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THE ARMORED SCHOOL
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TITLE: The Battle of Zigzag Pass.

SCOPE: This monograph deals with the battle of Zigzag Pass. It covers the actions of the 38th Infantry Division from the time they established a beachhead on the island of Luzon until the battle of Zigzag Pass had been completed and the Japanese escape route into Bataan Peninsula had been cut off. This article principally concerns the 149th Infantry Regiment, of which the writer was a member during the entire battle.

41-24

Prepared by Arthur Brinson
ARTHUR BRINSON

Captain - Cavalry

THE BATTLE OF ZIGZAG PASS

Before the war Bataan was an obscure province of the Philippines. It is a narrow peninsula on the island of Luzon, bounded on the west by Subic Bay and the South China Sea and on the east by Manila Bay. Bataan is a mountainous and jungle area and only sparsely populated. There are two fairly good roads, from Dinalupihan south to Cabcaben and then through Corkscrew Pass to Marveles on the southern tip of the peninsula and from Bagac on the west coast to Pilar on the east coast. It was along these roads that the defenders of Bataan and Corregidor were forced to march after their capture by the Japanese in 1942.

Zigzag was important because it was the key to control of the strategic Bataan peninsula. Officially Zigzag Pass is highway seven. This highway extends across the lowlands of Zambales Province through Olongapo into a defile in the mountains of northern Bataan. Its dizzy curves, hairpin turns and blind angle approaches make defense easy. The highway is hemmed in on both sides by steep sheer cliffs and thick jungles. In 1942 General McArthur had depended on Zigzag to protect his retreat into Bataan. He had sent a company of Americans and Filipinos into prepared positions. He did this to meet the Japanese thrust from their beachhead on the west coast of Luzon in Zambales province. The mission

of the Japanese was to race through Zigzag Pass to the east coast of Bataan at Manila Bay. This action by the Japs would seal off Bataan Peninsula and prevent the Americans who were retreating before the Japanese from using the peninsula as an escape haven. Success of the American retreat depended on how long the pass could be held. Against numerically superior and better equipped Japanese the American force held Zigzag for six weeks before joining the main body on Bataan Peninsula. In 1945 Positions of opposing forces were exactly reversed. The Japs were fleeing before the Sixth Army's drive southward out of its invasion point at Lingayen Gulf. It was essential to prevent the Japanese from attempting to escape into Bataan Peninsula.

On 14 January 1945, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, issued instructions to the Commanding General, Eighth United States Army, outlining the general plan for Mike Seven Operation. This plan called for the seizure of the San Antonio-Castillejos San Felipe area in southern Sambales Province, Southwest Luzon, by overwater operation.

The specific missions assigned Eighth Army were as follows:

- (1) In conjunction with Allied Naval Force, to seize Olongapo and such adjacent areas as would open Subic Bay to shipping.

- (2) To seize the line Hermosa-Dinalupihan in order to deny hostile movement between the Pampanga Plains and Bataan Peninsula.
- (3) Be prepared to pass control of Eighth Army units and responsibility for duties and missions in the San Antonio-Subic-Dinalupihan area to Commanding General, Sixth United States Army, at a time to be designated by General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area.

Eighth Army Field Order Number 15, dated 16 January 1945, charged XI Corps with conduct of the operation. The assault force was to consist of the 38th Infantry Division reinforced by the 34th Regimental Combat Team. The 41st Infantry Division, General Headquarters Reserve, was to be prepared to land in the area on orders of the Commanding General, Eighth Army, and on landing pass to control of XI Corps.

*B-Day for the operation was 29 January 1945; H-hour was 0830. At H-hour minus two three guerrillas reported to the flagship that there were no Japanese in the beach-

* Report of the Commanding General, Eighth Army, on the Nasugbu and Bataan Operation, P. 75.

head area. Assault troops hit the beach at the scheduled hour with three regiments abreast, 152nd on right, 149th center, and 151st on left.

At this time I was executive officer of Company C, 149th Infantry and this narrative will concern principally that regiment. Orders from Regiment directed the Battalions to capture San Marcelino that day even if it meant fighting at night. By 1600 we had seized San Marcelino air strip. The 152nd Infantry Regiment also secured its sector of XI Corps beachhead and 2nd Battalion, 151st Infantry, secured the Corps flank. The following day the 149th and 152nd moved past Castellejos to Subic. One Battalion from 151st Infantry made a shore to shore operation, landing on Grande Island in Subic Bay without a casualty. In the meantime 34 RCT advanced rapidly on San Marcelino, Castellejos and Subic to Olongapo. On 31 January 152nd relieved 34 RCT astride Highway Seven, north of Olongapo in the entrance to Zigzag Pass.

The plan of attacking Zigzag was simple. One regiment was to smash there frontally, another to follow an almost unknown Negrito trail north of the highway, eventually to emerge at the eastern entrance near the town of Dinalupihan. It was then to attack westward through the pass, pressing the Japanese in a small but tight pincher.

