



American Legion Post 11-11  
Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.  
Paul B. Post Historian  
Welcome Home-May 2014

The Battling Belles of Bataan  
Part 1 of 2  
Surrender of Bataan & Corregidor

We have read about the horrific sufferings of the Bataan Death March in WWII; but I would like to share another story; one of bravery and dedication; our Army and Navy nurses stationed on Bataan and Corregidor.

After reading a great book entitled “We Band of Angels” by Elizabeth M. Norman, I felt that their story should interest all of us Veterans alike. Here is a brief account of 64 Army nurses and 11 Navy nurses who ministered to the wounded soldiers in the Pacific during WWII. Many of the nurses volunteered for nursing duty in Manila prior to the war, the climate was inviting, dancing under the stars, golf courses, a steady contingent of men for dates and a chance to see Asia & experience ocean events.

After the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, Japan then captured numerous islands in the south pacific, on Jan. 2, 1942, the Japanese military had control of Manila. It was only a matter of time before Japan controlled Bataan and Corregidor. General Douglas MacArthur escaped on a PT boat to Mindanao, then he flew to Australia to wage the war on the Imperial Japanese Army.

There were two hospitals for nursing duties, one hospital on Bataan and the other on Corregidor. With the continued shelling & bombing of the Islands by the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force, the nurses worked day and night to aid the injured soldiers. The Japanese pilots destroyed the US aircraft at Clark field in a surprise attack, rendering all but two planes useless for further defense of the islands. MacArthur promised time after time that help was on the way for the soldiers and the nurses, but to no avail, no help was coming in the near future. The nurses had so many wounded soldiers, that the hospitals were overflowing, the wounded GI's were laid on cots in a clearing in the jungle for treatment. This also meant that all hospital supplies were in very short supply. Soldiers encountered Malaria, Beriberi, dengue fever, gas gangrene and a multitude of insects and other bacteria entering the wounds, also dysentery was epidemic as well.

With the advent of the continuous bombing of the Corregidor, and Bataan, the hospital on Bataan was overflowing with injured GI's, with no shelters to protect the men and the nurses, General Wainwright closed the hospital on Bataan and moved the nurses to the Malinta tunnel on Corregidor. The nurses performed admirably with what supplies they had left for the soldiers. The Malinta tunnel was built prior to the war, with the daily bombing; the tunnel filled up fast with injuries. Soldiers were piled up three beds high in the tunnels. Nurses sometimes worked 24 hours without any rest.

On May 6, 1942, General “Skinny” Wainwright surrendered all US & Philippine forces to General Homma of the Japanese Imperial Army. General Homma immediately ordered the soldiers to POW camps, and nurses out of the Malinta tunnel to set up a temporary hospital on a hill. After a short time, the nurses were then informed that they would be sent to Manila to another hospital, but instead the ladies were destined for Santo Tomas Imprisonment Camp for the next three years.

Part II, Three Years in Santo Tomas Prison

