

P.O.W./C.I. - Lt. Col. F.S. Conaty

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Extracted from the Diary of
Lt Col F. S. Conaty
U.S. Army

Easter Sunday, April 9, 1944

Easter and the second anniversary of the fall of Bataan. Chaplain Oliver had real sunrise services this morning as it is Yasume. I didn't go, but there was a large crowd there. We had solemn high mass at 8:00 A.M., with a fair showing. Chap. Wilson was celebrant with Chaps. O'Brien and Reilly as deacons. Three years ago this time we were at Baguio together. It seems to me as if it was in a previous incarnation. Today I dressed up in the new uniform shirt you sent me, with collar insignia taken off an old shirt, and silver leaves for shoulder ornaments embroidered with white thread by yours truly. Not too bad, either. All dressed up and no place to go.

Had only one death during March, an old retired negro from Stotsenburg, Pvt Bell, who has been sick a long time.

April 21, 1944

We received no letters for about a week after our headquarters protest, and then got 300 in one day. 83 of them were for one man. Since then we have received about 100 a day. As it is estimated there are still at least 50,000 over there it will be two years before we get them all, if Uncle Sam doesn't get us out of hock before then. Many haven't gotten a single letter yet. Lt. Col. Lockwood is one of them. Also John Ball, Lt. Strong, Frank's classmate, got one from his mother in which she didn't mention his father once. Then several weeks later he got another dated 3 or 4 months before the first one, telling of his father's death. As he hasn't been well, it has rather depressed him. Another officer received a letter telling him that Lt. Col. Hize, of McKinley when you were there, was dead. A few more radios came in last week dated as late as March 16, 1944. Most of them said they had received a number of cards from us.

The Manila Tribune of April 12, stated that Ogeesa had been evacuated, and Palau and Yap had been bombed for 3 or 4 days. Also that Manila was having blackouts and that everyone was digging foxholes and bomb shelters. So may be it wont be so long now.

139 men, including 3 officers, returned here last night at midnight from various work details. Most of them had been sick and were convalescent. So far I haven't talked to any of them, so haven't gotten any news. The Japanese are putting our old hospital area back in shape, and replaced the barbed wire fence around it. We hear that the 1500 men sent to Davao in Mindanao about 18 months ago are coming back. That is, those that are left. It may be they expect the "Yanks and Tanks" there soon. Many of the prisoners here say the "Reds and Sleds" will get here first.

Diary of Lt Col Francis S. Conaty, cont'd

April 27, 1944

This past week I learned of two more Citadel men. One is Lt. Godwin, '31, who was in the 31st Inf., and was picked up as a guerrilla about a year ago. He is here in camp now. The other, Lt. Daniel (or Daniels) unfortunately died at Bilibid in 1942. He was in Frank's class for about 2 years.

* * *The other day, a group of 50 officers who were watering plant on the farm, each carrying two 5-gal buckets from a stream about 300 yards away, displeased one of their guards (Carabao Sam) by their lack of enthusiasm for their work. He lashed them up in double rank facing one another and required them to slap one another's faces for about 10 minutes using full-arm swings. Any that didn't put enough stuff into their slaps were hit over their bare backs, shoulders and heads with a bamboo stick 2 inches wide and about 40 inches long. Then he gave them 5 minutes rest period, and started them slapping again, until one of our interpreters arrived and induced him to stop. Altho' reported to Japanese headquarters nothing has been done about it so far as we know. Several of the officers had to be treated for cuts made by the edge of the bamboo.

Visited the T. B. ward at the hospital a few days ago and talked to Capt. Hibbs in charge. There are 28 patients there, some of them in pretty bad shape, but all holding their own just now. The Japanese are giving each of them one-third of a can of evaporated milk every day, now, and occasionally a few extras like carabao liver when any are slaughtered. Also there were about 100 extra R/C Food boxes after we got 4 each and our headquarters saved these for them and a few other seriously ill men who need special diet. Our Welfare Fund also buys bananas, coconuts, etc., for them. Little else is available. Several have made very good progress, especially those who have been given air in their pleural cavity to collapse the lung using a home-made apparatus some of the doctors rigged up. Several also have been operated on by cutting the nerve to the diaphragm. Last December I saw one man who weighed about 95 lbs., and the doctor said he couldn't last till Xmas. After an operation (and the Red Cross food) he now weighs 123 lbs., and can get up, move around, and take care of himself. Of course, the dry weather has helped some. It's too bad that men like that can't be sent out somewhere to be better cared for. After all our hospital is one in name only, altho' the doctors do their best.

