



## From the Commander

Our reunion in February in Fremont was a great success with more than 150 people attending, and we feature a summary and some of the pictures taken during the event. Following the reunion, Sascha Jansen led a group of 46 people back to the Philippines, and they visited the site of the camps at Santo Tomas, Los Baños, and Baguio.

Our descendents group really took off at the reunion, with a breakfast where they discussed how the descendents could become more active in the BACEPOW organization. They followed up the talk with action, putting up an Internet forum that now includes posts from interested people, and many many pictures. We would be delighted to have more people post pictures to this site, particularly if they are for pre- and post-war events and people. The site is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bacepowkids/>. Visit it, join the group, and post your ideas and comments.

We also now have a website for BACEPOW. It is just a starter site with basic information, but it is up and running and we'll expand it to provide more information and coming events. You can reach it at [www.bacepow.org](http://www.bacepow.org).

We have an active year ahead, with several meetings planned, so see the section, Mark Your Calendar, that gives dates and places. Particularly note that we are planning a 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Liberation reunion at Fremont, California on January 22, 23, and 24, 2010. Directly afterwards, Sascha Jansen will lead another Philippines tour, with a special celebration at the University of Santo Tomas on February 3. Hope to see you there.

Angus Lorenzen, Commander



Amtracs head into the Laguna de Bay carrying the rescued prisoners from Los Baños to safety at Multinlupa inside the U.S. lines.

## Camp Profile

*This is the third in our series of articles about the civilian prison camps in Japanese-occupied East Asia. John Montessa, the author of this article, was in the first group dispatched to build Los Baños in 1943. The dramatic rescue of the prisoners by the 11th Airborne Division is still considered one of the best-planned actions of World War II, with a minimum of casualties to the U.S. forces. Tragedy struck after the evacuation of the rescued prisoners when the Japanese returned to the town of Los Baños and massacred 1,500 civilians in retaliation for their assistance to the U.S. forces.*

### Los Baños Internment Camp

In the early months of 1943 the Japanese authorities in charge of the internment of American and Allied civilian nationals in the occupied Philippines were confronted with the problem of the ever increasing internee population in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp located in Manila. Their proposal was to create an additional camp on the acreage available at the University of the Philippines Agricultural College adjacent to the town of Los Baños in Laguna province on the shores of Laguna de Bay, a large lake in central Luzon.

Accordingly, on May 14, 1943 seven hundred and eighty-six single male internees and twelve U.S. Navy nurses were transported to the site. Arriving at the site, it was immediately apparent that the permanent pre-war buildings could house only the newly arrived seven hundred and ninety-six internees; and then, only in an extremely crowded condition.

Early on, the commandant put the internees to work, excavating the gradual slope in order to erect barracks. On the basis that there were insufficient rations to support hard manual labor, the internees' governing committee protested. The Japanese finally relented and resorted to contracting with outside interests for both the excavations and barrack construction. From photos on file of the housing for military prisoners at Cabanatuan, the construction was similar except that the civilian camp's barracks had cubicles for two persons each. Thus, the Japanese did make some distinction between civilian and military POWs.

Before the barracks were ready for occupancy, on December 10, 1943 an additional two hundred and seven internees from Santo Tomas arrived. Between that arrival and the next one, twenty-six barracks with adjoining toilet and washroom facilities were completed, after which, most of the permanent buildings were vacated and occupied by the Japanese garrison. Then, on April 7, 1944, five hundred and thirty men, women



Baguio/Bilbid



Los Baños



Descendents Forum



Santo Tomas

## BACEPOW 2009 Reunion

## Recipe Corner

A grand time was had by all at the BACEPOW reunion, held in Fremont, California from February 13 through 15, which was attended by 150 people, 28 of them from out-of-state. Following the reunion, 46 people left for Manila on a tour to visit the war sites and the prison camps.

The reunion was held in February to commemorate the 1945 liberation of the 3 principal civilian camps in the Philippines. Santo Tomas was liberated on February 3, Baguio/Bilibid on February 5, and Los Baños on February 23. 6500 civilian POWs survived these camps, while more than 500 died by execution, starvation, or were killed in action.

On the facing page are groups who attended the reunion from each of the camps.

One of the main themes of the presenters was that the ex-prisoners should be telling their stories now to contribute to the living history before it is lost forever and distorted by contemporary historians and novelists. People were also admonished to be sure that the stories are historically accurate because new books are appearing that are complete fabrications and demean our true history with absurd distortions. (See Word of Mouth in this issue). We must keep the record straight.

