The Diary of a Prisoner of War
and the Bataan Death March

Kenton, Ohio—On April 9, 1942, a young U.S. Army doctor from Kenton was en route back to his unit on the Philippine island of Luzon when he was captured by Japanese troops and made a part of the "Bataan Death March."

Dr. Calvin G. Jackson has vivid memories of the march and his 3 1/2 years as a prisoner of war. Unchanged by time are his feelings about his former captors. "When I came home, anything made in Japan I threw out," he said.

Jackson's route to Bataan began in February 1941 when, as a Reserve Medical Officer, he was called to active duty and assigned to Camp Wheeler, Macon, Ga. In July, he was transferred to the Philippines and assigned to the 12th Medical Regiment, Co. C, 31st Infantry Regiment RECT. Four months later, he was promoted to Major and assigned to the Philippine army as Division Surgeon of the 51st Infantry Division of the Philippine army.

"We were not fully organized or equipped," he said. "We had soldiers, but many didn't have uniforms."

On Dec. 8, 1941, a day after bombing Pearl Harbor, the Japanese turned their attention to the Philippines and Manila. More than a month passed, though, before the war came to Jackson. He wrote in his diary that he saw his first Japanese planes on Dec. 23, 1941.

"We didn't have a cap gun to defend ourselves, let alone a machine gun," he said.

It was Christmas Day 1941 when a Filipino captain became the first casualty of the Japanese assault, he said. As the assault continued, "everyone retreated in Bataan...the last stand," he said.

The Japanese army overwhelmed the 51st Division, Jackson said, adding that most of the Filipino troops had little military training and some never had shoes. "They didn't know anything about war," he remembers.

Jackson then became subsector surgeon of Corps I on the west side of Bataan. Corps I was the 1st and 91st Divisions of the Philippine army.

Soon Jackson was transferred to Hospital 2, the second of two field hospitals on Bataan — a peninsula 45 miles long and 15 miles wide and 25 miles across the bay from Manila.

"On Monday, April 5, I was ordered to go to the head of the Philippine army in southern Bataan. One of my officers deserted me and dead and wounded men were left in the Collecting Co. tent.

Jackson said that after that meeting, he visited old friends in subsector HQ and technically was AWOL, though the hospital never realized his absence. There was not much fighting going on at the time, he said, and he stayed overnight. He started back next morning, April 7, but a flat tire prevented his return to the hospital.

After he fixed the tire, his truck ran out of fuel on April 8. He and his Filipino driver tried to get gasoline, which was stored along the roads in 55-gallon drums. The next interruption proved more memorable—Jackson and his driver slept on the side of the trail and in the morning started walking to Marivales when they met two Nip soldiers with their rifles bayoneted. They held up their arms. After being searched, they were walked to Marivales and put in a fenced-in area with other men. They were marched out of the area about sundown on Friday evening, April 9, of 1942, and that was the start of the Bataan Death March.

He estimated that 200 American and Filipino soldiers marched with him, four abreast, under the control of the Japanese guards with fixed bayonets.

While Jackson knew some of the territory, "the days and nights got so mixed up I didn't know what was going on," he said. "I remember walking through the square of Balan."

The prisoners were force marched to San Fernando, approximately 80 miles north of Bataan.

It was terrible. It was so hot, no shade," he said of the ordeal. "If they did let us rest it was never in the shade."

He noted that water was plentiful because of artesian wells along the march route, but when guards would allow the prisoners to drink, many
drank too fast and were soon thirsty again.

Jackson witnessed no killing of prisoners during the march, but did see many fall out of line. "But I don't know what ever happened to them," he said.

Philippine natives would throw food along the road to the prisoners, but the Japanese frequently prevented prisoners from getting to it, he said.

Jackson said he ate what he was given, which was one rice ball a day about the size of a baseball. "Many said, 'I can't eat that.' If they didn't, they were out of luck. I think we were one of the first bunch out."

Malaria and other diseases caused many deaths in the prisoner-of-war camps, he said.

In the San Fernando area, Jackson saw a Japanese doctor who spoke English. Jackson told him that he was supposed to be in Hospital 2.

"These are all soldiers, I am a doctor," Jackson said. The Nip said, "You come," and took him out and put him in the back seat of a four-door U.S. Army car. "I thought, my God, what is he going to do with me?" he said.

By that time, the battle for Bataan had ended and the Japanese were in full control of the Philippines. Jackson was taken back to Hospital 2 and was told by the Japanese doctor, "don't tell," he said.

Jackson said he believed he ran into this same Nip doctor in Dapecol P.O.W. camp and he gave Jackson everything he asked for and sometimes more.

"He did me good by getting me out of San Fernando and back to Hospital 4. I have no use for (Japanese), but there is some good in everybody," he said.

Hospital 4 was later transferred to near Hospital 1 in Little Baguio, and one day the Nips abruptly said, "You're leaving."

"And I thought, oh Jesus, am I going to have to walk to San Fernando again? I knew I couldn't do it," he said.

But they were then trucked to Manila and placed in Bilibid prison, an old Spanish prison. The Japanese used it as a distribution point to assign people jobs.

On May 29, they were jammed in small boxcars and shipped out. On May 30, 1942, Decoration Day, Jackson's group opened a prison camp at Cabanatuan, about six miles east. He described it as several rows of barbed wire with guard posts and old barracks. There were about 5,000 prisoners, with the Filipinos separated from the Americans, he said.

Jackson said eventually Filipinos were released and only the Americans and a few other nationalities fighting with the Americans were held.

Jackson remained there until November 1942, then was shipped to Mindoro Island. In the summer of 1944, they were sent back to Cabanatuan.

He was taken on Sept. 5, 1944, to a prison camp in Japan, where he stayed until the war ended. He was liberated exactly one year later, on Sept. 5, 1945.

While in prison, he was starved and mistreated, Jackson said.

"One time I got so mad I couldn't see straight," he said. "We never could figure them out. Sometimes they treated us wonderful. Then they would do the darndest things."

He recalls the day he was released. Supplies such as food and toilet paper were dropped from planes in bright colored parachutes.

His first meal following release was aboard a British ship and consisted of tea and cookies and canned apricots. "It tasted like manna from heaven," he said.

Jackson said he survived because of the way God put him together. "I was skinny. I always was. I saw big husky guys and later they were skin and bones," he said.

This article, titled "Bataan," was written by Mark Hamilton and published in The Lima News on April 4, 1988. This excerpt is printed with the permission of The Lima News.