

Island in Agony: The War in Guam

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When one reads the popular anthologies about World War II in the Pacific one is invariably impressed by the drama of the stealthy Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the rape of Nanking, the humiliation of the French in Indochina, and the blustery cry of "I shall return!" from General Douglas MacArthur just before the fall of Bataan in the Philippines. As one leafs through the ultimate chapter of these chronologies one senses the heroics at Midway and the Coral Sea, the deathly battles at Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, and finally, the Japanese surrender aboard the battleship *Missouri* on Tokyo Bay. These are, of course, all factual and quite appropriate in any recounting of the Pacific War. Invariably missing in all these anthologies are the roles played by the unwitting victims of the war and the effects the three-year conflict had on these people.

Let me speak about Guam because I was there from beginning to end, although I was a bit too young to fight and a bit too old to forget.

Guam is the southernmost island in the Mariana archipelago, a little over 200 square miles at about 14 degrees north of the equator. During 1941 there were some 20,000 people living in Guam; no less than 90 percent were of Chamorro ancestry. The other 10 percent were Americans, mostly military personnel and their dependents, Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, some Micronesians, and a few persons of Spanish, German, and English ancestry. About half of the population was then living in the city of Agana. A good number were living in the seaport town of Sumay, and the villages of Agat, Umatac, Merizo, and Inarajan. Most people, including those in Agana, derived their livelihood from the farms, which were strewn throughout the 30-mile long island.

In 1941 Guam had been under American naval administration for four decades, or since 1898 when naval Captain Henry Glass seized the Spanish-owned island while en route to Manila to assist Admiral Dewey to subdue the Spaniards--and later the Filipinos--during the Spanish-American War. Believe it or not, not a drop of blood was spilled during the American take-

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over. In fact, the Spanish garrison of some fifty soldiers thought the booming sound coming from the USS *Charleston's* cannon was a salute rather than an act of war. Needless to say, the Spaniards surrendered meekly in the face of some two thousand armed troops aboard the American naval fleet close to the reef and bound for the Philippines.

Several things must be understood before we dwell on the Pacific War itself. First of all, although they were mere wards of the United States, the Guamanians were very loyal to America. For more than thirty years, they sought US citizenship status, but they were consistently turned down. They remained loyal nonetheless. The Guamanians strongly believed in the greatness of America, both as a freedom-loving country and as a military power. Second, the neighboring islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, the latter being only 45 miles north of Guam, were Japanese-mandated islands and were virtually closed ports during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Native inhabitants of these islands were also Chamorros, all related to the Chamorros in Guam. Their loyalty, however, was to Japan.

Preparations for the possibility of war were taking place. Military barracks and fuel tanks were under construction. Young local men were being recruited into the US Navy as mess attendants and as Insular Guards. Other local men were being recruited by Pan American World Airways for work at Midway, Wake, Canton, and other points in the Pacific. Late in November 1941 the navy evacuated all its dependents to Hawai'i--except five nurses and a dependent awaiting the birth of a child.

Then, early in December 1941, two Japanese envoys stopped in Guam while en route to Washington, DC, to talk peace. And while the Japanese emissaries were talking peace in Secretary of State Cordell Hull's office that fateful day on 7 December 1941 (8 December in Guam), the Japanese naval fleet and air armada struck Pearl Harbor. According to my clock, the Japanese struck Guam four hours later, blasting the Marine Barracks and the Pan American Hotel in Sumay, and peppering other selected targets throughout the island.

Two days later, in the early morning of Wednesday, 10 December 1941, some five thousand fully armed Japanese soldiers invaded Guam or, as the Japanese historian preferred, "advanced" into the island. The only resistance took place at the historic Plaza de Espana in Agana where about one hundred local defenders, mostly Insular Guardsmen, navymen and a few Marines fought the invaders for perhaps thirty minutes before accepting the inevitable. No one has ever established the number of people killed during the Japanese invasion. I would say one hundred, more or less. My father helped bury about thirty bodies in a mass grave along the beach in east Agana. And there were, of course, dead soldiers and sailors at the Plaza de Espana. No

one seems to know how many Japanese soldiers were killed during the brief encounter. My guess is few, if any.

