
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the second October meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Stephen Moore, author of *Pacific Payback* and *As Good As Dead*. He will discuss the prisoner of war camp at Palawan, the site of a massacre of American servicemen.

On December 8, 1941, the Japanese destroyed American air assets in the Philippines and invaded the main island of Luzon, beginning their march toward the capital of Manila. By the end of December, Allied forces had retreated to the Bataan Peninsula and commanding General Douglas MacArthur had moved his headquarters and the Philippine government to the Manila Harbor island of Corregidor. Surprised by the determined resistance, the Japanese called for army reinforcements to break the defense. US soldiers and marines fought tenaciously through March while hoping in vain for their planned supplies and reinforcements; there would be no resupply or reinforcement since President Roosevelt had decided on a "Europe first" strategy at Acadia Conference in December 1941.

On March 12, President Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to leave the Philippines, and on 23 March, Lt. Gen. James Wainwright became commander of US Forces in the Philippines. Resistance on the Bataan peninsula ended on 9 April with the surrender of all units. The forces on the island of Corregidor held out until May 10, 1942, when, despite his dividing his forces and assigning all those not in Manila Bay to Maj. Gen. Sharp's command, Wainwright was forced to surrender all American forces in the Philippines. Most US forces complied with the surrender as ordered, but others carried on the fight, fading into the jungle and joining with Filipino resistance fighters.

The American troops who surrendered received no mercy from their captors. From their last positions on Bataan peninsula, the POWs were marched north for over 60 miles to prison camps, in what became known as the "Bataan Death March". The Japanese believed that if a soldier surrendered they were less than human,

and could be treated as such. The savage brutality that characterized Japanese treatment of American prisoners throughout the war was first experienced on the Death March. Beatings, lack of water in the tropical heat, and death by bayonet for those who fell behind shocked the American forces in Japanese hands. If civilians offered the prisoners water or food, they were killed. This nightmare march was only the beginning of the suffering of the American POWs, many of whom became laborers for Japanese military projects and in factories and mines in Japan.

In August 1942, the Japanese decided to use POWs as slave labor building an airfield on Palawan, an island southwest of Luzon. Roughly four hundred POWs were taken from camps near Manila and brought to Palawan's capital of Puerto Princesa. They build Camp 10-A along one end of a bay on the edge of a cliff above a sandy coral beach, surrounded by jungle. Over the next two and half years the POWs were forced to clear the jungle foliage, lay gravel, and pour cement building the airfield. They were always subject to beatings, whippings, and other improvised forms of torture. Conditions in the camp were brutal. Their inadequate food consisted of rice balls, root soups, and whatever they could smuggle into camp from nearby fruit trees. If men were caught with extra food they were interrogated, starved, and tortured by the *Kempei Tai*, the Japanese military security police. Some men escaped into the jungle and met up with the Filipino resistance, who had a network of safe houses and were able to get the escapees off Palawan. While an escape cheered the POWs, the ensuing Japanese rage would mean half rations and beatings for those left behind.

For those POWs left behind there were other forms of resistance. The work on the airfield was done very slowly, never making the daily quotas the Japanese had set. POWs would take up only half shovels of dirt and then when a guard turned his back return it to the same hole. Those who mixed the cement for the runway would put too much sand in the mixture so the cement would be weak. Eventually the airfield was finished, only to be bombed by American air forces, and the POWs would be sent out to fill the bomb craters, but once again, working as slowly as they could.

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

In 1944 American forces invaded the Philippines, and the POWs' worst fears were realized: the Japanese high command ordered the killing of all POWs in the islands. In parts of the camp the POWs had dug thatched roofed air raid trenches for shelter during American bombings. These would become their tombs. On December 14, 1944 they were ordered into the trenches. Then Japanese guards poured in gasoline and lit them on fire, shooting anyone who dared to escape. Some POWs ran for the fence-line and others escaped through a secret tunnel they had dug to the cliffs beyond the razor wire fence. Amid the chaos of fires and shooting, the Japanese murderers failed to keep track of all the prisoners. The few who escaped the executions and made it to the beach took cover among the caves, rocks, tall grasses, and others hid in sewer pipes or the garbage dump. As soon as night fell, the POWs made the treacherous swim across the bay. While the Japanese slaughtered over 130 of their defenseless comrades, eleven Americans successfully escaped the camp and eventually linked up with Filipino guerrillas who would help them to US lines.

Many of the Japanese murderers died in later fighting, and only a few of those tried after the war were imprisoned, denying justice for either the survivors or the dead of Palawan. The horrible treatment of conquered peoples and prisoners of war is one legacy of the war the Japanese have regularly ignored, though books like Moore's help us to remember.

FURTHER READINGS:

Stephen L. Moore, *As Good As Dead: The Daring Escape of America POWs From a Japanese Death Camp* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016).
 Bruce Henderson, *Rescue at Los Baños: The Most Daring Prison Camp Raid in World War II* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2015).
 Earnest Miller, *Bataan Uncensored*, 2nd ed. (Military Historical Society, 1991).
 Hampton Sides, *Ghost Soldiers: An Epic Account World War II's Greatest Rescue Mission* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).
 Bob Wilbanks, *Last Man Out: Glenn McDole, USMC, Survivor of the Palawan Massacre in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2004).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -
 21 Nov. 2017 – *Three Paths to Glory: 2nd & 5th MN, 1st TN* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 27 Nov. 2017 – *2nd Minnesota Battery* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
 Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 7 Apr. 2018 - info@tccwrt.com
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523

Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
 World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 16 June 2018. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
 Airshow - Eden Prairie - 14-15 July 2018 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Wright, *Terror Years* [9/11->] - 25 Oct. - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafm-n.org 651-455-6942

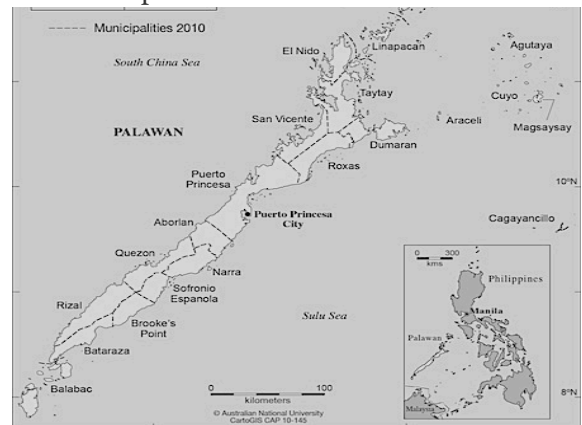
We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2017-2018

- 2017**
 9 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Origins Grand Alliance
 14 Dec. Battle of the Bulge
2018
 11 Jan. Eastern Front: Stalingrad
 8 Feb. Berlin Airlift
 8 Mar. American Airpower in World War II
 22 Mar. OSS Woman v. Imperial Japan
 12 Apr. Lucian Truscott: Greatest Field CO
 10 May Marshall Plan: Saving Victory



Trenches at Puerto Princesa, where 143 American prisoners of war were killed in the Palawan Massacre. USAF photo



The barrack's veranda where Japanese riflemen and a machine gunner were in position for the afternoon slaughter of 139 American Prisoners of War

See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>