

Jack H. Heinzl, Colonel, USAF, Ret.
WWII-Death March-Hell Ships Experience

Three days before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, two squadrons of B-17's were ordered to fly from their home base at Clark Field, Luzon, the Philippines, to Del Monte Field on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Second Lieutenant Jack Heinzl, a B-17 co-pilot in the 93rd Bombing Squadron, 19th Bomb Gp., was part of this group.

Then news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was announced, Jack's B-17 was fueled, loaded with bombs and dispatched to bomb the invading Japanese forces landing at San Fernando, La Union on Luzon. This mission successfully completed, they returned to Clark Field to reload bombs, and take off on a second bombing mission that day, this time to Vigon on the Northwest side of Luzon. After completing the two bombing missions, Jack and his crew returned to Del Monte Field expecting a hot meal and a well-earned crew rest. This was not to be. A huge thunderstorm was guarding the runway. They orbited the field waiting for the thunderstorm to pass, but the huge storm didn't budge. With darkness approaching and running low on fuel, the crew decided to return to Clark Field where they landed close to midnight. They secured the plane, got some food, and went to bed with plans to get going at four in the morning and returning to Del Monte Field on Mindanao. Upon their return to the field, it was a shock to Jack and the crew to find their B-17 was nowhere to be seen. While they slept, another crew, whose B-17 had been destroyed on the ground by a Japanese attack on Clark Field, had taken their plane and flown off leaving Jack and his crew stranded at Clark Field without an airplane.

When the Japanese Forces approached Clark Field all personnel were ordered to withdraw to Bataan Peninsula. Jack and his crew were ordered to Cabcabin Field on Bataan. At Cabcabin Field, Jack was designated Engineering Officer of the Field and was soon engaged in constructing a huge revetment to hide a B-17 that was coming from Australia to rescue them. The revetment was successfully constructed, but the B-17 that was to fly Jack and his crew to Australia never arrived. His 1st pilot was evacuated by submarine to Australia. Jack, along with other personnel of the 19th Bomb Gp., were placed in charge of Cabcabin Field under the command of Major Maurice O. Daly (a former football coach and Westpoint graduate.)

On April 8, 1942, Jack and all the others at Cabcaben were ordered to assemble at nearby Mariveles Field, on the southern tip of Bataan, where on April 9 they became POW's of the Japanese. Jack and everyone else knew they were going to be captured by the Japanese, but they expected to be treated humanely and in accordance with the Geneva Convention. During the withdrawal from Cabcabin Field to Marivales, loud explosions and black clouds filled the air as the American forces destroyed weapons, fuel supplies, ammunition and other supplies to prevent their use by the Japanese.

Surrender of the twelve thousand American forces on Bataan came on April 9, 1942. Two days later, in groups of a hundred, closely guarded by four to six Japanese guards, Jack and the other prisoners began their perilous journey to the railroad head in San Fernando. This sixty-mile forced march was to become known as the infamous "Bataan Death March." The road from Mariveles to San Fernando led up a fairly steep hill. When the prisoners reached the top, they encountered hundreds of Japanese soldiers,

part of the invasion force, coming toward them. The road was narrow and the prisoners had to thread their way past the oncoming Japanese. Jack was stopped by one of the Japanese soldiers and stripped of two canteens of water. The soldier poured the water on Jack's feet and then crushed the canteen under his boot. All prisoners were stripped of personal possessions, watches, jewelry and cigarettes by the oncoming Japanese front line troops.

Flowing Artesian wells along side the road were tempting sights for the thirsty prisoners, but the guards would not allow anyone to stop. Those who couldn't keep up were either shot, bayoneted or clubbed with a rifle butt. Bloated corpses of dead soldiers littered both sides of the road and the smell was horrible. A small mountain stream ran under the road, where upon looking upstream, bodies of dead soldiers could be seen. In desperation for water, and perhaps not seeing the corpses, some prisoners elected to drink from the stream. Jack avoided this temptation and luckily he did, as those that did drink came down with the dreaded and disabling dysentery.

