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**Memoirs and Diaries of Felipe Buencamino III,
1941-1944
by Felipe Buencamino III**

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Memoirs and Diaries of Felipe Buencamino III, 1941–1944

Makati City: Copycat, 2003. xiv + 230 pages.

After more than half a century of being kept unpublished in its entirety, the diaries of Felipe “Philip” Buencamino III (1920–1949) are now available to the public in book form. Some entries found their way to the published memoirs of the author’s father, Victor Buencamino, put out by the Jorge B. Vargas Filipiniana Foundation in 1977. The Buencaminos, of course, are part of the old aristocracy, whose patriarch, Felipe Buencamino, became prominent in national history as one of the leading members of the Malolos Congress. However, coming from an officer who served in Bataan, the diaries themselves are important as they shed light on the unexplored aspects of the Japanese occupation.

Diaries are valued sources in Philippine historiography. Several diaries from the Japanese occupation have become sources for corroboration of facts and have provided vignettes in the writing of social history or biography. Buencamino’s diary then is a welcome addition to the growing number of published personal accounts of the Japanese occupation following the tradition of Marcial Lichauco’s *“Dear Mother Putnam”* (1949), Juan Labrador’s *A Diary of the Japanese Occupation* (1989), and Pacita Pestaño-Jacinto’s *Living with the Enemy* (1999).

Buencamino’s, however, are unique, for the first two diaries are chronicles of his experiences as an officer of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFPE), not as a civilian as Jacinto, Lichauco, and Labrador were. He had the opportunity to witness the military offensives and preparations in the frontline in Bataan as well as the conditions inside the Malinta tunnel and Manila environs. However, the memoirs are limited by Buencamino’s elite orientations and perceptions similar to the civilian accounts cited above as opposed to, say, those of a private who comes from a peasant family.

The first diary consists of entries from 23 December 1941 to 8 April 1942. The second, made up of six entries from 8 April to 21 April 1942, is Buencamino’s vivid and riveting account of his participation in the Death March and his days in the Capas concentration camp. In the third, Buencamino writes about his daily activities at home as a civilian, the entries commencing on 21 September 1942 and ending on 26 December 1944.

This third diary opens with the arrival of the U.S. light bombers, an occurrence much anticipated and auspicious, which could have impelled him to commence the diary with the statement: “I have been waiting for this sight for more than two years—since the bloody days of Bataan” (41). The change in style is noticeable: the short sentences or phrases of the first two diaries are replaced here by long, elegant ones.

Aside from the diaries, the book also includes an article written by Buencamino that was published in the *Manila Free Philippines*, as well as reminiscences about him by Raul Manglapus and Teodoro Locsin Sr., two of his contemporaries. The foreword is by Victor Buencamino Jr., his younger brother, while his widow Nini Quezon writes an afterword addressed to their two sons.

For the military historian, the book is valuable for its references to battles fought by Filipinos in the frontlines. One such encounter was the Battle of Aglaloma described as “our greatest victory” (65). Buencamino’s entries from 31 March to 8 April 1942 (113–22) are heart-rending, and one feels the tense situation in which the defenders of Bataan found themselves as the Japanese unleashed the fury that eventually forced them to surrender.

For the social historian of the war, Buencamino provides day-to-day descriptions of what was happening in the places where he went: evacuation centers, frontlines, Corregidor, Manila, and the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) headquarters in Bataan. Repeated throughout the text and the subject of much discussion is “convoy” (6 and passim). Officers and enlisted men had pinned their hope on the arrival of the convoy, but were dismayed when it did not come as promised (97).

The title of the book may intrigue readers: is it a diary or a memoir? According to the last entry in Buencamino’s first diary, he was ordered to burn all his papers, because the Japanese had breached the frontlines. Yet, not having the heart to burn the diary, he asked his sergeant to do it (122). How is it then that we have that first diary today, including the account that it was ordered to be burned?

The anonymous annotator suggests that Buencamino rewrote the diary from memory, citing as evidence the testimony of Victor Jr. that he (Felipe) was typing furiously all day and night. Hence, to the annotator, the first diary is properly a memoir.

