

Periodizing the Japanese Occupation: Baguio City at the Eve of Liberation, 1944-1945

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ABSTRACT

According to the National Artist for Literature Resil B. Mojares, “The Japanese Occupation has been one of the most widely written-about periods of Philippine history....Yet, if one thinks of an organized, comprehensive body of scholarly knowledge about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, there is so much that we do not know...” This observation is particularly true in the writing of the civilian life during the Japanese Occupation, which is often left as “uneven, impressionistic and unintegrated.”¹

Following Mojares' observation, this paper argues that understanding the Japanese Occupation better necessitates the division of this history into turning-points indicative of its key phases. Crucial to this periodization is the year 1944 when Douglas MacArthur, along with Sergio Osmeña, has returned to the Philippines, signifying the liberation phase of the Japanese period. This paper emphasizes this turning-point by studying the local case of Baguio. What was the impact of these American campaigns in 1944 to the conditions experienced in Baguio?

This paper answers the question by presenting (1) the initial outbreak of the war, (2) the general condition of Baguio City from December 27, 1941 to September 21, 1944, (3) and the changes that the city experienced from October 20, 1944 until its liberation at April 27, 1945. Utilizing documents from the Philippine Archives Collection of the National Archives and Records Administration, the People's Court Trials, newspaper clippings of the *Tribune*, together with various eyewitness accounts written by Baguio's survivors, this paper intends to highlight the 1944 Leyte Landings as a vital turning-point in the period of the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. In doing, the paper periodizes the history of the Japanese Occupation in Baguio, providing for a systematic analysis for the civilian life in the city during the war.

KEYWORDS

Japanese occupation, policy of appeasement and coercion, turning-point, Baguio City, civilian life

INTRODUCTION

PERIODIZING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

The study of the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines is “one of the most widely written-about periods of Philippine history.” The bulk of these published accounts of the war are those of former soldiers and veterans who have written about their experiences by way of a memorializing imperative, “replete with data on the chronology of events and the names and rosters of the various military units involved,” making them useful sources in reconstructing local histories of towns and cities. However, the same cannot be said for civilian materials. Although there are materials that have been published already on civilian life, most of them have remained to be “uneven, impressionistic, and unintegrated,” providing “little systematic analysis of life in the occupied towns and cities.”²

One prime example would be Laurence W. Wilson’s *Baguio: The Main City of the Mountain Province, P.I.*,³ which was a compilation of more than 220 statements regarding the civilian experience of the war in Baguio and its surrounding vicinity. This copious material, though useful, cannot stand on its own if it were used to explain the

events that occurred in Baguio during the war. It does not provide for periodization of the war, and whenever it does, the accounts of the individuals cannot explain why such events occurred in their lifetime. It is at this juncture that the critical eye of the historian is needed—to sift through all the data to construct a coherent and contextualized narrative of the past. To do this, the historian must identify the turning-points in his history.

“Turning-points,” according to the French historian Fernand Braudel, are historical events which serve as markers for “a new phase” in the history of a society. Although there are numerous markers which a historian may consider to be turning-points, what often serves as the basis for its selection is its persistence, that is: “The more important the change, the more clearly significant its harbingers.”⁴ Hence, it is through this concept of “turning-points” that we are able to identify phases within a historical period—the Philippine Revolution (1896-1898); Philippine-American War (1899-1913); American Occupation (1901-1935); and the Philippine Commonwealth (1935-1941) are some of these examples.

This identification of turning-points also applies to that period of the Japanese Occupation. However, most turning-points highlighted for this period have been the military events which took place at the early years of the war (bombing of Baguio and Davao on December 8, 1941; the fall of Bataan on April 9, and of Corregidor on May 6, 1941; the infamous Bataan Death March which occurred throughout April 1941),⁵ or the political events that led to the foundation of the Second Philippine Republic (the

declaration of Philippine Independence under the Laurel Government on October 14, 1943),⁶ while conveniently ending this period with Yamashita's signing of the surrender documents at the former High Commissioner's Home in Baguio on September 3, 1945.⁷ What is omitted from this periodization are the turning-points in between the beginning and the end of the Occupation—what were the phases of life in between?

