

= Raid at Cabanatuan =

The Raid at Cabanatuan , also known as The Great Raid , was a rescue of Allied prisoners of war ( POWs ) and civilians from a Japanese camp near Cabanatuan City , in the Philippines . On January 30 , 1945 , during World War II , United States Army Rangers , Alamo Scouts , and Filipino guerrillas liberated more than 500 from the POW camp .

After the surrender of tens of thousands of American troops during the Battle of Bataan , many were sent to the Cabanatuan prison camp following the Bataan Death March . The Japanese transferred most of the prisoners to other areas , leaving just over 500 American and other Allied POWs and civilians in the prison . Facing brutal conditions including disease , torture , and malnourishment , the prisoners feared they would all be executed by their captors before the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur and his American forces returning to Luzon . In late January 1945 , a plan was developed by Sixth Army leaders and Filipino guerrillas to send a small force to rescue the prisoners . A group of over a hundred Rangers and Scouts and several hundred guerrillas traveled 30 miles ( 48 km ) behind Japanese lines to reach the camp .

In a nighttime raid , under the cover of darkness and a distraction by a P @-@ 61 Black Widow , the group surprised the Japanese forces in and around the camp . Hundreds of Japanese troops were killed in the 30 @-@ minute coordinated attack ; the Americans suffered minimal casualties . The Rangers , Scouts , and guerrillas escorted the POWs back to American lines . The rescue allowed the prisoners to tell of the death march and prison camp atrocities , which sparked a new rush of resolve for the war against Japan . The rescuers were awarded commendations by MacArthur , and were also recognized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt . A memorial now sits on the site of the former camp , and the events of the raid have been depicted in several films .

= = Background = =

After the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor on December 7 , 1941 by Japanese forces , it entered World War II to join the Allied forces in their fight against the Axis powers . American forces led by General Douglas MacArthur , already stationed in the Philippines as a deterrent against a Japanese invasion of the islands , were attacked by the Japanese hours after Pearl Harbor . On March 12 , 1942 , General MacArthur and a few select officers , on the orders of President Franklin D. Roosevelt , left the American forces , promising to return with reinforcements . The 72 @,@ 000 soldiers of the United States Army Forces in the Far East ( USAFFE ) , fighting with outdated weapons , lacking supplies , and stricken with disease and malnourishment , eventually surrendered to the Japanese on April 9 , 1942 .

The Japanese had initially planned for only 10 @,@ 000 ? 25 @,@ 000 American and Filipino prisoners of war ( POWs ) . Although they had organized two hospitals , ample food , and guards for this estimate , they were overwhelmed with over 72 @,@ 000 prisoners . By the end of the 60 @-@ mile ( 97 @-@ km ) march , only 52 @,@ 000 prisoners ( approximately 9 @,@ 200 American and 42 @,@ 800 Filipino ) reached Camp O 'Donnell , with an estimated 20 @,@ 000 having died from illness , hunger , torture , or murder . Later with the closure of Camp O 'Donnell most of the imprisoned soldiers were transferred to the Cabanatuan prison camp to join the POWs from the Battle of Corregidor .

In 1944 , when the United States landed on the Philippines to recapture it , orders had been sent out by the Japanese high command to kill the POWs in order to avoid them being rescued by liberating forces . One method of the execution was to round the prisoners up in one location , pour gasoline over them , and then burn them alive . After hearing the accounts of the survivors from the massacre at the Puerto Princesa Prison Camp , the liberating forces feared that the safety of the POWs being held in the country was in jeopardy , and decided to launch a series of rescue operations to save the surviving POWs on the islands .

= = POW camp = =

The Cabanatuan prison camp was named after the nearby city of 50 @, @ 000 people ( locals also called it Camp Pangatian , after a small nearby village ) . The camp had first been used as an American Department of Agriculture station and then a training camp for the Filipino army . When the Japanese invaded the Philippines , they used the camp to house American POWs . It was one of three camps in the Cabanatuan area and was designated for holding sick detainees . Occupying more than 25 acres ( 0 @. @ 10 km<sup>2</sup> ) , the rectangular @-@ shaped camp was 800 yards ( 730 m ) deep by 600 yards ( 550 m ) across , divided by a road that ran through its center . One side of the camp housed Japanese guards , while the other included bamboo barracks for the prisoners as well as a section for a hospital . Nicknamed the " Zero Ward " , the hospital housed the sickliest prisoners as they waited to die from diseases such as dysentery and malaria . Eight @-@ foot ( 2 @. @ 4 @-@ m ) high barbed wire fences surrounded the camp , in addition to multiple pillbox bunkers and four @-@ story guard towers .

