

Triumph and Tragedy: The Liberation of Laguna in 1945

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What happened in the Philippines during the liberation of 1945 was a triumph but it was also tragedy in the sense that so many Filipinos died, especially in Laguna. Laguna was one of the hardest hit provinces in the Philippines during World War II. Those who gave up their lives were not only soldiers but also civilians. There were many counts of casualties and wanton acts of destruction some of which were unreported, unknown or forgotten due to the painful memories they evoked.

The liberation of the municipality of Sta. Cruz is commemorated on March 5. This date does not pertain to

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the liberation of the whole province of Laguna but only to the town of Sta. Cruz.

How was Laguna during WW II? Nothing much was known because what has been written about the war was too Manila-oriented, Manila based, or Manila-centric, so to speak.

There is a need to describe Laguna before World War II. Of course, Laguna de Bai was very significant. It was one of the big bodies of water near Manila which made it very important economically. It was also the transport route of waterborne vessels. The province can be divided into different parts. Apart from the water or lake area, there is western Laguna which is primarily agricultural. Similarly, southern Laguna is agricultural land planted to rice and coconut but is also partly mountainous. Eastern Laguna includes Paete and other towns in the east side. The terrain here is more hilly. Laguna's main crops in the past were rice and coconuts. Because of the agricultural base, there were agrarian-related problems. Land ownership was in the hands of a few, and the lives of the peasants were very difficult. The main problem stemmed from the inequitable sharing of harvest between the tenant farmers and landowners. Millenarian or social movements emerged. They culminated in the Sakdal uprising of 1935. The Sakdal movement was triggered by agrarian injustice. It was composed largely of farmers who realized the futility of dealing with the government and politicians. The government system failed them. They rebelled which they did in May of 1935. The center of the Sakdal uprising was

Cabuyao and adjacent towns. It turned very bloody. Though they initially seized control of some of the town centers, the Sakdalistas faced a mighty force. The police and the Constabulary were dispatched to quell the rebellion. Many Sakdalistas were killed and the uprising ended tragically. But the root cause of the problem was not addressed.

Another important development in Laguna before the war was the huge Philippine Commonwealth project in Lake Caliraya. Lake Caliraya was planned as an artificial lake to provide electricity to Manila. At around 1939, it was already predicted that Manila would require more electrical power than was being generated. President Manuel Quezon thought of building Lake Caliraya to serve as a secondary source of power.

At that time, there were signs already that a war might break out. Japan had invaded parts of China without formally declaring war. Many Chinese refugees came to the Philippines. Then in September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and declared war against France and Britain. Nazi Germany began arresting and exterminating Jews. These occurrences resounded in the Philippines since Filipinos were well aware of European events. President Quezon offered sanctuary to Jewish refugees in the Philippines.

A major plan of the Philippine Commonwealth was national defense. The first act passed by the transition government was Commonwealth Act No. 1, the National Defense Act, which is still a functioning act. The act created the Philippine Army and brought about mass

training for its reserves who came from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) trainees in universities and colleges. The ROTC program which continued after the war officially started during the Commonwealth era. It became mandatory for all male college students to undergo military training at least one day a week. Filipino males turning 21-years-old were subjected to five-and-a-half months' training after which they became part of the Philippine Army's Reserve Force. This mass training is no longer practiced. The ROTC cadets and reserves before the war could be mobilized in times of disasters. During elections, they helped in maintaining order. These military trainees were ready to serve the country when they were needed. The reserves were mobilized in 1941 as part of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFPE).

By the middle of 1941, Japan and the United States could no longer resolve issues related to China. Japan was fighting an undeclared war against China and the US sought all means to stop Japan's aggression and to maintain the open door policy in China. To cut off support for China, Japan marched off to what is now Vietnam (French Indochina at that time) which was geographically close to the Philippines. Japan's advance into southern French Indochina threatened the security of the Philippines, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the USAFFE in July 1941. The Philippine Army reserves were called to active duty as part of USAFFE. Laguna belonged to the 4th Military District which covered the southern Tagalog region, including Cavite and Batangas. In Laguna, a major training camp was established in Canlubang for

the 41st Field Artillery Regiment. This regiment was part of the 41st Division under General Vicente Lim. This division became most famous in Bataan when it held its ground in the Abucay Line. Gen. Lim, who later became a guerrilla but was captured and executed by the Japanese, is commemorated in our ₱1,000 bill today, as one of three Filipino martyrs of World War II.

Who was General Vicente Lim? He was the first Filipino graduate from the US Military Academy at West Point. Born in Calamba, he became a professional military officer. In 1941, he was a top officer in the Philippine Army. However, before the USAFFE could be fully trained and mobilized, the war started.