This paper posits that the year of 1944, highlighted by the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur and President Sergio Osmeña at Red Beach, Leyte on October 20, should be considered as one of these national turning-points in Philippine History for this event inaugurated the beginning for the battle of liberation for the Philippine Islands from 1944 to 1945. To emphasize how this landing signified a national phase for the Japanese Occupation period, this paper presents the case of Baguio, analyzing how the events of 1944 affected its character and landscape.

Using primary sources from the digitized Philippine Archives Collection of the National Archives and Records Administration,⁸ proceedings of the People's Court Trials, newspaper clippings of the *Tribune*, together with various eyewitness accounts written by Baguio's survivors, the proceeding section of this paper describes the city's condition under three phases. The first is the outbreak of the Japanese Occupation on December 8, 1941; second is Baguio under Japanese rule from December 26, 1941 to September 21, 1944; and third is the liberation phase of Baguio from October 20, 1944 to April 27, 1945. In concluding this paper, both conditions of Baguio of 1942-

44 and 1944-45 are compared, presenting how the city's experience changed from a relative calm to its destruction under American liberation.

THE BOMBING OF CAMP JOHN HAY: OUTBREAK OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION, DECEMBER 8-26, 1941

The city of Baguio is located at the southern part of Benguet and serves as the capital of the said province. It has an area of 49 square kilometers and has an elevation of 4,500 to 5,500 feet above sea level. As for its surrounding mountain regions, most of it is found to possess higher elevations of 8,000 feet above sea level.⁹ Due to its high altitude, Baguio experiences a cool atmosphere throughout the year, registering a mean temperature of 17.9 degrees Celsius for 1903-1918.¹⁰ In addition, the city is also home to a natural spring, and is close to La Trinidad, which with its successful agricultural experiments, could serve as the vegetable basket for the city's growing population.¹¹ Hence, with the advantage of a cool climate,¹² a water source, and a nearby food source, Baguio was considered as a possible site for the establishment of "a sanitarium and as an advisable site for the military and political capital of these islands (the Philippines)."¹³

After discovering Baguio in 1900, the Americans immediately planned and built the future city, "if not solely, for the comfort and enjoyment of Americans."¹⁴ Evidence of this American character of Baguio are the various colonial institutions built in the first decade of American rule, which at first primarily catered to the Occidental

population—the Benguet Sanitarium (1902),¹⁵ Camp John Hay (1903),¹⁶ the Governor General’s Residence (1908),¹⁷ a Teachers’ Camp (1908),¹⁸ and a Government Center as summer housing for the American government’s executive department (1910).¹⁹

Most of these colonial institutions continued under the new Philippine Commonwealth Government of 1935, albeit under varying capacities. The Benguet Sanitarium dropped all pretensions of serving as a site to the convalescent and became the Pines Hotel, “the meeting place of Baguio’s elite.”²⁰ The Governor General’s Residence, on the other hand, stayed in the hands of the Philippine government but was converted into temporary residence of the United States High Commissioner until the completion of his summer residence in 1940.²¹ As for the Government Center, it no longer served just as a summer housing for the colonial government; instead, it was used as a part of the City’s government offices.²² In addition, one of its buildings housed the Northern Luzon Junior College branch of the University of the Philippines which was transferred from Vigan to Baguio on June 9, 1938.²³

However, Baguio’s role as an important military outpost did not change. Rather, the military presence in the city could be said to have intensified, as seen in the creation of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). The PMA was created from the reorganization of the old Philippine Constabulary Academy into a curriculum modeled after the United States’ West Point. The aim of the PMA was to provide the Commonwealth’s citizen army with a corps

of regular officers. First opened at Camp Henry T. Allen, the Academy soon had to be expanded to fit the Military's needs prompting the Academy's transfer to Teacher's Camp in May 1936.²⁴ In addition to the regular officers of PMA, another school for reserved officers was established at Camp Henry T. Allen—the Reserved Officers Service School. Under this Service School, selected college graduates and young professionals became officer candidates provided they complete basic military training.²⁵ Even the nearby town of La Trinidad was incorporated into this military training system by hosting Camp Holmes to serve as a training school for infantry cadres at the 1st Military District.²⁶

