

# POW Raid At Cabanatuan

By John A. Larsen

**E**arly last year my friend, Steve Dick, Editor of Tactical Knives magazine and fellow contributor to BTL lent me William B. Breur's excellent book *The Great Raid on Cabanatuan*. It is the story of how elements of the 6th Ranger Battalion rescued over 500 POWs being held by the Japanese at Cabanatuan in the Philippines.

General Douglas MacArthur said of the raid, "No incident of the campaign in the Pacific had given me such satisfaction as the release of the POWs at Cabanatuan. The mission was brilliantly successful."

I noticed that the man who had commanded the raid, Captain Robert W. Prince, was from Seattle, and in the epilogue it stated that he had retired in the Northwest. After checking the phone book and making a phone call, Steve Dick and I went to the home of Barbara and Bob Prince. There we were graciously greeted, taken to lunch where Bob proved to be both helpful and patient in relating his story of the Cabanatuan raid.

Commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in Artillery after graduating from Stanford University in June 1941, Prince attended artillery school at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, and in November 1941 was assigned to the 98th Pack Artillery stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington. The 98th was equipped with pack 75mm howitzers that could be broken down into six parts and carried on mules. After further training at Ft. Carson, Colorado the 98th was alerted for movement to New Guinea where it



28 Jan. 1945—Men of C & E Companies, 6th Ranger Infantry Battalion shown crossing a river some distance behind the Japanese lines near San Rosario, Luzon, P.I. (Robert Prince collection)

was thought with their mule carried artillery they could help the Australians in their desperate fighting against the Japanese. As everything had to move forward on the Kokoda trail over the rugged Owen Stanley mountain range, conventional artillery could not be used.

Arriving in New Guinea in January 1943, the men of the 98th had two surprises waiting for them. First, the campaign in New Guinea was just about over. Second, their 1,000 mules and their handlers had been diverted to Burma to become part of Merrill's Marauders! In Charlton Ogburn's classic book, *The Marauders*, he talks about

two pack howitzers being dropped in Hsamsingyang, Burma, and that the crew "were formed of volunteers formerly with a pack artillery unit in New Guinea."

Now the 98th was a unit that no longer had its mules or a mission, but that did not last long. Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, commander of the 6th Army, wanted to form a Ranger battalion and turned to Lieutenant Colonel Henry A. Mucci to accomplish the transition. A West Pointer, Class of '36, Mucci was only 5'7" but tough yet friendly. Mr. Prince credits LTC Mucci's leadership for the successful formation of the 6th Ranger Battalion.

accomplished. Let's see which party will pull their collective cone heads out of the sand and run with this political football. I'm writing to my congressmen and senators—both Democrats and Republicans—today to encourage them to see that VA reform is an issue on their party platform.



With the recent rise of training fatalities in the U.S. military, it is becoming more and more apparent that budget reductions, unit

downsizing, and forced early retirements are having a negative effect on our combat readiness.

The recent deaths at Ft. Campbell and Camp Lejeune are only the latest in a growing number of training fatalities among our military branches. Are reduced combat training and inadequate equipment maintenance the culprits? This has happened before and there is ample evidence to support the premise that the reduction in defense spending is having a far, far greater effect on our military than first believed. Why must a reduced bud-

get and lower manpower requirements result in poorer performance from our soldiers and their equipment?

Look for more training "accidents" in the future. Until the current Administration, Congress and the Pentagon get on the same frequency, our service men and women are likely to pay a heavy price in the name of Cost Reduction. RAISE HELL! Realistic combat training doesn't require friendly casualties.



## Notice

### Scholarships for Vietnam Veterans Children

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Inc. has authorized funding to assist the children of those who served in Vietnam. The funds will be distributed to selected universities. One Hundred Thousand Dollars has been allocated. Plans call for making the scholarship program expand through help from veterans groups.

"We hope that many youngsters will be helped through this program." Jan Scruggs, President of the VVMF said today.

Colleges were selected in an effort to get funds to deserving students at a sample of colleges nationwide. A \$25,000 Scholarship was created at the University of Maryland College so that military personnel or their dependents can take college courses. VVMF will be asking veterans groups in various states to contribute funds to participating colleges. The list of colleges receiving \$5,000 grants follows:

Howard University, Texas Tech, University of California at Davis, The Citadel, University of Illinois, University of Massachusetts, University of Georgia, New Mexico Military Institute, Norwich University, University of Virginia, State University of New York, University of Colorado, University of Nebraska and the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will be asking veterans groups and others to donate to help the VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND SCHOLARSHIP effort grow.

