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Locking horns with the devil

December 7, 1941, U.S. Time
December 8, across the International Date Line

Battery D, 200 CA-AA Stationed at Clark Field. Our barracks were half mile plus from the runway. We were used to being coiled out for practice day or night, but this day seemed different. We moved out right after breakfast to a position between Clark Field and Fort Stotsenberg. Fort Stotsenberg was a Filipino cavalry post. I guess we were supposed to give what air protection we could for both the air field and cavalry post. About a mile and a half separated the post and air field.

About noon. First Lt. Eddie Kemp called 40 to 50 names; I don't remember all of them. My name was on the list. Rufus Whitman, Sgt 4, Gun Commander, Frank Jones, Jack (Bailey) Hnidak, SS, Tom Hunt, SS, Frank Wilson, Harold Hise, Tony Bolt, Gap Silva. These names and others were in the process of becoming Battery D, 515 CA-AA. We didn't know at the time but the wheels were in motion.

We loaded on a couple trucks, left our 3" guns behind and went back to camp where Lt Kemp told us we were at war with Japan. They had bombed Pearl Harbor, practically destroyed our Navy. We would be next under attack. All most of us had at that time were our 30-06 rifles, a couple of air cooled louis machine guns. I think Harold Hise was on a 50 cat mach gun when he came into camp after the air raid. He said he had shot down a zero fighter.

Sgt. R. Welch, in charge of supplies, opened up the warehouse and we had access to the ammunition. I filled my gun belt about the time the first wave of bombers came over. They were out of range of anything we had, all we could do was watch them destroy Clark Field. Fires were burning where planes, barracks [were hit. There were] many casualties, mostly Air Force at this time.

After the last wave of bombers were gone, the zeros came in. The air was full of them. They were diving, strafing everything they could see. But it gave us a chance to shoot back. Lt. Kemp, myself, four or five others were standing beside a barracks. I don't know what the others were doing. We should have been looking for cover but this was new to us. All we wanted to do was fight back. The zeros were coming in so close, you could see the pilots' faces looking down.

All I can remember feeling was rage at what they were doing. When a plane got close, I would empty my 30-06, reload and wait for another. I remembered to give a little lead, like shooting ducks. Lt. Kemp was right behind me and he kept asking, "do you think you hit him?" All I could say was I don't know. My rifle barrel got pretty warm. Then they were gone. We had a chance to look around. It looked pretty hopeless. Our Motor Pool hadn't been hit quite as bad, so we still had some trucks running.

Taking what we could carry in our back packs, our rifles, ammunition, canteen, mess kits, we loaded up in trucks, leaving everything else behind. Sometime after dark, we pulled into Manila, to a warehouse where we worked most of the night cleaning up equipment, 2 3" guns, a director, ammunition, and by day light we were set up and ready. On a beach at the edge of Manila, we were in full view of Manila Bay, Corregidor, and in the path of Jap planes heading for Cavite Naval Station. A few days later it was official. Battery D 515 CA-AA: First Lt. Eddie Kemp to Captain; Sgt Thomas Hunt to Staff Sgt-Director; Cpl Jack (Bailey) Hnidak to Sgt-Director; Pvt Frank Jones to PFC-Cpt; RFC Virgil Aimes to CPL-runner; CPL Rufus Whiteman to Sgt-Gun Commander; Sgt Frank Wilson to S.S. Director; CPL Pecavich to Sgt Commander; other names and positions they worked out, I can't remember, just a few of my closest friends; Jack (Bailey) Hnidak, Rufus Whiteman, Frank Jones, were very close friends.

Air raid sirens screamed, often day and night. Planes, sometimes in our area, sometimes just going over to other targets.

Christmas Day — 1941 — P.I. Christmas Dinner 1941, a can of "c" and a can of "k" rations. It wasn't too bad. We hardly knew it was Christmas anyway. We loaded up, left Manila. It took us a couple days to get to Bataan. Setting up in different locations to cover the retreat. About 3 days later, we set up where we were to stay for a while. On the Manila Bay side of the peninsula and in the path of planes going to attack Corregidor. One of the locations we set up was where a Battery from Corregidor had been the day before. But they had been bombed out, lost 2 or 3 men and gone back to Corregidor.

About the first of January, we were pretty well set up. We were in the path of Jap planes going toward Corregidor. West had a couple small air fields with 3 or 4 planes operating from Bataan. General orders from General MacArthur to all units went something like this: "Help is on the way. We will hold out for 30 days. Help will be here."

His orders left no doubt what we had to do. But 30 days came and went, no help. General MacArthur was ordered to Australia. 60 days, 90 days, no help. Rations were down to almost a starvation diet. An old Filipino man came by with a little pet monkey and offered to sell it if we didn't eat it. Rufus Whiteman and I scraped up 5 or 6 pesos for it. I still remember the little monkey. He was crying with his hands over his head when I hit him with my bayonet. A medic took it to the kitchen, cooked him and made gravy. He brought some of it back to us, but I couldn't touch it.