Camp John Hay also continued to serve the government as an army post. However, rather than being a convalescent facility, the camp became more of a rest and recreation center under the Commonwealth government.²⁷ Among the Camp's frequent guests were the American officers of Clark Field who would usually spend long weekend leaves at the Officers' Mess, and the officers and pilots of Fort Stotsenburg who would also come to John Hay during their leaves. However, a warning was issued by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson that Japan might take "hostile action" at any moment, thus most officers and pilots would be restricted to base after November 27, 1941.²⁸

This warning of Stimson did coincide with Japan's actual plans for the Philippines. According to Japanese Army's plans found in the "Proposed Measures Dealing with the Philippine Islands in the Event of War with the

United States” which was prepared in March 1941, the Philippines was to be attacked with the “paramount aim to destroy American military bases in the Philippines.”²⁹ Furthermore, Japanese intelligence suspected that Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who was placed in charge of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), was vacationing at John Hay.³⁰ Thus, with the intent of having their first bombs fall on him, the Japanese launched their attack on Baguio on December 8, 1941, 7:25 am. Though they missed MacArthur, John Hay was nevertheless bombed that day.³¹

The reality that Baguio was bombed by Japan, however, came much later into the minds of the City’s inhabitants. So confident were most individuals that Japan would not attack the Philippines that when it happened, government officials at Baguio at that time were caught by surprise. After the bombing of John Hay, Commandant of the Camp Col. John P. Horan was caught by Baguio resident James J. Halsema as “standing in front of his headquarters, dazedly pointing to his shrapnel-riddled car.”³² Pres. Manuel L. Quezon himself showed no concern despite hearing explosions while having breakfast that morning.³³ Hearing explosions within Baguio was common then since similar explosions were heard from a nearby limestone quarry. However, his Chief of Staff Jose B. Vargas called him that morning, bearing the news that those explosions were indeed the beginning of hostilities in the Philippines. Quezon, upon hearing the news, gave colorful expletives over the line—so colorful that Vargas refused to give an exact rendering “in any language” even after the war.³⁴

Even ordinary citizens of Baguio did not realize that the planes they saw and the subsequent explosions they heard were the beginning of the war. Fern Harrington Miles, a 25-year-old American Baptist missionary who fled China to continue her Chinese studies in Baguio, was already attending her morning Chinese classes when she heard the explosions at John Hay. Much like Quezon, she did not pay attention to it, but her “Chinese teacher turned pale and froze” instead.³⁵ Ethel Thomas Herold, an American teacher who resided in Baguio since 1927, similarly paid no attention to the explosion at John Hay. After seeing several planes fly overhead, she just assumed that those were American bombers and that the explosion at the Camp were cannon salutes to the pilots. It had to take her hearing the morning radio report to realize that those were Japanese planes, and that war had come to Baguio.³⁶

After the initial shock had settled, the Baguio population, which was multi-ethnic in character, responded according to their political situation regarding the ongoing crisis: the American population of Baguio, lacking any official orders from the U.S. government, decided to seek refuge in their old domains such as the Brent School, the Baguio Country Club, the Pines Hotel, and the Seventh Day Adventist Mission compound.³⁷ As for the Filipino population, most of them decided to leave the city for their hometown at the lowlands,³⁸ or to flee to the hills.³⁹ A similar instance occurred with the City’s Chinese population, who fearing a repeat of Nanjing, fled to the hills.⁴⁰

The Japanese civilians then residing in Baguio, on the other hand, were interned in the same damaged barracks of

Camp John Hay which the Japanese air force bombed on December 8. This was done despite the continued threat of Japanese bombing, which did occur in two separate occasions of December 11 and 21.⁴¹ This had repercussions for the American population of Baguio later when on the 29th, after the Japanese Imperial Army's ascent to Baguio, they were interned in the same bombed-out shelter under the same vulnerable and unsanitary conditions.⁴² The Camp by this time was under Japanese control, with American troops leaving on December 24, 1941 under USAFFE orders to "Save your command. Take to Mt. Trails."⁴³

In summary, Baguio during the early phase of the occupation was a deserted city, left to the remaining American nationals, the interned Japanese civilians, and a few Filipinos and Chinese who had not yet fled for their hometown or the hills. Most of the city streets were "lined with broken-down vehicles, and any convenient open space became the depository of looted and wrecked cars."⁴⁴ Stores were boarded up, and the few left open were emptied by the remaining nationals.⁴⁵ This was the Baguio that the Japanese came to occupy upon their ascent on December 27, 1941.

