WW II Japanese General Homma

Bataan Death March, War Crimes Accusations, and Execution

by

Bob East

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2026

Ethics International Press, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (Hardback): 978-1-83711-877-9
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-83711-878-6

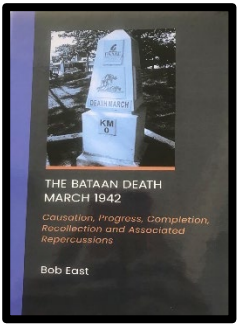
I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded, who cry aloud for blood, for vengeance, for desolation. War is hell.

Attributed to General William Tecumseh Sherman.

(C. 1863).

General William Tecumseh Sherman. Circa 1870.

Author's Note



Throughout this narrative, the United States of America will be known as, and referred to as, "United States of America", "United States", and "U. S.".

It is recommended to the reader of this narrative that before they read this account of General Masaharu Homma's trial, conviction, and subsequent execution, if they know little or nothing of the **Bataan March** that they read ***The Bataan March: Causation, Progress, Completion, Recollection and Associated Repercussions. Author, Bob East, 2024.*** It follows the gruelling forced march—albeit just over a week—that resulted in the death of thousands of U.S. and Philippine P.O.Ws. It also explains in some detail how the march originated. That is, it was as a result of the largest surrender of U.S troops in its entire history.

* * *

Before I proceed with this account of General Masaharu Homma's time in the Philippines and his trial and subsequent execution, I must warn the reader that I— Bob East—PhD—a social research scientist and international author, who has researched General Douglas MacArthur meticulously over a considerable time period—have come to the conclusion that this gentleman, like his father, Arthur MacArthur, was a plenipotentiary of the first degree. Having said that, it may explain why—but perhaps not excuse totally—why I do use some animus at times when describing certain actions undertaken by General Douglas MacArthur. I do accept that he was in the past,

and more than likely still remains, revered by a large percentage of U.S. citizens. And of course, many Filipinos as well.

* * *

In bringing into this narrative, what I believe was the wrong decision—(the guilty verdict given to General Masaharu Homma on 11 February 1946,) I believe it is necessary to quote, and trace the history briefly of one of history's well recorded and highly respected 19/20th century human individuals: Bertrand Arthur Willian Russell, 3rd Earl Russell, OM, FRS, and Noble Prize Winner (18 May 1872 – 02 February 1970). Earl Russell wrote the following. ***"The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed, in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widely spread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible".*** **(**Bertrand Russell 1943**.)** (It is just coincidental that when Earl Bertrand Russell wrote this statement it was just three years before General Masaharu Homma was executed for supposedly initiating, and approving, war crimes).

This British philosopher, logician, mathematician, public intellectual, peace activist and Nobel Prize recipient, was alive in April 1946—still very much so. He lived to be 97. He was 74 in 1946 and witnessed—perhaps—what I believe was the injustice levied on the brave Japanese General—Masaharu Homma. If he did take an interest in the trial of General Masaharu Homma, he may well has uttered these words then. **But**, they are attributed to him in the early 20th Century when he was opposed to Britain's involvement in WW1. (As a result of him publicly lecturing against The United Kingdom's invitation to the United States to declare war on Germany in 1917 he was imprisoned for six months in Brixton Prison, United Kingdom.)

The above quote by Bertrand Arthur William Russell—repeating—*"**The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed, in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widely spread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible**"*, could very well fit into the trial of General Masaharu Homma that was initiated, orchestrated, and totally controlled by General Douglas MacArthur to seek his revenge for being defeated by the Japanese forces under the control of General Masaharu Homma in the Philippines in April 1942. (Although at the time, General Douglas MacArthur was not present at the surrender but enjoying a lavish lifestyle in a first-class hotel in Brisbane, Australia.) Prior to that he was in the Philippines but had been "persuaded" by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to leave the Philippines and travel to Australia—in the face of imminent surrender of the U.S Forces to the Japanese Forces—which did eventuate.