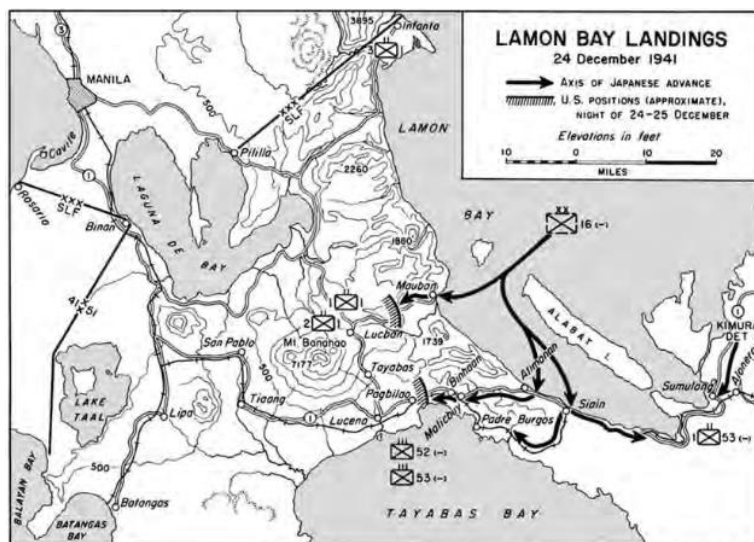
World War II in the Philippines started without warning in December 1941. Laguna was in turmoil. Manila was bombed right after the Japanese attacked Clark Field. Other areas outside of Manila were bombed soon after. In Laguna, one place that was bombed was Los Baños, particularly the train station. San Pablo was bombed subsequently. Laguna experienced the war firsthand right away. It resulted in the evacuation of many civilians in Santa Cruz, Los Baños, and San Pablo to the safer and nearby towns and provinces. Others sought refuge in forests and mountains, outside the towns, trying to escape the war. The word “bakwit” originated from World War II. The original word was “evacuate”—which was Tagalized into “bakwit.” The word is still used today. During the siege of Marawi in 2017, many people “nag-bakwit” (evacuated). This word is one of the legacies of the war.

Insignia of the 41st Division

General Vicente Lim

This is the insignia of the 41st Division, indicated in the map of Bataan. Here is a picture of General Vicente Lim who died during the war. To show you how important Laguna was at that time, note that to the south was the province of Batangas. Batangas was considered a potential landing spot for the Japanese. The men of Gen. Lim's 41st Division were ready to defend the beaches where the Japanese might land. Another probable landing area was on the east side of Laguna, in Mauban or Atimonan in Quezon Province. The Japanese landed on the beach at Mauban on Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day, they took Mauban and began trekking the mountains. Laguna was directly affected because the first town the Japanese captured after crossing the mountains was Luisiana. From Luisiana, the Japanese forces went directly to the lakeside area. Laguna was at the center of the initial fighting operations and before the USAFFE troops were ordered to Bataan.

The Japanese did many things that changed the Filipino way of life. They established garrisons in the towns, even in



Japanese landings in Mauban, Quezon Province



This is a picture of San Pablo just after the bombing in 1941. Much of the town's center was destroyed. The war was not just in Manila, or in Bataan, it was also in Laguna.

Sta. Cruz, the provincial capital. There were garrisons in Los Baños, Calamba, and other places supposedly to maintain peace and order. Within each garrison was a *Kempeitai* detachment. These were the military police. The *Kempeitai* were much feared. They wore civilian clothes; sometimes, they were in uniform. They could arrest anybody. Their routine was to arrest suspects at around two or three o'clock in the morning when people were still asleep. They would barge into houses, arrest people, and bring them to the *Kempeitai* headquarters. These Filipinos were suspected to be anti-Japanese or pro-guerrilla. Their policy was that one was guilty until proven innocent. They were after a confession that one was pro-American, a guerrilla, or anti-Japanese. To get a confession, the *Kempeitai* used physical torture which was extremely painful. The suspects were tied and beaten with a 2x2 piece of wood. Others were subjected to water torture. A hose would be placed in the suspect's mouth and the water would be turned on. When the suspect was bloated, the *Kempeitai* would jump on the suspect's belly to force the water out. It was like drowning on dry ground. Many people could not endure this agonizing punishment and died. Most of the police stations in Laguna were former *Kempeitai* jails where too much suffering and death happened. That was a part of the tragedy of the war.

Among the Japanese policies was the censorship of all forms of mass media. Publishing companies and radio stations ceased operations. Radio sets were confiscated. In short, all form of mass media was controlled, curtailing the freedom of speech. Nobody dared say anything against

the Japanese. Any pro-American statement could land one in jail. All were careful of what they were saying. Before the war, the Philippines was one the freest countries in the world. The press was free; the people enjoyed freedom of speech. The Japanese took away those civil liberties.