Pausing in a small town, prisoners waited in a long line to drink from a small water spigot. As Jack rested, a Filipino lady, risking death, slipped Jack a banana leaf filled with rice, his only nourishment during the march. A rumor circulated that the Japanese were offering fifty dollars for turning in any American trying to escape or hide. A Filipino civilian, immaculately dressed in a white suit, stopped Jack and tried to recruit him for a guerrilla resistance group. Fearing the man might be a bounty hunter trying to collect a fifty-dollar reward, Jack declined the opportunity. One of Jack's buddies, who worked with him prior to the war for the Standard Oil Co. in El Paso, TX, was wearing a new pair of shoes and quickly developed painful blisters on both feet and was in such

agony he could barely walk. As the daylight faded, they slipped away from the group and made their way to a rice paddy where they took refuge on top of a huge anthill. During the night, Jack massaged his friend's blistered feet as torrential rains drenched them. The next morning, with Jack helping his friend walk, they returned to the road where they merged with other prisoners and continued the march. Death to the marching prisoners came in many ways. Some from the brutal Japanese guards who eagerly clubbed, bayoneted, or shot anyone who could not keep up. Malaria, dysentery and other tropical diseases, took their toll. Jack and the other Death March survivors reached the railroad boxcars for the trip to Camp O'Donnell. They were jammed in so tightly everyone had to stand up. The intense heat and poor physical conditions of the prisoners claimed more lives during the trip.

Camp O'Donnell, some eight miles west of the Manila Railroad line at Capas, had been built before the war by the Americans for use by the Philippine Army. It was now to be used as a prisoner of war camp and was Jack's home for the next three months.

The Japanese were unprepared and completely overwhelmed with the sheer number of prisoners arriving at Camp O'Donnell, and prisoners were forced to live in miserable conditions. A single water faucet served nine thousand prisoners who stood in line for hours to get a drink. Food and medicine were in short supply, and prisoners were dying by the hundreds. Each morning, those who died during the night were placed in a blanket; corners tied over a wooden pole and carried out by two prisoners for burial. Those near death were taken to a separate building called the "Dying Building" where they remained until their death, usually within a few days. During his first month at

O'Donnell, Jack became ill with Malaria and Diarrhea and became weak and lost considerable weight but could still make it to the faucet.

During the first week of June 1942, after being at Camp O'Donnell for about three months, Jack was transferred to Camp Cabanatuan, about a hundred miles north of Manila. Compared to Camp O'Donnell, Cabanatuan was an improvement. There were more water faucets and more food. The camp was cleaner and the guards seemed to be less hostile. Because of his poor physical condition due to Malaria and diarrhea he contracted while at Camp O'Donnell, Jack was placed in the hospital Area. He was so weak he could hardly get out of his bunk. It was at this time that he had his first close encounter with death. His close friend, whom he had helped on the death March, came to Jack's aid and talked an American doctor into seeing him. He was given a pill. Whatever that pill was, it brought Jack back from the brink of death. Within a few days he was strong enough to get out of that catwalk, climbed down and began regaining his strength.

About three months after his arrival at Camp Cabanatuan, Jack was transferred from the Hospital Area to the Work Area. He was sent out to work on various details performing farm labor, pick and shovel work building a Runway, hauling straw, wood details and others. While loading wood on a work detail, Jack severely injured his back. He was in constant pain and could barely walk. After a few hours at work, he would be helped by his fellow prisoners back to the barracks. The camp doctor (an American) decided the cause of this back pain and was a bad tooth and pulled it. This didn't help his back pain and only gave him a sore jaw. Jack was miserable and it was only when he was put in traction and using hot canteens on his back that he finally got relief from the

pain. The traction procedure consisted of ropes tied to his ankles then placed over a 2x4 above his bed then tied to rocks for weights. When showing some improvement, he was sent back to work. After a few hours of work, the severe pain would return and his fellow prisoners would help him back to his barracks. The traction process would start again. The procedure occurred many times over a period of several months.

The Japanese camp commander insisted all the prisoners perform work, and Jack's doctor said he had to go back to work. Jack resisted and stood his ground. He called for the senior officer from his barracks and told him he was not going back to work because of his back injury. Jack asked the officer to tell the Japanese camp commander that he wasn't going back to work because of his back. He said, "If he wants to shoot me he can. I'm ready to go, but I'm not going back out that gate." Nothing happened. Jack did not leave the camp again. With the help from other prisoners, he set up a small workbench outside under his window where he repaired leaky canteens used by prisoners on their work details.

