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# **NOTE TO USERS**

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**THEY TOO FOUGHT THE JAPANESE  
THE AMERICAN ARMY'S WAR IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC**

**BY  
ROBERT YOUNG**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York**

**2003**

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**This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

Dec 6 2002  
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## ABSTRACT

### THEY TOO FOUGHT THE JAPANESE THE AMERICAN ARMY'S WAR IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

by  
Robert Young

Adviser: Professor David Syrett

This study describes how the men of the United States Army fought a brutal four-year war in the Southwest Pacific against the soldiers of the Japanese Army. Beginning with the campaign at Buna and culminating with the bitter battles on Luzon during the summer of 1945, the reader will see the development and maturation of an American Army that few to this day have given a suitable amount of credit for the final defeat of Japan.

Fighting in the Southwest Pacific was far different than the type of war being waged in Europe or even in the Central Pacific by the U.S. Marine Corps. In addition to combating a resourceful, hardened, and fanatical enemy, the men of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) also had to combat the heat, incessant rains, jungles, and mountains of New Guinea and the Philippines. Unfortunately, they at times also suffered from the flawed designs and ego of their theatre commander, General Douglas MacArthur.

War in the SWPA was not one of maneuver, deception, or fluidity. Rather, it was a bitter war of attrition in which the Japanese occupied formidable defensive positions and the Americans had to blast them out. Utilizing the available weapons and capabilities of the American fighting man and developing those weapons and capabilities into a suitable tactical doctrine is the focus of this

**dissertation. It was neither the type of war America expected to fight nor the type of war they expected to excel in. Yet, America won and won convincingly.**

**This is dedicated to the three women in my life.**

**My mother, Judith Young, for inspiring me to begin this process.**

**My wife, Madeline Young, for making sure I finished.**

**My daughter, Gabriella Young, for calling me Doc when I finished my dissertation defense.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the completion of this dissertation and I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to them.

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I am also grateful to Professors Richard Gid Powers, K.C. Johnson, Joshua Freeman, and Stuart Prah. All the aforementioned individuals were involved in either the proposal or defense of the dissertation. In Professor Power's case, he was involved in both processes. I am also indebted to the archivists and directors of the United States Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks and the Modern Military Records Division of the National Archives at College Park. The records consulted in this work were often very obscure and the dedicated professionals of both Carlisle and College Park made it possible for me to explore the materials needed for my research.

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## INTRODUCTION

Often forgotten amid the glamour of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps roles in the defeat of Japan during the Second World War was the part played by the United States Army. The part of the army that operated in the region known as the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) played a significant role in the final defeat of Japan. It was they who advanced across the island of New Guinea, reconquered the Philippines, and stood poised, along with other American forces, to invade the main islands of Japan during the winter of 1945-6. The European Theatre of Operations (ETO) produced such dramatic operations as the invasion of Normandy, Operation COBRA, the Battle of the Bulge, all names synonymous with American victories during World War II. Not so famous are the victories on the obscure island of Biak, along Breakneck Ridge at Leyte, and in the Philippine Capitol City of Manila. All were hard fought, important triumphs in the Pacific. Yet, they have remained, to this day, virtually unknown. Further, the type of war fought between the American and Japanese armies was far different than the battles waged in Europe. In the Pacific Theatre of Operations (PTO), the enemy, terrain, weather, and necessary equipment were the antithesis of what was encountered and required against Germany. To succeed against two different enemies required two different types of soldier. My attention will be completely devoted to the men of the PTO.

The evolution of the soldiers who fought in the PTO can be directly attributed to the type of enemy they faced and that enemy's military philosophy. The legend of bushido and its impact upon the conduct of the Japanese military during World War II has dominated much of the history written on the subject. Fanatical, ferocious, and proud are but three of the words that have been used to describe the Japanese soldier. A degree of historical tunnel vision has often omitted another important quality: skill. Skill, when combined with ferociousness, fanaticism, and pride made the Japanese a very tough enemy. This skill was most

obvious when the Japanese were forced to conduct defensive operations. They prepared some of modern military history's most stout positions. These positions were enhanced by nature. The island of New Guinea and the many islands of the Philippines were veritable mazes of thick jungles, swelling rivers, and towering mountains honeycombed with caves, defiles, and ravines. They were also engulfed in debilitating heat, torrential rains, and tropical diseases. To conquer the Japanese, the American soldier first had to conquer the elements. It would be as tough an enemy as Japanese soldiers.

To fight effectively in this terrain, a soldier had to be more than tactically and technically proficient. Above all he had to be physically fit and acclimated to the conditions of the Southwest Pacific. Only then, could soldiers and their commanders set about their primary task of producing combat units capable of defeating the enemy in a tropical environment. To accomplish this, it became obvious before long that doctrine, the rules and procedures by which an army fights, would have to be changed in the SWPA. Fighting in this part of the world and the tactical requirements it mandated were alien to the planners and training centers of the United States. Bitter experience in this theatre's first battle at Buna demonstrated this undeniable fact to all involved. The SWPA would have to create and perfect its own doctrine to succeed. Evaluating that newly formed doctrine will be my primary concern.

My analysis will begin with the Battle of Buna in 1942, then progress to the leapfrog campaign across the northern coast of New Guinea in 1944 and end with the reconquest of the Philippines in 1944 and 1945. More than just battles will be examined here. There is an old military rule that you fight as you have trained. That point is critical here. To create a new doctrine and use it effectively often requires many years of intensive training. The American Army did not have many years. It did have 1943 and the first half of 1944, periods of relative calm in the SWPA during history's most destructive war. These were, in effect, training years for the seventeen divisions that would encompass the SWPA command. In these

**years doctrine was created and tested. It would be graded on the battlefields of New Guinea and the Philippines.**

**While reviewing the following chapters it will become obvious that certain sources, as well as specific units within the American Army, are emphasized. My emphasis is in no way meant to slight the accomplishments of all the divisions that served in this theatre. Some units just kept better records than others. Those that did so will be mentioned in great detail and will serve as barometers for the entire SWPA.**

**Certain works were enormously helpful as I completed this book. The several applicable volumes of the United States Army in World War II series were perhaps the most valuable. Written in the years immediately following the war, they provide accounts of many battles that are otherwise unavailable as well as many interesting personal narratives. These narratives are not available in official unit histories and only exist here because the authors of the Army's official history conducted extensive interviews immediately after the war. These volumes are frequently cited because at times they were the only reliable source available. These volumes offer the broadest examination of the many campaigns of the SWPA, covering everything from the uniforms the soldiers wore to their everyday lives on the battlefield. My focus is far narrower. My goal is to write a critique of the American Army's performance. How they fought, whether or not they corrected their mistakes, and the reliability and suitability of their weapons will receive the preponderance of my attention.**

**Several other works are available that deal with specific segments of the time period covered in the following pages. A recent addition to the scholarship on the 1944 New Guinea campaign is Stephen R. Taffe's *MacArthur's Jungle War*. This book is an excellent reference source for strategic considerations and the personalities of the various commanders but is short of tactical detail and analysis. Edward Drea's *Defending the Driniumor* is the premiere source on the American Army's defense and counterattack along the Driniumor River during**

**July and August 1944. To date, there is little scholarship available on the ground campaign in the Philippines.**

**I am the only person that has ever examined many of the operational records and unit histories that are the basis of the chapters on Leyte and Luzon. Several divisions, such as the 7<sup>th</sup>, 77<sup>th</sup>, and 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, have had their records examined numerous times. However, these records were examined to provide a basis for the analysis of the Okinawa campaign, a campaign in which the three aforementioned divisions participated. Their participation in the struggle for Leyte has been ignored. The Battle of Leyte Gulf, a naval action involving more tonnage than any other maritime battle in history, seems at times to be all that is remembered from a campaign that lasted nearly a year. A ground war was also fought there. A very bitter, costly, protracted ground war that deserves recognition along with the many other campaigns that resulted in the Allied victory in World War II.**

## CHAPTER ONE

The war in the SWPA began on December 7, 1941. On that famous date, in addition to their sneak attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked American forces in the Philippine Islands. In April 1942 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt would order General Douglas MacArthur, the senior U.S. commander on those islands, to Australia. By that time, it was obvious that the military situation was beyond repair and in May, the last American forces surrendered. While leaving his former command, MacArthur vowed, "I shall return!" That vow would govern the war in the SWPA.

Douglas MacArthur was born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1880, the son of General Arthur MacArthur, a hero of the American Civil War, and his beloved mother Mary. He lived on various army posts and secured an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, graduating in 1903. After that, MacArthur served at various posts around the world and from 1913-1917 was assigned to the army's General Staff. During the First World War he was first, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division's Chief of Staff, and then commander of the 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, with the rank of Brigadier General. After the war, he served as Superintendent of West Point before spending eight years (1922-1930) in the Philippines. In 1930 he secured the army's top position, Chief of Staff. His tenure was not without controversy. He used military force to break up the encampments of the "Bonus Marchers," a collection of World War I veterans seeking their pensions early to relieve unemployment and the horrors of the Great Depression. When his time as Chief of Staff ended in 1935, he had seen his army through some of its most difficult economic times. In 1935, President Roosevelt appointed MacArthur as the military adviser to the Philippines, a post he held until July

1941, when he was appointed commander of all U.S. Forces in East Asia. It was in this capacity that he commanded American forces in the Philippines when the Japanese attacked.

How to return to the Philippines as quickly as possible dominated MacArthur's thinking at his headquarters in Australia. However, more immediate problems existed as Japan was in a position to threaten Australia itself if it could secure a significant staging area for an invasion. That staging area was the world's second largest island, New Guinea. Located directly north of Australia, it was a prerequisite to any nation with designs on the island continent. Port Moresby, a superb natural harbor in New Guinea, caught the attention of both America and Japan. It would provide the staging area so desperately needed by the Japanese, as well as providing a base from which to interdict American seaborne communications with Australia.

The Japanese first attempted to seize Port Moresby by seaborne invasion. From 4-6 May 1942 a Japanese naval force steaming for Port Moresby encountered an American naval force in the Battle of the Coral Sea. In this, naval history's first battle where opposing ships never fired a shot at each other, airplanes conducted all offensive action and the Japanese fleet was forced to turn for home. Undeterred, the Japanese landed on New Guinea's northern coast and began an overland advance through what many would eventually consider the most horrific terrain on the planet. Throughout the summer of 1942, the hardened jungle fighters of Australia would oppose the Japanese. The Australians, with nature's help, forestalled the Japanese advance and compelled an even more destructive retreat. Scattered remnants of the once powerful Japanese force entrenched themselves in the old missionary village of Buna, in Papua New Guinea. Australian strength also deteriorated during the Japanese retreat. Help would be needed dislodging the enemy from his new position. With Australia seemingly secure, MacArthur decided to commit his own forces. He had the 32nd and 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions, both National Guard divisions that had recently

arrived from the United States. They were physically available, though not militarily ready for action. How unprepared America was for jungle war would not become clear until the 32nd launched its first attack against Buna in November.

The 32nd and 41<sup>st</sup> divisions had spent most of 1942 travelling, not training. Initial training time was dedicated to preparations for movement to Europe, the original destination for both units. Unforeseen disasters in the PTO mandated a change of destination. In March the 32nd were ordered to Australia, finally arriving there on 14 May. It would be another four months before they left for New Guinea. That may seem like adequate time to institute an effective training program. Most of that time was spent moving, settling in, and then moving again. This concerned General Edwin F. Harding, the commander of the 32nd, who noted

...Unfortunately we had no opportunity to work through a systematic program for correcting deficiencies. From February, when I took over until November when we went into battle we were always getting ready to move, on the move, or getting settled after a move. No sooner would we get a systematic training program started than orders for a move came along to interrupt it.<sup>1</sup>

MacArthur also realized his army's shortcomings. He fretted that "...none of the three elements of my command: naval, air, or ground, was adequate for the job. This concerned him because he knew that against a well-equipped, experienced force his men were in serious trouble. The ground troops, too, were inadequate for the tremendous task ahead. Not only were they too few in number, but they lacked the equipment and strenuous training necessary for combat."<sup>2</sup> Yet, he sent them into action because he and his staff considered the Japanese troops occupying Buna to be an understrength, ill-equipped, malnourished force.<sup>3</sup> Believing even green troops could deal with the Japanese in their then current condition, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was deployed. Harding, despite his

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<sup>1</sup> General Harding, quoted by Samuel Milner in *Victory in Papua*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas MacArthur. *Reminiscences*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Milner. *Victory in Papua*, p. 137.

misgivings, also believed Buna could be “easy pickings, with only a shell of sacrifice troops left behind to defend it.”<sup>4</sup> This overconfidence, on the part of both MacArthur and Harding, was the precursor to the disasters that historically plague unprepared troops in battle.

General Robert E. Eichelberger, a name that became famous in this theatre of World War II, was sent by MacArthur to report on the 32nd Division’s fitness for combat. He rated them “barely satisfactory” and noted the 32nd “went into New Guinea ‘high’ on itself, full of confidence, but quite unprepared for the miseries and terrors of jungle warfare so alien to the experience of boys from the clipped green lawns and serene streets of small-town Middle West.”<sup>5</sup> Despite these warnings and the obvious danger of sending unprepared, overconfident troops into battle, the 32nd was ordered in. Further, MacArthur, ever mindful of his brethren in other theatres of the war, knew that American forces were fighting to his north on the island of Guadalcanal, and in North Africa. He needed to get his men involved. What better opportunity would present itself? Commanders often have to fight in less than favorable conditions. Washington fought the entire Revolutionary War with an army outclassed by his opponent. Yet he fought on. The American Civil War’s first battle, First Bull Run, was a disaster. Both commanders knew they were not ready yet both committed their forces to battle. In the case of First Bull Run, politics demanded a battle. Wars are seldom devised, planned, and executed by military leaders alone. MacArthur, too, had to attack. He could only hope his green troops and their equally green leaders could overcome a decimated Japanese garrison.

Who were the men MacArthur sent to Buna in November 1942? Most of the junior leaders were recent graduates of Fort Benning’s Infantry Officers’ Basic Course (IOBC). In a 75-day course, these young men supposedly learned the fundamentals of warfare. Seventy five days were dedicated to heavy weapons

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Robert Eichelberger. *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, p. 22.

training, company, battalion, and regimental attacks, combined arms operations, and flanking maneuvers, all keys to success in an anticipated European ground war.<sup>6</sup> Not a second was spent on jungle warfare. Only four hours of training were spent on night problems. Assaults on limited fronts against improvised field fortifications were also omitted from the training schedule. It was as though a Pacific ground war was never even considered. If it did occur, American planners must have predicted physical conditions would not seriously impede operations and current doctrine would suffice. If that was their prediction, they were soon proven wrong.

The vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean made senior members of the American military hierarchy believe that naval power alone would eventually produce victory in a war with Japan. Before the war, military planners envisioned scenarios against all possible enemies. The ORANGE Plans were devised to cover the contingency of war with Japan. They envisioned holding actions by various American garrisons throughout the Pacific while the Navy fought its way across the great ocean, finally defeating Japan and its fleet in one colossal battle. The only consideration of ground troops revolved around those already in distant garrisons and small Marine amphibious units.<sup>7</sup> It was this interpretation that explains the complete lack of attention to jungle warfare during the prewar years and most of 1942. Therefore, it would not have mattered what divisions were sent to the Pacific. None were ready for the type of war that would be fought there because no American Army unit had received training in jungle combat. Not until America actually fought a jungle battle would the realization actually sink in that there were be two totally different ground wars, one in the PTO, the other in the ETO.

The senior commanders of the 32nd and 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions were a mix of World War I veterans and longtime National Guardsmen. They had spent the

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<sup>6</sup> 1941-2 *Infantry Officers' Basic Course Training Schedule*.

<sup>7</sup> Russell Weigley. *The American Way of War*. p. 245-8.

interwar years doing their weekend drills and two weeks of summer camp, perhaps accumulating 15-20 days of real military training time each year. What training a National Guardsmen does do each year is individual weapons qualification, weapon and equipment maintenance, and common tasks training. A pre-mobilization training cycle is usually required before an activated unit is sent to combat. As previously mentioned, the constant travelling of the 32nd and 41<sup>st</sup> made any such training cycle impossible. The yearly training offered to National Guardsmen is meant to ensure that part-time soldiers maintain at least a minimal level of military efficiency. It was no different for commanders. They had all the problems of regular army commanders with only a fraction of the time to address them. Tactical proficiency understandably suffers in such conditions. The 32nd Division participated in the Louisiana maneuvers of 1941, at the time the largest peacetime maneuvers in American history. Unfortunately, the maneuvers emphasized mobility and all the subjects mentioned in IOBC. These commanders were not ready for a jungle war.

The soldiers of the 32nd were a blend of veteran National Guardsmen and green basic trainees. The 32nd, severely understrength when it reached its forward staging area of San Francisco, was brought up to strength by a massive influx of newly graduated basic trainees. Upon arrival in Australia, they were evaluated by General Eichelberger, who as I previously mentioned, rated them as “barely satisfactory.” He instituted a rigorous acclimation and jungle-training program to ready the new arrivals for combat. The 41<sup>st</sup> Division, which did not enter action until January 1943, would reap the benefits of this program. The 32nd, which launched its first attack in November, would not get the chance to develop jungle skills until they started fighting.

In the contemporary American Army, field manuals play a significant role in both an officer’s and soldier’s professional education and development. They are also readily available should a soldier or commander have any doctrinal questions, or need refreshment on a pertinent subject. Today’s American Army is

a professional army, composed entirely of volunteers, with an established noncommissioned officers and commissioned officers corps to provide leadership and experience. The American Army of 1942 was far from a professional army. Its ranks had swelled in the early months of 1942 as new recruits poured in. However, the prewar infrastructure of all the armed services was not large enough or competent enough to deal with the massive numbers of men thrown at them. A division such as the 32nd, with half its strength composed of basic trainees and the other half trained for a different type of war than they would encounter in the Pacific, had little to fall back on other than the manuals then available. The most pertinent books were *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations (Operations)*, *FM 31-20, Jungle Warfare*, and *FM 17-32, The Tank Company, Light and Medium*. *FM 100-5*, the infantryman's bible, was the fighting man's most important source of reference. Unfortunately, few of its pages were applicable to a war in the Pacific.

Most of *FM 100-5* is devoted to infantry operations. Infantry is the army's most important branch. They perform most of the close-quarter combat and most weapons are designed to support and expedite their operations. Those who looked towards a European war would disagree with the previous statement since the army in the pre-war years was moving towards a force centered on mobility and firepower, with infantry losing its elite role to the ever-expanding armored force. In the Pacific, old traditions would still hold true. Tough, competent infantry were needed to defeat the Japanese though armor would soon play a key role. The U.S. Army's synopsis of the infantry branch is:

Infantry is capable of limited independent action through the employment of its own weapons. Its offensive power decreases appreciably when its freedom of maneuver is limited or when it is confronted by an organized defensive position. Under these conditions or against a force of the combined arms, the limited firepower of infantry must be adequately reinforced by the support of artillery, tanks, combat aviation, and other arms.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations (Operations)*, p. 7-8.

No freedom of maneuver was possible on the Buna battlefield. Any ground where a force could move was covered by a Japanese defensive position. Throughout World War II, American units could typically depend on ample material resources to aid them in accomplishing their mission. That was not possible in their first battle. There was one, only one, American artillery piece available throughout the Battle of Buna, a 105mm howitzer with limited ammunition. The only tanks or armored vehicles available to the SWPA were M3 Stuart light tanks and Bren gun carriers. The Stuart was a smallish, lightly armored tank that mounted a 37mm main gun. The Bren was a lightly armored, slow personnel carrier that mounted a heavy machine gun. The tanks would not arrive until late in the battle (despite the pleas of General Harding and then of General Eichelberger) but when they did they proved invaluable in reducing the Japanese defenses. Air support was not plentiful, but was available, although air-ground cooperation was still in its infancy at this point. Considerable time would pass before pilots and ground troops could truly count on each other. In SWPA's first battle it would be the infantry and their personal weapons that would have to do the job.

The infantry branch is considered one of initiative and boldness. "Every individual must be trained to exploit a situation with energy and boldness and must be imbued with the idea that success will depend upon his initiative and action."<sup>9</sup> These traits were proven to be especially necessary in the jungle. Large units simply could not fight effectively. If enemy positions were located, it was a very arduous undertaking getting heavy weapons into proper firing position. Individual soldiers who possessed the courage to run up to a pillbox and throw a grenade in a firing slit or advance to within bazooka or flame-thrower range allowed attacks to continue and ultimately succeed. Buna would see little such initiative, which cannot be expected of all soldiers, especially when the preponderance of them possessed no combat experience. There would be some

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

who did rise to the occasion, however, and they would help ensure an American victory.

American doctrine is also quite explicit on the role of the individual commander. “During the decisive phase of the battle, the place of the commander is near the critical point of action.”<sup>10</sup> General Eichelberger and other observers found many commanders sorely lacking when touring the front. The Army wanted both the commander and the individual infantrymen to be bold and where the action is. It would take some time before this hope was realized. Men remained within their perimeters and commanders far away from the action. When this changed, victory was achieved.

Night combat receives little attention in the infantryman’s bible. This lack of attention may explain both the weaknesses and ignorance of American soldiers in this arena of combat. The American Army felt: “...night combat can be conducted successfully only when there is time for the preparation and distribution of a well-conceived plan and for thorough reconnaissance by all leaders during daylight.”<sup>11</sup> One soldier told General Eichelberger that in twenty months of service he had had only one night problem.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of proper reconnaissance and patrolling would hinder the American Army in all phases of its first battle, not just in night engagements. The Japanese were the antithesis of the Americans in this arena. They were quite adept at night probing, scouting, and infiltration. If they could do none of these tasks, they were quite satisfied to just rattle the nerves of the American soldiers. The Japanese gave U.S. intelligence a precursor to their expertise in night combat in the naval battles around the island of Guadalcanal. America would make a concerted effort to improve its night fighting capabilities throughout World War II, improving to marginal at best. No battle in this theatre of World War II was ever lost because of a Japanese night attack. Further, few battles were won by

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Luvaas, *Dear Miss Em: General Eichelberger's War In The Pacific, 1942-1945*, p. 61.

**American night attacks. After the war, American military leaders realized the importance of night combat and worked for decades to perfect nocturnal combat. We reached the top of the pyramid with the smashing victory in the Gulf War of 1991, most of which occurred at night. Darkness is now the preferred time for battle in U.S. doctrine.**

**A final oversight in *100-5*, perhaps the most important one, was jungle warfare. What scant attention it did pay to what would be the typical Pacific battlefield was generally useless. The manual stated: “Jungle warfare is characterized by close fighting. Artillery and other supporting weapons have only limited application. The grenade, submachine gun, bayonet, and machete are the weapons best suited to operations in the jungle.”<sup>13</sup> This general statement was all most of our soldiers knew about jungle warfare. The only essential point that is mentioned, but was unfortunately overlooked by those in command, was “...all troops must be thoroughly acclimated before initiating major operations.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, the writers of *FM 100-5* trusted the army’s official manual on jungle warfare would cover this realm of warfare in greater detail. Unfortunately, the army’s official manual on jungle warfare, *FM 31-20*, was of little help. It provided only a very limited view of how to fight and survive in the jungle. It was based on the many experiences of American soldiers and Marines in the jungles of Central America during the first half of the twentieth century and was undoubtedly intended for troops serving in the Panama Canal Zone or the Dominican Republic. Tanks and heavy weapons had never been needed for the United States to squash insurgency or assert its will. This manual was all the men of the SWPA had if they wanted to learn about jungle warfare, if they were even issued it. Those who did read it would quickly realize the differences between the jungles of Central America and those of Asia and the Pacific Islands.**

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<sup>13</sup> *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations (Operations)*, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Adequate information was provided by *31-20* on known jungle diseases, how they are transmitted, and the preventive measures that could be taken. It contained six appendixes that covered poisonous jungle plants and trees, poisonous jungle foods, poisonous weapons used in the jungle, poisonous jungle snakes, venomous jungle insects, and wild jungle animals. The only reference to Asia in those six sections is a few insects and snakes in the Philippines. This is a curious omission after the bitter fighting between American troops and Filipino insurgents at the turn of the Twentieth Century. American military planners obviously felt that the only jungle war the nation would ever fight would be in Central America, not Asia. Time would change this perception.

The jungle manual is also lacking in its discussion of offensive and defensive actions. It seems to trust basic doctrine, with some modifications, to get the job done. It is not lacking in describing the type of soldier needed to fight in this different environment. The first page of *31-20* states:

Troops newly arriving in tropical jungle areas experience a climate to which they are not accustomed and are exposed to diseases with which they are not familiar. These conditions impose a special responsibility on all commanders; they must assure themselves that their troops are adjusted to tropical climates and that the health and combat effectiveness of the command will insure the execution of the assigned mission under tropical jungle conditions.<sup>15</sup>

This passage tries to impress upon the commander the most vital point to success in the jungle: the need for troops ready to fight under its oppressive climatic and topographical conditions. Such a soldier is necessary in both Central America and Asia. A jungle warrior must be acclimated and he must be in top physical condition. He must be able to survive on dull food in smaller quantities than he may be accustomed to. He must be able to keep himself, his weapons, and his clothing clean and dry. The jungle warrior must be stronger than the average soldier.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *FM 31-20, Jungle Warfare*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

The manual correctly asserts the infantry arm as the key weapon in the jungle environment. It also correctly recognizes reconnaissance, small-unit training, and initiative in the commander as keys to victory. It automatically assumes, due to terrain considerations, that artillery, heavy mortars, and mechanized forces will have little value.<sup>17</sup> American infantry never received the opportunity to fight the Japanese in open, fluid combat because the Japanese did not fight in such a manner. They preferred a defensive posture with limited counterattacks to forestall their American attackers. The positions encountered at Buna, however, could not be reduced with basic infantry weapons alone. Tanks and artillery were needed. Of course, this was not yet known when the manual was written. As the war progressed, so did the strength of Japanese fortifications. Fortunately, American firepower and their ability to apply it in the restrictive terrain of the jungle also improved as the war progressed.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, the tank was the key weapon in the Battle of Buna. In 1942, the War Department printed *FM 17-32, The Tank Company, Light And Medium*. A mere three paragraphs of the army's latest manual on armored warfare mention fighting in the jungle. The manual states the obvious, such as, "because of their sensitiveness to terrain, tanks are unsuited to mass employment in jungles," and "a tank platoon might be attached to an infantry company."<sup>18</sup> It believes that infantry should lead in attacks in the jungle, with tanks in support. Future battles would demonstrate the opposite. As far as the SWPA's first battle revealed, *17-32* was correct in its assessment that light, rather than medium or heavy tanks was best suited for the jungle.<sup>19</sup> That too would change. The light M3 Stuart tank was crucial in the coming battle. However, it would prove too flimsy and lightly armed to have any effect against Japanese fortifications as the war progressed. The enemy also honed their craft as time

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19-23.

<sup>18</sup> *FM 17-32, The Tank Company, Light And Medium*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

**moved along. The medium tank would supplant the light tank as the armored weapon best suited for jungle operations.**

**The manual was sorely lacking in all aspects that pertain to the jungle. No mention is made of tank formations in the restrictive terrain. Combined infantry-armor assaults in the jungle were neither mentioned nor demonstrated. It mentions nothing of assaults on a narrow frontage; armor theoreticians and commanders believed too much in wide envelopments and flanking maneuvers against field fortifications. As with many other tasks in this war, the first fight would be the best manual and teacher as to how armor should be employed in the jungle.**

**Both sides often enter their first fight blind as to the other side's capabilities and intentions. The men of the 32nd Division were not physically or mentally ready for this battle. They were poorly equipped and led by men who had been civilians only a few months before. The Japanese were also in poor physical shape due to long months of campaigning, but they were veterans and more capable than their American counterparts at this point in the war. Yet, for various reasons that are often necessary in war, the 32nd went into battle. America needed a victory. MacArthur needed a victory. Both would get their victory but at a very high cost. In the process, the green men who faced the Japanese would become the hardened veterans that stood poised to invade Japan in 1945.**

## CHAPTER TWO

**“In no other profession are the penalties for employing untrained personnel so appalling as in the military.”**

**General Douglas MacArthur  
Chief of Staff, U.S. Army  
1933**

**“Successful operations against well-prepared enemy positions over rugged terrain are possible only if adequate time is allowed for careful reconnaissance and the construction of roads over which to move supplies and heavy supporting weapons. Without the benefit of heavy close-support weapons capable of delivering a heavy volume of accurate fire on enemy positions, the enemy could hold out indefinitely. Assault by foot troops without heavy supporting fires would be costly, if not impossible.”**

**Major General Innis P. Swift  
Commander, I Corps  
1945**

**It would become known as “Bloody Buna.” The first major land battle between American and Japanese forces in the SWPA developed into a battle of attrition, with both sides suffering devastating losses. These losses can be attributed to American inexperience, Japanese tenacity, and New Guinea itself. For the United States, it was a learning experience for a nation still adjusting to war. For Japan, it marked the beginning of the end as MacArthur in the SWPA and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz in the Central Pacific ensnared the periphery of their empire in a chokehold.**

**The Battle of Buna actually began four months before American troops entered the fray. Frustrated in their initial attempt to seize Port Moresby by the American victory in May’s Battle of the Coral Sea, they nevertheless staged a successful landing on the northern coast of the Papua section of New Guinea. Port**

**Moresby was only one hundred miles away from the initial Japanese landing point at Gona but it may as well have been one thousand. The Owen Stanley Mountains, unmapped jungle with little more than footpaths, and a small though resilient Australian ground force stood in their way. The first objective of the Japanese advance force of approximately 2,000 men was Kokoda. Kokoda commanded the Kokoda Trail, the only somewhat manageable infantry path to Port Moresby from Gona. American and Australian intelligence considered an advance along this trail through the thick jungle and high mountains nearly impossible. The Japanese would prove them wrong.**

**Initial Japanese attacks toward Kokoda in the vicinity of Deniki and then Isurava were successful since the Japanese often outnumbered the Australian force by as many as three to one. By the beginning of September, Isurava was in Japanese hands and the Australians in retreat. However, as the Japanese advanced deeper into the New Guinea jungle their lines of supply stretched to the breaking point while that of the Australians became shorter. Heat exhaustion, hunger, and thirst were as great an enemy to the Japanese as the Australians. By 17 September, despite their ever weakening condition, the Japanese reached Ioribaiwa, a village only thirty miles from Port Moresby. However, a new enemy now entered the equation against the Japanese.**

**The Fifth United States Air Force, a small group of attack, fighter, and transport planes commanded by Major General George C. Kenney, continually harassed the Japanese, destroying makeshift bridges, communications, and supplies. The Japanese remaining at Ioribaiwa were physically depleted. Yet, they were determined to drive forward. Port Moresby was closer than a return to Gona through the same disease infested, debilitating jungle commanded by the planes of Kenney's air force. Retreat became the only option when the Australian ground force was reinforced and any hopes of dislodging them evaporated. The Japanese began moving back towards Gona. They were continually attacked by the Australians and U.S. airpower. By the beginning of November, approximately**

2,000 near skeletons occupied defensive positions at Gona and nearby Buna. As the Supreme Commander of Allied forces in the area, General MacArthur felt the time was ideal for the introduction of American ground forces. Though inexperienced and ill-equipped, MacArthur's own intelligence division and Australian After Action Reports led him to believe that this would be an easy fight. Thus began the American Army's part in the Battle of Buna.

Buna was the ideal place to fight a battle, if one were relying on a defensive strategy. The key to the entire battle, as with most battles throughout the Pacific War, was an airstrip. Located on open ground southeast of Buna Mission, the airstrip was imperative for strategic control of the Port Moresby area. It lay only 105 air miles from Port Moresby, 147 from Salamua, and 400 from Rabual, the most important Japanese base in the South Pacific.<sup>1</sup> Buna had to be taken. The Japanese knew this and planned their defenses accordingly. The natural, unforgiving terrain of the area enhanced the positions they constructed.

The Military Intelligence Division of the American War Department published a report on the Buna campaign in 1944, two years after the battle. Its appraisal of the area's geography and climate sheds light on many of the problems American troops would face in the battle. Unfortunately, no such thorough examination of the physical topography was available beforehand. The terrain the 32nd Division encountered included:

The principal swamp in the Buna area lies between Entrance Creek and Simemi Creek...It is absolutely impenetrable, a fact of vital importance in the campaign. Between the closely spaced trees, which are 25 to 100 feet high, is a tangle of roots, creepers, and underbrush. Much of the other ground in the area, though not actually swamp, is thoroughly waterlogged. Much of the drier land is covered with a thick growth of kunai grass or plantations of coconut palms. This coarse grass grows to a height of more than 6 feet, but its height varies greatly, depending on how recently it has been burned over or cut. Its leaves are broad and sharp-edged: its stems are about the thickness of a pencil. The coconut palms are usually planted

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<sup>1</sup> *The Buna-Sanananda Operation, 16 November 1942-23 January 1943*, p. 10.

about 18 feet apart and the growth under them is relatively clear of cover. Between the mouth of Simemi Creek and Buna Mission lies a government coconut plantation about 300 yards wide: running south from Cape Endaiadere is the Duropa Plantation, about 700 yards wide and 1800 yards long. To the southwest of this latter plantation is a large area overgrown with Kunai grass. Another even larger area of grass occupies the region to the north of the main swamp.<sup>2</sup>

General MacArthur realized the advantages the terrain and climate of New Guinea offered the defender. He also knew he had to attack regardless of his troops' inadequacies and the land in to which he was sending them. He noted:

In addition to all our other difficulties, there was New Guinea itself, as tough and tenacious an enemy as the Japanese. Few areas in the world present so formidable an obstacle to military operations. The jagged mountains rear their tall peaks amid sudden plunging gorges, towering above the trackless jungle that covers nearly the entire surface of the sprawling island...In the jungle itself, trails were a sea of mud, with little relief from the swollen rivers and the razor-edged Kunai grass that grows in treacherous bunches higher than a man's head. Offshore were dangerous reefs, most of them uncharted, and the existing harbors were poor and inadequate. Everything about the island and its approaches seemed to hamper combat efforts. Nature did not stop with adverse terrain however...Health conditions matched the world's worse.<sup>3</sup>

Obviously Buna would not be the first place a commander would select to fight a battle. Yet, how many of history's great battles have been fought when it is 70 degrees, sunny, and on beautiful, rolling terrain. Unfortunately for some and fortunately for others, most of the world does not resemble Western Europe or the American Midwest. Many of the Second World War's turning points occurred on battlefields or during campaigns that make many historians ponder, why? Why did the Russians counterattack the Germans outside of Moscow during the harshest period of the 1941 Russian winter? Why did the Germans attack American units in the Ardennes Forest during the winter of 1944, when the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, p. 155.

**German strategic situation seemed so hopeless? Why would any sane strategist fortify and defend so vehemently an island such as New Guinea? The answer to all these questions is because you attack the enemy where he is ( hopefully in a weakened condition, as the German and American units were in 1941 and 1944 respectively) in order to improve your tactical and strategic situation at the expense of your enemy. General MacArthur did exactly that, despite the risks, because he had more to lose if he did not attack.**

**Nature made Buna unappealing enough to an attacking army. The Japanese made it even worse. Enhancing the natural defensive possibilities of the Buna area was a system of bunkers impervious to all but the heaviest weapons and ammunition, of which the 32nd Division had little. The bunkers were constructed in shallow trenches and reinforced with coconut logs. Coconut logs, earth, and sand were placed on top of the bunkers to protect them from mortar and artillery rounds. The walls of the bunkers were reinforced with logs, rocks, sand-filled ammunition boxes, and sand or earth-filled oil drums. These masterful defensive stalwarts were then camouflaged with very fast growing vegetation. Initially, it was impossible to spot these bunkers. They would have been a daunting obstacle to any army.**

**The Japanese soldiers opposing the Americans were also not in top physical condition. They were malnourished, ill equipped, and ravaged from months of campaigning in the disease and fever-ridden jungles of New Guinea. However, they were well motivated, possessed ample ammunition for their weapons and occupied excellent positions. Further, they would not leave the sanctuary of their bunkers. The men of the 32nd would have to come to them.**

**There were actually two separate battles occurring here. Approximately 800 Japanese soldiers held Gona, covering the anchorage at Basabua.<sup>4</sup> Gona would be a primarily Australian task. 1250 Japanese soldiers initially garrisoned Buna, where the U.S. would handle the fight. In addition, over one thousand**

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 145.

fresh, well-equipped troops arrived at Buna on November 16. They were skillfully ferried in by the Japanese Navy and would be followed by several hundred more in a subsequent convoy. U.S. Intelligence was not aware of the arrival of these troops, which would be an unwelcome surprise to the 32nd Division when they launched their first attack on November 19.<sup>5</sup>

An omen for what lay ahead was the initial execution of General MacArthur's plan for the Buna operation. He had hoped to make the Japanese position at Buna untenable through a double envelopment, the jaws closing behind the Japanese positions. One section of this envelopment was the main body of the 32nd Division. The other was a two-company patrol that had to cross the treacherous Owen Stanley Mountains. They were led by Major Alfred Medendorp, who later commented on the readiness of his men. Though in 1942 he was not an expert on jungle warfare, (America possessed few, if any), he was able to make several important observations. There was a complete lack of jungle equipment. Heavy weapons were discarded because it was anticipated that it would be impossible to drag them across the mountains. His unit did not even know they were being committed to a jungle environment and failed to utilize what little training time they had in Australia to prepare. They arrived at Buna in shambles and were of little use in the upcoming campaign. The jungle had defeated them before they ever encountered the Japanese Army.<sup>6</sup>

After viewing the campaigns of the Second World War and as a soldier in the Army myself (methods may have changed but how an attack is conducted has not), the standard doctrine of the U.S. Army when attacking a known enemy position can be divided into four basic stages:

1. Commander's Estimate of the Situation (Terrain analysis, consideration of enemy condition, planning)

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Medendorp, *Personal Experiences Of A Patrol Commander In The Attack On Wairopi*.

2. Preparations (Preparatory fires, movement to assembly areas, reconnaissance)
3. Attack
4. Consolidation and Reorganization<sup>7</sup>

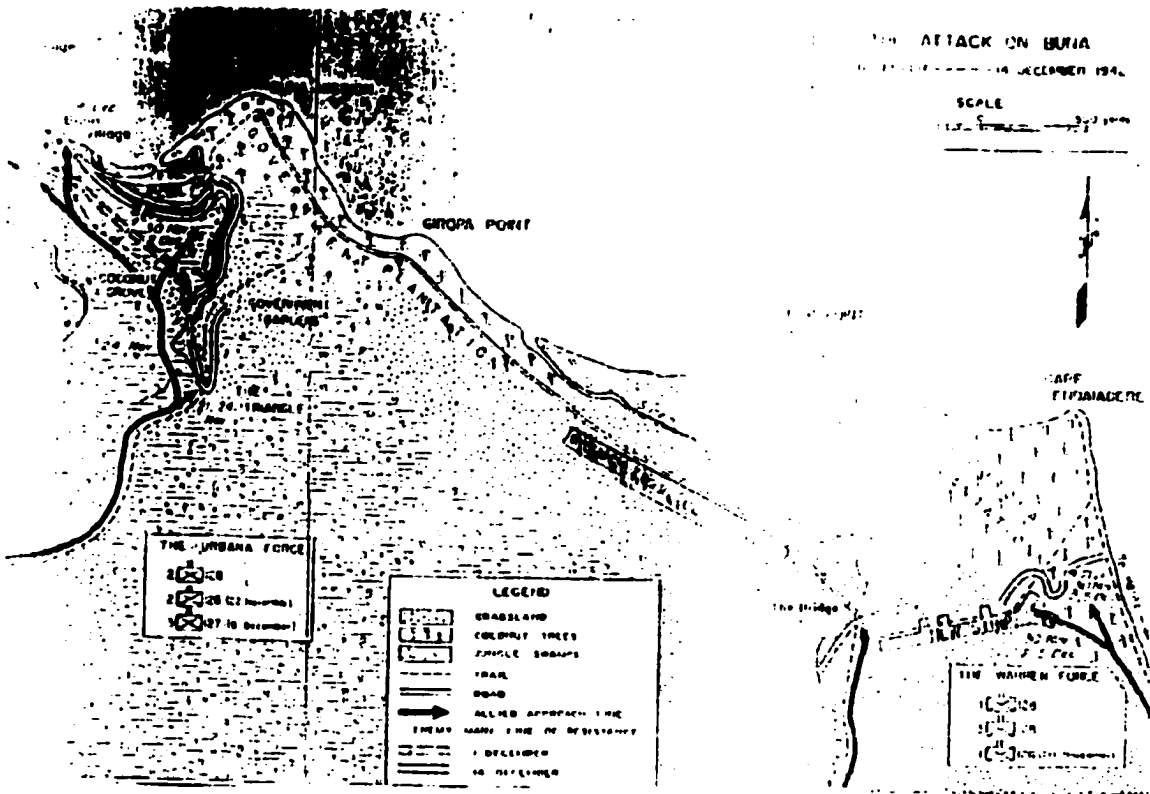
To this day, this is how the U.S. Army believes an attack should be conducted. Often, time constraints may force a stage to happen more quickly than would be ideal or may force the complete omission of stages 1, 2, or 4. There was ample time before the attack of November 19 to thoroughly conduct stages 1 and 2. Stage 4 is only necessary when an attack is successful and would not be needed at Buna.

General Harding had hoped to precede the attack with both an artillery barrage and an air attack. Unfortunately, only two Australian mountain guns were able to fire on suspected enemy positions (no patrols had been dispatched to exactly pinpoint Japanese positions) and due to a storm the night before, there was no air support. This mattered little to Harding's overconfident men. Their bravado would quickly evaporate as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry, encountered the first enemy opposition.

The entire Buna battlefield was little more than 3,500 yards wide. That may seem adequate but attacks were channeled into limited avenues of approach by the terrain, offering the Japanese a distinct advantage (see map). The Girua River protected the western flank of the Japanese position. Buna Village and Buna Mission were the American targets in this area and were the responsibility of what would be called the Urbana Force. They were engulfed in kunai grass, coconut groves, and swampland. The eastern Japanese flank was protected by the sea and centered on Cape Endaiadere and the Duropa Coconut Plantation and were the responsibility of what would be called the Warren Force. From this central position the Japanese could place effective fires upon the Old and New Strips and the Bridge across Simemi Creek that linked the two airfields. The positions on the

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<sup>7</sup> *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations (Operations)*, p. 25.



The Buna battlefield, November 1942-January 1943  
 Source: Samuel Milner, *Victory In Papua*

Figure 1

eastern edge of the battlefield would take significantly longer to reduce than those on the western edge. However, neither fight would be easy.

As the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion advanced towards the Bridge, they encountered murderous small arms fire. As they were taugth, they deployed and prepared to attack. However, what were they attacking? They did not know where the enemy fire was coming from. They did know that with every inch they advanced the rate of enemy fire increased. Part of the problem for the American troops was Japanese infantry weapons gave off no flash, and all noises simply echoed through the jungle. An observer from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion noted:

...It was impossible to see where the enemy fire was coming from; consequently, our own rifle and machine gun fire was ineffective during the early stages...Grenades and mortars were difficult to use because, first, it was difficult to pick out a nest position to advance upon with grenades, second, the thick jungle growth and high grass made throwing and firing difficult, and third, because it was nearly impossible to observe our fire.<sup>8</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry's attack fared little better than that of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Troops approached to within 300 yards of the trail junction between the Old and New Strips before being halted by heavy machine gun fire. The 3d's commander, Lt. Colonel Miller, said it best: "we were stopped cold."<sup>9</sup>

Why such utter failure in this first attack? An observer travelling with the 32nd noted that: "enemy perimeters and general defensive organization must be definitely pinpointed before the attack by patrols and by reconnaissance in force of units as large as a company."<sup>10</sup> American troops had no idea where the enemy positions were located. Disregarding reconnaissance explains above all else why this attack failed. You cannot attack an enemy conducting a static defense if you don't know the location of his positions (or at least their possible locations). This was called an attack but it should be described as a charade. The U.S. troops thought this would be a cakewalk. To their great surprise and discouragement, the

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<sup>8</sup> Major David B. Parker, as quoted by Samuel Milner in *Victory in Papua*, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup> Observer's Report #162, *Observer's Report On Jungle Warfare*, Enclosure#2.

few dead Japanese soldiers they did find, most likely the results of lucky shots, were well-armed, healthy men.<sup>11</sup> The bubble had burst. Intelligence shortcomings and overconfidence had doomed the first attack.

Preparations for the attack had been far from satisfactory. Strafing and bombing runs were unavailable due to the previous night's heavy rains, a distinct possibility on any day or night in this part of the world. The artillery bombardment, whose effectiveness would be dubious in any regard since there were only two guns available, was poorly planned and executed. It lasted only a few minutes and was fired unobserved. Indirect fires are those in which the weapons employed cannot visually identify their targets. They are dependent on intelligence reports or observers for the locations of their targets. Neither was available here. The two mountain guns were essentially firing into an area hoping to hit something. No ground personnel were with the infantry helping to pinpoint targets or adjust the artillerymen's fire. The jungle would have made such observation difficult but it would seem better than just wasting ammunition to have at least attempted observation. Regardless, at this point there were no definitive targets to shoot at because no reconnaissance had been conducted beforehand. Time, experience, and better and more plentiful weapons would eventually cure this problem. Another problem became apparent to several observers during the first attack. Rather than following the artillery preparation immediately upon its cessation, the troops waited before advancing, giving the Japanese soldiers ample time to reorient themselves and prepare to repulse the attack. Colonel Harry Knight, an observer dispatched by the War Department, wrote fear of their own artillery prevented a close advance by the American troops.<sup>12</sup> Only training and familiarization with artillery and its effects could change this and it was too late to start once the battle began. Several attacks.

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> Harry Knight, *Report of Observations in the Southwest Pacific Theatre, during the period October 16 to December 30, 1942*, p. 9.

mostly before the arrival of General Robert Eichelberger, would fail because of this shortcoming.<sup>13</sup>

The first Buna engagement provides difficult criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the American Army's tactical doctrine. The four steps previously outlined were not all followed, so analyzing them is not yet possible. Had those steps been followed, it is still uncertain as to their impact upon the success of the first attack. It is impossible to see if a certain doctrine is workable until it is actually used in combat. Later attacks provide better criteria for evaluation. The American Army quickly got its act together and conducted its next attacks by the book. Unfortunately, the book is not always right.

Undaunted by the failure of the first attack, General Harding ordered a second attack for 21 November. With the general enemy positions pinpointed after the failed attack of the 19<sup>th</sup>, more thorough preparations were now possible. However, there were still problems. The attack was still poorly coordinated. It was supposed to start at 0900, but didn't jump off until 1630 hours. The preattack air strike came late for the 0900 SP (Start Point), then was rescheduled for early afternoon and badly missed the target area, even hitting some American troops. A few minutes before the attack, a quick unobserved bombardment by the two mountain guns and the available mortars against the target area signaled the start of the attack.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 126<sup>th</sup> Infantry, moved out into what would become known as the Old Strip-New Strip area. The Old Strip was an operational airfield while the New Strip was still under construction. The 126<sup>th</sup> moved out against the strips and was once again stopped by heavy machine gun fire. The artillery and air attacks had done no damage to the Japanese positions. The men tried to regroup and continue the advance but could make no progress. They were finally ordered to withdraw.

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<sup>13</sup> *Observers Report #7, Extracts from Buna Campaign Report, p. 6.*

Despite the added preparations for this attack, the result was the same. Why? The attack followed the three of the four steps of the doctrine, though there were some costly coordination problems. The American forces quickly discovered they did not have the proper weapons to deal with the stout Japanese bunkers. The only shells available for the mortars at the time were of the quick fuse variety. These shells exploded on contact rather than after entering their intended target. Even a direct hit did little more than blow around the overhead brush and vegetation covering the position. Delayed action fuses were needed for both the mortars and artillery but were in very short supply. The men occupying the bunkers remained unmolested and ready to meet incoming attacks. Doctrine may have been sound. However, without the proper weapons, it is still not possible to evaluate established methods because the American infantry were fighting without any effective firepower. The foot soldiers would have to do this largely on their own.

Colonel Willis J. Tack, another observer dispatched by the War Department to observe the fighting in New Guinea, realized that due to the lack of available material, a metamorphosis would be needed in the mindset of the American infantry. He noted:

...Infantry is the general purpose and most important arm in the jungle. No type of jungle is impassable to trained foot troops. In hill and mountains, jungle infantry, with limited air support, may be the sole arm. Its lack of firepower must be compensated by aggressiveness and movement...Field artillery and aviation are required to provide the necessary support. Due to the nature of the jungle, firepower may be required for a shorter distance, but infantry mortars alone will not suffice. The infantry-artillery team is the most powerful combination that can be devised for hard jungle fighting.<sup>14</sup>

When commenting here, Colonel Tack was thinking not only of the present situation but also to the needs of the future. There was as yet no infantry-artillery

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<sup>14</sup> Observer's Report #162, *Observer's Report On Jungle Warfare*, p. 5-6.

cooperation. There were only two trained American artillerymen at Buna.<sup>15</sup> The lack of observation has already been noted. Colonel Tack erred in one respect. The infantry-artillery team, while decisive, was not the most powerful combination for jungle fighting. As this battle, and future battles will attest, that distinction belonged to the armor-infantry team.

Due to the lack of firepower, the type of infantry suggested by Colonel Tack was needed. Unfortunately, as November drew to a close, the American infantry were in terrible physical condition. Their lack of preparation for the climatic and topographical conditions of a jungle environment had taken their toll. They were tired, listless, and without rest since arriving in the combat area. General Eichelberger's Intelligence Officer, who visited the front at his commander's request, reported that: "the troops were deplorable. They wore long, dirty beards. Their shoes were uncared for or worn out. They were receiving far less than adequate rations and there was little discipline or military courtesy."<sup>16</sup> As the troops' physical condition deteriorated, so did their state of mind. They realized they did not have the weapons to reduce the bunkers. There were no tanks, flame-throwers, or bazookas. Due to inadequate ammunition, artillery and mortar fire seemed to have no effect even when registering a direct hit. The only way left, or so it seemed, to combat these bunkers, was for small groups of infantrymen to advance against murderous fire against selected positions and throw a grenade through a firing slit. It rarely worked. As the next attack of 26 November approached, little had changed. The Japanese positions still dominated the battlefield.

Something was needed for the Americans to break the stalemate: tanks. Tanks could advance to within pointblank distance of a bunker and systematically reduce it, with accompanying infantry ready to deal with any fleeing Japanese soldiers. Tanks only needed dry ground. The area around the airstrips provided

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<sup>15</sup> H.F. Handy, *Report of Military Observer in Southwest Pacific Theatre of Operations, September 26 to December 23, 1942*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, p. 25.

such ground. General Harding urgently requested Stuart light tanks, whose 37mm main gun would be effective at short range. They would not arrive for a few weeks. His next attack would have to take place with what firepower he already had available.

