

What Will the "TRIBULATION" Really Be Like?

From the man who is now Professor of English at Ambassador College, here is the story of what he personally went through as a prisoner-of-war in World War II -- a foretaste of the personal suffering millions will experience in the coming great tribulation.

by L. E. Torrance

IT HAS taken me sixteen years to come to the point where I am willing to write of my experiences as a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese. But today, as I sit at my desk on the beautiful Ambassador College campus, privileged to be a member of the faculty of GOD'S OWN COLLEGE, the personal memories of what I am about to recall to you come flooding vividly into my mind as though from a horrible, unforgettable nightmare. It is very difficult to find words that can even begin to describe what it was like.

How It Began

The story of my "tribulation" in the Japanese concentration camps began on May 10, 1942. That was the day General Sharp surrendered the American forces on Mindanao to the Japanese. They interned us in the prison compound at Davao, Mindanao, Philippine Islands.

At Davao we were forced to work on a starvation diet from early dawn until dusk. We soon began to suffer from acute malnutrition, then from scurvy, malaria, dysentery, and beriberi. I remember how every fiber of my body cried out for food -- as it wasted away, day by day, pound by pound, until I was reduced to an emaciated 100 pound skeleton. My every thought was about food.

Pangs of hunger were greatly intensified by the sight of food that was everywhere about us in abundance. We could look through the prison camp fence and see the fruit and smell the bloom of the thousands of orange, banana, lemon and breadfruit, the guava, coconut, mango and avocado trees around our compound. The fruit RIPENED and fell to the ground. There it lay rotting. Our captors refused to let us have it. They said that Americans deserved only to suffer. And SUFFER we did!

The mental anguish of seeing such an abundance of food going to waste before our very eyes is indescribable.

There were times when our ration of dry rice contained as many worms as kernels of rice. Gnawing hunger pangs forced us to OVERLOOK them.

Our wretched diet of polished rice took its toll. If our captors would have allowed us to eat unpolished brown rice, with its vitamin B1, we would not have had so much beriberi. But our enemies knew what they were doing. They INSISTED upon feeding us polished rice which had the vitamin layer removed. Our legs swelled to twice their normal size. The nerves in

our feet and finger tips became inflamed. They throbbed day and night. Our guards enjoyed hearing the groans of those who suffered the excruciating pains of beriberi.

Because of malarial fever, fever as high as 107°, accompanied by blinding headaches and violent chills, half of the entire camp was ALWAYS at the point of death.

Nevertheless, the Japanese forced us to march to work even though we were so sick we could scarcely stand. If any of us were reluctant to march, guards jabbed the tips of their bayonets into our hips until the pain became more than we could bear. We marched to work -- malarial fever or not. What would you have done?

Can you imagine what mental and spiritual torment would have been added had we then also known the truth of God, that we could not work on the Sabbath, even though our "pagan" guards commanded us to? What would you have done when the searing pain of the bayonets being jabbed deeper and deeper into your backs and hips became so great you could no longer bear it?

Put yourselves in our place. Imagine how difficult it would be to refuse to on the Sabbath when all you would have to do to escape this brutal torture is to begin walking -- walking to WORK.

Others Had Same Experiences

At Davao we met other prisoners who had been transferred from the prison camp at Cabanatuan, Luzon. They were in worse condition than we -- the most wild-eyed, gaunt, wretched-looking men I have ever seen!

After talking to them it was obvious why they were in such a pitiful condition. For example:

Lieutenant Colonel Mellink told us how the 7,000 Americans and the 5,000 Filipinos with him were treated after their capture on the Island of Corregidor. They were kept on a 100-yard square slab of concrete for 15 days, from May 6-22.

After seven long days without food, they were given their first dish of rice. One faucet served the entire 12,000 men. They waited in line 12 hours for each to fill one canteen with water.

The heat on Corregidor was at its worst in May. Men fainted by the score. Hundreds died. The bloated and stinking dead bodies lay out in the sun. Clouds of black flies added to the misery.

On May 22, the Japanese loaded their remaining captives into three small merchant ships and steamed to a suburb south of Manila. When the heat of the day had reached its peak, the Americans were transferred and jammed into barges. After waiting an hour in the hot sun, they were towed to within a hundred yards of the beach.

