



The Mindanao Death March: Establishing a Historical Fact through Online Research

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The purpose of this paper is to bring to the fore the rather untold story of the Death March in Mindanao – one of the only two death marches recognized in the Tokyo war crime trials as evidence of the inhuman treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs) during the World War II. On the 4th of July 1942, surrendered Filipino and American soldiers in Mindanao were made to march on a rocky dirt road and under the blazing tropical sun, from Camp Keithley in Dansalan to Iligan in Lanao – a distance of about thirty-six (36) kilometres for the purpose of joining them with the rest of the Mindanao POWs at Camp Casisang, Malaybalay, Bukidnon. Transport trucks, although available, were denied the POWs. Without food and water, one by one the soldiers fell down due to exhaustion. Those who fell were shot in the forehead to prevent them from joining the guerrillas in the event they recover. But the story did not end there. The challenge of establishing said historical fact is very difficult because of utter lack of records. It is, however, fortunate that some survivors of the ordeal left recorded interviews and memoirs, which are now available online. But then again, historians are faced with the challenge of validating and admitting these online sources as primary sources of history. Thus, this paper undertakes this task.

Key words: *Online primary sources, world war II, death march in Mindanao, Philippines.*

Introduction

During World War II, there were two (2) death marches that took place in the Philippines. Both were presented at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials as evidence of the inhuman treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). These were the “Bataan Death March” and the “Iligan Death March.” The Bataan Death March, which took place in April 1942, was an arduous 65-mile



march from Mariveles, Bataan to San Fernando, Pampanga. The Mindanao Death March, sometimes called the Iligan Death March or Dansalan Death March, happened on July 4, 1942. It was a 25-mile walk under the scourging heat of the tropical sun from Dansalan (now Marawi), Lanao del Sur to Iligan, Lanao del Norte.

While the Bataan Death March is a widely known indignity to WWII POWs, there seemed to be only scanty accounts of the Iligan Death March. It is fortunate that at least four (4) of the American POWs who participated in the said death march eventually survived the gruesome war and narrated their ordeals before they died. They were: Victor L. Mapes, Herbert L. Zincke, Richard P. Beck and Frederick M. Fullerton, Jr. These narratives, however, can only be found online. After validating these sources, it is now possible to retell the story of the Mindanao Death March for present and future generations. Thus, this paper undertakes that task.

Notes on the Sources

Although the Iligan Death March took place in Mindanao, the majority of the primary sources may only be found overseas. Thus, a few years back, it will take a persistent historian, with means, to access records from overseas libraries and archives to establish historical fact. It indeed is fortunate that in the recent years, some survivors of the World War II left interview video records, memoirs and photographs, which were posted online by the overseas libraries and archives.

Historians, before considering the expositions of a source, examine its intrinsic and extrinsic validity. The source should be historically verifiable in form and substance. Failure to pass these tests may result in the rejection of a document, record, narrative, interview and even memoir as evidence for the establishment of a historical fact. This is also true to sources found online. The four primary sources used in this work are primarily personal narratives of the survivors of the event. Two were published online, that of Richard P. Beck and Frederick M. Fullerton, Jr. The other two are published memoirs, that of Victor L. Mapes and Herbert L. Zincke. The online sources, after triangulation, were verified and accepted as records for purposes of reconstructing the historical fact - the Mindanao Death March.

The first set of primary sources are the video interview and memoir of Frederick M. Fullerton, Jr. He was a corporal in the US Army assigned at Philippine Ordnance Depot, 75th Ordnance Company. He survived the Iligan Death March, which he called “Dansalan Death March.” He was interviewed by Holly Edwards of the Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress on September 15, 2003 at the Tyler Junior College, Tyler, Texas. He also wrote an unpublished account on his World War II ordeals entitled “Memoir of Frederick Marion Fullerton, Prisoner of War of the Japanese,



May 27, 1942 - September 2, 1945.” These sources can be accessed online and cited as: Frederick Marion Fullerton, Jr. Collection (AFC/2001/001/15785), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. The said memoir details the events before, during and after the 1942 death march.

