had sent by the same mail to the chief of The Museum of Natural History in Stockholm. The proposal was that Thord should gather a collection of species representing all the animals in East Africa and Uganda on behalf of the museum. It would cost the government £3 100 delivered to Sweden. If all the skeletons were to be included the cost would increase by another £2 000. On his last hunting trip he had shot two elephants, three lions, and one hippopotamus.

‘I could have gotten ten or twelve if I had just tried. Here I could earn quite a lot of money by hunting but the licence and the transport cost a lot. My standard of living is rather good – and as you know, hunting is my greatest pleasure – a hunter’s life.’

He also wrote about the lion cub Billie: ‘In the beginning of 1907 I returned to Nairobi after a hunting trip to the central part of the country. I was met by an unpleasant surprise: instead of the money that should have been deposited in my account there was a message: “No money available.” It came as a great shock to me as I had used all the money I had in advance and my porters had not been paid for a long time. I had to get money. I did an inventory of my stock of trophies and found that there were fine samples of great value. By chance it happened that two

safaris of amateur hunters returned to Nairobi after several months of hunting. This amazingly had produced unusually poor results. Most of them had to return to Europe and of course it was annoying to arrive home empty-handed. I became a huckster in trophies and secretly sold beautiful skins, heads, ivory, and other things for sky-high prices.

‘One thing I would not part with was a lion cub I had reared from only a few weeks old. I called him Billie. Others just called him Simba. He was now as big as a large pointer, very beautiful and as gentle as a lamb. At times during the day I let him go loose and he followed me like a loyal dog. But I found it necessary to instill respect in him. From the time we came to Nairobi I constantly had Billie under supervision. I was careful not to let him taste raw meat. His playfulness was now becoming a bit too rough and at times I had to threaten him with the whip to stop him from biting through my hand, which he liked to hold between his teeth when we were fooling around.

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‘There were times when I was really afraid of him: even so I did not want to part with my friend. My suspicions that Billie was rapidly gaining his wild ancestors’ nature were confirmed in a spectacular way.

‘On my way home on the day I sold my last trophies, I was met by a black boy. He came running wild with fear and screamed that Simba was devouring the cook. I was not far from the camp. With a depressing premonition of troubles ahead I rushed to the place where Billie ought to be chained. Would I see a bloody tragedy?

‘Now it happened that the rumour of the cook’s horrible death was exaggerated. He was not even half-eaten and was still alive. Unfortunately he was so badly bitten in the leg that later on it had to be amputated.

‘I initiated an inquisition and found out that the cook had for some time been teasing and exciting Billie with raw meat and had recently been feeding it to him. It was not far from the truth to say that his stupidity and disobedience had nearly cost him his life.

‘Nairobi at the time was the centre of the world’s finest big-game hunting grounds, but man-eating lions were still not allowed to run around freely and I was requested to get rid of Billie. I detested parting with him and the thought of killing him was repulsive. But away he had to go and I thought that the most sensible thing to do was to make some business out of it. The hunter who had bought most of my skins and trophies had also offered me a considerable sum for Billie. Now I was prepared to make a deal.

‘The man intended taking him home and he promised solemnly that the lion would be well treated, given the greatest possible amount of freedom, and would not have to perform in some circus. We made a large and comfortable cage and then Billie and I parted with mutual sadness. He was the only lion friend I ever had. I thought often of my pet and wondered how he was doing. Surprisingly my curiosity was soon satisfied. A few months later I read in a prominent newspaper a long and very interesting article about how the “grand big game hunter Sir...” had come home from East Africa with a large collection. He had noble-mindedly donated his greatest treasure, the lion cub Simba, to the London Zoo. He had

been forced to take care of the cub after its mother, a formidable wild-tempered lioness, had attacked insidiously. He had only succeeded in saving himself after a long and frantic struggle.’



In spite of hunting life’s delights and temptations, Thord did not give up his fascination for war. He kept eyes and ears open for anticipated threats of war in the world and in preparation acquired letters of introduction. For example, he had visited the French vice-consul in Johannesburg before he left South Africa and received from him such a letter of introduction to the governor-general in Algeria. The vice-consul asked his colleague in Algeria to receive Thord and facilitate things for him if he desired to follow the French troops’ operations.

Thord’s hunting trips had sometimes reached all the way into Congo, a wonderful country which was the Belgian King Leopold’s personal property. When the king became so sick that it seemed he would die, Thord and two other British officers gathered a group of volunteers with combat experience. They also acquired around thirty British flags. The idea was that as soon as the king had died, they should cross the border, take possession of all the garrisons, and hoist the British flag. But the king did not die then. He died later on, but by then the volunteer group had dissolved and was occupied with other things. Still, in 1961, fifty-four years later, when Thord told the story to a Swedish journalist, he still believed that the coup would have been justified and possible to implement.

Instead he made for the Far East, where there seemed to be a chance of further combat. Believing his parents to be worried on his account, he tried to reassure them by explaining what a formidable soldier he had become. He recalled the praise of superior officers like Major-General MacKenzie and Colonel Royston: ‘Well, Captain Thord-Gray, are all Swedes like you? If they are, they must be a damned tough crowd.’ (Thord would never forget this compliment.) Often, he wrote, when he had an important command and found himself in a difficult position – up against a superior number of the enemy – he had asked himself, ‘What would Father have done in this situation?’ And the answer was usually the same: ‘Forward!’ He did, however, recall four occasions when the answer had been ‘retreat’ in order to save his life and those of his men.

‘Often there was not time to think, but then I had my “forward” ready. Up to now it has always worked out for the best. But often after battle I have thought, “What would have happened if I broke out to the left or right or retreated?”’

He reminded his parents that he was one of the ten best revolver marksmen in South Africa and a first-class swordsman. He was in excellent health and could not remember ever being in better spirits. Feeling himself to be well-equipped for adventure, he took passage at the end of August 1907 on a ship from Mombasa to Bombay. He planned to travel overland to Calcutta and then around Southeast Asia to Hong Kong. Once there he would travel into China and try for a command in the army. On 2 September 1907 Thord arrived in Bombay after eleven days’ voyage from Mombasa. On 4 September he continued his journey

on the steamship *Brittania* (9 000 tons) bound for China, abandoning his plan to travel across India. He found Bombay to be beautiful in places. Everything about the Orient was fascinating, he remarked, when viewed from a distance, but if you were to come into closer contact with those who lived there you would find something totally different. They were dirty, unhealthy, poorly creatures, with a hatred towards all whites.

‘Here as in Africa I found them to be all the same.’

Much more positive was his impression of Ceylon, when he arrived a few days later in Colombo. It was enchanting and it was with a heavy heart that he had to continue his journey. He would have liked to stay and travel around the country.