The other theme was that the descendents of the ex-prisoners must now step forward to participate in BACEPOW, and to be the future of the organization. To facilitate this, BACEPOW has created two seats on the Board of Directors exclusively for descendents. At the reunion, a forum was held for descendents to discuss how they can contribute to the organization. On the facing page are descendents who attended the forum and participated in the reunion.

Featured speakers included Angus Lorenzen who described methods of publishing personal stories, Roger Mansell discussed his project to document all WW II prison camps and the people held in them, Walter Riley explained how civilians ex-POWs fit into the American Ex-Prisoners of War organization (AXPOW), and Kinue Tokudome described her project to educate Japanese people about the treatment of WW II civilian and military POWs. Two members of the Army rescue units were present, and Hal Jones described the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne operation to rescue the Los Baños prisoners, while Frank Mendez gave a moving talk about entering Santo Tomas on the night of liberation and the emotional greetings from those who were liberated. This was the most emotional presentation of the whole day, and there weren't many dry eyes in the audience.

The Keynote speech at the Banquet was given by Angus Lorenzen who explained that this was the 65th anniversary of 1944, the year of starvation. We celebrate our survival, while memorializing those who did not make it.

*John Montessa who contributed the profile on Los Baños Internment Camp also wrote a description of the food they had. It is a long article and will be serialized in the next editions of Beyond the Wire.*

### Haute Cuisine

In 1944 the tide of war had shifted for Imperial Japan and this fact was reflected in the daily fare of the unfortunates behind the 'sawali' and barbed wire enclosure of the internment camp in Los Baños. There is an irony when one considers that the site was located on the acreage of the University of The Philippines' agricultural college.

Of bounty there was none. The Japanese authority provided only a minimum of foodstuffs, consisting mainly of leafy greens, mongo beans, bananas and coconuts, rice, salt and an occasional supply of carabao [water buffalo] meat. They did allow outside vendors to conduct business with the internees. Needless to say, their business was that of selling additional edibles to those that had money to pay for them. Many internees did not have any money unless they performed tasks for those able to pay for services such as laundry, cleaning and whatever else a monied person did not wish to do. Two enterprising individuals established a 'café' serving only pancakes and ersatz coffee. Their business was brisk but its' life was short as the outside vendors were terminated by the Japanese in early 1944.

Early on, with the establishment of the camp in May 1943, a truck garden was created under the direction of the internee committee. This acreage was planted with 'camotes' [a tuber of Mexican origin, introduced during the Spanish regime], tomatoes, eggplant, fava beans, and two other 'salad' vegetables that remain embedded in the survivors' memories to this day. They were 'talinum' and pigweed. I cannot believe that they would be part of anybody's peacetime diet. Whoever thought that those two would contribute to the camp's survival?

The internee committee was also able to obtain some additional land which was apportioned out to any individual who was willing to cultivate it. Reflecting back on it, it is wryly humorous that each plot was not any bigger than a large living room. However, it was an opportunity. I obtained a plot and planted a number of papaya trees and more camotes. Papayas could be used in a variety of ways. When green, they could be prepared in the same manner as cole-slaw. The seeds from a ripe papaya could be toasted in a pan with a minimum amount of vegetable oil and were then a substitute for GrapeNuts! At least, hungry people thought so. Best of all, papayas could be sold for U.S. dollars at \$5 each for one the size of a small mango. In the war years a \$5 bill was quite an amount of money when the average U.S. factory-worker weekly wage was \$50. The \$5 dollars could then be used however one pleased. In my case, breakfasting at the 'café' on pancakes and coffee was a real treat. Ha! Ha!

*To Be Continued*

### WE KNEW YOU WHEN

*In this column we will honor those who have passed on. Please help us in our efforts to keep everyone informed by submitting the obituary notices of our friends who have died.*

**ROBIN PRISING**

**ROBERTA OLSON SLIVON**

**PAUL FLORENZ**

**DAVID BARNETT**

**DOROTHY KNEEDLER LAWENDA**

**ROSARIO OCCHIPINTI**

**HAROLD PENNY**

## Los Baños Internment Camp (continued from Page 1)

and children, again from Santo Tomas arrived. In December, 1944 the last transfer from Santo Tomas took place with the arrival of one hundred and fifty more. The total was now one thousand, six hundred and eighty-five POWs, not counting the religious contingent who were brought in as small groups during this last year. A final count of inmates upon liberation was 2,146.

As in Santo Tomas, the internees governed themselves through the Internee Committee, whose governance was subject to approval of the commandant. Teams of workers were assigned to the various details involved running the camp kitchen, collecting firewood, maintaining the truck garden, sanitation work, carpentry and plumbing, public works, etc.; the whole myriad of tasks that a small town of over two thousand would require. The wonder of it all was that it was accomplished with very few resources.

