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## "Avenging Furies": The Memoirs of American Women in the Philippines during the Second World War

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## **Abstract**

A large and active resistance movement developed in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation of the islands from 1942-1945. This paper discusses the memoirs of several women caught up in these movements, specifically Claire Phillips, Margaret Utinsky, Yay Panlilio, and Virginia Hansen Holmes. I argue that these women utilized their memoirs to secure places for themselves in history, using gendered and racialized language to define their experiences as incredible adventures. Their memoirs give significant insight into the civilian experience of the Japanese occupation and testify to the unique efforts made by women to support the American cause.

## **Keywords**

World War II, Memoirs, Philippines, Women's History

## **Disciplines**

Asian History | Military History | United States History | Women's History

## **Comments**

Written for HIST 412: The U.S. and World War II.

## “Avenging Furies”: The Memoirs of American Women in the Philippines during the Second World War

Meghan O’Donnell

History 421: The United States and World War II

December 11, 2017

**Abstract**

A large and active resistance movement developed in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation of the islands from 1942-1945. This paper discusses the memoirs of several women caught up in these movements, specifically Claire Phillips, Margaret Utinsky, Yay Panlilio, and Virginia Hansen Holmes. I argue that these women utilized their memoirs to secure places for themselves in history, using gendered and racialized language to define their experiences as incredible adventures. Their memoirs give significant insight into the civilian experience of the Japanese occupation and testify to the unique efforts made by women to support the American cause.

## Introduction

In his foreword to her memoir, *Manila Espionage*, Major John P. Boone of the United States Army defined Claire Phillips as “the brave revenging wife of one of Bataan’s fallen warriors.”<sup>1</sup> Boone adored her, noting that not only did she serve her country admirably in war, but also that she was “very pretty and great fun.” To him, Claire was the very pinnacle of American femininity. She, first and foremost, was the beloved wife of a red-blooded American man who fell at Bataan, “a fellow soldier’s widow.” He raised her work to mythical levels, calling her an “intensely patriotic, and spiritually strong godmother of ragged, desperate men,” simultaneously conjuring images of an honorable Christian woman and drawing attention to the plight of the men whom she served. The unsuspecting reader who cracks open Claire’s memoir does not hear her voice first, but, rather, Boone’s. He introduces her story of resistance with his perception of her as a picture of wartime femininity.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the masculine influence in Claire’s memoir does not end with Boone’s foreword. Claire wrote her memoir with considerable help from Myron B. Goldsmith, an experienced writer in Hollywood who focused on the possibility of adapting her story to the screen. It is likely that his words form the bulk of Claire’s memoir and it is well established that he “twisted the truth” of her story.<sup>3</sup> Claire’s role in the resistance in the Philippines was significant and

<sup>1</sup> Major John P. Boone of the United States Army refused to surrender with the rest of the American forces in the Philippines. Instead, he went into hiding in the hills, gathered Filipinos and Americans into guerrilla bands, and harassed the Japanese as much as possible. He and Claire met when she escaped to the hills for a brief period after Manila’s fall and they hatched plans for a major operation to help American POWs and undermine the Japanese. Claire returned to Manila to work as a spy and sent all of her information to Boone in the hills. For more information about his wartime work, see Peter Eisner, *MacArthur’s Spies: The Soldier, the Singer, and the Spymaster Who Defied the Japanese in World War II* (New York: Viking, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> John Boone in Claire Phillips and Myron B. Goldsmith, *Manila Espionage* (Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> Eisner, *MacArthur’s Spies*, 267.

historically important, yet her own memoir represents an exaggerated, carefully constructed femininity that reflects male expectations of the American woman and her own attempt to adhere to these ideals. Certainly, by approving Goldsmith's work, Claire maintained a level of control over her story and accepted the images of her that he constructed. Her voice is muffled, but it is still present throughout the memoir.

*Manila Espionage*, Claire Phillips' memoir, is perhaps the most well known memoir to come out of the Philippines in the years following the Second World War. Its cinematically minded ghostwriter succeeded in bringing her story to the silver screen; *I Was An American Spy* was released in 1951 and further endeared Claire to the American public. To the American public, she was a "demure housewife thrust into war" who accomplished impossible feats of bravery without compromising her femininity or her morals.<sup>4</sup> The Claire Phillips that was brought to the American people was a glossy, sanitized figure whose triumphs in the Philippines were used to enhance the postwar glow of American exceptionalism. Claire, according to Peter Eisner, intentionally emphasized that version of her story.<sup>5</sup> She wanted to be remembered cinematically; she wanted her tales of espionage to astonish Americans. Her memoir presents us with the details of her work as a spy during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and with an image of herself as she wanted to be known.

The tension between reality and controlled presentation defines not only Claire's memoir, but also the memoirs of the other American women who resisted the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Margaret Utinsky, a spy who worked alongside Claire Phillips, released a memoir entitled *Miss U* in 1948 that detailed her experiences with espionage and imprisonment by the Japanese. Colonel Yay Panlilio, a guerrilla fighter, released *The Crucible* in 1950 and traced her

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., xi-xii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

involvement in fighting the Japanese. More recently, Virginia Hansen Holmes's *Guerrilla Daughter*, released in 2009, tells the story of a young girl growing up in the Philippines as she and her family attempt to evade capture. The stories of these women overlap at points, but their distinctive voices reflect their very different personalities and attitudes towards their experiences. They defined their accomplishments in heroic language while emphasizing the maintenance of their femininity, highlighting tensions within wartime society that simultaneously led to the liberation of women and the confirmation of traditional gender roles. They were women who, above all, wanted to be remembered.

### **Historiography**

The study of the Second World War is largely focused on the European theater of operations, with the evil symbolized by Hitler and the Nazis forming a perfect foil to the bright-eyed American boys deployed to defeat them. By contrast, the Pacific theater remains a scholarly afterthought despite its significance. The Philippines, lost early in the war and under Japanese occupation until 1945, is almost entirely forgotten by historians. The one exception to this is the Bataan Death March, when the Japanese forced American soldiers to walk dozens of miles to Camp O'Donnell, committing atrocities against the prisoners of war along the way. Thus, the literature that does focus on the Philippines in World War II is limited to an analysis of this march and the ensuing trials that the POWs faced as they awaited liberation. The experiences of the men and women who joined the Resistance movements as spies and guerrillas are almost entirely ignored. Two recent books, however, *MacArthur's Spies: The Soldier, the Singer, and the Spymaster Who Defied the Japanese in World War II* by Peter Eisner and *Angels of the Underground: The American Women who Resisted the Japanese in the Philippines in World War II* by Theresa Kaminski, released in 2017 and 2016, respectively, have initiated a new trend in

World War II scholarship that emphasizes the Philippines and the clandestine movements that were integral to its eventual liberation in 1945.

