

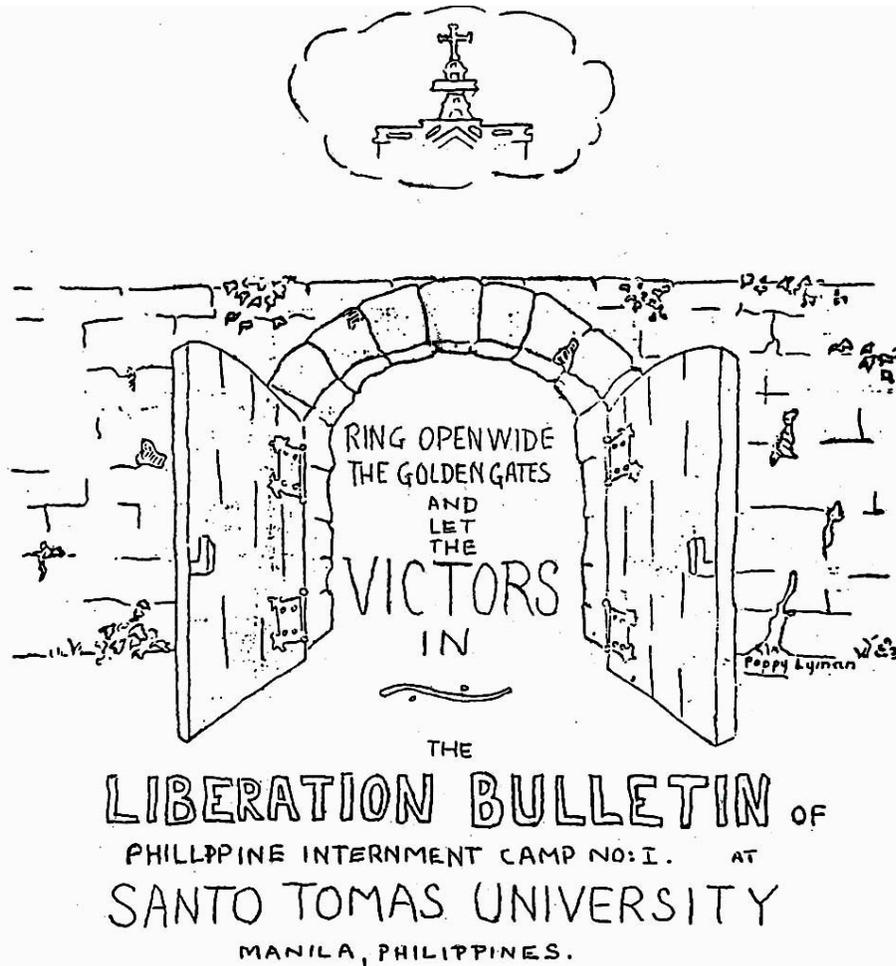


BACEPOW
Bay Area Civilian Ex-Prisoners of War

Beyond the Wire

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FEBRUARY 3rd, 1945 ~

From the Commander

Liberation, so eagerly awaited, finally came to the three camps in and around Manila in 1945. The dates that live so vividly in our minds were February 3 at Santo Tomas, February 5 for the hostages at Santo Tomas and for the military and civilian POWs at Bilibid prison, and February 23 for Los Baños. But while we celebrated the removal of the yoke that had restrained us for more than 3 years, the cataclysmic Battle of Manila raged, causing destruction, misery and death as a price for our freedom, and the city's liberation came only with capitulation of the last Japanese defenders on March 3.

We now remember the end of our dark times 65 years ago with this issue of *Beyond the Wire*, and will celebrate with a reunion in Fremont, California from January 22 to 24. I'm really excited about this reunion as it will be the best ever, and the last one for awhile. We have lined up some excellent speakers, but what fascinates me is the three panel discussions where people who were in the camps will describe where they were and what was happening as the liberating forces entered their camps. These discussions will be amplified by questions and discussion from the audience.

Evening cocktail parties are scheduled for both Friday and Saturday, and on Saturday evening a special entertainment program has been planned. The event will culminate at the Sunday banquet, with introduction of several luminaries who are joining us and featuring an excellent keynote speaker. Hope to see you there with all of the enthusiasm that you exhibited at our last reunions.

Angus Lorenzen

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The Angels Came At Dawn

Robert A. Wheeler tells this personal story about his liberation at Los Baños, and gives his tribute to the units of the 11th Airborne Division who participated. The date was February 23, 1945. It should be noted that shortly after the prisoners were evacuated, Japanese troops entered the village of Las Baños and killed 1,500 Filipino civilians in retaliation.

