

Remembering World War II

Tragedies Mark the Battles for the Philippines

By Jay M. Jones

Seventy Five Years ago the concluding events of World War II took place. This is the fifth in a series of articles highlighting some of the contributions made by people from Iron County to the successful termination of the war.



U. S. postage stamp commemorating the Battle of Corregidor in the Philippines.

Austin Halterman, a Parowan native, arrived with the 90th Bombardment Squadron of the Army Air Corps to the Philippines in October of 1941.

As Germany appeared close to a complete domination of Europe at that time, Japan was expanding its power in Asia. The United States territory of the Philippines was soon to be the target of Japanese aggression.

Ten hours after the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japanese forces were attacking American bases in the Philippines. Although six U. S. troop ships and nine cargo vessels were on their way to reinforce American defenses there, they were diverted to Australia and New Caledonia due to lack of naval and air protection. The defenders of the Philippines were on their own.

In May of 1942, following the fall of Corregidor, a heavily fortified island in Manila Bay that was the last major American defense in the territory to fall, Halterman was listed as Missing in Action. Over a year later, in June of 1943, his parents were notified that he was a Prisoner of War.

The Halterman family received a postcard from Austin in September of 1943, claiming that his health was excellent and he was in Prison Camp 10-A, now known to be located at Palawan. A card received in August of 1944 indicated that he was then at Prison Camp 10-C, which was at Clark Field.

As the Americans were preparing to land in the Philippines to reclaim control, the Japanese began to relocate prisoners of war closer to Japan.

On October 20, 1944, American forces landed on the Philippine island of Leyte and General Douglas MacArthur made his dramatic statement, "I have returned!"

On October 24, 1944, the Japanese freighter Arisan Maru, with 1,781 prisoners aboard but having no visible markings or flags indicating that it was carrying prisoners, was torpedoed and sunk in the Bashi Straits of the South China Sea by a U. S. submarine that was then hit and sunk by a Japanese destroyer. Of the 1,781 Prisoners of War aboard the Arisan Maru, only 9 survived. This was the greatest loss of American life in a single military sinking.

It was not until June of 1945 that the Japanese released a list of names of the prisoners aboard the ill-fated ship and the Halterman family received word that Austin was on the ship and did not survive.

Maurice Clothier of Minersville was another American prisoner aboard the same ship who suffered the same fate. During the war, his family moved to Cedar City when his father began employment at the iron mines.



Floyd Tucker of Cedar city was one of the crewmen of the USS St. Lo to survive a kamikaze attack on the ship in the Leyte Gulf. Official U.S. Navy photograph.

On October 25, 1944, the escort carrier USS St. Lo was hit by a kamikaze aircraft during the naval battle in the Leyte Gulf of the Philippines. An explosion resulted on the hangar deck, where aircraft were being refueled, and subsequent explosions engulfed the ship in flames. The St. Lo became the first major warship to sink as a result of a kamikaze strike.

Floyd Tucker of Cedar City was one of the survivors of the attack. Of the 889 sailors on board, 113 were killed or missing, and approximately 30 others died later of their wounds.

Two weeks after the American landing on Leyte Island, Dean Harris Nelson of Cedar City was killed in a nighttime attack on November 3, 1944. He and his twin brother Don enlisted in military service on their 18th birthdays and trained together in an engineering unit. They served together in New Guinea before going to Leyte Island in October 1944.

After the Americans gained control of Leyte Island, they continued on to other islands. They landed on Luzon Island on January 9, 1945.

Milo Mortensen of Parowan participated in a raid behind enemy lines to free prisoners at Cabanatuan on Luzon in late January 1945. The raid behind enemy lines was conducted because American POWs at Palawan had been killed by Japanese guards before they could be freed by advancing American troops. Mortensen died in March 1945 of wounds suffered on Luzon.

Lyle W. Robb of Paragonah was a fighter pilot with the Army Air Corps. He was assigned a special mission in a P-38 over Luzon on March 14, 1945. His plane crashed and Lieutenant Robb, who enlisted in military service in June 1942, did not survive.

Leo Esplin of Cedar City, a rifleman with the infantry, died in action on Luzon on April 9, 1945. Private Esplin entered the army in August 1944 and saw his first combat action on Luzon.

Following the war, the Philippines were granted independence on July 4, 1946.

Zion	Exploring	Natives	Pioneers	Towns	Resources	Arts	History	Photos	Maps
----------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	---------------------------	----------------------	-------------------------	------------------------	----------------------