May 15, 1944

Today is Frank's birthday. Doesn't seem possible he is 24. Like last year, I am hoping that we'll both be home on his next birthday. We get no news at all now as everything has tightened up. Our carabao drivers were confined by the Japanese the other day accused of bringing in notes and money to prisoners in the camp from Filipinos and civilian internees. They also took a number of officers into custody,

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among them Lt. Col. Eddie Mack who was with us at McKinley. All their belongings were searched and they have been sent away to be questioned by the Military Police. I don't know how serious it might be.

One of the Japanese guards put a bullet thru his hand yesterday by an accidental discharge of his rifle. How some of the prisoners haven't been hit is a miracle. He was taken to their hospital in Cabanatuan.

Maj. Chester Johnson, F. A., from Stotsenburg, was telling me something the other day that his wife had written him, and I found out she is Col. Sylvester Down's daughter.

Wed. May 25, 1944

The other day all the officers and men who were arrested about two weeks ago (25 of them) were returned to camp from Cabanatuan where they have been undergoing examination. Yesterday all but 10 were released to our side of the camp, but those 10 are still confined on the Japanese side. Among them are Lt. Col. Mack, Chaps. Oliver, Tiffany, and Taylor, Lt. Col. Schwartz (a doctor from McKinley) and 5 other officers, men, and civilians. It is too bad as they have done much to keep up morale and to enable patients in the hospital to buy some extra food. Of course, they realized they were taking chances. Hope they come out of it all right.

The detail coming in brought word of the fatal wounding of * * * prisoners at Bilibid by a Japanese guard accidentally discharging his rifle while playfully pointing it at the prisoner. The guard then put the muzzle under his own chin and blew it off. They are not certain whether he died or not. We have just been inspected by a Japanese Maj. Gen. He didn't come on our side of the fence, but we are wondering what trouble will come of it, as invariably something unpleasant happens after every inspection.

Sunday June 4, 1944

Nevertheless we have had no deaths here in the past two months since some time in March. We have heard that Capt. Derris of the F. A. at Stotsenburg and 3 soldiers were shot about a month ago at Baguio for trafficking with the Filipinos.

Read "Stars on the Sea" last week, and enjoyed it very much. Hope

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to read "Three Harbors" this week. Our dramatic club has been in two parades recently. One was "Othello" starring Brownlee, the negro from McKinley, in the title roll. The other was "West of the Pecos", a cowboy drama. The costumes were particularly ingenious. Also PFC Eddie Booth did an excellent job as female impersonator.

* * * * *
Monday, June 19, 1944

Lt. Cmdr. Jordan told me he had a letter from his sister-in-law, Dr. Jordan's widow in Fayetteville, saying that Louise was married. I wonder if Frank and Dorothy are married by now, as it seems as if all the young people are doing it. Maybe you'll be a grandmother before I get home. I feel like a grandpap now. Also Maj. Deering received one from his wife saying Maj. Lotterop's little boy died. That is a tragedy. He was a fine youngster. Maj. Bradley of the Marines received his first letter from his wife recently. When he opened it he found some pictures of her, his two little girls and his mother and father, but the letter had been switched in some censor's office and the one in the envelop was to Chaplain Day who was at McKinley when we were and the last we heard was in Davao. I suppose Chap. Day got Bradley's letter. There's not much chance to exchange unless the Chaplain arrives with the Davao detail we expect in a few days.

Another detail of 150 leaves here tomorrow at 4:00 A.M. They are issuing them new clothes so that looks of * * * * *. Our present rags are good enough for the P.I. 250 arrived back several days ago, 200 of them hospital patients and 50 quarters cases. Among them was Col. Duckworth, from McKinley, who has been at Bilbid. He doesn't look so well has aged a lot. But then, I guess we all have.

* * * * *

Looking thru a list of deceased prisoners the other day I saw the name of a PFC Frank Jordan who died in July 1942, and whose next of kin was Lt. Col., F. W. Jordan, c/o the AGC, Washington, D. C. Our group of prisoners, mostly officers, who have been confined in the Japanese guard house for over a month for receiving notes from outside camp, is still over there except for three who have fallen sick and been transferred to our hospital while they aren't very comfortable, we hear they are getting along all right, but can't find out whether they are undergoing sentence, or are still being investigated.