On February 23, 1945, the Marines raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi, on the island of Iwo Jima. On that same morning, about 42 miles southeast of Manila in the Philippine Islands, the 11th Airborne Division began an operation about which Army Chief of Staff General Colin Powell proclaimed, "I doubt that any airborne unit in the world will ever be able to rival the Los Baños prison raid. It is the textbook airborne operation for all ages and all armies".

As that day dawned at Los Baños Civilian Internment Camp, it held two thousand one hundred and forty two U.S., British, Canadian, French and other Allied civilian prisoners of the Imperial Japanese Army. After several years of imprisonment, they were the remaining survivors, who were slowly but surely going to join their predecessors in starving to death.

As we went to bed the night before, little did we know that the men of the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, with attached guerrillas, were sneaking up to their positions at key points outside the camp. Elsewhere, the troopers of the 187th Para Glider Regiment were busy keeping the Japanese troops occupied in a diversionary operation. The men of the 672nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion were making their way in the dark with hand held compasses across Lake Laguna de Bay, transporting the balance of the First Battalion of the 511th Regiment, and that "B" Company 511th with attached Medics and the light machine gun platoon from Headquarters Company was getting a little bit of sleep at Nichols Field under the wings of the 65th Troop Carrier Squadron's C-47s that were to carry them to their moment of history.

That morning, as I walked out of the barracks with my family to line up for 7:00 AM roll call, I looked up into the sky over a field near our camp and saw several C-47 transport planes.

Suddenly, the sky filled with the "Angels", the troopers of "B" Company 511th, floating down as if from heaven in their white parachutes.

At that same moment the men of the Recon Platoon hit the guard posts and began their race to the guardroom where the off-duty guards had their rifles stored. Those guards were outside doing their regular 7:00 AM morning exercises. The troopers won the race!

We all ran back into the barracks. With bullets flying just over my head through the grass mat walls, I lay on the floor under my bunk, eating my breakfast. I was so hungry that not even bullets could keep me from that pitifully meager portion of watery, buggy, rice mush.

Soon, one of the "Angels" came into our barracks shouting, "Grab only what you can carry and hurry outside to the Amtracs", the Amphibian Tractors that had brought the balance of the attacking 1st Battalion across Laguna de Bay.

They had to get us back safely across the lake to U.S. lines before two thousand crack Japanese troops of the infamous Tiger Division, just over the hill, found out what was going on.

On that day, all 2,142 of us who were still alive, including a newly born baby girl who was carried out in a helmet liner,

were saved. ALL OF US WERE RESCUED!!! NOT ONE OF US WAS LOST!!!

Some time later, I read that they had come to get us because General Douglas MacArthur had received information, from three men who had escaped from our camp, that our guards had been making preparations to dispose of us - digging trenches for our graves and placing oil barrels which could be rolled down the hillside onto the barracks to set them afire - then machine gunning any of us who ran outside.

I also read that this execution had been scheduled for that very morning of February 23, 1945.

To this day, sixty five years later, this singular event of history, this magnificent military operation, this unmatched rescue of starving civilian prisoners of war from behind enemy lines has been overshadowed by the Mount Suribachi flag raising.

They were and are a special breed, those men who came that day. Superbly trained - thank God - men who went home after they served - going on with their lives - not complaining - humble - proud that they served.

When I meet one of my "Angels" for the first time, I take his hand and say, "Thank you for my life". To a man, they immediately insist, "I was just doing my job. You guys were the heroes".

But for the pilots and crews of the 65th Troop Carrier Squadron, the troopers of the 11th Airborne and the men of the 672nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, I would not have survived Los Baños Internment Camp. There would have been no opportunity for me to have a wife, son, daughter, nine wonderful grandchildren (one of whom, SPC Danielle Wheeler, recently returned from serving 14 months at FOB Kalsu, Iraq) and one great-grandchild.

The Wheeler Family - as it exists today - would never have been. I WILL NEVER FORGET!!!



Los Baños internees were evacuated by Amtracs across the Laguna de Bay after the camp was set on fire, pursued by Japanese mortar and machine gun fire.

