

# St Bentley's Account

Tank Battle  
-9-

C Company  
transferred from  
D Co.

tank park, this machine gun set up with sand bags around the tank park itself, because we still had a lot of trucks and equipment in there and we had guards posted.

And this particular boy was actually hit in the tank park. (That was Brooks, right?) Yes, right. So he was our first casualty, in the battalion. Then the next action that we had until we went north to meet the Japanese at Lingayen, was merely standing repeated bombing at Clark Field. We thought that after the first bombing that if the planes did come back they certainly would bring in paratroopers because there wasn't anything left. Then, we, of course, moved north when the Japanese started the invasion, with the three letter companies remaining in the battalion taking up position at Lingayen. Of course, as soon as we arrived in the Philippines, Company "D" was transferred to the 194th Tank Battalion. Skip Rue, who was then commanding Company "D," was transferred to General Weaver's headquarters and a captain from Texas, by the name of Altman, became company commander of "D" company. And the officers that were with "D" Company prior to being transferred to 194th, were transferred within 194th to other companies of the 194th. And "D" Company had a full new complement of officers at that time.

Of course, the 194th went south to take up the position in the south and the invasion from the south of Luzon. And the 192nd went north to take care of the invasion up there. Of course, our training had all been offensive training. I can't remember any particular phase of our training at Fort Knox that we ever had defensive action; it was always offensive. The tanks were always considered offensive weapons. And we immediately found ourselves in the position of having to reverse and fight rear-guard action all the way back in the Bataan peninsula. The three companies of 192nd, of course, fanned out: "A" Company taking the western sector; "B" Company taking the central sector; and "C" Company taking the eastern sector, on the withdrawal. In the fight at Roserio was the particular time I was sent from Headquarters Company by Col. Wickord to join "C" Company and help Collins out. Sorensen, the Company commander, had returned to the rear and Collins was in command with two officers with very little experience.

Start

We were in support of the 26th Cavalry from Roserio back to a place called Umigan. We fought rear-guard action for them. We had numerous clashes with the Japanese. The 26th Cavalry were excellent soldiers, being Philippino scouts, being well-trained, quite good fighters. Quite often we had a few mix-ups in trying to understand the Philipinos. The main effort that we could put forth for them was in the elimination of machine gun nests or artillery emplacements. As they pointed them out, we would go in and eliminate them, and hold as they were crossing river or bridges, and then blow the bridges behind us. The area of San Quentin, we spread out on a wide front, sometimes as much as twenty-five miles with a single company, with no support to speak of, because they had all pulled back to a third position. And we were trying to hold until our third position could be established. Then we pulled back to San Jose; had limited action down to Bongabong and Cabu. Encountered the Japanese at Bongabong and then, at Cabu, we blew the bridge and waited for the Japanese to move in.

At this particular time, they felt that they needed to gain information as to how the Japanese made their attacks. We camouflaged on platoon of "C" Company, 192nd, just south of the river at Cabu and waited for

for the Japanese to cross. Our troops were then ten or twelve miles further south and the only thing we had in the vicinity was tanks. The fact that we had them very well camouflaged under houses and covered up with brush and in clumps of trees, the only thing we had to do was talk, shout, to make the Japanese think they had troops in front of them. And they made their attack when they crossed the river. They made their river crossing and we could hear them. We could hear tanks operating on the opposite side of the river. The infantry came first, and we sat through about three hours of infantry streaming by before they ever discovered that we were in there. In fact, I sat on the front of the tank and described their complete action by radio back to headquarters, where they were, at this particular time, getting a complete account of it.

They discovered us by a Japanese trying to walk through the brush pile I had standing around my tank. At this point, we were discovered and the only thing left was to sound the siren and attack. We had a skirmish in the field, a field just south of the river at for quite some time, and we withdrew back to the town of Cabanatuan. And the only road back was through Cabanatuan, and when we arrived at Cabanatuan, we found all types of Japanese equipment at Cabanatuan. We still had ammunition left but had to withdraw south to join up with the rest of the forces. But, in coming into Cabanatuan, we found artillery, plenty of other equipment, and we stayed in the town for two hours doing everything we could to chop up the Japanese unit and to halt them before they proceeded south. We pulled back then to the town of Gapan, picked up more ammunition, gasoline, pulled back into the vicinity of Baliuag. At Baliuag, we found ourselves confronted by a bridge that had not been blown by the engineers, a narrow-gauge railroad bridge. And we waited at Baliuag for the Japanese to advance south. At this particular point, we were given the orders to hold at all costs, as the troops from the south had to clear the Calumpit Bridge before we could withdraw, because it was the only route to Bataan.

