Beyond the Wire

CPOW
Civilian Ex-Prisoners of War
(Formerly BACEPOW)

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From the Commander

This January edition is full of interesting and important information. One change from our usual practice is that we will not be collecting dues this year. We are transitioning Treasurer and Membership responsibilities from our dear Cindie Leonard to another Board member still to be decided. Cindie will remain on our Board but has asked to relinquish the roles she has handled so wonderfully over the past years. So do NOT send a check to us until you hear otherwise … a rare plea to not send money!

We're fortunate to have another outstanding article in this newsletter from Mary Beth Klee. It is a "sneak peek" at the book she is writing on the same topic, "Let's Show Them How Democracy Works!"

Also in this edition, we have updates on several items including the status of Lewis-Films' upcoming documentary "The Last Reunion" by Arden Lewis and her team. We also have information on a trip through the WWII Museum in New Orleans that we need to gauge members' interest in; descendant Kirstin Everard is leading that effort.

We have an important update from Cecilia Gaerlan, Executive Director, Bataan Legacy Historical Society, on the Coalition for WWII Nurses Congressional Gold Medal efforts. This is long overdue recognition for the military nurses of WWII, but it involves an uphill battle getting both the House and Senate to agree to support it. I have included the memories of one internee, Martin Meadows (my father), of his experience being the beneficiary of the dedication of one nurse who helped him in Santo Tomas. If you have memories of your experience with a nurse, please send them to me and I will share them with Cecilia to help in the effort.

Speaking of memories, I appreciate receiving yours about events we explored in the "Lightning Round" in Sacramento last February (the questions were shared in the July 2025 newsletter). I will share them in future newsletters, so please continue to send your recollections.

Coming soon, keep an eye on our Facebook page for information on a special that Fox Nation is working on about the Los Baños Raid which will air around Memorial Day. David Blackledge, former internee in LBIC, is working with the producers and has shared his experiences with them. If you have memories of time in Los Baños, let me know and I will connect you with the producers. We look forward to seeing that project come to fruition.

Happy reading and wishing you a healthful 2026.

Sally Meadows

"Let's Show Them How Democracy Works!"

The Democratic Tradition Alive in a Civilian POW Camp

By Mary Beth Klee

As we approach the 250th anniversary of our nation's birth, Santo Tomas Internment Camp (1942-1945, Manila, Philippines) has something to teach us. It stands as the single most striking example of our democratic heritage lived out in captivity. Democracy and captivity seem inherently incompatible, but at Santo Tomas thousands of civilian prisoners – three quarters of them American -- behaved as if they should co-exist.

Recall that in January 1942, when the Japanese herded nearly four thousand Allied civilians into Manila's Santo Tomas Internment Camp, they imprisoned the largest body of American civilians ever interned by a foreign power (roughly 3200 American civilians). Within days the defiant slogan "Let's Show Them How Democracy Works!" inspired the numerous committees that sprang to life. Over the next three years that counter-intuitive prison camp advice became the signature characteristic of one of the most unusual experiences of captivity in history.

What made Santo Tomas unique, admirable, and far less known than it deserves was the internees' vigorous exercise of their democratic heritage and remarkable agency in the face of adversity. Internees set up a structure of government, developed elaborate committee systems, published a newsletter, ran a K-12 school, started a hospital, arranged for religious services, and emceed nightly PA broadcasts. The uninitiated student of the camp reads about these accomplishments and thinks: "Wait - who was in charge here?" And often the answer was: the internees themselves – "we the people."

These remarkable accomplishments should not obscure the grim truth: throughout their thirty-seven-month ordeal,

Mary Beth Klee holds her Ph.D. in the History of American Civilization from Brandeis University and is the author of Leonore's Suite, a novel about teen internment at Santo Tomas. This article is adapted from a recent presentation she gave at the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Klee is currently writing a book on this topic. A footnoted version of this article can be obtained by emailing her at klee.mb@gmail.com.

(How Democracy Works, continued on page 2)

(How Democracy Works, continued from page 1)

internees grappled with severe overcrowding, deprivation, disease, cruelty, boredom, hunger and eventual starvation. Women lost on average 24 percent of their body weight; men, 30-32 percent. By January 1945, death from starvation occurred daily. A month before liberation, four internee leaders were carted out of camp and beheaded. Tragically, at least seventeen internees, including children who had survived the three-year ordeal, died in the Japanese shelling of the camp. This was not a cushy camp. Nor was it a democracy – it was a Japanese internment/prison camp, pure and simple.