The Rescue Of Bilibid

John Ream, who was a civilian POW in Bilibid, wrote this article. It is interesting to note that, though shown on the maps used by the U.S. Forces, Bilibid was not known to be a POW prison, even though it was notorious as being the way-station for military POWs shipped to slave labor camps on the Hell Ships. It was first "discovered" by a 1st Cavalry foot patrol on the evening of February 4 when they heard a voice from the other side of the wall. "Hey, are you guys Americans? Can you get us out of here, we're POWs." The next day, the first elements of the 37th Infantry entered Manila on a rickety footbridge, and when they encountered Japanese resistance, sent a platoon to reconnoiter. When the platoon did not report back within an hour, a patrol was sent to look for it. The patrol "rediscovered" Bilibid and its occupants, who included civilians and many severely ill POWs. The next day, February 6, a frantic effort was made to evacuate Bilibid as the Japanese had set fire to the City and flames were approaching what was thought to be an ammunition dump and fuel depot adjacent to the prison.

On December 26, 1944 the Japanese notified the internees of Camp Holmes in Baguio that they were to be transferred to Manila on the 28th and 29th. The convoy of trucks left early in the morning and it was well into the night when the internees arrived at their destination, the old Bilibid Prison in Manila. Everyone was tired and immediately flopped on beds in the three story concrete building in the compound. That night and the next morning it was learned that the mattresses were infested with bedbugs and were soiled with urine and defecation. Three hundred Cholera patients had been moved to make room for the civilians.

20-foot concrete walls with guard towers surrounded Bilibid, and another 20-foot wall separated the internees from the military prisoners on the southern end of the prison. The main building in the northern compound was a three story concrete hospital building built in 1908. At the start of the war this building was in the process of being demolished and the roof had already been removed. The building was also stripped of windows and plumbing. 2" x 4" frames supporting corrugated iron covered the windows. These frames were hinged at the top so that they could swing out and be kept in that position with a pole - for ventilation. A set of one-story cells with bars as outside walls comprised another small building, which was used for those in need of medical attention. One hundred sixty six graves of military prisoners who died in Bilibid during the war lined the inside of the walls. Two latrines had been constructed in the outside yard. These were troughs made by nailing two 6" boards together to make a "V". The trough was slanted into the ground and periodically sloshed with water.

On February 3rd the City was eerily quiet. At dusk a machine gun broke the silence. Internees rushed to the upper floors of the hospital where they could look over the outside wall. Tanks could be seen rolling down Quezon Blvd. a few blocks away - firing at buildings along the way. Hell broke loose that night. A detail of Japanese soldiers went to the roof with Molotov Cocktails. The area of Manila surrounding Bilibid was being demolished; an ammo dump exploded as did the bridges over the Pasig River. The Japanese came down from the roof, and later that day the Japanese informed the internees that they were free, but recommended that they stay inside the Bilibid walls. Before leaving the Japanese placed a 50-gallon drum of gasoline with dynamite attached as a booby trap behind a wooden gate in the wall, hoping to destroy any tank attempting to crash through. Miners, knowledgeable about explosives quickly dismantled the explosive as soon as the Japanese were gone. That night someone had discovered some soybeans left by the Japanese. These were cooked up in a large hospital sterilizer, dispensed and eaten in a festive party.

In the early morning hours of February 5th Sergeant Ray-

ford Anderson and his nine-member squad of the 37th Infantry Division were looking for the Second Platoon when they reached the main entrance to Bilibid Prison. They observed two Japanese guards at the entrance. These guards were immediately killed. A Japanese machine gun opened fire forcing Anderson and his squad to go to the rear of the prison, where they found a locked storage room alongside the prison wall. After gaining entrance to the room they found that by prying away some boards they could look into Bilibid Prison, and saw about fifty people huddled together in the courtyard. These were military prisoners in the southern compound. The Battalion moved in and around the prison and discovered over 1200 military prisoners and civilian internees awaiting liberation.

On the evening of the 5th the fires were making their way towards Bilibid from the Pasig River. The POWs and internees had to be evacuated immediately, but 300 could not walk. The 37th Division called for all rolling stock and those of the internees who could walk were directed to start walking. Later vehicles from the 1st Cavalry assisted and everyone was able to catch a ride to Ang Tibay, a shoe factory north of Bilibid, where the former prisoners were fed K rations. Two days later Bilibid was deemed to be safe, so the internees were returned to await passage to the United States. During the internees absence from Bilibid, the Filipinos, thinking the internees had left for good, had looted what meager possessions that were left there.



The "Old" Bilibid (meaning prison) was built by the Spanish in 1865. It was taken over by the U.S. Government, but being considered inhumane, was replaced by "New" Bilibid, a Federal penitentiary at Multinlupa. New Bilibid is where the Los Baños internees were taken when they were rescued later in the month.

My Story of Santo Tomas

This is an excerpt from Sarah England's story written in Manila in 1950, contributed by David and Sally England Brown. Sarah's room was on the first floor of the Main Building, next to the infirmary, which was used as a surgery on the night of liberation.

