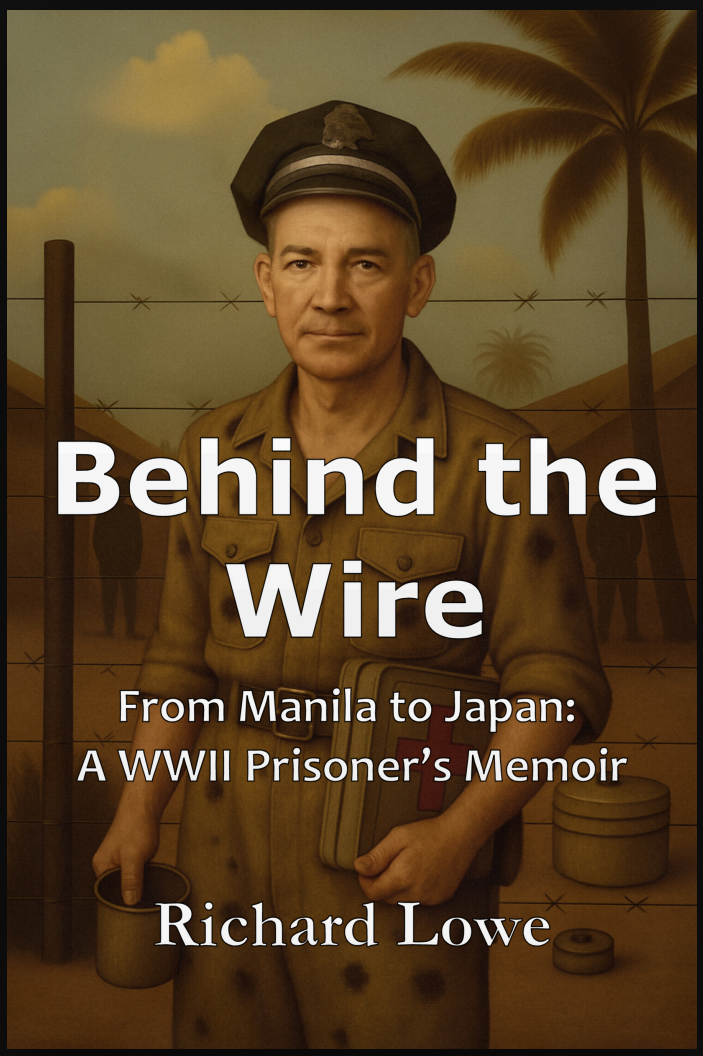
A FREE COMPANION TO BEHIND THE WIRE

The Long Way to Auburn

A reader's companion to Behind the Wire: the route, the timeline, the men, the food, and questions for your book club.



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How to Use This Companion

Keep it open beside the book, or bring it to your book club.

Behind the Wire is Frank Hoeffer's own account of the war, from the journal he wrote after it ended. He was a Navy cook on the Yangtze River gunboat USS Oahu. He was taken prisoner when the Manila Bay forts surrendered in May 1942 and spent three years and four months in Japanese hands. His grandson Richard Lowe heard the stories at seventeen, over a few Christmas visits, and set them down.

This companion helps you keep your bearings: a timeline, the route to trace on a map, who's who, what the men ate, questions for discussion, and a worksheet for the stories in your own family.

> *This man who couldn't let anyone leave his table hungry had once been starved nearly to death for three years and four months.*

The book contains graphic wartime violence, torture, executions and starvation, and Frank's hatred of his captors is on the page as he wrote it. This companion keeps to the facts of where he went and what he endured.

Part 1: The Timeline

Dates are as the book gives them.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
April 1, 1931	Frank reports to the Naval Training Station at Great Lakes, Illinois.
January 7, 1940	He joins the river gunboat USS Oahu in Shanghai. Chief Martinez wants seven hundred eggs on the table, hot, by 0530.
November 29, 1941	The Oahu and the Luzon leave Shanghai, destination unknown. The USS Wake stays behind.
The voyage south	A storm in the Formosan Straits rolls the Oahu forty-seven degrees. A Japanese task force surrounds her, guns trained, and lets her pass.
December 4, 1941	The Oahu anchors off Cavite, three days and seven hours before the war.
Late April 1942	Fuel runs out. Frank cooks one last meal aboard, then goes ashore on Fort Hughes as a gun loader.
May 5 and 6, 1942	The Oahu is sunk. At noon the next day the white flag goes up over Corregidor, and Fort Hughes surrenders with it.
May 1942	A staged newsreel the prisoners laugh through. Twelve days wrecking the Voice of Freedom radio station while pretending to dismantle it.
1942	The forced march through Manila to Bilibid Prison. Then Cabanatuan, Camp III, and the ten-man rule.
October 8, 1942	The hell ship Totoru Maru sails from Manila, packed with prisoners and troops.

