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## BOOK REVIEW

Tuten-Pucket, Katheryn (ed) (2004) *We Drank Our Tears*. Saipan: Pacific Star Center For Young Writers.

reviewed by

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*We Drank Our Tears* is a unique and engaging work bringing together several generations of many families to recount, for the first time in many cases, the experiences of the indigenous people during invasion of Saipan by the Americans in June and July of 1944.

This project was done in conjunction with the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US invasion of the Mariana which opened the way for the Americans, using the new B29's, to bomb Japan from secure land bases and thus bring an end to World War II.

Many books have been written and movies made about the great battle of Saipan and the rest of the Marianas in 1944 but very little attention, if any, has been given to the plight of the civilians who were caught between the two giant powers, one trying to hold on to the last vestiges of empire at all costs and the other to put an end the threats against United States and its allies.

At the time of the invasion there were approximate 3000 indigenous (Chamorros and Carolinians) resident on Saipan. In addition, there were upwards of 15,000 Japanese, Okinawan and Korea and civilians living on Saipan and Tinian. Theirs is another story, much of

which is already known. This book is particularly touching because it is the culmination of efforts by many people; teachers, parents, and others as well as a group of outstanding young people from eight years of age to 19 who persuaded their grandparents, and in some cases great-grandparents, to recount their experiences during the actual invasion and how they survived. The stories are both poignant and nightmarish as stories were told to the newest generation of descendants by people who, in many cases, had repressed memories of nightmarish horror for 60 years. These are stories of great heroism and personal sacrifice for family and friends. And this is, in many cases, the first time they have been told by the actual participants. The language is simple and without sophisticated turns of phrase. As such, it is all the more readable and impressive

There are 79 short stories, each of which deserves its own book. Having listened to them myself personally on several occasions, I can attest to the difficulty these folks had dredging up 65-year-old memories and visions of horrors of war over which they had no control and no responsibility.

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The book is well-designed with a forward by Noel Quitugua, local historian. It is followed by a brief but very detailed chronology of the day by day events between June 15, 1944 when the invasion began and July 4, 1946 when indigenous populations was released from protective custody and allowed return to what was left of their homes, farms, and businesses. The stories are well illustrated with photographs of both the interviewer and some outstanding-hand drawn illustrations appropriate to the stories. In some cases photographs of hiding places are included.

At the end of the book there is a list of the approximately 490 indigenous people who died during the period of conflict. These names are now forever inscribed on a new memorial for them included in the newest additions to the

American Memorial Park honoring the war dead of the US military.

In addition, to make it easier to follow the travails and travels of the individuals and families involved, a map of Saipan villages and a listing of place names is also included. There is also a Chamorro English vocabulary. The third appendix lists the names of the participating schools and teachers.

This book is a must read for those who would understand the nature of warfare and its impact on those others than the actual combatants. In present day terms, *collateral damage* takes on a whole new meaning.

This book is available from The Northern Marianas Museum Of History and Culture, P.O. Box 504570, Saipan MP, USA.