Jack was very ingenious and in his spare time designed and constructed a small forge using a broken grinding wheel, a five-gallon can and other scraps. He melted an old aluminum canteen in his forge and fabricated a pair of Air Force aviation wings using dental compound for casting. He also made a cribbage board from a caribou horn, a cigarette holder, a knife from a hacksaw blade, navigational dividers, a protractor and a Mercator map. All this was made from scrap parts scrounged from around the camp. Part of an aluminum airplane aileron, a Hershey chocolate tin, a Maxwell House coffee can, rubber bands from an old inner tube, and a window shade were but a few of the items Jack utilized for these projects. With the Mercator map, war news received by a

prisoner's contraband radio, Jack and his buddies were able to keep an up-to-date plot of the America's progress in the Pacific War. Jack later buried all these items, which were later recovered by American forces and returned to Jack after the war in a ceremony at the Pentagon. These items are now on display in the Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio.

In September 1944, 1619 prisoners, one of whom was Jack, were to be shipped to Japan in the *Oryoku Maru*, a Japanese passenger ship. The *Oryoku Maru* was a passenger ship in name only and was soon to be known as one of the notorious "Hell Ships." Jack said for him, the "Bataan Death March" was very brutal and almost unbearable but it didn't compare to the torture and suffering he and others endured on the "Hell Ships." The Bataan Death March received wide publicity in the United States where it was used as a propaganda tool against Japan, but almost no one heard of the "Hell Ship's" episodes, which took place during the later stages of the war. This was the first of three "Hell Ships" the *Oryoku Maru*, the *Enoura Maru*, and the *Brazil Maru*.

The passenger sections of the *Oryoku Maru* were already filled with Japanese women, children and merchant seamen when the prisoners arrived. Jack and other prisoners were crammed into three cargo holds so tightly they could barely move. If you were standing, you couldn't sit down and vice versa. There was no air circulation except for the open hatch covers and the heat was unbearable. Prisoners would wave their shirts, handkerchiefs and anything else just to circulate the air. With no toilets, it didn't take long before the cargo holds were fouled and reeked of human waste. The "honey buckets" were filled to overflowing by those with dysentery and diarrhea. Small amounts

of food and water were lowered into the holds at night but because there was such a scramble for it, only a few prisoners got any.

The next morning the *Oryoku Maru*, in convoy and hugging the coast of Luzon, was attacked by Navy planes from aircraft carrier USS Hornet. The American pilots had no way of knowing that American prisoners were in the cargo holds and continued strafing and bombing what they believed to be a Japanese transport. Conditions in the prisoner holds were intolerable because of the overcrowding, darkness, intense heat and cries of those crazed by an insatiable thirst. Out of their minds and desperate for something to quench their thirst, some prisoners drank their own urine. A few slashed their bodies and licked their own blood. One of Jack's friends, a P-40 pilot from Denver CO., cut his own wrists. The wound was sealed with tape and he made it back to Denver.

The next day, a tremendous blast rocked the ship; the result of a direct hit from attacking American planes from the USS Hornet. The ship began to list and eventually sank. The planes continued their attack as they strafed and bombed the ship, now a sitting duck. Many prisoners were killed from bomb blasts, shrapnel and ricocheting bullets. A direct hit on the side of the ship by a bomb killed a number of West Pointers who were gathered together in the hold. Eventually the attacks ceased and the prisoners were ordered to abandon ship but not until all of the bodies of the Japanese women, children and merchant seamen were removed.

Jack and the other prisoners made an orderly exit from the cargo holds; the strong helped the weak up the ladders to the open deck. From there, they could see they were not very far from land. Jack removed his shoes and tied them around his neck with the shoe laces and placed his pants over his arm and jumped to the side and started

swimming toward the shore. All the while, the struggling prisoners were carefully watched by Japanese machine gunners who would fire a burst at them if they swam in the wrong direction away from the ship. During his swim to shore his pants drifted away. Jack set his shoes beside him and laid on the beach and rested. When he opened his eyes, his shoes were gone.

The Japanese soon rounded up over nine hundred prisoners and led them to a fenced-in tennis court, near the U.S. Naval Base at Subic Bay. They were kept there in the blistering sun with the only water from a single spigot. Food consisted of dry uncooked rice issued by the spoonful. The death toll mounted as the prisoners baked in the intense sun for the next four days. During this period the naval aircraft continued their attack against Japanese antiaircraft gun placements beyond the tennis court. While flying over the tennis court the pilots rocked their wings in recognition of the POW's below.

Jack and the rest of the tennis court prisoners were loaded onto trucks and taken to San Fernando, Pampanga. He stayed there while the Japanese separated the sick and wounded prisoners from the healthy ones. Jack was among the healthy ones and this group was shipped by train to San Fernando, LaUnion. Then they boarded the second "Hell Ship," the *Enoura Maru*, which was to transport them to Japan.

