



## PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

### American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society

For Immediate Release  
October 2, 2017

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### American POW of Japan Widows and Children of POWs of Japan Undertake trip of reconciliation

One former prisoner of war of Imperial Japan, two widows of POWs, and seven children of POWs are visiting Japan this week as guests of the Japanese government. They are the 9<sup>th</sup> delegation of the U.S.-Japan POW Friendship Program to promote reconciliation between the two countries. This program began in 2010.

The families represent seven American POWs of Japan who were members of the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Army Air Corps. Japan attacked the Philippines and other American Pacific territories hours after their surprise air raid on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. All the men fought to defend the Philippines against invading Japanese forces and all endured years of brutal captivity. Two survived the Bataan Death March, five were slave laborers for Japanese companies, and two perished in the sinking of the “Hell ship” *Arisan Maru* to Japan.

#### The delegation is composed of:

**HENRY TILDEN CHAMBERLAIN**, 95, resides in Edmunds, Washington. He is accompanied by his daughter **Rebecca Chamberlain**, 56, who was born in Okinawa, Japan. He was a surgical technician at the outdoor General Hospital #2 on the Bataan Peninsula during the five-month Battle of Bataan. After two years in POW camps in the Philippines, in October 1944, he was taken to Japan aboard a “Hell ship” to be a slave laborer mining lead and zinc at Mitsubishi Mining’s [Sendai #3-B POW](#) camp.

**JOSEPH BROWN**, 75, born in Manila, is the youngest son of the late **Charles D. Brown** lives in Temecula, California. He carries with him a bracelet his father crafted for his first birthday while in POW camp on the Philippines. The elder Charles Brown was assigned to the headquarters of the [31st Infantry Regiment](#) in Manila. Warrant Officer Brown fought in the defense of the Bataan Peninsula and suffered the Bataan Death March. After over two years in POW camp in the Philippines, he died in the sinking of the *Arisan Maru* “Hell ship” to Japan.

**CAROLINE BURKHART**, 70, is the daughter of the late **Thomas F. Burkhardt**. She is an experienced researcher of the American POW experience with Imperial Japan and a former vice president of the [American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society](#). Her father was an officer with the Headquarters Company of the [45th Infantry, Philippine Scouts](#), an elite U.S. Army unit composed of American officers and Filipino enlisted men. In November 1942, he was taken to Japan aboard a “Hell ship” to be a slave laborer at a number of POW camps and was liberated at [POW Camp 11-B Rokuroshi](#) deep in the Japanese Alps near the industrial town of Fukui.

**MARY JANE MCCORTS BLAINE**, 62, is the daughter of the late **John J. McCorts**. She is a life-long resident of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and works for the [Pennsylvania State Employee Credit Union \(PSECU\)](#). Her father John J. McCorts was radio operator with U.S. Army [228th Signal Operations Company](#) on Corregidor Island in Manila Bay. He fought on both Bataan and Corregidor. He was taken to Japan aboard a “Hell ship” in September 1942 to be a slave laborer first at the Mitsubishi Shipyards in [Tokyo #1-D Yokohama](#) and then in a copper mine owned by Dowa Holdings at [Sendai #8B Kosaka POW Camp](#).

**DORIS JEAN PRUITT**, 88, is the widow of the late **Charles L. Pruitt**. She is accompanied by her daughter **JUDITH ANN PRUITT**, 70, who lives in Boston, Massachusetts and is a Board member of the [American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society](#). Charles L. Pruitt was a carpenter’s mate assigned to the Naval Ammunition Depot, Cavite Navy Yard to train as a mine technician. Like most of the U.S. Navy on the Philippines, he became an infantryman to fight in the Bataan of Bataan. He ended up on Corregidor Island fighting beach defense. In August 1944, he was taken to Japan aboard a “Hell ship” and became a slave laborer mining coal at an Ube Industries’ [Hiroshima # 6B - Omine \(Sanyo\)](#), which is only 75 miles from Hiroshima.

**SHIRLEY EMERSON STEELE**, 92, is the widow of the artist **Benjamin Charles Steele**. She is accompanied by her step-daughter **ROSEMARIE STEELE**, 70, who was Wheatland Country, Montana’s elected treasurer. Benjamin Charles Steele was a member of the U.S. Army Air Corps assigned to [Clark Field about](#) 40 miles northwest of Metro Manila. After the invading Japanese destroyed the air field, Steele joined a provisional infantry regiment to fight in the Battle of Bataan. He suffered the Bataan Death March and over two years in POW camp in the Philippines. In July 1944, he was taken to Japan aboard a “Hell ship” and became a slave laborer at an Ube Industries owned coal mine in [Hiroshima # 6B - Omine \(Sanyo\)](#), which is only 75 miles from Hiroshima.

**JOHN COLLIN WHITEHURST**, 76, born in Manila, is the only child of the late **Collin B. Whitehurst, Jr.** He lives in Texas and serves on the board of the [American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society](#). Collin B. Whitehurst, Jr. was a 1938 graduate of West Point and assigned to [45th Infantry Regiment, Philippine Scouts](#). He served on the staff of the Commanding General of the Visayan-Mindanao Force, Major General William F. Sharp on Mindanao. After over two years in POW camps in the Philippines, he died in the sinking of the [Arisan Maru](#) “Hell ship” to Japan.

**Full profiles of the POWs can be found here:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0FzSK4JQBd1SV90Yzg2cTRKajO/view?usp=sharing>

They will visit the sites of their loved ones' imprisonment and rescue as well as several Japanese cultural properties.

This is the 9<sup>th</sup> trip of this much appreciated Japanese government-funded program of remembrance and reconciliation. Jan Thompson, president of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society that works with the U.S. State Department to identify participants, welcomes the inclusion of POW widows and children in the program.

Ms. Thompson said, "It confirms Japan's commitment to overcoming its dark history and shows a modern understanding that the traumas of past atrocities and war crimes are intergenerational. The goodwill and healing resulting from these trips is a model for more Japanese efforts to acknowledge and console its victims. The result strengthens the personal ties that undergird the U.S.-Japan Alliance."

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