The memoirs that came out of the Philippines, like *Miss U*, *Manila Espionage*, *Guerrilla Daughter*, and *The Crucible* are primarily used as props to reconstruct the lives of the resistors. They have not been analyzed extensively as unique pieces of literature and, until the last few years, have fallen out of the public eye. Those who have used the memoirs, like Peter Eisner and Theresa Kaminski, focus primarily on exploiting the memoirs to construct biographies of the women. Thus, the memoirs have been severely underutilized. While they can help historians write biographies of the women resistors, the memoirs are perhaps far more useful in what they reveal about the wartime expectations of women. Indeed, the woman who writes a memoir is attempting to construct a specific vision of herself to sell to the world.

### **Claire Phillips and *Manila Espionage***

Claire Phillips was thirty-one years old when she arrived in Manila in 1938. After years of seeking the limelight on stages throughout the United States, Claire traveled to the Philippines in the hopes that the islands would afford her opportunities at celebrity that she hadn't had on the mainland. It paid off. She went to work at the Metropolitan Theatre soon after landing in the Philippines and became infatuated with Manuel Fuentes, ten years her senior. He and his money, she hoped, would allow her to live a life full of excitement and adventure. Just a few months after their wedding, however, Claire became frustrated with Manuel's busy schedule and the standard life that they were leading. In a truly dramatic manner completely characteristic of her personality, she adopted a child, Dian, and convinced her husband, who had been gone for months, that the child was his. Though she succeeded in persuading Manuel that Dian belonged

to him, Claire left her husband shortly thereafter, returning to the United States in 1939. She did not go back to Manila until September 1941.<sup>6</sup>

Her second stint in Manila, “the Pearl of the Orient,” began in a very similar manner as her first one.<sup>7</sup> She picked up work again at various theaters and fell in love with the man who would become, as she described it in her 1948 memoir, the source of her motivation as she resisted the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. John V. Phillips was younger than Claire and he worshipped her. They became engaged shortly after they met, but were never officially married, despite what Claire later said. When war came, John left to fight with his unit but returned amid the chaos that had enveloped the islands to check on Claire whenever he could. He eventually became a prisoner of war after the American surrender early in 1942. To avoid internment at Santo Tomas, Claire obtained false papers and began using the name Dorothy Fuentes. She clumsily attempted to ask for help from friends to send support to the POWs and, receiving little aid, returned to what she knew best: the stage.<sup>8</sup>

Claire first found work at a nightclub owned by a woman named Ana Fey, where she interacted with Japanese soldiers and learned she could extract information from them. She made mistakes early on, and, after receiving a beating from Japanese soldiers for acting too forward for a woman, she left Ana Fey’s. Claire, not to be deterred from her mission of helping American POWs and guerrilla forces, established Club Tsubaki, which began its operations on October 17, 1942. She and her girls flirted with Japanese officers and got them drunk to get information from them, which she then passed on to John Boone. It is generally accepted that prostitution played a

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<sup>6</sup> Theresa Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground: The American Women who Resisted the Japanese in the Philippines in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30-32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 45-46, 57-72; Eisner, *MacArthur's Spies*, 74; Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 192-194.

large role in Club Tsubaki's success, despite Claire's dismissals of this. In addition to spying on the Japanese, the club served as the headquarters of a larger system of resistors who worked to gather supplies needed by soldiers imprisoned at Camp O'Donnell and Cabanatuan. The Japanese eventually discovered the true work performed by Claire and her helpers, and Claire was arrested in late May 1944. She was tortured by the Japanese for several months at Bilibid prison and eventually taken to a women's prison, where she remained until the war ended.<sup>9</sup>

In her memoir *Manila Espionage*, Claire Phillips was particularly interested in defining herself to the postwar American public. As was previously noted, although she used a ghostwriter to help her create her memoir, her involvement with the memoir's dissemination indicates that she consented to the image of herself that was being promoted. One of the hallmarks of her memoir is the emphasis on her role as a woman devoted to an honorable American soldier, describing him as a highly stereotypical man of the period. When Claire describes her first meeting with John, she lingers over his physical description. He was "over six feet of erect, well-proportioned he-man," she wrote, emphasizing his masculinity by drawing attention to his above average height and, perhaps more significantly, by literally doubling the references to his gender with the word "he-man." It was clearly important to Claire to describe John in such fully masculine terms. By highlighting his masculinity, she could highlight her own femininity, the implication being that a man like John Phillips would only ever be interested in a woman who was the very picture of American femininity.<sup>10</sup>

Claire's entire characterization of their courtship focused on their virtuous American-ness. "Ours was a real case of true love at first sight," she said, and they lived in a "fool's

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<sup>9</sup> Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 194-195, 200-201, 209; Eisner, *MacArthur's Spies*, 137; Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 222-223, 313-342, 373-375.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Phillips and Myron B. Goldsmith, *Manila Espionage* (Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, 1947), 4.

paradise” that she described as weeks of “dancing, swimming, movies, and horseback rides,” naming activities that could have been enjoyed by any young American couple that was crazily in love in the early 1940s. Their “glorious days together” were filled with fun and carefree frolicking and they dreamed of accomplishing the American Dream together: “it was back to the States, a big family wedding, the dreamed-of ranch, and ‘live happily ever after.’” The emphasis on the “dreamed-of ranch” is notable. Of all the facets of the American Dream, the hope for the big home in the country is one of the most recognizable. Claire characterized herself and John as idealized American lovers, endearing the reader to her story by writing their relationship as a very mirror of the American dream itself.<sup>11</sup>

John’s appearance in Claire’s memoir was brief, but he served a very particular function. He provided the opportunity for Claire to develop an image of her own perfect femininity, defined by submissiveness and total devotion to her husband. After hearing that the United States was at war with Japan, Claire waited anxiously for John to come fetch her and tell her what to do. In her memoir, his eventual arrival at her door inspired possessive and patriotic language: “My soldier stood there in full battle dress,” she wrote, emphasizing his devotion to his country and setting the stage for her own future work in the service of the nation.<sup>12</sup> John made her promise to stay at home and Claire “did not dare leave,” because of that vow.<sup>13</sup> She listened to her handsome American soldier, assuming the role of the dutiful wife who never took action without her husband’s approval. It is clear that Claire, whether or not this is how their interaction actually played out, truly wanted to make herself look like an upstanding woman. Her femininity

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12.

is the focus of this passage, and femininity meant that she was submissive, looking to her husband to figure out what to do next and how best to act.

