

# Imperial Japan's Allied Prisoners of War in the South Pacific



# Imperial Japan's Allied Prisoners of War in the South Pacific:

*Surviving Paradise*

By

C. Kenneth Quinones

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Surviving Paradise

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Dedicated to my wife Julie  
for her patience, understanding and support.

The following dedication appears in English, Japanese and Pidgin English  
on a monument which the Japanese government erected in Rabaul,  
New Britain:

*IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE  
WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES  
IN THE ISLANDS AND SEAS OF THE  
SOUTH PACIFIC DURING WORLDWAR II,  
AND IN DEDICATION TO  
WORLD PEACE.*



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## The South Pacific - Setting for the Battle for Rabaul 1941-1944

### Approximate Distances from Tokyo and Rabaul

Tokyo to San Francisco	5,151 miles
Tokyo to Pearl Harbor	3,865 miles
Tokyo to Midway Island	2,549 miles
Tokyo to Truk	2,098 miles
Tokyo to Rabaul	2,863 miles
Tokyo to Singapore	3,302 miles
Rabaul to Truk	795 miles
Rabaul to Townsville, Australia	953 miles

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# INTRODUCTION

Mere mention of the South Pacific sparks images of a tropical paradise where puffy white popcorn clouds drift lazily above a vast azure sea as cool ocean breezes crown blue waves with white tips. Beyond the surf washed tan beaches, rustling coconut palm trees and steamy emerald green jungles embrace islands large and small that dot a vast, tranquil landscape. Nature eons ago fashioned this endearing paradise. An American veteran of World War II in the South Pacific, the 20<sup>th</sup> century popular author James Michener, paradoxically popularized the image of the South Pacific as paradise in his global bestselling novel, *Tales of the South Pacific*. His creative imagination transformed traumatic war experiences into tales of joy and romance in nature's paradise. The brilliant composers Rodgers and Hammerstein translated Michener's tales into romantic opera vividly presented on the Broadway stage. For many this became the reality of World War II in the South Pacific.

Alas history has confirmed the author's tales and the composers' interpretations of them to be wonderfully entertaining illusions. A single small black and white photograph awoke me to this reality. It captured five very thin men standing shoulder to shoulder dressed in baggy, plain khaki uniforms staring expressionless at the camera. Unseen are their two companions who had already boarded the C-47 "Goony bird" transport aircraft parked behind them. The picture, taken by an US government photographer, appeared in the *New York Times* newspaper some years later when the men held a reunion. Identified with the picture were former prisoners of war (POW) of Imperial Japan held at Rabaul, the port city on the then Australian ruled New Britain Island north of New Guinea. They were:

- Lt. Jim "Mac" McMurria (1917-2003), a B-24 pilot and native of Columbus, Georgia,
- Lt. Jose "Joe" Holguin (1921-1994), a B-17 navigator from Los Angeles, California,
- Lt. Alphonse "Al" Diaz Quinones (1918-2002), a P-38 fighter pilot born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico and raised in New York City.
- Lt. (j.g.) Joseph "Joe" Nason (1919-2012), a Navy dive bomber pilot from Westborough, Massachusetts.

- Sergeant Escoe Palmer (1915-1977), a B-24 gunner/engineer from Gainesville, Georgia,
- John Kepchia (1924-2020), a Navy torpedo bomber radioman/gunner from Greensburg, Pennsylvania,
- Captain John Murphy (1914 -1997), a native of Brisbane, Australia.

Among these Rabaul survivors the name Alphonse Quinones stood out. He was my father. Even my mother knew little about his experiences as a POW. Seeking answers to a multitude of questions consumed five years of research which is summarized below.

Much had been written about the fighting in the South Pacific and the battle for Rabaul, but very little about the people Imperial Japan imprisoned there. The Rabaul survivors had not been alone. Thousands of POWs from Australia, Great Britain, British ruled India, Dutch ruled East Indies (now Indonesia) and China were also imprisoned there, each nationality segregated from the other. Hundreds of missionaries and civilians from Europe and North America were imprisoned on the island. Imperial Japan also dispatched nearly ten thousand conscripted Koreans to the region. The men performed hard labor for little or no compensation while some 3,000 young women served as so-called comfort women to satisfy Japanese military personnel's sexual desires. Although not imprisoned, none were free.