Through January of 1945, things progressed in the same monotonous, hungry fashion, and in my room, the husbands of two women had died from starvation. On Saturday evening, Feb. 3, I was sitting in the corridor as usual when a British woman came running up to me in great excitement, "Oh, Mrs. England, the Americans have come. I know it. I have been out back at my daughter's shanty and heard the tanks and saw the Filipinos across the street leaning out of their windows, crying 'The Americanos, the Americanos.'" I looked at her in surprise and sympathy, thinking, "What a pity. This woman has lost her mind, her grief over loss of her husband has unbalanced her."

Finally I was convinced, so hurried to two of my friends and told them with great excitement. (They told me later that they thought my mind had broken.) They hurried to the back door where the crowd assured them that what I had said was the truth.

I then went into my room to watch out of the windows, which faced the main gate. We could hear the commotion and noise, and saw flares at our gate. We heard gunfire, but saw no Japanese guards or officials. We kept repeating, "The Americans are here, the Americans are here." My insides were trembling, but my only thought was, "They're here!"

We could hear the tanks, then a loud noise as they broke through the wall. They came slowly up the roadway right toward us, surrounded by soldiers on foot, guns in readiness pointed outward. Some soldiers went behind the big moving picture screen we had on the plaza, and came out with three Japanese Officers. Two Japanese Officers surrendered, and were taken to a place directly in front of my window across the plaza. The third one shot one of our boys in the leg, and raised his hand to throw a grenade. He was shot several times by the Americans, who were quicker on the trigger, and fell just a few feet to the right of my window.

The tanks and boys continued toward the Education Building, where the Japanese had their offices and quarters. About 40 Japanese, including the Commandant, were trapped in this building along with young men and older boys. The tanks opened fire, but word was sent to them about the hostages and the firing stopped. The capture of 40 Japanese was not worth the death of even one American. When the firing ceased, everybody rushed out of the Main Building.

Everyone was happy, tears, kisses and hugs. The soldiers immediately started giving the children chewing gum, chocolate and crackers. The boys emptied their pockets. Happiness, joy everywhere, in the faces, in the voices.

An American Officer came to me when I was standing in the doorway of my room, and asked if they could put the wounded boys in the beds? Of course. All the mosquito nets were down, so I started with my bed to put them up. Some of my roommates came in and when they saw what I was doing helped. In a few minutes the wounded were brought in. One was brought in on a stretcher covered with a blanket. When this wounded one was put to bed and the blanket taken off his face, there was Abiko, the mean Japanese Officer who had wounded one of our boys, and then been shot. The owner of that bed came in and was terribly upset about the, "Jap in my bed".

An American Internee doctor came into the room and I

said, "Look, Doctor do we have to have that Abiko in here?" He replied, "What, that fellow in here with our good American boys?" He left and returned in a few minutes with four fellow internees. They picked Abiko up by the arms and legs and carried him out. I looked down at him and saw that he was suffering dreadfully; but had absolutely no feeling of compassion or sympathy. He was placed on the floor in a secluded corner of the main lobby, and died in a couple of hours.

The rejoicing and happiness continued and anyone who had saved anything to eat brought it out. Wherever you looked people were eating. My roommates and I had no place to sleep, but that didn't worry us. Sleep was impossible. Sometime early in the morning my friends took me upstairs to their room, and one gave me her bed and slept with her sister. We slept because we were so weak from hunger that even the most wonderful joy in the world exhausted us.

When we woke up, it was daylight and our boys were still there. 700 had come in quietly, orderly. Each boy knew ahead of time what he was to do, and where he was to go. Ditches were dug, telephone wires were all over the ground, and tanks and soldiers were everywhere. Everyone was free, free to walk around and see these wonders. The tanks had names - Georgia Peach, On to Tokyo, Spareparts. That morning we still had rice for breakfast, but a big helping, and not the usual small amount of watery lugao. Our men had broken into the Japanese store-room and found many bags of rice and red kidney beans. That was our diet for three days, big helpings, rice and beans. Many got sick from over eating. These 700 troops, the First Cavalry, had come so fast that the supplies couldn't keep up with them.

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After the hostage situation ended on February 5, a flag that had been smuggled into camp was displayed to rousing cheers.

