

The Bataan Death March 1942

*Causation, Progress, Completion,
Recollection and Associated Repercussions*

By

Bob East

**The Bataan Death March 1942: Causation, Progress, Completion,
Recollection and Associated Repercussions**

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Author's Note

Throughout this written narrative there were times when it was necessary to engage some revisionism. I also felt it necessary to expand on certain periods before and after the ill-fated Bataan Death March. This put the death march into perspective—time wise. After all, the complete sad episode lasted less than two weeks from the initial setting out from Mariveles, at the bottom of Bataan, to the last P.O.Ws (Prisoners of War) arriving at Camp O'Donnell, Capas.

In researching the Bataan Death March, the author believed it was prudent to do justice to the many victims of this atrocity by following the route they took—by various public transport means, and when possible, walking. By doing this it enabled the author to compare what the various cities, and towns along the route now look like 80 plus years after the event. They are quite different now in all respects. Barangays are now towns and cities. Populations have in some instances increased 10-fold. As to be expected, in 2024—82 years after the event—the author did not come across any citizens who remembered the event. And those very few who may have been alive in 1942 would have been far too young to remember the event. Their parents may have, but they would have passed on by 2024.

The author also found it prudent to include the *first person* when he thought it would add to authenticity in the narrative. It was not intended to be revisionist in the main, more so a retelling to those readers who may wish to understand the history and complexities of one of the more—among many—atrocities that occurred in the War in the Pacific—1941-1945—inclusive. The author not only wanted to recount the tragic circumstances involved in the Bataan Death March, but to question why they occurred at all. To understand the consequences of the aftermath of this tragedy it was important to examine the history of the leadup to the invasion of the Philippines, and also the decade before it.

This written narrative of the Batan Death March was not intended to repeat or retell to any extent the atrocities that occurred—as most renditions of the relevant episode appear to do—some with little regard as to the authenticity of what was being related. The purpose of the author examining the Bataan Death March was to firstly make it historically accurate as possible. Secondly, it was important to trace the route taken and to comment on the different municipalities, towns and barangays (a small administrative division) as they were then, and as they are at the time of writing, 2024. And lastly, to make it accurate and informative—albeit with a tinge of sadness.

That said, the historical analysis of the Bataan Death March must begin geographically somewhere. The main section of the track began from the city of Mariveles at the base of the Bataan Peninsula. It semi-terminated at San Fernando, (Please see **Fig. e. 3**), and fully terminated at the P.O.W camp of Camp O'Donnell.

At the city of Orion, the main participants from Mariveles were joined by thousands of other Filipino and U.S. troops from the city of Bagac, approximately 15 kilometres to the west. Inter alia. In this written narrative both “United States” and “U.S.” will be used.

There are a number of memorials to the victims of the Bataan Death March along the route, and many of these are included throughout this narrative. There are also concrete pillars, known as obelisks, at almost every kilometer along the track and some of these were photographed by the author—more on that later. However, it must be added here that the obelisks following the Bataan Death March trail and numbered every kilometre were not the only ones. A minor track was formed to take P.O.Ws from Bagac to Orion. (Again, please see **Fig. e. 3**.) This sub-track also has obelisks every kilometre, but with different initials.



One of a number of concrete obelisks at the start of the Bataan Death March. Photograph taken by the author in October 2023.

A chapter—**Chapter 8**—is included in this written narrative which endeavors to outline both photographically and descriptively the various monuments—not exhaustive. They include both U.S. and Filipino monuments.

However, before analysing and delving into, and researching the lurid—and at times atrocity—of the Bataan Death March, it is only fitting that the context of war, and suffering in general of mankind, be put into perspective by quoting some past humanist and pacifist individuals beginning with Earl Bertrand Russell. (1872-1970). (These individuals are not in alphabetical order or indeed historical importance—rather just as the author researched them.)



“Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.”

“Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors—the whole world of loneliness, poverty and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil. But I cannot, and I too suffer.” (Bertrand Russell. 1969).

(Circa 1965)

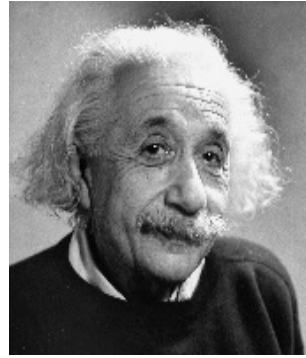


"Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion, too. Imagine all the people, living life in peace." From the song "Imagine". Written by John Lennon and Yoko Ono. 1971.

(Circa 1970)

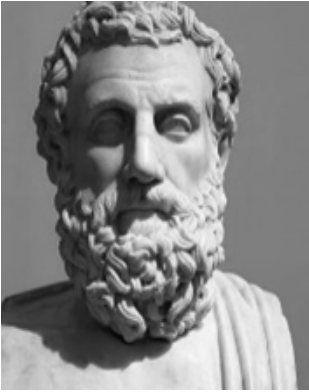
"Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding. Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order—in short, of government." (Albert Einstein)

(Circa. 1950)



"War is the greatest plague that can afflict humanity. It destroys religion. It destroys states. It destroys families. Any scourge is preferable to it." (Martin Luther)

(Circa 1520)

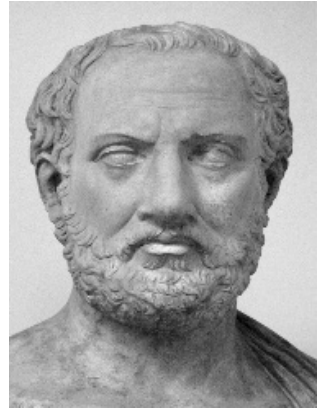


“In war, the first casualty is truth.” (The coinage of these seven words by Aeschylus could well fit into the period of Japanese occupation in Bataan in 1942. Specifically, the episode referred to as the Bataan Death March—and the general occupation of the Philippines in early April 1942—expanded on in Forward. (Aeschylus. 456-524 BCE)

(Circa 500 BCE)

*“The people made their recollection fit in with their sufferings”. From **History of the Peloponnesian War**. This descriptive sentence could well fit into many of the recollections quoted by survivors of the Bataan Death March in this narrative. (Thucydides. 460-400 BCE).*

(Circa 430 BCE)



Finally, to give all due respect to the victims of this obscene, unnecessary and inglorious episode in the War in the Pacific, the name, Bataan Death March, will be capitalised.)

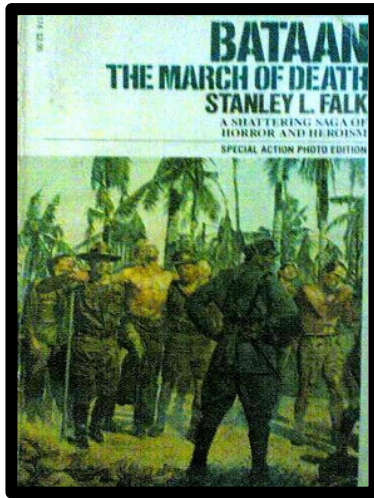
Epigraph

Previous Books Written about the Bataan Death March

Like all historical recollections of human atrocities, this narrative is no different when it comes to attempting to understand why such atrocities occurred. And, with that in mind, it would be an injustice to the many authors who have researched this tragedy without mentioning, albeit briefly, some of the more prudent editions of various accounts of the Bataan Death March. (References will be included where it is necessary.) They are also in alphabetical order, not order of importance. These are also included in the list of **Bibliographies and References**.

It must be stressed here that this list is not exhaustive. It is included so the reader of *The Bataan Death March, 1942*. can compare what has previously been written about the Bataan Death March to this latest edition of the episode. With that in mind perhaps the reader of *The Bataan Death March, 1942* may be best advised to leave the reading of the first part of **Epigraph** until after **Conclusion**.

