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Autobiography & Memoir

The War Journal of Major Damon 'Rocky' Gause
Major Damon
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Damon L. Gause never met his father and knows him only through the crude handwritten journal left behind and through his mother's memories, yet the pride in his voice when he says "my father" is a clarion call of love. As his softspoken Southern voice introduces his father's biography, he opens the private door into his family history and shares the remarkable journey Major Rocky Gause undertook out of love for his family during World War II.

While stationed in Manila, Rocky served as a communications officer in addition to his training as a pilot. When the Japanese attacked in 1941 in an effort to control the Pacific arena, Rocky watched as bombs fell from the sky "like the shiny paper wrapper on a piece of gum" and narrowly survived the resulting devastation. During the fighting, he saved the life of a young woman named Rita, who would later help him escape the island.

As fighting raged back and forth, Rocky and another soldier escaped from the victorious Japanese troops by diving off a bridge and hiding among the mud and reeds further downstream. After a freezing night spent submerged to the neck in the water, they crept from the river to find themselves at the edge of a seeping Japanese encampment. In a nerve-wracking night spent creeping through the camp, they crawled from pallet to pallet to reach the beach on the other side and struck out for freedom by holding onto pieces of board as they swam for the next island. Rocky's friend never made it.

Rocky escaped the infamous Bataan Death March by killing a guard only to spend the next months on the run from island to island trying to avoid recapture and certain death as he stuck to his plan to sail to Australia.

Incredibly, he and another soldier made it in a leaky boat held together with rags and prayer. The irony is that Rocky died as a test pilot almost a year after he was relieved of duty.

The sparse words Rocky used to document his journey are blunt, revealing his upbringing as a Georgia boy, his strengths and shortcomings. In keeping with the times, he

refers to the Japanese as “Nips” or “Japs” and to the Filippinos he served with as dark-skinned “little men.” While he admires their bravery, he seems surprised that anyone other than another white man would exhibit such behavior under fire. He offers a disturbing glimpse into the mind of a wartime soldier to whom the enemy is not considered human.

This memoir is tribute to a long-dead man by a son strong enough to let his father be judged on his own merits and frailties.

Melanie C. Duncan