We reached Baliuag the day before and had time to make a complete reconnaissance before the Japanese moved in on us. The morning of December 31, we made a reconnaissance run northward, north on a route on which we had retreated on, and encountered several Japanese patrols, so we knew that they were well on us. We knew that the bridge would be the only possible place that they would be able to cross, so we set up our defenses in view of the railroad bridge which was in a large rice paddy at the edge of the town of Baliuag. Early on the morning of the 31st, the Japanese started moving infantry across this railroad bridge. Shortly after, the Japanese engineers came in and put down planking down on the bridge to carry the tanks and started carrying tanks across the bridge some time before noon on the morning of the 31st.

By late afternoon, they had assembled a good number of tanks and artillery pieces in the field at the end of the bridge. They had the look-outs in the church steeple in the town. We had one platoon under the command of Marshall Kennedy to the southwest of the bridge; I had my platoon to the west -- Kennedy was southeast of the bridge. I had my platoon west of the bridge. Collins was south on the road leading out of Baliuag with one tank. Early that morning, we had sent Lt. Preston south after we had observed the Japanese trying to move across the bridge; we had him go south to find a bridge that he could

cross, to find some way that he could get back up on the opposite side of the river to surprise the Japanese. He left early that morning and became lost some way that day and never made it back. In fact, we had to look him up the following day to find out where he was. But he was still trying to find a crossing in the river when we found him.

Late in the afternoon, Major Morley came riding into Baliuag in a jeep. At this point, during the day, we had maintained radio silence so that we would not give our position away. We had all remained within the houses, under which we had our tanks parked. We had zeroed all our guns in on the collection of Jap tanks and artillery in the field some fifteen hundred yards in front of us. When Morley came in, the look-out in the church steeple was quite excited as to why he was there. And that the only thing for him to do was to get in his jeep and drive out of town just as though nothing had happened. And we would hold until we thought he was clear of the town and then we would attack because the Japanese in the steeple were bound to investigate what was going on in this house. We waited until we felt that he had sufficient time to clear. Then we opened fire on them from the houses.

Our first round of fire was concentrated on the collection of Japanese tanks at the end of the bridge out in the open field. We immediately pulled out from our position under the house and signaled Kennedy that we were going to drive the Japanese tanks in his direction. He held this position until tanks came within view of his platoon and, at this particular point, he entered the fight too. Our first burst of fire, the Japanese immediately scattered out over the field and headed for the town. Also, some of them went in the direction of Kennedy's platoon which was southeast of the town. We were chasing the tanks up and down the streets of the town, under buildings, through buildings. We were able to definitely establish that we had eight tanks out of action when we were ordered to withdraw. We had dealt considerable damage to the infantry unit, in fact put them in route over the bridge whence they came, left the town burning. The burning houses, of course, helped us in chasing the Jap tanks in the dark.

The battalion headquarters, of course, was tuned in on our radio frequency and was apparently having a picnic listening to the fight. Occasionally, they would come in and give us words of encouragement, like cheering on a football team. The only casualty from the encounter was a sprained ankle when one of the boys attempted to get off the tank in a hurry to tell his part of the story after the fight was over and we had withdrawn to a safe area. We were completely out of ammunition; we had completely out-manuevered, out-fought the Japanese tanks. The tanks we had were, of course, very fast, very maneuverable, and the 37 MM guns really packed a whollop. We only had armor-piercing ammunition with us, the only ammunition available for the old type 37 MM guns. And later on, we had the ordnance to take a projectile from the old 37 MM ammunition, reduce the amount of power in the shell, and reinsert the high-explosive projectile in the new type case and recrimp it. And we used these in the latter operations in Bataan.