The second set of primary sources are the video interviews of Richard P. Beck. He was a Master Sergeant of the 14th Bomb Group of the US Army Air Corps. He surrendered in 1942 and was held a captive in several Japanese prison camps days before being rescued by the Rangers from Camp Cabanatuan in 1945. He survived the Iligan Death March. He was interviewed by Janson Cox of the South Carolina Cotton Museum, Inc. where he narrated his ordeal. The videos of the interviews may be accessed online and cited as: Richard P. Beck Collection (AFC/2001/001/54751), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

The third primary source is a published memoir of Victor L. Mapes. He was enlisted in the 14th Bomb Group of the US Army Air Corps in 1939 and served until his retirement in 1959. Upon his surrender at Camp Keithley in Dansalan in 1942, he served as the Camp’s cook, thus, the title of his memoir is “The butchers, the baker: The World War II memoir of a United States Army Air Corps soldier captured by the Japanese in the Philippines.” It cannot be accessed online. A copy may be found at The Filipinas Heritage Library (FHL), Ayala Museum, Makati City. On the Iligan Death March, Mapes devoted a detailed chapter on the event, which he called the “Mindanao Death March.” Mapes’ work verifies the online accounts on the death march by Beck and Fullerton, Jr.

The last primary source is the published memoir of Herbert L. Zincke. At 18, Zincke enlisted in the 14th Bomb Group of the US Army Air Corps. He was a survivor of the Death March and even helped Beck survived the ordeal. He wrote “Mitsui Madhouse,” a memoir based on a diary he wrote during the war. Zincke’s notes on the Mindanao Death March is very similar in substance with that of Mapes. Nevertheless, it may also be used to validate the sources found online.

The identified authors were confirmed survivors of the WWII Mindanao Death March. Although they revealed their ordeals long after the war was over, their narratives were gathered and kept by the United States Library of Congress for posterity. The intended audiences include future researchers, filmmakers, storytellers and other stakeholders. All of the authors confirmed the existence of the Mindanao Death March and its gory details. All of the sources were assessed to be relevant, reliable and accurate. Thus, there is the following historical narrative.



Objective

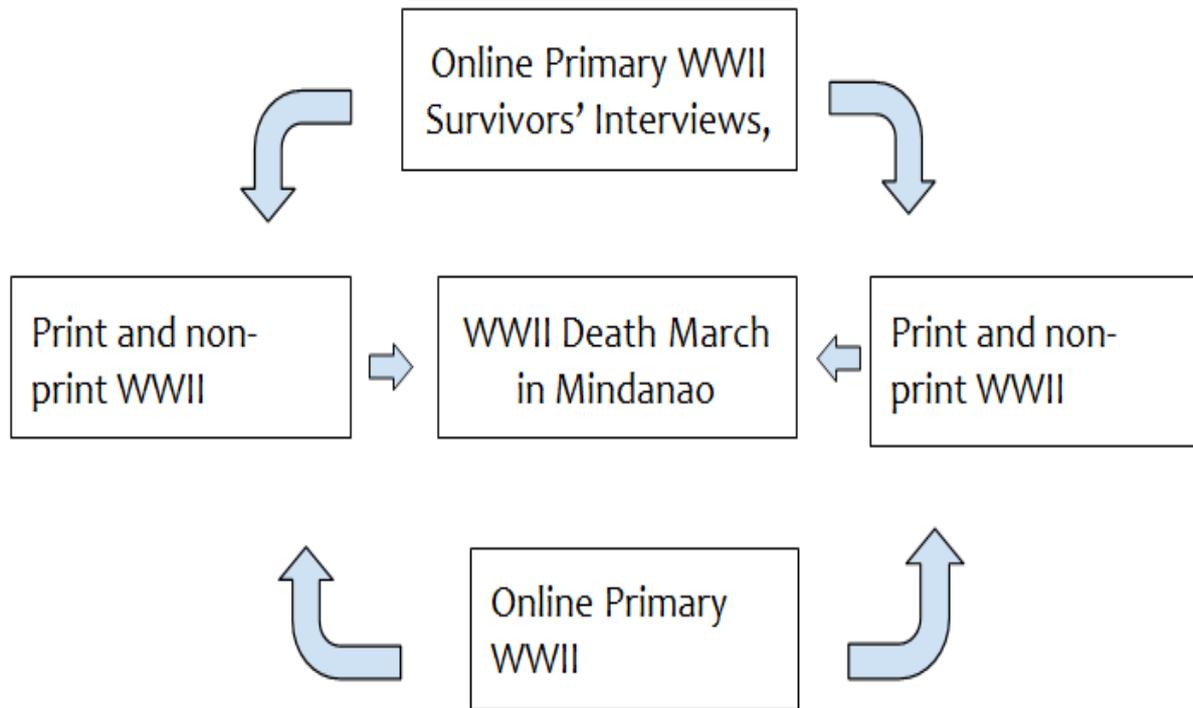
The objective of this study is to establish a historical fact - the Death March in Mindanao. It is hoped that this paper spurs interests among historians and researchers to re-examine Mindanao's role during World War II to better appreciate it and to create more space for Mindanao in Philippine History textbooks.