The next report home came from Hong Kong, where he arrived on 18 September. (It seems that on the way they called at Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and the Philippines.) He found the city to be very interesting and was impressed by the view from The Peak and the electrical tramway that climbed there up a forty-five-degree slope. He was intending shortly to continue to Peking. The trip to Hong Kong had been very interesting and had been favoured with good weather. In the harbour one could still see damage caused by the previous year’s typhoon, which had claimed 10 000 lives.

On 22 September he arrived in Shanghai, which was situated seventeen miles upriver. It was a modern town with modern buildings, railroads, tramways, and hotels. Chinatown lay on the outskirts and was of course more interesting. He intended to seek employment in the Chinese army but found that it was too early. ‘They are not yet awake to the necessity of having a modern army. The only exceptions are a few European or Japanese instructors. They still consider their army to be large and strong enough to be victorious over any other in the world.’

The voyage would therefore continue to Japan and North America.

Thus on 1 October 1907 he was on the steamship *Borneo* in the port of Moji, Japan. He was well as usual, but due to an outbreak of cholera on board the passengers had been put into quarantine. His intention was to continue to Kobe and Yokohama when they were released. How long the quarantine lasted and what happened thereafter is not clear in the available documents.

The next his family heard from Thord was on 17 May 1908, when he was three days north of Cebu in the Philippines. He briefly described the trip, and tried to allay his parents’ concerns about his financial wellbeing. Before he left Nairobi he had sold all his lion skins and four elephant tusks for £200, which was enough to cover the trip. He had not been travelling around with closed eyes. In Bombay he had heard that the Chinese central government was having difficulty in keeping order in the southern part of the country. He thought that this was an opportunity for him to earn golden spurs, but there was no war and that is why he had ended up in the Philippines.



## THE PHILIPPINES

IT IS NOT CLEAR exactly when Thord arrived in the Philippines, but he stayed there for the following two years. In the beginning he was employed by the police force. After almost a decade under USA rule, the force still had considerable problems with insurgents striving for independence in various trouble spots.

During most of 1908 he was employed in Cebu as chief clerk of material in the Bridge and Track Department of an engineering agency, JG White & Company Inc., a contractor to The Philippine Railway Company.

After a few autumn months in Manila in 1908, of which he did not write, he was back in Cebu and employed in the Philippine Government's Department of Commerce and Police, Bureau of Public Works. This work was just a sideline while he was waiting for other things, Thord noted.

The whole purpose of his presence in the Philippines was to keep alive his hopes of participating in some war in the East Indies or China.

He had not 'found any treasure', and therefore he had to take the jobs offered. From letters of recommendation he received at the time of resigning from these civilian employments it was obvious that he had performed his tasks there with honour: 'He has proved to be a first-class man in every respect, honest and especially careful towards his duties, and he was always available from early to late as his work required.' 'Your services have been of the foremost quality and we regret very much to lose such a capable and willing civil servant.'

In a couple of letters home during this time he gave a clearer account than before of the goals he had set for himself. He was born under a lucky star and therefore he would always become better and better, step by step. But he was determined to attain his goal: he would study different countries' armies and their tactics in war and peace.

His main wish, when the time came, was that he should be worthy to draw his sword for old Sweden: to be of service, to teach her something that no one else, or only a few could, based on his experience of other countries' methods. May God only grant him this, he prayed. The dream remained with him every day of his life. He wanted to be the best, most experienced person in the world regarding other countries' military forces, and in that capacity he wanted to offer his services to his native country.

If he became an old man before his experiences became useful or if his lance and sword should become too heavy to handle, what did that matter? Nothing! As long as he could advise others on how to lead our armies to victory over our enemies, then he would die happy.

With this attitude it is natural that Thord carefully followed what happened in the global political arena and took note of any tensions and risks of war that existed. He had had great hopes that something would happen in Bulgaria, but these were not realised. Then on 27 October 1908 he received a telegram informing him that Russian armed forces had crossed the border into Persia. He wondered if this was

war and whether the Russian action owed anything to the fact that Britain had not fulfilled its promise to loan Turkey 20 million pounds and help with its navy.

An apparently German-inspired pamphlet based on a fictional lecture at the University of Alexandria, which sketched a possible scenario for a global war in 1911 (three years ahead of time, as it turned out), made a deep impression on Thord at this time. The whole thing was actually German propaganda to spread disparaging opinions about Britain and predict the downfall of the British Empire. The lecturer, Arabi Pasha, predicts the outcome of a naval confrontation between Britain and Germany in the North Sea. The German Navy defeats the British, and twenty-four hours later the German armies effect a landing in Britain. The Anglo-French entente is shaken. Russia's promised support fails to appear. (This refers to the Triple Entente, the defensive alliance of Britain, France, and Russia that had been formed to counter the threat posed by the Central Alliance of the German and Austrian Empires.) Ten days after the British fleet's defeat the Japanese take Hong Kong. Revolution breaks out in India and thousands of British are massacred. Russia sends an army corps to India, which is received with open arms. A massacre of the European population in Egypt is prevented only by Italian troops transported there for the purpose. Six days later South Africa's four colonies (the Cape, Natal, the Orange Free State, and Transvaal) unite and declare their independence as a republic. At the same time the USA sends troops into Canada. In Ireland a republic is declared, and the British are driven out. The German-initiated battle for the North Sea lasts only three weeks. Starvation in Britain forces the country to sue for peace. A victorious Germany handles the diplomatic issues very carefully and shows generosity in its demands. Germany's compensation from England and France is determined in proportion to these countries' wealth. Other than this compensation, Germany is satisfied with taking over all the African possessions belonging to the two, except for the new South African Republic. The war breaks the British Empire and shows how weak the basic principles of Commonwealth diplomacy really are.

This German wishful thinking nevertheless prompted Thord to wonder how all of this would affect Sweden?

Apart from predicting correctly that a global war could break out, the fictional lecturer gets almost everything wrong, if one compares the 1911 scenario with what actually unfolded in 1914.

But now back to reality in the Philippines. In the spring of 1908 Thord was in command of a police detachment of a hundred and fifty men on the north side of Cebu tasked with hunting down a band of insurgents who had ravaged and plundered the area for many months. They did not offer much resistance but it was hard work to pursue them across mountains and valleys, through thickets and forests. Several had been captured but the main force was still at large when he wrote home. He had lost four dead, two wounded, fourteen sick with dysentery, and two with fever.