November 11, 1942	She docks at Osaka. Frank goes to Osaka No. 1 prisoner of war camp.
March 13, 1945	A B-29 raid on Osaka begins. It lasts twenty-seven hours.
June 1, 1945	Fire bombs burn the camp down. No prisoner is killed. By June 29 the men are at Nagoya Camp Number Ten.
August 16, 1945	At 8:15 a.m. the foremen tell the coal loaders, “Work finished.”
September 2, 1945	The guards surrender their rifles at the camp gate.
September 1945	Home by air and rail to Auburn, New York, to his wife Jeanette and, for the first time, his daughter Valerie.
January 18, 1985	Franklin M. Hoeffer dies, after Alzheimer's has taken the stories from him.

Part 2: The Route

Find each place on a map and check it off. The distances are part of the story.

War and surrender

- [ ] **Shanghai, China.** The Oahu's station on the Yangtze River Patrol.
- [ ] **The Formosan Straits.** The storm and the Japanese task force.
- [ ] **Cavite and Manila Bay.** Three days of liberty, then the bombing.
- [ ] **Corregidor and Fort Hughes.** The siege, Malinta Tunnel, the surrender, the 92nd Garage.
- [ ] **Manila, Bilibid Prison and Cabanatuan.** The march, the prison, Camp III.

The hell ship

- [ ] **Formosa.** A port stop with the prisoners kept in the hold.
- [ ] **Fusan, Korea, then Moji and the Inland Sea.** More than 1,300 Americans go ashore at Fusan, bound for Manchuria.

Japan

- [ ] **Osaka.** Camp No. 1, the Ichioka stadium hospital, the docks.
- [ ] **Omori, Nagoya Camp Number Ten and Yokohama.** Coal bin barracks, liberation, the USS Rescue.

The way home

- [ ] **Kisarazu, Guam, Kwajalein and Pearl Harbor.** Flights, Red Cross huts, medical checks.
- [ ] **Alameda and Oak Knoll Naval Hospital, California.** Waffles with strawberries and ice cream.
- [ ] **Winslow, Kansas City, Columbus, Washington and New York.** The flight east.
- [ ] **Syracuse, then Auburn, New York.** The bus station, 8:55 p.m.

Part 3: The Men

No names in Behind the Wire have been changed. These are the people you'll meet most often.

NAME	WHO HE IS IN THE STORY
Martinez	Chief of the Oahu's galley in Shanghai. Teaches Frank to cook “like your life depends on it.”
Kelly	A shipmate with a white scar from lip to chin. Takes Frank ashore in Shanghai, and turns up for the last meal aboard.
Ah Ting	The officers' cook. His family was in Nanking. He gives Frank a pouch of ginger “for cold seas.”
Pitts Eberhardt	Fireman 1st Class and Frank's buddy since they came aboard. Partner in the failed fish trap.
Captain Morrison	The Oahu's captain. “A cook holds his crew when nothing else can.”
Kitty	The Oahu's mascot, a gray and white cat born aboard.
Colonel Bunker	U.S. Army. Runs the ration group at the 92nd Garage.
Tiger Jack	The Marine who runs galley distribution at Cabanatuan, and looks every man in the eye.
Miller	A Marine from Ohio who keeps Frank company in the hold of the Totoru Maru.
Fujimoto	Interpreter at Osaka No. 1, later replaced by Hayashi.
Davies	Royal Artillery quartermaster who runs the Osaka camp galley and wins a Christmas dinner.
Doctor Jackson	Royal Navy surgeon who disobeys orders that would hurt his patients, and is beaten for it.
Matsumoto	The sub-lieutenant who orders the sick and crippled to work.
The Boy Corporal	A young guard obsessed with salutes. The prisoners learn to salute shadows.
Chief Saunders	Camp leader, captured at Guam. Holds the prisoners' own court.
Maloof	Boatswain's mate who was “never afraid of the enemy.”
Dix, Wells and Egan	The cook staff who save the food when the camp burns and keep the men fed after.
Willie Cronin	Chief Torpedoman, paralyzed by falling bags of beans in July 1945.
Colonel E. A. Johnson	Parachutes into Nagoya Camp Number Ten to arrange the way home.
Jeanette and Valerie	Frank's wife, and the daughter he had never met.

Part 4: The Galley

Frank was a cook, so he watched what men ate and what hunger did to them. Here is the war by the plate.

WHERE AND WHEN	WHAT THERE WAS TO EAT
Oahu, Shanghai	Seven hundred eggs for breakfast. Thirty pounds of potatoes mashed by hand. A roast the captain said "could serve in San Francisco."
Formosan Straits	After the grease burns, sandwiches and coffee. The coffee urn lashed down with rope as thick as a thumb.
Corregidor, the siege	Biscuits with no baking powder. "Cookie's mystery candy" from coconut and sugar. Three cases of peaches salvaged from the burned Don Jose.
The last meal aboard	Rice cooked slow, the last of the salt, and a tin of corned beef hidden since December.
Fort Hughes, after surrender	Half a canteen cup of water and two spoons of catsup or peas a day. Beans and tomatoes eaten in secret inside the storerooms.
Bilibid Prison	Rice from giant cast iron pots and onion soup.
Cabanatuan	Onions alive with maggots. A carabao of about a thousand pounds divided among nine or ten thousand men. Rice that crystallized over green wood fires.
Totoru Maru	Oyster crackers packed in old soap tins, tasting of soap. Wormy rice and soup. One canteen of water a day.
Osaka No. 1	Rations set at 700 grams of rice, 250 to 450 grams of vegetables and 5 grams of sugar a day. Sick men got half.
Christmas 1942	One Canadian Red Cross box for every three men, one International parcel for every two. Jam at two pounds for sixty-six men.
Chuba Goon lumberyard	Soup of two small snakes, ten tiny frogs and borrowed eggplant. The point was the oil.
Ichioka stadium	Barley and water, three tiny buns, half a pint of radish soup. Men saved tea leaves to eat.
June 1, 1945	Burnt meat soup from the guards' pig, rabbits and chickens, roasted when the camp burned.
September 4, 1945	Parachuted rations: canned meat, crackers, chocolate. Frank holds a Hershey bar and stares at it.
USS Rescue	Fruit Jell-O, meat loaf, fried potatoes, sliced tomatoes, cake, bread, fresh milk, butter and coffee.