The Battle for Manila

This is an excerpt from the story told by eyewitness Joseph Romero, who was in the middle of the battle. General Yamashita had decided not to defend Manila, but Admiral Iwabachi with 16,000 Naval Defense troops disobeyed his orders to evacuate, commanded 10,000 additional Army troops, and prepared to die defending the Intramuros and Ermita. The U.S. 37th Infantry and 1st Cavalry attacked from the north and west, while the 11th Airborne advanced from the south. In the fiercest U.S. urban battle of WW II, Manila became the second most destroyed city after Warsaw. About 100,000 civilians died - 20,000 trapped in the Japanese defenses were killed in the crossfire, while 80,000 were executed in what is now called the Manila Massacre.

In mid-1944 we three children returned to Manila to live with my mother and stepfather in Ermita, described in the book *The Battle for Manila*, as the place where, "The foulest organized incident in modern warfare" occurred. My mother is American married to a Filipino, and she and Europeans were required by the Japanese to live in that zone.

I was eleven years old that early February '45 evening, when the city surrounding our house was ablaze. Glowing bits of paper were sailing like leaves against the orange-black sky as we left the house to join the crowd on the plaza, where Japanese troops were trying to create order.

As I shuffled across the street my foot knocked over an inverted flowerpot. I knew this was a cover for an aerial bomb buried with the fuse head up, and I was lucky not to be blown up. We had watched the Japanese dynamiting holes to emplace them, and we memorized these locations so we could warn the American tankers.

In the plaza, soldiers sorted two thousand of us - men to the left, women and children to the right. A Jap shoved me to the left, but my dad, knowing something was going to happen, pushed me to the other side. My dad later said the men were walked to the Manila hotel, and later taken out in groups of 30 and killed - the human stack was baled with wire, gasoline thrown, followed by a grenade.

We women and children were driven at bayonet point to the Bay View Hotel, which was now empty of furniture. Shoved into rooms, we sat on the floor all night while American artillery pounded against the outside walls, causing the building to shake, with deafening noise and flashes of light.

There was no food or water. We drank from the toilets, rationing out a few gulps a day. When the toilets ran dry, my mother pretended to be crazy and complained to an officer so much that he grabbed my 10 year old sister and me, and handed us buckets to get water from the Manila Hotel swimming pool. Accompanied by a soldier, we ran, ducking into Japanese bunkers when the shelling got deadly. The American shelling was predictable, and we could count on a lull after a heavy barrage. Back at the hotel, I found a couple of crates of hard biscuits, and that was our bread and water for about a week.

The Japanese started taking the young girls out of the rooms to rape them. My sister hid by lying down behind my mother, younger brother, and me. With my mother acting crazy the Japanese did not come near us and didn't see her.

After a week, the building started to burn, probably set on fire by the Japanese who would not let us leave. My mother convinced the officer in charge to let us go, and we streamed out of the building into the shelling. The entire Ermita was rubble, and we instinctively hit the ground when we heard the whistle of incoming fire. One time, I heard incoming, and flattened face down on one side of a fallen tree. The shell exploded on the other side, probably not more than five to ten yards from me

We looked for any structure that would give us cover. The first place we went had a missing wall so we could see the Bay View Hotel. Suddenly a terrific explosion shook the hotel, followed by a second blast. The building withstood both events; but had we remained, we would not have. We started to run from ruin to ruin, hoping to get nearer the American lines, and now there was no food or water.

We were lying on the floor of another room at ground level, when a shell landed on the other side of the wall, which collapsed, and we saw a group of refugees in the smoke, dying people with no way for us to help. We found other small groups in other rooms, and then a surprising thing happened. A couple of Caucasian men in civilian clothes, speaking unaccented English approached our group with a soupy pot of boiled rice; but we never saw the guardian angels again.

The shelling got worse and worse, with too many hits and deaths. The upper floors of buildings were infested with Japanese soldiers, and people said, "They have to shell because of the Japanese". It was decided that blonde women and children would step outside and wave a white flag at the Piper Cub spotter planes; but that didn't work because within a few minutes the shelling opened up in a saturation mode.

We found a house and I lay on the floor of the kitchen. Then there was a terrific explosion in the living room. A mother emerged carrying the upper part of her four or five-year-old daughter, while another daughter carried the child's leg. We left the building for the streets again, thinking that the Japanese must have planted a booby trap.

