



Ed Dyess, probably as a flying cadet.

**HOW ED DYESS AND OTHER
AMERICAN PILOTS OF THE BATAAN
AIR FORCE HELD THE JAPANESE AT BAY
UNTIL THEIR LAST P-40 WAS DESTROYED**

AMERICA'S ONE-MAN AIR FORCE

BY S. SAMUEL BOGHOSIAN

Fortunately, a number of Curtiss P-40Es made it to the Philippines to augment the nearly useless Seversky P-35 fighters. However, many of the new fighters were destroyed on the ground in the initial enemy attacks.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This writer met then-Capt. Dyess when we were both stationed at Clark Field, Philippines, in the weeks immediately following America's entry into World War II.

Clark Field became "Little Pearl Harbor" when — despite ten-hours prior warning of the Pearl Harbor raid — half of our heavy bomber force (B-17s) was destroyed on the ground.

Within 48-hours, the Japanese had wrested control of the air over the Philippine Islands. Nichols Field, near Manila, and Iba Field on the west coast of Luzon Island, were bombed out of existence. What remained of our fighter command (P-40s and P-35As) operated out of Clark Field.

It was from this airfield that Dyess, "Buzz" Wagner (first US ace of WWII), and a handful of fighter pilots daily rose to challenge the enemy — against odds of ten to one and 20 to one.

By Christmas, following the enemy invasion of Luzon, American and Filipino forces were forced to withdraw to Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island.

In January 1942, this writer escaped to Mindanao Island from Bataan, along with 600 other Army Air Force personnel. There we waited for promised aerial reinforcements, which never arrived.

By 10 May, most of the Americans on Bataan, Corregidor, and Mindanao had been killed or captured.

Captured US forces on central Mindanao were later moved to Davao Penal Colony, on the southern end of the island. At Davao, we met the newly transferred "walking ghosts" of Bataan and Corregidor. Among the living ghosts was Ed Dyess.

At Davao, this writer worked under Dyess on a work detail, and got to know him and quickly learned why he commanded respect and got it. This deep respect on the part of everyone who knew him grew out of the fact that Dyess never asked anyone to do anything that he himself would not do. He fought for his men, and along side them, and he gave them courage and confidence, because he displayed the same qualities. During combat and captivity, Dyess exhibited the same simple virtues and heroic qualities.

We mourned Dyess' death twice. The first time was following his escape from Davao Penal Colony, when the enemy camp commander announced that Dyess and the other Americans had been tracked down and killed.

We had no reason to doubt our captor's word,

the telephone. "They're being followed by three 12,000-ton transports and tankers!"

That alarm sent the little Bataan Air Force (BAF) into action with Capt. Edwin "Ed" Dyess — the One Man Air Force — in a little-heralded American air action, scoring the greatest United States victory to date.

At 11:25 am, B/Gen. Harold H. George, a highly decorated WWI ace and commander of BAF (George AFB was renamed in his honor) received word from Red Net — the communication network, which tied the Bataan peninsula together. As soon as the message was relayed to Gen. George, he alerted his fighter pilots. At the same time he ordered the BAF to prepare for immediate action.

His air force? Five tired Curtiss Warhawks (P-40Bs and Es), all desperately in need of engine overhaul, with worn out guns, and no oxygen aboard.

To his pilots of the BAF — who had been bombed 27 times in 31-days — combat flying demanded all that their weakened and tired minds and bodies could possibly give. Yet they pleaded to be allowed to takeoff in their P-40s, with fuselages so covered with patches that the fighters' airspeed had been reduced considerably. Since no spare parts were received from America, pilots arranged for their own "spare" parts by cannibalizing any plane they could.

since other American and Filipino escapees who had been recaptured, had been executed.

We mourned Dyess' death again, following our liberation in September 1945, when we learned that he had made good his escape, only to lose his life in trying to save the lives of others.

3 MARCH 1942: Bataan Peninsula, Philippines. "Two Japanese cruisers! — two destroyers, now in Subic Bay — I repeat, two cruisers — two destroyers!" The voice over the Red Net telephone circuit rose with excitement.

After a slight pause, the US Naval lookout shouted over

To a healthy, well-nourished combat pilot, flying is always a considerable strain but the pilots flying today were still weak or not yet fully recovered from the latest bout with malaria or dengue fever. They were suffering from hunger, night blindness, beriberi, scurvy, dysentery, and diarrhea. Ed Dyess, commander of the 21st Pursuit Squadron, and the man Gen. George chose to lead the fighters into action, today would fight the war on two fronts: The enemy and diarrhea.

Today, for the first time, Gen. George would use his P-40s as fighter-bombers.

Employing an ingenious homemade bomb rig, first con-

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