At its peak , the camp held 8 @, @ 000 American soldiers ( along with a small number of soldiers and civilians from other nations including the United Kingdom , Norway , and the Netherlands ) , making it the largest POW camp in the Philippines . This number dropped significantly as able @-@ bodied soldiers were shipped to other areas in the Philippines , Japan , Japanese @-@ occupied Taiwan , and Manchukuo to work in slave labor camps . As Japan had not yet ratified the Geneva Convention , the POWs were transported out of the camp and forced to work in factories to build Japanese weaponry , unload ships , and repair airfields .

The imprisoned soldiers received two meals a day of steamed rice , occasionally accompanied by fruit , soup , or meat . To supplement their diet , prisoners were able to smuggle food and supplies hidden in their underwear into the camp during Japanese @-@ approved trips to Cabanatuan . To prevent extra food , jewelry , diaries , and other valuables from being confiscated , items were hidden in clothing , latrines , or were buried before scheduled inspections . Prisoners collected food using a variety of methods including stealing , bribing guards , planting gardens , and killing animals which entered the camp such as mice , snakes , ducks , and stray dogs . The Filipino underground collected thousands of quinine tablets to smuggle into the camp to treat malaria , saving hundreds of lives . When the Japanese had an American radio technician fix their radios , he would steal parts , allowing the prisoners to have several radios to listen to newscasts of the war efforts outside the camp . One group of Corregidor prisoners , before first entering the camp , had each hidden a piece of a radio under their clothing , to later be reassembled into a working device . The radios were able to pick up a San Francisco @-@ based radio station , allowing the POWs to hear about the status of war outside the gates of the prison . A smuggled camera was used to document the camp 's living conditions . Prisoners also constructed weapons and smuggled ammunition into the camp for the possibility of securing a handgun .

Multiple escape attempts were made throughout the history of the prison camp , but the majority ended in failure . In one attempt , four soldiers were recaptured by the Japanese . The guards forced all prisoners to watch as the four soldiers were beaten , forced to dig their own graves and then executed . Shortly thereafter , the guards put up signs declaring that if other escape attempts were made , ten prisoners would be executed for every escapee . Prisoners ' living quarters were then divided into groups of ten , which motivated the POWs to keep a close eye on others to prevent them from making escape attempts .

The Japanese permitted the POWs to build septic systems and irrigation ditches throughout the prisoner side of the camp . An onsite commissary was available to sell items such as bananas , eggs , coffee , notebooks , and cigarettes . Recreational activities allowed for baseball , horseshoes , and ping pong matches . In addition , a 3 @, @ 000 @-@ book library was allowed ( much of which was provided by the Red Cross ) , and films were shown occasionally . A bulldog was kept by the prisoners , and served as a mascot for the camp . Each year around Christmas , the Japanese guards gave permission for the Red Cross to donate a small box to each of the prisoners , containing items such as corned beef , instant coffee , and tobacco . Prisoners were also able to send postcards to relatives , although they were censored by the guards .

As American forces continued to approach Luzon , the Japanese Imperial High Command ordered that all able @-@ bodied POWs be transported to Japan . From the Cabanatuan camp , over 1

@, @ 600 soldiers were removed in October 1944 , leaving over 500 sick , weak , or disabled POWs . On January 6 , 1945 , all of the guards withdrew from the Cabanatuan camp , leaving the POWs alone . The guards had previously told prisoner leaders that they should not attempt to escape , or else they would be killed . When the guards left , the prisoners heeded the threat , fearing that the Japanese were waiting near the camp and would use the attempted escape as an excuse to execute them all . Instead , the prisoners went to the guards ' side of the camp and ransacked the Japanese buildings for supplies and large amounts of food . Prisoners were alone for several weeks , except when retreating Japanese forces would periodically stay in the camp . The soldiers mainly ignored the POWs , except to ask for food . Although aware of the consequences , the prisoners sent a small group outside the prison 's gates to bring in two carabaos to slaughter . The meat from the animals , along with the food secured from the Japanese side of the camp , helped many of the POWs to regain their strength , weight , and stamina . In mid @-@ January , a large group of Japanese troops entered the camp and returned the prisoners to their side of the camp . The prisoners , fueled by rumors , speculated that they would soon be executed by the Japanese .

