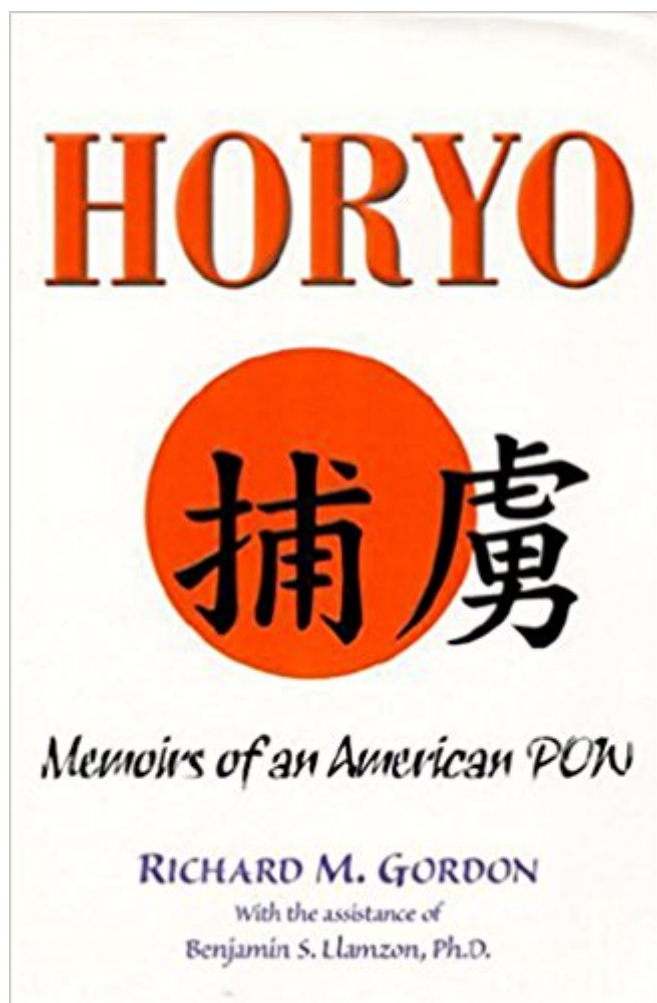




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Horyo: Memoirs Of An American POW



Synopsis

On April 9, 1942, defeated and hungry, thousands of American and Filipino captives gathered together in large fields near Mariveles at the southern tip of the Bataan peninsula in the Philippines. Mass confusion reigned, and when darkness fell, it became impossible to recognize anyone. Friends were soon separated, in many cases never to see one another again. This book tells of the author's experience as a Japanese prisoner of war during World War II. Based on his own experience, the author states that "life in any prisoner of war camp is a shattering experience, but Japanese prison camps far exceeded others in cruelty, barbarism, and outright murder of Allied soldiers captured throughout the Far East." In the end the story serves as a reminder that the precepts of courage, devotion to duty, and sacrifice displayed by the men and women of Bataan, both Filipino and American, have not and will not become outmoded.

Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Paragon House; 1st edition (September 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1557787816

ISBN-13: 978-1557787811

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.9 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,004,596 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #150 in [Books > History > Asia > Philippines](#) #1475 in [Books > History > Asia > Japan](#) #2351 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II](#)

Customer Reviews

"This is the vivid account of Richard M. Gordon, who grew up in "Hell's Kitchen" in New York City, and in August 1940 enlisted in the Army and was assigned to duty in the Philippines. He attained the rank of sergeant during combat in Bataan. In April 1942, he was captured by the Japanese and forced to participate in the infamous Bataan Death March, and subsequently held prisoner of war in several camps including O'Donnell, Cabanatuan, and Hiraoka on Mitsushima in Japan. At O'Donnell and Cabanatuan he was assigned to burial detail until malaria compelled him to join a group of POWs who were shipped to Japan as laborers in November 1942. In shocking detail, he describes life and death in these camps and forces the reader to confront the predatory behavior of many

soldiers in such circumstances."--BOOK JACKET.

Richard Gordon enlisted in the US Army in August 1940 for duty in the Philippines. On April 11, 1942, he was captured by the Japanese and remained a prisoner until September 4, 1945, when his camp was liberated by the British and Americans.