All through our part of the war, I was very angry at what the Japs were doing. I wanted to shoot down all of their planes. I was very happy when one went down, but I can't forget what I did to that little monkey. When I dressed him out, he looked just like a little baby.

The controls on our guns were clock like pointers to be matched by the operators. When pointers matched, gun commander gave orders to fire. Gunners would fire as fast and as many times as they could till they got cease fire order. We didn't have time to look up to see what had happened till we got a cease fire. I was very proud of my gun crew, actually it was Rufus Whiteman's crew. He was the Gun Commander, his job was on the telephone from the director crew. My job was gunner, then we had the fuse setter, elevation, asmuth, ammunition handlers. Everyone

worked as a team. When planes were coming in, Ruffus would grab his telephone and I would call out, "Man the guns", and [we] were ready in seconds. When things were quiet, Ruffus and I would have long talks about where each man worked the best, who was most dependable. We had several Filipino boys, untrained of course, they were used mostly to pass ammunition.

A few days later, a few of us were sitting around on the gun platform when there was a small explosion. Three men got shrapnel wounds, Gap Silva, a Filipino boy, and one other, I can't recall who. I checked the Filipino boy, it was just a flesh wound. A medic was checking Silva. He got shrapnel in his leg and arm. One of the books I have, said it was a stray 37 mil shell, but there was no activity that day and I still think it could have been a hand grenade, it was pretty dense jungle behind us and someone could have gotten in pretty close and ran away.

Things got pretty quiet for a while. I guess the Japs had to wait for fresh troops and equipment. That was good for us, we were pretty beat any way, malaria, hunger, etc. Capt Kemp told us to put our guns out of commission and get ready to move out. I dismantled the firing mechanism and scattered it in the jungle behind us. Others destroyed the controls, clocks and cables. We loaded up and moved down the road about a mile and set up a new line. It was on a jeep road on top of a ridge. Jungle behind us and an open flat in front. The bottom of the valley, open space about 300 yards across that gave us the advantage over any Japs coming across. Most of us had 30-06, three or four 30 cat mach guns.

We lay on the ridge, the rest of the day and night. No one had much to say. We knew this was the last stand.

April 9, AM Capt. Kemp sent word down the line. Bataan has fallen. It was every man for himself. We could hear a rumble that sounded like tanks back on the main road. I thought we were about to be cut off, so I decided to get across the open flat to the jungle on the other side. Five or six boys said they were going with me. We made it across okay, skirted around an ammunition dump that had been blown up the night before. Some small ammo still going off. We decided to ease out to the road to see what was going on. The brush was pretty thick but we could see the road ok. We could hear someone talking into a bull horn, then a command car and a jeep came down the road.

A GI driving, an American officer and a Jap officer were in the command car, Jap soldiers in the jeep. I motioned the other boys to stay back and I stepped out to the edge of the road. They stopped and this officer, I think he was a Colonel, told me General King has surrendered Bataan. Lay down your arms, go up the road a half mile. You will find some food and water. The Jap army will take over. I went back where the boys were waiting and told them what was up. We wrapped our rifles around a tree, scattered our ammo in the jungle and went down the road and turned ourselves in.

We didn't know what would happen. Maybe we will be shot. I had never heard of this POW stuff. I always thought war was do or die. We got to this clearing where several hundred men were laying. They were a pretty tired bunch of men, Jap soldiers were standing around the edge of the clearing. There was a tank of water and some barrels of c and k rations. We got to eat a little and fill our canteens. Sometime later that day, they started moving us out.

We hadn't gone a quarter of a mile when I saw an old Filipino man laying in the ditch, the top of his head had been cut off clean with a sword. Most of the Jap officers carried swords. His brains were half out of his head and flies were all over them.

Things got worse. American and Filipino soldiers were beaten, shot and bayoneted for no apparent reason. Filipino civilians who tried to give us water or food were beaten or killed. I don't know how long it took to make the march, it must have been 5 or 6 or 7 days. I was sort of out of it most of the time with fever, chills, etc. I remember one night it rained a little and I dipped water out of puddles, to fill my canteen. I vaguely remember getting to San Fernando and being loaded into box cars so tight we couldn't move. We were on the train about 40 or so miles, to Capas, then about 8 or 10 miles walk to Camp O'Donnell. I still don't remember getting to O'Donnell.

Camp O'Donnell had been a Filipino post before the war started. The barracks were about 20' by 40', bamboo frames, split bamboo sides and banana leaves tied together for the roofs. They were fairly weather resistant. Inside a 6 foot walkway down the center a 6 1/2' elevated bench down each side for beds. The bench was covered with bamboo slats.