Harding had recognized the physical condition of his men and gave them all possible time to rest before the 26<sup>th</sup>. To augment the attack he would once again have the two mountain guns. There would also be the support of six Australian 25 pounders, a dozen 81mm mortars, several heavy machine guns, and thirty-five planes. This was the largest concentration of firepower yet mustered and it was hoped it would be enough. Hope would be quickly dashed.

The air attack went off as planned but did little damage.<sup>17</sup> Artillery and mortar rounds were still inadequate. The only gun available that could be helpful was a single American 105mm howitzer. It arrived soon with a limited supply of ammunition. The ammunition was critical because the shells possessed delayed-action fuses that would first penetrate the bunkers before exploding. The bombardment on the 26<sup>th</sup> hit the enemy positions. Due to the time lag between the end of the bombardment and the initial advance of the American infantry, as well as the inability of the weapons employed to do any damage to the Japanese positions, murderous fire again stopped the attackers. The Japanese situation was made easier by the continued American frontal attacks.

Due to the location of the Japanese positions, American commanders saw little recourse but to order general frontal assaults. The ocean was to the rear, which the Americans could not take advantage of because they did not have the shipping necessary to place troops in the Japanese rear. The few available small ships were preoccupied with ferrying supplies. With unfordable streams and heavy jungle to their left and right, attacks were channeled into a few select areas,

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<sup>17</sup> John Shortal, *Forged By Fire: Robert Eichelberger's War in the Pacific*, p. 45. The planes had difficulty locating, and even more difficulty hitting targets. General Kenney, MacArthur's Air Commander, had boasted his planes would be the "flying artillery." A similar boast about the effectiveness of air power would soon doom a quarter of a million men at Stalingrad.

making it very easy for the Japanese to repulse attack after attack. No effort was made to infiltrate within the Japanese bunker network or to find a better route of attack. American doctrine had been mandated to air and artillery preparations with ineffective weapons preceding an infantry frontal assault that did not immediately follow the supporting fires. Each attack failed. Each attack produced heavier American casualties.

Fortunately, Japanese tactics in this battle did not include counterattacks. The Japanese waited in their bunkers for each attack and stayed there when the Americans retired. Something had to change. That change would have to occur on the American side of the battlefield.

To break the stalemate, better artillery and tanks were needed. When they arrived, General Harding would no longer be in command of the 32nd Division. Despite never seeing the area General Harding's men were fighting and dying in, MacArthur could not understand what was holding up the advance. His headquarters also abounded with negative Australian comments about American fighting abilities.<sup>17</sup> MacArthur decided Harding had to be replaced and Robert Eichelberger would be the man to replace him. Eichelberger was told:

I want you to go to Buna and capture it. If you do not do so I don't want you to come out alive and that applies to your Chief of Staff also. Do you understand Bob! Time is of the essence! I want you to relieve Harding Bob. Send him back to America. If you don't do it, I will. Relieve every regimental and battalion commander. Put corporals in command if necessary. Get somebody who will fight. When do you want to start Bob?<sup>18</sup>

This was a really inspiring speech by a man who had no idea what his own men were going through. MacArthur obviously believed the men would not fight. Had MacArthur visited the front he would have seen that they were fighting. They were fighting with ineffective weapons against a powerfully entrenched enemy positioned in dominating terrain. Nevertheless, MacArthur's personal timetable

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<sup>17</sup> George Kenney, *George Kenney Reports*, p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> *Introduction to the Eichelberger Papers*.

was very important, hence his statement to Eichelberger that "time is of the essence." He hoped Eichelberger would reinvigorate the American troops. Loyal soldier that he was, Eichelberger left for Buna the following morning. When Eichelberger arrived at Buna he set to work on straightening out the mess his men were in.

Robert Eichelberger was born on March 9, 1886 in Urbana, Ohio. His father, George Maley Eichelberger was a successful attorney while his mother, Emma Ring Eichelberger was a homemaker for five children, of whom Robert, was the youngest. In 1903, Eichelberger entered Ohio State University. However, his father's law partner was elected to Congress in 1904 and secured an appointment for Robert to West Point. He graduated from the academy in 1909, along with several other men who would command American armies during World War II, including George S. Patton and William Simpson. His first six years of service were as an infantry officer with the Tenth Infantry, shuttling between Indiana, Texas, and Panama. In 1915, he was assigned to the Twenty-second Infantry Regiment and would observe fighting between American forces and those of Pancho Villa on the Mexican border. During World War I, he served on the General Staff in Washington until July 1918, when he accompanied his mentor and the new commander of the Eighth Infantry Division, General William Graves, to France as his Operations Officer. After the war, he served as the Intelligence Officer of the Philippine Department and spent ten months in China. He then transferred from the infantry to the Adjutant General's Corps and would serve as the AG of the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth until July 1929, when he was selected to attend the Army War College. He would then serve as the AG at West Point until July 1935, when he became secretary to the General Staff. He would serve with MacArthur for the last three months of MacArthur's tour as Chief of Staff.

In August 1938 Eichelberger became a full colonel and commander of the Thirtieth Infantry Regiment. In October 1940 he was promoted to Brigadier

General and became Superintendent of West Point. In July 1941 he was promoted to Major General. For the first half of 1942 he created, molded, and trained the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. On 18 June 1942 he became commander of I Corps and that organization would accompany Eichelberger to Australia and General MacArthur. He had a tough job ahead and would need his great wealth of experience to get the job done.

Before he launched another attack, Eichelberger inspected the front and realized many things would have to change. The first and most critical thing Eichelberger addressed was the troops and their state of mind. Their frustration was understandable. What was not, was their reluctance to close with the enemy. Perhaps because of their prewar training and indoctrination, where they were told tanks, artillery, and other weapons would eradicate enemy vehicles and positions, they did not feel it was their job to personally destroy the Japanese bunkers, a mindset that would have to be changed. Second, Eichelberger determined that all indirect fire would be placed under the control of a Fire Direction Center and all Japanese positions would be registered. Ascertaining the exact locations of Japanese positions would be accomplished through vigorous scouting and patrolling, which Eichelberger ordered started immediately.<sup>19</sup>

Eichelberger's third concern was that commanders should get more personally involved in their work. Eichelberger felt command posts were too far behind the front line and commanders, due to their failure to personally supervise attacks, had no idea what was happening.<sup>20</sup> Fourth, a change of tactics was direly needed. Unless absolutely unavoidable, there would be no more frontal attacks. Eichelberger hoped the tanks and howitzer arrived before he had to launch another attack. However, if they had not, infiltration, not frontal assault, was to be the norm. After patrols had located an enemy position, artillery was to work it over as best it could with the infantry attacking immediately afterwards with their

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

individual weapons. It was a tedious, dangerous job that would have to be done one position at a time. Finally, the new commander would get his men fed and rested. He repeatedly appealed for the tanks Harding had requested and was content to wait before his next attack. MacArthur would not wait. Eichelberger launched his first attack on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

Eichelberger would have preferred to have the tanks before launching his first attack. Since they had not yet arrived, his forces would try to make use of the five Bren Gun Carriers that arrived on the evening of 3 December. These were very lightly armored vehicles, open at the top, and completely unarmored in the belly. Further, they were not very reliable on uneven, marshy ground. For the attack of 5 December they would be used on the Warren Front, in the area of the Duropa Plantation. Concurrently, Urbana Force would once again attack and attempt to seize Buna Village. The usual compliment of artillery and six A-20 attack planes would support the attack, the preponderance of the effort focused on the Warren Front.

The Warren Front attack began at approximately 0820 when the A-20s bombed and strafed the target area. Artillery and mortars followed at 0830 and the infantry moved forward at 0842.<sup>21</sup> The advancing infantry immediately came under heavy enemy fire. All five Bren Gun Carriers were quickly destroyed by machine gun fire, grenades, sticky bombs attached to the belly of the vehicles, and an anti-tank gun. Sticky bombs were long poles that had a mine, explosive charge, or dynamite attached to the end of it. However, the men whose devotion and skill had been loudly questioned at SWPA Headquarters, continued the advance under heavy fire and in intense heat. They moved towards the bridge between the strips and were successful in destroying several troublesome bunkers. Once inside the bunker network, they were able to move close enough to get grenades and accurate rifle and machine gun fire through the firing slits. Unfortunately, once they reached within 150 yards of the Bridge, the fire became so intense they had to fall

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<sup>21</sup> 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report of Action Against Enemy: Buna (Papuan) Campaign*, p. 2.

back.<sup>22</sup> Artillery support was requested and received but proved no more effective on this day than it had on any other day. The American troops dug in just 200 yards short of the Bridge, repulsed once again but perhaps inspired by their first limited successes against the Japanese positions.

The Urbana Front's situation, while still quite bad, did not seem as hopeless as on the Warren Front. There were fewer Japanese troops and positions in the village vicinity and the American soldiers had been slowly constricting the area held by the enemy. Urbana's attack would be conducted by a battalion of the 126<sup>th</sup> Infantry, reinforced by the Cannon Company of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Eight 81mm mortars, a 37mm gun, and nine B-25 medium bombers would also support the attack.<sup>23</sup> Between 1000 and 1030, the B-25s and mortars hit the target area. The infantry quickly followed the bombardment and attacked. The company attacking the center of the village made little progress, as did the Cannon Company. On the right, an imaginative and brave platoon advanced between the Japanese positions after crossing a creek under enemy fire. Using similar tactics to those employed successfully on the Warren Front, they destroyed several pillboxes and reached the beach behind the village with eighteen men.<sup>24</sup> The village was now isolated and though still occupied by the Japanese, could be squeezed slowly and methodically until it capitulated.

Though this attack was only partially successful, there was much that could be construed as positive. Finally, there had been successes against the formidable Japanese positions. At point-blank range, the positions were vulnerable to the infantryman's basic weapons. There was now little time between the end of an artillery barrage and the infantry advance. This undoubtedly enabled some troops to get close enough to destroy the pillboxes and bunkers. Furthermore, contrary to reports MacArthur had heard at SWPA Headquarters, all American troops were not reluctant to fight. The determination of the men on the Warren Front after the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> 126<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Buna(Papuan) Campaign*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Brens were destroyed attested to this, as did the successes of the Urbana Force. The Americans were learning how to fight a jungle war. Eichelberger also learned much from the attack of 5 December. He would not attack again on the Warren Front until the tanks arrived. The Japanese positions were too formidable and their fire too intense. While waiting for their arrival he launched limited attacks against Buna Village. The last Japanese bunker was not destroyed until 15 December. One man made a mad dash to the last bunker under heavy fire, climbed on top of it, and dropped a grenade through the firing slit.<sup>25</sup> That was not doctrine. That was blind courage. Such courage allowed the seizure of Buna Village. Attention was now turned to the Warren Front.

By 18 December everything was ready. The tanks had arrived. The American 105mm howitzer with its limited supply of bunker busting ammunition and several veteran Australian infantry companies would also participate in the attack. The tanks and two Australian companies led the attack to the Duropa Plantation and headed right for Cape Endaiadere. The ground was well suited for the employment of armored vehicles. The 3d Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry followed the Australians, mopping up any isolated Japanese positions. Once they secured Cape Endaiadere, they moved west, through marshy ground to Simemi Creek, where they established a bridgehead to threaten the enemy rear. Concurrently, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 126<sup>th</sup> Infantry, moved on the Bridge between the strips (another, though necessary, frontal assault), supported by the remaining tanks, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry and another company of Australians. There were high hopes for this attack.

The artillery, with the exception of the howitzer, as usual had little effect on the bunkers. However, the tanks did. Colonel MacNab, who, with his battalion, supported the main attack, best described their effect. He witnessed:

The tanks really did that job. They apparently completely demoralized the Japs...who fought like cornered rats when they were forced

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<sup>25</sup> Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 253.

into the open as a result of having their fires masked when the tanks broke through their final protective line... There were few holes knocked in the bunkers except where the tanks stood off and blasted them at short range with their 37mm guns.<sup>26</sup>

The heavy small arms fire, which had stalled the infantry for a month, had no effect on the tanks. Two tanks were lost, one to a Molotov Cocktail, the other to mechanical failure, but the attack continued.<sup>27</sup> The three remaining tanks advanced to within 500 yards of Cape Endaiadere, where they systematically blasted a strongpoint to destruction. They halted there.

The other attack against the Bridge and the New Strip was initially less successful. It was held up by a strongpoint consisting of twenty bunkers. One of the two tanks committed here was put out of action after its vision slits were damaged by machine gun fire. The three tanks that had reached Cape Endaiadere and the lone reserve tank joined the attack. Along with two Australian companies and the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 128<sup>th</sup>, they overran the most formidable of the Japanese strongpoints. What was not destroyed by the tanks was finished off by the infantry, who were able to advance to within kicking distance of the bunkers since the tanks drew most of the fire. The emerging veterans of the 32nd Division had distinguished themselves after finally receiving the proper support.

The most successful battle thus far for the 32nd Division was completed. It was also clear to those who had inspected the Japanese positions after the battle that much of the failure experienced in combating these positions resulted from inadequate weapons, not reluctant American infantry. Eichelberger was quick to point this out to General Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff, in a letter dated 20 December 1943. He informed the Chief of Staff: "I know General MacArthur will be glad to know that we found concrete pillboxes with steel doors, interlocked in such a way that it would have been impossible for infantry unassisted to get

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>27</sup> A Molotov Cocktail is a crude but effective explosive. A rag or some other flammable material is put in the top of a liquor bottle and ignited. When it hits its designated target, which is no further away than simple throwing distance, the target is set on fire.

across.”<sup>28</sup> When speaking with an Australian general about his use of tanks, he added: “I am glad he had the tanks to help him. I do not believe he or anyone else would have gone very far without them.”<sup>29</sup> This would be true of many battles in the Pacific War and tanks continued to play a critical role throughout the war in the SWPA. However, this battle was not yet over. Though the outcome was no longer in doubt since the main Japanese line had been broken, much bitter fighting still remained before the Allies completely controlled the Buna battlefield.

The next objective was the Old Strip. To secure it, the Americans would have to cross the bridge over Simemi Creek. The Bridge was 125 feet long and covered the creek and dense swamp on both sides.<sup>30</sup> Realizing its importance, the Japanese had blown a gaping hole in it and covered it with a variety of small arms. It would not be until 22 December that the bridge was repaired and troops with tanks could cross. On Christmas Eve, 1942, Eichelberger was ready to launch his next attack.

The Old Strip was the obvious next American target and the Japanese adjusted their defenses accordingly. The first tank attack had been in an area where the Japanese possessed few heavy weapons. That was not a problem for the Japanese in the vicinity of the Old Strip. In addition to the machine guns that had proved so troublesome to the American infantry, they had two 75mm guns, two 37mm guns, several 25mm dual and triple pompoms, and several dug in 3-inch naval guns.<sup>31</sup> They would be waiting for the attackers and their lightly armored tanks.

After a short artillery preparation, the U.S. infantry moved out at 0950. They were doing well until the 3-inch Japanese naval guns engaged the tanks, destroying three of them. Devoid of their armored support, the infantry faced the same old problems. It was impossible to advance without prohibitive casualties.

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 264.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

**Forward Observers (FO's), located one of the 3-inch guns and artillery quickly destroyed it. Two still remained. No more tanks would be sent forward until the Japanese guns were located and destroyed.**

**Without tank support, the infantry had to find another way to break through the Old Strip and into the enemy rear. Patrols were dispatched to find a crossing somewhere along the creek, but they deemed it impossible. One platoon was ultimately able to wade through a very muddy spot and get behind the Old Strip undetected. On the morning of 26 December two infantry companies, one American and one Australian, joined them. They seized two expertly camouflaged 3-inch guns. The guns were out of ammunition, a problem affecting the Japanese at all levels in the battle. American air power ruled the daytime skies, making resupply very costly. Further, most Japanese air and naval resources were committed several hundred miles away at Guadalcanal. The resilient, brave, and resourceful soldiers defending Buna and Gona were literally left to die. Rather than surrender, they tried to make as many Americans and Australians as possible die with them.**

**With the capture of the guns, the seizure of the Old Strip could now take place. The 105mm howitzer, now out of ammunition, was replaced by an Australian 25 pounder with armor piercing rounds. This weapon was emplaced on the southeast end of the Old Strip and was able to blast the Japanese bunkers at a range of 1000 yards. This was the first application of what would become a staple of SWPA doctrine, the destruction of fortifications by indirect artillery in a direct fire role. American and Australian infantry engaged fleeing soldiers. Those Japanese soldiers who survived fled to Giropa Point. A very limited combined-arms team of thinly armored tanks, a single gun, and dedicated infantry had finally broken the Japanese defenses on the Warren Front.**

**The Urbana Front still had work to do after the capture of Buna Village. Buna Mission and its formidable defenses remained. The American infantry on this front had learned a great deal in their month of combat. Unfortunately for**

them, tanks could not operate on the marshy ground of this area. An attack would have to come from two directions, across the bridge from the island to the southwest of the Mission or along the triangle along a single road that passed through two separate areas of dense jungle. Several attacks were attempted and each failed for the all too familiar reasons.<sup>32</sup> Despite these failures, slowly and deliberately, the Japanese positions were constricted on both the Urbana and Warren Fronts. By 3 January the battle was finally over. The inexperienced, poorly equipped, and until Eichelberger arrived, poorly led Americans had overcome the battle-hardened veterans of the Japanese Army. It had been very costly.

Losses to the 32nd Infantry Division, in this, their first battle of the Second World War, had been severe.

	KIA	Died of Wounds	Died of Other Causes	WIA
126 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	266	34	5	728
127 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	182	29	3	504
128 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	138	25	4	434
Division Troops	16	0	5	14
	602	88	17	1,680

In addition to these numbers, 7,125 men had at one time or another succumb to the elements.<sup>33</sup> The 32nd, which entered the battle with a total strength of 10,825 men, had lost 90% of its effective strength when these sick numbers are combined with the battlefield casualties. This is the result of men not being acclimated to the climate or physically hardened for the rigors of extended combat. The men had persevered. However, the Japanese were in an equally wretched condition. Had they possessed the strength and dynamics of the troops that had conquered so much of Asia, they might have been able to take advantage of their enemy's

<sup>32</sup> 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Tactical History during Papuan Campaign, Buna Area*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 271.

**inexperience and lack of preparation. To win this war, the U.S. military hierarchy knew it could not lose 75% of a division to non-combat causes. Before future operations were mounted, men would have to be acclimated to the jungle or other divisions would suffer the same horrendous losses as the 32d.**

**Before going into the doctrinal and material changes that would have to take place in the American Army before it attacked again, the Japanese situation and its contribution to the eventual U.S. victory deserve some attention. As the battle wore on the Japanese supply situation grew worse, a point attested to by the ammunitionless 3-inch naval guns. Had fresh troops not arrived before the battle, this could have been the easy fight many Americans thought it would be. An easy fight may have been the worse possible scenario for MacArthur's Army. Buna simply would have occurred in the next battle or at whatever time the Japanese decided to put up a protracted fight. Those newly arrived troops were never reinforced. Instead, supplies moved to the Japanese forces on Guadalcanal, where their fellow troops repeatedly attacked, rather than defended against, their American counterparts. Once the Japanese garrison was isolated in Buna Mission and around Giropa Point, their fate was sealed. Their tactics, strictly defensive throughout the operation, allowed the vulnerable 32d Division to survive. Rather than counterattacking the beleaguered American infantry, particularly after the first few attacks, they were content, undoubtedly due to manpower and supply constraints, to wait in their positions for the 32nd to attack again. The ineffectiveness of the available artillery that shelled them before each attack may have also contributed to this defensive state of mind. Why come out to fight if you are safe in a secure position? Contrary to what they may have thought, the 32nd gained experience while the Japanese position grew weaker with each passing day. The American Army was the victor in this battle of attrition.**

**American tactics would now have to be adapted to the environment and enemy they would face in the SWPA. The first goal of every new commander in this area had to be the acclimation and hardening of his troops. Once this vital**

task was accomplished, how to defeat the Japanese became the next priority. Limited movements and close-quarter combat against stout defensive positions would be the norm in the SWPA. When entering this battle there was no doctrine. MacArthur never seemed interested in addressing this pertinent detail. His timetable was the Commanding General's foremost concern, the actions of his men were simply a means to the end. MacArthur did not heed the precautionary words of General Eichelberger on unfitness of his men and therefore bears the brunt of fault for this near debacle.

Fortunately, the beginnings of a workable tactical doctrine had emerged in this battle. Infantry following close behind their indirect fire support had proved somewhat successful in destroying Japanese bunkers, though with prohibitive losses. Only with the arrival of tanks was the stalemate on the Warren Front finally broken and American casualties curtailed. A combined-arms doctrine utilizing the various capabilities of armor, artillery, infantry, and aviation had to be developed. The men had to be properly trained for service in the jungle, not for the open plains of Western Europe. General Eichelberger described jungle warfare as "a sly and sneaky kind of combat which never resembled the massive and thunderous operations of Europe."<sup>34</sup>

U.S. forces facing the Japanese would also have to be better equipped. Individual weapons such as flame-throwers, bazookas, and heavy machine guns were needed. Artillery with proper ammunition, better tanks and heavier mortars were also needed. American industry would provide the tools. It was up to the commanders and veterans of the Buna Campaign, victorious despite all their shortcomings (some self-inflicted, others the result of higher command), to combine the tools with the soldiers into an effective doctrine. The American Army entered the Battle of Buna unprepared for jungle war. Some units in the SWPA would have sixteen months to prepare for combat. Others would have

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Eichelberger, *Our Jungle Road To Tokyo*, p. 33.

longer. It was April 1944 before New Guinea witnessed its next desperate land battle.

The qualities of the American fighting man as well as the American citizen shone brightly in this battle. Many had believed, both enemy and friend, that the U.S. did not have the stomach for a protracted, brutal war. Americans wanted their easy way of life. In some ways, American soldiers mirrored this stereotype. They were quite willing to use the machines of war to fight, machines produced in quantities that only American industry could achieve. Is there anything wrong with doing something the easy way if the opportunity presents itself? However, these machines were not yet ready for the Battle of Buna. Once that became apparent, the men of the 32d Division displayed the premier of American qualities, flexibility. If the machines were unavailable or could not do the job, the men of the SWPA would do it the hard way. They did just that and would continue to do so throughout the war in this theatre.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, along with the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, which arrived in the final stages of the battle, possessed a significant advantage over most of the units that followed them into battle in this theatre. They fought a bitter battle, recognized their doctrinal deficiencies, and worked to address them. These two divisions would bear the brunt of the fighting in New Guinea when battle returned in 1944. A prudent course of action would have involved the dissemination of the lessons learned and training objectives of these two division throughout the SWPA. Such a course of action was the responsibility of the theatre commander and his primary staff. However, no such guidance was forthcoming. The men of the SWPA would have to figure out how to fight the Japanese on their own.

## CHAPTER THREE

**“Training means long hours of arduous work. For the officers and noncommissioned officers it means not only hard physical work but also intensive daily study of the manuals covering the latest technique in warfare. It is only through discomfort and fatigue that progress can be made toward the triumph of mind and muscles over the softness of the life to which we have become accustomed.”**

**General George C. Marshall  
U.S. Army Chief of Staff  
1940**

**“The leader of fighting men must never lose sight of the continual training it takes to perfect his troops as individual fighters. He receives them well trained from the training center and then it’s his job to perfect them. He must constantly see, during all of his units’ training, that his troops form the fighting man’s crafty habits. He must give them hours for special training in these things as they need it. He must take quick steps of criticism and even punishment to rid them of careless, over-confident, and unrealistic habits in training that would invite unnecessary death in battle. He must see that his unit grows into a fighting team made of soldiers.”**

**Lt. Col. Joseph I. Greene  
Editor, Infantry Journal  
1942**

**Before being affected by the fighting at Buna in 1942, the infantryman’s bible, *FM 100-5*, was sorely lacking in the essentials for combat in the jungle. The updated version of 15 June 1944, still devoted little of its text to the type of war fought in the SWPA. Nonetheless, what it did explain was far superior to the 1941 version, if for no other reason than at least some of its authors had seen combat against the Japanese and wanted to ensure that those who fought them in the future had some idea what they were up against. What was written did possess some**

discrepancies and was vague in several key areas but it must be remembered that *100-5* is the army's basic manual. Specifics were covered in sub-manuals such as *FM 71-20, Jungle Operations*, and *FM 17-36, Employment Of Tanks With Infantry*. The type of war encountered in the SWPA is covered in *100-5's* "Special Operations" chapter. Assaults against fortified positions, night combat, combat at defiles and in mountainous terrain, and jungle operations were covered in only a few pages. Nevertheless, what was covered demonstrates that *100-5's* authors recognized that the U.S. Army was in fact fighting two wars against two enemies. It also demonstrates that Germany was still seen, perhaps rightfully so, as the army's primary enemy. The new manuals were available for the American forces that began assaulting the Philippines in October 1944. Unfortunately, most were unavailable in April of that year when MacArthur began his offensive along the northern coast of New Guinea. Veterans, not manuals provided the necessary knowledge at that point in time.

The first special operation applicable to the SWPA in *100-5* was the assault of a fortified locality. The presentations concerning reconnaissance and organization of positions were not applicable to the SWPA. The manual said a fortified locality "may comprise a single, strongly organized position. It will probably consist of a series of strongly organized positions disposed in great depth and breadth in such manner as to be mutually supporting."<sup>1</sup> Few Japanese positions were mutually supporting because the Japanese did not fight in a conventional western manner. The Pacific War provides example upon example of Japanese soldiers occupying a position and remaining there until destroyed. Flanking attacks were very successful against Japanese positions because the positions were unsupported. They were isolated bastions of resistance, occupying areas crucial to the ultimate success of an operation. Although at times Japanese positions could count on support from a nearby bunker or pillbox, had they always been mutually supporting, they would have been an even tougher nut to crack.

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<sup>1</sup> *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations (Operations)*, p. 215.

The type of reconnaissance advocated in this section of *100-5* was impossible in a jungle environment. While correct in its assertion of the importance of detailed reconnaissance, the manual was inapplicable in jungle terrain. The manual stated "reconnaissance involves the employment of reconnaissance and combat aviation, and mobile ground recon units containing engineers, sound, and flash ranging, and signal intelligence units."<sup>2</sup> Air recon was nearly impossible in the thick growth of the jungle and the ground was impassable to most wheeled vehicles. At Buna, tanks and other armored vehicles were employable on a very limited basis on very selective terrain. Signal unit's transmissions rarely penetrated the jungle or they bounced off the surrounding mountains. The foot soldier is the primary reconnaissance tool in jungle warfare. The type of recon proposed here might have worked quite well in Europe but was woefully out of place in the SWPA. It was a serious omission of how to assault a fortified locality that the jungle warfare manual would have to address.

When describing how an attacking force should be trained, organized, and equipped, *100-5* did an outstanding job in the few pages it dedicated to the subject. The exact description found in *100-5* was a detailed, systematic, possible solution to a typical defensive position. Its approach parallels that used by many of the special assault teams created in the SWPA that would perform so magnificently in 1944 and 1945. The attack echelon:

...is made up of specially selected troops and weapons. Normally, this attacking echelon will contain infantry, engineers, high muzzle velocity, flat-trajectory guns, and chemical troops. The engineers equipped with demolition equipment will destroy obstacles and mine fields, and will assist the forward movement of the infantry and direct fire cannon.

Training of assault detachments is carried out by having them rehearse the contemplated operation on terrain and against fortifications similar to those to be encountered. The size and number of assault detachments needed in the preliminary operations depend on the size and number of emplacements which must be reduced.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Each tactical grouping must have enough trained assault detachments with sufficient special equipment to insure the reduction of all emplacements in its zone of action...Sufficient artillery of all calibers required to reduce the outpost system supports the attack echelon. Artillery of the heavier types assists the preliminary operations by constant bombardment of the hostile main position, paying particular attention to hostile artillery which can bring fire upon troops engaged in preliminary operations...Some emplacements will remain intact following the employment of heavy artillery and combat aviation. Members of the assault team are assigned to destroy these emplacements by the placing of demolition charges. Under cover of supporting fires and smoke, the assault detachment advances close to the emplacements; final selection is made of the exact location and route for each demolition to be placed; and the preparation of each demolition is completed.

Ordinarily, one assault detachment is formed for each emplacement to be attacked. After the capture of an emplacement, the next emplacement scheduled to be attacked is overcome in the same manner. When an assault results in prolonged hand-to-hand fighting, local supports are rushed forward to assist the assault detachments.<sup>3</sup>

These passages cover the basics of an assault against a well-prepared position. Units could use it as a guide and tinker with it to best suit their men and equipment. Unfortunately, there was an important omission of a valuable tool against Japanese fortifications: armor. Perhaps believing the employment of armor to be impracticable in a jungle environment, the experience at Buna notwithstanding, the authors of *100-5* neglected to include a possible scenario involving armor in an attack against a fortified position. In this case, the philosophy that armor was a weapon of penetration and exploitation, the missions for which it was originally intended, probably governed those writing *100-5*. The manual stated that armor would not be used to its best capabilities in a deliberate attack against a specific position. The men of the SWPA would be quick to disagree with that assertion, however. Tanks had proved decisive at Buna and would continue to do so from time to time throughout the Pacific ground war.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 218-221.

**They would do so not as a weapon of penetration and exploitation but as a direct fire platform, often at point-blank range.**

**Another staple of war against the Japanese was night combat. The pages devoted to nocturnal fighting predominantly covered night attacks, an extreme rarity by American forces in the SWPA. Establishing a nighttime perimeter was the key facet of night combat against Japan. The Japanese were adept at probing American lines at night and rattling nerves. American units would learn to cease their own attacks with enough daylight left to prepare and man foxholes, clear fields of fire, and conduct reconnaissance. These essentials were recognized and developed the hard way, through experience and actual combat. By necessity, they were developed in-theatre, without any guidance from *100-5*.**

**As the battles in New Guinea and the Philippines are examined, the importance of preparing nighttime perimeters will become increasingly clear. A successful infiltration or a limited attack by the Japanese at night could disrupt an early morning American attack, cut off individual units and produce unnecessary casualties. It could also return the initiative to the enemy. Therefore, rarely, did American units continue attacking after 1600 hours. This gave them anywhere from two to five hours to prepare positions and weapons. Additional preparation time paid off when the nightly problems arrived. As the war progressed, the Japanese continued to attack American perimeters despite staggering casualties. In the morning, American infantry would have to walk over the scores of Japanese dead they created the previous night before resuming their attack. This, of course, left fewer enemy facing them each morning and bolstered the American troops' confidence. Survival was worth less sleep.**

**Some of the war's most bitter fighting would take place in the defiles and mountains of the SWPA. Outflanking these natural obstacles is the Army's preferred method of fighting an enemy entrenched around a defile or on a hill or**

mountain.<sup>4</sup> What they failed to realize was the frequent impossibility of a flanking maneuver in the forbidding terrain of New Guinea and parts of the Philippines, as well as the Japanese soldier's attitude towards flanking maneuvers. They usually did not care. Bunkers and individual positions remained dangerous even after being outflanked because the Japanese would fight on until they starved, were burned out, or sealed in. This would be the case at Biak, at the defile in front of Lone Tree Hill, and in the battle for the city of Manila, to name but a few examples which will later be explored in depth. The value of *100-5* in this area was the premium it placed on tough, well-trained infantry, the only troops that could operate successfully in this terrain. Armor could not always be employed and most high trajectory artillery was useless. It was hard, dirty work and the realm of the infantryman.

The most important part of fighting successfully in the SWPA was skill in jungle operations. Four, only four pages in the "Special Operations" section of *100-5* are devoted to the arena that more than one half a million American soldiers would eventually fight in. Most of the little applicable instruction in the manual did at least provide a suitable basis for jungle warfare. Specifics were covered in sub-manual *FM 71-20, Jungle Operations*. Generally, though, the shortage of information was just another example of both the U.S. Army's lack of knowledge and lack of interest in a protracted jungle war.

One of the costly mistakes made by the authors of *100-5* when discussing war in the jungle, as when they described the assault of a fortified locality, was the reliance they placed on the tactical effectiveness of air power. "Airpower has relative freedom of movement over the jungle."<sup>5</sup> While it did have freedom of movement, observation of enemy forces in the thick jungle was nearly impossible. As future battles will demonstrate, tactical airpower rarely turned the tide of any battle in the SWPA. Poor visibility and the close proximity to each other of

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

friendly and enemy troops made air attacks very risky ventures. However, air power did have a role, a very vital one and one which the manual got right. Perhaps they had a crystal ball, but *100-5* was correct when stating: "Jungle conditions may require the movement of the bulk of the troops, supplies, and equipment by air. In jungle warfare the seizure, construction, and protection of the necessary airdromes is often made the initial objective of all forces involved."<sup>6</sup> The previous two sentences explain MacArthur's 1944 New Guinea campaign, as well as Nimitz's drive across the Central Pacific. Due to the great distances involved and the forbidding terrain of Asia and the Pacific Ocean, many men on both sides would die attacking and defending airfields.

The few other paragraphs in these four manual pages are very accurate, though not too detailed. They stress the importance of acclimated, hardened troops, the need for specialized equipment and training, and in one sentence, the use of armor. *100-5* states:

The ability to maneuver off trails requires hardened troops, thoroughly acclimated and equipped for close fighting. Their training must enable them to move across country, at least for tactical movements and give them confidence in their jungle technique. Arms and equipment must be designed for maximum mobility through tangled wilderness under oppressive climatic conditions.

The rifle and bayonet, automatic rifle, grenade, submachine gun, carbine, machete, and mortars are weapons suited for jungle fighting. Heavy artillery and rockets may replace artillery in the jungle, when lack of observation and the weight of field pieces limit their employment. Against well-constructed defensive positions, flame-throwers are extremely valuable. All infantry heavy weapons must be transported by pack, small cart, or on the backs of men. Tanks may be used in close support of infantry.<sup>7</sup>

This limited, but valuable information would have been better if *100-5* included in its "Special Operations" chapter, the assault of a fortified locality in a

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

**jungle environment or restrictive terrain. That would have to be covered in other manuals or developed by the veterans of individual units.**

**Lack of experience with armor in the jungle was the main contributor to the meager three paragraphs, most of which obvious generalization, in 1942's *FM 17-32, The Tank Company, Light And Medium* (reference, Chapter 1, p. 14-15). On 13 March 1944, *FM 17-36, Employment of Tanks with Infantry*, was published by the War Department. A conventional manual on the employment of armor was essentially useless in the SWPA. Rarely, could armor forces larger than platoon size (3-5 tanks) be committed to the limited small unit engagements so typical of the battles between the US and Japanese. Further, they were not used for deep penetration moves in the enemy rear areas or flanking maneuvers around a city. German blitzkrieg or Patton's style of war was impossible here.**

**Blitzkrieg, or Lightning War, was Germany's answer to the stalemates of World War I. Tanks and mechanized infantry would penetrate the main enemy line of resistance with the aid of tactical air support and cause havoc in the vulnerable rear areas. Large pockets of enemy resistance would be bypassed and dealt with by slowmoving infantry. The tank was the key component of blitzkrieg as well as of Germany's conquest of Western Europe and much of the Soviet Union. George Patton commanded the Third U.S. Army in Western Europe during the last year of the war. With a very vehicle heavy army, he helped break the stalemate in Western Europe and advanced incredible distances in short periods of time. Such accomplishments were impossible in the SWPA. The terrain did not support such movement while the tank had to work with infantry and artillery as a combined-arms team to survive and fight effectively against an enemy as resilient as the Japanese. Regarding the employment of tanks, *17-36* devoted most of its pages to the large-scale battles being fought in Europe. The section on "Operations in Jungles" then displayed the experiences of the previous 18 months in the seven pages it devotes to war against the other enemy.**

***FM 17-36* begins its section on jungle operations by detailing under what conditions tanks should be committed in such an environment. These conditions include:**

- 1. Against a definitely located enemy resistance which has been holding up the infantry advance, the importance of the resistance being such that its reduction will materially affect the operation as a whole.**
- 2. In sufficient numbers to insure continuity of effort and to make full use of the tank's own powers of fire and maneuver.**
- 3. After a thorough tank-employment reconnaissance has been made.**
- 4. After detailed planning for coordinated action of the combined force participating in the attack. This planning is conducted in echelons down to include infantry elements and tank crews, which are to operate closely together.**
- 5. In conjunction with the supporting fires of all available weapons before and during the attack.<sup>8</sup>**

**This describes Pacific land combat. A Japanese pillbox or bunker is stalling an advance. Reconnaissance determines where it is and how best to destroy it. The actual tank crews and infantry plan together what they will do and the position is then blasted with every weapon possible. Exactly how that is done, or a general guide to such an operation, is elaborated upon in the "Attack Against Fortifications" section of *17-36*. It offers that:**

**...medium tanks may be used to assist in the reduction of fortifications...they assist the infantry by fire and as a protection for the advance.... Precede the attack with heavy artillery preparation .... When paths have been blasted in the obstacles, move the remainder of the platoon of tanks forward by the assault detachment. Tanks fire on pillbox at close range. Tanks pass through the gap followed by assault teams. Assault detachments complete neutralization of pillboxes. Tanks fire at other pillboxes at close range as soon as smoke clears. Assault teams complete capture or destruction.<sup>9</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> *FM 17-36, Employment Of Tanks With Infantry*, p. 77.

The use of this general description of an attack against fortifications was emulated in some degree by most of the units that eventually fought in the SWPA. Tanks would draw fire and aid in the infantry advance. The infantry would protect the armor from ambushes and complete the neutralization and destruction of individual positions. Special assault teams were created and trained to deal with the resolute Japanese positions. It required all arms to work together to succeed. Though the general remarks in the field manual were helpful, most of the tactical details would still be worked out by individual units in the field. To reduce a position in the jungle, a soldier had to first know how to fight and survive in such an environment. *FM 72-20, Jungle Warfare*, dated 27 October 1944, reinforced the basic principles set down by *100-5* on how to fight and survive in the extreme conditions of the SWPA.

The new jungle warfare manual was clearly written by men who had actually fought against the Japanese in the jungles of Asia. It covers a myriad of subjects, all of which can be considered important. It begins by explaining health, hygiene, and sanitation in the field. The wildlife, diseases, and peculiarities are of the jungles of Asia, not Central America. The importance of physical conditioning and acclimatization for all troops, even veterans, was stressed. The climate of Hawaii and the United States, while often very hot, is pleasurable when compared to the inferno of New Guinea. The large numbers of sick during the Battle of Buna, due to exhaustion and heat prostration, could be avoided in the future if the men were properly attuned to the environment they would fight in. The manual also stresses rest and increased water consumption. It was impossible for troops to function in continuous combat in such conditions without added care. This, as with most key areas in war, was the responsibility of the individual unit commander.

*FM 72-20* stated a successful jungle warrior must possess three vital traits: discipline, suspicion, and patience. Discipline was vital because he must be able

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83-4.

to function as part of a team, to trust what he has learned, and to follow the directions of his immediate superiors. Suspicion in the dense jungle, with its constant bombardment of weird noises, could be the key to survival. A Japanese soldier could be hiding anywhere. Above all, the jungle warrior must be patient. Rapid movement is not safe, nor often possible, in the jungle. What would take an infantry unit in France two hours to do could take two days in New Guinea. Fighting in such an environment necessitates methodical, meticulous, planning and movement. Speed and bravado could mean disaster.

Drawing on their own experiences, the authors of *72-20* even offer practical hints for jungle living. They suggest how best to sleep in the jungle by using personal gear to make hammocks or individual tents.<sup>10</sup> Despite its added weight, rain gear should never be discarded because torrential rains could appear at any time. The authors offer the best foods to eat and how to preserve them. Alcohol, despite the instant pleasure it provides, is dangerous in the jungle because it speeds along dehydration and numbs senses. Finally, due to the isolation of units at various times in jungle combat, knowledge of individual medical care was essential.

*FM 72-20* next offers suggestions, not directives, on how to fight an enemy such as the Japanese in an unforgiving environment. When discussing jungle operations, *72-20* mentions all the essentials of success against a resourceful and determined enemy in an extreme environment. All attacks, if possible, should be preceded by ground reconnaissance. The veterans of Buna can attest to this vital fact. Properly trained scouts are helpful but not always available. The basic infantryman must be taught the value of “alert, intelligent patrolling.”<sup>11</sup> It saved lives and allowed preparation of a better plan. Artillery, thought to be too cumbersome for effective employment in the 1941 jungle warfare manual, was now considered irreplaceable. Buna had demonstrated its

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<sup>10</sup> *FM 72-20, Jungle Warfare*, p. 35-37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

great importance. In that battle, a single effective artillery piece made a great difference in the outcome of the battle. 72-20 states that the principles of artillery employment:

...in open areas are equally applicable in the jungle, however, the employment itself presents many difficulties. The value of artillery support is so great, however, that every effort must be made to make this firepower available and effective. All calibers of artillery are desirable. The thick vegetation restricts the effective radius of shell burst so that in general, more large caliber shells are necessary than for similar targets in more open terrain. Artillery should be of sufficient caliber (105mm and 155mm) to blast away jungle undergrowth and also to destroy hostile positions. All such weapons should be capable of high-angle fire.<sup>12</sup>

One need only look at the future battles of Biak, Breakneck Ridge, and Manila to see how much firepower the American Army could bring on a single objective in jungle or mountainous terrain. Battles between the Japanese and Americans usually evolved into a protracted fight for a key position. The Japanese occupied the position and had to be blasted out of it. Every possible weapon was needed to accomplish this task. Even anti-aircraft guns, an organic part of all American infantry divisions, had a role other than protecting troops from air attack. Since they may be needed in the infantry support role, "anti-aircraft weapons should always be sited for alternate, direct-fire missions at ground or waterborne targets. Frequently, they can be employed in support of attacks on enemy positions on ridges."<sup>13</sup> 72-20 recognized that when assaulting elaborate defenses, such as those used by the Japanese, anything that can shoot could be useful. Such an assault should also follow certain tried and true steps.

The first step was of course, aggressive patrolling and reconnaissance. Next, once the position was identified, all possible firepower must be brought to bear on that position. Artillery support, and if possible tank support during the actual attack, must be heavy and continuous. The best method of attack was on a

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

narrow front, so the greatest possible concentration of fire could be brought to bear on the target. The next point was key: as soon as the fires lift, the troops must assault.<sup>14</sup> This allows them to get close enough to the position where their own weapons could be effective, with the Japanese soldiers either dead or still hugging the ground from the artillery barrage. There was now a recipe for success that was emulated by many of the victorious American units throughout the Pacific War.

The tank, even the lightly armored, lightly armed Stuart, had proved its value in a jungle environment. It had broken the Japanese defenses at Buna the first day it was employed. In this part of the war, American tanks could rarely be used for deep penetrations, flanking maneuvers, or armor v. armor clashes, the roles for which they were intended. The terrain did not support such missions and Japanese tanks were woefully inferior to American tanks. The few strictly tank battles in this theatre were overwhelming American victories. Yet, armor did have an important role in the jungle. *72-20* states:

Tanks may be used to advantage against definitely located, limited objectives where the terrain permits. Thorough tank-employment reconnaissance is necessary...Frequently, tanks are attached to infantry companies; the two elements operate closely together, the infantry providing close-in protection to the tanks. The principal value of the tanks will be in the use of their cannon, flame-throwers, machine guns, and crushing weight in the destruction of enemy bunkers and other field fortifications.<sup>15</sup>

The key point here, aside from the types of targets tanks should be employed against, is the absolute necessity of infantry-armor cooperation. Each must recognize the other's capabilities and weaknesses. Only thorough training would ensure this.

The final essential point of this manual was the preparation of the nighttime bivouac area. Even though this may seem trivial, against the Japanese it was crucial. Lack of a protected perimeter would spell disaster given the Japanese

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

pendant for probing night attacks. A safe bivouac area must have 360 degree security with good fields of fire; patrols should advance at least 1000 yards outside the perimeter to locate any nearby enemy.<sup>16</sup> The area must be defensible. To ensure this, certain steps must be followed. They included:

1. A brief daylight reconnaissance of the bivouac area and assignment of units to sectors for all-around defense.
2. Movement of the troops into assigned sectors.
3. Clearing of limited fields of fire for automatic weapons.
4. Preparation of hasty all-around defense.<sup>17</sup>

The authors of *72-20* considered following these steps essential to success in the jungle. If a Japanese night attack caused enough damage or confusion, the next day's mission was imperiled. Fortunately, the preponderance of American units, especially in this theatre, followed these guidelines. Try as they might, the Japanese Army and their unnerving night attacks were never able to forestall an American advance.

With this manual, as well as *100-5* and *17-36*, American commanders had the basics from which to fight effectively in the jungle. Still, the manuals were not as useful as they could have been. They did not come out in time to effect the fighting during 1943 and much of 1944. *FM 100-5* was printed on 15 June 1944, *17-36* on 13 March 1944, and *72-20* on 27 October 1944. By the time *72-20* was printed, the New Guinea campaign was over and the Leyte campaign just beginning. Though the manuals were too late to be of immediate help they were useful once distributed. Training for the campaigns after Buna would be the responsibility of the veteran soldiers and commanders of individual units. The older manuals were of little use, so it would have to be experience that prepared American troops for their next battles with the Japanese Army.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

It was quickly realized at SWPA Headquarters and in Washington, that though new recruits would receive basic training in the United States, they would need specialized training once arriving at their units. The southeastern United States could have served as an adequate area for a jungle warfare center but to staff such a school would have meant taking veterans away from their units in the SWPA. Therefore, General Leslie McNair, the Commander of Army Ground Forces (the Army's top training command), with General MacArthur's wholehearted approval, decided that recruits would receive their fundamental training at home and their jungle training in the Southwest Pacific under the supervision of their commanders.<sup>18</sup> All General MacArthur wanted was men in good physical shape, who knew their weapons and basic tactics.<sup>19</sup> There were few theatre-based training programs in the SWPA. most occurred at the individual unit level. However, the Australians had set up a Training Center for Jungle Warfare and in 1943 and 1944 many new arrivals attended this school and reaped the benefits of Australian expertise in this most unusual type of combat.

General McNair was certainly a man who thoroughly checked anything that could aid in the development of the American soldier. Before agreeing that jungle training would take place exclusively in the SWPA, he dispatched an observer to the Australian Center. The observer noted the expertise of the instructors, the prerequisite for any successful school, civilian or military. Nearly all the officer instructors were combat veterans and most of the senior NCOs were recent veterans of the fighting in New Guinea. Men were hardened and acclimated to life in the jungle; lack of this was perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the 32d Division during the Buna campaign. Japanese doctrine and "tricks" were covered in detail. Small unit actions, reduction of fortifications, jungle survival and equipment, and scouting were also covered throughout the course. This center performed so well

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<sup>18</sup> Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Organization Of Ground Combat Troops*, p. 342.

<sup>19</sup> William R. Keast, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Procurement And Training Of Ground Combat Troops*, p. 227.

that General McNair's observer recommended: "...no attempt be made to train replacements in jungle warfare in the United States. It is believed that such training can be given more efficiently within the SWPA and that by doing so the replacements will reach the units in much better physical and mental condition."<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, not every man assigned to the SWPA was able to attend this outstanding school, although enough men did attend to ensure most units had at least a core of proficient jungle fighters. The rest of the training would have to take place in the individual units that would make up MacArthur's command.

The weakness of replacements in jungle combat also compelled General McNair to allow MacArthur and his subordinates to perform much of the preparation these basic trainees needed before entering combat. Brigadier General L.S. Ostrander was sent to the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division to inquire on the "Sufficiency Of Trained Replacements" during the late spring of 1944. He interviewed Colonel H.H. Haney after his 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment received approximately 1200 replacements. According to the Colonel, the replacements were better than he had anticipated, but still needed work in weapons firing, realistic squad and platoon combat exercises, and extended exercises in the field.<sup>21</sup> Another negative in Colonel Haney's view was the long time lag, sometimes up to five months, between a soldier's completion of basic training and arrival at his unit.<sup>22</sup> Physical condition deteriorated during this layover, a point which would have revealed itself far more radically had the 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry been in combat when the replacements arrived.

The other unit visited by General Ostrander was Colonel O.F. Newman's 186th Infantry Regiment. Colonel Newman was also generally pleased with the several hundred replacements his regiment had received. He told General Ostrander he was happy if a recruit could "shoot and salute."<sup>23</sup> He and his

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<sup>20</sup> Observer's Report # 9, *Australian Training Center For Jungle Warfare*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Observer's Report # 68, *Sufficiency Of Trained Replacements*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

subordinates would take care of the rest. He did want stateside training to be more rigorous with regard to long distance marching, and physical stamina, two staples of war in the jungle.

Other observers also visited the battered 32d Division, refitting from its ordeal at Buna. The formerly green and now battle-hardened veterans of the division received several hundred replacements early in 1944. Commanders felt the replacements could fire their weapons but were inadequately trained in weapons mechanics and taking care of themselves in the field, tactics of the individual in the squad, and combat practice firing, stressing fire distribution and control by the squad leader.<sup>24</sup> Based on the competency level of soldiers when they left the United States, it was up to their unit to truly prepare them for combat. The commander would take care of the rest.

The individual divisions that would serve under MacArthur in the SWPA arrived in-theatre in various stages throughout 1943 and 1944. The 32d and 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions were with the SWPA throughout the war. The 6<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions would join his command during the 1944 New Guinea Campaign. The rest of the SWPA combat strength would arrive during the campaign for the Philippines. These units would have the most time to solidify their understanding of SWPA tactical doctrine concerning assault of fortified positions, jungle and mountain warfare, and night combat. Units that used their available time wisely had the best chance to excel in the bitter fighting of 1944 and 1945.

The Americal Division was one of the last units to arrive in the SWPA. They used their available time wisely. Before entering combat they were stationed first, on the island of Fiji and then on the island of Bougainville. Between 1 September 1943 and 31 October 1943 they trained rigorously in the jungle there. Particular emphasis was placed on assaulting strongly defended positions with rifle platoons. Use of organic supporting weapons was stressed throughout the

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<sup>24</sup> Observer's Report # 32, *Replacements*, p. 7.

There is a maxim in the American Army and perhaps in other armies as well, that you “fight as you train.” Rigorous, realistic training would produce the type of warriors America needed to quickly and economically defeat the Japanese.

Along with his reminder of what must be stressed in training, the Operations Officer (G-3) also directed that each rifle platoon continue practicing the assault and reduction of a fortified position.<sup>27</sup> In issuing this order he included the weapons a platoon could count on as their organic support so they would become comfortable utilizing the available firepower. The G-3 stated: “In these assault problems each platoon will be reinforced by machine guns (caliber .30 and .50), 81mm and 60mm mortars, 37mm guns, and flame-throwers. All weapons will be used.”<sup>28</sup> This was the key facet of the doctrine in the SWPA.

