



BACEPOW
Bay Area Civilian Ex-Prisoners of War

Beyond the Wire

Volume 1, Number 1

February 2008

From the Commander

At the BACEPOW meeting in November 2007, the Board accepted the resignation of two members, and elected two new members. Our many thanks to outgoing members Don Thompson, Commander, and Harry Robinson, Treasurer, for their hard work over the past few years keeping our organization going. As the new Commander, I'd like to welcome my fellow neophyte on the Board, Sally Connelly who takes over the duties of Treasurer.

Sally and her family were taken prisoner by the Japanese in Baguio, and interned at Camp John Hay then moved to Camp Holmes. In December of 1944, they were moved to Old Bilibid Prison in Manila, where they were liberated just as the Battle of Manila started. In my case, my family was stranded in Manila when the ship on which we escaped Japanese-occupied China was sunk. We were in Santo Tomas Internment Camp from January 1942 until repatriated in April 1945.

This is an exciting time for our organization as the Board takes new initiatives to enhance its value to the members. But first and foremost, we must keep in mind that BACEPOW has a responsibility to serve all civilian ex-POWs and to provide a forum for those of us who share a common experience to exchange ideas and tales of our adventures.

Our population is shrinking as time takes its toll, but there are many Americans throughout the U.S. and World who were prisoners of the Japanese in East Asia those many years ago. We welcome all of them to join with us in holding the lamp that shines on those dark days to keep them from fading into oblivion. We also invite the next generations of those ex-prisoners to better understand what happened to their forebears by joining our next-generations forum.

You will hear more about our initiatives in future newsletters, but for now we encourage you to send in ideas you may have that will strengthen our organization. Contact any of our Board members to let them know what you expect from BACEPOW.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy the February reunion, which this year falls on the 63rd anniversary of the liberation of Santo Tomas Internment Camp. It is a wonderful opportunity to renew old friendships and make new ones, swap stories, and meet people who were instrumental in our survival. Many thanks to Sascha (Weinzheimer) Jansen for her hard work in putting it together and arranging the sumptuous banquet.

Also, watch for the announcements of coming events throughout the year.

Angus Lorenzen, Commander

BACEPOW Starts Newsletter for and About Civilian Prisoners of War

Communication is vital to any organization and organized communication is essential as well.

With this newsletter, tentatively named "Beyond The Wire", we hope will accomplish this for the BACEPOW organization. It will be a conduit for personal stories, introduction of leaders, book and film reviews, and also information about BACEPOW history, purpose and plans for the future.

BACEPOW was founded for and by civilians who had been prisoners of the Japanese during WWII, mostly in the Pacific Theater. The camps from which most of them came were Santo Tomas Internment Camp and Los Baños - both in the Philippines - but it includes ex-POWs from all over Japanese-occupied Asia. BACEPOW is also a Chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War (AXPOW), which has a Congressional Charter and keeps us apprised of new legislation that might affect POWs. It pays dues to this National organization and is a participant in its meetings. However, BACEPOW is first and foremost a civilian organization with a structure, dues and membership.

Many of these civilians settled in the West, after they were repatriated, especially around the San Francisco Bay Area, hence Bay Area Civilian Prisoners of War. China, Dutch East Indies, Singapore, Malaya, and French Indo China also held allied civilians "behind the wire" during WWII. When we flew "beyond the wire" we settled not only in the west but other parts of the country, and some remained in the countries where they were held prisoner.

We want to invite any allied civilian who was detained during WWII to join the organization to help keep the history alive to the next generation and work with others concerning the special needs of this unique group.

This will be your newsletter. We hope you will submit your stories, attend meetings and get to know the membership.

I hope to meet many of you in Fremont in February. Please send me information and stories of interest to our members.

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Welcome to the BACEPOW Reunion

We welcome everyone to our 2008 reunion, and the opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones, to reestablish that special bond that people who survive such an ordeal forge with each other. This bond is so well described by William Shakespeare in the words he gave King Henry V in his speech rallying his fearsomely outnumbered yeomen before the battle of Agincourt.