Guam thus became the first and only American territory conquered by a foreign power. Some people may argue that the Philippines also fell to the enemy, but it must be remembered that the US Congress passed legislation in 1934 granting independence to the Philippines, and it was during a transitional period that war broke out. Philippine independence was slated for 1944.

In surrendering Guam to the Japanese, Naval Governor George McMillin poignantly said:

Captain George J. McMillin, United States Navy, Governor of Guam and Commandant, United States Naval Station, Guam, by authority of my commission from the President of the United States, do, as a result of superior military forces landed in Guam this date, as an act of war, surrender this post to you (Captain Hayashi) as the representative of the Imperial Japanese Government.

The responsibility of the civil government of Guam becomes yours as of the time of signing of this document.

I have been assured by you that the civil rights of the population of Guam will be respected and that the military forces surrendered to you will be accorded all the rights stipulated by international law and the laws of humanity. (Palomo 1984, 31)

Shortly afterward the Japanese commandant issued the following proclamation:

We proclaim herewith that our Japanese Army has occupied this island of Guam by the order of the Great Emperor of Japan. It is for the purpose of restoring liberty and rescuing the whole Asiatic people and creating the permanent peace in Asia. Thus our intention is to establish the New Order of the World.

You all good citizens need not worry anything under the regulations of our Japanese authorities and my [sic] enjoy your daily life as we guarantee your lives and never distress nor plunder your property. In case, however, when use demand you [sic] accommodations necessary for our quarters and lodgings, you shall meet promptly with our requirements. In that case our Army shall not fail to pay you in our currency.

Those who conduct any defiance and who act spy [sic] against our enterprise, shall be court-martialled and the Army shall take strict care to execute said criminals by shooting!

Dated this 10th day of December 2601 in Japanese calendar or by this 10th

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day of December, 1941. By order of the Japanese Commander-in-Chief.

(Palomo 1984, 31)

Thus began thirty months of Japanese occupation.

Everyone was required to report and register with the Japanese authorities. The Japanese issued orders banning possession of firearms, radios, and cameras. Those found to possess any of these instruments were subject to stiff penalties, including death. To impress the local citizenry of their seriousness about criminal or treasonable behavior, the Japanese executed two young Chamorro men by firing squad early in 1942. Shot to death--before a captive audience of Chamorros near the Catholic cemetery--were Francisco Won Pat for allegedly stealing goods at a warehouse owned by an American company, and Alfred Flores for sneaking a message to an American friend being interned. The message allegedly sought the American's advice on what to do with a stack of dynamite at a worksite.

All American personnel--except six navy men--were later shipped to prisoner of war camps in Japan. The six sailors fled into the jungles of Guam to await the return of American forces, which they confidently estimated would take no more than three months at the most. Only one--George Tweed--survived the war, thanks to the courageous and surreptitious assistance of dozens of Guamanians, including Antonio Artero and his family who fed and kept him in hiding for eighteen months. The others were eventually tracked down and executed by Japanese search teams. None was given a chance to surrender.

Agana became a virtual ghost town during the occupation period. Most of its residents left the city and eked out their living in the farming areas in the outlying districts. For hundreds of years Guam's economy had been agricultural. So the people had no difficulty making the adjustment, including my father who was a carpenter by vocation and a part-time storekeeper. When our family moved to my maternal grandparents' ranch in Mogfog, some ten miles east of Agana, my father simply swapped the many cans of groceries and other goods in our small store for hogs, chickens, and a couple of heads of cattle, and we all became full-time farmers. We even purchased our first and only horse, Peggy by name. The soil and the farm animals became our salvation, as they did for hundreds of other city folk.

