

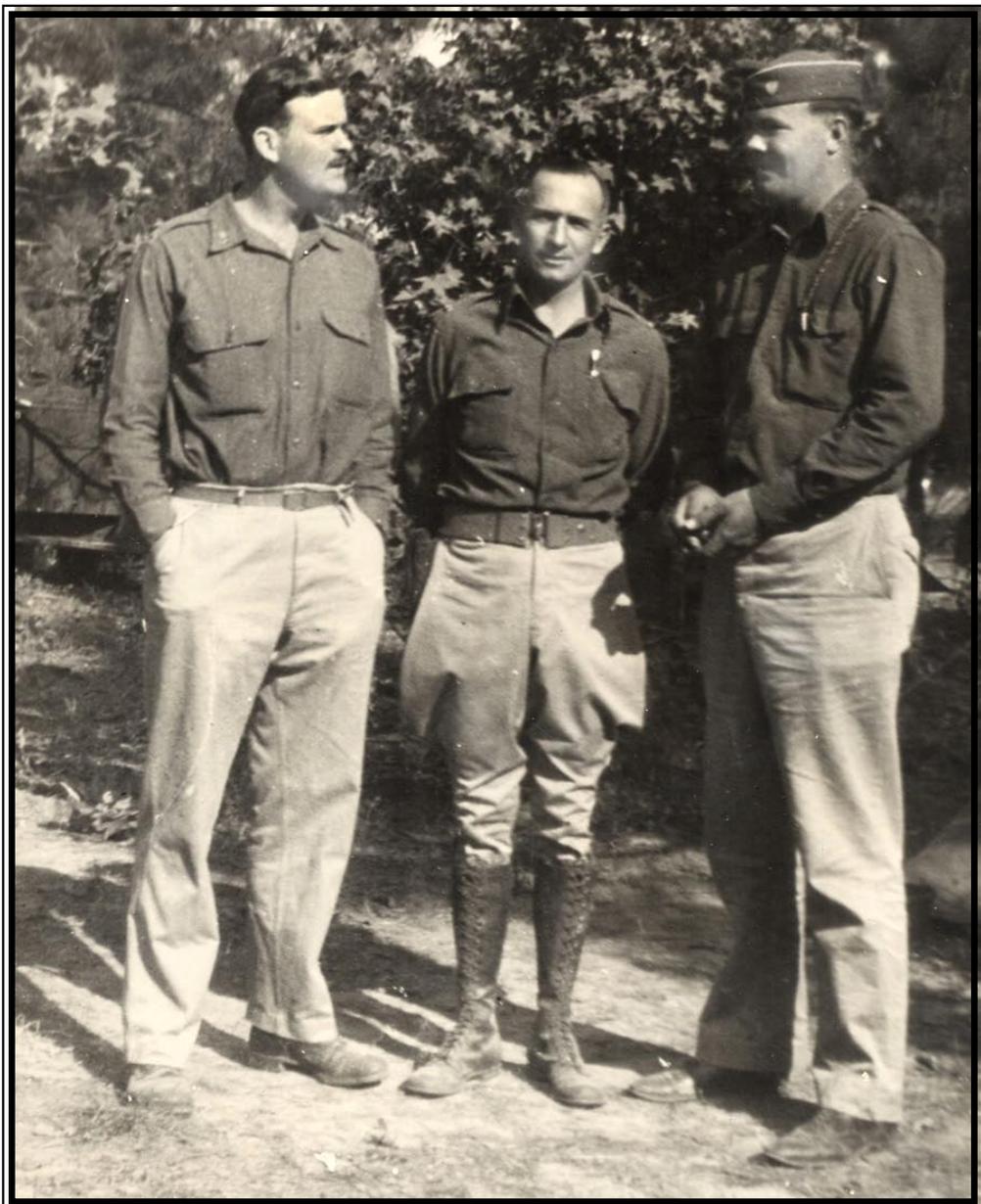
Captain Dennis  
Patrick  
Sheridan Jr.  
1941  
Philippines