Surviving paradise was an arduous challenge. Imperial Japanese military commanders demonstrated a complete disregard for their prisoners' welfare and deemed them expendable. The POWs were treated like caged animals, fed a daily starvation diet of white rice equal to three tennis balls and three cups of salty bean curd soup. They slept without bedding, lacked water to wash even their hands and used a bucket as a toilet. Mosquitoes and lice feasted on their filthy bodies which were covered with tropical ulcers. All suffered from malaria and *beriberi* caused by the lack of vitamins and minerals in their white rice diet. Both medicine and medical treatment were denied them. Of the 1,200 Australians taken prisoner on New Britain Island early in the war, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) executed at least 200 shortly after their capture. The others died when a US submarine sank the Japanese hell ship transporting them to Japan. Of the 213 Allied airmen and coast watchers captured most were executed or died of disease. Three were victims of a medical experiment. A few were transferred to Japan. Only seven survived imprisonment at Rabaul. Of 600 British POWs sent as slave laborers from Singapore to Rabaul only 18 returned home to Scotland after the war. At least one third of the missionaries and civilians perished during internment.

Little is known about the Asian POWs whom the IJA called *romusha* or laborers, not POWs. Many died of malnutrition, tropical diseases or were the victims of IJA cannibalism. Probably fewer than half survived the war. Nearly all the Korean workers were mistaken for IJA troops and died in combat or from malnutrition and tropical diseases. Most likely all the comfort women died from disease or when US submarines and bombers sank the ships evacuating them to Japan.

Even the 600,000 Japanese military personnel scattered across the South Pacific fared only slightly better than their alien prisoners. By early 1944 they too had become *de facto* POWs after the Allies surrounded New Britain Island, isolating from Japan those who had survived two years of intense warfare and an unending struggle against tropical diseases and hunger. Although their resupply and evacuation were impossible, commanders ordered their troops to fight to their death. Dwindling supplies of food, ammunition and medicine rendered further resistance impossible. But surrender, even for starving, ill and wounded soldiers was deemed equivalent to treason. Instead these troops were ordered to rush screaming toward Allied machine guns in final, futile suicidal *Banzai* charges. If wounded were expected to kill themselves with explosives if Allied troops approached to help them. Among the few survivors many turned to cannibalism hoping to sustain the strength needed to fight.

The American historian John Dower accurately labeled World War II in the Pacific a war without mercy. Indeed it was. Actually however all wars are without mercy as a multitude of historians have documented since the beginning of recorded history. Simply stated, humans regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, politics, etc. have been and remain capable of inflicting horrible brutality on their fellow human beings. All groups of people have recognized this and attempted to deter such brutality by defining codes of conduct intended to guide human conduct toward the universal golden rule, "Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you." Tragically, such codes are marginalized during wars.

Many questions about the war in the South Pacific merit answers but foremost among them is: What motivated the Imperial Japanese armed forces to inflict such horrendous and pervasive suffering on not just its adversaries and the people of East Asia, particularly the Chinese and Koreans, but even on its own personnel? Historians and legal experts have extensively catalogued the Imperial Japanese armed forces' multitude of atrocities. There is no reason to challenge this work's validity or to attempt to add to it. Also undeniably as we shall see all sides committed atrocities during World War II not just in the South Pacific but everywhere. None of this is being contested. The focus rather is upon attempting to decipher the

rationale Imperial Japanese leaders used to justify going to war and to conduct the war as they did. Some have suggested it was a consequence of feudal Japan's medieval warrior code, *Bushido* and traditional Japanese norms. So-called ultra-nationalism has also been suggested as a cause. Both theses and others will be explored in depth.

Our quest employs a global approach to history. After all World War II was a global event. It has long been assessed in terms of particular great men and nations' accomplishments and failures as defined by Judeo-Christian religious values and European cultural preferences. Humanity was molded into a hierarchy based on one's race and nationality as determined by physical features and place of birth. Societies were similarly divided into civilized or barbaric, and industrialized, developing or undeveloped according to European standards. Human conduct was seen as a consequence of religion, culture or nationality until Karl Marx claimed social class and economic status determined an individual's conduct. Global history endeavors to reverse this. The historian is encouraged to broaden their perspective beyond the orthodox hierarchy of races, nations, people and events. Instead all people are seen as members of the human race regardless of their physical attributes, ethnicity, culture, etc. They share the fundamental characteristics and preferences that define the human race. People are assumed to generally prefer peace and collaboration over conflict and confrontation. Each society is seen as subscribing to a culture, religion and/or philosophy that distinguishes between good and evil. When times are good human society enjoys good health, harmony, and prosperity. But evil is indeed a reality that haunts all humans. Our task is to better understand what tips human conduct toward evil. Is it possible that evil overwhelms good if the voices of fear overwhelm those of hope?

