

# Episode 31 – Pantingan River Massacre– Transcript

*[Note] This episode contains graphic details of a massacre and killing and is not suitable for some listeners.*

*[Setting -- Military tribunal courtroom, Manila, Philippines, January 1946]*

[Lt. Raff] “Will you state your name, age, and nationality?”

[Pedro] “Pedro L. Felix, 32 years old, Filipino.”

[raff] “What is your present rank and assignment?”

[Pedro] “Captain, Inspector General Service, Philippine Army.”

[Raff] “Now, in April of 1942, were you a member of the Philippine Army forces that surrendered to Japanese Imperial Forces on Bataan?”

[Pedro] “Yes, sir.”

[Raff] “About how many men were with you at the time of surrender?”

[Pedro] “I figure in my particular regiment we were about 1500 men – officers and men.”

[Raff] “After surrender, you say the men got into trucks and started towards the destination designated by the Japanese?”

[Pedro] “Yes, sir. We reached as far as the Pantingan River.”

[Raff] “What happened when you reached the Pantingan River?”

[Pedro] “We were stopped by Japanese soldiers who ordered us to get off our vehicles. The Japanese soldiers sorted out the enlisted men from the officers. They then allowed the privates to continue the march towards Balanga.”

[Raff] “About how many officers and noncommissioned offers were left when the privates were taken away?”

[Pedro] “There were anywhere from 350 to 400 officers and noncommissioned officers left.”

[Raff] “And what happened?”

[Pedro] “We were formed into columns of four men and Japanese soldiers started tying our hands behind us with telephone wire, each man connected, tied one behind the other.”

[Raff] “Go on, continue with what occurred at that time.”

[Pedro] “We were marched in those columns of four to a ravine and were made to face toward the bottom of the ravine. There was a Japanese interpreter who spoke to us in Tagalog. He gave statements which can be translated this way: ‘My friends, you have to be patient, This is your fate. Had you surrendered earlier, maybe we would not kill you.’”

[Raff] “And then what happened, Captain?”

[Pedro] “They made us sit on the ground. Just before executing us, the Jap soldiers around us stuck a cigarette into our mouths and lighted them for us. But on the given signal by the Jap officer in charge, they started bayonetting.”

[Narrator] This is *Left Behind*.

### **Podcast Welcome**

Welcome to “Left Behind,” a podcast about the people left behind when the US surrendered The Philippines in the early days of WW2.

I’m Anastasia Harman, and I tell you the stories of WW2 servicemen and women, civilians, guerillas, and others captured by Japanese forces in The Philippines. My great-grandfather Alma Salm was one of the POWs, and his memoir inspired me to tell stories of his fellow captives.

This is the last of 4 episodes about the Bataan Death March.

Most of the Left Behind episodes tell the life story of 1 or more servicemen or women in The Philippines – their before, during, and after (if there was an after) the war.

This episode, however, tells about an event – a massacre of Filipino officers and non-coms by Japanese soldiers.

I want to re-emphasize my warning from the beginning: this episode focuses on a mass execution and I’ve included details of that.

I decided to tell this too-little-known event because it’s important to know about – if only to illustrate what indoctrination, racism, extremist thinking, and war can lead regular, everyday people to do.

### **Leading up to the Massacre**

[Narrator] The largest part of the fighting force on the Bataan Peninsula in early 1942 was the Philippine Army. The Philippine Army, established in 1936, was The Philippines’ national army and made up entirely of Filipino servicemen. Just before the war started, (most of) the Philippine Army was placed under the umbrella of the US Forces in the Far East. And they withdrew with the US Armed Forces to the Bataan Peninsula in early January 1942.

Philippine native Pedro L. Felix – a handsome, 28 year old with a young-looking, round face and a perfected military stance, his shoulders back and chest forward – was a 1938 graduate of the Philippine Military Academy in Baguio, which is about 150 miles/245 km northwest of Manila.

I posted a wonderful picture of him looking quite dapper in his uniform with fellow cadets on Facebook and Instagram. The links are in the show description.

When the war began, Felix was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lt, but in February 1942 while fighting on Bataan, he received a battlefield promotion to the rank of Captain. He was part of the PA's 72<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 91<sup>nd</sup> Division.

When Bataan fell on April 9, 1942, Felix and his unit were on the far western coast of Bataan near the town of Bagac. Each serviceman or unit had to surrender individually, so complete surrender of all Allied forces on Bataan took several days. Felix's unit surrendered directly to Japanese forces on April 11, 1942 – which was 2 days after Gen. King officially surrendered.

