



**Charlie Baum**  
**Enlisted June 6, 1941**  
**by Jaquita Lewter**

More than sixty years ago, Charlie Baum found his world turned upside down because of events in a place most Americans had never heard of, a rocky peninsula on the island of Luzon in the Philippines, which separates the South China Sea from Manila Bay. It is called Bataan.

**Water Street**

Charles Edison Baum was born on July 19, 1917, in Whitesboro to **George Campbell Baum Sr.** and **Callie White Baum**. He is a great grandson of **Captain Ambrose B. White**, who founded Whitesboro in 1848. He was the youngest of three boys. G. C., Jr., and Al Baum were his older brothers. He also had a half-sister, Nettie Baum Ashley.

Baum grew up on Water Street, and his story sounds like something from Booth Tarkington or an Andy Hardy movie. He was a quick kid, a bright kid who made good grades. He made friends easily, he played football, and Sunday mornings would find him at the Methodist Church.

Baum graduated from high school in 1937 from the same building he had entered as a first grader. A short time later, he took a job with **E. T. Allen, Sr.**, in the grocery and grain business. “I did a little bit of everything at Mr. Allen’s store. I was a delivery boy, I stocked the grocery shelves, and I moved the sacks of grain. And he was like a daddy to me,” Baum said. “After my daddy died, he sort of looked after me. His son, E. T., Jr.— we all called him ‘**Mike**’—was like a brother. We were best friends.”

When France capitulated to the Germans in the spring of 1940, the Congress of the United States passed the country’s first peacetime conscription act. Inductees were to serve only one year. (In

August of 1942, Congress extended the time of service. Speaker of the House of Representatives, **Sam Rayburn**, stepped down from the rostrum to cast the aye vote that broke a 202 to 202 tie.)

On June 6, 1941, two months before Rayburn's vote extended the draft, Charlie Baum had enlisted. "I was the only one at home. My brothers were married and had families. I didn't want them to have to go. I felt that it was the right thing to do."

He joined the Army Air Corps. "I went to Sherman to volunteer," he said. "Then I rode the Interurban to Dallas. I was sworn in that same day." The army liked men like Baum. He was twenty-four years old, stood nearly six feet tall, and weighed a healthy 215 pounds.

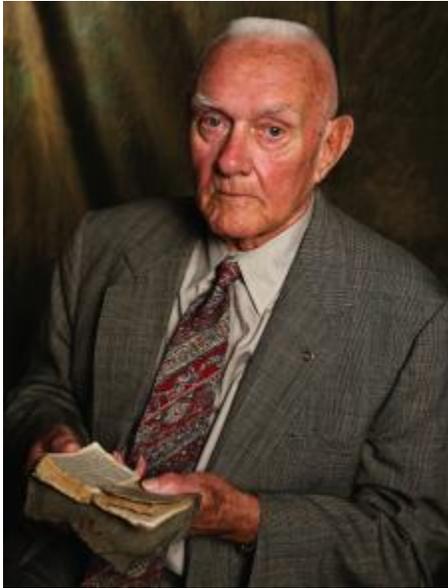
When he got back to Whitesboro, he told first Mr. Allen of his decision and, later, his mother. Recalling the reaction of his employer and close friend, Baum said, "He took me to the back of the store where we each sat down on a sack of grain, and he talked to me just like a daddy." The recollection of this conversation held sixty-seven years ago brought tears to his eyes.

When he told his mother, Callie Baum made a simple request of her youngest son. "Mother asked me to read my Bible daily, if I could. I did my best to honor that request all the time I was gone," he said.

### **The Defense of the Philippines**

Baum received his brief basic training at March Field, California, and by September he was at Clark Field on Luzon in the Philippines. He was assigned to the 7th Material Squadron attached to the 19th Bombardment Group.

For the Americans in Hawaii, the war began at 8:30 in the morning on December 7, 1941. Nine hours later, nine hours during which little or nothing was done to prepare Clark Field for what was sure to come, the Japanese struck there. Baum operated a .50-caliber machine gun in the defense of Clark Field and the Bataan Peninsula.



