

Relief for Americans in Philippines
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LETTER #20

The Gripsholm docked on the morning of December 1st one day ahead of schedule and by noon of the following day all the passengers were off. This was much quicker than the last time. By that time many of the repatriates were already flocking to our office, particularly those whose relatives were unable to meet them in New York. Almost all appeared remarkably well and seemed overjoyed to see so many familiar faces about. First news of our Committee and its work had reached them at Mornagao and later they had details when our special notice was posted on the bulletin board, for which arrangements had been made months ahead. All the Philippine Group were "tremendously thrilled" to learn of our existence and our work and as a result of this we have had their unselfish cooperation and assistance in compiling information in regard to individuals and conditions in Santo Tomas, Los Banos and Camp Holmes. A few of them worked as late as nearly two o'clock in the morning using our stenographic service in order to relay first hand information to relatives and friends in this country. Besides this they have taken precious time from family reunions and necessary rehabilitation to give us all aid possible. In spite of all their happiness in being free and home again they have the fate of those left behind very much at heart, and their one idea is to go to Washington and stress the vital need of further repatriation.

With all this splendid cooperation on their part we are now able to give a clearer picture of conditions in Santo Tomas, Los Banos and Camp Holmes.

Up to September, 1943, the combined report on Santo Tomas stresses the fact that most of the nearly four thousand internees were in excellent health and still displayed splendid morale and this after nearly two years of hardships and an unbalanced diet. They all agreed that time passed very swiftly because they were kept so very busy. This is by far the best news which has come out. However, they are now facing probably the severest test of all. The general food shortage is their most pressing problem and one which threatens to become worse as time goes on. The Red Cross supplies recently delivered at Manila should help the situation for the time being. Many of the internees have been able to augment their diet with provisions from the camp canteen supplied from the outside, such as vegetables, fruits and a few staples but these are now not only becoming scarce but more and more expensive. However, they still have meat three times a week. Sugar, which used to be very plentiful in the Philippines, has now to be severely rationed. Rice flour is substituted for wheat flour, which entirely disappeared, some time ago. Coconut milk or carabao milk is now in general use. Leather shoes are very scarce and costly and clothing and cloth severely rationed. Eight meters a year is allowed per person. For men one pair of long trousers and one shirt, or one pair of shorts and two shirts, or two pair of shorts and one shirt is the allowance.

For thousands to be living in such close quarters without a single epidemic is indeed a remarkable record and a great tribute to the physicians in charge of the health and sanitation of Santo Tomas, a University which was never designed for mass living. Illnesses which occur from time to time and which do exist are not considered above normal. The most astonishing report is that with 900 children interned there has never been a case of the usual childrens diseases. In fact they are the healthiest inmates of the camp. Their diet is especially taken care of and they are given the precedence in whatever is obtainable; such as milk, eggs, and vegetables. The produce of the kitchen garden in Santo Tomas is reserved entirely for the hospital and the children. The milk allowance is 24 ounces of milk a day for a child up to 1 year, 12 ounces from one to 8 years, and 4 ounces from thereafter. Boys and girls are kept in excellent physical condition by supervised exercises and boxing was taught by a professional to the children of 5 years and up. Matches are frequently held with all the rules adhered to and participated in by the boys and girls with a great deal of enthusiasm, fighting to a finish and ending with childish and sportsman like hugs.

Movies for the adults are regularly shown but after spontaneous outbreaks of applause for President Roosevelt by the Americans, and Mr. Churchill by the British, news films are not permitted but news of the outside world does trickle in by various means. Everyone is most hopeful as to the outcome of the war.

In a census taken in the camp with regard to repatriation 40% refused repatriation and preferred to stay until the end.

The shack colony has increased to 600. These are used during the day by families to do their washing and preparation of light meals on native charcoal stoves. This enables them to stay out in the open air but protected from the glare of the sun. A great many men are permitted to sleep in these shacks in order to reduce the congestion in the dormitories.

During May of this year the Japanese authorities rounded up all those living on the outside, irrespective of age, and brought them into camp. Only those who are actually ill were allowed to remain outside and their number is a little over a hundred. Besides this the internment camps at Iloilo, Cebu, Bacolod, Tacloban, and Tagbilaran have been transferred to Santo Tomas which leaves only four civilian internee camps; Santo Tomas, Camp Holmes, Los Banos, and Davao. Los Banos was started in April, 1943, to relieve the overcrowding at Santo Tomas and it now houses 800 able bodied men, 12 Navy nurses, two civilian women who volunteered as secretaries to the Executive Committee and one civilian woman who acts as house mother to the nurses. These 800 men are mostly bachelors with 120 married men, without children, who volunteered to complete the quota of 800. The camp is situated in the old Agricultural College and its high elevation makes health conditions an improvement over Santo Tomas. Food is less costly in Los Banos so the men are able to obtain three meals a day while the same amount of money provides those in Santo Tomas with only two. Besides this there is a small convalescent camp at Sulphur Springs where there are 83 people interned and it is considered the healthiest camp in the Philippines. It is situated about 5 miles outside of Manila on a hill and has excellent water. It is used especially for convalescents and elderly people and is run as a sanitarium. No work is required and they have three meals a day. This is actually, however, an annex of Santo Tomas.