Dr. Nakajima Mineo, founding president of *Kokusai kyoyo daigaku* (Akita International University, AIU) in Akita, Japan advocated global history. He did not develop the concept but pioneered its application in Japan. Credit for its development belongs to many other historians. I adopted the global approach while teaching East Asian history for nine years (2006-2015) at AIU. Expanding the perspective of the war in the South Pacific was my responsibility but credit for being able to do so belongs to many historians in the United States, Australia, Japan and elsewhere who have explored numerous archives to reveal what actually happened in the South Pacific during WWII. Their work made possible building a global perspective which encompasses not only persons and events in the South Pacific but also the actions and policies of political and military leaders in Japan, the United States, Australia, Great Britain,

Germany, the Soviet Union, etc. and at the League of Nations. Only then was it possible to fully comprehend the agony and stark reality all WWII prisoners endured in the South Pacific.

Our focus is on the seven Rabaul survivors whose stories are best documented and represent the other prisoners' ordeals. Only a comprehensive view of what all prisoners and Japanese soldiers endured as they struggled to survive paradise will enable us to fully appreciate their odyssey. Our story unfolds against the global backdrop of the clamor between the voices of optimism and fear that the Great Depression and militarism's rise in Japan which culminated in war in China and Europe.

#### Names

Japanese, Korean and Chinese names appear according to East Asian format, i.e. family name followed by given name.

#### Data

Every effort has been made to include accurate statistical data but the data should be considered to be approximate and indicative, and not as being precise. The compilation and maintenance of accurate data during periods of intense combat is virtually impossible. The constant shifting of combatants from place to place makes it impossible to know exactly how many troops are at any one place at a given time. Also the Japanese military destroyed most of its records at war's end. Even the number of US prisoners of war (POW) imprisoned by Imperial Japan varies between approximately 21,000 and 29,000. This is because the Japanese government did not establish an office to keep track of POWs until several months after WWII started. Also thousands of US military personnel continue to be listed as MIA, missing in action. No records are known to exist regarding East Asian military personnel imprisoned by Imperial Japan.

# CHAPTER I

## THE WORLD BETWEEN THE WARS

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”  
—President Franklin D. Roosevelt Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933

Economic woe and political turmoil plagued the period between the World Wars 1919 to 1939. No one could have foreseen history’s most deadly and devastating war of 1939 to 1945 that followed the clashes between civilian and military leaders over how best to deal with these challenges. At that time the Rabaul survivors were understandably preoccupied with the Great Depression because it would most directly impact their future. Eventually they came to realize that the impact of economic hard times would spark prolonged and profound political ramifications as industrialized nations’ leaders divided themselves into what the American historian Jon Meacham called the voices of fear and hope. The Greek philosopher Aristotle in his ancient book *Rhetoric* defined fear as being caused by whatever we feel has great power of destroying us, or of harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain. He believed fear affects us when prosperity is threatened. Opposite fear is hope about which Aristotle wrote, “The coward then, is a despairing sort of person; for he fears everything. The brave man, on the other hand, has the opposite disposition; for confidence is the mark of a hopeful disposition.” Aristotle believed fear divides and weakens, hope unites and strengthens. The same can be said about the leaders and the reality industrialized nations experienced between the wars.<sup>1</sup>

As Aristotle had opined centuries earlier, the Great Depression’s threat of impoverishment excited and energized the voices of fear across the industrialized world. For reasons economic historians continue to debate the world economy virtually collapsed. Unrecognized at the time 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism and industrialization had fostered economic interdependence or globalization - the interweaving of economies far beyond geographical and national boundaries. The actions of the world’s wealthiest nations after World War I only contributed to the economic fiasco. Hyper-inflation propelled Germany into bankruptcy, causing an

international banking crisis. Unregulated and irrational speculation in the US real estate and stock markets during the 1920s encouraged excessive borrowing, fostering inflation. The US Congress passed the Smoot-Hawley Act which doubled import tariffs on imported goods. The intent was to protect American producers by making imported goods more expensive and thus induce Americans to “buy American.” But it backfired. Other exporting nations retaliated. Disruption of international trade reduced the dollar value of American exports from \$5.2 billion in 1929 to \$1.7 billion in 1933.