Early in 1942, just before Bataan and Corregidor fell and with John fighting the Japanese, Claire fled Manila to seek safety in the hills among friends and acquaintances. It is during this period of her memoir that Claire chose to emphasize both her virtuous femininity and her whiteness. In the hills, she stayed in a village with the Sobrevanas family. There, she encountered “natives” who, “ignorant of the ever-present danger attendant on promiscuity, would not use the latrines, nor take proper care of them.”<sup>14</sup> With this remark, Claire deployed othering tactics that drew distinct lines between her own American femininity and the primitive natives that she encountered. She cast herself as the enlightened one that understood the link between morality, modesty, and cleanliness. Even when faced with a primitive society, Claire maintained the standards of propriety. The natives served as a foil to her virtuousness. Their extremely backward ways, as Claire intentionally portrayed them, made her look better by comparison. She may have had to live in the hills, far from civilization, but she never forgot her feminine standards.

Though she often made racialized observations to promote her own perfect white femininity, Claire also used them to define the superiority of her American nationality, which, to her, also implied whiteness. When she retold her experience of watching the Bataan Death March from the hills, she called the Japanese “little tormentors” and “merciless orientals,” equating the brutality of their actions towards the American POWs with their race. The Japanese were naturally savage, she implied. She even compared the heights of the Japanese soldiers and the American POWs, writing: “a little man would strike a tall man with the butt of his rifle, or

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

kick him." The tall men, "the sons of men who had fought at Gettysburg, San Juan Hill, and the Argonne, were being subjected to these sadistic outrages..." Claire continued. The Americans, descendants of honorable, patriotic men, are painted as physically larger than their Japanese counterparts. "Little," as Claire describes the Japanese, is not simply an attempt at physical description; it is a pointed stab at their racial inferiority, who were, according to her, neither physically nor morally comparable to the heroic inheritors of the American military tradition. And the "outrage" to which she referred was not simply the violence to which they were subjected, but the fact that the lesser Japanese had control over the superior Americans.<sup>15</sup>

Claire used these tropes again when she described her attempts to get back to Manila and begin her work as a spy, having been convinced by John Boone, her guerrilla contact in the hills, to join his cause. During the treacherous trip back men known as Negritos guided her. She described them as "savages" and "primeval men." She wrote of them more harshly than she did of the Japanese, likening one of the Negrito men, and his "small, claw-like paw" to an animal. In her telling, Claire was alone among strange, nearly inhuman guides, a frail white woman surrounded by potentially dangerous brutes. By including these racialized observations in her memoir, Claire sought to raise the stakes of her story and make it appear that she went to incredible lengths to fulfill her "all-consuming desire to aid the American cause."<sup>16</sup> If she drew as many racial distinctions as she could, her own achievements would seem more astonishing. She was a perfect white American woman, driven to the point of associating with racial others so that she could do her patriotic duty. This kind of scenario would endear her to the American

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 75-76, 83.

public and, indeed, solidify her image as the woman that American men were fighting for.<sup>17</sup> The choice to make such clear, racist remarks was not just a natural predilection of the period, but rather a specific attempt to improve Claire's image as an American heroine.

When she eventually arrived back in Manila, prepared to assume her role as a spy, Claire continued to define her own upstanding conduct in feminine terms. She played upon traditional stereotypes of womanhood to continue the image of herself that she had already created throughout her memoir. One night, confronted with an especially important guest at Club Tsubaki, General Sato, Claire planned a particularly spectacular evening at the club.<sup>18</sup> During her preparations, she concerned herself with the "woman's eternal question 'what to wear?'"<sup>19</sup> In framing her quest for the perfect dress as one of the most pressing problems among women everywhere, Claire characterizes herself as both a typical American woman and an exceptional one. She was engaged in high levels of espionage, but she was still a woman, and clothes always constituted an issue. This detail made Claire relatable and acceptable to an American audience by accentuating how she retained her femininity despite the wartime threats to it. And for a memoir that was supposed to generate a movie deal, this was the goal.

When she reached the point in her memoir when the Kenpeitai captured her on May 23, 1944, Claire made even sharper allusions to her femininity. The Japanese searched her house and took anything they thought might be valuable, including her "treasured makeup."<sup>20</sup> She was

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<sup>17</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, "'I Want A Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly* 42.4 (December 1990): 592-600, accessed September 4, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713166>.

<sup>18</sup> The general to whom Claire was referring was Saito Jiro of the Kenpeitai, the Japanese military intelligence agency. For more information, see Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 210.

<sup>19</sup> Phillips, *Manila Espionage*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

being taken away to certain torture at the hands of the Japanese, yet she felt the need to mention, as if it would deepen the sense of horror she was creating, the fact that they took her makeup from her. Claire continued in the same vein while describing the conditions of her imprisonment, focusing on the lack of hygiene as if it were a surprise that the cells were “devoid of any creature comforts” and that the “sole concession to sanitation” was a stream of water that flowed through the *benjo*, or latrine.<sup>21</sup> Claire even wrote that she and her fellow prisoners “shared a toothbrush!”<sup>22</sup> By adding these details to her memoir, and describing them in language that implied her own shock at the lack of respect for hygiene, Claire put her femininity at the forefront once again. She cared about sanitation and self-presentation, as any good woman would, even while the Japanese tortured her.

