Episode 28 – Ray Hunt – Transcript

[Note] *This episode contains graphic details of war crimes and killing that are not suitable for some listeners.*

[Narrator] The sweltering heat beat upon 22-year-old Ray Hunt, blazing at him from the merciless sun above, reflecting up from the dusty, rocky ground, and coming from all sides through the relentless humidity. The heat had followed him for 10 days as he trudged mile after mile up the eastern side of Bataan Peninsula. Dust and dirt, kicked up by previous marching groups, filled the air, choking him and sticking to his sweat-drenched body.

His tongue stuck to the roof of his dry mouth, which hadn't seen water that day, and intense hunger gnawed at his stomach, as he attempted to keep pace with the rest of the group, marching in three columns on the road's left side.

The classically tall, dark, and handsome young Air Corps man from St. Louis, with eyes that creased in a mischievous glint when his wide smile revealed perfect, gleaming teeth, now resembled a walking skeleton. His uniform – what was left of it anyway – hung off his dysentery and beriberi ravaged body.

Rage and hatred had grown with every footfall of the 50 miles Hunt had already traversed. Rage at the cruelty and death he'd witnessed over the past 10 days. Anger toward the captors who inflicted brutality that, just days before, he could not have even imagined.

Looking up from the ground, Hunt noticed a bridge ahead. Below it, a deep ditch. If only…

Glancing toward the guard at the group's front, then to the one at back, Hunt moved to the middle marching column. After a second glance, he slipped into the left column.

The ditch became ever closer with every step the advancing group took. And then they were upon it.

The guard looked away, and Ray Hunt dove, headfirst, into that deep roadside ditch. Grasses moved under his fall, falling back in place to hide him from the guards.

[Soldier] "Don't look!"

[Narrator] He heard an American marching above him hiss to another, who had obviously witnessed Hunt's dive.

[Soldier] "Do you want to get him shot?"

[Narrator] But no shot came. The guards had not seen the leap. The marching columns passed over the bridge, their footsteps fading into the distance, and the dust settling once again to the ground.

Ray Hunt slowly moved himself forward, crawling along the bottom of the ditch away from the road before another marching group passed over him.

He'd escaped the march, at least for now. But he had to get to safety, to food, and to water.

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And then…he'd get his revenge … or die trying.

This is *Left Behind.*

[Narrator] 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 second of 4 episodes focusing on the Bataan Death March. Today we'll look at the march starting at its southern-most point on Bataan and meet a remarkable man who, thinking death preferable to captivity, risked everything to escape the misery of that march.

But first, I want to reiterate my caution from the beginning of the episode – there are graphic accounts of brutality and killing. These Bataan Death March episodes are proving to be the hardest for me to write because of the ruthless details I've come across. The atrocities of the Death March are soul-wrenching.

But I feel strongly that the stories need to be told.

So, let's jump in.

Before the War

[Narrator] On December 11, 1919, in the city of St. Louis, Missouri, Raymond Champ Hunt Jr. entered the world. He was the first (and only son) of 4 children born to Raymond Sr. and Flossie Hunt. Raymond Sr. made a living as a grocery store manager and then as a butcher.

In 1938, Ray graduated from St. Louis's Roosevelt High School and worked as a grocery clerk for a short while. Then, in February 1939, 19-year-old Ray enlisted in the US Army Air Corps. He underwent training as an aircraft mechanic at Moffet Field in Sunnyvale, California, just south of San Francisco.

Life must have been quite a change for a young man from Missouri, now in the sunny landscapes of California. But his landscape would soon change again when, on November 1, 1941, he sailed from San Francisco to the Philippines. He would arrive just in time for the world to change.

On December 8, 1941, Ray found himself stationed at Nichols Field, just south of Manila, with the 21st Air Pursuit Squadron. At first, he ignored the early-morning cannons announcing the attack on Hawaii's Pearl Harbor, rolling over to continue his interrupted sleep. When the sun rose, he put off digging his foxhole, choosing to rest under a shade tree – until Japanese bombs stared falling, some landing close enough to – almost – have his name on them.

