

**Major Richard M. Gordon,  
Remarks at the Manila American Cemetery  
Ft. Bonifacio, Makati, Manila, Philippines,  
April 2, 2002**

Senator Inouye, Senator Stevens, Ambassador Ricciardone, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen. On behalf of the Battling Bastards of Bataan, I want to express our sincere appreciation to Superintendent Mervin R. Jones and his staff for the magnificent job they do in caring for this beautiful memorial to America's Pacific War Dead.

I have been here a number of times, and each time, I am overwhelmed by the majesty of this Memorial. One can feel the presence of those who are buried here or who are remembered here. It has a special significance to those of us gathered here today, as it is the place for many of Bataan's Dead. It is the place that remembers those "missing in action", lost aboard the Hell-Ships, and those buried unidentified. Their names are inscribed on the hallowed walls that surround you.

Many visiting here today will never return. Time is catching up with us. So we come here today to honor for the last time our friends and buddies. We owe them nothing less, as they have been forgotten by their country. Here, they are remembered and always will be as long as this memorial stands.

They fought the Battle of Bataan under the most adverse conditions, which most people could never imagine. For all intent and purposes, they were abandoned with inadequate training, supplies, materials, and food. Using World War I weapons, many of which failed to function, they fought a tenacious and highly trained enemy.

Beset with starvation and disease, the American and Filipino soldiers who fought on Bataan held the best Army in the Orient at bay for four months. The stand on Bataan altered the course of World War II. We did not suffer the loss of our Pacific arsenal, Australia, and we severely delayed the Japanese time table for their conquest of South East Asia.

On April 9, 1942, the men of Bataan were surrendered by their Commanding General, Edward P. King, Jr. If General King did not have the courage to surrender, we survivors of Bataan who are here today, would not be here. Today, General King is an ignored figure in history.

Had the General not surrendered, it would have been a blood bath on Bataan. One day's ration existed in the QM [quartermaster] storage areas. Fuel for what few vehicles we had left was almost extinct. Medication to fight the diseases, so prevalent in Bataan, was non-existent. The last bit of quinine had disappeared around March 1, 1942. The hospitals were filled with malaria and dysentery patients, along with the wounded.

Approximately, 1,000 men a day were being admitted to the hospitals, while only 30% of those troops remaining were fit for combat. These men were existing on 1,000 calories a

day. Bataan was a far greater disaster than Pearl Harbor and very few of the American people know of it.

Thousands of soldiers were forced to march for days in the extreme heat of April in the Philippines, without food or water, on a journey of over 85 miles, with 26 of those miles in a nightmare train ride. Men struggling to march were shot, bayoneted, decapitated, and run over for no reason other than they wanted water. Their enemy showed them no mercy. That man could be that inhumane to his fellow man is the real story of Bataan.

The surrender and the infamous Death March paled in significance by what followed at Camp O'Donnell and Cabanatuan. In O'Donnell alone, under horrible conditions, over 1,600 Americans died in less than two months, while the Filipinos lost about fifteen thousand, dying at a rate of 500 a day.

The Americans taken to Cabanatuan from O'Donnell, in June 1942, arrived desperately ill and starving. Of the almost 3,000 Americans who died there, 95% of them were men of Bataan, who died within the first five months of the camps existence.

Then came the infamous Hell-Ships. If ever there was or is place called "Hell", it was those ships.

Men died in places such as Japan, Manchuria, Korea, and China, working as slave laborers in coal mines, steel mills, or building hydro-electric dams. Cremated at those sites, a good number of them were never returned home.

It is worth noting that every country who had prisoners of war working under such conditions have compensated those prisoners. Every country except one, the United States. Japan, unlike Germany, has refused to compensate any or even admit to the conditions that existed. They are in a constant state of denial. I am ashamed to say that our government has supported Japan in it's refusal, offering such weak excuses as we do not want to offend the Japanese. It is they who have offended us.

In 1941-42, we on Bataan were abandoned by our government and we are being abandoned again today.

Of the 58 known Hell-Ships taking 68,000 British and American Prisoners of War, from Singapore and Manila, 22,000 of them perished at sea by "Friendly Fire." Hollywood has led us to believe that the Titanic was our greatest loss at sea. Far from it... Almost 1,800 Americans perished on one ship alone: the Arisan Maru. And the greatest maritime disaster in history was when the Junyo Maru -- with British, Americans, and Javanese prisoners of war -- was sunk with the loss of 5,640 men. History has barely mentioned this.

25,000 Americans were captured by the Japanese in World War II. Over 38% of them died while in the Japanese hands. Many of these soldiers rest here, or are remembered on the walls around you. It is for these men that we come here today.

In closing let me add this:

Bataan's place in history is firmly established. It stands as a lesson to our country. We can all pray that lesson is never repeated.

It is wrong to place our military in harm's way and not support them. May God forgive those who did so in Bataan, and may God forgive those who forget the sacrifices of Bataan, and those other Americans who rest here.

Maj. Richard M. Gordon (USA Ret.)

Adjutant

Battling Bastards of Bataan