“Mother asked me to read my Bible daily, if I could. I did my best to honor that request all the time I was gone.”

He remembered being on guard duty Christmas Eve, 1941. The unit had fallen back to the edge of the dense jungle. As he paced off the perimeter of his assigned area, he suddenly came upon two trees illuminated with hundreds of lightning bugs. “They were lit up like Christmas trees,” he recalled. “I stopped and looked up. I could see God’s face in the top of one of the trees.”

On April 8, 1942, Pfc. Baum (actually he was a sergeant though his promotion had not been made official due to poor communications) and his unit were in front of the first line of contact. He and a second lieutenant dropped back to prepare machine gun pits in case of retreat. “We used the machine gun to hold back the enemy as we retreated,” he recalled. “We fired 18,000 rounds in about four hours time. The gun barrel bent from being overheated.”

Immediately, the squad dismantled the gun and retreated with the Japanese in pursuit. The Americans scrambled to the position where the front line was supposed to be established. No one was there. The enemy attempted to surround them, and they fought back. “I had my .45 on my side,” Baum said. “We were chased almost to Camp Cabanatuan. We tried to form a line, but orders came down that night to surrender.” Ordered to stack their weapons in preparation for the surrender, the squad tossed them into the sea instead. “We stacked them in Manila Bay,” Baum said with a little chuckle.

At dawn on April 9, with 10,000 Americans still stubbornly defending the island of Corregidor off the tip of Bataan, Maj. Gen. Edward P. King surrendered his used-up army of 75,000 (11,796 Americans, 66,000 Filipinos and 1,000 Chinese Filipinos) to the Japanese. When he asked a Japanese colonel if the prisoners would be treated properly, the officer replied, “We are not barbarians.”

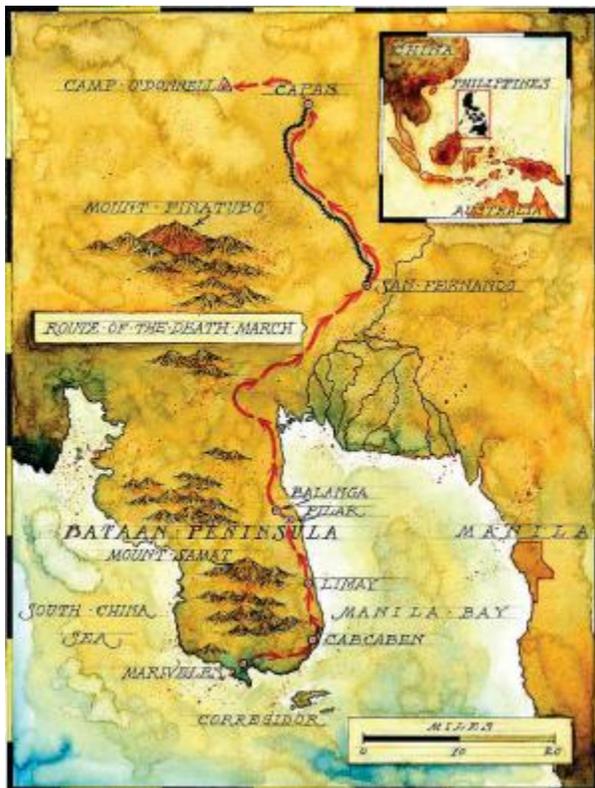
Half a world away back home in Whitesboro, Callie Baum and other family members received word that Charles E. Baum was missing in action. It would be eighteen months before they would learn that he was a prisoner of war.

## Prisoner of War

The victors were unprepared to deal with the vanquished. The Japanese had expected the Americans to continue fighting for several more months and had anticipated no more than 25,000 prisoners. Gen. Homma, overall commander of Imperial forces in the Philippines, already had decided to move the POWs to Camp O'Donnell, an American air corps base about one hundred miles north of Marivales, the principal city in southern Bataan. Knowing that many of his soldiers were sick, wounded and weak from months on short rations, Gen. King offered to use American trucks to transport the prisoners. Gen. Homma refused. They would march.

