**#1 Overview:**

The Bataan Death March began on April 10, 1942, when the Japanese assembled about 78,000 prisoners (12,000 U.S. and 66,000 Filipino). They began marching up the east coast of Bataan. Although they didn't know it, their destination was Camp O'Donnell, north of the peninsula.

The Death Marchers received almost no water or food, further weakening their fragile bodies. The POWs marched roughly 65 miles over the course of about six days until they reached San Fernando. There, groups as large as 115 men were forced into boxcars designed to hold only 30-40 men. Boxcars were so full that the POWs could not sit down. This caused more to die of heat exhaustion and suffocation in the cars on the ride from San Fernando to Capas. The POWs then walked seven more miles to Camp O'Donnell. At the entrance to the camp, the POWs were told to lay out the few possessions they still had; any POW found with any Japanese-made items or money was executed on the spot.

James Bollich, and American soldier who endured the ordeal, recalled marching out of the peninsula with Japanese guards on either side of the line of prisoners.

"They took our wallets, anybody who had a ring they took those, took our dog tags. Then they began to beat us. They beat us with rifle butts, sabers, clubs, anything they could get their hands on. That went on all day long. They wouldn't let anybody have a drink of water or let us rest and they didn't feed us.

And then I think it was around the middle of the second day that people began to collapse. We hadn't had water in a day and a half and in the tropics it's almost beyond what you can take. And of course once anybody collapsed, the Japanese immediately killed them, it looked like they were really trying to kill us all."

**#2 First atrocity of the March: from James Bollich’s memoir**

"The victim, an air force captain, was being searched by a three-star private. Standing by was a Japanese commissioned officer, hand on sword hilt. These men were nothing like the toothy, bespectacled runts whose photographs are familiar to most newspaper readers. They were cruel of face, stalwart, and tall.

'The private a little squirt, was going through the captain's pockets. All at once he stopped and sucked in his breath with .a hissing sound. He had found some Japanese yen. He held these out, ducking his head and sucking in his breath to attract notice. The big Japanese looked at the money. Without a word he grabbed the captain by the shoulder and shoved him down to his knees. He pulled the sword out of the scabbard and raised it high over his head, holding it with both hands. The private skipped to one side.'

'Before we could grasp what was happening, the black-faced giant had swung his sword. I remember how the sun flashed on it. There was a swish and a kind of chopping thud, like a cleaver going through beef'.

'The captain's head seemed to jump off his 'shoulders. It hit the ground in front of him and went rolling crazily from side to side between the lines of prisoners. The body fell forward. I have seen wounds, but never such a gush of blood as this. The heart continued to pump for a few seconds and at each beat there was another great spurt of blood. The white dust around our feet was turned into crimson mud. I saw the hands were opening and closing spasmodically. Then I looked away.'

**#3: Drop-outs – from James Bollich**

The parade of death continues its journey as its members inevitably succumb to the heat, the lack of food and the lack of water. The hours dragged by and, as we knew they must. The dropouts began. It seemed that a great many of the prisoners reached the end of their endurance at about the same time. They went down by twos and threes. Usually, they made an effort to rise. I never can forget their groans and strangled breathing as they tried to get up. Some succeeded. Others lay lifelessly where they had fallen.

I observed that the Japanese guards paid no attention to these. I wondered why. The explanation wasn't long in coming. There was a sharp crackle of pistol and rifle fire behind us.

Skulking along, a hundred yards behind our contingent, came a 'clean-up squad' of murdering Japanese buzzards. Their helpless victims, sprawled darkly against the white, of the road, were easy targets.

As members of the murder squad stooped over each huddled form, there would be an orange flash in the darkness and a sharp report. The bodies were left where they lay, that other prisoners coming behind us might see them. Our Japanese guards enjoyed the spectacle in silence for a time. Eventually, one of them who spoke English felt he should add a little spice to the entertainment. 'Sleepy?' he asked. 'You want sleep? Just lie down on road. You get good long sleep!'

**#4 Arrival at San Fernando**

Finally, after five days without food and limited water, the dwindling column arrives at its destination:

"The sun still was high in the sky when we straggled into San Fernando and were put in a barbed wire compound similar to the one at Orani. We were seated in rows for a continuation of the sun treatment. Conditions here were the worst yet.

The prison pen was jammed with sick, dying, and dead American and Filipino soldiers. They were sprawled amid the filth and maggots that covered the ground. Practically all had dysentery. Malaria and dengue fever appeared to be running unchecked. There were symptoms of other tropical diseases I didn't even recognize. Japanese guards had shoved the worst cases beneath the rotted flooring of some dilapidated building. Many of these prisoners already had died. The others looked as though they couldn't survive until morning.

After sunset Japanese soldiers entered and inspected our rows. Then the gate was opened again and kitchen corpsmen entered with cans of rice. We held our mess kits and again passed lids to those who had none. Our spirits rose. We watched as the Japanese ladled out generous helpings to the men nearest the gate. Then, without explanation, the cans were dragged away and the gate was closed.

**#5 Life at the Camp:**

“Then the Japanese commander got up and laid down the rules of the camp,” said Bollich. "He said that if any were broken, the person would be shot, which are words we expected to hear. But he was speaking through an interpreter and the interpreter said that you have come here to die. At first I didn't believe it and that he'd misquoted the Japanese commander, but it didn't take us long to realize that he was telling the truth."

“All we were doing was burying the dead," remembered Bollich. "I remember looking around and deciding that the way people were dying that within a few weeks we would all be dead. Our food was nothing but a handful of cooked rice a day. The barracks we stayed in were made out of bamboo with thatched roofs, no doors or windows. At night the mosquitos would chew us alive and during the daytime the flies would get all over us. The big killer was dysentery. They had open latrines that had flies by the billions, covering our camp. Once you caught dysentery you were gone.

**#6 Eventual Rescue:**

The exact death count has been impossible to determine, but some historians have placed the minimum death toll between six and eleven thousand men; whereas other postwar Allied reports have tabulated that only 54,000 of the 72,000 prisoners reached their destination— taken together, the figures document a casual killing rate of one in four up to two in seven (25% to 28.5%) of those brutalized by the forcible march. The number of deaths that took place in the internment camps from delayed effects of the march is uncertain, but believed to be high.

On [June 6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June_6), [1942](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1942), the Filipino soldiers were granted [amnesty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amnesty) by the Japanese military and released. The American prisoners continued to be held. [Camp O'Donnell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_O%27Donnell) presented very hard conditions for the prisoners. They would line up once a day for water. Men were weak and dying from [dysentery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysentery) and [beriberi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beriberi). Eventually they were transferred to camps outside of the Philippines. This process began with American prisoners moving from [Camp O'Donnell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_O%27Donnell) to [Cabanatuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabanatuan_City). Acting as a staging camp, many of these American prisoners then were sent from [Cabanatuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabanatuan_City) to prison camps in Japan, Korea, and Manchuria in transports known as "[hell ships](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hell_ship)." The 511 prisoners-of-war who still remained at the Cabanatuan Prison Camp as of January 1945 were freed during an attack on the camp led by [United States Army Rangers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/6th_Ranger_Battalion_%28United_States%29) later known as [Raid at Cabanatuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raid_at_Cabanatuan).