

ACT CHALLENGE: "A ROAD OF ENDLESS HORROR" — KEY

ANSWER KEY SUMMARY

1. **D** - his 100th birthday (LEAST acceptable - redundant)
2. **F** - NO CHANGE (pronoun "they" correctly refers to Japan)
3. **B** - thousands of deaths (most precise, matches statistics)
4. **J** - shortest version (most concise while maintaining meaning)
5. **A** - NO CHANGE (summarily executed is precise military/legal term)
6. **G** - the guards (logical referent for "they")
7. **C** - He recalled: (introduces specific remembered detail)
8. **F** - NO CHANGE (current placement maintains logical flow)
9. **B** - comma after New Mexico (required after introductory clause)
10. **H** - Delete (shifts to unrelated first-person narrator)

ANSWER AND DISTRACTOR ANALYSIS

1. Choice D is correct. "His 100th birthday" is the LEAST acceptable alternative because it creates redundancy with the preceding statement "He was 100 years old." Stating both his age and that it's his 100th birthday violates principles of concise writing in standard English. While grammatically correct, it's stylistically unacceptable due to unnecessary repetition.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice A ("the") provides clear reference to the celebration without redundancy.
- Choice B ("his birthday") identifies the celebration type without repeating age information.
- Choice C ("this particular") adds appropriate emphasis without creating redundancy.

2. Choice F (NO CHANGE) is correct. The pronoun "they" appropriately refers to Japan (or Japanese forces) established in the previous sentence: "when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor." In historical writing, "they" conventionally refers to a country's military forces as a collective entity, and the context makes the reference unambiguous.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice G ("it") creates ambiguity and could incorrectly suggest the U.S. bombed the Philippines.
- Choice H ("Japan") creates unnecessarily repetitive prose when a clear pronoun reference exists.
- Choice J ("we") inappropriately shifts to first-person narration inconsistent with the passage's third-person objective tone.

3. Choice B is correct. “Thousands of deaths” provides precise quantification matching the statistics in the next sentence: Filipino deaths (5,000-18,000) plus American deaths (500-650) totals thousands. This specificity maintains formal tone while allowing readers to verify the claim against cited evidence.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice A ("untold number") contradicts the specific estimates provided immediately after.
- Choice C ("many people") is too vague and casual for the formal tone, potentially suggesting hundreds rather than thousands.
- Choice D ("was deadly") provides only qualitative assessment without quantification, failing to communicate the death toll's magnitude.

4. Choice J is correct. This version achieves maximum conciseness by recognizing that "covered with bayonet holes" already communicates multiple bayonet wounds. The phrase "He had been bayoneted by many, many bayonets" redundantly restates what's visually evident. Removing "just" (unnecessary intensifier) and the redundant sentence creates tighter, more professional prose.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice F retains the awkward redundancy of "bayoneted by many, many bayonets" after already stating "covered with bayonet holes."
- Choice G still redundantly explains what "covered with bayonet holes" already communicates.
- Choice H ("stabbed") loses the military-historical precision of "bayoneted," which identifies the specific weapon type.

5. Choice A (NO CHANGE) is correct. "Summarily executed" is a precise legal and military term meaning executed without due process, trial, or formal procedure. This single adverb efficiently captures both the immediacy and the arbitrary, extralegal nature of the killings—aspects that would require multiple words to convey otherwise.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice B ("without delay") focuses only on timing, losing the crucial legal meaning that executions occurred without due process.
- Choice C ("immediately and summarily") is redundant since "summarily" already implies immediacy.

- Choice D uses three words to convey what "summarily" captures more efficiently, creating wordy, informal prose.
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6. Choice G is correct. "The guards" (or captors) is the only logical referent for "they" in the context "they put us in barbed wire enclosures." The subject "they" performed the imprisoning action, while "us" (prisoners) were the objects. Only guards/captors had the authority and means to place prisoners in enclosures.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice F leaves the pronoun ambiguous when clarity would benefit readers.
 - Choices H and J are logically impossible—prisoners could not imprison themselves or their fellow prisoners in Japanese-controlled enclosures.
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7. Choice C is correct. "He recalled:" appropriately introduces the shift from general narrative about Skardon to specific remembered detail (his friend's death, the chaplain's words). This construction is standard in historical writing when moving from summary to specific testimony, and the colon correctly introduces the elaboration that follows.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice A ("However") signals contrast where continuity exists.
 - Choice B ("Therefore") suggests direct causation when the relationship is elaboration of experience.
 - Choice D ("Meanwhile") indicates simultaneous action elsewhere when both sentences describe Skardon's sequential experiences.
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8. Choice F (NO CHANGE) is correct. Current placement maintains effective organization: Gordon (violence of capture) → Beck (escape) → Skardon (hell ships for those who remained) → Reyna (post-war life). The Skardon paragraph logically follows Beck's escape by showing another dimension of captivity, then leads to Reyna's concluding reflection on survival.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice G clusters two violence-focused paragraphs awkwardly.
 - Choice H separates escape narratives that flow naturally together.
 - Choice J undermines the structural closure by placing harrowing hell ship details after Reyna's philosophical resolution about survival.
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9. Choice B is correct. A comma is required after the introductory dependent clause "When Tony Reyna returned to New Mexico" to separate it from the main clause "he was one of 11 Death March survivors." This follows standard English comma rules for subordinate clauses and aids clarity.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice A violates comma rules for introductory clauses, creating a run-on effect.
 - Choice C uses a semicolon incorrectly—the first clause is dependent, not independent.
 - Choice D uses a colon incorrectly—the clause before the colon cannot stand alone, and the relationship is temporal, not explanatory.
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10. Choice H is correct. The paragraph should be deleted because it shifts from the third-person historical narrative to an unidentified first-person narrator discussing "wearing a mask" and "duty for appearances"—content completely unrelated to the Bataan Death March. This appears to be text from a different document accidentally included, disrupting unity and confusing readers about narrative voice.

Why other choices are incorrect:

- Choice F misrepresents content—the paragraph provides no reflection on the Death March.
 - Choice G is inaccurate—the first-person perspective doesn't belong to any survivor mentioned.
 - Choice J gives wrong reasoning—the problem is irrelevance and voice shift, not repetition.
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Test-Taking Strategies:

- For LEAST acceptable questions (like #1), remember that three choices are acceptable—find the one that's redundant, grammatically incorrect, or stylistically inappropriate.
- For pronoun questions #2, #6, identify the antecedent by asking "who or what is performing this action?"
- For precision questions #3, #5, match the language to specific evidence in the passage.

Claude (Anthropic). (2025). ACT English answer key: "A road of endless horrors: The Bataan Death March" [Educational assessment material]. Unpublished manuscript.