= = Planning and preparation = =

On October 20 , 1944 , General Douglas MacArthur 's forces landed on Leyte , paving the way for the liberation of the Philippines . Several months later , as the Americans consolidated their forces to prepare for the main invasion of Luzon , nearly 150 Americans were executed by their Japanese captors on December 14 , 1944 at the Puerto Princesa Prison Camp on the island of Palawan . These Americans were herded into air @-@ raid shelters , sealed in , doused with gasoline , and burned alive . One of the survivors , PFC Eugene Nielsen , recounted his tale to U.S. Army Intelligence on January 7 , 1945 . Two days later , MacArthur 's forces landed on Luzon and began a rapid advance towards the capital , Manila .

Major Bob Lapham , the American USAFFE senior guerrilla chief , and another guerrilla leader , Juan Pajota , had considered freeing the prisoners within the camp , but feared logistical issues with hiding and caring for the prisoners . An earlier plan had been proposed by Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Anderson , leader of the guerrillas near the camp . He suggested that the guerrillas would secure the prisoners , escort them 50 miles ( 80 km ) to Debut Bay , and transport them using 30 submarines . The plan was denied approval as MacArthur feared the Japanese would catch up with the fleeing prisoners and kill them all . In addition , the Navy did not have the required submarines , especially with MacArthur 's upcoming invasion of Luzon .

On January 26 , 1945 , Lapham traveled from his location near the prison camp to Sixth Army headquarters , 30 miles ( 48 km ) away . He proposed to Lieutenant General Walter Krueger 's intelligence chief Colonel Horton White that a rescue attempt be made to liberate the estimated 500 POWs at the Cabanatuan prison camp before the Japanese possibly killed them all . Lapham estimated Japanese forces to include 100 ? 300 soldiers within the camp , 1 @, @ 000 across the Cabu River northeast of the camp , and possibly around 5 @, @ 000 within Cabanatuan City . Pictures of the camp were also available , as planes had taken surveillance images as recently as January 19 . White estimated that the I Corps would not reach Cabanatuan City until January 31 or February 1 , and that if any rescue attempt were to be made , it would have to be on January 29 . White reported the details to Krueger , who gave the order for the rescue attempt .

White gathered Lt. Col. Henry Mucci , leader of the 6th Ranger Battalion , and three lieutenants from the Alamo Scouts ? the special reconnaissance unit attached to his Sixth Army ? for a briefing on the mission to raid Cabanatuan and rescue the POWs . The group developed a plan to rescue the prisoners . Fourteen Scouts , made up of two teams , would leave 24 hours ahead of the main force , to survey the camp . The main force would consist of 90 Rangers from C Company and 30 from F Company who would march 30 miles behind Japanese lines , surround the camp , kill the guards , and rescue and escort the prisoners back to American lines . The Americans would join up with 80 Filipino guerrillas , who would serve as guides and help in the rescue attempt . The initial plan was to attack the camp at 17 : 30 PST ( UTC + 8 ) on January 29 .

On the evening of January 27 , the Rangers studied air reconnaissance photos and listened to

guerrilla intelligence on the prison camp . The two five @-@ man teams of Alamo Scouts , led by 1st Lts . William Nellist and Thomas Rounsaville , left Guimba at 19 : 00 and infiltrated behind enemy lines for the long trek to attempt a reconnaissance of the prison camp . Each Scout was armed with a .45 pistol , three hand grenades , a rifle or M1 carbine , a knife , and extra ammunition . The next morning , the Scouts linked up with several Filipino guerrilla units at the village of Platero , 2 miles ( 3 @. @ 2 km ) north of the camp .

The Rangers were armed with assorted Thompson submachine guns , BARs , M1 Garand rifles , pistols , grenades , knives , extra ammunition , as well as a few bazookas . Four combat photographers from a unit of the 832nd Signal Service Battalion volunteered to accompany the Scouts and Rangers to record the rescue after Mucci suggested the idea of documenting the raid . Each photographer was armed with a pistol . Despite Geneva Convention restrictions on armed medical personnel , surgeon Captain Jimmy Fisher and his medics each carried pistols and carbines . To maintain a link between the raiding group and Army Command , a radio outpost was established outside of Guimba . The force had two radios , but their use was only approved in asking for aircraft support if they ran into large Japanese forces or if there were last @-@ minute changes to the raid ( as well as calling off friendly fire by American aircraft ) .

= = Behind enemy lines = =

Shortly after 05 : 00 on January 28 , Mucci and a reinforced company of 121 Rangers under Capt. Robert Prince drove 60 miles ( 97 km ) to Guimba , before slipping through Japanese lines at just after 14 : 00 . Guided by Filipino guerrillas , the Rangers hiked through open grasslands to avoid enemy patrols . In villages along the Rangers ' route , other guerrillas assisted in muzzling dogs and putting chickens in cages to prevent the Japanese from hearing the traveling group . At one point , the Rangers narrowly avoided a Japanese tank on the national highway by following a ravine that ran under the road .