Of interest. In **Chapter Seven** of this narrative—*The Bataan Death March, 1942*—a number of survivors of the Bataan Death March are examined. Included in this list is also the last known survivor of the Death March—Paul Kerchum—who died just short of his 103 birthday in 2023.



Bataan: The March of Death. Falk, Stanley L. Published 1982

This book written by Stanley Falk in 1982 is not only informative in the true sense but attempts to correct many misdemeanors written about the Bataan Death March—dates, numbers and reasons for the prolonged “march”. It brings to the attention of the reader that it took almost 18 months before the news of the atrocity reached the U.S. public. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least being those who escaped from the march were few. And their getting to the United States was long and arduous.

One of the more interesting sides of the story is that this author attempts to see the episode from both the Japanese and the American/Filipino perspectives. To do this Falk made a detailed study of army records on both sides. This included letters and diaries from major players.

Of particular interest is the recollections of one of the U.S. officers who was selected to defend General Masaharu Homma, who was accused of 48 counts of violating the international rules of war. This officer, Lt. Robert Pelz, saw a different person who was portrayed by General Douglas MacArthur as being the *Beast of Bataan*.

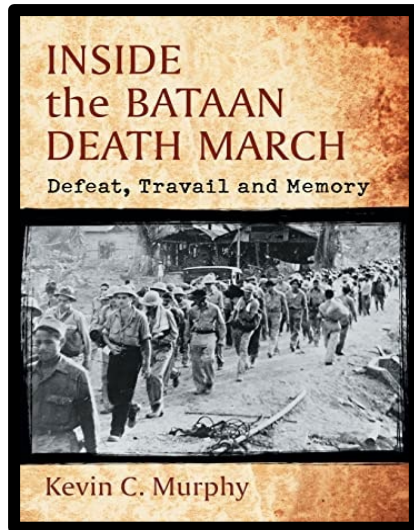
As Pelz rightly pointed out, this war crimes tribunal was completely different to the international trials being conducted by Allied Powers in

Tokyo. The U.S. Army was in complete control of procedures—which in turn was in complete control by General Douglas MacArthur. General Douglas MacArthur had the distinction of trying an enemy commander who not only had beaten him in one of the greatest losses the U.S. had ever suffered, but rather than surrender with his troops had “deserted” to Australia. (Inter alia: the descriptive verb “deserted” is used by this author (Bob East) not in a derogative sense but in the sense that General Douglas MacArthur left his position as supreme commander to his 2 IC when the position became untenable. (Which of course it did when the U.S and Philippine troops surrendered to the Japanese in April 1942).

Returning to General Homma’s trial: To make matters even more uneven for General Homma, his accuser, General Douglas MacArthur selected the venue—Manila—and even selected the defense, the prosecution, the jury, and the rules of evidence. Years later, one of the defense team, General Arthur Trudeau, was so troubled by his recollections of events that he wrote the trial had really said that “circumstantial and hearsay evidence may be admitted if you run short of sound evidence. I am afraid that we created a precedent that could have far-reaching repercussions in the future”. (Trudeau 1986).

As the trial proceeded it became more and more obvious that General Douglas MacArthur was going to have a “victory” over the Japanese commander who had embarrassed him and “forced” him to issue his famous departing words “I came through and I shall return”. (This was in defiance of instructions by President Roosevelt who insisted that “I” should be changed to “us”. That is “we have come through and we will return”. General MacArthur had his way though, as usual.)

More is written about the trial of General Masaharu Homma, in **Chapter Seven** of this narrative. *Trial, and Death Sentence of General Masaharu Homma.*



Inside the Bataan Death March (Defeat, Travail, and Memory). Murphy, Kevin C.
Published 2014

This account of the Bataan Death March unfortunately did not receive a glowing report overall. Its community review only averaged 2.83/5.00. (This author, Bob East, gave it 4.5.)