In 1944 the United States inflicted great losses upon the Japanese Empire. The effects were immediate upon the Los Baños camp. Extreme restrictions were placed upon movement within the perimeter, diminution of food rations resulted in malnutrition with consequent disease and death. Demoralization set in and lethargy prevailed. The last three weeks of February, 1945 saw the camp in actual starvation mode existing on approximately eight hundred calories per day.

Deliverance through an air assault by the 511<sup>th</sup> Airborne, a U.S. Army Pathfinder team and a guerilla force ultimately freed the 2,146 civilian POWs on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1945. This exploit received little notice, being overshadowed that same day with the raising of the Stars and Stripes on Mt. Suribachi at Iwo Jima. However, the survivors have always held their rescuers in the highest regard.



Freed Prisoners from Los Baños are served a meal by the Army at the former U.S. Federal penitentiary at Multinlupa where they were taken after their rescue.



Former prisoners plant a memorial tree at Los Baños to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation in 2005.

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## Volunteer to Help Veterans

*MaryJane Laznibat, a Director of BACEPOW and member of AXPOW, and her husband, Stephen, are highlighting an opportunity for members who wish to volunteer in assisting veterans.*

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On November 20, 2008 Steve and I attended the Veteran's Affairs Voluntary Service meeting held at Fort Miley in San Francisco. We were invited to attend the meeting by David Tejada, Commander and AXPOW representative of the Luzviminda Chapter and Jesus Okialda. (Luzviminda is an acronym of Luzon, Visayan and Mindinao). The meeting was presided over by James McDermott, Acting Chief of Voluntary Services.

The purpose of the Voluntary Services is to attend to the auxiliary needs of the veteran patients. The retirement building houses some POW patients from the Pacific theater, who are members of the Luzviminda Chapter. Some of the things needed are new socks, used books

and warm jackets because it is cold and windy near the ocean, and, as always, money donations. Whatever is obtained from the volunteers is given to the patients.

At the January meeting, friendly visiting and respite services were discussed for the future and there were possible plans for a "Welcome Home" festivity for soldiers who will return from the active duty. With our troops coming home soon, we could help with their needs as others did for us.

The next meeting is May 21, 2009. To apply as a volunteer, Contact:

Antonio (Tony) LeRoy, Voluntary Service Specialist  
135 VA Med Center  
4150 Clement Street  
San Francisco, CA 94121  
tel: 415-750-2144  
fax: 415-750-2119  
E-Mail [Antonio.LeRoy@Med.va.gov](mailto:Antonio.LeRoy@Med.va.gov)

## Word of Mouth

This is a continuing column of book reviews by Sascha Jansen to highlight books about the World War II prisoner experience.

### THROUGH MY MOTHER'S EYES

by Michael McCoy with Jean Marie Heskett  
Strategic Book Publishing Co, New York

Meant to be a factual account of the perils, misadventures and Eloise type imagery of a 6 year old girl child as she enters the gates of Santo Tomas, the author turns this biographical tale of WWII in the Philippines into a deep, deceiving sink hole of fiction. Watch your step!

I do not fault the author, McCoy, in this often-startling tale of hurling stories of untruths set through the dates of January 1942 – April 1945. After all, these tales of intrigue were dictated by his mother to her son to tell her “own” account of the war. Michael McCoy, with his mother, Jean Marie Heskett, had a great collaborative idea about how to tell a good story. However, the stories are too good in part, telling the reader more than meets the eye.

If writers could just relate real stories without peppering the truths with legendary fabrications, they would really have a masterpiece of adventure. As a son, McCoy trusted his mother. As a journalist he failed to verify!

Heskett relates that when the camp Commandant Hayaishi had taken the Education Building and its prisoners hostage, the U.S. command was looking for an interpreter to coach Jap snipers from existing bomb shelters. General Chase chose little 9 yr. old, Jean Marie to be the interpreter.

According to the book, she offered her linguistic services to the General, as she spoke some Japanese and was willing to help. Since the General had “no other interpreters”, he gladly accepted the offer and pressed her into service to coax the Japanese snipers to surrender and come out of the shelters. After she poked her head in the shelter, she pleaded for the enemy to come out. She understood them to say to each other that they would die rather than surrender. After she told the General what she heard, the GI's grabbed their flamethrower, pointed the nozzle into the pit, and, “Blooley,” charred Yakitori!

