



The Ledo Road opened in January 1945 and linked India to China. (Courtesy photo)



The 1,072-mile Ledo Road provided an essential linkage from British India to China for running supplies to the Nationalist Army in China as they continued their fight against the Japanese. (Courtesy photo)



U.S. Forces land at Lingayen Gulf on Jan. 9, 1945. (Public domain photo)



Freed Prisoners are overjoyed after being freed from the prisoner of war camp following the Cabanatuan Camp Raid. (Public domain photo)

January 1945 – World War II at 80 (Part 2)

Advancing on the Philippines

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While the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle for the Colmar Pocket were occupying American forces in Europe, the Pacific theater forces were in the thick of their own combat operations in January 1945 on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.

The Philippine Islands had been a U.S. colonial possession since it was ceded to them by Spain following the war with Spain.

Because of its strategic position in the Pacific, U.S. leaders wanted to protect the islands at all cost.

In the months leading up to U.S. involvement in World War II, some 135,000 troops and 227 aircraft were stationed on the island.

But they were no match for the superior Japanese forces that invaded Luzon on Dec. 8, 1941, and took control of the island four months later.

The Americans Land on Luzon

Four years later, on Jan. 9, 1945, 175,000 members of the U.S. 6th Army Group landed along a 20-mile beachhead at Lingayen Gulf near the city of Baguio on the west central edge of Luzon.

Among them were some 45 men from Martinsville, Ind.

All of them were part of the former Company K of the Indiana Guard, which had been federalized in March 1940 and activated.

The company members became part of the 151st Infantry, 38th Division.

Albert “Pup” Tackett of Martinsville was one of the Company K boys. He served for 3 years in the Pacific theater and endured the fierce combat on Luzon.

For their work in liberating Luzon, he and the other members of the 38th Division earned the coveted title as the “Avengers of Bataan.”

Tackett survived the war and returned to Martinsville, where he lived until his death at the age of 85 in 2001.

Although not a member of Company K in 1940, Martinsville native Adrain Stanger, was also part of the landing at Luzon.

Born in Crown Center on Dec. 19, 1921, Stanger grew up in Martinsville and, except for his three years in World War II, lived there the rest of his life until his death in 2018 at the age of 96.

On July 23, 1942, at the age of 20, he was drafted into the Army.

After basic training, he was assigned to the Army’s 40th Infantry Division in Hawaii to protect the islands from further Japanese assault.

He became a truck driver with the 115th Combat Engineer Battalion, Company B.

Stanger was assigned to drive a



Adrain Stanger, seen here in his 1942 service photo, was a longtime Martinsville resident and also part of the landing at Luzon. (Courtesy photo)

ton and a half truck.

“It was B-14,” he said, recalling the truck’s identification tag painted on the front left bumper. “It didn’t have any doors; just cutouts where the doors would have been.”

The division left Hawaii in December 1943 and arrived at Guadalcanal for further training and combat patrols.

On Dec. 9, 1944, the 40th Division arrived at the Philippine Islands.

They landed at Lingayen Gulf in Luzon on Jan. 9, 1945, under assault by the Japanese.

“The Japs bombed us our whole way in,” Stanger recalled. “Two or three in our company were killed, and others were injured.”

Once established on land, Stanger took to his truck, hauling his squad to different points on the island as they closed in on the Japanese occupiers.

The battle against Japanese forces was fierce.

Although it did not produce the highest number of American casualties, it did reach the highest net total of casualties for any battle during World War II.

It is estimated that some 200,000 Japanese soldiers died during the battle, most of them victims of disease and starvation.

On the Allied side, more than 8,000 Americans died and over 150,000 Filipinos, most of whom were civilians massacred by the Japanese.

By March 1945, after months of fierce combat, most of Luzon came under Allied control.

There were pockets of Japanese infantry that hid in the mountains and resisted until Japan surrendered in August 1945.

One key objective on Luzon was the Bataan peninsula, across the bay from Manila.

This was the location of the bitter holdout of Gen. MacArthur’s Army back in early 1942 after Japan invaded Luzon in early



Albert Tackett sitting on the Courthouse Square during his last of many Veterans Day programs, November 11, 1999.

LEFT: Albert Tackett, seen here at a Veterans Day program in Martinsville in 1999, was part of the American landing on Luzon in World War II. (Courtesy clipping)

BELOW: Col. James Duckworth served as a medical doctor and provided medical services while imprisoned at Cabanatuan Camp. Here, he can be seen after being freed. (Public domain photo)



December 1941.

Outmanned and not resupplied, the brave forces held out against the enemy invaders for several months.

But by April 1942, surrender was the only reasonable option.

The men, numbering around 75,000 Americans and Filipinos, were marched 70 miles north to a POW camp.

Because of all the men who died on the three-day march, estimated at 18,000 Filipinos and more than 500 Americans, it became known as the Bataan Death March.

Freeing American POWs at Cabanatuan

While Bataan was under siege by American forces in late January 1945, a group of 100 men from the 6th Army Rangers and 200 Filipino

guerrillas pulled off a daring surprise raid at Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp in the northern part of Bataan where approximately 500 U.S. POWs were imprisoned.

Among them was Paragon native and Martinsville High School graduate James Duckworth.

Duckworth, a career Army medical officer, entered the Army in 1914 after graduating from Indiana University Medical College in Bloomington.

He later headed a medical receiving station in France and served with Gens. John Pershing and Douglas MacArthur in World War I.

After the armistice in 1919, Duckworth served in several U.S. military hospitals in America before getting assignments in the early

1930’s to military hospitals in the Philippines.

In September 1940, Duckworth, now a colonel, was sent again to the Philippines on a two-year assignment, this time as commanding officer of General Hospital No. 1 in Manila.

In the weeks after Japan invaded Luzon in December 1941, U.S. forces in the Philippines were moved to defensive positions along the Bataan peninsula to hold out until more forces could be sent to augment them.

Duckworth kept busy as commanding medical officer of Bataan overseeing the steady stream of wounded men needing medical care.

The additional forces never came, and Bataan was overrun, forcing a surrender in April 1942.

Following the Bataan Death March, Duckworth found himself as the lead medical officer at Cabanatuan Camp.

He and the other captured U.S. doctors did their best to treat the wounded and sick prisoners, but they had limited means.

Thousands died over the ensuing years of imprisonment.

By January 1945, only 500 surviving POWs were left at Cabanatuan Camp.

But sweet freedom came unexpectedly on Jan. 30 when the Army 6th Rangers pulled off their daring raid and freed the men, bringing them back to the safety of U.S. lines.

Duckworth made it home but died six months later, on Nov. 11, 1945, of a heart attack. He was 54.

He lived long enough to enjoy the victory over the nation that had imprisoned him for three years.

The Ledo Road Opens

Another noteworthy event occurred on the last day of January when a 1,072-mile road from India to China opened as the Ledo Road, later named the Stilwell Road in honor of Gen. Joseph Stilwell.

Japanese forces had closed the former Burma Road in 1942 to prevent Allied supplies from reaching China to aid in their combat with Japan.

The new road, which had been under construction since December 1942, provided an essential linkage from British India to China for running supplies to the Nationalist Army in China as they continued their fight against the Japanese.

The advance toward mainland Japan continued as 1945 began.

Next time: February 1945.

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