

The Bataan Peninsula during World War II: NCOs Made the Difference

by

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Group M15

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### I. Introduction:

#### A. References:

1. Tenney, Lester. My Hitch in Hell: The Bataan Death March. Washington: Brassey's, 1995.
2. Knox, Donald. Death March: The Survivors of Bataan. Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983
3. Faulk, Stanley. Bataan: The March of Death. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962.
4. Himchak, Elizabeth. Bataan Project. 12 Sep. 2005  
<<http://history.acusd.edu/gen/st~ehimchak/WWII.project.html>>.

B. Statement about research- Provide the class an overview of the Japanese attack of the Philippines and the fall of Bataan. Explain the circumstance that led to the fall of Bataan in regards to the training, discipline, and weapons. Provide the class an overview of the Bataan Death March and the NCOs that endured the march. Address how the training, discipline, duties, and heroic actions of the NCOs contributed to many Soldiers leaving the island alive.

### II. Body:

A. Present facts that led to the fall of Bataan (the training, discipline, and weapons that contributed.)

B. Present the facts behind the Death March (the training, discipline, duties, and heroic actions of the NCOs that contributed to many Soldiers making the march alive)

### III. Closing:

A. Summary- Review the main points: events that led to fall of Bataan, and the Death March.

B. Questions from the class.

C. Conclusion- Expound on the actions of the NCOs.

## The Bataan Peninsula during World War II: NCOs Made the Difference

The Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) on the Bataan Peninsula made the difference between life and death for many soldiers during World War II. From the initial attack by the Japanese to the Bataan Death March, the NCOs made the difference. The discipline, dedication to duty, and leadership during this horrific time in history set the example for all NCOs to emulate. The example set by these great NCOs displayed true leadership, the Army values, and the leadership attributes that all NCOs should possess. The example set by the NCOs during the fall of Bataan Peninsula and the Bataan Death March displays the true meaning of the NCO Corp as the backbone of the Army.

As with any event in history, the Bataan Death March did not just happen. Numerous circumstances led to the fall of Bataan and the subsequent surrender of forces on the Bataan peninsula. We must study the military aspects that caused this event to take place. One of the factors that led to the fall was the landscape. The mainland is surrounded by higher ground. The island of Corregidor would be used to keep foreign vessels out of the Manila Bay; however, Corregidor was not equipped to perform such a task. Corregidor is only two miles away from the Bataan Peninsula. It only had a few weapons pointed toward Bataan, but those weapons were inadequate to protect it. Bataan's landscape had mountains and numerous valleys and ravines, which protected the enemy from observation and incoming fire. President Roosevelt and the military decision makers decided to station only minimal defense forces on the islands. The main island of Luzon received an insufficient number of combat troops and depended on reinforcements from Pearl Harbor if defending became impossible. The troops that were stationed there lacked the equipment needed to defend the islands. The main problem despite the lack of manpower was the problem of the Navy stationed in Hawaii. Without the supplies and

reinforcements from Hawaii, the forces would not be able to survive and withstand a drawn out battle (Dyess 20).

There were numerous units involved in the defense of the Bataan Peninsula. In Bataan, there were 78,000 allied soldiers, 68,000 Filipino and 12,000 American. The 68,000 Filipino soldiers comprised the Philippine Army. The forces that comprised the Philippine Army consisted of a combination of reserve and regular forces. Most had been called to duty only three months prior to the invasion. The forces lacked any formal training, weapons, and equipment. The 12,000 American Forces were comprised of American and Filipino Scouts who had been part of the United States Army in the Philippines for many years prior to the war. These were magnificent soldiers, well trained, loyal, and dedicated to the war effort. General MacArthur devised a plan known as War Plan Orange, which called for all the forces to withdraw to the Bataan Peninsula and defend until reinforcements could arrive from Pearl Harbor. The plan called for two National Guard Tank Battalions to reinforce Bataan. The tank battalions arrived in the Philippines on November 20, 1941. The tank battalions received new tanks and equipment prior to arrival; however, they did not receive any training on the new equipment (Lester 26-43).

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor; the United States was at war with Japan. The Pacific fleet was incapacitated and could not defend American interest in the Pacific Rim. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan launched an aerial attack on the Philippines. The aerial attack destroyed most of the American Air Force in the Philippines. The island defenses were not prepared for the attack but the NCOs set the example and lead from the front. NCOs like SGT Forrest Knox of the 192d Tank Battalion, which opened the turret of his tank

and fired his machine guns at incoming Japanese aircraft with total disregard for his personnel safety (Knox 13).