The group reached Balincarin , a barrio 5 miles ( 8 @. @ 0 km ) north of the camp , the following morning . Mucci linked up with Scouts Nellist and Rounsaville to go over the camp reconnaissance from the previous night . The Scouts revealed that the terrain around the camp was flat , which would leave the force exposed before the raid . Mucci also met with USAFFE guerrilla Captain Juan Pajota and his 200 men , whose intimate knowledge of enemy activity , the locals , and the terrain proved crucial . Upon learning that Mucci wanted to push through with the attack that evening , Pajota resisted , insisting that it would be suicide . He revealed that the guerrillas had been watching an estimated 1 @, @ 000 Japanese soldiers camped out across the Cabu River just a few hundred yards from the prison . Pajota also confirmed reports that as many as 7 @, @ 000 enemy troops were deployed around Cabanatuan City located several miles away . With the invading American forces from the southwest , a Japanese division was withdrawing to the north on a road close to the camp . He recommended waiting for the division to pass so that the force would face minimal opposition . After consolidating information from Pajota and the Alamo Scouts about heavy enemy activity in the camp area , Mucci agreed to postpone the raid for 24 hours , and alerted the Sixth Army Headquarters to the development by radio . He directed the Scouts to return to the camp and gain additional intelligence , especially on the strength of the guards and the exact location of the captive soldiers . The Rangers withdrew to Platero , a barrio ( suburb ) 2 @. @ 5 miles ( 4 @. @ 0 km ) south of Balincarin .

= = Strategy = =

At 11 : 30 on January 30 , Alamo Scouts Lt. Bill Nellist and Pvt. Rufo Vaquilar , disguised as locals , managed to gain access to an abandoned shack 300 yards ( 270 m ) from the camp . Avoiding detection by the Japanese guards , they observed the camp from the shack and prepared a detailed report on the camp 's major features , including the main gate , Japanese troop strength , the location of telephone wires , and the best attack routes . Shortly thereafter they were joined by three other Scouts , whom Nellist tasked to deliver the report to Mucci . Nellist and Vaquilar remained in

the shack until the start of the raid .

Mucci had already given Nellist 's January 29 afternoon report and forwarded it to Prince , whom he entrusted to determine how to get the Rangers in and out of the compound quickly , and with as few casualties as possible . Prince developed a plan , which was then modified in light of the new report from the abandoned shack reconnaissance received at 14 : 30 . He proposed that the Rangers would be split into two groups : about 90 Rangers of C Company , led by Prince , would attack the main camp and escort the prisoners out , while 30 Rangers of a platoon from F Company , commanded by Lt. John Murphy , would signal the start of the attack by firing into various Japanese positions at the rear of the camp at 19 : 30 . Prince predicted that the raid would be accomplished in 30 minutes or less . Once Prince had ensured that all of the POWs were safely out of the camp , he would fire a red flare , indicating that all troops should fall back to a meetup at Pampanga River 1 @. @ 5 miles ( 2 @. @ 4 km ) north of the camp where 150 guerrillas would be ready with carabao @- @ pulled carts to transport the POWs . This group would help to load the POWs and escort them back to American lines .

One of Prince 's primary concerns was the flatness of the countryside . The Japanese had kept the terrain clear of vegetation to ensure that approaching guerrilla attacks could be seen as well as to spot prisoner escapes . Prince knew his Rangers would have to crawl through a long , open field on their bellies , right under the eyes of the Japanese guards . There would only be just over an hour of full darkness , as the sun set below the horizon and the moon rose . This would still present the possibility of the Japanese guards noticing their movement , especially with a nearly full moon . If the Rangers were discovered , the only planned response was for everyone to immediately stand up and rush the camp . The Rangers were unaware that the Japanese did not have any searchlights that could be used to illuminate the perimeter . Pajota suggested that to distract the guards , a United States Army Air Forces ( USAAF ) airplane should buzz the camp to divert the guards ' eyes to the sky . Mucci agreed with the idea and a radio request was sent to command to ask for a plane to fly over the camp while the men made their way across the field . In preparation for possible injuries or wounds received during the encounter with the Japanese , the battalion surgeon , Cpt . Jimmy Fisher , developed a makeshift hospital in the Platero schoolhouse .