* * * * *
Tuesday, 4th July 1944

723 officers and men from Davao arrived last week, but have been put into our old hospital area, 500 yards from our camp, and we have no contact with them, so we do not know who has come. 1200 arrived in Manila, we hear, but the other 500 are being sent direct to

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Japan, together with 462 men from here who left a week ago. It took over 20 days from Davao to Manila. On the way up, 2 officers - a Lt. Col. and a Lt., jumped overboard in Zamboanga harbor and swam ashore, escaping. Consequently all the rest were confined in the holds for the rest of the trip, and stayed in Manila Harbor 5 days more before being unloaded, being fed rice and water only once a day. Two were dead on arrival and about 100 had to be removed to Bilibid on litters. We hear 21 officers escaped while they were at Davao, and Maj. Harrison was executed for attempted escape. However, only some 20 died, including Joe Sullivan, so their death record was much better than here. We went thru June without a death, so that makes 3 months in a row without a clean sheet.

* * *
The officers and men confined 2 months ago have been moved to a new guardhouse near the entrance to camp, where they are each in a separate cell in solitary confinement, not able to see out except to the sky thru gratings higher than their heads.

* * *
Saturday, July 29, 1944
* * *

There have been a lot of changes the past month. 839 officers and men left here for Japan about two weeks ago. Don't know whether they have sailed from Manila yet, but the detail that left here in June hadn't gotten away up to 10 days ago. Another 180 men went out on work detail, and 170 convalescents returned. The idea seems to be to work them until they drop, and then return them here to try to get them in shape again. These men brought in word that an ammunition ship had blown up in Manila harbor outside the breakwater.

The detail from Davao was transferred to our side of the camp last Sunday. They looked like the wrath of God, and from their stories have had a very bad time, especially coming to Manila by boat. The officers who jumped off the ship were Lt. Col. McGee, Inf., and Capt. Wills, Cav. They can't tell whether they got away safely or not, but think they had a good chance. It made it pretty hard for those left on the ship, tho' Lt. Cols. Edmunds, Gregory, Capt. Knapp, Whaley, Chaps. Carberry and Braun, Lts. Powell and Humphries from McKinley were among them. Also Maj. Joseph Hughes from Matapan, and Col. Powell, from Cebu, the father of the Powell boys in Skerry's outfit, also Jim Heary. All are very thin, but seem to be in good spirits, and glad to be back here. I'm certainly glad I have been able to stay out so long.

* * *
Carl Boehr got a letter from his mother this week telling him Hank Lockwood graduated from the Point in June '43, and married Nancy Baldwin of Manila the following week. However, Col. Lockwood has not received a single letter yet. Neither has Phil Lauman. John Ball got his first a week ago, from his sister.

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Thursday, August 17, 1944

Had a tragic occurrence here last week. 2d Lt. Robt J. Huffcut S. C., who was employed in the High Commissioner's office at Manila before the war, was working in the garden he planted with Lt. Moore, one of Frank's classmates, about 1:00 P.M., on the 11th. The garden was in the rear of the camp near a new boundary fence the Japanese are erecting, but well within our authorized area. The Japanese sentry in the guard tower 40 or 50 yards away yelled at him, but as they are always yelling at one another in Japanese, he paid no attention until some of the other prisoners hollered at him. Then he straightened up and looked towards the sentry just as the latter fired his rifle. Huffcut fell and the sentry took a careful sight resting his rifle on the edge of the box and fired again. No American was allowed to go near him, even our doctors. The guard sent for the Japanese officers and Japanese doctor, who left him lie there for over half an hour by which time he was dead. Then they took him to the hospital, stripped him and ordered out a burial party. By 3:00 P.M. he was buried. Officially it was announced he was shot for being "out of the authorized area." It was plain murder.

~~147~~ 3000 more prisoners left here this morning for Japan. That puts us below 3000 men here for the first time, over half of them sick, and most of the rest officers and Medical Corps men. Chap. Braun from New Mexico, (a Franciscan) went with them as a volunteer. Chaps. Reilly and * * * * * the last batch. They have been trying to get the Japanese to let Chaplains go with each Japan detail, but have never been successful before these two details.