Although there were no underground saboteurs as we see depicted in European cities and towns, we had some pretty brave and daring souls on our little island. During the first year of the war there were at least six radio receivers operating on the island, and information on the changing tides of war was passed on, secretly of course, to key island residents--sometimes right under the noses of the Japanese. Those in-the-know learned of the fall of

Bataan, Singapore, and Malaysia. They later learned of the victories at Midway, the Coral Sea, and Guadalcanal. So by the time the last of the radio receivers burned itself out the outcome of the war was a certainty.

There were many heroes during the war, but I shall name only two because they were giants in their hearts and convictions--one was a man of God, the other a true earthly patriot.

Father Jesus Baza Duenas was a constant thorn to the Japanese, including the military and civil authorities as well as the Japanese Catholic prelates who were brought to Guam to help sell the goodness of the Japanese Empire. Stubborn as a mule, Father Duenas refused to accept temporal orders and insisted that he was answerable only to God. "And the Japanese are not God," he asserted many times. At a meeting called by the Japanese, Father Duenas sat at the back of the meeting room and was heard to sing--quietly--"God Bless America." It is said that at one time a frustrated Japanese leader threatened to have the padre exiled to nearby Rota but decided not to do so for fear of an uprising by the natives. As is the destiny of most heroes, Father Duenas was executed nine days before American forces returned to Guam.

The other hero was Joaquin Limtiaco, an unassuming man who operated a fleet of taxicabs prior to the war. Limty, as all persons by that name are called, was recruited by Japanese intelligence to track down the American fugitives. Limtiaco did such an excellent job that he pretty much knew where the Americans were most of the time and was able to forewarn them whenever the Japanese searchers planned a stake out at any of their many hiding places. Because of their frustrations the Japanese took it out on Limtiaco, torturing him on eight different occasions, and not once did Limty give away the Americans.

The Japanese were, of course, aware of the need to convert the Chamorros, recognizing that they had been under the spell of the Americans for four decades. By the middle of 1942 elementary schools were reestablished throughout the island, manned by Japanese teachers brought in from Japan. Established also was a special school geared toward training local young men and women to become interpreters and teaching assistants. In other efforts to Japanize the island, the names of Guam as well as the various municipalities were changed. Guam became "Omiya Jima," which means "the Great Shrine Island." The city of Agana became "Akashi" or "Red City." The various villages were similarly renamed.

Propagandists were also utilized. Among arguments used were the potential benefits that could be derived by the Chamorros as partners in the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, which, in effect, would be the Japanese Empire comprising Japan, a big chunk of China, Indochina, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, the Philippines, and the Marianas. The empire would

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then be the greatest in the world, possessing everything needed to prevail, and would need nothing from outside these perimeters.

In conversations with prominent Chamorros astute Japanese propagandists would offer any or all of the following arguments in attempts to convert the natives:

1 It is understandable for the Chamorros to prefer the Americans. After all, the Americans had been in Guam for forty years and sentimental feelings were bound to develop. However, if the Chamorros would give the Japanese the same length of time, forty years, the Chamorros would prefer Japanese to the Americans.

2 Unfortunate though it may have been historical facts indicated that Guam was the only known inhabited island to regress in population during the past three centuries. When the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan docked in Guam in 1521 the estimated population of the Marianas was placed at anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000. When the Japanese arrived in 1941 there were less than 20,000. All other areas in the world showed substantial increases in population. Something must have been wrong in Guam.

3 Ever since Western colonizers stepped on the shores of Guam in the seventeenth century, the Chamorros never controlled their own destiny. "When the Spaniards came, they controlled you, didn't they? When the Americans came, they ruled the island, didn't they? Now that we're here, we control you, don't we? And should the Americans return, they'll control you again, won't they?"

