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## **Bataan Diary of Major Achille C. Tisdelle** **By LTC (Ret) Thomas Morgan**

**INTRODUCTION:** The diary kept by Major Achille C. Tisdelle vividly reports the disintegration of American resistance in the Philippines in early 1942 until the surrender of Bataan and Corregidor on April 9, 1942.

This diary was an important document because most organizational records were buried, lost, or captured. Personal diaries kept by some US prisoners, filled with information about prison camp life, have limited value to historians. Major Tisdelle's diary is an exception because, as an aide to Major General King, he was in a position to record the details of how the US Forces on the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island surrendered to the Japanese. Although General King kept no diary of his own, he directed Tisdelle to keep one for him, so the diary may be considered General King's observations, of unique value to historians. Most of the entries were made at Tisdelle's discretion but from time to time General King asked Tisdelle to note a certain event or fact.

Tisdelle kept the diary during his several years as a Japanese POW, recording his observations in a little notebook that he managed to keep from the Japanese. When captured, he tied it between his legs beneath his groin. Later it was kept in different places when he got wind of Japanese "shake-down" inspections. Then he would put it in the pocket of a recently washed shirt hung on a clothes line in full view of the Japanese.

The period from 17 February to 13 April 1942 has been selected for this short account because it reflects the day-to-day account of the shelling and bombardment of Corregidor as well as the US retrograde actions on Bataan.

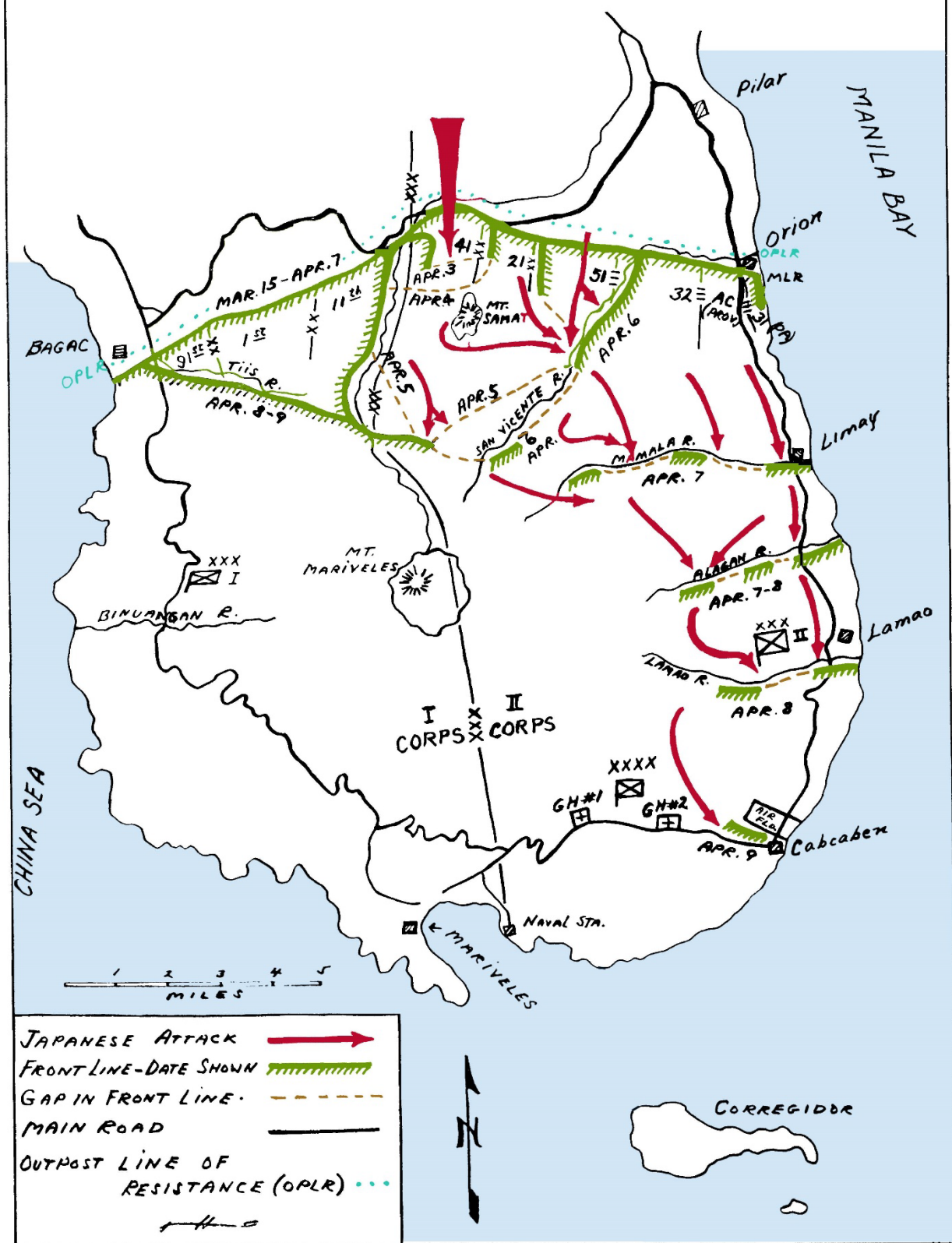
Tisdelle's entries vividly report the effects of short rations and inadequate medical supplies on the men in combat. From 21 March 1942, when General King assumed command of the US Luzon Forces, surrendered less than three weeks later, Tisdelle's diary records the Japanese offensive and rapid dissolution of American resistance.