Roughly half the military captives on Bataan surrendered at or near Mariveles on Bataan's southern tip. That's the "official" starting point of the march. Along the way, POWs captured at other locations joined the march as it progressed northward along the eastern coastal road. Felix Pedro's unit was among the non-Mariveles captives, and since they were captured on the peninsula's west coast, before joining the march, they had to first be transported or marched roughly 18 miles/30 km across the peninsula.

So, upon capture, Felix and the other roughly 1,500 enlisted men, non-commissioned officers, and officers were ordered to march toward Balanga, a town on Bataan's eastern coast. In 1946, Felix testified:

[Felix] "If I remember right, sir, we surrendered about 11 o'clock on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1942, and we stayed there for about 5 hours until they gave us orders to march toward Balanga. Those of us who were lucky to get transportation rode in automobiles and army trucks, while the rest of the men marched on foot."

[Narrator] They started for Balanga but drove only about 13 miles/20 km before stopping at the Pantingan River. The bridge spanning the river was broken and unpassable, so the men spent the night there at the river. Felix continued:

[Felix] "The next morning we repaired the bridge, and soon after the bridge was repaired, we continued on with our truck, but we had hardly gone about two kilometers when we were stopped by Japanese soldiers who ordered us to get off our vehicles, and so we had to proceed on foot."

[Narrator] The Japanese soldiers had the POWs walk southward for 5 miles/8 km down a trail that ran north to south through the Bataan jungle and roughly paralleled the Pantingan River, which was down in a valley below them. They came upon a large, downed tree blocking the trail, so the group stopped, coming to rest on a hilly, sloping part of the trail.

Soon, a high-ranking Japanese officer arrived in a fancy car and held a small conference with the Japanese officers already there. After about 10 minutes, the high-ranking officer left. The surviving POWs later assumed the man in this car ordered a mass execution.

Now, I'm a bit confused about who this man was. Capt. Felix said that a Japanese guard told him the man was General Nara. Other sources attribute the execution order to Col. Masanobu Tsuji – who a Japanese general later called “the most determined single protagonist in favor of war with the United States” and who was an influential advocated for the attack on Pearl Harbor. If Tsuji did in fact order the execution, it was beyond his command. I do know that another Colonel also received the execution order and, thinking it an abnormal order, refused to follow it.

Well, once the fancy car left, the Japanese soldiers separated the Philippine Army officers and non-commissioned officers from the privates, placing the group of 350-400 officers on one side of the trail. The privates were permitted to continue their march toward Balanga.

### ***The Massacre***

Downhill from the POWs, encamped on the banks of the Pantingan River, was the Japanese 122<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. On the morning of April 12, the soldiers were eating breakfast when a rumor swept from unit to unit through the camps: “We are going to kill them.” All of them. And then their leaders offered them sake – as much sake as they could drink.

As they drank, some soldiers continued their boasts about conquering Bataan Peninsula and their rants about hating Americans and Filipinos. As the soldiers toasted their good fortune to be alive after the bloody 3-month battle, they started to remember all the comrades they'd lost because of the Americans and Filipinos, who had launched continual streams of bullets and shells on Japanese forces. So many men, now cremated remains encased in small boxes, and waiting to be taken home.

Now that enemy had surrendered, put down their weapons in the midst of battle. It was dishonorable and shameful. They deserved whatever they would get.

[Commander] “We’re going to stab them to death,”

[Narrator] A Japanese commander told the men.

[Commander] “And soldiers from each company should be in on it.”

[Narrator] Some soldiers, filled with sake and anger, volunteered, grabbing their rifles and bayonets and heading up the trail to the top of the rise.