We were crossing debris when a Japanese soldier ran by waving a pistol at us; but he didn't shoot. As I write this I have

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GIs walking through the destruction of Manila

Liberation Vignettes

There were three great raids that made history in 1945. The first was the 6th Ranger Battalion operation to free the POWs at Cabanatuan on January 30. The second was the 1st Cavalry flying column that raced 100 miles to free the prisoners at Santo Tomas, which has been called one of the most dramatic rescues in the history of warfare. And the third was the coordinated land, air, and amphibious rescue of the prisoners at Los Baños by the 11th Airborne Division, called one of the best-planned and successful operations of the war. The Battle of Manila fought by the 1st Cavalry, 37th Infantry, and 11th Airborne divisions also made history as the fiercest urban battle fought by U.S. Forces. During the Gulf War I, this battle was studied as a model of how the U.S forces would have to fight if they invaded Baghdad. There was nothing easy about fighting a fanatical Japanese force and the men who witnessed the liberation of the camps had this to say.

Bill Dunn – CBS News Radio – War Correspondent who accompanied General MacArthur to Leyte and Luzon - On General MacArthur’s reasoning for the push to Manila “Nowhere else in history of warfare will you find an instance of a military commander sending a force of barely eight hundred men into a city of more than a million population known to be held by the equivalent of several divisions of infantry. It was impossible, and the Japanese knew it was impossible. That was the premise on which MacArthur founded his entire strategy for the thrust. Based on his long association with the Oriental and his study of this particular Oriental, he was sure the Japanese would mark the progress of this fragile column and, from the very first, not believe what they saw. Furthermore, he didn’t want the 37th to arrive at the same time as ‘the flying column’ because the arrival of a full division while the Japs were trying to solve the enigma of this small force might prompt large-scale fighting before the internees were in protective hands.”

Sgt. Austin E. Aulds – C Troop – 1st Medical Squadron “We set up an Aid Station just inside the Main Building (at STIC). There were some interned Army nurses who helped us operate it. Later I went into the main lobby and everyone wanted a souvenir from us. I gave away all my cigarettes. They even took my ammo for my Thompson sub-machine gun. We signed autographs and they treated us like heroes. I didn’t feel like a hero. I was sitting in a chair about midnight upstairs above the lobby smoking a cigarette with about 4 or 5 young girls. They were asking me all kinds of questions about what was happening back in the States – like the latest movies and music. One little girl about 9 years old was sitting on my lap from Baltimore. One of the girls, Ann Davis, was killed by a Jap shell several days later.”

Cpl. Leon D’Angelo – C Troop – 8th Engineer Combat SQ “We went through the gate and were ordered, ‘You right! You left!’ - as we filed right down along the wall. Beside the tanks, we also had a bulldozer that was driven by Gilstrap. He lived about 5 miles from me back home. Oh, God! These people were all skin and bones. I wasn’t ready for this, they were so thin and weak, they could hardly stand up. ‘God Bless You,’ they said. ‘You have come.’”

General Henry J. Muller Jr – Brig. General (Ret) – 11th Airborne – Instrumental in planning Liberation Raid for Los Baños “The memory of this operation has been a lasting satisfaction for me. It is seldom in wartime that a soldier has a chance to assist in the rescue of his countrymen from a desperate and precarious situation.”

Bob Allen – Santo Tomas/Los Baños prisoner on the Raid of Los Baños “Suddenly I beheld a sight (in the middle of the lake after rescue) which I will always remember. Spread out



Ruined Manila—airial photo from near Santo Tomas and Bilibid

almost uniform lines abreast were dozens of Amtracks – each one flying the American Flag. I realized at that moment the things my Country’s flag stood for. The freedom to simply walk around and have outspoken opinions, the unhesitating courage of men who voluntarily would participate in a rescue such as ours for people they did not know, and the opportunities we would all have to make a fresh start in life.”

Carl Mydans – Time and Life War Photojournalist – With the 1st Cavalry Division “Flying Column” heading to Manila “From the moment our troops broke into Santo Tomas, liberators and liberated were drawn together with a magnetic force, the troopers feeling a kind of deep, paternal love for these abused and blighted and unnerved people, giving them of their own short rations until they themselves were without food, helping in strong and easy motions with prison household tasks, and listening by the hour to painful stories of injury and longing and starvation. The prisoners returned a different kind of love, adoring and worshipful. For to them these soldiers were the fulfillment of every single dream the prisoners had in captivity.”

Carl Salonitis – 37th Division – “Ohio Buckeyes.” Bilibid/Intramuros/Manila Liberation “This tour of duty will always be an important part of my life. It was a battle to remember.”