Kevin Murphy adopted a revisionist approach, insomuch that he defined the Bataan Death March as having many key elements, or components, that made it possible. Included was that the American and Filipino troops were made victims because of General Douglas MacArthur's decisions—that is the retreat to Bataan and his “deserting” and retreating to Australia. He also brought into the equation the brutality of the Japanese guards was seen as normal, and even in their training. He also stressed that even though the Philippine civilian onlookers were sympathetic to the prisoners and helped when they could, the sheer number of prisoners and the shortage of food meant their efforts were minimal at best. Murphy summed up the Bataan Death March as Hobbesian in nature: nasty, brutish, and short.

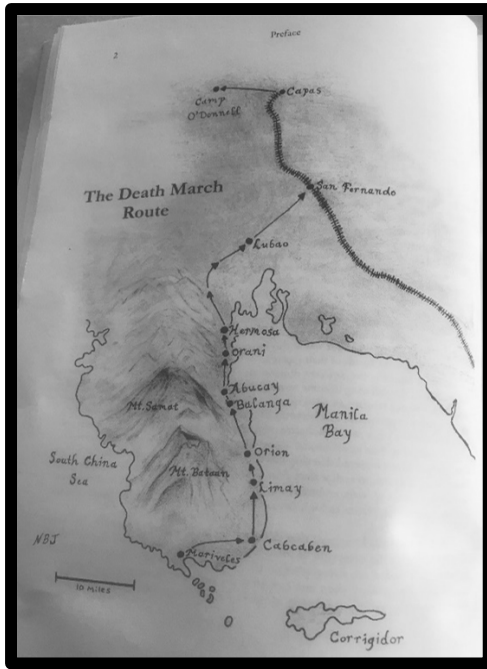
One very explicit, and equally well researched part of this written narrative is the number of survivor accounts Murphy managed to find. Most of which were written soon after the War in the Pacific ended. This

is not surprising given that the knowledge of the Bataan Death March was making world headlines because of the trial of General Homma.

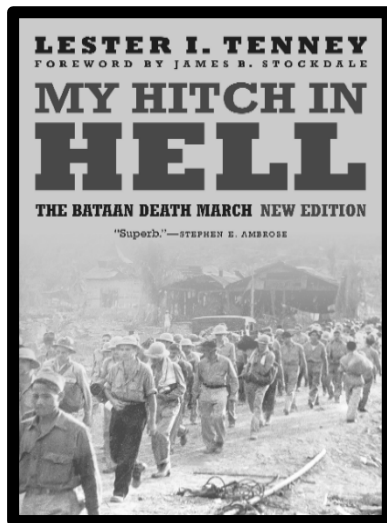
Two criticisms that continually appear of the book are why Murphy found it necessary to walk, and re-walk the Death March route, and why his numerous personal accounts of his time spent in Japan teaching are all that important. However, it is ever so easy to criticise when history writers take a different approach to the norm.

I personally found Murphy's narrative, riveting. And totally believable in his numerics ascertaining to deaths on the march. He followed the Bataan Death March from its beginning at Mariveles to Camp O'Donnell. The diagram below, which he drew and included in his account of the Bataan Death March shows most of the points where the P.O.Ws stopped for whatever reason. My only criticism of this "map" is that Murphy did not include the 13-kilometre section from Bagac to Orion. (Perhaps Murphy did not personally traverse the Bagac to Orion?) (Expanding slightly, Bagac was a large U.S./Philippine military base and surrendered on the same day that all the other forces surrendered in Bataan, except for Corregidor.)

Digressing slightly, Although Kevin Murphy did not include the town of Bagac in his hand-drawing of the Bataan Death March, but I made a conscious effort to visit the town of Bagac—now a municipality. It appears to be a town that has stood still. It has a population of over 30,000 and does not boast a bank. There is an ATM there, but its access and availability are very limited. Cash appeared to be the only means of purchasing goods. Apart from that, the "town" is very well set out and has excellent reminders of the Bataan Death March. It also has a memorial garden and the first obelisk on the section of the Bataan Death March from Bagac to Orion.