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Those bombs, however, made quick work of the American P-40 pursuit planes and not even Hunt and his fellow mechanics could fix the damage. So, with the American air corps all but demolished, he joined the ground forces fighting on Bataan.

Back home in St. Louis, Ray's family must have been concerned and anxious about his well-being. They heard from him on Christmas 1941. And then the naval blockade of The Philippines dried all streams of wartime communication to nothing. In April 1942, headlines of Bataan's fall shouted from the front pages of the St. Louis newspapers, only to be soon replaced by other war news. In late 1942, some families began hearing that their sons were Killed in Action or captured on Bataan and now resided in POW camps.

But for the Hunts…nothing.

Silence.

For 3 years.

And then, well when the truth of their son's wartime experiences arrived, it was probably beyond anything they could have ever imagined.

During the War

[Narrator] Maj. General Edard King's surrender of Bataan Peninsula on the morning of April 9, 1942, really wasn't what it purported to be. Gen King wanted to surrender all American and Filipino forces on the peninsula and establish a ceasefire. But Japanese leaders resisted, saying they would only stop firing on allied soldiers when they, individually, surrendered themselves.

A complete ceasefire would only happen if King surrendered the entire Philippine Islands to Japanese forces. King couldn't and wouldn't do that – so the surrender was, basically, every man for himself. Some men headed into the jungles, others waited for orders – that never came due to the chaos that was, on that morning, southern Bataan. (I covered the details of King's surrender in episode 25, if you're interested.)

From January through March 1942, and especially over the past week of war, Allied forces had been pushed steadily south on the peninsula, until a huge part of the American and Filipino fighting force was in and around the town of Mariveles on the peninsula's southern tip.

Among these was 22-year-old Ray Hunt. He recalled:

[Ray] "I had expected that we would eventually be rescued. I had simply assumed that no matter what the situation, the United States was bound to prevail in the end. We did not relish the idea of capitulating, and we did not know what to expect, but the Japanese were all around us.

[Narrator] And truly, who of those confused, sick, hungry, waiting men could have expected the actions that awaited them in the coming days – in what would become one of the most atrocious war crimes in a war filled with human atrocities.

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The first thing that Hunt had to do was wait for Japanese forces to arrive, so he could surrender.

[Ray] “I was weak, sick, and confused then. Discipline had broken down completely in the last days before the surrender. Men either milled about aimlessly or sprawled in the dust like dogs, too tired to move.”

[Narrator] But, since a ceasefire hadn’t been called, waiting for the enemy force’s arrival was no guarantee of survival. One account tells of American soldiers walking to a point of surrender under cover of a white flag, with a Japanese aircraft strafing them from above.

One Bataan survivor wrote:

[Jacobson] “Along toward late afternoon Japanese troops began to be spotted on the road moving toward us. The first Japanese to approach carried heavy field packs and rifles and in groups pulled heavy infantry pieces. They swarmed over us, searching each man roughly and thoroughly, slapping, kicking, taking whatever they wanted, and destroying items they couldn’t’ use. Within a matter of minutes, they had stripped us of our watches, rings, pens, and anything that looked at all valuable.”

[Narrator] Similar narratives of looting are told in almost every account of the Death March I’ve read. And sometimes the looting got violent. Reports tell of Japanese soldiers cutting off POWs’ fingers to get rings or executing Filipinos and Americans who were found in possession of Japanese money. (The thought being if an Allied soldier had Japanese money, he must have gotten it off of a dead Japanese soldier, likely one that soldier had killed.).

An Army medic recalled standing in lines at Mariveles as Japanese soldiers searched the POWs. A Japanese soldier punched a young, frightened American soldier in the face, and the American cried out in pain. Apparently thinking the soldier’s cry was a protest, the guard punished the young man – bashing him in the head with a rifle butt.