* * * Chap. Carberry from McKinley got the bad news in one of them that his father had died and his brother was drowned. Some of the letters also have contained bad news. A F.S. Lt. Col. received word his wife and mother had died, leaving his son and daughter, both of college age without relatives in the U.S. Another Lieut. got word his wife and daughter were in a plane accident, the daughter dying and his wife sustaining a broken back. Col. Lockwood and Phil Lauman both received their first letters last week.

Three more of Frank's classmates at Citadel arrived here with the Davac detail, Bryant and Glover of the Air Corps, and Leonard of the Inf. numbers of that detail also brought in the bad news that Mrs. Allen had been arrested at Sto. Tomas Internment Camp for sending out notes to Filipinos and friends in Frison Camps. She was confined at Ft. Santiago, undergoing physical punishment, and her two babies had been taken from her. Don't know whether they're at the Internment Camp or not. Hope she doesn't have too bad a time of it. Our officers and men out here who were given solitary confinement for the same offense are still confined in the Japanese area and none of us see them.

Monday, Sep. 11, 1944

Diary of Lt Col Francis S. Conaty, cont'd

We have had a lot of changes in the past three weeks. Two details left for Japan, one of 70, and one of 475. They expected to pick up more men at Bilibid. Chap. Bowman went with one, and Chap. Seccias with the other. Our orchestra is now all gone except a few in poor physical shape, so I guess no more entertainment. In fact, there are only 30 able-bodied enlisted men left in camp. Practically all the work, including cooking and running the farm is done by officer and Medical Corps enlisted men. 100 convalescents returned from Bilibid, including 2 British soldiers captured at Singapore who were left in Manila from a prison ship going to Japan on account of sickness. They were in a camp in Thailand and from their stories we have had an easy time. They lost about 3/5 of those captured by cholera. We had one death on Sept. 1st from cerebral malaria, a Russian civilian that is ~~one~~ only natural death in 5 1/2 months.

The officers, men and civilians who were confined 4 months ago for sending out notes were released last week, including Lt. Col. Mack and Chap. Oliver. All were admitted to hospital, but are in pretty fair shape considering what they have been thru, except Chap. Oliver. * * * * * He is nearly 61. We also heard recently that Lt. Col. Mills, Signal Corps, who escaped from McKinley about a year ago had been caught and executed. We all had our pictures taken last week by the Japanese. My number is 2882. All same as Rogues Gallery.

Saturday, Sep. 23, 1944

The last detail for Japan left here about a week ago. R was only 42 men, all doctors, Med. Corps men and 2 Chaplain Fr. Wilson was one. We hear it was to pick up prisoners at Bilibid from work camps thruout the Islands.

Had one more death last week, from pneumonia, the 2d this month. It's a year since we had 2 in a month. * * * * *

Ran into another Citadel graduate the other day who knew Frank, Capt. Byers, CAC, '38, who came here from the Davao camp several months ago.

Oct. 7, 1944

63 Dutch and British prisoners of war arrived here on Oct. 1st after being sunk 3 miles off the Zamboales coast near Sto. Antonio

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by American bombers on Sept. 21st. They were in a convoy of other ships many of which were sunk of about 900 these were probably the only survivors being picked up by Filipinos in bancas after 5 hours in the water. They look very bad and a dozen of them had to go into hospital right away. About 1350 started from Singapore in June and have been on the ship ever since. Many died and some sick, were sent to Bilibid after 90 died from bad treatment while the ship lay for 3 weeks in Manila Bay.

My weight stays about the same 145 # for 3 months. Am feeling fine. Have had no asthma for over a month.

Sunday, Oct. 15/1944

Just got word this morning that we are to pack up and leave on a moment's notice. Our baggage was inspected this morning and the first detail is now lining up for the 5-mile hike into Cabanatuan where they will probably catch a train. The Staff including myself, will leave with the last detail, probably tonight. Nearly 1000 have gone from here since the 1st, and we hear that 1800 embarked about Oct. 1st. Hope they get thru all right. Also ourselves. We can't take any records with us, so I am burying these books in jars under our bahay with a notice in each that you or I will pay a reward of P100 to the one who finds and returns them to either. If I don't get there to pay it, please take care of it. This is probably the last I shall be able to write to you for some time. Got my 99th letter this morning, one from Peg.

CERTIFIED TRUE EXTRACT:

Francis S. Conaty
FRANCIS S. CONATY
Capt Wac