**Achille C. Tisdelle, Major, U.S.A., 26th Cavalry,  
Philippine Scouts. Aide-de-Camp to Gen. Edward P.  
King on Bataan. P.O.W. in Japan, 1943-45.**

In early February 1942, with the Japanese shelling of Corregidor and bombing it from the air, the scarcity of food and drugs and the military situation justified the relocation of Philippine President Quezon and his entourage to the south. On 12 March, General MacArthur and his staff departed Corregidor for Australia.

# THE SECOND BATTLE OF BATAAN MARCH 15-APRIL 9, 1942



A Sketch of the Bataan Peninsula Battle Area.

Then, the War Department in Washington created a new command, the US Forces in the Philippines, and designated newly promoted Lieutenant General Wainwright Commander of US Forces in the Philippines. Major General King was then named Commander of the Luzon Force consisting of about 75,000 US and Filipino troops on Bataan.



MGen Edward P. King, Jr.

During March, the military situation on Bataan deteriorated rapidly. American and Filipino soldiers, lacking adequate supplies, ammunition and air support, received one-third rations, unbalanced and vitamin-deficient. (When they arrived on Bataan, they immediately went on half-rations and it became worse because they had to abandon supplies stored elsewhere on Luzon in anticipation of a fighting withdrawal while waiting for expected US Forces from the USA that never arrived.)

On 28<sup>th</sup> March, General Wainwright warned the Army Chief of Staff that unless more supplies reached the men on Bataan by April 15<sup>th</sup>, they would be starved into defeat. In response from Australia, General MacArthur devised a plan for the Bataan forces to fight their way out of the peninsula and possibly inflict a decisive blow against the enemy. Before the plan became operational, the Japanese attacked, outflanking the American lines on Bataan and making further organized resistance impossible.

On 8 April, General King threw everything he had into a general attack which had failed by late afternoon. General King's force of 75,000 men (11,000 Americans) were overwhelmed; and then malnutrition, malaria, and disease lowered combat efficiency by more than 75%. With no relief in sight, and no possibility to stop the Japanese, General King opened negotiations for surrender. He then directed that all weapons and equipment except motor vehicles and gasoline, be immediately destroyed. However, he kept enough vehicles and 300,000 gallons of gasoline to take the US and Filipino prisoners to POW camps.

Early on 9 April, a team of officers led by Colonel Williams and Major Hurt were sent forward by jeep to open surrender discussions. Detailed discussions with the Japanese continued, but the gasoline and vehicles for moving the American and Filipino POWs was used by the Japanese for other purposes and the infamous Bataan Death March ensued. Eventually the US/Filipino soldiers were sent to prison camps at O'Donnell and Cabanatuan on Luzon, and the horrors of the "Death March" were realized.

Major Tisdelle's diary describes the final days on Bataan and Corregidor, the constant Japanese bombings, and the inadequate supplies for the beleaguered US/ Filipino Forces. The remains of MacArthur's Far East Air Force (a few P-40 fighters and B-17 bombers) held off the Japanese for a little while until there were only two P-40 fighters left. Finally, by mid-March, General Wainwright's troops were being bombed and shelled around the clock and his army could not attack the Japanese anymore.

What follows are some of the things that Tisdelle recorded in his hidden diary as the US Forces and their Philippine allies desperately resisted the Japanese invaders.

"Submarine came into Bataan and Corregidor last night bringing some supplies but they were limited considering the size [of the Allied Forces.] Unless the allies can get command of the air and bring in an actual convoy, we are lost."

The volume and accuracy of 140mm and 240mm Japanese artillery shells along with constant, routine aerial bombardments was taking its toll of the troops on the Bataan Front causing signs of tense nerve fatigue among the men.

Radio Station KZRH in Manila, captured by invading Japanese forces, played the theme song “Ships That Never Come In” followed by popular American records to taunt American servicemen.

