



## THE CABANATUAN PRISON RAID: THE PHILIPPINES 1945

### *BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:*

ROTTMAN, Gordon L. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009, paperback, 64 pages, \$22.00, ISBN: 978-1-84603-399-5

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At 1400 hrs on the afternoon of 27 January 1945, months of preparation and training were put into motion when trucks filled with the scout elements of a large raiding party left Sixth Army Headquarters in the Philippines. As the trucks began their 80-mile trip, they set into motion what has become known as one of the best planned and executed raids in US Ranger history.

It is a remarkable story well worthy of being told, and the author, Gordon Rottman, does an exceptional job of it. In what is likely his best work for Osprey, Rottman details the raid on the Japanese Cabanatuan Prison to rescue more than 500 American, British and Dutch prisoners, all survivors of the Bataan Death March.

Statistically, the raid is impressive: 522 prisoners (including 1 Canadian) were liberated; 225 Japanese in the camp killed; a battalion (1,200 men) outside the camp decimated; 2 friendlies killed and 7 wounded, all in a period of less than twenty minutes. But that doesn't tell the whole story. Indeed, Rottman devotes two thirds of the book to meticulously describing the key elements of the plan. Like a good set of orders, he begins with an overview of the situation in the Philippines and follows it with descriptions of the enemy, the objective and even the terrain and weather. This he follows with chapters on the execution, analysis and conclusion.

Most notably, he discusses the personalities of each of the commanders, and in so doing, one gains a deeper understanding of the complexities of the raid—trust emerging as the key element. The extra detail is a good thing; for to fully understand the magnitude of the accomplishment, the reader needs to have an appreciation of the hurdles that had to be overcome.

As we see the raid unfold, it becomes clear the gamble that the commander, Lieutenant Colonel Mucci, takes when he relies on the “unknown” Filipino guerrilla force. Under the command of Captain (later promoted Major) Juan Pajota, who coordinated support, this force was responsible for the roadblock at the Cabu River bridge that totally destroyed the Japanese 359<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Battalion. Without the guerrilla's support it is unlikely that the raid would have been as successful or even succeeded at all.

Sidebar include a biography on LCol Henry A. Mucci, descriptions of Ranger weapons, an outline of the leadership of the raid, and a list of radios used. Also included are artwork, detailed maps and photographs taken by the Army photographers who were (if you can believe it) brought along to cover the raid. All add rich detail to an exciting story. Of particular interest is the centre panel showing a bird's-eye view of the prisoner camp with coloured pointers showing critical moments of the raid as it unfolds.

The true value of this book, however, comes in the description of the evolution of the plan. For the Canadian soldier studying tactics, there is much here that is recognizable. The structure of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion, for instance, is remarkably similar to the Canadian company structure, sharing many of the same elements and organizational layout. The leadership practiced by Mucci is an object lesson in applied leadership principles and flexibility in the face of a changing situation. The evolution of the plan and applied leadership principles make this a good case for the junior leader and junior officer to study.

There is an analysis section that summarizes key elements of the raid and a conclusion that ties everything up in a neat bow. For those interested in further, and more detailed, reading on the raid, there is a bibliography listing titles on the subject. Interestingly, for the movie buff, Rottman includes a paragraph of comments in his conclusion on Hollywood's 2005 take on the mission entitled *The Great Raid*, which is good stuff if you're going to watch the movie.

Overall, *The Cabanatuan Prison Raid* is well written and offers a detailed description of a complex raid and, as such, is highly recommended. 🍁

