



Although my Navy troop transport had participated in the early 1945 invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa during World War II, I never went ashore there, nor had ever visited any other foreign country in my 19 years.

So, when we docked at Subic Bay in the Philippines in April, just five months before the war ended, I looked forward to visiting the country. At the time, the island nation was an American possession just recaptured from the Japanese. (Two years after the war ended, the Philippines became independent.)

I had been reassigned from my ship to report to the Navy Third Fleet headquarters in Manila, so I packed my gear and hopped on an Army convoy that traveled the 60 miles to the Philippine capital city. All along the way, as we passed through villages and towns, people packed the roadsides and cheered the American GIs. They tossed flowers and fruit to us, and as we slowed down or stopped, people climbed aboard our trucks and rode along for several miles.

The GIs and sailors reached into our bags and took out cigarettes, candy, K-rations, canned food and anything else we could give to these friendly, but ragged and thin people. Later, as we approached the city limits, I wondered about their attitudes toward us.

After all, didn't General MacArthur run away in 1942, forcing the surrender of American and Filipino troops? Didn't the people remember the horrors of the Bataan Death March? Shouldn't they hate us for leaving them with the murderous Japanese occupiers for more than three years? I could only guess that the joy and relief of liberation erased any feelings of resentment they could have had. If it had happened to me, I'd never be so forgiving.

From the relatively intact conditions of the towns along the way, I was shocked by my first sights of Manila as we drove into the city. It had been called the Pearl of the Orient before WWII, because it was one of the most beautiful and sophisticated capitals in Asia.

During half a century, American business and government agencies put up beautiful buildings, hotels, residences, stadiums and other modern structures. Then, as the WWII was ending in 1945, while the defeated Japanese troops retreated from the city just weeks before our truck convoy arrived, they deliberately went on a spree of mass murder and destruction.

Almost all of the government buildings, colleges, theaters and other major structures had been dynamited into total wrecks. The once-beautiful downtown business area was in smoking ruins. Bunking in my first week in Manila was in a former bank called the Wilson Building. My cot was on the top floor, with nothing by sky and bits of remaining ceiling and roof above me.

Although there were still pockets of Japanese hold-outs, we could drive around secured areas, as long as we took pistols or carbines with us. The city's devastation was horrible, made even more so by the sights and smells of hundreds of dead along many streets and in burned-out

buildings.

As they retreated, the brutally angry Japanese soldiers had taken Filipino officials, POWs, women and children, shot them and burned the bodies. Before I went home after the war, I had the satisfaction of learning that the two commanding generals of the Japanese occupation army, Homma and Yamashita, were hanged in Manila.

Although my first visit to a foreign country was in wartime, and I witnessed the terrible struggles the people of the Philippines had to endure, I do have pleasant memories. I remember how friendly and cheerful every Filipino was to me and other Americans, even in the midst of their deepest tragedy.