The POWs at the top of the hill were divided into 3 groups -- about 115-130 POWs in each group, four abreast. 27-year-old 1st Lt. Eduardo T. Vargas was one of them. He later testified:

- [Vargas] “When we had formed into the groups desired by the officer, the Japanese soldiers started cutting the telephone wires into short pieces and tied each one of us individually, and then with long wire tied each line along the group.”
- [Narrator] Captain Felix further described:
- [Felix] “They started tying our hands behind us, each man connected, tied one behind the other.”
- [Narrator] The prisoners were then marched in those columns of four further along the trail. Lt. Vargas recalled:
- [Vargas] “Then each line was taken into the interior of the forest. I noticed then there were a lot of Japanese following us, laughing and shouting at the others, calling the others towards our group. When we reached the interior to a small clearing, we were first made to sit down facing the Japanese officers and soldiers.”
- [Narrator] Near this clearing, was the edge of a steep ravine. It was a heavily wooded area, so the men waiting at the place of separation were not able to see what was happening at the ravine.
- This ravine was about 2 km east of the Pantingan River. The area was hilly, nestled in between two Bataan mountains. The ravine, as far as I understand, was dry at the bottom; it did not connect to the Pantingan River.
- A Japanese interpreter spoke to the men in Tagalog, that’s the Philippine language. Felix and other sources recalled his words as:
- [Interpreter] “My friends, you have to be patient, This is your fate. Had you surrendered earlier, maybe we would not kill you. But we suffered heavy casualties. So just pardon us. If there is anything that you want to request before we kill you, you ask them now.”
- [Narrator] Several of the younger men asked to be spared, but those pleas fell on deaf ears. Captain Felix, who I believe was in the first group of POWs, described what came next:
- [Felix] “I was in the first column. They moved us about 15 yards in front of the other three columns to the edge of the ravine and made us sit on the ground. Just before executing us, the Jap soldiers around gave us – stuck cigarettes into our mouths and lighted them for us. But on a given signal by the Jap officer in charge, they started bayonetting and beheading us on that line.”
- “I was on the extreme left of that line, and I was watching on the right, I saw at least two heads cut off before they struck me in the back with a bayonet. The first thrust hit me in the shoulder blade; the second one went through and through, and I thought they had cut my intestines. I fell on my side, and the Jap soldier thrust again; this time they hit my spinal column. He tried a fourth one, and it hit the upper part of my chest, the upper part of my back.”
- [Narrator] After bayonetting Captain Felix—and beheading the others in his column—the Japanese executioners pushed the men over the edge of the ravine.

[Narrator] Down in the Japanese camp, Private Isamu Murakami was chosen for “special duty” because he excelled in bayonet training. He wasn’t an invested soldier – meaning he hated being in the army and hated the war. Still, when the Lieutenant came to fetch the group, he had to follow him up the hill to a clearing along the trail and at the edge of a ravine.

Four tied Filipino men stood at the precipice, facing away from the ravine. (Japanese leaders had the Filipinos stand facing their executioners, after the sight of comrades bodies in the ravine upset the prisoners too much, making the executions that much more difficult.)

The officer in charge called Murakami’s name. He reluctantly stepped forward, and his Sergeant said:

[Sergeant] “Just kill one and then you can go back to camp.”

[Narrator] Murakami didn’t move. The Sergeant continued in an angry whisper:

[Sergeant] “There are lots of officers here from other units. Their men are killing the prisoners and our company commander wants to show them that our men can do this too. You should do this as quickly as possible, just one and you can go back. Or you will be killed by the company commander.”

[Narrator] The officer in charge grew impatient and yelled at the Sergeant:

[Officer] “Why don’t you tell your men to do it quickly. This is the order of the emperor!”

[Narrator] Feeling he had no choice, Murakami stepped forward, his rifle ready, facing the man he was about to kill. That man’s eyes were filled with fear. Murakami got into stance, then lunged forward with a Yaah!, aiming for the man’s heart. He heard a snap and guessed he’d broken a rib. He twisted his blade and pulled his bayonet from the body.

Blood gushed from the wound and the man sank to his knees. Turning away from the sight, Murakami shouted in disgusted defiance:

[Murakami] “I’m done!”

[Officer] “Kick him down!”

[Narrator] The officer ordered. Murakami turned back to the twitching body on the ground, placed his heel and pushed him into the ravine. The three Filipinos bound to him fell with him. The ravine was filling with bodies, and the air with the sound of moaning, screaming and crying.

A disgusted Murakami wiped blood from his bayonet and clothing, tossed the towel into the ravine, and ran back to camp. Other young soldiers were doing the same behind him.

Did you notice the officer’s words above regarding the massacre: “This is the order of the emperor!” At this time, all Japanese military recruits were taught

[Felton] “that their officers were infallible and that any order issued by a superior must be treated as an order given by the divine emperor himself—who, as a living god, was always correct, as were his subordinates.”

[Narrator] That was British historian Mark Felton. And, boy, that is a dangerous, loaded belief – that allowed such individuals as Col. Tsuji, the radical officer who supposedly ordered the mass execution, to order some truly abhorrent things.

