

DANIEL W. CROWLEY
US Army Air Corps (1940-1946)
Prisoner of Japan (1942-1945)
May 29, 1922-September 16, 2021

*After 76 years, on January 4, 2021, Ptv. Daniel Crowley, a son of Connecticut and a WWII veteran, received his promotion to Sergeant, his Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB), and POW Medal. Dan served in the Philippines with **several units**: the U.S. Army Air Corps at Nichols Field near Manila, the U.S. Army Air Corps Provisional Infantry Regiment (PARC) that fought the invading Japanese forces on the Bataan Peninsula, and the 4th Marines on Corregidor. He became a prisoner of the Japanese in May 1942. He was liberated from a POW slave labor copper mining camp in Japan in September 1945. Dan, one of 212 confirmed American POWs of Japan from Connecticut, passed away on September 16, 2021.*

Biography

On October 7, 1940, Daniel Crowley, 18, traveled to Hartford, Connecticut to enlist with the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was hoping to “take a long trip somewhere at the expense of our country.” The son of the once-famous women’s fashion icon, textile designer Timothy F. Crowley, he had experienced the depths of the Depression when his father’s business failed. In the 1930s, the senior Crowley turned his attention to painting and public speaking where he warned all who would listen of Japan’s unjust and brutal aggression against China.

Thus, Dan left for his “adventure” more aware than most 18 year olds that the world was rapidly moving toward war. His father spoke throughout the state advocating for Americans to stop enabling Japan’s invasion and occupation of China through sales of scrap iron and petroleum. Although Dan knew something of the Japanese, he never imagined that they would become his enemy in barely a year.

At the [Army Supply Base in Brooklyn](#), on January 2, 1941, untrained and unarmed, he boarded the [USAT Leonard Wood](#) that sailed through the Panama Canal to Angel Island off San Francisco. From there, he was transferred to the [USAT U.S. Grant](#). This ship, via Hawaii and Guam, after engine failures, fires and a typhoon, arrived at Manila in the Philippines in March 1941.

Private Crowley was assigned to Nichols Field (today's Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport) near Manila with the 24th Pursuit Group, V Interceptor Command, 17th Pursuit Squadron. For months, there was little to do and the enlisted men at the Field remained untrained and their officers unconcerned. The 17th Pursuit Squadron had been sent overseas in October 1940 (arriving December 14, 1940) from Selfridge Field in Michigan without aircraft to fly. Until their planes arrived and were assembled in March 1941, they practiced in outdated [Boeing P-26 Peashooters](#) that then constituted the interceptor force at Nichols Field.

New planes arrived in March 1941. These were [Seversky P-35s](#) that had been held back from a sale to Sweden (on 18 June 1940, the United States declared an embargo against exporting weapons to any nation other than the United Kingdom). By late 1941 standards, the P-35s were obsolete. They were too lightly armed and lacked both armor around the cockpit and self-sealing fuel tanks. In addition, the instruments in these aircraft were marked in Swedish and calibrated in the metric system! New [Curtiss P-40Es](#) "Warhawks" did not arrive until September 1941.

The Japanese attacked Clark Field on December 8th, nine hours after Pearl Harbor. The next day they struck Nichols Field along with other air bases on Luzon. Within three days, Japan controlled the air over the Philippines and completely eliminated the U.S. Far East Air Force as an effective defense of Asia. The Philippines now had to rely solely on its ground forces, which at the time had no lines of supply or escape.

Crowley participated in an improvised air defense of Nichols Field with antiquated British Lewis machine guns that were welded together to form more powerful, but still ineffective weapons against Japan's modern planes. Despite their best efforts, most of the aircraft and Nichols Field were destroyed. The ground crews were soon evacuated and sent to the Bataan Peninsula via boat and train. The air base was abandoned on December 26th.

The surviving ground crews and airmen were made members of the U.S. Army's Provisional Air Corps Infantry Regiment on Bataan. Although designated as Infantry, the U.S. Army has long refused to recognize these veterans as such and denies them their Combat Infantry Badges (CIB). In every way, including by name they fought like infantry soldiers. Mr. Crowley will be awarded an "honorary" CIB on January 4, 2021.

On Bataan, Crowley's unit was joined by the Philippine Scouts who were instrumental in helping them fend off three amphibious landings by the Japanese on the west coast of Bataan in the [Battle of the Points](#). The Army Air Corps men on Bataan were armed with only machine guns from their destroyed aircraft or WWI [Springfield M1903s](#) (a five-round magazine fed, bolt-action service repeating rifle). Crowley had not fired or used a rifle until his combat on Bataan.

After the Bataan Peninsula was surrendered April 9, 1942—the single largest military surrender in American history—his unit made its way down to the tip of Bataan and the town of Mariveles to surrender. Refusing to become prisoners, he and a number of soldiers and sailors hid among rocks in the breakwater near the shore. At nightfall they made their way through the three miles of shark-infested, mined waters to Corregidor Island in Manila Bay by swimming and clinging to life boats or debris from various ships bombed or scuttled in Manila Bay and Mariveles Harbor.