Methodology and the Conceptual Framework

As the study involved a historical problem or a need to establish a historical fact, the methodology used is historical approach and triangulation. Data about the Death March in Mindanao was mined from online records, memoirs, statements, and testimonies, as well as printed books triangulated with contemporaneous print and non-print sources.

The data collection includes: (1) mining online libraries, archives and other sites for relevant public documents, statements, testimonies, edicts, decrees, memoirs, books, documentaries, and movies among others; (2) combing Philippine libraries and archives for published WWII books authored by some survivors; and (3) looking into the secondary sources - the published works of historians and scholars found in Philippine libraries.

The collected records and documents were evaluated in regards to their extrinsic and intrinsic validity. They were cross-validated with existing print and non-print sources through triangulation. They were then classified as primary and secondary sources. The verified primary sources were given primacy over secondary sources. Secondary sources were consulted only when the primary sources were ambiguous or contradictory.



The conceptual framework shows how online primary WWII documents, decrees, survivors' memoirs, interviews, documentaries, and movies, were triangulated through cross verification with print and non-print sources to establish a historical event known as the Mindanao Death March.

Results and Discussion

A. *The Tokyo War Trials and the Iligan Death March*

On January 19, 1946, the victorious Allied powers—France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America— established the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in Tokyo, Japan. The IMTFE had the jurisdiction to try individuals for Crimes Against Peace, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity that were committed during the World War II. The subsequent trials held were collectively known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trials (Richard, 1946).

The IMTFE was authorized to try and punish Far Eastern war criminals. It presided over the prosecution of nine (9) senior Japanese political leaders and eighteen (18) military leaders who were considered to be the prime movers of World War II atrocities. Eventually, the tribunal found all the defendants guilty and sentenced them to punishments ranging from seven-year imprisonment to death. Two of them died during the trial. The Japanese Emperor Hirohito and the members of the imperial family were not indicted. The Emperor was permitted to retain his royal position, although on a diminished status.



General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, as authorized by the IMTFE Charter, appointed judges to the IMTFE from the countries which signed Japan's instrument of surrender: Australia, Canada, China, France, India, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each of these countries also sent a prosecution team (Bassiouni, 1999).