In the past two episodes, I’ve talked about some of the speculated reasons why the Japanese were so cruel to POWs, including: young, uneducated, and indoctrinated soldiers trying to show their worth, a “perverted form of Bushido” (the Samurai code), racism, and retaliation for the deaths of fellow Japanese servicemen during the Bataan campaign. The Pantingan Massacre was definitely a retaliatory action.

In this episode, we’ll add another layer to the reasoning – that of the military and government ideology, and how they shaped military doctrine. To make quite complicated history very simple, Japan becoming part of Western commerce in the mid-1800s showcased how backward the country and culture was technologically, economically, and militarily.

Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, Japan sought to become a military power, with quite a bit of help from Britain. But the US, Britain, and other western nations were concerned by this and took measures to counter Japan’s rise. These actions increased Japanese feelings that the Western powers—who they wanted to join—looked down on them as Asians and that the west wanted to, according to a leading Japanese scholar:

[Okawa] “preserve the status quo and further the domination of the world by the Anglo-Saxons.”

[Narrator] I’ve said it before, but World War 2 really was, at its core, caused by racism – on all sides. And millions of people had to die so various races could attempt to prove they were on top. It sickens me.

Japan’s military successes in the early 1900s led to extreme patriotism and xenophobia within Japan, which in turn informed the idea that Japan was racially superior to all other Asians – and the rest of the world. Further, as historian Felton continued,

[Felton] “In 1890 the emperor had been declared divine, a direct descendant of the sun goddess—an idea rigorously taught in schools throughout Japan well into the 20th century. Several generations of Japanese believed the emperor’s divinity demanded unquestioning obedience of not only him but also his representatives in the government and military.”

[Narrator] It was a messy setting for nationalist military leaders to push onto their inferiors the ideology that all commands came from and were for the emperor.

And all this led to Japan becoming a military state with an undercurrent of racist ideas, especially that Japan was a “master race,” and with an extreme, perverted form of the Samurai honor code Bushido. Prevalent among these bastardizations was the idea that battlefield honor demanded everything a soldier had to offer (i.e., his life) and that death was preferable to surrender.

These beliefs were indoctrinated into military recruits from day one of their training. And the results of such indoctrination were seen in atrocious war crimes committed from the fall of Bataan through to the fall of Japan.

- [Narrator] A Japanese private named Yoshiaki Nagai wanted to join the killing forces, but he was too sick with malaria even to stand. Instead he crawled up the trail and found a perch above the ravine from where he could see all that was happening.
- He noticed that some men, upon reaching the ravine's edge, jumped into the ravine rather than wait for execution. Their bodies bounced and their bones broke as they tumbled down to the bed of rocks at the bottom.
- Up on the ridge, Japanese soldiers had to pick up the beheaded prisoners by the arms and legs, and on the count of three --- ichi, ni, san – threw them into the pit.
- He saw a sunburned American at the feet of a Japanese soldier, the man's red skin making him stand out against the darker skin all around him. The man was wounded but obviously alive, his body flailing around as he lay face down on the trail.
- [Nagai] "He looks like a frog swimming in water,"
- [Narrator] Nagai thought. Then he saw a Japanese soldier pick up a large rock, yell his dead commander's name, and smash the rock down on the American's head. The pomegranate-colored body stopped moving.
- Pvt. Nagai stayed on his perch until late afternoon, listening to the shouts of executioners with each thrust and the nearly simultaneous screams of their victims. By this point, Nagai's fever was making him too sick to remain, so he crawled back to his camp for rest.
- Also watching the executions that afternoon from a vantage point above the ravine was PFC Takesada Shigeta. Earlier that day, he had refused to join the killing force. He watched for hours as soldiers from his unit left camp only to return covered in sweat and blood – and very thirsty. Copious amounts of sake awaited them, and they continued to imbibe freely as they compared their killing stats.
- Shigeta didn't want to kill anyone. He thought surrendering was enough of a punishment for them. And he continued to recuse himself from joining the killing groups leaving camp, despite significant cajoling from his peers. Soon, though some executioners began to get angry at Shigeta for abstaining. A shouting match started and his sergeant stepped in, telling Shigeta:
- [Sergeant] "Either go to the killing site, or take your machine gun to the hill above the ravine and make sure none of the bodies at the bottom try to crawl away!"
- [Narrator] Shigeta chose the latter, taking his machinegun and best friend to the top of a hill overlooking the killing fields. The sight was disturbing: The ravine was filling up with bodies. Moans, cries,



screams of suffering men echoed around the hills. The breeze on that hot, humid day brought the nausea-inducing smell of blood.