“A submarine came in after dark, with around 200 rounds of mechanical fuse 3-inch antiaircraft ammunition, and maybe we can shoot down a few Nip bombers that would be flying over with impunity out of the range of our antiquated powder train fuse 3-inch antiaircraft rounds. It’s hell to have nothing to work with.”

“The US Surgeon General reported that the Allied troops were only 55% combat effective from suffering the debilitation effects of malaria, dysentery, and general malnutrition.”

Many of Tisdelle’s entries began with the words, “routine bombing front and rear.” He commented that the food was very scarce, but he managed to get a peanut butter sandwich from one of his friends who had saved a big jar of real peanut butter. Occasional submarines came into the war zone and managed to take off a few wounded and non-combatants after dark to Australia. About President Roosevelt’s radio broadcast, Tisdelle wrote, “The President means to cheer us up. Actually, his talk tends to weaken morale. We are not interested in what the [war] production will be in 1943-44 and 45. All we want are two things, but we need them right now. Unless supplies arrive soon we will be finished by the latter part of March.”

The defenders on Bataan continued to fight back, but they only had two P-40s left. The little black balugas (negritos or black pigmies) General King used as scouts were successful against the Japs with their poisoned arrows and their adroit ambushes. On occasion, the US Forces were able to conduct artillery ambushes with 155mm guns against the Japanese, but the routine Japanese bombing and shelling was taking its toll.

On March 13, General MacArthur, his family, and some members of his staff departed Corregidor by PT Boat for Mindanao and then by B-17 bombers for Australia.

By March 15<sup>th</sup>, the 26<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and other units had finished the last of the horses. Monkeys and iguana were very scarce and allied fisherman were unable to catch enough fish in Manila Bay and the China Sea because of trigger-happy beach guards and enemy activity. Rice was the only food they had left.

In April 1942, the Japanese bombardments and Japanese reinforcements had resulted in the US defense lines being penetrated and the Japanese were poised to take Mount Samat, the major US observation post. The front lines were being beaten back daily and it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Luzon Force to offer effective resistance and it was no longer possible for the US Forces to attack. It was now a vain hope that troops from the USA would be able to arrive in time to keep the US Forces in the Philippines out of concentration camp.

## THE SURRENDER

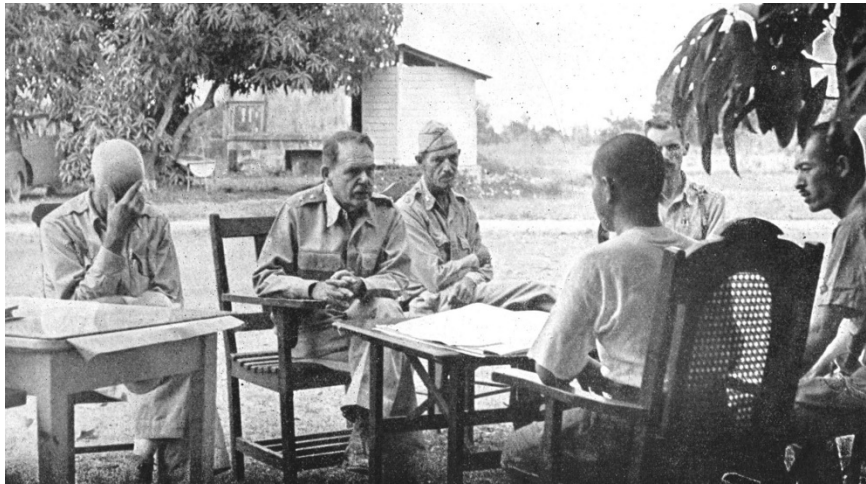
On 8 April, General King ordered all tanks, fighting vehicles, ammunition, and arms destroyed. He then went forward to contact the Japanese and tried to avert a massacre. The main ammunition dump was blown up and two earthquakes levelled the rest of the overhead cover. The next day a white flag was raised and a conference with the Japanese Commanding General Homma was set up. General King, Major Cothran, Colonel Collier, Major Hurt, and Major Tisdelle went forward in two jeeps that were bombed and strafed all the way. The party used white flags made from Tisdelle’s bed sheets to try to stop the bombardment. Arriving at 0800, a Japanese Colonel and two others sat down at an outside table with the surrendering group. A Japanese interpreter asked if General King was General Wainwright. When he learned that King was not Wainwright, the Japanese interpreter asked the purpose of the meeting and was told that the US was asking for an armistice. When General King tried to impose terms, the Japanese refused demanding an unconditional surrender.

