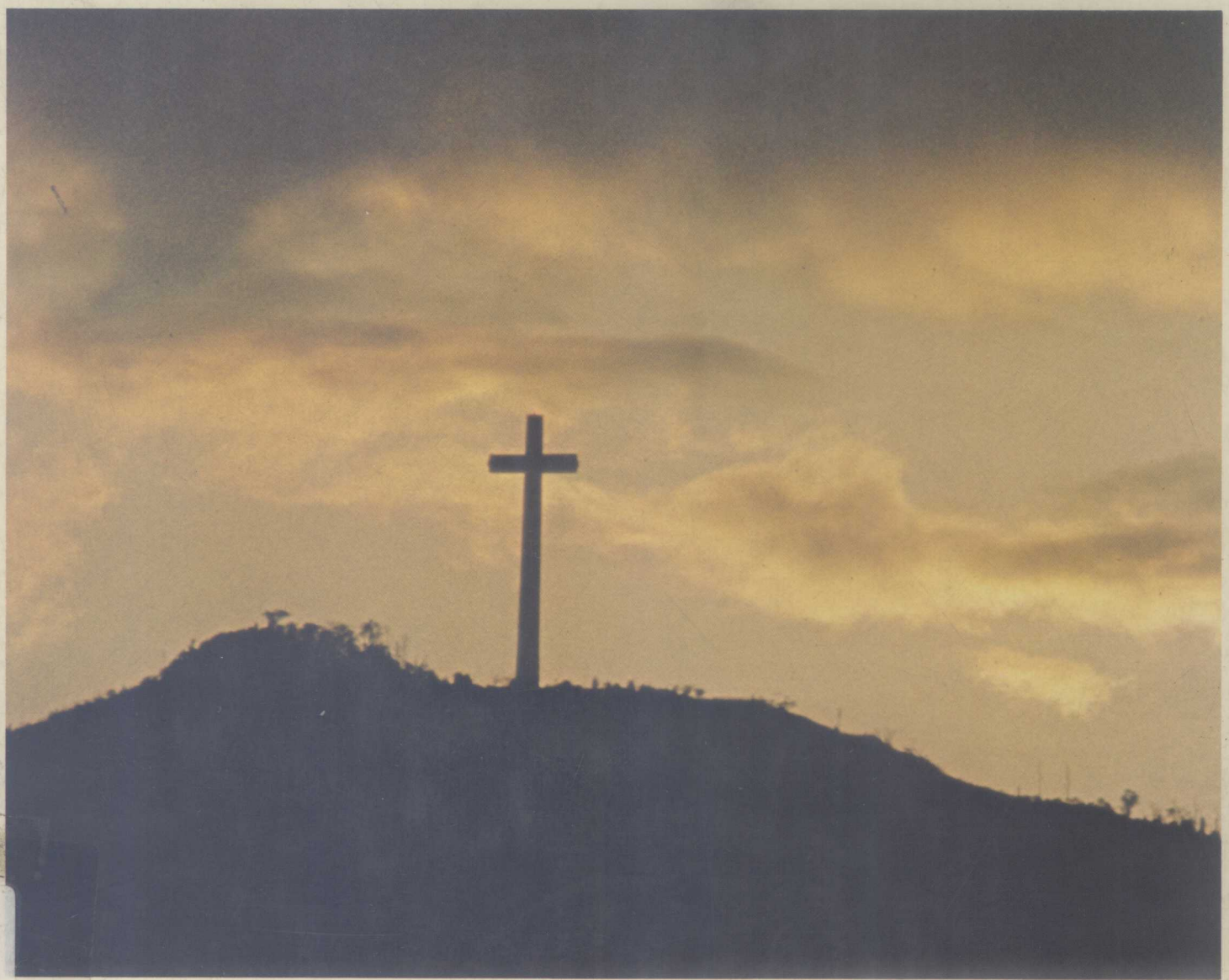
NMPC BOOKS

BATAAN AND CORREGIDOR

Battleground of the Brave



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GREGORIO S. CENDAÑA
Director, NMPC

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS after it took place, the siege of Bataan still is a historic landmark in the life of the Filipino nation. Though the brave men who fought there came from three different nations, this battleground was our own peculiar agony, and our own peculiar triumph.