The diagram above is reproduced courtesy of Nichole Murphy



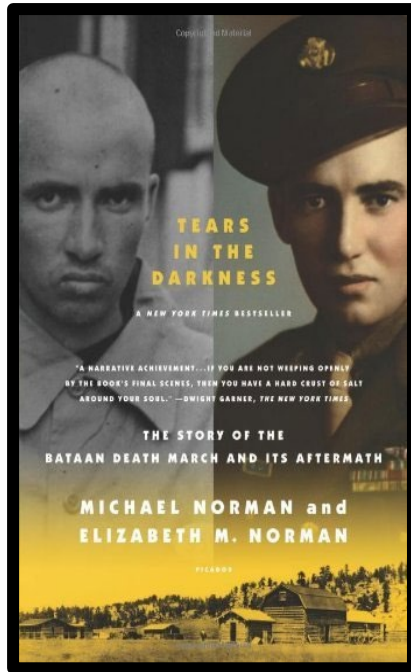
My Hitch in Hell (The Bataan Death March). Tenney, Lester I. Published 1995

These recollections of the Army tank commander Lester Tenney are captivating in the extreme. He became a P.O.W. after the fall of Bataan in March 1942, and immediately was forced to begin the arduous and cruel Bataan Death March. Which he completed despite being wounded by a Japanese guard.

Not only did Lester Tenny survive the Bataan Death March and a number of months in the notorious O'Donnell P.O.W. Camp, but he also endured the balance of the War in the Pacific as a labourer in many other Japanese P.O.W. camps.

After he was repatriated back to the United States, he went on to continue his campaign for reparation and recognition of the plight of U.S. troops that had been in Japanese P.O.W. camps.

He went on to earn university degrees at various U.S institutions and in February 2017 he died at the age of 96 years. He not only wrote *My Hitch in Hell (The Bataan Death March)*, but another written narrative about the plights of U.S. P.O.Ws of the Japanese, and how he overcame depression. — *The Courage to Remember*. (2014).



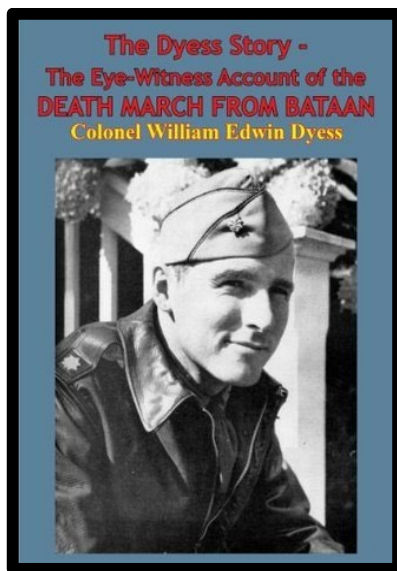
Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath.
Norman, Michael, and Elizabeth. Published 1992

The best way of describing where this narrative fits into the sordid account of the Bataan Death March is to read the following account from the Goodreads website: available on <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6455003-tears-in-the-darkness> This description has been cropped so as to make it easier to comprehend.

The Normans bring to the story remarkable feats of reportage and literary empathy. Their protagonist, Ben Steele, is a figure out of a young cowboy turned sketch artist from Montana who joined the army to see the world. Juxtaposed against Steele's story and the sobering tale of the Death March and its aftermath is the story of a number of Japanese soldiers.

The result is an altogether new and original World War II it exposes the myths of military heroism as shallow and inadequate;

it makes clear, with great literary and human power, that war causes suffering for people on all sides.