Captain Dennis Patrick Sheridan, Jr., known as Denny, was born in Augusta, Georgia, on December 9, 1914. He was the oldest of nine children born to Dennis P. Sheridan and Mary Felicitas Hueber. In 1917 he moved with his family to San Antonio, Texas, where he resided until his entrance into military service. Denny attended St. Mary's parochial school in downtown San Antonio and graduated from Alamo Heights High School in 1930 at the age of fifteen. Four years later, he graduated from St. Mary's University at the age of nineteen with a degree in business, along with a reserve officer's commission. After college Denny was employed as a construction supervisor and bookkeeper with Walsh and Burney, a general contractor. He later worked for the federal civil service at the U.S. Quartermaster Depot in the quadrangle at Fort Sam Houston.

Denny loved sports and received a good deal of recognition for his athletic activities. He was an all-around athlete at Alamo Heights High School but had to drop football after a badly broken leg required him to remain bedridden for six

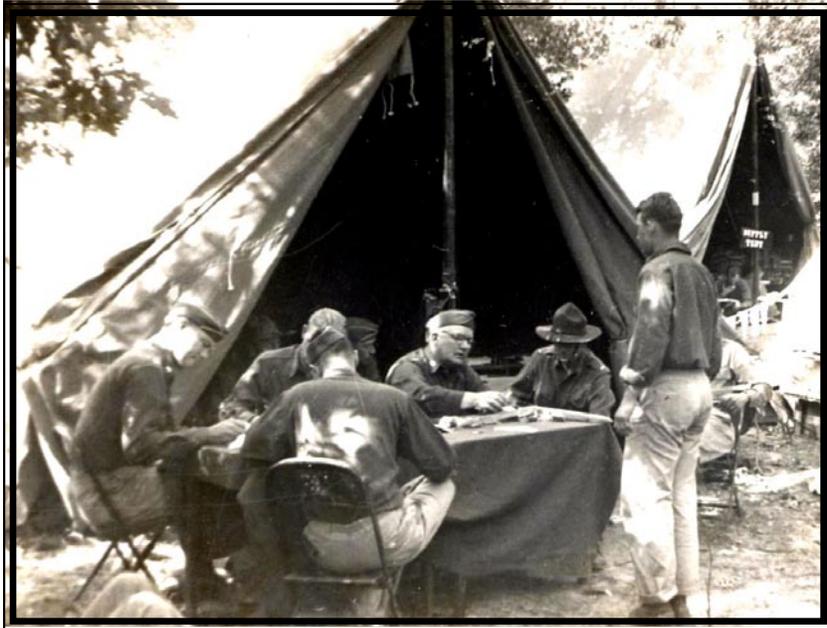
weeks. At St. Mary's University he played baseball, basketball, golf, and tennis, with baseball being his best team sport. After college he was able to pick up a few dollars playing for local semi-pro teams. Being a very large man (6' 4" tall, 200 plus lbs.), Denny normally played first base and was known to be quite a heavy hitter. The San Antonio newspaper described him as a "big, strapping athlete [who] was long a local favorite with hundreds of old friends and the public in general."



Capt. Sheridan (right) confers with other commanders

In 1939 Denny received a direct commission in the Quartermaster Corps of the U.S. Army and went to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, where he spent sixteen months. In April of 1941, he travelled to the Philippine Islands on the U.S.S. Washington for his first overseas assignment. Denny was assigned to Fort McKinley on Luzon, the largest island in the Philippines, to help train the Filipino troops. By all accounts, he enjoyed the army life, planning to make it a career. During this time he became engaged to a young woman whose identity has been lost.