But the traits of a lively democratic polity abounded there. I would argue that those very traits enabled many internees to survive 37 months and reach liberation. What then are these democratic attributes as political scientists might define them and how did they manifest themselves at Santo Tomas?

- First, as a persistent **drive for self-determination and self-governance**, seen in elections, committee systems, town meetings: internees displayed strong civic participation.
- Second, in a **commitment to an informed citizenry** through newspapers and PA broadcasts.
- Third, in **self-generated laws** from ethical codes to formal regulations.
- Fourth, in a **commitment to education of the citizenry** both young and old.
- Fifth, through **a culture of improvisation, innovation, and entrepreneurship** to navigate the crisis.

For this brief article, let's consider a few intriguing examples of these traits at work.

Choosing Their Own Camp

One striking instance of self-determination by this group occurred even before internment. In 1941 American business leaders in Manila worried about U.S. government inertia in preparing for conflict. China had been invaded. Who would safeguard Americans in the Philippines if war came? This group formed the "American Emergency Committee," focusing on contingencies. When disaster did strike in December 1941, they sprang into action asking: If captured, where will the Japanese imprison us? What sites would be best for our survival?

The American Emergency Committee contacted the Spanish Dominican priests who owned the University of Santo Tomas—Spain was neutral in the war—and secured their permission to use the campus as an internment camp if necessary. When Japanese troops marched into Manila, the Americans relayed their proposal through the U.S. High Commission to their would-be captors. The Japanese agreed.

That first act of self-determination (they chose their own camp!) proved providential. Though it was the oldest university under the American flag, the Santo Tomas campus on España Street had been completed in 1927 (less than 15 years earlier). Dominican architect Fra Roque Ruaño, O.P. had engineered it for safety: it was quake-resistant with robust independent foundations and a spacious design. The open grounds and internal plumbing for hundreds of day students became vital assets. The building protected against typhoons and quakes during internment—and, crucially, against Japanese shelling at war's end. That foresight paid extraordinary dividends. Once inside the camp, initiatives for self-governance would prove no less crucial.

Self-Governance in Captivity

On January 4--the first day of internment--a Japanese officer asked the newly imprisoned men in one classroom-turned-jail-cell who their leader was. They shrugged but suggested -- Earl Carroll? A thirty-six-year-old insurance executive who had worked with the American Emergency Committee, Carroll was ordered by the guards to select other room leaders and report to the commandant in half an hour. He complied and became the internee go-between with the Japanese.

Days later, as the camp population swelled and nearly the entire Emergency Committee arrived, Carroll suggested to the new commandant that this group act as an intermediary governing body with the internees. The Japanese were not interested in dealing with 4,000 liberty-loving individuals, and agreed—but they required Carroll to remain in charge of that group for a time. It eventually became known as "the Executive Committee."

That arrangement worked in part because the Japanese authorities, at least in the early years, proved surprisingly pragmatic about day-to-day administration. During the first two years of the war, the Japanese military delegated camp oversight mostly to Japanese civilians (diplomats and businessmen) whom they deputized to take charge. In the third year, the military took over. But initially the Imperial Japanese Army did not want to waste military talent on a civilian camp. They posted military guards to the camp, but Commandant Tomoyasu, the first camp Commandant, was not career

(How Democracy Works, continued on page 3)

(How Democracy Works, continued from page 2)

army. Accepting an internee governing body for him was pragmatic. And pragmatism governed some other choices too.

For example, the Executive Committee argued to the Commandant that elected (instead of appointed) room monitors would garner more respect from internees. The Japanese permitted it; within three weeks, all room monitors were voted in. Floor and building monitors followed.

Informing the Citizenry and Fostering Participation

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee unleashed a flurry of organizational activity beginning with the establishment of a Duplication Department and the publication of a newspaper, called *Internews.* Its January 24, 1942 debut declared: "This little sheet is intended to supply internees with news of their internal government and to report negotiations between camp officials and Japanese authorities. Announcements... will be official. Rules and regulations will be explained." *There was a lot of 'splaining to do.*

Within two weeks the Executive Committee established 16 subcommittees addressing all facets of life in camp. The range of committees was comprehensive and staggering: medical, sanitation and health, building, education, religion, work assignments, recreation, and later finance and supplies. Chairs were appointed by the Executive Committee, but, as the *Internews* made clear, staffing relied on volunteers, and *Uncle Sam wants you* – for everything from plumbing to vegetable gardens.

