

Beaten with bayonets and starved

Aggie recalls days in POW camp

By MARK PERRIN
Battalion Reporter

"Sometimes it would have been easier to die than to keep living," John Scott Coleman, a 1927 graduate of Texas A&M University, recalled his experience as a captive of the Japanese in World War II in an interview here Saturday.

Coleman was on campus for an autographing party for his book, "Bataan and Beyond: Memories of an American POW," which was published recently. The book describes his experiences following the Japanese invasion of the Philippines.

Coleman was stationed on Bataan, an island in the Philippines, when troops on the island surrendered to

the Japanese Imperial Army April 9, 1942.

Coleman said that no reinforcements had reached the island and the men on Bataan had been without food for the four days before the surrender.

The troops then made the "Bataan Death March" to O'Donnell Prison Camp in the Philippines. Thousands

of prisoners died en route. At one time during the march, he said he went without food for 13 consecutive days.

At one time during the march, he said he went without food for 13 consecutive days. Coleman also said that he was beaten until unconscious and

bayoneted by the Japanese, and that the prisoners were never given medical treatment.

After reaching the prison camp, Coleman said he and the rest of the men were shipped to Japan. He said it took them 19 days to reach Japan, and that every day some of the prisoners aboard the ship died.

"They would take the bodies and tie a weight onto each one and slide them off the ship. This was to keep the bodies from being spotted by Americans," he said. When they got to Japan, Coleman said they were sent to labor camps. He said they were forced to work in steel mills and other plants, and produced things such as motor blocks and barrels for the Japanese army.

At first, he said, the prisoners worked seven days a week. Later that was cut to six days a week. The plants were operated around the

clock, but Coleman said his detail only worked during the day. Coleman said that he and the rest of the men at the labor camps were given very little food a day. Usually, the only food they received was rice. He said they got a serving of rice, about as much as a vienna sausage can would hold, three times a day.

first, they only were fed twice a day. Sometimes, instead of rice, Coleman said they were given soup made from sweet potato vines.

Coleman was a prisoner for a total of three years and five months. He said his good physical condition and ability to control his temper enabled him to survive.

The men in the prison camps were never given any information about the war, Coleman said, but that during the time he was at the labor camp, he was confident that the United States would win.

On Sept. 8, 1945, Coleman and the men in the labor camps were released. Looking back on the experience, he simply says that it was "Service to his country."

Gonzalez says American politics suffering; feelings of apathy and despair are prevalent

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Texas, says Americans are suffering from a sense of helplessness and are trying to counter with a self-centered philosophy.

"It has been said that right now America is in the political doldrums," Gonzalez told the Communications Workers of America, Friday. "That's a good word, because it means a period of inactivity, helplessness or depression."

There is a kind of despair abroad in the land today, there is a feeling of helplessness, a feeling that nothing we do really helps, a feeling that government can't or won't help, it's every man, woman and child for himself."

Gonzalez said the general feeling of apathy and despair was not confined to the government, because organized labor also had suffered a setback on confidence it could help solve the problems of inflation.

In the last two years the AFL-CIO has lost a half million in dues-paying members — while at the same time the number of people

working increased by 6 million," he said. "A little over 30 years ago one-third of all wage earners were members of labor unions. Today only one worker out of four is a union member."

The veteran congressman criticized the pressures brought on lawmakers by the so-called "one-issue organizations" that refuse to compromise on issues such as the Panama Canal treaties, gun control and abortion. He said the president and leaders of Congress are not giving the people clear-cut alternatives.

"Because the political party structure of Congress is weak, no one can argue that he is following a party policy on this or that issue," Gonzalez said. "Members are left to the mercy of these rapidly growing, ever-more demanding single issue groups."

On the presidency, Gonzalez said: "I think first of all, we should expect clear leadership from those who are supposed to be entrusted with providing leadership. A president with fuzzy positions, or one who re-

verses field, simply leaves everyone frustrated and confused. What's worse, public opinion has no chance to form one way or another, because there are no clearly spelled-out alternatives for people to think about, argue and decide upon."

"We can credit Jimmy Carter with one thing: he has always said that he would sooner or later produce a balanced federal budget. He has on the other hand never said how he would accomplish this."

Gonzalez credited Carter with proposing a "genuine tax reform" to remedy a situation in which he said individual taxpayers today pay a larger share of the federal tax bill than corporations. He said in 1969, corporations paid about 42 percent as much tax as individuals did, but today they are paying less than one-third as much as individuals.

"But this Congress gutted any real tax reform," Gonzalez said. "Will the president stand clearly by his reform call, or will he sign the bill anyhow — even though it means that 80 percent of us will pay more taxes than before?"

Where is that clear and consistent voice?

"I think it would make a real difference if it were there. We would at least know what to argue about; we would at least know whether we are on the winning or losing side. You can't know what side you are on if the captain keeps changing uniforms."

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