To some extent, such propaganda worked. A story is told of a woman who, prior to the war, lived with an American navy man, and not long after the Japanese came, she commenced living with a Japanese officer. Some of her girlfriends began berating her for catering to the Japanese. Her friends, you see, had been either married to or living with Americans. The woman became so mad at her so-called friends that she lambasted them thus:

Why is it that when I have an affair with a Chamorro, it's perfectly all right. If I have an affair with an American, it's also all right. But now that I'm having an affair with a Japanese, you people look down on me. I have read the Ten Commandments, and the Sixth Commandment said: "Thou shall not commit adultery." Period. It did not say "Thou shall not commit adultery with a Japanese!" They are winning the war. So they must be okay. Anyway, should the Americans return, I will have an affair with an American. (Palomo 1984, 88)

One of the most difficult things for the Chamorros to accept was the edict that the Japanese Emperor was both the temporal and spiritual leader of the empire. This was contrary to their religious upbringing because at least 95 percent of the people of Guam were Christians, the great majority Catholics.

During the initial occupation period the Japanese held several victory parades throughout the streets in Agana, especially after the fall of the Philippines and Singapore. Attendance by the residents of Agana was obligatory. Most elderly Chamorros who witnessed these events remembered the galloping stallions, the weapons of war on display, and the inevitable float showing a young nisei boy wearing a Japanese military uniform and pointing a rifle at another boy dressed in American navy attire, with the nisei youngster stepping on an American flag.

By the middle of 1942 parades ceased to be held. The tides of war had changed and Japanese authorities were then more concerned about the American fugitives who were hiding out in the jungles of Guam. Search parties comprising Japanese military personnel, Japanese-speaking Saipanese interpreters and investigators, and locally recruited police officers were constantly on the prowl looking for the fugitives.

The Chamorros, however, were determined not to help the Japanese in their pursuit. The Chamorros looked to the American fugitives as symbols of America and were willing to suffer any indignities to prevent their capture. As a consequence dozens of Chamorros--and perhaps hundreds--were beaten and generally brutalized by Japanese (and in some instances, Saipanese investigators) for refusing to divulge the whereabouts of the Americans. Unfortunately, even those Chamorros who knew nothing about the Americans' hiding places were jailed and brutalized.

At about dawn on 12 September 1942, three of the fugitives were tracked down and executed on the spot in the jungle of Togcha in south-central Guam. They were L. L. Krump, A. Yablonski, and L. W. Jones. Six weeks later, on 22 October 1942, two others--Al Tyson and C. B. Jones--were found and executed at their hiding place in Machananao in northern Guam.

George Tweed, the lone survivor, was at about this time hiding out near a ranch belonging to Juan (Male) Pangelinan, a retired navy man and veteran of World War I. Tweed subsequently moved to Urunao at the northwestern tip of the island and remained there for the rest of the war. Pangelinan was executed by the Japanese shortly before the end of the war.

From late 1942 to early 1944 a semblance of peace reigned in Guam, if that is possible. Most of the Japanese soldiers were gone in pursuit of other island conquests, and only a handful of Japanese administrators were on the island. The young Chamorros were busy learning kanji and the mysteries of the oriental world. The adults were busy trying to survive and make do

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without Dodge and Plymouth sedans, Lucky Strikes, Camels and Chesterfields, the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Nelson Eddie and Jeanette MacDonald, Coca Cola and Van Camp's Pork and Beans. They had to make do with Japanese cigarettes, soy sauce on rice, tea, zories, and a lot of locally grown farm products. My dad grew his own tobacco and fermented his own liquor, *aguardiente*, which beats Mexican tequila and Russian gin.

If Guam was ever self-sufficient it was during the occupation period. Not only were we able to feed ourselves with natural food, but by late 1943 Guam began feeding thousands of Japanese troops who were returning from the war zones in the central Pacific--the Marshalls, the Solomons, Gilbert and Ellice, Papua New Guinea, and other exotic places.

By middle and late 1943 the Japanese demanded--and got--two things: laborers forced to help construct airstrips at several parts of the island, and more laborers forced to work at rice and vegetable plantations in various parts of the island. Thousands of people, from youngsters in their early teens to elders in their sixties and seventies, were required to toil under the hot sun at the airstrips and at the plantations. Compensation was nil.

