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The Last Full Measure: Bataan Death
March

Lead: For 400 years service men and women have fought to carve out and defend freedom and the civilization we know as America. This series on A Moment in Time is devoted to the memory of those warriors, whose devotion gave, in the words of Lincoln at Gettysburg, the last full measure.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The Bataan Peninsula juts out into the waters guarding the sea approach to the Philippine capital

of Manila. On the west is Subic Bay. Running along its east flank is Manila Bay. Just off Bataan's southern tip is the oddly shaped island of Corregidor. On Bataan approximately 75,000 U.S and Philippine troops, largely abandoned by the Allied command, held out against hopeless odds against the invading Japanese until the spring of 1942. Soon after their surrender, allied troops were marched off the peninsula in one of the most horrific wartime atrocities in the Asian theater, the Bataan Death March. Nearly 18,000 died.

Actually, it was several death marches approximately 90 miles from various locations on the peninsula to

Camp O'Donnell and other locations where the prisoners were consolidated and kept under wretched conditions until their liberation years later.

Alf R. Larson was a soldier in the 27th Material Squadron, a part of the Army Air Corps. He and his fellow soldiers began their ordeal in already weakened conditions because General Douglas MacArthur, US commander in the Philippines at the time of the Japanese invasion, did not believe in defensive maneuvers and had refused to stock pile sufficient amounts of rations, ammunition, or medicine to mount an effective defense of the peninsula. Larson's march began on April 12, 1942.

Despite assurances by Japanese commanders at the time of surrender that the prisoners would be treated humanely, the Japanese soldiers in charge of the marches seem to take sadistic pleasure in inflicting as much pain, discomfort, and death on the prisoners as they could. Larson remembered that the prisoners were required to move in a rough military formation and if anyone fell out because of exhaustion or even by accident, they were immediately bayoneted. There were no bathroom breaks permitted, so men simply soiled themselves. They were often forced to stand in the unbearable midday sun for hours while the guards rested in the shade.

Anyone who tripped during the march, could be set upon by "Buzzard Squads" of Japanese soldiers who would murder these stragglers and leave their bodies in the middle of the road to be flattened by oncoming traffic. Some of the most horrific deaths were prisoners buried alive and eventually drowning in urine and defecation in so-called latrine "slit trenches."

The prisoners recalled that the guards knew very well what they were doing and would often engage in psychological violence. They were given no water during the march and on occasion would be forced to stand directly next to artesian wells and then dared to break ranks in an

attempt to drink. Dehydrated prisoners, in a mad rush for water would be bayoneted to death. Guards would promise the prisoners food early in the day, deny them the food at night and then prepare and directly consume the food in front of the starving prisoners to crush the spirit of those who were still alive.

The Bataan Death March was one of history's most egregious disregard of international agreements governing prisoners of war and even elemental decency and fanned anti-Japanese hostility among American service members and as the details slipped out, American's on the home front.

Research by John Sciuto, at the

University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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