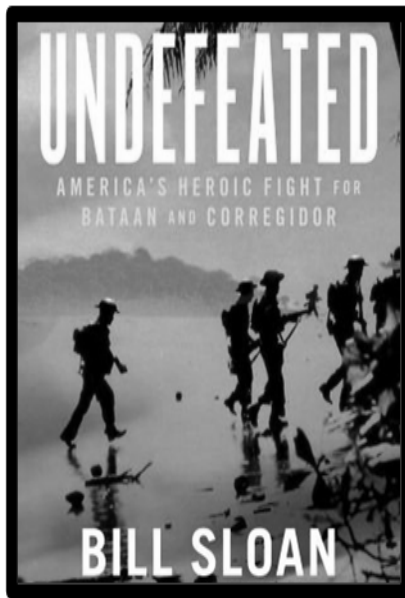
The Dyess Story - The Eye-Witness Account of the Death March from Bataan. Dyess, William. Published 1944

After the surrender of Bataan by American and Philippine troops in March 1942, this author, Lt.-Colonel William Edwin Dyess, and his surviving members of 21st Pursuit Squadron, were made to walk, along with thousands of other prisoners to San Fernando and then eventually arrived at the O'Donnell P.O.W. Camp. Camp O'Donnell was originally a U.S. Air Force Base. It was taken over by the Japanese in early 1942.

After staying captive for a number of months, Lt.-Colonel Dyess, and two other U.S. servicemen escaped from the O'Donnell P.O.W. Camp, joined a guerilla group and eventually were able to escape to Australia in a submarine. Eventually Dyess and his two fellow escapees were repatriated to the United States where they recuperated. It was during this time that Dyess wrote this narrative about the Bataan Death March and gave it to the *Chicago Tribune*. After careful consideration, the U.S. government gave consent for the book to be published publicly. This

was the first account of the Bataan Death March that the U.S. public became aware of its existence. It created an outrage in the U.S. and made Dyess a hero in his country. He eventually returned to duty, but tragically was killed in an airplane accident in late 1943.

What makes *The Dyess Story - The Eye-Witness Account of the Death March from Bataan*, so compelling to read and comprehend, is the collection of over 30 original photographs taken on the Bataan Death March and inside the O'Donnell P.O.W. Camp. Exactly how these photographs were taken and stored is not revealed in his book. This may have been because when the book was published the War in the Pacific was still in action.



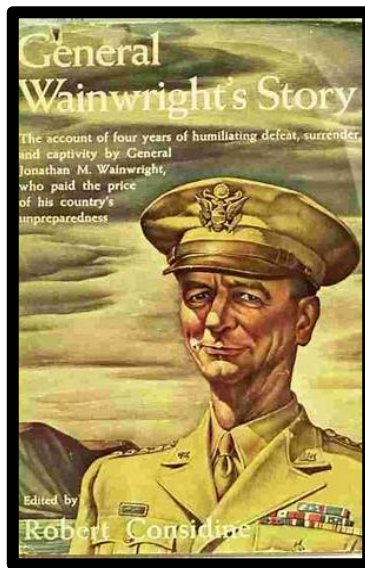
Undeclared (*America's Heroic Fight for Bataan and Corregidor*), Sloan, Bill.
Published 2012

This written narrative by Bill Sloan was first published in 2012. It is not exclusively about the Bataan Death March but chronicles the four months plus, of resistance against the Japanese forces in Bataan, and Corregidor.

After the American and Filipino troops surrendered in April 1942—and after General Douglas MacArthur’s controversial “abandoning” of his troops at Corregidor for “greener pastures” in Australia, General Jonathan Wainwright took over the position of the top U.S. commander in the Philippines. He positioned himself in the stronghold of Corregidor whilst the majority of his troops in Bataan surrendered and were immediately destined for imprisonment in the O’Donnell P.O.W. camp west of Capas.

