



The rescue party of U. S. Rangers and the Filipino guerrillas grin with delight at the success of their mission. Lead man in center is Lieut. John Frank Murphy of Springfield, Mass., who

led the storming of main prison gate. Rangers and guerrillas suffered 30 casualties—27 dead, three wounded. But they and the guerrillas killed about 500 Japs, knocked out 12 Jap tanks.



The rescued men, dazed by excitement and weariness when they arrived at last at the American camp, helped each other walk off to a place where they could sit down and be quiet. Their gaunt faces and their thin thighs show the mark of three years of near-starvation in prison.

## THE RESCUE AT CABANATUAN

Rangers and guerrillas free survivors of Bataan

by CARL MYDANS

*Last month, three years after the infamous Death March to which the Japanese subjected the U. S. Army men they had taken on Bataan and Corregidor, a troop of U. S. Rangers and Philippine guerrillas rescued 486 of the Death March survivors from the prison camp of Cabanatuan, 60 miles from Manila. In these pictures and this story Carl Mydans, who had known many of the rescued men before he himself had been captured at Manila in 1942, tells the stirring story of the Rangers' rescue.*

BY WIRELESS FROM MANILA

At dusk on Jan. 30 the 6th U. S. Rangers poured through the main gate of the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp at Cabanatuan. The Rangers had fought their way 25 miles through the Japanese lines and they burst in shouting, "The Yanks are here! Assemble at the main gate!" But there were only a pitiful few of the heroes of Bataan and Corregidor who were still alive to hear them, and even about them there was a strange and ghostly quality.

Human emotions cannot be strained that far without its having an effect. These men had adopted a kind of muteness, for long ago they had seen what happened to those who rebelled or protested or tried to escape. And so they pressed closely into the brown soil of their slit trenches or lay face down on the split bamboo floors of their barracks when the sounds of battle came to them. Even when there was shooting and shouting all about them, only a few moved. Finally they began to understand when strong hands hustled them to their feet.

"Buddy, we're Yanks," they were told. "We're Americans! Up quick and get over to that gate! Here's a pistol. Here's a knife. You're a soldier again!"

Slowly the suspicion born of wasted bodies and slowed-up minds was overcome. The men who lifted them to their feet were dressed as they had never seen American soldiers dressed before. Their hats were strange new Army gear, their uniforms were splotted with jungle green. But they were gentle. Not in three years had these ghosts of Bataan known what

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## RESCUE AT CABANATUAN (continued)

gentleness was. And now their shouts were joining those of the soldiers, "They are Americans! They're here! God, they've come! Christ, are we glad to see you!"

It was dark now and the Rangers were moving columns of the released prisoners through the main gate. A final detail combed the camp to see that no one was left behind. The orders were "Bring out every goddamned man. Bring them back if every Ranger has to carry a man on his back."

A few of the prisoners were found still crouching in their fox-holes. The Rangers picked them up bodily, nudged their shoulders gently and led them out, stepping over dead Japs as they went. There wasn't much talk now. Half of the job of rescue was done but the half coming up would be difficult. The prisoners were weak but they had liberty and freedom, which was like a blood transfusion.

Rangers had to carry many of the prisoners pickaback but some of those who were not too weak soon felt the strength of new freedom surging into them. They struggled off the backs of the Rangers and insisted on walking alone and by themselves, as men again.

There was heavy fighting on their left flank now. The Japanese had rushed up 2,000 men from the near-by village. But out from the trees came Filipino guerrillas. This was their job.

Rifle for rifle the Filipinos have shown they are better soldiers than the Japs and they showed it again that night. They had to shoot over piles of dead Japs to repulse other Japs who were attacking. Their orders were to stop the Japs and they did. No Ranger will accept congratulations on a job well done without saying, "Thanks, but don't forget those Filipinos. We broke into the camp but the Filipinos got us through."

### A proud story is written

It is now American history and every child of coming generations will know of the 6th Rangers, for a prouder story has not been written. They jumped off Jan. 28 at 1800 hours. Lieut. Colonel Henry A. Mucci commanded, with the American guerrilla leader Major Robert Lapham and two Alamo scouts heading the column. But as Colonel Mucci would like to have it, his "wonderful captain," Robert W. Prince, was in command. The orders were "Do two marches of 25 miles and assemble five miles from the prison camp and strike at 1729 hours."

The Rangers traveled light and fast. They were largely pistol-packing farm boys, hand-picked for just such a job as this. They wore no helmets but each man carried two pistols, a knife, one canteen and two days' streamlined rations. "You're not to eat your rations or drink the water," was the order, "they're for the men you release. There are some 150 Japanese there and you are 121 Rangers. You can do it."

The Rangers picked up their food along the way. "Those Filipinos," said one Ranger, "got a thing called bamboo wireless. Don't know how they work it but they knew we were comin'. Everybody in every barrio was out there to meet us. It was a secret operation and we moved fast. In the first barrio we were given a few bananas. But by the time we reached the third, the whole village was out with roasted chickens wrapped in banana leaves for all of us. They were sure good."

But at H-hour, as the Rangers lay by the road ready to strike, the Japanese moved a full division past them and the operation was delayed 24 hours. Then on the 30th they struck. The signal was the firing of shots at the main gate. Each Ranger had a picked job. Sgt. Theodore R. Richardson of Dallas was the lead man at the gate. His first pistol shot was the signal for another sergeant whose job was a Jap sentry on the tower. One shot and the sentry stood for a split second, then crumpled backward, head over feet, his rifle tossed wide.