This is fable on two points. First, General Chase traveled with a Nisei, Sgt. Kenji K. Uyesugi, G-2, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, Divi-

sion Headquarters. A very little known fact to the general public, the Nisei contingent of Military Intelligence were kept under wraps for the most part, the U.S. not wanting the enemy knowing of its existence. There were interpreters in abundance to assist General Chase, including Sgt. Uyesugi, another Nisei, Tad (Tadashi) Nomura, and our very own British Santo Tomas internee by the name of Earl Stanley, with another prisoner, Frank Carey, who were always with General Chase and Colonel Brady from the time the First Cavalry entered the camp compound. And second, No Japanese were outside the Education Building in shelters during this two day siege.

Another unbelievable tale is the story of the total obliteration of eight British and Australian women prisoners who were in the Main Building sipping tea during the infamous shelling of the camp. There they were at teatime, contently savoring the welcomed brew, when “Blooley,” they were blown to smithereens by an incoming shell, hide and hair splattered to kingdom come - all dead, witnessed by little Jean Marie (and, it seems, only Jean Marie).

This devastating incident never happened! Fred Stevens definitive 1946 book, *Santo Tomas Internment Camp*, lists the death of eleven men and six women by Japanese artillery fire.

In this book, there are pictures about our experiences in camp and also official war pictures. The caption under a picture of little Jean Marie and her friends, on her way to the United States, tells us that it was taken on the SS Jean Lafitte. Then in a chapter describing her voyage to freedom, she tells the reader she was on the SS Admiral Capps. Which is it? Then in a disturbing flamboyant account, she relates to her unsuspecting son/author, that Kamikaze planes attacked the Admiral Capps and the rest of the ships in the convoy! Ayamatta! Ayamatta! Taku-san no kaze!

This book reviewer and family were all on the Admiral Capps. I was twelve years old and will tell you unequivocally, that not a single Kamikaze plane attacked us during any part of our trip.

Well, you get the picture. There are many more unbelievable, disturbing passages, out-and-out lies and “facts” in this otherwise pretty believable account of one family's story, if they would only stick to reality. One does not need to resort to subterfuge to tell a good story – duping the public will have us dining out on this meal for a long time to come. Please, pass the Grey Poupon!

## Mark Your Calendar

June 6, 2009 – Saturday

### BACEPOW LUNCH & PROGRAM

Alameda Elks Lodge – Alameda, California

11:30 – Reception - 12:30 – Buffet Lunch – Program to Follow

Board Meeting @ 10:00 – Preceding Reception

August 15, 2009 – Saturday

### BACEPOW LUNCH & PROGRAM

SF Peninsula

Location and program being planned

August 15, 2009 – Saturday

### BACEPOW LUNCH & PROGRAM

Southern California

Location and program being planned

October 3, 2009- Saturday

### BACEPOW LUNCH & PROGRAM

Alameda Elks Lodge – Alameda, California

11:30 – Reception – 12:30 Buffet Lunch – Program to Follow

Board Meeting @ 10:00 – Preceding Reception

January 22, 23, and 24 – 2010

### SIXTY-FIFTH LIBERATION REUNION – San Francisco Bay Area.

January 25<sup>th</sup> – February 6<sup>th</sup> 2010

### BACK TO THE PHILIPPINES TOUR – 65<sup>th</sup> LIBERATION

For information contact Sascha Jansen at mabuhayma@aol.com or (530) 795-0411

## BACEPOW Board of Directors

We have been asked to put a face on that anonymous group who runs our organization, so here they are.



Left to right, Angus Lorenzen, Frank Stagner Membership Chairman emeritus, MaryJane Laznibat, Sascha Jansen, Sally Connelly, Marjorie Wagstaff, Paula Jansen, John Ream, Ric Lawrence

### BACEPOW Board of Directors

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### Editorial Policy

The editorial staff of *Beyond the Wire* encourages all those who are former prisoners of the Japanese to submit stories and article for publication in future issues. This is "living history" that provides important first-hand information about the prisoners experience that will soon be lost as contemporary historians and fiction writers distort the true facts of what really happened. The information provided to this publication should be factual and based on first-hand knowledge. Submit anecdotes, recipes, or historical information in a form that is suitable for publication. Send your information to BACEPOW Newsletter at 15 Diamonte Lane, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275, or to bacepow@earthlink.net.

### Events

October 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 – Celebrate the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Leyte Liberation at The General MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia. Authors of WWII events in the Philippines will be guest speakers, and Peter Parson's new documentary of the Philippine Guerrillas, *Unsundered*, will be shown. Contact: james.zobel@norfolk.gov

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(Address Label)