When General King asked how the prisoners would be treated, he was told by the interpreter, “After all, we are not barbarians.” This was the best that General King could get from the Japanese and he then agreed to surrender. General Homma’s aide then asked for King’s saber. Since King had left his saber behind, the Japanese considered it an outrageous violation of ethics. Although angered, the Japanese agreed to accept the General’s pistol. All other officers also laid down their pistols, and the surrender party were taken captives.



Then, the surrender group was taken to Balanga and questioned further. There were 70,000 troops on Bataan that were surrendered, and the Japanese were disgruntled and angry when they learned that there were no artillery, nor ammunition to be taken as war booty. Then the Japanese started questioning about the Corregidor defenses. Not much came of that as General King said he could only answer questions about Bataan, but the rest of the surrendered party were questioned day and night for the next two days.

Three days later General King and a number of other US and Filipino generals were questioned at Camp O'Donnell. Tisdelle and several others were questioned again and he was forced to stand at attention for three hours and was repeatedly slapped for refusing to discuss the defenses of Corregidor. On 13 April Tisdelle and some other officers were marched to San Fernando and loaded 150 men each to sugar boxcars. It was so crowded that the men were unable to sit down and most of the men had dysentery. The doors of the boxcars were closed and in the stifling heat of the day taken from San Fernando to Capas and then marched to Camp O'Donnell.



**Discussing surrender terms with the Japanese representative, Col Nakayama. L-R Col Everett Williams, MGen Edward P. King, Jr, Maj Wade Cothran and Maj Achille Tisdelle. US Air Force Photo.**



**Left: Japanese soldiers celebrate the surrender of American and Philippine troops. US Air Force Photo.**



**Right: American and Philippine soldiers begin the death march. US Air Force Photo.**



## President's Report

The Friends Board has a full schedule for this year. At our January meeting we established primary goals for the year. These goals include replacing the signs in the vehicle park, reviewing the bylaws and updating them as required, recruiting new board members and expanding Friends membership. I also participated in a Center of Military History Museum Enterprise Symposium in late January and came away with additional objectives that we will strive to meet.

Replacing the signs in the vehicle park is part of a broader museum initiative to update the park and bring it into compliance with Center of Military History and the Fort Lewis Army Museum goals. The signs project specifically will include researching each vehicle, its characteristics, and its relationship with Fort Lewis. If possible, we will also try and capture stories from Soldiers who used that type of vehicle when it was in service. After we collect the information, we will then design and build new signs that are visually pleasing and durable, providing knowledge and connection for years to come.

The Friends bylaws have not been updated in over a decade. Since that time the Army has published new regulations regarding Private Organizations that support the museum enterprise. This revision will incorporate these regulatory changes, along with other minor modifications to bring the bylaws in line with current non-profit best practices. In addition to the bylaws review, the Center of Military History has directed that every museum update its Memorandum of Agreement this calendar year to bring it in line with current regulations. This project will be done in coordination with CMH legal personnel as well as the Friends and JBLM staff.

The last two goals, recruitment to the Friends and recruitment to the Board of the Friends, are essential to this organization's continued effectiveness. Right now, the Board needs a new board secretary and another board member to supervise Cannon Shop operations. If either of these interest you, or if you are aware of somebody who might be interested, please reach out to me or any other board member with contact information. Along with this, the Friends could use more members who can support the museum, either financially or with volunteer time. If you know people who might be interested in supporting this great organization, encourage them to sign up for membership.

It looks like it will be a busy year, but I am excited for the possibilities. Thank you for your continued support of the Friends!

**Edward Wood**

**The Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum was organized in 1973 to provide volunteers, monetary assistance, and encouragement for the Lewis Army Museum. The Friends organization believes that the story of our Soldiers, their families, and supporters must be preserved to educate and inspire future generations of Americans. The Friends is a non-profit organization—501 (c) (3)—dedicated to keeping the history of the United States Army alive by supporting the Lewis Army Museum and its programs. The Friends membership includes active duty and retired military personnel and their families, as well as patriotic citizens from all walks of life. Friends receive a quarterly newsletter, The Banner, a discount at the Cannon Shop, and the opportunity to participate in brunch meetings and other programs with both the museum and the Friends. Please help us to promote an appreciation and awareness of our priceless military heritage by becoming a Friend.**

**NOTE: Volunteers are currently needed to work in the Cannon Shop (gift shop). If you are interested, please give us a call at 253-967-4523 during business hours: Wednesday through Sunday from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm.**

### **2023 Friends Membership Fees**

#### **Annual:**

<b>Single</b>	<b>\$ 10</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>\$ 15</b>
<b>Sustaining</b>	<b>\$ 25</b>

#### **Life:**

<b>Life</b>	<b>\$100</b>
<b>Gold Life</b>	<b>\$500</b>

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