By dawn on January 30 , the road in front of the camp was clear of traveling Japanese troops . Mucci made plans to protect the POWs once they were freed from the camp . Two groups of guerrillas of the Luzon Guerrilla Armed Forces , one under Pajota and another under Capt. Eduardo Joson , would be sent in opposite directions to hold the main road near the camp . Pajota and 200 guerrillas were to set up a roadblock next to the wooden bridge over the Cabu River . This setup , northeast of the prisoner camp , would be the first line of defense against the Japanese forces camped across the river , which would be within earshot of the assault on the camp . Joson and his 75 guerrillas , along with a Ranger bazooka team , would set up a roadblock 800 yards ( 730 m ) southwest of the prisoner camp to stop any Japanese forces that would arrive from Cabanatuan . Both groups would each place 25 land mines in front of their positions , and one guerrilla from each group was given a bazooka to destroy any armored vehicles . After the POWs and the remainder of the attacking force had reached the Pampanga River meeting point , Prince would fire a second flare to indicate to the ambush sites to pull back ( gradually , if they faced opposition ) and head to Plateros .

As the POWs had no knowledge of the upcoming assault , they went through their normal routine that night . The previous day , two Filipino boys had thrown rocks into the prisoner side of the camp with notes attached , " Be ready to go out . " Assuming that the boys were pulling a prank , the POWs disregarded the notes . The POWs were becoming more wary of the Japanese guards , believing that anytime in the next few days they could be massacred for any reason . They figured that the Japanese would not want them to be rescued by advancing American forces , regain their strength , and return to fight the Japanese again . In addition , the Japanese could kill the prisoners to prevent them from telling of the atrocities of the Bataan Death March or the conditions in the camp . With the limited Japanese guard , a small group of prisoners had already decided that they would make an escape attempt at about 20 : 00 .

= = Prisoner rescue = =

At 17 : 00 , a few hours after Mucci approved Prince 's plan , the Rangers departed from Platero . White cloths were tied around their left arms to prevent " friendly fire " casualties . They crossed the Pampanga River and then , at 17 : 45 , Prince and Murphy 's men parted ways to surround the camp . Pajota , Joson , and their guerrilla forces each headed to their ambush sites . The Rangers under Prince made their way to the main gate and stopped about 700 yards ( 640 m ) from the camp to wait for nightfall and the aircraft distraction .

Meanwhile , a P @-@ 61 Black Widow from the 547th Night Fighter Squadron had taken off at 18 : 00 , piloted by Capt. Kenneth Schrieber and 1st Lt. Bonnie Rucks . About 45 minutes before the attack , Schrieber cut the power to the left engine at 1 @,@ 500 feet ( 460 m ) over the camp . He restarted it , creating a loud backfire , and repeated the procedure twice more , losing altitude to 200 feet ( 61 m ) . Pretending that his plane was crippled , Schrieber headed toward low hills , clearing them by a mere 30 feet ( 9 @.@ 1 m ) . To the Japanese observers , it seemed the plane had crashed and they watched , waiting for a fiery explosion . Schrieber repeated this several times while also performing various aerobatic maneuvers . The ruse continued for twenty minutes , creating a diversion for the Rangers inching their way toward the camp on their bellies . Prince later commended the pilots ' actions : " The idea of an aerial decoy was a little unusual and honestly , I didn 't think it would work , not in a million years . But the pilot 's maneuvers were so skillful and deceptive that the diversion was complete . I don 't know where we would have been without it . " As the plane buzzed the camp , Lt. Carlos Tombo and his guerrillas along with a small number of Rangers cut the camp 's telephone lines to prevent communication with the large force stationed in Cabanatuan .

At 19 : 40 , the whole prison compound erupted into small arms fire after Murphy and his men fired on the guard towers and barracks . Within the first fifteen seconds , all of the camp 's guard towers and pillboxes were targeted and destroyed . Sgt. Ted Richardson rushed to shoot a padlock off of the main gate using his .45 pistol . The Rangers at the main gate maneuvered to bring the guard barracks and officer quarters under fire , while the ones at the rear eliminated the enemy near the prisoners ' huts and then proceeded with the evacuation . A bazooka team from F Company ran up the main road to a tin shack which the Scouts had told Mucci held tanks . Although Japanese soldiers attempted to escape with two trucks , the team was able to destroy the trucks and then the shack .