Japan, unlike Germany or the US for that matter, has never come to terms with its actions leading up to and during WW II. The revisionists continue to make ridiculous statements like "the Rape on Nanking" never happened, "all POWs were treated with honor," "we never did that here." This book, like so many others of the topic, help keep the truth alive. They prevent the revisionists from sweeping the truth under the rug, from hiding away any mention of "the unmentionable acts" that were done by and in the name of The Emperor. It helps give meaning and value to the blood, sweat, and tears of those who experienced the terror and anguish of being a "guest of the Emperor." for us, and for the Japanese as a nation, it helps recall that those who do not remember the past, are doomed to repeat it.

This is one very interesting and compelling POW account. It is an amazing and admirable story, and a highly recommended read. It is engrossing, gripping, dramatic material, as most all of the POW accounts from Japan are. Having studied many of them, I look for different facets or facts that distinguish one memoir from others. Major Gordon has many, in his account. He is not bashful to mention homosexuality in the camps, which is rare in written records. The reader will only wish that he gave specific eye-witness, first-person accounts, rather than these kinds of sweeping generalizations (which could even be hearsay, exaggeration, or rumor that he just overheard?). There is a unique and rather morbid theme running throughout the account, from front to back, and it recurs regularly, from beginning to end: Some (or even "many" as Gordon terms it) American POWs were "predators" upon their own fellow POWs, with low-down and exploitative behavior when the chips were way, way down. Gordon makes the case for this claim rather well, with concrete examples. At the same time, he channels most of his bitterness on that issue into a consistent criticism of American "officers" in general, and their lack of "leadership" in the camps. It comes across pretty harshly for the reader who places himself in the exact circumstances of these prisoner-officers. Time after time, Gordon does not explain exactly what an officer could have done in the described circumstances, without being instantly beheaded, killed quickly, or beaten severely if not nearly to death. What advantage would there have been in that? Of course, Gordon HIMSELF

was not resisting and standing up with a "backbone" or doing any of the things he seemingly expected some officer to be doing, in the face of what was obviously total Japanese control and violence at a whim. I agree that the standards for military officer conduct should be exemplary and irreproachable, even under the extreme and debased conditions of Japanese captivity in WWII, but need they be suicidal or counter-productive? He opens a fierce, literally life-and-death issue with this criticism, without any voice from the other side. Lots of these officers died in the camps, while Gordon did not, so it rubs a bit awkward, as a personal "axe to grind."

Now that we have reached the tenth anniversary, this past July 26th, of our father's death the powerful details of his personal account still send chills down my spine. As his daughter Suzanne, I am working on the story of his surviving children and the aftermath of his horrific experience which impacted us all throughout our growing years. It is a story that must be told. It will be dedicated to (among others) our beloved mother Jean Alice Pellechi Gordon. She was his wife of 47 years. She was as much a hero in our family as Dad was, for the love and dedication throughout all the years, to the shattered soul who returned from the war. The story truly ended with her death in 1993. I remain grateful for her mention in the Epilogue included in this book.

Richard Gordon and my father shared some of the same experiences, as they were both in the Bataan Death March, were on the same hell ship to Japan and were in the same prison camp together. My father went on to Kanose prison camp in 1944, as Mr. Gordon notes in his book. This book has enabled me in my research on my father, Jack, to understand what he went through. It has given me an even greater appreciation of those men who were prisoners of the Japanese. And for those captured on Bataan and taking the Death March, and those who fought on Corregidor, it only serves to further bring to the forefront, that these men were indeed considered EXPENDABLE by their government. In fact, in all of the hoopla of World War II, what happened on Bataan and Corregidor has all but been forgotten in the annals of history, except for those men and their families who fought there, died there, or were imprisoned. Some came home, most did not. My father notes in his letter home, after release, that of the 120 men in his company (Headquarters) in the 194th Tank Battalion, only 32 were coming home. He notes that that is apparently true with the whole battalion. I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Gordon, and several other men who were in prison with my father. I have been corresponding with others. I have met men who were in the 194th with him. How any of these men survived is a miracle. Mr. Gordon's story, along with those of others, deserves everyone's attention.

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