World Book Encyclopedia provides some details about this period in history. The Japanese began to threaten the Philippines and other Asian countries during the late 1930's. The United States sent General Douglas MacArthur to act as military advisor in 1935. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, and the Pacific phase of World War II began. Japanese troops landed on Luzon on December 10. MacArthur concentrated his outnumbered Filipino and American troops on Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island in Manila Bay. After a heroic resistance, they surrendered in April and May, 1942. (World Book Encyclopedia, xxx ed., s.v. "Philippines")



Dennis (left) with staff, prepare for the Japanese

During 1941 Denny won the Golf Championship of the Armed Forces and on December 7th, he was scheduled to play for the Philippine Civilian Golf Championship. However, this event never occurred due to the Japanese surprise attack and bombings on Pearl Harbor. With the subsequent invasion of the Philippines by the Japanese, the American troops were forced to flee Fort McKinley. Thinking that a place of worship would never be destroyed, Denny hid his prized golf clubs in the church. He wrote his family, "As we topped a hill, I looked back and saw the church go up in

smoke." His group eventually arrived at Camp O'Donnell in central Luzon. The family received a Christmas cablegram in 1941 sent from Balanga City, the capital of Bataan, where he had traveled with General Douglas MacArthur to set up supplies for the defense.

The following April in 1942, Denny's group was captured on the Bataan peninsula when 75,000 Filipino and American troops were formally surrendered to the Japanese. What followed was the infamous Bataan Death March, which involved the forcible transfer of prisoners of war from the Bataan peninsula to prison camps. The men marched more than seventy miles for six days and seven nights in intense tropical heat with almost no food or water. Thousands died en route from disease, starvation, dehydration, heat prostration, untreated wounds, and execution. In his letters home, Denny later wrote to his family that the Japanese forced him to drive a truck on the death march, which enabled him to survive. For two and one-half years, from April, 1942, until October, 1944, Denny was held at Bilibid Prison, the national penitentiary, in Manila. While incarcerated, the prisoners repaired the Manila railroad at Davao, the southern terminus of the railroad, and worked as laborers in the rice paddies. The prisoners were fed very little, and occasionally Filipino civilians risked their lives to smuggle food to the Americans. During this period his family treasured five postcards, each with a limit of twenty handwritten words. The Bataan Relief Agency Headquarters in Santa Fe, New Mexico, sent cablegrams to families of American prisoners with instructions to collect items in a shoebox, weighing less than two pounds. The Sheridan family gathered a rosary,

a pair of shoes, and vitamins. A neutral Swiss ship, the Grisholom, shipped the supplies. Sadly, neither the relief boxes nor personal letters from home were ever delivered to the American soldiers. Denny's contemporaries who survived later reported that he never lost his sense of humor. He also relied on his Catholic faith as a source of strength. Denny told his mother in one Red Cross letter that he had been able to attend Mass and receive communion while in prison.

With U.S. forces about to retake the islands in late 1944, the Japanese started transporting prisoners back to Manila and mainland Japan to work in ammunition factories and coal mines. They were loaded onto freight ships known as hell ships. Denny's ship was called the Oryoku Maru. "Maru" was the equivalent to the SS prefix of American ships and the word "fortress." In violation of international law, the Japanese did not mark the ship with a Red Cross flag to indicate that prisoners were on board. 1,619 POW's were packed into the ship's holds with their hands tied behind their backs. Navy planes from the U.S.S. Hornet repeatedly attacked the unmarked ship on December 14 and 15, 1944. The Oryoku Maru sank in Subic Bay, Luzon, and Denny was reported missing in action. Out of the approximately eleven hell ships that left the Philippines, only five or six reached Japan. The others were attacked, resulting in the loss of thousands of American lives. In August of 1945, Denny's parents, Mr. and Mrs. D. P. Sheridan, received a letter from the War Department telling them that Denny was officially reported mission in action. His brother Tom, a Marine on furlough, was home when the news arrived.

Unknown to everyone, Denny and a group of prisoners were able to swim ashore and were recaptured. They were held for several days on a tennis court (at Olongapo Naval Station), and then eventually transferred to another unmarked ship. Once again, men with arms bound behind their backs were forced into the holds, and on January 9, 1945, this second ship was targeted by Allied aircraft and bombed. Denny did not survive this second attack. There were some, however, who did survive both bombings and were transported to Moji, Japan on yet another ship, the Brazil Maru. Some of their stories share amazing similarities with the events and dates known about Denny and provide even more details about the ordeal. Although we will never know with certainty, it is likely that the name of the second ship on which Denny died was the Enoura Maru. Sources say that it was attacked on January 9 by U.S. aircraft and disabled while in Takao Harbor, Formosa, with one bomb hitting the hatch of the forward cargo hold and causing the death of about 350 more POW's.