Claire further emphasized her femininity when she recounted the periods of torture that she endured. In these scenes, she made an effort to represent herself as heroic, but feminine in her heroism, drawing upon ideas of self-control to describe her response to the injustices with which she was faced: “The blows stung me into a quiet fury, and although tears came to my eyes, they did not fall.”<sup>23</sup> With this statement, Claire demonstrated that, in the middle of a wave of emotion sparked by the violence, she was still capable of reining them in so that she would not give her captors the satisfaction of watching her cry. She created a gendered representation of her experience by presenting herself as capable of suppressing feelings that would otherwise give the Japanese an edge over her. And through acknowledging that she felt emotion, like a woman should, yet subverting the stereotype of the hysterical woman, Claire defined her heroism in feminine terms.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 189.

In his analysis of reflective essays written by British girls during the Second World War, James Greenhalgh picks up on the theme of self-control that defines Claire's recreation of her torture, and notes that it is an attempt to prove participation in the war effort. For a class assignment, British girls in Hull were asked to describe their experiences during the bombing of their area. Greenhalgh notes that, in a manner similar to the way that Claire Phillips described her experiences with torture, "the girls' essays demonstrate their attempts to present composed and fortitudinous selves within popular discourses of morale and hint at an imagined intersubjective relationship with a reader in a position to judge the girls' contribution to the war effort."<sup>24</sup> Essentially, the girls, like Claire, knew that they were writing for an audience, and wanted to show that through their self-control they were performing their duties as patriotic citizens. Greenhalgh further argues that these "selfhoods produced through the girls' narratives were shaped by gendered discourses on civilian service."<sup>25</sup> Thus, their creation of a stoic self was not only reflective of a desire to demonstrate involvement with the war effort, but it also fell in line with the roles given to women during wartime. Greenhalgh's identification of the importance of self-control in these pieces of reflection suggests that women and girls actively played into gender roles to legitimize their own actions as civilians.

Self-control appears again during the scene in Claire's memoir in which the Japanese pretended to execute her. Believing it was real, and forced to kneel down, Claire felt a blade against the skin of her neck. She claimed that she did not cry, nor shake, nor beg for mercy from her captors. Instead, summoning the poise referenced by Greenhalgh, Claire simply prayed

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<sup>24</sup> James Greenhalgh, "'Till We Hear the Last All Clear': Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls' Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War," in *Gender & History* 26.1 (April 2014): 171, accessed October 31, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12057>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 167.

quietly to “Our Lord to give me courage, watch over my loved ones, and grant success to the arms of the United States.”<sup>26</sup> According to Claire’s account, she had only thoughts of her family and the great patriotic cause for which she was fighting in the moments before she suspected she was going to die. It does not matter whether or not she actually had those thoughts; what does matter is that Claire, in the aftermath of the war, wanted to make sure she appeared as composed as possible. And she wanted to be seen as a truly feminine American hero. It was not enough for her to share the dangers that she had faced in her memoir. If she wanted her story to succeed as a film and herself to be remembered, she needed to emphasize her patriotism as much as possible. For Claire, this meant that she had to make sure that her memoir depicted her as heroically and womanly as possible, even to the point that she described her last thoughts as being controlled, dignified pleas for the success of the American cause.

### **Margaret Utinsky and Miss U**

During their time in the Philippines, Margaret Utinsky and Claire Phillips were involved with the same network of spies. They were close enough that, during Claire’s imprisonment, Margaret took care of Dian for her.<sup>27</sup> While they were both intimately connected during the war, neither woman mentioned the other frequently in their memoirs. Peter Eisner believes that Margaret’s silence about Claire’s work in her memoir was a way to get back at Claire, whose fictionalized memoir did not sit well with the men and women who had known her during the Japanese occupation. Jealousy, according to Eisner, was the main factor at play. Both women wanted postwar fame, but Claire was the more successful one, which frustrated Margaret. Theresa Kaminski approaches their relationship differently, however. Though she emphasizes the disintegration of the friendship between the two women, pointing, in particular, to the

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<sup>26</sup> Phillips, *Manila Espionage*, 198.

<sup>27</sup> Eisner, *MacArthur’s Spies*, 212, 267-286.

contentious arguments they had as they traveled back to the United States after the war on the SS *John Lykes*. Kaminski considers Claire's "quest for recognition" as the root of the troubles between the two women.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of what created the enmity between the two women at the end of the war, they worked relatively well together during the early years of the occupation.

Margaret Utinsky first went to the Philippines for a brief visit in 1926 or 1927, when she was in her late twenties. She had been a widow since she was nineteen years old and had pursued a career as a nurse to support herself and her son, Charley. Drawn in by the allure of Manila, Margaret ended up remaining in the Philippines and she eventually fell in love with Jack Utinsky, whom she married in 1934. They lived happily in Corregidor, where Jack, a career soldier, was stationed. In 1940, Margaret returned to the United States with her son, who was to remain there for the duration of the war, to visit family. By the time she tried to return to the Philippines, tensions had heightened in the Pacific and travel restrictions had been put in place; Margaret eventually went to a general to get permission to get back to her husband on the islands. She succeeded and returned to the Philippines.<sup>29</sup>

Upon the declaration of war, Jack immediately went to fight against the Japanese invasion of the Philippines and Margaret resumed her work as a nurse in local hospitals to contribute to the war effort. When the occupation began, and with Jack among the POWs sent to the camps, Margaret obtained a new identity for herself: a single Lithuanian woman named Rosena Utinsky. To find out what had happened to her husband, she went to the Bataan Peninsula with the Red Cross, hoping to receive information on his whereabouts and to help the captured American soldiers. She made several trips of this kind and traveled frequently between Manila and Bataan to do what she could to help. When it became impossible for her to continue

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<sup>28</sup> Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 417.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18-21, 36-39.

on with her work with the Red Cross, Margaret sought out ways to help the American POWs and decided to send letters, rations, and various other necessities to them at Camp O'Donnell and Cabanatuan. She found people who were willing to help and began the *Miss U* organization for which she would later receive the Medal of Freedom.<sup>30</sup>