The Tokyo War Crimes Trials were held between May 1946 to November 1948. The Philippine Prosecution Team presented and proved before the IMTFE at least sixteen (16) incidents of indignities, torture and barbarities committed against the Filipino and Foreign Prisoners of Wars (POWs) and civilians. These incidents were as follows:

1. The Bataan Death March
2. Bataan General Hospitals 1 and 2
3. Camp O' Donnell
4. Iloilo Camp
5. Corregidor Fortress
- 6. Iligan Death March**
7. Cabanatuan Camp
8. Gapan Camp
9. Bilibid Prison
10. Davao Penal Colony
11. Nichols Field
12. Tayabas Road Detail
13. Puerto Princesa
14. Bombing of Oryoku Maru
15. Execution of Two American Fliers
16. Los Baños

Each of these incidents is a bundle of gruesome stories and tales of human suffering. The Bataan Death March, notorious as it was, overshadowed all the other incidents in history books. In fact, of the 16 incidents, only the Bataan Death March appeared in history textbooks. All the others remained unknown.

Because the evidence against the accused were overwhelmingly strong, the Iligan Death March, along with others, were only summarily presented and proven during Tokyo War Crimes Trials. The trial records summarized the incident as follows:

“A milder counterpart of the Bataan Death March happened on July 4, 1942, in Lanao. On that day, American and Filipino forces were forced to march from Keithley to Iligan, Lanao,



a distance of about thirty-six kilometers with Malaybalay as their destination. During the march a prisoner was sick and unable to keep pace with the rest was shot. No food or water was given the prisoners. One died during the march.” (POW Summation)

B. Guests of the Emperor

The Japanese landed in the Southern part of Mindanao, in Parang, Maguindanao. From there, they began advancing northwards to the Province of Lanao. The Philippine Troops and Moros formed the Bolo Battalion under General Guy Fort. The plan was to defend Ganassi, Bacolod Grande on the southern end of Lake Lanao and stop the advancing Japanese troops. Gen. Fort planned for guerrilla warfare.

However, on May 6, 1942, Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright IV, the Allied commander in the Philippines, surrendered the Filipino and American Forces on Bataan and Corregidor. Gen. Homma threatened to kill the American surrenderees from Bataan and Corregidor unless all American and Filipino forces surrendered. Subsequently, on May 10, 1942, Gen. Wainwright ordered Gen. William Sharp to surrender all his US and Filipino troops in Mindanao. He complied (Chen, 2018).

At Bubong, Lanao del Sur, a large number of Filipino troops escaped to the hills. The Americans were ordered not to desert or face court martial. On May 26, 1942, soldiers walked 6 miles from Bubong to Dansalan, where they surrendered their arms. The Japanese Commanding Officer declared them to be “guests of the emperor” and not “prisoners of war.” Soon, the surrenderees realized it was just a lip service. There were 46 Americans and some 300 Filipinos under General Fort who surrendered.

While awaiting instructions from Gen. Homma, the POWs were billeted in an abandoned building once used as a mint for producing provincial money. Soon, the Japanese soldiers guarding the POWs were replaced with extremely young men. These spirited new guards forced the prisoners to count in Japanese. Those who were too slow in learning Japanese numbers or those who committed mistakes in counting received a hard slap on each cheek.

Beginning in June 10, 1942, the young Japanese guards invaded the POW sleeping quarters. During these nightly invasions, the Japanese looted the POWs of their belongings, beat and abused them physically. These incidents resulted in hushed talks about escaping. To avert possible escape, the Japanese guards adapted the Honour System, that is, for every soldier who escaped, their officers will be executed.

On July 1, 1942, Cpl. William Knortz, Pvt. Robert Ball, Seamen Jas S. Smith and William Johnson escaped. Under the Honour System, Col. Robert Hale Vesey, Captain A.H. Price and



Sgt. John L. Chandler paid the price. When asked about the whereabouts of the above-mentioned officers, the Japanese interpreter only remarked: “They died like soldiers.” The Japanese were very angry with the escape. As punishment, all POWs were required to walk instead of riding to Iligan (Zincke, 2003).

C. The Iligan Death March

At 8:00 A.M., July 4, 1942, the POWs lined up for the march at Dansalan (now Marawi), Lanao. The Americans were arranged by four abreast and were strung together, in columns, by a gauge wire through their belts. The Filipino POWs, though unwired, were to walk barefooted. As it was the fourth of July, the march was mockingly dubbed the “Independence Day March.”