[Shigeta] “Imagine standing in front of the prisoner and watching his eyes at the very moment you pierce him with your bayonet?”

[Narrator] Shigeta thought as he watched the executions below. After some time of stupefied watching, the two men decided to fire a few rounds of machine gun bullets at the opposing, body-less hill – just in case their sergeant realized they weren’t firing any shots.

[Narrator] Lt Eduardo Vargas was likely among the later groups of prisoners to reach the edge of the ravine. Vargas recalled:

[Vargas] “While I was smoking, I tried to pray that if I be killed, I be killed instantly without any hardship, and I raised my head and saw a Japanese sergeant pull out his saber and raise it up. I just bent my head as far forwards as possible and prayed that if my neck would be cut, just cut it clean and through without any hardship. Suddenly I heard shouts behind me, and I felt a thrust in my back. I moved my body forward, following the thrust, and let myself fall down.”

[Narrator] He was bayoneted on the right side of his back. He and at least two of the men in his column survived the fall into the ravine. One of the men fell on top of Vargas, covering his legs. Another man covered his back, so that Vargas was completely covered for the remainder of the massacre.

At dark the killing stopped. Captain Felix recalled:

[Felix] “The massacres started about 3 o’clock in the afternoon. At about 5 o’clock that same afternoon there was hardly anybody living. I was conscious all the time but I didn’t move. I could not move because there was a Jap soldier going back and forth, and I was afraid that he would discover that I was alive.

“I waited until darkness came, and at dark I removed my head from under Lt. Jacinto’s already stiff legs and tried to rest. There was no sound at all from my companions, and it seems to me that I was the only one living there.”

[Narrator] A Japanese soldier, noticing that one of the men covering Lt. Vargas was alive, stabbed his bayonet through the man. The blade went through that man’s body and then through Vargas’ right hand. Somehow, Vargas did not cry out.

Now, I’m not certain how far down the ravine Vargas and his companions were. Seems to me they may have been among the last men massacred, if they were still close enough for Japanese bayonets to reach them.

The Japanese left, and the other POW covering Vargas’ body called out:

[Soldier] “Damn you Japs! Come back and finish me off. Kill me!”

[Vargas] "Stop! Stop!"

[Narrator] Vargas replied in a harsh whisper.

[Vargas] "They will come back and maybe find some of us alive and actually kill us all off."

[Soldier] "Partner, please let me die. I can't stand it anymore,"

[Narrator] The soldier responded. He then shouted again to the Japanese, a couple of whom came back and stabbed him three times. Then they noticed the other man on top of Vargas was alive and gave him four. Meanwhile, Vargas

[Vargas] "didn't move, and even tried not to breathe so that they wouldn't notice that I was alive."

[Narrator] Vargas stayed in that position until dark and no one was around anymore. His bonds were loose, so he stood up and undid them. Then he looked around to see if anyone else was alive. Not finding anyone, he ran away as fast as he could.

### ***Escape and Survival***

For Captain Felix, escape wasn't so easy:

[Felix] "My problem then was how to free myself from the rest of the dead. I was so desperate myself that I tried to commit suicide. I didn't expect to live anyway, so I tried to press my nose on the ground and force myself not to breathe, but nothing would come out of it. I got tired of committing suicide and thought of a way to escape.

"Since the ground was sloping, I had to brace myself, brace my feet on the ground, until the wire connecting me to the rest of the dead men would come across my mouth, and every time it would come across my mouth I tried to chew the wire. It took me three hours before I could cut the wire that connected me with the rest of my dead companions."

[Narrator] While Capt. Felix was attempting this, he heard groaning several yards away. He called out:

[Felix] "Are you still alive."

[de Vencia] "Yes. I freed myself from the wire."

[Felix] "Can you come here and untie me?"

[Narrator] The POW tried, but he was severely wounded and in an almost helpless condition. So, Felix continued working to cut the wire connecting him to the dead men. He did so, then went over to the wounded man, who he discovered was named Lt. de Vencia. De Vencia was able to untie the wire that still bound Felix's hands behind his back. Felix continued:

[Felix] "Lt. de Vencia, aside from three rifle wounds, had eleven bayonet wounds all over his chest. We were both very thirsty, and being the strength of the two, I went over the dead bodies, believing that I could get water from the canteens of the dead men, but I couldn't find any.