After the war, two comrades visited Denny's parents and described how the three men swam ashore after the first bombing and then were recaptured. Regarding the second bombing, they reported that Denny had been in the section of the ship that took the direct hit. General John McGee, a fellow prisoner, contacted the family by phone and also confirmed the events. In recognition of his honorable service during World War II, Denny was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart by President Harry S. Truman. His name is inscribed on the Tablets of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in Manila, Philippines.



**Manila American Cemetery**



### **SHERIDAN FAMILY PHOTO**

First Row: Dennis P. and Mary Hueber Sheridan with pictures of Dennis P. Sheridan, Jr., who died off the coast of Formosa 9 Jan 1945.

Second row: Patricia Sheridan (Woollett), Mary Louise Sheridan Graviss, Anne Sheridan Riordan, Helen Sheridan Barron and Betty Sheridan (Kosub)

Third row: Tom J., Edward H. and Philip J. Sheridan

This picture was taken in front of the Sheridan family home at 145 Elizabeth Road in Alamo Heights in March of 1946. After Denny's death, Mr. and Mrs. D.P. Sheridan realized that they did not have a family picture with all of their adult children. Being a close family, it was especially important now that they have one taken. So, they gathered the remaining eight children for a family photo on the occasion of Mr. Sheridan's birthday.

In 1999 Polly Sheridan had a picture of Denny digitally transposed into the original photo and surprised her husband Tom for Father's Day. The "retouched" photo looks as if D.P. Sheridan is holding a framed picture of his son, Denny.

## RESOURCES

<http://www.wvculture.org/HiStory/wvmemory/vets/hellships.html>

Includes a list of hell ships in World War II

<http://www.hellshipsmemorial.org/hellships.htm>

The Hell Ships Memorial in Subic Bay, Philippines, was dedicated on January 22, 2006. It is a permanent tribute to all the POW's on all the hell ships. The sunken remains of the Oryoku Maru lie about five hundred yards from the site. The inscription on the Memorial reads:

**WHEN YOU GO HOME, TELL THEM OF US AND SAY,  
FOR THEIR TOMORROW, WE GAVE OUR TODAY.**

<http://www.bataansurvivor.com/index.php>

This is a series of interviews with a survivor who gives descriptive accounts of Camp O'Donnell, Bilibid, Bataan March, Hellships, Surrender, and Homecoming.

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/winter/hell-ships-1.html>

This site gives accurate and detailed information about the hell ships. It includes a lengthy message transmitted by the Japanese describing the sinking of the Oryoku Maru and announcing the presence of American POW's onboard.

<http://www.wvculture.org/history/wvmemory/vets/hellships/henry.html>

West Virginia Veterans Memorial

Dale Henry was a POW in the Philippines. He was imprisoned at Camp O'Donnell, Cabanatuan #1, and Bilibid Prison and endured the Bataan March. He lost his life on the Enoura Maru.

[http://www.west-point.org/family/japanese-pow/JLL\\_Memory.htm](http://www.west-point.org/family/japanese-pow/JLL_Memory.htm)

In Memory of Lt. Col. John L. Lewis (August 21, 1901 - January 25, 1945)

This story was pieced together by Col. Lewis' son. Col. Lewis did not survive the final convoy to Japan on the Brazil Maru.

Acknowledgements:

Philip Jude Sheridan, brother of Denny, furnished the preliminary information that enabled us to begin our research and to record what we know of Denny's story. We thank him for sharing his memories and knowledge with us.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Robert (Bobby) C. Barron, nephew of Denny, recorded the stories he had heard through the years from Denny's brothers and sisters. We used some of these personal anecdotes and are thankful that Bobby preserved these family memories.

Submitted by: Polly Grona Sheridan and Colleen Sheridan Tschoepe  
December 31, 2008