The organization operated well until Margaret was informed of Jack's death, for which she felt responsible, as she had been unable to send him supplies. She started to drink to deal with her pain and her behavior completely changed. She was no longer confident, dependable, or motivated and those involved in the operation, including Claire Phillips, worried that Margaret, clearly unable to think straight, would turn them all in and end their efforts to aid the POWs. Indeed, when the Japanese arrested Margaret, many of the helpers believed that she would spill their secrets the second that she was subjected to torture. Yet Margaret did not reveal any information about the organization and eventually returned to Manila somewhat the worse for wear after a brief imprisonment, although those who witnessed her return contested the extent of the torture that she experienced. Regardless, Margaret's arrest marked the beginning of the end of the operation's efforts to aid the POWs. She lost what remained of her motivation and, a few months after Claire was arrested, she took Dian and ran to the protection of the guerrillas in the hills. Margaret stayed with them and protected Dian until the end of the war.<sup>31</sup>

In her memoir, Margaret showed a tendency to present her actions and decisions as exceptional, whereas Claire usually tried to show how she represented a typical woman; her focus lay in emphasizing how she fit certain expectations of all patriotic women rather than distinguishing herself from them. Margaret established her own uniqueness early on in her memoir, describing her defiance to recommendations that American women leave the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 94, 145-147, 175.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 213-214, 288-289, 384-387; Eisner, *MacArthur's Spies*, 199, 212.

Philippines. “Then came the order – which I refused to obey – that all American women were to return to the states.”<sup>32</sup> She drew attention to her femininity and, at the same time, distinguished herself from the group in citing her noncompliance. In showing how she subverted the norm, Margaret was attempting to label herself as historically noteworthy. This followed an old pattern in historical writing that had become less and less prevalent by the 1940s, but that still emphasized from time to time that women were deserving of recognition “not because they had been ‘typical’ or because their lives had in any way represented the fortunes of women as a social or cultural construct, but precisely because as ‘great women’ they had been different from the rest of their gender.”<sup>33</sup> Margaret wanted to try and increase interest in her story by showing that she was not a typical woman, but rather one of the “great women.”

Interestingly, although Claire focused as intensely on her feminine identity as her American one, Margaret tended to take every possible opportunity to write in another line about her total devotion to her countrymen. Early in her memoir, she detailed an experience she had in watching part of the Bataan Death March, as American POWs were transferred from Corregidor to Bilibid. They were “exhausted and starved, wet and dirty.”<sup>34</sup> She watched “men fall and saw them kicked and beaten with bayonets.”<sup>35</sup> She remarked afterwards: “That day it was not easy to pretend not to be an American.”<sup>36</sup> It is not unusual that she felt especially affected by the suffering of her fellow Americans. What is notable, however, is that she intentionally expressed her desire to *be* an American, despite the danger, so that she could show the men solidarity.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Utinsky, *Miss U* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company), 1948, accessed October 30, 2017, Hathitrust, 66.

<sup>33</sup> Billie Melman, “Gender, History, and Memory: The Invention of Women’s Past in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” in *History and Memory* 5.1 (Spring – Summer 1993), 17, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25618641>.

<sup>34</sup> Utinsky, *Miss U*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Margaret's point in emphasizing the emotional, rather than logistical, problems of concealing her nationality was to show that she took no joy in temporarily renouncing the nation of her birth. It was no convenience to her.

Margaret further accentuated her devotion to the nation in an anecdote near the beginning of her memoir when, just after the Japanese began their occupation, she came upon an American flag that had been tossed aside by the invaders. Apparently motivated by her patriotism, Margaret picked it up and made her way home with it. But the journey to preserve the flag, according to Margaret, was not easy: "On the way back to Manila, some Japanese hailed us and climbed in for a ride. I was scared stiff."<sup>37</sup> One of the soldiers "insisted" that they "have a drink with him."<sup>38</sup> She took the flag with her and sat with him in the bar, and the whole time, she said, "his arm practically rested on that American flag."<sup>39</sup> When she eventually got home, she "washed the flag and hung it up in the living room to dry."<sup>40</sup>

It is likely that Margaret fictionalized this scene in her memoir to show the extent of her patriotism. While others may have simply left the flag along, Margaret took it, despite the danger, and hid it safely at her apartment after cleaning it and restoring it to a proper state of cleanliness. What makes this particular story interesting is the fact that it is likely a fabrication. The run-in with the Japanese soldier and the drinks at the bar was too coincidental of a scenario, too unbelievable given that she had just picked up an American flag. Maybe she did save a flag, but it is doubtful that what happened afterwards is true. What it tells us, though, is that Margaret's efforts to embellish her recovery of the flag were specifically aimed at increasing interest in her wartime endeavors. By claiming that she had saved the flag, Margaret was

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 23.

entering a larger tradition of patriotic activity with which the public could identify. Margaret may also have been attempting to heighten the stakes of her memoir, as well, by writing that she accomplished her patriotic duty in spectacular fashion, staying calm when faced with the threat of discovery by the Japanese soldier who made her drink with him.<sup>41</sup>

Even as she recounted the darkest days of her imprisonment under the Japanese, Margaret drew attention to her patriotism. Once, while she was in her cell, the Japanese brought in an American soldier and tied him to the bars, beating him in front of her. “Blood and pieces of flesh flew all over me,” Margaret wrote.<sup>42</sup> She suffered a moment of hopelessness while watching the ordeal before having an epiphany: “But I remembered that my filthy dress was all spattered with what I knew was American blood, shed to make me talk and endanger more Americans.”<sup>43</sup> She could endure being splattered with the soldier’s blood because, in enduring, she was saving the lives of more Americans. When the soldier eventually died, Margaret responded to his demise with rather superficial references to his attractiveness. For her, the horror in his death lay in that “the pitiful thing that had once been a good-looking, clean-cut American was only flesh now.”<sup>44</sup>

Margaret and Claire both consciously made racist remarks to differentiate themselves from their surroundings. Margaret, however, actually attempted to substantiate her racism in her memoir. She threw barbs into her memoir at opportune moments, particularly during the scenes in which the Japanese questioned her about her illicit activities. “I hope I never hear anything again about the stoical Oriental,” she wrote. “At the slightest excitement, the Japanese begin to