*For Further Information:*

**Call Jan Scruggs - 202-393-0090**



31 Jan. 1945—Capt. Robert Prince (CO, Co C 6th Ranger Infantry Battalion) shown with his guide, Filipino guerrilla Johnny Nomosanti, Giumbo, P.I. (Robert Prince collection)

After receiving his orders Mucci informed the entire 98th of what was happening and what would be expected of them. According to Bob Prince, many of the senior and older officers left the 98th. When the remaining artillerymen arrived on New Guinea the 98th had a TOE strength of about 1,000 men, 200 of which ended up being assigned to Merrill's Marauders. LTC Mucci, who had received Infantry/Ranger type training back in Hawaii, proceeded to train those volunteers from the 98th Artillery. After their training was complete the new 6th Ranger Battalion had a TOE strength of 475 men.

Already knowledgeable in individual weapons, the trainees were put through extensive and exhaustive training, stressing infantry weapons, patrolling, physical conditioning, which included long marches, and basic infantry tactics. Looking for a better area Mucci relocated his Rangers to Finsfjord, New Guinea where training

continued until October 1944 when the 6th Ranger Battalion deployed to participate in the invasion of the Philippines.

After taking part in the campaign for the Island of Leyte, where CPT Prince, commanding C Company, landed on Dinagat Island, the 6th Rangers shipped out to the main island of the Philippines, Luzon. Landing at Lingayen Bay on D+1, the 6th Rangers were eventually alerted for the POW rescue mission at Cabanatuan.

As the Allies thrust ever closer to Japan they grew increasingly more concerned about the fate of Allied POWs in Japanese hands. It was well known that the Japanese had little regard for adhering to the rules of the Geneva Convention, and that they had an even lower regard for POWs. This had been tragically demonstrated on the island of Palawan, located in the southwestern Philippines. (I flew over that island many times deploying to Vietnam and Thailand without ever

realizing its dark, bloody history.) It was there at a Japanese POW camp that the enemy soldiers, fearing a U.S. invasion, had herded the inmates into an open trench, supposedly to protect them from an impending air raid. Once inside, the Japanese poured gasoline into the trench and set it afire, shooting and bayoneting those who attempted to escape the flames. Only a few made it out of the trench and avoided the Japanese soldiers searching for them long enough to be rescued.

On the island of Luzon, there was increasing concern for the fate of the POWs held there. Intelligence reports coming in from Filipino guerrilla units, as well as grisly memories of the infamous Batan Death March, suggested the Japanese were preparing to kill the POWs rather than allow them to fall back into Allied hands. COL Horton White, the G2 (Intelligence Officer) for the 6th Army, grew ever more worried about the POWs at the Cabanatuan POW camp (some 25 miles east of the 6th Army's forward position at Giumbo, Luzon). He knew that there were some 9,000 Japanese soldiers in the vicinity of Cabanatuan who were either withdrawing to Baguio or digging in to defend against the advancing 6th Army. Briefing LTG Krueger on his fears, COL Horton recommended that a raid be conducted to rescue the POWs.

The mission was given to LTC Mucci, who briefed CPT Prince, telling him that he would be commanding C Company and a platoon from F Company under 1st Lieutenant Murphy on the raid. During our talk Bob Prince laughed when he recalled that his friend, CPT Arthur "Bull" Simons would have likely commanded the raid, had he not been on another mission on Santiago Island with B Company. "Colonel" Bull Simons would later lead the raid into Son Tay in North Vietnam. Another of Prince's contemporaries, Captain Robert W. Garrett, was the commander of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Okinawa in the early 1960s.

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31 Jan. 1945—PFC James M. Reynolds, BAR man who was part of the 6th Ranger unit that freed American prisoners of war from the Japanese prison at Cabanatuan, Luzon, P.I. (Robert Prince collection)

The raid itself was a fairly simple plan. Two teams of Alamo Scouts, a 6th Army reconnaissance unit (see BTL #18, Nov/Dec '95) would move out 24 hours in advance of the Rangers and conduct last minute reconnaissance of the Cabanatuan POW camp. The Rangers would move on foot some 30 miles through Japanese controlled territory, link up with the Alamo Scouts, then attack the camp under cover of darkness. Their plans were to kill the more than 250 Japanese guards, then move the 500 POWs safely and quickly back behind friendly lines. The Rangers would have help from two other units. First, two parties of Filipino guerrillas would lead the Rangers and provide security for the attack. One party under Captain Juan Pajota with 91 men would set up a roadblock some 400 yards northeast of the camp. This measure was intended to block approximately 600 to 800 Japanese bivouacked along the Cabu River from reinforcing the Japanese camp guards. Another party under Captain Eduardo Joson would set up a road block southwest of the camp to prevent any Japanese approaching from Cabanatuan town. The Filipino guerrillas would also round up carabau (water buffalo) carts to carry the POWs back to friendly

lines.

