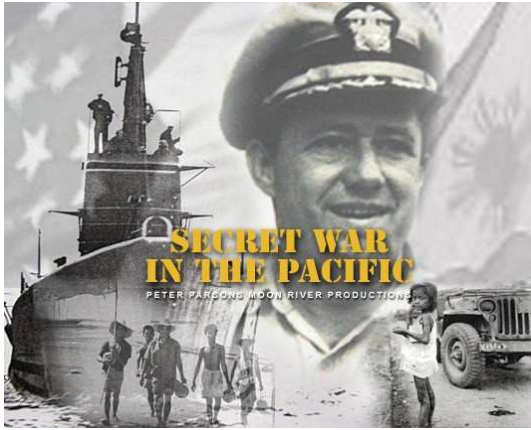


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## Remembering the War: Interview with a Maker of Documentaries

Gina Cariño



Peter Parsons was a 4-year-old American in Manila when war broke out in the Pacific. Today he lives in the boondocks of Baguio, Philippines, and by the river Urumea of San Sebastian, Spain.

**GC:** Peter, tell me about wartime childhood.

PP: I remember learning the word 'shrapnel' and digging it out of our trees after a bombing. We were under house arrest. Our Japanese guards would take us out on their bicycles. I had a ball. But I also saw them torture and kill and I gave water to Filipino and American POWs who were marched past our house. Everything's still sharp like a movie in my memory.

**GC:** What was the secret war in the Pacific?

PP: This was the war of the resistance against the Japanese. It was an effort to gather information that would help the Allied Forces gain the upper hand when the time came for outright invasion.

**GC:** Can you explain the picture?

PP: There's a submarine and a group of Filipino guerrillas on the left. The big face is my father, U.S. Navy Commander Charles 'Chick' Parsons. He is the link between the submarine and the guerrillas. Because of his knowledge of the Philippine islands, people, and dialects, Gen. Douglas MacArthur put him in charge of helping organize the resistance. Parsons used submarines to bring in arms, radios, medicines, food, and propaganda items.

**GC:** Is *Secret War in the Pacific* a tribute to your father?

PP: The submarines were the lifeline of the Philippine resistance and my father often made the trip himself, showing them where there was deep water wherein to hide. Thanks to these boats, there were over 200 radio stations relaying information to MacArthur and over 300,000 armed guerrillas ready to attack the Japanese at a given notice.

**GC:** MacArthur called your father the bravest man he had ever known.

PP: My father was considered a colorful character, partly because of his disguises (farmer, fisherman, priest), and partly because he literally walked under the noses of the

very people who had put a very high price on his head, dead or alive, preferably dead.

**GC:** You also did a video titled *Manila 1945: The Forgotten Atrocities*. What's it about?

PP: It's about the cruelties inflicted upon the Filipino civilian population, especially during the battle for Manila. It was not a pretty picture and you can scarcely find a person in Manila who does not have a relative who experienced some of that treatment.

**GC:** Are you working on something now?

PP: *The Unsundered* is underway. It lets ex-guerrillas tell their stories. We have no narrator, no historians here. This is told only in their voices.

**GC:** What made you decide to make these documentaries?

PP: I was talked into doing the one on my father but the others were things I was compelled to do by an inner urge. I already had the research behind me, all I needed was a few more interviews. The sad thing is that every time I interview someone, he or she dies! People don't want me to interview them these days. They are afraid of my killer camera. One thing for sure, there is no money to be had from making videos like these. The market is already six feet under!

**GC:** How do you make them?

PP: I have my own form of script for these things. First I have to know what story I'm going to tell and I write the narration bits. Then I search for the relevant pieces of the interviews I've done. And then I search for pictures or footage that will accompany the talking heads and the narration. Music comes in last. Of course the story is inspired and directed by what I've collected from the interviews and from U.S. and Manila archives, hundreds of hours of material no one in his right mind would be interested in.

**GC:** What prior preparation and experience are needed to make documentaries?

PP: None. I've compiled news and photos, I've seen movies and written stories. So I figured I had to tell a story, but use pictures or moving footage from archives. I developed a format wherein I put in the relevant time codes on the left, the quote from the interviewee in the middle, and the visual matter to the right. My computer editors do the rest. Sometimes we fight about whether something should be included or not. Loud fights. Like WWII all over again.

**GC:** Will you ever do something that's not about war?

PP: I'd like to do a short film on cellphones. A driver runs into a pedestrian, both talking or texting at the time. No one saw anything because they'd been looking at their phones. The ambulance also bumps into several people, all with phones. In the funeral parlor from the closed casket comes a ring tone. A word bubble comes on screen with its tail to the casket. Inside the bubble it says NO LOAD or NO BATT. The end.