Survival in the jungle was key but how small units destroyed Japanese occupied positions was the most important combat skill of this theatre. Nevertheless, organic weapons would not always be enough to do the job. Therefore, considerable time was spent making the American’s infantry comfortable with their best friend, the M3 Sherman Medium Tank, a tank far superior to the Stuarts that helped win the Battle of Buna. Weighing thirty tons, the Sherman was much heavier than the light Stuarts. Its armament was also much heavier. The Sherman had a 75mm main gun, a .50 caliber heavy machine gun, and two .30 caliber machine guns. Its three inches of armor also made it invulnerable to most Japanese infantry weapons and lighter anti-tank guns. Squad exercises with individual tanks were carried out throughout 1944, with the assumption that a squad-tank team would be the primary method of employment in the jungle.<sup>29</sup> The mutual support armor and infantry provided each other would become apparent throughout the training as both arms realized each others’ capabilities.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> American Division, *Training Memorandum # 6*, 21 February 1944, p. 1.

**exercises, as was use of supporting weapons available at higher levels. A rifle platoon, as part of a rifle company, had immediate access to bazookas, flame-throwers, heavy machine guns and mortars. Artillery support, tanks, and combat aviation could be attached or requested by higher headquarters should the need arise. Each battalion of the Americal Division created extensive defensive positions where the rifle platoons could rehearse and perfect techniques. Along with assaulting fortified positions, the other area of emphasis was jungle exercises. The training included daylight movements to objectives, preparations for follow-up attacks, establishment of night bivouac areas, and complete omission of vehicles.<sup>25</sup> Omission of motor vehicles demonstrates the recognition that the units arriving in the Pacific understood the conditions they would be fighting in. You walked wherever you needed to go in the jungle, you did not ride. That walk was over difficult ground in extreme heat with heavy loads. The fighting man of the SWPA had to be hardened to fight in this extreme environment. Subsequent training cycles of the Americal reflected this critical fact.**

**When issuing his training directives, the Operations Officer of the Americal Division included the following reminder to all units: All training will stress:**

- 1. Combat firing exercises as applied to the battlefield**
- 2. Jungle Training**
- 3. Physical conditioning and hardening**
- 4. Malaria control**
- 5. Self Confidence on the part of all officers and men<sup>26</sup>**

**The commander of the Americal, along with the other commanders of other divisions in the Pacific, clearly wanted proficient, hardened, aggressive jungle fighters. The line devoted to building self-confidence is quite revealing. The reluctance of American infantry and their commanders, or rumors of such reluctance, for close-quarter combat was something that had to be eliminated.**

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<sup>25</sup> Americal Division, *Training Memorandum No. 18*, 26 August 1943, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Americal Division, *Training Memorandum No. 25*, 20 October 1943, p. 1.

Along with unit training, the Americal emphasized two other important areas: integration of replacements, and training of key leaders. Replacements are a problem for most armies in war. They do not have the savvy or experience of those they are joining yet a unit cannot survive without them. It was the responsibility of the parent unit, in this case the Americal Division, to train and acclimate these men. The Americal received 49 new officers and 792 enlisted men during the winter months of 1943.<sup>30</sup> Rather than sending these new men right to their units, they were given fifteen days of intensive training in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of the division. They were then sent to their regiment, where they could train with more confidence than had they begun immediately upon arrival. With the abundant training time available, special schools were also created. A course on the flame-thrower and its capabilities was created to educate the Americal's soldiers in this useful weapon. Leadership schools for both officers and NCOs were also set up and they stressed:

1. Leadership
2. Offensive Combat
3. Security Measures
4. Field Fortifications
5. Infantry Mechanized Forces Co-ordination
6. Scouting and Patrolling
7. Tactics of Squad, Platoon, and Company
8. Jungle Tactics<sup>31</sup>

All of the above mentioned areas of concentration were imperative to survival in the SWPA. The Americal wanted to ensure that its new arrivals, and the men who led them, were at their best when they went into battle.

Part of the Americal Division's Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) was an organic mechanized reconnaissance troop. The mindset of the

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<sup>30</sup> 132<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Fiji, 1 October-31 December 1943*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

word mechanized can create many problems in the jungle. Scouts had to be able to do their job with their feet and not just with vehicles they might never use. Throughout the months of November and December 1943 the scouts worked diligently in the art of the foot soldier. Individual weapons instruction, reconnaissance methods, jungle survival, demolitions, organization and occupation of defensive positions, formation and tactics of assault groups, and infiltration were the key areas of emphasis during these months. Vehicles were completely neglected. Unfortunately, so was any night training. American units still did not place much stock in the importance of fighting at night. The lack of coordination between the various divisions in the SWPA, as well as the lack of guidance from SWPA Headquarters were to blame for this training omission. Fortunately, the Americal's 21<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Troop could operate on foot in the jungle, rather than relaxing in a rear area motor pool because their commander realized their training needs.

After constant work and revision, the Americal Division published an SOP on 3 September 1944 for the "Assault of Fortified Positions." It took into account everything the division had learned in its nearly fifteen months of training and provided a basic doctrine for all attached units. It described a methodical, firepower-heavy way to eliminate the anticipated positions the Japanese would occupy in the war's coming months.

The first stage in the assault was perhaps the most important. Thorough reconnaissance was imperative to locate the actual position, as well as routes of approach that may be unobservable to those defending the position. Then, the rifle platoon or specially trained assault team went into action. The elaborate positions used by the Japanese often required men and weapons outside the realm of the standard rifle platoon. Assault teams created by the Americal typically constituted:

1. **The Holding Force:** five men armed with two carbines, two rifles (one with a grenade launcher), one rocket launcher with ten rockets, ten grenades and ten AT grenades.
2. **The Maneuvering Force:** seven men armed with three carbines, two rifles, one very pistol, two wire-cutters, two pole charges, one bangalore torpedo, six white phosphorous grenades, four thermite grenades, and one flame-thrower.
3. **The Reserve Force:** six men armed with five rifles, one Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), and 12 grenades.
4. **The Base of Fire-Forward Observers (Maneuvering Force having priority of fires),** one 37mm gun, one 81mm mortar, one 60mm mortar, and one heavy machine gun.<sup>32</sup>

This team of twenty-eight to thirty men had substantial firepower and the men trained meticulously to make best use of it. According to the SOP, a typical scenario would evolve as follows:

After the reconnaissance of the enemy position has been made and orders issued, the Base of Fire is employed. Those weapons always fix each emplacement assaulted during the attack until the advance of the Maneuvering Force, at which time fire will be lifted. In addition, any emplacements on the flanks of those attacked must be covered by the Base of Fire to prevent them from placing fire on the attack. The Holding Force, in a firing position from which it can observe the movement of the Maneuvering Force, places "fixing" fire on the position attacked beginning when the approach of the Maneuvering Force compels the Base of Fire to lift its fire for safety reasons. The Holding Force, in turn, lifts its fire when the Maneuvering Force, with flame-throwers, has advanced to within approximately forty yards of the hostile positions. The Maneuvering Force clears a path through the wire, advances against a blind spot on the emplacement, blows an opening in the emplacement, and destroys the enemy inside or drives him outside. For the last 30-40 yards, the Maneuvering Force covers its advance by fixing fire from the flame-thrower. The Reserve follows the Maneuvering Force, prepared to finish the enemy outside the emplacement and to hold the ground captured.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Americal Division, *Training Memorandum # 34*, 3 September 1944, p. 2.

Fortunately, such careful attention to a typical battlefield scenario was not limited to the Operations Section of the Americal Division. Several other divisions in the SWPA also prepared for battle in a similar fashion.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was another unit ultimately committed to action in the SWPA. The key point of their training, prior to action on the island of Luzon in January 1945, was the establishment of a standard method for reducing enemy strongpoints.<sup>34</sup> Division Headquarters established an Assault Troop Instruction School and higher commanders conducted several conferences on the subject. It was decided that each rifle company should organize one assault platoon, with that platoon receiving intensive instruction in flame-throwers and demolitions. This instruction began in October 1944 and lasted approximately three months. These specialized platoons would work to make the reduction of positions a science. They would be ready to assist the standard rifle platoons should a position prove too hardy for their capabilities.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division became part of MacArthur's command when he invaded the island of Leyte. Prior to joining the SWPA, they had undergone an intensive training program that demonstrated an understanding of the type of war they would be fighting. The 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division published the following goals for its training program: "Attainment of a high state of training in troop leading in small units, fire and movement, use of organic supporting weapons, and use of supplementary direct support of attached weapons, such as 4.2 mortars, tanks, and artillery."<sup>35</sup> To accomplish these goals, the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment did it the traditional army way. They ensured the individual soldier was proficient and then steadily increased the size of the units until they were able to train as a Regimental Combat Team. Six weeks would be spent training individual soldiers, another month for squad problems, a month for platoon training, three weeks for company training, two weeks training at the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Combat Operations Report: Luzon, P.I.*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report of King II Operations-Leyte*, p. 1.

battalion level, a vital three weeks on tank-infantry cooperation, and final three day Regimental Combat Team exercise.<sup>36</sup> All steps were taken to make this unit ready for action.

After sharpening their individual skills, the infantrymen of the 7<sup>th</sup> progressed to squad training. During the month devoted to this area they worked extensively on patrolling and attacks against fortified positions. Once in the platoon phase they continued honing their skills in attacking fortified positions, making general attacks on both open and constricted terrain, and occupying defensive positions. Also included in this phase of training were attacks in mountainous terrain and extensive infantry-armor platoon problems. Company and battalion training reinforced subjects already taught but emphasized tank-infantry cooperation as a prelude to the three-week training cycle devoted entirely to tank-infantry cooperation. The purposes of the training were to demonstrate and integrate the fire support available up to the battalion level, to ensure the proficiency of small units on all types of terrain likely to be encountered in-theatre, and to instill confidence in the individual fighting man.<sup>37</sup> At Leyte, they would have the opportunity to demonstrate just how proficient they were.

Thus far, when examining the training programs of the Americal, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Divisions, one point is clear: doctrine was being developed at the division level and lower. There was little, if any guidance received from 6<sup>th</sup> Army or SWPA Headquarters. One of the few such guides to any doctrinal concerns was XXIV Corps, which comprised the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and 20<sup>th</sup> Armored Group, SOP on tank-infantry cooperation. Published on 4 February 1945, while the XXIV Corps was in action, the SOP offered very general guidelines for the combined use of tanks and infantry. It states the obvious fact that tanks should not be committed

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

individually and a reserve should always be maintained.<sup>38</sup> Of value was the description of armor in a jungle environment. It states:

In the jungle, tanks will be used primarily in the assault of pillboxes or emplacements that are holding up the infantry advance... Tanks will fire only on designated targets and will not shift fire until ordered to do so by the infantry... The composition of the infantry-tank team will remain flexible. Every rifle squad and platoon will be trained and prepared to function as a member of an infantry-tank team.<sup>39</sup>

While the comments on armor-infantry cooperation are excellent, they are but one facet of the doctrine needed in the SWPA. It is also the SOP of only one infantry division and its attached tank support. Each division that would eventually encompass MacArthur's command had to figure out on its own how to fight this war. MacArthur's command included, at various times, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, the Americal Division, the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, 32<sup>d</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>, 77<sup>th</sup>, and 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, as well as various independent Regimental Combat Teams, Airborne units, and tank units. In essence, there were seventeen or eighteen different armies fighting war against the same enemy, each in their own way while a part of the same command. Units did not, based on the available evidence, collaborate on training programs or swap manuals. The 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division published an SOP for Jungle Operations (will be examined later) that never went to another American unit. Surely, such an SOP would have been helpful at least as a guide to other combat units, although they would have been under no obligation to adhere to its published principles. This is an important consideration when evaluating future battles. Divisions, rather than the army as a whole, will have to be independently evaluated because that was how they operated.

The 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division arrived in the SWPA during the spring of 1944. After completing construction of their camp area, they began a rigorous training program. Initially, acclimation to the conditions and the basics of survival in the

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<sup>38</sup> Observer's Report # 203. *SOPs on Tank-Infantry Cooperation*, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

jungle (sanitation in the field, malaria prevention and control, care and cleaning of weapons, first aid, water discipline, jungle fruits, and jungle diseases) were the main subjects.<sup>40</sup> It was a sensible approach that presupposed that before you can fight in the jungle you must be able to survive in the jungle, the same contention of the yet to be published *FM 72-20, Jungle Warfare*. Most of this basic instruction took place in the jungle, not in classrooms at the division campsite. Training then progressed to patrolling and long distance road marches, under the watchful eyes of experienced combat veterans. The 31<sup>st</sup> made it a practice to incorporate veterans into all training events and to mingle them amongst replacements.<sup>41</sup> This was intended to build the esteem of recent arrivals to the unit, and develop confidence amongst veterans with regard to the new men since they would be the ones teaching them.

The 31<sup>st</sup>, fortunately, was paying attention to what had happened in New Guinea, and was then happening in the Central Pacific, when formulating their training program. Recognizing both the importance of the flame-thrower against Japanese positions and the lack of knowledge about the weapon within the division, Division Headquarters established a flame-thrower school. All members of each battalion's Assault and Pioneer Platoon, as well as six men per rifle company, attended this school. There was now insurance that so long as the weapons were available, each company would have some men able to operate them.

The pace of training picked up with platoon tactics and platoon combat orders. In this vital phase of training, perimeter day and night defense, the assault and reduction of field fortifications, and small-unit tactics were worked on repeatedly. The training and integration into platoons of Forward Observers received much attention. This was done to impress upon junior leaders the

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<sup>40</sup> 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Unit History: 1944*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

availability and impact of artillery. The 31<sup>st</sup> wanted to ensure that its junior leaders knew that war in the jungle was strictly a small unit affair.<sup>42</sup>

An officer surplus in the SWPA (before the return to combat) also enhanced the division's combat capabilities. The division's 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had the opportunity to receive additional officers, all with combat experience, despite already being at full strength in officers and with no jobs to assign them to.<sup>43</sup> Instead, they were assigned as mentors, trainers, and assistants to key staff officers, where their valuable experience would provide the most good. During war, a military unit can never have enough experienced leaders. Their arrival came several weeks before the division participated in the Driniumor River operation.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would see combat in some of the SWPA's most ferocious battles. Fortunately, their training was as ferocious, though the warm, but serene weather of Hawaii bore little resemblance to what they would encounter in New Guinea and the Phillipines.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, everything possible was done to mold the division into efficient jungle warriors. Hawaii had two jungle training centers. The men and their bodies were hardened through constant physical training and self-defense classes. As the division's Public Relations Section described, they were always "scouting and patrolling under what approximated jungle conditions, moving artillery pieces over trackless woodlands, practicing assault landings on reef-ridden shores, and relearning the vital but annoying sanitary discipline."<sup>45</sup> The annoying but vital sanitary discipline ensured survival and combat effectiveness. Learning to keep clean, dry, and hydrated may have seemed like a rehashing of basic training to many of the men but it was important. It was also important not to let trash accumulate, lest informing the enemy of your strength and previous position. The importance of artillery and the difficulties of

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> Division Public Relations Section, *6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*, p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

properly employing it in the jungle also received much attention in training programs. A special range was created so artillerymen could practice dragging and positioning their weapons.<sup>46</sup> A Forward Observers Course was also created so these key personnel could learn to make adjustments by sound as well as sight, a frequent requirement in the thick growth of the jungle.

The 6<sup>th</sup> was also another division committed to this theatre that devoted much of its time to fortification reduction, infantry-tank cooperation, and the creation of specialized assault teams. The 6<sup>th</sup> created sixteen man assault teams, different in number and armament than those created by the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the Americal Division. Here was another indication of the lack of direction from higher headquarters. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Division assault team, the flame-thrower was the primary weapon of destruction.<sup>47</sup> The team was organized as follows: 1 Squad Leader (M-1 rifle)

1 Assistant Squad Leader (M-1 rifle), he also commanded the demolition men

2 Sub-Machinegunners (Tommy sub-machineguns)

2 Rifle Grenadiers (M-1 rifle with grenade dischargers)

4 Flame-thrower men (2 teams of 2 men each)

2 Demolition men (M-1 rifle)<sup>48</sup>

All men also carried five hand grenades. There was a great deal of firepower and flexibility here. A squad leader of one of the pillbox assault teams described a typical scenario:

When held up by an enemy pillbox the infantry opens a sustained aimed fire intended to bring accurate fire on the pillbox embrasure while the special pillbox assault team is brought forward. Upon its arrival, the fire of the rifle grenadiers is added to the already heavy rifle fire to cover the advance of the bazooka teams (part of the parent unit) to more advanced positions. This advance is also covered by fire from automatic weapons. Upon their arrival in suitable advanced positions

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup> Observer's Report #501, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

the bazooka teams cover the advance of one flame-thrower team by fire on embrasures and entrances. The second flame-thrower team may be held in reserve or the flame-thrower teams may operate together, one supporting and covering the other. Upon arrival at a suitable position, the flame-throwers open fire on pillbox embrasure entrances. The reduction of the pillbox is completed by the use of hand-placed or pole charges by demolition teams. Coordination of fires is employed to cover and protect personnel from snipers or other enemy in the area.<sup>49</sup>

This type of team dealt with Japanese positions that could delay the standard infantry platoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. To be effective, it would have to travel near the front of the attacking unit, where it could be used quickly. The flame-thrower was the key weapon. Unfortunately, only a select few in each infantry company could operate this gruesome, yet effective weapon. Many commanders in the SWPA wanted flame-thrower operators to be organic members of the infantry squad.<sup>50</sup> Such desires were never accomplished theatre-wide or even in any single division. When the situation arose that a significant number of flame-throwers were needed at a specific location, commanders were able to pool their resources to meet the need. They were able to do so because other divisions of the SWPA also set up flame-thrower schools such as that created by the 31<sup>st</sup> Division. The 6<sup>th</sup> was another division that created its own way of dealing with the Japanese but the points of interest were still the same as its sister units: fortification reduction, tank-infantry-cooperation, integration of supporting weapons, and jungle survival. The 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would take its training a step further.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's SOP for jungle operations covered many of the sanitary and survival skills of *FM 72-20*. It is very general in its discussion of tactics, suggesting that the 40<sup>th</sup> Division was following the lead of SWPA Headquarters by allowing its subordinate units to figure out their own tactical doctrine. This SOP serves mainly as a reminder to the 40<sup>th</sup> Division's infantry

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.

<sup>50</sup> Observer's Report #112, *Flame-thrower*, p. 1.

companies of how the jungle affects operations, rather than a definitive order on how to fight. Flanking attacks should be used whenever possible because of the Japanese propensity to make positions isolated bastions of resistance, rather than a network of mutually supporting pillboxes or bunkers.<sup>51</sup> Due to jungle terrain, frontal attacks could at times be unavoidable. Should such an occasion arise, the attack must be made on a narrow frontage, utilizing all supporting weapons.<sup>52</sup> This can be a slow, methodical process. Impatience can not govern operations against an enemy as canny as the Japanese, particularly when they occupy such formidable defensive positions.

Another point the 40<sup>th</sup> Division SOP makes is key. No matter how well operations are going, momentum may have to be curtailed in order to create a suitable nighttime perimeter. The SOP states: "...when the attack on the Japanese extends into the afternoon, select the night position for your unit, dig in, and establish your coordinated defensive fire plan for all weapons prior to darkness...the attack will usually cease about 1600 and attention will be given to preparing night positions."<sup>53</sup> Being ready to stave off Japanese night attacks was a crucial part of war in the SWPA. As one of the division commanders in the SWPA stated in a letter to General McNair in 1943:

When mentally prepared and properly trained, I think a Jap night attack need never be feared by our troops. It's the best way I know of to kill plenty of Japs in a short time. But it's a fearsome thing for untried troops, and almost wrecked one regiment before it found itself. Our training should take cognizance of this.<sup>54</sup>

The preceding pages have demonstrated that many of the SWPA units did take cognizance of this. The battles of the following chapters will also demonstrate if training carried over to the battlefield. It was time for the soldiers of the SWPA to make their mark on World War II. The island of New Guinea

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<sup>51</sup> 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *Standard Operating Procedure: Jungle Operations*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Observer's Report #453, *General Griswold to General McNair*, p. 4.

**would once again be home to a major battle between the forces of General MacArthur and those of the Empire of Japan.**

## CHAPTER FOUR

Though most of 1943 and part of 1944 were a period of preparation for the many ground units that would eventually encompass MacArthur's command, SWPA was not entirely idle during this period. MacArthur's Fifth U.S. Air Force and its commander, General George C. Kenney, were very active. Through innovative tactics and clever use of available resources (skip-bombing, the use of strategic bombers as attack planes) Kenney was able to dominate the seaborne lanes of communication in the southwest Pacific. The strategic objective of this time period was the mammoth Japanese base of Rabaul, on the island of New Britain. Rabaul contained several major airfields, a large army garrison, and a vast port. An amphibious assault against Rabaul with MacArthur's limited 1943 strength (three understrength, refitting infantry divisions) offered little chance of success and would also contribute little to an eventual return to the Philippines. MacArthur could not risk defeat or even another costly battle of attrition such as that of Buna. Yet, the continued existence of Rabaul was a constant thorn in the side of all American operations in the south Pacific. Perfectly located to supply and reinforce all Japanese units to its south, as well as to strike at any American operations in the same area, it had to be "isolated." Isolated in this context did not mean the physical occupation of Rabaul but the elimination of it as a viable base.

Operation Cartwheel, the isolation and reduction of the Japanese strategic base of Rabaul occurred between June 1943 and January 1944. During that time, American airpower devastated the vast base, essentially rendering it useless. No costly ground assault was needed. The reduction of Rabaul ensured MacArthur that the only forces he faced in his leapfrog campaign along New Guinea's northern coast were the enemy soldiers already on the island. Further, without Rabaul, Japanese forces on New Guinea had to subsist on their available stocks.

Resupply was no longer possible. Neither were reinforcement nor evacuation. The desperation of the Japanese on New Guinea resulting from this was demonstrated along the Driniumor River during July 1944. Japan's 18<sup>th</sup> Army, slowly starving, unable to be reinforced or evacuated, attacked the American Army and was eliminated as a fighting force. Operation Cartwheel ranks among the most exemplary applications of airpower in military history. It also enabled MacArthur to begin his approach to the Philippines in the spring of 1944. That approach began along the northern coast of the island of New Guinea.

Few campaigns of World War II have received the attention and accolades of Admiral Nimitz's "leapfrog" across the Central Pacific. In a brilliant campaign, Nimitz's forces moved across the vast Pacific Ocean from island to island and atoll to atoll. Bypassing numerous islands along the way, they seized only those deemed absolutely critical as staging areas for future operations, as bomber bases, or for airfields. The combined forces of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Army produced victory after victory and brought America's formidable power to Japan's doorstep. Yet, though often forgotten, another equally successful leapfrog campaign occurred in our area of interest, the Southwest Pacific. As 1944 approached, MacArthur was in danger of witnessing the American Navy take control of the entire PTO. Long recovered from the enormous losses of the war's early months, the Navy had grown enormously, particularly in aircraft carriers. These floating airfields could bring the war to Japan's doorstep very quickly, even in the vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean.

Considerable pressure and influence was exerted throughout the Pacific War, particularly by the American Navy, to streamline the offensives of Nimitz and MacArthur into a joint command, under the control, of course, of the navy. Interservice rivalries and personal egocentricities prevented even the serious consideration of placing MacArthur and his army under the control of Nimitz, an admiral, or placing Nimitz and his mighty fleet under the control of MacArthur, an army general. After a long and vigorous discussion it was decided to support the

offensives of both Nimitz and MacArthur, despite the logistical nightmares such a dissipation of resources would create. More naval resources would be devoted to the Central Pacific drive where they could be best utilized; MacArthur's theatre would have to make do with far less. Nevertheless, MacArthur would accomplish his mission. MacArthur's overriding goal, or preoccupation, in World War II was America's return to the Philippines. His personal pride had been offended when he evacuated those islands and he felt it was his, as well as his nation's duty to free the Filipinos from the iron grip of the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> His appeal to national pride and responsibility, however, was not enough to convince Washington to support his plans as well as those of Nimitz and the navy. MacArthur's economic arguments were far more convincing. MacArthur genuinely believed that the reoccupation of the Philippines would be an economic deathblow to Japan. The Philippines would prove an adequate staging area for an invasion of the Japanese home islands, and would also place the United States in position to strangle shipments of vital supplies from Southeast Asia to Japan. Japan was almost totally dependent on outside sources for its vital raw materials. As an island nation, those supplies had to be delivered by ship. The ships had to sail through the narrow South China Sea, bordered on the east by the Philippine Islands and the west by Mainland China. It was the quickest route from these mineral supplies to the Japanese home islands and Japanese bases were established all along the route for protection. These supplies could easily be disrupted if the United States once again controlled the Philippines.

Nimitz would face more Japanese naval units than would MacArthur, but the preponderance of Japanese ground forces outside of their homeland and China were located in New Guinea and the Philippines. MacArthur predicted that should the U.S. invade the Philippines, Japan would have to commit everything possible to ensure their supply lifeline remained open. This would not only allow

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Weigley, *The American Way Of War*, p. 291.

MacArthur to destroy much of the Japanese Army and Air Force, but it would draw in the Japanese Navy, giving Nimitz the opportunity to destroy it. Another argument in MacArthur's favor was he could fight his battles without the navy's precious aircraft carriers. All his advances would be made within range of his own land-based airpower.<sup>2</sup> MacArthur's arguments had ensured the navy alone would not carry the fight to the doorstep of Japan and he could now fulfill his pledge and attempt a return to the Philippines. The only question was how best to get there and in the shortest amount of time?

Invading the Philippines directly from Australia was out of the question. It would create a very long and easily cut line of communications and would require more resources than MacArthur had available in early 1944. He was even outnumbered by the Japanese on New Guinea, the natural stepping stone to the Philippines. It is important to note that all of the Japanese Army in New Guinea was not concentrated in one area. Realizing this and the pressure he was under to demonstrate the viability of a return to the Philippines, MacArthur formulated his own version of leapfrogging. It would be the most brilliant campaign of a long and distinguished military career. It would also be far less costly in terms of casualties than Nimitz's drive across the Central Pacific. The following table is most revealing:

**American Casualties During the Approach to the Philippines**

	<b>Killed</b>		<b>Wounded</b>	
	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>
Hollandia	155	4	1,060	7
Aitape	450		2,550	
Wakde/Sarmi	415	3	1,500	10
Biak	435	36	2,360	83
Noemfoor	70		345	3
Sansapor	15		45	
Morotai	30	15	85	18 <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 283.

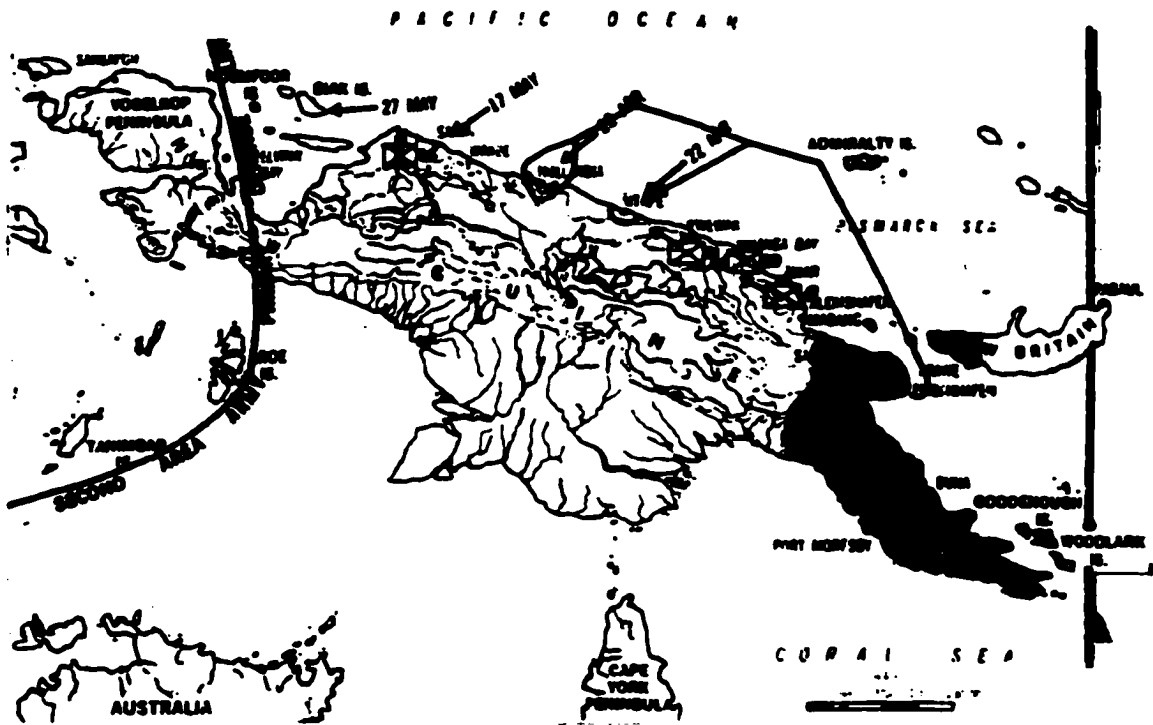
<sup>3</sup> John H. Bradley, *The Second World War: Asia and the Pacific*, p. 297.

MacArthur suffered total losses of 1,648 killed and 8,112 wounded. In comparison, Nimitz's invasions during the same period of time (the Palau Islands, Tarawa, Kwajalein, and the Marianna Islands) resulted in over 32,000 dead and wounded. The invasions of the Paulus Islands alone resulted in 1,948 dead and 8,515 wounded, more than the total casualties for MacArthur's entire campaign.<sup>4</sup> In fairness, MacArthur's casualties increased dramatically when he invaded the Philippines, as did Nimitz's as he advanced closer to Japan.

The targets of both Nimitz and MacArthur were usually airfields. As Nimitz advanced across the Central Pacific, he selected islands that would enable American strategic bombers to reach the Japanese home islands, to protect those bombers, and to develop staging areas for an eventual invasion of Japan itself. The main difference between the war in the Southwest Pacific and that in the Central Pacific revolved around air support for American offensives. Nimitz brought his with him (his aircraft carriers) and could strike wherever he chose. MacArthur was dependent on land-based airstrips. So long as his forces were covered by his own air force, his position was strong while that of the Japanese was imperiled. He would, beginning in April 1944, advance along the northern coast of New Guinea to a position from which he could launch his invasion of the Philippines. Along the way he would stage several major operations while at the same time isolating the preponderance of the Japanese New Guinea garrison. Three operations in particular are of interest: the invasions of Wakde-Sarmi and Biak and the defense of the Driniumor River Line at Aitape. Each of these operations involved protracted fighting and a test of the American Army's new capabilities. We can now determine if the American Army utilized their preparation time to ensure that another near disaster such as had occurred at Buna would never happen again. The first operations of MacArthur's New Guinea campaign were the seizure of Hollandia and Aitape. Hollandia was needed for its superb anchorage facilities while Aitape was attacked for its airfields. Both

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



MacArthur's advance along the northern coast of New Guinea. The initial landings at Hollandia and Aitape represented a leap of nearly four hundred miles from SWAPA's airbases on New Britain and the eastern corner of New Guinea. After the first landings on 22 April, all subsequent landings occurred within range of MacArthur's own air support. He was able to land at Hollandia and Aitape because of *ULTRA*, which revealed the greatly understrength Japanese garrisons. The toughest fights of the campaign would occur at Wakde, Sarmi, and on the island of Biak.

Source: *World War II Encyclopedia, Volume XVII*

Figure II

operations were quick and relatively light in terms of casualties because MacArthur utilized his trump card when deciding where to strike first. That trump card was *ULTRA*. *ULTRA* was the intelligence only a select few senior commanders received from American intercepts of Japanese radio traffic. The immense value of *ULTRA* and its impact upon operations will be explored in Chapter Six, when the defense of the Driniumor River line is explored in detail. *ULTRA*'s early impact on this campaign was felt when it alerted MacArthur that Hollandia and Aitape were weakly garrisoned and ripe for the picking. Hollandia has been called a stroke of genius by some because MacArthur had secured such a valuable staging area at minimal cost. The SWPA commander could not comment on *ULTRA* or its value after the war because the United States was still utilizing it to read the Soviet Union's secret military correspondence. MacArthur accepted his accolades, as was his right, because it is one thing to receive inside information; it is another to utilize it properly. War is not Wall Street. MacArthur's utilization of *ULTRA* saved a great many American lives. However, soldiers still had to fight. The next operation, the invasion of Wakde Island, would be a true barometer of the American Army's capabilities.

After the seizure of Hollandia and Aitape, the next step for the SWPA hierarchy was the Wakde-Sarmi area. Wakde Island contained an airstrip capable of supporting both the bombers and fighters of General Kenney's Fifth Air Force. The Sarmi area had another operational airstrip with one more under construction. These airfields were needed to support MacArthur's next anticipated operation, the invasion of Biak, as well as to provide air support for the invasion of the Mariana Islands, a support task assigned to MacArthur by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1944.<sup>5</sup> Initially, only the seizure of Wakde was planned. That would eventually change. The 163<sup>rd</sup> Regimental Combat Team of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division would assault the island of Wakde on the morning of 18 May 1944.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 208.

The 163<sup>rd</sup> was selected despite the recent arrival of two new infantry divisions in the SWPA, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. This was a crucial operation and General Walter Krueger selected an acclimated, veteran unit to make this assault. Krueger had seemingly seen and done it all in his nearly fifty years of army service. He began his career as an enlisted man during the Spanish-American War. He never attended West Point, instead receiving his commission directly. He was a staff officer in both the search for Pancho Villa and during World War I. He attended many service schools and held several staff jobs in the inter-war years. In May 1941, Krueger was appointed commander of the recently created U.S. Third Army. MacArthur must have noticed him during his career because when the 6<sup>th</sup> Army was formed in the SWPA, he requested and received Krueger to serve as its commander. MacArthur did this despite the fact he had another three-star general already in-theatre, Robert Eichelberger. Krueger commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Army until the end of the war.





The support available to the 163<sup>rd</sup> demonstrates how much American power had grown in the months since the costly victory at Buna. The assault unit, designated *TORNADO* Task Force, had two field artillery battalions, one each of 105mm and 155mm howitzers, in direct support.<sup>6</sup> These battalions were reinforced by another company of 105mm howitzers. In addition to the artillery support, there was also abundant naval gunfire available. Three separate naval fire support groups had between them two heavy cruisers (8-inch guns), three light cruisers (6-inch guns), twenty destroyers (5-inch guns), three rocket equipped LCI's (Landing Craft Infantry), and two rocket equipped submarine chasers.<sup>7</sup> After softening up the beaches, the naval vessels were available for infantry initiated fire support missions. The Fifth Air Force would also support the operation. This abundant support stood ready at 0900 hours on 18 May as four

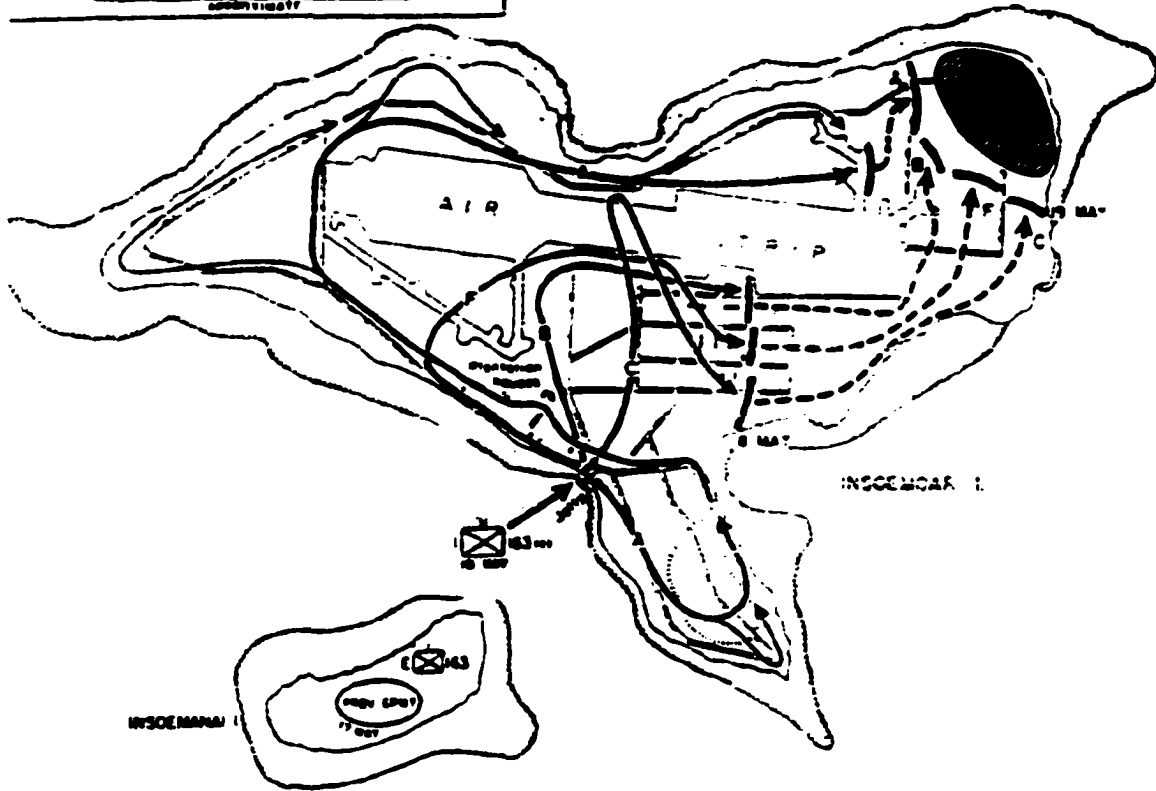
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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

**CAPTURE OF WAKDE ISLANDS**  
17-19 May 1944

 ARMS OF ADVANCE, 18 MAY  
 ARMS OF ADVANCE, 19 MAY  
 NIGHT POSITION OF SAFE HIDEOUTS  
 JAPANESE POCKET, NIGHT 19-20 MAY  
 500 0 100 YARDS  
 60001102817



The small, but formidable island of Wakde.

Source: Robert Ross Smith, *Approach To The Philippines*

Figure III

companies of infantry and a platoon of Sherman tanks of the 603d Tank Company stormed ashore on the island of Wakde.

Wakde, as with most positions occupied by the Japanese during World War II, was superbly prepared. The island itself is only 3,000 yards long and 1,200 yards wide at its widest point. The airstrip dominated the island. Eight hundred Japanese soldiers garrisoned the island and they had erected approximately one hundred bunkers, many of which were reinforced with concrete or coconut logs and concealed by nature and superb Japanese camouflage. Fortunately, many of these positions were either damaged or destroyed by naval gunfire and bombing before the 163<sup>rd</sup> RCT went ashore.<sup>8</sup>

The landing was made with little difficulty. Once ashore, Company C of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion made first contact with the enemy. They encountered a system of bunkers and cleared them in little more than an hour.<sup>9</sup> They performed this task by laying down heavy small arms fire and lobbing grenades through the bunkers' firing slits. This was done despite heavy enemy fire. Once they reached the second bunker system, Company C needed help. These bunkers were better concealed than those first encountered, were in an area with considerably more underbrush, and had many coconut trees fallen amongst them that had been hit in the pre-invasion bombardment. Progress was slow at best. Two Sherman tanks were dispatched to the area and quickly proved their value. They attacked each bunker separately, a task made easier by the failure of the Japanese to make their positions mutually supporting. The tanks, with infantry close behind, blasted the Japanese positions at point-blank range. Forced to engage the tanks, though lacking weapons capable of defeating them, the Japanese allowed American infantrymen to get right on top of the bunkers, where grenades and flame-throwers eradicated whatever the Shermans had left standing. Fleeing Japanese soldiers

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>9</sup> 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Wakde, Ibi Ridge*, p. 2.

were cut down by tank machine guns and infantry small arms fire. The tank-infantry team had worked flawlessly in this action.

Meanwhile, F Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, was occupied with the old coconut plantation buildings on the eastern end of the island. They were quickly pinned down by enemy automatic weapons fire and awaited assistance. The two tanks that had aided Company C were quickly dispatched to the area. By noon, using the tanks and their machine guns as both shield and base of fire, F Company was able to clear the buildings. They did so by using their own hand-held weapons in the type of vicious combat they had been trained for and told to expect.

At the same time, A Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, had begun moving to clear the western end of the island. At approximately 1245 hours, they were held up by three Japanese bunkers. The two tanks arrived and quickly destroyed all three bunkers from distances as close as twenty yards. Realizing the importance of the tanks, the Japanese attacked them but their weapons were useless. Accompanying infantry killed or drove off the attackers and by 1330 A Company had already reached the northern shore of the island.<sup>10</sup>

While the Americans had reached Wakde's northern shore and cleared most of the vital airstrip, it was unusable so long as the Japanese could fire on the airfield from their stronghold on the northeastern corner of the island. The remainder of May 18<sup>th</sup> was spent eliminating individual Japanese positions that had been spotted with artillery fire while the infantrymen dug in. The days of Buna, where scarce guns and inadequate ammunition were the norm, were over. If a position was spotted, a FO called it in and it was destroyed. And still, the battle was not over on the first day. The attack would have to be resumed on the 19<sup>th</sup> since dusk was approaching and the immediate ground commander, Major

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Leonard Wing, believed it was more important to establish a night perimeter than to attack to the last minute of daylight.<sup>11</sup>

The first day of battle had revealed the benefits of tank-infantry cooperation and the processes by which Japanese fortifications could be reduced. It also demonstrated that American commanders preferred, and time would prove their choice to be a prudent one, to cease attacks with some daylight remaining in order to prepare for Japanese infiltration tactics or night counterattacks. This allowed for vital reconnaissance and patrols, the establishment of cohesive perimeters and communications and the clearing of fields of fire. While prolonging the time needed to complete some operations, often to the disgruntlement of higher commands, this allowed American soldiers and their commanders some sense of security and confidence in an arena of combat where they were neither proficient nor experienced.

True to form, the Japanese attacked the American perimeter during the night. Several sporadic firefights ensued, but the enemy was driven off with heavy losses and the following morning's attack proceeded undelayed. At 0815 hours, an hour-long artillery and mortar barrage blanketed the Japanese positions. American infantry immediately followed the guns and once again, Company C was the first unit to encounter enemy opposition.

The formation chosen by the C Company commander demonstrated that all-unit commanders realized how best to utilize their men and their weapons. Two platoons led the attack. One platoon had two tanks, the other platoon one tank. The third rifle platoon and the weapons platoon followed in support. The tanks drew most of the enemy fire, allowing the infantrymen to advance to within point-blank distance of Japanese positions. The trailing infantry platoon was then available to deal with isolated pockets of resistance, allowing the main attack to continue. As C Company advanced, they encountered a small rise in the ground. This rise was riddled with Japanese positions. The tanks destroyed each position

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Ross Smith. *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 338. *Ibid*, p. 228.

and the accompanying riflemen killed fleeing Japanese soldiers. The company now advanced to the beach and turned north, encountering Japanese positions in small coral caves. The tanks advanced to within throwing distance of the caves, blasting away enroute. Riflemen and flame-thrower teams then finished the job.<sup>12</sup>

The other unit in action at the time was B Company. They were attempting to clear the southern edge of the airstrip and were advancing painstakingly slow. Two tanks quickly arrived to lend their support. A rifle platoon accompanied each tank, with the third rifle platoon in support. They moved towards the bunkers and heavy brush that had impeded B Company's advance. The brush meant little to the tanks but the advance had to proceed cautiously since the riflemen had to be wary of hidden Japanese soldiers in the brush. By 1400 hours, the strip was completely secure. A few dozen fanatical Japanese defenders launched a banzai charge on the 20<sup>th</sup> but it was of no consequence. The airfield was already operational.<sup>13</sup>

Wakde was a rousing victory, attested to by the following casualty figures. Japanese losses were 759 killed and 4 captured in the two days of heavy fighting while American losses were 40 men killed and 107 wounded.<sup>14</sup> Why such a difference? The Japanese soldiers were certainly competent and their defensive positions typically excellent but American tactics and equipment were superior. American industry provided in abundance the tools of war. In the arena of tactics, the 41<sup>st</sup> had clearly molded their armor and infantry into a cohesive unit. By the end of the battle this team had cleared most of Wakde's Japanese positions. Tanks drew most of the enemy fire and the infantry eliminated any Japanese soldiers who managed to flee their positions. One of the American company commanders noted that "the enemy seemed intent on knocking the tanks out so much so that they actually forgot the infantry following the tanks and delivered a great share of

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<sup>12</sup> 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Wakde, Ibi Ridge*, p.4

<sup>13</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 230-1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

their fire at the tanks.<sup>15</sup> While the tanks worked, the infantry were busy looking for other enemy positions. Once located, they directed their comrades to these new locations. The tank was the key weapon of this battle. However, the lack of generic assault teams was a cause for concern. The 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division had not followed a training program such as those of the 25<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions during their preparation period. Not enough men were proficient in the use of bazookas, flame-throwers, or demolitions, the key infantry weapons in the destruction of fortifications.<sup>16</sup> Had the tanks not performed so magnificently, the infantry would have had a tough time finishing the job on their own.

After the capture of Wakde, General Krueger felt unsure about his new position. He worried about the safety of the island since Japanese forces on the mainland could still threaten it.<sup>17</sup> The 6th Army commander decided to send the newly arrived 158<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team and their battalion of 105mm howitzers toward Sarmi, a point sixteen miles west of the Tor River. Due in part to inadequate information on enemy strength and positions in the area, the Battle of Sarmi, well known for the fight for Lone Tree Hill, would be a far more difficult victory than that achieved at Wakde.

The advance westward from the Tor River bridgehead began on the morning of 23 May. By the end of the day, the 158<sup>th</sup> had advanced and dug in at a point roughly 400 yards east of Maffin No. 1. Japanese rifle and machine gun fire had blunted the 158<sup>th</sup>'s attack, mandating during the night an American artillery and mortar barrage. Harassing rifle fire was also used throughout the night.<sup>18</sup> On the morning of 24 May, after another artillery preparation, the 158<sup>th</sup> moved out. They encountered more enemy positions, including a heavily fortified position under a warehouse. The infantry could at first not get close enough to use their weapons. Therefore, a call for armored support was issued and approved. The

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<sup>15</sup> 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Wakde, Ibbi Ridge*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Operations Report: Toem-Wakde Operation*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> 158<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Reduction of Enemy Defenses*, p. 2.

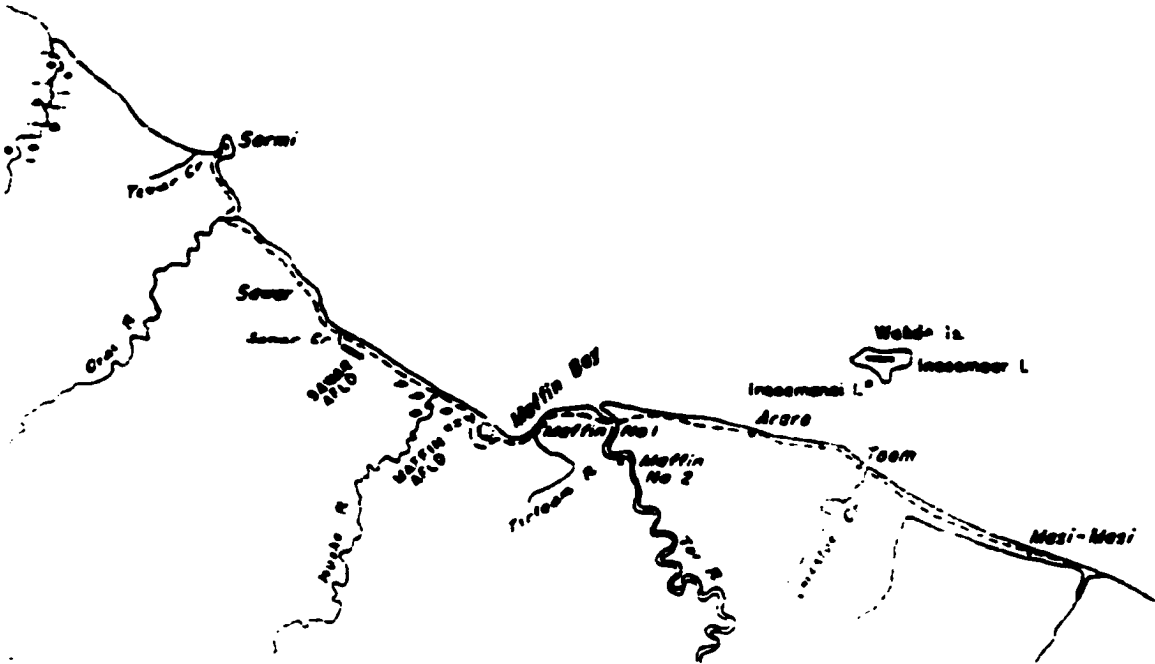
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3 miles



## WAKDE - SARMI AREA

- COASTAL TRACE
- AIRFIELD
- ⊞ AIRFIELD UNDER CONSTRUCTION

0 3  
MILES



The Wakde-Sarmi operational area. Note the location of Lone Tree Hill, approximately one half mile to the ea of Maffin Airfield. Lone Tree Hill also commanded the road that led to Maffin Airfield and Sawar Airfield, approximately four miles west of Maffin.

Source: Robert Ross Smith, *Approach To The Philippines*

Figure IV

tank managed to knock out a few of the Japanese positions but the jungle in this area was far denser than on Wakde and they could not get into proper firing position. The infantry then used their own weapons to deal with the enemy. Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) teams kept the positions under constant fire, allowing flame-thrower teams to get within thirty feet of the pillboxes from where they burned them up. Infantry armed with tommy guns then sprayed the positions just to make sure.<sup>19</sup> The 158<sup>th</sup> would use the tanks when possible but when they were unavailable they had their own techniques for dealing with enemy positions. Such techniques, as simple as they might sound, required a great deal of training and rehearsal before all the men involved could operate efficiently. The advance had now reached the vicinity of the Tirfoam River but could immediately go no further since Japanese positions were thought to be very strong on the other side of the river and little was known about their exact location. Before resuming the attack on the 25<sup>th</sup>, a heavy artillery and mortar barrage silenced many of the Japanese defenders and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was able to cross the Tirfoam and reach an objective referred to as the jetty. Lone Tree Hill, a point 2,000 yards west of the jetty was selected as the next day's objective.