<sup>41</sup> There is a long tradition in the United States of saving the flag as the fulfillment of a patriotic obligation. For more information, see Robert Justin Goldstein, *Saving “Old Glory”*: *The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> Utinsky, *Miss U*, 108.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

scream.”<sup>45</sup> This is the first time that Margaret referred to the Japanese as Oriental, which is a significant shift in diction. Prior to the scenes of torture to which she was subjected, she referred to the enemy simply as the Japanese. Though the word “Oriental” was commonly used in the 1940s both with and without racist intent, the fact that Margaret only began to use the word after her torture to develop a negative caricature of the Japanese soldier suggests that she was probably using it as a racially charged term. It is a perceptible change that feels almost mechanical, as if she decided that, after describing torture in her memoir, she was then allowed to unleash a stream of racism that she had been holding back. This is not to say that racism is not present in the first half of her memoir – she often used the word “hissing” to describe scenes of Japanese soldiers talking – but to show that she intentionally increased the level of racism in her work once she had what her contemporaries would have considered justification: torture.<sup>46</sup>

The enhanced racism in the second half of her memoir does not simply apply to the Japanese, either. Margaret, who decided to leave Manila and go to the hills after her torture, began making consistently racist statements that presented her own struggle as that of a white woman threatened by her association with the racial other. She used her identity to heighten the sense of danger in her memoir. Margaret wrote: “I sat in the bamboo chair, holding the sleeping baby, and wondering how on earth this had happened to me. Wondering how on earth Peggy Doolin had turned into the notorious Miss U, the only white woman in God knows how many miles, escaping for her life through a bamboo forest.”<sup>47</sup> The language that she used here is purposeful. In describing herself as “notorious” she intentionally put forth an inflated image of her own significance in the underground movements. The mention of her white womanhood, and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 130.

particularly the fact that she was alone in her whiteness among bands of Filipino guerrillas in an exotic bamboo forest, was an effort to manipulate her audience into feeling empathy for her as she sat pondering her incredible fate. The way Margaret told it, she was the lone pillar of civilization, and her fight in the Philippines an active resistance to not only the Japanese, but to the immoral, threatening influences of the non-white other as well. She played right into the expectations of her postwar audience.

### **Colonel Yay Panlilio and *The Crucible***

Colonel Yay Panlilio was born on May 22, 1913 in Colorado to a Filipina mother and an American father. She spent most of her young life in the United States before traveling to the Philippines in the early 1930s with her husband Eduardo Panlilio, who had been born on the islands. They later divorced and Yay became a single mother with three children to take care of. She never wanted for work, however. She wrote for *The Philippines Herald*, one of the most popular newspapers in Manila, and worked as a newscaster for KZRH (Radio Manila). Yay was a career woman. She loved what she did and she was well known in the city because of her willingness to do whatever it took to uncover an important story. Yay also had a penchant for wearing rather loud, colorful clothes that made her stand out from the crowd. She was such a character, apparently, that the people of Manila knew her “on sight.”<sup>48</sup>

In the late 1930s, Yay’s responsibilities expanded as Captain Ralph Keeler of the United States Army convinced her to join the military’s S-2 (intelligence) unit. Army officials believed that she had a “natural cover” as a newspaperwoman who already had plenty of experience with infiltrating Manila’s social circles to get the scoop for her articles.<sup>49</sup> The Army considered Yay’s Filipina identity an asset, as well, determining that it would allow her a greater level of mobility

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<sup>48</sup> Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 35.

in Manila compared to her white counterparts. They were right. When war came to the Philippines and the Japanese occupation began, Yay did not have to worry about obtaining false papers to avoid the internment camps. She remained a free citizen in Manila even if she had to tread carefully among the Japanese soldiers. Yay did not lay low, however. She left her children with friends that she could trust and went to work. She believed all women had to choose sides in war and she was determined to do her part and fight for her two countries: the United States and the Philippines.<sup>50</sup>

Early on in the occupation, the Japanese approached Yay and asked her to work for them at KZRH, which they planned on turning into a propaganda machine. Yay, recognizing that she had an opportunity to aid the war effort, agreed, and passed along coded messages to American forces while she relayed Japanese propaganda. Unsurprisingly, the Japanese eventually caught on to her work and Yay fled to the hills where she joined the guerrillas. She had a turbulent love affair with Major Marcos V. Agustin, a Filipino soldier known by the nickname Marking. Together, they assembled a force of Filipino guerrillas.<sup>51</sup> Yay counseled Marking on his plans to attack the Japanese and took care of the “administrative details” that allowed Marking’s guerrillas to operate effectively, including “keeping troop rosters, assigning duties, and distributing supplies.”<sup>52</sup> Yay remained with the guerrillas for the duration of the war. When peace was declared, she went to the United States with her children and became a journalist again. A few years later, she moved back to Manila and married Marking for short period of time

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 35 and 98.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 99-102, 240-244.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 245.

before divorcing him and returning to the United States for good. Like Claire and Margaret, she received the Medal of Freedom for her wartime work.<sup>53</sup>

Though Yay's work during the war was of a much more militant nature, she followed the pattern established by Claire and Margaret by playing on similar themes of traditional femininity and patriotism in her 1950 memoir *The Crucible*. Patriotism, though, was much more complicated for Yay. Though she considered Manila "her real home," Yay was just as devoted to the United States as she was to the Philippines.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, in the first pages of her memoir, Yay chose to reprint the creed of Marking's guerrillas. The creed, dated April 9, 1942, included several statements of loyalty to the United States and addressed the issue of colonialism, stipulating that the guerrillas "wanted no independence by treachery."<sup>55</sup> They believed, however, "in the right of every Filipino to walk in dignity...to mold our destiny as a people."<sup>56</sup> This creed, though it was designed to unify the guerrillas under one belief system, represents Yay's own attitude towards her identity as a Filipina-American. Her patriotism was twofold. She supported the United States completely but also believed in the eventual independence of the Philippines. She wrote of raising the flags of her two countries when she joined the guerrillas. "We did what even America in her greatness could not do," Yay wrote. "We kept her flag, and our own, hoisted in occupied territory."<sup>57</sup> Yay felt wholeheartedly loyal to America and to the Philippines, so much so as to pointedly remark upon raising the flags side by side with the guerrillas.