George Fisher – Company B – Serial 2 – 44th Tank Battalion – Flying Column - 1st Cavalry Division - on the Georgia Peach “I heard the CO of B Company tell the rest of the 3rd Platoon he was going to crash through the gate and we were to follow. After reaching the Main Building, we were told to surround the Education Building where 60 some Japs soldiers were holding out on the 2nd floor holding men and boys prisoners

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Word of Mouth

Book Review by Cecily Marshall

Child of War: Son of Angels

Curtis Whitfield Tong

iInfinity, Inc., New York, Bloomington. 2009

In the past few years there has been a spate of books about the Philippine civilian prisoner of war experience written by authors who were young children or barely teenagers at the time. Why this sudden rush to get those years down on paper? Of course there is the obvious: leaving a history for ones' heirs. Finding material from ones' deceased parents, which answer questions never asked or answered. Then there is the personal one: dealing with one's own unresolved issues and attempting to reconcile the indelible impression the prison experience left on the authors in their formative years. Time is marching on, and everyone who endured those years has a story to tell. Witnesses to the same event will recount the experience in his or her unique way, adding variations to the theme. This uniqueness is what makes the newest books good reading.

Curtis Tong's book falls into the category of, "all of the above!" But there is a twist, which makes this recounting distinctive.

The Tong family of five lived in Davao, Mindanao prior to the war. The three Tong children, Eloise, Curtis, and Annarae were born in that city to missionary parents, Walter and Margaret Tong. The children enjoyed a fairly carefree but simple life. How many young boys got to travel with their fathers visiting remote mission stations, and bunking in with aboriginal tribes?

The Tongs were concerned with the huge influx of Japanese into the city of Davao and the implications that it held for the future. Yet, like most Americans who saw the handwriting on the wall, they remained. Just prior to the outbreak of war, Mrs. Tong and the three children left Mindanao for Baguio. The children entered Brent School. Mr. Tong visited them at Thanksgiving 1941. That is the last they saw of him for two and a half years.

Like most Baguio residents, the family was interned at Camp John Hay, Camp Holmes and then Bilibid in Manila. Curt's story centers on that of a young boy of eight and nine making it on his own in the camps much of the time. He was at first assigned to the women's quarters only to be shifted off to the men's, where he was privy to conversations, discussions and language that were well beyond his years, which quickly accelerated the maturation process. Left to his own devices, he was able to explore the camp's grounds and form insightful observations about what went on.

Curt missed his father, but felt a responsibility to somewhat fill the void and be helpful and supportive to his mother and younger sisters. He chronicles his mother's positive attitude and the role she played in bringing comfort to the women who were having a more difficult time coping with the cramped conditions and the ensuing stress.

To the family's surprise, Mr. Tong who had been interned in the Davao Internment Camp, and for a time in Santo Tomas, was transferred to Camp Holmes in March of 1944. Much of the family's anxiety was lifted as worry about his situation was alleviated.

The commandants of Camps John Hay and Holmes ran the gamut from the obstinate Nakamura to the "caring and honest" Tomibe who, in contrast to others, demonstrated respect for human life.

Christmas 1944 saw the entire camp being transferred to the forbidding, decaying fortress of a prison in Manila...Bilibid. Starving, emaciated remnants of the survivors of the Bataan Death March shared the prison, although separated by walls. The contrast between the mountain air of Baguio and the rat and varmint infested Bilibid was not the only shock. The meager garden produce of Camp Holmes was now replaced with scrapings off bodega floors. There is a lot of fascination with the military and of the days of liberation and Battle for Manila. However, this is not to the exclusion of the accounts of suffering that follow the barrage of bombs, bullets, and shells.

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Recipe Corner

Liberation Chow - SOS

By Angus Lorenzen

In the latter part of 1944 and early 1945, we obsessed about food. We talked about it, we dreamed of it, and we watched our fellows die from the lack of it. When the Flying Column entered Manila to rescue the prisoners at Santo Tomas, they had outrun their supply column, and the troopers had to survive on K-rations, the high protein tightly packaged meals, a few of which a trooper could throw in his pack or the tankers could strap in cartons on the side of their tanks. We, the liberated ones, subsisted for a few days on rice and beans liberated from the Japanese-managed bodega, though we were liberally plied with goodies from the troopers rations.

Eventually the rear echelon arrived with their portable kitchens and liberal supplies, and we started to get real American home cooking – military style. Somewhere in that few weeks from liberation until repatriation I was introduced to that breakfast so reviled by the GIs. It was called SOS, or as I was allowed to call it, Sh_tuff On a Shingle rather than the more scatological name used by the contemptuous GIs. SOS is a simple breakfast of creamed chipped beef on toast. I loved it; but then anything that wasn't lugao was a delight.

Many years later my niece took Army leave before shipping over to Somalia, visiting some of the far-flung family while driving to her departure point. When she visited us, I offered numerous breakfast choices, and with tongue firmly in cheek, threw in SOS knowing how much she must despise it. To my dismay, she brightened when she heard SOS, and that was her choice.