The sense of urgency about engagement was heightened by the fact that for the first six months Japanese authorities refused to accept responsibility for feeding their prisoners. Internees had been told to bring food and clothing for three days. Those three days lasted three years, but the sign greeting internees as they entered Santo Tomas was "Internees in this camp shall be responsible for feeding themselves."

Improvising for Survival

Internees were appalled—but far from helpless. Within hours they had alerted the Philippine Red Cross and friends outside the camp. Loyal Filipino servants and many Axis friends alike thronged the university fence to assist them – lobbing bedding, food, mosquito netting, and supplies over the wall. Commandant Tomoyasu's own car struggled to reach the gate because of the crowds. He abruptly banned all deliveries and front-campus access to the needy internees, complaining that the site resembled a "picnic ground" more than a prison camp.

Those initial tosses had been literal lifesavers because the Japanese provided nothing. Carroll and two Executive Committee members approached the Commandant with a proposal: cover the España Street fence with sawali (reeded matting) to block views, then formalize deliveries at set hours. Outside resources could help sustain the camp while maintaining order. Tomoyasu conceded—and the Package Line was born.

By January 15, the line was operating. As camp historian A.V. H. Hartendorp recorded: "Faithful servants and friends... came... month after month, an average of 900 a day for more than two years." The Package Line was a masterstroke of improvisation. Through this conduit, supplies could be delivered and civic participation facilitated.

The newly formed Medical committee established an infirmary and launched a vaccination program; they soon erected a modest tent hospital. The Radio-Music group installed a public address system (wired by the ingenious Earl Hornbostel) and solicited hundreds of long-playing records from the YMCA through the Package Line. Don Bell ensured that music was broadcast nightly promptly at 7:15. The Recreation Committee's Dave Harvey organized variety shows and got costumes imported from the outside. Dr. Walter Brooks Foley made sure religious services were being held in all denominations, and arranged for Father Kelly, a local Catholic priest, to enter the camp.

By February, the Construction Committee built a Central Kitchen serving meals. Their plumbing drive was underway, employing 600 volunteers, adding desperately needed sinks, toilets, and showers to the Main Building and beyond. Shanty neighborhoods were being built for family privacy.

Who drove this? Not the Japanese. Internees did—prisoners and pawns at times, but never passive. Self-determination and internee agency were on full display. And that activity took place in the context of both elections and self-generated laws.

Elections and Self-Generated Laws

The Executive Committee urged the Commandant to allow camp-wide elections for their own (Executive Committee) positions, knowing their current authority

(How Democracy Works, continued on page 4)

(How Democracy Works, continued from page 3)

rested on pre-war decisions rather than democratic mandate. Elected legitimacy would build trust, they argued. On July 4—poetic timing—the camp elected a nominating committee, and later that month voted for Executive Committee members and chair, subject to Japanese veto.

Those elections mattered because the Executive Committee now issued most regulations. The Japanese mandated basics (regular roll calls, no escapes, no radios, enforced bowing drills), but the Executive handled day to day--and internees wanted it that way. The more authority the Executive Committee exercised, the more internees could buffer themselves from possible captor cruelty. For two years, the Japanese allowed that leeway.

Self-generated laws emerged almost as quickly. Just weeks into internment, the Religion Department—urged by the Executive—issued the "Ten Commandments for Santo Tomas," which the PA broadcast. These blended biblical cadence with civic appeals – internees reminding one another of duties, both to the community and a higher law.

The First was unequivocal: "Thou shalt have no other interest greater than the welfare of the camp." Several commandments explicitly invoked America's democratic heritage. The third declared: "Do not betray ideals and principles" of that heritage. The Fifth urged internees to "honor thy forefathers, recalling vividly their struggle... that thou mayest contribute now... to the realization of their ideals."

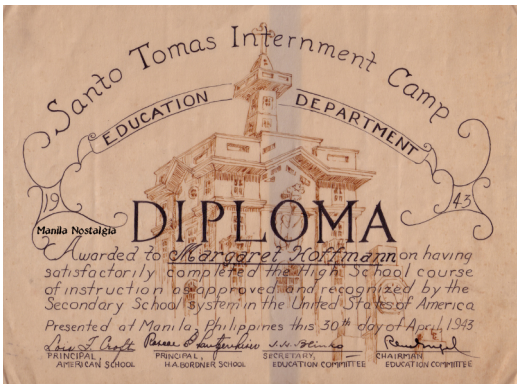
In essence, the Ten Commandments sought to counter a danger Alexis de Tocqueville had warned about in his nineteenth century classic, *Democracy in America*. It was the tendency of democratic individualism to erode community. Their antidote was simple and direct: "Remember the Camp. Respect thy Neighbor."