Global trade was severely disrupted, thrusting industrialized nations into deep psychological and economic depression followed by political turmoil. Hardest hit were: Australia, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States, among other nations. France and Spain were less severely affected. In South America, Chile was hardest hit because of its dependence on mineral exports. China and the Soviet Union escaped primarily because their economies had yet to be fully integrated into the global economy. By 1932, industrial production had declined dramatically: 23% in Great Britain, 24% in France and 41% in Germany. Unemployment exploded by 129% in Great Britain, 214% in France and 232% in Germany. In 1930 only 48,000 people among 132 million Americans earned more than \$2,500 per year. Half of male and two-thirds of female workers earned less than \$1,000 per year. Then the American economic bubble burst as stock values crashed, forcing factories to close and people to lose their jobs. One out of every four Americans in a work force of about 52,500,000 people was unemployed and the extent of underemployment was unknown. Eventually 11,300,000 workers lost their jobs. By 1933 US industrial production had dropped 46%, forcing 32,000 businesses into bankruptcy and causing unemployment to explode 607%. More than 5,000 banks failed. The entire credit and banking system collapsed because fewer people and businesses could pay their bills and repay their loans.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately for humanity the majority of Americans including the Rabaul survivors represented the voices of optimism, not fear. As representatives of what some have called the Greatest Generation, the task fell to the Rabaul survivors and their fellow Americans to restore global prosperity and peace by defeating the voices of fear in World War II. But initially Americans were reluctant to confront these daunting tasks. They ultimately did so only after several years of rowdy debate. Surely Imperial Japan’s bold but futile attack on Pearl Harbor unwittingly rallied Americans behind the world’s foremost voice of optimism President

Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945) but this does not explain Americans' initial hesitancy.

A partial explanation is the reality that American society in the 1930s was splintered socially, economically, racially and ideologically. It hardly resembled the egalitarian promises of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and other key documents which promised equality for all. Society remained deeply divided according to ethnicity, race, gender, income, occupation, education, religion and political views. Ability, experience and education were of marginal significance in determining one's qualification for a job.

The most obvious divide was between rural and urban Americans. The United States remained predominantly an agrarian society. Most Americans lived in small towns and on farms scattered in New England's forests and across vast plains where the quality of life was generally superior to that of urban dwellers. Farmers and town inhabitants benefitted from access to fresh air and clean water, and could cultivate crops and nurture livestock for income and food. They were not dependent on jobs for either.

But in 1933 68% of those living in cities and towns enjoyed indoor bathrooms with flush toilets and 61% had either a bathtub or shower, allowing bathing to become a Saturday night ritual. Most city dwellings had electricity but few farm houses. Central heating, air conditioning and telephones were still luxuries for most people. City dwellers, at least those fortunate enough to have a job, endured long working hours for poverty level wages in dimly lighted, dirty, foul smelling factories with ear damaging noise and little or no heat. Most factory workers could only afford to rent small, dank and dark apartments where the air was foul, clean water scarce, personal hygiene poor and disease rampant. If they lost their job, city dwellers became destitute. Child labor both in cities and on farms was common.

Rural Americans began experiencing economic stress as early as the 1920's once agricultural exports such as wheat, cotton, tobacco and lumber declined at the end of World War I. The Smoot-Hawley Tariffs crushed agriculture's economic vitality after 1930. Farmers particularly in the Great Plains and southeastern states fled their farms. A huge dust bowl developed when wheat and corn farmers in the Great Plains and eastern Colorado attempted to increase profits by increasing harvests. In the process they destroyed their land's fertility. Winds swept across arid fields creating towering dust storms, polluting the air and destroying crops. An extended drought aggravated the situation. Eventually the Dust Bowl measured upwards of 1,000,000 acres. Impoverished and facing famine, people abandoned their homes, piled their few possessions high on rickety

autos and trucks and fled west on US Highway 66 toward the “Promised Land” of California, Oregon and Washington. Eventually an estimated 200,000 farmers with their families abandoned the Dust Bowl. A second mass migration followed when poverty forced tens of thousands of farm families to flee farms in the southeastern states and migrate west or north to urban areas. Most were white farmers who left behind millions of black farm workers and sharecroppers whose sturdy backs had long shouldered much of the labor needed to cultivate and harvest crops. Many rural Southern blacks followed seeking work in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.<sup>3</sup>

