

## EXCERPT

### Prologue

*What's past is prologue ...*

The Tempest, Act II, Scene 1

. . . For a brief moment at the beginning of World War II Bataan and Corregidor were rallying cries – strange sounding names of faraway places where the resistance of a few Americans and Filipinos shone as a tiny beacon of hope in a very dark sea. The world watched, helpless and unbelieving, as Japan after savaging the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, struck with appalling speed and terrible efficiency into Southeast Asia and the far reaches of the South Pacific.

The Japanese onslaught shattered all the old images of this remote race: Myopic little men jerking across flickering Pathé newsreel screens in dirt-colored uniforms with their shaggy Manchurian ponies and museum-piece mountain howitzers. Here they were now, brandishing their long rifles and leering out of grainy news photos as they planted the standard of the Rising Sun on heaps of rubble or herded hollow-eyed prisoners to their appointed fate. But this wasn't China; these prisoners were white men, and the rubble heaps were what was left of the old Anglo-Saxon strongholds in Asia. Before the year 1941 was out, Thailand, Guam, Wake Island and Hong Kong had fallen; in February, the British had surrendered Singapore, and three weeks later, the Dutch East Indies dropped like a rotten mango.

All that marred these stunning successes was the stubborn American-Filipino defense of the Philippines. The Japanese timetable called for the islands to be secured in fifty days, but the defenders of Bataan and Corregidor held for four months. Encouraged by promises from Washington, General Douglas MacArthur assured his men that “. . . help was on the way. Thousands of troops and hundreds of planes are being dispatched from the United States” they were told. “. . . it is imperative that our troops hold until these reinforcements arrive.”

But there would be no reinforcements. . . . In time Washington stopped sending its messages of false hope and the defenders of Bataan stopped hoping. Even General MacArthur, himself, who directed the war from his island fortress of Corregidor, seemed to have abandoned his men when in March of 1942, under orders from President Roosevelt, he escaped to Australia to carry on the war against the Japanese on other fronts.

Bataan resisted until April 9, 1942 and Corregidor fell a month later. Starving and ridden by disease, their cause long since lost, the beleaguered defenders laid down their arms and disappeared into the cess pools of Greater Nippon's prisoner-of-war camps. Not until their release almost four years later did the world learn of the full horror of the Bataan Death March, of the years of brutality and neglect, and of the attacks on their unmarked ships by American planes and submarines as they were being shipped to Japan as slaves of the Empire.

By the summer of 1945, America no longer needed the hope once inspired by Bataan and Corregidor; in the intervening war years the memories of those old battles had receded into the shadow of too many other battles and too many other heroes. In September of that year the Japanese surrendered

to the United States and its allies, and the survivors of Bataan returned home leaving half of their number behind in the charnel fields of Japan's bloody war.