

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

# US couple retires in Corregidor

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in the hearts of the Kwiecinskis.  
**Last of big guns**  
 Steve's father, Staff Sgt. Walter Kwiecinski, was the sergeant assigned to the last of Corregidor's big guns still in operation and the only one left to challenge the Japanese the night the defenders retreated into the island's tunnel

system in May 1942. He was captured and suffered the most brutal treatment for more than three years in Japanese prison camps.  
 Walter returned to Corregidor in 1980 to see his beloved tropical island paradise restored and transformed into a poignant memorial of heroism. He died in 1988. A plaque to honor him and

one of the most heroic battles in the history of the war was installed in 2007 at Battery Way, the best preserved of Corregidor's five gun emplacements.

**Adventure begins**  
 Steve first visited Corregidor with his youngest sister Paula in 2002 when they joined a trip led by Valor Tours, America's oldest military tour operator.

"Dad was a hero on Corregidor and Jap POW (prisoner of war) for 39 months. However, he only wanted to talk about the paradise that was Corregidor Island before the war. It was a dream come true for me to stand where he stood. I was so overcome by emotion that my sister had to support me so that I did not collapse on the dock when we landed at Corregidor. I was crying so hard that I almost couldn't see."

Marcia saw the island a year after and thought it was beautiful even if it was more rugged than she had expected.

In 2007, Steve became the tour leader of Valor Tours' annual *Ghost Soldiers* tour, a nine-day journey that takes in Manila, Corregidor, Bataan and the Japanese prison camps around Luzon. At a dinner for the tour group, Steve asked Lt. Col. Art Matibag, president of the Filipino-American Memorial Endowment and executive director of the Corregidor Foundation Inc. if it was possible for him and Marcia to live on Corregidor. He believed this would enable them to help preserve, protect and promote the island they had grown to love.

Matibag was elated at having residents on the island who could interact with English-speaking visitors, particularly those interested in local WWII history. The Kwiecinskis joined the Special Resident Retiree's Visa, a retirement program run by the Philippine Retirement Authority for qualified foreigners who want to spend their retirement years in the country. They sold their house and almost everything they owned, and arrived on Corregidor Island with only four suitcases. The entire process took a year and a half.

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