

## **Horrors of The March of Death From Bataan Peninsula; Prisoners Denied Food, Water; Buried Alive**

When Bataan fell those men who were not fortunate enough to get to Corregidor began this March up the National Highway which was to mean death to many. Those who were fortunate enough to survive this march were to see many days of hell at the hands of the dastardly Japanese.

The lines on Bataan disintegrated about 4 o'clock the afternoon of April 8, 1942. The American troops were driven back to Marivales, which is the southern tip of Bataan, the little peninsula where so many Americans held a vast army of Japs for four months in one of the greatest defenses ever staged in the history of America.

The following morning, General King, who was our commander, went forward to ask the Japanese for surrender terms. At approximately 9 A.M. the American Headquarters received word that the surrender had become official, but the Japanese continued to bomb and strafe the Americans on the island. We were in terrific confusion. During the day the Japs discontinued the air activity and we began this March up the National Highway which for myself lasted five days and five night. All Americans were congregated at Marivales and started marching north. I fortunately happened to be a little farther north at the time and was on this march for only five days, but many marched as long as 10 days and 10 nights.

### *No Water Permitted for Entire March*

The Japs had just sent up 80,000 troops from Singapore to put on this final drive and when they were successful in forcing us to surrender they were very bitter. They were crack Jap front line troops and this was the first opportunity that they had had to inflict cruelty on the Americans. They did everything possible to make us feel inferior to them. They lined the Americans four abreast and made them stay in the road. We were surrounded by guards on bicycles and other vehicles. We were told when we started that we would not be allowed any water at all, and it was very difficult to restrain from getting water as there are hundreds of artesian wells along the highway. All one of us would have to do would be to step a few feet either to the left or right and we could drink all the water we desired. But we had strict orders to drink no water. If anyone of us attempted to get water, we would be shot, just as we would be if we accepted food from the Filipinos.

We found out that the Japs meant this order. They took everything they desired from us when we started this march. They took all the clothing that they wanted for themselves, all watches, fountain pens, etc. During the noon hour every day they would give us 'about face' and march us for five or eight miles to the rear, between noon and 2 P.M. when it was terrifically hot.

Hundreds were killed by the guards or died from exhaustion. The Japs were moving vast amounts of equipment south and installing guns along the beach preparatory to landing on Corregidor. During this march the Americans on Corregidor were firing at the Japs and we had many men who were injured from this shelling from our own lines.

### *Lieutenant Colonel Bayoneted for Falling Out*

We saw atrocities committed by the Japs that we thought could never happen to Americans. They would not let the strong help the weak. If a strong man attempted to help the weak they would shoot both of them, so we were all reluctant to help anyone who fell out. One day I was assisting a lieutenant colonel who was very large, and he kept telling me that he was going to fall out and I was pleading with him to continue marching because they would kill him if he fell out. I held him as long as I could and finally I had to let him fall. When he fell a Jap sentry came and pushed me on, and as I looked back I saw him bayonetting the colonel through the stomach. This was a habitual occurrence. Anyone who fell out on the march was instantly killed. Many Americans and Filipinos were buried alive on this march.

### *American Prisoners Forced to Bury Filipino Alive*

One day during the march, I, along with other Americans, was called out of the line by a Jap, whom we thought was an officer, and forced to dig a large hole at the point of a bayonet. Then, we were forced to bury a Filipino alive. Just before throwing the last shovel of dirt on his body the Filipino moved and a Jap guard was ordered by this officer to bayonet him through the stomach. Many Americans were buried alive also. (Every incident related in this story was either seen by me or told by some responsible person after we arrived at our first prison camp). Many men on arriving at O'Donnell were actually stark crazy from witnessing such atrocities. One man was required to bury an American officer alive after the officer had passed out on the march.

### *One Rice Ball Ration for Five Day March*

On this March, I was with my very good friend Lieutenant Colonel Dyess who escaped in 1943 and successfully reached the States and gave the American people the first information concerning our prison life and the March of Death. The third day of this march, Dyess and I were very thirsty and we stepped to the right a few feet and attempted to get a drink of water from an artesian well. A guard shot at me and missed, but killed a Filipino standing right next to me. This was not an unusual incident, as many of us were desperate for water. For the entire five days the Japs gave us no water at all. After seeing so many killed in the attempt, few of us would dare to try to get the water,

On this march we were given one small rice ball about the size of a 50 cent piece. Our lips were so blistered and raw that we could not eat even this small amount of rice. That is all the food the Japs gave us during these five days and nights of horror. I reiterate, many were on this march as long as 10 and 12 days, but in my group we were only marching for five days. I will never understand how those few made it for 10 days and longer.