The second unit was the U.S. Army Air Force's 547th Night Fighter Squadron flying their P-61 Black Widows. These twin engine, twin tailed fighters had a night radar system, four 20mm cannons, four .50 caliber machine guns and a lot of experience flying at night and during bad weather. The 547th probably can be linked to the Special Operations Wings in the current U.S. Air Force.

CPT Pajota had reported that whenever American planes flew near the camp the Japanese guards became very nervous and concentrated on keeping their eyes on the sky for several minutes. The P-61s would fly low over the camp just prior to the raid so the Rangers could make their final approach unseen by the Japanese guards. After the raid the P-61s would return to use their devastating firepower to prevent reinforcements from reaching the vicinity of the camp.

After listening to Bob Prince describe this "simple" plan I was even more amazed that the Rangers had successfully pulled it off. Anyone who

has any combat experience will realize how many things could have gone wrong, and just how difficult it must have been to get all the elements to come together at the same time. The Rangers had only limited combat experience and very little time to run rehearsals. It may have been a "simple" plan but its successful execution would demand that everyone involved give 110 percent effort.

Ironically, Prince told us about a friend that he had met during summer ROTC training at Ft. Ord, California in 1940. He had been tentmates with Reif Shertleff, who had also been commissioned in June 1941. Bob's joining the Army had been delayed four weeks because of an impacted wisdom tooth, whereas Shertleff had been immediately inducted and shipped to the Philippines. He was captured after Batan fell and died at Cabanatuan. Prince wondered if it had not been for that impacted wisdom tooth, would he have been in the Philippines when the Japanese attacked?

At 1900 hours on January 27, 1945, just hours after being alerted, the Alamo



31 Jan. 1945—PFC Edward Knowles shows how big his feet had grown after completing the 50-mile hike to the Japanese prison camp at Cabanatuan. (Robert Prince collection)

After a tense approach march during which the Rangers had to cross several major roads patrolled by the Japanese, at daylight on January 29, they finally arrived at their initial destination, the barrio of Balincarin. They had covered 25 miles in total darkness and were now located about five miles north of the POW camp. Linking up with the Alamo Scouts and the Filipino guerrillas the Rangers discovered that there were large numbers of Japanese around the POW camp, and worse, that a Japanese division was moving up the road in front of the camp that night. It would be very likely that the Rangers would bump into them in the darkness. Since the land around the camp was so flat and open the Alamo Scouts had been unable to get close enough to perform a good reconnaissance. LTC Mucci decided to postpone the raid 24 hours. The Rangers then moved another two and a half miles to their final destination, the barrio of Plateros, where



31 Jan. 1945—Capt. Prince (left) talking to COL White (G2, 6th Army) at the 52nd Base Hospital, Giumbo, Luzon, P.I. (Robert Prince collection)

they rested until the next evening and radioed back about the 24 hour delay. Prince told us that this was actually a very fortunate occurrence as it allowed them to get a good rest and an excellent reconnaissance of the camp before the raid. He also pointed out that the Filipino civilians treated them great and were very happy to see the Rangers, bringing them flowers and what food they had.

Late the next day, January 30, 1945, the Rangers received a final briefing and pushed off toward the POW camp, with LTC Mucci stressing to the Filipino guerrillas that it was critical that they hold their roadblock positions regardless of the cost.

After low crawling for more than half a mile through an open, flat rice paddy, the Rangers were in position for the P-61s to buzz the camp. 1LT Murphy's platoon from F Company moved to the east taking up a position near the rear gate. They would initiate the raid by firing into the Japanese guard barracks. At the same time, Bob Prince's C Company along with some of the Alamo Scouts would charge through the front and rear gates, killing

the Japanese guards and bringing the POWs out the main gate back to where the caribou carts were waiting.