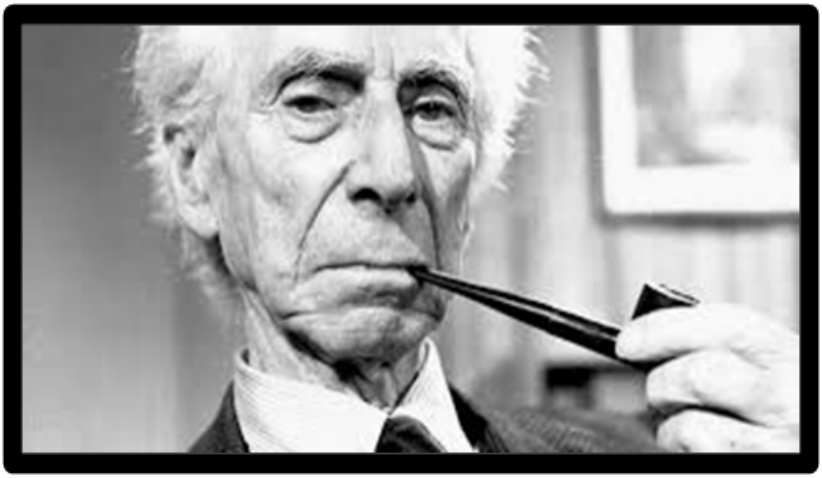
General Douglas MacArthur enjoyed overwhelming public support in the United States during and immediately after he accepted Japan's unconditional surrender in September 1945. (Inter alia: and up to and including the Korean War of 1950-1953). Earl Bertrand Russell's words "***more likely to be foolish than sensible***" fits neatly into the death sentence imposed and enacted on General Masaharu Homma on 03 April 1946. It also fits into the sobriquet—or nickname—"The Beast of Bataan" that was given to General Masaharu Homma by many, including General Douglas Macarthur. (More about General Douglas MacArthur and his role in the execution of General Masaharu Homma will be expanded on in detail in following chapters. However, it must be pointed out to the reader, in this **Author's Note**, that where this author saw fit to criticise General Douglas MacArthur for his perceived injustices, overreactions, sense of self-esteem and self-importance, he did so.

* * *

Returning briefly to 1918: The incarcerations of Earl Bertrand Russell in World War 1, as mentioned above, did not result in his being sentenced to death like General Masaharu Homma in 1946 but he did experience a loss of freedom/s through innocent actions he took for his beliefs during WWI, and the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s. (Of interest, the adjective "innocent" may not be appropriate to some—because he did actually disobey a direction under the "*Defence of the Realm Act*"—and four decades later during the Vietnam War. Briefly, ***(4 & 5 Geo. 5. C. 29)*** *(DORA)* was passed in the United Kingdom's Parliament four days after the country had entered WWI. It had wide ranging powers including the right to have buildings and factories requisitioned if they were deemed necessary for the war effort. It also introduced laws enforcing social controls such as censorship. It stated, in part "*No person shall by word of mouth, or in writing, spread reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm among any of His Majesty's Forces or among the civilian population*". Earl Bertrand Russell tested the power of The ***Defence of the Realm Act 1914*** to its limits. By addressing anti-war rallies and defending members of parliament who had been jailed, he pushed the limits so far that in 1916 he was convicted of a number of charges and fined £100—a considerable amount of money in those days. He refused to pay the fine and rather than him being jailed the court ordered that his extensive library be auctioned. However, his disobedience did not stop there. In 1918 he gave several public speeches condemning the United States entering WWI in 1917 on the side of the United Kingdom. He was convicted under ***The Defence of the Realm Act 1914*** in 1918 and was jailed for six months in Brixton Prison. Like all wars, WWI did eventually end and then WWII came into being. He initially was against the U.K entering into war against Germany but did change his mind, reluctantly, after it was revealed mass murder against Jew and certain other European groups had been committed. This action of being slaughtered wholeheartedly is now known as, ***The Holocaust***. After

WWII ended with Germany surrendering on 08 May 1945, and Japan surrendering in September 1945 as a result of two atomic bombs being dropped on Japan, with the loss of hundreds of thousands of civilian lives, Earl Bertrand Russell took up another cause—Nuclear Disarmament. He led demonstrations against nuclear armament even though his permission to do was refused. (It must be remembered that the early 1960s was close to the middle of the Cold War). Accordingly, he was arrested in 1961 and incurred a small fine. He refused to pay the fine and when the judge said he would waive the fine if Bertrand Russell pledged himself to be of "good behaviour", Russell simply answered "No I won't". Subsequently he was sentenced to seven days in Brixton Jail with it being reduced to 4 days with time off for good behaviour. Of course, there were many of his supporters that offered to pay this meagre fine, but he refused to accept it. (At that time of his arrest and jailing the Prime Minister of Britain was Harold Macmillen.)