The medic continued:

[Sidney] “Groaning, the kid sagged to his knees. With all his strength the guard swung the butt again and the boy’s head made a dull, splattering sound as it split open before our eyes.

“The body convulsed, shuddering, and the fingers grabbed the ground. Then it lay still. One of the Jap soldiers laughed and kicked the dead American with the toe of his shoe. Suddenly I hated them with a violent passion.”

[Narrator] Survivors have filled books with similar interactions.

Japanese leadership was unprepared for surrender on two fronts. First— They had expected their final assault on Bataan last for several weeks before American forced capitulated. It took 6 days. Second – Japanese leaders thought they would capture around 25,000 prisoners of war. Exact numbers are impossible to know, but they found anywhere from 75,000 to 105,000 prisoners – American servicemen, Filipino servicemen, and civilians.

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The reasons exact numbers are unknown is because (1) the chaos of Bataan's fall prevented record keeping of those men KIA, (2) it's not fully known how many men fled into the jungle instead of surrendering, and (3) it's not know exactly how many men died on the march.

Best estimates suggest around 10-12,000 American servicemen, 60-65,000 Filipino servicemen, and upwards of 25,000 civilians.

The Japanese were not prepared to transport, house, or feed this many prisoners. And this created more chaos as Japanese leadership attempted to alter any established plans they had had in order to meet the massive numbers of prisoners they were now faced with.

The march from Mariveles began on April 10, 1942. To quote a former POW, "there was confusion everywhere."

Aside from moving 75,000 or so military prisoners, Japanese forces' number one priority was capturing Corregidor Island – the American fort and stronghold in Manila Bay – as quickly as possible. When Corregidor fell, The Philippines would fall. And Japan wanted that to happen as quickly as possible.

So in those first days after surrender, the Bataan roads south to Mariveles were jammed with south-bound Japanese trucks, tanks, artillery, and more. (Mariveles was the best and closest point from which to base their assault on Corregidor.) So between this troop and equipment movement and altering plans for POWs, confusion reigned.

Death March survivor Lester Tenney (whose story I told in episode 2) wrote:

[Tenney] "The individual Japanese units did not know what they were supposed to do. No sooner had one group of Japanese lined us up and told us to start walking than another group would tell us to wait. All of these orders were issued in Japanese, and if we did not respond immediately, we would be hit, spat upon, shoved, or in some cases shot for not obeying orders."

[Narrator] Ray Hunt and more than 35,000 fellow POWs left the Mariveles area in groups of a hundred or so men at intervals, guarded to varying degrees. Estimates suggest around half of the total POWs began the march at Mariveles. The remainder joined the march over the next days as POWs caught elsewhere on the peninsula joined the march.

Hunt recalled that, in the first days of the march, sometimes guards would be with the group, sometimes not.

The body of POWs from Mariveles headed east along Bataan's main road. I call it a "main" road, but it was little more than a developed dirt road made of rock, shells, and sand. Three months of heavy military usage had left it rutted and filled with potholes. Witnesses describe a never-ending procession of POWs walking in bunches along the road in the march's first few days. Coming the opposite way was that equally never-ending stream of Japanese vehicles and equipment.

Ray recalled:

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[Ray] "These southbound Japanese took up much of the road, kicked up a horrendous cloud of dust that seemed to hang forever in the humid hear, and frequently struck at the heads of staggering prisoners with their rifle butts or bamboo sticks."

[Narrator] It was the hottest, driest time of year for The Philippines, with afternoon temperatures in the mid-90s, zero rain, and no relief from the scorching sun.

The POWs followed the road east for 9 miles from Mariveles to the Cabcaben airfield. But those first 9 miles contained a steep rise with sharp switchbacks, "the zig-zag," the men called it. Here the hungry, sick men first began to stagger as turn after turn revealed only…more climbing. It was, in reality, not that long a distance—but the steepness made it seem interminable. The weakest men soon collapsed on the road's edge.