At 1835 hours a P-61 Black Widow, appropriately named "Hard To Get", crewed by pilot CPT Kenneth R. Schreiber and radar operator LT Bonnie R. Rucks, made a low pass over the POW camp as the Rangers crawled forward to their final attack position. There was a delay getting 1LT Murphy's platoon into position when three NCOs moving along the fence line toward the rear gate were spotted by a Japanese guard. As they froze in the darkness the guard called out, probably for help, but none of the other Japanese guards responded to his outcry. Because of this event the attack did not go in until 1945 hours, when Murphy's platoon opened up on the Japanese barracks and the three Ranger NCOs riddled the Japanese guard.

When the firing began Sergeant Ted Richardson started to beat on the lock securing the front gate, then pulled out his .45 automatic to shoot it off. A Japanese soldier inside the camp shot the .45 out of Richardson's hand before he could pull the trigger. The

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Japanese, in turn, was killed by Private First Class Leland Provencher, carrying a BAR, before he could fire a second round at Richardson. Richardson then picked up the .45 and shot the lock, breaking it and allowing the Rangers access to the camp. Although it was dark and the internees were scared and confused by what was going on, the Rangers were still able to kill the 250 Japanese guards, free 511 POWs, and get them moving northward toward the waiting caribau carts within 28 minutes.

The Filipino guerrillas had also successfully accomplished their mission at no small cost to themselves, keeping the Japanese reinforcements from reaching the camp and giving the Rangers time to evacuate the POWs. The Black Widow P-61s soon returned to the area and destroyed a convoy that looked like it would intercept the withdrawing Rangers and POWs. Only two Rangers died on the raid, CPT James C. Fisher, the Medical Officer, and Corporal Roy Sweezy.

During the long march back to friendly lines those same Filipino civilians who had greeted the Rangers kept bringing up more and more caribau carts until over a hundred were being used to move the POWs to safety. Prince feels that the Filipino civilians were the unsung heroes of the raid. The POWs were in such weak condition that it is doubtful that many could have made the long march back, which lasted until early morning on February 1. Well knowing the penalty for helping the Rangers if caught by the Japanese was death, these courageous Filipino civilians still came forward to help.

Like many veterans I have known over the years, Bob Prince is very modest about his part in the raid. But the U.S. Army didn't think so, and awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross. Bob left the Army February 26, 1946 as a major. He may not consider himself a hero, but I doubt if any of those 511 POWs would agree



31 Jan. 1945—PFC Alexander F. Trunkowski, with a Thompson submachine gun after the raid on Cabantuan POW camp. (Robert Prince collection)



31 Jan. 1945—L to R: PFC Julis Cobb, Navy Gunner's Mate Clarence Hall, British Army Sergeant Robert Bell, Captain Robert J. Duncan carried in caribau carts after the rescue from Japanese POW camp at Cabanatuan, Luzon, P.I. (Robert Prince collection)



**P-61 Black Widow from the 547th Night Fighter Squadron played a major role on the Cabanatuan raid. (National Archives photo)**

with him.

When we finally paused for some coffee that his wife, Barbara, offered us, Bob excused himself and left the room. He returned a short time later from his bedroom with the original map that he carried during the raid. He moved close and showed Steve and I his route of march. He wanted to donate it to the Ranger Museum. Later on, I made a few calls to the Infantry Museum which had a Ranger wing, and was told that they would accept it but cautioned that it would only be on display about 25 percent of the time. Passing this on to Bob, I was surprised when a few days later he sent me the map saying, "I've enclosed the map of the P.I. from Gumbia to Cabanatuan, I think it might get lost at the museum. You take care of it and use it as you see fit."

After a few more calls I managed to link up with CPT Don Wilson, the S5 of the 2nd Battalion, 75th Rangers located at Ft. Lewis, Washington. I explained how I had gotten the map and CPT Wilson asked if Mr. Price would consider giving an OPD (Officer Professional Development) class to the officers of the battalion. Mr. Prince agreed and after fixing a date and discussing some provisions of AR 675-2-1 with CPT Wilson, on July 12, 1995, Bob Prince came down to Ft.

Lewis and was greeted by LTC Michael Okita, then XO of the 2nd Rangers. After a tour of the Ranger compound and a long talk with LTC Stanley McChrystal, the CO of the 2nd Rangers, Bob Prince stood in front of the officers of the Battalion and gave a talk on the raid 50 years before. I had learned that the Cabanatuan raid is taught at the Ft. Benning phase of Ranger School. Now, here was the



**Feb. 1995—Robert and Barbara Prince today. (John Larsen collection)**

chance to listen to the man who had actually conducted the raid.