Although the barges could easily have run up to the beach, the Americans were forced to jump overboard and wade to shore. Thus, when they were marched through Manila in a Japanese victory parade, they presented the worst possible appearance -- wet, ragged, exhausted, staggering from illness and hunger.

This "victory march" through Manila was a "subtle method of convincing the subject peoples of the Philippines that only the Japanese were members of the Master Race" (*Life*, Feb. 7, 1944).

Just think! This same kind of punishment, AND WORSE, will be soon inflicted upon our entire nation by the worst of the heathen -- unless our people repent.

The men who had been transferred from Cabanatuan to Davao told us what happened to two army officers and one navy officer who were caught attempting to escape.

The Japanese beat the three Americans about the feet and calves until they were unable to stand. Then they stomped up and down on them with all their weight.

These brave men were stripped of all their clothing, except shorts, and dragged outside the camp to a point in full view of the rest of the Americans. Their hands were tied behind them, and they were pulled up by ropes tied to their wrists, so they had to remain standing on their crippled legs and feet.

Then began 48 hours of inhuman torture. The Japanese periodically beat the men with a heavy two-by-four. Their half-conscious screams were horrible to hear. They were battered beyond recognition.

Strong men vomited. Others said, "Oh, just to be able to lie down and die!"

This happened to HARDENED soldiers! Now notice what God prophesies is to happen to this entire nation little more than 10 years from now! "... because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God ... the LORD shall scatter thee among all people of eyes, and SORROW OF MIND: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou SHALT FEAR day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see" (Deut. 28:62-67).

We Americans were horrified to learn of the intense resentment and hatred that the Japanese felt for us. Because they felt inferior to the Americans, they tried to show us how great they were by mistreating us in every way possible. Life as a prisoner-of-war was a living hell of fear, starvation, and forced labor.

A Sense of Humor

The evening of June 5, 1944, about 5 o'clock, the Japanese told us that they really liked us and wanted to feed us more. After a diet of virtually nothing but rice for many months, this was the best news that we had heard in a long time. They gave us soybeans and some half-rotten sweet potatoes to eat. The kitchen was kept open all night and we were allowed to eat all that we could hold.

However, so much "rich" food was a violent shock to our stomachs. It caused us to vomit. But it was so much fun to eat that we kept coming back, again and again, all night long. Our digestive systems were not able to tolerate such a terrific shock. Severe cramps and diarrhea set in.

The next morning we were marched on board a ship in Davao harbor. Six hundred of us were tightly jammed into a small, dark hold. They put the cover over the hatch, then closed the door that led down the gangway into our hold. There were no toilet facilities.

The heat was terrific, and there was no ventilation except one small porthole. Within a few minutes we were soaking wet with sweat. Our bodies stung as all the excess water was drained out of us by the terrific heat. Our thirst became maddening.

I remember that the physical and mental anguish caused by the constant, ever present pangs of hunger was so unbearable that I even despaired of living.

Then when the unbearable physical agony of intense thirst set in, I suddenly knew that EXTREME THIRST was FAR worse than the extreme hunger I had been suffering. I thought, "Oh! just to get back to the United States where I can get a drink of water. Food is easy to get!"

Men began to "pass out" all around due to the heat and suffocation. A desperate struggle for breath began. I then discovered how very much worse it was to be without AIR, than it was to be thirsty or hungry. A dying man clings desperately to the last thread of life. When you are without air, and life begins to ebb away, panic sets in.

As far as I can remember, for the FIRST time in my life I PRAYED -- "Oh God, just let me get back to the United States alive, where I can take a breath of 'free' air. I know that I can always find food and water -- I'll never, never again complain -- no, never!"

Finally, after men began to die, the Japanese opened the hatch door and gave us a little air.

Yet, as bad as that experience was, it is certain that there is coming upon this nation CATASTROPHE that will be far worse than anything that has ever been experienced by humans in the whole history of man! The Almighty God says so!

It grieves me to realize that some of my friends, yes, some of you, are deliberately choosing to go through an experience that will be far worse than my 3 1/2 years of "tribulation."

Many of you are proving by your very actions that you really believe it is too much work to study and pray now, too much work to struggle to overcome.

Some of you actually have said to me that it will take the tribulation to make you "spiritual," that in the face of great danger you will suddenly become willing to give your life for the faith.

Listen!