DAY ONE CAMP O'DONNELL Evening

I had chills and fever. I crawled under a barracks, trying to get warm. It didn't help. The next morning, I came out still having chills. The first person I saw was Orland Hamlin, a friend and neighbor from Farmington, he said the Japs had him on a detail, driving a truck back to Bataan to pick up salvage, so he was eating pretty good. He gave me a can of hash. That can of hash was just what I needed to get started again. I never saw Orland (nicknamed Cotton) until we were at home after the war. He got married and moved to Mesa, Arizona. Sometime later, I heard he was dead.

A day or two after I got to Camp O'Donnell they called assembly to the center of the compound. General King was there, he said the Jap commander had given him permission to say a few words.

I don't remember his exact words, but it was about how proud he was of our defense of Bataan. He knew we would have fought to the end. He said never let it be said that you surrendered. He said, I surrendered you in hope that some of us may get home to tell our story.

General King survived and died in 1958. General King commanded the troops on Bataan.

We started getting rice to eat, soupy in the morning, dry, unseasoned later in the day. The rice was cooked in large iron pots over outdoor grills. GI cooks from different units were assigned to Mess Halls. When the pots were cleaned, there would be a layer of burned or scorched rice. It was given to anyone there at that time. It tasted some better than the unseasoned dry rice.

Burial details continued every day. 50 to 75 or more died every day. After a time, they started moving us to Camp Cabanatuan. It was a much larger camp, divided into 3 areas, one a hospital area where the men were too weak to work. I was in this area for 3 or 4 months.

Another, called the dysentery ward was where they took the very sick men to die. No one ever came out of there alive. The other, about a half mile away, the main camp, where the men were able to work some. A lot of the men there had been on Corregidor. They looked a lot better than the boys from Bataan and they hadn't made the Death March.

I gradually got a little stronger and got to where I could choke down the rice. A few weeks later, I was put on the ration run. We would go to the main camp warehouse. Four men would carry a sack of rice on a litter, with several rest stops. Then they started getting some limes once in a while, squeezed onto the rice, which made it taste a little better. But we only got one once in a while.

I started going around camp to see who I could find, going from barracks to barracks. I found Jack, Edo Mac's brother, and my friend. He didn't look too bad, but not ready to do much yet. He told me Frank Jones was in the same barracks. I went down the breezeway and Frank looked pretty bad. I tried to get him to eat some of his rice, but he couldn't. I went back the next day. Jack said they had moved Frank to the dysentery ward, so I went down there. He knew me but he could hardly talk. The next day, he wasn't there. A few days later, Jack was moved to the barracks next to the one I was in.

I started getting around and getting information on what had happened to the rest of our Battery. Capt. Kemp, Capt. Twaits and some of the other officers had been shot. Many had been killed or just died of sickness.

I was sitting outside the barracks one day and SSgt. Tom Hunt came over. He was in the barracks next to the one I was in. We talked a while and he gave me a can of hash. I didn't ask where he got it, but I found out later he had been crawling under the fence at night and contacting Filipinos then slipping back in. The next day, he was gone. He was caught and returned about 3 weeks later with four others. They had been beaten half to death. The Japs tied their hands up with feet barely touching the ground in the hot sun all day. Then in the evening they made everyone that could walk come out in the compound. They brought out the firing squad and executed the five men. The next day, we were all listed in groups of 10, with orders if one man attempts to escape, the rest of that group was to be shot.

Sometime later. Jack and I were in a group that was transferred to the main camp. There were a lot of different work details and everyone worked. A wood detail walked 3 or 4 miles, cut wood with a small trimming saw, and carried the wood back to cook the rice. Work was done on different air strips, pick and shovel rice details, some would take ox carts to rail spurs, load rice and return about 8 miles to the farm detail. This was unlimited acreage, undeveloped, covered with heavy grass and worked with picks and shovels. A lot of men can do a lot of work. and in time, there was a beautiful farm, with rice paddies, vegetables, sweet potatoes, all shipped out, except some sweet potato runners that we were allowed to keep to make green soup.

We still had the burial detail. It had eased up some, but was still there. The farm was the main project, always clearing new ground and pulling weeds. In season there was a sweet melon about 18 to 20 inches long, 5 to 6 inches in diameter. When the guards weren't watching, 4 or 5 men

could make a melon disappear fast and have the rind buried. Burial details gradually got smaller. Some were still dying but not nearly as many.

The Japs finally let the Redcross send in a package for each man, that was a life saver. This happened 2 times as I remember. The packages contained food items, corn beef, spam, chocolate, etc. I guess the Americans were getting close. The Japs started moving POWs out of the camps sometime in the Spring of 1944.

