

Horrors of Bataan linger for survivors from Harrodsburg World War II force



DICK BURDETTE

HERALD-LEADER
COLUMNIST

HARRODSBURG — During the commemoration earlier this month of the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, **Takashi Hiraoka**, Hiroshima's current mayor, said what a lot of American World War II veterans already were thinking. Japan, he said, should see itself not only as victim, but as aggressor; as a country that also should acknowledge the widespread atrocities it committed.

He might have added:

"And for details, ask the folks in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, about Bataan."

Bataan.

If it's a name an embarrassing number of younger Americans don't even recognize — and it is — it's also one that many old

Tank monument

There is a World War II tank honoring veterans of the 192nd Light Tank Battalion in Harrodsburg. Take U.S. 60 west to the Blue Grass Parkway. Exit the parkway at the Ky. 127 exit and go south to Harrodsburg. As you enter town, the tank is on the left.

enough to remember still pronounce improperly as buh-TAN.

But by any name, Bataan (pronounced buh-TAWN) — a tank-fortified, jungled, 14-by 50-mile Philippine peninsula — became

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BURDETTE: Bataan claimed 29 Harrodsburg soldiers

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one of the most storied places in U.S. military history.

And one of the most ghastly.

On Dec. 10, 1941, three days after bombing Pearl Harbor, the Japanese invaded the Philippines. Their timetable: conquest in three or four weeks. By capturing Manila Bay quickly, they could use it as a vital supply and stopover port en route to attack unprepared Australia and New Zealand. But to take Manila Bay, they first had to dispose of those defending its entrance at Bataan.

Instead of quick defeat, more than 75,000 badly outnumbered U.S. and Filipino troops doggedly held onto Bataan for five months. Today, the site of the battle is a national shrine in the Philippines.

Starving, ragged, decimated by death and disease, cut off without air cover, naval support, supplies or reinforcements, they called themselves "The Battling Bastards of Bataan — Got no momma, no poppa, no Uncle Sam. No aunts, no uncles, no nephews, no nieces. No pills, no planes, no artillery pieces. "... And nobody gives a damn."

Then came the Washington-ordered surrender.

Then things really got bad.

Clubbed, beaten, bayoneted, robbed of their personal possessions, denied adequate food and water, used as a human shield to prevent artillery from nearby Fort Drum from destroying Japanese

heavy equipment moving south, they were forced to march north five days and nights — 65 agonizing, dusty miles on what became known as "The Bataan Death March."

Thousands died. Many survived only to suffocate while being transported like cattle in hot metal boxcars with the doors shut. Still others died aboard unmarked prison ships sunk en route to Japan — by U.S. bombs and torpedoes. One ship carried 1,600 prisoners; only 300 reached Japan.

Others, surviving on fewer than 570 calories a day, died in Japanese prison labor camps. All totaled, only 37 of the 66 members of Harrodsburg's Company D, 192nd Light Tank Battalion made it home.

One was **Logan Sampson**.

Sampson, who lives south of here on Danville Road, recalls the major marching directly behind him. The major, Sampson said, managed to struggle to his feet the first time he fell. Second time, too. But the third time, a Japanese guard carrying a bayoneted rifle shot him to death.

Sampson, his voice rising anew with outrage, tells of being ordered to pick up the bodies of naked Americans and pitch them into a mass grave.

If anyone was a sure candidate not to survive it was **Cecil VanDiver**. Just before the surrender, he had undergone an appendectomy. He was forced to march anyway.

But VanDiver did survive.

Arch Rue survived the march and twice swam to safety after unmarked prison ships he was aboard were sunk. He later died of pneumonia in a prison camp.

His brother, **Edwin "Skip" Rue**, who now lives in Lexington and remained in a prison labor camp until the war ended, still has difficulty talking about his experiences on Bataan. Others, such as **Earl Fowler**, decline to talk about it at all.

But listen to the soft-spoken Rue talk about the horror, the meaning of Bataan, and you can see him bristle at the word "surrender."

"Hell, we didn't surrender. That was the high command's decision."

General of the Armies **Douglas MacArthur** said it another way:

"No army in history more thoroughly accomplished its mission. Let no man henceforth speak of it other than a magnificent victory."

But perhaps **Lt. Henry G. Lee**, quoted in **Louis Morton's** book *The Fall of the Philippines*, best described the true significance of Bataan — that it strikes a universal chord in anyone facing overwhelming adversity:

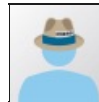
"If I endure, I must go on enduring

"And my reward for bearing pain is pain

"Yet, though the thrill, the zest, the hope are gone

"Something within me keeps me fighting on."

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