On one side, cliff walls dropped down into ravines. Later marchers reported seeing bodies with American and Filipino uniforms at the bottom of the ravines – likely straggles pushed over the sides by Japanese guards.

During the first day or so of the march, a Japanese guard pulled Ray Hunt and 6 others out of line and ordered them to dig foxholes.

[Ray] "While we were busy at it, the heavy mortars on Corregidor opened up on us. All we American diggers hit the dirt at once, as we had been trained to do, but the Japanese just laughed at us and stood unconcernedly in the open, seemingly confident none of the shells had their names on them. Their bravado in such cases also helps to explain why Japanese casualties on Bataan were so much higher than American."

[Narrator] And, of course, the bombs from mortar attacks from fellow allies on Corregidor could also have American or Filipino POWs' names on them.

From Cabcaben airfield, the road turned north and ran through a series of villages for almost 30 miles. During this stretch, the march became more organized and the real atrocities began. Hunt described:

[Ray] "We were now marched in large groups, three abreast, on the left side of the road, so southbound vehicles would not be impeded. Guards trotted up and down the columns clubbing men into line with rifle butts, stabbing laggards with their bayonets, and shooting or bayonetting to death anyone chronically unable to keep up.

"One poor fellow behind me jumped into a stream as we crossed a bridge. As soon as the man surfaced, he was shot in the back. I watched a general being clubbed until he was a bloody, unrecognizable mess. As for myself, I was clubbed many times for no reason other than sheer malice.

"So we stumbled along, mile after mile, through heat and dust, tortured by hunger, thirst, diseases, and the accumulated effects of three months on short rations. The popping of .25-caliber Japanese rifles grew more frequent as more and more men proved unable to maintain

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the pace of the march. After a while nobody even looked back to see who had been short this time."

[Narrator] Food and water were scarce. POWs would gather berries and whatever else they could, surreptitiously, from road-side plants. Filipino civilians would slip men food, when guards weren't looking. The captors did provide some food, but it was insufficient.

[Ray] "I did go three days in one stretch with no food. The sensation is odd. The first day one is hungry, the second much more hungry, and the third ravenous, but on the fourth day the process begins to reverse itself."

[Narrator] Worse than food distribution was lack of water. The Japanese guards often didn't let the prisoners stop to get water from wells or clean streams, instead making them drink from mud pits where carabao water buffalo wallow – at best. At worse, dead, rotting human bodies floated in the water sources. These stories about water are also reported in many survivor recollections.

[Narrator] At night, POWs were herded into fields and encircled with barbed wire to prevent escape – like cattle in a corral. They lay on bare, dusty ground.

[Ray] "Thousands of men were packed in so closely that one could not shift his body without causing discomfort to others. Worse, there were no toilets, and by now maybe a third of us had dysentery. There we lay in mind-numbing squalor, soaked in our own body wastes and those of others."

[Narrator] I've long had the question: Why did the Japanese treat the POWs so inhumanely? There seems to have been absolutely no respect for human life. And this torturous treatment went on for the rest of the war and captivity.

It flies in the face of what I've known and experienced with Japanese friends, roommates, and others in my life.

I've obviously spent time thinking about and researching this topic, and in the end, I don't think there is a satisfactory answer. If there were one single answer, I'd have to say it is: that war is hell and people do disgusting and unthinkable things. It happened on all sides of WW2.

That being said, there are several reasons and factors that seem to play into the brutality exhibited by Japanese guards and soldiers. And over the next few episodes, I'll discuss several of these reasons.

Today, I'm going to start with Ray Hunt's personal thoughts. He wrote:

[Ray] "Most of the guards seemed to me to be ignorant farm boys, no doubt irritated by our inability to understand and respond quickly to commands given in Japanese, but, at bottom, concerned mostly to demonstrate how tough they were, to show off in front of their buddies, to let everyone know that they were real men who shrank from nothing."

