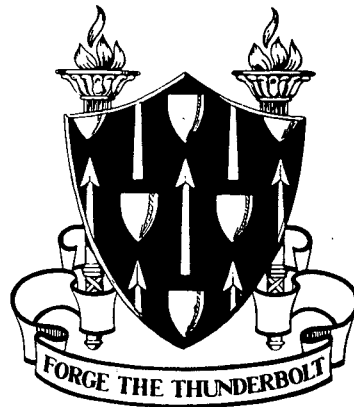


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TITLE ARMOR In The Defense OF The Philippines
(8 December 1941 to 8 January 1942)

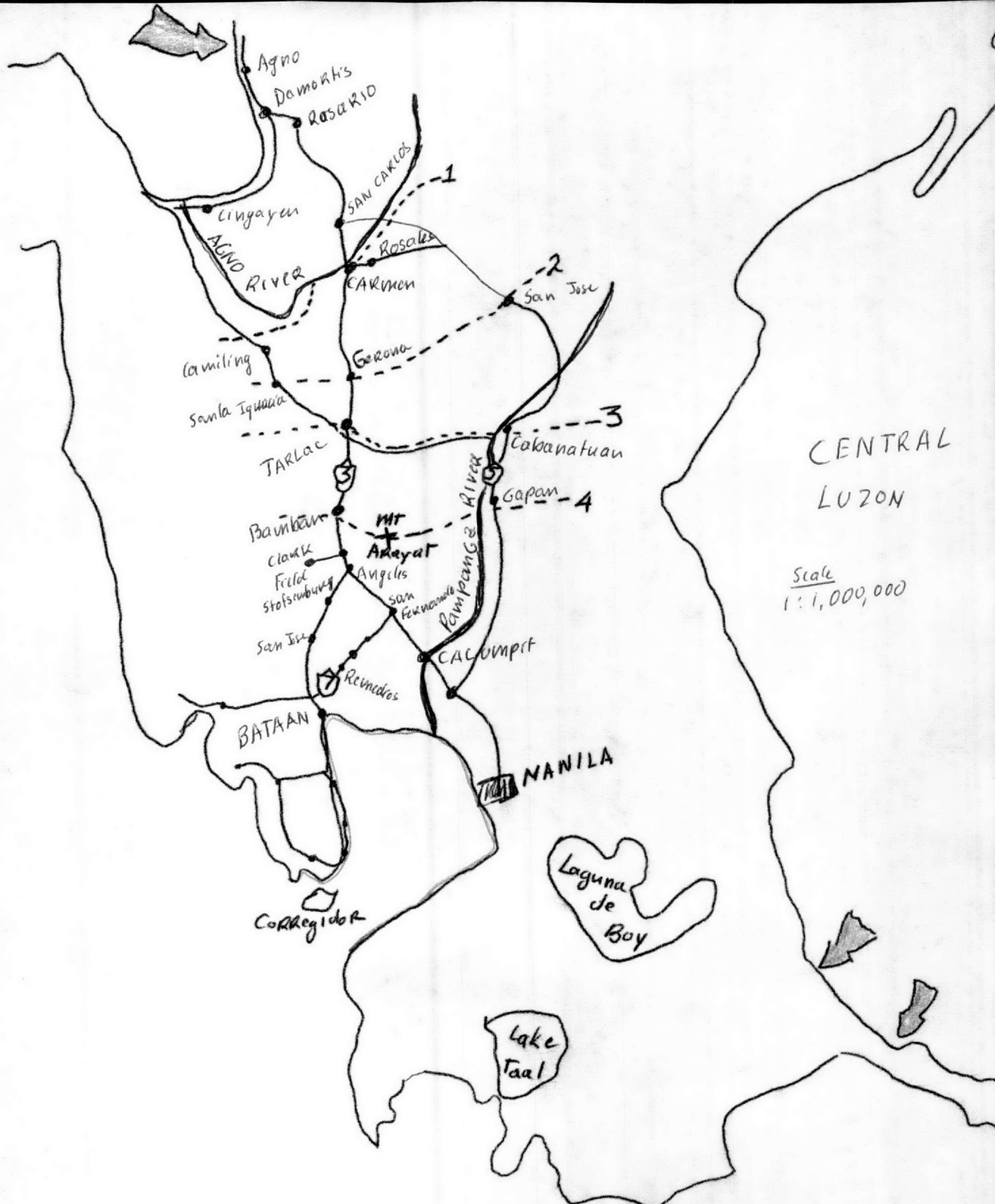
US ARMY ARMOR SCHOOL

Fort Knox, Kentucky

Bernard, George L., Captain

ARMOR IN THE DEFENSE OF THE PHILIPPINES

(8 December 41 to 8 January 42)