More elaborate governing codes followed. By August 16, 1943 a "General Code of Regulations" was issued —seven titles akin to constitutional articles— governed releases, roll calls, duties, rights, property, quiet hours, and more. This document codified evolving and often self-generated rules.

Educating the Citizenry

Educating the camp's children—and soon its adults—became an immediate priority. More than 700 children had been swept up mid-school year, but fortunately, their principals and teachers were imprisoned with them. The Education Committee sprang into action and by January 21 the Santo Tomas Internment Camp school was up and running for grades K-12. Classes began outdoors, later moving to sheltered fourth floor chemistry labs. Books and supplies arrived via the Package Line.

High school student Lee Iserson—my mother-- later recalled: "The camp census lists 28 professional teachers, but for the most part we had engineers teaching



math, chemists teaching science, missionaries, who had lived abroad teaching us languages, and of course, religion. And there was one Shakespearean actress who taught history in a way no one could ever forget." My mother completed three years of high school in camp. When her class of 28 juniors scattered across the United States after liberation for their senior year of high school, six became valedictorians.

Nor was K-12 the only education underway at Santo Tomas. Within weeks more than 200 adults had enrolled in courses ranging from languages and geology, to business and music appreciation. The Religion Department added its own offerings in psychology, world organization, and Old Testament women.

The Religion Department's vigor was boundless: it organized religious services in all denominations from the earliest days. And beginning in September 1942, it sponsored a series of democratic "Town Meetings." Up to 700 internees gathered to debate vital issues, urged on by posters proclaiming, "Use your right to be heard!" Imagine the scene: prisoners openly discussing and often challenging Executive Committee actions under the watchful eyes of Japanese guards.

The meetings inevitably grew contentious, often challenging leadership. Under new Chair C.C. Grinnell, the Executive Committee disbanded the meetings, a move that Dr. Walter Brooks Foley, head of the Religion Department, said showed "the inability of Camp executives to understand the values of democratic procedure, for which, presumably, the war was being fought."

Innovation and Entrepreneurship

This whirlwind of initiative amid captivity may astonish us – but on reflection, it should not. Prisoner talent abounded at STIC: Manila business leaders, church and school leaders; opera singers, composers, bankers, mining engineers, doctors, and nurses.

There were seasoned journalists and photographers, like the AP's Russell Brines and Life magazine's Carl Mydans. There were also self-mocking nightclub entertainers like "disaster of ceremonies" Dave Harvey, author of the camp's wry theme song: "Cheer Up! Everything's Going to be Lousy." And there were

(How Democracy Works, continued on page 5)

(How Democracy Works, continued from page 4)

resourceful broadcasters like NBC's Don Bell (known in camp as Clarence Beliel) who sent coded messages through song titles—playing "It Looks Like Rain in Cherry Blossom Lane," when American forces bombed Tokyo, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" when the Japanese military took over camp, and "Pennies from Heaven," when US planes began striking Manila harbor. Such men and women didn't yield to fate; they shaped it—as did countless ordinary internees.

That same innovative spirit found expression in entrepreneurship. By January 1943 no fewer than 197 internee-owned businesses had registered with the Executive Committee: barbers, shoe-shiners, coconut milk vendors, sellers of cigarettes, fly-swatters, notions, and candy. My grandmother Agnes Iserson supported her family for two years with her "Superior Fudge" business. The robust and complex internal economy of Santo Tomas deserves fuller treatment than space allows here, yet stands as further evidence of an irrepressible can-do mentality at work.

Conclusion

That deeply ingrained sense of democratic agency provided desperately needed coping strategies, for the toll of captivity -- overcrowding, disease, cruelty and hunger -- was immense.

Everything worsened in February 1944 with the military takeover: the camp was rebranded a POW camp. Internees witnessed slap-downs, water tortures, and cruelty. The Package Line was shuttered; elections and leadership rotations were banned. Twice daily roll calls and mandatory bowing lessons intensified. Executive committee member and camp chronicler Fred Stevens wrote: "Democracy in Santo Tomas Internment camp was thereafter virtually at an end."