Likewise, the Japanese controlled the economy. Before the war, people observed *laissez faire* or free trade. But during the Japanese occupation, everything was planned according to Japan's needs and designs. There was price control. The so-called Mickey Mouse money was issued and forced upon the population. Prewar currency was banned. Essential commodities were rationed: rice, soup, cooking oil, virtually everything. Filipinos who were used to buying as much as they wanted before the war could only buy five kilos of rice a week. They had to show their residence certificates which would be marked upon purchase. Soap which was not manufactured commercially, had to be rationed. So was cooking oil—which was very strange because San Pablo was already producing cooking oil for local consumption. It was difficult to cook if there was not enough cooking oil. Even matches were really hard to find. In buying rationed goods, one had to line up. A prevalent joke at that time went like this: “Ano ang dinala ng mga Kastila dito sa Pilipinas? Relihiyon. Ano ang dinala ng mga Amerikano dito sa atin? Edukasyon. At ano ang dinala ng mga Hapon dito sa atin? Rasyon.” Indeed, people had to have ration tickets to buy their necessities. This was part of the controlled economy that the Japanese imposed. Demand outstripped supply, resulting in shortages. Laguna was not self-sufficient in rice production. So there was not

enough rice. What would one eat? Coconut? Yes, one could eat coconut, but not all the time.

One notable thing the Japanese did was to complete the construction of the Caliraya Power Plant. The power plant was supposed to be finished in 1942 under the Commonwealth timetable. But the project was halted because of the Japanese invasion. For its inauguration, the Japanese even brought a Shinto priest to bless the power plant which augmented the local source of electricity.

The Philippine Executive Commission was created to continue the work of the national government. Nevertheless, it performed only some executive functions. It had neither legislative nor judicial power. The Japanese Military Administration did everything else. The Second Republic was also established with Jose P. Laurel as president. It was supposedly independent but local governance was dictated by Japan. The Japanese put up neighborhood associations. They abolished all political parties and created the *Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas*, or the KALIBAPI—a one-party system. Some people noted its similarity to President Marcos' Martial Law when political parties were also banned. Only one party dominated: the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* or KBL. KBL even sounded like KALIBAPI. Some of the people I interviewed during Martial Law told me that what the Japanese did then was repeated under the Marcos dictatorship.

UP Los Baños was made into a prisoner of war (POW) camp. Some of the captured guerrillas and soldiers who surrendered in Bataan were brought to Los Baños

where they remained POWs for a time. Eventually, many were released. Some of them who could not go home—especially those from the Visayas—stayed in Los Baños. There was one soldier who fell in love with a girl from Los Baños, married her, and stayed there until he died in the 1990s. When UP Los Baños was vacated as a POW camp, it was converted into an internment camp. A POW camp is for soldiers while an internment camp is for civilians. In Manila, a large internment camp was set up at the University of Santo Tomas. In time, it became too crowded so the Japanese looked for an alternative place. They transferred some of the American and allied internees to UP Los Baños which became Internment Camp #2.

There were Filipino collaborators. They were called Makapili—Makabayang Kalipunan ng mga Pilipino. Most of them belonged to the Sakdal Party before the war. These Sakdalistas did not change in their beliefs. They wanted social and agricultural reforms, and they thought the Japanese would help them. Prior to the war, they were already pro-Japanese. When the Japanese came, the Sakdalistas became allies of the Japanese. Some of them could not be faulted for what they did because they wanted real social changes. However, the Second Republic, specifically the Philippine Executive Commission, was composed of prewar politicians. There were no real reforms. The Sakdalistas believed they could obtain their desired changes under the Japanese. Later on, they became the Makapili—the Filipino military force of the invaders.

All this time, atrocities were happening. The Japanese soldiers said they came here to liberate us, Filipinos; their

skin was the same color as our skin; we were all Asians. But the way they treated us was not on an equal level. During the American period, Filipinos were generally treated as equals. During the Japanese period, when one passed a Japanese sentry, one had to bow in front of the soldier—the deeper the bow, the better. Before the war, we never bowed to anybody. We never bowed to the Americans. Neither did we bow to the Spaniards. With the Japanese, we were required to bow to them. We could not understand that. If we did not bow properly, we would be slapped. That was one thing that was deeply impressed on the minds of Filipinos; we were not a race that slapped each other—unless maybe when a boyfriend got too fresh, and was slapped by his girlfriend. We do not have a “slapping” tradition. In the Japanese Army, the slightest mistake was immediately punished with a slap on the face. For the Japanese soldier, it was normal to be slapped at least once a day. They accepted that. But we could not accept that. Imagine, they were the invaders and they slapped us. What would you do if you saw your mother slapped? Or your grandfather? This was one thing that many young men could not accept or forget which was precisely the reason why the guerrilla movement grew strong.