The Japanese people, whose own heroic tradition recognizes the nobility of failure, will easily understand this seeming paradox. Everywhere else in Asia, the audacious and resolute Imperial Army snatched easy victory in the dry season of 1942. At Bataan, the Japanese met a force as indomitable as their own.

That, in practical terms, the Filipinos' struggle had been useless from the beginning, heightened the poignancy of their sacrifice and the purity of their courage. In the end, of course, the preponderance of firepower and matériel told. Bataan fell, followed soon after by the island-fortress of Corregidor. In suffering military defeat, the young Filipino defenders of Bataan won a soaring victory of the spirit.

May this spirit live on in our country!

FERDINAND E. MARCOS
President of the Philippines

9 April 1977

Battleground of the brave

New figures in the eternal landscape of Bataan, spheres and cylinders of a refinery rise out of old farming land.

A FULL GENERATION after the Pacific War, the scars of Bataan are all but gone, save in the spirit of those who lived through the defeat of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East in the peninsula in the dry season of 1942. The province is beginning, belatedly, to stir to the vigor infused into the whole of national society by President Ferdinand E. Marcos, who, as a combat officer, had distinguished himself in Bataan 35 years ago. The characteristic sound of the province today is the rumble of Japanese bulldozers gouging highways out of the burnt-siena clay of mountains where troops of the Imperial Army had fought the besieged Filipino and American forces. To the Southeast Asian region and the world, the peninsula is becoming known for the Bataan Export-Processing Zone. This industrial complex, which has up to now attracted 45 different manufacturers from as far away as Scandinavia, is located in Mariveles at the southern tip of the peninsula. Here, in their April of defeat, Filipino and American prisoners began the 83-kilometer trek known as the Death March.

Attracted by the prospect of work, and the opportunities of the frontier-land, migrants from other regions of the Philippines are swelling Bataan's population. Since

1948 it has been expanding by almost double the national rate, which has more than twice multiplied its 1939 population of 85,538. At the end of 1976 the province had 277,511 inhabitants. Tagalogs and Pampangos from Central Luzon make up the largest migrant groups. Bataan also has significant communities of settlers from the Bicol Region, Northern Luzon, the Visayas and even Mindanao.

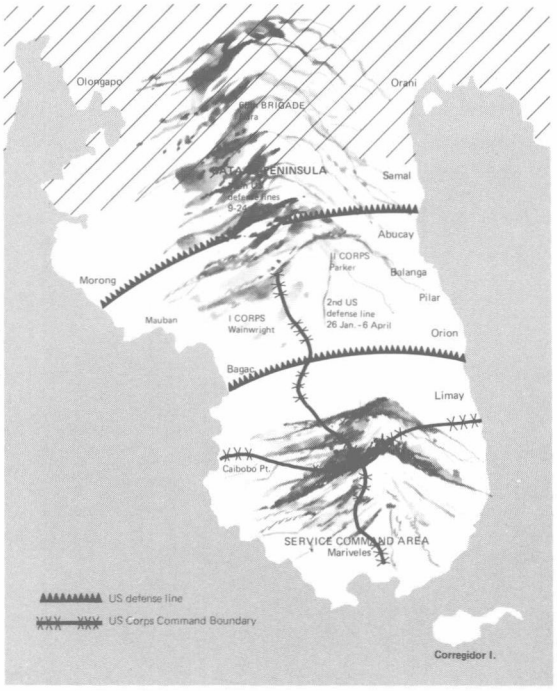
Apart from the traditional occupations of farming, fishing and logging, Bataan has a petroleum refinery complex, a chemical fertilizer plant, a pulp and paper mill and a thermal electric-power plant. The Export-Processing Zone provides jobs for close to 20,000 workers, who manufacture a range of industrial goods varying from blue denim jeans to polypropylene bags, machine screws, transistor radios, golf clubs, car bodies and fiber-glass cabin cruisers.

