

CABANATUAN JAILBREAK



POW Claude Gibbons is shown new type Tommy gun.



One of the liberated prisoners, armed with a Red Cross parcel, helps another into a waiting jeep, transport to an evac hospital.



At the hospital a tired POW, still wearing a battered campaign hat, rests his hands on the desk and registers with a clerk.

By Sgt. OZZIE St. GEORGE
YANK Staff Correspondent

LUZON, THE PHILIPPINES — "Prisoner of War." There are some thousands of GIs on Luzon who know what those words mean. They have seen American POWs, survivors of Bataan, Corregidor and the Death March, freed after 34 months imprisonment. It has not been a sight that many of us will forget.

"The worst part, I think," Cpl. Albert L. Parker of Phoenix, Ariz., told us, "was knowing that the Japs could do anything to us they wanted to."

CABANATUAN

Cpl. Parker's knees sagged. He sat down suddenly and bowed his head over his arms.

Pvt. Joseph R. Stanford of Pittsburgh, Pa., a 28th Bomb Squadron bombardier on Dec. 8, 1942, asked him, "How does it go?"

"Not so good," said Parker, without raising his head.

We were in a farmyard near a dirt road 10 miles north of Cabanatuan in the central Lingayen plains. Parker, Stanford and Pfc. Lloyd E. (Swede) Anderson of Everett, Wash., were three he said, "I could have gotten anything—anything—in camp for this cigarette."

Stanford fumbled with a match. "We cannot strike matches yet," he explained. "We have not had any since we were captured." He lighted it. "I am going to smoke myself sick today."

Somebody asked, "How was it?"

Anderson drew slowly on his cigarette. "Rough," he said. He said it seriously. "Rough, you could say it was rough."

Stanford said, "Rough—that's all. We would never be captured again."

Stanford fought through the first month on Bataan, was transferred to Mindanao and was captured there on May 10, 1942. He was held in the Davao penal colony until June 1943 and then sent north to Cabanatuan No. 1.

"We were on the prison ship 21 days between Davao and Manila," he told us, "packed in like sardines. At first we were allowed on deck once a day, but on the sixth day two men jumped overboard. We were locked below decks then for the rest of the trip. We got one canteen of water and two handfuls of salted rice per man per day. A hell ship."

Stanford was wearing faded blue denim shorts, a jacket and Japanese socks. His face was flushed. Anderson's and Parker's faces were dead white.

Anderson, a 60th Coast Artillery antiaircraft gunner, fought through Bataan, escaped to Corregidor by a small boat when the Peninsula fell, was captured there May 6, 1942 and was sent to Cabanatuan No. 1. He, too, wore denim shorts and jacket, Jap shoes and a faded felt hat, one of 42 such hats received in Cabanatuan No. 1 through the Australian Red Cross.

Parker, one of the 200th CAA, fought at Bataan and was captured at its fall on Apr. 9, 1942.

"You were on the Death March?" somebody asked him.

"Is that what they call it?" Parker answered. "Yes, we walked to Capas, about 65 miles. Three days and three nights without food, only such water as we could sneak out of the ditches. We were loaded into steel boxcars at Capas, 100 men to a car—they jammed us in with rifle butts—and taken to Fort O'Donnell. I gave out at Capas and was paralyzed from the waist down. The Japs were killing stragglers but some fellows helped me into a car. Still we had no food or water. The Japs kept saying next stop, next stop' but nothing ever came of it. I was transferred to Cabanatuan June 3, 1942."

Parker wore blue denim shorts and a jacket and an overseas cap, a product of Cabanatuan's prisoner-run tailor shop. He was barefoot.

A few feet away a half dozen of the prisoners, clad in only thin long-handled cotton unders, "in a space smaller than a city block. The summer of '42 was the worst—they were dying 20 or 30 a day. One day 65 died. The Japs made us bury them, made us dig holes, then threw 40 or 50 bodies in a hole. When the hole was full, we covered it up. The smell made us sick."



Men told of eating cats, dogs, rats and lizards in their fight to stay alive in the Jap prison camp.

