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UD REUNION INCLUDES BATAAN DEATH MARCH SURVIVOR, DAUGHTER

DAYTON, Ohio -- Al Suttmann remembers the dust--thick clouds of it--all the way from Mariveles through Lamao to Orani and eventually to hell.

It was April 1942, and Suttmann was a prisoner of the Japanese, trudging along the east coast of the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines on his way to a prisoner-of-war stockade at Camp O'Donnell. It was the infamous Bataan death march, half a world away from the University of Dayton campus where he had been a student.

On May 31, Suttmann, now a Bellbrook resident, will meet with his fellow UD alumni as the class of 1941 observes its 50th reunion. Suttmann, 71, is one of a number of World War II veterans from the class who are expected to attend the three-day celebration.

Suttmann actually graduated from UD in 1948, after the war. "But I've always considered myself to be a member of the class of '41 because that's the group I started out with," he explains.

He wound up in the Philippines in the summer of 1941 after dropping out of UD, enrolling at the New Mexico State Teachers College and enlisting in the New Mexico National Guard.

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Suttmann fought on Bataan, winning a battlefield commission as a second lieutenant. After U.S. forces surrendered on April 8, 1942, he began a long ordeal as a prisoner of the Japanese—an ordeal that ended only at the conclusion of war.

"By then I was in a prison camp in Roku Roshi, Japan, working as a farm laborer," he says. "When I first came to the Philippines, I weighed 198 pounds. When I was finally released in early September 1945, I weighed 98 pounds."

Suttmann came back to UD, met a student, Patricia Justice, who became his wife, and earned a degree in 1948. Mrs. Suttmann is also a member of the class of 1948. Their daughter Patricia graduated from UD in 1971, and their son Clement in 1977.

"Our daughter also received an MBA and a law degree from UD," says Suttmann. "Now she has her own practice in Lebanon, Ohio, and has also been teaching at the UD Law School. Her class is holding its 20th reunion this year."

Eventually, Suttmann became a salesman for several different Ohio packaging firms, and he now owns and operates his own packaging business in Butler County, just north of Cincinnati.

Today, the tree-covered hills on the western slope of the Bataan Peninsula overlook the huge American naval base at Subic Bay. When Suttmann was there, only the tiny fishing village of Olongapo stood on the site.

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"It's been an interesting 50 years," he says, "but those days on Bataan and in prison camp were a lifetime in themselves. I was sure glad to get back to UD."

Suttmann and his fellow UD classmates will soon begin their reunion that will recall happy days on campus—when they graduated six months before Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into World War II. Some of them never came back from that war, and all of them were deeply affected by it. They were indeed, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "a generation that had a rendezvous with destiny."

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For media interviews, call Al Suttmann at (513) 848-4034.