

# MARK PENN GOES TO WAR

*Michael Springer*

**A SEQUEL TO "THE BOOTLEGGER'S SECRET"**



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Also by Michael Springer

*THE BOOTLEGGERS SECRET*

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*To The Memory of My Parents*



Tell the men to fire faster, fight  
till she sinks, and don't give up the ship.

Captain James Lawrence, USN, mortally wounded  
aboard the USS *Chesapeake* (June 1, 1813)



## Chapter 1

Mark Penn held his Daisy air rifle chest-high with both hands the way Marines did in the new movie, *To the Shores of Tripoli*. He was tracking the enemy on the Middleton Ridge—using trees, boulders, and caves as cover. Six months had passed since Japan's sneak attack on the U. S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor. Mark was too young to join the Marines and fight the real enemy, but he could play war like millions of red-blooded American kids.

He was alone because his pal Swede Larson was in summer school for flunking sixth-grade geography. How anybody could have trouble with that subject was beyond Mark, but Swede seemed to thrive on trouble.

Ahead was a spring-fed creek that tumbled down the ridge and emptied into the Minnesota River upstream from the boys' tree-house. From here, the river meandered like a gray snake across the green valley floor. He dropped to his knees, splashed his face with the icy water, and had a long drink.

Mark scrambled to his feet and crouched out of the woods into a grassy clearing. He froze at the sight of a lifelike scarecrow dressed in tattered blue overalls. It stood guard in the center of a half-acre garden with neat rows of vegetable seedlings.

Mark heard voices behind him. He flopped to the ground and

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rolled behind a fat honeysuckle bush like the tough leatherneck he longed to be.

A man and a girl walked out of the woods toward him. Both were dressed in blue shirts, dungarees, and black work shoes. The girl wore a red bandanna on her head. The man had graying black hair and a gimpy right leg. He said something. She smiled.

Goose bumps rose on Mark's arms as the pair got closer. They looked Oriental. Could they be Japanese? Maybe they were spies. Why didn't they talk some more so he could tell if they spoke English?

The two passed so close that Mark could hear the soft creaking of their shoes. He counted to ten and crawled after them in the tall grass.

Beyond the clearing was a three-foot chain link fence that secured a well-kept yard and white clapboard house that needed paint. The man unlatched a gate, and the pair went up a walk and four steps. Both removed their shoes before going inside.

Mark crept to a lilac bush fifty yards from the house. Why hadn't he brought Swede's telescope?

The front door opened, and the girl skipped down the steps barefooted and bare-headed. Her short black hair was cut in bangs, and her brown eyes had an almond-shape. She was definitely Oriental. Mark had never seen anybody like her.

The girl leaned forward, lobbed a smooth gray stone onto the walk in front of her, and jumped ahead twice on one foot. She was playing hopscotch. Mark could see the white chalklines now. And she was singing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" in perfect English.

The front door opened again. A tiny Oriental woman with gold-rimmed glasses came outside. Her gray hair was done in a

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bun, and she wore a flowered cotton kimono. Mark recognized the long gown with the sash and big sleeves from his geography book. They had to be Japanese.

The woman beckoned to the girl, and they went inside.

Mark got to his knees. This wasn't a game anymore. He had to tell somebody. But who'd believe him? His dad? Police Chief Morton? And what would he tell them? That he saw people who looked Japanese, who might be spies? He needed more proof. Mark crawled through the grass toward the back of the house.

Off to the right, at the edge of the woods, was a two-holer outhouse. To the left was a weather-beaten shed with the doors hooked open. Inside were a black '39 Ford and a two-wheeled wooden trailer, both with California plates.

President Franklin Roosevelt had ordered that all Japanese on the west coast be sent to internment camps as potential wartime enemies. Maybe these people had skipped out before they could be imprisoned, or maybe they'd escaped from a camp.

A rustle in the grass behind Mark stiffened him. He looked up to face the Japanese man who'd been with the girl. At his side was a brown and blue Doberman pinscher.

"What're you doing here?" The man's English was nasal, but as perfect as the girl's.

Mark's reply came out like a squeak. "Nothing."

"Nothing," the man boomed back. "This is private property. You're trespassing. I could have you arrested."

Mark's brain was spinning. Here was this Japanese man who might be a spy or escaped prisoner talking about having him arrested.

"Did you hear me?"

Mark sat up and edged away as the dog sniffed at his dungaree

pantleg. “I didn’t mean anything...”

A ‘41 Chevy pickup came crunching down the graveled driveway. Two small shadows moved behind the kitchen curtains.

The man scowled at Mark. “I don’t want to see your face again. Now, get out of here.”

Mark glanced over his shoulder every few yards as he scurried to a thick sugar maple at the edge of the woods. He dropped to the ground behind an earthen berm the tree roots had raised, a great place to watch the man approach the truck.

Two men in their early forties dressed in striped overalls and work caps got out of the pickup. One was tall, the other short. Both had bushy mustaches. They reminded Mark of Mutt and Jeff, the cartoon characters.

The taller man took a German Luger out of a baggy back pocket and gave it to the Japanese man. Mark recalled the unusual shape of the pistol—long, thin barrel and angled grip—from *The Invaders*, a movie about Nazis in Canada.

They all spoke together for a minute, then Mutt and Jeff got into the truck, made a U-turn, and drove away.

“Come on, Brutus,” the Japanese man said. He patted the Doberman’s head as they walked to the back of the house. The man opened a heavy storm cellar door, led the dog down a half-dozen limestone steps, and closed the door behind them.

The twelve-o’clock siren wailed at the Middleton fire station. Swede got out of summer school at noon. His pal would be at the treehouse in a few minutes. Swede would know what to do.