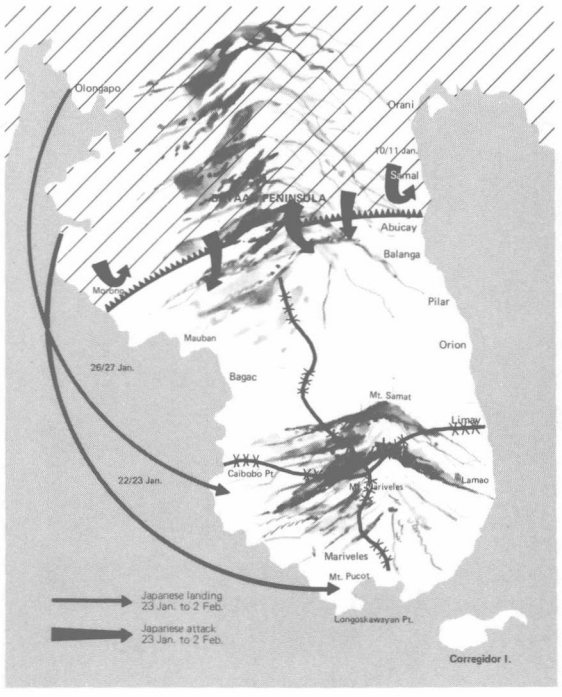
Inaugurated in middle 1969, the EPZ—as it is popularly called—did not take off until after President Marcos was able to establish authoritative government in September 1972. Mr. Marcos gave the Zone not merely the kind of money and facilities it needs to compete with other industrial zones in Southeast Asia. He also gave national economic planning as a whole direction and continuity. This, together with political stability, enabled the country's main attraction, a highly literate and adaptable work-force, to begin to count in the calculations of multinational industrialists. At its peak, the EPZ will support 100,000 people and export over US$300 million worth of goods annually. Already the national government is laying plans for a second export-processing zone on equally historic Mactan Island off Cebu in the Visayas.

The very air of Bataan seems filled with optimism and purposeful activity, an atmosphere as pervasive as the red-brown dust that road-building work is raising all over the peninsula. Already a four-lane concrete highway runs the 80 kilometers from the EPZ to the north-south highway at San Fernando, Pampanga Province. A second highway is being completed, which runs along the Manila Bay coast clear to Manila—cutting the travel time between the primate city and the Zone to two hours. A third artery, cutting across the spine of mountains that divide the peninsula into two, will connect the capital, Balanga, on the Manila Bay coast with Bagac and Morong towns facing the China Sea.