The third night it rained very hard and about midnight the Japs said we could rest, but the minute we sat down on the road they screamed "Forward march." This was very difficult, as the moment we sat down our limbs became so stiff we could hardly rise again. During this second of rest, I fortunately sat in a mud hole and I drank this water in the hole, even though animals and humans had marched through it for days.

Along the highway one saw bodies maimed and completely decapitated as the result of the Japanese trucks along the highway. The Japs in these trucks would hit the Americans on the head in passing. One day a Jap in a passing truck attempted to decapitate me and I ducked and he completely cut off the head of a Filipino standing next to me. One day during the march we heard a blood curdling scream and when we looked over into a nearby rice pattie we saw a guard cutting the stomach out of a poor old Filipino. I was later told that the Filipino had refused to march any farther. The Filipino was not dead when they finished cutting out his stomach and he was begging the guard to shoot him, but he was refused even that.

### *Americans Forced to Eat Human Flesh*

One person told me that he, along with other Americans, had been required to eat pieces of human flesh during the march. Another American told me that he had seen several men who had had their penis cut off and stuck in their mouths.

It is certainly hard for the American public to believe that anything like this actually occurred, but the three years spent by the Americans in these prison camps are probably the most terrifying of any period in American history. The most amazing thing to me about this march and the thing that I was to see borne out later in prison camp was the high morale of the Americans in the face of these atrocities. I remember late one evening we all sang "God Bless America." The Japs immediately forced us to stop. They could not understand how our morale remained so high, but we were to see the same thing in prison camp.

### *Filipinos Killed for Throwing Food to Prisoners*

On this march the Filipinos were lined along the highway and tried to give us food, but many were killed for throwing us rice, candy and cassava cakes. I remember one old Filipino woman threw a rice ball out of a window of her house. An official looking person, probably an officer, jumped out of his car and, with an enlisted man, ran into the house. We heard the poor old woman screaming and then there was a moment of silence and the Japs came out of the house. This was also a common thing as many of the Filipinos took great risks in giving us food, and were not careful to see if there were any Japs around. I am convinced after witnessing the demonstration by the Filipinos on this march and after we were liberated that they are 100 per cent for the Americans. The Japs have mistreated them terribly and have not gained the support of the natives at all. Once on this march a Filipino threw me a piece of sugar candy and I will never forget the expression of a few Americans close by when I offered them a bite of sugar. They fell on their knees and cried. One would have thought that they were being turned loose instead of being given a suck of a hard piece of sugar candy. That was really wonderful and it give us a little more energy.

### *Slashes Off Finger for Ring*

One man told me that a Jap took the glasses from an officer and the officer could not see and had to be led the remainder of the march. The Japs took all rings and jewelry.

One man refused to give a ring to the guard and, when the guard attempted to take it from the American's finger, he was unable to do so. He pulled a bolo out and cut off the finger and ring and forced the man to move on. This was witnessed by one of the prisoners who cried every time he told the story.

I was walking along the road during the morning of the fourth day and an official looking car stopped right next to me and a man in the rear motioned for me to come over by the car, which I did. He asked me something in Japanese and since I was unable to understand, he hit me over the head several times and pushed me on. I am sure that he was a high ranking officer. His uniform was covered with insignia and he was about 55 years old. He had a driver and rode in the back seat.

### *Prisoners Taunted on America's Lack of Armed Power*

During this march the Japs kept asking us where the wonderful American Army and Navy were and where was the Air Corps about which we had boasted so much.

No one will ever know how many Americans died on this march. When a man fell out he was shot and buried or even burned on some occasions. At about two o'clock one morning I was weak and walking from one side of the road to the other. I accidentally bumped into a guard. He hit me on the head with something which some of the fellows told me later was an iron rod. It knocked me out completely. Fortunately for me, a few of the fellows carried me for about six hours. When I came to I had a big gash on my head. If these men had not carried me, I would have been killed like the rest who fell out. I think the fact that it was so dark and the guards could not see very well, was the only reason the men were able to assist me.

### *Many die of Malaria and Dysentery*

On this march the Japs were riding ahead of the column and the pace set was terrific. We had to stay closed up and if one dragged behind he was immediately bayoneted. It is amazing what an individual can do when there is a 'slant eye' behind him with a bayonet. We were all very weak from fighting on Bataan. Many of us had dysentery and malaria, which is of course common in the tropics. On this march those with amoebic dysentery were in a very precarious condition as they were not allowed to have a bowel movement. Many just fell out and died and those who were able to keep going were living in filth. They had no water to wash their bodies and after arriving at the first prison camp it was going to be 35 days before they were to get any water to use externally.

Major Bert Bank