The ship had just unloaded horses and the hold where Jack was placed was littered with horse manure. The smell of the manure and the urine was sickening and the air was dark with flies which bit worse than any mosquito. Jack discovered some hard brick-like object on the floor mixed with the horse manure. Upon closer examination, he

found they were compressed cakes of oats for feeding the horses. The bricks were chipped and gnawed for what little nourishment they could provide.

Electric lights were strung along the empty horse stalls. Jack, along with others, used the electric wiring to lower one of the POW's below to another cargo hold. The cargo was raw sugar being shipped from the Philippines to Japan. They gorged themselves with some seventeen sacks of sugar. Jack, still having his socks after his swim to shore from the Oryoku Maru, filled his socks with the raw sugar. Many of the men became very ill from eating too much raw sugar and some died as a result.

The Japanese guards discovered the sugar had been stolen and threatened to cut off the prisoner's food and water unless the guilty parties came forward. Two prisoners, knowing they were dying, volunteered to take the blame. Everyone was startled when the prisoners were returned unharmed. They said they were treated humanely, fed warm meals and returned. They both died within two days, along with several others.

After about ten days, the ship arrived at Takao Harbor, Formosa, where it anchored next to another freighter, the Brazil Maru. The Enoura Maru had been at anchor for several days when it was attacked by a plane. Jack thought it was a B-24, possibly based in China. A bomb scored a direct hit on one of the holds killing close to three hundred prisoners outright, another hundred or so died from wounds during the next few days. It was several days before their captors aided the prisoners. Many of those wounded could probably have been saved had the Japanese given prompt medical treatment.

Jack was part of a ten man detail placed on a barge next to the ship to unload the cargo nets full of dead bodies. The crane operator seemed to enjoy holding the cargo net

over the working party as body fluids from the dead rained down on the working party. Once the net full of bodies was lowered to the barge, the agonizing process was repeated. The barge was moved to a sand bar and the prisoners were required to drag the bodies across the sand and load them to the Siapans for the Chinese to take them across Takao Harbor for disposal. It was during the third week of January 1945 that Jack was transferred from the *Enoura Maru* to his third "Hell Ship," the *Brazil Maru* which set sail for Japan.

The weather became colder and the sea rougher. He and another prisoner discovered a big old canvas windsock in one corner of the cargo hold, and he and several others, using it as a sleeping bag, slipped into the windsock for warmth. About fifty prisoners died each day from exposure; most of them from pneumonia. A number never recovered from the bombing of the *Enoura Maru* in Takao Harbour. One of whom was MO Daly, Jack's commanding officer at the Cabcabin Field of Bataan.

The water rationed to the prisoners continued to be inadequate. Jack had saved eleven spoons of water in his canteen. He awoke one morning to discover that someone had drained the canteen dry during the night.

Latrines constructed of wooden boxes were hung over the side of the ship. Jack was on the deck, now covered with a thin layer of snow, waiting his turn at the latrine. He heard that a little water could be drained from an old steam jenny on deck. When he thought the Japanese guard wasn't looking, he ran over to the steam jenny and started draining the oily water into his canteen cup. He heard a growling sound, turned around and saw the guard running toward him, rifle in hand, ready to bring it down on his head.

He made a desperate dash for the cargo hold, pausing to scrape some snow off the deck into his canteen cup. It was the same spot on the deck where the dead bodies were placed before rolling them into the sea. Upon reaching the bottom of the ladder, he took one sip of the melted snow. Jack says this is the biggest mistake that he made in his 3 ½ years as a POW.

Jack came down with dysentery from that one sip of water from the melted snow. Amebic dysentery is much more severe than diarrhea. Without any digested food to pass, the dysentery began to eat away from Jack's stomach and his body started to dissolve from the inside and was passed from his body in the form of gray matter.

Jack was so weak, he could not make it up to the ladder to the weather deck to use the latrines. The "honey bucket" in the prisoner's hold began to overflow onto the deck making footing almost impossible in the rolling and pitching ship. Jack tried to make it to the "honey bucket" in bare feet, but the deck was too slippery from those who had come before him and he almost fell down. The death rate was terrible. Approximately fifty prisoners died each day. Considering the physical condition of his friends who were passing away each day, Jack figured he would be lucky to last just three more days. The third day the ship arrived at Moji, Japan on January 30, 1945.