At the beginning of the gunfire , many of the prisoners thought that it was the Japanese beginning to massacre them . One prisoner stated that the attack sounded like " whistling slugs , Roman candles , and flaming meteors sailing over our heads . " Prisoners immediately hid in their shacks , latrines , and irrigation ditches . When the Rangers yelled to the POWs to come out and be rescued , many of the POWs feared that it was the Japanese attempting to trick them into being killed . Also , a substantial number resisted because the Rangers ' weapons and uniforms looked nothing like those of a few years earlier ; for example , the Rangers wore caps , earlier soldiers had M1917 Helmets and incidentally , the Japanese also wore caps . The Rangers were challenged by the POWs and asked who they were and where they were from . Rangers sometimes had to resort to physical force to remove the detainees , throwing or kicking them out . Some of the POWs weighed so little due to illness and malnourishment that several Rangers carried two men on their backs . Once out of the barracks , they were told by the Rangers to proceed to the main , or front gate . Prisoners were disoriented because the " main gate " meant the entrance to the American side of the camp . POWs collided with each other in the confusion but were eventually led out by the Rangers .

A lone Japanese soldier was able to fire off three mortar rounds toward the main gate . Although members of F Company quickly located the soldier and killed him , several Rangers , Scouts , and POWs were wounded in the attack . Battalion surgeon Capt. James Fisher was mortally injured in the stomach and was carried to the nearby village of Balincari . Scout Alfred Alfonso had a shrapnel wound to his abdomen . Scout Lt. Tom Rounsaville and Ranger Pvt. 1st Class Jack Peters were also wounded by the barrage .

A few seconds after Pajota and his men heard Murphy fire the first shot , they fired on the alerted Japanese contingent situated across the Cabu River . Pajota had earlier sent a demolitions expert to set charges on the unguarded bridge to go off at 19 : 45 . The bomb detonated at the designated time , and although it did not destroy the bridge , it formed a large hole over which tanks and other vehicles could not pass . Waves of Japanese troops rushed the bridge , but the V @-@ shaped choke point created by the Filipino guerrillas repulsed each attack . One guerrilla , who had been trained to use the bazooka only a few hours earlier by the Rangers , destroyed or disabled four tanks that were hiding behind a clump of trees . A group of Japanese soldiers made an effort to flank the ambush position by crossing the river away from the bridge , but the guerrillas spotted and eliminated them .

At 20 : 15 , the camp was secured from the Japanese and Prince fired his flare to signal the end of the assault . No gunfire had occurred for the last fifteen minutes . However , as the Rangers headed towards the meetup , Cpl. Roy Sweezy was shot twice by friendly fire , and later died . The Rangers and the weary , frail , and disease @-@ ridden POWs made their way to the appointed Pampanga River rendezvous , where a caravan of 26 carabao carts waited to transport them to Plateros , driven by local villagers organized by Pajota . At 20 : 40 , once Prince determined that everyone had crossed the Pampanga River , he fired his second flare to indicate to Pajota and Joson 's men to withdraw . The Scouts stayed behind at the meetup to survey the area for enemy retaliatory movements . Meanwhile , Pajota 's men continued to resist the attacking enemy until they could finally withdraw at 22 : 00 , when the Japanese forces stopped charging the bridge . Joson and his men met no opposition , and they returned to help escort the POWs .

Although the combat photographers were able to shoot images of the trek to and from the camp , they were unable to use their cameras during the night @-@ time raid , as the flashes would indicate their positions to the Japanese . One of the photographers reflected on the nighttime hindrance : " We felt like an eager soldier who had carried his rifle for long distances into one of the war 's most crucial battles , then never got a chance to fire it . " The Signal Corps photographers instead assisted with escorting the POWs out of the camp .

= = Trek to American lines = =

By 22 : 00 , the Rangers and ex @-@ POWs arrived at Plateros , where they rested for half an hour . A radio message was sent and received by Sixth Army at 23 : 00 that the mission had been a success , and that they were returning with the rescued prisoners to American lines . After a headcount , it was discovered that POW Edwin Rose , a deaf British soldier , was missing . Mucci dictated that none of the Rangers could be spared to search for him , so he sent several guerrillas to do so in the morning . It was later learned that Rose had fallen asleep in the latrine before the attack . Rose woke early the next morning , and realized the other prisoners were gone and that he was left behind . Nevertheless , he took the time to shave and put on his best clothes that he had been saving for the day he would be rescued . He walked out of the prison camp , thinking that he would soon be found and led to freedom . Sure enough , Rose was found by passing guerrillas . Arrangements were made for a tank destroyer unit to pick him up and transport him to a hospital .