“The last resort I had to do was to urinate in my canteen, and I tried to drink it, but I just couldn’t take the taste of it, so I gave it to Lt de Venecia. Apparently, he was very thirsty for the lack of blood he suffered, and he drank the urine. After resting for about an hour, I told Lt. de Vencia that it would be wise to leave the place, go to a place of safety where we could die peacefully.”

[Narrator] They were located on steep, sloping ground, and de Venecia couldn’t stand, so they had to scoot on their hands and buttocks away from the massacre site. Capt. Felix recalled that when he had fallen into the ravine, he was facing north toward the place of massacre, and that helped him determine which direction to go. Around 3 am, after a couple hours of moving, de Vencia couldn’t continue on.

[de Vencia] “Leave me here,”

[Narrator] the young lieutenant told Felix.

Felix wanted to encourage him to continue, but knew the man was too weak to make it much farther. de Vencia’s fading voice broke the silence.

[de Vencia] “Before you go, will you build me a fire, so I can be warm before...”

[Narrator] the young man’s voice faded out. Felix began gathering sticks, and when the fire was crackling before him, de Vencia had one last request:

[de Vencia] “If you should reach Manila, please find my family and tell them what happened to me.”

[Narrator] Felix nodded in acceptance and reluctantly left the young soldier in the middle of the Bataan jungle. It was the last time anyone saw de Vencia. And I do not know if his body was ever recovered.

While Felix and Vargas were escaping the massacre, the majority of the Japanese 122<sup>nd</sup> Infantry (who had carried out the executions), packed up and left the Pantingan River for another bivouac. Before leaving, Pvt Murakami, who had reluctantly killed one of the captives, chanted a prayer for the man he had killed. That night, he had a vision of the dead man and others coming to him. He begged them:

[Murakami] “Don’t come only to me. Please appear in front of the emperor and ask the emperor how he would feel if he had been ordered to stab you.”

At their new encampment, machine gunner Shigeta sat around a silent campfire with men who had participated in the killing. Watching the men, Shigeta thought:

[Shigeta] “They were all in high spirits a few hours ago. They were saying, ‘I killed this many or I killed that many.’ Now none of them are willing to talk because it wasn’t an honorable deed.”

[Narrator] And despite not taking part in the massacre, Shigata knew he would never forget the echoes of the dying men in that valley.

The next morning, the malaria-ridden Pvt. Nagai and his unit left the Pantingan River camp. Able to walk now, Nagai followed with the other soldiers up the trail and past the killing site. He looked over the ravine; it was filled with bodies. Years later, he said:

[Nagai] “They are piled up to the edge of the road. If I sat on the edge and stretched out my arm, I could touch them.”

Later that morning, he heard a bugler sounding the call to colors. The music sounded especially bright, and Nagai told himself

[Nagai] “We won. We won.”

Around 9 o’clock on the morning following the massacre, April 13, 1942, Captain Pedro Felix came upon a creek. As he approached the water, he heard rustling in the leaves. Startled, he looked behind him and saw two Filipino non-commissioned officers that he recognized. They were both weak and wounded, one with a cut on the base of his neck that exposed the spinal column bones where his head and body connected.

The three men washed their wounds in the creek and drank much needed water. While doing so, Lt. Eduardo Vargas (who had escaped the previous evening) arrived at the stream and joined the group. Felix was the highest-ranking man, military speaking, but also the weakest. However, he told them:

[Felix] “If you will stick with me, I am sure that I can get us out of this hole.”

[Narrator] Capt. Felix explained that if they followed the stream, they would very likely come to a river. And if they followed that river, it would empty into a bay. Whether that was the bay on the western side of Bataan or the eastern side, Felix didn’t know.

The men agreed to follow Felix.

[Felix] “We subsisted on snails, cracking the shells, and we ate them all. Also on all fruit and leaves that we picked on the way, as long as they were not the bitter leaves.”

[Narrator] On the third day, their ranks swelled from 4 to 5, when they came across another massacre survivor. On the fourth day, they stumbled into a sector where Capt. Felix had been previously assigned. He recalled:

[Felix] “I could pick my way blindfolded.”