It was extremely embarrassing on the international stage for Prime Minister Harold Macmillen. Here was a Nobel Prize winner—he was awarded it in 1950 for *The History of Western Philosophy*—a member of the House of Lords, a "friend " of both President John F. Kennedy and Russia's President Nikita Khrushchev, and he was in Brixton Jail for daring to hold a peaceful (*anti-nuclear*) demonstration. To make it even more embarrassing, when he was jailed for refusing to pay this token fine, he was 89 years old. Subsequently, Prime Minister Macmillen called a mid-night emergency meeting of the House of Commons, and a law was passed to change the "crime" that Bertrand Russell was convicted of. (His time in Brixton was shortened even further).



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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people and /or organizations—in alphabetical order, not order of importance—for their assistance in helping to make this narrative about the plight of the WWII Japanese General Masaharu Homma possible.

Borlongan, Norma, Malolos, the Philippines. Her help in assisting me to travel to the various towns and cities along the Batan Death March route was immeasurable.

Gray, Kerrie, BSc, Dip. Ed. As always, her technical assistance in helping this author was of enormous help.

The Bataan WWII Museum, Balanga, Luzon, Philippines.

Various articles and numerous photographs were accessed from the internet and used. Permission was sought where appropriate. If not available because the source did not respond to the author, names and titles were acknowledged where possible. If on the public domain, this was also acknowledged—with appropriate thanks.

Where permission was granted or available it is acknowledged after the source. It is then included in the List of Illustrations.

Preface

This written narrative of the life and death of the Japanese General, Masaharu Homma, is an attempt to correct some of the calumny that was—and still is—levelled against one of Japan's previously moderate and humane military leaders. Masaharu Homma was an enigma when it came to the generally accepted code of behaviour deemed appropriate from a senior Japanese military officer. It was expected that such an officer would follow the long-established tradition of Bushido. That is, sincerity, frugality, and loyalty unto death that was expected of a Japanese high military officer. By the time Masaharu Homma was in the Japanese Army in the early part of the 20th century, the age-old tradition of the samurai—the aristocratic warrior class that rose to power in the 12th century—was all but over. Although some Japanese officers still believed that any soldier—warrior—that did surrender should be executed.

It goes without saying that General Homma did not subscribe to this belief. However, his superior officer, and future Prime Minister, Hideki Tojo, did, and paid the ultimate price for it, being hanged in December 1948 in Tokyo.

Beginning after the news of the **Bataan Death March** reached the United States media—well over 12 months after the actual event—the hysteria surrounding the Japanese treatment of the U. S. P.O.Ws on the approximate 10-day event reached fever pitch.

The U.S. Army began creating posters that were just totally untrue. (Fabrication in the extreme). For instance, the U.S. Army claimed 5,200 U.S. P.O.Ws were murdered on the 10-day death march when in effect it was around 500—at the most. Of course, General Masaharu Homma was deemed to have approved the killings—as was claimed at his war

crimes trial. This narrative will stress—and hopefully prove—just the complete opposite had occurred.

As for the many books published about the Bataan Death March, up to this written narrative, almost without exception General Masaharu Homma has been accused of authorising the atrocities committed by his P.O.W guards. Of course, much of this conviction is attributed to the fact that General Douglas MacArthur—who holds an almost hero-like position in the United States of America and the Philippines—historically—made it known that the chief architect of the Bataan Death March, and associated atrocities were at the behest of General Masaharu Homma. However, there is one written exception to this, the 2014 "Inside *the Bataan Death March. Defeat, Travail and Memory"* (Kevin C. Murphy). It will be used extensively to illustrate what this author—Bob East—believed was the fabrication and exaggeration exerted by the plenipotentiary responsible for the trial that wrongly convicted General Masaharu Homma of the 48 war crimes he was accused of committing. ("War crimes" is the general term used for "violating international rules of war". This goes back to 1750 B.C.—the Code of Hammurabi which stipulates the code of conduct in the event of war.) Inter alia, General Homma may have been accused of, charged, and convicted of 46 of 48 war crimes—but as will be demonstrated, General Douglas MacArthur was the architect of selecting the entire 48 crimes. Most of which repeated that although General Homma did not authorise the atrocities, he did not punish those who were responsible. (As will be stressed later in this narrative, General Homma claimed he had no knowledge of any atrocities committed in the Bataan Death March. But General Douglas MacArthur made it clear to the Military Court that General Homma was simply not telling the truth).