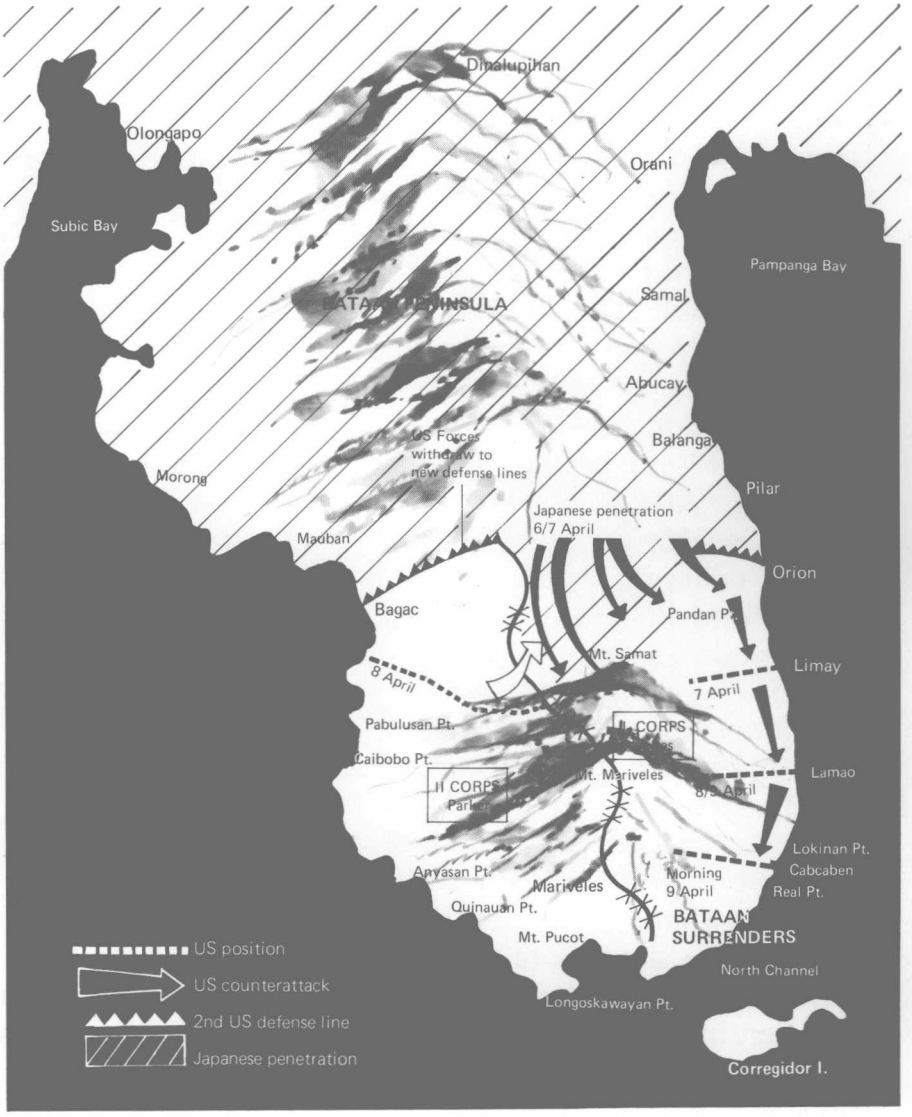
As Bataan races toward the future, historical markers and individual memory preserve the past. Wherever in the peninsula the traveler ventures, he comes on folk who remember the bitter-sweet days of defeat and glory. A cross the height of a 30-story building, which stands at the summit of Mount Samat not too far from Balanga town, and which is visible from as far away as the bayshore at Manila, is the major public monument. It objectifies the country's collective recollection of a desperate struggle that was actually lost before it was even fought.

WAR PLAN ORANGE-3, the USAFFE strategy for defending the Philippines, conceded the Japanese ability to overrun the plains of Luzon. Once unable to prevent an enemy landing on the gentle coast of the main island, the USAFFE could do little more than hold out until an aroused America could send help from across the Pacific. The stronghold for this resistance would be the mountainous peninsula of Bataan, protected from the sea by





Maps show how the battle went from the first Japanese offensive on January 9, 1942, up to the fall of Bataan on April 9, 1942. *Left:* The main battle positions of the USAFFE, January 9-April 6. *Bottom, left:* The Japanese landings on the west coast in the south and an attack behind the Orion-Bagac line. Both offensives were repulsed. *Below:* The extent of Japanese penetration on April 6.



the island-fortress of Corregidor. If only Bataan withstood the Japanese for six months, reinforcements could land behind its shield and retake the Philippines.

