

Documentary Tells Story of ‘The Tragedy of Bataan’

Unique TV and Radio Series, Narrated by Alec Baldwin

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NOTE: Thompson will assist media outlets, at their request, in identifying former veterans from the Philippine conflict for additional local programming.

(Carbondale, IL) – December 7, 1941. For a generation of Americans, the day Japan bombed the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii not only led to our nation’s entry into World War Two, it also deeply wounded the collective psyche of the American people, shattering their belief in the country’s seeming invulnerability. Over 3,500 military and civilian personnel were killed or wounded on that day, and the U.S. Pacific fleet was dealt a crippling blow.

Although the infamous date and the destruction it brought are forever etched in memory, Emmy Award-winning documentary producer Jan Thompson will present an in-depth look at another dramatic, though lesser-known, story about this unforgettable chapter in American history.

Narrated by acclaimed actor Alec Baldwin and produced and written by Thompson, *The Tragedy of Bataan* is a 30-minute television documentary and five-part companion radio series that chronicles the fall of the Philippines and the Bataan Death March in the early months of World War II. This unique series was created for PBS and NPR stations. The radio series contains more in-depth material leading to the surrender while the television documentary covers the Bataan Death March. A website is available at www.tragedyofbataan.com.

The series will air on [Station] on [Airdate/Time].

The Tragedy of Bataan features first-person accounts by over 20 survivors of the conflict, archival photos, and never-before-seen Japanese propaganda film footage. It also includes excerpts from the unpublished diary of Captain Albert Brown of Pinckneyville, Illinois, who describes the five months leading up to the surrender of U.S. troops and Filipino defenders to the Imperial Japanese Army. Brown, who is featured in the television program, was 101 years old at the time of the interview and passed away at age 105 in August 2011. He had been the oldest survivor of the Bataan Death March.

The Tragedy of Bataan begins shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Imperial Japanese launched attacks across the Pacific on several western territories and advanced across the Pacific with little resistance. Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, Wake Island, and Guam all surrendered. The British surrendered Singapore – the largest surrender in Britain’s military history.

American and Filipino Defenders in the Philippines repelled the Imperial Japanese for several months, then retreated to the Bataan peninsula to wait for supplies and reinforcements. The Imperial Japanese, however, had cut off all routes to the Philippines, which prevented U.S. troops from providing assistance. Realizing the situation was hopeless, President Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to escape to Australia, leaving Lt. General Jonathan Wainwright in command of the troops in the Philippines. Already weakened by malnourishment, dysentery, and malaria – and rapidly running out of adequate supplies – the Defenders were no match for the Japanese and were surrendered on the Bataan Peninsula on April 9, 1942 by Major-General Edward P. King.

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Since Japan had not ratified the 1927 Geneva Convention, an international agreement on the treatment of prisoners-of-war, the American and Filipino prisoners were viewed as captives. Approximately 75,000 men were forced to march 66 miles north, under horrific conditions, to a prison camp known as Camp O’Donnell. It is estimated that over 650 American soldiers and 10,000 Filipino defenders died from illness and exhaustion or were murdered by the Japanese along the way. Several weeks later, Lt. General Jonathan Wainwright surrendered the rest of the Philippine islands, including Corregidor, which became the largest United States military surrender in history. For those surrendered in the Philippines, liberation from brutal captivity would not come for three and half years.

Thompson, the daughter of a former prisoner of war who was surrendered on Corregidor, has invested over 19 years in the research and production of these documentaries. “This is a slice of history that few know about,” she says, “and I hope to honor the veterans by telling their stories.”

This fall marks the 70th anniversary of the United States’ entry into World War II and next spring, April 9, 2012, is the 70th anniversary of the fall of Bataan and the Death March.

The Tragedy of Bataan is presented by WSIU Public Broadcasting, a service of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and is distributed by the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) and PRX.

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About the Producer

Jan Thompson is a two-time Emmy award winning documentary producer. Before launching a career in documentary filmmaking, she was in live sports and was the Studio Director for the Chicago Bulls and White Sox. Thompson was the creator of the *Hidden Journeys* series distributed by PBS. She also was the producer-director of the interfaith program *Ties That Bind*, which was distributed by NETA for 9/11 anniversary programming. *The Tragedy of Bataan* is one of two major projects produced by Thompson about the war in the Pacific. Her second documentary, *Never The Same: The Prisoner of War Experience*, is in the last stages of production and also will include narration by acclaimed actor Alec Baldwin. Thompson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Radio-Television at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

About NETA

The National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) is a professional membership association that serves public television licensees and educational entities in all 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. NETA connects people and ideas by providing quality programming, educational resources, professional development, management support, and national representation. Learn more at netaonline.org.

About PRX

Public Radio Exchange (PRX) is an online marketplace for distribution, review, and licensing of public radio programming. PRX is also a growing social network and community of listeners, producers, and stations collaborating to reshape public radio. The mission of PRX is to create more opportunities for diverse programming of exceptional quality, interest, and importance to reach more listeners. Visit their website at prx.org.

About WSIU Public Broadcasting

WSIU Public Broadcasting is licensed to the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University and is an integral part of the College of Mass Communication & Media Arts on the Carbondale campus. The stations reach more than three million people across five states and beyond through three digital PBS channels, three NPR stations, a radio information service, a website, and an education and community outreach department. WSIU’s mission is to improve the quality of life of the people they serve. The WSIU stations partner with other community organizations to promote positive change and to support the academic and public service missions of Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Learn more and get the latest station news online at wsiu.org and on WSIU’s Facebook and Twitter pages. WSIU’s programs and services are partially funded by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.