In a makeshift hospital at Plateros , Scout Alfonso and Ranger Fisher were quickly put into surgery . The shrapnel was removed from Alfonso 's abdomen , and he was expected to recover if returned to American lines . Fisher 's shrapnel was also removed , but with limited supplies and widespread damage to both his stomach and intestines , it was decided more extensive surgery would need to be completed in an American hospital . Mucci ordered that an airstrip be built in a field next to Plateros so that a plane could airlift him to American lines . Some Scouts and freed prisoners stayed behind to construct the airstrip .

As the group left Plateros at 22 : 30 to trek back towards American lines , Pajota and his guerrillas continually sought out local villagers to provide additional carabao carts to transport the weakened prisoners . The majority of the prisoners had little or no clothing and shoes , and it became increasingly difficult for them to walk . When the group reached Balincarin , they had accumulated nearly 50 carts . Despite the convenience of using the carts , the carabao traveled at a sluggish

pace , only 2 miles per hour ( 3 @. @ 2 km / h ) , which greatly reduced the speed of the return trip . By the time the group reached American lines , 106 carts were being used .

In addition to the tired former prisoners and civilians , the majority of the Rangers had only slept for five to six hours over the past three days . The soldiers frequently had hallucinations or fell asleep as they marched . Benzedrine was distributed by the medics to keep the Rangers active during the long march . One Ranger commented on the effect of the drug : " It felt like your eyes were popped open . You couldn 't have closed them if you wanted to . One pill was all I ever took ? it was all I ever needed . "

P @-@ 61 Black Widows again helped the group by patrolling the path they took on its way back to American lines . At 21 : 00 , one of the aircraft destroyed five Japanese trucks and a tank located on a road 14 miles ( 23 km ) from Plateros that the group would later travel on . The group was also met by circling P @-@ 51 Mustangs that guarded them as they neared American lines . The freed prisoner George Steiner stated that they were " jubilant over the appearance of our airplanes , and the sound of their strafing was music to our ears " .

During one leg of the return trip , the men were stopped by the Hukbalahap , Filipino Communist guerrillas who hated both the Americans and the Japanese . They were also rivals to Pajota 's men . One of Pajota 's lieutenants conferred with the Hukbalahap and returned to tell Mucci that they were not allowed to pass through the village . Angered by the message , Mucci sent the lieutenant back to insist that pursuing Japanese forces would be coming . The lieutenant came back and told Mucci that only Americans could pass , and Pajota 's men had to stay . Both the Rangers and guerrillas were finally allowed through after an agitated Mucci told the lieutenant that he would call in an artillery barrage and level the whole village . In fact , Mucci 's radio was not working at that point .

At 08 : 00 on January 31 , Mucci 's radioman was able to finally contact Sixth Army headquarters . Mucci was directed to go to Talavera , a town captured by the Sixth Army 11 miles ( 18 km ) from Mucci 's current position . At Talavera , the freed soldiers and civilians boarded trucks and ambulances for the last leg of their journey home . The POWs were deloused , and given hot showers and new clothes . At the POW hospital , one of the Rangers was reunited with his rescued father , who had been assumed killed in combat three years earlier . The Scouts and the remaining POWs who had stayed behind to get James Fisher onto a plane also encountered resistance by the Hukbalahap . After threatening the communist band , the Scouts and POWs were granted safe passage and reached Talavera on February 1 .

A few days after the raid , Sixth Army troops inspected the camp . They collected a large number of death certificates and cemetery layouts , as well as diaries , poems , and sketchbooks . The American soldiers also paid 5 pesos to each of the carabao cart drivers who had helped to evacuate the POWs .

= = Outcome and historical significance = =

The raid was considered successful ? 489 POWs were liberated , along with 33 civilians . The total included 492 Americans , 23 British ( including Edwin Rose ) , three Dutch , two Norwegians , one Canadian , and one Filipino . The rescue , along with the liberation of Camp O 'Donnell the same day , allowed the prisoners to tell of the Bataan and Corregidor atrocities , which sparked a new wave of resolve for the war against Japan . Prince gave a great deal of credit for the success of the raid to others : " Any success we had was due not only to our efforts but to the Alamo Scouts and Air Force . The pilots ( Capt. Kenneth R. Schrieber and Lt. Bonnie B. Rucks ) of the plane that flew so low over the camp were incredibly brave men . " Some of the Rangers and Scouts went on bond drive tours around the United States and also met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt . In 1948 , the United States Congress created legislation which provided \$ 1 ( \$ 9 @. @ 85 today ) for each day the POWs had been held in a prisoner camp , including Cabanatuan . Two years later , Congress again approved an additional \$ 1 @. @ 50 per day ( a combined total of \$ 24 @. @ 59 today ) .