Looting took place; houses were burned; rapes were committed. One specific example of violence: the a New Zealand Columban priest in Pililla, Laguna—Fr. Francis Vernon Douglas—was taken by the Japanese, tied up, tortured, and eventually killed. He was accused as a spy and was reported slain near Paete. The killing of Fr. Douglas was never resolved. In fact, his relatives came to the Philippines just two years ago because Fr. Douglas’ body

was never found. His relatives believed that since Paete was just a small town, they would be able to trace his remains. They went to Paete and found someone who witnessed the execution but he was 95 years-old already and could not pinpoint the location.

There were other individual cases like this as well as other types of experiences that demonstrated that we are a strong people. We are survivors. Regarding food shortage, we came up with substitute foods. For example, before the war, we didn't eat cassava. It was only for pigs. But we concocted the cassava cake. We also learned how to eat *darak*, the by-product of rice millings. *Bakya*? It became popular because our leather-making and shoe-making factories could not produce shoes anymore. Instead, *bakya* was commonly used. Before and after the war, the term *bakya* crowd refers to the poor or low class. During the war, everyone wore *bakya*. People said that war was the great social leveler because everyone—the poor; the rich—wore *bakya*.

Persistently, the Japanese carried out anti-guerrilla operations. They tortured suspected guerrillas. One of the strongest guerrilla leaders in Laguna area was a man called Col. Hugh Straughn. He was a retired US Army officer but chose to stay in the Philippines. When the war started, he volunteered for duty. He was cut off from his USAFFE unit and became a guerrilla officer.

But in 1943, he was captured by the Japanese in the jungles of Laguna. After that, he was forced to speak



The capture of Colonel Hugh Straughn, FAIT

in various towns, condemning guerrilla activities and convincing guerrillas to surrender. Eventually, he was executed. His remains were never found.

One of the vestiges of the occupation is Mickey Mouse money issued by the Japanese. Some Mickey Mouse money can still be found perhaps in your own home or the home of your grandparents. In fact, in Manila, you can buy these monies for five pesos each, or a whole set for one hundred pesos. This writer inherited from a grandaunt a box full of Japanese Mickey Mouse money. There were several thousands of ₱1,000 bills. With Mickey Mouse money, one became an instant millionaire. However, the money used could not be used after the war. What was

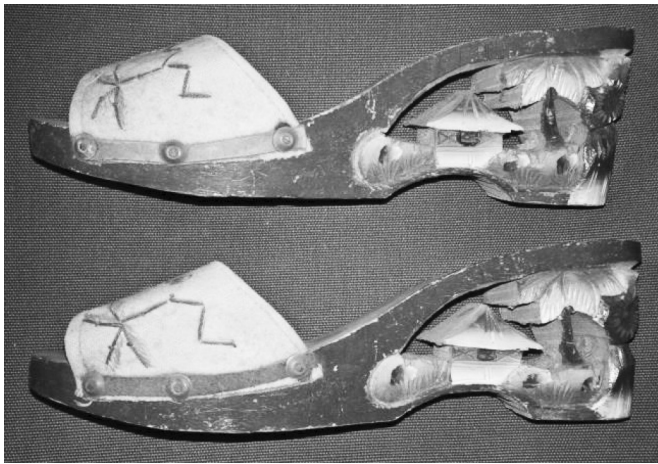


"Mickey Mouse" money

wrong with Mickey Mouse money? It looked like real money but there was no serial number on top, only code letters. The code letters—PD, PE—were so many. How could one check that kind of money? It looked like play money. If one is familiar with Monopoly or similar games, these paper bills appeared like the money used for betting and paying. When people got hold of this currency, they said, "this is fake or fictitious money." It became known as Mickey Mouse because the cartoon character it was named after is not real. Later on, the Japanese came out with new bills with serial numbers. But they still looked bogus and funny. Today, these bills have no value.

Filipinos managed to produce art amidst the difficult times. Well-carved pairs of *bakya* were made in Paete during the war. Everyone is familiar with the simple *bakya* without

the design. But the rich and the artistically-conscious preferred the elaborate designs. Even if one belongs to the *bakya* crowd, there are still distinctive class levels. One can see a *bahay kubo* or coconut palm designed in this special *bakya* created by Paete woodcarvers.



Intricately designed *bakya* from Paete

One thing unique about Laguna was the existence of so many guerrilla resistance groups. There was the Filipino-American Irregular Troops under Col. Straughn. This was one of the first groups formed. The group's name sounded funny because of the use of the term "irregular troops." Why were the members called irregular? Since regular soldiers were full-time and professional soldiers, Col. Straugh adopted the term "irregular" for his men who were guerrillas, not professional soldiers.