He was not pleased with the way the Americans dealt with the natives. As representatives of the American Government, he felt, they ought to adopt a more

forceful posture. They were far too meek and did not have any kind of system for the treatment of prisoners. Thord had sent many prisoners down to Cebu who had been taken 'with pipes and spears in their hands defying our troops'. A few days later he would see the same men around the camp studying the police force and everything connected with it. The only explanation for this was that the police had released them, probably because they had friends in high places. They ought to be hanged or shot without any regard for their family ties, Thord believed. The insurgents had an effective intelligence service that co-operated with almost all the natives on the island. That was surely the reason why on their next offensive Thord and his detachment took a circuitous route through mountainous and unpopulated districts. The result was not what he had planned, but still better than if he had gone straight at them. The attack killed or wounded twenty-four of the insurgents and took seventeen prisoners.

Earthquakes were experienced almost every other day. Every now and then houses were destroyed. The natives seemed very afraid of them and fell to their knees during larger tremors. On 22 October 1908 there were forty-eight tremors, of which nine were rather strong. One lasted for thirty-eight seconds. There was not much damage but the panic was great. Hundreds of people stood paralysed or fell to the ground in terror.

They thought without a doubt that doomsday had come.

The experience gave Thord cause to reflect on people's reactions when in great danger. He himself had in such situations wished that he was an artist, a painter with an interesting subject to study. He found it interesting, but pathetic, to observe the terrified look in the eyes of those confessing to past sins in a silent prayer to God for forgiveness, and the submissiveness in the face of a deadly danger. Often it had amused him to observe his comrades when the bullets whizzed around their ears and the shells exploded at close range, or when the camp was attacked at night without warning. He had come to the conclusion that most men were afraid of dying – they were cowards. They did not fight because of their belief in a righteous cause. No, at times they fought without any conviction, merely to protect their own skins – to kill the enemy rather than be killed. Thord felt that although this form of cowardice existed in all of us it ought not to be there.

He found that there were few faithful Christians: The more often a man went to church, the more hymns he sang, the more he tried to do good to make others believe that he was a faithful Christian, the worse coward he was, and the more he strove not to die. Men like that were of no use either to God or man. He did not want anything to do with such people. He did not comfort them. A man who was afraid to die had a bad conscience.

Thord experienced a powerful typhoon when he was in Manila during the autumn. The city escaped major damage. Only a few roofs blew off. But on the island of Samar the storm devastated the whole town of Borangan. More than a thousand lives were lost and several ships were stranded.

On 20 October he wrote that in Manila the soldier's life was over. Only a few 'Moros' on the southernmost islands inflicted some damage at times. They would

continue to do so for the next fifty years if the Americans didn't deal with them with greater decisiveness.

The sword was the only politics they understood: the pen was impotent. The Americans had spent seven hundred million dollars to no avail. Thousands of dollars ended up in the pockets of the higher military and civilian officials. In a British colony this would not happen.

Among Thord's papers a song highlighted how heterogeneous the police units were. The lyrics detail their work and describe the unity and friendship forged among them by shared hardships:



We come from the furthestmost corners  
of the world to rejoice in a fight.  
We police all the islands  
from Aparri to secluded Bangao.  
And Westerner, Yankee, or Brit  
they can trust us all to a man,  
because we are proud of our corps  
and our good name.  
And we blindly trust our chief and our band.

For some of us came from Texas  
and some came from France.  
And some have served under Kitchener,  
some carried the emperor's lance.

We have followed the wild headhunters  
beyond Lepanto's pine trees.  
We have fought the Igorote people  
at the side of the Benquet mines.  
We were out among the crowd and thunder  
when the Cagaya flooding roared.  
And we have been in quarantine when the  
cholera besieged Manila town.  
For some of us came from Sweden  
and some from Arkansas .  
Some learned to ride in Cuba  
and some in the war in Transvaal.

We have taken our man by his rein.  
We have taught him to handle a gun.  
We have dressed, fed, and drilled him

and bet that he enjoyed a joke.  
We have wandered around with a Moro  
detachment  
and searched the hot Sula Lake.  
We have waded in the negroes' black  
swamp grounds  
and trundled in mud up to our knees.

For some of us come from Georgia  
And some from Baltimore  
And some of us are from Timbuktu  
But all belong to the corps.

We have worried the careful Bukidnon.  
We have sunk a pirate ship.  
We have danced in the teeth of a typhoon  
and we have fought with the wild Ifuago.  
We have learnt some navigation  
in a leaky and rotten Sakajan.  
And we learned the doctor's way  
when we fought with the pest in Vigan.

For some of us come from Oregon.  
Some had their schooling in Spain.  
Some learned to shoot in Kentucky.  
And some in the woods in Maine.

We whipped Leyte's fanatics  
when we gathered and fought under Nevill.  
And with White at Dajo's Crater  
showed them the road to hell.

We have climbed up Mount Apo's cliffs  
to catch a Bagobo chief.  
We have pushed Samar's rascals  
and hunted a Carabao thief to death.

For some of us served with Doughboys  
and some in the National Guard.  
And some were clerks in Chicago  
and some work in a lumber yard.

And Loyalty! There are names on our rolls  
of men you can never forget.  
And their bones may be withered away,  
their spirit remains with us yet.  
There were Hayson and Burr and young Walker  
and Barret and Warsmick and Clark  
and five groups more have been recruited  
the legions on the other side of darkness.

For some of us came from Dixie  
and our fathers carried the grey.  
And some of us came from Yukon  
and some from Hudson Bay.

They were men that died during service,  
they were 'brave masters'.  
They were heroes of simple aspiration  
who belonged to our fighting brigade.

Then it is cheers to those who left us  
and fallen in quarrel and fight,  
and here are jokes to those who are left  
and 'good luck' for them yet to come.

For Westerners, Yankees, and British  
from north or south, like a man,  
here is a 'cheers' for our chiefs and our band.



## FRENCH INDO-CHINA

IN AUGUST 1909 it looked as if something was about to happen in French Indo-China. Thord wrote to the Swedish Consul in Hong Kong and asked him to try through his French colleague to obtain permission for him to join a French unit. The French Consul in Hong Kong wrote two letters of introduction for Thord, one on 22 August 1909 to 'Monsieur le Général de Division Commandant-en-Chef les Troupes de L'Indo-Chine á Hanoi', the other on 26 August to the governor-general in French Indo-China. Thord wished to 'make use of his skills in the present campaign in some corps, it might be the Foreign Legion or the domestic troops'.

According to the later letter Thord would be pleased to be useful in some way to the military authority in Tonkin. 'All he asks is to participate in an effective way in as many battles as possible.'

The available documents do not divulge when Thord left Hong Kong and arrived in Tonkin. Therefore we cannot determine how long he spent there either. Already on 4 September 1909 he was on his way from Tonkin (Haiphong) to Hanoi with a Messageries Maritimes packet ship. What he had experienced in between is described in a letter to Colonel Griffith from Deli, Sumatra, on 29 January 1910, in which the information regarding the time span seems doubtful.