Jack and I were in a group to ship out some place. They took us to Manila, there were 2 junk ships at the dock. These boats were unmarked, the Nissy Maru and the Arisan Maru. We slept that night on a concrete floor at Bilibid prison. The next morning they started calling out names. Jack got on the Arisan and I got on the Nissy. I never saw Jack again. We were cramed in the hold like sardines. I don't know how many men we lost. There were quite a number of ships used to evacuate the Phillipines. All of them lost quite a few men. The Arisan Maru was sunk with 1,800 POWs. 8 survived. All of the ships they used were unmarked. I guess the American subs had pretty much control of the China Sea. One night there were several explosions. They had to be torpedoes from subs. We must have been in a convoy. The ship I was on didn't get hit. We were all yelling, sink this tub, we had had enough. After we got home we gradually learned about the other ships that had been hit and of the casualties.

Sometime later, we docked at Nagasaki Harbor where we were split up. This is where the term "Slave labor" started. Some went to steel mills, some to coal mines, others to ship yards. I was in a small group, 100 men. After we were deloused, we were issued a shirt and pants and a pair of split toed canvas shoes. After a while, we were loaded on a train, an old passenger train that actually had seats. We rode about an hour or so and then walked a short distance to the camp. There was a high wood fence around two barracks, a mess hall and a bath house. The Jap officer and guards had another building. They lined us up and the camp commander came out. Word got around later that he had been going to school in the states and came home to visit his folks and got put in the Army. He spoke fair English. He said you will be treated well, you will be fed and you will work. He went on to tell us we would work in a coal mine 12 hours a day. We had to count off and that was our number.

The next day, we were taken to the mine, it was about 1/2 mile from camp. In the main building top side, we were issued a cap with a battery light. Then we went to the cable cars that took us down 2000 meters. A 30 degree slope from there was a honeycomb of large tunnels that had been mined out. I guess the old mine had been worked for many years. The main tunnels were lighted but we needed our cap lights for where we worked. The next day we started working two 12 hour shifts. The day shift came out as the night shift went in. 40 men to each shift. The other 20 men took care of the camp, KP, cooks, latrine, and bath house. There was a concrete tub about 12 square feet, kept full of hot water and drained after each shift had bathed; filled and heated for the next shift. This schedule went on for a year. Go to the mine, 12 hours later, come back, bathe, eat, go to bed, get up and back to the mine.

Some of the men would come in and rest before bathing. I always hurried to bathe before the tub got full of coal dust. Outside of long hard 12 hour work shifts and not enough to eat, I guess this wasn't too bad. There weren't any beatings or killings like we had at other camps.

Our diet was o bowl of soupy rice for breakfast. For lunch we carried a small box of cooked dry rice and dinner was a bowl of dry rice and a bowl of watery soup made of some kind of greens. There were some mining injuries. One of the boys had to have his leg cut off. A number of cuts and bruises. I had a couple mining injuries.

Our supervisors were Koreans. They were for the Americans but they didn't dare say so. I had gotten a little stronger than some of the boys, so I was put on the jack hammer. I was supposed to drill 12 holes a shift, about 5 feet deep. If I couldn't make it, the Korean supervisor would take over and finish. His name was Sito Son, he seldom said anything, he was just there.

One day in August, we got up, the gates were open, the guards were gone and their rifles were stacked. This was a surprise, the guards had told us if the Americans landed on Japan, we would be shot and they would go fight.

This proved to be true when later, documents showed up with these orders. Somewhere in my papers are copies of these orders. That afternoon, someone told me our Korean supervisor, Sito, wanted to talk to me and McConahay. We went outside and Sito had a quart bottle of beer. It wasn't cold but is was good. He was sure happy. He said the war is over. Two big bombs, Nagasaki and Hiroshima. He said he would go to Southern Korea, get a job and save some money and buy an American Car. I hope he made it. He said come to my house. It was small, 2 rooms, but clean. He said take off shoes, then we went in. His wife gave us each a glass of sake, it didn't taste good but we drank it to be polite.

We were on our own for 3 or 4 days then a B-17 came over and dropped supplies, canned food, soap, cigarettes, candy, etc. A couple of days later, some GIs showed up and took us back to Nagasaki Harbor where we loaded on a boat, went to Okinawa, split up in small groups, flew back to Manila in Bomb Bay on B-24s. We were there a couple of weeks, getting paper work done, lots of shots, lots of rest and anything we wanted at the PX. Went to the Mess Hall anytime. I don't think they wanted us to get home until we fattened up a little. It took 30 days on a slow boat to get to Seattle. I think I gained about a pound a day. From Seattle we went to Bruns Hospital in Santa Fe. Finally got a furlough to go home. That was the day I thought would never come. About half of our outfit made it home. About half of them were sick and died after a few years.

2002, about 5% are alive today. These notes I have written, are just a few of the things that happened. Many books have been written of different men and different stories, All true.

Day is done
Gone the sun
From the lakes
From the sky
All is well
Safely rest
God is nigh.....
TAPS