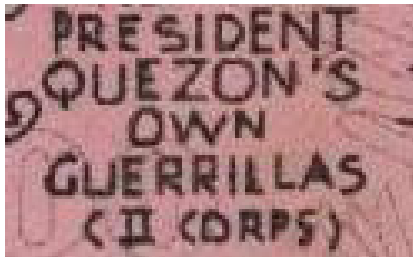
Another group was called Marking's Guerrillas whose designation came from the name of its head or leader. The leader's name was Marking but he called himself General

Marking. His real name was Marcos Agustin. When converting a name into a nickname, Filipinos tend to use “ing,” so Marcos became “Marking.”

Another popular guerrilla unit was the Hunters ROTC Guerrillas composed of young college students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years. Some of them were officers; a few were cadets of the Philippine Military Academy who were unable to finish their studies because the war broke out. Instead of going to Bataan, the cadets were told to go home as they were too young to fight, but they decided to form their own guerrilla group.

There were other groups as well. One was called President Quezon’s Own Guerrillas, which was based in Mount Banahaw. From Mount Banahaw, they patrolled the entire Laguna area. Another was a Chinese group—the Wha-Chi, or the 48th Squadron. This was a fairly small group—linked to the Communist guerrillas in China but its members were very effective and efficient. Then you have the USAFFE Intelligence Net, and a smaller group called the 1st Laguna Brigade. Their members were mainly volunteers. They were not professional soldiers, but they came and joined the guerrilla resistance movement.

Here are the logos or insignias of some of the guerrilla units that fought in Laguna. At the top left, is the logo used by Marking’s Guerrillas. The letter or figure “V” was very symbolic because V stood for victory. In Europe, when one made the V sign, it meant victory and was a symbol of resistance. In the Philippines, the figure V also meant victory. You could make a V sign with your fingers.



The logos or insignias of the guerrilla units in Laguna

Much later during the postwar period, V stood for peace but its wartime meaning was victory. The Japanese banned the sign, alleging that it was anti-Japanese.

On the upper right, is the logo of the Hunters ROTC Guerrillas featuring the names of the ten schools where the initial group members and leaders came from: UP, Ateneo, PSAT [Philippine School for Arts and Trade], La Salle, FEU, Letran, PMA, Jose Rizal College, Mapua, and San Beda. These young college students decided to leave their homes to fight the enemy. When they embarked on their mission and met up in the mountains of Antipolo, in Rizal Province, they were like Boy Scouts camping and training.

But they had guns and began ambushing the Japanese. These ambushes angered the enemy.

The HUKBALAHAP (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon) was different from other guerrilla units because it was a socialist/communist-oriented group. Its members called Huks were based mainly in Central Luzon, but some of them came to Laguna and other Southern Tagalog provinces. They wanted to change the social system, implement land reform, and introduce radical ideas. After the defeat of the Japanese, they continued their ideological struggle.

Seen also are the logos of President Quezon's Own Guerrillas, which was based in Mount Banahaw, and of the Wa-Chi Squadron, which was active in Laguna.

The wartime personalities were heroic but they were real people. The brains of Marking's Guerrillas was a woman named Yay Panlilio. Before the war, Yay Panlilio was a journalist, radio announcer, and a spy in Manila. She was a badge-carrying agent of the US FBI. When the Japanese invaded the country, she opted to stay in Manila, and became a spy for Corregidor. She worked in the radio station under the Japanese, and broadcast Japanese propaganda. Surreptitiously, during her radio program, she used different words to transmit hidden messages to Corregidor. Eventually, the Japanese found out what she was doing, but she managed to escape before being arrested. She headed to the mountains and was arrested by Marking's men. When they first met, Marking was very angry at Yay but subsequently they fell in love with



Yay Panlilio and Marcos “Marking” Agustin

each other. The two combined their skills: Marking was an expert in fighting, organizing men, military planning, and strategizing; Yay was the brain behind the group—she knew the theories, the ideologies. The two of them became very good partners, and later got married. However, because of their clashing personalities, their love which was nurtured in the mountains cooled and they separated eventually.

The photo on the opposite page shows the Hunters ROTC Guerrillas in the forest. They were practicing with a machine gun that they had retrieved from the battlefield. They were very young and were not yet formally commissioned as officers but they had uniforms already. Some were quiet innocent and naïve. Actually teenagers, they raided a college in Manila and stole firearms from the armory.



Hunters ROTC Guerrillas

They were proud of their success. But they lost a battle in Morong and their leader was killed. After that, they became careful. They mobilized themselves in different areas, including Laguna where they were very active in many towns.

The smaller units were of mixed groups who also fought bravely. The photo below taken after the war shows the young guerrillas happy and high-spirited. They were active resistance fighters from small towns like Siniloan and Pila.