Internal evidence suggests, however, that the first part is the original notebook where Buencamino had typed out his entry for each day—therefore, a diary. Buencamino’s frequent use of phrases like “right now” indicates

immediacy foreign to memoirs or recollections: “Right now, I’m here at the front lines in Gen. Vicente Lim’s command post” (9). After recounting a funny story on a certain Lieutenant Palo, Buencamino scribbled in a line below the typewritten entry: “Palo is now in bed” (55). He could not have written this after Bataan.

Knowing its significance for posterity, somebody among those assigned to do the burning must have smuggled out the diary. What Victor must have heard was Felipe typing his daily observations—the contents of the third diary—not his recollections as the annotator alleges. There are erasures in this third diary as in the first, and there are also handwritten entries such as those for 15–16 December 1944 (182–84).

It is the second diary that contains entries that, no doubt, are recollections. Unlike the first diary there are no scribbles and erasures on its six entries. (Buencamino might have copied the text from the original manuscript he discarded.) Further, in the entries for 8 April and 10 April 1942, one finds the phrase “that night” (124), which implies that the events recounted were being recalled days after they had occurred. (The entry for 10 April is about Buencamino’s ordeals during the Death March. He could not have possibly written it on that day but only when he had arrived in the Capas concentration camp on 14 April.) The next entries, however, are diary entries, as evidenced by the same time markers used in the first diary (e.g., “Right now, somebody just died” [136]).

It seems appropriate, then, to entitle the work “diary” or “diaries” rather than “memoirs.”

The diaries are reproduced with all the erasures, doodles, handwritten notes, and drawings. Having the diaries in a form as close as possible to their originals makes one appreciate the narrative and know the author intimately. The downside is that it makes the book expensive and therefore inaccessible to the majority of readers. Another is the difficulty of deciphering some of the words in the diarist’s penmanship (34, 61). And because the text is unedited errors are to be expected: misspelled words such as “bivouaced” (12), “reconnaissance” (12), and “dysentery” (26); inconsistencies in the spelling of proper names such as Valdez/Valdes (16, 46) and Leoni/Leonie/Leonio (51); typos such “were” to “where” (8) and “me” to “be” (27); and the like.

Included are the useful glossary of places and glossary of names and expressions, but there is no index. Select photographs of the author either alone or with his family and friends provide visual accompaniment.

The book is ultimately not only about Felipe Buencamino III’s war experiences. It reveals to us a life productive and promising but cut short by a dastardly Huk ambush that also murdered Mrs. Aurora Quezon and her daughter, Baby Quezon. Moreover, the diaries give us a firsthand account of the early days of the war and life under Japanese occupation, particularly the relatively unknown activities of the MIS in which Buencamino served as aide-de-camp to Gen. Simeon de Jesus, head of the unit.

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R. KWAN LAUREL

Ongpin Stories

Manila: Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, 2008. 122 pages.

Story cycles typically revolve around a locality. The best of them, like James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), show how place shapes person, how it both molds and maims characters whose stories become memorable in the very process. To romanticize or idealize is not the usual object of these works—to the storyteller, the locality is both “dear and dirty”—but rather to show the specific turns that the human drama takes as it is played out in a specific milieu.

For his first collection of short stories, R. Kwan Laurel has chosen as his subject the Chinese Filipino community of which he is a member. He calls the collection, fittingly, *Ongpin Stories*, Ongpin being the street most associated with the Chinese in the Philippines. The eight loosely interconnected stories chronicle the lives of residents of the street as they are seen by an adolescent boy narrator.

We meet, among others, his classmate Tommy, a “math wizard,” who stakes his dream of making it in Hong Kong and escaping from a future of wet floors and rundown automobiles at his uncle’s garage on a quiz show; Grandfather, a dabbler in traditional Chinese medicine, family shaman, who suddenly acts “like a teenager” (99) when the neighbor (and business rival’s) grandmother comes to town; Mang Tony, the family driver, the “most honest man in the world,” whose compulsion to tell the truth almost ruins the hardware store and makes him the husband of Jenny, daughter