Baum was one of the first group of seventy-five men to make the continuous four-day-and-night march. His "uniform" was a pair of shorts, and he carried a New Testament hidden inside the waistband. The Bible was a gift from USA Chaplain Ernest A. Israel, signed and dated June 30, 1941. The inscription reads: "Good luck, Charles." Baum carried the New Testament throughout his captivity. A diary entry written on a blank page reads: "Dec.14 – Sunday – I pray they will keep this day holy."

The Japanese showed little concern for their captives on the march. The prisoners got neither food nor water. They were not allowed to stop and rest. They were prodded with bayonets and were under constant threat of being shot to death on the spot.



Route of the Bataan Death March that began on April 10, 1942 and covered 85 miles in 6 days.

“I remember coming up on a sugar cane field,” Baum said. “I broke from the march and ran to the edge of the field where I pulled up two stalks of cane. A guard came after me waving and slashing his bayonet. It was early morning and the sun was in his eyes, and I managed to duck and weave underneath his slashes.” After several failed attempts to strike Baum, the guard left him alone and began to focus his attention on another nearby soldier. This man was not as fortunate as Baum had been.

A second incident during the forced march was recalled with poignant clarity. “We were passing alongside a bar ditch that was partially filled with muddy water,” Baum said. “I pretended to stumble and fell face forward into the ditch. I began drinking all the water that I could gulp down, just as fast as I could before the guards stopped me. When I raised my head I saw the bloated body of a dead soldier in the water nearby.” Baum paused for a moment to collect himself before continuing with the story. “That water still tasted good to me.”

Baum has no way of knowing exactly how many men died during the complete forced march which relocated 75,000 men. “I saw several men shot on the way,” he said. “Many of the men were already wounded. Many were sick and were too weak to walk. Another soldier and I carried a man who was unable to stand on his own for a good six hours.” Baum paused again. “Finally the guards made us leave him. We had to lay him down right there on the road. We moved on a little ways, and then we heard a shot. We all knew what happened.”

Of the 75,000 who left Marivales, 54,000 arrived at Camp O’Donnell. Some Americans and many Filipinos had found opportunities to escape and taken them. It is estimated that 5,000 to 10,000 Filipinos had died or been murdered along the way, along with 600 to 650 Americans. Death on the march was an iffy thing. Some of the Japanese soldiers guarding the prisoners treated them, if not well, then at least humanely, while a half a mile up the road, prisoners were murdered without apparent cause.

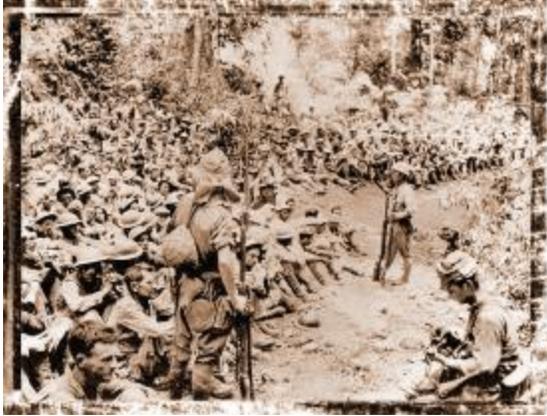
## **In the Camps**

Baum was kept at Camp O’Donnell for sixteen days, and then he was sent out on a salvaging detail for the Japanese. After a month and a half of this detail he became ill with malaria. No medical attention was given to the prisoners. “We looked after each other the best we could,” he said. “Even if you were sick, you still had to work. If your fever got up to 105 degrees, you could ‘stay in’ for the day. Otherwise you had different camp jobs to do.”