Siniloan Volunteer Guerrilla Organization

What did the guerrillas do? What were their operations? Basically, they conducted ambushes; sabotaged the Japanese communication lines; raided ammunition depots; gathered intelligence information on the strength of the Japanese forces and their positions; went on patrols; and disseminated propaganda materials. When the American military started bombing the Philippines, some planes were shot down over Laguna. The guerrillas rescued pilots who bailed out from their planes and brought them to the resistance base or headquarters. The ambushades conducted by the guerrillas were depicted in artwork such as the one reproduced below.

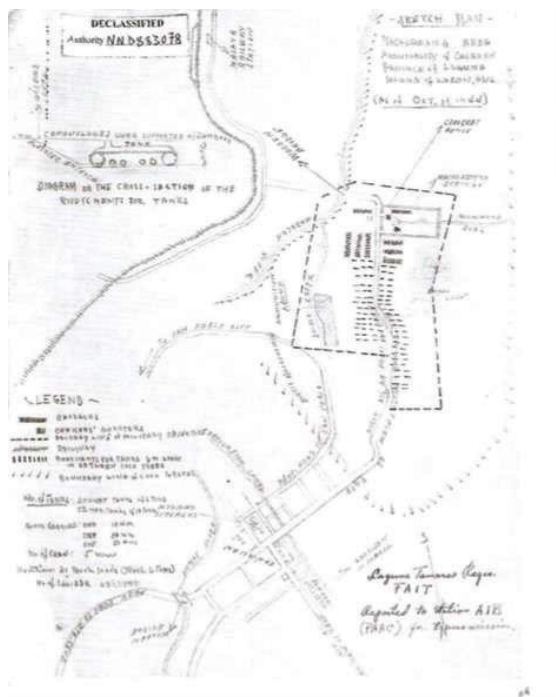


Guerrilla warfare

Also films for photos were scarce and developing them was not easy. Note that the guerrillas were not wearing standard military uniforms. Some wore either khaki pants or blue denims (*maong*). Others were in civilian clothes.

Even the helmets were of different types. This was typical of the guerrilla resistance movement: a mixture of uniforms, equipment, and weapons. But the guerrillas did their best in fighting.

Here is a blurred guerrilla map of Calauan, Laguna. It indicates Japanese tanks near the river as well as their strategic positions. This information was transmitted to the Americans.



A guerrilla map of Calauan

Another thing that the guerrilla did was to help the civilians escape from the Japanese and bring them grounds. Here is an artist's rendition of what happened in Pila, with

the Wha-Chi guerrillas assisting in the evacuation of the townspeople.



Wha-Chi guerrillas helping civilians from Pila

Insofar as propaganda was concerned, this [cover of *Liberator*] was a publication of President Quezon's Own Guerrillas. It was printed in Mount Banahaw and was smuggled into town by guerrilla sympathizers.



So how did this guerrilla newspaper get smuggled into Japanese-controlled territory? These mimeographed newspapers were placed at the bottom of the *bayong* and covered on top with all sort of items—vegetables, fish, etc. The Japanese checkpoint guard would not bother checking the contents of the *bayong* upon seeing the smelly fish or rotting vegetables. Thus, the guerrilla newspaper could get through and was circulated in different towns.

Another point of interest is how the guerrillas managed to print this type of underground newspaper. They needed a printing press, an artist to do the cover, ink, and paper. All the materials were smuggled out of Japanese-occupied buildings. The printing device was a mimeograph machine as there was no Xerox machine or photocopier at that time. To print using a mimeograph machine, you have to make a stencil—type the text, then draw an illustration using a stylus. Then you put the stencil in the mimeograph, crank it around, and let the ink flow. What's unique about this particular issue of the propaganda paper is the use of at least two colors: red and black. It means that the copy has been run twice to get the two colors. The guerrillas had all the time in the mountains to do the writing and printing of these underground or propaganda sheets.

The guerrillas also had time to print their own money. It was mentioned earlier that the Japanese circulated their Mickey Mouse money. The guerrillas countered the Mickey Mouse money by issuing their own currency. This particular example of guerrilla money was printed in Mount Banahaw by President Quezon's Own Guerrillas. The Marking's Guerrillas also had their own wartime currency.



Guerrilla money

While all these were going on, the Japanese had to be on their toes because they were constantly being attacked by the guerrillas. Then came 1945, the period of liberation. In 20 October 1944, the Americans landed first in Leyte with General Douglas MacArthur then in Mindoro in December. On 9 January 1945, the Americans landed in Lingayen. This was the first American landing in Luzon. Their target was Manila, but the push south from Lingayen, Pangasinan was slow so General MacArthur ordered another landing in Nasugbu, Batangas on January 31. The objective of both these landings was Manila. American troops from Nasugbu passed by Laguna but did not stop and headed straight to Manila. On February 3, American paratroopers jumped over the Tagaytay Ridge (now famous for its restaurants). The paratroopers landed on February 3, and again, they proceeded to Manila. Hence, Laguna was bypassed by all these US military operations. Since

nothing much was happening in Laguna, insofar as the US Army operations were concerned, some guerrillas, at this juncture felt that the time had come for them to attack and defeat the Japanese. On 26 January 1945, the Battle of Sta. Cruz took place. The attack was launched by a unit of the Wha-Chi, or the Chinese guerrillas. Then in February 1945, the Los Baños raid took place. The American civilian internees were freed from the Los Baños internment camp through the joint guerrilla and American operation.