After fielding questions from the assembled officers, Bob Prince stood as LTC McChrystal expounded on what an honor and privilege it had been to have Mr. Prince speak. He reminded his officers of the problems that they had experienced on a recent field problem and compared their assets today, especially the night vision goggles and the communications gear, with the assets of the 6th Ranger Battalion at Luzon. Facing a dangerous and determined enemy, it was the training and spirit of those Rangers, Alamo Scouts, the Filipino guerrillas and the P-61 crews that carried the day. He went on to stress that even in today's high tech Army this still holds true.

After LTC McChrystal finished, Bob Prince said it was he that was honored to be there, and then presented his operational map to the 2nd Ranger Battalion. LTC McChrystal announced that it would be put in a display case in the Ranger Mess where future generations of young Rangers could admire an actual part of Ranger heritage.

LTC McChrystal presented a Ranger coin and a Battalion certificate of appreciation to Bob Prince, then called his officers to attention. As LTC Okita read the award under the provisions of AR 675-2-1, LTC McChrystal pinned the coveted U.S. Army Ranger tab on Mr. Prince in recognition of his World War II service, and stated that he "wished that it could have been done 50 years ago."

Anyone who has seen Bob Prince knows that he still has a straight military posture a full half century after leaving the U.S. Army. But after the presentation they will surely notice that Bob now stands a little taller than before and proudly wears a metal Ranger tab on the label of his coat. HOOOAAAH!



# The Magnificent Sacrifice: Lang Vei—Special Forces' Finest Hour

By William R. Phillips

**L**ang Vei was, in January 1968 just prior to the infamous Tet Offensive, the northernmost and perhaps the most isolated and fortified of the sixty-four Special Forces camps established along the border of South Vietnam and its neighbors, Laos and Cambodia. Less than a mile from the Laotian border to the west, the camp was seven road miles and five air miles from the Marine Corps' combat base at Khe Sanh.

At that time the Lang Vei Special Forces camp was occupied by an A-team commanded by CPT Frank Willoughby, and run by his team sergeant, SFC William T. Craig. The rest of the team, designated A-101, consisted of the executive officer, 1LT Miles Wilkins; SFC James Holt, medic; SFC Kenneth Hanna, weapons specialist; SSG Peter Tiroch, intelligence specialist; SSG Emmanuel E. Phillips, radio operator; SSG Arthur Brooks, weapons specialist; SGT Nickolas Fragos, medic; SP4 William G. McMurray, radio operator; SP4 Franklin H. Dooms, radio operator; and the newest member of the A-team, SP5 Daniel R. Phillips, explosives specialist.

The perimeter was shaped much like a dog bone. The long axis of the camp ran almost east/west. Within the perimeter, which was protected by triple concertina and some German razor wire, were originally almost three hundred Civilian Irregular Defense Group (C.I.D.G.), mostly Bru tribesmen.

The next higher headquarters for the Lang Vei Special Forces unit was



1LT Paul Longgear and SF enlisted men in front of pre-mission "lock-down" building at Ft. Bragg in July, 1967. (Paul Longgear collection)

in Da Nang, nearly a hundred miles away. Company C of the 5th Special Forces was commanded by LTC Daniel Schungel. In December 1967 Schungel had dispatched a Mobile Strike Force (MIKE Force) to Lang Vei to lend assistance to Willoughby's A-team. Consisting of six Green Berets and a company of Hre Montagnards numbering about 160 men, the MIKE Force was commanded by 1LT Paul R. Longgear. His Green Beret platoon leaders were: SFC Charles Lindewald, heavy weapons specialist; SFC Harvey G. Brande, senior medic; SFC Earl Burke, heavy weapons specialist; and SGT John Early, light weapons specialist. Longgear also commanded

medic SP4 James L. Moreland.

The MIKE Forces were distinct from the C.I.D.G., who normally served in their own living area, and had their own tribesmen as officers. Led by Green Berets, the MIKE Forces were more thoroughly trained and airborne qualified. They were mercenaries, to be sent wherever needed, and their pay was determined by the number of captured enemy weapons they returned after each battle. With four of his Green Berets as troop handlers (Moreland was the medic and not in a command billet), Longgear was intensely training his company of Hre who had acquired a perhaps undeserved reputation for breaking under fire.

They were mercenaries, to be sent wherever needed, and their pay was determined by the number of captured enemy weapons they returned after each battle.

Willoughby was careful to separate the mercenary Hre from his Bru C.I.D.G. The Hre were assigned to the Observation Post (OP) about half the distance between the camp and the Lao border. They would be the first to feel any attack from the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) if they came from the west. It was the job of the Hre Montagnards to patrol their surround-