CENTRAL
LUZON

Scale
1:1,000,000

Legend

- Towns
- Highways
- Rivers
- 1. Planned Withdrawal Phase Lines
- ➔ - Japanese landings

Much has been said and written concerning the defense of the Philippines; however, little has been mentioned about the part played by United States Armor in this defense. In the following article I will attempt to portray part of the vital role played by the Provisional Tank Group, United States Army Forces Far East, the only Armor unit which participated in this campaign. This article will cover the organization, equipment, training, and actions of the Provisional Tank Group during the initial stages of the defense of Luzon, the period of 8 December 41 to 8 January 42. In addition it will give a brief terrain study of the area of operations. A study of the campaign will show the ever increasing need for tank-infantry-artillery co-ordination and co-operation; the fact that tank unit integrity should be maintained; and finally that terrain is the key to success in any operation, armor or otherwise.

While reading this article, I would like the reader to keep the following thoughts in mind; first, that Armor, in the Philippines in 1941, did not consist of a balanced tank-infantry-artillery team; and second, that the present Armor doctrine of mobility, shock action, firepower, penetration and exploitation is hardly applicable to the armored actions in Luzon where most of the tank warfare was limited to supporting the Infantry.

1
TERRAIN STUDY CENTRAL LUZON

The scene of operations of the Provisional Tank Group is the CENTRAL LUZON area, comprising the Provinces of BATAAN, BULACAN, NUEVA ECIJA, PAMPANGA, RIZAL, TARLAC, and ZAMBALES. It includes the major portion of the CENTRAL LUZON PLAIN. The CENTRAL VALLEY of LUZON is a level alluvial plain extending northwest to southwest for about 120 miles between LINGAYEN GULF and LAGUNA DE BAY. It has an average width of about 40 miles. It is shut off from the China Sea on the west by the high, rugged ZAMBALES MOUNTAINS, and from the Pacific Ocean on the east by the rough and heavily wooded SIERRA MADRE. The plain itself is broken by a single topographic feature--the isolated and extinct volcano of MT AYARAT. The plain is totally cleared of forest, is highly cultivated and is thickly populated. It is one of the most strategically important areas in the Philippines. The mountain areas are covered with rain forest, or in the case of Northern ZAMBALES, pine trees. Movement is fairly free over most of the plain, especially in the higher sandy tracks (western area) such as exist in the vicinity of the TARLAC RIVER. In the low areas, especially in the southern part of the plain, drainage is poor and consequently movement is more difficult during the rainy season. Major obstacles are the wide, large rivers, such as the AGNO and PAMPANGA Rivers, which are generally too

deep to ford, and which also have low, marshy approaches. Rice paddies, located mostly in the eastern portion of the plain, are obstacles during the rainy season. There is a well developed rail and road net. Besides the two main north-south highways (Routes 3 and 5), there are many lateral roads. Few roads connect the east and west coasts. All main roads of the CENTRAL PLAIN are either concrete or asphalt. The lateral roads are all-weather, rock-surfaced roads.

The rough, mountainous terrain of the BATAAN PENNINSULA is heavily wooded and free movement is restricted to the coastal highways and the connecting road across the MARIVELES MOUNTAINS which split the peninsula in half. There are many miles of "jeep tracks" particularly on the northern slopes of the MARIVELES Mountains. The eastern coastal plain is mainly under rice and corn cultivation, and affords free movement except for the rainy season.

The seasonal distinctions in Central Luzon depends on precipitation rather than temperature. There are two seasons: the dry season, from November to May; and the wet season, from May to November.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PROVISIONAL TANK GROUP

Prior to relating the organization of the Provisional Tank Group United States Forces Far East (USAFFE), it would be well to point out that there were no armor units

assigned to the Philippines prior to September 1941, when the first elements of the Tank Group began to arrive. Headquarters, USAFFE, did have a Cavalry Regiment, the 26th Cavalry, but this organization could hardly be considered an armor unit; it had no tanks, and its heaviest vehicles were unarmored scout cars. In view of this fact, General MacArthur, Commanding General United States Army Forces Far East (USAFFE), urgently requested armor re-inforcements. In answer to his request the 194th Tank Battalion, equipped with 54 new M-3 light tanks and half-trucks, began to arrive in Manila at the end of September 1941. In addition, the 192nd Tank Battalion, similarly equipped, was earmarked for service in the Philippines.²

To command these two tank battalions, Provisional Tank Group, United States Army Forces Far East, was organized. The Group had its beginning on 9 October 1941, when Colonel James R. N. Weaver received orders to proceed to Camp Polk, Louisiana, and Fort Knox, Kentucky, to receive secret orders. On 13 October 1941, Colonel Weaver was ordered to the Port of Embarkation (West Coast) for shipment. On arrival at the Port, he was assigned three officers. This was the beginning of the Provisional Tank Group Headquarters. Two National Guard Tank Battalions, the 192nd and 194th were assigned to Colonel Weaver's command. As mentioned previously, the 194th Tank