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[Narrator] So Ray suggests language barriers, bravado, and inexperience/under-education. Sadly, these three things seem to be unfortunate aspects of human nature that we continue to see every day.

But this idea of young, inexperienced, uneducated men plays into another idea – namely, that the soldiers set to guard the death march prisoners and the POW camps were the "dregs" of the Japanese military. In other words, Japanese military leadership put their best soldiers on the fighting fronts and left the prisoners to the, perhaps, undesirable soldiers/guards.

That reasoning could make sense regarding the death march – at the very moment the POWs were marching northward, the Japanese army was beginning its siege on Corregidor Island. So, they needed troops to fight that battle and others to guard the prisoners.

And considering that Japanese leadership wanted to defeat Corregidor and obtain complete control of The Philippine Islands as soon as possible, they'd likely want their best forces focused on that task. Thus leaving the lesser members of their military to manage the POWs – who numbered 3-4 times as many as had been expected.

Certainly, Japanese leadership not being prepared to accommodate the massive number of POWs (as well as the bad physical shape the POWs were already in) could partially explain the food and water shortage issues that plagued the death march and subsequent POW camp experiences. That unpreparedness doesn't however offer good reasons for Japanese guards prohibiting POWs from drinking from good streams or for guards punishing civilians who gave food to POWs.

Back to the ignorant farm boys idea. Culturally and ideologically, Japan was, at the start of WW2, a military state.

The military had adopted, what British historian Mark Felton calls,

[Felton] "a perverted version of the samurai bushido code among soldiers, including the belief that any form of surrender was deeply dishonorable, even the surrender of one's own enemies. Surrender, so went the thinking, rendered the enemy soldier a nonentity, and a Japanese victor could treat a nonentity worse than an animal."

Thus, the young, inexperienced death march guards – who Hunt described as "farm boys" – would have been indoctrinated with this idea that surrender was shameful and the POWs were nonentities, therefore brutal, inhuman treatment of them wasn't morally wrong.

Add to this that Japanese soldiers themselves were treated rather brutally by their superiors, thus the military culture of Japan bred brutality. American historian John Toland, in his Pulitzer-prize winning book about Japan during WW2, wrote:

[Author] "Brutality was a daily event for the Japanese soldier. He had to admit brutality against himself by his officers. This treatment he simply gave further to his subordinates or the prisoners, the last because they were inferior to him after their surrender. Surrender simply did not exist to him, because he fought to the last drop of blood."

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[Narrator] Thus this culture of brutality further bred cruel and sadistic treatment of those whom a Japanese soldier considered to be his inferiors.

As the days of 10, 15, and 20-mile marches dragged on in the horrid heat and humidity on empty stomach with no water, Ray Hunt felt his chance of survival diminish with every step. He recalled:

[Hunt] "As I trudged along, rage and hatred welled up from the depths of my soul and engulfed me. I resolved to escape or die trying."

[Narrator] By now, he'd been on the march for around 10 days, having marched some 50 miles/80km and reached the northern Bataan peninsula. He noticed that two Japanese guards were assigned to each marching group of 100 to 800 men – one at the front and one at the rear. By this point the prisoners were marching three abreast, so he slipped from the right column to the middle and finally to the left column (which was closest to the side of the road) as his group approached a bridge over a deep ditch.

[Ray] "When a guard looked away, I dove head first over the bank into the ditch. There I lay rigid, terrified that the pounding of my heart must be so loud that the guards on the road above could hear it. But they did not, and as the footsteps faded away, I head an American voice say something like. 'Don't look. Do you want to get him shot.'"

[Narrator] Once he was certain the marching group had passed on, Hunt crawled along the ditch, where he discovered two other Americans. They had jumped into the same ditch about 10 minutes earlier. When Hunt touched one of the men's legs, he scared the man half to death until Hunt whispered softly that he was an American.

