

## PRESS RELEASE

# NEVER THE SAME The Prisoner of War Experience

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Celebrated actors from Hollywood to New York lend their accomplished voices to celebrating and commemorating courageous men who used ingenuity, creativity and humor to survive one of the most notorious times in history.

*Never The Same: The Prisoner of War Experience* is a stunning new documentary narrated by (two-time Emmy award winning) actress Loretta Swit. Her all-star supporting cast is: Ed Asner, Alec Baldwin, Jamie Farr, Mike Farrell, Robert Forster, Christopher Franciosa, Robert Loggia, Christopher Murray, Don Murray, John O'Hurley, Kathleen Turner, Robert Wagner and Sam Waterston.

These distinguished actors came together to lend their vast talents to dramatize the diaries, the moving yet often hilarious poems and to narrate forbidden drawings and cartoons.

In this intimate and moving portrait, American prisoners of Imperial Japan during World War II, reveal their indomitable will to survive. Starved, beaten, sick and brutalized, but always keeping a wry sense of humor, these amazing soldiers used gallows humor to beat the odds. Some of the men were artists, some wrote poetry and songs and many collected recipes.

But for American POWs, almost 1 in 2 died. 45% of American POWs of the Japanese perished while captive.

The program does not shy away from the daily trials of prison camp life; it unflinchingly paints a grim portrait of the ways that the men were forced to survive three and half years of captivity. The film consists of compelling interviews with twenty-five former POWs and never-before-seen in the West Japanese propaganda films where the POWs are used

as the actors. The film also tells the story of one of the most infamous Hell Ship journeys where the men were packed in the holds in conditions similar to the African slave trade. The Hell Ships are often remembered by the men as one of the worst ordeals during their captivity.

The film is packed with entries from seventeen diaries, poems, over 140 original drawings and cartoons (many have been animated), songs and, surprisingly, recipes. The constant driving force was about food: fighting starvation, stealing, trading, dreaming and fantasizing. These men fought through the tedium and terror of imprisonment, and rose above with the American dark sense of humor. It is a reoccurring theme whether heard in an interview with the “official arm breaker” of the camp or how they described themselves, starved, as just “knees and eyeballs”.

*Never The Same* is unique because of its many layers. It reaches deep to the core of how the men created coping mechanisms to survive. Once stripped of their dignity any resemblance of humanity quickly disappeared. It was a kind of social Darwinism and sheer luck that sustained the survivors throughout their ordeal.

*Never The Same* gives a voice to group of veterans whose story is rarely taught even in American history classes today. In Japan, it is not taught at all. The story of the American POW of the Japanese has been previously examined in popular media, but only in cursory ways. No other documentary has the depth and breadth of research and access to materials as *Never The Same*.

And, at this point in our history, the topic of the treatment of Prisoners of War is a timely one. *Never The Same* comes at a time when Americans need to be reminded of what happens when men have unchecked power over others and the rules of civilization disappear. And, it comes when those who lived through it all are disappearing from this earth.

The film is written, directed, edited with music composed by award-winning documentary maker Jan Thompson. Thompson has devoted over twenty years making the documentary because her own father had been a prisoner-of-war. “This has been built frame by frame with my

hands and my heart.” Thompson last year released *The Tragedy of Bataan* documentary and five-piece radio series narrated by Alec Baldwin that chronicled the Bataan Death March.

**ABOUT THE FILMMAKER:**

Jan Thompson is a three-time Emmy award winning documentary writer-director-editor and composer. Before launching a career in documentary filmmaking, she was in live sports and was the Studio Director for the Chicago Bulls and White Sox. Her work covers several genres. *The Music Masters* featured Conductor Daniel Barenboim and his work with the Chicago Civic Orchestra. Thompson was the creator of *Hidden Journeys* a series of primetime specials for PBS on food and cultures around the world. She also was the producer-director of the interfaith program *Ties That Bind*, which was distributed by NETA for 9/11 anniversary programming. Jan is a professor in the Radio-Television-Digital Media Department at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

*NOTE: Thompson will assist media outlets, at their request, in identifying former POWs for additional interviews and local programming.*