Throwing grenades ahead of them and carrying their knives in their hands, the Rangers went in. Their instructions were to "Get inside and do a knifing job. We want no Americans in that camp killed."

### The ghosts of Bataan

I met the Rangers and the ghosts of Bataan early on the morning of Jan. 31, five miles inside the Jap lines. Many were on foot, many in Filipino oxcarts. They were an exhausted column, Rangers and prisoners alike, but they were jaunty. They carried little with them. There was nothing from Camp Cabanatuan they wanted but their lives. As they approached our own lines their excitement increased. Some grabbed my arms, tugged them, and all in one way or another

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Mission accomplished, the exhausted Rangers fell where they stood. "They're terrific tough guys," reported Mydans, "but they handled the prisoners like frail children, were so moved themselves they kept saying kind words, often patting old men on the shoulder and asking, 'How's it now, Dad?'"



American cigarets for the first time in three years helped the prisoners realize that their ordeal was over. They also were given hamburgers. Below: the tubercular, the most emaciated and those requiring more than food and freedom to recover were examined and placed under observation in a tent hospital.







**Red Cross kits** were given all rescued prisoners as soon as their column had reached safety. The kit contained such wonderful luxuries as soap, shaving cream and a toothbrush. Along the way cheering Filipinos handed them nuts and fresh tomatoes to eat.

## **RESCUE AT CABANATUAN** (continued)

said the same thing, "Christ! are we glad to see you!" and "What guys these Rangers are!" and "What an army!"

Ambulances were coming in and trucks were throwing up sprays of dust. Everyone assembled about an old Filipino farmhouse. Fighter planes and Piper Cubs buzzed down over them like happy hornets. The exhausted Rangers dropped where they stood, sleeping over each other, curled up next to straw stacks or lying flat out on the ground. The prisoners sat, still dazed, or seized spasmodically with another grip of emotion they laughed and talked loudly to whoever was near them.

Some of the prisoners were in bad shape. Some were still mute. Some munched tomatoes given them by Filipinos or hamburgers which relief trucks had brought in.

Many of these men were old friends of mine but it was hard to recognize them. They had wasted away and their clothing was patched and weird. Some wore full uniforms and boasted that they had "saved this last one for just this day." Most of the men retained the insignia of their rank. On the sleeves of scraps of Filipino clothing were the stripes of the sergeant, the insignia of the Marines, pins of petty officers, the oak leaves of a major.

There was Colonel James Duckworth, the famous surgeon of Bataan who was the commanding officer at Cabanatuan. His arm was in a sling. He broke it when he fell during the excitement of the rescue. When I made his picture he said, "That's the first time I've had my picture taken since Mel Jacoby made it on Corregidor and then my other arm was broken."

There was Captain Robert E. Roseveare who had changed so much that I did not recognize him. "My God, it's good to see you again," he said, "Remember the way you took my picture at a LIFE Goes to a Party at the Canlubang sugar estate a month before the war?"

Lieut. George W. Green of the Navy had to tell me who he was. He lay in the grass, smiling feebly, wearing tattered long drawers but proudly retaining his naval officer's cap.

"It's been a long time," he said, "a long, long time. I hear that Mel Jacoby got out all right. Made me very happy. I arranged the ship that took them from Cebu to Australia."

I told him that Mel was later killed and he said, "Yes, I know. We had our own method of getting news in there. We're pretty well informed. Sometime I'll tell you about how we knew all these things."

There were the endless other men, a few without an arm or a leg and all with their own stories.

Trucks and ambulances carried them the last five miles out of Jap lines and on to the 92nd Evacuation Hospital where the Army's efficiency and planning amazed them all. They were registered and given showers. Bad cases went into the hospital at once. Others were taken to tents. All received Red Cross kits and, opening them, played with them like children playing with dolls.

The doctors were wonderful. Each doctor's or corpsman's hand that touched a prisoner was one of such feeling that many of the men who had held up so stanchly and proudly until now broke down and wept. When they did the doctors would go right on, giving no indication they had seen the breakdown.





**Famed Bataan surgeon**, Colonel James Duckworth, became commanding U. S. officer of the Cabanatuan camp. At the start of the war in 1941 he broke his left arm. In his hurry to get out of Cabanatuan with the Rangers he fell and broke his other arm.

## **RESCUE AT CABANATUAN** (continued)

Some of the men talked of "getting back into it," but most of them talked of going home. "Sure want to see the States again," they said.

A medical officer said: "They've had the war, these fellows. We're going to build them up with the best we've got and then we're going to send them home. They'll all have to be classified 4F and they're going to sit out the rest of this show. And there's not another American who has a better right."

The day was ending, and as I was making a last circuit in one of the tents, I passed an old fellow sitting by himself on a cot. He was dressed in a tattered shirt so patched that it was difficult to see the original fabric. I stopped and put my hand on his shoulder.

"How are you, dad?" I asked. He looked up and then burst into tears. He wept as I have seen no man weep. I sat down beside him and he took my hand and held it. We did not talk. Later I left him without either of us saying anything. As I walked away a young marine sitting a few beds away beckoned to me. Pointing to Old Dad, he said with a catch in his own voice, "That's the first time the old man has cried since he was captured."



**Army man, Navy man and marine** were among 513 rescued from the camp. Also released were a few British, Dutch and one Norwegian. Last Jan. 7, two days before Lingayen landing, the Japanese took 1,600 prisoners out, transferred them to other camps.