

BEYOND PEARL HARBOR

**Civilians Imprisoned
at Santo Tomás,
Manila 1942-1945**

by

Clio Mathews Wetmore

INFINITY PUBLISHING

pantomime of *Cinderella*, supposedly for the children, but we all loved it.

Each day brought more hardships along with our worsening health. New labor rules were imposed making it mandatory for everyone to work three and four hours a day at Camp duties. Also, as an added insult, we were ordered to turn in any money we held to a Camp fund for the purchase of food, as apparently no more funds were forthcoming from the International Red Cross for our use.

Again dire warnings were issued regarding our food situation. We were told that due to bombings of their ships by our planes no more food would be brought into Camp. We must grow our own food. Of course, this was impossible. In order to raise enough food to feed four thousand people two daily meals we would need many acres of land, and tools and seeds, none of which were available.

Our Camp vegetable gardens were small and grew mostly talinum, corn, and a few bananas. These precious commodities were reserved for the sick and for the very young children. The adobe soil was difficult to cultivate. In any event, most of us were in such poor physical condition we were unfit for such strenuous labor. We believed that there was plenty of fresh produce available in Manila—that the markets still had coconuts, bananas, papayas, mangos and other native fruits and vegetables to sell. Not allowing us to have access to them meant they intended to see us die slowly of starvation. The Commandant kept ordering us to grow our own food. He also said we must build air raid shelters. We could do nothing about these commands. On the whole, we just ignored them.

Fred earned a little extra food and money by digging shelters for some of his more affluent neighbors, but the shelters filled with water when it rained and became mud holes.

I was glad to realize that the Japanese were now anticipating trouble, but when we met in the evenings our main concern was the inadequate food. Breakfast at 8:30 A.M. was now usually a

ladle of watery rice gruel, sometimes corn meal. No coffee or tea was served, only hot water. At 4:00 P.M. we were served another ladle of slightly thicker rice with a few vegetables boiled in it. It contained no discernable meat, fat or salt, and tasted like cardboard. It was probably just about as nutritious. Our caloric intake was, and had been for some time, less than what was needed to sustain us even if totally sedentary and not required to do work. Yet, most of us labored several hours a day. Fred still worked as a cook. His inimitable good humor prevailed even in these dismal circumstances. He tried to find ways to make our unpalatable food sound interesting by changing the name if not the content. On the blackboard one evening to announce our evening meal menu, he wrote "Isotonic Beans today—Hooray!" They were ordinary beans, but he had added some salt and garlic (filched from somewhere) that gave them a zesty flavor. They were a huge success. Thereafter he was inundated with requests for his "Isotonic Beans," and berated for not serving them more often.

The Antiaircraft Shot

Fred was often in trouble. His escapades brought a little excitement into our lives, though at times the humor of the situation escaped me. One day several of us were standing near the vegetable garden where long ago Fred had once built a small putting green. As he frequently did, Fred had one of his golf clubs in his hand, a wedge, and was swinging it back and forth through the long grass like a scythe. Nearby lay an old rusty lawn mower he had once used to cut the grass for his green. With his free hand he was testing the mower to see if it still worked but the blades were stiff and immovable.

One of the strange rules recently foisted on us by our latest Commandant was that we must never look at the planes flying overhead. I figured it was because he feared that someday soon some of our planes might appear. We had not seen any planes flying over us for a long time.

As we stood watching Fred wrestling with the mower, waiting for four o'clock to come so that we could line up for chow, we heard a drone of airplane engines. Soon a small group of Japanese planes flew by. We all looked up ignoring the rules. Fred stopped toying with the rusty mower and turned his wedge upside down. He aimed the shaft like a gun toward the overhead planes and said, "Bang, bang."

Immediately six Japanese guards started moving toward him in a tight circle, their guns and bayonets pointed menacingly as they advanced. Realizing what he had done, Fred stood stock still, clutching the club in both hands like a baseball bat.