We pulled out of Baliuag on order of General Weaver, told to pull back to the Calumpit bridge and hold until all the troops had cleared from the south. When we reached Calumpit Bridge, we found that the bridge had been dynamited by the retreating forces, but we were still able to go across the bridge. Just north of the Calumpit Bridge,

the area is all open rice paddies. The rice had been harvested in the area and was in large stacks around at different places. Since we felt the attack would probably come at night, we moved into position; we zeroed our guns in on these rice stacks so that the first round of ammunition from the 37 MM gun would be tracer ammunition that would go through a rice stack. This would give us a light to light up the area so that we could see the Japanese.

We spaced our tanks about a hundred yards apart or more and, since we were the only troops in the area, we kept up a constant chatter of shouting between tanks in order to make the Japanese know that there were troops up in front and to hold up their advance. They moved equipment across the bridge and troops from dusk until about midnight. At this particular point, they had advanced up within just a few yards of us. In fact, there were some houses directly in front of us, the Japanese had collected in back of these houses until we felt there just wasn't room for any more. We could see them setting up their mortar fire which they dropped right over in amongst our tanks and we had four men that picked up a few pieces of shrapnel in this first volley from the mortar. At this particular point, we opened fire by setting the rice stacks afire and gave them small-arm machine gunning.

Then later on, as we leveled off the troops out in front of us, we started using the 37's on equipment we could see further out. And in fact, we were down to the point where we were shooting a single Japanese with a single round of 37 MM ammunition. At about two o'clock in the morning, we were completely out of ammunition, even though we had started with more than our normal load of ammunition. And we pulled back, under orders, to San Fernando, where we refueled and filled up with ammunition. At this point, we were told to proceed to Porac, as there were troops clearing through San Fernando and the Japanese were pushing in the Porac area and were about to cut us off at San Fernando. We went over in the vicinity of Porac and there the Philippine army was having considerable trouble with the artillery fire. We were soon able to find out the exact position of an artillery battalion from a Philippine lieutenant who was returning with a scraggling platoon. After getting this location, we immediately pulled out to see what we could do with it.

When we arrived at the gun positions, we were able to get three of the guns, but the Japanese immediately pulled out and dispersed. We chased them over the area, putting out of action trucks and taking care of as much infantry in the area that we could. After this encounter, we were ordered to withdraw to the Hermosa Bridge. We held up at the Hermosa Bridge until the last troops cleared through, and Major Morley, at this point, told us it was time for us to back up over the bridge and blew the bridge. This halted the Japanese advance until a few days later when they attacked the first line.

The first line of defense included the area on each side of the mountain range, but it did not include a line of defense over the mountains. And the Japanese, as they are unpredictable, they made their penetration by coming over the mountains and had made a penetration far enough that we were not able to restore the line due to the terrain. We had to withdraw from this line to our second position. The second position held for several days before we were forced, by their penetration, to withdraw and form a third and final line. The third



line was well defended from one side of Bataan to the other. By this time, the troops were well coordinated and this line held for quite some time and possibly, would have held a great deal longer due to the fact of the shortage of rations. We ate the horses of the 26th Cavalry and then the mules of the 26th Cavalry and we thrashed the rice stacks that were in the area to get the rice. We were down to the point where we were only getting about eight hundred calories a day and, normally, one meal at the time of surrender.

The real penetration came in the area where we had the biggest losses from malaria. In fact, many thousands of Philipinos were taken with malaria and weren't able to hold their rifles up. Quinine gave out soon after we arrived in Bataan. The gasoline had dwindled to a place where all the gasoline was reserved for the tanks. We were actually, in the sector that I was in, carrying 105 ammunition. And with the addition of food, quinine and gasoline, we probably would have been able to hold out a great deal longer.