Eventually, when no other marching groups or guards were around, Ray decided to emerge from the ditch and call out. A Filipino farmer heard him and walked across a log spanning the ditch. When the farm looked down, Hunt asked:

[Ray] "'Any Japs around?'

"Fortunately, he understood some English. He told me to stay down, and slipped into the underbrush. A few minutes later, he returned and motioned for us to follow him."

[Narrator] The farmer took the 3 Americans to a bamboo hut, where they ate and learned about William Fassoth's camp in the foothills. William Fassoth was an American rice and sugar planter who established a camp in the Zambales Mountains, which run south to north and begin in the northern Bataan peninsula, not far from where Hunt escaped. At the beginning of the war, when Japanese forces destroyed Fassoth's home and rice and sugar mills, Fassoth and his family escaped into the Zambales foothills.

But American servicemen, escaping the fighting on Bataan and then later the death march, found the camp (which expanded into at least 3 camps, each farther back in the mountains to avoid Japanese raids) and it became a sanctuary for "stray Americans."

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Ray Hunt was extremely sick with beri-beri, malaria, and yellow jaundice by the time he arrived at Fassoth's camp, and he remained there, recovering and mainly in bed, for about 5 months until that camp was raided and destroyed on the night of September 26, 1942.

By some kind of luck, Hunt, who was still sick, was out of camp using the latrine and barefoot when the attack started, and he was able to escape. Unfortunately, though, he hadn't worn his shoes to the night-time latrine visit. Hunt wrote:

[Hunt] "I walked on my heels to avoid the sharp grass. When my feet pressed down on the shoots, I sprawled to escape the pain."

[Narrator] He found a temporary home with a Filipino family in a village. They concealed him in a low-roofed grass hut next to a stream—which would be his home for several months. He was still very sick.

[Hunt] "My head was shaved to rid me of lice, and my overalls hung limply on my frame. I was a sight to frighten everyone."

[Narrator] He had to stay concealed, so he spent his time learning to speak the Tagalog, the Filipino language, and reading.

[Hunt] "I studied government, religion, customs and everything I found in the elementary school books my guardians brought to my hut."

[Narrator] Over the course of several months, Hunt's health and strength returned. He refused to stay hidden, and ingrained himself in Filipino culture and activities.

[Hunt] "I had become Filipino. I ate with my fingers from banana leaves spread on the floor, and learned to accept strange food—such as cattle intestines carefully cleaned. You might say I was almost happy."

[Narrator] He even met a girl and almost got married – but her father objected to the match and it was eventually broken off.

Then Japanese searched the area where Hunt was hiding. He escaped by hiding in a field until night, then slipping through the enemy forces that encircled the field.

He headed north toward an area where he'd heard rumors of American guerilla activity. For some reason, and I don't know exactly why, he stopped in a Filipino village not too far away from Camp O'Donnell and created his own small guerilla force.

[Hunt] "My first guerilla force was recruited from the laborers on a Japanese airfield. Guns began to appear. My skin had been burned dark by the sun. I spoke Tagalog and rode a water buffalo like a native."

[Narrator] Hunt's main objective with this force was to spread disinformation. He and his group spread stories of American victories, daily bombings of Tokyo, and made-up timelines of American forces returning to The Philippines.

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In summer 1943 – so roughly 15 months after escaping the Bataan Death March – Hunt learned that Maj. Robert Lapham was in the area. Lapham was part of an American group during the Bataan campaign assigned by Gen. Douglas MacArthur to gather intelligence. After Bataan's fall, Lapham, bolstered by some 15,000 Filipinos and other American escapees, formed the largest and most successful guerilla force on Luzon, which is The Philippine's largest island. It became known as the Luzon Guerilla Forces—United States Armed Forces Far East.

When Hunt learned that Lapham was nearby, Hunt sent one of his men to find Lapham and suggest that Hunt's small force combine with Lapham's larger one. Lapham told Hunt find and combine with the branch of Lapham's forces in the western part of central Luzon, about 80 miles/130 km northeast of Manila.