Yet not entirely. Committees continued their work, choral groups performed, variety shows ran until July, school continued until Christmas 1944, when students had grown too weak to climb the stairs to the classrooms. Amid slow starvation on a 700-calorie daily diet, internee initiative--though diminished—endured, mitigating the rigors of imprisonment wherever it could.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of American independence, I contend that the Santo Tomas experience is no quirky outlier in American history. It offers profound lessons in living out the democratic tradition and choosing freedom in captivity. Shortly after the war, Auschwitz survivor and psychologist Viktor Frankl wrote: "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves… Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the freedom to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."

In contemporary terms, Santo Tomas internees exercised agency—proactively waiting for their liberators, the American troops who would storm the gates on February 3, 1945. That liberation vindicated their faith in the fruits of their nation's own democracy. Yet throughout their ordeal, their own actions, initiatives, and can-do spirit became sustaining traits, revealing a living democratic tradition at work even in the darkest circumstances.

AMERICAN INTERNEES OF SANTO TOMAS INTERNMENT CAMP RAISE THE FIRST AMERICAN FLAG ON 6 FEB. 1945. U S Army Photo 162-20

NEWS from Lewis-Films and the LAST REUNION TEAM

Hello and Happy New Year to all! It has been a while since you had an update on "The Last Reunion" documentary. It's been a banner year of development for our independent documentary. We just booked our flights for our team to go to Manila in February for research, interviews and to be part of the World War II History Museum of New Orleans tour of historical places. We will meet up again with James M. Scott, who we all know and love, and author and filmmaker Desiree Ann Cua Benipayo among others.

Our planned trips to Florida and the National Archives in DC were delayed due to Arden's hip replacement surgery, but now that she is up and walking about those trips can be put into motion. We did a VERY successful Zoom meeting with Martin Meadows, Ted Cadwallader, Doug Luyendyk, Lotte Hershfield, Karen Lewis, Cliff Mills, and Helen Feldman Dalton, among others and interviewed Gloria Villareal and Angus Lorenzen last summer.

We should be into editing and post-production by March of 2026 and will have a rough-cut version of the film to be shown by Fall of 2026. Thank you to all who have supported this independent low budget film. Our 2025 Seed & Spark Fundraiser was a great success. We have over 40 hours of interviews that must be pared down to a feature film! We know the footage we capture in the Philippines with be incredible. – Best Regards, Arden Lewis and the Last Reunion Film team of Kimberly, Andrew and Evie.

From Arden Lewis (ardenteresalewis.com)

Support for WWII Nurses to Receive the Congressional Gold Medal

By Cecilia Gaerlan

More than eighty years after World War II ended, a coalition of retired nurses, veterans, educators and community leaders seeks the Congressional Gold Medal to recognize the legacy of nurses who saved tens of thousands of American lives during the war.

The Coalition for WWII Nurses Congressional Gold Medal, consisting of members of veterans and civic organizations such as the Army Nurse Corps Association, the Navy Nurse Corps Association, Military Officers Association of America, the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame, Bataan Legacy Historical Society and the Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project, is spearheaded by Co-Chairs Rear Admiral Cynthia Kuehner, USN (Ret), the 26th Director of the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps and Brig. General (Ret) Clara Adams-Ender, 18th Chief of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

When the United States entered World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, there were fewer than 7,000 nurses on active duty. By 1945, there were approximately 59,000 nurses serving under the Army Nurse Corps and 14,000 under the Navy Nurse Corps from all over the country, including U.S. territories such as the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, Alaska and Puerto Rico as well as Allied countries such as China, Burma and India. They worked near the frontlines sometimes in makeshift hospitals under dismal and dangerous living conditions. They endured hunger, disease and constant bombing. Some were imprisoned. Approximately 200 of them died from enemy fire, aircraft accidents or illnesses. Many of these women also endured discrimination. Today, there are only a handful of WWII nurses left. Our country must honor the immense sacrifices made by these nurses during its hour of need so that their legacy of selflessness and service can continue in future generations.

Two companion bills, S.2195 by Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and H.R. 4901 by Cong. Elise Stefanik (R-NY-21), were introduced at the beginning of the 119th Session of Congress to award the Congressional Gold Medal. These bills were introduced in previous congressional sessions but have failed to garner the necessary co-sponsors to be considered for approval. S.2195 needs at least 67 co-sponsors while H.R. 4901 needs at least 290. During the 118th Session of Congress, the Senate bill garnered 50 co-sponsors while the House bill only received 7.