> *Feeding them was the only thing I had left that made sense. So I fed them.*

Part 5: Questions for Discussion

For book clubs, classrooms, and families reading together.

1. **The cook's war.** Frank tells the war from the galley. What does that angle let you see that a battle account would miss?

2. **Hot mattered.** Even in the storm, Frank keeps the coffee going. Why do small comforts matter so much in this book?

3. **The missionaries.** They refuse passage out of Shanghai and keep their faith that they'll be protected. How does Frank see them, then and later?

4. **Laughing on camera.** The prisoners laugh through the Japanese newsreel. What other small acts of defiance can you find, from the radio tubes to the overloaded cargo nets?

5. **The ten-man rule.** "The man sleeping next to you was now your responsibility." What did the rule do to trust among the prisoners?

6. **Policing themselves.** The prisoners hold their own court for Bradshaw and Reemer. Was the sentence fair? What happened when the two men went to the guards instead?

7. **The anger on the page.** The book keeps Frank's hatred of his captors exactly as he wrote it. How did that affect your reading? What would be lost if it had been softened?

8. **Those who helped.** The Filipinos on the march, the Chinese stevedores with bread and news, Doctor Jackson. Who stood out to you, and why?

9. **Coming home.** "Are you my daddy?" How does the book handle the reunion with a daughter Frank has never met?

10. **The kitchen that outlasted the war.** Richard came to see his grandfather's overflowing table as a form of defiance. Do you know someone whose habits came from a hardship they rarely talked about?

11. **The folding chair.** A bored seventeen-year-old asked the questions no one else asked. What made Frank willing to answer him?

12. **The gravestone.** It reads "Husband. Father. Grandfather." If you could add one line from the book, what would it be?

Part 6: Ask Before It's Too Late

Richard heard his grandfather's stories just in time. Years later, Alzheimer's took them. Use this page for the stories in your own family.

Pick one person: a veteran, a grandparent, anyone who lived through something the rest of the family never asks about. Bring a notebook or a recorder. Ask one question at a time and let the silences run. Frank's stories came in pieces, over several visits. Yours may too.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Place:** _____

QUESTION	WHAT THEY TOLD ME
Where were you, and how old were you, when it started?	
What was your job, day to day?	
Who were the people you worked or lived beside? What were their names?	
What did you eat? What did you miss most?	
What was the hardest day?	
Who helped you, and how?	
What did you carry with you, or keep?	
How did you come home, and who was waiting?	
What do you still do because of that time?	
What do you want the family to remember?	

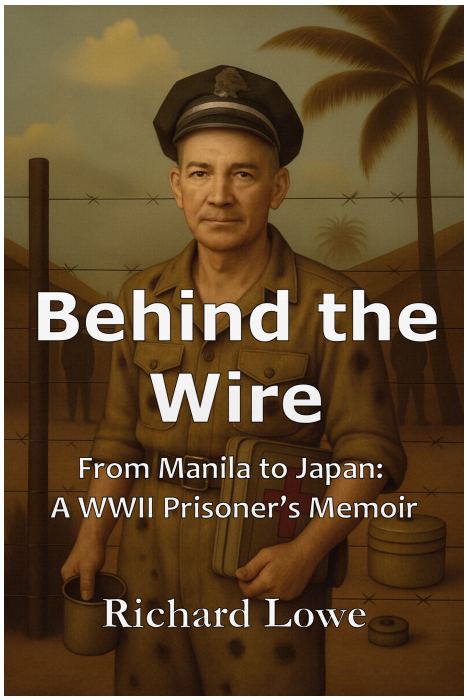
Before you finish

- ☐ Write down dates, ship names, unit names and places exactly as they're said
- ☐ Ask whether there are letters, a journal, photographs or service papers
- ☐ Note the names of anyone else who might remember
- ☐ Make a copy of everything and keep it in a second place
- ☐ Set the date for the next visit

> *No one leaves this table hungry.*

The Whole Story

This companion maps the route. Behind the Wire tells it in Frank Hoeffer's own words, from the galley of the USS Oahu in Shanghai to a bus station in Auburn, New York, three years and four months of captivity later.



Behind the Wire:
From Manila to Japan: A WWII Prisoner's Memoir

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