The Great Depression adversely affected the quality of life in America’s cities for all except wealthy Americans. While they continued to increase their wealth, to live in splendid residences, to enjoy the good life of wining and dining, and sending their children to the best schools, the majority of Americans by 1932 were living in poverty. By 1933 the migration from rural to urban areas had overwhelmed available jobs, housing, schools and social services in urban areas. Hordes of unemployed workers and former farmers huddled with their families in so-called “Hoovervilles” named for Republican President Herbert Hoover (1874-1964), urban clusters of unheated shanties made of waste wood, even cardboard and other discarded materials. There was no electricity, piped water or flush toilets. Paradoxically such appalling conditions began erasing Southern states’ preference for separate but equal facilities which segregated whites and blacks. Poverty had begun to foster equality as economic conditions compelled whites and blacks to stand side by side in long lines awaiting a free meager meal at a “soup kitchen.” World War II would perpetuate and quicken the erosion of segregation but not necessarily racist attitudes and practices.<sup>4</sup>

Race was for most Americans a decisive concern. Racism is the irrational belief that one’s ancestral ethnicity and/or skin color makes one superior to others. Racism is a global phenomenon not unique to nor invented in the United States. Europeans have long sliced humanity into a hierarchy based on skin color and other physical features. Most Germans excluding Jews and not just members of the Nazi Party favored Aryans, a mythical race of people with blond hair, blue eyes and white skin. Nor did the Nazis invent antisemitism. Nazi leaders like Hitler exploited the German myth of Aryan superiority and antisemitism to broaden the appeal of their political platform. These attitudes were already pervasive across Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and European Russia before the rise of Hitler. Antisemitism accompanied European immigrants to the United States. In Japan, 18<sup>th</sup> century scholars of the national studies

(*Kokugaku*) school advocated a distinctive theory of Japanese racial superiority that remains pervasive.<sup>5</sup>

Some European and American 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century politicians and academicians relied on Social Darwinism, a school of social science that took root among many scholars at the world's most prestigious universities such as Oxford and Harvard Universities to rationalize racism and imperialism. They applied early 19<sup>th</sup> century biologist Charles Darwin's survival of the fittest theory of nature's evolution to pseudo scientific data to substantiate claims of white racial supremacy. Even scholars at Harvard University equated human brain capacity with human intelligence. Based on their comparative measurements of white, black, "yellow," and "red" skinned human beings' skulls and brain capacities, they concluded whites were the most intelligent of the human species followed by all the others. They extrapolated that whites were best qualified to rule the world. These pseudo scientists and sociologists claimed their findings justified excluding people of color, particularly African Americans (about 10% of the American population), Hispanic Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans (less than 3% of the population) from society's upper echelons, best schools, better paying careers and jobs, etc. Similarly white male advocates of Social Darwinism asserted that women were biologically programmed to work in the home giving birth to and nurturing children while looking after their husband's needs and caring for the home. Pervasive sexism in the United States barred women from being able to vote until 1920. Sexism also persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stifling women's access to higher education, most professions and equal pay for equal work.<sup>6</sup>

In America, white racism against black, brown, "yellow" (Asians) and "red" Native Americans was particularly abusive. The Jim Crow era concept of separate but equal was invented to circumvent laws, even the Constitution, and to perpetuate racial inequality between whites and blacks living in southern states. Blacks were excluded from "White Only" facilities such as schools, churches, hotels, public transportation, entertainment places, restaurants, bathrooms, neighborhoods and even water drinking fountains.

But segregation was not exclusive to southern states. The army and navy were segregated until 1947. During the Great Depression, the US Army's 500,000 members included only 4,700 black soldiers, two black officers, three black chaplains and four segregated units. Most black soldiers were assigned to logistic duties as truck drivers, repairmen, etc. Blacks in the navy were relegated to serving in galleys, mess halls and laundries. Not a single member of the US Marine Corps (USMC) was

black. A black college graduate who had graduated 13<sup>th</sup> among 300 pilot trainees in a government program was told, “There is no place for a Negro in the Air Corps.” The US Army War College, drawing on the pseudo science of Social Darwinists published in 1925 a report entitled “Negro Manpower,” which read in part;

In the process of evolution, the American negro has not progressed as far as other sub species of the human family ....The cranial cavity of the negro is smaller than whites ...The psychology of the negro, based on heredity derived from mediocre African ancestors, cultivated by generations of slavery, is one from which we cannot expect to draw leadership material...In general the negro is jolly, docile, tractable, and lively but with harsh or unkind treatment can become stubborn, sullen and unruly. In physical courage [he] falls well back of whites...He is most susceptible to ‘crowd psychology.’ He cannot control himself in fear of danger....He is a rank coward in the dark.”<sup>7</sup>