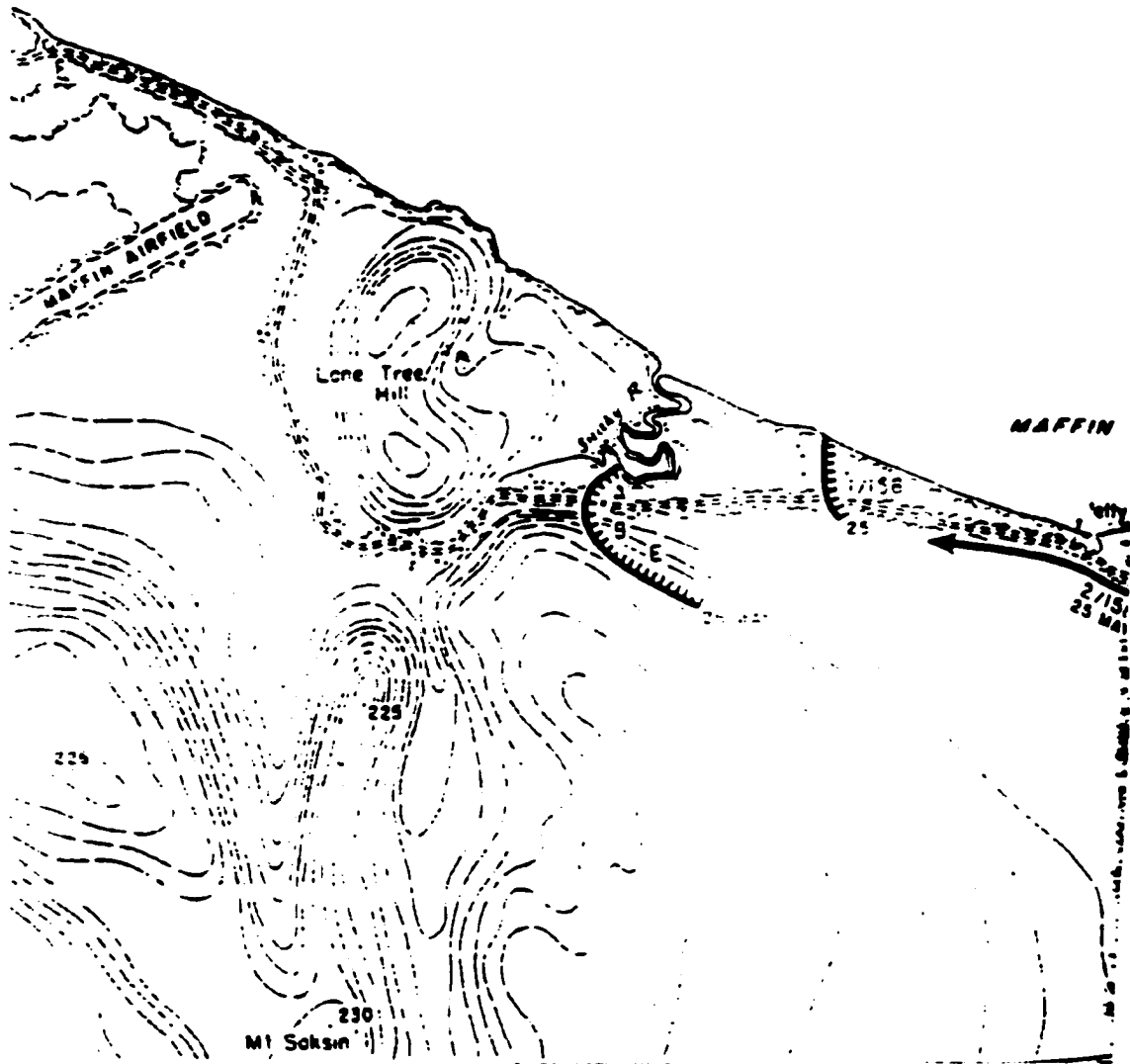
Lone Tree Hill was one of three enemy positions that dominated the forthcoming battle. It was about 175 feet high, 1,200 yards long, and 1,100 yards wide. The hill's northern face was very rocky and steep and a twisting stream that would be dubbed the "Snaky River" flowed in front of the eastern face. The sole usable road through the area passed through a defile between Lone Tree Hill and Mt. Saksin. Much bitter fighting would take place in this defile. The southern part of the defile was dominated by Hill 225, the western nose of Mt. Saksin. Native villages were at both the defile's entrance and exit.<sup>20</sup>

The Japanese had begun occupying and emplacing hasty defensive positions on Lone Tree Hill, Hill 225, and the defile on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The natural

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 244.



Lone Tree Hill was not the only Japanese position located on high ground. Hills 225 and 226 were also controlled by the enemy, making any advance towards Maffin Airfield an extremely hazardous operation.

Source: Robert Ross Smith, *Approach To The Philippines*

Figure V

terrain of the area greatly enhanced these positions. The jungle was seemingly thick everywhere, nowhere did the ground appear to be flat, and it was oppressively hot.<sup>21</sup> These Japanese positions dominated the approaches to Maffin airstrip, immediately to the west of Lone Tree Hill. The terrain mandated that the attack be a frontal assault with little tank support possible since the ground off the road was unusable to armor and the only bridge over the Tirfoam River could not support the Sherman's thirty ton weight. An amphibious landing behind Lone Tree Hill would have been ideal but all available landing craft were needed for the imminent invasion of Biak. Further, it was generally felt that there could not be that many Japanese soldiers in the area and that the 158<sup>th</sup> should have little trouble.<sup>22</sup> This assumption seems all too similar to the assumptions made by the 32d Division before they launched their first attack at Buna. The results would be nearly the same.

The 158<sup>th</sup>'s first attack took place on the morning of 26 May. It was preceded by naval gunfire from two offshore destroyers and all available artillery. The timing of the preparatory fires also suggested a regression to the days of Buna. The destroyers were to fire from 0630 to 0700 hours and would be followed one and a half-hours later by the artillery. The infantry would begin their advance at 0845 hours. The destroyers started firing ten minutes late but still stopped at 0700. The artillery then fired on time. It would seem to be more advantageous for the artillery to start firing at 0700 and the infantry to advance at 0715. The long delay between the naval and indirect fires not only allowed the Japanese to reoccupy their positions but also indicated from where an attack would be coming.

Adding more problems to this developing situation, the infantry Line of Departure (LOD) was one thousand yards short of Lone Tree Hill. To reach the objective would take some time even if the 158<sup>th</sup> hadn't been advancing through

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

dense jungle. By the time the American infantrymen had closed the distance to their objective, the Japanese were in their positions waiting for them. The artillery and naval preparations timed poorly and not intensive enough in any regard, were wasted. The advance was halted at the foot of Lone Tree Hill by fire from both there and the defile. Tanks, the great equalizer at Wakde, were unavailable for the reasons mentioned earlier. All that was gained was some valuable intelligence: the Japanese occupied the area in far greater strength than originally thought and the locations of their primary positions were pinpointed. With this new knowledge, the attack would resume on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>. The 26<sup>th</sup> had been a wasted day but the losses, only six killed and ten wounded, demonstrated that even in unsuccessful attacks against heavy opposition, the infantry would perform admirably. Overconfidence would not be a problem in the second attack. The American troops knew the enemy was there and waiting for them. The poor timing of the artillery fires would also be rectified before the next attack.<sup>23</sup>

The attack of the 27<sup>th</sup> was again preceded by the gunfire of two offshore destroyers. They fired for approximately forty-five minutes and were immediately followed by another forty-five minute artillery barrage. With the infantry right behind their artillery, the advance started at 0830 hours.<sup>24</sup>

This attack, even with the added support, was little more successful than that of the 26<sup>th</sup>. One company attacked and occupied what they thought to be Hill 225. In fact, they had occupied the eastern nose of Mt. Saskin, seven hundred yards from their objective. It was that easy to get lost in the jungle.

The rest of the attacking force met frustration. The naval and artillery fire, far more intense than those of the 26<sup>th</sup>, had eliminated most of the Japanese positions exposed above ground. However, the natural terrain of the area, which included caves, draws, and coral, had prevented the elimination of most of the Japanese soldiers and their weapons. Indirect fire simply couldn't reach into the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245-6.

<sup>24</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 158<sup>th</sup> Regiment, *Unit Journal: Sarmi-Wakde*.

skillfully selected positions or had no effect upon them. In this case, the positions were stronger than the weapons. Yet, no position is impregnable. The infantry could destroy them if they got close enough. Thus far, they continued to be met by a wall of bullets and mortar shells. Making matters worse, it was difficult to coordinate attacks because units quickly became separated in the dense jungle. One company even managed to secure the eastern slope of Lone Tree Hill, though it was under constant enemy fire and completely isolated from any other American units. This would have to be strictly an infantry battle due to the ineffectiveness of artillery and impossibility of employing tanks. In such a battle, the defender, occupying excellent positions that dominated all possible avenues of approach, had a distinct advantage. There was no fault in the doctrine of the 158<sup>th</sup> or the American Army. It was immensely difficult to fight a war in such conditions. The assault detachments of the 158<sup>th</sup>, the same ones that had allowed the attack to Lone Tree Hill to continue, could not get close enough to the Japanese positions to be effective. Casualties were also mounting. By the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>, the 158<sup>th</sup> had suffered nearly 300 killed, wounded, and missing. Their strength was dwindling and they needed relief.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than continuing to assault the Japanese in the area of Lone Tree Hill, it was decided at 6<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters to withdraw the 158<sup>th</sup> and resume the attack when another unit became available.<sup>26</sup> The 158<sup>th</sup> was needed for the impending invasion of Noemfoor, three hundred miles northwest of Sarmi and all other units immediately available were preparing for the invasion of Biak. There was just too much happening at once. One of the great principles of war is mass, placing as much of your combat power in one place in order to secure victory. The SWPA was trying to do everything with only limited resources and was beginning to hit a snag. It would be almost the end of June before another unit, the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, arrived to finish off the enemy at Sarmi. Despite their

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<sup>25</sup> 158<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team, *Operations Report: Sarmi-Wakde Campaign*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 251.

frustration and heavy losses, the 158<sup>th</sup> had not done poorly. It was estimated they had killed 920 Japanese soldiers at the cost of 70 men killed, 257 wounded, and 4 missing.<sup>27</sup> However, they could neither dislodge the enemy nor reach the vital airstrip. That task would have to be accomplished by the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

Evaluating the performance of the 158<sup>th</sup> and the doctrine they utilized is difficult. They followed the basic tenets of the tactical doctrine needed in this theatre: tank-infantry cooperation, utilization of overwhelming indirect fires, and the creation of generic infantry assault teams, etc. When able to utilize their skills and weapons, they had performed competently. Before reaching Lone Tree Hill, tanks and infantry had worked well together. When tanks were unavailable, the generic assault teams had performed adequately, and even the artillery problems of the attack on the 26<sup>th</sup> were corrected. The 158<sup>th</sup> never had a chance to win this battle. They also did not lose it, which gave the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry a chance to finish the job.

The first attack of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division against Lone Tree Hill would not occur until the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. The division commander wanted all his units in the combat area and he also felt it necessary, wisely so, to get a more thorough picture of what he faced than had been secured by the 158<sup>th</sup>. Lone Tree Hill:

...contained a veritable maze of Japanese defenses. There were many caves and bunkers on the western cliff-positions which were hidden from observers by tall trees or undergrowth on the cliff face. There were also a few pillboxes or bunkers in the swampy area between the cliff and the beach west of Rocky Point. Two 75mm field pieces, defiladed by rocky outcroppings, were emplaced by the enemy on this beach. On the face of Rocky Point and on the rocky shore below were other defensive positions and at least one other artillery piece. In the ravine east of Rocky Point were five 75mm guns hidden in various caves or crevices. Although none of these guns could be traversed, they were so emplaced that they covered most of the northwestern, northern, and northeastern land and sea approaches to Lone Tree Hill.

On the hilltop plateau Japanese defensive positions included log and earth dugouts which, presenting low silhouettes and covered with

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

undergrowth, were very difficult to locate...One of the most troublesome installations was a Japanese observation post at the northern part of the hilltop plateau. This post, about one hundred feet off the ground in the branches of a huge tree, was sturdily constructed and cleverly camouflaged. It had withstood air, naval, and artillery bombardment aimed at Lone Tree Hill prior to 20 June. From the post the Japanese could observe movements along the main road to the east of Lone Tree Hill, the entire beach area from Sarmi to Arare, and maneuvers on most of the hill itself.<sup>28</sup>

The Japanese position would be a tough nut to crack.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, launched its first attack against Lone Tree Hill at 0800 hours on 20 June. For approximately four hours they advanced without incident. As they approached the defile, the usual heavy Japanese fire pinned the men of the 20<sup>th</sup> down. Tank support was available but still unusable. Rather than continuing the attack, the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry spent the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of June securing perimeters and dispatching patrols to locate the exact Japanese positions. They would attack again on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the night preceding the attack, American artillery and mortars targeted Lone Tree Hill. Before the morning attack, a squadron of p-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers strafed and firebombed the hill. Then the artillery chimed in once again. Three artillery battalions sent over 1,000 rounds of 105mm and 155mm shells into an area only four hundred yards wide and six hundred yards long on the northeast side of the hill.<sup>30</sup> This massive fire kept the Japanese hidden in caves and any other cover they could find, allowing the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry to reach the top of the hill by noon. There was just one problem: the Japanese soldiers forced into their caves by the artillery bombardment were able to cut off the American troops at the top of the hill. The Japanese could also observe the 20<sup>th</sup>'s positions, and artillery fire began falling with greater ferocity. The Americans on the hill consolidated their positions for the expected counterattack.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>29</sup> 20<sup>TH</sup> Infantry Regiment, *The Battle Of Lone Tree Hill*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 269.

Even when cut off, they still performed that vital task. They would be ready when the Japanese attacked.

When dealing with enemy fortifications, American infantrymen often needed the assistance of armor or artillery but when defending against massed Japanese infantry attacks, even at night, the infantry needed little help. The Japanese counterattack on the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> was decimated by American machine guns. Another larger and more ferocious attack on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> produced even more Japanese casualties because the American troops had used the available time to improve their positions.<sup>31</sup> Much of the area's Japanese manpower disappeared in these two attacks, which allowed the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry to begin clearing or sealing in Japanese positions on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Adherence to the doctrine of establishing defensive perimeters during daylight in anticipation of nighttime defensive actions had allowed the 20<sup>th</sup> to break the back of the Japanese Sarmi garrison.

Though the initiative had once again passed to the American Army, the dirty work of clearing the Japanese from their positions remained to be done. The sixteen man assault teams created, trained, and rehearsed by the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the many months before seeing its first action were put to work. They used flame-throwers, bazookas, rifle grenades, machine guns, BARs, hand-grenades, explosives, and gasoline ignited after being poured into the areas' many crevices, coral outcroppings and caves. This was dirty work and the men of the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry did it well. Even the most formidable position was vulnerable when an enemy was within kicking distance of it. By 30 June the work was done. Any Japanese positions not totally eliminated were sealed in and left to wither. Those occupying the positions were left to starve or be incinerated by burning gasoline.

The protracted battle for Lone Tree Hill and the surrounding heights was strictly an infantry battle. Armor could not reach Japanese positions because of the forbidding terrain, terrain that may have even exceeded the Buna area for the

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<sup>31</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *The Battle Of Lone Tree Hill*, p. 3.

obstacles it presented to offensive operations. It was left to the infantry and their supporting fires to do the job.

Artillery also had its limitations in this environment. It could not penetrate into the caves or blast away the dense coral which harbored many Japanese positions. Its great value, demonstrated in the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry's attack of 22 June, was in keeping the Japanese pinned down long enough for the infantry to advance to a position from which they and their weapons could eliminate the enemy. A possible change in the use of artillery was also indicated by this battle. Prior to the attack of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, most preparatory artillery barrages lasted about fifteen minutes, which tended to do only negligible damage. The barrage of the 22<sup>nd</sup> was longer and very intense. Longer barrages, despite the fact they gave away any hope of surprise, may have been the best way of using the artillery. The barrage of the 22<sup>nd</sup> allowed the special assault teams to eventually do their jobs.

Doctrine would be put to the test once again on the island of Biak, the next objective of MacArthur's leapfrog campaign.

The doctrine employed at Wakde was an improvement over the steps and procedures used at the culmination of the Battle of Buna. A combined arms team of infantry, armor, and artillery overran Wakde in only two days. The pattern that developed on Wakde began with tanks drawing the majority of Japanese fire. Their attention fixated on the encroaching American armor, Japanese pillboxes and bunkers fell easy prey to the bazookas, hand grenades, flame-throwers, and explosives of accompanying infantry. Artillery's part in this scenario involved forward observer's pinpointing Japanese targets and then indirect fires meticulously eliminating them. At Buna, artillery was available in neither numbers nor effectiveness to be of much value until late in the battle. At Wakde, everything was available in sufficient amounts. Further, for one of the few times in the Pacific ground war, American forces were aided, rather than encumbered by terrain.

Wakde, though a small island, was relatively level and solid. Therefore, it was ideal tank country. American tanks could advance to within pointblank range of Japanese fortifications before firing. The lack of significant hills or mountains on Wakde also allowed artillery to have an effect on all enemy positions. Unlike future battles, few positions were located underground. Essentially, this island was the perfect place for American combined arms doctrine. As American forces moved to the New Guinea mainland, the jungle grew thicker, the mountains and hills much more numerous. Was American doctrine flexible enough to function successfully on ground where infantry had to fight alone, devoid of armor and artillery support? The Battle of Lone Tree Hill answered that question.

Lone Tree Hill was typical of the type of terrain the Japanese defended throughout the war. Guarding the road leading to a vital airfield, it had to be taken. Littered with caves, natural strongpoints, and thick jungle vegetation, it was a fortress even before Japanese ingenuity, expertise, and tenacity entered the equation. American tanks could not offer support because the land was completely impassable to tracked vehicles. Artillery fire was limited by the coral and rock where Japanese positions tended to be found and the lack of visibility in the jungle. FO's frequently could not find targets. The infantry had to win this fight alone. In such a battle, the advantage lies with the defender. Fire and maneuver quickly fell apart since coordination in the jungle was nearly impossible. The forbidding terrain prevented large scale attacks. Doctrine developed into the principle of attrition through frontal attacks. Depending on superior numbers and infantry weapons, American forces methodically eliminated Japanese strength in the Lone Tree Hill area. They were greatly aided by the Japanese insistence of launching attacks against prepared perimeters at night. In the process, one American Regimental Combat Team, the 158<sup>th</sup>, was essentially finished for many months as a fighting force. The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division also suffered heavy losses. Though successful, it was naturally preferable to win with

**combined arms rather than just infantry. Unfortunately, such scenarios were not always possible in the SWPA.**

**The headquarters of 6<sup>th</sup> Army and SWPA also contributed to the lengthy fight for Lone Tree Hill. When it became obvious that Lone Tree would be a radically different battle than the relatively easy battle for Wakde, rather than reinforce the 158<sup>th</sup> or provide the landing craft needed for an amphibious flanking maneuver, higher headquarters simply implored the 158<sup>th</sup> to drive on. Resources were needed elsewhere. Future battles and a race against time with the Central Pacific drive of Nimitz drove MacArthur and his chief subordinate Krueger forward. SWPA Headquarters never finished the battle they were fighting. Instead, once a battle started they considered it no longer a point of concern and looked forward, depriving ongoing battles of precious men and material. The battles of attrition that developed in cases such as Lone Tree Hill, battles where combined-arms, casualty-reducing doctrine were inapplicable, were in many regards the responsibility of MacArthur.**

## CHAPTER FIVE

**“When speaking of actions in the Southwest Pacific campaign, the newspapers have a stock phrase which goes like this, ‘Our forces have captured and consolidated the airfields and have chased the Japs into the trackless jungles. The operation is now over for all practical purposes and all that remains to be done is mopping up.’ This phrase probably expresses the truth from a purely strategic standpoint but from the place where GI Joe stands this statement is a masterpiece of irony and is liable to merit one loud, prolonged raspberry. For we all know that much of the hardest fighting comes after the airdromes have fallen and the so called mopping up starts.”**

**Harry T. Grube  
1<sup>st</sup> Lt., 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry  
Observer’s Report**

**The Battle of Biak and its vital airfields was in many ways reminiscent of the struggles for Buna and Lone Tree Hill. It paralleled Buna in that American units launched successive attacks against formidable Japanese positions and were turned back at each attempt. It paralleled the battle for Lone Tree Hill in that these attacks were supported by massive amounts of American firepower and that firepower had little or no effect on the Japanese defenses. Biak would prove to be another example of American soldiers displaying their ingenuity when all else failed. The conquerors of Wakde, the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, hoped to continue their success on Biak.**

**Biak’s military value lay in the outstanding airfields the Japanese had constructed on the island. These airfields were capable of supporting not only fighters and attack planes, but long-range bombers as well. Airpower based at Biak could support MacArthur’s drive to the end of New Guinea and even reach his ultimate objective, the Philippines. These airfields were also needed to support another offensive, Nimitz’s attack against the Mariana Islands, set to begin on 15 June 1944. The invasion of Biak was set for the last week of May. This was sufficient time, at least it was thought to be sufficient time, to seize the airfields**

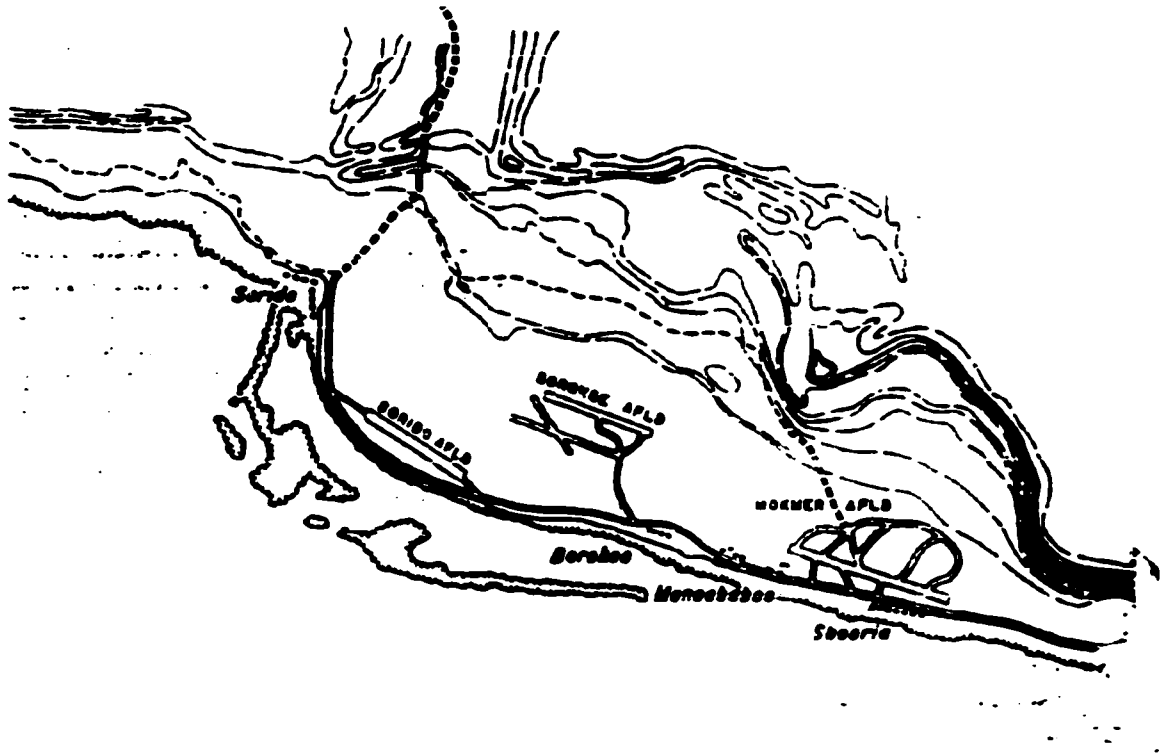
and make them operational. The main airfield, Mokmer Airdrome, was indeed seized prior to 15 June. However, it was unusable because the Japanese occupied the heights and could fire on every inch of it. The Battle of Biak would revolve around the battle for the island's high ground, without whose control air operations were impossible. The 41<sup>st</sup> Division eventually cleared the high ground, though not in time to support Nimitz's initial attack. Fortunately, Nimitz was able not only to launch his invasion but also decisively defeat a Japanese fleet in the Battle of the Philippine Sea without MacArthur's help.

Mokmer Airdrome was the key airfield on Biak and the Japanese had planned their defense accordingly. After finally making Mokmer operational, the men of the 41<sup>st</sup> inspected the high ground that had forestalled them for over three weeks. They found:

...a position which had withstood two aerial bombings and strafings, naval gunfire, heavy mortar and artillery concentrations and almost daily poundings from our guns. The coral reef that parallels the coast rises to a height in excess of 240 feet behind the village of MOKMER. The cliff at this point is not as sheer as in the vicinity of PARAI, but it is very steep and cannot be ascended without the use of the hand...Both caves here were at least 50 feet deep and one of them measured about 75 feet x 200 feet across its top opening. They were honeycombed with tunnels and passages, at least one of which led to an opening in the face of the cliff. Forward of the caves on the high point were two well constructed observation shelters. Behind the caves on the steep slope that led to the top of the reef were five pillboxes...Excellent cover and concealment for snipers and automatic weapons existed in the area surrounding the caves. The OP permitted unobstructed observation of the whole coastal flat from PARAI Jetty to the east end of Mokmer Airdrome. MG and mortar fire could be laid at will on most of this vital area... This position is but another example of the Jap ability to select a terrain feature and develop it into a fortress by a small amount of pioneer work.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, Report of Operations: Biak Island, p. 3.



The airfields and the high ground which dominated them.

Source: Robert Ross Smith, *Approach To The Philippines*

Figure VI

The above description was of the West Caves. The other main Japanese positions on Biak were centered on the East Caves and the Ibd Pocket. The Ibd Pocket was:

...a series of knifelike east-west ridges separated by depressions and crevices up to fifty feet deep. These ridges were connected in places by cross-ridges and the entire area was covered with thick rain forest and dense jungle undergrowth which had found a foothold in the coral. Pillboxes of coral and logs, hasty emplacements of the same materials, small caves and crevices, and foxholes at the bases of large trees were all utilized by the enemy to defend the area.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, Japanese forces in this pocket could not directly threaten Mokmer Airdrome. The defenders of the West Caves could. No American plane could land on any of Biak's three airfields so long as the West Caves were occupied by Japanese troops. The East Caves were another formidable collection of defensive positions. Their great value was as a natural bond between the Ibd Pocket and the West Caves and as an Observation Post, from which the entire coast from Parai to Mokmer could be observed. This would be a tough nut to crack. There would be ample support for the 41<sup>st</sup> Division, including four battalions of artillery, a company of heavy mortars and two platoons of Sherman tanks. There was also abundant air support and the naval fire of two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, twenty-one destroyers, and three rocket firing LCI's.<sup>3</sup> The support was there. Its effectiveness would dictate the course of the battle.

The terrain of Biak was the anchor of the Japanese defensive plan. Colonel Naoyuki Kuzume, the Japanese commander on Biak, made an important decision before the Americans even landed. It was obvious that the airfields, particularly Mokmer, would be the targets of any American forces. The airfields were located on most of the only open terrain on the entire island. To fight the battle at the airfields would leave Kuzume's forces vulnerable to superior American firepower.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

However, Kuzume did not have to hold the airfields to prevent their use. By occupying the high ground above the airfields Kuzume and his forces could deny their use to all aircraft and place any attacking American units under constant fire. To accomplish this, Kuzume had 3,400 army troops, a company of light tanks, 1,500 naval troops, and approximately 6,000 service personnel.<sup>4</sup> The service personnel were primarily construction laborers but they would be used as auxiliary infantrymen. Overlooking Mokmer Airdrome itself the Japanese had a battery of mountain guns, three or four 3-inch antiaircraft guns, and large numbers of machine guns and mortars.<sup>5</sup> There were other heavy weapons located in the East Caves and in the Ibdì Pocket. The Japanese were able to cause the men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division a great deal of trouble.

On 27 May, 1944, the 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, landed on the island of Biak. That day was spent unloading supplies and preparing for the next day's advance. The Japanese had done little to obstruct the initial landing other than by pouring in harassing artillery fire. This meager response did not continue on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The 162<sup>nd</sup> moved out early on the 28<sup>th</sup>, hoping to reach Mokmer. The American advance was stopped by a Japanese counterattack. Digging in for the night, the Americans had no idea that the following morning would produce an extreme rarity in the ground war between the American and Japanese armies.

The Japanese garrison of Biak, unlike that of Wakde or the Japanese units around Lone Tree Hill, had armored support. That support swept into action on the morning of 29 May. Two waves of Japanese tanks, the first with four vehicles, the second with three, attacked the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, about 1,000 yards east of Mokmer Airdrome. The Japanese tanks were accompanied by infantry and also supported by mortar fire. The Japanese vehicles were the Type 95 light tanks. Weighing only 7.28 tons, armed with a 37mm main gun and 2

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

machine guns, and with a crew of three, they were little match for the 162nd Infantry's armored support.<sup>6</sup>

Two platoons of Sherman tanks of the 603rd Tank Company were ready for the Japanese. In addition to their light armament the Japanese tanks only had about 30mm of armor. The thirty-two ton Sherman had 76mm of armor, a crew of four, a 75mm main gun, two thirty caliber and one fifty caliber machine gun.<sup>7</sup> The Sherman's 75mm gun also had a much longer range than the Type 95's 37mm gun. The first four Japanese tanks were quickly destroyed and their infantry support dispersed or killed by the Shermans' machine guns and the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. The Japanese were able to score a few hits on the American tanks but their small caliber rounds did no damage. Shortly thereafter, the second wave of Japanese tanks attacked. The results were the same. All three tanks were destroyed and the accompanying Japanese infantry killed. One Sherman's turret was locked in place by a Japanese shell but it still managed to stay in the fight. Seven tanks and 250 Japanese infantrymen were killed in this battle, demonstrating the dominance of American armor in this theatre of the war.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the overwhelming victory of the American tanks, the battle of Biak was not yet won. The 162<sup>nd</sup> was able to resume its advance but could not dislodge the enemy forces on the high ground. The close proximity of American and Japanese forces made artillery support very risky and their were coordination problems with naval and tactical air support. The 162<sup>nd</sup> withdrew to its positions of 28 May and did not resume its attacks until reinforcements arrived. Those reinforcements were the 163<sup>rd</sup> and 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. General Krueger ordered General Fuller, the 41<sup>st</sup> commander, to get moving again. His offensive was "to be pushed with a view to carrying out his mission effectively and expeditiously."<sup>9</sup> The attack resumed on 1 June.

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Hogg, *The Greenhill Armoured Fighting Vehicle Data Book*, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> 603d Medium Tank Company, *Historical Record: Biak Island Operation*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 315.

American units moved out early on 1 June and by the end of the day the 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry had occupied most of an area surveyed by the Japanese for an airfield. A perimeter was established for the expected Japanese night attack, which occurred at 0330 hours on the morning of 2 June. About 150 Japanese soldiers attacked the lines of the 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Anticipating this attack had allowed the 186<sup>th</sup> to place one of its battalions, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, in position to trap the Japanese once they advanced. American machine guns had the Japanese in a crossfire. At first light there were three dead Americans and eight-six dead Japanese within the perimeter of the 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry.<sup>10</sup> Despite all the commotion, at 0900 hours on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 186<sup>th</sup> moved out again.

The objective for 2 June was a point 5,000 yards west of the airstrip. The heights, infested with Japanese soldiers, flanked the 186<sup>th</sup> the entire way. Small Japanese detachments continually attacked but to no gain. Ninety-six more Japanese soldiers perished launching fruitless attacks against the 186<sup>th</sup>, which suffered sixteen casualties, six of whom died.<sup>11</sup> At 1600 hours the Americans dug in about 600 yards northeast of their objective, astride the 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, at the Ibdì Pocket.

At this point in the battle, supply problems began plaguing all the American units. Lying only one hundred miles south of the equator, the heat and humidity on Biak were intense and debilitating. There was no natural water on the island. Even torrential rainfall run off merely disappeared into the island's natural coral. The unbearable heat was made worse by the thick scrub, up to twelve feet high, which kept any breezes from alleviating the heat. Men received one canteen of water per day, a mere quart of water, and were expected to continue fighting. It was an impossible situation but MacArthur needed an operational airfield. Therefore, the advance continued.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Operations Report: Hurricane (Biak) Task Force, Lessons Learned*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 319.

The days of 3-7 June were relatively calm as far as Japanese action against the 41<sup>st</sup> Division was concerned. The main holdup of the American advance continued to be supply problems. All water had to be carried overland and even ammunition was becoming less abundant, though at no time did lack of ammunition affect operations. Foot trails were the primary means of travel and thick scrub limited visibility. Fortunately, there was little Japanese opposition on 3 June. Neither the 186<sup>th</sup> nor the 162<sup>nd</sup> suffered any casualties, though they did kill three Japanese soldiers. By 1500 hours all units were digging in for the night.

The 41<sup>st</sup> Division remained static on the 4<sup>th</sup>, as water was still scarce and intelligence warned of a possible Japanese attack from the sea against Biak. Water problems also hindered the advance on the 5<sup>th</sup>. No water had been received in the forward areas since early on the 4<sup>th</sup> and the men were understandably thirsty. With little water, an advance was risky, but ordered nonetheless. As the advance started, nature smiled on the 41<sup>st</sup> Division. A heavy rainstorm suddenly appeared to quench the thirst of the American soldiers. Colonel Newman, the commander of the 186th Infantry Regiment, had his men stop, catch the rain in their ponchos, and fill their canteens.<sup>13</sup> Temporarily refreshed, the advance continued. There was still no Japanese opposition. The Americans had now reached the ridge overlooking Mokmer Airdrome, still 2,500 yards ahead. General Fuller wanted the airfield secured immediately. General Jens Doe, Fuller's Assistant Division Commander, and Colonel Newman, though it better to secure the heights above the airfield first.

Under pressure from Krueger, who was under pressure from MacArthur to get an airfield operational, Fuller ordered the airfield at Mokmer occupied. SWPA was supposed to support the invasion of the Marianas in little more than a week and needed Biak's airfields to do so. Colonel Newman was infuriated by this decision, as was General Doe, and they pleaded their case to the division commander. Fuller stood by his decision. General Decker, Krueger's Chief of

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

Staff. visited the front at this time and asked Colonel Newman what would happen to his men if they occupied the airfield without first securing the heights?

Newman's response: "We are going to catch hell!"<sup>14</sup> It defied military logic to occupy a position when the enemy could fire at you at will from dominating high ground. Yet, it is not difficult to understand Fuller's decision when considering the amount of pressure he was under from both Krueger and MacArthur. General Decker stated in his post-war papers that Biak was the only time in the Pacific War that MacArthur put pressure on Krueger and his subordinate commanders to move despite any adversity.<sup>15</sup> Decker must not have heard of Buna or been present during any of the communications between MacArthur and Krueger during the Leyte and Luzon campaigns, which will be explored later. Fuller, a division commander, was up against not only the Japanese but also the strategic and tactical timetables of MacArthur. He had to keep moving.

Despite the time crunch, no American advance occurred on 6 June. The entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry was hand-carrying supplies to the 186<sup>th</sup>'s 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion atop the ridge overlooking Mokmer. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was busy looking for routes to Mokmer, as well as any sign of the Japanese. They found a route and prepared to attack on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Little did the Americans realize that while preparing to advance to Mokmer Airdrome they were already in place to eliminate the Japanese positions that would later prove so troublesome. When the 186<sup>th</sup> reached the top of the ridge they occupied on 5 and 6 June, they were to the left rear of the Japanese defenses. They could have taken these positions from the rear, had they known they were there. Colonel Newman had ordered patrols in this area, but due to either poor patrolling or expert Japanese camouflage and noise discipline, or both, the enemy positions were never located. Colonel Newman

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<sup>14</sup> *Newman Notes*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Decker Papers (9 November 1972 Interview)*, p. 22.

would bemoan this failure on the part of his 3rd Battalion.<sup>16</sup> He later ordered the advance resumed.

The relative calm the 41<sup>st</sup> Division faced in the days prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> ended when the Americans occupied Mokmer Airdrome and reached the beach. General Fuller had played right into the hands of Colonel Kuzume. Kuzume had allowed the 41<sup>st</sup> Division to occupy the Airdrome. His men in the East and West Caves then opened fire. The entire airfield and beach area, from which vital supplies would soon be arriving, was under enemy fire. Tanks were landed on the beach and quickly went to work. Engaged by a Japanese mountain gun and a 20-mm anti-aircraft gun, as well as Japanese troops in pillboxes along the beach, the Shermans of the 603rd Tank Company again proved their value. They silenced the two Japanese guns and destroyed two pillboxes while drawing most of the enemy fire from the East Caves. Accompanying infantry eliminated the remaining pillboxes. No American tanks were hit.<sup>17</sup> Supplies could now land without interference. However, Mokmer Airdrome was still unusable as long as the Japanese in the West Caves continued firing at will.

From 7-10 June Fuller sent his men against the heights, with the most emphasis placed on the Japanese positions in the West Caves. None of the American weapons seemed to do any good. Infantry arms, tank gunfire, and even artillery seemed to have little effect on Biak's natural coral. It took a tremendous amount of ammunition to blast away the coral housing many of the Japanese positions, and artillery fire could not reach the interior of the caves that held the remainder of the Japanese garrison.<sup>18</sup> American engineers could not repair the airfield because of the constant enemy fire. Attacks continued day after day with little progress and increasing casualties. Fuller's position was also very precarious. His failure to get Mokmer operational was compounded when MacArthur announced that victory was already achieved at Biak, an impromptu,

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<sup>16</sup> *Newman Papers*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> 603d Tank Company, *Historical Record: Biak Island Operation*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Observer's Report #149, *Report on the Defenses of Biak*, p. 15.

unfounded statement for which the SWPA commander became infamous. It was not the first, nor would it be the last time he issued such a statement. However, Krueger then decided a change was needed. General Eichelberger was ordered to Biak to assume control of the Task Force. "MacArthur's Fireman," the victor at Buna, was told Fuller could remain in command of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>19</sup> However, Fuller, a West Point classmate of Eichelberger's, requested his relief of all command responsibilities. Eichelberger reluctantly accepted his old friend's resignation. Eichelberger assumed command of the Hurricane Task Force on 14 June. Fuller's Assistant Division Commander, General Doe, assumed command of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division. Eichelberger then set himself to fixing another mess, a task he had performed brilliantly at Buna.

The situation at Biak presented a problem both easier and more difficult than the one Eichelberger had faced at Buna. It was easier since the 41<sup>st</sup> was a veteran unit and did not require wholesale doctrinal changes as the 32d Division had at Buna. The 41<sup>st</sup> knew how to fight and had the weapons to do so. Therein lay Eichelberger's problem. Those weapons, and the tactics developed to employ them were useless in this type of terrain. Vast amounts of firepower did little to abate the volume of Japanese fire, and infantry could not do the job on their own because they did not know the exact location of the Japanese positions. To break the stalemate, Eichelberger ordered a change in tactics. It would have been helpful to know exactly where the Japanese were hiding, but the available maps were very inaccurate and aerial photographs revealed little more than heavy jungle.<sup>20</sup> Only thorough patrolling, more thorough than the lost opportunity of 6 June, would provide the exact locations.

It was obvious that due to their ability to observe the entire battle area from their positions in the heights, the Japanese could shift their forces to meet any

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 344.

<sup>20</sup> 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, *History: Hurricane (Biak) Operation, 15-27 June 1944*, p. 6.

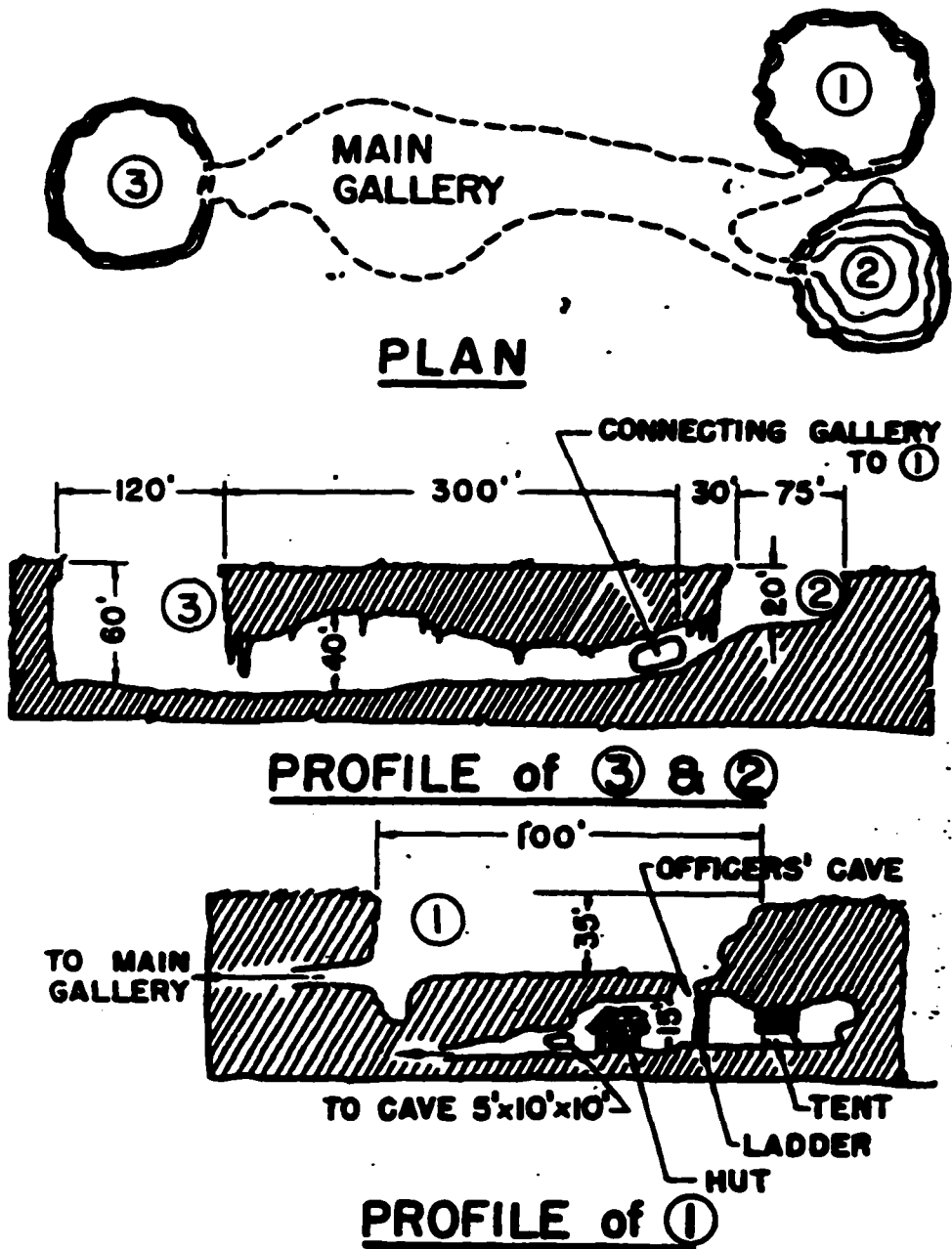
incoming attack.<sup>21</sup> Before an attack on the West Caves could be successful, Japanese forces in that pocket had to be isolated from the rest of the battlefield. It was decided to clear the West Caves first because they alone threatened Mokmer and prevented use of the airdrome. The purpose of the 19 June attack was the isolation, not reduction of the West Caves. The mission of the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry was vigorous patrol activity with the sole purpose of locating the Japanese positions. A battalion of the 163<sup>rd</sup> was also to move to a position on the high ground north of the West Caves, to serve as both observer and blocker of any Japanese forces attempting to move into the area. The 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, already stalled in the sumps area of the West Caves, was to continue its frontal attacks, keeping the Japanese forces occupied. Finally, the 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry, its assembly areas above Mokmer, was to attack to the north and east. If successful, the West Caves would be enveloped and isolated. It is surprising that no one in the 41<sup>st</sup> Division thought of such a plan before Eichelberger arrived?

The attack on 19 June was successful and the West Caves were isolated. However, the Japanese were still there and able to fire upon Mokmer Airdrome. Reducing those defenses was the next task. On 21 June the first of the West Caves' three sumps was attacked. These sumps, which were actually natural depressions in the coral that were overgrown with vegetation and riddled with caves, had caused a great deal of trouble. With the Japanese positions located, tanks were able to join the fight and fire from point-blank range, where their fire could be effective. Tanks fired at the entrances to the caves and as usual drew most of the enemy fire, allowing flame-thrower teams to get close enough to the cave mouths that their fire actually entered the former Japanese sanctuaries.<sup>22</sup> The 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry then set up a position right in front of the main cave entrance, hoping to finish the job on the next day. Additionally, five 55-gallon drums of gasoline were poured into various seepage points around the caves and ignited.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



# THE SUMPS - BIAK ISLAND

ASSAULTED 22 JUNE '44, REDUCED 27 JUNE - SCALE 1" = 100'

Source: 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, *History: Hurricane (Biak) Operation, 15-27 June 1944*

Figure VII

Now cut off, the Japanese attempted to escape during the night of 21-22 June. To do so they had to break through the lines of the 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Once again demonstrating the importance of establishing a strong and effective perimeter, the 186<sup>th</sup> decimated the Japanese attackers. One American soldier was killed while 109 Japanese soldiers perished in the lopsided battle.<sup>23</sup> It was an overwhelming success and a precursor to the success of the following day.

Apparently, the Japanese had been pulling their guns out of the caves at first light each day to blast the American positions at the airdrome. American patrols, now that they were in position to isolate the West Caves, were also in position to ambush the Japanese as they emerged from their underground havens. Caught in the open, the Japanese heavy weapons and much of what remained of the West Caves garrison were eliminated.<sup>24</sup> To get into position to stage this ambush, the American troops initiated their movement in darkness, a move used far too infrequently in this theatre of the war. Believing their weapons safe in the early morning hours, the Japanese were easy targets. Now the job could be finished.

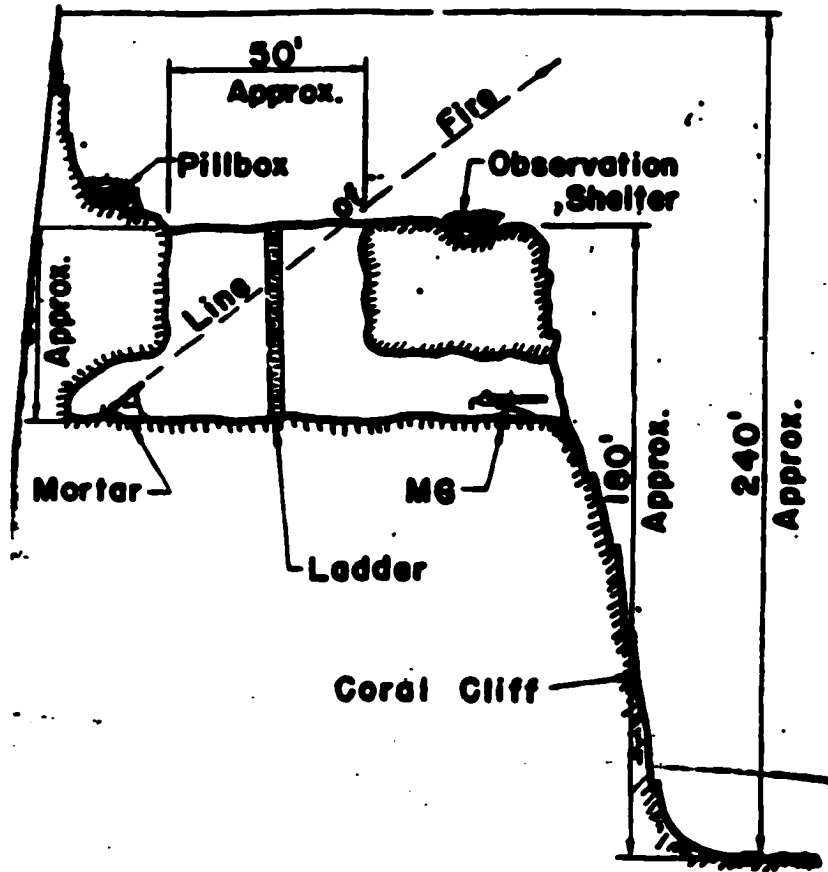
On the morning of 22 June, the fires were still burning within the West Caves from the gasoline poured into them the previous day. It would be a slow, dangerous process entering the caves and clearing them. Further, MacArthur needed Mokmer operational, and clearing the caves could prolong that event even more. It was decided to seal any Japanese survivors within the caves with a massive explosive charge. Before this was done, several explosions were heard within the caves as the burning gasoline worked its way to various ammunition dumps. Under cover of flame-thrower teams and tanks, an 850 pound charge of dynamite was lowered into one of the Sumps and fired electrically.<sup>25</sup> The deafening explosion marked the end of Japanese resistance in the West Caves. Almost simultaneously, the first American aircraft began landing on the airfield.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



**MOKMER POCKET**  
**Schematic Cross Section**

This schematic represents the type of positions occupied by the Japanese on the high ground overlooking Mokmer Airdrome. It provides cover, concealment, and an excellent field of vision of the American forces on the ground below.

Source: 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, *History: Hurricane (Biak) Operation, 15-27 June 1944*

Figure VIII

**Biak's main airfield was finally fully operational. However, there were still Japanese forces in the East Caves and Ibdì Pocket, though they posed no threat to Mokmer. Destroying those Japanese forces would be accomplished in a different fashion.**

**Once the beach area near Mokmer was secure, the East Caves posed little threat to the American forces on Biak. Japanese forces in the East Caves had been firing on the supply road from Bosnek to Mokmer. Once the beach became the main point of supply, the road's value became negligible. Rather than assault the East Caves with infantry, it was decided instead to use indirect and direct supporting fires to neutralize any Japanese resistance located there. From 7 to 24 June artillery, mortars, tanks, and offshore destroyers subjected the East Caves area to a constant bombardment. Use of supporting fires rather than infantry was also necessary since most of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division's foot soldiers were needed at the time to clear the more essential West Caves area. After 28 June little other than harassing fire was heard from the Japanese soldiers occupying the East Caves. The last enemy soldier was eliminated on 20 July.<sup>26</sup>**

**The Ibdì Pocket was the last major point of Japanese resistance remaining on Biak after the neutralization of the East Caves. The 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry had been dug in the vicinity of Ibdì since the battle's first days. Yet little was heard from the Japanese soldiers who faced them. On 12 June the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment relieved the 162<sup>nd</sup> and set itself to clearing the Ibdì Pocket. As with the East Caves, the Japanese forces at Ibdì posed no threat to the vital airfield at Mokmer. However, it was decided to clear the area nonetheless. From 12 to 20 June, the 163<sup>rd</sup> patrolled the area to find the exact locations of the Japanese positions. The first attack would be launched on 21 June, the same day as the main attack against the West Caves.**

**The American attack of 21 June was launched by a single rifle company and easily thrown back by the Japanese. For the next three days the entire area**

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 384.

was saturated with all types of fire. Tank destroyers, 4.2 inch mortars, 81-mm mortars, heavy and light machine guns, an entire battalion of 105-mm. howitzers, and the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry's Cannon Company kept the area under constant attack. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, two more rifle companies attacked and were once again met by a hail of bullets and mortar bombs. Two more days of bombardment followed. On the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> four rifle companies compressed the remaining Japanese soldiers into an area only 600 yards square.<sup>27</sup> More patrolling followed in the next few days to pinpoint exact position locations for American artillery. This was going to be done the easy way.