APPEASEMENT PHASE: DECEMBER 27, 1941–SEPTEMBER 21, 1944

On the 26th of December, the remaining American citizens of Baguio overheard the declaration of Manila as an open city over the radio. This declaration brought hope to the remaining residents of Baguio, thinking that a Japanese Occupation would simply mean the taking over of policing

powers by the Japanese, with life resuming as usual. That same afternoon, leaflets were dropped by Japanese planes stating that unless Baguio surrendered, it would again be bombed.⁴⁶ To avoid this, a group of Baguio citizens led by Mayor Nicasio Valderrosa, Vice Mayor Emil Speth, Chief of Police Joseph Keith, retired Col. Pedro Dulay, and president of the *Nihonjin-kai* (Baguio Japanese Association) Toyohai Hayakawa decided to meet the incoming Japanese forces at Naguilian on December 27 to inform them of Baguio's declaration as an open city.⁴⁷

This pronouncement was accepted by the Japanese Imperial Army and upon arrival at Baguio, they gathered remaining Filipino civilians to the Baguio City Hall to witness the lowering of the Philippine and American Flag. In its place, the Rising Sun emblem was hoisted after which, an impromptu speech was delivered by Toyohai Hayakawa urging the small crowd that the Japanese were friends of the Filipino, and for them to return to their homes.⁴⁸ Later that day, Lt. Col. Kanmori of the 9th Infantry of the Japanese Army arrived with the bulk of the invading army. It was under his instructions that Valderrosa, together with other incumbent city officials including American Vice Mayor Speth, was asked to remain in service under the Japanese Military Administration.⁴⁹

The reappointment of incumbent Filipino officials such as Valderrosa was a tactic done by the Army following the Japanese Command's March 1941 strategy in invading the Philippines. According to the Army's "Proposed Measures Dealing with the Philippine Islands..." the

Japanese operation in the Philippines was to be guided by the following “Directions:”

1. The Philippine operation...is *mainly for the purpose of destroying American strongholds*. The extraction of Philippine natural resources should not be looked upon as urgent.
2. In accommodating the operation itself and the extraction of resources, *steps should be taken to avoid placing the Philippine government in the enemy camp*. Even if the government does side with the enemy, however, no other pacification operations should be carried out in the Philippines besides eliminating resistance specifically for the purpose of destroying American bases of operation. While in such cases we should take measures for gradual disintegration of the government through intrigue and other such means.
3. In any and all cases, *our military forces are not to become involved in the direct governance of the country*, except for the purpose of attaining our military mission or providing assistance to the Philippine government for the establishment of a new domestic economy.⁵⁰

Although this policy will be changed in November 1941 with Japan's adoption of “The Proposed Plan for an Early Termination of the War against the United States, Great Britain, and Netherlands,”⁵¹ we can still see the influence of this earlier March 1941 proposal in the invasion of the Philippines. As seen from the March 1941 directions, Japan's primary objective was to destroy

the American strongholds in the Philippines. This, the Japanese did with the bombing of Camp John Hay and other military installation during the first day of invasion.

Just as the first direction of neutralizing American bases in the Philippines was observed, the second direction ordering the Army to not intern Filipinos in the conduct of the war can also be seen in how the Japanese tried to appease both the local population and the ruling officials of the Philippines during the early occupation years. Recognizing the strong Western leaning of the Philippines, the Japanese Command saw that harsh policies against the Filipino people would not create the desired response of cooperation from them. Hence, it was in their interest to attract the Filipinos instead through pronouncements of friendship. The same appeasement policy was applied in their dealings with the country's officials. It was hoped that by allowing the current Filipino administration to continue its governance, they could contribute "to accelerating the termination of the war." Furthermore, the responsibility of economic administration over the Philippines could also be left to these Filipino officials, freeing the Japanese exert their control indirectly while focusing on the termination of the war.⁵²