Ignorance, fear and economic considerations nurtured the “Yellow Peril” myth which “yellow journalism” trumpeted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The American mass media created imagines of hordes of impoverished, unwashed, and opium crazed people from China and Japan flooding North America. Anti-Asian racism was particularly vicious on North America’s west coast where Americans and Canadians began clamoring for their governments to legally block Asian immigration. Once Chinese coolies were no longer needed to build railroads in the West, the US Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882. Efforts to bar Japanese and Korean immigration followed. Initially Japan did this voluntarily based on its 1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement with the United States. But white farmers feared competition from Japanese-American farmers who produced 40% of California’s harvest on 1% of the farm land. Rather than improve their farming techniques, white farmers sought to prevent more Japanese farmers from entering the United States. The white California farmers even admitted they wanted to expel the Japanese-Americans so they could gain access to their competitors’ fertile farmland. “California was given by God to a white people,” the president of Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West proclaimed, “and with God’s strength we want to keep it as he gave it to us.” At the time Asian-Americans accounted for less than 1% of American society, but white Americans’ mounting calls for exclusion, principally on the West coast, convinced Congress to legally bar Asian immigration. The 1924 immigration law rendered the 1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement passé, outraging the Imperial Japanese government. Thereafter Japanese, Koreans,

Chinese, and other Asian people were almost completely excluded from immigrating to the United States until 1965.<sup>8</sup>

Ethnicity, the geographical origin of one's ancestors, and religion were another rationale for prejudice second only to racism. At least 98% of Americans were and are immigrants from foreign lands. Despite this shared characteristic white Americans differentiated themselves according to their ancestors' geographical origins and religion. So-called May Flower Protestant Americans incorrectly claim to be the first European settlers of North America. Actually Spaniards settled the southern and western regions of the United States much earlier, a fact ignored because Spaniards are mostly Catholics. White Protestants from Great Britain, including Scotland, proclaimed superiority among all immigrants. All other white Protestant immigrants were ranked lower beginning with those from France followed by northern Europeans, particularly Germans and Scandinavians. Catholic Irish and southern Europeans like Catholic Italians were ranked near the bottom of America's social pyramid. Jews, despite their white skin and European origins, were ranked just above the lowest social echelon. The lowest echelon was reserved for African Americans, Asians and immigrants from Arab kingdoms. Mormons were despised while Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims were too few to cause concern at least prior to World War II.

Jews, a mere 3% of the US population in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were particularly vilified. Public opinion polls taken in the late 1930s indicated that although Americans disapproved of Hitler's abuse of Jews, 35% of Americans nevertheless disliked Jews and labeled them "noisy, cheap, boisterous and loud people." More Americans (53%) advocated regulating Jewish access to certain business and social circles. Antisemitism infected the Department of State's policy regarding the admission of Jewish refugees from Europe. Some antisemitic State Department officials rejected European Jews' applications for refugee status claiming they might be Hitler's spies. Despite multiple obstacles, an impressive number of Jews acquired the education needed to qualify for government service as evident from the fact that although only 3% of the US population identified itself as Jewish, Jews accounted for 15% of President Roosevelt's appointed officials during his tenure.

This social pyramid belied the Declaration of Independence's claim that, "All men are created equal." It remained rigidly in place during the first century and half of the United States determining access to society's upper echelons, where a person could live, the schools they could attend, eligibility to vote, access to justice or legalized regulation of an individual's freedom, and who qualified for employment in the most

respected and financially rewarding professions. An extensive vocabulary developed to categorize people. The elite were designated WASPs, an abbreviation of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, a category reserved for males. WASPs monopolized politics, the financially most rewarding and prestigious professions, exclusive social club membership, and access to preferred neighborhoods, school districts and housing. Even before the Great Depression's full fury was felt, a mere 1% of American WASPs controlled 40% of the nation's wealth in 1929. Of the US Congress' 531 members in 1933, 526 were male (including one black) but only 5 females. Everyday American English was punctuated with words coined to demean the majority of Americans. Italians were referred to as "Wops," Puerto Ricans as "spics," blacks as "niggers," native Americans as "red skins," and Japanese, Chinese and Koreans as: Mongoloids, mad dogs, yellow vermin, yellow bellies, yellow bastards, yellow monkeys, LYBs (little yellow bellies) or nips, slant-eyes, squint eyes, slopes, Chinks, gooks, zips, etc. This derogatory terminology was commonly and pervasively enunciated across America until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s sharply curtailed its use.<sup>9</sup>

Politics further divided Americans: Democrats versus Republicans, conservatives versus liberals, pragmatic progressives versus ideologically rigid socialists and communists, management versus labor unions, etc. Even political parties were divided into adversarial camps: rural Southern Democrats championed segregation while urban blue collar Democrats favored labor unions. Republicans and Democrats clashed over how best to promote prosperity and how to achieve social and economic equality.