[Narrator] They soon came to a former Army bivouac area, where they were disappointed to not find any food. They were just about to continue their journey, when two Japanese soldiers on horseback approached the area, stopping at the river to let their horses drink. Luckily, the 5 men were hidden – and remained so. Soon after the riders left, a Japanese vehicle convoy passed on the nearby road. After those two close calls, the men decided to continue hiding.

After dark they continued along the river, rather than risk exposure on trails or roads. They were back down to 4 men. The sergeant whose spinal column had been exposed couldn’t

continue. Felix says that by this time, at least some of his brain was exposed and maggots had already started infesting the wound. He was too weak to go on.

The 4 remaining men stopped for the night and slept, only to discover at first light that their camp was 50 yards away from a Japanese bivouac area. They quickly left, staying in the jungle as they paralleled the main Midpeninsula road, heading east toward a Filipino town. They came upon farmers who knew Capt. Felix, and who were able to give the men shelter, medical aid, food, and water.

On April 24, two weeks after the massacre, a still-wounded Capt. Felix arrived at his home in Manila -- dressed like a peasant and riding in a horse-drawn calesa (that's a 2-wheeled carriage). He had joined a group of Bataan refugees heading north. Once at home, he told his family his astonishing story.

I don't know when Vargas arrived home. They both lost track of the other men in their group. And as far as Felix and Vargas knew, they were the only 2 survivors of the massacre.

### ***Aftermath & Consequences***

In January 1946, mere months after Japan surrendered and signed a peace treaty with the United States, General Masaharu Homma was brought before an American war crimes tribunal in Manila. Homma was the commander over all Japanese forces on Bataan during the Battle of Bataan and the Death March. The Allies held him responsible for the actions of all the men under his command, although he insisted that he did not know the details or atrocities committed during the March. He was charged with the war crimes that occurred during the Bataan Death March, including the Pantingan River Massacre.

During the month-long trial, Capt. Pedro Felix and Major Eudaro Vargas testified about what happened at the Pantingan River on April 12, 1942. All of their words in this episode come directly from their respective testimonies.

One person not tried for Bataan-related war crimes was Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, the man who reportedly ordered the massacre. He was a real piece of work. A high-profile, radical military leader during Japan's invasion of China in the 1930s and then throughout WW2, Tsuji fled after the Japanese surrender to avoid arrest. Officers under his command, who followed his orders, were tried and executed for some of those crimes.

Tsuji had fled to Thailand, then to China, and finally to Vietnam. In 1948, he returned to Japan and again took a place of some prominence. In 1961, he travelled to Laos and vanished. Some thought he was killed in the civil war there, others that he became an advisor to the North Vietnamese government.

He even worked as a spy for the CIA during the Cold War. Declassified agency documents state he was "extremely irresponsible," "will not take the consequences for his actions," and that he was "the type of man who given the chance, would start World War III without any misgivings."

I just have no words to describe this despicable man. It is men like him to I believe we really can blame for WW2 atrocities. And isn't it disgustingly ironic how dishonorable and disloyal his orders and actions were, considering he was part of the military indoctrinating young, impressionable men about the absolute importance of honor and loyalty.

I do not know what happened to Capt. Felix and Maj. Vargas after the Homma trial. I've tried to find historical records or newspaper articles for them; but have come up empty handed.

However, they were not the only 2 survivors of the Pantingan Rier Massacre. Lt Manueal Yan, who later was the head of the Philippines armed forces and an ambassador to Thailand, and Capt. Ricardo Papa, who became Manila's chief of police, also survived.

While this massacre was occurring, tens of thousands of Filipino and American POWs were marching north toward a not-quite-finished Philippine Army training camp – that soon became more like an enormous mass grave.

More on that next time.

This is *Left Behind*.

## Outro

Thank you for listening! You can find pictures, maps, and sources about The Pantingan Massacre on the Left Behind Facebook page and website and on Instagram @leftbehindpodcast. The links are in the show description.

If you'd like to know more about the Massacre, I suggest the book "Tears in the Darkness," by Elizabeth and Michael Norman. The Normans interviewed several former Japanese soldiers for this book, which is where I obtained that information for this episode.

If you appreciate this podcast, please subscribe so you'll know when I drop a new episode and leave a review wherever you listen to podcasts.

*Left Behind* is researched, written, and produced by me, Anastasia Harman.

- Voice overs by: Mike Davis, Tyler Harman, Jake Harrenberg, Connor Davis, and Paul Sutherland.

I'll be back next time with a literal train ride to hell.

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