This policy of appeasement appeared to have been implemented in Baguio during the first two and a half years of Japan's occupation in the mountain resort, as seen in the retention of most Commonwealth officials, and in the Japanese army's early pronouncements of friendship through liaison personnel such as Hayakawa. In addition,

the Japanese actively encouraged the Filipinos who left for the mountains to return to the city and to go back to their work and other activities. Such policies were effective in attracting some Filipinos back, such as Ernesto M. Santiago who upon Japanese advice, returned to Baguio on January 4, 1942.⁵³ Another individual who initially left for the surrounding hillside was Casiano Rivera, an employee of the Benguet Auto Line. Similar to Santiago, he returned to Baguio on January 9, 1942 upon the advice of Japanese authorities that “it was better (for us) to stay in the City.”⁵⁴ The same policy of appeasement was applied also in Japanese sentries. Although accounts of slapping abounded, there were accounts of appeasement also as narrated by an anonymous Baguio citizen. From his testimony, he described his encounter with one Japanese soldier: “The first Jap asked me if there were (any) Americans. I said ‘Yes in the concentration camp.’ He said: ‘If you know of any Americans let me know. I said: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘We are friends.’”⁵⁵

As a result of this policy, people who evacuated to the lowlands and to the nearby mountain areas of Baguio began to return slowly to the city. Elementary schools were reopened on May 4, 1942,⁵⁶ and by May 19 the *Tribune* reported that conditions in Baguio were “fast normalizing with the opening of almost all of the city’s business establishments and recreation centers.” In addition, the same report, in comparing the city to most towns of Luzon, noted how the conditions in Baguio appeared to be better, noting abundance in food, and the absence of bombed ruins.⁵⁷

Though the *Tribune* by 1942 was considered to be a propaganda tool for the Japanese Military,⁵⁸ local accounts did prove that by this time people were returning to Baguio. The Lopezes, for instance, left Baguio during the initial outbreak of the war for Negros, but returned to the city before the end of 1942.⁵⁹ With people slowly returning, an observation by an anonymous Baguio citizen at that time noted how “the citizens of the City of Baguio became better day by day, so the people returned to their regular work and ordinary occupation.”⁶⁰

Aside from attracting the Filipino population back to Baguio, the Japanese also implemented the same appeasement policies towards the Chinese who fled for the surrounding hills. In an attempt to convince them to return to the city, the Japanese military in Baguio brought with them “several leading Chinese” as they went to Baguio’s surrounding hills. According to the statement of an anonymous Chinese girl:

Japs brought several leading Chinese from the Internment Camp to our place, suggesting that we come in. They said that the Japs were treating them fairly well. The Japs, some of whom we formerly knew as Baguio residents, told us that if we came in, all the Chinese would then be registered and set free. *If we did not, they would come after us with force.*⁶¹

From these various accounts, it is clear that the Japanese launched various attraction policies in order to bring civilians back to Baguio. However, as noted from the Chinese girl’s statement, this policy of appeasement

did not come without the threat of coercion. Perhaps this threat was made most evident on October 6, 1942 with the Japanese Military's execution of 5 suspected guerrillas in the City Market without trial.⁶² The execution was done in front of gathered Baguio citizens in an attempt to dissuade them from supporting the movement. After the execution, then 11-year-old Simeon Dicang mentioned how the Military threatened that "for every Japanese soldier that will die in the city, 50 civilians will be killed in Baguio."⁶³

In Dicang's estimate, the warning was effective since, after the execution, guerrilla attacks no longer occurred in Baguio.⁶⁴ However, this did not mean that covert activities ended. In fact, this "peace through fear"⁶⁵ tactic backfired and resulted to the rousing of civilian anger towards the Japanese military in Baguio. This was evident in the testimony of older citizens who witnessed the execution such as Ernesto Santiago, who stated: "Then, from that moment, I came to conclude that they (the Japanese) came here in (sic) the Philippines for destructions (sic), that was, *the Japs came to kill and to be killed because life to them is nothing*."⁶⁶ This anger towards the Japanese led to civilian support of covert guerrilla activities in the city. One such example was Col. Manuel P. Enriquez's Nacoco Intelligence Unit.