Hunt and his men trailed this branch for several days and finally caught up with the group of American and Filipino guerillas. They joined forces, and Hunt became the group's executive officer, basically second in command. And, for the next year, they set to work causing the Japanese as much grief as possible.

[Hunt] "My clothing and equipment consisted of a one-piece khaki outfit, a hat fashioned from half a gourd, and a pair of GI shoes, the first in 18 months.

"I carried a .45 caliber automatic on my right hip, a .38 revolver on my left hip and a Garand M-1 rifle across my back. Ammunition was carried in crisscrossed bandoliers.

"We moved constantly across the rice paddies of Central Luzon. We ate and slept in many villages, protected by bodyguards. At night we set roadblocks for parties of Japanese, which we ambushed.

"Spies were executed publicly, for all to witness what happened to Filipinos who worked for the enemy.

"We organized the puppet leaders in our areas, the governor, police heads and mayors. Each was warned to co-operate. Most did. While they feared the Japanese, they feared the guerillas more.

"Some [ambush and attack] locations were under the very noses of large enemy garrisons. When possible, we executed an ambush, then faded away."

[Narrator] In response, the Japanese put a price on Ray Hunt's head. The enemy knew Hunt's name, his hair and eye color, and even his favorite brand of cigarettes – but they never knew where he was located or any of his movements.

In June 1944, so about 2 years after Ray's escape from Bataan, Guerilla leader Maj. Robert Lapham gave Hunt the rank of Captain and put him in command of his own guerilla force, which eventually numbered 3,400 men and covered an entire Luzon province.

Hunt's was largely an intelligence organization – with 3 times as many unarmed men (and women) as there were armed men. Equipped with a transmitter radio that was smuggled into The Philippines from Australia on board a US sub that had slipped through the enemy infested

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waters, Hunt could gather information and send it to MacArthur's headquarters in Australia. In return, Hunt and his group received information on how the war was progressing.

At one point, he had the opportunity to escape Luzon on board one of those submarines, but chose to remain on the island, believing his duties as a guerilla officer were too great to abandon.

His guerilla force mapped Japanese military heavy artillery installations in central Luzon, especially near the western coast. MacArthur's staff used that information to determine where the American invasion army would land.

[Hunt] "For the first time since my capture on Bataan I began to dream that I might live through the ordeal. I began to allow myself to think of things back home. It was a good feeling."

The transistor radios allowed Hunt's organization to contact and meet up with US submarines, which brought the guerillas weapons, ammunition, medicine, cigarettes, and candy.

[Hunt] "The strangest things we received were rocket launchers, bazookas, which we didn't know how to use."

As the US reinvasion of The Philippines neared in late 1944, MacArthur's headquarters in Australia gave Hunt's group specific instructions on how to support the American invading forces. Hunt's guerillas were given locations of where to establish roadblocks and ambush Japanese forces, as well as power plants, bridges and garrisons to attack.

Around this time, Hunt's family in St. Louis, Missouri, finally received word that their son and brother was alive and fighting.

On January 5, 1945, Captain Hunt received orders to begin operations in preparation for the US invasion landing.

[Hunt] "That night I led an attack on the Japanese garrison at the town of San Quintin, in central Luzon, after warning the Filipino residents of the town to evacuate when our force moved in. We attacked the garrison's building with light machine gun and automatic rifle fire.

"Guerillas worked their way under the buildings, firing through the floors. Japs who tried to jump out windows were shot. A wood bridge was burned and telephone wires were cut. We faded away without a casualty."

[Narrator] The next morning Hunt's forces occupied the garrison – which provided valuable intelligence as well as became a communications center for guerilla operations in the larger Northern Luzon area.

For 5 days, Hunt's guerillas continued to attack other garrisons and captured small Filipino villages from the Japanese. On January 9, 1945, US forces landed at Lingayen Gulf. Hunt sent runners through 40 miles of Japanese-held territory to meet the American troops and pass along all the information they possessed.