At Baguio the internment camp is Camp Holmes situated on the mountain trail in the Trinidad Valley five miles out. The internees were moved there after three months of uncomfortable internment in Camp John Hay. The buildings used are the old Constabulary Barracks which are somewhat limited in space but internees have considerable freedom within the camp grounds. There are approximately 500. The camp is well organized and has a hospital, with six doctors, a dentist, and numerous nurses in attendance and good medical care is given to the patients, but there is a great need for medicines and medical supplies. There is also an excellent school for the children, under the supervision of a large faculty from the Brent School, also interned there. All the able bodied have work to do and there is a regular wood crew which cuts, splits, and hauls wood into the camp for the cook stoves. There is an adequate supply of food and a camp store which provides some of the necessities as well as vegetables and fruits. Besides this there is also a little bake shop which manages to supply edible concoctions out of rice and casava flours. A certain doctor interned there has been most helpful in providing the camp with banana yeast which has been a great addition to the diet. He has also been able to manufacture soap, face cream, cocconut butter and many other items helpful to the internees. There is also a small much used camp library. Entertainments are arranged every Saturday night. The other evenings are spent in games and bridge, or the pursuit of individual hobbies. They have several baseball teams and games are held nearly every afternoon for exercise and the entertainment of the internees.

There is no military camp at Baguio. However, there are about 10 American soldiers who are acting as volunteer truck drivers.

Unfortunately no information with regard to conditions in Davao were available. Evidently as far as the internees are concerned there has been practically no communication except for censored notes which are allowed to pass between relatives in different civilian camps.

Of all the thousands of letters which have been written in this country to Santo Tomas, very few have been received in the camp. Only about a few hundred letters all together, have trickled through. The British, however, have been more fortunate and have had at least six distributions of English and Australian mail. The internees have been allowed two or three opportunities to write home and also send cables, but the high cost of cables has made it almost prohibitive for many to avail themselves of this means. For most it is a question of buying a little extra food or going without and quite naturally under these conditions survival takes precedence over sentiment. We are requested by those who have returned from Santo Tomas to advise our readers that when sending letters or cables to the internees on no account must bad news or mention of deaths be included, this omission is considered essential to the morale of those still left behind in Santo Tomas.

For the first time since war began civilian mail from the internees is now being distributed in this country, this evidently was brought on the Gripsholm.

The 150 children at the Holy Ghost Convent with a few adults to help with their care are all reported to be in excellent health.

In Manila proper conditions appear to be much the same as they were last year. Some factories are still being operated but by the Japanese. The rest have been stripped of their machinery and this together with all available metals have been shipped to Japan. Telephone services have been greatly curtailed, most phones have been removed. There are only a very few automobiles in use and these are using charcoal or alcohol for fuel oil. The street cars are still operating. There are several daily newspapers but are under Japanese control, the main English paper being the Manila Tribune. All the clubs, most of the hotels and apartments are occupied by the Japanese and some Germans. Jai Alai is more active than ever and play goes on daily with the restaurants and bars functioning as usual. All foreign banks are closed, two or three reorganized Filipino Banks have reopened and there is also a Japanese Bank. The money used is the Japanese Government Peso, per exchange value with the Japanese Yen and with the old Peso but the value is uncertain as inflation is rampant. The policing of Manila is done both by the Filipinos as well as Japanese. The law courts have been reorganized and are functioning. The activities of the religious orders have been very much curtailed but they are operating to a certain extent. Most of the hospitals are still open. The Philippine General Hospital is running as usual. Quezon Institute, St. Luke's Hospital, Manila Sanitarium and Sternburg have all been taken over by the Japanese and are run primarily for their benefit.

The Spanish residents are living as usual with little interference on the part of the Japanese. All the German refugees are still free in Manila and living as usual.

We have had many inquiries with regard to the Military camps in the Philippines. Unfortunately very little information is obtainable in regard to them, their location or identification, except there are known to be four military camps in Manila proper; one on Engineers Island; one in the Elementary School in Pasay; one at Nichols Field; and one at Bilibid Prison.

We have been informed that proposals for a third exchange have now been made. We must bear in mind, however, that there will almost inevitably be complications and probable delays before this can be accomplished. Our government is doing everything in its power to facilitate this and will leave no stone unturned to make this possible, but it requires Japanese consent.

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To many of us this is still far from a Merry Christmas. Our Committee, nevertheless, feels that both here and there we should keep up our courage and spirit so we send Christmas greetings with a renewed hope for the coming year. For some years it had been the practice of our counsel to send to his lawyer colleagues at Manila, DeWitt, Perkin's & Ponce Enrile, a cablegram at Christmas time. In December, 1941, in view of conditions in Manila, it seemed mockery to send one but worse not to so on December 23rd this cablegram was sent:

"Nevertheless Merry Christmas".

On December 29th a reply came, probably one of the last cables sent from Manila:

"Still notwithstanding Happy New Year".