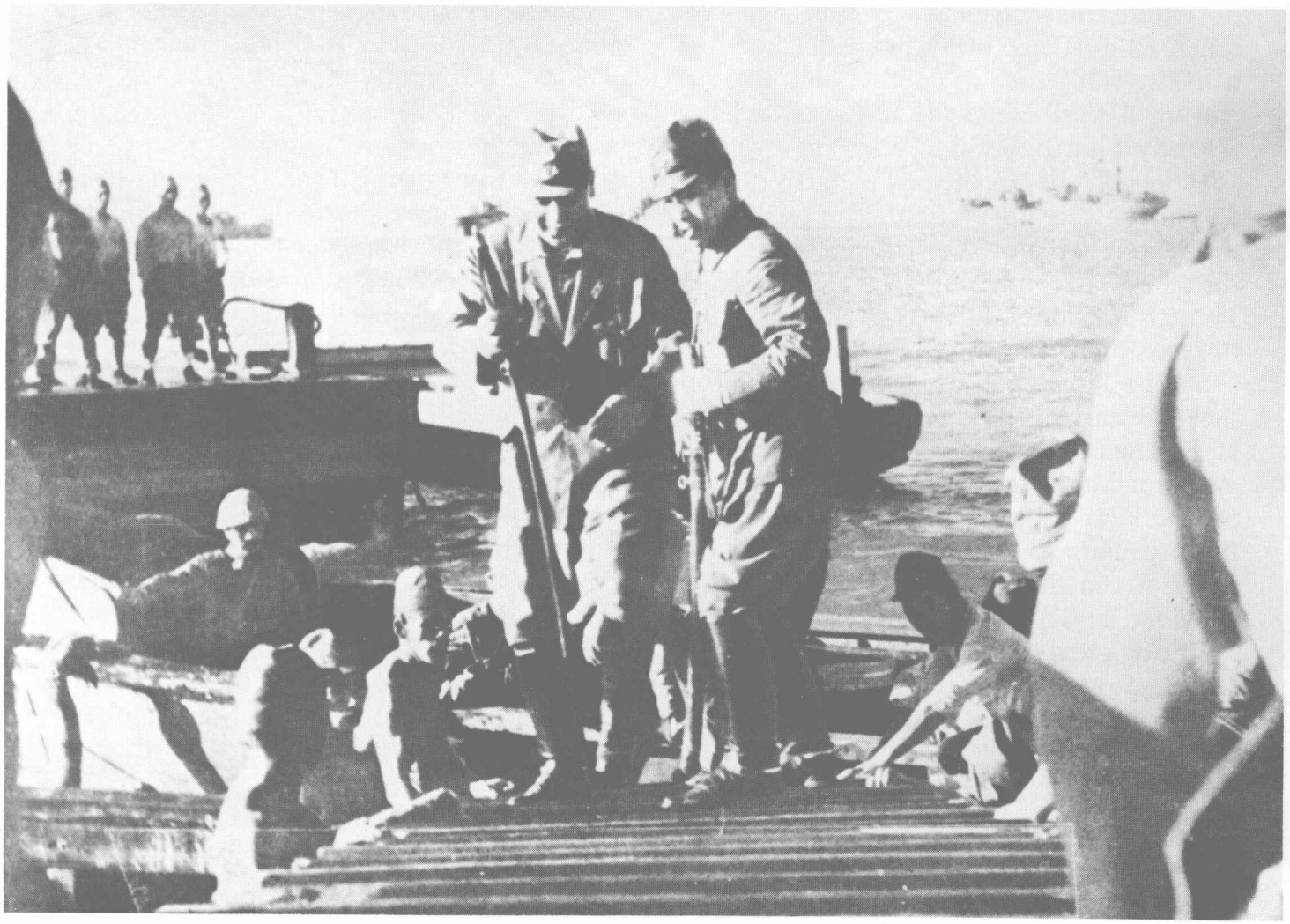
These calculations were upset by the ferocity and power of the Japanese attack all across the Pacific. A brilliant assault destroyed the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in Oahu, the Hawaiian Islands, even before Japan formally declared war. Ten hours later, bombers caught American warplanes on the ground at Clark Field in the Philippines. Having neither an air force nor a navy, General Douglas MacArthur could not stop the Japanese at the beachheads: at Agoo, the historic "Port of Japan" in northwest Luzon, and at Lamon Bay southeast of Manila.