CABANATUAN

Maj. Hubbard, in O'Donnell with No. 2 hospital, told of the same thing. Men died so fast, it was impossible to identify their bodies. "The Japs," the major told us, "had stripped the prisoners of almost everything by the time they reached O'Donnell — dog tags, wallets, papers, rings, watches, letters, everything. Many were stark naked. We kept what records we could on toilet paper, the labels off cans, any kind of wrapper. Often it was only a surname. We turned these over to the Japanese, but I don't think they forwarded them until late '42."

Somebody asked about the food. Anderson thought a moment. "Poor," he said. "Poor."

Cabanatuan No. 1 had a farm a few kilometers from the enclosure. The prisoners worked on it from 0700 to 1100 and from 1200 until dark six days a week.

They broke the ground for that farm with hoes, worked it with hoes and their hands. "And vitamin sticks," said Stanford. "That's what we called the stuff the guards beat us with—rifle butts, hoe handles, axe handles, anything they could lay hands on. It was keep your head down and your backside up. If we straightened up to stretch, the guards let us have it. Our guards at Cabanatuan were Taiwans (Formosans). They were bastards, rotten clean through, no decency whatever. They hated and feared the Jap regulars—the regulars beat them up—then they took it out on us. Most of the Japs' prison guards are Taiwans. I would like a chance to get even with them. The sons of bitches."

American POWs were like Rip Van Winkles when the 6th Rangers freed them after three years on Luzon

"Sometimes," Anderson said, "they only hit us once, but usually they knocked a man down and then kicked or beat him unconscious. Most of us carry scars or have some teeth missing. Some of us have broken ribs or broken arms. We will not forget the Taiwans."

The farm grew camotes, casaba (melons), okra, native spinach, egg plants, onions, radishes, peppers, cucumbers. The camotes and casaba, and sometimes okra, were for the prisoners; the Japs took everything else.

"We had only one kind of vegetable at a time plus rice," Stanford put in. "Or sometimes only rice. Breakfast was lugao—strained rice and water, mostly water. We got 250 grams of rice per man per day, about 8 ounces or two double handfuls. We got 160 kilos (about 350 pounds) of meat per week per 2,000 men. It figured out to a little under three ounces per man. We got the leftovers—heads, the guls and so on. Generally, it was carabao meat, but there would be weeks at a time when we did not get any meat at all. Instead, sometimes we got fish powder."

Stanford sunk his teeth into a porkburger. "Bread!" he said. "The first bread I have had in 32 months. And there is more meat here than the Japs gave us in a month."

Everett Dillard CTM of Copperhill, Tenn., captured on Corregidor, told of men eating cats, dogs, rats, lizards. "I did not," he said, "but I went down to 85 pounds. My hip bones broke through the skin. I did eat and can eat a piece of cornstalk straight out of the ground with as much relish as I once ate beef steak. I lived, I guess, because I wanted to. We all did, all of us that are still alive. The will to live was the only thing that kept us going. Now I would like to get even. I have had 22 years service and I could still do some good on a destroyer."

Anderson went on. "We have had no sugar or pepper since 1941. Now and then the Japs gave us a little salt. Sometimes we had tea—the Nips gave it to us after they had used it."

Stanford agreed with Dillard. "We are alive," he said, "because we wanted to live and because we learned to steal. We had to. If we were caught, they made us stand in the sun for three or four hours, with our arms stretched level with our shoulders. If our arms dropped, we got a beating. Or sometimes, particularly with potatoes, they made us eat what we were stealing, dirt and all. The Taiwans tried to make one man eat half a bushel of potatoes. They forced them down his throat until he vomited."

"We had strafing sacks," Anderson explained. "That's concentration camp talk—pockets sewed

CABANATUAN

inside our jackets or pants legs that we could hide things in, a radish, a pepper, anything to eat. Strafing means stealing of any kind, or it means a beating, too. We have a language all of our own."

"We figured it out," Stanford continued. "It cost the Japs between 3 and 4 cents a day to feed us. I do not think we could have lived without the Filipinos. You can say they were really in there pitching. They really stuck their necks out to slip us food, cigarettes, news, anything they had. They are all right."