*This story shall the good man teach his son
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it must be remembered;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;*

Descendants Program

At the 2008 Reunion, we are launching our newest program to involve the descendants of civilian ex-POWs in BACEPOW. Most of our members were imprisoned by the Japanese in East Asia, with around 100 internment camps located between New Guinea in the south and Manchuria in the north, and we'd like to encourage them to share with our descendants the variety of experiences they had. This is an opportunity that is fast fading, and we rely on our descendants to carry our stories forward.

The largest concentration of Americans was in the Philippines because of its Commonwealth status in 1941. The U.S. colonial experience in the Philippines was a unique period in the nation's history, yet it is in danger of being forgotten. The average American today knows something about the British Raj in India, but nothing about the miniature American version in the Philippines and its fiery World War II denouement. But American civilians also suffered in such places as Japan, China, Burma, Malaya, French Indo China, Dutch East Indies, and many other colonial areas occupied by the Japanese, and which dissolved after the war.

Our descendants' forum is being organized by Mark Lewis and Karen Kerns Lewis, and will discuss the ways and means of preserving this legacy for future generations, before it slips away forever. We'll talk about recording oral histories, posting family-history narratives on a comprehensive web site, and above all, the urgent need for descendants to organize their family papers - diaries, letters, photographs and other relevant documents - and donate them to appropriate archives, so that future scholars can reconstruct the vanished world of the past. For inspiration, we'll show Peter Parsons' recent film "Secret War in the Pacific," which details the wartime adventures of his father, Chick Parsons. Making a film like Peter's is perhaps beyond the capabilities of most descendants, but there are less daunting projects that we all can undertake, which collectively will ensure that our parents' and grandparents' stories are not lost to history. Please join us.

A Day to Remember

February 23, 1945 was an auspicious day for the American forces tightening the noose around Japan. A week after the landing on that stinking volcanic lump, Iwo Jima, a squad of Marines fought to the top of Mount Suribachi, the highest prominence on the island, and planted the Stars and Stripes where it could be seen from everywhere on the island and the offshore invasion fleet. Three more weeks of bitter fighting were in store for them, but this simple act gave the Marines heart in what was then the costliest battle in the Pacific.

On that same day in Manila, GIs from the 37th Infantry Division finally crept through the rubble, all that remained of the immense walls of the Intramuros, the ancient Spanish city where Japanese troops had dug in to make their last stand. Another week of building-to-building fighting was in store for them in what was the most intense urban battle fought by American troops during the World War II, but the breach of this defensive position foretold the end of the organized resistance that left Manila the second most devastated city of the war.

The army had already had great success on the way to Manila. On the night of January 30-31, the 6th Ranger Battalion penetrated behind the Japanese lines and rescued 530 POWs, captured on Bataan and Corregidor in 1942, who were too weak to be shipped to Japan or Manchuria as slave laborers. This operation is now called "The Great Raid".

Immediately afterwards, the flying column from the 1st Cavalry broke through the Japanese lines on a headlong 100-mile race to Manila. The 800-man 44th Tank Battalion entered the city on the evening of February 3, and broke into the Santo Tomas Internment Camp, freeing 3,800 civilian prisoners. This exploit is called, "The greatest rescue in the history of warfare". The next evening, a foot patrol probing the Japanese defenses just a few hundred yards from Santo Tomas stumbled on the Bilibid prison where the Japanese held 800 POWs and 500 civilians, and the 37th Infantry rescued them on February 5.

In that brief period of less than a week, the two great raids by MacArthur's 6th Army had freed more than 5,600 prisoners from the Japanese. The urgency that dictated these daring raids was an intercepted message from Tokyo to local Japanese commanders in the Philippines ordering them to execute all Allied prisoners before they could be rescued by advancing American forces.