Threatened with a pincer attack by 53,000 elite troops of the Imperial Army, MacArthur ordered the general retreat to Bataan of 15,000 American and 65,000 Filipino troops. There, in a jungled peninsula 24 kilometers wide and 48 kilometers long, with a central spine made up of two great, extinct volcanoes, the USAFFE grimly prepared its last stand. The retreating troops found a lack of preparations characteristic of the entire Allied war effort then. Trenches and fortifications had not been dug. There was not enough food for a month, though Bataan was meant to hold out for six. So the troops were on half-rations from the very first battle. The inhabitants of the peninsula should also have been evacuated. Not only was this neglected. Civilians from other provinces were allowed to drift with the retreating troops into Bataan, where they multiplied the casualties and ate into the scarce stocks of food.

Unprepared as Bataan was, ill-equipped and untrained the bulk of its defenders, the USAFFE fortress held for three whole months, until it was the last Allied pocket in the whole of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific. Everywhere else, the Japanese were irresistible—not because of their number or their superior arms, but because of their audacity. Attacked unexpectedly from the Malay Peninsula, Singapore and its 85,000 troops meekly gave in to 30,000 Japanese after a three-day assault. All General Archibald Wavell could do was rebuke the British with the example of Bataan. Soon the entire Netherlands East Indies too fell; only Bataan endured. For there the Japanese met a spirit as indomitable as their own.

In the beginning, Bataan's high morale fed on the myth of a rescue convoy a "mile long" that was expected at any moment from Mother America. The desperate MacArthur himself abetted this delusion, promising his beleaguered men troops and planes he in his heart knew were not coming. Meeting before Christmas in Washington, even before the Japanese invasion fleet came down on Luzon, Roosevelt and Churchill had decided on "Europe First": Germany was to be the prime enemy. In Asia the Allies would trade space for time.

As the siege wore on, and it became clear no help would come from anywhere, Bataan's gallantry became effortless for having lost its practical meaning. Young soldiers like Ferdinand E. Marcos, who began the war a Third Lieutenant and ended it four ranks higher, with a dozen wounds and 28 medals, found courage easy as breathing. It was the only way to live in the packed and pestilential peninsula they were in. If the Japanese high command thought it was a rabble of straw-soldiers that faced them across the mouth



Landing in Lingayen Gulf in December 1941, General Masaharu Homma *(left)* secures a beachhead from which his 14th Army would advance and defeat the USAFFE in Bataan and Corregidor. After the war Homma was convicted of ordering the Death March and of condoning other atrocities, and executed by a firing squad at Los Baños in April 1946.

of the peninsula, the very first encounter along the Abucay line disillusioned them. There, American artillery and Filipino foot-soldiers mangled their 41st Infantry. In fact, the very exuberance of the Filipino counterattacks proved their undoing. Striking savagely at a salient formed by a regiment that had far outrun its flanks, the Japanese breached the Abucay line, driving the USAFFE into the tangled valley between the great volcanoes, into what was to be known as the Pilar-Bagac line.

Here the struggle for Bataan settled down to attrition, after a Japanese effort had failed to outflank the western anchor of the second USAFFE line. By then the Japanese had lost 7,000 men in combat, and another 10,000 to malaria, beriberi and dysentery. Not until April could the Japanese add Bataan to their string of victories in the East. On Maundy Thursday, 50,000 Japanese, a third of them fresh troops from the homeland, and 150 big guns began the last offensive. By then, barely a third of the 78,000 Fil-American defenders were fit to fight, the rest laid low by starvation and disease. On Easter Sunday the Japanese scaled the strongpoint of Mount Samat. Soon all resistance collapsed, save for a brief attempt to hold at the San Vicente River, farther down the peninsula's edge. Though forbidden to surrender, Major General Edward P. King, Jr., did so on April 9. Yet the passion of the USAFFE was not over. The Death March was still to come.