Heck, I was stuck. A promise is a promise, but SOS isn't featured in any cookbooks that I know, so it was a matter of improvising. Here is what resulted, with a little experimenting along the way. I tried to be true to my memories, but years of my wife's gourmet cooking has jaded me. Still, the young corporal gave it her stamp of approval by cleaning her plate – not as good as the mess hall, but passable.

Sh..tuff on a Shingle

1 cup milk
2 tbs cornstarch
1 - 4 oz package chipped beef, or substitute
corned beef
2 oz mozzarella cheese
A touch of salt and pepper
4 slices of toasted Wonder bread (I used sliced
sourdough)

In a saucepan, blend milk and cornstarch and heat until thickened. Add chipped beef and cheese, and continue to stir over low heat. Spoon over toasted bread, then close your eyes and drift back to the good old days when Army chow was heaven.

My Story of Santo Tomas (continued from Page 4)

The Japanese stayed in the Education Building with their hostages until Monday morning, when they surrendered under the premise that they be would escorted out of the camp and released. I was looking out of the window when they were taken out. What a wonderful sight, these ill clothed, dirty-uniformed Japanese huddled together, with their guns, but surrounded by big American boys with their guns aimed at them. They were released about 8 or 10 blocks from the camp. It is our belief that the Filipinos made sure that not a single one got away.

The hours flew like magic for the next few days. Tuesday afternoon the wounded boys in my room were moved to a regular hospital. On Wednesday morning, the Red Cross set up a table and distributed letters from home, the first many internees had received for three years. Letters, although written the November before, were like a fresh breeze from home, from our loved ones. The Red Cross gave us paper and envelopes to answer our letters, and mail would go out the next morning. Our rescue seemed genuine and complete with the receipt of these letters.

The liberated internees did not anticipate the trauma that would strike later that same day. The story continues in our next issue.

Liberation Vignettes (continued from Page 6)

hostage. After the firing stopped from the tanks trying to get the enemy to surrender, a young English youth of 16 yrs of age came over where I was manning a MG, offering to take my place in order to give me some sleep. This request, I had to refuse. However, if I would have agreed to his request, I could have been court martialed. His name was Charlie Davies."

Frank Mendez – 1st Cavalry , Flying Column, entered Santo Tomas 3 February 1945 "I always look forward to attending these reunions with all the wonderful children who are now grown. Being part of such a rescue operation will be so special and important to me for the rest of my life."

Both Tanker Fisher and Trooper Mendez remain good friends with the prisoners they liberated 65 years ago.

The Battle for Manila (continued from Page 5)

lost count of these close calls and I have only written of the memorable ones, not counting starving as one.

Continuing through more rubble and burnt out buildings, we heard small arms fire. Someone said that there were Caucasian soldiers nearby, but did not know if they were Germans or Americans. My mother said without hesitation, "We're going to the lines. Whatever they are they can't be any worse than these Japs." I ran towards the American lines with Japanese in the upper floors shooting, kicking up spouts of dirt about me.

We reached a quiet vacant street with three dead Japs in the middle. Their bodies were black and bloated, the skin had split in places with yellow fat visible. The maggots made their eyes and mouths look like they were full of boiled rice moving incessantly. Tired, I sat on a curb, and noticed that behind us on the sidewalk were five or six more putrid bloated bodies. "Mom, they're Filipinos, their hands are tied behind them."

Then we heard English voices from behind a low cement wall. Someone in our party yelled, "We're Americans." From behind the wall came, "So are we lady. Get back. In about five minutes the artillery is going to open up right where you stand." Prudently we moved on, and a while later found several GIs sitting on the ground, eating k-rations. We had finally escaped the Japs!

Word of Mouth (continued from Page 7)

Now to the "twist" mentioned in the opening paragraph. Following a short epilogue is a chapter entitled: "A Tale of Two Japanese Soldiers." In it Curt compares and contrasts two of the commandants: Mukaibo and Tomibe, evaluating their tenures objectively.

Curt spent considerable time in Japan, seeking ex-enemies. He queried them and spent time in their homes, creating a theme of reconciliation that makes this book distinctive. The author quotes from Archbishop Desmond Tutu who urged: "Open up old wounds so that we can cleanse them...then we can move into the glorious future that is opening up for us."

Child of War comes full circle. The story is told of a little boy who lives the horrors of imprisonment and war. As a man he seeks to reconcile with those who had a hand in taking away his boyhood.

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