* * *

The power that General Douglas MacArthur held was unprecedented. It is fair to say that he would not have had such authoritarian power had there been a truce between Japan and the U.S.A. rather than an unconditional surrender. General Douglas MacArthur relished the position he held in the War in the Pacific, that is, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. When he left the Philippines in March 1942, and made his way to Melbourne, Australia, he made a broadcast in South Australia where he said, "I came through and I shall return". It was reported later, that although U.S. authorities—presumably with the authority of President Franklin D. Roosevelt—requested that General Douglas Macarthur replace the words "I shall return", with "we shall return". As was to be expected General Douglas MacArthur ignored the request. ("I" is much more authoritarian than "we".)

On a similar note, when General Douglas Macarthur returned to the Philippines in October 1944, leading what has been described as one of the largest naval battles in history, and accompanied by no less than 1,250,000 U.S. troops and 30,000 Philippine guerrillas he addressed the Philippines with this message "People of the Philippines: **"I have returned"**. "By the grace of Almighty God". (**not, WE have returned).**

* * *

On 20 October 1944 General Douglas MacArthur stepped ashore at Palo, Leyte Island. He insisted that he wanted to stand on the dry beach in full uniform after being taken from his command vessel in a small boat. Unfortunately, the sea between his command vessel and the beach was quite rough. It was just not possible for the small boat, which he insisted not only carry him, but seven other dignitaries including a CBS radio correspondent. It was to be a grand event and photographed in its entirety for worldwide distribution.

After much deliberation and procrastination, General Douglas MacArthur made the decision that his party would wade ashore but not before General Douglas MacArthur's official photographer—Gaetano Faillace—had been strategically placed in front of the wading party. The official landing/wading party including the following, were Philippine President-in-exile Sergio Osmeña, Lieutenant General Richard Sutherland, Brigadier General Carlos P. Romulo, Major General Courtney Whitney, Sergeant Francisco Salveron, aide and orderly to General Douglas MacArthur, and CBS Radio correspondent William J. Dunn.

Fig P.1. The landing party at Palo Leyte on 20 October 1944. General Douglas MacArthur leads

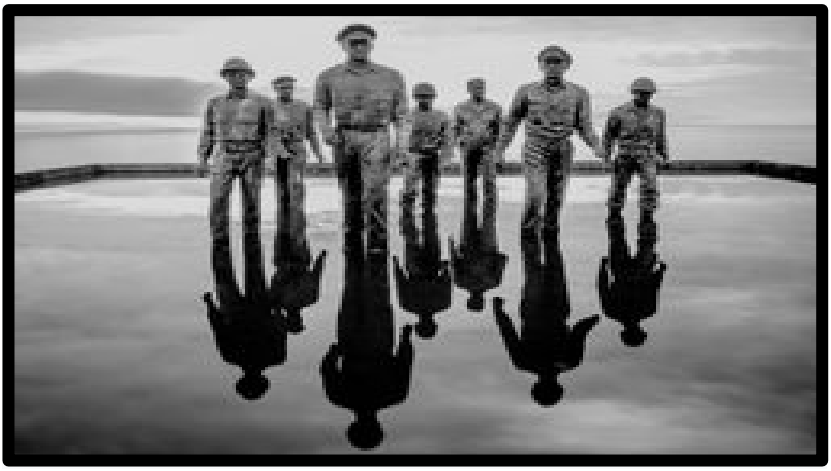

Fig P. 2. The landing party statues at Palo, Leyte. Inaugurated in 1981

An interesting aspect of the statues at Palo, Leyte, is that the original photo taken on 20 October 1944 has eight in the party, The statues above only includes seven.