A truckload of Japanese soldiers with a mounted machine gun followed the prisoners, ready to shoot anybody who tried to escape. As the day progressed, the midday tropical sun became unbearable.

Without food and water, one by one the soldiers fell down due to exhaustion. Those who fell were left behind after they were first shot at the forehead to prevent them from joining the guerrillas in case they recover (Mapes, 2000).

D. The Death of Childress/Kildritch

Mr. Childress, or in other documents - Kildritch, was an American civilian who owned a coconut plantation in Mindanao. Fullerton, Jr. shared that Childress married a Filipino and settled in Pagadian, Zamboanga (Fullerton). When the Japanese landed at Parang, Southern Mindanao, he volunteered for duty. During a skirmish at Ganassi, Lanao, Childress was separated from his unit and wandered for days in the jungles around Lake Lanao. While asleep on the side of a trail, a Maranao attacked him, wounding him on the left side of his body. The Maranao took his rifle, and left him unconscious (Zincke, 2003).

Lt. Ali, the leader of the Maranao guerrilla battalion, found the unconscious Childress and brought him to Camp Keithley, a US Military Reservation in Marawi. At that time, the camp was already under the control of the Japanese Imperial Army. Lt. Ali had to intoxicate the Japanese guards for Childress to be slipped in. Lt. Ali believed that the patient would have better care with the camp’s medical facilities and supplies and by Major Luther Heidger, a US military surgeon (Zincke, 2003).

Indeed, Childress improved under Major Heidger’s care. However, he was not fit enough for a long walk. During the “Independence Day” march, the throng had not gone far when Childress collapsed on the road. He had to be carried by three other prisoners wired with him.



They were soon exhausted and called Col. Mitchell for intervention. Col. Mitchell descended from the truck and explained the situation to Lt. Osawa, who was in charge of the march. But Lt. Osawa angrily replied, “This march is my responsibility.” He ordered Col. Mitchell to get back in the truck.

A Japanese guard unhooked Childress from the throng and brought him to the rear. Col. Mitchell hoped that Childress would be placed on the truck. Instead, the Japanese guard led him some 75 yards behind the column and into bush and a shot was heard. When the guard came back into sight, Lt. Osawa screamed, ordering him to make sure Childress was dead. The guard returned to the bushes, leaned over, fired another shot and re-joined the column. The march became a death march (Zincke, 2003).

E. The Psychological Trauma of Richard P. Beck

Richard P. Beck was one of the lucky survivors of the war. He maneuvered into a safe spot as General Fort's orderly while a prisoner at Camp Keithley. During the march, Herbert Zincke, a sturdy sergeant, was tied next to him. It was obvious to everyone that without help, Beck would not have made it through the day (Mapes, 2000).

The march became traumatic for Beck as he saw people getting executed without reason. Beck felt like he was the next to die as he was hardly moving. Zincke slipped his arm around Beck's shoulder and helped him along. “Had it not been for him,” Beck later recalled, “I would not have made it through the march.” (Richard)

F. The Death of Major Jay J. Navin, Commanding Officer, 84th Regiment

Lt. Col. Barnes, the medical officer of the 81st Division, loaded himself down with beddings, canned goods and medical books. This load slowed down not only him but also his whole file. His companions, Lt. Robert Pratt and Major Jay J. Navin, had to pull like hell to keep up with the rest of the column. The other prisoners tried to convince Barnes to throw off the yoke before he, or his comrades get killed, but to no avail.

The Japanese guards allowed a ten-minute rest for every hour of walk. But the rough and rocky country road, the burden of pulling loaded comrades and the mercilessly blazing tropical sun have taken its toll. After two hours of walking, Major Jay J. Navin, the Commanding Officer of the 84th Philippine Regiment, was in bad shape. Suffering from exhaustion, Major Navin fell to the ground.