The Japanese had made provision for only 25,000 prisoners. Now they found 76,000 sick and starving soldiers on their hands. The Japanese plan was to gather all the prisoners at Balanga, the provincial capital halfway up the east coast road. The captives farthest away, at Mariveles, would have to walk 30 kilometers to Balanga. Those who gave up on the Pilar-Bagac road would have a shorter march. From Balanga, trucks would ferry the prisoners to the railhead at San Fernando in Pampanga Province, 53 kilometers away. From there, it would be another 48 kilometers by freight train to Capas, Tarlac Province, and a last 13-kilometer march to the prison camp at O'Donnell.

The great number of prisoners and the weakness of two-thirds of them mocked this Japanese plan. Some columns from Mariveles took three full days to make the journey to Balanga, normally a day's easy march. At Balanga, only a small portion of the captives found trucks to ride. Most marched the full distance to the railhead in the heat of the Luzon summer, goaded by the casual cruelty of their captors—soldiers of a strange and fanatic tradition, themselves indoctrinated to fight to the death.

The American historian John Toland later traced a systematic effort to kill off all prisoners to a group of staff colonels who regarded the war as a crusade against all Western influence in the Pacific. After Bataan's fall, these racists passed the word down clandestinely through the Japanese command. To their credit, few of the field officers obeyed them. Even so, more of the USAFFE died from the March than from battle. Only 54,000 captives reached Camp O'Donnell. Twelve thousand Filipino troops might have escaped into the little towns and villages. Certainly, between 7,000 and 10,000 died on the road of defeat. That was how Bataan ended for the ill-fated USAFFE, 35 years ago.

Corregidor did not long survive it. A rock shaped like a tadpole, its round head pointed toward the mouth of Manila Bay and its curved tail flicking toward the Bataan coast, Corregidor actually is the largest of a group of five islands—the others are hardly more than

One hero among many, Ferdinand E. Marcos is photographed with major's rank and three of his 28 medals at war's end.

giant boulders—guarding the entrance to the Bay. As early as the end of the eighteenth century, the island had been used militarily. The Spaniards set up on it a naval hospital, and then a signal station to warn Manila by semaphore of approaching enemies. A generation later, Corregidor had three ten-inch guns, capable of firing shells a mile away. The Spaniards also fortified El Fraile and Caballo Islands on the south channel into Manila and the coast of Bataan covering the north channel.

The Americans in their turn also fortified Corregidor and the nearby islets—but only against an attack by sea. Even before World War I ended, it was clear that air power would decide victory or defeat in the next one. By the 1920s, American planners considered Corregidor obsolete, though the well-known Malinta Tunnel complex was not dug until 1922. From the beginning, Japanese aircraft dominated the air over Corregidor. Bombs easily destroyed most of the surface installations, driving the bulk of Corregidor's defenders underground. Toward the end, 10,000 people were holed out in fetid Malinta, which was headquarters, hospital, barracks and supply depot.

From the day of Bataan's fall until the Japanese landings in early May, Corregidor was shelled heavily. So intense was the artillery fire from the Bataan shore that the woods on the island were set on fire, and the American batteries silenced one by one. A quarter of the 4,000 troops meant to defend the beaches were put out of action by the Japanese guns. Even then, they killed over two-thirds of the 2,000 veteran troops in the first Japanese assault. Incredibly, the Japanese survivors came on shore at night in their flat-bottomed barges and held. By daylight they were reinforced by tanks. General Jonathan Wainwright, in command at Corregidor, knew he was beaten, and ordered the white flag raised. At least Corregidor's death agony was brief.

THE PRISM of human memory tells much the same story, in smaller bits and pieces, and without the logic of chronology. Bright-faced urchins hunting the sweetest stalks prowl the sugar-cane fields at Dinalupihan, close to the Pampanga border, where the first patrol-encounters between defenders and invaders were fought. At Hermosa, on a week-day afternoon, high-school girls drill with wooden rifles on the grounds of a whitewashed Spanish-time church. The road runs within sight of the sea where the Filipinos and Americans had passed on their way to prison-camp. At Balanga bridge a survivor recalls how he and his fellows, herded by the water to rest, had gorged themselves on turnips grubbed from the soft and sandy soil. By the sea at Balanga, a middle-aged man tells of how as a young civilian he had helped ferry soldiers escaping from the peninsula across the water to safety in the mangrove shores of Pampanga and Bulacan.