The malaria brought chills with the fever. Baum remembers wrapping himself in three blankets and still being unable to stop the shaking. Later while in a different camp location, he developed beriberi, a disease of the nerve endings which brings about muscular paralysis, weakness, and extreme weight loss. This is caused by the lack of vitamin B in the diet.

“We had very little food provided by our captors,” Baum explained. “A small serving of rice every day, and sometimes it was every two days. We had to forage for anything else to eat. A starving man is not too particular about what he eats. We ate dead fish, worms, grass,

grasshoppers, chemical salt, soup made from the stalks of pepper after the Japanese had removed the peppers, or soup made from the bones of animals.”



The Japanese pushed the troops across the jungle with no water, and a single meal of rice for the entire journey. 600-650 Americans perished.

Once they butchered and cooked a mangy camp dog that had strayed onto the premises. Baum chewed animal bones in order to provide calcium to his undernourished body. He cleaned his teeth with charcoal.

After contracting malaria Baum was sent back to Camp Cabanatuan in Central Luzon. There he served as first sergeant of Company F. His job was to supervise the burial of allied prisoners who were dying at the rate of twenty-five to seventy-five each day. The mounting malnutrition, diarrhea and malaria took a heavy toll. Very few medical supplies were available at Luzon, and these items were largely smuggled in by the Filipinos. “These men would have been executed immediately if they had been caught,” Baum said.

The prisoners were subjected to frequent beatings and barrages of verbal insults and accusations. There were inconsistencies in the guards’ behavior and treatment of their charges. “We never knew what to expect,” said Baum. “They required us to learn the Japanese language. We had to learn in five minutes to count off perfectly. The men who failed at this task were beaten until they could perform satisfactorily.”

Even so, there were snatches of human kindness and compassion. Once when Baum was quite ill with malaria, one of the guards brought him some bananas. “His name was Tanaka, and I had been teaching him some English. I think he appreciated that and the fruit was his way of thanking me. He saved my life.”

### **The Land of the Rising Sun**

In the spring of 1944, Baum and other Americans were moved by ship to Japan. “The transport ships that carried us were old antiques,” he said. “They herded us in like cattle. We were prodded on board with bayonets.”

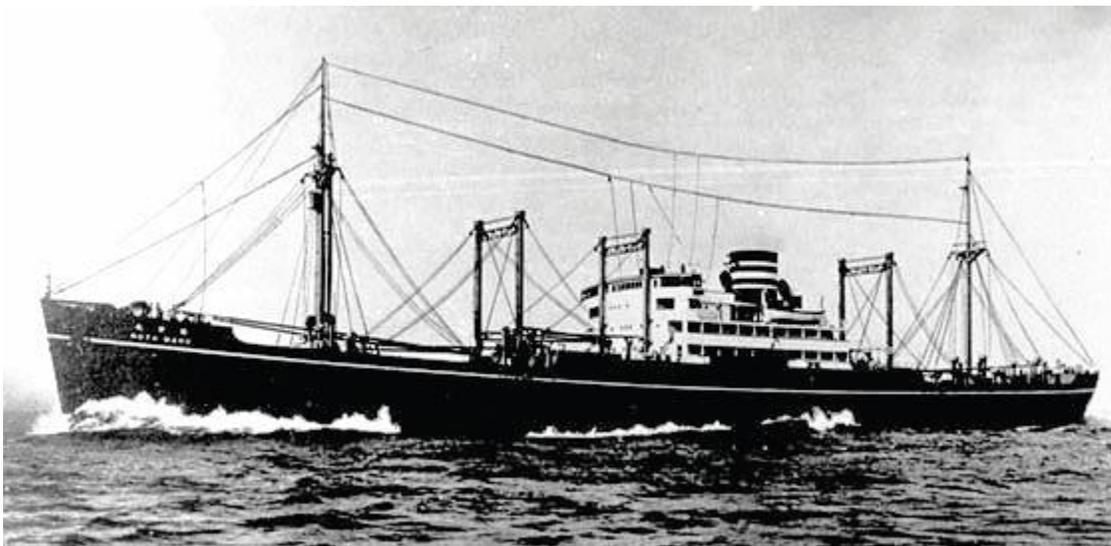
During the ninety-day journey, Baum witnessed American soldiers go crazy with the effects of the malaria and jump overboard into the ocean. There was very little food and very harsh treatment. The transport ships were unmarked, and the two vessels immediately following Baum's ship were sunk.