Victor L. Mapes offered him pineapple juice and tried to get him on his feet. It did not help. Major Navin asked for water. Zincke handed him a canteen but insisted that Navin only drink



a little. Instead, Navin turned the canteen upside down and drank half of it before he could be stopped. He became delirious and was gasping for breath. His comrades laid him on the ground, opened his shirt, and called Major Heidger, the surgeon. A Japanese guard stopped Major Heidger, walked over and looked at the unconscious Navin. He pulled him off the road by his collar and shot him in the forehead. Then, the death march continued (Zincke, 2003).

G. The Death of the Filipino Soldiers

The Filipino soldiers, being resilient people, started the march at a lively pace. They weren't tied together. But unlike their American counterparts who wore military shoes, they walked barefooted. A few hours into the walk, the hot rocky dirt road started to burn their feet, which was so unbearable that some of them started crawling. One was left behind. The Japanese guard, tired of prodding him to walk, bayoneted him to death. As the march continued, The Japanese killed four more Filipinos, including a Medical Officer with a Red Cross band on his arm. By the end of the day, Fullerton, Jr. estimated some ten or twelve Filipino soldiers were killed by bayoneting or shooting (Fullerton).

H. At St. Michael's Academy, Iligan

By mid-afternoon, when the throng was about 3 kilometres from Iligan, the gauge tie was removed. They arrived in Iligan at around 7:00 P.M. in the evening. All were tired, thirsty, hungry and were at the point of complete exhaustion (Fullerton).

The POWs, both Filipinos and Americans, were housed in a rickety two-storey school building of St. Michael's Academy, located across the St. Michael's Church in Iligan. The Filipino POWs occupied the first floor while the Americans were locked at the second floor. Physically drained by the long walk, the Americans struggled their way up the stairs. They were so cramped in the small room that when they tried to sit down, their legs became entangled. The prisoners were irritable. They growled at each other like wild animals with the slightest provocation. It was only when the Japanese realized that their prisoners were manageable that they were properly hydrated and allowed to obtain water from the nearby well (Mapes, 2000).

I. The Death of Lt. Robert Pratt, Finance Officer, 81st Division

During the march, Lt. Robert Pratt, a young and conscientious Finance Officer of the 81st Division, was positioned in front of Lt. Col. Barnes, the Medical Officer. The fat Lt. Col. Barnes couldn't keep up with the pace of the throng. He was further burdened by his baggage, which he refused to let go. As a result, Lt. Pratt was forced to pull him all the way to Iligan. This left him completely exhausted and dehydrated by the end of the walk.



That night, Lt. Pratt was violently vomiting. Some of his comrades tried to comfort him by giving him whatever they had - water, juices, etc. The physicians in the group, Lt. Col. Barnes and Major Heidger, said there was nothing they could do for him. He was delirious and he passed out. Before dawn, Pratt died in the arms of his comrade, Victor L. Mapes, with a faraway look in his eyes. He was buried in a shallow grave at a nearby Catholic Cemetery. Atop his grave, they placed a wooden cross with Lt. Pratt's dog tags (Mapes, 2000).

J. Off to Camp Casisang, Malaybalay, Bukidnon

The POWs stayed in Iligan for two (2) days before they were ferried away to Cagayan de Oro. The Japanese, every now and then, confiscated the POWs' money, valuables, gold rings, wristwatches, etc. on the pretext that the POWs had to purchase their own food or transportation. Afraid of another dreaded march, the POWs gave whatever they had of value to the Japanese. On July 6, 1942, the POWs boarded a canon boat and sailed a hundred miles east along the shore of Mindanao to Cagayan de Oro, a town in Northern Mindanao. From there, trucks took them to Camp Casisang, Malaybalay, Bukidnon where they joined other POWs from Mindanao (Mapes, 2000).

Conclusion

The story of the Mindanao Death March, through all these years, remained relatively unknown. This speck of Philippine History was neither available nor accessible to the Filipino reading public until online primary sources became available. Triangulating and verifying these online primary sources with other available printed and non-print sources made possible the admissibility of these sources as historical records to be used as evidence for the writing of this historic fact - the Mindanao Death March.