Battalion had already sailed for the Philippines prior to the arrival of Colonel Weaver at the Port of Embarkation. The 17th Armored Ordnance Company, which had helped the 194th Tank Battalion to load its tanks, sailed with that unit and became part of the Provisional Tank Group. The 192nd Tank Battalion sailed to the Philippines with Colonel Weaver, and arrived there on the 20th of November 1941. On 21 November 1941, the Provisional Tank Group, USAFFE, was formally activated.³

TRAINING AND SUPPLY PROBLEMS⁴

Prior to sailing for the Philippines, the personnel of the two tank battalions had no chance to familiarize themselves with their newly issued equipment. Training accomplished prior to being Federalized had been done with old equipment and tanks. Upon arrival in the Philippines, Headquarters, Provisional Tank Group, USAFFE, made extensive plans for an intensive training program; however, due to limitations, tank training to familiarize personnel with their weapons and vehicles was well nigh impossible. 35% of the men were new to the M-3 light tank, with which the units were now equipped. Ammunition, gasoline, and range facilities, although requested on numerous occasions, were not made available; consequently many of the men never fired their weapons until time came to fight the Japanese.

In the matter of supplies, the situation was no better. Total gasoline allocation for the entire Provisional Tank Group was 40,000 gallons. This allowed for less than 200 miles travel for the 108 tanks of the two battalions. We shall see how this dire shortage of gasoline, plus poor logistical planning, plagued the operations of the Provisional Tank Group during the initial stages of the campaign. Spare parts amounted approximately to six car loads, which included tracks, engines, etc. Efforts made to secure these spare parts were futile, and it was not until the Group's arrival on Bataan, in January 1942, that these parts were made available.

OPERATIONS OF THE PROVISIONAL TANK GROUP⁵

(8 December 41 - 8 January 42)

At the outbreak of hostilities all elements of the Provisional Tank Group were in battle positions. The 192nd Tank Battalion was deployed north and east of FORT STOTSENBURG. The 194th Tank Battalion was deployed in the vicinity of CLARK FIELD. These units had been in place, combat loaded, since 1 December 1941.

During the air attacks against CLARK FIELD, 8, 10, and 13 December 1941, elements of the two tank battalions participated in aerial defense of the airfield. The 192nd Tank Battalion^{was} credited with shooting down one Japanese plane. Losses for the Provisional Tank Group amounted

to one half-track destroyed by a bomb in the motor park for the 17th Armored Ordnance Company. On 12 December USAFFEE ordered the 194th Tank Battalion to move south of SAN FERNANDO to protect the strategically important CALUMPIT BRIDGE. These orders were issued in view of an impending Japanese landing in southern LUZON. All elements of the 194th Tank Battalion were in position by 19 December. On Christmas Eve, Company "C", of the 194th was attached to the South Luzon Forces, which were engaged with Japanese troops which had landed in southern LUZON. Headquarters, Provisional Tank Group, was ordered to move from FORT STOTSENBURG to Manila, and opened in that city on 15 December. The half-tracks of Headquarters Detachment were incorporated in the air defense plan of the city.

During the night 21-22 December, orders were received at Group Headquarters, to send one tank battalion, minus one company, to the LINGAYEN GULF area to reinforce the North Luzon forces of General Wainwright. The 192nd Tank Battalion was given this mission while its remaining company was ordered to LA UNION coast to meet an anticipated landing at daylight 22 December. On that day the company was discovered by the Group Commander at ROSARIO (very much short of its assigned position) out of gasoline. Conflicting orders, not issued by Group Headquarters, had prevented the company from regassing at

GERONA. In the meantime the anticipated landing took place. A squadron of the 26th Cavalry was ordered into the area and reported that enemy cyclists or motorized units were in the area. At this time General Wainwright's Headquarters urgently requested tank support. To meet this request, the fuel resources of the company were pooled, and a platoon was given the mission--the results: one platoon completely destroyed. Meanwhile enemy pressure in the DAMORTIS area, where the Japanese had also made a landing, was increasing against the 11th Philippine Division, and a need for tanks soon became evident. As soon as the precious gasoline arrived, the rest of the company refueled and was sent into the area with orders to cover a withdrawal. The tanks were to fall back one by one, peeling off successively from contact after the infantry had withdrawn.

