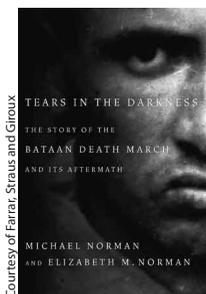


itself, and the coeditors and chapter authors of *The Three Circles of War* have assembled an excellent collection of thematic essays that inform our understanding of the complex nature of conflict in the 21st Century. One can only hope that the multidisciplinary approach of *The Three Circles of War* be further refined and applied to other conflicts, such as Afghanistan, and in a manner that continues to inform both the scholar and policy practitioner.



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## ***Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath***

by Michael Norman and Elizabeth M. Norman

**Reviewed by Dr. Steve R. Waddell**, Professor of History,  
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**I**n *Tears in the Darkness* Michael and Elizabeth Norman tell the story of the Bataan Death March through the eyes of Ben Steele, a twenty-two-year-old Montana cowboy who enlisted in the Army in 1940 and found himself in the Philippines when the Japanese invaded in 1941. They follow Steele as the US and Filipino forces retreat to Bataan and desperately resist the Japanese onslaught until hunger, disease, and lack of supplies finally forced the surrender of the 76,000 defenders. Forced by their captors to undertake a horrific 66-mile march (the Bataan Death March) to the rail station at San Fernando, Steele and his comrades suffered from a near total lack of food, water, and medical care. They endured the brutality of the Japanese guards and those lucky enough to survive witnessed the murder of massive numbers of their comrades who lacked the strength to continue. Steele survived the death march, making it alive to Camp O'Donnell. The authors follow Steele through his captivity in the Philippines, shipment to Japan on one of the hell ships, and his eventual liberation at the end of the war.

Michael Norman, a former reporter for the *New York Times* and Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam, is a professor of journalism at New York University. Elizabeth M. Norman is professor of humanities at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. The book they have written is a blend of history and literary journalism. That is both the strength and weakness of their approach. As such, it is both compelling and troublesome. One cannot help but get to know and admire Ben Steele. This work is not a comprehensive history of the Bataan Death March and the American prisoner of war experience in the Philippines. It is the story of Ben Steele with short sections on the Pantingan River massacre, 12 April 1942, and the hell ships. The authors manage to tell Ben's story of the Bataan Death March with little outward emotion. The story is told matter-of-factly. For such an emotional topic it reads more like a newspaper account than a history of one of the worst war crimes perpetrated against American forces during World War II. The Normans portray the American defenders as poorly led and trained,

which is for the most part true, and the Japanese as hardened fighters, bound by their culture, indoctrinated and trained to fight to the death with no respect for those who did surrender. While the author's explanation of the behavior of the Japanese soldiers rings true; the authors avoid making clear moral judgments. Understanding why many Japanese soldiers committed war crimes does not justify the commission of those crimes.

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The final chapter of the book is problematic. It examines the postwar war crimes trial of General Homma. The authors spend a significant part of the book looking at the Japanese soldiers, portraying them as common soldiers carrying out terrible orders. At the same time, the authors are very sympathetic to General Masaharu Homma, the commander of the Japanese army in the Philippines. They portray him as a professional soldier overcome by events and unaware of the crimes his troops were committing. The argument is unconvincing. The authors describe a Japanese army trained to follow orders, facing severe discipline for failing to do so, and bound by honor. This very army is supposedly committing war crimes despite General Homma's instructions. General Homma was ultimately responsible for the behavior of his army. The war crimes committed were so widespread they were not the work of just a few individuals. Homma either issued orders which directed his subordinates to commit acts which resulted in war crimes, condoned the war crimes once he learned of them, or was negligent for unleashing a force that he could not or would not control. Forces under his command murdered or mistreated large numbers of American and Filipino prisoners of war. The United States chose to hold him responsible for such behavior. Unlike the American soldiers bayoneted, beheaded, or shot dead on the road to San Fernando, General Homma received due process. That others were not prosecuted, or that Homma was otherwise a nice individual who might have been one's friend at another time and place, is largely irrelevant.

*Tears In The Darkness* is well written and utilizes a considerable number of sources, to include archival materials. The drawings throughout the book, created by Ben Steele himself, contribute greatly to the story. The work includes endnotes and a solid bibliography. The book is well worth reading. Just be aware that it is more a journalistic story of Ben Steele than a comprehensive history of the Bataan Death March. Historians, history students, and anyone interested in the history of World War II, will find the story of Ben Steele inspiring. It is the story of an American soldier's triumph over adversity, and of his ability to survive the worst behavior of the Japanese army.