Lingayen landing



Nasugbu landing



US parachute infantry landing at Tagaytay Ridge

More victories were recorded in various pictures taken of different military operations. There is a photo of the Lingayen landing, with many ships in the gulf. The other pictures show the Nasugbu landing and the American parachute jump over the Tagaytay Ridge respectively. It looked like the Americans were winning all over against the Japanese defensive moves. So confident were many of the guerrillas that the Japanese had already lost, that the Wha-Chi guerrillas attacked Sta. Cruz. Since the guerrillas had no cameras, the event was depicted in an artwork. The Wha-Chi guerrillas came in from all sides of Sta. Cruz. They attacked the garrison and the Japanese took refuge in the church. There were Japanese soldiers in the belfry. What did the guerrillas do? The Japanese did not want to surrender and their snipers could shoot at the guerrillas below. But the guerrillas could also see the enemy and tried to shoot them. Since the church was a heavy stone structure, it was difficult to hit the Japanese. The Wha-Chi guerrillas decided to burn the church as shown in an illustration. The Japanese would not budge, so they died inside the burning church. In the restored church, there is a historical marker

indicating that the church was burned in 1945 because of this guerrilla raid. The problem at that time was that the Americans were not yet around. The Wha-Chi guerrillas left after attacking Sta. Cruz. They thought they had won but this was not the case. The Japanese came back.



The Battle of Sta. Cruz

The same thing happened in Los Baños as can be seen in an artist's depiction of the event.



The Los Baños Internment Camp Raid

The Filipino guerrillas launched an attack on the Japanese garrison in the Los Baños internment camp. The Americans arrived later. The attack was supposed to commence at 7 o'clock in the morning, but the Japanese spotted some guerrillas moving and the shooting started at around 6:30 a.m. The Filipino guerrillas were already on the ground, in action while the American paratroopers were just taking off. By the time the paratroopers reached Los Baños, much of the fighting was over, and the internees were brought out by amphibious tractors (Amtracs).



Amphibious tractors (AMTRACS) in the Los Baños raid

These Amtracs were driven from Laguna de Bay into UP Los Baños—the area of Baker Hall today—and used to rescue the internees. These landing vehicles traversed the coastline of Laguna Bay then sailed on to Muntinlupa where the internees were fed and received medical care.

The main problem in both the Battle of Santa Cruz and the liberation of internees in Los Baños was that in

either operation no covering force was left behind. The guerrillas were not yet that strong to prevent the Japanese from returning. Moreover, the US Army units were not yet in a position to secure these places. When the Japanese returned, they committed acts of intimidation and reprisal against the civilian residents. This is the reason why this narrative-visual presentation presentation is titled “Triumph and Tragedy: Liberation of Laguna in 1945.” It was an eventual triumph but at what cost? The reprisals of the Japanese in Laguna were very severe. In Paete, on February 9, the Japanese massacred a considerable number of civilians. In Calamba—this was even before the Los Baños raid—about 1,000 were massacred, and houses and buildings were burned. In San Pablo, around 700 were killed including members of the Chinese community. In Los Baños, the Japanese came back and killed many of the townspeople. In Canlubang, a massacre also took place.

The Japanese retaliatory action followed an odd pattern. It was very organized and systematic. And why was it so organized? Because the military commander of the Japanese forces in Laguna and Batangas was Col. Masatoshi Fujishige. Fujishige was in charge of all the ground forces in the two provinces.

His forces were always attacked by guerrillas. So he directed his men to kill all guerrillas in Los Baños and Sta. Cruz. Women, children and men—proven guerrillas or not—were killed. He ordered his men to go from town to town. If one looks at the chronology of events, he can see that the massacres took place in a very systematic



Colonel Masatoshi Fujishige

manner—moving from one town to another. When they were done in Laguna, the Japanese went to Batangas—Taal, Bauan, the present Batangas City, and other towns. There also were massacres there because of Col. Fujishige. He issued very strict orders. Eventually, he was caught by the Americans and tried as a war criminal. The men under him said: “We said we cannot follow these orders because not all the people are proven guerrillas. Are we going to kill women and children also?” And Fujishige replied: “Kill them all—I will take full responsibility.” The massacres took place in these areas because this one man commanded the Japanese troops to do it.

For this presentation, there are no available photos of the massacres themselves, only the artist’s interpretations

of the incidents. Supposedly, this is what happened in the San Pablo massacre.