In spite of the numerous distinctions and contending cliques, the United States sustained its unity. A primary reason was the American people's belief in the American Dream, a concept suggested in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and Emancipation Proclamation. Regardless of skin color, geographical origins or religion of a person's ancestors being American meant an individual who believed the United States was a nation of laws that promised equal opportunity for all to climb the socio-economic ladder so long as they demonstrated the willingness to work hard and to perform to the best of their innate ability. Had upward social and economic mobility ceased the great American Dream would lose its validity and the United States might again crumble into violent chaos as happened during the Civil War.

The Great Depression emboldened the American voices of fear to claim that perpetuation of the American Dream was in doubt. They advocated political and economic measures more extreme than democracy and capitalism to restore prosperity and thus perpetuate the American

Dream. President Hoover's do-nothing response to the Great Depression failed to nurture confidence that prosperity was just around the corner as long as the federal government did not disturb the concentration of wealth at society's apex. So long as the wealthy were allowed to invest their financial wealth as they deemed best prosperity would eventually trickle down to the lower socio-economic classes. Demagogues, the shrillest of the voices of fear, reacted with calls to replace democracy with authoritarian fascism or communism. Despite some disillusionment with democracy and the fact that the American Dream remained more myth than reality, popular optimism persisted that the dream could be achieved if and when prosperity was restored.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his wife Eleanor and the capable staff surrounding them deserve much of the credit for perpetuating Americans' optimism in the dream during the Great Depression. Roosevelt, or FDR as he was widely known, was born into a family of wealth and high status. He attended America's elite schools, including Harvard College. Although he and his wife were WASPs, their families were politically aligned with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban progressive movement which urged people of wealth and privilege to promote the common good and people's welfare. Government service was esteemed as the preferred manner for doing so. After completing his education FDR accepted an appointment in the Navy Department during World War I where he established a broad network of political contacts. He next entertained pursuing a career in politics but was struck down by polio which robbed him of the ability to walk. Instead of collapsing into self pity or anger FDR's innate optimism enabled him to view his infirmity as a challenge to overcome.

As the Great Depression deepened FDR emerged as the leading voice of optimism. He confidently declared that reliance on democracy would restore prosperity and preserve the American Dream. His beaming smile, not his polio stricken legs, became his trademark. At his first inaugural address FDR famously countered the voices of fear declaring, "We have nothing to fear except fear itself!" From this was born his New Deal. Prosperity was not immediately restored, but optimism in democracy and the American Dream was preserved. As FDR worked to formulate his New Deal he radically altered the traditional role of government. Previous presidents had used the machinery of government to promote prosperity by facilitating the expansion of commercial opportunities for the economic elite while minimizing government's involvement in the so-called private sector of commerce.

FDR turned this on its head. He used every resource of the federal government to address the needs of Americans impoverished by the

depression. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation restored confidence in the banking system. Agencies were created to regulate the stock market. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) created jobs for unemployed urban youths. Government funds financed massive public works projects. The Rural Electrification Program linked farms to the electric power grid. He even adopted some socialist programs such as Social Security and unemployment taxes to give workers some income after retirement or during periods of unemployment. As FDR and the American people focused on reversing the impact of the depression they continued to share optimism that the vast Atlantic and Pacific Oceans protected them from the world's profound problems which enabled the US government to invest its limited fiscal resources in restoring prosperity rather than rearming for possible war at least until 1938.

The Rabaul survivors could not escape the Great Depression's turbulence. Being optimists they sought out opportunities to better prepare themselves for a productive and hopefully prosperous life. In FDR's New Deal they found ample opportunities to continue preparing for a prosperous future. McMurria (1917-2003), the future bomber pilot and POW, was the son of a successful businessman who had built a prosperous Packard automobile dealership in Columbus, Georgia about 35 miles south of Greenville where the US Army would build the huge infantry and airborne training center named Fort Benning. In the 1930s and 1940s a Packard automobile was one of America's technologically most sophisticated, luxuriously equipped and higher priced cars. Even Emperor Hirohito owned a couple of them. McMurria's family was doing rather well financially despite the Great Depression. In 1937 McMurria was 19 years old and a sophomore at the University of Georgia in Athens, about seventy miles east of Atlanta. As he later explained in his autobiography he enjoyed the good life partying and drinking and impressed the girls with his dancing to swing, the popular music of the day. But McMurria was ambitious, intelligent and aspired to follow in his father's footsteps as a successful businessman which was his dream before December 7, 1941.<sup>10</sup>