When the ship arrived in Japan, Baum and the other men were taken to Osaka where they joined fifty British and 150 Dutch POWs who were already at work in a copper factory. They made copper plates used for submarine batteries. He would remain here until WWII ended in 1945 and the camp was liberated. He weighed eighty-six pounds when he was freed.

During the forty-two month ordeal, Baum never doubted that he would survive and return home. "I learned to control my mind," he explained. "I read my Bible as much and as often as I could, just as mother had asked me to do. I made plans for later, after I got home. I thought about survival all the time. Those men who gave up died fast. You learn to get by.

The Bible got passed around among the other prisoners, too. Often they would ask to borrow it just to read a favorite passage. Baum kept a dated written account on the blank spaces of its pages. He also managed to keep his class ring with him and a lucky \$2.00 bill that belonged to a friend back home. Baum was "holding" it for him at the time of his enlistment.

In the weeks following the Japanese surrender and his liberation, he was carried by hospital ship to Tokyo Bay, flown to a Manila replacement center, and transported by ship to San Francisco. He was provided with doctors and medical care and placed on a nutrition regimen that slowly increased his food intake and allowed him to begin to gain weight.



POW's were transferred by ship to Japan in spring of 1944. The 90-day journey on these "hell ships" proved fatal for many prisoners.

### **The End of the Long March Home**

Charlie Baum came marching home on Friday morning, October 26, 1945 when he came back to Whitesboro. His family, friends and neighbors, Whitesboro schoolchildren who had been dismissed from classes for the day, and the entire town were with Callie Baum at the train depot to welcome her boy home. "Mother never lost faith that I would come back," Baum said. "All that time and she never wavered. She told everyone she met that God would bring me home again."

Shortly after his homecoming, Baum met **Waunema Ruth Chisum**. "I didn't know her before," he said. "I saw this really pretty girl wearing a lacey dress walking down the street one day. I said, 'Man alive! Who's that gal?' And Mr. Allen introduced us."

A courtship began, and the couple married June 24, 1946. Daughter Kay was born in 1949, and a second daughter, Susan arrived in 1954. Baum opened an ice cream parlor and confectionery business downtown, which he ran for a couple of years. In 1948, he enrolled in Austin College, where he attended classes for the next two years. Friend **Norman Bennett** lived in Gainesville; he would stop by on his way to class to pick up Baum, and they would carpool to Sherman.

In the early 1950s, Baum served as Whitesboro's postmaster. When the political party in power changed, he was replaced. He took a job working in the hardware business with a local store and was looking into the possibility of purchasing the business. Instead, his life course took another turn and headed him down a different path.

In 1953, Superintendent Lyman Robinson offered Baum a job teaching at the junior high school. He accepted the position teaching science, math, health and P. E. He also coached football and girls' basketball. His teams excelled under his tutelage. "I ran those girls forty-five minutes straight nearly every day—up and down those bleachers. I had them where they could move on that court." He went back to Austin College and completed the twenty-one hours necessary for a degree and certification by attending nights, week-ends, and summer sessions. He graduated in 1955. He taught until 1965, when he left education to become postmaster a second time. He held that position until his retirement in 1981.

In 2004, the Whitesboro Intermediate School Gym was dedicated and named in his honor. On that occasion the tribute read in part, "Charles E. Baum for his lifelong service to country, community, and family."

Life is good," Baum said with a smile. "I do not harbor any animosity for the things that happened to me. Would I do it all again? Yes, I sure would. We're the luckiest people on earth. You've got to go through something to appreciate it."