

Bataan and Corregidor

Author Unknown



OVERVIEW

In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese bombed and destroyed United States installations in the Philippines. With no hope of receiving supplies or reinforcements, United States and Filipino troops withdrew from Manila to Bataan Peninsula and later to Corregidor Island. They held out courageously for six months until May 1942, when commanding General Jonathan Wainwright had to surrender. An army nurse described what happened during those months, and excerpts from her experiences appear here.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- How does this passage convey a sense of hope even while the Americans are withdrawing?
 - Why did the author feel a sense of guilt as she was evacuated to Australia?
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Conditions at Hospital Number 1 were not too good during the last few weeks we spent there. Patients were flooding in. We increased from 400 to 1,500 cases in two weeks' time. Most were bad shrapnel wounds, but nine out of ten patients had malaria or dysentery besides. One night we admitted 400 patients, most in worse condition than usual. They'd been left at first-aid stations near the front because of the shortage of gasoline.

We were out of quinine. There were hundreds of gas gangrene cases, and our supply of vaccine had gone months before. There was no more sulfapyridine or sulfanilimide. There weren't nearly enough cots so triple-decker beds were built from bamboo, with a ladder at one end so we could climb up to take care of the patients, who were without blankets or mattresses.

There was almost no food but carabao. We had all thought we couldn't go carabao, but we did. Then came mule, which seemed worse, but we ate that too. Most of the nurses were wearing Government-issue heavy-laced men's shoes. We had to keep our feet taped up to walk in them. . . .

We went about our work feeling perfectly safe because of the Red Cross roof markings. When bombers came overhead on April 4, we hardly noticed them. Then suddenly incendiary bombs dropped. They hit the receiving wards, mess hall, doctors' and officers' quarters, and the steps of the nurses' dormitory, setting fire to all buildings but luckily not hitting the wards. . . . The patients were terrified, of course, but behaved well. The Japanese prisoners were perhaps the most frightened of all. Everything was a blur of taking care of patients, putting out fires, straightening overturned equipment.

We remained frightened until two hours later when someone heard the Jap radio in Manila announce that the bombings had been an accident and wouldn't happen again. So after that, we wouldn't even leave the hospital for a short drive. We felt safe there and nowhere else. . . .

The morning of April 7 we were all on duty when a wave of bombers came over. The first bomb hit by the Filipino mess hall and knocked us down before we even knew planes were overhead. An ammunition truck was passing the hospital entrance. It got a direct hit. The boys on guard at the gate were shell-shocked, smothered in the dirt thrown up by the explosion.

Convalescent patients picked us up and we began caring for men hurt by shrapnel. Everything was terror and confusion. Patients, even amputation cases, were falling and rolling out of the triple-decker beds to run. Suddenly a chaplain, Father Cummings, came into the ward, threw up his hands for silence and said: "All right, boys, everything's all right. Just stay quietly in bed, or lie still on the floor. Let us pray." The screams stopped instantly. He began the prayer just as a second wave of planes came over.

The first bomb hit near the officers' quarters, the next struck the patients' mess just a few yards away. The concussion bounced us three feet off the cement floor and threw us down again. Beds were tumbling down. Flashes of heat and smoke burned our eyes. But through it all we could hear Father Cummings' voice reciting the Lord's Prayer. He never faltered, never even fell to the ground, and the patients never moved. Father Cummings' clear voice went through to the end. Then he turned quietly and said: "All right, you take over. Put a tourniquet on my arm, will you?" And we saw for the first time that he'd been badly hit by shrapnel. . . .

It would be hard to believe the bravery after that bombing if you hadn't seen it. An enlisted man had risked his life by going directly to the traction wards where patients were tied to beds by wires. He thought it was better to hurt the men temporarily than to leave them tied helpless above ground where they'd surely be hit by shrapnel, so he cut all tractions and told the patients: "Get under the bed, Joe."

We began immediately to evacuate patients to another hospital. We were so afraid the Japanese would be back again the next day that even the most serious cases were moved, because giving them any chance was better than none. . . . Then we heard the Japanese had broken through and [the] Battle of Bataan was over. The doctors all decided to stay with the patients, even doctors who had been told to go to Corregidor.

We left the hospital at 9 that night—got to Corregidor at 3 in the morning. The trip usually took a little over an hour. As we drove down to the docks, the roads were jammed. Soldiers were tired, aimless, frightened. Cars were overturned; there were bodies in the road. Clouds of dust made it hard to breathe. At midnight on the docks we heard the Japs had burned our hospital to the ground.

Bombers were overhead, but we were too tired to care. We waited on the docks while the Navy tunnel and ammunition dump at Mariveles were blown up. Blasting explosions, blue flares, red flares, shrapnel, tracers, gasoline exploding—it was like a hundred Fourth of July and Christmases all at once, but we were too frightened to be impressed. As we crossed the water with Corregidor's big guns firing over our heads and shells from somewhere landing close by, the boat suddenly shivered and the whole ocean seemed to rock. We thought a big shell had hit the water in front of us—it wasn't until we landed that we found an earthquake had come just as Bataan fell.

Corregidor seemed like heaven that night. They fed us and we slept, two to an Army cot. We went to work the following morning. . . .

. . . There was constant bombing and shelling—sometimes concussion from a bomb outside would knock people down at the opposite end of the tunnel. Emperor Hirohito's birthday, April 29th, was a specially bad day. The bombing began at 7:30 a.m. and never stopped. Shelling was heavy; soldiers counted over 100 explosions per minute. Dive bombers were going after the gun on the hill directly above our heads and the concussion inside was terrific. . . .

Through all those weeks on Corregidor everyone was grand. At 6 o'clock one evening, after the usual bombing and shelling, 21 of us were told we were leaving Corregidor by plane with 10 pounds of luggage apiece. We don't know how we were selected. Everyone wanted to leave, of course, but morale was splendid. Everyone realized the end was getting close, but none gave up hope.

All Corregidor was under shell fire. We waited for an hour on the dock while medical supplies were unloaded from two seaplanes. Then we went out to the planes in motorboats. The pilot hustled us aboard—said to pile in quickly, not to bother to find seats. He was anxious to get off because we were between Cavite and Corregidor, directly in the range of artillery. On that trip we almost skimmed the water.

There was so much fog over Mindanao that we had to make a forced landing. A hole broke in the bottom of the ship and water came through. But we did reach the scheduled lake when the fog lifted. They had breakfast ready for us there on Mindanao. Some of us had champagne for the first time since the war started, but scrambled eggs, pineapple and pancakes were also the first we had seen since December. People on Mindanao were just as courageous as those on Corregidor and Bataan. They knew they would be trapped but cheerfully wished us a good trip and happy landings.

At dusk we left for Australia. We had to throw all our luggage overboard, and even then the plane barely got off. There is no joy in escaping when all one's best friends are prisoners or dead. But we reached Australia dirty, tired, dressed in overalls we'd worn for four days.

Now we're safe, but the only reaction we notice is wanting to make up somehow, anyhow, for those who didn't get away.

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