

# philippine studies

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## **The Fight for Freedom, by Nieva**

Review Author: Joaquin Jose Mari C. Sumpaico III, S.J.

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of these people to their socio-economic and political problems. The dream of Eden (*DreamEden*) is "longing for paradise." It becomes possible with these people in Casper's novel. *DreamEden* affirms that nations are held together by individuals who are faithful to their country, not to leaders and not to political parties, and by people who have vision, moral sense and courage.

The literary critics have emphasized the fact that historical novels concentrate not just on the heroic figures in nations, but on the variety of common people who constitute the nation. That is the essence of Casper's *DreamEden*. It is a profound observation of ordinary people in the Philippines and their relationship with their government. The achievement of *DreamEden* manifests wonderfully the validity and value of the historical novel—a fictional story of people, places and events with moral commentary.

Linda Ty-Casper writes with discipline and vision. She has a very sharp eye for the historical details which are manifestations of the moral value in her novel. Moreover, she also has a compassionate touch, and sympathy with her characters. In historical fiction people are, as she says, "returned to the center of human events."

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.  
Interdisciplinary Studies Program  
Ateneo de Manila University

**The Fight for Freedom: Remembering Bataan and Corregidor.** By Antonio A. Nieva. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997. 229 pages.

Recognition is needed in affirming the Filipino's ability to adapt to certain crises in life. Living in a land that is visited by typhoons and other calamities, Filipinos accustom themselves to their surroundings in order to survive. Through the centuries, the Philippines has witnessed its people adjusting to varied crises—wars, calamities, and other predicaments.

A test of this virtue was experienced during the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. Being a part of the infamous Axis powers of World War II, the Japanese annexed the Philippines in order to expand its Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. It presented a platform which boasted the phrase "Asia for Asians." Yet in the process of its expansion, many people suffered. Millions were killed by Japanese military aggression.

The people of the Philippines weathered this storm. This experience may be seen in Mr. Nieva's narration of how a specific group of people witnessed, held their ground, and suffered the consequences of war. He tells of the experiences of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)—how they moved out of Manila to the battlefields of Bataan and Corregidor under the command of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFEF). He tells

the story of how the "reserves" managed to hold their ground even if the promised reinforcements of General MacArthur did not arrive. He recalls how they were captured by the Japanese and how they were freed. He further narrates how they continued to resist the invaders by becoming guerillas. He describes how the war gave these "reserves" a baptism of fire.

What is of great interest in the author's work is his ability to narrate his war experiences in detail. It is not an everyday occurrence that one hears the war stories of the World War II veterans, since most of these war veterans have remained shattered by the experience of combat. Oftentimes, they choose not to narrate their encounters because it opens their memory to the bloodshed and suffering which they have experienced. It is a good thing, though, to get glimpses of what happened during the war through the help of Nieva's narration.

The first eight chapters talk about the experiences of the reserves in the battlefields of Bataan and Corregidor. When Christmastime of 1941 arrives, Manila is "given up for lost." The USAFFE is battered and "trapped" by the Japanese invaders coming from the North and South of Luzon. And the USAFFE is the only force in the Philippines that poses as a stumbling block in the aggressor's plan to place the nation under its control. The strategy left for the USAFFE is to retreat to the Bataan peninsula. And from there, they could hold their positions in the hope that reinforcements from the United States would come. With the need to fortify their positions, the USAFFE's tactic is to delay the advance of the Japanese so that most of the soldiers may slip into Bataan to ready themselves for the combat.

However, promised reinforcements never came. And for this, the soldiers become known as the "battling bastards of Bataan." They were left behind by their leaders who promised to return. They were left to endure the pounding and the carnage of Japanese artillery. Food and morale dropped, yet the spirit of the soldiers remained strong. This enabled the USAFFE to delay its defense for a few months more than expected.

Chapters nine and ten describe the hardships that the soldiers experience after their surrender. After walking from Bataan to Tarlac, they endure another ordeal of surviving in a prison camp. Rations were meager and the soldiers forced to make do with the little that they had. Living conditions were unfit for humans. As a result, hundreds of soldiers died of starvation and sickness in captivity.

Yet the Filipino spirit refused to die. The final seven chapters tell of our resilient nature. The Filipinos resorted to guerrilla warfare. Once free, a good number of the released prisoners took up arms again. They conducted assault missions with hit-and-run tactics against the Japanese.

However, the book also points out confusion present in the system. After the surrender of Corregidor, the troops lost a central body that issued commands. Thus, guerrilla unit moved on its own. Although they managed to hurt the Japanese invaders, they also figured in clashes with fellow Fili-

pino guerrillas. Order was restored only upon the arrival of reinforcements in 1945—a good three years too late.

The epilogue of the book tells of the “unfairness” that happened to the soldiers after the war. It talks about the compensations which the World War II veteran received from the United States. Fighting under the standard of the USAFFE, the soldiers were considered as “American troops.” And as “Americans,” they were acclaimed for their bravery, sacrifice, loyalty, and dedication to the democratic ideals of freedom and equality. However, they were not given the same benefits as the American soldiers. They were only given a mere fraction of what was promised.

It is a sad thing to note that most of the Filipino soldiers’ effort have not garnered much support from the U.S. government. Until now, the promises made to the veterans of World War II are still not fulfilled. We still see war veterans in the news reports demanding their rights to be recognized and be given the proper benefits due them.

Demanding their well-earned benefits is not a simple question of receiving monetary payment. The matter directly tackles how the veterans are valued for their contribution during the war. They are presented as mere support players to the American troops when in fact, the Filipino troops endured the brunt of the Japanese onslaught.

Money is but secondary. Recognizing the contribution of the Filipino soldiers as an important player in the war stands as the primary issue. Reading and understanding Nieva’s narration affirms the validity of their heroism, and of their lives.

*Joaquin Jose Mari C. Sumpaico III, SJ  
Loyola House of Studies  
Ateneo de Manila University*

**Inside Philippine Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life.** By Niels Mulder. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997. 154 pages.

The book is a collection of essays about contemporary Filipino culture by the author, an independent European anthropologist, based on a six-year period (1985-91) of research in Lucena City. He further qualifies the culture as a “lowland Christian society” as expressed by members of “urban, Tagalog-speaking middle classes.” It presents analyses from the point of view of an outsider-observer of how members of that particular class look at life and understand it. With these analyses, the author hopes to arrive at a better understanding of Filipino culture and how the Filipino thinks. Having had extensive experiences in Thailand and Indonesia (specifically Java), he furthers the analysis by comparing the lowland Filipino Christian culture with the two Southeast Asian cultures.