The San Pablo massacre

A big pit was dug, and the Chinese and other residents stood in front of the pit. Then, they were beheaded. The number of fatalities was quite staggering. When one looks at the reports, the actual names of the victims are there—the postwar mayors had to submit the names of all of those who were killed. That is why we know that these events really occurred. The massacres were painful reminders of the Japanese retaliation for the guerrilla attacks and raids. After the massacres, the liberation of Laguna ensued.

Laguna was liberated in parts. Some of the areas earlier liberated were those of eastern Laguna like Siniloan and Pila which the Americans reached first. Santa Cruz

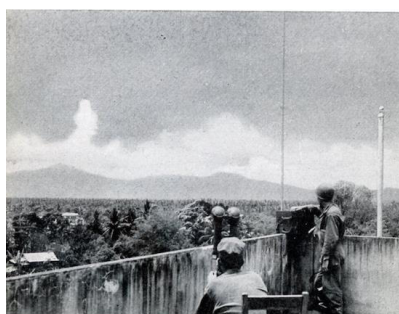
was liberated on March 5. Pagsanjan was liberated later, on April 6. Paete has a different liberation date. So there is no single day for the liberation of the whole province.



The liberation of Laguna

Before the towns were liberated, the Americans bombed and destroyed many of these places. Santa Cruz was bombed, as well as parts of Paete. The American forces drove into the Southern Tagalog area from different places such as Novaliches and Muntinlupa. Hence, there were many avenues of approach. Two American divisions came to liberate Laguna: the 1st Cavalry Division and the 43rd Infantry Division. These divisions were assisted by Filipino guerrillas. In some cases, the Filipinos reached the towns before the Americans did, so those who actually liberated the towns first were Filipinos, not Americans.

There are no pictures of Filipino guerrillas liberating towns, but the Americans brought their cameras and took photos of their operations. Some of the pictures show Americans entering the Southern Tagalog region, the Laguna area, then San Pablo. San Pablo Church was also photographed. The Japanese were in the mountains in the San Pablo area so they were shelled by artillery. In Santa Cruz, the bridge and the provincial capitol building are still there. Looking at the provincial capitol picture, one would be intrigued because in front of the building was the sign: Laguna. It was like the markers, “I Love Laguna” and “I Love Sta. Cruz” which are popular at present. The 1945 photo proves that around 1941, a provincial marker was already existing in Laguna.



Sta. Cruz, Laguna

As the guerrillas pursued the enemies in Mount Banahaw, fierce fighting ensued. The Japanese trekked through the forests and mountains of Batangas—Mount Malepunyo, Mount Maculot—and continued fighting as they retreated.



Fighting in Mt. Banahaw (Wha-Chi guerrillas)

While the fighting raged on, the Makapilis were arrested or captured not by the Americans but by Filipino guerrillas. We don't know what happened to these collaborators. Some of them were tried, but the fates of many were unknown.



Suspected Makapilis

The liberation of the whole Laguna province probably occurred around mid-April 1945 but the war lasted some more months. As a postscript, Laguna became interesting relative to World War II because it's here that General Tomoyuki Yamashita and General Masaharu Homma were executed. After they were tried as war criminals in Manila, they were brought to the UP Los Baños area where the death penalty meted out to them was carried out. Memorials were installed in their places of executions.

In the 1970s, a Japanese memorial was put up in Lake Caliraya. There is a marker for the Japanese garden. But it is more than a Japanese garden. It is a Japanese memorial to the Japanese war dead. Among the memorials is one for the electric company that started the operations of the electrical generating plant in 1942. So Lake Caliraya is also significant in the history of World War II in the Philippines.



The Japanese Garden in Lake Caliraya



Yamashita Shrine in Los Baños



General Homma Execution Site

The photo above is the Yamashita shrine. Below is the photo of the General Homma Execution site. These shrines are within the UP Los Baños property and near each other.

The Lake Caliraya Japanese garden looks innocent and innocuous but if you look inside, you'll see that it has a much deeper significance. It's not an ordinary garden—it's a war memorial. The Japanese Emperor Akihito, during his visit to the Philippines in 2016, made a special trip to Lake Caliraya. He was the first Japanese Emperor to visit the Japanese war memorial in Lake Caliraya.

To conclude on a brighter note, here is a photo of the Battle of Sta. Cruz Victory Memorial. Located in the town plaza, the memorial commemorates a guerrilla victory and symbolizes Filipino valor that we should all be proud of. This group photo taken on 26 January 2020 shows the relatives of the Chinese and Filipino war veterans celebrating the 75th anniversary of the battle. It was a most touching occasion which reminded all those present of the struggle and heroism of the people of Laguna during World War II.



Battle of Sta. Cruz Victory Memorial

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