Rabaul survivor "Al" Diaz Quinones (1918-2002) was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, a town on the island's west coast but grew up in New York City. Puerto Rico, long a Spanish colony in the eastern Caribbean Sea, became a US colony in 1898 after the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War which brought fame to President Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) and his Rough Riders. Until America's victory descendants of Spanish colonists owned large plantations and slaves who cultivated the land. The United States government ended slavery and broke up the plantations, impoverishing

many previously wealthy Puerto Ricans of Spanish descent. Quinones' father Alfonso arrived at Ellis Island in New York harbor at age 22 from Mayaguez aboard the SS *Maracaibo* on November 7, 1917. His 23 year old wife Elisa Diaz stayed behind in Puerto Rico to await the birth of her second son Al early the following year. Once settled on lower Manhattan's east side near the area called Stuyvesant Town Alfonso opened the Spanish American barber shop. After Elisa joined him they worked together at the barber shop, he giving haircuts and she giving customers a shave.

Upon completing 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Public School 11 Al enrolled in Stuyvesant High School which was within walking distance of his parent's apartment. Named for Peter Stuyvesant, the last Dutch governor of New Netherland before the colony was transferred to England in 1664 and renamed New York, the school was one of the city's first magnet schools. Admission was and continues to be highly competitive, and the school offers college preparatory courses particularly in mathematics and the sciences. Although a tuition-free public school enrollment was limited to males until 1956. Al aspired to attend college but hard economic times made this impossible. His father's barber shop had closed, his younger sister had died, a victim of the flu, and a younger brother had joined the family.

Shortly after graduation from high school at age 18 in June 1936 and unable to afford college, Al joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). This New Deal program was nicknamed "Roosevelt's tree army" because it employed urban male youths to work at national parks. The CCC was actually a paramilitary organization headed by US Army officer George Marshall (1880-1959) who later chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during World War II and Secretary of State. Al arrived at Camp Dix (now Fort Dix) in New Jersey on a steamy July 6, 1936 to undergo a brief period of basic training. New recruits were given a free hair cut, issued stiff blue denim uniforms, learned how to obey army style discipline and to march. They earned \$30 per month plus free room and board, certainly attractive inducements for inexperienced urban youths just out of high school during the Great Depression. The CCC first sent Al west to Idaho where he worked on the shovel brigade in McCall, Idaho constructing roads and paths in a national park. Next he worked as a short order cook at French Creek, Idaho before completing his CCC service at Camp Lovelock, Nevada working on road construction. When time allowed Al took CCC sponsored courses in auto mechanics and photography. After his discharge he returned to New York.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 1 – 1. Al Quinones and Father in Front of Family Barber Shop, New York City

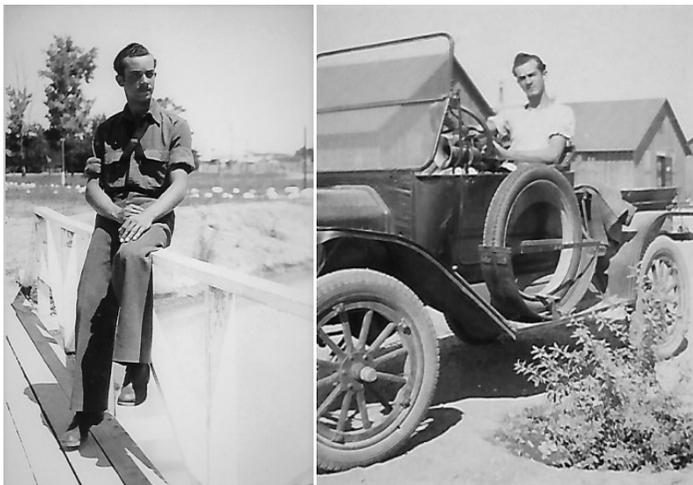


Fig. 1 - 2 & 3 Al Quinones in CCC Uniform and on Duty in Nevada

Joseph “Joe” G. Nason’s (1919-2012) father like Jim McMurria’s owned a successful automobile dealership in Westborough, Massachusetts