The Japanese ground forces landed two days later on the Philippine Islands. General MacArthur decided to deviate from the plan and meet the Japanese at the points of their ground landings. The troops fought but were overwhelmed by the Japanese forces. General MacArthur decided to revert back to the original plan and withdraw all forces to the Bataan Peninsula. Once again, an NCO set the example for all to follow. The Medal of Honor Citation reads:

“A battery gun position was bombed and shelled by the enemy until one gun was put out of commission and all the cannoneers were killed or wounded. SGT Jose Calugas, a mess sergeant of another battery, voluntarily and without orders ran 1,000 yards across the shell-swept area to the gun position. There he organized a volunteer squad, which placed the gun back in commission and fired effectively against the enemy, although the position remained under constant and heavy Japanese artillery fire” (Houlahan)

The forces were hampered by many factors: a shortage of food, ammunition, and medicine. Most the ammunition was old and corroded. The anti-aircraft and artillery shells lacked the proper fuses. Some of the poorly trained Filipino reserve troops were thrown into frontline combat against the highly trained Japanese veterans. American soldiers from non-combat units were formed into provisional infantry units. Despite all these factors, the NCOs and soldiers continued to hold their ground without reinforcements and resupply (Himchak). NCOs like SGT Agapito Gayanilo who received the Silver Star, his citation reads:

“For gallantry in action in Bataan, on February 2, 1942, lead a machine gun squad in displacing to a position where it could deliver effective fire for the friendly attack.

Before reaching its new position the squad was subjected to heavy enemy machine gun fire at close range from a gun to the front, and another to the left. This intrepid Sergeant placed the squad under cover, crept forward and destroyed the gun to the front with hand grenades, returned and emplaced his gun, crawled to the left and accurately designated the enemy machine gun nest by throwing a hand grenade in it to draw fire, thereby causing its immediate destruction by the fire from its machine gun” (Houlahan).

By the end of March, the daily food rations were cut in half and seldom contained as much as 800 calories. General King, the commander of forces on Bataan, and his staff assessed the fighting capabilities of his forces, in view of an impending attack planned by the Japanese. General King determined that the forces could only “fight at 30% of their efficiency,” due to malnutrition, disease, a lack of ammunition and basic supplies, and fatigue (Himchak). On 3 April 1942, the Japanese launched their final attack to take Bataan. The Japanese broke through the defensive line and the writing was on the wall. The American forces were only two miles from the waters edge with no place left to fall back to. On 9 April 1942, General King surrendered the forces on Bataan. SGT Tenney describes the feeling, “We troops felt let down, even betrayed. If we had been supplied with enough ammunition and guns, troops and equipment, and food and medical supplies, we believed that we would have been able to repel the Japanese. Instead we were facing a degrading surrender and the brutality that was surely to go along with it” (Tenney 32).

The forces consolidated near the town of Mariveles, at the southern tip of the Bataan Peninsula. Large fields outside the town were used as staging areas for the thousands of captive, American and Filipino soldiers. The treatment of the prisoners differed with each set of guards. MSG Michael Bruaw described the treatment, "I saw a group of Japanese soldiers using several Filipinos for bayonet practice, plunging their sharp weapons repeatedly into their screaming victims" (Faulk 40). The Bataan Death March would follow and it was at this point that discipline, will, and Warrior Ethos of the NCO Corps would be the foundation of many soldiers survival.

The Bataan Death March began at Mariveles on April 10, 1942, with 65,000 Filipino Servicemen, 28,000 civilians, and 12,000 Americans. The Japanese assumed that the POWs were in fair physical condition and able to complete a sustained march without much food or water. However, the starvation diet that the troops had been placed on brought with it numerous diseases and diminished the ability to fight off malaria and other diseases. Many soldiers suffered from dysentery and were very weak from starvation and malnutrition. The POWs started the 60-mile march in a weakened state (Teney 44-48).

The atrocities that the POWs witnessed and experienced caused many soldiers to doubt their survival. The NCOs knew that they would have to keep the soldiers together and maintain the will to survive. Any troops who fell behind were executed. Japanese soldiers denied the prisoners food or water for days and beat them randomly. The prisoners of war (POWs) were forced to sit in the hot sun for hours with no water. Anyone who dared to ask for water was executed on the spot. The discipline to continue to march in formation, even though water was next to the road and the soldiers had been without water for days. Breaking the ranks to stop for

water or take break meant sure death. The NCOs had to maintain the formations and continue to march (Teney 49).

The NCOs performed many heroic acts and lived the Warrior Ethos of never leaving a fallen comrade. They shared their water and rations and carried their fellow soldiers that were too weak to continue the march. This devotion to duty, will to survive, and discipline contributed to the survival of countless POWs. The NCOs that fought to defend the Bataan Peninsula and complete the Bataan Death March set the example for all soldiers and NCOs to emulate.

## Works Cited

- Dyess, Wm. E. (Lt. Col.). The Dyess Story: The Eye-Witness Account of the Death March from Bataan and the Narrative of Experiences in Japanese Prison Camps and of Eventual Escape. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1944.
- Faulk, Stanley. Bataan: The March of Death. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962.
- Himchak, Elizabeth. "The U.S. Military in the Philippines." US Military and the Philippines. 10 Dec. 2005 <[http://history.acusd.edu/gen/st/~ehimchak/PI\\_military.html](http://history.acusd.edu/gen/st/~ehimchak/PI_military.html)>.
- Houlahan, Michael. "Philippine Scouts Heritage Society." The Philippine Scouts on Bataan: Their Finest Hour. 10 Dec 2005 <[http://www.philippine-scouts.org/Articles/Finest\\_hour.html](http://www.philippine-scouts.org/Articles/Finest_hour.html)>.
- Knox, Donald. Death March: The Survivors of Bataan. Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- Tenney, Lester. My Hitch in Hell: The Bataan Death March. Washington: Brassey's, 1995.