



## **Captured: The Extraordinary Adventures of Colonel Hughes** By Mary Madden

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Kansan James Clark Hughes led an extraordinary life. Born in Topeka in 1888, James Hughes was destined to be a soldier. His ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War and his father was commander of the Kansas National Guard in the 1890s.

As a young adult James Hughes developed an interest in photography. He brought his camera with him when he arrived in France as Captain of the 130th Field Artillery during World War I. Hughes' battalion was constantly on the move, stopping in a different town almost daily before engaging in the Battle of Meuse-Argonne on September 26, 1918. This would be the final major Allied offensive in the war. It was the largest, and deadliest battle in United States military history.

Not an Army photographer Captain Hughes was limited to non-combat photography. When the war ended, he spent seven months in Europe as part of the army of occupation which gave him time to take more than 400 photographs. Hughes, like many other soldiers, also collected "souvenirs" in Europe. Perhaps because he was an artilleryman, he collected examples of grenades and fuses from European battlefields along with German helmets and even a German field telephone.

During World War II, Colonel Hughes was part of the 10,000 U.S. troops sent to protect the Philippines in case of Japanese aggression. He didn't have long to wait. As commanding officer for the 11th Field Artillery Battalion, Philippine Army, Hughes engaged the Japanese forces for five months. The U.S. and Filipino forces fought bravely but were continually driven into the Bataan peninsula by the Japanese. 75,000 U.S. and Filipino soldiers surrendered on April 9, 1942; the largest force to do so in American history.

Colonel Hughes and his soldiers were now Prisoners of War. By his own account, Hughes was a prisoner of war for 1,202 days and confined to six different POW camps first in the Philippines, then Formosa (now Taiwan) and finally Manchuria. High ranking officers, like Colonel Hughes, were treated better than enlisted men or lower ranking officers, but still suffered. As Hughes wrote:

*...Tho we have been cautioned that just because we might get better treatment, not to get cocky-we are still PWs and will be punished severely-even to death for violation of rules. (September 16, 1943)*

Remarkably, Colonel Hughes kept a daily diary of his POW experiences in five notebooks. Hughes' journals tell his story of sickness, abuse, despair, monotony, and hunger. All POWs lost weight due to the starvation diets. Colonel Hughes weighed 177 pounds before the war. At his lowest he weighed only 125 pounds. He wrote on August 15, 1943:

*...How many people in the states could realize that for over a thousand consecutive meals Ive had nothing but rice and soup....*

Colonel Hughes also endured multiple bouts of malaria and terrible pain from chronic tooth problems. On December 27, 1944, he wrote:

*...Oh whoa is me! My number four upper right tooth ... broke at the gum line!! Thats three of them now with not even good sized stumps to chew against - right uppers gone with nothing but roots and jagged short stumps left....*

By spring of 1945 the POWs knew the war was coming to an end. American parachute troops finally brought the word of Japanese surrender on August 15, 1942. Russian soldiers arrived two days later to liberate the camp.

Although free, it would take Hughes three months to reach the United States. His final diary entry on October 19, 1945, recorded going to the hospital in Van Nuys, California, for a physical and 10 days leave. And there it ended. He stopped writing about his life and started living it again.

To learn more about Colonel Hughes visit the KSHS website, [kshs.org](http://kshs.org). There you will find his WWI photographs, transcribed POW diary, and collection of artifacts from Europe and Japan as a POW. A virtual tour of the museum's 2016 exhibit "Captured: The Extraordinary Adventures of Colonel Hughes" is available on the Google Arts and Culture website.

*This transcript of "Captured: The Extraordinary Adventures of Colonel Hughes" is part of the Humanities Kansas Humanities Hotline, a series of bite-sized micropresentations about Kansas stories – both serious and light-hearted – that are researched and presented by experts across the state. Humanities Hotline topics change monthly. For more information about Humanities Kansas and the Humanities Hotline, visit [humanitieskansas.org](http://humanitieskansas.org) or call 1-888-416-2018.*