Col. Enriquez was the former Commanding Officer of the 14th Infantry Regiment of the USAFIP-NL. Under his command, the regiment launched intermittent attacks on the Japanese forces at Nueva Vizcaya and Pangasinan until his surrender on April 13, 1943. In order to attract other guerrillas to surrender, the Japanese Military

immediately released Enriquez in Baguio as an example of their gesture towards surrendering guerrillas. However, by May 1, 1943, Enriquez continued his contribution to the movement, with the help of Capt. Jose Alvarez, by opening a branch of the National Coconut Corporation (Nacoco) in Baguio. This Nacoco store was used by Enriquez as a front to “collect money, food, clothing and medicine” to help support the remaining guerrillas in Northern Luzon, and as an intelligence center for the guerrilla movement at Northern Luzon.⁶⁷

Throughout its span of operations, the Nacoco Intelligence Unit was able to contribute to the needs of the guerrillas through the patronage of the civilians of Baguio who “knew somehow” that the proceeds of their purchases “were for the benefit of those in the field.” Furthermore, the intelligence reports gathered by Enriquez’s unit was able to reach as far as Brig. Gen. Macario Peralta’s unit in Panay and Negros, indicating its vast communication network.⁶⁸ However, by August 30, 1944, the Nacoco Intelligence Unit ceased its operations due to the infiltration of the Filipino double agent Franco Vera Reyes.

Franco Vera Reyes was a notorious pre-war swindler, evidenced by his various estafa cases which saw print in the foremost morning daily paper of Manila, the *Tribune*.⁶⁹ When the war broke-out, he was employed by Colonel Akira Nagahama, Kempei commander-in-chief, to infiltrate Manila’s underground resistance network. Using the alias “Lieutenant-Colonel Reyes,” he claimed to have been sent via submarine by General MacArthur to coordinate all guerrilla activities in the Philippines. Through this

deception, Franco Vera Reyes acquired guerrilla rosters of groups such as Anderson's guerrillas in Tayabas Province.⁷⁰

Using the same method, albeit under the alias of Capt. Bill Arthur, he successfully enlisted his service under Enriquez's Guerrillas, gaining the secrets of the unit. Fearing that the whole organization might be identified, Enriquez, along with Capt. Jose Alvarez, Capt. Antonio Garcia, Lt. Col. Nestor Reinoso, and Capt. Vicente Gepte, surrendered to the Laurel government on January 21, 1944, hoping to apply for its Amnesty program. However, according to assemblyman Ramon Mitra, later wartime mayor of Baguio, the amnesty proposal for the city had already expired on January 2, 1944.⁷¹ Thus by August 30, 1944, Enriquez and his men were executed at Fort McKinley.⁷²

The death of the Enriquez guerrillas was a portent of the events to come. Despite of the relative calm that the civilians experienced in Baguio during 1942-43, living conditions worsened. By the middle of 1942, people were being laid off already from their work. Ernesto Santiago, for instance, was laid off in July 1942. In order to sustain his family, he opened a small business.⁷³ Such businesses often focused on retail or rental of stalls.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the inflation of the Japanese Money increased the prices of commodity so much so that even the *Tribune* reported on this increased cost of living in the city on August 25, 1943.⁷⁵ This condition was exacerbated by the continued rise of unemployment throughout Northern Luzon, resulting to the prevalence of bartering in Baguio's black market.⁷⁶

By 1944, American forces began their initial attack on the Philippines with the bombing of Manila on September 21. Fearing that Manila was to become a battleground, many of the wealthy families who owned Baguio properties fled to the city—the Tuasons, Ferias, Guevarras, Moreno, and Arenas, just to name a few.⁷⁷ What they failed to foresee was that Baguio shall suffer the same fate in 1945.

COERCION PHASE: OCTOBER 20, 1944 – APRIL 27, 1945

The year 1944 signified an important turning-point in the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. In 1942–43 when guerrilla forces were laying low, the middle of 1944 saw an increase in their attacks against Bureau of Constabulary garrisons and Japanese controlled outposts in Northern Luzon.⁷⁸ It was also in 1944, on September 21, that American bombing in Manila began. Finally, the conflict in the Philippines reached its apex on October 20, with the arrival of Douglas MacArthur, and Japan's subsequent defeat at the Battle of Leyte on October 24–26.⁷⁹

Both the Japanese and American forces saw the significance of Leyte in the overall battle for the Philippines. For the Americans, the acquisition of Leyte would provide them with an airbase from which they can wrest air control from the Japanese, and it would help them divide the Japanese forces into two—in Luzon and in the islands of Visayas and Mindanao.⁸⁰ For the Japanese, they saw Leyte as a possible launching pad for the Americans to invade

Luzon, thus the need to defend it.⁸¹ Unfortunately for them, the Americans were successful in the battle of Leyte, leaving Luzon vulnerable.