From 4 to 11 July an immense amount of shells fell on the compressed Japanese position at Ildi. Approximately 20,000 105-mm. shells and an equal number of 60-mm., 81-mm., and 4.2 inch mortar bombs blasted the area.<sup>28</sup> These formidable totals allowed bazooka teams to enter the small area and finish off any Japanese pillboxes or bunkers left erect. Amazingly, there were Japanese positions still fighting in the pocket. Bazooka teams, covered by flame-throwers began destroying Japanese positions from as close as forty yards, on ground completely devoid of cover. American artillery shells had wiped the area clean. Tunnels to caves were fired upon by the bazooka teams, who were often stunned that any opposition could have possibly survived their artillery.<sup>29</sup> Tanks were now able to observe any remaining Japanese positions and added the weight of their 75-mm. guns to the carnage.

By 15 July, there was still enough Japanese opposition in the area that another wave of bombardment was ordered. By 22 July 5,000 more 105-mm. shells had hit the area, as well as 2,275 rounds of 155-mm. shells, sixty-four 1,000 pound bombs and countless mortar rounds.<sup>30</sup> That day the area was fully occupied by the 163<sup>rd</sup>, though they took the precaution of sealing all the remaining caves

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>29</sup> *Infantry Journal* 56, *Bazookas on Biak*, March 1945, p. 18-21.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 389.

with explosives. Later inspection displayed an incredible number of Japanese positions, both natural and manmade. There were four large caves, seventeen smaller caves, seventy-five log and coral pillboxes, and various individual-fighting positions. These defenses were supported by eight 90-mm. mortars, three 75-mm. mountain guns, two 37-mm. guns, two 20-mm. guns, and three heavy machine guns.<sup>31</sup> There were also numerous infantry weapons and it would never be known how many Japanese weapons existed in IbdI before the massive artillery bombardments.

A month after MacArthur had declared the operation a success, Biak was finally secure. Though successful the operation left several questions lingering in the minds of the American infantry and their commanders.

Tanks had been key to the quick victory on Wakde. On Biak, they were employed far less successfully. This can be attributed to the impassable terrain and limited visibility, but both the infantry and the tankers involved felt that other problems existed as well. The infantry commanders believed their men were becoming too dependent on tanks and the protection they afforded.<sup>32</sup> Men were not dispersing properly and should a tank take a hit, the accompanying infantry were as susceptible to destruction as the iron monsters they had come to depend upon. Commanders also stressed the need for more thorough infantry-tank cooperation training. The 603d Tank Company agreed that better combined training was needed.<sup>33</sup> The tankers of the 603d were also frustrated by the false sense of security the infantry felt in the presence of their armored support. Infantry had to precede the tanks, not vice-versa. The lack of visibility in the jungle handicapped tankers even more than infantry since they had to stay buttoned-up within their vehicles when enemy fire was anticipated. An exposed tank commander or loader is an easy target for a sniper. Once the infantry pinpointed a target the tanks could do their work. However, the 603d believed that

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>32</sup> 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report of Operations: Biak Island (Review of Lessons Learned)*, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> 603d Tank Company, *Historical Record: Biak Island Operation*, p. 10.

convincing infantry commanders to perform this vital task would be a very difficult undertaking.<sup>34</sup> They would have several more battles to get their point across.

Another problem encountered on Biak was the ineffectiveness of American heavy weapons against Japanese defensive positions, both natural and manmade. Despite the huge number of shells fired into the Ildi Pocket there were still Japanese pillboxes left standing. The bombardment had also done little to the natural caves and coral of the area. Only flame-thrower supported bazooka teams and demolitions ended the Japanese resistance. Artillery shells and tank shells could not reach into the interior of caves unless they were in a direct fire, observable position. Fortunately, MacArthur's forces would not encounter such formidable positions again until the Battle for Manila and even the positions in Manila did not provide the same trouble as the natural terrain of Biak.

The 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division did not employ generic assault teams. When the Japanese positions in the West Caves were finally overrun it was by teams created on the spot. The 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment noted in its Operations Report that "the need for trained teams to overrun and demolish fortifications was demonstrated. The use of a combination of covering fire and special weapons such as tanks, flame-throwers, rocket launchers, and demolition crews requires training as a team."<sup>35</sup> The 186<sup>th</sup> also tended to agree with the men of the 603<sup>rd</sup> Tank Company with regard to the mindset of the infantry. The 186<sup>th</sup> found it preferable to keep tanks in the rear and call them in as needed. Infantry casualties tended to rise as the result of fire directed at tanks.<sup>36</sup> There were also smaller problems concerning night perimeters, but those problems (congestion, failure to integrate fires) were rectified by the end of the campaign.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Hurricane (Biak) Task Force, Lessons Learned*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

The campaign for Biak was both a success and failure. It succeeded when the island was secure and its airfields operational. It also failed because the airfields were not secured in time to support Admiral Nimitz's invasion of the Marianas. Was the failure a result of poor American doctrine? Unlike Buna, the failure to secure Mokmer and the surrounding heights quickly cannot be attributed to the men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division. They were willing to fight and tried in vain before General Eichelberger arrived to drive the Japanese from the West Caves. Unfortunately, the doctrine of combined arms cooperation that worked so well at Wakde was far more difficult in the terrain of Biak. Armor could not reach many of the Japanese positions, artillery was generally ineffective, and infantry often could not even see the enemy to engage them.

A simple change of tactics won the battle for Biak. Flexibility is vital in military operations. Doctrine, while necessary, may not always be applicable. The West Caves were not reduced in a systematic, doctrinally correct fashion. Gasoline and an 850-pound explosive charge were needed to finish the job. It may not have been pretty but it worked. Doctrine did not envision the expense of nearly 50,000 shells to reduce an area only 600 yards square. That was the most economical way to eliminate the Ibd Pocket. The combined-arms doctrine developed by many American units during their months and years of training could work in some battles and be useless in others. It worked on Wakde. When it did not work on Biak, tactics and weapons were changed. This flexibility secured an American victory.

Once again, SWPA Headquarters deserves some blame for the problems faced by American ground forces in battle. Reinforcements were needed but were unavailable because troops were simultaneously employed at Lone Tree Hill, Biak, and along the Driniumor River. Further, other forces were staging for future operations, rather than finishing ongoing battles. On Biak, even a veteran division like the 41<sup>st</sup> was hampered by inaccurate and ineffective intelligence and at times, inadequate leadership at all levels. SWPA Headquarters predictions of Japanese

**troop strength were dangerously low. Even as the fighting intensified and American losses mounted, no help of any kind, with the exception of a resourceful General Eichelberger, was offered. Instead, the 41<sup>st</sup> Division's Commander was relieved and business at SWPA Headquarters continued as usual. The American fighting man on Biak was ill-served by his senior leadership.**

## CHAPTER SIX

**“The response of a commander when asked what was holding up his advance: I’ll be damned if I know; we haven’t seen over five Japs, but the bullets are coming from every direction.”**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Journal  
2 August 1944**

**During July and August 1944 another bitter battle was fought in the jungles of New Guinea between the armies of America and Japan. Unlike previous battles, the roles of attacker and defender were reversed. Circumstances on this occasion made the Japanese the aggressor and the Americans the defender. The Driniumor River became the latest scene of action in our saga. For Japan, the Driniumor River and breaking into the American Army’s rear areas meant survival or starvation for their 18<sup>th</sup> Army. A deep penetration by the Japanese could also spell disaster for MacArthur’s men. Should the Japanese achieve more than a local success the critical staging areas and airfields of Aitape and Hollandia were threatened. Further, MacArthur’s drive towards the Philippines would be threatened if he were forced to divert forces to handle problems in his rear. A sense of desperation encompassed both sides. Japan’s desperation had been building since the Aitape and Hollandia landings in April.**

**When MacArthur landed at Hollandia in April, the Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Army, approximately 55,000 men, was cut off from the remainder of Japan’s forces in New Guinea. Thanks to *ULTRA*, which would create both problems and benefits for the Americans in the coming battle, MacArthur’s planners knew that the Japanese Army was concentrating in the vicinity of Wewak, anticipating a landing there. *ULTRA* revealed Hollandia and Aitape were not only lightly defended but**

three hundred miles further west, thus advancing MacArthur's forces even closer to his real goal of the Philippines. Once the landings occurred and the designated areas were consolidated, the 18<sup>th</sup> Army was cut off from any hope of resupply, reinforcement, or evacuation. The 18<sup>th</sup> Army's commander, General Adachi, had three choices: stay in place and subsist on his available supplies (approximately five months at near starvation levels); fight his way west and hope to link up with other Japanese forces in New Guinea; or surrender.<sup>1</sup> Surrender was not an option. Neither was staying in place and starving. Adachi thus began moving west, mostly on foot, through the treacherous, disease-ridden jungle. As July approached, Adachi was in position to cross the Driniumor River and drive for Aitape and Hollandia. However, the preceding months had sapped his army of most of its combat power.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Army's official figure of 55,000 soldiers in July was very misleading. Only 15,000 had reached the vicinity of the Driniumor and only slightly more than 5,000 of them were actually combat troops.<sup>2</sup> 20,000 men had to remain in the Wewak area because of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army's pitiful supply situation and poor physical condition. Another 15,000, due to the almost complete lack of any type of transport, had to hand carry supplies to the Driniumor from Wewak. Those that reached the Driniumor were starving, low on ammunition, and riddled with sickness, a fact *ULTRA* presented to General Krueger. Two intercepts in particular revealed not only the date of the impending Japanese attack but the general location and strength of the attack as well. In the first intercept, dated 21 June 1944, Adachi stated: "we are staking all on an encounter with the enemy in the vicinity of Aitape about 10 July. At present we are preparing this attack."<sup>3</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> message to Krueger was based on another intercept and was essentially a synopsis of Japanese strength and intentions. It stated:

The attack planned against Aitape is scheduled to begin about

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*

<sup>2</sup> Edward Drea, *Defending the Driniumor*, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

10 July and to be made by approximately 20,000 troops...the 20<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Divisions are to participate in the attack and enumerates the following additional troops to be attached to the 41<sup>st</sup> Division: the 66<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 51<sup>st</sup> Division, 1 mortar company, and a provisional Army artillery unit composed of Army and Navy Anti-Aircraft troops...The 20<sup>th</sup> Division is believed to be located on the right bank of the Driniumor River (about 20 miles east of Aitape). The 41<sup>st</sup> Division and the attached troops are scheduled to be concentrated in the Yakamul-Ulau area about 5 July. The plan calls for the 20<sup>th</sup> Division to attack west across the Driniumor River, while the 41<sup>st</sup> Division moves around to the south and attacks north and northwest towards the Aitape and Tadjji airfields. ...The 18<sup>th</sup> Army has made a number of urgent requests for submarine shipment of materials (principally wire-cutters and signal equipment) necessary for the Aitape operation. An indication that it has been having serious local supply difficulties as well appears in a 21 June message in which the Army reported that it had only 60 usable trucks.<sup>4</sup>

This information did not go below Krueger and his immediate staff.

Krueger was aware of Japanese intentions and in the following days would go to great lengths to get his subordinate commanders to search out and destroy the Japanese. It was a difficult proposition.

Despite their pathetic condition, Japanese patrolling was still excellent and revealed the location of most of the American positions on the Driniumor while keeping their own hidden. The Japanese were still quite adept at warfare in the jungle. They realized that the American Army was spread very thin and a breakthrough, even in their weakened condition, was possible.

Defending the Driniumor was not among the higher priorities of Generals MacArthur and Krueger. In fact, the fighting that followed has been referred to by the few historians who have ever written on the subject as a covering force operation. A covering force operation differs from a typical defensive operation in that a covering force is intended to "provide time for the main force to prepare itself for combat, to deceive the enemy as to the actual location of the main battle

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166-169.

position, to force the enemy to deploy early, and to provide a deeper view of the terrain over which the attacker would advance.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, conduct a delaying action. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division were told to: “...afford maximum delay to an expected enemy attack East over the Driniumor toward Tadjji drome by falling back on successive defensive positions.”<sup>6</sup> The 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry received similar orders, being told to “delay the enemy to the maximum extent without sacrifice of troops.”<sup>7</sup> While preparing for an operation along the Driniumor, Krueger was also busy at Hollandia, Wakde-Sarmi, and Biak. Final preparations for the invasion of Sansapor, perhaps the last piece of the New Guinea puzzle, were also ongoing. A fight in the rear areas was simply not of prime importance, unless of course it threatened operations in the forward battle area. Therefore, all MacArthur and Krueger initially committed to this operation were elements of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division and the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. They would later be reinforced by elements of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. It was far from enough. Only the weakened condition of the Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Army prevented a disaster in an otherwise forgotten operation.

Conducting an operation such as this presented several problems for American commanders. The terrain in the area of operations was typical of New Guinea. It was horrible. To the men of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, the soldiers who fought in the hell of Buna, the land around the Driniumor seemed even worse. To quote a veteran of the 31<sup>st</sup> Division’s 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, “the terrain is indescribable.”<sup>8</sup> To see anything meant chopping down the surrounding jungle. The river itself averaged only 40 yards in width and two to five feet in depth, but

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<sup>5</sup> FM 100-5, June 1944, paragraph 597.

<sup>6</sup> 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Operations Report: Aitape Campaign*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, *Historical Report*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Edward O. Logan, *The Enveloping Maneuver Of The 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment East Of The Driniumor River, Aitape, New Guinea, 31 July-10 August 1944*, p. 9.

that could change after a daily rainstorm.<sup>10</sup> It was hot, muggy, and wet. As usual, it was a terrible place to fight a battle.

Once *ULTRA* revealed the Japanese were indeed preparing to attack, the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were sent forward. A mere eight infantry battalions were committed in depth to the coverage of a line that extended from Afua to the sea, approximately five miles. Of these, only three were on the forward line that would have to meet the initial attack. The weakness in terms of combat troops in the standard American infantry division also became apparent in this battle. In previous New Guinea battles, MacArthur and Krueger had been free to choose where to attack, concentrating forces to achieve numerical superiority at the decisive point. In a covering force or defensive operation, the attacker selects where to attack and can consequently mass his troops in a like fashion.

The typical American infantry division contained approximately 16,000 men. It would seem therefore that two regiments of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division and the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment would possess enough men to thwart an attack by the debilitated 18<sup>th</sup> Army's five thousand infantry. Such an assumption is quite erroneous. The three infantry regiments of an American infantry division comprised only 9,354 of the division's 16,000 men. Each regiment contained three infantry battalions of 871 men, along with a weapons company of 160 troops. Service and support troops equaled in number combat troops in the American Army. The 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was also handicapped by a lack of combat soldiers. It possessed only two squadrons (the cavalry word for battalion) instead of the infantry regiments' three. Even the two squadrons that existed were understrength. The squadrons possessed only three troops (cavalry word for company) instead of the four rifle companies of an infantry battalion, and one weapons troop. In total, the 112<sup>th</sup> barely numbered 1,500 men. Between the one squadron of the 112<sup>th</sup> deployed forward, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Regiment, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry, there were roughly 2,500 soldiers covering a line nearly five miles long.<sup>11</sup>

The preceding chapters have demonstrated how adversely the jungle, heat, and terrain of New Guinea affected operations. In the offense, nature played a significant role. In the defense, its role was no less important. The thick jungle made coordinating units a daunting task. In defensive operations, coordination between units is crucial because one unit seldom occupies an entire defensive line. One unit is always dependent upon another. That is true in today's style of warfare and was true in the jungle of New Guinea in 1944. A jungle line required more troops than a standard defensive line. A squad of twelve riflemen with an attached machine gun could conceivably cover a one hundred-yard front if visibility permitted. In the jungle a squad might have an entire company of enemy infiltrate through their lines without ever seeing them. An attack at night made the plight of the defender even more difficult. The 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron of the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was responsible for approximately a mile of ground, from Afua to the right flank of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The 3<sup>rd</sup> was covering one and one half miles, an impossible task for its three available infantry companies but a paradise when compared with the plight of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, which occupied the left flank of the American line. Its three available infantry companies occupied a ridiculous two and one half miles of frontage. Had General Adachi so chosen, he could have infiltrated through this paper-thin line. However, he wanted to destroy his enemy, not slip past them. His objective was made easier by a questionable decision by General Krueger on the eve of battle.<sup>12</sup>

Intelligence, most importantly reliable intelligence, is the military commander's most valuable asset. American forces in all theatres of World War II were blessed with *ULTRA*, the information derived from broken Japanese and German military codes. For intelligence to have its greatest value, it must be

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 133-135.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

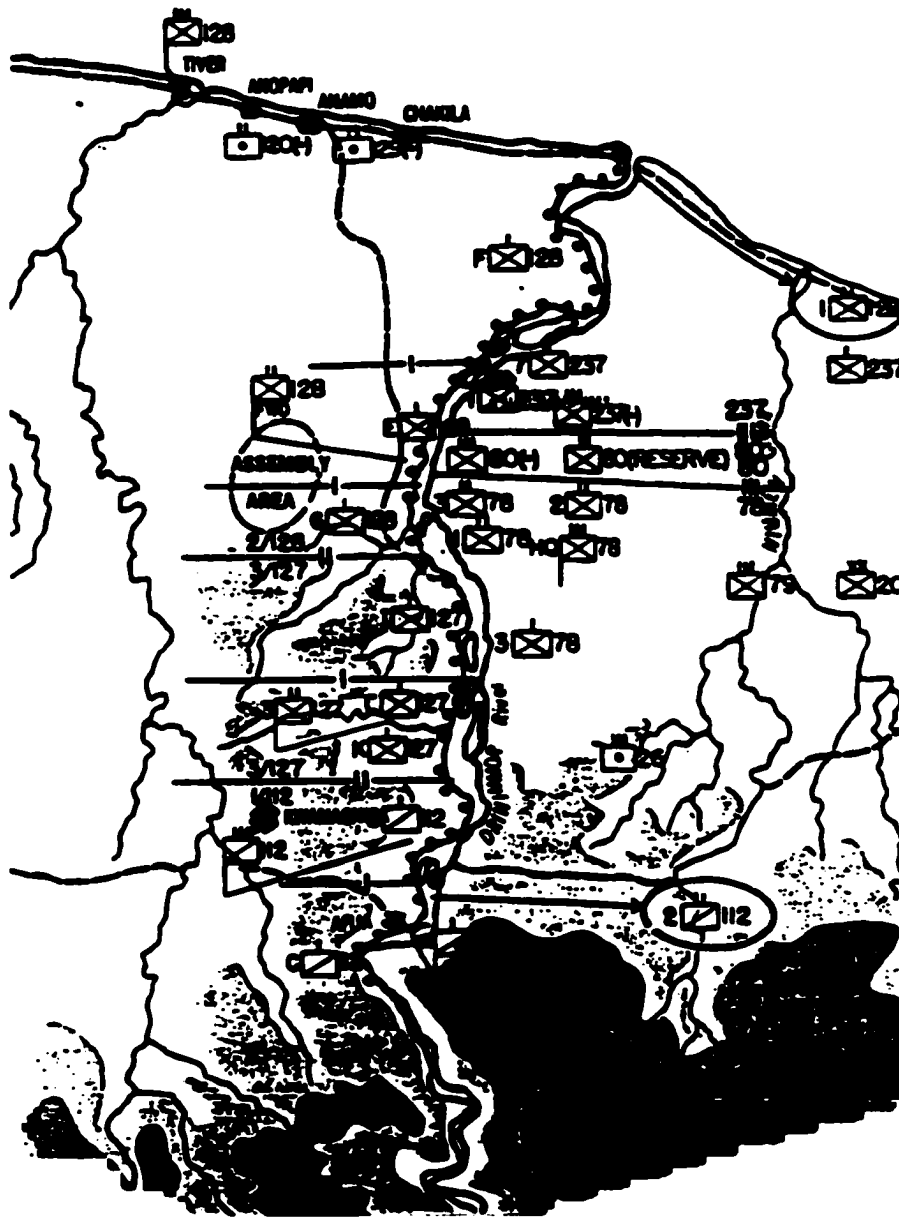
exploited. In the case of this operation, General Krueger knew, thanks to *ULTRA*, that the Japanese were moving west, that they would cross the Driniumor River in early July, and that their strategic objectives were the staging areas of Hollandia and Aitape. The condition of the Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Army was also revealed to him, which may explain why he felt he had enough men covering the Driniumor while his 6<sup>th</sup> Army continued moving west across New Guinea. However, Krueger, as MacArthur had in previous battles, failed to take into account the impact of the jungle on an army. Further, all his *ULTRA* information failed to provide the most valuable piece of information, where exactly Adachi's men were located. Patrols failed to find any significant Japanese forces while the Japanese were able to pinpoint most of the American positions.

The lack of information frustrated General Krueger, who began to make miserable the lives of General Gill, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division Commander, General Cunningham, the 112<sup>th</sup>'s Commander, and General Hall, the overall commander of the Driniumor line.<sup>13</sup> Krueger made a decision that is both understandable and perplexing. He decided to strip his covering force of two battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron of the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, for a reconnaissance in force along the flanks of the American line. It was understandable because as a commander you do not want to let the enemy dictate where and under what terms a battle is fought. At the same time, this decision was risky because it left only three battalions covering five miles of front without knowing exactly where, when, and with what the Japanese would attack. The reconnaissance in force would start on 8 July, two days before the anticipated Japanese attack.

Protests from all the affected commanders were quick and desperate. General Cunningham was shocked that he would be responsible for a mile of front with only one understrength squadron instead of two. In fairness to General Krueger, he was aware of the plight of the enemy while his subordinates were not. *ULTRA* did not go below an army commander. Krueger would not leave the

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<sup>13</sup> General Gill Papers, *Tape 5*, Page 9.



Reconnaissance in force, 10 July 1944

Source: Edward Drea, *Defending the Drinumor*

Figure IX

Driniumor line devoid of support. In addition to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division's organic artillery regiment (48 guns), an additional 155mm howitzer battalion was deployed to the area along with a wing of Royal Australian Air Force fighter-bombers and several squadrons of American medium bombers. Once the battle started the air support would be of little use. However, the 155mm howitzers arrived in time to start registering on points along the Driniumor. While the artillery registered and the infantry occupying the line sighted their individual weapons, the reconnaissance elements moved out into the thick jungle. They moved yard by yard, foot by foot, as soldiers tried as hard to keep their comrades in sight as they did to find the enemy. It developed into an exercise in futility.

Moving in the unforgiving jungle was a laborious process. The machete was the soldier's key weapon. There were no roads and few trails. As usual on this island, maps were useless. To move forward, the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry had to hack their way through thick jungle in unbearable heat. Frustrating the American troops even more was their inability to find the enemy. They were out there somewhere. But where? The lack of progress for the reconnaissance became evident during the night of 10-11 July when the sounds of battle in the rear answered the question of where the Japanese were. They had begun their attack against the Driniumor River. General Krueger's *ULTRA* inspired reconnaissance in force had failed. To make matters worse, only three, instead of five battalions were there to face the initial Japanese assault.

In previous battles such as Wakde, Lone Tree Hill, and Biak, the establishment of proper nighttime perimeters had allowed American units to sap the remaining strength of Japanese garrisons. Futile assaults against American automatic weapons were turned back time and time again. In this battle, the situation was in many ways similar. The firepower available to the American defenders was considerable, especially with regard to artillery support. Further, the Driniumor line had not been established in one evening. Some units had spent

more than a week clearing fields of fire and preparing individual positions. Yet, preparations to meet an attack and actually repulsing an attack are two entirely different propositions. Previous Japanese attacks against American perimeters had generally been limited to a few hundred men who were often outnumbered at the point of attack. On the night of 10-11 July, the advantage in numbers had shifted to the Japanese. Instead of a hundred men, several thousand desperate Japanese soldiers were ready to attack the weakest portion of the American line.

Companies E and G of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry, held approximately one and one half miles of the American front. The main Japanese attack occurred at 2355 hours on 10 July against the positions of Company G.

The Japanese let Company G know they were coming. They emerged from the east bank of the Driniumor in several screaming waves. The first fire the attackers received was not from the entrenched American infantry but from their supporting artillery. The effects were devastating. Hundreds of Japanese soldiers were killed and many of their heavy weapons emplaced along the riverbank destroyed. One Japanese battalion of 400 men was reduced to a mere 30 soldiers in a matter of minutes by artillery fire.<sup>14</sup> The men of Company G then added the effects of their weapons to the fray as the Japanese infantry reached the barbed wire in front of the American positions. As Company G entered the engagement, more Japanese units began attacking the lines of Company E. Japanese dead began piling up along the embankments as the American fire slackened, not due to losses, but to overheated machine gun barrels. Thousands of rounds of ammunition struck the exposed Japanese infantry, but despite their horrendous losses, the Japanese kept coming. Mortar fire began plastering the screaming attackers until they were within throwing distance of the American line. Through sheer weight of numbers, the Japanese managed to find several gaps in Company E's line of nearly 1,250 yards and were able to break into the American rear. They paid a dreadful price. In the Japanese 78<sup>th</sup> Division alone, over 600 men were

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Ross Smith. *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 152.

killed.<sup>15</sup> Once a breakthrough was achieved, Company E, which had 10 men killed and 20 others wounded, began a withdrawal to River X, some 4,500 yards to the west. It took three days to reach the river and the men of Company E fought the entire way against the Japanese soldiers that had pierced their line. The withdrawal was due as much to a lack of ammunition as to the ten to one superiority in troops possessed by the Japanese. With their flank exposed by the withdrawal of Company E, Company G also began a general withdrawal to River X. The first phase of the Japanese attack, despite horrific losses, had succeeded in forcing the withdrawal of the American covering force.<sup>16</sup>

The Japanese on this first night, fortunately, did not assault the southern flank of the American line. The 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, which was responsible for this portion of the line, upon hearing the sounds of battle to their north, ordered the return of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron from its reconnaissance mission east of the Driniumor to Afua and from there to River X. Fearful of being cut off, General Cunningham received permission to withdraw from what he considered an untenable position.<sup>17</sup> Withdrawal of the covering force had been a necessary action in General Hall's eyes. It maintained a semblance of a defensible line and prevented forward units from becoming cut off from the remainder of the force. Technically, Hall's covering force had performed its mission. It had delayed the advance of a numerically superior force, severely attrited the combat strength of the attacker and suffered only minimal casualties, while occupying another line of defense. Hollandia and Aitape were still safe. However, General Krueger was far from satisfied. He felt a withdrawal was unnecessary and ordered Hall to drive the enemy back across the Driniumor.<sup>18</sup> To accomplish this, Hall would have the five battalions he started the operation with, plus two battalions of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division's 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and a battalion from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division's 127<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Drea, *Defending the Driniumor*, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Operations Report: Aitape Campaign*, p. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 158.

**Infantry Regiment. This was eight battalions with approximately 5,500 combat troops. Hardly an imposing number but it was all Hall had available. The withdrawal to River X had left many of those men physically debilitated, the New Guinea jungle once again playing a significant role in a battle. The men of the 124<sup>th</sup> would play a vital role in the upcoming battle, their first taste of combat.**

**Despite constant prodding from Krueger. Hall could not launch an immediate counterattack until his forces were consolidated and reorganized. General Adachi's shattered 18<sup>th</sup> Army faced similar problems but was preparing for another attack. this time in the vicinity of Afua and the 112th Cavalry. Most American action between 11 and 15 July involved closing the hole punctured in the Driniumor line by the Japanese. Hall did not feel the counterattack was moving fast enough and in the following message to General Gill. the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division commander, told him to get moving:**

**Careful analysis of your situation discloses at your disposal 127, 128(-), 124(-), 112<sup>th</sup>. some tank-destroyers and engineers. Confronting you west of Driniumor is an undetermined number of Japs but certainly not your equal in either numbers or firepower. It appears to me that with the forces at your disposal if the proper offensive action is instituted at once you should be able to clear the area west of the Driniumor within 48 hours. Troop movements have been delayed and I cannot promise you any reinforcement. I do not attempt to tell you what measures to take to counter an offensive from the east and at the same time clean up the situation west of the Driniumor. It cannot be done by defensive action. I expect you to take all offensive measures not only to clarify the situation but to eradicate the enemy west of the Driniumor. You must do it with your own forces which are considered adequate for the purpose. We cannot waste time by dilatory tactics. While I appreciate that some of your troops are tired I know of no battle which was entered into with fresh troops. Please give this your personal attention and push it to a conclusion in order that incoming troops may be used to finish up this situation outside of your area.**

**HALL<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Drea. *Defending the Driniumor*, p. 95-6.

**This was hardly a reasonable message but the last sentence reveals the rationale behind it. "...in order that incoming troops may be used to finish up this situation outside of your area." This entire battle was threatening future operations, a point Krueger no doubt made to Hall who in turn made it to Gill. The troops available were insufficient to stop the initial Japanese attack and it is hard to see how they could be adequate to both clean up the Japanese troops behind the main American line and launch a counterattack. Cunningham's 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was also under pressure to become more proactive. The longer the fight at the Driniumor continued, the greater the possibility MacArthur's westward momentum would dissipate. Hall had to finish off the 18<sup>th</sup> Army.**

**To launch the type of counterattack desired by Hall would take time. Units had to coordinate with each other, troops had to be resupplied, and isolated units rescued. Various American units of platoon and company size (30 to 100 men) had been isolated during the initial Japanese attack and American withdrawal, yet, they continued fighting. No American unit was ever abandoned in the quagmire that was the jungle of New Guinea. Until a coordinated American counterattack was launched, this battle was a series of small-unit actions, all confusing and all costly. For example, a patrol of the 112<sup>th</sup> encountered a Japanese patrol on the morning of 11 July. The Americans spotted the Japanese first, set up an ambush, and killed several Japanese soldiers, sending the rest fleeing into the jungle. This was a typical action in this campaign. Whichever side spotted the other first would be able to set up an ambush and drive off the other side. Platoons of American and Japanese soldiers often attacked the same objective, running into each other in the process. Another action, demonstrating just how influential the jungle was, occurred on 25 July in the sector of the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The Japanese were launching a counterattack against an American advance. American troops occupying the extreme left of the line could not engage the Japanese from their foxholes, the jungle was simply too thick. They stood up out of their foxholes so they could get clean shots at the enemy, although they of course were**

now very vulnerable.<sup>20</sup> It was effective, just very dangerous. On 14 July, a plan was formulated to restore the line that existed before the Japanese attack and to destroy the remaining combat power of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army. The attack would in many ways resemble the ill-advised reconnaissance in force demanded by General Krueger before the Japanese attack.

Two pincers would advance parallel to one another along the northern and southern corridors of the battlefield. After advancing a specified distance each American unit would make a 90-degree turn, one to the north, the other to the south. The units would then move back towards the Driniumor, trapping the Japanese between the pincer and American units along the river. It was a straightforward plan made difficult by the jungle. Every inch advanced had to be through thick vegetation and to link up in such terrain was very difficult. The American advantages lay in their artillery superiority and the fact this time they knew the general location of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army. On 10 July, they had not known that until the Japanese charged across the Driniumor.

The Japanese, their desperation growing each day, turned their attention toward Afua and the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry's section of the line. The Japanese launched several attacks against the 112<sup>th</sup> between 14 and 22 July and at several times the American situation was quite desperate. When the Japanese had secured their initial breakthrough of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry's line, lack of ammunition was the primary factor. Around Afua, there were several troops of the 112<sup>th</sup> isolated because of repeated Japanese attacks. The lack of troops was the culprit here. The 112<sup>th</sup> historical report states: "...the situation at this time was critical as our force was covering such a long riverline frontage that a strong reserve necessary to break through the encirclement around Troop C was not immediately available."<sup>21</sup> By the end of July, despite the shortage of ground troops, the 112<sup>th</sup> and all the other American units on the Driniumor line were ready to counterattack.

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<sup>20</sup> 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Aitape Campaign*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> 112<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team, *Historical Report*, p. 9.

The attack to trap and destroy the 18<sup>th</sup> Army began on 31 July. Only light opposition was encountered and surprisingly, the advance was quite swift, due to the use of trails previously cleared by the Japanese. The only negative was the ambush of a platoon of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry by Japanese machine guns. As had become the norm, the jungle and the different rates of advance of the various American units opened up large gaps. Vigorous patrols constantly operated in those gaps to prevent any Japanese infiltration. Another problem created by the jungle was communications. Radios could not penetrate the jungle, nor did any usable high ground exist in the combat area.<sup>22</sup> Once again, units were becoming isolated. Yet, the advance continued. Hopes for a quick end to the operation were quickly dashed by the harassing fire of Japanese snipers and their smokeless powder “Nambu” light machine guns.<sup>23</sup> Snipers can delay but rarely stop an advance. The men dug in for the night of 3 August hoping for more success than the previous four days while the fire of four battalions of American artillery fell on the Japanese throughout the night.

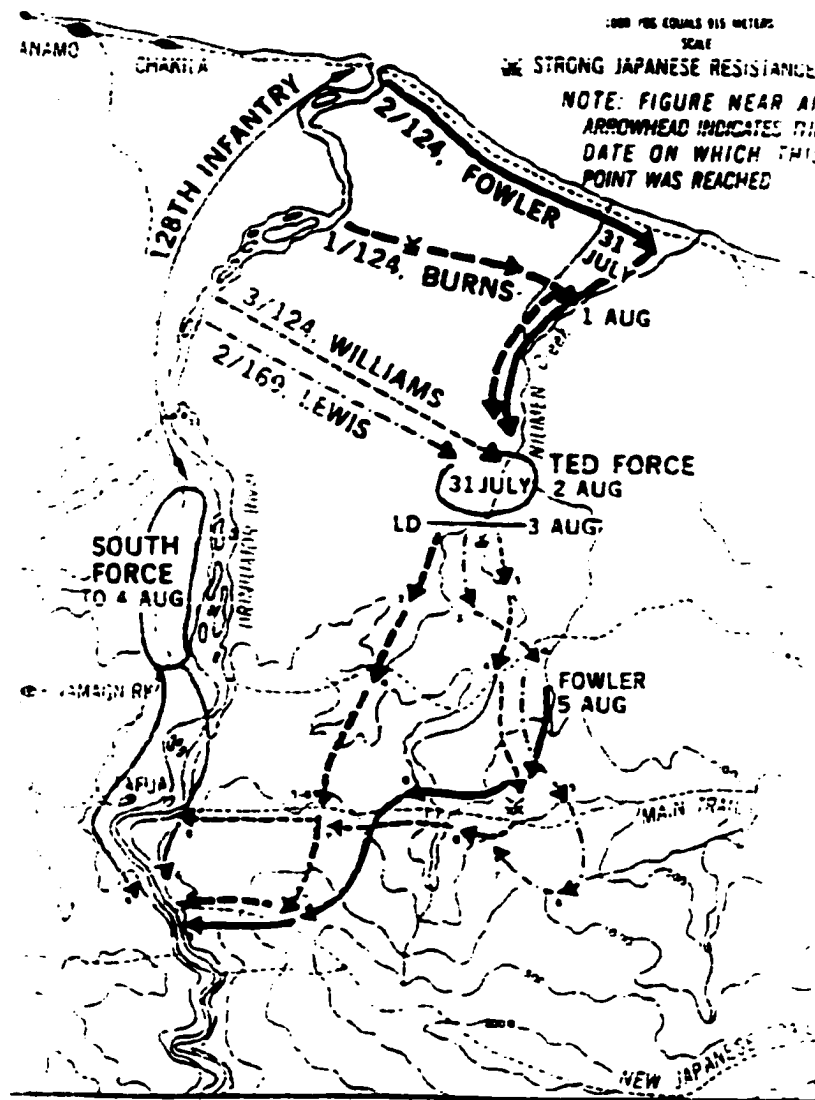
On 4 August, the enveloping force moved out again. The southern portion of the pincer headed for the Afua Trail, two miles away. It took the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry, two and one half days to cover that distance. Averaging a distance traveled of 100 yards per hour, each inch of which had to be cut through, the American soldiers were very vulnerable. Fortunately, the previous night’s artillery preparation had eliminated most of the enemy in the route of advance. Dead snipers were seen dangling from trees and only an occasional rifle blast was heard in the distance.<sup>24</sup> By 6 August, all units were finally in position to begin their turns towards each other and back to the Driniumor, crushing any Japanese resistance in their path. However, the southern part of the pincer would first have to deal with an entrenched Japanese force along the Afua Trail.

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<sup>22</sup> Edward O. Logan, *The Enveloping Maneuver Of The 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry East Of The Driniumor River, 31 July-10 August 1944, Aitape, New Guinea*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.



The Envelopment of the Japanese east of the Driniumor, 31 July – 10 August 1944

Source: Edward Drea, *Defending the Driniumor*

Figure X

Thus far in this campaign, American infantry had done little of what they had trained so long for, eliminating Japanese defensive positions. The Japanese had not constructed any positions but occupied a hill approximately 1,000 feet high that overlooked the American positions. In past battles, tanks had been available to assist in assaulting such positions. On this occasion, no armor support was available and even if it had been it would not have been able to operate in this part of the jungle. Infantry and their artillery support would have to do the job on their own.

Before launching an attack, the artillery kept up a steady rate of fire on the hill and was assisted by 300 rounds of mortar fire.<sup>25</sup> This rather light volume of mortar fire was nevertheless difficult to achieve since all mortar ammunition was being carried through the jungle. Having learned from past experiences, the American forces were preparing to outflank the hill, rather than launching a frontal assault. The flanking maneuver was to take place on the morning of 7 August. The Japanese foiled the plan but also made it unnecessary. During the night of 6-7 August they launched an all-out attack on the perimeter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry. As many as 400 Japanese soldiers participated in the assault. American artillery fire saved the day. Shells were falling as close as 50 yards from the American position, even catching two companies of Japanese soldiers in a ravine as they prepared to attack. Once daylight arrived, the sleep-deprived American infantry enveloped the surviving Japanese attackers. Four hundred twenty five Japanese soldiers lay dead. The last obstacle to the end of the Driniumor River operation was eliminated. By August 10 the line of 10 July had been restored and the 18<sup>th</sup> Army ceased to exist as a fighting force.<sup>26</sup>

Evaluating this battle is quite different than those previously mentioned and those that will be discussed in the following chapters. Doctrine in this fight consisted of little more than how to occupy a defensive line, something the men of

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26-8.

the American Army should have been quite adept at. They were intact, but to properly defend a defensive line, or even act as a covering force, men and weapons are needed. There was a definite shortage of the former and an adequate number of the latter. The effectiveness of American weapons and the simplicity of Japanese offensive tactics allowed even the outnumbered men covering the Driniumor River to slaughter their attackers. Nevertheless, this had been a costly operation for both the American and Japanese armies. American losses were 440 men killed, 2,550 wounded, and 10 missing. Japanese losses were 8,821 killed and 98 captured.<sup>27</sup> What had actually been accomplished? A doomed Japanese army hastened its demise with its attack along the Driniumor, its survivors being left to die in the jungle. As in the battles of Wakde, Lone Tree Hill, and Biak, American firepower had given the infantry an insurmountable advantage. Despite being heavily outnumbered, American artillery and machine guns eliminated so many Japanese soldiers that the sides were actually somewhat even by the end of the battle. The fact that the men covering the Driniumor were outnumbered is the great saga of this battle. Krueger's 6<sup>th</sup> Army and MacArthur's SWPA as a whole were committed to too many battles at one time. Maintaining the momentum of the advance across the northern part of New Guinea towards the Philippines was MacArthur's most important objective. Heavily reinforcing the Driniumor or scaling back other prospective invasions endangered that objective. The men of the Driniumor covering force were on their own, expected by Krueger and MacArthur to do an impossible job in New Guinea's horrible terrain. Naturally, neither Krueger nor MacArthur ever visited the combat area. They had more important missions to see to. The men of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment and their artillery support won this battle. They did it in terrain that seemed worse than even Buna two years earlier and without the prospect of relief. As had become the norm in this theatre, they carried the day. Finally, MacArthur could fulfill his promise of April 1942. He

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *The Approach To The Philippines*, p. 204.

**could now return to the Philippines. The island of Leyte, strewn with mountains and jungle, would be the first Philippine Island attacked.**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**“Never butt your head against a prepared Japanese defensive position. If the ground is not absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of your mission, go around it. Their defensive set-ups are seldom extensive and can be bypassed easily. If the ground is necessary to the accomplishment of your mission, blast it with everything you can muster (mortars and artillery) before you even attempt to attack it with rifle troops.”**

**Captain William Hanks  
19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division  
Leyte Island, 20 October 1944**

**When discussing the battles in previous chapters it was easy to follow them from beginning to end because they were limited in scope and seldom involved more than a single American division. The battle for the island of Leyte involved six full-strength infantry divisions, substantial elements of several others, and dozens of major battles. The island would not be declared officially secure until Christmas Day, 1944. The initial invasion occurred on 20 October 1944 and though the island was declared secure on 25 December, many months of mopping up operations followed the official declaration of victory. It was the costliest campaign thus far in MacArthur’s theatre. Rather than presenting a broad summary of the entire campaign that may neglect the tactical principles portrayed thus far, I will instead offer only a brief synopsis of the campaign. The synopsis will be followed by analyses of several specific battles that discuss both the triumph of American men and arms and several familiar problems seen in previous chapters. Nearly two years after the debacle at Buna, many of the problems in the American Army had yet to be addressed satisfactorily.**



**The Philippine Islands**

**Source: Rafael Steinberg, Return To The Philippines**

**Figure XI**

American landings on Leyte took place on 20 October 1944 as four divisions (24<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division) began storming their assigned beachheads. MacArthur's assertion that an American invasion of the Philippines would force the Japanese to commit everything they had because of the threat to their supply lines from Southeast Asia proved correct. The Japanese Navy sailed for Leyte with the sole purpose of obliterating the American forces there. When ground forces land on a hostile beach they are very vulnerable. Attacks from the sea or counterattacks by enemy ground forces can dislodge an amphibious force as it attempts to consolidate its beachhead. The American Army could handle the Japanese ground forces. Unfortunately, they were exposed against a still strong Japanese Navy.

The Battle for Leyte Gulf was history's largest sea battle in terms of tonnage of ships engaged. The Japanese fleet was still dwarfed by the more formidable American fleet, commanded by Admiral William "Bull" Halsey. Halsey's primary mission was the defense of American ground forces, although he possessed sufficient units to both accomplish his mission and engage the Japanese fleet. Halsey had been among the most vocal critics of Admiral Raymond Spruance several months earlier during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. During that battle Spruance had defeated but not destroyed the Japanese fleet, drawing the ire of many American admirals who believed that a naval commander's sole purpose in life was the annihilation of the opposing fleet. Spruance, on the other hand, considered his main mission the protection of the beachheads on Saipan. Once that mission was accomplished, Spruance pursued the Japanese fleet with vigor but it was too late; the Japanese had withdrawn.

In the waters off Leyte, patrolling American submarines and planes looked for any sign of the Japanese fleet. Admiral Halsey received reports that Japanese aircraft carriers were in the waters of northern Luzon and major Japanese fleet units had been attacked and destroyed by American submarines and carrier based aircraft. The reports of enemy carriers were something Halsey would not ignore.

He sailed north with his entire battle fleet, leaving the straits to Leyte unguarded and not even informing his subordinate, Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, that he was departing. The beachhead on Leyte was now dangerously exposed. All that stood between defeat were the six restored battleships of the invasion bombardment force (the surviving veterans of the attack on Pearl Harbor) and a group of escort carriers and their attending destroyers.<sup>1</sup> The sailors of the American Navy would display the same courage and determination that MacArthur's ground forces had put forward throughout the war.

Luckily, the depleted American fleet remaining at Leyte was able to stave off a less than inspired Japanese assault. However, Halsey's decision to take his entire battle fleet with him in pursuit of Japanese aircraft carriers (which had no planes, although Halsey had no way of knowing that) deployed specifically to bait him, nearly resulted in disaster. As an admiral, Halsey believed his objective was the destruction of any and all enemy ships. Several months earlier, Spruance had made exactly the opposite decision. The lack of a supreme theatre commander (as General Eisenhower was in Europe) almost doomed this operation. The objective was the seizure of the island of Leyte. Neither MacArthur nor Halsey could override the decision of their service counterpart. Due to the objective of the operation, MacArthur should have had control of all American forces, at least until the beachhead was secure and the drive inland begun. Then control of the navy could have reverted back to Halsey. The refusal of both the American Army and Navy in the Pacific to compromise on this point almost snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

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<sup>1</sup> An escort carrier was a small aircraft carrier that carried perhaps twenty to thirty planes. They were slower than the large fleet carriers and possessed little, if any defensive armament. They were a creation of the assembly line style American shipyards. Most were converted into carriers by placing a simple wooden flight deck on top of the hull of a merchant ship. The planes of the escort carriers at Leyte were intended to support the ground attack and thus their carriers contained primarily high explosive ordnance. They did not possess the weapons to penetrate the heavily armored surface ships of the Japanese Navy.

**GENERAL HEADQUARTERS  
SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA  
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF**

**DECLARATION**

**TO THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES:**

I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God our forces stand again on Philippine soil - soil consecrated in the blood of our two peoples. We have come, dedicated and committed, to the task of destroying every vestige of enemy control over your daily lives, and of restoring, upon a foundation of indestructible strength, the liberties of your people.

At my side is your President, Sergio Osmeña, worthy successor of that great patriot, Manuel Quezon, with members of his cabinet. The seat of your government is now therefore firmly re-established on Philippine soil.

The hour of your redemption is here. Your patriots have demonstrated an unswerving and resolute devotion to the principles of freedom that challenges the best that is written on the pages of human history. I now call upon your supreme effort that the enemy may know from the temper of an aroused and outraged people within that he has a force there to contend with no less violent than is the force committed from without.

Rally to me. Let the indomitable spirit of Bataan and Corregidor lead on. As the lines of battle roll forward to bring you within the zone of operations, rise and strike. Strike at every favorable opportunity. For your homes and hearths, strike! For future generations of your sons and daughters, strike! In the name of your sacred dead, strike! Let no heart be faint. Let every arm be steeled. The guidance of divine God points the way. Follow in His Name to the Holy Grail of righteous victory!

  
DOUGLAS MACARTHUR.

MacArthur's message of vindication

Source: M. Hamlin Cannon, Leyte: The Return To The Philippines

Figure XII

**Despite all the mishaps and command problems, the naval battle in Leyte Gulf was an overwhelming American victory. Japanese warships were no longer a menace to the Leyte landing force.**

**Why had MacArthur selected Leyte as the site of his first Philippine invasion? Centrally located in the vast Philippine archipelago, Leyte based aircraft could strike anywhere in the islands. Further, the heavily fortified island of Mindanao would be cut off from support from the main Japanese force on Luzon, as well as smaller units on other Philippine islands. MacArthur and Krueger wanted the island secured quickly to prevent Japanese reinforcement of Leyte's garrison, which would undoubtedly happen once it was apparent landings were taking place. Several months of heavy fighting lay ahead.**

**Airfields were always among the many reasons MacArthur chose an objective. Leyte was no exception. Unfortunately, Leyte's airfields would be of little use in the coming campaign. Constant rainfall turned the Tacloban and Dulag airfields into little more than mudbaths. When the navy and its aircraft carriers withdrew in early November from Leyte's waters, for one of the rare times since the early days of the Pacific War, the U.S. did not have air superiority. Japanese air raids wreaked havoc on American planes parked on Leyte's useless airstrips, on the beachhead, and on the supply ships lying in the water off Leyte's coast. Additionally, General Yamashita, the overall Japanese commander in the Philippines, was able to land 45,000 reinforcements at Leyte because of the greatly reduced American air presence. These substantial reinforcements turned Leyte into a typical SWPA slugfest.**

**American forces landed at various points on Leyte. Some objectives were secured fairly easily, others required efforts and bloodshed similar to Buna, Wakde, Lone Tree Hill, and Biak. Leyte's terrain was typical of what American forces faced in the SWPA: jungle and mountains. Despite his greatly reduced air strength, Krueger and his 6<sup>th</sup> Army were able to begin their drive for Ormoc, the key to the entire campaign. To reach Ormoc, the key town of Carigara and the**

mountain-looping road it controlled first had to be secured. The Japanese had a garrison there but it was not enough to stop an American advance. Both Krueger and the Japanese recognized Carigara's importance and both sent a large force there; America to occupy it, Japan to reinforce it. Whoever arrived first gained the advantage of occupying positions in rugged mountain terrain that could only be dislodged with substantial firepower and prohibitive losses. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were in a race against the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Divisions. American mobility won. The Japanese garrison in Carigara withdrew and awaited the arrival of reinforcements.

With the arrival of those reinforcements, the Japanese dug in on the ridges overlooking Carigara. It would be the responsibility of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to dislodge them in what became known as the Battle for Breakneck Ridge. American firepower could do little to break what developed into a bloody stalemate. Making matters worse for both sides were the constant drenching rains. An advance of a mere two miles resulted in approximately 1,500 American and 5,300 Japanese casualties.

Nevertheless, by 2 November, Baybay and Carigara were captured, allowing Krueger to set his sights on the Ormoc Valley and the port of Ormoc, the point of entry of most Japanese reinforcements in this campaign. In the north, the 24<sup>th</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Divisions and the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division would form the top of a pincer that would end at Ormoc. In the south, it would be the 7<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions. Advancing across central Leyte were the 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, and 112<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team. The Japanese contested the advance every inch of the way. Not deterred by their setback at Carigara, the Japanese attempted a combined airborne-infantry attack on the Buri airstrip. The attack had little chance of success. Short on food, ammunition, and able-bodied soldiers, only several hundred men remained by the time the Japanese seized the airstrip from a small American force. Elements of three American Divisions (11<sup>th</sup> Airborne, 38<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry) then

counterattacked against the greatly outnumbered Japanese. It took three days to either kill or drive into the hills the tenacious Japanese force.

