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NO PLACE FOR KINDNESS

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No Place for Kindness with an introduction (excerpts)
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Excerpt, Introduction, Newton

The continuation of the second World War led to the constant movement of European and U.S. prisoners, including Lt. Col. Roy L. Bodine, an Army dentist, who spent almost three and a half years under the captivity of the Japanese. The movement of prisoners kept them one step ahead of rescue, as the Japanese intended. General Douglas MacArthur, in his *Reminiscences*, explains the strategic importance of the Philippines (and its prisoners) to the Japanese: “I had once called the Philippines ‘the Key that unlocks the door to the Pacific.’ The Japanese understood this completely, for the Philippines . . . were close to South China and the island stronghold of Formosa, forming not only an obstacle to Japan’s international ambitions, but depriving the Rising Sun of a powerful strategic springboard for their drive south and eastward.”¹ Although the Philippines held out longer than did places such as Singapore, these triumphs in southeast Asia whetted Japan’s confidence. Hence, once MacArthur left due to the pressing in of Japanese forces and military orders, starvation set in; the men were cut off without supplies or water.² The soldiers surrendered on April 9, 1942.³ The Death March ensued. After the March, Bodine himself traveled from Cabanatuan to Bilibid in Manila over land. He then moved over water and by truck or train from and to places like Olongapo, San Fernando, Takao, Moji, Fukuoku and Pusan. He found himself on the *Oryoku Maru*, the *Enoura Maru*, and the *Brazil Maru*, the hellships on which he records much of his tale.

Historian Robert C. Doyle notes that journeys on these hellships proved “particularly dangerous because the Japanese refused to paint ‘PW’ on the ships’ hulls” (130). Bodine recalls waving during strafings to Allied planes, which sometimes dipped their wings in recognition. In addition to enduring bombings, the prisoners also suffered airtight and uncomfortable conditions. According to General Jonathan M. Wainwright,⁴ the men often slept “on two long wooden

¹ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 112. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text.

² MacArthur himself lost 25 pounds by mid-March of that year (MacArthur 142).

³ Gregory F. Michno, *Death on the Hellships: Prisoners at Sea in the Pacific War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 30.

⁴ The soldiers referenced here are U.S. soldiers unless indicated otherwise.



shelves extending six feet out from the walls and arranged one over the other. Each man was granted two and a half feet of space on the shelves . . ."⁵ Often the Japanese ordered the men to cover portholes during raid alerts, and so they could scarcely breathe. Alternatively, they shivered due to drafts. As discussed later, many died of suffocation and even fear and of infections likely sustained due to the poor disposal of human waste...

Excerpt, Diary, Bodine

15 December 1944 [aboard the Japanese hellship, the *Oryoku Maru*] ... Bombs were much bigger and all were aimed for this ship. We could feel many hit the ship with force. A couple of small holes were blown in the side near us and water ran in when the waves were kicked up by the near misses. There was a big hit somewhere forward of us and water was running in there. More heavy hits to the rear of the ship. The percussion of these big bombs was so great that deck planks were lifted off the floor of our hatch, letting them and our duffle fall down to the hold below where Bob and I were.⁶ About 8 AM during a lull, a sentry came to the head of the hatch and shouted 'all go home, speedo.' Everyone knew what he meant and started scrambling up 2 ladders and the stairway. Before this lull in the bombing, I had to use the latrine can and when this notebook fell from inside my shirt I put it temporarily in the mess kit carrier for the mess kit, which is the only reason I have it now. When I emerged on deck (Bob Nelson near me as he wasn't too confident in his swimming and trusted mine), we were lying parallel to shore 4 to 5 hundred yards off. Many Americans and Nips were already in the water making for shore. The ship seemed to be floating OK, only maybe a little low in the stern and listing to port a little more than it had been all along.

I picked up two pieces of 4x4 gave one to Nelson. I hadn't yet decided how much clothes to take off as I didn't know until now that we would have to swim. People in the water started to holler that she had only a couple of minutes more, to hurry up. I took off hat, shirt and shoes and socks--shoes fell in the water, then threw in the board and jumped hurriedly. Water felt swell. I paddled around in the water, picked up extra canteen for Bob and helped a few people

⁵ Robert C Doyle, *Voices from Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 131. For discussions of the double decker platform, see also Manny Lawton, *Some Survived* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1984), 155; Thomas Hayes, *Bilibid Diary: The Secret Notebooks of Commander Thomas Hayes*. Ed. A.B. Feuer (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987), 218; Weller, 8 November 1945; Charles M. Brown "The *Oryoku Maru* Story." 1983. 2 December 2012 <http://www.oryokumaruonline.org/oryoku_maru_story.html>; and J.V. Crews and R.J. Hostetter, "The Prisoners' Voyage of Doom," *Hospital Corps Quarterly* 21:3 (1948), 24.

⁶ According to Weller, "More civilians perished from the bomb in the stern of the *Oryoku Maru* [sic] than any other cause" (Weller).



get to their planks. Bob didn't seem anxious to jump, had taken off all his clothing to BVDs⁷ but finally got him to jump. I picked up another small board and canteen for Bob and started shoreward. I looked back at the ship and it was a mess. A big portion of the stern was blown away and the whole ship looked like a scrap heap. What a loss from the beauty we had boarded. I saw an old man on a big box who could make no headway. I took him by the tired swimmers carry⁸ to another old man on a big plank who was getting along OK. He bitched like hell but I just went ahead and put them together and he had to accept it. Nelson and I had gotten half way in. I was going slow, trying to keep my eyes on all around me. Bob wanted to hurry ashore as he was afraid of the affects of the bombs on people in the water. Bob seemed OK so I gave him my 4x4 and took little plank from him and said I was going back toward the ship when I saw four American planes coming over low.

One peeled off and came down lower ...

⁷ This is a brand of men's underwear.

⁸ This is a technique used by lifeguards to get tired swimmers, rather than drowning swimmers, to shore. Bodine helped one survivor to a floating plank to which another survivor was holding.



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