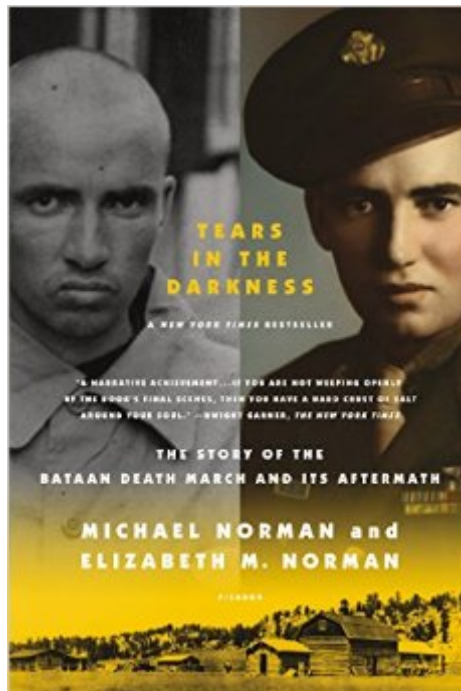


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Tears In The Darkness: The Story Of The Bataan Death March And Its Aftermath



Synopsis

Tears in the Darkness is an altogether new look at World War II that exposes the myths of war and shows the extent of suffering and loss on both sides. For the first four months of 1942, U.S., Filipino, and Japanese soldiers fought what was America's first major land battle of World War II, the battle for the tiny Philippine peninsula of Bataan. It ended with the surrender of 76,000 Filipinos and Americans, the single largest defeat in American military history. The defeat, though, was only the beginning, as Michael and Elizabeth M. Norman make dramatically clear in this powerfully original book. From then until the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the prisoners of war suffered an ordeal of unparalleled cruelty and savagery: forty-one months of captivity, starvation rations, dehydration, hard labor, deadly disease, and torture—far from the machinations of General Douglas MacArthur. The Normans bring to the story remarkable feats of reportage and literary empathy. Their protagonist, Ben Steele, is a figure out of Hemingway: a young cowboy turned sketch artist from Montana who joined the army to see the world. Juxtaposed against Steele's story and the sobering tale of the Death March and its aftermath is the story of a number of Japanese soldiers.

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Customer Reviews

This book may be history, but it reads like a novel. The authors have obviously done a lot of interviewing—more than 400—and it really shows. They have woven a story that's hard to put down. My only knowledge of the "Bataan Death March" was from the movies. This is some story. They take you to the Philippines before the battle and set the stage for it. Then they take you into the battle itself, right into the action. It's like you are there with the men. Then comes the surrender on

April 9, 1942, 76,000 men under American command, the biggest military defeat in our history. Then comes the death march. I think it's the longest chapter in the book. It was both hard to read and hard to stop reading. The details that these writers have accumulated are just unbelievable. You can see the work that went into this. Two things I especially like. First, although there must be literally more than a hundred characters in this book, they keep coming back to touch base with one character, a guy named Ben Steele, who was a young cowboy who grew up in Montana. His story really drew me in and I liked following him from the first page to the last. He became an artist after the war, and a many of his sketches, from that time in his life, are in the book. Surprisingly, I enjoyed reading about some of the Japanese soldiers. What's interesting is that you are angry at the Japanese and also feel for them at the same time. That's the way this book is written. Sometimes the good guys are bad and sometimes the bad guys are good. In the end, of course, the American and Filipino soldiers really suffered, so this is really a story of great courage and endurance. This is now my favorite war novel. Five stars all the way through the read.

In their book, "Tears in the Darkness," Michael and Elizabeth Norman, have taken a historical event, the American defeat and its horrific aftermath in the Philippines at the start of World War II in 1942 and turned it into a spell-binding exploration of the human spirit. At the center of the tale, of course, is the Bataan Death March. But after ten years of incredibly detailed research on both sides of the Pacific, the authors are able to render its full reality from a variety of individual perspectives: American, Japanese and Filipino. The result is a revelation -- not merely a narrative of courage, sacrifice, cruelty and suffering, but also, ultimately, of the redemptive power of reflection and forgiveness. It may also be the most moving book ever written about those dark April days almost seven decades ago and men who experienced them.

I'm not usually inclined to read books about war, but I picked this up and couldn't put it down. It follows the story of a boy from Montana who ends up a soldier in the Bataan Death March. Even though the reader knows in the first few pages that the soldier, Ben Steele, survives, and is still alive in fact, I found myself on the edge of my seat and praying for him to make it. His story is heartbreaking, uplifting and compelling all at once. The book is not for the faint of heart and is harrowing in many places, but it's written with a kind of simplicity and grace that shows above all, the ambiguity of war. Tremendous.

Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath by Michael and

Elizabeth Norman, both professors, is one of the finest treatments of how American POW's were treated by the Japanese ever written. *Tears in the Darkness* is profoundly insightful and laboriously researched, and presents the reader with an honest view into both the American psyche as well as the Japanese victors. As the son of a navy vet who served on an escort carrier in the Pacific and saw action at Macon Island, Tarawa, and later at Leyte Gulf, I found *Tears in the Darkness* very moving. I've read extensively about the Pacific war and in many ways still haven't forgiven the Japanese for what they caused. Political Correctness be-gone. The Normans focus on a young American who happened to be serving in the Army Air Corps when the war began. Focusing on Ben Steele allows the authors to use his experiences to study the wider specifics of the Bataan death marches and the POWs later treatment in the camps. With information gleaned from more than 400 interviews and many of Steele's pen and ink drawings, they provide the readers of a later era a revealing glimpse into what true torture is. No water boarding here. Starved, deprived of water, beaten, and allowed to die of horrendous diseases, Americans and their Pilipino allies, suffered and died together. By traveling to Japan to interview the few guards still alive, the Normans provide an authoritative element to the story they want to tell. Without allowing the Japanese an easy out, the authors do provide background that at least helps to explain the level of brutality suffered by the captives. No alibis here.....just facts about how the Japanese chain of command worked. Interesting. I also recommend *We Refused to Die* by Gene S. Jacobsen as a companion read. I highly recommend *Tears in the Darkness*. Semper Fi!

The Normans' magisterial history of one of the darkest chapters of modern warfare is one of those rare books that transforms readers. Those who read this book will be affected in different ways; some by the inconceivable suffering and cruelty, and some by the courage and grace of those who suffered. The authors have included not only the entire history of the death march and imprisonment, but also the consequences of these things on individuals, especially Montana's courageous Army Air Force enlistee Ben Steele, one of the few who survived. There was one episode that was particularly telling. After the war Steele became an art professor, and the day came when a Japanese-American student entered his class, and all the horror and bitterness and desolation of his three years of imprisonment rushed back into Steele's mind. But then he learned that the student's Japanese-American family had been interned here in the States. Steele invited the student into his office for a heart-to-heart talk, and out of it came reconciliation. Ben Steele treated his Japanese student with all the fairness he could muster. Other readers will discover other treasures in this powerful and luminous history. But no reader will finish the book unchanged.

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