Thord thanked the colonel for the letter dated 17 July 1909, which he had just received. The last seven months had been rather stimulating from a soldier's point of view and he felt like a different man from the one who had left the Philippines

after two years' service there. He had departed with the intention of offering his lance to the Spanish in Morocco, but destiny decided otherwise. When he arrived in Hong Kong he met some old friends, among them the French Consul, to whom he had been introduced by Swartz, the Swedish Consul. From him he got the advice to apply as a volunteer for the French Expeditionary Corps, which was about to be organised in Tonkin against the rebel leader De Tam.

The consul was a good friend of the governor-general in Indo-China and the commander-in-chief there. He promised to arrange a letter of introduction to these men for Thord, which he did.

The sea voyage from Hong Kong to Haiphong was interesting. It usually took two and a half days if travelling directly, but they had to visit a small French treaty harbour called Kwangchang-wan situated almost in the centre of the half island Lieu-choo-pen. This place was once a real stronghold. There was something terribly pathetic about the large barracks and grand buildings on both sides of the harbour. Now they were empty, with the exception of an infantry regiment and the governor, wrote Thord.

After Kwangchang-wan they visited Hainan and Kien and then continued to Pakhoi, which was a rather miserable kind of place but pretty in its own way. After four-and-a-half days' journey on an awful boat they were happy to arrive at Haiphong. Compared with other places in the Orient, Haiphong was a fine town and Thord was treated like royalty. From the start the French made the visit a pleasant experience and Thord could not stop praising them.

Back in Hong Kong Thord had met Captain WTC Jones of the Royal Marine Light Infantry stationed on HMS Tamar as British Intelligence Officer in the Far East. Jones had asked Thord to write about the conditions in Tonkin and what the French were up to there. When he arrived at Haiphong he made an arrangement with some British civil servants to forward his letter to Jones in Hong Kong, to avoid the risk that it might be read by the French.

He did not intend to spy on them but thought it better not to become a suspect, as misunderstandings easily occur in such situations. Whatever a man wrote of military matters to a foreign officer, especially one in charge of an intelligence department, would look bad.

From Haiphong, Thord continued to Hanoi, Tonkin's capital. He considered it to be the most agreeable town in the Orient, although he conceded it was difficult to compete with Saigon at its best.

Hanoi was a great military garrison town and it had all a man could wish for: good soldiers, good wine, an opera house, good music, and above all charming women. What more could a French soldier desire?

Thord was introduced to the commander-in-chief, a fine soldier of the old French school. He was very decent and invited Thord to dinner. At the same time the old rascal gave orders to an aide-de-camp to make sure that Thord had a good time – not for any other reason than to get time to examine his luggage. The old fellow was smart and wanted to make absolutely sure that Thord was Swedish as he claimed and not a British officer. Maybe he knew that Thord had been in British

service for several years – certainly he had received some information that made it necessary to confirm Thord's identity. There was nothing of importance in Thord's luggage. Thord was not mistreated but was carefully watched for several days. It was not until later that Thord realised how close he had come to being treated as a British spy.

The unrest in French Indo-China concerned the railroad concession that China had allowed to France from the eastern bank of Song-Kai (The Red River), where the river passes Tonkin's northern border to the town of Yunnan-foo. This town is the capital in the province Yunnan, one of China's richest provinces, and located beside the lake that is the source of the Canton River.

All important trade in the provinces of Yunnan, Kwai-chan, and the western part of Quang-si flowed by river to Hong Kong and Canton. The population in these provinces was around seventy million.

At approximately the same time as the French, the British also received a railroad concession from China to construct a line from the area of the Kunlong-ferry on the Burma border to Yunnan-foo, like the French, but with the right to continue the line to Chungking-foo, the capital of the province of Szechuan, which lay about 1 400 miles up the river Yangtse-kiang. Thord was concerned that this was going to become rather complicated and that competition for the China trade might be the flashpoint for a war among the European powers. The present trade in Yunnan was monopolised by the British and Germans from Hong Kong and Canton respectively, a distance of around one thousand miles by river. Through the construction of their railroad the French intended to open Yunnan to cheap and quick transport from Haiphong-Hanoi to Yunnan-foo by train. If the British built their line, however, they could easily compete with the French through the railroad from Rangoon-Mandalay to Yunnan-foo and would have a clear advantage over the French with their extension to Chungking-foo.

Just at that stage of the game our 'heavenly friend' (the Regent Tsai-feng, who ruled in the name of the child emperor, Hsuan-tung) woke up, understood what a donkey he had made of himself, and revoked the concessions. The odd thing about it all was that Germany did not have a single concession in all south or west China, and yet their trade with this area was extremely successful.

With their usual foresight, but rather slow off the mark, the British pointed out to the Chinese that if the southbound trade were to go to the French, China would lose its trade on the Canton River. On receiving this fatherly advice, China turned to France and demanded that they immediately suspend the building of the railroad. China made a liberal offer of a few million in compensation, but France would not listen and continued to build. They doubled their construction effort and the line expanded in such haste that China – to stop this invasion – forbade its citizens to work on the line. In the end it became a capital offence for Chinese to work for the French on the line. To counter the shortage of workers the French imported Italians and Greeks and continued the work. It was at this stage – with the relationship between the French and Chinese rather tense – that Thord entered the arena.

At this time there were strong rumours abroad that the mobilisation of troops in Tonkin was not directed towards the rebel chief De Tam but was intended to launch an attack on South China if that country were to continue to show animosity towards the French.

Thord thought these rumours to be totally unfounded, but without doubt the French were taking steps to enable them to deal with further disruptions to the railroad construction, as their intention was to get to Yunnan-foo, whatever the cost. Taking into consideration the background of intense Anglo-French rivalry, the French had good reason to suspect the sincerity of a man who came as a Swede but who had served as a British army officer.

In the end Thord was placed as a scout in the Foreign Legion and went northwards with his regiment. Very little real combat with De Tam's troops took place but there was a lot of sniping and much strenuous tramping about in the paddy fields.

The division general's son became one of Thord's close friends through a minor incident in one of the towns. 'A bottle of wine, a jealous man, some shots fired from a revolver, some injured men, and our friendship was secured.' Thord was not a part of the company at the start but he sided with the boy when he got into trouble.

After a few weeks' tramping through the rice fields and being sniped at from hidden positions, his brigade ended up in the middle of the large delta between Haiphong and Hanoi.

It had been raining in the country for several weeks and especially for the last few days. The river was rising quickly, but there did not seem to be any immediate danger. De Tam and a crowd of his men were surrounded not far from the camp and the following day would see the end of the operation.

The night came and they made themselves as comfortable as possible.