Let me assure you that it is much, much EASIER to give your life in service to God NOW -- it is much easier to study and pray NOW -- it is much easier to have a living, active part in spreading the work of God NOW than it will be to die an agonizing death for refusing to disobey God when brutal, vicious guards try to see how much torture they can inflict upon you.

If you have to go through the tribulation, I am certain that the mental agony you will have -- when you realize that you could have escaped all this torture -- may well be more than you can bear. It will be worse than the agony of starvation, thirst, and suffocation.

The tragedy of it all is that some of you don't even know that you are "luke-warm." You have never studied the Bible enough to let the Word of God correct, reprove, and instruct you in righteousness. "You don't know that you don't know."

But -- if you REPENT -- you need not go through the coming tribulation, for God has promised that the faithful will escape (Rev. 3:10).

A Prisoner in Japan

The boat trip from the Philippines to Japan took us 90 torturous days. I will not recount what the succeeding, seemingly endless months were like.

We prisoners-of-war were forced to work seven days a week in a steel mill in Toyama, Japan. In July, 1945 the U.S. Air Force dropped tens of thousands of propaganda leaflets in Japanese. These leaflets had a devastating effect upon the Japanese. They said, "In accordance with America's well-known humanitarian principles, the American Air Force, which does not wish to injure innocent people, now gives you warning to evacuate your city." They warned the Japanese that the air raid would begin at 11:30 p.m., August 9 and end at 2:30 in the morning. It did.

About 400 B29's dropped incendiary bombs. The fantastic figure of "99.5 per cent of the city of Toyama was destroyed in incendiary mission 307." (Craven and Cate, "The Army Air Forces in World War II," Vol. 5, p. 657.) Our compound, which was on the eastern edge of Toyama, contained the only buildings left in sight. Not a one of us was injured. Not a building of the compound harmed!

They also dropped leaflets saying that our steel mill area was to be the next atom bomb target. But the war ended the very day the raid was scheduled! Did God look down and protect me even when I was a sinner! -- knowing that He was going to call me to become a member of His Church?

Out of Slavery

September 6, 1945, I was released from the Japanese prison camp. After arriving back in the United States, I was able to obtain all the food, water, and air that anyone could desire. Yet, somehow that did not make me happy, as I thought it would. There was something missing. Life was empty; it was not satisfying. I kept looking for something, just what, I did not know. I went to college, but the more of this world's knowledge I gained, the more miserable I became.

The latter part of October in 1953 I heard the voice of the World Tomorrow broadcast. For the first time in my life I knew that I heard a man speak the TRUTH straight from God's Word. It made sense. From that very first broadcast I realized that I NOW had found what I had been looking for. Life suddenly became full and meaningful.

The TIME is NOW!

Maybe you have gone through this same experience. You have come to realize that sin is WRONG -- that God's laws are RIGHT and for YOUR GOOD. You have REPENTED of your disobedience to the Supreme CREATOR God -- you have been baptized and have been given the Holy Spirit.

All you brethren have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal SAVIOUR, believing that He is able to deliver you from your past sins by His shed blood, which justifies, makes clean your guilty past. You are now RECONCILED to God the Creator.

Contact with God has been established and God has made good His PROMISED gift of the Holy Spirit. He is reproducing Himself in you, creating in you a new character.

But there is something that you must be doing. You still have the downward pull of HUMAN NATURE striving AGAINST this new divine character which is being created in you. You must "OVERCOME" this carnal nature (Rev. 2:26).

Is Eternal Life Worth the Effort?

God has chosen to create His character in you, to make you His son, a member of His very family. Once God has called you He will not change His mind (Rom. 11:29) and call you again some other time.

THIS IS IT! If Eternal Life in the Kingdom of God is not worth the effort, if you don't, can't, or just plain won't IN FAITH let God develop character NOW, if you won't force yourself to pray, force yourself to study, if you won't ask God for the Gift of continued repentance NOW, if you won't back the WORK with your prayers and with your tithes and special offerings NOW, Christ will SPUE you out -- you will no longer have His protection (Rev. 3:16).

God WILL force you to make a choice. He said, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life ..." There is no way out. You cannot escape it. You MUST make the choice. If you choose to let God develop in you His character, He promises to give you Eternal Life. But if you refuse to seek Him earnestly, with all your might, while He may be found, HE WILL REJECT YOU (Rev. 3:16).

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

This is the lesson of life my experience has taught me.