



A Free Frenchman under the Japanese: The War Diary of Paul Esmérien, Manila, Philippines, 1941-1945

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Paul Esmérian's diary begins with his arrival in the Philippines from French Indochina in the summer of 1941 and sets the scene with an absorbing portrait of pre-war Manila. Just months later, in December, came the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, quickly followed by the invasion of the Philippines. Esmérian is an eloquent witness to the fall of Manila and its subsequent occupation. As early as January 1942, the Japanese set up an internment camp for allied civilians - men, women and children - on the site of the University of Santo Tomás in northern Manila. It came to hold nearly four thousand internees - mostly American, but also British, Empire and allied European. Because France was no longer officially at war with Japan's Axis partner Germany, French residents of Manila were not immediately interned, and for a year and a half Esmérian was able to live outside the Camp. He has left an engrossing account of life in the harsh setting of occupied Manila during this period. Eventually, however, in June 1943, as a Gaullist he was forced into Santo Tomás. Over the next eighteen months he continued to keep a diary which forms a precious record of life in the Camp. He charts the changes in conditions as the Japanese grip tightened, culminating in the internees' dramatic liberation in February 1945 by a flying column of the US 1st Cavalry Division. Published in France in 1980, Paul Esmérian's gripping diary can now be enjoyed by a wider audience in this fine translation by Robert Colquhoun, himself an internee in the same camp.

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