The situation in southern LUZON was also developing rapidly, but the northern LUZON front remained the critical one. On 24 December, the 194th Tank Battalion, minus Company "C", arrived on the North Luzon Front, and was placed in line to the left of the hard pressed 192nd Tank Battalion. In accordance with orders received from Headquarters USAFFE on 25 December, the Provisional Tank Group was to cover the withdrawal of the North Luzon Forces in the following manner: the south bank of the AGNO RIVER was to be held until the night of 26-27

December; they were then to withdraw to a line SANTA IGNACIA-GERONA-SANTO TOMAS-SAN JOSE; the night of 27-28 December withdraw to the line TARLAC-CABANATUAN; and finally the night of 28-29 December to the south bank of the BAMBAN RIVER. This position was to be organized for indefinite resistance. Company "C" of the 194th Tank Battalion was to remain attached to the South Luzon Forces, and help cover their withdrawal. It should be noted that ^{these} ~~their~~ orders called for successive night withdrawals and destruction of bridges, operations which require much detailed planning and co-ordination.

During the period 25-26 December reconnaissance to the various delay positions were made, plans developed, and orders issued. On the night of 26 December the Japanese occupied CARMEN, after the American-Philippino units (infantry and artillery) had withdrawn from the south bank of the AGNO RIVER. The initial withdrawal of the armor units was not as successful. Company "D" of the 194th Tank Battalion, while withdrawing, arrived at the AGNO RIVER only to find the bridges blown. Reconnaissance failed to disclose any fording sites and the remaining 15 tanks of the unit were abandoned. SOP destruction of one of its platoons was not carried out, and the Japanese were able to capture these tanks and later used them against United States Forces. This sad situation left the 194th Tank Battalion with only 20 tanks in NORTH LUZON.

Withdrawal during the night of 26-27 December was carried out successfully, covering the rear of four Philippine divisions. The axis of withdrawal for the 192nd Tank Battalion was Route 5, and for the 194th Tank Battalion, Route 3. During the period of 30 December 41 to 1 January 42, the 192nd Tank Battalion covered the withdrawal of the Philippine Army divisions east and west of the PAMPANGA RIVER. In addition some of its tanks were used to help cover the withdrawal of the South Luzon Forces towards BATAAN. The 194th Tank Battalion was covering the withdrawal of the Philippine divisions south on ROUTE 3 toward SAN FERNANDO and BATAAN.

On 2 January 1942 the Provisional Tank Group was ordered to cover the withdrawal of all American-Philippino troops across the PAMPANGA RIVER at the CALUMPIT BRIDGE, and into the BATAAN Peninsula. The Group carried out its mission successfully; withdrawal of its two tank battalions being carried out as planned, as there was no longer any question of premature destruction of bridges. The withdrawal of the two tank battalions was carried out in their prescribed zones, under heavy pressure, and was completed on the night of 6-7 January when the 194th Tank Battalion withdrew over the CALUMPIT BRIDGE covered by the 192nd Tank Battalion. The 192nd Tank Battalion was the last American force to cross that bridge into BATAAN before it was blown. The provisions of a long-existing plan had

been accomplished successfully due to the valour and hard work of the Provisional Tank Group. During the remainder of the campaign the Provisional Tank Group was used as a "fire fighting unit", plugging holes in the defense of BATAAN, and re-establishing the Main Battle Line whenever possible.

CONCLUSIONS

"The Provisional Tank Group, USAFFE, took to the field in battle alert ten days after its organization lacking a headquarters company, one light battalion, and both medium battalions. It was unacclimated; unused to its weapons, armor, radios; a new arm unacquainted with and to the people with whom it was to be associated. The group learned the hard way, for tankers--in defensive battle, covering the withdrawal into BATAAN for 18 days of unremitting strain and action with an enemy who did not attack in force but infiltrated at night and around flanks, snipped by day, and used his aviation immune from air counterattack or observation." ⁶ The results achieved by the men of the Provisional Tank Group are truly amazing when one reads the above words of Brigadier General Weaver, the Group Commander, and one recalls the obstacles that this unit had to surmount. I sincerely believe that their task would have been much easier if certain cardinal rules had been used. Armor, to properly function, must be an integral part of a balance team; it must have sufficient

training in team work. Close co-operation and co-ordination is a must in all operations, and much more so when contemplating and executing night withdrawals. We have seen how an entire tank company lost all its vehicles because of either poor planning or co-ordination. Logistics has always been of utmost importance; this importance is magnified when employing armor--a tank without fuel is nothing more than a stationary target. Tank companies and battalions should be inviolate, self-sufficient as to supply, and maintenance. Finally terrain is the key factor in armor warfare, and should be employed to its utmost advantage.

NOTES

1. Terrain Study No. 94, Central Luzon, Vol. 1, Philippines Series, Allied Geographical Section, Southwest Pacific Area, dtd 18 Oct 44, pp 1-6, 45-65, 112, 193, 243-245, 257-261.
2. The Fall of the Philippines, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1953, pp 21-24, 32-34.
3. After-action Report, Provisional Tank Group, USAFFE, 1941-1942.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Personal Notes of Brig Gen Weaver.