I remember one man who loved smoking cigarettes and didn't mind working at one of the airstrips, because at the end of the day the workers would be given a pack of cigarettes. Usually, however, the men would form a line and before each received his pack from the Japanese leader, each worker had to bow to the Japanese and say *arigato* (thank you). To impress the Japanese, this worker made a fanciful and elaborate bow but in his nervousness forgot the Japanese word for "thank you." For showing off and for being forgetful the Japanese slapped him and denied him his pack of cigarettes.

It was about this time that the animalistic nature of the Japanese soldiers began to emerge. The American forces were closing in, having taken the Marshalls, Gilbert and Ellice, the New Hebrides, the Solomons, and the eastern Caroline Islands. Reports from afar were all bad. Nazi Germany was on the verge of collapse. El Duce, Benito Mussolini, was hanged by his own people. The war in China was turning from bad to worse, and the mighty Japanese Pacific fleet was in disarray.

To the Japanese, life became meaningless and worthless in Guam, particularly when the American armada began bombarding the island early in June 1944. People were killed without reason. A forty-year-old man found in a ranch in Agat was forced to kneel and slashed on the neck with a sword and left for dead. A group of young people found in Agana during the height of the bombardment were forced to dig their own grave, beaten and stabbed, and buried alive. Rapes were frequent. Beheadings at Tai and Fonte and other places more so.

By then the Chamorros were taking it from both sides. While the Japanese were brutalizing the people on land, the American bombardment was taking its toll from the sea. Bombardment commenced as early as 8 June but was sporadic. However, beginning on 8 July and continuing day and night for thirteen consecutive days, hundreds of ships blasted Guam. And on 20 July 1944, the day preceding the landings, American carrier planes pummeled the island with 627 tons of bombs and 147 rocket shells, the most shattering weight of explosives expended in prelanding operations in the Pacific war up to that point. Of 3826 buildings throughout the island, 2631 were destroyed. And of 665 dwellings that escaped destruction, the great majority were located in the southern and south-central part of the island.

Among bombardment casualties were Tomas DeGracia Santos, struck by shrapnel on 12 July, died; Rosalia Cruz Roberto, fatally struck by an American missile on 19 June (she was six months pregnant and hiding in a cave near Sumay); Magdalena Nora L. G. Shimizu, a girl who died when her head was struck by shrapnel; Frank Brown, killed during bombardment on 11 July.

Among casualties at the hands of the Japanese during the bombardment were Jose (Papa) Cruz, executed for attempting to save a downed American pilot; Gaily Camacho and Vicente Munoz Borja, among thirty victims of a massacre at Fena on 23 July; Asuncion and Maria Rabago Castro, sisters shot to death on 22 July; Diana and Josefina Sablan Leon Guerero, sisters, bayoneted to death on 18 July; Hannah Chance Torres, beaten to death on 15 July.

By late 1945 Guam was a veritable armed camp. More than 160 military installations, both large and small, were strewn throughout the 22-square-mile island. As of 31 August 1945 there were 65,095 army troops, 77,911 navy men, and 58,712 Marines, or a total of 201,718 military personnel. There were 21,838 Chamorros. More than 19,000 Guamanians were made homeless by the bombardment, and the dire situation was further aggravated by the need for land and accommodations by the troops being readied for the invasion of Iwo Jima, Chi Chi Jima, and eventually the Japanese homeland. In the farming district of Yona alone, about 33,000 Marines of the 3rd Division were in training for the conquest of Japan.

In its report to Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal, the Hopkins Committee, comprising three prominent Americans (Ernest M. Hopkins, retired president of Dartmouth College, Maurice G. Tobin, former governor of Massachusetts, and Knowles A. Ryerson, dean of agriculture at the University of California), described the situation then existing in Guam:

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There was constantly evidence (of) an undercurrent of uncertainty and insecurity caused by the fact that great numbers of families had lost their homes and did not know what the future had in store for them.