Capt. Robert E. Roseveare of San Francisco had a case in point. With G-2 of the Philippine Department, the captain was captured on Bataan and sent north on the Death March. Reaching Capas at the end of that March, after 72 hours without food, the prisoners were halted. Filipinos of all ages, who came crowding in on them with bananas, water, tomatoes, etc., tried to pass this food to the prisoners. Jap guards knocked the stuff out of their hands and forced them to stand back.

"Then," said Capt. Roseveare, "one Filipino girl, about 18, stepped up, pushed a guard out of the way—she pushed hard—and walked by him to hand out some tomatoes. I tell you, that brought a lump the size of your fist to my throat. When the Filipinos saw it, they all crowded in. The guards saw the jig was up and to save face they started passing out food and cigarettes."

DURING '42 and '43 details of a thousand or two worked on Cabanatuan's farms. The Japs, Anderson told us, "think only in thousands. A thousand men for this, a thousand men for that."

Other details were sent to cut wood or to other parts of Luzon to work on roads and airstrips. While on details, the prisoners went barefoot. The Japs kept their shoes in camp to discourage escapes. These details were worked literally to death.

"The Taiwans guarding the details," Stanford said, "always gave orders in Japanese purposely. When we did not understand, they beat us up."

"Those Taiwans," Anderson said, "were just plain mean. They made us tinko—that is count off—in Japanese. They would leave us standing in formation in the rain, a lot of tricks like that. There were a lot of rules and regulations, GI crap, shakedown inspections, all that stuff. A shakedown meant the guards came through and took anything they wanted. We kept our stuff buried most of the time."

Prisoners who broke the rules—or were accused of breaking them—were beaten, put on "short" rations and deprived of water.

"It's funny," Stanford told us, "but the Jap regulars were usually pretty decent to us. Sometimes they even gave us cigarettes. They knew what we had been up against, they were fighting soldiers themselves. The Taiwans had never seen a battle."

"We had nicknames for the worst guards," Anderson said. "White Angel, Donald Duck, Clark Gable, Big Speedo and others. White Angel was a son of a bitch."

Once classified as POWs, the men were paid while on details. NCOs got 25 centavos (12½ cents) per day; privates and pfcs, 15 centavos. Officers were paid 10 pesos per month, later raised to 30. All payments, of course, were in Jap currency.

"There were other details," Stanford added. "In Davao we built rice-paddy dikes, with our hands and carabao dung. In Cabanatuan we fertilized the farm with our hands, with human dung. The Japs took pictures of that and showed them to the Filipinos. There were other indignities—all kinds. They were worse than the beatings. We had to salute all guards, or if we did not have a hat, we had to bow to them. That was the worst of all."

Cabanatuan's barracks were of nipa, approximately 18 by 50 feet. Each had a doorway at each end, six small windows covered with bamboo shutters, dirt floors but for a narrow board catwalk down the middle. On either side of the catwalk were double tiers of 6- by 10-foot bamboo bays. Up to 125 men were in each barracks, sleeping five or six to a bay.

There was entertainment in Cabanatuan. In 1942 the prisoners sat through repeated showings of "The Fall of Bataan and Corregidor," under orders. There had not been any movies since then. They had their own band, mostly guitars and banjos that some prisoners had somehow saved or that others had made of bam-

CABANATUAN

boo and odds and ends. They made a roulette wheel, too, and a slot machine. Slugs for the latter were on sale.

"You would be surprised," Anderson told us. "We could make almost anything. We had to."

Practically everybody made a cigarette holder. Tobacco in Cabanatuan was worth literally its weight in gold. On a very few occasions the Japs sold it through their commissary at prices too high for the prisoners. Now and then they issued some. The last issue was in August 1944—three bags of weed the Nips had used in making nicotine solution for insect repellent. Filipinos slipped tobacco to the prisoners or gave it to details working outside the camp. Maj. Hubbard showed us his cigarette holder—a 2-inch long ebony cylinder with a hole the size of a match stick at the end.

"That fits our cigarettes," Stanford said, and dug an inch-long cigarette out of his pocket. "Uncured Philippine tobacco and newsprint," he said, "big around as a match—may we never see another."