Despite the successes at Caribara and Buri, the drive for Ormoc was still proceeding painstakingly slowly. To break the near stalemate, General Krueger proposed landing the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the vicinity of Ormoc (about four miles away). The landing on 7 December was a complete success and led to the quick seizure and securing of Ormoc and the island of Leyte by Christmas Day. Mopping up operations would last several more months but at the cost of 3,500 dead and 12,000 wounded, MacArthur had returned to the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

The 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment met heavy opposition almost from the time they landed on 20 October. To escape the beachhead, the 19<sup>th</sup> had to pass through several major Japanese strongpoints. These strongpoints were:

...constructed concrete boxes, heavily reinforced with logs and earth, well camouflaged, and protected against tank attack by a deep water filled ditch on the shore side and swampy ground on the other side. These boxes were mutually supporting and were surrounded by a system of communication ditches and foxholes from which Japanese riflemen could cover individual infiltrations.<sup>3</sup>

These stout positions were even able to withstand the direct fire of American tank destroyers and their high-velocity 76mm guns. However, tank destroyers were not the only support available to an American infantry regiment. Self-propelled howitzers were employed and their fire, combined with that of the tank destroyers, enabled flame-thrower teams to finish the job.<sup>4</sup> The flame-thrower teams were also aided by armored bulldozers, which piled dirt in front of Japanese machine gun positions, thus preventing them from hindering the brutally

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<sup>2</sup> M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: The Return To The Philippines*, p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Combat History Of The Nineteenth Infantry Regiment: Leyte, P.I.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Tank destroyers and self-propelled howitzers were support weapons available in increasing numbers to American infantry regiments. Tank-destroyers were essentially tanks. However, they had a higher velocity gun for added punch and lighter armor for added speed. Their lighter armor made them more susceptible to Japanese infantry weapons than the more heavily armored Sherman tanks. Self-propelled howitzers were armored, tracked vehicles that contained either a 75mm or 105mm howitzer. In the Pacific, they were often employed in a direct-fire role.

effective work of the flame-throwers. By the second day of battle, approximately twenty such positions had been overcome, though at a heavy cost. Against Japanese losses of 276 men killed, the 19<sup>th</sup> had 66 men killed and 178 wounded, an almost identical number of total casualties. This was hard, tough fighting and as the attacker American casualties were understandably high. The 19<sup>th</sup> had succeeded because its armor, artillery, and infantry had worked well together. Their doctrine was sound. In this case, so was Japanese doctrine, a fact attested to by the similar casualty figures.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment also met stiff enemy opposition as it moved off its landing beaches. Overaggressive individuals and small units destroyed pillboxes. One company commander personally destroyed a pillbox by throwing several grenades through a firing slit. Other Japanese positions fell victim to similar acts of courage, such as those attacked by Private First Class Frank B. Robinson. This man

...proved himself almost a one-man army. He crawled behind one pillbox, dropped three grenades into the port, then reached down and pulled the machine gun barrel out of line. Two hundred yards farther on, when a flame-thrower refused to ignite, Robinson crawled to the flank of another pillbox, threw a bundle of lighted paper in front of it, and withdrew, permitting the flame-thrower to fire through the flames and ignite its charge. He exposed himself to draw fire from a third pillbox so that tanks could locate its position.<sup>5</sup>

Acts such as those performed by Private Robinson allowed for a rapid advance out of the beachhead. Speed can sometimes be a more effective weapon than firepower. Individual Japanese positions were often handled by tanks, self-propelled howitzers, and naval gunfire, a welcome addition to the already considerable firepower available to American troops.<sup>6</sup> While these scattered Japanese positions were eliminated by firepower, the men of the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry

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<sup>5</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *Historical Report: Leyte Operation*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

**Regiment dashed for Palo, a town located several miles behind the beach. Palo had been heavily bombed and was a primary target of naval gunfire as well. To prepare Palo for an American attack, the Japanese once again displayed their ingenuity for preparing a position. The Japanese had**

**impressed practically the entire male Filipino population of Palo for three months prior to A-Day to fortify this eminence. It was packed with positions. Five heavy, well constructed pillboxes were built of rocks, planking, and logs covered with earth and well camouflaged. Communications trenches were seven feet deep and tunnels honeycombed the hill. A concrete OP perched directly on the crest. Filipinos in Palo said that the Japanese had rounded up hundreds of men from the street of the town, taken them to the hill to work, given them two meals of rice a day, then returned them each night to a compound in Palo. When this schedule exhausted one group it would be released and another group gathered from the streets. Although the hill was occupied with little difficulty it was entirely due to the speed of the advance. The enemy apparently had drawn his forces away from the hill because of the initial pounding it took from the navy, the air, and our own artillery, and intended to reoccupy the positions just prior to our assault. His timing was only minutes late.<sup>7</sup>**

**This could have been another battle such as that for Lone Tree Hill or the West Caves of Biak. Instead, the frantic pace of the advancing 34th Infantry avoided a protracted, costly fight. With the capture of Palo, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division could move on to their ultimate objective of Carigara, approximately 50 miles west of Palo. Enroute they fought several skirmishes but keeping the advance moving was the overwhelming priority. Several times along the way, Japanese positions had to be eliminated. The 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment encountered one such position, the town of Pastrana, the approaches to which were protected by an elaborate system of trenches and pillboxes. Rather than becoming involved in a series of time-consuming, bitter individual battles, it was decided to let artillery and mortars do the job. After a nightlong barrage on 26/27 October, the attack of 27 October easily secured Pastrana. The road to Carigara was now open. However, the toughest part of the campaign for the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division still lay**

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

ahead. After securing Carigara the division headed west towards the name that became synonymous with the Leyte Campaign, Breakneck Ridge.

#### The Battle of Breakneck Ridge was fought over

...terrain ideally suited to defense, rough, rocky hills covered with grass from two to five feet high. The ridge itself was not a single ridge, but a series, all of which were broken into knobs. There were almost innumerable ground pockets which were thickly wooded natural forts and whose defensive potentialities the Japanese had thoroughly exploited. There were elaborate systems of trenches and defensive positions. The entire area was packed with spider holes. The road from Pinamoposan ran upward across Breakneck Ridge and twisted through the hills. It crossed several streams and ravines. Constant rain complicated the entire operation, bogging down supply and making hillsides slippery and treacherous. There were no accurate maps of the area. Difficulty was experienced in keeping unit attacks from breaking into a series of uncoordinated squad fights.<sup>8</sup>

Another operation, another formidable Japanese position located on a dominating terrain feature. The division's 21st Infantry Regiment launched the first attacks.

On 7 November, the 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry attacked. The fighting did not end until 17 November. Everything was attempted to clear this area, however, inaccurate maps made flanking attacks difficult to coordinate, and units became lost or attacked the wrong position.<sup>9</sup> Flame-throwers burned out spider holes. The direct fire of tanks destroyed pillboxes and machine gun positions. The tanks accounted for 25 such positions in one day.<sup>10</sup> Artillery blanketed all suspected Japanese positions. The time-consuming, costly infantry battles avoided at Palo and Pastrana were unavoidable here. The men of the 21<sup>st</sup> were up to the challenge though and with their BARs, grenades, flame-throwers, and bazookas they destroyed dozens of Japanese positions. By the 17<sup>th</sup>, Breakneck Ridge was finally cleared. However, the combat strength of the 21<sup>st</sup> was decimated. 630 men were

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

killed, wounded or missing.<sup>11</sup> Another 135 men had succumbed to sickness or battle fatigue. Though successful, it was a costly battle, once again demonstrating that even the best techniques were not enough to prevent significant casualties.

The 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was a new member of the SWPA family and Leyte was its first operation. While moving with the rest of the division towards Ormoc, they encountered a position that would become known as the “blockhouse.” It was a three-story, stone and concrete blockhouse, bordered by pillboxes and well dug foxholes.<sup>12</sup> An infantry assault would have undoubtedly been a costly undertaking. The fire of three artillery battalions, mortars, M-8 self-propelled howitzers, and M-10 tank destroyers engulfed the blockhouse but could not reduce it. An attack order for the following morning, 13 December, was issued. Three batteries of artillery once again smothered the blockhouse and the ground in the house’s immediate vicinity. Japanese troops not in the blockhouse were either killed by the bombardment or by American automatic weapons as they attempted to escape the bombardment’s effects. This enabled the 305<sup>th</sup> to get close enough to the blockhouse to prepare for an assault. It did not matter. The Japanese soldiers occupying the blockhouse had survived the pre-attack fires and greeted the advancing American infantry with withering automatic weapons fire. Foxholes around the house, all with some form of cover, also made coordinated attacks difficult.<sup>13</sup> A new method would have to be developed for the attack of 14 December.

The pillboxes next to the blockhouse were dealt with first in typical SWPA fashion. An early dawn artillery barrage allowed infantry, supported by tank destroyers, to advance to within point-blank range of the pillboxes. Flame-thrower teams then removed the pillboxes from the equation. The flame-throwers then began burning the Japanese out of their foxholes until a more economical method appeared. Several armored bulldozers either uncovered the overhead

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *After Action Report: Leyte Campaign*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

protection of the foxholes, allowing rifle fire and grenades to finish the job or buried the Japanese in their holes. The tank destroyers then moved to within throwing distance of the blockhouse and finally finished it off. Over 800 Japanese soldiers had perished.<sup>14</sup> It was a typical SWPA battle. Anything and everything that was of use was employed and contributed to victory.

After Christmas Day, 1944, the 305<sup>th</sup> remained in action on Leyte until the end of January 1945. Most of that time was spent actively patrolling, in movements to contact (an operation where a military force seeks out the enemy), and occupying nighttime perimeters. This was the mopping-up phase of the Leyte operation. To a soldier, the term mopping-up often connotes feelings of easy times ahead. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Though the island was declared secure on 25 December, many thousands of determined Japanese soldiers remained. They were not going to surrender; they were going to fight. As usual, they had to be blasted or burned out of their holes and positions. With plentiful tank and artillery support, the US troops scoured the island of Leyte, looking for the scattered remnants of the once formidable Japanese garrison. The following table illustrates just how successful they were:

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TYPE OF ACTION</b>	<b>JAPANESE LOSSES</b>
2 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	18 Killed
4 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	10 Killed
5 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	4 Killed
8 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	4 Killed
9 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	32 Killed
10 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	85 Killed
11 January	Patrolling/Movement to Contact	24 Killed
12 January	Conventional Attack	43 Killed
13 January	Conventional Attack	146 Killed
14 January	Conventional Attack	140 Killed
15 January	Japanese Counterattack	388 Killed

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

16 January	Japanese Counterattack	133 Killed
17 January	Patrolling	39 Killed
18 January	Patrolling	52 Killed
19 January	Probing	26 Killed
20 January	Probing	20 Killed
21 January	Japanese Probing	17 Killed
23 January	Patrolling	2 Killed
24 January	Patrolling	8 Killed
25 January	Patrolling	39 Killed
27 January	Patrolling	10 Killed
29 January	Japanese Probing	99 Killed
30 January	Conventional Attack	41 Killed
31 January	Conventional Attack	56 Killed <sup>15</sup>

In a month of action the 305<sup>th</sup> killed 3,357 Japanese soldiers at the cost of 42 men killed in action, 8 more who would later die from their wounds, and 113 wounded. To inflict losses of 75 to 1 in a mopping-up operation is a testament to two factors: training and leadership. Leaders are critical to the success of such operations since they must keep their men in the proper frame of mind to avoid careless mistakes and unnecessary casualties. Training ensures that even basic military actions such as patrolling and movements to contact are done correctly, even against negligible opposition. Doctrine, the perfection of basic combat principles, had ensured mopping-up remained just that.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment also played a leading role in the liberation of Leyte. Among their many battles, the struggle for Dagami, a key road intersection leading to several important airfields, stands out. The Japanese understood the value of Dagami, garrisoning it with approximately 2500 men and dozens of pillboxes and entrenchments.<sup>16</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> had trained extensively in the reduction of fortifications, night perimeters, and the use of organic and supporting weapons. They would have ample opportunity to display their prowess between 24 and 28 October.

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<sup>15</sup> 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *After Action Report: Leyte Campaign, 26 December 1944-2 February 1945*.

<sup>16</sup> M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: The Return To The Philippines*, p. 141.

On 24 October the 17<sup>th</sup> set up their night perimeter so they could proceed without delay at first light on the 25<sup>th</sup> towards Dagami. The Japanese, rather than launching mass attacks against the American lines were probing with ten and twenty man patrols, hoping to find a weakness. They were unsuccessful. The 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment's official history states:

Fields of fire for automatic weapons had been cut through the brush; concertina barbed wire had been strung throughout the forward positions within hand grenade range, all fires of Cannon Company, 81mm mortars, and artillery had been coordinated through the Regimental S-3 section and the Regimental Artillery Liaison Officer.<sup>17</sup>

To be so prepared, the daytime move had to cease around 1500-1600 hours. That left several hours of daylight that could have allowed for further advance but would have left American troops vulnerable at night. The advance resumed at first light on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

To reach Dagami, the 17<sup>th</sup> had to cross a stone bridge (needed for the tanks) and a system of pillboxes and zigzag trenches past the bridge. Securing the bridge took several days due to its obvious value and the heavy volume of Japanese fire directed towards it. Once the bridge was made serviceable, three tanks, two armored cars (armed with 37mm guns), and a company of infantry was able to engage the Japanese pillbox system. Quickly joining them were more armored cars, several self-propelled howitzers, and the guns of the 49<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. Though no immediate penetration of the Japanese line was achieved, its flanks were isolated and the constriction process begun. Tanks and the self-propelled howitzers did their usual direct fire missions, though Japanese anti-tank guns destroyed two tanks. The 17<sup>th</sup>'s infantry were able to finish off the pillboxes once the armor lent its support, always trying to hit the enemy fortifications from the flanks and rear.<sup>18</sup> Japanese trenches and spider holes were finished off by six

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<sup>17</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report of King II Operations: Leyte*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

flame-thrower teams, standing shoulder to shoulder and slowly advancing, burning everything in their path.

The extensive training program and preparation working as a team had allowed the 17<sup>th</sup> to kill 1,520 Japanese soldiers and capture another 8, while suffering losses of 68 men killed and 372 wounded.<sup>19</sup> They had also destroyed forty-two pillboxes and forced the Japanese to give up Dagami. Their combined-arms doctrine, arrived at after months of continuous practice, had overcome Japanese fortifications.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment was also quite busy in this operation. From the moment they landed they butted their heads against Japanese pillboxes and bunkers. Many of these positions were bypassed as the landing force dashed inland, enlarging the beachhead and allowing follow-up units and supporting elements to enter the fight. Though bypassed, these individual Japanese positions eventually had to be eliminated, lest they become a thorn in the American rear area. One such position, attacked by the regiment's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, had two heavy artillery pieces, four separate pillboxes, each with a machine gun, and was surrounded by trenches and foxholes.<sup>20</sup> Two reinforced rifle platoons, approximately 75 men, defended the position. The Japanese were aided by the jungle and swampy ground, which offered little land for tanks and self-propelled howitzers to use. However, the little dry ground available was utilized by the American armor. Japanese fire was concentrated on the American armor. The Japanese guns had no effect on the tanks, though they did penetrate the lighter armor of one of the self-propelled howitzers, setting it afire. While the tanks and howitzers began systematically reducing the Japanese position, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's infantry were able to advance to the pillboxes under only sporadic fire. Their tools (bazookas, grenades, explosives, and flame-throwers) were the same as those used

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report of King II (Leyte) Operation*, p. 5.

by other American infantry units. Their success also, as with other units and as with other battles, depended on the support of armor and other heavier weapons.

Combined infantry-armor teams could not eliminate all the Japanese positions encountered in this campaign's first days. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup>, despite herculean efforts by attached engineers and their Assault and Pioneer Platoon, could not find roads or improve trails enough to bring up any type of heavy support.<sup>21</sup> Infantry had to do it alone. The resulting actions at times harkened back to the dark days of Buna. Bazookas had little effect on the larger positions, and flame-thrower teams had difficulty advancing to striking distance under heavy enemy machine gun fire. Often, the only way to accomplish the mission was for a solitary brave soldier to push a grenade through a firing slit. Eventually, all the positions encountered were eliminated, though it was a slower process than the destruction of positions on solid ground where heavy weapons support was available. Success was dependent on confident, well-trained infantry. As the advance continued, particularly in the vicinity of San Pablo airstrip, not all the Japanese positions were as well constructed as those encountered in the beachhead area. Speed and volume of fire ensured success. As the regiment's historical report of the Leyte Operation states in a narrative of one particular engagement:

**A Company (3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion) forced their way through intense enemy resistance by placing a heavy volume of rifle and machine gun fire on the Jap positions. Courageous soldiers working together as a team in a game they knew well, charged forward, firing from the hip. Heavy machine guns, light machine guns, rifles all opened with a terrific lead barrage under which the enemy resistance crumbled.<sup>22</sup>**

The volume of American fire that broke Japanese resistance in engagements such as this is most likely what convinced the Japanese to fight from

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

a position of strength, despite how temporary that strength often was when American armor and artillery entered the fray.

Combat in jungle terrain was difficult, as this and previous chapters have demonstrated. Battalions had different rates of advance depending on opposition and terrain. Gaps often developed as parent units worked feverishly to maintain a semblance of a continuous line. As the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment advanced towards the Buri airstrip, the regiment's 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions had to wait two days for their 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to eliminate a system of bunkers. Progress was initially slow because no ground was solid enough for tanks. An anti-tank gun was dragged forward to fire on the bunkers and eventually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion joined the rest of their regiment. A coordinated attack by the entire 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment could then take place on the Buri airstrip.

Before the attack, Japanese positions were blanketed by artillery fire. Each of the 32<sup>nd</sup>'s three infantry battalions had a platoon of tanks and a platoon of armored cars in direct support. The support was needed. Infantry alone could do little against the bunkers they encountered; they needed tanks. Keeping the Japanese positions under constant fire and accompanied by the fire of the armored cars, artillery, and mortars, the infantry were again able to finish the job with machine guns, grenades, and explosives. As the unit history states: "The tank-infantry coordination was superb."<sup>23</sup> The 32<sup>nd</sup> and the rest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would continue to fight in less severe engagements on Leyte before transferring to the U.S. Tenth Army for the impending invasion of the island of Okinawa.

No unit saw as much of the ground war in the SWPA as the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. They fought in the theatre's first battle at Buna, landed at Aitape and later fought the bitter battle along the Driniumor River, and were now embroiled in the fight for Leyte. Leyte must have seemed normal to the hardened veterans of the 32<sup>nd</sup>. Another island, another jungle, another system of Japanese bunkers. The

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

32<sup>nd</sup> encountered its heaviest opposition as it moved towards the Leyte River. Highway #2 became the symbol of the 32<sup>nd</sup>'s Leyte Campaign, as the Old Strip symbolized their struggles at Buna and the Driniumor River their fight at Aitape.

As the 32<sup>nd</sup> approached the Leyte River in early December 1944, they encountered Japanese positions on the high ground south of the Leyte River Bridge. It would take two days of heavy fighting to eliminate what the 32<sup>nd</sup> called: "...one of the strongest defensive positions encountered during the campaign. Numerous foxholes and spider holes 10 feet deep, in cases, were connected by interlacing communications trenches and all of the positions were extremely well camouflaged."<sup>24</sup> The veterans of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, finished off 183 Japanese soldiers, eight 105mm howitzers, and two 75mm howitzers in the two day battle.<sup>25</sup> It was an infantry fight and the men of the 128<sup>th</sup> were quite proficient at it. Once across the river, they would need help.

As the 32<sup>nd</sup> began its movement down Highway #2 they encountered fire from Japanese positions occupying the high ground on both sides of the road. Highway #2 was one of the few large, usable roads on Leyte and the Japanese had planned their defense accordingly. Fire seemed to be coming at the Americans from every conceivable direction. Every bend of the road was:

...lined with Jap foxholes dug into the banks of the road and spider holes dug underneath the roots of trees and under logs on the hillsides. It was bitter, close, hand to hand fighting and because of the steepness of the terrain, the denseness of the tree growth, the inaccuracy of maps and nearness of adjoining units, artillery and mortar fire could not be used to its full advantage in reducing these positions.<sup>26</sup>

On New Guinea, the lack of maps and knowledge of the terrain was understandable. Few Westerners had even visited New Guinea until the 1940s. Conversely, the Philippines had been an American possession for forty years before the Japanese invasion of 1941. The American military had maintained a

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<sup>24</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, *After Action Report: Leyte*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

large presence on the islands throughout those forty years, yet had not mapped the land. American units advanced blind on Leyte and the other Philippine Islands throughout the following year. Much confusion, lost time, and possible casualties resulted from this avoidable error.

While the Japanese positions astride Highway #2 may have been impervious to artillery and mortar fire, they were vulnerable to the direct fire of tanks. The advance was slow as each system of Japanese positions was engaged by the American armor. The 32<sup>nd</sup>'s infantry accompanied the tanks but let the steel monsters big guns do the work. As the 32nd continued moving down the highway they faced

...two ridges immediately east of Highway #2. These ridges were 300 yards apart, were densely covered with jungle growth and were occupied by an estimated company on the westernmost ridge and two companies on the eastern ridge. An unusually high percentage of automatic weapons was encountered on both ridges and they were so located that their fires were mutually supporting. Attempts to maneuver around the positions to approach from the rear brought our troops into crossfire from both ridges and it was impossible to bypass them on Highway #2 as both ridges commanded that route.<sup>27</sup>

Tanks had little effect on these positions. The Japanese had cleverly constructed makeshift roadblocks of disabled light tanks on this part of the highway.<sup>28</sup> The final piece of the American combined arms team, artillery, now entered the equation. On the night of 21-22 December, all available artillery and mortars pounded the Japanese positions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment assaulted the enemy positions the morning of 22 December. They were abandoned. A five-week campaign to secure the length of Highway #2 had ended. Prisoners later stated that hundreds had died during that final artillery barrage and some 500 to 600 shell-shocked Japanese soldiers had fled before the inevitable American infantry assault.<sup>29</sup> The fight for Highway #2 had seen it all. Combined

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

arms teams won some battles, tanks alone won others. Still others, as in this case, were won by the awesome weight of massed artillery fire. Whatever worked was used. Flexibility and experience once again allowed the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division to emerge victorious.

Though Leyte was a success, several problems did appear. Despite the help provided by armor and self-propelled artillery in the breakout from the beach area of the 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the regiment's commander felt it could have been better. Not enough training time, in his opinion, was spent on individual tank and infantry platoon problems or the vital coordination planning necessary to mesh the two into an effective team.<sup>30</sup> The 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division felt its infantrymen had become too dependent on the tank's armor protection. They were bunching up instead of dispersing and thus not performing their mission of protecting the tanks from Japanese infantry attacks.<sup>31</sup> The 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 383<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment needed its trained tank-infantry teams in its San Vicente Operation but the impassable terrain made their commitment impossible.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division's 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had nothing but accolades for their attached armored support, the 44<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion. The 127<sup>th</sup>'s official history states: "The four tanks of the 44<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, working on the road (Ormoc) are to be commended. They worked aggressively and knocked out all pockets of resistance they encountered."<sup>33</sup> Thus, armor support, though helpful, could have at times been better if better planning and selection of terrain had taken place.

The question of replacements and their readiness for battle became a point of concern during this campaign. In a previous chapter, Colonel Oliver Newman replied to the question of what type of soldier he wanted to receive from the states

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<sup>30</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Combat History Of The Nineteenth Infantry Regiment*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Lessons Learned: Leyte Campaign*, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> 383<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *After Action Report: King II, Leyte*, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Leyte*, p. 12.

by saying, “so long as they could shoot and salute.” That question was asked in 1943 during a break between campaigns when there was ample time to assimilate new arrivals into the parent unit. The replacements for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division were received during the campaign when losses started to increase and assimilation was not always possible. The division history noted that

...It was found necessary during this operation to have an officer carefully check each group of replacements at the replacement depot to see that they were properly equipped prior to joining the Division. Much delay and confusion resulted from having inadequately equipped troops join their units in combat...Many casualties were suffered during this campaign because replacements had to be rushed right into the heaviest combat. Many of these casualties could have been avoided if the men had arrived a week before the Division was committed or during the later stages of the operation when enemy opposition was disorganized.<sup>34</sup>

This was a serious problem for the 32<sup>nd</sup>. By the end of the campaign the 32<sup>nd</sup> had suffered 1,949 casualties (450 dead, 1,491 wounded, and 8 missing), or about one-seventh of their total strength.<sup>35</sup> Of course, most of those casualties occurred in the infantry regiments, leaving them in desperate need of qualified soldiers.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division suffered the heaviest losses of any American division in the campaign. It had 2,764 casualties (584 dead, 2,179 wounded, and 1 missing).<sup>36</sup> The lack of replacements, not just their inadequacy, caused problems for that division's 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. The 32<sup>nd</sup> received 336 battle replacements during the campaign, a far from adequate number made worse because only 119 of those men were trained infantrymen, the skill needed most.<sup>37</sup> Of the replacements destined for infantry companies 217 were from service branches (ordnance, medics, quartermaster, signal).

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<sup>34</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, *After Action Report: Leyte*, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: The Return To The Philippines*, p. 368.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report of King II (Leyte) Operation*, p. 32.

Surely, SWPA knew that replacements would be needed, if not in this campaign then during the Luzon campaign. Luzon would involve three times as many American troops and five times as many Japanese troops as Leyte. Poorly prepared troops are quick to become casualties. SWPA would have little time to address this problem because the invasion of Luzon occurred while mopping-up operations on Leyte still continued.

Certain misconceptions arose about the quality of American troops during this campaign and are reflected in the U.S. Army's official history of Leyte. The history is critical of the general use of frontal assaults rather than wide envelopments, citing the advantages accrued by leaving isolated pockets of Japanese resistance to be handled by follow-up units.<sup>38</sup> How often did bypassed Japanese soldiers snipe, harass, and interdict American operations after being bypassed? The terrain on which the SWPA fought World War II, including the island of Leyte, often made maneuvers other than frontal assaults impossible. When envelopments were possible, they were usually employed. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division's fight along Highway #2 is a perfect example. A flanking move would not have broken the Japanese positions and would have drawn fire from other positions in the area. American units were often left with no other option but to launch a frontal assault.

The official history also criticizes the mindset of American infantry. It states:

Although the primary mission of the infantry is to close with the enemy and destroy or capture him, the natural reluctance of American infantrymen to engage the enemy in close quarters had to be overcome. There were several instances in which the American attacking force felt out the Japanese position and then sat back to wait it out...If more than minor resistance was encountered, the troops frequently fell back and called for fire from supporting weapons.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> M. Hamlin Cannon, *Leyte: The Return To The Philippines*, p. 245.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

The official history expounds on its point about American reliance on supporting weapons when commenting on the use of artillery. It states:

The standard employment of artillery in close support of the infantry again proved to be very effective and was used extensively. However, since the artillery fire enabled the infantry to secure many heavily fortified positions with few casualties, the infantrymen tended to become too dependent upon the artillerymen and expected them to do the work of the infantry.<sup>40</sup>

Such observations were valid if applied to the European Theatre of Operations, where fluidity and movement more often than naked brute force ensured victory. In the Pacific, the Japanese rarely occupied hasty (temporary) positions. They were there to stay. Past battles like Buna, Lone Tree Hill, and Biak demonstrated that. Japanese positions could not be eliminated without artillery and other supporting weapons. Even then, it would often take a considerable amount of time and ammunition before a position was finally reduced. Infantry could not do it alone. Bravado was replaced by intelligence, in this case a wise decision.

The army's official history and General Krueger were both overcritical of tanks and their performance. The official history states:

...The tanks and tank-destroyers were ideal weapons for the destruction of machine guns, mortars, and other heavy infantry weapons, but the infantry commanders seemed to be unaware of their capabilities. Many commanders employed their armored vehicles down the middle of the road when they could have used them more effectively on the flanks and for envelopments.<sup>41</sup>

Tanks were employed exactly as recommended above. In actuality, that was their only role since there was little Japanese armor opposition. If they were not utilized it was because the terrain made it impossible. Moreover, roads were often the only way for armored vehicles to enter a combat area. This land was not

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

**the rolling plains of Western Europe. Traversable jungle was infested with Japanese soldiers laying in wait to ambush American tanks. Infantry dealt with these enemy soldiers but it was a time-consuming process. Further, Krueger's comment that "tank-destroyer commanders lacked aggressiveness and skilled direction" is wholly without merit.<sup>42</sup> The lightly armored tank destroyers were vulnerable to even the crudest of weapons (Molotov Cocktails, sticks of dynamite attached to bamboo poles). They could go nowhere without accompanying infantry. Overaggressiveness meant destruction. Prudence was the order of the day, a fact that would have been all too clear to General Krueger had he visited the forward battle area.**

**A final consideration is the quality of the opponent. Some of Japan's finest army units participated in the Leyte campaign. Nonetheless, even the finest of units was wasted in what had become the all too familiar tactics employed against the Americans by the Japanese. One particular unit, the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> Division, was described as a "crack outfit. It was one of Japan's finest."<sup>43</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Division had plentiful equipment, artillery, and supplies. Still, their American adversary outnumbered them in every pertinent category. In a defensive operation, the defender does not have to outnumber the attacker in order to stall or even defeat him. However, Japan's doctrinal deficiencies and outdated philosophy wasted a fine unit. Among these shortcomings were:**

**The apparent inability of subordinate commanders to think for themselves, their inability to be flexible and depart from a predetermined plan to meet a change in their local situation, their lack of coordination and piecemeal efforts, their apparent inability to use artillery effectively, lack of adequate communication facilities, vague and ambiguous orders, inadequate and incorrect maps, and their dishonesty – up and down – all contributed to their inevitable defeat. This division's order to conduct an "all-out attack" to the north coast, was never deviated from, until the division has**

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Observer's Report #220, *The Destruction of the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> Division in the Leyte Campaign*, p. 1.

been decimated... The most noteworthy example of his dissipation of troops in piecemeal efforts was in the Kilay Ridge area. We occupied Kilay Ridge with a battalion. Kilay Ridge was a bald, open hill and he knew what strength we had on it. Yet with the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment at his disposal he threw away the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of that regiment in repeated attempts to climb the ridge through our heavy artillery concentrations. The other glaring example was the push to the north coast by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He pushed the battalion through but when it got into hot water he let it stew, rather than assisting its withdrawal with the other two battalions of the 49<sup>th</sup>, which were in that area. His failure to use his artillery in a coordinated manner is the most glaring deficiency in this engagement. It was used and inflicted considerable casualties and damage on us, but with the entire field artillery regiment, amply supplied with ammunition at the gun positions, he preferred to use his artillery in small-scale harassing fires for counter-battery or against rear installations rather than coordinated preparatory or defensive fires for his infantry troops, while huge piles of ammunition, unused, lined Highway #2.<sup>44</sup>

With an enemy so willing to destroy himself it is sometimes better to let him do so. Whether launching foolish attacks or simply staying in a position until destroyed, the Japanese contributed as much to their own defeat as did American assault teams and heavy weapons. Modern tactics would have prolonged the inevitable, an American victory, but would have made that victory even more costly. Luzon and its 275,000 Japanese defenders now awaited the onslaught of Krueger's 6<sup>th</sup> Army.

How effective were American tactics and doctrine? Japanese tactics not only were very costly in terms of lives but played directly into the strength of American doctrine: firepower. Japanese insistence on a strongpoint rather than a flexible defense allowed the American combined-arms team of artillery, armor, and infantry to wreak havoc on their pillboxes and bunkers. All the strengths and capabilities of this American team would have been far less successful in a war of movement. Yet, not all Japanese positions were located in areas where combined arms could be utilized. Large areas of Leyte were impassable to armored and

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

wheeled vehicles. Artillery had little or no effect on caves or underground shelters. What then? American doctrine in such a scenario was obvious after reviewing many of Leyte's battles. First, send in tanks. Tanks were often committed down roads alone, such as along Highway#2, because they could usually withstand Japanese fire. However, if tanks could not do the job, artillery in massive amounts was used. Sometimes even that was not enough. Only when all other possibilities were exhausted, would the infantry enter the fray. With all the material resources and firepower available to American commanders they were naturally reluctant to risk the lives of the precious infantrymen. Doctrine was shaped in part by American culture and ideals: you could always buy or build more weapons but American lives are irreplaceable. Yet, when called upon, the infantry did the job. It just was never the first option.

Many American units on Leyte fought their battles in a similar fashion. When waiting to invade Leyte, ideas and procedures must have been exchanged between various leaders because no evidence exists that SWPA Headquarters or 6<sup>th</sup> Army issued any theatre-wide training goals. If a corps level attack had occurred on Leyte, most attacks were regimental level or lower, it is foreseeable that severe coordination problems would have appeared. The tactical level of operations, the level where battles are won and lost, was sacrificed to the strategic vision of one man, Douglas MacArthur. The second American troops landed on Leyte he was already visualizing an attack on the main Philippine island of Luzon. Divisions were withdrawn from Leyte before the battle was over to ensure the continuing momentum towards Luzon and eventually Japan. Speed, not the battles being fought, was MacArthur's primary concern.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**“To date, the morale of all troops is good to excellent. The status of all our troops is amazing, they hold up and fight like fury in the face of tremendous odds as to tactical position. To understand this it is necessary to realize that wherever we take up` position now, the Japanese have a better one. They are emplaced on all the really strategic high hills and mountains. It is impossible to locate their artillery, mortar, or machine gun emplacements. They are masters of camouflage and keeping an area they occupy free of evidence of their occupancy in the form of rubbish from caves, change in landscape by the placing of revetments. etc. They disperse themselves over a considerable area in groups of two or three...”**

**After Action Report: Luzon  
40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**

**After the end of the fighting on Leyte, MacArthur’s next objective was the largest of the Philippine Islands, Luzon. The bulk of the Japanese Army in the islands, approximately 275,000 men. was located there. The main American objective on the island was the Capitol City of Manila. How best to reach it would determine the manner in which the campaign was fought.**

**There are various points along the massive island of Luzon where a substantial military force could land and drive for Manila. The landing point eventually chosen, Lingayen Gulf, was over two hundred miles away from the city. Other landing points were available closer to Manila, but Japanese resistance at these points was expected to be far heavier. Further, the ground between Lingayen Gulf and Manila was conducive to rapid movement. Time could be quickly made up. D-Day was set for 9 January 1945.**

**The battle for Luzon occurred in three distinct phases. The first phase included the initial landings on the island and the drive for Manila. This drive would involve several major battles, most notably the struggles for Question Mark**

and Bench Mark Hills, Clark Field, and San Jose. During the first phase we will be introduced to the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, an elite unit that participated in the mopping up phase of the Leyte Campaign and would go on to truly distinguish themselves on Luzon. The second phase of the campaign involved the fight for Manila itself and the subsequent battles to clear the sea approaches to the city. The final part of the campaign was the attempted destruction of Japanese forces on the northern portion of Luzon. The final part of the campaign had not yet ended when the Japanese government surrendered.

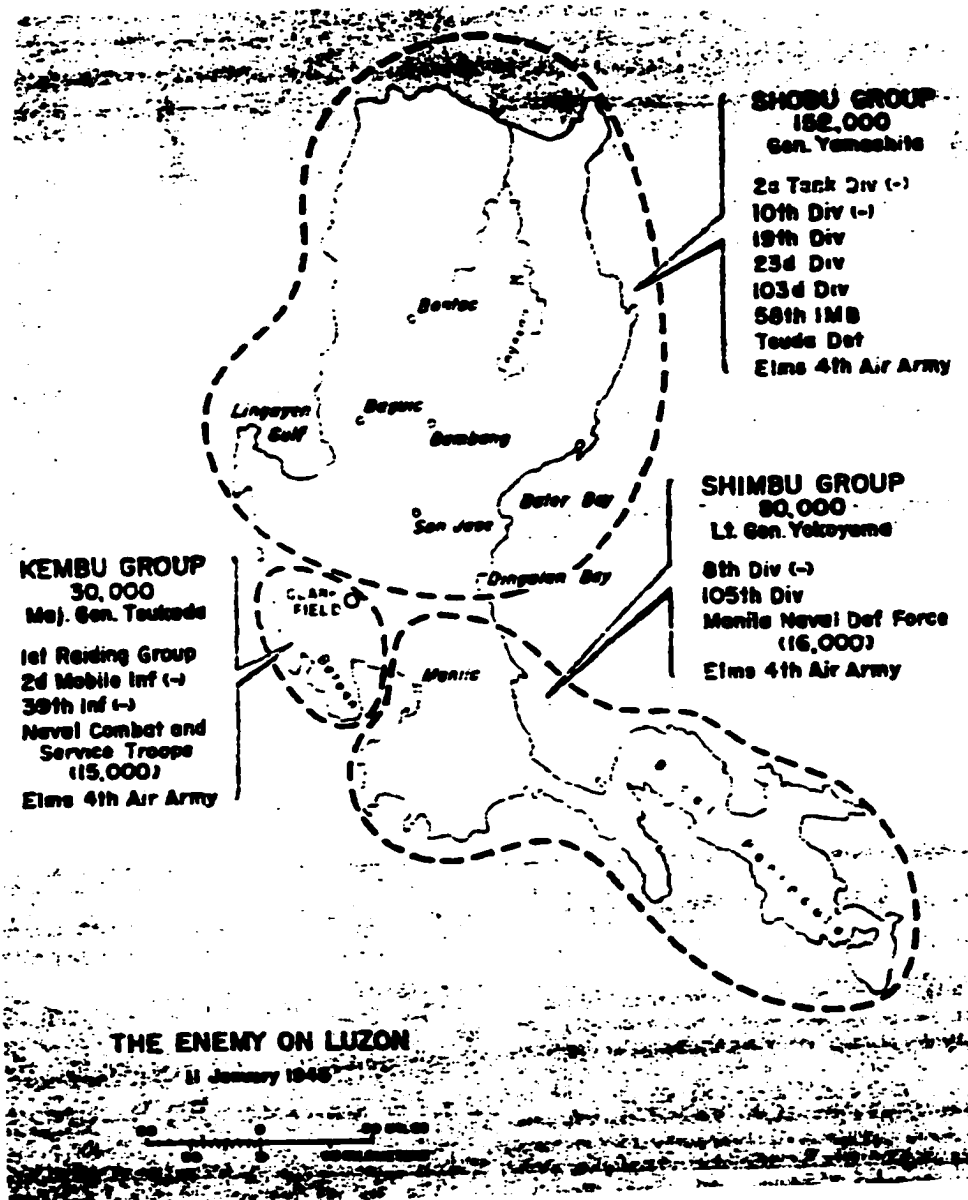
With each phase of the Luzon Campaign, American forces faced larger, more determined Japanese forces. General Yamashita based his main defenses in Luzon's northern mountainous regions. He hoped to forestall the inevitable American invasion of Japan as long as possible by tying down MacArthur's forces in brutal positional battles.<sup>1</sup> His approximately 275,000 soldiers were dispersed into three groups, the preponderance of them dug in along the mountainous regions of Northern Luzon. The Shobu Group comprised 152,000 troops and was personally commanded by Yamashita and responsible for the northern section of the island. The Kembu Group, the smallest of the three defensive groups Yamashita created, had approximately 30,000 soldiers and was responsible for Clark Field and the Bataan Peninsula. The final group, the Shimbu Group, had approximately 80,000 men and defended Manila and all land south and east of it. Yamashita did not want these men to fight for the city and ordered them to withdraw when American forces approached.<sup>2</sup> These 275,000 men were determined, tenacious, and usually well armed and supplied. It was the most formidable force the American Army faced in the Pacific War.

As in the case of Leyte, it would be impossible to describe every battle that took place on Luzon. However, specific battles involving many of the major units of MacArthur's Army is possible. Such an approach will allow for an extensive

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96-7.



Japanese troops dispositions on Luzon

Source: Rafael Steinberg, *Return To The Philippines*

Figure XIII

**evaluation of the training, equipment, and doctrine of the American Army in the Pacific. We will also be able to see how far the army had come since the desperate days of Buna.**

**In the coming pages it at times will become necessary to deviate from a strictly chronological series of events. To explain every action that occurred in a chronological sequence would be too time consuming. For example, the Battle for the city of Manila occurs in the following chapter while the Battle for Bench Mark and Question Mark Hills, which were part of the overall strategy to close in on Manila and occurred during the same period of time, is examined in this chapter.**

**The Lingayen Gulf landings were without any major incidents and the drive for Manila began. Among the first battles fought were over two hills. Luzon is very mountainous and the Japanese utilized the terrain accordingly. The narratives that follow differ little from those I have described in earlier chapters. What they reveal is that no two American divisions had the exact same way of dealing with their enemy. Nor were any two Japanese positions the same. Whatever worked was used. If artillery could do the job it was employed. If tanks were needed, they were sent in. If all other means were exhausted, infantry and specialized assault teams finished the job. American infantry were not afraid to do the dirty work. Unfortunately, as has been displayed throughout the course of our story on the ground war in the Pacific, infantry alone could do little against Japanese soldiers dug in underground or in reinforced bunkers and pillboxes. Even when the Japanese did not have the benefit of reinforced positions, such as in the Battle of Question Mark and Bench Mark Hills, they were skilled and tenacious enough to put up a protracted fight. As will be seen, so were their American counterparts. This was the type of fighting a soldier did not learn from a manual or on a training range. It was learned up close and personal, with a real enemy and real weapons.**

**Along with the capture of Manila, the seizure of the Clark Field Air Complex was deemed crucial to the first phase of the campaign. The Japanese**

expanded the pre-war American airbase and by the time of the American invasion it comprised fifteen airstrips. They were located along fifteen miles of Route 3, in the western portion of which lay Fort Stotsenburg, one of many formidable Japanese positions in the area. In addition to Fort Stotsenburg, the Japanese had occupied and entrenched themselves on all relevant high ground around the airfields. The situation paralleled that encountered on Biak the previous year. The Japanese could conceivably allow the Americans to occupy the airfields while still denying them their use by pouring fire upon them from the commanding heights. With the slow progress in airfield construction encountered by American engineers on Leyte due to the soft terrain and incessant rains, Clark Field was needed to support offensives throughout the Philippines. Plans were being formulated to invade the southern Philippine islands of Mindanao, Cebu, Panay, and Negros and those attacks would require land based air support. In addition, mopping up operations continued on Leyte and with the withdrawal of the navy's aircraft carriers, the units still fighting on that island required some form of air support. The initial U.S. landings of 9 January included the 40<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions. These two divisions, particularly the 40<sup>th</sup>, would spearhead the attack on the Clark Field/Zambales Mountains area. Their most formidable obstacle was the maze of hills and caves in the vicinity of Fort Stotsenburg.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had been the only division to publish a Standard Operating Procedure for jungle operations during the war. Luzon and the Zambales Mountains was different terrain, but the concepts applied towards fighting the Japanese were essentially the same. American infantry still had to eliminate Japanese soldiers who had the added benefit of nature on their side, along with their fortifications. The rugged mountainous terrain of this area was enhanced and even improved upon by the resourceful Japanese. The 40<sup>th</sup> encountered:

...cave positions which were dug straight into the hill as deep as 70 feet. The communication tunnels were extended laterally,

connecting caves of the same level, in many instances were so small that one would have to crawl to make use of them. Others were large enough to allow a normal man to walk upright. Practically all caves were provided with dead-end offsets which enabled the enemy to stay near the firing position at the mouth of the cave and yet have maximum protection against projectiles entering the position. Although some of the caves had nothing but camouflage nets and painted canvas over the opening, some were constructed with an earth parapet constructed to provide both camouflage and protection at the cave opening.

In a few instances, supporting timbers were used to strengthen the caves but due to the high plasticity clay and the volcanic rock, additional supports were usually unnecessary. In all cases these positions were well camouflaged by combining natural and artificial means.<sup>3</sup>

To destroy these positions, the 40<sup>th</sup> first tried artillery. When that failed, wherever the terrain permitted, tanks were used. However, due to the natural protection afforded by the Zambales Mountains' numerous caves, artillery and tank fire could do no real damage. Assault teams were needed. The 40<sup>th</sup> had used its training time well and its assault teams (14 men armed with explosives, flame-throwers, and automatic weapons) knew their craft.

The teams did the actual work of destroying the caves but at the same time utilized direct and indirect fire support to keep the Japanese in the caves deep enough that they could not interfere. Supporting fires did not have to destroy the Japanese to be effective. The 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division usually followed a five step process when dealing with the Japanese caves in the Clark Field area. These steps were:

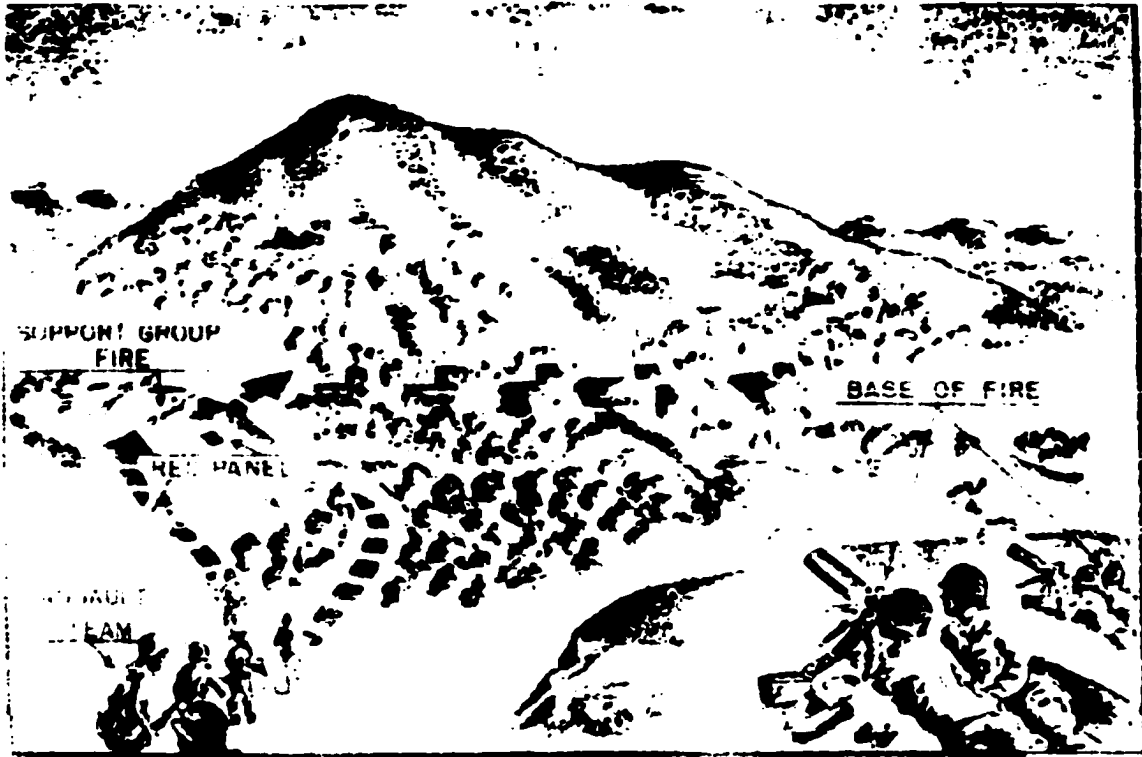
**Step 1:** (Sketch 2) Covering group of the assault team took the enemy positions under fire as the assault group continued the advance and maneuvered to a position from which to attack the target enemy cave.

**Step 2:** (Sketch 3) Demolition team approached the position from above; a trench was dug approximately 18 inches deep and wide enough to allow the insertion of a crater charge as near the center of the position as possible.

Or

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<sup>3</sup> 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *History: Fort Stotsenburg*, p. 1.



SKETCH NO. 7

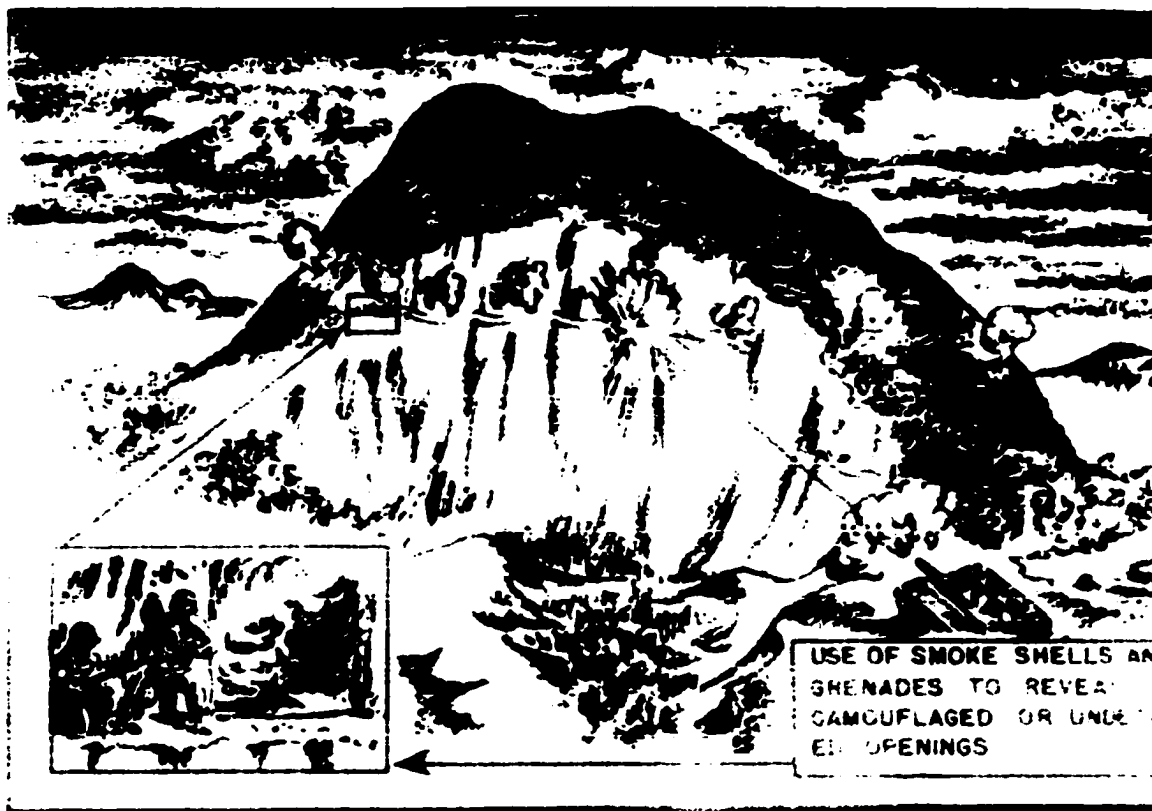
Source: 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, History: Luzon

Figure XIV



Source: 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *History: Luzon*

Figure XV



SKETCH NO

Source: 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *History: Luzon*

Figure XVI

When a cave could not be approached from above, charges were placed in the entrance of the cave and along the catwalk approaches.

**Step 3: (Sketch 5)** Direct fire weapons ceased firing on the cave under assault and directed fire on flanking caves capable of interfering with the assault team.

**Step 4: (Sketch 4)** A smoke round is fired into the caves and observing the extent of the inter-communication with adjacent caves, the power of several direct fire weapons could be brought to bear on all caves so connected, thus denying the enemy the use of any one cave for counter fire.