Sloan’s *Undeclared* is significant inasmuch that he not only covered the battles at Bataan and Corregidor, but the short “existence” of the O’Donnell P.O.W. camp. What makes Sloan’s *Undeclared* so riveting to read is that he personally interviewed over 30 survivors of Camp O’Donnell and the Bataan Death March.

Finally, and this is not in the alphabetical order above, but it is important enough to be included in this list of “must reads”. It is a biographical account of General Jonathan Wainwright, edited by Robert Considine.



General Wainwright's Story, Wainwright, Jonathan, M. Published 1970.
Edited by Robert Considine

General Jonathan Wainwright held many enviable and unenviable records, awards and positions.

He held the position of Commander of Allied Forces in the Philippines when General Douglas MacArthur held the position of Commander of the United Armed Forces in the Far East. After General Douglas MacArthur “retreated” back to Corregidor in the face of certain defeat—and then took “leave” in Australia—General Wainwright took his position in Corregidor—all to no avail.

In the above narrative, *General Wainwright’s Story*, which is autobiographical, General Wainwright gives a detailed account of the ill-fated defense of the Philippines during the War in the Pacific. It includes the surrenders at Bataan and Corregidor, and the Bataan Death March. His experiences as a P.O.W. of the Japanese, and his eventual liberation are also covered.

General Wainwright was not in the Bataan Death March—being at Corridor when his troops surrendered in early April 1942. He did join many of the survivors of the Death March in various Japanese P.O.W. camps in the Philippines as well as Formosa and Manchuria.

At the time of his surrender, he became the highest-ranking U.S. prisoner of war. Of further interest, the total number of troops that surrendered to the Japanese at Bataan was approximately 78,000. Of this number approximately 66,000 were Filipinos and 12,000 U.S. troops. This made the number of U.S. troops becoming P.O.Ws in one event second only to the 12,500 who surrendered at Harper’s Ferry in September 1862 during the Civil War.

(There is more about General Wainwright in **Chapter One**.)

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Fig. 4.4. The opening of the above monument (Circa 1972).

Fig. 4.5. Photo taken by the author at the "zero" Beginpunt obelisk at the beginning of the Bataan Death March. Date November 2023.

Fig. 4.6. The opening of the Beginpunt "zero" obelisk (Circa 1972).

Fig. 4.7. The near completed Mariveles Bataan World War II Museum. It was empty at this time. On completion the Mariveles Museum also had a video complex. (This building is not to be confused with the Bataan WWII Museum at Fig 2.3.

Fig. 4.8. The 16-kilometre obelisk in the centre of Cabcaben.

Fig. 4.9. Colonel Masanobu Tsuji.

Fig. 4.10. This obelisk marks the starting point of the Bagac to Orion trek. It is entitled “the zero marker”. It is situated at the junction of two one-way streets leading to and from the main Bagac marketplace.

Fig. 4.11. The remembrance garden about 100 metres from the Zero marker shown in Fig. 4.9.

Fig. 4.12. The tablet is in Tagalog. However, the author’s command of Tagalog is somewhat limited. But there are three dates mentioned: 10, 11, and 15 April 1942.

Fig. 4.13. The Japanese/Philippine Friendship Memorial Tower. This photo was taken by the author in March 2024.

Fig. 4.14. The plaque at the base of the Philippine–Japanese Friendship Tower.

Fig. 4. 15. Shows the distance from Bagac to Balanga.

Fig . 4. 16. The Mount Samat National Shrine.

Fig. 6. 1. The memorial to the rescue at Cabanatuan Camp. Situated in Cabanatuan City.

Fig. 7.1. 1936. Minister of War of the Japanese Empire. In office 9 March 1936 – 2 February 1937.

Fig. 7.2. 1945. General Hideki Tojo bedecked out with medals, awards and miscellaneous paraphernalia.

Fig. 7.3. 1937 Chinese civilian corpses near the Quinhuai River.

Fig. 9.1. FAME’s distinct “trademark”.