Crowley remembers hiding in the breakwater with the crew of the [USAT *Yu Sang*](#), an armaments ship carrying 1,500 tons of bombs. The ship moored in the Mariveles Harbor had been attacked and badly damaged by the Japanese. They watched as the ensuing fire ignited the ordnance causing a tremendous explosion and tidal wave. He can still recall the sound of the flaming bits of the ship raining down on his doughboy “Brodie” helmet.

On Corregidor, Crowley became part of the 4th Marines Regimental Reserve (China Marines) commanded by Major Max Schaeffer. These Marines fought a dangerous and desperate shore defense until Corregidor fell on May 6, 1942. His Company commander was the famous University of Tennessee football star [Captain Austin Conner “Shifty” Shofner](#). The Philippines was surrendered on May 8th, although a number of units on the outer islands did not put down their arms until late May,

Dan, like the rest of the men and women in the Philippines, did not surrender. They were all willing, despite hunger, disease, and a lack of ammunition, to fight on. It was their commanders who “surrendered” them. It was Washington that did not send reinforcements.

Shofner would become famous later in the war for being one of the very few who escaped from a Japanese POW camp. On April 4, 1943, he and a small group of nine other Americans and two Filipinos escaped their labor camp in Davos, Philippines. These men were able to make it to a sympathetic Filipino village and rescue by an American sub that took them to Australia. Among the men was [William Dyess](#) who told his story to *The Chicago Tribune*. It was published on January 27, 1944, revealing to Americans for the first time the horrors of the Bataan Death March. Shofner returned to combat in 1944 commanding units of the Marine Corps in the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa. Dyess died in December 1943 when the plane he was testing crashed.

On May 25th, Crowley and the nearly 12,000 other POWs who were held at [the 92nd Garage Area](#)—an exposed beach with little water or food and no sanitation—on Corregidor were taken by boat to Manila and [paraded through town on what became known as the “March of Shame.”](#) By rail and foot, the POWs traveled on to the prison Camp [Cabanatuan](#). To escape its squalor and despair, Crowley joined 300 POWs in August to build an airstrip on Palawan Island for the Japanese Army. Starvation, beatings, and unworkable conditions

prolonged the task. They only had hand tools to turn the coral rock on the tropical island into a sturdy runway.

He and approximately half of the men were returned to Manila in early 1944. Crowley says he feigned insanity to be relieved of the work. The remaining 150 prisoners on Palawan became victims of Tokyo's directive to "kill all" POWs once the Americans began to take territory. On December 14, 1944, as American troops approached the Philippine Islands, the remaining POWs on Palawan were herded into an improvised air raid shelter, doused with gasoline, set afire, and machine-gunned to death. Nevertheless, a lucky 11 did escape to report on the [Palawan Massacre](#).

Today, the airfield built by the POWs on Palawan is the Philippine Air Force's Antonio Bautista Air Base that shares its runway with the Puerto Princesa Airport. It is part of the enhanced security initiative between the Philippines and the United States to reinforce security in the Indo-Pacific. It is an anchor in the U.S. alliance with the Philippines.

At the time of the infamous massacre, Crowley was in Japan. He had been sent there on March 24, 1944 via Formosa aboard the "hell ship," [Taikoku Maru](#) arriving April 3 like most other American and Allied POWs at the Port of Moji, on Kyushu. Three hundred-odd men had been crowded into the ship's fetid hold that ordinarily would accommodate only 25. They were 11 days in the dark, lying in their own waste with little food or water. Of the 308 men loaded onto the ship, 17 died en route to Japan.

Crowley remembers that the Japanese had cameras focused on them as they, bedraggled and dazed, made their way down the ship's gangplank to the dock at Moji. We do not know what happened to the newsreels made from these films and photos. Today, there are memorials to Japanese soldiers, horses, and bananas at this historic port. No physical record exists, however, of the thousands of American and Allied POWs who first arrived in Japan at these docks.

He was first sent to the POW camp [Tokyo #8B \(Motoyama\)](#) administered by the Nippon Mining Company. There he was a slave laborer in its Hitachi copper mine, Japan's oldest and most dangerous. There were facilities for both Chinese and Korean miners at the mine. Today, the global company is known as JX Nippon Mining and Metals. Although one of the largest users of slave and forced labor in wartime Japan, the company has never acknowledged nor apologized for their abusive labor conditions.

In August 1944, he was transferred to Tochigi, Japan, near Tokyo, where he again was forced to mined copper ore, this time for Furukawa Kogyo (today's [Furukawa Company Group](#)) at the [Ashio POW Camp Tokyo 9-B](#) until the end of the war. Working alongside Japanese and

conscripted Korean miners were approximately 300 Allied and American POWs from the United States, Singapore, Hong Kong, Dutch East Indies, Norway, Australia, and China.

The mine was closed in 1973. Today, it is a national historic site and [tourist attraction](#) touting the mine's contribution to Japan's industrialization, albeit without mention of the American and Allied POWs who labored there. The Furukawa Company Group is one of Japan's 15 largest industrial groups and was largely untouched by the U.S. Occupation policies to dismantle Japan's industrial conglomerates (*zaibatsu*).