**Step 5: (Sketch 6)** When possible, holes were drilled with compressors, using rock drills, in the cave roof and sides and dynamite charges placed therein.<sup>4</sup>

These methods allowed the 40 Infantry Division, with the aid of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to secure the Clark Field area by 31 January. American planes were utilizing its runways soon thereafter. The 40<sup>th</sup> had suffered losses of 75 men killed and 340 wounded during the week of 24-31 January, while along with the 37<sup>th</sup> inflicting 2,500 casualties on the Japanese.<sup>5</sup> In the past and on several occasions in the future, it often required weeks or even months to clear positions that contained more than one hill, bunker network, or system of caves (e.g. Biak, Breakneck Ridge). It took the 40<sup>th</sup> a week to clear this area. Thorough training, excellent equipment, and ingenuity gave the Americans the airbase they needed. The drive for Manila, a drive in which the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division played an enormous role, now continued.

The following introduction to the 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry *Regiment's History of the Luzon Campaign* in many ways exemplifies the neglect felt by the men of the SWPA when it came to notoriety: "When the historians write the final chapter in the Second Battle of the Philippines, in all probability the Battle of Bench Mark-Question Mark Hills will not be mentioned."<sup>6</sup> The 130<sup>th</sup>, with the rest of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, was part of the force driving for Manila. As usual, these two hills were excellent defensive positions, though the Japanese had not constructed

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines*, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History of the Luzon Campaign*, p. 11.

pillboxes or bunkers on either of them. Nature made them formidable enough. Further adding to the Japanese advantage as a defender, the ground in the area was so rugged that no tank support could be brought forward. Having to fight without their armored support, the 130<sup>th</sup> encountered

Question Mark Hill, located in the foothills of the Caraballo Mountains, rising 2500 feet above the Central Luzon Plain. The hill is elongated, covered with cogon grass, and with wooded draws indenting its sides. Between Question Mark Hill and the fertile valley stands Bench Mark Hill, a 1500 foot, grass covered sentinel. The two hills are separated by a slight draw, sparsely wooded, and a distance of 600 yards... Occupying these positions was the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry, practically intact—a fact which was to be learned only during the forthcoming fight.<sup>7</sup>

Before attacking, the 130<sup>th</sup> first tried to find out what they were up against.

Patrols discovered that a reinforced company of Japanese infantry, armed with automatic weapons and mortars defended Bench Mark Hill. Patrols could gain little information on Question Mark Hill. The 130<sup>th</sup> was able to reach within several hundred feet of the summit of Bench Mark Hill with little difficulty; the only Japanese action occurring at night in futile probing attacks against prepared American perimeters. On 19 February the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was ordered to seize the remainder of Bench Mark Hill (BMH) and then proceed to Question Mark Hill (QMH).

The fire of 105mm howitzers signaled the beginning of the American attack on 19 February. Two companies of American riflemen attacking abreast were quickly separated by the rough ground and were unable to support each other. Two separate battles developed but progress was made. Once reaching the summit of BMH, the lack of information regarding Japanese strength on QMH came back to haunt the Americans. The Japanese on QMH opened fire on BMH and were joined by snipers and scattered riflemen hiding in the caves of BMH.

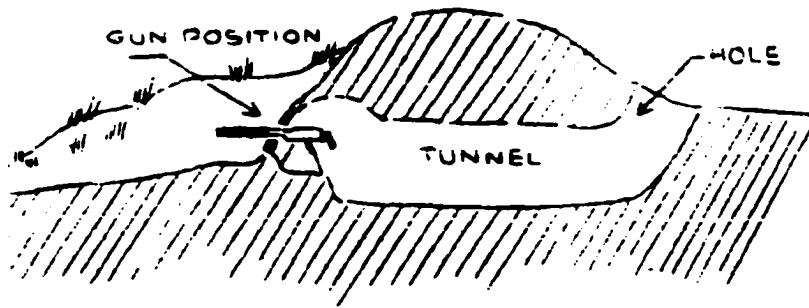
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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

LIGHT or HEAVY MACHINE GUN  
*Positions*



SIDE VIEW



A typical Japanese position on Bench Mark Hill

Source: 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Luzon Campaign*

Figure XVII

The forward slopes of BMH were still occupied by the Japanese and were now attacked by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.

The attack against BMH's forward slope was met by automatic weapons fire and grenades that seemed to come from all directions.<sup>8</sup> American infantry were advancing over Japanese positions without even knowing it, such was the nature of the terrain. Yet, the advance moved on. Two small knobs on the forward slope provided a great deal of trouble. While machine gun fire neutralized Japanese fire on QMH, three attacks were launched against these knobs. Each attack failed. A lull now developed on BMH.

While the brief lull on BMH continued, another infantry company assaulted QMH. They quickly reached a point only 75 yards short of the hill's summit. This success was the result of no pre-attack artillery bombardment alerting the Japanese of an advance and the fire placed on Japanese positions from BMH. By the time the Japanese realized what had happened only 75 yards remained to the summit. Co. I of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion then continued its attack. It is described best by the 130<sup>th</sup>'s official history, which states:

The Japs still entrenched on the forward slopes of BMH and the Nips on the summit of QMH finally recovered from their surprise and opened fire with automatic weapons and semi-automatic weapons. Despite this deadly, frontal, and oblique fire, the attack of Co. I never faltered. It was a perfect example of fire and movement. One could see men rushing forward on a zig-zag course, hitting the ground, opening fire on the enemy, covering by fire the similar movement of the riflemen on their right or left...the casualties were few. With such aggressiveness and speed, the attack moved to within 50 yards of the top of the hill before the increasing Jap fire brought it to a stop.<sup>9</sup>

Why did the attack stop here? Certainly with a little more push the last 50 yards could be secured. However, darkness loomed in the sky. Failure to prepare a perimeter could result during the night in the loss of that day's gains. Why pay

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

for the same land twice? The attack would resume at first light the following morning.

Realizing their hold on the remainder of QMH was tenuous at best, the Japanese advanced perilously close to Co. I's perimeter that night. The following morning, the Japanese were so close that artillery could not even be used to dislodge them because of the potential danger to American troops. Mortars, however, could be used and were very effective. A new American unit, Co. A of the 136<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, then moved past Co. I's perimeter to attack but was stopped by the Japanese. Despite the danger, friendly artillery fire was used to drive off the Japanese defenders, setting the stage for the final attack of 22 February.

Following closely behind their artillery, the American infantry were able to finish off the remaining Japanese soldiers with grenades and at times, bayonets.<sup>10</sup> Four days of heavy fighting resulted in Japanese losses of 489 dead (many American units never found wounded Japanese) as compared to American losses of 33 dead and 82 wounded.<sup>11</sup> Supporting weapons, until the final day, had little impact on this battle. Fire and movement, the keys to the successful infantryman in just about any other type of terrain, had proved their value against hasty Japanese defensive positions. Had the Japanese constructed pillboxes, bunkers, and their usual assortment of mini fortresses, fire and movement would not have been enough. The infantry finished the job alone when it could. Recognizing when it was unable to do so and in need of support was the key decision when encountering the defenses of a town such as Munoz, the next battle to be explored.

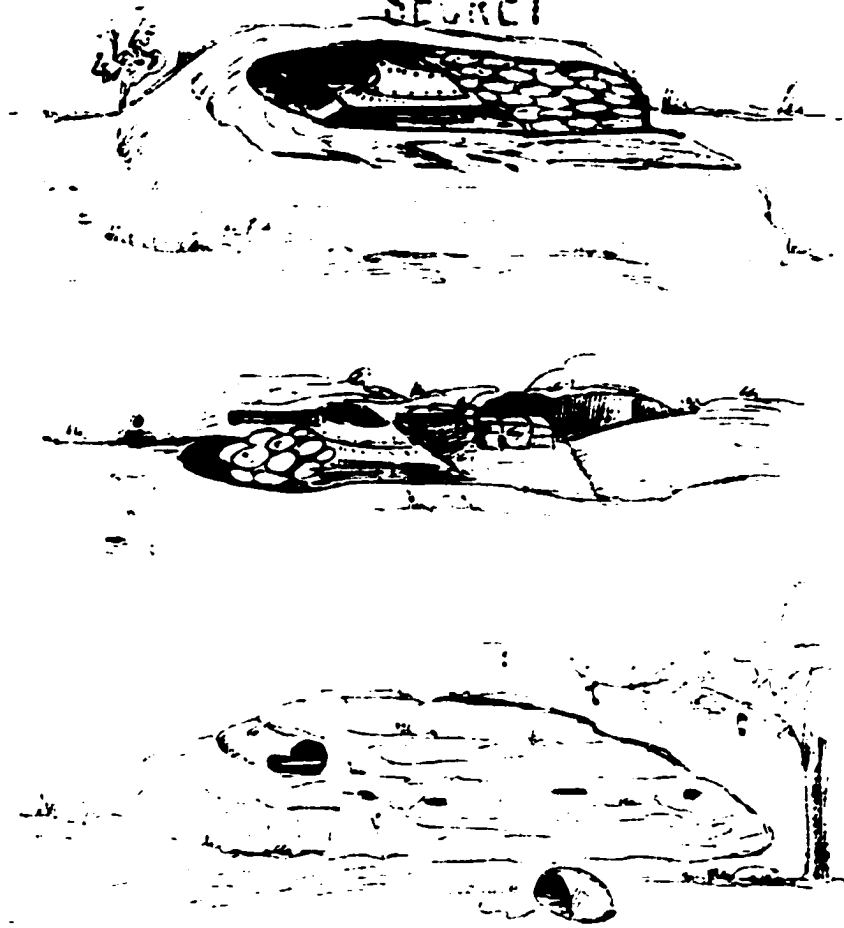
Munoz was another Japanese occupied town on the way to Manila, commanding the main highway to San Jose. Munoz witnessed the largest commitment of Japanese armor in one location yet experienced by the American Army. The Japanese tanks were employed as static artillery and were reinforced

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

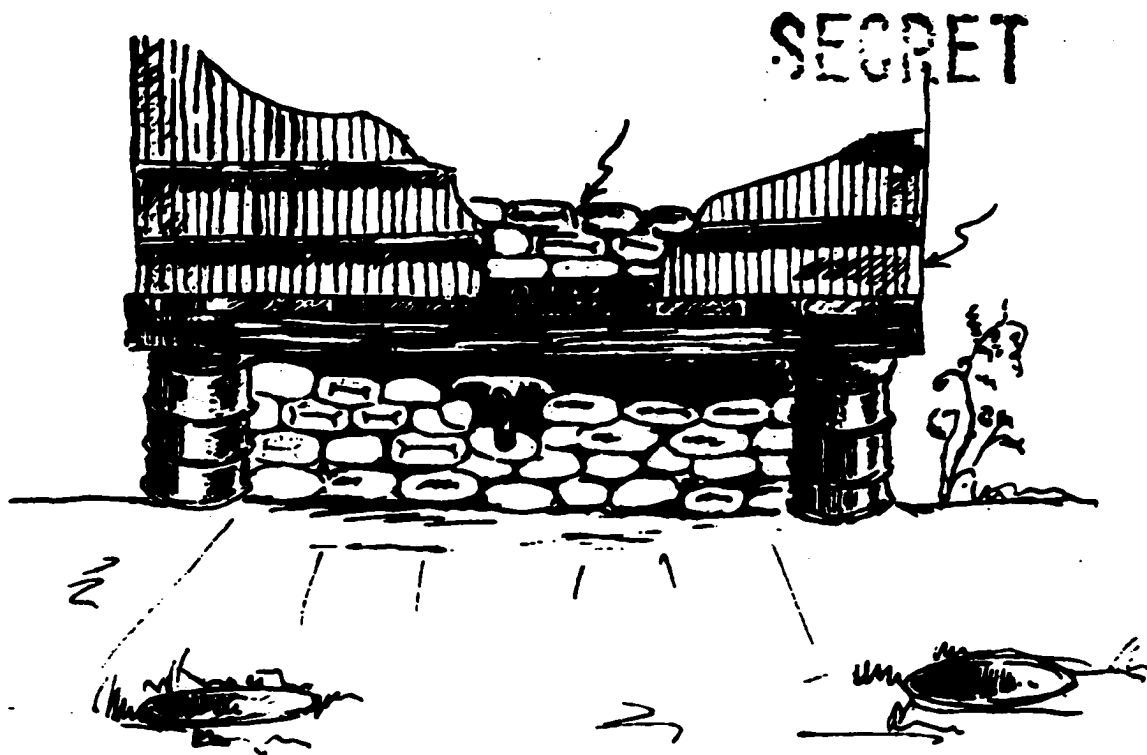
SECRET



**Japanese tank positions on the outskirts of Munoz**

Source: 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: MI Operation (Luzon Campaign)*

**Figure XVIII**



A typical Japanese tank position at Munoz. Buried within a fortified building, it remained an effective weapon until forced into the open.

Source: 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: MI Operation (Luzon Campaign)*

Figure: XIX

with all that nature and Japanese ingenuity could provide. The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment assaulted Munoz and its Japanese defenders.

They encountered:

...the 6<sup>th</sup> Tank Regiment, less one company, strongly reinforced... This force was approximately 1900 men in strength, armed with the best weapons and equipment the Japanese Army could offer. All types of supplies were plentiful.

Munoz had been converted into a veritable fortress. The defense was well organized in depth, and weapons were so placed as to be mutually supporting. The backbone of the defense was medium tanks armed with 47mm guns and LMGs. These tanks were dug in so that only the turrets were exposed. Camouflage was so excellent that artillery spotter planes had difficulty in locating the tanks. The 47mm AT guns and 105mm howitzer guns were also well emplaced. Many positions were protected by 2 or 3 walls of sandbags and others by walls of dirt several feet thick. Smaller pillboxes covered the heavier weapons with automatic fire, and riflemen used individual foxholes. Only direct hits from artillery, heavy mortars or infantry AT weapons could faze the tank or field piece emplacements.<sup>12</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry launched its first assault against these formidable defenses on 1 February.

The attack had barely started before artillery and 47mm tank fire stopped it dead in its tracks. American artillery managed to account for one Japanese artillery piece and two tanks, thus beginning the attrition of Japan's considerable Munoz defenses. Unfortunately, the artillery could accomplish little against Japanese machine guns on 1 or 2 February. Enemy automatic weapons prevented the American attacks from gaining any momentum and allowed three Japanese tanks to emerge from their sanctuaries to launch a counterattack. The lightness and vulnerability of Japanese armor in the open was obvious to all when rifle grenades and a few well-placed bazooka shots eliminated all three tanks.<sup>13</sup> A new attack would occur the following morning.

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<sup>12</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. *Historical Report: M1 Operation, Luzon Campaign*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Large concentrations of artillery and heavy mortar fire preceded the American attack of 3 February. Tanks, self-propelled howitzers and anti-tank guns provided additional support. The added support allowed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to pierce the outer line of the Japanese defenses and enter the interior of Munoz. More dug-in tanks and bunkers then stopped the advance again. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 20<sup>th</sup> then attacked alongside the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. Three more Japanese tanks then foolishly came into the open and were destroyed, although in this quick fracas the Japanese did manage to knock out a Sherman tank. The Americans spent the remaining hours of daylight straightening out their line in preparation for another attack on the 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>14</sup>

The attack of 4 February differed little from the attacks of the previous days. Now, five artillery battalions (approximately 60 guns) were supporting the attack. Initial success involved the destruction of four more Japanese tanks and approximately 100 infantrymen. Japanese material and manpower losses did not translate into gains on the ground, however, as one member of the 20<sup>th</sup> stated: "The Japs were there to stay. If one emplacement was knocked out there was always another able to fire the same mission."<sup>15</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup>'s infantry assault teams began probing the line for weakpoints and on 5 February managed to eliminate 12 pillboxes and allow several more penetrations into Munoz. Flame-thrower and demolition teams did their usual efficient work, accompanied by riflemen and tanks. Once a penetration of the main Japanese line was achieved, another futile counterattack by tanks and riflemen achieved nothing more than adding to growing Japanese losses.<sup>16</sup>

As dawn approached on 6 February, little had changed in the strategic situation in Munoz. The Japanese still controlled two-thirds of the town and were fighting ferociously as the Americans advanced. Tactically, Japanese fighting capabilities were being methodically eliminated. To remain in Munoz meant the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

certain destruction of all their vehicles and personnel. The Japanese commander decided to withdraw towards San Jose down the main highway between the two towns. However, the Japanese commander was unaware that his enemy now controlled San Jose and the all-important highway. Before dawn on 7 February a diversionary attack was launched against the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Anti-tank guns accounted for four more Japanese tanks while the remainder of the Japanese force burst onto the highway. Waiting for them were two artillery battalions firing point-blank at their thinly armored vehicles. Blocked from entering San Jose and unable to retreat back to Munoz, the Japanese force was annihilated. Ten more medium tanks, one light tank, two prime movers, ten 2 ½ ton personnel carriers, two 105mm guns, and 247 dead soldiers were added to the final totals of:

- 48 medium tanks
- 4 light tanks
- 4 armored cars
- 2 tracked prime movers
- 41 trucks
- 1 American half-track
- 15 sedans
- 1 station wagon
- 4 105mm howitzers
- 16 47mm anti-tank guns
- 1527 Japanese dead<sup>17</sup>

The vulnerability of Japanese armor and other weapons to American firepower was demonstrated beyond doubt in this battle. Light anti-tank guns and bazookas, often powerless against the heavy German armor encountered in Europe, was more than enough to destroy the thin-skinned armor employed by the Japanese. Yet, when the Japanese remained in their positions, they were as tough as ever. In this battle, their tenacity was reinforced with substantial armor support. When dug in, even the lightly armored Japanese tanks were effective weapons. As tenacious as the Japanese continued to be, their American enemy had grown equally

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24-25.

tenacious. Despite superior firepower and numbers, it still required a week of heavy fighting to finish the job. The 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment never grew frustrated. They never grew impatient. They simply grew more determined. It was the Japanese who grew frustrated at their staggering losses and inability to defeat their American counterparts. This frustration led to the decision to withdraw, which led to their final destruction.

When one thinks of American airborne divisions during the Second World War, the heroes of the ETO, the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions, usually come to mind. These two famous divisions have kept up their fine tradition to the present day, having participated in the Vietnam War, the invasion of Panama, and the Gulf War. However, World War II and the PTO had its own outstanding member of the airborne fraternity, the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. This unit participated in both the Leyte and Luzon operations and was at its best in the battles leading to Manila and the assault on Corregidor, perhaps the most difficult airborne operation of the Second World War. Wherever they fought, they did so hard and well.

Airborne divisions operate with several advantages and disadvantages. Perhaps the greatest attribute of an airborne soldier is his mindset. Made up of volunteers who possess extraordinary physical abilities, as well as a natural aggressiveness, perhaps even recklessness, they are a cut above the standard infantryman. It takes a special type of person to jump out of an airplane (an act I have been fortunate enough to avoid during my time in the military). Airborne infantry are also more lightly armed than the standard rifleman is. Since they are often dropped onto isolated parts of the battlefield, they fight and survive with what they carry on their backs. Fire support was 75mm pack howitzers, hardly sufficient strength to deal with robust Japanese fortifications. The 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division usually relied on tactical air support and their own natural overaggressiveness. When tank and artillery support were available, they were

gladly used. Among the first units to land on Luzon, the 11<sup>th</sup> spearheaded the drive to Manila.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne's fighting regiments, the 503<sup>rd</sup> and 511<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 187<sup>th</sup> and 188<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiments all played a part in the Battle of Luzon. How they tended to handle the stoutest Japanese fortifications, fortifications even their own aggressiveness and personal weapons could not handle alone, was exemplified by the 511<sup>th</sup> PIR's battle along the Paranaque River on 5 February. The 511<sup>th</sup> was on the south bank of the river and able to see on the north bank a maze of enemy fortifications. These fortifications included pillboxes, trenches, and caves. The 511<sup>th</sup> managed to eliminate fourteen of these emplacements through fire and movement and the liberal use of flame-throwers. They could do little against the remaining positions, fire and movement being only so effective. Air strikes were called for and produced excellent results.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the Pacific War, examples of MacArthur's forces utilizing tactical air support are few and far between. The lack of visibility, the close proximity of American and Japanese troops, and the lack of training time with ground and air units together prevented the effective use of ground support aircraft. Without heavy supporting weapons, the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne depended on their flying artillery. It would be needed again in the following days.

On 6 February the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division continued its advance towards Manila. Nichols Field, the next objective, was attacked by the 188<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry, the 511<sup>th</sup> PIR, the Cannon Company of the 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment (105mm self-propelled howitzers), and a battery of 75mm pack howitzers. The momentum of the attack brought the Americans to the southern edge of the airfield before heavy Japanese fire stopped the advance. Flame-thrower teams and the direct fire of pack howitzers destroyed pillboxes and trenches along the runway. However, Japanese fire from caves was impervious to any and all the weapons the paratroopers brought with them. For the next two days, the American advance

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<sup>18</sup> 188<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment, *History: Luzon*, p. 5.

was painstakingly slow. Unaccustomed to such a laborious pace, the 11<sup>th</sup> once again called in their flying artillery. All other possible measures were attempted before the call for air strikes. The caves could not be outflanked. Artillery fire could not root them out. It required two heavy air strikes to eliminate the Japanese threat and allow the advance to continue.<sup>19</sup>

The movement of 9 February resembled that of the previous few days. With every inch advanced, Japanese fire increased. On two separate occasions air strikes eliminated Japanese positions, allowing the advance to continue. One of those strikes destroyed a Japanese battery of six anti-aircraft guns firing on American ground troops. These guns were expertly camouflaged and the strike was a precision hit. Spotters guided in the planes on the ground.<sup>20</sup> This was not saturation bombing. This was a call for fire mission expertly carried out by ground troops and pilots.

The pace of advance on 10 February was more in line with what the paratroopers were accustomed to, but on the 11<sup>th</sup>, the pace again slowed. Cutcut Creek and the high ground to the north bristled with Japanese troops and weapons. Along the creek itself, “the enemy had strung barbed wire, built tank traps and impregnable pillboxes, eight of which, heavily fortified with heavy machine guns and twenty millimeter guns, poured a withering hail of fire at the approaching battalions.”<sup>21</sup> The attached Cannon Company’s self-propelled howitzers and a heavy air strike eliminated the Japanese positions, accounting for:

20 20mm guns  
67 enemy soldiers  
25 machine guns  
24 25mm guns  
1 75mm field piece  
100 pillboxes<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Even the inspired paratroopers recognized there were cases where firepower could do the job. Ft. McKinley, attacked on 16 February, was a similar fight to that along Cutcut Creek.

The attack began with air strikes blowing up Japanese fuel and ammunition dumps, dropping napalm on pinpointed positions, and conducting low level attacks against anything that moved as well as Japanese positions exposed by the burning napalm. Napalm, a recent arrival to the American arsenal, is jellied gasoline that starts fires nearly impossible to extinguish. Napalm bombs incinerated large areas of land and were gruesomely more effective than standard high explosive bombs. After these air strikes, the paratroopers easily eliminated those Japanese that survived. As March approached, even more formidable Japanese positions were attacked.

Hill 660, in the vicinity of Mt. Sungay, was next attacked by the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. As the 11<sup>th</sup> advanced towards Santor, Hill 660 opened up with a hail of machine gun and mortar fire. It required three days to take the hill by an envelopment. Advancing through bamboo thickets to the north of the hill, the 11<sup>th</sup> eliminated a system of pillboxes with grenades and flame-throwers. The remaining Japanese on the hill retreated into its many caves, waiting to be rooted out. Looking to continue their advance but at the same time realizing the Japanese had to be neutralized, the paratroopers sealed every entrance and exit they could find on the hill. The surviving Japanese soldiers who retreated into Hill 660's caves died there.<sup>23</sup>

By this time, the fighting within Manila was over. The 11<sup>th</sup> had not participated in the fighting for the city but had led the drive towards it. They now moved on to the most formidable obstacle they had seen, the Macolod-Dita-Bukel Hill Triangle. They met

...Macolod, which was a densely wooded, cone-shaped mountain connected to Bukel Hill on the northeast by a saddle. Bare

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<sup>23</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. *Combat History: Luzon Campaign*, p. 4.

noses known as Browne and Bashore Ridges, descended to the Dita Highway. In this area, the Japs had built formidable positions over a period of three years, employing drafted Filipino laborers. All the workmen were killed when the job was completed. The area bristled with artillery and automatic weapons which laid down continuous fires from concealed caves and pillboxes on the high ground...The routes of approach to these positions were limited to a small number of draws.<sup>24</sup>

It took the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division's 187<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment an entire month to clear this position. Air strikes and artillery removed most of the expertly employed Japanese camouflage from their positions, allowing recently arrived tanks and 155mm howitzers to place direct fire on them. Infantry, using flame-throwers and explosives eliminated any remaining Japanese positions above ground. Those within the caves and crevices of the many caves were either sealed in, like those surviving at Hill 660, or perished as oil drums were emptied into crevices and set afire. It took until April 20 to finally end this battle. The number dead within the caves will never be known, but 1,400 Japanese soldiers were killed above ground. The 11<sup>th</sup> had done well and would be heard from again.<sup>25</sup>

This first phase of the Luzon operation was a resounding success for the American Army. The four divisions or their organic infantry regiments discussed here, the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Divisions all fought the same enemy but in vastly different battles. The 40<sup>th</sup>'s work in the Clark Field area was a testament to their many months of training and preparation. They had devised a methodical, systematic approach for the destruction of Japanese positions and it worked very well. Supporting weapons were a necessary ingredient in their success and it is questionable how successful the 40<sup>th</sup> would ultimately have been without the aid of their heavy firepower. On the other hand, the 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's (33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division) fight for Question Mark and Bench Mark Hills was strictly an infantry battle, the terrain preventing the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

employment of heavy weapons. Further, the Japanese had prepared hasty, not deliberate positions and were therefore easier to root out. The 130<sup>th</sup> defeated the Japanese with fire and movement, the 40<sup>th</sup> with firepower and explosives. Each situation simply called for a different solution.

In the Battle of Munoz, the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division encountered a rarity in the Pacific, a large Japanese armored force. However, the weakness of Japanese armor necessitated a strictly defensive posture for their tanks and the 6<sup>th</sup> eliminated them the way they would any other Japanese position. Finally, there was the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. They utilized air support far more extensively and effectively than any other American unit in the Pacific. Whenever a position appeared that could hold up their advance, the 11<sup>th</sup>'s flying artillery was called in to remove the obstacle. Why did no other American division utilize air power in such a way? There were no directives or concrete guidance from 6<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters. Units were left to their own devices to figure out how they wanted to fight and how best to utilize their available support. Fortunately, thus far, all the units did their job well. This could become a problem as the fighting progressed, as multi-division operations became necessary.

## CHAPTER NINE

**“It was found that all terrain in enemy territory must be considered as strongly defended until it has been proven otherwise. Numerous ridges that were almost void of vegetation appeared to be free of enemy positions but were found to be honeycombed with Japanese dugouts and spider holes that were covered with excellent camouflage materials.”**

**After Action Report  
1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment  
Luzon Campaign**

**“There is seldom such a thing as outflanking a Jap position. He fortifies his hilltop with an all-around defense, the nucleus of which is generally a pillbox covering the main approach. Spider holes cover the main position and the more unlikely avenues of approach. Fields of fire are sacrificed for concealment. Such positions can best be taken by a few men working their way cautiously and using a liberal amount of grenades. Where heavy covering fires from machine guns have been used our own casualties have been decreased ... Where infantry can follow closely an artillery preparation, the casualties have been lessened.”**

**Lt. Colonel Howard N. Smalley  
164<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment  
Americal Division**

**After securing Manila and its approaches the final phase of the Luzon campaign began for Krueger’s 6<sup>th</sup> Army. Along with Krueger’s men, Robert Eichelberger and the recently formed 8<sup>th</sup> Army played a prominent role in the war’s final months. While the 6<sup>th</sup> Army labored to clear the mountainous northern regions of Luzon, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army conducted several major amphibious landings and dozens of smaller ones on the vast stretch of islands in the southern Philippines. In this final phase of the ground war, manpower shortages began to have a devastating effect on operations. Replacements were hard to come by and preparations for the invasion of Japan began to dominate all troop and equipment needs. A common theme throughout the war in the SWPA was that the theatre commander, General MacArthur, always looking to the future at the expense of**

the moment. Even after securing Manila there were still substantial Japanese forces in northern Luzon and the southern Philippine islands. As divisions began to be pulled off the line to rest and refit for the war's ultimate invasion, those still fighting had to do so with what they had. More men and material were not forthcoming. In such a situation the doctrine honed over the previous years suffered. A military unit is only as good as its men and equipment. Shortages in both areas made the remainder of the SWPA ground war costlier and longer than it need have been.

Krueger's 6<sup>th</sup> Army faced over one hundred thousand Japanese troops in northern Luzon. To combat these forces, at no time would he have more than five infantry divisions (6<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>) for active operations. Indeed, several of Krueger's divisions were taken from him to form the 8<sup>th</sup> Army while others were pulled off the line to rest and refit for the looming invasion of Japan. Krueger's men faced more Japanese troops than he could put in the field. Fortunately, as the attacker, Krueger could choose where to place his limited strength and usually outnumbered the Japanese at the point of attack. Nevertheless, it was at times a desperate situation. The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which would open this final phase of the Luzon campaign, commented in its official history on the state of its unit while assaulting the Wawa and Ipo Dams:

Up to this point the Regiment had been in combat for 84 consecutive days, and the battalions had been decimated to such a point that they were no longer capable of carrying out the powerful offensive thrust necessary to breach the enemy's heavily fortified position. Taking this fact into consideration it was decided to maintain present positions and pound the enemy with mortars, artillery, and airstrikes until such time as our forces were able to attack again.<sup>1</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division obviously needed to be rotated off the line to rebuild its strength. Unfortunately, that was not possible, as there was no unit of comparable size to replace them. They went to work with what they had.

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<sup>1</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: MI Operation-Luzon Campaign*.

Even while American forces occupied Manila, the city and its surviving civilian population were still vulnerable. The city's water supply was thought to originate north of Manila at the Wawa and Ipo Dams (after the battle it was discovered that the Wawa Dam actually had no part in supplying water to the city). The Japanese still controlled these dams and could conceivably turn off the water at any time. Krueger wanted them taken immediately and assigned the task to the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. This veteran unit had taken Lone Tree Hill during the Wakde-Sarmi campaign and destroyed an entire Japanese armored division during the Battle of Munoz. Their techniques were sound, their men experienced. Nevertheless, it would be a long, bitter battle to secure those dams, a battle that left the 6<sup>th</sup> in shambles.

The desperation of the American manpower situation was actually alleviated by Japanese doctrine. The Japanese decision to maintain most of their strength underground allowed the men of the 6<sup>th</sup> to develop a technique employed by many American units in recent battles. Rather than risk excessive casualties in destroying individual Japanese positions, the men of the 6<sup>th</sup>, when possible, sealed the enemy soldiers in their holes. American artillery and tank fire, while unable to destroy caves, bunkers, and other Japanese positions, was able to keep the enemy underground. American artillery was devastatingly accurate, eliminating any Japanese soldiers foolish enough to stick their head above ground while keeping those underground in a state of shock.<sup>2</sup> The neutralization of positions followed a similar pattern. Covered by automatic weapons fire, individual American soldiers tossed white phosphorous grenades into the position, forcing into the open Japanese soldiers who were then quickly cut down by riflemen and machine gun teams. Some Japanese positions were so deep underground that the WP grenades could not reach all their occupants. The 6<sup>th</sup>'s organic assault teams then moved in with demolitions to seal all survivors into their holes. Losses were lighter in these

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

engagements but when the 6<sup>th</sup> encountered above ground pillboxes, slit trenches, and spider holes, the dirty work began again.

Losses to the 6<sup>th</sup>'s infantry battalions were inevitable. To keep them down, extensive patrolling located Japanese positions for artillery. At weekly intervals, to preserve their strength, the 6<sup>th</sup> would patrol and then attack. It made the process of securing the dams and the surrounding areas very time consuming. The 6<sup>th</sup> was not relieved until 25 April. By that time they had killed 2,150 Japanese soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Understrength when the operation began, the division's three infantry regiments lost an additional 330 men killed, 1,000 wounded, and 3,000 noncombat evacuations.<sup>4</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was no longer a functional combat unit. Robert Ross Smith, the Army's official historian of the campaign, in extensive interviews immediately after the war received the following impression from a commander within the 6th Infantry Division: "Morale was down, men and officers alike were worn and tired, and all units were sadly understrength, especially in combat effectiveness." The 6<sup>th</sup> needed time to rest.

While they refitted, the 6<sup>th</sup> were part of the force intended to invade Japan, they reviewed their nearly eighteen months of combat. Their assault teams worked well and were superbly armed. As they were once again brought up to strength and replacements trained, they would be ready to return to work. It was recognized that artillery fire was ineffective unless the Japanese were in the open. To achieve that goal and eliminate the predictability of attacks, the 6<sup>th</sup> found that:

Our preparatory fires became too stereotyped, allowing the enemy to take cover in caves only to come out fighting when the artillery fire lifted and our troops began the attack. To counteract this a five minute artillery preparation was fired, then lifted for five minutes wherein small arms were fired, then an additional five-minute artillery preparation was fired catching the enemy outside of caves and foxholes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 389.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 398.

<sup>5</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: MI Operation-Luzon Campaign*.

The 6<sup>th</sup> had certainly done its part in this brutal war. Several of the 6<sup>th</sup>'s sister divisions, part of Eichelberger's recently formed 8<sup>th</sup> Army, now began the process of clearing the Visayan Passages, the great maze of islands in the southern Philippines.

When MacArthur invaded Leyte in October 1944, he bypassed the great collection of islands in the southern Philippines. Of these islands, only three: Negros, Cebu, and Mindanao, involved substantial fighting. Mindanao, the second largest of the Philippine Islands, also contained the second largest Japanese garrison. Cebu had the second largest port in the islands and was viewed as a major staging area for an eventual invasion of Japan. The Japanese units on these islands had little hope of reinforcement, resupply, or evacuation. They would fight and die where they stood, or more appropriately, where they could hide in a cave or dig into the ground. Cebu was occupied by 14,500 Japanese soldiers.<sup>6</sup> Their opposition was the Americal Division.

The Americal Division had trained extensively in 1943 and 1944 for the type of combat they expected to see in the SWPA. They were seemingly proficient in tank-infantry operations and had assimilated the use of all possible support weapons into their scheme of maneuver. A potential problem for the Americal on Cebu was their less than full compliment of infantry regiments. Only two of the Americal's three infantry regiments were involved in the initial phases of the battle, the third RCT was the 8<sup>th</sup> Army reserve. At this point in the war, senior American commanders tended to look for targets of opportunity and needed some kind of combat force should that opportunity arise. There were not enough troops to do everything. The Americal was actually outnumbered when it first landed on Cebu. Fortunately, many of the 14,500 Japanese troops on Cebu were poorly trained, inadequately armed, or in some cases, not even combat troops. When the Americal landed, the opportunity for a quick victory seemed possible. However, that opportunity would be missed and another long battle of attrition

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 608.



**The Island of the Southern Philippines**

Source: Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*

Figure: XX

would take place. In the process, the doctrine of the Americal, while eventually successful, would be far from effective.

Interrogated after the war, a Japanese commander on Cebu stated that the Americal could have flanked his main positions easily in the battle's first days.<sup>7</sup> Such a move was unusual when fighting the Japanese but in this case it was possible. Upon landing, the Americal Division Commander, General Arnold, decided upon a frontal assault rather than a flanking maneuver for several reasons. First, his patrols could never find the extreme flanks of the Japanese position, a necessity for any flanking maneuver. Part of the problem was inadequate reconnaissance on the part of some of the Americal's infantrymen.<sup>8</sup> Second, Arnold did not have the troops to execute a flanking maneuver, protect his base area, and pin down Japanese forces to his immediate front. Had he possessed all three of his regiments Arnold might have opted for the flanking scenario rather than that of the frontal assault. A frontal assault would allow his division to use its overwhelming firepower superiority and hopefully keep casualties to a minimum.

In their reports after the battle, many of the line unit commanders had problems with two points: the doctrine of their division and the lack of aggressiveness on the part of many junior leaders. Lt. Colonel Arthur K. Amos, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, stated when asked what about his battalion concerned him after the Battle of Cebu

Not at all least in importance was the lack of continued aggressiveness on the part of leaders and men. Frequently a whole platoon would be pinned down or at least stopped by three or four Jap riflemen. Immediately the whole unit would begin to worry about an envelopment by one or more enemy. The find of a junior leader who, failing once in his attack, would have another plan in mind to take his objective and immediately, without orders, put the plan into effect, was the exception rather than the rule.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 616.

<sup>8</sup> 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Lessons Learned In Combat: Cebu, V-2 Operations*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

**Another officer concluded that:**

**Some units showed unwillingness to advance as long as enemy fire was being received. Rather, these units stopped completely and engaged the enemy in long, drawn out firefights, where a quick advance by fire and movement to the Jap positions would have succeeded and casualties among our troops would have been lighter.<sup>10</sup>**

**And another noted:**

**There were many cases where the effect of artillery, mortar, and the base of fire was lost because the infantry did not follow it up immediately. During the interval between cease firing of support weapons and the infantry attack the enemy regained from the shock and was able to bring fire on the assaulting troops as soon as they jumped off.<sup>11</sup>**

**Why this lack of aggressiveness? There are several possible reasons. The lack of quality replacements kept all units far from reaching peak efficiency. This was a theatre-wide problem, not one only found in the Americal Division. The lack of troops also played into operations here. Knowing no additional men or support is available must play some role in the decision-making process of even a junior leader. Finally, the chronology of the war cannot be overlooked; it was the spring of 1945. Hitler committed suicide and Nazi Germany surrendered while the men of the Americal assaulted another formidable Japanese position. The end of the war was in sight. A soldier is naturally hesitant to risk his life when he feels the end of a war is near. The Americal Division doctrine was to let their heavy weapons do the fighting.**

**The doctrine for most of the divisions in the SWPA was to use combined arms to eliminate robust Japanese defensive positions. The hills overlooking Cebu City were no different than those that other American units were then encountering on Luzon. Rather than using infantry, armor, and artillery, the Americal seemed to rely almost exclusively on firepower. Again the lack of**

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<sup>10</sup> Americal Division, *Lessons Learned In Combat: Cebu, V-2 Operations*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

troops may have played a role. Firepower was fine and often very effective but small unit commanders rarely even tried to win a fight with what they had. If encountering opposition, heavy weapons were brought forward without even trying to overrun or flank the Japanese position. Too much reliance was placed on tanks and artillery.<sup>12</sup> Other units in the SWPA followed a similar course but only when infantry attacks were ineffective. The general feeling amongst the commanders of the Americal was they would have been effective if pushed aggressively enough.

Over five thousand Japanese soldiers died on Cebu. A further eight thousand five hundred men surrendered in August. It required three months, from 26 March to 20 June, for the Americal Division to clear Cebu. Americal losses were 410 killed and 1,700 wounded. A further eight thousand men were out of action at one time or another because of disease or exhaustion. Nature, as well as the Japanese, took their toll on American soldiers.<sup>13</sup>

Panay and Negros were the Visayan Passage islands assigned to the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Panay was among the easiest operations carried out by American forces in the SWPA. Panay had a large Philippine guerilla force that controlled much of the island and the roughly 1,250 Japanese combat troops on Panay had little time to deal with them.<sup>14</sup> The Japanese commander on Panay decided to deploy his limited strength in the hills above Iloilo, hoping to deny his enemy use of the area's airfield and port facilities. This plan was rendered meaningless by the speed of the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division out of their beachhead, which compelled a Japanese withdrawal.<sup>15</sup> No heavy fighting occurred. Initial landings occurred on 15 March and by 20 March Panay was essentially secure. Some of the 40<sup>th</sup> now prepared for the invasion of Japan while the remainder invaded the island of Negros.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 617.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 602.

<sup>15</sup> 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *Operations Report: V1, V2, Panay-Negros Operations-Amphibious Landings*, p. 7.

Facing the 40<sup>th</sup> on Negros were a ragtag group of 13,500 men of whom only 4,000 were combat troops.<sup>16</sup> Not all of the Japanese troops were even armed. The Japanese commander, as had his counterpart on Panay, intended to conduct a protracted fight from his island's rugged mountains. Unlike his counterpart on Panay, he would not withdraw in the face of an American advance. As landing craft approached on 29 March, many American soldiers undoubtedly hoped for and anticipated an easy fight such as that they encountered on Panay. Instead, it would be 2 June before Japanese resistance finally ended. During that time, the battlehardened men of the 40<sup>th</sup>, victors at Ft. Stotsenburg and Clark Field, would engage in another round of vicious mountain fighting with their Japanese counterparts.

The positions encountered by the 40<sup>th</sup> were as formidable as those encountered in the Clark Field area of Luzon. Rather than launching costly infantry assaults on heavily defended hills and mountains the 40<sup>th</sup> paved the way for their foot soldiers by first utilizing the immense firepower available to them. In an attack against one hill, one in which infantry could make no headway:

... the decision was made to withdraw the troops from the hill for four days while all available air and artillery was concentrated on the positions. P-38's, F4U's, and A-20's carrying 250- and 1000- pound bombs bombed and strafed the hilltop in over 100 sorties. Massed fires of the division artillery were laid in successive concentrations on the area and intermittent shelling continued night and day. Early on May 15<sup>th</sup>, the fifth day, the infantry moved again to the crest under the protection of heavy artillery fire. The four-day preparation had proved devastating in its effect. The once dense vegetation had been completely cleared; not a leaf remained on the bare tree stumps; 41 enemy pillboxes were found blasted to bits; over 200 enemy dead were discovered, and our troops moved to the crest unopposed. Patrols working down the sides of the ridge made several minor contacts but the dazed remnants of the enemy force was unable to resist the

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 605.

occupation.<sup>17</sup>

The 40<sup>th</sup>'s assault teams then went to work clearing out any remaining Japanese pockets of resistance. Experienced in their craft, they were aided in their work by the decision to pulverize any Japanese positions before being committed. Once again firepower, when used with infantry, was effective and less costly. There were losses. At the cost of 370 men killed and over 1,000 wounded, the 40<sup>th</sup> had killed 7,100 Japanese soldiers.<sup>18</sup> The most formidable island fortress of the southern Philippines, Mindanao, now lay ahead.

General Eichelberger tasked the 24th Infantry Division, with elements of the 31st and 41st Infantry Divisions attached, with the mission of clearing eastern Mindanao. Any Japanese forces west of the Zamboanga Peninsula were cut off or had joined the approximately 43,000 Japanese soldiers remaining on the island. All three American divisions were veteran units, the 41<sup>st</sup> having been involved since the closing days of the Buna campaign. The 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had executed the Hollandia landings, fought along Breakneck Ridge on Leyte, and in several operations on Luzon. The 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division had helped eliminate the remnants of the Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Army along the Driniumor River the previous July. All eyes looked forward to the invasion of Japan. However, from 17 April to 30 June, these veteran American units would find the fighting as difficult and ferocious as it had ever been.

One reinforced regimental combat team of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, the 162<sup>nd</sup>, took part in this operation. As they approached the town of Davao down several of Mindanao's few usable roads, their experience in tank-infantry operations (Biak) bore fruit. At Davao

... the regiment was up against a very determined enemy fighting a well planned delaying action. The Infantry-Tank Team worked very efficiently together in destroying enemy pillboxes and emplacements. Most of the roads were flanked by heavy abaca

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<sup>17</sup> 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *Operations Report: VI, V2, Panay-Negros Operations-Amphibious Landings*, p.23.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 607-8.

fields that prohibited cross-country movement for the tanks. The enemy had placed automatic weapons off to the sides of the roads and had cleared fields of fire in the abaca. Infantry would work up ahead of the tanks and locate the pillboxes. When a battalion attacked, it usually used four tanks, two of which were deck-loaded with ammunition.<sup>19</sup>

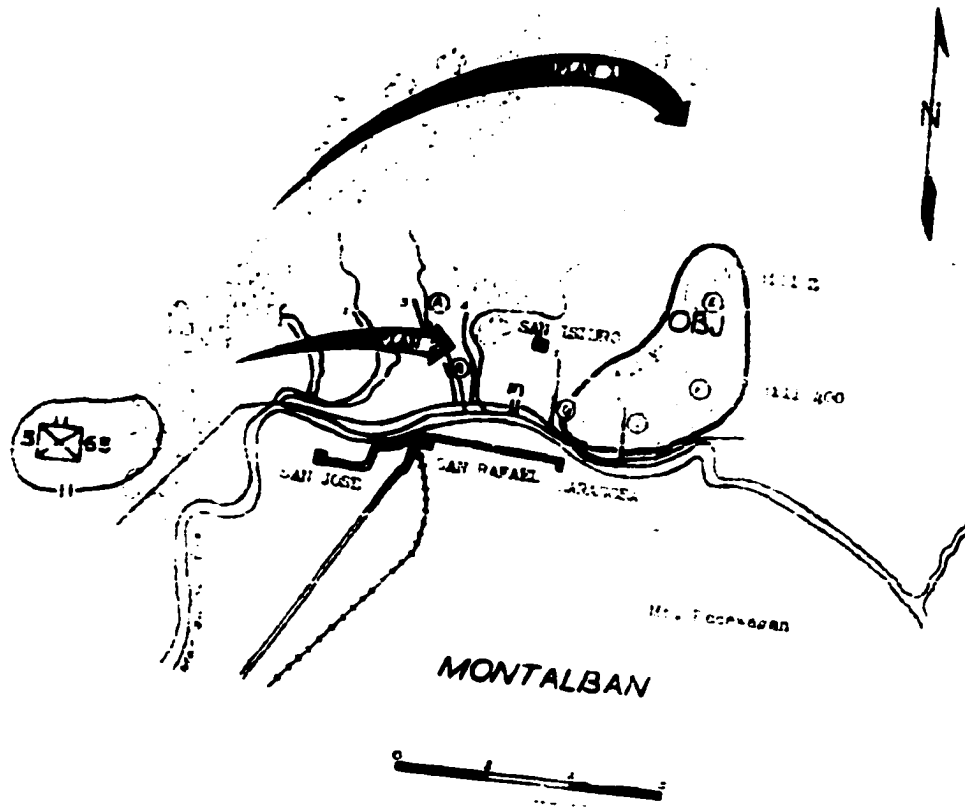
Their sound techniques, utilizing the strengths and capabilities of both their armor and infantry, resulted in resounding success. The 41<sup>st</sup> and its subordinate units seemed to rely more on the direct fire of tanks than the indirect fire of artillery to eliminate the stronger Japanese positions. The armor battalion attached in support of the 162<sup>nd</sup> RCT, the 716<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, was also a veteran unit, quit accustomed to working with infantry down narrow roads against Japanese pillboxes and bunkers. The 162<sup>nd</sup> also could do something seen far too rarely in the SWPA: conduct a night attack. American doctrine did not embrace this concept because of the coordination problems and possibilities of friendly casualties. In the jungle or mountainous terrain, coordination was even harder. Yet, a night attack against an unsuspecting enemy can reap enormous benefits. The 162<sup>nd</sup> saw such a benefit while planning their attack against Hill 400, a dominant terrain feature on the road to Davao.

Hill 400 was different than most of the high ground encountered by American infantry units during the SWPA ground war. There were large tracts of open ground leading to the hill. While not having to hack their way through thick jungle or laboriously climbing over steep hills and mountains may have seemed easier, advancing over nearly three miles of open ground, while under constant Japanese observation, was not an enticing proposition. A rare option was decided upon: the 162<sup>nd</sup> would move into position to attack Hill 400 by conducting a night march and then attack.

The attack started at 2000 hours. The Americans had established their usual perimeter at around 1600 hours, hoping to deceive the Japanese that they

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<sup>19</sup> 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Report Of Operations: Mindanao*, p. 13.



**The 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division night attack against Hill 400**

**Source: 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, *Report of Operations: Mindanao***

**Figure: XXI**

were setting up for the night. It proceeded well until the first enemy contact was encountered at Phase Line 3 (see map), still a considerable distance from the objective. The Japanese were scattered but time was needed to reorganize units in the dark. A similar delay for reorganization occurred at Phase Line 4, which was reached at 2220 hours. The infantry reached Phase Line 5 before the Japanese finally realized they were coming. The action at Phase Line 3 was most likely considered by the Japanese to be little more than a fight with a lost American patrol. Now that the Japanese knew where they were, it was wisely decided, very wisely to wait for dawn to resume the attack. Artillery fire plastered Hill Y, allowing it to be quickly occupied. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was now in position to secure Hill 400. A quick assault secured the objective. For the loss of 10 killed and 35 wounded, the 162<sup>nd</sup> had killed another 210 Japanese soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

The casualty figures attest to the overwhelming success of this operation. So why were so few large scale American night attacks conducted? The answer is command and control. In most battles in the SWPA, most of the terrain made any such attack impossible to coordinate. Even daytime attacks often ran into coordination problems. Here there was enough open ground. Still, while the movement to within striking distance took place at night, the main attack still took place in daylight. The official synopsis of the operation best explains the rationale for the decision to initiate a night movement: "Although the objective was rather deep for a successful night attack, and difficulties were encountered, the final casualty figures reflect the value of this type of action in appropriate circumstances."<sup>21</sup>

This was a risky operation that reaped great results. However, its riskiness was in many ways attributable to the almost complete neglect of night training in the SWPA. This error emanates in SWPA Headquarters but the individual divisions deserve blame as well. By this point in the war, these divisions were

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<sup>20</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Army, *Lessons Learned: Combat Notes, Luzon*, p. 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

accustomed to mapping their own training objectives. Why did they neglect night training? It was complicated, few men were experienced in nocturnal fighting, and once the sun went down, leaders thought of only defending a perimeter, not launching attacks. More attention in this area would have reaped huge rewards.

The soundness of the doctrine of the 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment was exemplified by their casualty figures from the campaign: 25 killed and 85 wounded.<sup>22</sup> Another veteran unit, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, suffered higher losses but committed their entire division to the battle, not just a single RCT.

Several protracted fights marked the advance of the 24<sup>th</sup> across eastern Mindanao. During this process, hastily prepared assault teams did fabulous work, becoming more proficient with each passing day. The 24<sup>th</sup> also corrected what it considered some basic faults in its doctrine during the operation and felt ready and confident to invade Japan. The only question is, why would a veteran unit like the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division not have formed assault teams beforehand? Why did they wait until the end of the war? Once again, the lack of guidance from higher headquarters was a detriment to the combat units of the SWPA.

