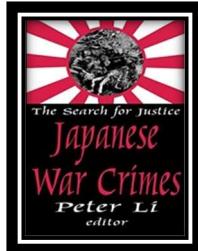


**JAPANESE LT. GENERAL MASAHARU HOMMA EXECUTED  
FOR ORDERING THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH**

**GENERAL MACARTHUR, HAVING STACKED THE DECK WAS GOING TO GET HIS POUND OF FLESH.**

**READ THE ARTICLE AND DETERMINE IN YOUR MIND IF YOU THINK THIS MAN WAS GUILTY AND DESERVED TO  
DIE OR IF HE WAS SACRIFICED TO SATISFY MACARTHUR'S MASSIVE EGO**

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Masaharu Homma was a Lieutenant General of the Imperial Japanese Army and during the early days of World War II, his command, the 14th Army was tasked with routing the American and Filipino forces from Bataan. **After the surrender of 76,000 American and Filipino troops** there, Japanese troops under Homma's command forced them to march up to 65 miles to a POW camp. **At least 5500 either died or were killed during** the "Bataan Death March" in April of 1942.



**Japanese soldiers guard American and Filipino prisoners during the Bataan Death March.**

Homma was later charged with war crimes after the war was over, **becoming known as the "Beast of Bataan"**, and was convicted in the Philippines as a war criminal **and executed by a firing squad on April 3, 1946.**

While the heinous crimes of the Japanese soldiers were well documented and as the commander of the Japanese troops there, he was ultimately responsible (and executed for), was Homma really in fact, “the Beast of Bataan” or just a convenient target for a biased General MacArthur to exact his pound of flesh? Americans especially Filipinos hated the Japanese for their brutal tactics and atrocities carried out during the war.

### EARLY LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

Homma was born on Sado Island in January 1888. As a child and a young man, he wanted to be a writer. By the time he was in high school, he had poems and short stories published in Tokyo magazines.

His dreams of being a writer would be dashed forever with the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 when he was just 17. As he wrote later, “with the pitch of patriotism raised to the highest degree”, he joined the military and in 1907 graduated at the top of his class from the Tokyo Military Academy.

Just two years later, Homma attended the Imperial Army Staff College, graduating with the highest honors. One of his classmates there was Hideki Tojo, the ambitious, ruthless, and hawkish future prime minister who would lead Japan into war with the West. Homma hated him. “His dogmatic character was deeply repugnant to me, and his pro-German idea was widely in variance with my liberal views.”

In 1917 while assigned to the Imperial General Staff, Homma was sent to study English and be an attaché to Great Britain. Back then, Britain and Japan were allies. He saw the Western Front firsthand attached to the East Lancashire Regiment part of the British Expeditionary Force. He was awarded the Military Cross in 1918.

Thus began a period in his life when he was thrust into the European continent and developed a deep understanding of and an affinity for the West. Homma met Winston Churchill, Gandhi, Adolf Hitler, and Mussolini, and attended the coronation of King George VI. He lived for a few years in New Delhi and was fascinated by the Indian people and their culture. He also spent time with British units in Afghanistan and Palestine.

Among Japanese circles, he was known as the “Poet General” for his affinity for writing verse during battle. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, Homma served as a division commander in China from 1938 to 1940 and directed the blockade of the foreign concessions in Tientsin, where he led the negotiations with the British. He was relieved of front-line duty when he stated publicly that for Japan, “unless peace is achieved immediately it will be disastrous”.

However, despite this, due to his exemplary career, he continued to rise and was promoted to Lieutenant General.

### WORLD WAR 2: THE PHILIPPINES

At the start of the war, Homma was given command of the 14 IJA (Imperial Japanese Army). He immediately earned the ire of his superior General Hisaichi Terauchi by ordering his troops not to treat Filipinos as enemies but as friends, and to respect their customs and religions.

The poor reports written by Terauchi on Homma were not lost on his subordinates. Many in the Japanese military believed Homma was too “Westernized” and that he cared too much about his own soldiers’ welfare. Army Chief of Staff Hajime Sugiyama frequently cabled Homma to press home his attacks on the Bataan peninsula regardless of Japanese casualties. One of his staff officers, Colonel Masanobu Tsuji countermanded Homma’s orders and in the general’s name ordered the execution of a Supreme Court Justice and the attempted execution of a former Speaker of the House of Representatives, which Homma was able to stop.

Reprisals against the Filipino people were carried out mercilessly. Homma was locked into a war he didn’t believe in, fighting for a totalitarian regime he hated but in the end, his oath as a Japanese officer would cost him his life.

After the war, he wrote in his journal that he didn't want war against the U.S. and the West.

