**Emil S. Morello**

 Sgt. Emil S. Morello was born on May 8, 1907 in Salinas, California.  He enlisted in the California National
Guard at Salinas and was inducted into federal service on February 10, 1941 at Salinas Army Air Base.  With his company, now designated C Company, 194th Tank Battalion he traveled to Fort Lewis in Washington state.

In late 1941, the United States was attempting buildup its military force in the Philippine Islands.  The 194th was sent to San Francisco and on September 13th sailed for the Philippine Islands on the President Calvin Coolidge.  After a one day stop in Hawaii, the ship sailed for Manila.  It arrived there on September 26th.  The soldiers were disembarked at sent to Ft. Stotsenburg.

The 194th spent the next two months preparing for maneuvers.  On December 8, 1941, Emil lived through the Japanese bombing of Clark Airfield.  That morning, the tankers were informed of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.  The tanks of the Provisional Tank Group were ordered to the perimeter of the airfield to guard against Japanese paratroopers.  Around 12:45 in the afternoon, the tankers watched as planes approached the airfield from the north.  At first, they thought the planes were American.  It was only when bombs began exploding on the runway that the tankers knew the planes were Japanese.

The tanks of the 194th were ordered to Mabalacat.  They remained there until December 12th, when A Company was sent north to the Agno River area.  C Company remained south of Manila. On December 25th, the five tanks of the tank platoon of 2nd Lt. Robert Needham were sent to an area on the east coast of Luzon near Lucban. The Japanese had landed troops in the area, and the American Command wanted to see what the strength of the enemy was in the area.

On December 26, the 2nd platoon was ordered by a Filipino major the tanks were ordered by a major to proceed, without reconnaissance, down a narrow trail.  (The platoon leader, Lieutenant Needham, protested the order and suggested they do a reconnaissance first to see what was out in front, but the major assured him that the enemy only possessed small arms and ordered the platoon to carry out the mission.) Since the area was mountainous, the tanks had a hard time maneuvering.  As they went down the trail, the tanks attempted to keep their spacing so that the driver of each tank could each see the tank in front of him.  At one point in the trail, the tanks found that the trail made a sharp turn.  Emil's tank made the turn.   His driver, Joe Gillis, realized that he could not see the lead tank.  In an attempt to find the lead tank, he sped the tank up.

As it turned out, this maneuver saved the lives of the tankers. Just behind them a shell exploded.  The lead tank was hit, mortally wounding Lieutenant Needham and Private First Class Robert Bales. Staff Sergeant Morello's tank was also hit, wounding Private Eddie DiBenedetti, who was hit in the neck by a flying rivet. (This incident prompted the War Department to change from riveted to welded construction in new tank production.) Another tank, commanded by Sergeant Glenn Brokaw, was hit and Privates First Class Jim Hicks, McLeod, and Seifort were killed and Brokaw seriously wounded. (Ironically, Hicks had volunteered to drive Brokaw's tank when the regular driver became ill.) The shell had been fired by a Japanese anti-tank gun.  Joe drove faster to prevent the gun from getting off another shot.  Emil's tank zigzagged and crashed into the log barricade that the Japanese had built across the road and took out the gun.

          

The tank crew continued forward until they reached an opening at a rice paddy where the tank could be turned around.  Emil realized that the only way out of the situation was the same way the tank had come in, so he ordered his driver to turn the tank around.

As Emil's tank approached the destroyed barricade, he and the other members of his tank crew saw Lt. Needham's tank off to the side of the road.  It had taken a direct hit from the antitank gun and been knocked out.  The impact from the shell's explosion had knocked the hatch coverings off the front of the tank.  From what the tankers could see, the Japanese had machine-gunned the crew while they were still in the tank.

Believing they were safe, the members of Emil's crew began to celebrate their good luck.  Suddenly, the tank took a direct hit from another Japanese anti-tank gun.  The explosion knocked the track off the tank.  The tank veered off the road and went over an earthen embankment.  The tank came to a stop in a rice paddy.  Emil's crew had no idea that their little reconnaissance mission had taken them straight into the main Japanese staging area.