There were cigarettes, American cigarettes, in the Red Cross POW packages, but those packages almost invariably were rifled before the prisoners saw them and the cigarettes and any sweets removed. While they lasted, the men traded wrist watches, rings and so on to the Japs for those cigarettes. "Changee, changee," the Nips called it.

"Our personal packages were often rifled, too," Anderson said, "if we got them at all. We got our first ones late in 1943. The Japs had let us write a card in March 1943, almost a year after we were captured. They told us then that we could write one every month but that promise did not work out either. Sometimes months would go by and they would only tell us there were no cards."

The Red Cross packages came through Nip hands the same way. Four 1943 packages reached Cabanatuan in time for Christmas '44. Those packages provided the men with almost their only soap, toothpaste, other toilet articles. The Nips made one 2-ounce issue of tooth powder; soap was almost as valuable as tobacco.

There were several chaplains at Cabanatuan and a few missionaries, but religious services were subject to the approval of the Japs.

"They'd tell us we could have Mass," Anderson said, "then send everybody out on detail."

The prisoners had their own hospital—a barracks like the rest—their own doctors and dentists.

They had no medicine at first except now and then some Jap-issued quinine. Later they were well supplied through Red Cross packages.

"In fact," Stanford told us, "we had more medicine than the Japs did. We used to trade them sulpha for tobacco. We even made some sulpha ourselves and in Davao some novacaine. I think they used fire extinguisher fluid as a part of the novacaine. The Japs, by the way, tried and tried to analyze our sulpha drugs but never made the grade."

In the prison hospital the commonest ailments were malaria, dysentery, broken ribs, miscellaneous bruises and above all, malnutrition.

Two operations that resulted in what the POWs called "vest-pocket bungholes" were performed following prolonged dysentery.

Cabanatuan's contact with the outside world was non-existent at first, sketchy but surprisingly accurate during the last year. Filipinos for a long time supplied most of it by word of mouth. The prisoners learned of the Normandy landings late in June. Later Cabanatuan had its own secret radio.

"We didn't know about this until a few weeks ago," Anderson explained. "Only a few of the officers were in on it. All our news was scuttlebutt except the time the Japs left three Reader's Digests slip through in a personal package. That was in March 1943. We read those magazines until they fell apart. Most of the time our news was just rumor but we learned that it was usually right."

"We heard about the Leyte landings almost



CABANATUAN

immediately," Stanford went on. "Incidentally, on that one we heard that 'green-clad hordes of Americans swarmed ashore'. We didn't know what to make of that until today—till we saw your green uniforms."

Stanford paused, gazed at the dusty green-clad hordes of Yanks that were milling in and around the prisoners, 2½-ton trucks and ambulances that were forming a convoy along the narrow road.

"Those Rangers," he said, "man, they deserve all the credit they'll ever get!"

"Those Rangers" were 121 picked men of the 6th Ranger Battalion.

"The Japs," Stanford said, "never knew what hit them. Neither did we. About 7:00 o'clock Pvt. George Barber (an English Tommy captured at Singapore who jumped ship enroute to Formosa and was recaptured in the PIs) took a sack of potatoes up to the guardhouse. About 15 Nips were sitting around. There were about 50 more in and around camp. At a quarter to eight the shooting started."

The Rangers closed in from three sides. The raid went off like clockwork. They smashed the gates, streamed inside, annihilated the Nip guards.

"Somebody stuck his head in our barracks,"

"We're Rip Van Winkles," Maj. Hubbard said. "Everything is new."

I felt oddly like a proud father.

Two P-40s buzzed low across the tail of the convoy. The men recognized them as old friends, breathed, "P-40s!"

"We know them," said Stanford, "our Air Force."

Capt. Roseveare said, "There's a flag." Anderson, Stanford, Parker, everybody craned his neck. "Where?"

"There," said the captain. "Oh Gbd, she sure looks good."

We passed the flag. For a few hundred yards the roadside was deserted. The captain said, "You know, if what we did helped—if our hanging on, I mean, gave them time—it was worth it. Once."

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