"War against the USA would be a disaster, I knew, but I could not show any feeling in it, as ... I would have been called a traitor," he wrote. "Tojo did not understand Anglo-Saxon temperament and its potential strength... Japan was already exhausted from its prolonged war in China and was not in a position to wage another against the U.S. and Great Britain. It was sheer madness."

But once the Americans and Filipino troops, starving, sick with malaria and dysentery surrendered, the mid-level Japanese forces mistreated the POWs horribly despite Homma's orders that they were to be treated fairly.



Initially thought to be 25,000, the Japanese were shocked to discover that there were 76,000 POWs. They had no facilities, nor any plan on how to deal with that many POWs. The Japanese also considered the allies as having disgraced themselves rather than surrender.

During the Bataan Death March, 5500 Allied soldiers died, many were shot, bayoneted, or beheaded if they fell out of the ranks during the march. Others died of disease or malnutrition.

However, the Japanese were furious at Homma for the delay at Bataan and the lenient treatment that he was advocating for the treatment of the Filipinos, was relieved of his command and forced to retire. He spent the rest of the war in near seclusion in Japan.

But after Japan's eventual defeat and surrender, the Americans had Homma arrested and charged with war crimes. It wasn't until his trial in December 1945, that Homma found out about the charges against him for the first time.

#### TRIAL AND EXECUTION

General MacArthur wasn't leaving anything to chance. He hand-picked the judges, prosecutors, and the defense counsel. Homma's lawyers were fresh out of school and had never tried a case before. The prosecution was given a great amount of leeway to enter into evidence hearsay and circumstantial evidence.

As witness after witness described in awful detail the atrocities committed by the Japanese soldiers, Homma was shocked, learning that they went against everything that he had so ordered. He wrote, "I am horrified to learn these things happened under my command," he added, "I am ashamed of our troops."



The most damning testimony was from a U.S. Master Sergeant Jimmy Baldassarre, who not only spoke about witnessing the atrocities but seeing Homma himself on the road that the Death March was held. It was damaging for the defense since Homma claimed he knew nothing about the acts of his soldiers.

He claimed that he was working on the advance on Corregidor and paid the march no mind. It was interesting that Baldassarre could identify him since at that time; few Americans knew Homma was in command and fewer even knew what he looked like.



Moriya Wada, a major in logistics under Homma testified for the defense. He said Homma had indeed ordered his subordinates to treat prisoners following the Geneva Conventions. And that the conditions in the camp after the Death March were so horrible he reported to Homma. The general ordered the removal of the POW camp commander and then told his replacement to clean up the conditions that the prisoners were subjected to.

Wada said Homma set out to get the POWs more food, improve sanitation in the camp, provide for a decent burial of the dead, and put in water pipes. Homma made 10 different requests to Tokyo for food for the POWs, requesting 100,000 tons of rice. But the Japanese sent him just 1/30th of his request. He also released thousands of Filipino prisoners. Tokyo, not interested in treating the Filipinos and Americans in any civilized manner, then fired Homma.

The court-martial convicted Homma, as it was ordained from the beginning arguing, that if he did not know the atrocities that his troops carried out, SHOULD have known. He was ordered to face death by a firing squad. He was executed early on April 3, 1946. His wife appealed to MacArthur to spare his life; her pleas were denied.

General MacArthur, having stacked the deck was going to get his pound of flesh. He wrote:

"If this defendant does not deserve his judicial fate, none in jurisdictional history ever did. There can be no greater, more heinous, or more dangerous crime than the mass destruction, under the guise of military authority or military necessity, of helpless men incapable of further contribution to the war effort. A failure of law process to punish such acts of criminal enormity would threaten the very fabric of world society."

However, a U.S. Supreme Court justice Frank Murphy lambasted the show trial.

Either we conduct such a trial as this in the noble spirit and atmosphere of our Constitution or we abandon all pretense to justice, let the ages slip away, and descend to the level of revengeful blood purges."

The fact that the Japanese committed horrible war crimes in the Philippines both during and after the Battle of Bataan has never been in question. However, what responsibility did Homma have in this? He ordered his troops to treat the prisoners fairly which they did not. While the troops' conduct reflects directly upon their commander, how high does this responsibility go?

There is no doubt that American troops committed war crimes in plenty of places; My Lai during the Vietnam War immediately comes to mind. Should General Westmoreland have been tried for war crimes related to this? Judging from MacArthur's remarks, the answer would be yes. And one can make that same argument for what is transpiring in trials for U.S. troops for war crimes in Afghanistan as well.

*Many of the Japanese soldiers who committed horrible acts during the war escaped prosecution in the aftermath of WWII due to a lack of evidence or witnesses.*

*But this trial was preordained from the start. Unlike what transpired in Nuremberg, this was not a fair trial and there is enough evidence to suggest at least reasonable doubt. But that was never going to happen.*

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