At 3 o'clock in the morning shouting was heard everywhere and shortly afterwards the trumpet signalled a general alarm. When Thord jumped up he noticed that the ground was wet everywhere.

'When I arrived at the commander's quarters I was wading up to my knees in water. As far as the eye could see in the dark there was only water. It was a strange and helpless feeling. My thoughts went to pictures of flooding that I had seen. The camp animals broke loose and came running through camp dreadfully frightened, which did not improve our situation. No orders were given and each man tried to save himself. The water had now reached stomach height and it was hard to stand because of the strong current, which carried with it all kinds of loose lumber and other objects which knocked you down. I became serious and thought it would be a good idea to climb up a tree or find a large chunk of lumber floating around, hang on and flow downstream. Sooner or later boats would be sent out to try and save the thousands of people who had been trapped in the same way.

'The brigade presented a strange spectacle in the general rush for safety. Luckily the night became clear and the stars helped us to see quite well. I sat on one of the lower and stouter branches of a tree but soon found it necessary to climb higher

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up. The water now flowed seven or eight feet deep over the ground I had slept on and I was very happy to have a tree to sit in, but I started to doubt if it was strong enough to withstand the force of the current that carried with it every conceivable thing that could float.

‘When daybreak arrived it revealed one of the most frightening sights I have ever seen. As far as the eye could see there was a huge expanse of water furiously streaming eastwards. Houses packed with people on the rooftops came floating by; others came on improvised rafts and smaller pieces of wood. I felt my tree beginning to give way, as four other men had increased its burden. The side of a wooden house came floating past the tree and all of us jumped. Two of us succeeded in crawling onto the raft and floated downstream in the midst of the thousands of items of debris in the water. Dead animals and humans could be seen floating around among broken trees and damaged houses.

‘In many cases whole houses had been lifted from the ground and floated downstream. The river, which usually was only about a hundred yards wide, now had a width of over twenty miles.

‘Heavy rainfall over the whole country – and especially in the north and northeast – was the cause of this dreadful flooding. The water rose every year and often flooded large areas, but never in living memory had they experienced such a torrent in this country. If I were a painter and had painted a picture of the scene, nobody would ever believe that it was not exaggerated.

‘Our raft was in peril many times. Once a man fell off and disappeared. After an hour we got caught in a collection of trees and stayed there for hours until a boat picked us up.

‘Of the seven passengers we found that four of the people who had shared our raft were soldiers in De Tam’s force, but I have to say that they were decent all the time while I was with them on the floating broken house.

‘That’s how De Tam’s war against the French forces ended. The flood scattered all the French units that had surrounded the rebels like a chain. The rebel units floated away and a lot of them drowned. With the whole communication system devastated – both railroad and telegraph – it was impossible to do anything to the rebels. The government concentrated all their effort on saving and helping the poor people in the flooded area.

‘In total twenty-three towns were flushed away, and sixteen miles of railroad was totally destroyed.

‘The telegraph lines were cut everywhere in the delta, and in most places the iron telegraph poles were bent and broken like matchsticks.

‘De Tam got away and all active operations ceased.

‘Only one or two squads of the Foreign Legion and some native Annamite forces were stationed at the delta’s edges to deter the rebels from reappearing. It was not necessary, as the country was in a terrible state after the flood and there was no further trouble.’

In a letter to his parents from Saigon on 9 September, Thord verified that all military operations in Tonkin had come to a standstill. The flood had submerged

the 'whole country' and nothing could be done before the railroad had been repaired and the flood water had subsided.



On the following day he intended to travel to Singapore and once there decide on his next move. There was no point in staying when there was no war. The chief of the Annamite rebels, De Tam, whom the government had intended to catch, had disappeared into the mountainous district in north Tonkin near the Chinese border. Not for at least three months could the army be expected to advance again and that was too long a time to wait.

Thord could not make his prospective plans until he had received some telegrams he was expecting in Singapore.

The next correspondence came from the Tebing Tinggi Estate, Deli, Sumatra, on 13 November, where Thord expected to be staying for a while. He had left Singapore on 15 September and arrived in Sumatra to fight for the Dutch against the Malaysians on the island's northern side. Local conditions were such that he stayed in Medan. The Dutch did not want any foreign help. (According to Thord's later statements to the press, they were asking for such a long period of employment – five to seven years – that he could not tie himself down.) Medan was the capital of the large islands on the east coast. He was offered employment as an assistant manager at one of the island's larger rubber plantations. He accepted the employment and was put in charge of nine hundred Javanese workers that logged forests around the plantation. He also had an additional four hundred men who planted rubber trees and coffee bushes.

He explained that the delay in writing home had occurred because he had been up in the mountains hunting elephant and bear.

That job lasted from 18 October 1909 to 31 January 1910. The director of the Tebing Tinggi Estate gave Thord the following recommendation: 'I found his work satisfactory and I am sorry that he is leaving the estate to take up a better position.' Thord had by then been offered a transfer to another plantation around twenty miles away from the first. The one he left was 2 500 hectares in extent. They had planted 1 500 000 coffee and 210 000 rubber plants and the numbers were going to be doubled the following year. The firm's capital was £200 000. Thord was lucky to get the new position. His experience in Africa and the Philippines (where he had learned the Malayan language) had secured him the job ahead of many others who had applied for it.

In a letter before the change of work, he wrote that elephants, tigers, and black bears were plentiful in the district. However he had a great deal to do as an administrator and had not shot anything. The rainy season had now come to an end and he was counting on getting more time for himself.

The second post, in Sumatra at the Simpang Sumatra Rubber Co Ltd, lasted for only two months. When he left on 8 April 1910 the manager gave Thord the following recommendation: 'To whom it may concern. Mr I Thord-Gray has worked here as head assistant for ten weeks. He has given every possible satisfaction

with his work every day. Amongst other things he is a first-class surveyor. He leaves me to take up a much better post. I can confidently recommend him to anyone wanting a manager.'

Thord had been in touch with the Klabang Rubber Co Ltd and had been offered employment as company manager. He had roamed around for several weeks to inspect the company's estates on the Malacca Peninsula and was not going back to Sumatra, as they did not have any interests there. At that time a director from London arrived in Perak and wanted to see as much as possible before returning to Britain. Thord reported for duty on 24 April 1910.

Two documents give some idea about Thord's continued activity on the Malacca Peninsula. On 19 August 1910 Barlow & Co, agents for the Sungei Liang Rubber Co Ltd, wrote to Thord from Kuala Lumpur at the address Raub Estate, Raub, Pahang: 'Dear Sir. We have the pleasure to inform you that the directors have authorised us to increase your salary to \$500 per month, to begin from today's date. We trust that this token of confidence in your work will inspire you with new energy in the task of putting the estate into thoroughly good order.' The other document was issued by the same firm on 9 October 1911 from Kuala Lumpur: 'This is to certify that Mr I Thord-Gray has been in charge of an estate in our agency from April 1910 to October 1911, during which time he has done good work and we have found him a capable and efficient planter. He leaves at his own request to take a trip to Europe.'