The Coalition for WWII Nurses Congressional Gold Medal is asking the public to appeal to their House and Senate representatives to co-sponsor these companion bills. There are only a handful of surviving WWII nurses ages 102 to 107 years old. The nation owes them and all the nurses' families the recognition and appreciation that they so much deserve for the immense sacrifices that they made for our country during WWII and for the precious legacy that they have passed on to nurses of today.

For more information, visit www.wwiinursescgm.org or email cecilia@bataanlegacy.org.

(See photos on page 8)

Remembering a Nurse in Santo Tomas

In October 1943, at age 12, Martin Meadows experienced a complex fracture and dislocation of his left elbow while interned in Santo Tomas Internment Camp (chronicled in more detail at https://philippineinternment.com/?p=4272). After his cast was removed, the dedicated care he received from a military nurse, also interned in Santo Tomas, enabled his complete recovery.

"When my cast at last was removed, then began a lengthy process of almost daily visits to the clinic; there one of the military nurses put me through a rigorous routine intended to deal with my frozen arm. It simply could not budge even a fraction of an inch from the 90-degree angle at which the cast had kept it motionless for weeks. First the nurse had me soak my left arm in hot water for at least 15 minutes, as I recall, to loosen it up. Then she had me lie down; got on top of my left arm; and, using both of her arms, pushed down and pulled back on my arm repeatedly with all of her strength. At the first few sessions the arm did not budge; but then, quarter-inch by quarter-inch, it began to give in to the nurse's grim determination. After a month or so she had completed the job — my arm had regained its full range of motion, and there was no outward evidence that it had been broken.

My left arm avoided the near-certainty of permanent deformation had one of the military nurses (whose name regrettably I have long since forgotten) captured on Corregidor not worked on my frozen left arm almost daily for weeks."

Please send your experiences with Military Nurses in internment to commander@cpow.org for inclusion in future newsletters. Please also indicate whether it's okay to share your story in the efforts to gain the Congressional Gold Medal for the brave nurses in WWII.

Exploring a CPOW trip to the Philippines: Interest Inquiry

Several members who attended the February 2025 CPOW reunion in Sacramento and the visit to the MacArthur Memorial in Virginia expressed interest in a future group trip to the Philippines to see firsthand key World War II landmarks and historic sites, including Santo Tomas, Bataan, Baguio, and locations connected to our families' WWII experience.

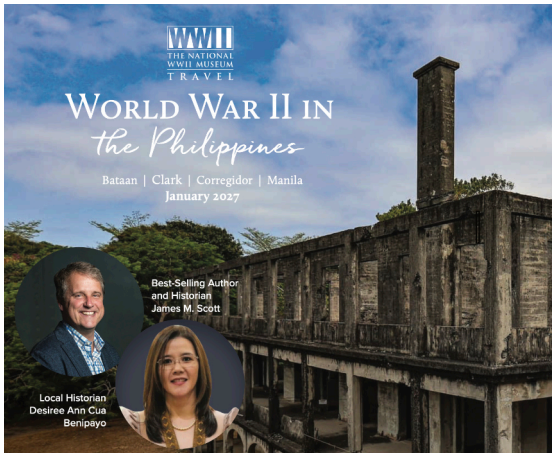
In response, I reached out to acclaimed WWII author James Scott, who connected us with Sarah Kirksey, Senior Director of Educational Travel at The National WWII Museum. Together, they have created a sample educational itinerary and preliminary pricing for a potential group trip in January 2027 or 2028. (https://www.nationalww2museum.org/events-programs/educational-travel/world-war-ii-philippines#dates)

At this stage, dates and availability are not yet confirmed. Before moving forward, we would like to gauge serious interest from our CPOW membership and gather a preliminary headcount. If you may be interested in participating in a trip like this, please email me at Keverard@tkpromotions.com with your name, number of people who may accompany you, your phone number and you will be contacted directly with follow-up details.

Please note: These trips book quickly, and 2027 availability may already be limited. This outreach is intended solely to assess interest before proceeding with dates, logistics, or finalized pricing.

Thanks!
Kirstin Everard

Kirstin Everard is a descendent of Frieda & Chester Magnuson and their daughters, Karen (Everard) and Sue (Devoe), interned for 3 years at Santo Tomas.



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(Nurses of WWII, continued from page 6)