The Pilar-Bagac junction, which had been the anchor of the second line of defense, is marked by a huge, kitschy monument of a hand holding a classical broadsword. Dust trails dump trucks muscling their way across the spine of mountains to the China Sea coast. The road-beds use stones and gravel from the Tjawir and Abo-Abo rivers, both scenes of fierce combat. Blood-red bougainvillea blossoms tumble from the walls of a primary schoolbuilding down to the Pantingan River, within sight of a ridge where, after the surrender, the victorious Japanese had massacred close to a thousand Filipino officers in a

A pillar among the ruins, a 12-inch mortar on Corregidor still stands in its emplacement after bombardment from Japanese coastal battery in Bataan.

spasm of hatred. A marker tells the event in matter-of-fact prose. Local people call the ridge Barrio *Kalansay,* "Village of the Skeletons," because for years afterward, farmers turned up bones below the low cliff from where the men had been lined up and bayoneted one by one.

The military trails that run from the road into the hills today are the paths of woodcutters and village boys stalking wood-doves with slingshots. A sawmill by Trail Seven that had been a landmark for the artillery has disappeared, along with the stands of timber that grew nearby. The slopes of the mountains are largely grown with cogon grass. From the road that follows the ridges, the hills look like the backs of great animals, skin rippling with tawny fur.

At the edge of Bagac town, a Friendship Tower erected by a Japanese Buddhist society looks up to the well-known peaks from which artillery had thundered on the armies struggling in the valleys. Scaling the highest of these, Mount Natib, Lieutenant Marcos, accompanied only by three 18-year-old recruits, had destroyed a Japanese mortar emplacement that was pinning down General Mateo Capinpin's 21st Division and preventing it from dealing with a battalion of Japanese infantry that had infiltrated the American lines. This single feat of arms, in the estimation of General MacArthur, delayed Bataan's fall by three full months. For it, Lieutenant Marcos received a Distinguished Service Star. From the center of the Buddhist tower hangs a bronze bell, with a single tree trunk for clapper. Its deep and mellow sound ripples through the luminous air of noon.

Bagac, like Morong farther up the China Sea coast, is just awakening to the possibilities of modernization. The town market is beginning to bustle with new commerce, and Bagac's inhabitants are looking forward to the time the highway, which is actually being superimposed on an old provincial road, is completed.

At the edge of Bagac Bay, beneath limestone cliffs whose caves the USAFFE had used as supply caches, a group of students were picnicking. In a nearby hut, a middle-aged fisherman sits mending a fine nylon net. He too remembers how the war had washed over his life, like a great wave. The caves are overgrown with second growth, but where they are has been imprinted on his mind. He stood up to point them out, seeing familiar contour and coolness where the stranger could see only brown brush and, here and there, the red blossoms of coral trees.

Corregidor across the Bay from Mariveles is one gigantic memorial to the war dead. From the water, the low cliffs of the island rise like a berg long before your ship bumps against the shattered concrete pier. The ridges and ravines torn up by shells have been repaired with forests of young *ipil-ipil* trees. Each day a hydrofoil brings pilgrims from Manila: mostly old people on some sentimental journey. Corregidor is too bleak, too quiet for younger tourists. Perhaps the ghosts of defeat linger on The Rock until now, for the Americans who defended Corregidor succumbed to an audacious enemy initially much weaker than they were, and the disgrace of surrender broke General Wainwright's spirit.

Where Bataan has left the war behind, Corregidor preserves it. The violence of exploding shells remains imprinted on the walls of shattered barracks and on the burnt metal of cannon. Malinta Tunnel is being rebuilt into its prewar look. The lighthouse, too,