Thord explained the reason for the trip to Europe to his parents in a letter on 15 October 1911. He was planning to travel the following day to participate in the Tripoli war between Italy and Turkey. If that war had ended by the time he arrived, he intended to join the French or Spanish in Morocco and then return home for some months. He hoped that his father would not be vexed with him because of his war lust as he could not help it. He blamed it on his Viking blood.

## EUROPEAN INTERLUDE

THE FIRST report after leaving Singapore came from Colombo in Ceylon. The voyage was fine but the swell from the Indian Ocean had been rather powerful. The stopover in Colombo on 21 October 1911 lasted only a few hours and Thord had to visit the Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, whom he knew and had met many times when he was governor in Natal and Thord was participating in the Zulu War. The mail followed the same packet-boat that Thord travelled on and he added a postcard from Alexandria on 4 November, the same day that he departed for Venice and Rome. For two days there had been fighting between Muslims and British troops in Alexandria – eighteen dead and thirty three wounded. A war of religion, reflected Thord.

The next account was written off the island of Corfu on 7 November:

'War – wonderful war! It is great to be back under fire! A Turkish warship chased us across the Mediterranean Sea for twenty-two hours. But with my usual

luck we escaped in the night and sneaked northwards in the lee of Crete. We sailed as far away as we could from the island and as close to the Greek coast as possible and gave them the slip between Corfu and Turkey. The Turkish ship fired 36 shots at us but none hit. Some were uncomfortably close and whistled between the tops of the masts. It took two Italian officers and me several hours on the navigation bridge with revolvers in hand to force the captain not to capitulate. Luckily it was nearly nightfall when they spotted us and the boat was one of the fastest in the Mediterranean, 20 knots when pushed. The Italian lighthouses were dark because of the war, which is why it was impossible to enter an Italian harbour at night. We had to go to Trieste.’

For Thord this meant continuing to Rome and then proceeding to Tripoli according to plan to sign up as a volunteer. He was hesitant about going to Stockholm during the winter after all those years in the tropics. However, he did not rule out going home for Christmas if Rome did not want him.

By 30 November, however, it was clear that he would go to Sweden; it was only a matter of when.

After a short visit to Madrid and a stopover in London from 12–15 December 1911 for negotiations with a director about rubber in Malaya, he passed through Brussels on 16 December, Hamburg on the nineteenth, and arrived in Stockholm on 20 December. The lost son had finally returned after sixteen years and was met by his father at the station. He was skinny, having suffered his last bout of malaria only two months earlier, and now needed to recuperate. The short daily entries in his diary gave an account of what Thord got up to during his nearly three-month long visit to Sweden.

There is no reason to reproduce this account here. Of course there were dinners with his parents in Stockholm and one- or two-day visits several times to his brothers, Gunnar on Björkö and Gustaf on Nummelinä and on Värmdön. ‘They did the best they could to slaughter the fatted calf.’

(Author’s note: I was seven years old at the time and had just finished my first term in elementary school on Adelsö. I have clear memories of the visit, which brought Christmas gifts of a totally different kind to what we normally received, mostly tin soldiers and Indians.)

Of course Thord responded to the hospitality that was bestowed on him by inviting everyone out to restaurants and visits to the theatre. Steadily the circle of friends widened: foremost among them was the family Adelborg, to whom Thord had brought regards from Fredrik Adelborg, the Swedish Consul in Singapore who features in a song by Evert Taube.

Through the Adelborgs he met Swedish military personnel and the question of a military career in Sweden was brought up without leading to anything. He met young ladies as well, and had a brief engagement to Elsa Fock, which was broken off when he returned to Malaya.

It is likely that the visit to Stockholm drained his savings and hence the need arose to ‘get back to business’. A trip to London on 14 March 1912 should probably be viewed in this context. Later on it would emerge that he had arrived

too late and missed a business transaction, which played an important part in the broken engagement.

He did return to his native country once more, however, after having arranged a meeting with his fiancée in Berlin. On 28 March 1912 the engaged couple were back in Stockholm and on 1 April Thord traveled by train to Trelleborg, Berlin, and Genoa to board the packet-boat from London via the Suez Canal to East India, Penang, and Singapore.

It is obvious that he had enjoyed seeing his native land and his family. He would not see his father again – he passed away the following year.

Evidence of the kinship he had with his family were the messages sent on the voyage. He sent a telegram or a postcard at every stopover. On the voyage to Port Said he found travel company at the last minute with the artists Andes Zorn and Louis Sparre – ‘decent fellows’. ‘My trip home to Sweden has built up my health and physique again and I have not felt the least bit of fever since I arrived home,’ he wrote after his arrival.

## BACK IN MALAYA

DURING his European trip Thord had been on leave and was now returning to duty. On his return to the old plantation in Raub, he found it all destroyed. His eighteen months of work had been thrown away. He became so angry when he saw the plantation that he telegraphed his resignation to the owner of the company. With his good references, he applied for and got an assignment to inspect and report on the situation on a series of plantations on the Malacca Peninsula, Sumatra, and Java. But his intention was to settle down again. He received several offers and eventually decided to become manager at Glenealy Plantations Ltd, from 1 October 1912 in Parit, Perak.

‘It is one of the best out here and I get on rather well.’ But he disagreed with the company about the terms of his contract.

Inspection trips produced Thord’s description of how he ascended ‘the burning mountain’ Papandayan on Java at the beginning of July 1912. The story is retold here. The official journey went, among other places, to the town Garut, situated on a plateau 2 500 feet above sea level and surrounded by high mountains. The most interesting thing Garut had to offer, apart from its thousands of acres of rice fields and its markets, was the volcanic mountain Papandayan, fifteen miles long and six miles wide.

The crater had been very active in recent history, it rumbled and fumed awfully at times. The natives called this mountain Goenoeng-Goentoer (the Thundering Mountain).

The last big eruption was in 1772, when a large solid lump of the mountain was thrown into the air and streams of lava poured out. Ash and stones covered the ground for a radius of seven miles in a layer seven feet thick. Forty villages and three thousand people were buried in one day.

To get up to the crater Thord and an Englishman (whom he had persuaded to accompany him) left Garut at five o' clock in the morning, each with an old two-wheeled vehicle harnessed to three horses small in size but hardy.

'We travelled like this for twelve miles even on the upward slope. Over the last two miles the terrain rose up towards the mountain. At dawn Papandayan and the other mountain, Tjikoraj, (with a totally perfect cone) lay visible in front of us – a lyrical picture. The steam rose up majestically from Papandayan.'

