

LIBERATION 1945

At Santo Tomas Internment Camp, we knew from the San Francisco Treasure Island Radio News that the American Forces were on their way to Manila and, also, that they had rescued the American military prisoners at Capas. We did not know how fast they were advancing nor what sort of resistance the Japanese were putting up.

On the morning of Saturday the third of February 1945 it did not seem that there would be anything special about this particular day. But, around noon, several ~~of these small 'spotter'~~ ^{fighter} planes came straight down from the north. They flew over our camp and close to the central tower of the University where, since 1942 the Japanese had been concentrating enemy civilians. We could see the pilots waving.

Quickly, reports swept the camp that a pilot had dropped a message as he passed. Indeed he had. A pair of goggles had landed in the east patio of the main building, telling us that rescue was near. The message was reported to read "Roll out the barrel. Santa Claus is coming on Sunday or Monday". (this was Saturday noon)

As the afternoon came and, with it, dusk we heard a good deal more firing from light weapons than we had heard before. We presumed that the guerrilla^s were getting more active. The firing became continuous from the north and, also, we heard the sound of heavier tanks than the Japanese had ever operated within our hearing. We simply concluded that they had brought up their front line equipment to get ready for the assault on Manila.

We were not expecting anything immediate, especially as the Japanese military detachment in the camp did not seem to be disturbed or to alter any of its routines in spite of the noise of the firing, and of heavy vehicles continuing and increasing. There was a much heavier exchange of firing down towards or beyond the Far Eastern University.

At about 9.00 p.m. the camp was quiet and most of the people had gone to their beds or whatever. Then there was the sound of heavy vehicles on España Street, followed by a commotion near the front gate.

Suddenly a bright spotlight from near the gate flashed around and across the Main building. ^{The intercom remained as silent as voice and the Americans feared that the buildings had been evacuated} A Voice - an American Voice - on a loud hailer shouted "Are there any Americans here". Three thousand voices shouted "YES".

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Engines started up and a tank, jeeps and cannon rolled up towards the buildings. The name on the first tank was "Battling Basic". For a long time the internees went on singing "God Bless America" and other patriotic airs so loud ^{that they could} be heard by our families living a couple of miles away.

Meanwhile those Japanese who had not been overwhelmed during the skirmish at the gate retreated into the nearby building, known to us as the "Education Building" where, at one end, they had their offices and quarters on the Ground floor. This narrow building became the front part of the U.S.T. Hospital as we now know it. The Japanese moved up into the rest of the building and mingled with the several hundred male internees who were housed there. The Americans, then, could not fire into the building. But one Japanese remained near a window facing the Main building with an automatic weapon of sorts with which he exchanged fire with a tank that was parked alongside that small office building situated between the Education

(Early the following day, before dawn, a truce was arranged and the
and Main buildings. Japanese group was escorted out of the U.S.T. area and to the Japanese lines.

So soon as the American soldiers arrived my wife and I dashed
down into the ^{camp} office to complete our Gestetner work - to put in the
final date and other finishing touches to the pamphlet you have in your
hand. Our duplicator was in that little office building just out
of the line of fire between the tank and the Japanese soldier. We were
very weak and turning that handle was tiring work. We took it in turns to
do the work and to rest - to look out of the window and admire the pretty
machine gun bullets flying about ^{by}. It never occurred to us that a small
deviation in the ^{aim} of that soldier would have polished us off.

~~I have to thank Mr. [redacted], who has so kindly had re-printed
for these copies which he has so kindly had re-printed.~~

Other things were going on in that little office. The Manila Press
group, led by Dave Boguslav of the Manila Times and Bessie Hackett of the
Manila Daily Bulletin, had found Bill Dunn who had come back to Manila in one
of those jeeps. They had much to tell each other and Bill had his carton of
"K" rations which contained, amongst other things, a tin of coffee. They
couldn't wait. They broke up the chairs, started a fire in the middle of
the tiled floor and soon had a can of water boiling. ^{My wife} Dolly and I enjoyed that
coffee also, when we had completed our work.

The American military unit that stormed Santo Tomas was from the
First Cavalry Division headed by General William Chase, which General
MacArthur had sent to Manila to secure the Santo Tomas Civilian Camp, Bilibid
which held military prisoners and Malacañan Palace, the symbolic seat of the
Philippine Government. This group of tanks and jeeps had orders to stop for
nothing, not to fight, just to make its objectives. They moved so fast that
the Japanese only succeeded in blowing up the road bridges and culverts after
the group had passed.

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intelligence reports from Manila that the Japanese High Command intended to disband
the camps of the civilian and military prisoners and take them ^{away from} Manila.

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The northern half of Manila was soon secured right down to the Pasig River. ^{whilst} The retreating Japanese destroyed all the bridges and held the South. ^{pass here}

We ^{must} not fail to remember that February 3 ^{also} was the start of a month of hell for the southern half of the city, which was ~~was~~ almost totally destroyed, and that some 90 to 100 thousand persons, mostly civilians, were killed in that battle.

Address delivered to the Mahanti Robair Club
at the Peninsula Hotel Ballroom on 5 Febry 1985

Revere Ruland