Then early in the morning of that auspicious day, and 40-miles south of Manila near the shore of the Laguna de Bay, Filipino guerillas led by members of the 511 Parachute Infantry Regiment, swept out of the jungle to attack the perimeter of the Los Baños Internment Camp. A company of paratroopers jumped into a drop zone adjacent to the camp, and additional troopers, who had landed in amtracs nearby, soon joined them in the attack. Other guerilla units and U.S. forces created diversionary attacks to prevent other Japanese forces from coming to the rescue of the garrison. This highly coordinated effort succeeded in rescuing 2,150 civilian prisoners, who were then whisked away across the Laguna de Bay in the amtracs.

The last great raid of the Philippine campaign has been called an unrivaled success and textbook example of planning, coordination, and execution of an airborne raid. The success was only marred when the Japanese returned to Los Baños after the American evacuation, and turned their full wrath on the Filipino population, massacring 1,500 men, women, and children.



At the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Santo Tomas Internment Camp, ex-prisoners were invited to the U.S. Embassy in Manila. The archivist requested that they identify anyone they recognized in the photos lining the wall. Imagine Margaret Squire's surprise when she recognized herself in a Japanese propaganda photo. She is on the right of the picture, shown washing her hair in an old bath tub.

In Memorium

Gerald Roe Sams (Jerry), at the age of 96, died peacefully in his home in Chicago Park, California on December 7, 2007. It is fitting that he died on Pearl Harbor Day because this date marked the beginning of events that would lead to the entwining of his life with Margaret Coalson Sams his wife of 65 years.

They were both interned at Santo Tomas Internment Camp, where they met, and later in Los Baños. He was a member of the group that built and operated the clandestine radio in camp. His wife, Margaret, his three children, his 9 grandchildren, and his 9 great-grandchildren, survive him.

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Internet Resources

The following Internet sites may be of interest to ex-prisoners and their families.

www.axpow.org The official voice of the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

http://keepemflying.30.forumer.com This is an open forum dedicated to remembering Santo Tomas Internment Camp and WWII in the Philippines. You are welcome to post stories and search for lost friends.

www.rememberlosbanos1945.com The Los Baños Liberation Memorial Scholarship Foundation provides information about activities affecting ex-prisoners and their liberators.

www.amchamphilippines.com By pressing *Organizations* in this website, then *FAME*, you reach the Filipino-American Memorial Endowment that is dedicated to maintaining WW II memorials in the Philippines, including the Bataan Death March kilometer markers.

BACEPOW NEEDS YOU

And YOU NEED BACEPOW!

Think about it! We are the only confirmed Civilian Ex-Prisoner of War Organization in the United States. BACEPOW is not just for members in the San Francisco Bay Area – it is for everyone and anyone who wants to join and MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

There are many of us still around without an anchor to a bona fide organization. Our important historical past as participants in the WWII experiences need to be nurtured and continued. We can do that! By simply joining BACEPOW will give us a voice. Save Our Heritage! Strengthen Our Future!

BACEPOW is a Chapter of the nationally chartered American Ex-Prisoners of War (AXPOW). To be a voting member of BACEPOW, it is also necessary to be a member of the national organization. Our Membership Chairman can provide you with the necessary application. But those who are not eligible for membership in AXPOW are very welcome to participate in BACEPOW, become Associate Members, and take advantage of the benefits we offer.

The FOLLOWING IS OUR DUES STRUCTURE per year.

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|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| A/ | Individual Voting Member: (Must be paid up member of AMERICAN EX-PRISONERS OF WAR) | \$15.00 |
| B/ | Former POWs/Internees not current members of the National Organization and wish to be a member. | \$17.00 |
| C/ | Friends of BACEPOW: Military – Liberators - Civilians - Descendants | \$17.00 |

Make checks out to: BACEPOW
 Mail to: Frank H. Stagner – Membership Chairman
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 Chico, California 95928-8410
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BACEPOW Membership Dues through 2008

Name.....Amount.....
 Include registered name in camp

Spouse.....Amount.....
 Only if applying for membership

Address:.....

Phone No. ()..... E-Mail.....

Major Camp Where Interned or Military Unit.....
 Give relationship if next of kin or descendant

BACEPOW Newsletter
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(Address Label)