

# MARCH OF DEATH

## HORROR IN PHILIPPINES

### U.S.A. PRISONERS' FATE

#### STARVATION, TORTURE, MURDER

WASHINGTON, Jan 27.—The Army and Navy jointly has issued a "factual, official story of how the Japanese tortured, starved to death and sometimes wantonly murdered American and Filipino soldiers taken prisoner at Bataan and Corregidor." This 3,000 word document is based on sworn statements by Navy Commander Melvyn McCoy and Lt-Col S. M. Mellnik, now serving under General MacArthur, and Air Corps Lt-Col William Dyess, since killed in a crash, all of whom escaped from the Philippines after a year's imprisonment.

Their statements contained no hearsay, only happenings which the officers themselves experienced or observed. The joint statement reveals that several times the number of prisoners died as were ever reported by the Japanese, mostly of starvation, forced hard labour and general brutality.

At Camp O'Donnell 2,200 American prisoners died in April and May, 1942. At Camp Cabanatuan, in Luzon, 3,000 Americans died up to October, 1942. Still heavier mortality occurred among Filipino prisoners.

A calculated Japanese campaign of brutality began at Bataan with what the survivors afterwards termed the "march of death." Thousands of prisoners were herded together at Mariveles airfield in daylight on April 10, 1942 and forbidden to eat. They were searched and their personal belongings taken away. Those possessing Japanese tokens or money were beheaded. The prisoners were marched along the National Road in groups of 500 to 1,000 to San Fernando, in Pampanga Province. The Japanese stopped and beat them with sticks as they marched, foodless and waterless, on a scorchingly hot day.

"A Japanese soldier took my canteen," said Lt-Col Dyess, "gave the water to a horse and threw the canteen away. We passed a Filipino prisoner who had been bayoneted. Men recently killed were lying along the roadside. Many had been run over and flattened by Japanese trucks. Patients from a bombed-out nearby hospital, half-dazed and wandering in pyjamas and slippers, were thrown into the marching column. I do not know their fate.

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"At midnight we were crowded into an enclosure too narrow for us to lie down. An officer asked permission to get water and the Japanese guard beat him with his rifle butt. Finally we were permitted to drink water from a nearby ditch. Before daylight we were awakened and marched for the entire day without food through clouds of dust and in blistering heat. Three officers were taken from our column, thrown into a motor car and driven off.

were taken from our column, thrown into a motor car and driven off. They never arrived at any prison camp. Our guards repeatedly promised us food which was never produced.

"That night we were again searched and the march was resumed. Prisoners frequently fell out moaning on the roadside. The stronger were not permitted to help the weaker. Then we would hear shots behind us. At 3 am on the 12th 1,200 of us were herded in a barbed-wire bull-pen, big enough for 200. We were unable to lie down. Human filth and maggots were everywhere. We were introduced to a form of torture known as sun treatment. We were made to sit in hot sun all day without cover and with little water. Many of us went crazy and several died. The Japanese dragged out the sick and delirious. Three Filipinos and three Americans were buried while still alive.

#### Half-crazed with Thirst.

"After two days of sun treatment we were forced to resume the march. Filipino civilians tossed food and cigarettes to us from their windows. Those who were caught doing this were beaten. Six Filipino soldiers half-crazed with thirst made a dash for a roadside well. All were killed.

"On the night of the 14th we were jammed into another bull-pen. Japanese soldiers with fixed bayonets charged into the compound to terrorise the prisoners. Before daylight 115 of us were packed into small narrow-gauge box cars and the doors were locked. Movement was impossible. The heat and the stench from diarrhoea and dysentery were unbearable. We were taken out at Capistarc and given sun treatment for three hours and then marched to Camp O'Donnell. I made the 85-mile march of death in six days on one measly bit of rice. Other Americans took 12 days without any food whatever."