A cold sharp wind blew from the mountains and Thord was glad that, out of old habits, he had brought warmer clothes than usual. It looked like being a wonderful day. Twelve miles from Garut, at 4 000 feet, they left the vehicles and continued on horseback towards the crater, which lay 4 600 feet higher. The place where they left the vehicles was called Tjisoeroepan, and there was a newly-built inn at just the right place for them to refresh themselves with good food and drink. The road up from Tjisoeroepan was very steep but sure. They had to lead the horses half the way. As they got higher, they passed a series of vegetation belts, among them a superb primeval forest of the same kind as in Sumatra. Eventually they arrived in the temperate zone. Here almost all vegetation disappeared except for the occasional tree-fern (just like those in Pilgrim's Rest in the Transvaal, remarked Thord). At various points on the way they enjoyed a magnificent view over the Garut plain with its square green rice fields, an unforgettable sight.

At last they came up to the level of *Kawak* or the crater. Nothing grew around it. Occasionally it was possible to find a plant that looked like the cowberry twigs Thord remembered from Södra Bergen in Stockholm. Already before they arrived at the top they could smell the fumes of sulphur from the crater. Luckily, at the time there was a northern breeze that carried most of the fumes away from the visitors. Thord thought that the place looked like a painting his father had owned many years before that depicted Dante in Hades, with steam coming up from hundreds of holes in the ground. In the holes were sinners, upside down with their legs up in the air.

The earth's crust around *Kawak* was very thin and they walked on a surface that was only one or two feet thick. Under the thin crust lay lava. The crust cracked often and out came sulphur and at times a stream of lava. Several holes were large enough to push a walking stick down. The stick caught fire at the very moment of contact, such was the heat close to the hole. From the holes came a racket as if all the evil spirits in hell were let loose. One whistled like a steamer, another sounded like a thousand snakes hissing at the same time, a third like a suffragette being murdered. It was deafening but fascinating. Thord felt small and helpless alongside this example of nature's ferocious power. The earth shook and trembled. Thord could well understand how native ghost stories had been created about giants and trolls lying tied up down there, trying to get out.

The word *Papandayan* means smithy.

The Tjiparoeppoeg spring that ran on Papandayan went through this sulphur and lava area. The water was warm and salty and could not be used further down to irrigate the rice fields. An area close to the source of one of these hot springs

was called by the natives Tanak Angkor (Dangerous, Forbidden Land), as it was believed to be the dwelling place of ghosts and spirits. It was impossible to get a native to enter this area for fear of these powerful and cruel spirits.

Poisonous fumes rose up by evaporation and created a steamy layer several inches thick over the ground. There were also many dead rats lying around. That was a mystery; why only rats? Where did they come from? During the short time Thord was on the spot he could not learn anything about the rats. They interested him but the natives did not know anything – or else they did not want to say. To Thord it looked as if the place had been left untouched from the time when ‘witch doctors’ had more power over people. Most probably, he thought, it had been a place of sacrifice.

Thord wanted to see the highest point on the mountain and continued alone. His companion had become tired and stopped at the crater. Thord was rewarded for his efforts by reaching the summit, although it had been both difficult and dangerous. He had one of the most thrilling experiences ever when he looked out from the summit at 8 600 feet and saw both of Java’s beaches, the Java Lake in the north, and the Indian Ocean in the south. The distance between Tjisoeroepan and the Papandayan crater was ten to twelve miles. From Garut it was therefore twenty three miles. When Thord was on the top of the mountain he felt that the weather was changing. The air was humid and a strong wind started blowing from the northwest. Fog-cloud was beginning to spread out and Thord had to get down as fast as possible so as not to get lost.

Two sides of the mountain were dangerous and looked as steep as the wall of a house. He did not intend to spend the night there without food and drink, to be dispatched to eternal sleep by the strong sulphurous fumes.

‘No thank you!’ he said and went down like a mountain goat. The fog had wrapped its arms around the whole mountain by the time he arrived back at the crater but by then the danger was over, because from that point there was a good path down to safety.



Another experience of nature in connection with a different inspection trip – on Sumatra at the end of August 1912 – had less to do with nature than with people. The birthday of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland on 31 August was celebrated in a grand way in Medan with lights and great fireworks – great fun thought Thord. He was invited to a reception that the governor of the east coast was holding, and he found it interesting to meet the sultans of Deli and Langkat.

‘I went in with my medals and honorary titles and aroused great curiosity among all those who did not know me. During the evening almost all of them drank themselves stupid.’

When his employment started at Glenealy Plantations in October 1912 he was glad to replace the roving and the constant changing of hotel accommodation with a place of his own. He sent home to Sweden enlarged photos of the building and of some of the rooms and their interiors and of guests and the plantation crops as

well. Some of the objects demonstrate Thord's personal interests. A photo from the upper floor corridor is dominated by a large tiger skin on the wall, mounted swords accompanied by a hunting rifle, and a reproduction of Cederström's painting *The Funeral Procession of Karl XII*. On another wall in the bungalow he had displayed on a bookcase a bust of Karl XII, a row of photographs, and a cavalry sabre.

Carpets are replaced throughout by tiger skins.

A catalogue of the photographs might be of interest as they portray some familiar figures:

Lieutenant Adelborg; Major Fraser; Colonel Royston; Colonel McKenzie (later Major-General Sir Duncan McKenzie); Major Watt; Lieutenant Kelly (a US army officer); General Lord Methuen; Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Rundle; Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Hamilton; General Sir John French; Field Marshal Lord Kitchener; Field Marshal Lord Roberts; King Oscar II; King Gustav V of Sweden, and King George V of England together with Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden.

The most regular guest was Fredrik Adelborg, but he was not alone; at least for Christmas several other men had taken part in the festivities. The contact with Adelborg had been made long before the Sweden trip and had been strengthened through socialising with his relatives during that visit. Before Thord found a permanent home, it appears that Adelborg's domicile had actually been his only base besides the hotel and the company's premises. Thord was indeed of the opinion that he had saved his friend from doubtful habits and that it was through Thord that he had found employment. Thord was also satisfied with the development and gave prominence in several letters to the fact that Adelborg was doing well, that he conducted himself well, and acted like a man, although maybe at times he was a bit rough on his juniors.

The visit to Sweden had another aftermath which is reflected in the correspondence. The broken engagement gave rise to a number of letters from home, not least from his father, who was genuinely vexed with his son. Thord defended his behavior principally by pointing to his economic situation and to the still unresolved divorce from Edith. A continued engagement in these circumstances would be dishonourable. The situation was complicated by his father showing Thord's letter to the abandoned fiancée, who in turn wrote to Thord in a way that he found unnecessarily insulting and unforgivable. With that, all possibility of reconciliation was forfeited. However, Thord did not sever any family ties. In fact, the correspondence with his parents and brothers was busier than ever. Because his mother had been admitted to a sanatorium for long intervals, he had to write duplicate letters home.