Fig. 9.2. This obelisk differs slightly from others. It is at Lamao, halfway between Cabcaben and Orion.

Fig. 9.3. An obelisk photo taken by the author in March 2024, 19 kilometres from Bagac.

Fig. 9.4. The obelisk in the Capas National Shrine stands at the beginning of a pathway surrounded by Philippine flags.

Fig. 9.5. Mount Samat “Shrine of Valor” *Dambana ng Kagitingan*. 2023. (With thanks to the Provincial Government of Bataan).

Fig. 9.6. Showing a Filipina helping a wounded U.S. soldier, and Filipino on the Bataan Death March.

Fig. 10.1. The Trinity test of the Manhattan Project on 16 July 1945. It was the first detonation of a nuclear weapon.

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Various articles and numerous photos were accessed from the internet and used. Permission was sought where appropriate. If not available because the source did not respond to the author, names and titles were acknowledged where possible.

Where permission was granted or available it is acknowledged in the List of Illustrations.

Foreword

In the sordid collection of atrocities committed in the War in the Pacific—1941-1945—there were many that eclipsed other wars. Even though history has shown that the losing side in any war is normally burdened with more cases of accused atrocities than the winning side, the Japanese did, in their invasions and occupations of Asian countries, came out well in front for the number of atrocities committed, or accused of committing. Among these atrocities, which were proven and resulted in many of the perpetrators being executed, was this aptly named Bataan Death March.

Bataan, known as the Province of Bataan, is a province in central Luzon. (Luzon being the northern of the three landmasses of the Philippines. The other two being the Visayas and Mindanao.) Bataan's capital, since 1754, is the city of Balanga. Its largest city is Mariveles. (Both cities feature prominently in this account of the Bataan Death March.)



Fig. f. 1. *Showing Bataan (in black)*

When it came to the scale of the number of P.O.Ws. or civilians murdered by occupying Japanese troops in the 1930s and 1940s in Asia, the Rape of Nanking (1937) far exceeded the total in the Bataan Death March. Estimates vary from 200,000-300,000 for Nanking, to 5,000-18,000 for the Bataan Death March—and most—if not all in the Bataan Death March —were certified P.O.Ws. There were of course many more who died in the confines of Camp O'Donnell—discussed later. Of the approximately 60,000 Filipinos and 9,000 Americans, it is estimated 20,000 Filipinos and 1,500 American troops died from disease, starvation, neglect, or just sheer brutality at Camp O'Donnell. This figure is even more stark when it is realised that the camp was only used as a P.O.W. establishment from April 1942 to January 1943.



Fig. f. 2. One of only a limited number of photos surviving from the O'Donnell P.O.W. Camp. The squalor is obvious

The only similarity in these two atrocities mentioned above, that is, the Rape of Nanking, and the Bataan Death March was, in the main, justice. Both commanding officers were executed. General Masaharu

Homma—*Bataan*—was convicted of “violating international rules of war” and was executed by a firing squad on 03 April 1946. This occurred at Los Banos, Laguna in the Greater Manila Area. General Iwane Matsu—*Nanking*—was convicted of “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity”. He was hanged on 23 December 1948. This occurred at Sugamo Prison, Tokyo, Japan.

With the above in mind, it is fitting that the route of the Bataan Death March be shown below. The main route of the “trek” from Marileves and Bagac to San Fernando is shown with a number of cities in between. Then a railroad is shown where the P.O.W. participants were transported from San Fernando to Capas. Then the final “walk” to Camp O’Donnell is also shown.

The author wishes to thank the National Museum of the United Air Force for the inclusion of this map. Unfortunately, the city of departure is shown as Marileves. This is incorrect. It should read as Mariveles—this is the spelling that will be used from here on.

Fig. f. 3. (below) is found on the official website of the “National Museum of the United States Airforce”. There are a number of major areas—municipalities—that are not shown here, including Lubao, between Layac and Guagua.