Estimates of the Japanese soldiers killed during the assault ranged from 530 to 1 @, @ 000 . The estimates include the 73 guards and approximately 150 traveling Japanese who stayed in the camp



that night , as well as those killed by Pajota 's men attempting to cross the Cabu River . Several Americans died during and after the raid . A prisoner weakened by illness died of a heart attack as a Ranger carried him from the barracks to the main gate . The Ranger later recalled , " The excitement had been too much for him , I guess . It was really sad . He was only a hundred feet from the freedom he had not known for nearly three years . " Another prisoner died of illness just as the group had reached Talavera . Although Mucci had ordered that an airstrip be built in a field next to Plateros so that a plane could evacuate Fisher to get medical attention , it was never dispatched , and he died the next day . His last words were " Good luck on the way out . " The other Ranger killed during the raid was Sweezy , who was struck in the back by two rounds from friendly fire . Both Fisher and Sweezy are buried at Manila National Cemetery . Twenty of Pajota 's guerrillas were injured , as were two Scouts and two Rangers .

The American prisoners were quickly returned to the United States , most by plane . Those who were still sick or weakened remained at American hospitals to continue to recuperate . On February 11 , 1945 , 280 POWs left Leyte aboard the transport USS General A.E. Anderson bound for San Francisco via Hollandia , New Guinea . In an effort to counter the improved American morale , Japanese propaganda radio announcers broadcast to American soldiers that submarines , ships , and planes were hunting the General Anderson . The threats proved to be a bluff , and the ship safely arrived in San Francisco Bay on March 8 , 1945 .

News of the rescue was released to the public on February 2 . The feat was celebrated by MacArthur 's soldiers , Allied correspondents , and the American public , as the raid had touched an emotional chord among Americans concerned about the fate of the defenders of Bataan and Corregidor . Family members of the POWs were contacted by telegram to inform them of the rescue . News of the raid was broadcast on numerous radio outlets and newspaper front pages . The Rangers and POWs were interviewed to describe the conditions of the camp , as well as the events of the raid . The enthusiasm over the raid was later overshadowed by other Pacific events , including the Battle for Iwo Jima and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki . The raid was soon followed by additional successful raids , such as the raid of Santo Tomas Civilian Internment Camp on February 3 , raid of Bilibid Prison on February 4 , and the raid at Los Baños on February 23 .

A Sixth Army report indicated that the raid demonstrated " ... what patrols can accomplish in enemy territory by following the basic principles of scouting and patrolling , ' sneaking and peeping , ' [ the ] use of concealment , reconnaissance of routes from photographs and maps prior to the actual operation , ... and the coordination of all arms in the accomplishment of a mission . " MacArthur spoke about his reaction to the raid : " No incident of the campaign in the Pacific has given me such satisfaction as the release of the POWs at Cabanatuan . The mission was brilliantly successful . " He presented awards to the soldiers who participated in the raid on March 3 , 1945 . Although Mucci was nominated for the Medal of Honor , he and Prince both received Distinguished Service Crosses . Mucci was promoted to colonel and was given command of the 1st Regiment of the 6th Infantry Division . All other American officers and selected enlisted received Silver Stars . The remaining American enlisted men and the Filipino guerrilla officers were awarded Bronze Stars . Nellist , Rounsaville , and the other twelve Scouts received Presidential Unit Citations .

In late 1945 , the bodies of the American troops who died at the camp were exhumed , and the men moved to other cemeteries . Land was donated in the late 1990s by the Filipino government to create a memorial . The site of the Cabanatuan camp is now a park that includes a memorial wall listing the 2 @@ 656 American prisoners who died there . The memorial was financed by former American POWs and veterans , and is maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission . A joint resolution by Congress and President Ronald Reagan designated April 12 , 1982 as " American Salute to Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Memorial Day " . In Cabanatuan City , a hospital is named for guerrilla leader Eduardo Joson .

= = Depictions in film = =

Several films have focused on the raid , while also including archival footage of the POWs . Edward

Dmytryk 's 1945 film Back to Bataan , starring John Wayne , opens by retelling the story of the raid on the Cabanatuan POW camp @-@ with real life film of the POW survivors . Based on the books The Great Raid on Cabanatuan and Ghost Soldiers , the 2005 John Dahl film The Great Raid focused on the raid intertwined with a love story . Prince served as a consultant on the film , and believed it depicted the raid accurately . Marty Katz conveyed his interest in producing the film : " This [ rescue ] was a massive operation that had very little chance of success . It 's like a Hollywood movie ? it couldn 't really happen , but it did . That was why we were attracted to the material . "

= = Cabanatuan memorial images = =