Thus, on December 25, 1944, Yamashita halted the sending of troops to Leyte and began to shift his focus back to the defense of Luzon to delay the American invasion of Japan. To do this, Yamashita divided his forces into three—the Shimbu Group to be stationed in Southern Luzon; the Kembu Group covering Clark Field, Bataan, and Corregidor; and the Shobu Group which shall retreat and defend mountains of Northern Luzon, using Baguio as his headquarters on January 4.⁸² This decision of Yamashita had two consequences for Baguio: (1) It increased Japanese presence in the city leading to worsened food and housing conditions, and (2) It made Baguio a prime target in the battle for the Philippines' liberation.

In 1943, the 14th Infantry's fragmentary reports noted that the total number of Japanese troops present in Baguio was 2058.⁸³ By January 1, 1945, the USAFIP-NL report showed that this increased to 11,276.⁸⁴ This increase in the city's population due to both Filipino evacuees and Japanese troops strained the city's already stretched resources. Unfortunately, the Japanese Military's priority in invading Southeast Asia always had been to improve the "self-sufficiency of the Occupation forces" at the expense of "burdening the livelihood of citizens."⁸⁵ This policy guided Japan's March 1941 "Direction" in the Philippines which emphasized indirect administration, "except for the purpose of attaining our military mission."⁸⁶

As a result, with Japan at the cusp of defeat, this indirect administration had given way to a more coercive rule by the Army. Baguio citizens thus were subjected to various harsh policies and conditions in 1944 such as zoning, forced labor, and confiscation of resources in order to support the Army.⁸⁷ The Dominican Juan Labrador, one of Manila's evacuees, recounted in his diary such events in 1944:

Every day we hear firings of guns of all calibers, but never have we experienced anything like the one of last night. Because of this, the police searched all houses. Some families were given four days to leave the city, others were given a month. The Army did this on the pretext that the city was overpopulated and the shortage of food has become alarming. ... the military authorities are...posing as bandits rather than sentries at all entries and thoroughfares leading to Baguio.⁸⁸

Hence, from once attempting to gain the Filipino's trust during the early years of the war, the Japanese policy has swung towards coercion during the latter years. Under imminent threat of invasion, the Army directly imposed its will upon the population.

Ironically, people who were forced to leave the city in 1944 were saved from later American bombings which began on January 6, 1945. For three straight months, Baguio was subjected to American bombings, killing both friends and foes alike. This prompted others to leave the city amidst air raids in February.⁸⁹ While some decided to

stay in the confines of their air raid shelters, others sought safety in public shelters which they thought the Americans would not bomb such as the Baguio Cathedral.⁹⁰

In spite of the ongoing bombings, the situation in Baguio was still worsening during 1945. President Jose P. Laurel who stayed in Baguio from December 22 to March 22, 1945, narrated how conditions in the city during the months of February to March was: “Food became very acute; people were sick; epidemics of dysentery, etc. broke out; the Japanese Army *Kempeitai* began to make more arrests; *the situation seemed hopeless*.”⁹¹ Beyond arrests, most of the atrocities which the Japanese committed occurred during this period. Some of these were the torture and massacre of American internees at Camp Holmes from October 9–December 28, 1944;⁹² “the brutal mistreatment and killing” of 83 men, women, and children on April 18, 1945;⁹³ the murder of 39 Chinese civilians by the Japanese Army on May 1, 1945;⁹⁴ and, the deliberate and wanton destruction, burning, and looting of private and public property in the city during February and March 1945.⁹⁵

However, according to the estimate of most Baguio civilians, it was actually the American bombings that killed Baguio. Most of the damage done to Baguio was attributed to the March 15 carpet bombing, designed supposedly to flush out its Japanese garrison. Although the guerrilla reports did mention a large presence of Japanese troops in Baguio by January 9, these troops did not stay in the city for long. Aware of the impending American attacks and the eventual bombing of the city, most fled towards the safety of Bayombong on January 8 to get a better food supply

from Cagayan.⁹⁶ As for the other troops, they established blockades along the Naguilian, Aringay-Galiano-Asin Railway Route, and Kennon road in an effort to delay the American arrival.⁹⁷