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For the next two weeks, Hunt and his men remained behind Japanese lines and continued to send combat intelligence about enemy locations to the US landing forces. Finally on January 22, Hunt received orders to meet up with the US forces.

[Hunt] "As we crossed the Ango River, American troops were fording it. They appeared young and fresh. I stopped on the bank and stared back into 3.5 years of terror."

[Narrator] After nearly 3 years, Captain Ray Hunt was again on the US side of the front lines. And, this time, they were winning. A few days later, a St. Louis newspaper told Hunt's story:

[Newspaper] "The tall, thin, 25-year-old Missourian apparently is in good health. The only evidence that he had been leading a hide-and-seek existence as a guerrilla leader for three years was the way his alert eyes shifted at any sudden movement."

[Narrator] Captain Hunt was again given the opportunity to leave on the first available ship or plane. Instead, he chose to remain in the islands for 6 more months and continued to coordinate guerilla movements.

[Hunt] "I was determined to see that my ren received what was theirs through their heroic service."

[Narrator] During those 6 months, the US military confirmed Hunt's appointment as Captain – meaning they upheld the guerilla rank he had achieved. Ray Hunt was now an official Captain in the US Army. He also received the Distinguished Service Cross – the second highest US military honor. The citation reads, in part:

[Citation] "For extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Luzon Guerilla Army Forces, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, in action against enemy forces from 21 April 1942 through 30 April 1945.

"By his ability, initiative, courage and qualities of leadership, while engaged in activities with the Luzon Guerrilla Army Forces, Captain Hunt materially aided American operations in the Philippine Islands."

After the War & Legacy

[Narrator] On July 19, 1945, Ray Hunt returned home to St. Louis on leave after being away for 6.5 years. A photograph in a local newspaper captured the moment he reunited with his father and sisters. (I've put that picture on Instagram and Facebook.)

Shortly after his return, on October 18, 1945, Ray married Theresa J. Sauter. He decided to remain in the military and began training as a jet fighter pilot at Williams Field in Arizona. Hunt, by then a Major, graduated first in his class in October 1947.

During this time, his wife, Theresa, lived with her parents in St. Louis. By early 1950, they had 2 children, ages 3 years and 3 months. The couple would have another child in the early 1950s. Ray named his only son after his Filipino bodyguard.

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In early 1953, Major Hunt was sent to Korea, where he served for the last 6 months of that conflict. He finished his military career as a Lt. Colonel in 1959. His last station was in England.

After retirement, Ray joined his father in a real estate business, which he remained in through out the 1960s.

In 1973, Ray married second wife Norma Irene Botkin in Seminole County, Florida. They settled in Orlando, Florida, where Ray spent the next 20 years.

On June 17, 1996, Ray Hunt passed away in San Antonio, Texas. He was laid to rest at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery near St. Louis, Missouri. Leaving behind 3 children, at least 5 grandchildren, and a legacy of courage and duty.

And all because he decided, in the midst of his personal horror on the Bataan Death March, to jump into a road-side ditch.

His Distinguished Service Cross says it all:

[Citation] "His intrepid actions, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, and the United States Army."

But, while Ray Hunt was crawling along that Bataan ditch to safety, tens of thousands more American and Filipino POWs were marching toward an unknown fate. Among them were two brothers – who shared the same childhood, served in the same unit, and marched the same death march route.

But would they share the same ultimate fate?

More on that next time.

This is *Left Behind.*

Thanks for listening! You can find pictures, maps, and sources about Ray Hunt's story on the Left Behind Facebook page and website as well as on Instagram @LeftBehindPodcast.

If you'd like to know more about Ray Hunt's experiences as a guerilla, I suggest the book *Behind Japanese Lines: An American Guerilla in the Philippines*, by Ray Hunt and Bernard Norling.

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