The 11th Division of the Philippine Army was in the sector of the Tuol River. The Japanese made a penetration up the Tuol River. Company "C" 192nd was sent in support of the 11th Division of the Philippine Army. We helped seal the pocket off and we had trapped, in this pocket, about ten or eleven thousand Japanese. It took us approximately a week or a week and a half to clean out the Japanese in this particular pocket. At the time we were cleaning out the Tuol pocket, the Japanese had landed a division of crack Jap marines on the Agaloma River or in the vicinity of it. They had pushed inward and cut off our supplies forward or make any movement of troops in that particular area for this was our one and only road. The area was fortified with an Air Force unit which were converted into infantry since we no longer had planes to fly. They were very much inexperienced.

Lt. John Hay of Company "C" 192nd Tank Battalion was sent in support of this converted Air Force unit. Immediately after arriving, John was confronted by the unit commander as to what they could do, as they were not infantry people, how would they handle the situation. Lt. Hay gave them information as to how they should handle the situation and developed a new technique, at this particular point, of putting six men behind each tank with a muset bag filled with hand-grenades. As he would move through the jungle with the tanks, he would force the Japanese into their foxholes and, as they passed over the foxholes, the men walking behind would leave each one a present of a hand-grenade. And they forced the Japanese right back to the sea with this particular maneuver. Hay could take care of the machine guns. He could take care of the anti-tank guns. He could take care of the artillery they had, but he couldn't get the Japanese out of the foxholes. So he came up with this method of using the muset bag and hand-grenade method of eliminating the Japanese from the foxholes. The campaign was very successful, and it took him about a week to eliminate this Japanese penetration on the west coast of Bataan. He was decorated twice with the Silver Star for his gallantry and being able to eliminate the units.

The other units of the company were called into the Agaloma River area. After, at the end of this mop-up operation, at this point we had our first tank loss in Company "C." The Japanese had mined the trails in the area and we lost on tank to a tank mine. Before we could get the tank out, push the Japanese back, and get the tank and drag it out of the

jungle, the Japanese had killed the men in the tank and had filled the tank full of dirt, which made it very difficult to drag it out of there. In fact, after the first few hours of combat, we knew that the men in the tank were no longer alive and it took us about three days afterward to actually get the tank out of there. We moved back at the break-through and to the 11th Division of the Philippine Army. And the break-through, "C" Company 194th was cut off. "C" Company 194th and led them back across into the western sector. At this point, we were given orders to destroy our equipment and surrender to the Japanese.

This we did and surrendered on April 11th to the Japanese on the west side of Bataan. They immediately told us to go to the Marvales where we did, and we were pushed out on the beach and kept there for two or three days and started the Death March to Camp O'Donnell. The men were grouped in groups of a hundred, a hundred fifty men, and with the complement of Japanese guards, started the march. The group I was with required eleven days to get to Camp O'Donnell, which could actually be accomplished on foot in a much shorter time, except the Japanese gave us the treatment of taking us out in the fields and having us sit in the sun, without our hats, crowded. Most of the movement was at night and the sitting in the fields in the day time was the treatment they preferred to give us.

In the eleven days, I only had seven canteens of water. And I think this would be pretty much average for the group I was with. We were given on ball of rice about the size of a baseball and this consisted of the food for eleven days. I had a very severe case of malaria while I was on the Death March, and three or four days of it I don't even remember. The fellows in the unit took turns carrying me along the road. In fact, one lieutenant in the 192nd Tank Battalion carried me for the better portion of the way. And I was able to reward him by carrying him the last few miles into the prison camp at Camp O'Donnell.

At Camp O'Donnell our major problem was water. We'd have to stand in the water line all day, sometimes two days, in order to get a canteen of water. The sanitation facilities were nil and immediately, disease started in. Our death rate started soaring almost immediately upon arrival at the prison camp. They moved us to Camp Cabanatuan shortly thereafter. Here again, our sanitation facilities were such that dysentery and malaria and broken heart took over. Our death rate at one time reached the rate of five hundred men a day. You would carry out the dead in the morning and that afternoon, and the next morning, the fellows that had carried the men the previous morning would be carried out to be buried. Of course, that death rate couldn't last very long. It would soon take us all.