* * *

General Homma's early life and military experiences including his arrival in the Philippines, is covered more in detail later in this narrative. It is revealed that his good nature and humanitarianism is bought to the forefront—making it extremely difficult to believe that he could be responsible for the crimes he was convicted of and executed for.

The various timelines, especially how he was "dismissed" by his commanding officer and Prime Minister, Hideki Tojo, just after the Bataan Death March, are examined in some detail later.

General Homma's trial is also covered in detail. And contrary to many glowing accounts written about General Douglas MacArthur this

author is far from being his "greatest fan"—to use a well-worn vernacular. The author's descriptions of General Douglas MacArthur's leaving the Philippines in 1942 and returning in 1944, and his addresses are testament to this. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that had General Douglas MacArthur's army not been defeated—or surrendered to General Homma's 14th Army then no trial would ever have taken place, because no "death march" would have occurred. Taking that just a little bit further—and this will be examined in detail later—if the figures of prospective U.S. and Filipino P.O.Ws estimated was nearer the mark rather than being estimated at half the true number, there would have been no reason for the P.O.Ws to march the 100 kilometres. (General Homma honestly believed that there was enough land transport to cater for the P.O.Ws immediate needs.) As will also be examined later.

Introduction

General Masaharu Homma, was appointed to command the 14th Imperial Japanese Army. An extremely omnipotent position in the Japanese Army. In fact, in November 1941—just weeks before the Japanese air attack on the United States naval fortress of Pearl Harbor—he was given instructions that he was to prepare to "wrest the Philippines from the Americans". (Pelz, 2007). This instruction was given to him by his superior commander—no doubt with permission from the Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo—who Homma had very little regard for—was nevertheless followed through meticulously.

The idea of preparing General Homma to wrest—or forcibly seize—the Philippines from American control, was part of the plan to conduct a "Greater East Asia War". The 14th Imperial Japanese Army was a part of the "Japanese Southern Expeditionary Army Group". The collective aim of the Southern Army Group was to seize raw materials from Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. This was to be just prior to Japan's objective of defeating the United States forces—including Filipinos—in late 1941 or early 1942.

This was a grand plan and the seizing control of Malaya—08 December 1941—and the Netherlands East Indies—10 January 1942, became a reality. In fact, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the taking control of Malaya were simultaneous. And, to add to the complete invasion of this area of Southeast Asia, the United States Air Force Base at Clark Airfield was all but destroyed and the northern islands of Luzon were also invaded. It only took two days for 2000 men of the 48th Formosa regiment under the broader control of

General Homma to take control of Vigan, Aparri and Tuguegarao. (Please see ***Fig I .1 below.***

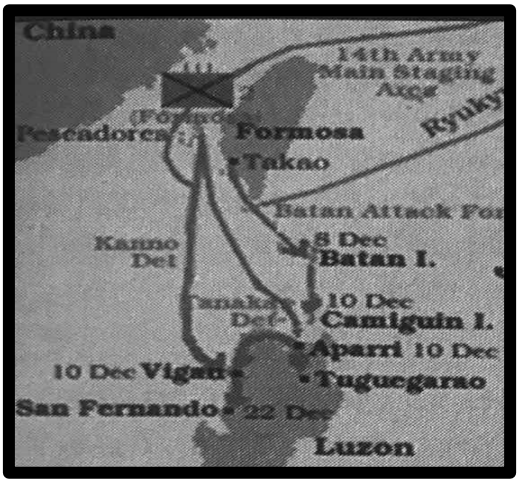

Fig. I. 1. *The various routes taken by General Masaharu Homma's amphibious troops. The dates being from 08 December to 22 December 1941 inclusive.*

Upon landing at the north of Luzon, General Homma's troops moved south and eventually took the surrender of the United States and Filipino Troops in the greater Luzon area. But before he took the surrender of the allied troops—American and Filipino—he held the position of the Governor-General of the Philippines—it was more correctly known then as the "Military Governor".