Assault teams were needed in eastern Mindanao because the Japanese occupied ground was a maze of pillboxes and bunkers. To combat these enemy positions, the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division:

...formed rifle platoons into assault teams, and working with tanks, bazookas, and flame-throwers, they carefully picked the least strong pillbox, slammed heavy supporting fires against it, crept up under fire, put bazookas and flame-throwers and demolition charges to work, and finished it off with grenades and an assault.<sup>23</sup>

Using this technique, in one thirty-six hour period, the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment eliminated thirty-nine bunkers. It was, as the men of the 34<sup>th</sup> called it,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 648.

<sup>23</sup> 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Historical Report Of The Mindanao Operation*, p. 19.

“hot, hard, dangerous work.”<sup>24</sup> As the advance continued, a new, better method of employing supporting fires was needed and devised.

As the 34<sup>th</sup> continued its advance, the effects of indirect fire and even airstrikes were far from satisfactory. Pillboxes were often left untouched and the cratering of the ground created even more defensive positions for the resilient Japanese. Further, when encountering a Japanese position, the infantry had to fall back to a safe distance so they would not be in the line of fire. The Japanese would then reoccupy the positions.<sup>25</sup> Direct fire weapons were needed. Self-propelled howitzers and 90mm anti-aircraft guns were brought forward and were much more effective. The effects of the fire could also be observed. Still, the campaign took time. It still took casualties. The 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had 540 men killed and another 1885 wounded while liberating eastern Mindanao. For the men of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, little differed in what they encountered from the other American units on the island. With losses of 185 killed and 485 wounded, the 31<sup>st</sup> contributed to the total of 10,540 Japanese soldiers killed on the island.<sup>26</sup> The remaining survivors surrendered at the end of the war. The main islands of the southern Philippines were now secure.

The operations against the islands of the southern Philippines were considered minor when compared with the larger operations occurring at the same time on Luzon. Japanese strength on these islands was also considerably less than their main stronghold of Luzon. Yet, with the exception of Panay, each of these operations involved a protracted fight and heavy American casualties. Even on Negros, where the Japanese soldiers were not even all armed, it took over two months of vicious fighting to secure the island. What would have happened on the main islands of Japan where, though many would be unarmed, the number of potential enemy was considerably greater? The combat units of Eichelberger's 8<sup>th</sup> Army all were successful and their doctrine in most cases, efficient. Only the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Ross Smith. *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 647-8.

**Americal Division performed below expectation, even its own expectations. Yet, had they possessed their full compliment of combat units, it is very likely their performance would have been better. The war was over for most of the men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, though at the time they did not know it. While they were clearing these islands. Krueger's 6<sup>th</sup> Army was hard at work trying to secure the remainder of the island of Luzon.**

## CHAPTER TEN

**“The Japanese invariably choose domineering terrain in dense forests to conduct his stubborn defense. Attacks became impossible on a broad front and heavy undergrowth restricts movement to the flanks. The narrow approaches to his position are well covered due to automatic weapons emplaced in elaborately constructed pillboxes. Overwhelming firepower is necessary to reduce such a position and often calls for heavy caliber weapons such as 75mm, T-32, or a 50 caliber machine gun which have been found effective on such installations.”**

**Combat Operations Report: Luzon, P.I.  
161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**

**“To destroy the Japanese forces on Luzon the Americans had no alternative but to go into these mountain strongholds and dig the Nips out of each viciously defended cave and tunnel. How this was accomplished is the story of some of the most bitter and difficult mountain fighting of this war, a war which has seen the battles in Italy and Burma. It is the story of Baguio, the Villa Verde Trail, and Balete Pass.”**

**The Battle of Baguio  
37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**

**“Yamashita realized that if I Corps managed to fight its way into the Cagayan Valley – northeast of Baguio – the Luzon war would be all but over. The valley housed the nerve system of the enemy’s northern force. His ammunition and food stockpiles lay in the fertile flatland; the road through the valley represented his principal line of traffic for reinforcements and supplies. Keeping a foothold in the mountains resolved into a life – and – death issue with the Japs. They had to hold or eventually perish. Consequently, the Nip fought with all of his great courage throughout the Corps sector.”**

**Introduction to the Battle of Baguio  
*The Golden Cross: A History of the  
33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division In World War II***

**The remainder of the Luzon campaign was for the American Army a race against time. The American Army needed to close off the escape route into the**

**Cagayan Valley, a valley fertile enough to support the remnants of the Japanese Army still functioning in northern Luzon. The Cagayan Valley was also the gateway to another formidable line of mountainous defensive positions on the northernmost tip of the island. Failure to stop a Japanese escape meant a return to more of the same style of vicious fighting. To prevent this contingency, the key town of Baguio would first have to be secured, along with the vital Villa Verde Trail, the Balete Pass (the main point of entry into the valley), and possibly the Cagayan Valley itself. Four infantry divisions, the 25<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, and 37<sup>th</sup>, were available for these operations. All were understrength upon entry into battle and all would need long recuperation periods upon the conclusion of fighting. The most experienced of all the SWPA divisions, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, was no longer fit for combat after its ordeal on the Villa Verde Trail. As the war drew to a close, little had changed in the operational doctrine of American ground forces. It was tested, it was effective. It was also unavoidably costly.**

**Baguio was considered to be the first key to control of the Cagayan Valley. For American forces to control the valley, Baguio had to be seized. General Krueger tasked the 33rd Infantry Division, "The Golden Cross," with this mission. They had potential support in the form of two regiments of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division once those units were released from Manila. Initially, that support was considered crucial to success. The infantry regiments of the Golden Cross had seen their strength slowly dissipate as the Luzon campaign progressed and along with the other divisions of Krueger's 6<sup>th</sup> Army, there was little chance of reinforcement or relief. To reach Baguio with the least amount of losses was the key.**

**The planners of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division saw four possible ways to reach Baguio. Only one of them offered the speed and prospect of lighter than normal casualties. The first route, along Route 11, was dominated by hills and mountains and most of the bridges that were key to moving American heavy equipment were already destroyed. Advancing along such a treacherous road without heavy fire support**

was not something the operations section of the 33<sup>rd</sup> wanted to contemplate. A second route was called the Tuba Trail, much like the Villa Verde Trail that the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was about to enter. Windy, treacherous, flanked by mountains, and offering innumerable ambush sites, it would be a dangerous road to use. The third approach, Route 9, also offered too many possible points where even a small force of Japanese could delay a larger American force. The final route passed through Asin, after which the path to Baguio was fairly open. Asin was surrounded by wooded hills and had two tunnels a force would have to pass through to reach the open ground leading to Baguio. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division decided on the fourth option.<sup>1</sup>

The above scenarios were typical of the SWPA. Each involved the possibility of long, protracted battles in which the Japanese as the defender had the advantage. The men and doctrine of the 33<sup>rd</sup> were first-rate but heavy casualties were still a possibility. Why then select the Asin route when it would be closed off if the Japanese decided to blow the tunnels? The recently arrived 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division controlled an excellent road, the Naguilian-Baguio Road, which would allow the transport of enough men and weapons to flank the Asin area, so the tunnels would be unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> The movement was easy and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division's 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was then on high ground above the Asin Tunnel Ridge. Heavy weapons including tanks, anti-aircraft guns, self-propelled howitzers, and machine guns could now fire on the Japanese from distances as close as eight hundred yards.<sup>3</sup> Further, the Japanese were cut off. Still, the 130<sup>th</sup> did not begin an immediate movement for Baguio, which lay open before their eyes. They dug in for the night attack they knew was coming. The Japanese, cut off from their support, had to pass through the 130<sup>th</sup> or surrender. They were not going to surrender. During the night of 21-22 April 1945 massive banzai attacks were launched against the 130<sup>th</sup>'s perimeter. The Japanese never penetrated the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 468-470.

<sup>2</sup> 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Luzon Campaign*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

American line. Hundreds of Japanese soldiers, in some spots piled “three high,” were outside the American perimeter the following morning.<sup>4</sup> The fight for Baguio was rather easy after that. It was won when the 33<sup>rd</sup> flanked Asin, the main point of the Japanese defense. Not all Japanese positions, in fact very few of them, could be flanked in such a way. American doctrine, while at times seeming to just love blasting away at stationary Japanese positions, always looked for the easy way first. As the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division began its ordeal along the Villa Verde Trail, no easy way was available.

No single army division saw as much action in the SWPA as the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. They had done most of the fighting at Buna, occupied the majority of the Driniumor River line, and been actively involved on Leyte. Amazingly, their participation in northern Luzon along the Villa Verde Trail was considered by many of the division’s battlehardened veterans to be the toughest fighting they encountered in the war. The bunkers at Buna were relics when compared to the caves and dugouts along the Villa Verde Trail, but years of training and experience had made the men of the 32<sup>nd</sup> quite adept at combating Japanese fortifications. However, the division, which would fight along the twenty seven-mile long trail for one hundred nineteen days, had its own problems before ever encountering the Japanese.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was assigned a mission in this case far beyond its capabilities. It started the Villa Verde campaign with only 625 officers and 10,499 enlisted men, over one-third below its authorized strength of 16,000 men.<sup>5</sup> General Gill, the division commander quickly realized this unavoidable fact and asked his new Corps Commander, General Swift for reinforcements. According to General Gill, Swift’s had replied that: “... there were no reinforcements available either in the Corps or in General Krueger’s army.” There was very small chance of getting anything and I would have to use what I had to accomplish my

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<sup>4</sup> 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Historical Committee, *The Golden Cross: A History of The 33d Infantry Division In World War II*, p. 255.

<sup>5</sup> H.W. Blakeley, *The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division In World War II*, p. 251.

mission.”<sup>6</sup> Securing the trail was not the only mission of the 32<sup>nd</sup>. They had to build a supply road at the same time because the Villa Verde Trail was little more than “a foot trail over the mountains.”<sup>7</sup> As the fighting dragged on and the men of the 32<sup>nd</sup> tired, General Gill noticed that “morale was poor because the men were tired: they had been in there in combat for months; they had had only a little rest after Leyte and during January, February, March, and April we had to fight the Japs on the trail and build a road at the same time.”<sup>8</sup> The manpower problems of the SWPA really began to reveal themselves here. Why were there no reinforcements for Krueger’s army? Half of Krueger’s strength was taken away from him when Eichelberger’s 8<sup>th</sup> Army was formed and the remaining divisions in theatre were off the line preparing for the invasion of Japan. MacArthur always looked forward. Unfortunately, he forgot the men who were still fighting as he planned his grand invasion of the Japanese home islands. The extra men were needed. The Villa Verde Trail was a formidable enemy position. General Krueger best described the terrain in the area. He noted that:

... it was much worse than any the Division had so far encountered. Hills with nearly perpendicular slopes and deep precipitous ravines made all movements exceedingly difficult. The enemy had, moreover, utilized the terrain to best advantage by constructing numerous, mutually supporting cave positions, which had to be reduced one by one, in order to allow the eastward advance of the Division to continue. This advance was, moreover, flanked 1500-2000 yards north of and parallel to the Villa Verde Trail by Mt. Imugan, on the forward slopes of which the enemy had established defensive positions and artillery observation posts. The Mt. Imugan positions dominated a stretch of over two miles of the Villa Verde Trail and his observation stations enabled the enemy to adjust his artillery fire on troops and vehicles moving along the trail, which ran along the crest of razor-back ridges and formed the only route of advance. Besides, the Mt. Imugan positions enabled the enemy to repulse any direction attack

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Jaquelin Smith, *Always A Commander: The Reminiscences of General William H. Gill*, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

through the valley north of the trail and constituted an ever present threat to the line of communications of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division. Under the circumstances, with the enemy holding Mt. Imugan, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division had no choice but to crack the enemy defenses on the dominating hills directly in its front some four miles west of Imugan village, since by-passing them was impossible.<sup>9</sup>

It would be another typical slugfest.

As the 32<sup>nd</sup> advanced up the trail for one hundred nineteen days it encountered a wide range of Japanese positions. The smaller ones, usually encountered in ambushes made all so easy by nature along the windy trail, were dealt with one way, the larger ones another. Many American infantry divisions during World War II created assault teams. The teams created by the 32<sup>nd</sup> consisted of fourteen men, divided between an assault group and a covering group. The assault group had a two-man flame-thrower team, a two-man demolition team, and a four-man close support team armed with a machine gun and rifles. The covering group had four additional riflemen and two others armed with Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs).<sup>10</sup> Years of experience had taught these men that certain weapons that may have been effective in earlier campaigns were of little use against Japanese cave positions. An infantryman put it best when he said that

...fighting the Japs in caves means that you have to take what they dish out until you can get in and blow it or neutralize it prior to closing in. This cannot be done with hand grenades. We found that by making three-pound blocks of TNT, with pull-type igniters, they could be thrown a considerable distance.<sup>11</sup>

Pole charges, which were little more than blocks of TNT wrapped around a ration box and attached to a bamboo pole, were also widely used. Added

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<sup>9</sup> H. W. Blakeley, *The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division In World War II*, p. 223-4.

<sup>10</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, *Lessons Learned: Combat Notes, Luzon*, p. 34-5.

<sup>11</sup> 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Combat History: Luzon*, p. 7.

firepower was needed when positions were dug into caves as deep as seventy feet.<sup>12</sup> One such position overlooking the Villa Verde Trail was called Hill 505.

“Hill 505 was a honey-combed shell of tunnels and caves.”<sup>13</sup> Securing the top of the hill was not terribly difficult. Clearing three fingers off it were. Several attacks against these fingers were repulsed, the Japanese positions as strong as ever and nearly impossible to locate. To break the stalemate, each finger was attacked from three different directions, a reserve always ready to exploit any breakthrough, and due to the multiple directions of attack, the Japanese could not shift their forces.<sup>14</sup> Then the assault teams went to work. Heavier supporting weapons such as tanks, heavy artillery, and self-propelled howitzers were of little use due to the difficult terrain, so it was left to the infantry to secure Hill 505. The caves were eliminated in the following fashion:

When the assault group was in range, WP grenades were thrown inside. Covered by this smoke and the fire of the close support team, the flame-thrower team advanced to the entrance of the cave and expended the entire load into the cave entrance. Simultaneously, the demolition team approached the position from above. Here, a trench was dug approximately 18 inches deep to allow the insertion of a crater charge as near the center of the position as possible. In approximately 90% of the cases, the explosion successfully neutralized the position.<sup>15</sup>

Caves were neutralized this way 90 percent of the time. If it had been 100 percent the war would not have lasted as long as it did. Even the best men, doctrine, and weapons did not always work. Adjusting to the unsuccessful 10 percent was the difference between victory and defeat. The Villa Verde Trail was one hundred nineteen days of Hill 505s, ambushes, and quick firefights. When the Villa Verde Trail was finally secured and the road to the Cagayan Valley open, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was pulled off the line. They were unfit for further operations.

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<sup>12</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, *Lessons Learned: Combat Notes, Luzon*, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Combat History: Luzon*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, *Lessons Learned: Combat Notes, Luzon*, p. 36.

Losses to the 32<sup>nd</sup> in this campaign were severe. In addition to 916 men killed and 2,516 wounded, they had the staggering total of 4961 non-battle casualties.<sup>16</sup> General Gill said: "... there are casualties other than battle casualties, particularly after a long period of fighting and exposure to the elements, to the diseases and to all the things that reduce the capabilities of fighting men."<sup>17</sup> Since there were few replacements and no reinforcements, the three infantry regiments of the division were rotated off the line for short periods of time so they could rest. They then went right back into action. The non-battle casualties (disease, exhaustion, shell-shock, heat prostration), nearly half the strength of the division at the beginning of the campaign, usually returned to the unit, though their combat effectiveness may have not been the same. How did the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division manage to win this battle? Their doctrine was sound. They knew how to fight their enemy. They took the necessary time. Had more men been available the Villa Verde campaign would not have lasted one hundred nineteen days.

The final piece to the puzzle of the Cagayan Valley, the Balete Pass, was the responsibility of another tired American infantry division, the 25<sup>th</sup>. The Balete Pass was the entry and exit point of the Cagayan Valley. Should the Americans control the pass, the Japanese would be unable to keep fleeing and surviving. The Balete Pass absorbed an entire American division, the 25<sup>th</sup>, for over two months. Balete Pass itself was

...A narrow, seventy-five yard wide opening in the great east-west ridge line which forms the water shed of the Digdig and Santa Fe Rivers, the former flowing south to the Central Plains, and the latter flowing north toward the rich, Fertile Cagayan Valley.<sup>18</sup>

To reach the pass and block a Japanese escape into the Cagayan Valley, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment first had to eliminate several formidable Japanese positions enroute, including Lone Tree Ridge and Myoko

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<sup>16</sup> H.W. Blakeley, *The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division In World War II*, p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Jaquelin Smith, *Always A Commander: The Reminiscences of General William H. Gill*, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Battle Report: Luzon Campaign*, p. 30.

Mountain. Due to the impassable terrain, these Japanese positions could neither be bypassed nor outflanked. The 27<sup>th</sup> would have to blast the Japanese out.

Myoko Mountain was the “dominating hill-mass of the entire area south of Balete Pass and north of Putlan. This mountain, southeast of Balete Pass, rises to a peak of over 4000 feet above sealevel.”<sup>19</sup> Firepower, as usual, was needed but would be very difficult to employ because of the rough terrain. Individual soldiers practically crawled up high mountain slopes. Wherever they advanced, the men of the 27<sup>th</sup> met a hail of Japanese fire. To reach the pass from the initial start point was a distance of 3000 yards, less than two miles. It took thirty-seven days.

To secure Myoko Mountain meant blasting the Japanese out of their log pillboxes. The infantry were good but they needed help. Sherman tanks were available but the ground was virtually impassable. Artillery and mortar fire was ineffective. The Japanese positions were in the thickest of jungle and hard to pinpoint. Further, the Japanese tended to wait until the American infantry were only a few yards away before opening fire, making artillery support impossible.<sup>20</sup> Armored bulldozers created paths for the tanks to move, often pushing them into position. Infantry always accompanied the tanks, preventing ambushes and killing Japanese soldiers flushed into the open. The horrible terrain must have convinced the Japanese that tanks would play no role in the battle because they had no weapons to deal with them.<sup>21</sup> Myoko Mountain was finally secured on 5 May. In addition to the 75mm guns of the Shermans, a flame-throwing tank was used extensively. Japanese soldiers either burned to death in their positions or were cut down by riflemen, adding to the twelve hundred of their comrades who perished in this fight.<sup>22</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> succeeded despite not employing generic assault teams as many of its sister units did. Much like the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, they made the tank their main instrument of destruction, hence the herculean efforts just bringing

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

**them into position. There was no time to rest. Lone Tree Ridge lay before the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and Balete Pass.**

**Lone Tree Ridge contained a plethora of Japanese strongpoints. Most were taken without difficulty. For one of the few times in this late stage of the war, flanking attacks were possible, though with considerable difficulty. Unprepared for attacks against their flanks and rear, most Japanese positions were easy pickings. However, to secure the entire ridge, one position became a nuisance.**

**This Japanese strongpoint was**

**...600 yards south of Lone Tree Hill and required seven days and the employment of three companies on successive days. This was another reverse slope situation which covered three high points fifty to seventy-five yards apart in the shape of an equilateral triangle. Each piece of ground was ingeniously organized with deep connecting tunnels cut into the reverse slopes with vertical shafts at the ends for firing positions. White phosphorous grenades thrown into some of the caves emitted smoke through as many as five holes in the hillside.<sup>23</sup>**

**A heavy volume of artillery and mortar fire fell on this position. While doing no damage it did keep the Japanese inside their caves. Then, using a method similar to that of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, WP grenades were thrown into the caves. Fleeing Japanese soldiers were quickly cut down by small arms fire. Those in the deeper parts of the cave were sealed in, neutralized, and doomed. The 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was also involved in the fight for Balete Pass.**

**The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment also engaged the Japanese in a series of slugfests in its Balete Pass operations, the most notable of which occurred at Norton's Knob and Crump Hill. The first action occurred at Norton's Knob, which was preceded by**

**...a long and knife-edged ridge, with a narrow jungle trail and precipitous sides, descending into a small saddle just before rising onto the heavily forested Norton's Knob. The**

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

defenders of Norton's Knob selected the bottom of the saddle as the point from which to deny access to the hill and covered the trail at that point with a series of eight pillboxes on the side of the hill, each containing a machine gun, with fields of fire converging on a single strand of barbed wire across the trail in the center of the saddle.<sup>24</sup>

For five days the infantry attacked without success. Terrain and jungle. Japan's great allies throughout the ground war in the SWPA, again aided the defender. The steep hills made maneuver impossible and visibility was nil due to the heavy vegetation. A flanking maneuver was tried but the ground was impassable. Further, another heavily defended saddle was encountered along the possible flanking route. The 161<sup>st</sup> then resorted to their other option: firepower. To make avenues of approach and enhance visibility, American artillery and mortars went to work. Ten thousand rounds of heavy ammunition landed on their Japanese targets.<sup>25</sup> The infantry were now able to secure the south slope and bring up 37mm anti-tank guns and self-propelled howitzers for direct fire missions, the jungle having been erased from the equation. The pillboxes were brought under direct fire, several of them having survived the artillery fires, and flame-thrower teams finished the job. Engineers then enlarged a trail enough to allow a tank and a self-propelled howitzer to reach the top of the hill. From that dominant position the armored vehicles were able to cover the infantry as they cleared the last Japanese pillboxes. Again the Japanese believed the ground was impassable to tanks and again they fled in panic at the sight of the steel monsters whose armor was impervious to all their weapons.<sup>26</sup> The 161<sup>st</sup> now set its sights on Crump Hill, an objective very similar to Norton's Knob.

To reach Crump's Hill, the 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry had to advance along Highley Ridge, slightly north of Norton's Knob. Once again the 161<sup>st</sup> attempted the "indirect approach," looking fruitlessly for avenues of approach outflanking

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<sup>24</sup> 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Combat Operations Report: Luzon, P.I.*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

**Crump's Hill. When these efforts failed, the "direct approach," American style, was employed. Twenty-three thousand rounds of artillery, tank, and mortar ammunition pounded Crump Hill for twelve days.<sup>27</sup> While the bombardment continued several infantry attacks were attempted but each ended in failure. However, at the end of twelve days of shelling, the hill was secured with little trouble.**

**On 13 May 1945 Balete Pass fell into the hands of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Although they would continue fighting north of the pass, the principal escape rout for tens of thousands of cut off Japanese soldiers was now closed. Along with securing the Villa Verde Trail, the campaign in Luzon was essentially over, though thousands of Japanese soldiers, along with their commander, General Yamashita, remained in mountain strongholds. Though unable to influence the course of the war, they planned to fight a guerilla campaign, tying down as many American forces as possible. The fight for Balete Pass had been costly in both American and Japanese lives. Seven thousand Japanese soldiers had perished while the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division suffered losses of 685 killed and 2090 wounded, over one third the strength of their infantry regiments.<sup>28</sup> Once again, noncombat casualties dissipated the strength of the infantry regiments, accounting for another one thousand men. The ground war in the SWPA was over, but the men of the theatre did not yet know it. In this final stage of the war, understrength, overextended American infantry divisions, trusting their doctrine, toughness, and material superiority, defeated a numerically superior, tenacious enemy. That enemy had the advantage of conducting a defensive campaign in some of the worst military terrain on the planet, yet were eventually overcome. The only objective left was the home islands of Japan.**

**MacArthur's forward vision was the reason for the unnecessary plight of the 6<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, and 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions. By this point in the war,**

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph In The Philippines*, p. 539.

**MacArthur had the equivalent of over twenty divisions available to him, with more on the way from Europe. The invasion of Japan was not scheduled to begin until November 1945 with most forces not being committed until March 1946. There is no plausible reason for five divisions to wither on the vine as massive forces prepared for an invasion many months down the road. A change of objectives to the remaining ground forces on Luzon, such as isolating but not destroying the Japanese ground forces still on the island, would have preserved Krueger's tired divisions and still rendered the enemy incapable of more than harassing attacks. However, MacArthur wanted the island secured. Such was war in the SWPA.**

## CONCLUSION

**“The application of lessons learned in our battle for Baguio must be the guiding light in our training for the battle of Japan. The things you will read in this book are not new – you have heard them before. But these are the things that actual combat has shown we must correct because they are still our faults. These lessons have been paid for in blood; let us learn them well.”**

**33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division  
Historical Report: Luzon Campaign**

**How successful was the American fighting man in the SWPA? Based upon the ultimate result, the surrender of Japan, he was of course very successful. However, that success must be measured against the enemy they were fighting and the doctrine American units utilized. Victory in war does not necessarily go to the best army. Several years earlier in the Winter War (1939-1940) an enormous Russian army attacked a much smaller Finnish army in the throes of winter. The Russians, in addition to their numerical superiority, also possessed overwhelming material superiority. Where they were lacking, and in this area the Finns excelled, was in the skills of the individual soldier and in leadership. The Finnish strengths allowed them to take a frightful toll in Russian lives. They held on for six months until sheer weight of Russian numbers and material finally forced the resourceful, brave Finns to succumb. Was the situation in the SWPA similar to that of the Winter War?**

**Unlike the Winter War, both sides in the SWPA were quite skilled in the type of combat they used. The Japanese strategy in all the battles described in the preceding pages was to occupy strong defensive positions, both natural and manmade, and force the Americans to attack them. The Japanese were skillful and tenacious, and they were also never overwhelmingly outnumbered, unlike the Finns in the Winter War. American forces never possessed a 5 to 1 or 10 to 1**

advantage in ground troops. The ground war in the SWPA developed into a brutal slugfest because the Japanese would fight and die for whatever position they occupied. Skill in selecting positions and defending them enhanced this fanatical determination. To overcome this, American forces would also have to exhibit skill and determination.

After the Battle of Buna it was obvious that in a ground war to the Japanese would have to be defeated one position at a time. The question on the minds of American ground commanders was, how best to do this? American doctrine revolved around one essential point: win each individual fight with as little loss of life as possible. Flanking maneuvers were the preferred method of fighting and when used were very successful. Such maneuvers secured objectives with minimal casualties. Unfortunately, such maneuvers were rare in the SWPA because the land did not allow it. Heavy jungle, mountains, ravines, rivers, etc.; all stood in the way of flanking maneuvers. The frontal assault was usually the only option. In such an attack, the firepower available to even small American infantry units was gladly utilized. The standard rifle squad of twelve men or even the rifle platoon of thirty-six men could do little against the pillboxes, bunkers, and cave positions held by the Japanese, so assault teams were created to help them when they encountered positions beyond their capabilities. When a position was too strong for the weapons of an assault team, tanks, artillery, and airpower were employed. Sometimes, amazingly, even that was not enough. Yet American ground forces rarely grew frustrated. They simply found another way.

With each battle of the war, Japanese positions became stronger. Experience and the formidable terrain of the Philippines aided the Japanese in their battles with the American Army. As manpower shortages began to present a dilemma to American commanders or because they simply had no other choice, it became preferable to blast the Japanese with every weapon available rather than launching costly infantry assaults. Here, American material superiority was key. If you had the weapons and they were effective then use them. When that was not

enough, and there were occasions that it was not, the preferred method became sealing the Japanese in their holes. Japanese doctrine mandated a firepower directed American doctrine. Many Japanese pillboxes or bunkers were flanked but unlike most situations in a war, a successful flanking maneuver did not compel a Japanese soldier to believe his situation was hopeless. He still remained where he was. Instead of surrendering, he had to be blown out. This method was not developed because of a lack of aggressiveness on the part of American infantry. There was just no other choice. In battle after battle the Americans shelled the Japanese continuously only to discover that despite the use of every conceivable weapon the enemy was still waiting for them when the attack was launched. The doctrine became to use whatever worked. Tanks, artillery, airpower, explosives, infantry assaults, bulldozers, or a combination of two or more, whatever worked was used. By the end of the war the American soldier of the SWPA had become as adept at destroying Japanese positions as the Japanese were in defending them.

By the end of the Luzon campaign, most of Krueger's 6<sup>th</sup> Army and Eichelberger's 8<sup>th</sup> Army were preparing for the invasion of Japan. Individual divisions, though exhausted, were flushed with success. They also realized that improvements still had to be made. The following are excerpts from several of the After Action Reports of the Divisions that fought in the SWPA. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division wrote:

“The A-T (Anti-tank) Company must be trained to operate as a Rifle Company. In terrain such as we encountered, there was no need for an A-T Company as such.”

“We must stress night operations and operations in rainy weather. More and more we will be operating under such conditions, and our training must point to it.”

“In operations where the Jap is dug in, we find it necessary to use the bazooka and flame-thrower. The assault team must be kept forward at a point where it can be moved into the action at the time needed. Instances will arise when two or more assault teams are necessary for one battalion. Unless regiment

**foresees this and assigns the assault teams to the battalion ahead of time, delays occur which may bog down a fast-moving attack.”**

**“A decision to attack must be accompanied by a determination on the part of every leader and man to keep moving forward. Any reluctance on the part of even a squad leader to push his men forward endangers the entire attack. Men must not be allowed to bog down. Training during periods out of the line must stress this factor continuously.”**

**“We do not follow our supporting fires close enough. When we have followed it, we have usually reached the objective with a minimum of casualties and proceeded to mop up the Japs in their caves without too much trouble. When we have waited fifteen or twenty minutes after the supporting fires have lifted and moved in, the Jap is out of his hole in position to hold us up.”**

**“The M-7, self-propelled, 105mm Howitzer and the 4.2” Mortar have proved themselves to be invaluable in direct, close-in support... In the reduction of strongly built emplacements and fortifications, the M-7 cannot be matched for speed and precision.”<sup>1</sup>**

**The lack of ground troops in American infantry division is noted here. Why the need for an anti-tank company? There was little threat of Japanese tanks in this theatre and the small caliber anti-tank guns employed in these companies were generally ineffective against fortifications. Riflemen were needed. Putting the assault teams in the hands of a lower commander was also a wise recommendation considering they were often needed at a moment’s notice. Requests under fire were not the optimal way of getting the well-trained, well-equipped assault teams into action. A very revealing comment made in this report harks back to the days of Buna. Troops still did not always follow right behind their own artillery fire thus depriving an attacking unit of its true shock value. At this late stage of the war, that would have been a difficult problem to fix. Finally, the self-propelled howitzer employed in a role for which it was not intended, direct fire against static positions, received the accolades it truly deserved. The skill with which these moving guns were employed won many battles and displayed the**

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<sup>1</sup> 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, *Historical Report: Luzon Campaign*, p. 3-8.

skill and ingenuity of the American soldier. They received a weapon and adapted it to the environment in which it was used.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division made several different observations:

“Poor coordination between tanks and infantry.”

“This operation illustrated the futility of attempting to shoot the Jap out of a position. He can be worn down by artillery and mortar fire, but if he elects to remain and fight to the last man as he did in the Cabaruan Hills, he can prolong the fight indefinitely. The only sure way of ending his resistance is for the Infantry to move in on his positions and dig him out of them by hand.”<sup>2</sup>

The positions encountered by the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment were the type that could only be eliminated in close by infantry. This is why by the end of the campaign the division was physically and mentally exhausted. The lack of coordination between tanks and infantry also demonstrates that not all American infantry units placed a high level of priority on training between their foot soldiers and available armor support. The lack of guidance from a higher headquarters played a role here. Where was the Operations and Training section of 6<sup>th</sup> Army, 8<sup>th</sup> Army, and SWPA? They were planning future operations, not managing ongoing battles, which should have been their first priority. On the subject of infantry-tank coordination, the commanding officer of the 603d Medium Tank Company, (a unit which had fought on Biak, Leyte, and Luzon) and a man who had previously criticized infantry units for their lack of support for his tanks, noted at the end of the Luzon campaign:

...the only defense against attempts of trickery is to remain constantly on the alert. On one occasion a tank eliminated a machine gun nest, and was then held up by a fallen tree. Later, when many infantry troops had passed through a lone Jap, cleverly concealed in an individual hole alongside the road, attempted to rush against the tank with a land mine. An alert infantryman thwarted this attempt. The splendid support given the tanks by dismounted troops undoubtedly prevented the enemy

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<sup>2</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. *History: MI Operations (Luzon Campaign)*, p. 7.

from knocking out more tanks.<sup>3</sup>

All units did not use tanks in the same way. If an invasion of Japan had taken place, armor support would have been critical. In their training memoranda prior to the invasion of Japan, the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division noted the value of armor and the need for continued training in tank-infantry operations. The 40<sup>th</sup>, in addition to its stressing continued training for reducing cave positions also stressed the need for joint infantry-tank training.<sup>4</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division noted:

...if maximum benefit is to be gotten from Infantry-Tank action units must have thorough training in actually working with tanks. You do not learn to work as a team on the battlefield... We would like to have tanks with us in almost all situations and believe we could use them to good advantage.<sup>5</sup>

A common theme in many AAR's was the need for adequate replacements. As units prepared for the invasion of Japan, the first landings in Japan were tentatively scheduled for November 1945; there was time to assimilate replacements into combat units. During the most desperate time of the Villa Verde Campaign for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, they were woefully short of ground troops. Replacements arrived but according to the division's 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, it may have been better for them not to arrive in the middle of a battle.

The regiment recorded that

there was a definite lack of training noted among all replacements received by the Regiment during this campaign. It is felt that upon receipt of replacements to a combat organization, sufficient time should be given to train men and prepare them for combat. This would not only save considerable casualties, through their lack of knowledge and own negligence, but would tend to raise the efficiency of the organization in their assigned mission. More training with the older men of the organization not only tends to instill more confidence in the new soldier, but of the older soldier toward him as he feels he can trust him to hold up his

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<sup>3</sup> 603d Medium Tank Company, *Historical Report: Luzon, P.I. Operation*.

<sup>4</sup> 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *Training Memorandum: 15 June 1945*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, *Training Memorandum: 2 August 1945*, p. 1-2.

part of the work in combat.<sup>6</sup>

Assimilating replacements with the available time was key to all units. Certain units, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, developed extensive programs for the training of replacements. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Division:

...when the tactical situation permitted, elements of the Division not in combat were assembled in rear areas for rehabilitation and training. During these periods units were able to give attention to equipment maintenance and shortages, to correct minor deficiencies in training, and to supplement the basic training of replacements... Replacements received while a unit was heavily engaged in combat were assembled in rear areas for a brief indoctrination and training period under the supervision of qualified officers and NCOs. Later, when the Division occupied a quiet sector for a few weeks, a Division Replacement Training Center was set up. At the Division Replacement Training Center, replacements, in groups of approximately 300, were given a two week intensive training course. Personnel received instruction from officers and men of the units to which they would be assigned. All of these instructors had combat experience and fully appreciated the importance of their task. Training included the firing of weapons, scouting and patrolling, sketching, assault team work, the operation of ambushes, and small unit tactics.<sup>7</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division went even further than the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Before entering the Leyte campaign, they had sent their replacements, under experienced supervision, to Mangus Island for extensive patrol operations against scattered Japanese forces. The replacements embarked upon:

“1) Long range patrols over primary trails, with directions to cover an average of twenty miles in four days, and to include side trails and all known hideouts customarily used by the enemy. These were ordinarily 10-man patrols, habitually inclusive of 7 trainees and 3 experienced men. Normal duration of the patrol was six days.

2) Close-in patrols moved over secondary trails to cover completely the inexhaustible # of native trails in a relatively small area. This type of patrol stressed a painstaking search for any evidence of previous Jap occupation, and sought out prospective hideouts and suitable locations for ambush. 12 men

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<sup>6</sup> 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *History: Luzon*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *After Action Report: Luzon Campaign*.

operated together in these patrols with an average proportion of 2 trainees for each experienced man."<sup>8</sup>

The results were fast and obvious. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry commented that:

"The concrete proof of the success of this practical training in the Admiralty Islands is evidenced in the final casualty figures: 1383 of the enemy killed and captured, as compared to our losses of 2 KIA and 11 WIA over the entire period of operations. Advantages gained from this training included:

1. Indoctrination of replacements with the realization that they could beat the Japs at his own game, a mental factor destined to be of value in later operations.
2. Enhanced experience of patrol leaders.
3. Development of teamwork in smaller units to a high degree.
4. Indoctrination of the individual soldier with confidence in his weapon and knowledge of his ability to take care of himself and his equipment under most adverse conditions of terrain and climate.
5. Development of proficiency of both officers and men in scouting and patrolling and preparation of ambushes. Along with the attainment of excellent physical condition.

During the pending rehabilitation training phase on Luzon, unit commanders will once more be faced with the problem of welding an efficient unit from a large group of replacements leavened with a nucleus of combat experienced personnel. Utilization, during this phase, of a system of practical patrol and ambush training along the lines of that employed in the Admiralty Islands will prove of material assistance in the development of leadership and teamwork in units."<sup>9</sup>

There were enough scattered Japanese garrisons throughout the Philippines to embark on such a program. With the invasion of Japan looming, potentially the most difficult operation of the war, such a program would have kept the number of completely green troops to a minimum. However, SWPA Headquarters mandated no such program. Further, the assimilation program utilized by the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry was devised by the division. Again, no such program was mandated for all divisions by SWPA. To those in the highest echelons of command, in particular General MacArthur, the state of his individual divisions seemed of little concern.

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<sup>8</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigade, *Historical Report: Luzon Campaign*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

**They just had to meet his timeline. It was up to individual divisions to make sure they were ready.**

**Earlier, great emphasis was placed on manuals and the lessons learned in the war's first campaigns as a building block for the future. In none of the After Action Reports of the Leyte and Luzon campaigns are the additions to the army's field manual inventories of 1943 and 1944 mentioned. They receive only scant attention in the reports of the various New Guinea battles. There is an old Army maxim: you throw away the book the minute the first shot is fired. In this case, that was an accurate statement.**

**Why the ambivalence towards the manuals that required such effort to create? In some cases, they were not ready in time, in others, units deferred to veterans rather than books when formulating Standard Operating Procedures. The manuals, if even referred to, existed as a training tool. Further, the caves, tunnels, and fortresses that existed on Luzon were not in the then current manuals. The nature of the SWPA ground war radically changed between Buna and Baguio. For the manuals to be much use on the Japanese home islands another major revision, a revision comparable to that which occurred between Buna and the onset of MacArthur's 1944 New Guinea campaign was needed. The war was over before the revision could take place.**

**A great bone of contention between General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz had been how best to defeat Japan. In the end, President Roosevelt had allowed each man to launch his own offensive with the same goal: occupation of a strategic position from which to launch an invasion of the Japanese home islands. MacArthur's drive was in the SWPA, Nimitz's across the Central Pacific. Which was more successful?**

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA</b>			<b>JAPANESE KIA</b>
	<b>KIA(US)</b>	<b>WIA(US)</b>	<b>US TROOPS COMMITTED</b>	
Buna	690	1,680	13,000	12,000
Wakde-Sarmi	415	2,550	11,000	4,629
Biak	435	2,360	15,000	4,700
Aitape	450	2,550	12,000	8,821
Leyte	3,504	11,991	120,000	48,790
Luzon	8,310	29,560	250,000	205,535
Cebu	835	2,300	14,000	5,545
Negros	410	1,700	14,000	7,480
Mindanao	820	2,880	40,000	27,510
<b>TOTAL US CASUALTIES (KIA &amp; WIA)= 71,700</b>				
<b>TOTAL JAPANESE KIA= 327,310</b>				

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>CENTRAL PACIFIC</b>			<b>JAPANESE KIA</b>
	<b>KIA(US)</b>	<b>WIA(US)</b>	<b>US TROOPS COMMITTED</b>	
Guadalcanal	1,592	4,283	15,000	28,146
Tarawa	1,069	2,050	10,000	4,690
Kwajelein	142	854	10,000	4,938
Saipan		16,525	60,000	28,000
Guam	1,919	7,122	40,000	17,300
Tinian	290	1,515	7,000	6,050
Palaus	1,948	8,515	30,000	13,600
Iwo Jima	5,885	17,272	60,000	20,000
Okinawa	7,613	31,807	200,000	110,000 <sup>10</sup>
<b>TOTAL US CASUALTIES (KIA &amp; WIA)= 110,401</b>				
<b>TOTAL JAPANESE KIA= 232,724</b>				

MacArthur's forces suffered significantly fewer casualties than their Marine and Army counterparts in the Central Pacific while killing even more enemy soldiers. The combat in both sections of the Pacific War was ferocious. Yet there are few accolades forwarded to the men of Biak, Leyte, and Luzon. The

<sup>10</sup> There are slight variations among the sources. This table represents the most accurate composite numbers.

forces in the Central Pacific have received credit for nearly sixty years, deservedly so, for their role in the defeat of Japan. However, the men of the SWPA played as significant a role in the ultimate defeat of Japan in perhaps the harshest environment in the world. They too fought the Japanese.




















What would have happened if the United States had invaded Japan? It would have been the Battle of Luzon magnified several times. Japan is a rugged, mountainous country. The defensive possibilities were endless. Further, American forces would be facing larger numbers of Japanese soldiers than they had yet faced, reinforced by a loyal civilian population. Night perimeters would be very active. Protracted fights would have been the norm. It is conceivable that many Japanese cities would have suffered the same fate as Manila: total destruction and massive civilian casualties. How many on both sides would have died? The exhausted divisions of the Pacific were expecting the help of the divisions of the European Theatre in this invasion. Unfortunately, the European divisions would have been of little use in the Pacific. Fighting the Japanese was not the same as fighting the Germans. Also, many of the divisions of the SWPA may have been called upon for combined attacks. The fact that each division in the SWPA fought war in its own unique way had not yet entered the equation. Though the Leyte and Luzon campaigns involved multiple divisions, rarely did two infantry divisions participate in a single attack. The lack of a specific theatre-wide doctrine would have been a problem. The American Army would have persevered of course, just as it did throughout the SWPA, but the cost would have been high. Many reputations would have been destroyed, though neither the legacies of MacArthur nor Krueger would have been affected. Fortunately, the invasion of Japan did not take place. The Japanese nation and the American military were spared the struggle by the atomic bombs.

## APPENDIX A

# Basic Military Map Symbols\*

Symbols within a rectangle indicate a military unit, within a triangle an observation post, and within a circle a supply point.

### Military Units—Identification

Antiaircraft Artillery . . . . .		
Armored Command . . . . .		
Army Air Forces . . . . .		
Artillery, except Antiaircraft and Coast Artillery . . . . .		
Cavalry, Horse . . . . .		
Cavalry, Mechanized . . . . .		
Chemical Warfare Service . . . . .		
Coast Artillery . . . . .		
Engineers . . . . .		
Infantry . . . . .		
Medical Corps . . . . .		
Ordnance Department . . . . .		
Quartermaster Corps . . . . .		
Signal Corps . . . . .		
Tank Destroyer . . . . .		
Transportation Corps . . . . .		
Veterinary Corps . . . . .		
Airborne units are designated by combining a gull wing symbol with the arm or service symbol:		
Airborne Artillery . . . . .		
Airborne Infantry . . . . .		

\*For complete listing of symbols see FM 21-30, from which these are taken.







## Size Symbols

The following symbols placed either in boundary lines or above the rectangle, triangle, or circle inclosing the identifying arm or service symbol indicate the size of military organization:







Squad . . . . .	•
Section . . . . .	••
Platoon . . . . .	•••
Company, troop, battery, Air Force flight . . . . .	
Battalion, cavalry squadron, or Air Force squadron . . . . .	
Regiment or group; combat team (with abbreviation CT following identifying numeral) . . . . .	
Brigade, Combat Command of Armored Division, or Air Force Wing .	X
Division or Command of an Air Force . . . . .	XX
Corps or Air Force . . . . .	XXX
Army . . . . .	XXXX
Group of Armies . . . . .	XXXXX

### EXAMPLES

The letter or number to the left of the symbol indicates the unit designation; that to the right, the designation of the parent unit to which it belongs. Letters or numbers above or below boundary lines designate the units separated by the lines:

Company A, 137th Infantry . . . . .	
8th Field Artillery Battalion . . . . .	
Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division . . . . .	
Observation Post, 23d Infantry . . . . .	
Command Post, 5th Infantry Division . . . . .	
Boundary between 137th and 138th Infantry . . . . .	

## Weapons

Machine gun . . . . .	
Gun . . . . .	
Gun battery . . . . .	
Howitzer or Mortar . . . . .	
Tank . . . . .	
Self-propelled gun . . . . .	

## APPENDIX B

### Key abbreviations, phrases, and terms

**Amphibious Operation-** An attack launched from the sea by naval and landing forces embarked in ships or craft involving a landing on a hostile or potentially hostile shore.

**Artillery Preparation-** Artillery Fire delivered before an attack to destroy, neutralize, or suppress the enemy's defense and to disrupt communications and disorganize the enemy's defense.

**Assault-** The climax of an attack, closing with the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting.

**Assembly Area-** An area in which a command is assembled preparatory to further action.

**Attack-** A form of offensive operation characterized by coordinated movement supported by fire.

**Attrition-** The reduction of the effectiveness of a force caused by loss of personnel and material.

**Avenue of Approach-** An air or ground route of an attacking force of a given size leading to its objective or to key terrain in its path.

**Bunker-** A defensive position developed within a natural feature (tree, hill, etc.) or a manmade feature (building).

**Bypass-** A tactical task that involves maneuvering around an obstacle, position, or enemy force to maintain the momentum of advance.

**Camouflage-** The use of natural or artificial material on personnel, objects, or tactical positions with the aim of confusing, misleading, or evading the enemy.

**Combat Power-** The total means of destructive and/or disruptive force which a military unit can apply against the opponent at a given time.

**Combined Arms Team-** Two or more arms mutually supporting one another, usually consisting of infantry, armor, cavalry, aviation, field artillery, and engineers.

**Covering Force-** A force operating apart from the main force for the purpose of intercepting, engaging, delaying, disorganizing, and deceiving the enemy before he can attack the force covered.

**Defilade-** Protection from hostile observation and fire provided by an obstacle such as a hill, ridge, or bank.

**Defile-** A narrow gorge or pass that tends to prevent easy movement of troops.

**Direct Fire-** Gunfire delivered on a target, using the target itself as a point of aim for either the gun or the director.

**Doctrine-** Fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of objectives.

**Emplacement (Fortification)-** A prepared position for one or more weapons or pieces of equipment for protection against hostile fire or bombardment, and from which they can execute their tasks.

**Envelopment (Flanking Maneuver)-** An offensive maneuver in which the main attacking force passes around or over the enemy's principle defensive positions to secure objectives to the enemy's rear.

**ETO-** European Theatre of Operations

**Field of Fire-** The area which a weapon or a group of weapons may cover effectively with fire from a given position.

**Fire and Movement-** A unit placing suppressive fire on the enemy as another unit moves against or around the enemy.

**FO(Forward Observer)-** An observer operating with front line troops and trained to adjust ground or naval gunfire and pass back battlefield information.

**Frontal Attack-** An offensive maneuver in which the main action is directed against the front of the enemy's forces.

**Indirect Fire-** Fire delivered on a target characterized by a relatively high trajectory and where the weapon operator normally does not have visual contact with the enemy.

**KIA- Killed in action**

**Line of Departure-** A line designated to coordinate the departure of attack elements.

**M3-** "Stuart" Light Tank, 37mm main gun, 2 machine guns, Crew of 4

**M4-** "Sherman" Medium Tank, 75mm main gun (later models were increased to a 76mm main gun), 2 machine guns, Crew of 4

**M7-** Self-Propelled Howitzer, 105mm main gun, 1 machine gun, Crew of 5

**M8-** Light Armored Car, 37mm main gun, 2 machine guns, Crew of 4

**M10-** Tank Destroyer, 76.2 mm main gun, 1 machine gun, Crew of 5

**MIA-** Missing in action

**Nonbattle Injury-** A person who becomes a casualty due to circumstances not directly attributable to hostile action.

**Pillbox-** A mamade,above ground defensive position.

**PTO-** Pacific Theatre of Operations

**Reconnaissance-** An operation designed to obtain information on the enemy, potential enemy, or the characteristics of a particular area.

**Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)-** A set of instructions covering those features of operations which lend themselves to a definite or standardized procedure without loss of effectiveness.

**SWPA-** Southwest Pacific Area

**WIA-** Wounded in action

## APPENDIX C

### Combat Divisions of the SWPA

Division	Regiments	Campaigns
6 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	1 <sup>st</sup> , 20 <sup>th</sup> , 63 <sup>rd</sup>	Lone Tree Hill, Luzon
7 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	17 <sup>th</sup> , 32 <sup>nd</sup> , 84 <sup>th</sup>	Leyte
24 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	19 <sup>th</sup> , 21 <sup>st</sup> , 34 <sup>th</sup>	Hollandia, Leyte Corregidor, Luzon Mindanao
25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	27 <sup>th</sup> , 35 <sup>th</sup> , 161 <sup>st</sup>	Luzon
31 <sup>st</sup> Infantry	124 <sup>th</sup>	Aitape, Mindanao
32 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry	126 <sup>th</sup> , 127 <sup>th</sup> , 128 <sup>th</sup>	Buna, Aitape, Leyte, Luzon
33 <sup>rd</sup> Infantry	123 <sup>rd</sup> , 130 <sup>th</sup> , 136 <sup>th</sup>	Luzon
37 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	129 <sup>th</sup> , 145 <sup>th</sup> , 148 <sup>th</sup>	Luzon
38 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	149 <sup>th</sup> , 151 <sup>st</sup> , 152 <sup>nd</sup>	Leyte, Luzon
40 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	108 <sup>th</sup> , 160 <sup>th</sup> , 185 <sup>th</sup>	Luzon, Negros
41 <sup>st</sup> Infantry	162 <sup>nd</sup> , 163 <sup>rd</sup> , 186 <sup>th</sup>	Buna, Biak, Mindanao
43 <sup>rd</sup> Infantry	103 <sup>rd</sup> , 169 <sup>th</sup> , 182 <sup>nd</sup>	Aitape, Luzon
77 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	305 <sup>th</sup> , 306 <sup>th</sup> , 307 <sup>th</sup>	Leyte
96 <sup>th</sup> Infantry	381 <sup>st</sup> , 382 <sup>nd</sup> , 383 <sup>rd</sup>	Leyte
Americal	132 <sup>nd</sup> , 164 <sup>th</sup> , 182 <sup>nd</sup>	Leyte, Cebu
11 <sup>th</sup> Airborne	187 <sup>th</sup> and 188 <sup>th</sup> Glider	Leyte, Corregidor, Luzon
1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry	503 <sup>rd</sup> and 511 <sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry 5 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> , 12 <sup>th</sup>	Admiralty Islands, Leyte, Luzon

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**History: Leyte. Headquarters: 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. 6 November-5 January 1945.**

**History: Luzon. Headquarters: 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. 27 January-30 June 1945.**

**History: Luzon. Headquarters: 188<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry, 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. January-June 1945.**

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**History: Luzon Campaign. Headquarters: 130<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. 10 February-30 June 1945.**

**History: M1 Operation (Luzon Campaign). Headquarters: 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. 9 January-30 June 1945.**

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