Furukawa dates its origins back to 1875. Before and during World War II, Furukawa specialized in mining, electronics, and chemicals. Now, the predominant companies are Fuji Electric and Furukawa Electric as well as Fujitsu, FANUC, Advantest, and Yokohama Rubber. One U.S. subsidiary directly related to its mining operation is [Furukawa Rock Drill USA Co., Ltd.](#) in Kent, Ohio and Spartanburg, South Carolina. The Furukawa Group has yet to acknowledge or apologize for its use of American and Allied POW slave labor or Korean conscripted labor.

The [Ashio mine](#) is best known as one of Japan's most polluted sites with a long history of environmental destruction, citizen protest, and company denial dating back to the late-19th Century when the mine was privatized. Water and air pollution have ravaged the streams and forests of the region, with deteriorating toxic slag pools still threatening villages. Although mining operations were halted in 1971, the smelting of ores continues there through the use of imports.

Crowley was liberated on September 4, 1945, after weeks of air drops of food, medicine, and clothing onto the POW camp. He was quickly flown to Manila via Okinawa. After several days at [Sternberg General Hospital](#), an Army troop ship brought him and other POWs to San Francisco by early October where he spent his days recuperating from the effects of starvation and torture at [Letterman General Hospital](#) and nights at the local bars mostly in his pajamas. He returned home to Connecticut close to Christmas. After spending time between [Fort Dix Hospital](#) in New Jersey and Connecticut, he was discharged at [Fort Devens](#) in Massachusetts on April 4, 1946.

He found that former POWs were quickly stigmatized as being unstable and difficult employees. This meant finding full time employment was a challenge and he became a traveling salesman dependent upon commissions and his wits. In 1958, he began working for [Northwestern Mutual Insurance](#) where he soon became one of their top producers, a member of their Million Dollar club, and most successful agents.

Crowley believes he enjoyed a good life in Simsbury, but he will never forget the years stolen from him by the Japanese. "It's a living thing with me," he said. "It's not ancient history at all."

On October 4, 2003, Dan participated in the funding and dedication of a new marker on the mass grave of 123 men massacred on Palawan who he had worked alongside building the airfield. Their remains were returned to the United States after the war and buried in a [common grave at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis](#). The new plaque reads:

These U.S. prisoners of war of the Japanese were on the island of Palawan, P.I., as slave laborers building an airfield for the Japanese military. Believing that an invasion by the U.S. forces was imminent, the prisoners were forced into three tunnel air raid shelters, thus following orders from the Japanese High Command to dispose of prisoners by any means available. Buckets of gasoline were thrown inside the shelters followed by flaming torches. Those not instantly killed by the explosions ran burning from the tunnels and were machine-gunned and bayoneted to death.

Another effort to recognize those with whom he served was his advocating for the Connecticut state legislature to name the bridge on Route 185 in Simsbury the “Bataan Corregidor Memorial Bridge” in memory of those soldiers who fought alongside Crowley and who lost their lives at the Battle of Bataan and the Battle of Corregidor. Dan was one of 212 confirmed American POWs of Japan from Connecticut. The [dedication took place on December 7, 2013](#).

In October 2014, Mr. Crowley returned to Japan as part of the 5th US-Japan POW Friendship program. Unfortunately, neither JX Nippon Mining nor Furukawa executives would meet with him. He did, however, revisit the two mines at Hitachi and Ashio where he toiled. Overall, he felt the trip was a positive experience with the satisfaction of finally getting something back from the Japanese who profited from his labor.

Mr. Crowley was married 65 years to Marie Boles and they had two children, a son (deceased) and daughter, Janet Sackbauer. On April 24, 2014, he married Kelley Thomen who accompanied him to Washington to represent the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor at President Obama’s annual Veterans’ Day breakfast in 2016. These White House breakfasts were suspended during the Trump Administration.

Sgt. Crowley passed away peacefully of natural causes on Thursday, September 16 at his home in Simsbury, Connecticut. He was 99. Both Kelley and Janet were by his side when he died. In addition to his wife and daughter, he is survived by his son-in-law Frederick Sackbauer and great grandchildren Lucy, Mary and Timothy Sackbauer, Daniel William Crowley III, and great grandson Peyton Crowley.

Mr. Crowley was a life-time member of VFW, American Legion, American Ex-Prisoners of War, and DAV, as well as the [American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society](#).

CBS Saturday Morning (2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxe-igDzxrE>

Video about Mr.Crowley (2020):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzCDfjkdXb4&feature=youtu.be>

VoteVets video defending the honor of POWs: <https://youtu.be/FY9OQUTmoxI>

Veteran of the Month – Corporal Dan Crowley (2014):

<https://ctsenaterepublicans.com/2013/12/veteran-of-the-month-corporal-dan-crowley/>

Library of Congress: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.79739/>

Philippines POW #: 1-12747

Palawan POW #: 101

Ashio POW #: 3870

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Donations should be made in Sgt Crowley's name to the
American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society

<https://www.adbcmemorialsociety.org/Memorial-Donations>