Jack was issued some heavy cold weather clothing the Japanese had captured from the Dutch East Indies. The clothing was so heavy and he was so weak he had to be helped along by a fellow prisoner under each arm and taken to a large empty warehouse where there was some drinking water. Finally, Jack was taken to Fukuoka Work Camp #3. Upon arriving at the camp, the Japanese weighed each prisoner. Jack weighed 93 lbs., a loss of 85 pounds since becoming a POW. Arriving at the camp, Jack was re-

united with some of his old 93rd Bombing Group airmen who had worked with him at Cabcabin Field on Bataan. They fed him hot soup and looked after him as best they could. Jack was placed in the hospital area. The hospital area was that in name only because medicine was almost non-existent.

Jack was so far gone that, as was the custom, a blanket was pulled over him to await death. Jack was still suffering from dysentery and his condition continued to deteriorate. During the night, a Catholic priest came and gave him the last Rights. Jack woke up and felt something crawling on his tongue. He figured it was a bedbug. He didn't want to swallow it and was so weak, he couldn't move his arms or spit, so he just kept his mouth open and the bedbug crawled back out. It was this night that Jack had his second close call with death. The next morning, the burial squad was making the rounds and discovered Jack was still alive! From then on, thanks to the medicine and care his old 93rd Bombing Squadron airmen gave him, he began to regain his strength.

After three months at Fukuoka Work Camp #3, Jack was deemed healthy enough to be transferred to the Mukden Prisoner of War Camp in Hoten, (Mukden) Manchuria. In mid-August, 1945, when Japan fell, the Russian troops reached Hoten and opened the gates to the Mukden Prisoner of War Camp.

While awaiting repatriation, Jack and two of his buddies decided to go into Mukden for some sight seeing. While riding into town in a rickshaw Jack spotted a large Japanese flag flying from the top of a tall building. He and his friends proceeded to liberate the flag for a souvenir. It was a fancy flag with a gold and red fringe and a Japanese inscription. Jack was later informed that the flag was a ceremonial flag from a Japanese battleship. He and his friends flipped for the flag and Jack won.

The next day Jack and another friend continued sightseeing and stopped at a cluster of buildings that appeared to be a college campus. While walking up a cement sidewalk they saw a Japanese officer approaching wearing an ornate Samurai sword from his waist. Jack stopped the officer and took the sword. They continued up the path and were approached by a Russian soldier who beckoned them to follow him. The Russian led Jack and his friend to an office where a Russian officer politely greeted them. He explained that they did not expect such a large number of Japanese soldiers to surrender and did not have enough men to guard them. He went on to say they made a deal with the Japanese officers to guard their own troops and in return permission was granted for the Japanese officers to wear their swords. Because of this agreement, he told Jack that if he would return the sword he could have all the swords he wanted. With that said, Jack handed over the sword and he and his buddy were lead by the Russian soldier to a large warehouse where hundreds of swords were stored. The soldier motioned for them to help themselves. After being very selective, Jack and his friend departed with each having an arm load of swords. Upon returning to the camp, they gave each of their friends in camp a sword, keeping one for a souvenir. Many years later Jack was told by a collector of Japanese swords that the sword was over 300 years old and had been owned by a member of the Black Dragon Society in China. In August 1999 Jack gave the flag and sword to the Admiral Nimitz Museum, Fredericksburg, Texas where they are to be placed on display.

Jack and the other POW's returned to the United States, where Jack underwent back surgery at Walter Reed Army Hospital for several ruptured disks, the source of his pain while he was a prisoner. The operation was a success, and Jack was returned to full

duty and assigned to the 9th Bomb Sq. Bomb Wg. as Aircraft Commander (1st Pilot on a B-29 crew at Ft. Worth Army Air Field) later renamed Carswell Air Force Base. With the exception of his POW days, Jack spent his entire career in the Strategic Air Command. Jack retired with the rank of Colonel with 30 years of service to his country.

No one will ever repay Jack Heinzl for the torture, agonizing pain and suffering he endured during the three and a half years he was a prisoner of war. We can though, remember Jack and the thousands of other Americans who were prisoners of war or sacrificed their lives for our country and pray it will never happen again.

Note: This condensed short story of Jack's WWII experiences was written by Captain Edward (Ed) Cox, a US Naval officer and Naval pilot, after a lengthy discussion during the celebration of Jack's 86th birthday. It was written in an effort to satisfy the curiosity of Jack's friends who continued to persuade him to write the story