His mother sent (among other things) newspaper clippings about his brothers and he expressed his delight with them several times.

'Gustaf's article about Björkö was damned good. Gunnar's painting above looked first-class. They are talented boys, those two. I have not yet met any man that can come close to my brothers in anything,' he wrote to his father. After he had received a newspaper clipping about Gunnar's exhibition: 'Damned lot of praise

**'As Mother knows,  
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and so it should be – Gunnar is probably our most handsome and shall become our most famous painter. When I read the article that Mother sent, how Gunnar's art has been shaped: masculine; profound but unaffected; produced from our Swedish soil; brimming with deep thoughts and sentiment; how he had collected his most typical motifs from times and imaginings far from our own; I was again carried away by his art to Old Norse days as I always was when I slept on Björkö. Gunnar and the others used to laugh at me when I told them that I could barely sleep at all on Björkö. The clash of arms, orders, and screams of all possible kinds – murder and fire! I saw people but I could not describe them well. They came to me in my dreams and sometimes I lay awake for hours afterwards in a strange mood, which I cannot describe either. Maybe it was a kind of fear, although I did not know it. Sometimes I felt as if I had been a "medium" in transformation, in transmutation. As Mother knows, these things and much darker things have been behind my quest – and maybe even the basis of all my wandering and my love of war. Mother may not be aware that I am known all over Africa and East Asia as the "Viking", while in South Africa, together with my two friends Watt and Midgeley, I was better known as one of "The Three Musketeers".

'I sometimes believe that I was born a thousand years after my time – the medieval age, after all, had its good points. I am sure that Gustaf is like me and maybe Gunnar too, but I cannot look into his soul like I can with Gustaf's.'

In April 1913 Gunnar complained of financial difficulties in connection with their father's death. Thord answered with a warning against idealism:

'Try to become a bit commercial in between times! Paint or draw a bit for money! Do not think that I do not dream as well. There is not one night, almost, when trumpets and banners do not play a more important role than anything else. These dreams show themselves at times fairly often in my work and trouble me a lot on occasion. But I don't let such things take over. No, wake up, draw and paint every so often what the primitive public wants – the one that buys.'

This exhortation fell on deaf ears. But Thord was of a generous nature and repaid the reception he had enjoyed during his visit to Sweden mostly with exotic Christmas gifts from the regions where he lived. Thus for Christmas 1912 he sent home, among other things, a box of thirty four Javanese, Malayan, and Sumatran swords to be distributed among his father and brothers.

As an old cavalryman Thord maintained his interest in horses. He used to compete in races with his own horses.

That he still dreamt of war was obvious. He was keenly interested in any world news that carried a whiff of gunpowder. On 20 August 1912 he wrote to his father about the unrest in the Balkans:

'If this quarrelling does not end soon it may be the cause of a European war, and then we will meet again at home or in Valhalla.

'You, Father, would have been an elegant warrior with all your energy and strength – but it may be that you are a bit too old to participate.' His father, August, was 72 years old.

On 21 November 1912 he brought up the same subject again.

‘This war looks strange, but I am glad that Father would have been on the Turkish side, because I would too. But this time it was totally impossible for me to join in, even though I had itchy fingers. It is still possible that out of this will come a European war and of course then I shall have to participate.’

On 15 January 1913 he jotted down a comment that the Turks and the smaller Balkan states did not seem to agree in London, which is why the war had to continue. ‘Heavens above! How I long to go there.’ He wondered if Britain, Germany, and Russia were intending to get involved in this affair. Austria might have more say than anyone else. But he also had his eyes on the French, who once again ‘were having fun in Morocco’.

## CHINA

GRADUALLY his attention turned to China. ‘A few days ago,’ wrote Thord on 11 September 1912, ‘I got an offer from China for the position of Chief Commissioner of Police in Tientsin. I have agreed if I get £900 a year. Most likely they do not want to give me more than £600. It would be fun to go up there – but I do not intend to lose too much on it.’

Nothing more came of this but there were further opportunities in China. In August 1913 he was offered a commission as major in the Chinese Army.

‘How much will I get per month and how long shall I have to wait every month before being paid?’ asked Thord, without getting an answer.

The strange thing was that the New Revolutionary Committee (said to have their headquarters in Perak where Thord was staying) offered him by messenger on the same day a colonel’s commission in the New Revolutionary Army. It seemed as if one had heard what the other one was up to and then made a higher bid. Perhaps the government thought that a major in their army was equivalent to a colonel in the Revolutionary Army?

Thord was not sure if one knew what the other one was doing, but it seemed strange. He wanted to avoid compromise in any way but it seemed as if Sun Yat-Sen was eager to get him to join his rebels, as he promised Thord a brigade if he would join them. The offer of the Chinese President, Yuan Shi-Kai, was by contrast cool and guarded and Thord was curious as to what answer he would get from the Minister of War to his impertinent questions. He was not going to be tempted by a higher rank and asked those at home to be discreet. Otherwise it might result in difficulties later on.

In a letter to his mother dated 29 August 1913 he sent the following information: ‘Among the British plantation owners in Ipoh, Perak, Raub, and Pahang I trained a Maxim machine-gun crew. Before I left for China approximately two hundred and fifty men had been approved as machine-gun operators. It was during this intensive training that Fo-Chun, a very rich Chinese man, turned to me and asked me to join Sun Yat-Sen in Yunan-Foo to lead the training of his army against Yuan Shi-Kai with the rank of lieutenant-general. I went to China with a large amount

of money for General Sun Yat-Sen. Fo-Chun gave the impression of being the Chinese Revolution's minister of defence.'

Thord's service with Sun Yat-Sen lasted only two months, and there is very little information among his papers as to what happened in that time and why it was so short. In his book *Gringo Rebel* Thord described how one day in October 1913 in the German club in Shanghai he was discussing the Mexican Revolution and decided – because he had nothing better to do – to investigate for himself the situation in Mexico. An Englishman, to whom he gave the alias Bradstock in his book, took a bet with him that the rebellion would be crushed before he could get to Mexico. In his service catalogue and the associated draft, he wrote:

'1913 Director General of Reorganisation of Sun Yat-Sen's Chinese Army and lieutenant-general. Reference paper stolen before leaving Shanghai.' And in another entry, 'Chinese Army. With I Army Corps for training same under Sun Yat-Sen fighting against Yuan Shi-Kai.'

The reason Thord offered in later interviews for terminating his Chinese contract so early was that he did not want to fight the European troops who were supporting the opposite side.