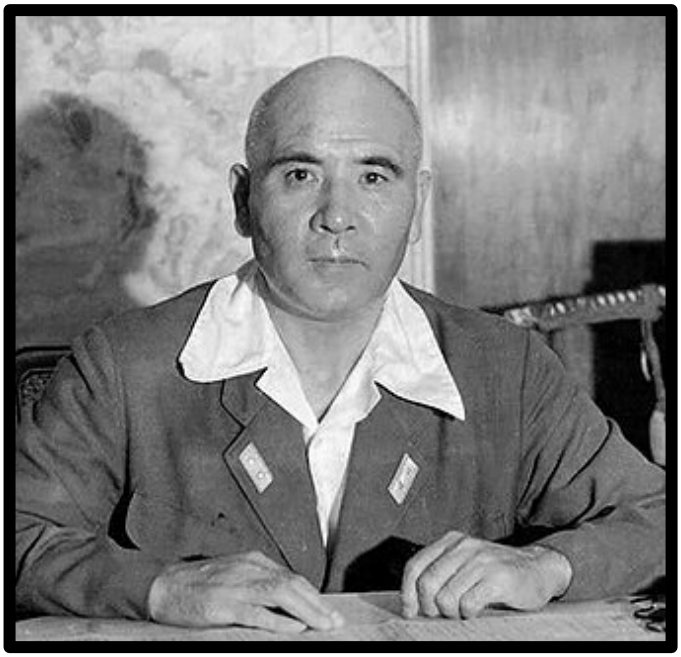

Fig. I.2. Military Governor of the Philippines 1942.

The surrender of the Allied forces was a relatively quick event—completed on 09 April 1942. It was the largest surrender of United States Forces in American history. The total number of American and Filipino troops was in the vicinity of 80,000. These troops then participated in the so-called Bataan Death March. Again, the number of deaths in these 100 plus kilometres forced march varies substantially. (Much has been written about the Bataan Death March, but the reader may care to access the 2024 edition of "*The Bataan Death March 1942"* (Bob East, 2024.)

However, before this surrender on 09 April 1942 the American and Filipino forces had lost thousands of troops defending the Bataan Peninsula. Exact numbers of the remaining Allied forces were hard to estimate because after the initial surrender there was a further

approximately 13,000 troops still defending Corregidor in Manila Bay. These troops surrendered on 06 May 1942 and were made P.O.Ws in various parts of Luzon. And, as was the norm, many of these United States P.O.Ws ended up working in factories in Japan. And many simply did not see the end of the War in the Pacific. They died either through neglect, illness, or ill-treatment.

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As mentioned previously, and it will be examined in detail later in this narrative, it was because of General Masaharu Homma's insistence that the Allied troops who surrendered at Bataan should be made P.O.Ws at Camp O'Donnell—near Capas—that the infamous Bataan Death March occurred. It must be mentioned at this time that when General Homma made the decision to have Camp O'Donnel the main P.O.W headquarters, that he genuinely believed the Allied P.O.Ws would be transported by truck to the rail station at San Fernando—a distance of some 100 kilometres—perhaps a little more. (Of course, if this travel was to be by foot it would perhaps add another 15-20 kilometres to the distance.) It was envisaged that there would be food and water stops at various points in the 100 kilometre "walk". Then after a 2–4-hour train trip they would be unloaded at the town of Capas, in Tarlac Province, and finish the "march" with an 17 kilometre "easy walk" to Camp O'Donnell.

It all sounded "too easy to be true". However, the first "stumbling block" came when the number of P.O.Ws—estimated by General Homma, no doubt with advice from headquarters—was not in the vicinity of 30,000—but more like 80,000. The second "stumbling block" came when the number of transports available for the P.O.Ws was totally inadequate. And the fuel for these few transports was just not available. To cap all this off the Japanese guards who were responsible for ensuring the P.O.Ws reached Sam Fernando had no

idea of the direction—apart from that San Fernando was north. And added to all this was that surrendered American and Filipino P.O.Ws continually joined the main "march" north. Ill treatment by Japanese guards—not all—continuing illness, extreme heat, lack of medicine, and inadequate food made what should have been tolerable, into a nightmare. (This is covered in extreme detail in **Chapter 3**.)

Unfortunately, General Homma, being the commanding officer, was deemed responsible for this debacle. And after the War in the Pacific ended in September 1945—even though he had been in semi-retirement back in Japan for well over one year he was going to pay the price of defeating the forces of the indomitable General Douglas Macarthur—even though at the time of the Bataan surrender he was not in situ, but living in luxury in Brisbane, Australia. (Again, all of this will be covered in detail in the following chapters, as will General Homma's trial where he was charged with 48 war crimes.)

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