The Japanese moved us out in small units of work details and this helped the situation a great deal. Although a great number of men did not stay at Camp Cabanatuan, many of us were able to get out to smaller groups. I was taken in a group down the the island of Mindanao, in a group of six hundred, where we were placed on an experimental farm of the Philippine Department of Agriculture. At this point, we joined with the ones that were captured in the southern forces of the Philippines. This brought our strength up to 2200 in the prison camp on Mindanao. The stay at Mindanao lasted 18 months. The main object the Japanese had there was to produce food for the Japanese army, to produce lumber, to

produce Manila hemp, and coffee. We had a large coffee plantation. We had plenty of timber. In fact, the acreage was 66,000 hectares; I believe a hectare is about 2.5 acres, isn't it? But, the rice area, or the area in which we raised rice, contained about 1600 acres. And we had under cultivation, we planted rice every day. We had this entire area of about 1600 acres in rice. Our sole purpose was to sabotage this rice any way we could.

First, as we harvested the rice, we would drop the heads of the rice in the mud and tramp on it. We'd get as little in the baskets as we could. Then, when we'd take it out to the thresher, we made sure the thresher blew as much out in the chaff stack as possible. When it was taken to the warehouse for the drying process, we would just forget to push it in when it rained and it would get musty and moldy. We lost as much of it as possible. A great deal of it would get as far as the rice polisher at the rice mills, to take the husks off and polish the rice. Here, we would stack the rice in large piles as much as twenty or thirty feet high. And when they'd get piled up next to the roof and the Japanese guard wasn't looking, they'd proceed to poke a hole in the roof so that it would leak in the middle of the pile. It would only take a few days and they'd bring the trucks in and move out the rice. They'd come to find that the entire stack was rotten even though the sacks looked good on the outside. In the eighteen months we were down there, they were only able to take a truck or a truck-load and a half of rice out of the place. So we were very successful in that.

Then the hemp plantation, we had to operate this. We made the hemp right from the banana tree. We had a detail to make the rope. And they would make the prettiest rope you ever saw and you could take a rope two inches in diameter and put six men on each end of it and pull it in two. They built the flaws in. We were so determined not to help the Japanese cause, even if we had to starve to death. We almost did starve ourselves to death as well as the Japanese garrison.

The health conditions on Mindanao were very good. We were able to get medications through the Red Cross which helped take care of the malaria, take care of the dysentery and so forth. The broken heart was the big killer at the very outset. In fact, a good number of the medical reports that the doctors kept, it was listed that the man died of a broken heart, of no particular disease.

As the war began to turn, and the Japanese were losing in the South, they decided to move us back north. They loaded us on boats and took us back to Luzon and back to Camp Cabanatuan. We'd only been there a very short time when they started making movement north to Japan, taking all the able-bodied out. Shortly after I reached Cabanatuan, I had dysentery for the first time and was, of course, confined in the isolation area in the camp. As far as the Japanese were concerned, you'd just as well have leprosy as dysentery, and actually wouldn't come near the area. That was one area in the camp that they wouldn't personally count the number of men in. They'd just come to the fence and say, 'How many men do you have?' and you'd say, 'I've got a hundred.' And they'd say, 'Well, thank you,' and walk off.' So the able-bodied were taken to Japan, and there were over six hundred of us left in Camp Cabanatuan when the invasion came on Luzon and the group was liberated by the ranger battalion. That about sums up the campaign, except a major portion of the fellows that were liberated at the time I was those to remain in the theater.

In fact, there were so many of us ~~that~~ chose to remain over there that they decided to send us all home. So we all came back.

Out of the group that returned, all of them I've come in contact with, I usually make the one point of trying to see how they feel. There is a lot of bitterness and remorse on the part of many of them. Of course, many of them are badly disabled. I was very lucky to come out in good physical condition. I know the Japanese did what they were told to do. Many times, I had the occasion to have a single Japanese guard off by himself and come to find out that he's very much human. It's only when you put two of them together ~~that~~ they become little Tojos. I think that the encounter that we had with the prison camp would be well for most people to know from the point of survival. What do men do, because in my army training, the one thing that never came about or no one ever spoke of, how are you to survive if you get into certain conditions. This is something the army has started, of course, survival courses. At this particular time, I would like to see survival courses for the general public because it's quite an art to learn to live out of a tin can. I don't know if there's anything else you want to inject or find out about.