

**Harrodsburg Tank Battalion in the Philippines:
Survivors of the Bataan Death March**

Interview with Ralph Stein

March 24, 1961

Conducted by William Joseph Dennis

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REEL NO. 7

March 24, 1961

My name is Ralph Stein. I enlisted in the National Guard December 5th 1939; inducted into the regular service November 25th, 1940. Went to Fort Knox. Stayed there approximately nine months. Went to Louisiana for maneuvers. Spent approximately two weeks, three, on maneuvers, in Louisiana. Then we had orders we were going for an unknown mission. We were granted seven days furlough to come home and see our families. Returned back to Fort Stotsenburg, boarded a train; correction on that, Camp Polk, Louisiana. Went to San Francisco, California. From San Francisco, California, we got aboard ship and landed in the Philippine Islands, Manila Bay, November 20th, 1941. From there, we went to our base at Fort Stotsenburg.

At Fort Stotsenburg, our duty was to protect the airfield from our enemy from taking over. On December 8th, 1941, my tank group was lined along the airfield as guards. At 12:00 noon, we saw fifty-four bombers overhead. Some of the boys made the expression, "Look at our Navy." They flew over, turned, and came back and started bombing. They bombed for approximately half an hour. Their Jap fighters came in behind them and strafed. We sat there and watched them, watched all our planes burn. Quite a few of the men were wounded. After the raid was over, the only thing you could see was smoke and flames.

After they was through, we pulled back into a bivouac area which from that time on, we never saw the inside of a barracks. Then the war got hot up at Linginguk. Our tank force advanced to Linging. From there on, we saw active combat approximately from the beginning of the war 'til the end of the war. After everything had pulled back close to the end of the war, my tank platoon was put on beach defense defending the beach looking out over Corregidor. Every day we watched the Japanese come and go. They never made a landing at that time. Of a morning, you'd wake up, the men that wasn't sleeping, you'd look out and usually find anywhere

from five to a dozen bodies had washed in on the shore. You didn't know at any time who they might be.

Then after the 7th of April, I'd taken down with the malaria fever. Was sent to a field hospital, approximately five miles from Corregidor. I stayed there 'til after the surrender of Bataan. The Japanese came in, built a wire fence around our hospital, and set up field artillery around our hospital to shell Corregidor to make a landing on the fort over there. One night, the Japs was shelling Corregidor and Drum, a little island next to Corregidor, returned the fire. They hit our field hospital, wounded, killed a lot of our American soldiers. I stayed there for around two months. The Japanese came in and taken us to Manila, loaded us aboard a boxcar trains, at the point of bayonets, crowded us in like sheep or cattle. The ones that couldn't get in, they bayoneted them. Then they took us to Cabanatuan, the number one prison camp.

There I run up on a lot of the boys out of my outfit. I stayed there until 1943. I shipped out on a working detail, about five miles from Clark Field. There, we worked rice fields, built an airport by hand, with picks and shovels. I stayed there approximately eleven months. We'd get one day's rest a month. In October of 1944, they shipped 1200 of us out to Japan. On the way up in a convoy, we were attacked by American submarines just off the coast of Hong Kong, China. We spent seven days in and out of Hong Kong, China Bay. In the daytime, we pulled out and circled. At night, we pulled into the bay to keep the submarines from getting us. We got ready to leave there, pulled out of the bay, the Japanese fleet was hit. Three of the ships were sunk and the rest of us got through to Formosa.

We stayed in Formosa 'til the war got so hot. We stayed in Formosa and worked sugar mills 'til the war got so hot that they moved us from there to Kobi, Japan. We worked steel mills and stevedore jobs in Kobi, Japan until the American forces came in and bombed the steel mills and their docks. They burned the fence around our guard's house, they burned it to the ground.

They broke all the windows out of the building that all our prisoners were staying in. Then they moved us out into a little farm. Kept us there.

I'd like to make a speech on Cabanatuan Prison Camp. A lot of people have asked a lot of questions about it and I don't think they ever got much answer. I was to say one thing. The boys there in this particular camp I was in now have an individual marker. And I know that at the time they were buried, they was buried as high as twenty and twenty-five in a hole and nobody knew who was who. By the time I left Cabanatuan in 1943, we'd lost 2,644 American soldiers.

After we was moved out on the farm, we drained lakes, put in rice fields, made irrigation ditches. Then on August 16th, at work time, the officer in charge came in and said, "No work today." The 17th, the same thing happened. So the 18th, the commanding Japanese officer came in and said, "No more work. The war is over." So after we found out the war was over, some of the Japanese could speak English told us that if ever the American forces landed on the main island of Japan, they had orders to shoot every man they had in charge.

REEL NO. 8

March 24, 1961

After August the 18th, we got word to stay in our camp until the American forces came by and picked us up. We stayed in this prison camp until September 12th, 1945. We were picked up there, taken to Yokohama, boarded ship at Yokohama and were sent to the Philippine Islands, Manila, for replacement center.

There I stayed about three weeks, shipped back to California, stayed in the hospital for three or four days. From there, I shipped to Fletcher General Hospital, Cambridge, Ohio, where rehabilitation. Stayed there nine days. Came home for sixty days hospital leave. After my sixty days were up, I went back and was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Stayed five days and I had a

104 day furlough coming to me. I was granted my furlough, came home and stayed 104 days,
went back, discharged May 16, 1946.