Agana, the capital and metropolis of the island with a prewar population of over 12,000, was laid completely waste by the war so that scarcely a house was left standing. Many smaller municipalities were severely damaged. In addition, with the reoccupation by American forces and the development of the island as a major base for the onslaught of Japan, thousands of others were forced to move from their homes and their sites taken for airfields, supply centers, ammunition dumps, housing areas, recreation spots and the like.

None of the municipalities which have been projected to take the place of those destroyed or preempted is yet ready for settlement or resettlement, and there is no clear indication when they will be. Also, many Guamanians find themselves still unable to go back to their small farms or ranches to live or even to farm in an effort to raise fresh foodstuffs to supplement that which is on sale in local stores. (Palomo 1984, 234)

The Hopkins Report went on to say:

In our opinion, citizenship is long overdue and should be granted forthwith. Indeed, an apology is due the Guamanians for the long delay and they are also entitled to the nation's thanks and recognition for their heroic services rendered during the recent war. The people are in all respects worthy of being welcomed into the full brotherhood of the United States, with all rights and privileges, and the nation will be the gainer for it. (Palomo 1984, 235-36)

Looking back at the tumultuous period, and based on the knowledge of what has happened since then, I ask myself questions which perhaps only astrologers can answer. Could the war in the Pacific have been avoided? I believe not. Although a relatively weak nation, Japan was suffering from lack of vital resources and needed to expand, particularly into China and Indonesia to provide the goods necessary for its people's survival. Japan, then as now, had very limited natural resources. On the other hand the Western countries, particularly the United States, would not permit the Japanese to "advance" into China or any other country in the Far and Near East, and would not furnish needed goods, such as oil, steel, and the like. Japan's biggest mistake, of course, was her militaristic leaders' decision to strike at Pearl Harbor. In doing so, she awoke a sleeping giant.

Could Guam have been spared had it been armed to the teeth, as some American leaders wanted? The answer is no. Guam was too far from the

continental United States and too isolated in the midst of the Japanese mandated islands to survive for any length of time.

Was Guam important? Yes, but only as part of a frontline of defense and as a way station to the Orient and to the continental United States.

Why were the Chamorros so patriotic to the United States? They were not United States citizens, and the government then in place was not democratic. For more than two centuries, Guam was under a Spanish regime that was dying a slow death. As a consequence its overseas possessions were either revolting or moving into stoic stagnancy. Times were miserable in Guam when Captain Henry Glass entered Apra Harbor in 1898. The Spanish garrison did not even have the means to return the captain's salute! The American naval administration was not outstanding by any means, but it offered high hopes of better things to come, in spite of itself. At least one naval governor, Willis Winter Bradley, proposed a "bill of rights" for the people of Guam. Unfortunately, such altruistic behavior did not endear Bradley to his superiors in the Navy Department. It never came to be.

I had wondered why the most popular song during the occupation was "Uncle Sam, Please Come Back to Guam." The little ditty went this way: "O Mr Sam, Sam, my dear Uncle Sam, won't you please come back to Guam. . . . Eighth of December, 1941, the people went crazy, right here in Guam. O Mr Sam, Sam, my dear Uncle Sam, won't you please come back to Guam." It was sung, indeed, but not within earshot of a Japanese. To me it meant deep love for the values that America was known to espouse. I sometimes felt it was unrequited love, but love nonetheless.

Did the war do us any good? No and yes.

No, for several reasons: First of all, we became pawns in an international conflict. We became victims of a war we had no part in causing. Second, we lost friends and relations dear to us, losses that can never be compensated. And finally, our life-styles have been changed completely--from a tranquil, parochial, and family-oriented existence to a fast-track, multicultural, and oftentimes cynical existence.

But also, yes, the war did us some good: The abiding loyalty that the Chamorros displayed during the war gave America the only rationale it needed to grant the Guamanians US citizenship and a civil government. Unfortunately, the American Congress did not grant full rights of congressional representation and voting participation in presidential elections. These latter rights would have completed the circle. America has yet to do so. And the war also made us aware of our own vulnerability in any Pacific conflict, then, now, and in the future.

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Reference

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