As shown, it was a tragic story of how the American and Filipino POWs experienced undue brutalities and indignities during the WWII in Mindanao. They surrendered and thus, under the existing laws of war, they expected civil treatment from the Japanese victors. It is now time to rewrite the Philippine History textbooks and create more space for the participation of Mindanao in WWII.



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Appendix 1

The Lanao Surrenderees

The following are the American Military Personnel who surrendered in Lanao area. The list was culled from writings of the survivors Victor L. Mapes, Herbert L. Zincke, Richard P. Beck and Frederick M. Fullerton, Jr.

A. Army Air Corps

From 14th, 19th and 30th Bomb Squadrons

1. Major Luther C. Heidger, Medical, 14th - Died on the Shinyo Maru, September 7, 1942.
2. Lt. John Doe, 14th
3. Robert Ball, Fifth Air Base - Joined guerillas, survived.
4. Richard P. Beck, 14th - Survived.
5. Edmund Casey, 14th
6. Cawthorne, 19th Medic
7. Sgt. John L. Chandler, 14th - Executed at Dansalan, Lanao, July 3, 1942.
8. John F. Clark, 30th - Survived.
9. Jerry L. Coty - 14th
10. Vergil E. Haifley, 14th
11. William A. Knortz, 14th - Joined guerillas, killed in action, September 11, 1943.
12. Koontz, 19th Medic
13. McLaughlin, Medic
14. Victor L. Mapes, 14th - Survived.
15. Sgt. James A. Palmer, 14th - Died on the Shinyo Maru, September 7, 1942.
16. Peterson, 30th
17. James Price, 19th
18. Thomas Renick, Jr., 14th
19. Herbert L. Zincke, 14th - Transferred to Japan, survived.

B. Navy

20. Lt. Commander Strong
21. David Goodman, PT Squadron Radioman Boat 34
22. William H. Johnson - escaped and joined guerrillas, survived.
23. James S. Smith - escaped and joined guerrillas.



81st Division, Philippine Army

Headquarters

24. Brig. Gen. Guy O. Fort, Division Commander - Executed.
25. Capt. A.H. Price, Field Artillery - Executed at Dansalan, Lanao, July 3, 1942.
26. Capt. Charles Wyatt, Engineer
27. Lt. Col. Barnes, Medical Department Doctor
28. Lt. Landis Doner, Quartermaster - Sent to Santo Tomas Civilian POW Camp
29. Lt. Robert Pratt, Finance Officer - Died following the Death March at Iligan, July 4, 1942.
30. Frederick M. Fullerton, Jr., Philippine Ordnance Depot, 75th Ordnance Company - Survived.

73rd Infantry Regiment

31. Col. Robert Hale Vesey, Regimental Commander - Executed at Dansalan, Lanao, July 3, 1942.
32. Capt. Steven M. Byars, Executive Officer
33. Lt. Albert Chase, 1st Battalion Commander - Died on the Shinyo Maru, September 7, 1942.
34. Lt. Jack Laro, 2nd Battalion Commander - Died on Arisan Maru, October 24, 1944.
35. Lt. John Stephens, 3rd Battalion Commander - Died on the Shinyo Maru, September 7, 1942.

61st Infantry Regiment

36. Col. Eugene H. Mitchell, Regimental Commander - Survived
37. Major Richard Hill, Executive Officer
38. Capt. Harry Katz, Regimental Staff - Died on the Shinyo Maru, September 7, 1942.
39. Lt. Donald Hanning, Regimental Staff - Sent to Santo Tomas Civilian POW Camp

Provisional Battalion (84th Regiment)

40. Major Jay J. Navin, Battalion Commander - Shot during Death March

Engineering Combat Unit

41. Lt. John D. Stuckenberg, Company Commander - Died on the Arisan Maru, October 24, 1944.