The Japanese officer commanding Camp O'Donnell warned the Americans and the Filipinos that they were not prisoners of war and would be treated as captives without rights and privileges. There was virtually no water. The prisoners wore the same clothing for a month and a half. The principal food was rice. Once a month they received an inch-square piece of meat and rotten sweet potatoes which had to be thrown away. The prisoners posted their own guards to prevent starving comrades from eating the rotten potatoes. Some of the Japanese operated a black market, selling a small can of fish for five dollars.

#### Heavy Death Rate.

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The death rate at Camp O'Donnell after a week was 20 American soldiers daily and 150 Filipinos. After a fortnight the rate increased to 50 Americans daily and 500 Filipinos. In the dilapidated hospital hundreds of men lay naked on the floor completely uncovered. There was no medicine. Doctors lacked water to wash human waste from the patients. Some, afflicted with dysentery, lay exposed to the weather near latrines until they died. Men shrank from 200lb to 90lb. They were human skeletons without buttocks. Sick and starving men were forced into labour details. Many times men failed to return from work.

The Americans were separated from the Filipinos on June 1 and moved to the Cabanatuan concentration camp in Luzon where conditions were slightly improved and water was plentiful, but Japanese brutality continued. Rice was the principal diet. On one occasion three chickens and 50 eggs were supplied for 500 men. Japanese propagandists later told the world that American prisoners in the Philippines were being fed on chickens and eggs.

Seven thousand Americans and 5,000 Filipinos who were prisoners at Corregidor were concentrated for a week without food at a former balloon station which was 100 yards square and built of concrete. The men had to stand in a queue for 12 hours to fill their canteens. On May 20, 1945 prisoners were loaded into barges and taken to Manila, where they were forced to jump into the water 100 yards from the beach.

#### Marched Through Manila.

Lt-Col Mellnik explained that they were then marched through the streets of Manila, presenting the worst possible appearance. Wet, bedraggled and thirsty, many were so weak from illness that they could hardly stand. However a Japanese triumphal victory parade was frustrated by the friendliness of Filipino civilians who tried to revive collapsing prisoners with ices, water and fruit.

At Cabanatuan prisoners were literally worked to death. It was a commonplace for 20 per cent of a work detail to die. In one instance 75 per cent were killed. One Navy and two Army officers attempting to escape were caught in a drain ditch under the barbed-wire fence. The Japanese beat their legs and feet until they were unable to stand, then kicked and jumped on them. The next morning the trio were stripped to their underpants in full view of the camp and their hands tied behind their backs. They were pulled up by ropes so that they had to remain standing and they were

pushed up by ropes so that they had to remain standing and they were kept in this position in the blazing sun two full days, and periodically beaten with a wooden plank. Every Filipino passer-by was compelled to beat the trio. If he failed to hit hard enough the Japanese beat the Filipino. Finally one officer was beheaded and the other two were shot to death.

#### **Colonel Knocked Unconscious.**

The Japanese made every effort to humiliate the prisoners, who were forced to stand while the Japanese called them vile names. An elderly

American colonel who turned away from his tormentor was knocked unconscious with a blackjack. American flags were habitually and designedly used as rags in Japanese kitchens. The death rate at Cabanatuan in June, 1942, was 30 daily and in September it was 15 daily because by then most of the weaker men were already dead.

When Lt-Col Dyess, Lt-Col Mellnik and Commander McCoy left Cabanatuan on October 26 3,000 of the 12,000 prisoners had died and 2,500 were in hospital with little hope of recovery. The chief cause of death was starvation as shown by autopsies by both American and Japanese doctors. The Japanese claimed that no food was available despite the great abundance of food in the Philippines at that time. The Japanese eventually permitted the Red Cross in Manila to send medical supplies which were not unpacked for many days after their arrival. During this period many died.

High Japanese officers knew of the conditions. They regularly inspected the camp. An American lieutenant-colonel pointed out to a Japanese general the great number sick from starvation. The general retorted: "Your men are not starving. They need more exercise." The lieutenant-colonel was restrained by guards and the general continued his inspection with an air of boredom and indifference.

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