Despite her own biracial identity, Yay often demonstrated racism towards the Japanese in her memoir, just like Claire and Margaret did in theirs. She typically refrained from describing

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 390-391, 405-410.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>55</sup> Yay Panlilio, *The Crucible: An Autobiography* (New York: MacMillan, 1950), accessed December 4, 2017, Hathitrust, vi.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 1.

the Japanese as physically inferior to the Americans. Instead, Yay chose to relay conversations that she had had with the Japanese and pointedly recreate the poor English that they spoke. Yay related a discussion she had with a Japanese man named Taki and changed every “l” to an “r.” “‘This is the miritary interrigence badge of the Japanese Imperiar Forces,’” she remembered him saying.<sup>58</sup> Though Yay probably believed that she was simply depicting the conversation the way that she heard it, she would also have been aware, undoubtedly, that the American readers of her memoir expected her to deliver certain images of the Japanese. They had been indoctrinated to believe in the inferiority of the Japanese, and this inferiority extended from sheer physical ability to an inability to speak proper English. Yay’s observation about their inability to pronounce the English “r” was not an innocent one. It was intended to create a picture of the Japanese other.

Yay discussed concepts of traditional femininity early on in her memoir. She did not often play it up in her daily life. She confessed, however, to the usefulness of emphasizing her femininity when she wrote of her attempt to escape Manila after the Japanese discovered that she had “tightroped and triple-talked in and out of the Japanese scripts” that she had been given at KZRH.<sup>59</sup> The Japanese had put out a reward for her capture and she assumed a disguise so that she could get to the hills safely. “The disguise,” she wrote, “was simply girl’s clothes – worn for the first time in years. A masculine escort, lipstick, powder, a dress. No customary slacks, no boyish bob visible under a frivolous kerchief.”<sup>60</sup> To get out of Manila alive, Yay transformed into the picture of traditional femininity that she typically avoided. This disguise would not only prevent the citizens of Manila from recognizing her and turning her in to the Japanese, but, by

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 8.

“simpering” and acting like a silly, uninformed woman, no one would assume she was actually the cunning American sympathizer that the Japanese were hunting.<sup>61</sup>

Yay referenced her femininity most directly when she wrote of her interactions with Marking. She was the only woman among the guerrillas when she first joined them. Marking, to protect her from any untoward advances, chose to sleep near her in those early evenings. And then he promptly attempted to kiss her. Luckily, Yay had been smitten with him from the first time they met: “When a man gives his life for his country, how little a woman’s heart! I turned my head to meet his lips. War was our marriage, the guerrillas our sons.”<sup>62</sup> Like Claire, Yay used her relationship with her wartime lover to enhance perceptions of her own femininity. Her love for Marking, as she described it, produced a fighting force that became legend throughout the islands. Yay painted their relationship as unconventional – borne out of wartime conditions – but simultaneously called the guerrilla fighters their children and identified herself as their mother.

Though their situation was unusual, Yay nonetheless attempted to draw connections between wartime adventures and the timeless, unchanging gender roles that apparently governed her work with the guerrillas. Marking, “the ‘father’ of a hungry family” often put her “in charge of the main base” while he “went forth to fend for food.”<sup>63</sup> Like any good mother, Yay managed the household and the children while the father went to work. She even wrote that, “for the moment,” she “was being domestic.”<sup>64</sup> This rather odd characterization of her work was an attempt to relate her own incredible responsibilities to those experienced by the average woman, who was expected to have a family and take care of the home. Perhaps Yay wanted to make her

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 32.

work seem more relatable to her readers. Regardless, she chose to describe her leadership of the guerrillas as feminine, domestic work.

When she did decide to outline the more unsavory aspects of her work with the guerrillas, Yay cast herself as the voice of morality amid the horror of war. She was the feminine voice among the men and she used her influence to ensure that her “children” retained their humanity, even as they went about the business of war. Yay “knew the meaning of violence,” and she “was against it in all unnecessary forms.” She took it upon herself to make sure that when the men killed, they did so “as mercifully and humanely as possible, so that our fighters would not be scarred by their own brutalities...”<sup>65</sup> Yay considered herself responsible for saving the men from destroying themselves by descending into savagery. She was the mother of the guerrillas and, therefore, she needed to make sure that they respected certain rules of morality and decency as they fought the Japanese. Yay’s analysis of her own importance to the morality of the guerrillas is consistent with Phil Goodman’s work on patriotic femininity. He theorizes that although women were not generally considered the principal actors in war, they were “culturally placed as central in the sense that they were the custodians of values being fought for.”<sup>66</sup> Like any good patriotic mother, it was Yay’s responsibility to exert her feminine influence over her children and keep certain expectations in place.

### ***Virginia Hansen Holmes and Guerrilla Daughter***

Virginia Hansen Holmes was born in the Philippines on December 17, 1934. Her father worked for the East Mindanao Mining Company. Her mother had been born in the Philippines,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>66</sup> Phil Goodman, “‘Patriotic Femininity’: Women’s Morals and Men’s Morale During the Second World War,” *Gender & History* 10.2 (August 1998): 287, accessed October 31, 2017, Academic Search Premier.

the daughter of an American soldier and a Spanish woman from an old, well-established family. Virginia had four siblings: Ed, Rudy, Hank, and Charlotte (who was most often referred to as Peach). Ed died in 1941. Virginia experienced the war very differently on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao than Claire, Margaret, and Yay did on Luzon in the north. Just seven years old when war came to the Philippines, Virginia spent the duration of the conflict avoiding the internment camps and seeking shelter with her mother and sister outside of the city. Her father and two brothers, Rudy and Hank, actively resisted the Japanese occupation as guerrillas. They spent much of the war separated from each other.<sup>67</sup>

Virginia's memoir, *Guerrilla Daughter*, was published around sixty years after Yay, Margaret, and Claire published theirs. *Guerrilla Daughter* is both a collection of Virginia's personal memories of the occupation and an attempt to recreate her family's history. While she wrote the book herself, Virginia received significant help from her siblings as they rifled through old family documents to rediscover their past and researched the history of the Philippines during the war to corroborate what they remembered of that time. It is clear throughout the memoir that in writing it, Virginia was trying to understand, and perhaps bring back to life, her mother and father. Since she was so young during the war, much of what she wrote involved her observations of the struggles her parents had as they fought for survival.