These troop movements have led to an observation by an anonymous Baguio resident that “the Japs had practically evacuated and there were few Japs in Baguio at that time” by March 1945.⁹⁸ Oscar Lopez, a Baguio evacuee, therefore criticized the intelligence report that led to the destruction of Baguio: “I consider it a serious flaw in the U.S. Army intelligence that when the Americans started bombing the City, nobody told them—not even the guerrillas—that Yamashita was no longer in Baguio or that the City proper was not heavily defended.”⁹⁹

Needless to say, much of old Baguio did not survive the war. The entire central business and residence section of Baguio was bombed and burned, while a section of Notre Dame Hospital was destroyed similarly, killing many of the American old-timers who was confined in the hospital (e.g., Mayor Eusebio James Halsema). The St. Louis School adjoining the Baguio Cathedral was turned into shambles,¹⁰⁰ and government buildings such as the Mansion house were destroyed.¹⁰¹ By the time the 37th Infantry Division of the US Army and the 66th Infantry Regiment of the USAFIP-NL had reached Baguio on April 27, the city was a “charred hillside bereft of green or brown.”¹⁰²

Justice George Malcolm, author of the Baguio city charter, visited the city after the war. What he found was

a city “tragically defaced. The numerous bombings had left ninety percent of the buildings in ruins.” However, Malcolm closed on a positive note: Baguio’s “God-given glories...could not be destroyed, and the city slowly rose from its ashes to revive its damaged splendor.”¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the history of Baguio during the Japanese Occupation by periodizing the bulk of published and unpublished accounts according to the city’s significant turning-points. From this periodization, the author has been able to identify 3 key phases in the city’s world war past: (1) the initial outbreak of the war; (2) a period of Japanese appeasement (1942–44); and (3) a period of Japanese coercion (1944–45). Through this periodization, we have been able to present how the Occupation years was not just a homogenous period but was instead a period similar to other events in Philippine history that has had its own ebbs and flows.

Furthermore, this paper has been able to provide an integrated and systematic analysis of civilian life in Baguio during the war. Contrary to the popular interpretation of the war years as being an entirely grim period, primary accounts pointed to the early years as being a brief period of respite for the civilians, particularly during the time when the Japanese still were attempting to win their trust through appeasement. However, peace in wartime could be achieved only through a “position of strength”¹⁰⁴ and as the various campaigns of 1944 had exposed Japanese

vulnerability, as emphasized with the loss of Leyte, appeasement was disregarded soon in favor of coercion from 1944–45.

Finally, the hardship of the Baguio population during this period of coercion between 1944–45 was not only of Japan's doing. As seen, the American bombings equally were to blame for the destruction of Baguio, leveling most of the city to ashes, killing both enemy and foe alike. Nevertheless, Baguio's recovery slowly pushed through; and by 1948, two and a half years after Yamashita signed his surrender on September 3, 1945, Baguio reopened, symbolized through the reopening of Baguio's major thoroughfare, the Kennon Road on February 6, 1948.¹⁰⁵

NOTES

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- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Laurence L. Wilson, *Baguio: The Main City of the Mountain Province, P. I. during the Japanese Occupation* (N.p.: n.p., 1946).
- 4 Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, trans. by Richard Mayne (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 26.
- 5 Mojares, 357.
- 6 Department of Education, *K to 12 Araling Panlipunan Gabay Pangkurikulum* (May 2016), 131. <http://lrmds.deped.gov.ph/>.

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- 8 These have been digitized by Philippine Veterans Affairs Office, under the supervision of Ms. Marie Silva Vallejo. They are available at <http://collections.pvao.mil.ph/>.
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- 10 Rev. Jose Coronas, S.J., *The Climate and Weather of the Philippines, 1903-1918* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1920), 55.
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- 23 The Northern Luzon Junior College Branch of the University of the Philippines was first established at Vigan. Under Commonwealth Act of 296, was transferred to Baguio City. OUSHC, *Third Annual Report of the United States High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 44.
- 24 Ricardo T. Jose, *The Philippine Army 1935-1942* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), 60–62.
- 25 Ibid., 59. This was also called the General Service School. “Service School,” *The Tribune*, June 19, 1936.
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- 47 Luga, 164.
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resident Narciso Padilla, interview by author, Luisita's Café, Session Road, Baguio City, June 28, 2016.

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