As Emil and his crew played dead, the Japanese repeatedly tried to open the hatch of their tank.  When a new group of Japanese arrived in the area, they too attempted to get into the tank.  The Japanese pounded on the tank and shouted to the crew, *"Is anyone in there!"* The tankers sat quietly in the tank, without food or water, until seven the next morning.  The temperature inside the tank became unbearable.  For water, the tankers licked the sides of the tank.  In all, five tanks were hit and immobilized. Sergeant Morello and four wounded stayed buttoned up inside their tanks, not daring to move because the Japanese had camped for the night alongside the tanks, unaware that anyone inside was alive. In the morning, the enemy left, and Sergeant Morello began tending the casualties. He gathered up five wounded, and they escaped through coconut groves and rice paddies.

American guns began shelling the area.  They destroyed three Japanese trucks and the kitchen the Japanese had set up.  The Japanese evacuated the area believing that the Americans were lunching a counter attack.  With the help of Filipino guides they hired, Sergeant Morello and the wounded soldiers all showed up in Manila five days later after fleeing through enemy territory. He left DiBenedetti in a Catholic Hospital in Manila and, with the other wounded, made his way by Banca to Corregidor. Later, during February, Sergeant Morello was able to rejoin the company on Bataan.

For this action, Sergeant Morello was awarded the Silver Star.  The action described above resulted in the loss of an entire platoon of tanks and five soldiers, and was a grim lesson about the consequences when reconnaissance is ignored and tanks are sent out on a mission, essentially blind.

When the crew left the tank, they made their way toward the American lines. The tank crew, with the help of Filipino guides, walked for the next six days attempting to reach their lines.  At Nagcarlan, a Catholic priest gave them food.  He also informed them that the Japanese were approaching the barrio and told them which trail to take to reach the coast.

The tankers made their way toward the coast and were able to get a boat to take them to Manila.  There, Emil's tank crew caught the last boat leaving Manila for Corregidor.  From Corregidor, the tankers were taken by boat to Mariveles.  They later rejoined their tank battalion.

On April 9, 1942, Emil became a Prisoner of War.  He took part in the death march from Mariveles at the southern tip of Bataan to San Fernando.  The POWs went days without food and water.

At San Fernando, the POWs were packed into small wooden boxcars.  The cars could hold forty men or eight horses.  The Japanese packed 100 men into each car.  The POWs were so close together that those who died remained standing until the living left the cars at Capas.  From there, the prisoners walked the last ten miles to Camp O'Donnell. Emil was held at Camp O'Donnell.  Conditions in the camp were extremely bad.  For the 12,000 POWs in the camp, there was only one water spigot.  Men literally died for a drink.  Conditions in the camp were so bad that the Japanese opened a new camp at Cabanatuan.

It is not known if Emil went out on any work details.  When it became apparent to the Japanese that it was just a matter of time before American forces would land in the Philippines, they began to evacuate POWs to other parts of their empire.

In July 1944, Emil was taken to the Port Area of Manila and boarded onto the Canadian Inventor.  The ship sailed for Formosa on July 4, 1944.  After stops at Takao and Keelung, Formosa the ship sailed for Naha, Okinawa.  It finally arrived at Moji, Japan on September 1, 1944.  From Moji, he was taken to Fukuoka #17.  The POWs in the camp worked in a condemned coal mine that was owned by the Mitsu Mining Co.

One day, the POWs who were too ill to work told the POWs returning from working in the mine about the large mushroomed shape cloud that had appeared over Nagasaki.   A few days later the POWs were given their first day off of work.  This was the first holiday that the POWs had ever been given.

One morning, an American reporter, George Weller, of the Chicago Daily News came through the gate of the camp.  After meeting with the camp commandant, Weller informed the POWs that the war was over and that they soon would be going home.

Emil was returned to the Philippines to be fattened up.  He later was sent to a Veterans Administration Hospital.
He was discharged from the Army on April 5, 1946.

He would marry and become the father of three children. He was self-employed until his retirement.

In 1983, Emil was awarded the Silver Star for his destroying the Japanese roadblock and antitank gun at Lucban, Philippine Islands.  He married and spent the rest of his life in Salinas.  Emil S. Morello passed away on October 16, 1990.

*Credit: Jim Opolony: 192nd & 194th Tank Battalion  and Armor Magazine, US Army Armor Center and School,
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