Virginia negotiated similar issues related to her gender and racial identity as she reconstructed her experience during the Japanese occupation. How Virginia dealt with her gender identity throughout the war was entirely different, however, from the way Claire, Yay, and Margaret used theirs. Virginia's parents actually did their best to hide that she and her sister Peach were girls. She recalled:

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<sup>67</sup> Virginia Hansen Holmes, *Guerrilla Daughter*, (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009), 121.

Mom and Dad came up with the notion that if captured by the Japanese, Peach and I might fare better if we were disguised as boys. So, our parents summoned the barber from a nearby barrio to our house to give us haircuts. To finish our disguise they called a seamstress...to fashion appropriate boys' attire in a hurry.<sup>68</sup>

For a young child, apparently, it was safer to be a boy. Although it is unclear why Virginia's parents assumed this, her experience provides a fascinating contrast to Yay Panlilio's escape from Manila. Virginia thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to be a boy, too. She "felt that everything boys did was exciting and daring," and she "looked forward to becoming brave and adventurous" like Rudy and Hank.<sup>69</sup> Virginia had been socialized to believe that, as a girl, she could not be courageous and bold like her brothers were. The boyish disguise, for her, was freeing. It allowed her a level of mobility that she believed had been previously denied her as a young girl.

Virginia did develop a distinct picture of femininity as she wrote of her mother's understated strength and superhuman calm as she took care of her family. Nowhere is this more evident than when Virginia told of her mother giving birth on September 26, 1944 in a little hut, "one of the most primitive and dilapidated" of those in which they had stayed while in hiding.<sup>70</sup> She watched her mother quietly drink a bottle of ergometrine, a medicine used to prevent extreme bleeding after childbirth, and wait for the midwife. Virginia described the birth as calm. "We never heard a sound from Mom during the delivery," she wrote, "and I had no idea what was happening until I heard a high-pitched wail."<sup>71</sup> The baby was quickly named after Virginia's brother, Ed, who had died before the war. Virginia did not witness the birth of the new baby and therefore could not truly have known how her mother felt during it. It is notable that she chose to

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 145.

describe the silence with which her mother approached it. To seven-year-old Virginia, her parents seemed naturally heroic as they protected the family. Yet her mother's heroism, as Virginia saw it, stemmed primarily from the composure that she demonstrated in stressful, terrifying situations like the birth. Indeed, Virginia's depiction of her mother is defined by the images of self-control that Claire Phillips often used and that James Greenhalgh identifies as a fixture of young girls' attempts to construct heroic identities in wartime.

Virginia wrote her memoir in a climate in which racism was addressed much more directly and freely than it was in the 1940s. Whereas Claire, Margaret, and Yay lived in a society that considered racism acceptable, Virginia benefitted from writing her memoir decades after the events that inspired it. She had the time to learn about race. This is not to say, however, that Virginia never made racist statements in her memoir. She had a tendency to describe native Filipinos, for example, in a manner that made them appear otherworldly and inhuman. Remarking on the landscape that the family passed by as they sought a new hiding place in Tandag, Virginia wrote of the "Manabos or Mananuas, hill people," who lived in the forests. "Their lifestyle was very simple," Virginia continued. "Naturally there was an air of mystery about them, but they were not hostile to outsiders who traveled through their territory." The Manabos "were very different from the more aggressive Magahats in the southern part of Mindanao," she finished. Though Virginia's description of the Manabos may not seem as blatantly racist as the statements made by Claire, Margaret, and Yay, Virginia still spoke of the native Filipinos in language that identified them as unknowable others. She treated them as primitive inhabitants of the island, using the anecdote to enhance the image of the dangerous, unpredictable journey that she and her family were experiencing.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 139.

She did, however, take the time to address racism directly in certain parts of her memoir. Virginia remembered an incident that occurred after the liberation of the Philippines. She encountered an African American soldier in the street and, thinking nothing of it, greeted him with the n-word. After seeing his reaction, Virginia realized that what she said had been inappropriate. She did not understand why at the time. As she reflected upon the experience, she wrote: “I have not forgotten that incident and what it must have meant to that poor soldier. We had grown up in a multiracial society, and I had no basis for my prejudice.” Virginia went on to speculate that she had not understood the weight of the word at the time because all of her ideas about “American social norms had all come from movies and magazines.”<sup>73</sup> This encounter, and Virginia’s assessment of it, demonstrates how significantly her whiteness blinded her to other realities. She showed greater self-awareness in her memoir than Claire, Margaret, and Yay did. Regardless, Virginia, especially as a young child, was not immune to the racism that defined the 1940s.

### Conclusion

Claire Phillips, Margaret Utinsky, Yay Panlilio, and Virginia Hansen Holmes each dealt with issues of femininity and racism in their memoirs detailing the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Often, they played up their own adherence to feminine ideals and made racist observations to demonstrate how incredible and unbelievable their adventures were. Though the women shared similar experiences in the Philippines, their lives after the war went in entirely different directions. Claire Phillips successfully engineered a movie deal based on her memoir and sued the United States government for money, believing she deserved to be repaid for what she had spent while aiding POWs during the war. Margaret Utinsky led a quiet life working in

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 176.

nurseries and schools. Yay Panlilio moved back and forth between the Philippines and the United States, continuing her work as a reporter. Claire, Yay, and Margaret all earned the Medal of Freedom for their actions. Virginia Hansen Holmes worked as a Pan Am stewardess and eventually settled in the United States. Her family kept in contact with a veteran's association, the American Guerrillas of Mindanao.<sup>74</sup>

The memoirs of these women provide historians with a rich opportunity to complicate the story of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. They shed light on what it meant to be a woman on the front lines of war, opening up a discussion on the ever-changing concept of identity that played a significant role not just in the Philippines during the Second World War, but in the United States as well. Although they had many different reasons for writing their memoirs, Claire, Margaret, Yay, and Virginia each demonstrated that they wanted themselves and their families to be remembered after the war. Sadly, their stories of survival have faded from memory despite their efforts. But no matter whether or not their lives are deemed worthy of representation on the big screen, in classrooms, and in books, these women fought to survive the occupation in extraordinary ways. Their actions speak for themselves.

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<sup>74</sup> Kaminski, *Angels of the Underground*, 404-428; Holmes, 196-201.

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