On B / four, 149th Infantry, was ordered by Division

to begin its end run around Zigzag. The second and third battalions with Company C of the 113th Medical Battalion, and platoon of Company A of the 113th Engineers, were to make the march; the first battalion was to remain in Division reserve. With Filipino guerrillas and Negritos as guides the regiment moved out. They reported their position at nightfall to be in a ravine, 2000 yards north of Highway Seven. Early next morning a cub plane spotted their location and from aerial photographs deduced that they were actually 5,000 yards farther north than their previous report had indicated. As a result the Division Commander, on the assumption that they had taken the wrong trail, ordered the 149th Infantry to return to Olongapo. They reached Olongapo that night, 3 February 1945.

On 3 February the XI Corps Commander directed the 149th Infantry to again proceed along the same trail and close on Dinalupihan as soon as possible. Although no operation was encountered until the march had been completed, the march was pure hell - five days of it.

The Louisville (Kentucky) Courier-Journal described the 149th cross-country march in the following dispatch:
"Reminiscent of the days of the old Second Kentucky Infantry, once commanded by Daniel Boone, was the epic march along mountain trails in Luzon, made by the 149th Infantry, Regi-

ment. A tortuous road believed never before to have been trod by white man was followed by the 149th to seal off retreat of the Japanese into Bataan at Zigzag Pass, when the 38th Division first won the title "Avengers of Bataan".

Only items of equipment essential to the successful completion of the mission could be taken along. Packing everything on their backs, including a complete portable surgical hospital, the regiment made the march in five days. It seemed up hill most of the way. In many instances ropes had to be used to scale the cliffs. Strange as it seems, not one man fell out. Of course, there was only one way to go and that was straight ahead.

The 149th Infantry Regiment completed its march on 5 February, linking up with XIV Corps driving southward from Lingayen to Dinalupihan. In our first bivouac after completing our march two men lost their lives due to poor planning. The Battalion Commander made arrangements with some Filipino guerrillas to pass through our lines all night on their patrol. Our companies were instructed not to fire unless they were certain what they were firing into. During the night, the troop on the main road, after having these Filipinos pass by them all night, became careless and when eight Japanese approached, a machine gun squad from Company C, about 0300, they were mistaken for Filipinos

until they started tossing grenades. All the Japanese were killed but we lost two good men in the fight. I believe anything that moves after dark should be fired on.

At the other end of the pass the 34th RCT and 152nd Infantry were having their troubles. For a while it seemed that a lot of the division's own artillery was falling on friendly lines and the men up front would call back to "Cut it out." It was finally discovered that as soon as we started firing the Japanese would open up with 90MM mortars on our lines, and that accounted for the front line doughboy thinking they were being fired on by their own artillery. After that, artillery was poured on the Japanese all night. That bottled up the Japanese mortars. Things hadn't been going too well for the 152nd Infantry. This battle was their first major action and they were learning important lessons the hard way. The Japanese had taken a heavy toll with their night attacks and mortar and artillery barrages. At the close of the third day in Zigzag the regiment was forced to dig in without having scored any appreciable gains. At this time XI Corps directed the 34th Infantry to relieve the 152nd. While passing through the latter regiment, it ran into heavy resistance and units jammed up. In the confusion many casualties were inflicted and it was impossible to disengage the 152nd Infantry.

Tank supported Infantry attempted a thrust down the road

but heavy fire forced them to withdraw. The next day the regiment began an attack, 152nd on the north and the 34th on the south of the road. While attempting to maneuver around its opposition, the 34th moved north of the road and again confusion reigned as king. On February 5th the 34th Infantry which had scored advances up to one thousand yards but tired and beaten had been driven back to their original positions, finally asked to be relieved. On 8 February the 151st Infantry was committed, taking over the 34th's sector.

After the 149th Infantry completed their march around Zigzag the regiment was halted one day while the men had a bath, clean socks and some fortunate ones received new shoes. All of our supplies were delivered by air. C-47 delivered ammunition, rations and even machine guns and mortars. The ammunition and rations were delivered to the ground in a free drop. This is a very poor way to deliver supplies as cartons of rations would break and scatter all over the drop zone. The drop was hard on mortar ammunition as the shock from hitting the ground bent the fins on the shells and caused numerous erratic rounds. After a day of rest the third battalion was directed to move down to the east coast of Bataan to capture Hermosa, the Corps objective. The 1st and 2nd Battalions with the 1st leading started into the pass from the east end. Very little opposition was en-

countered and the first day and that night we went into a rather crowded perimeter. During the night a position on the outside ring of the position killed two Japanese and wounded the third. The wounded Japanese was so seriously wounded he couldn't move, but instead of finishing him off he was allowed to continue his screams for help in hopes that he would attract additional Japanese.

The next day the 2nd battalion passed through the 1st and continued the attack. Bringing tanks into action for the first time, the "Nip" temporarily halted the advance of the 2nd battalion. Equipped with only light infantry weapons the men found it difficult to deliver effective anti-tank fire. Thick underbrush detonated bazooka ammunition and made that weapon harmless against tanks. However, the bazookas did knock out the machine guns on two tanks. Artillery fire was called for and the tanks withdrew. It should be noted that the artillery supporting the 149th was located near Olongapo, at the western entrance to the pass, and facing our infantry advancing from the east. Extremely accurate fire prevented friendly casualties. Much credit for the accuracy of our artillery should go to liaison pilots and air observers of the division artillery.

That night the 2nd battalion set up their perimeter along the road. The two Japanese tanks returned. The tanks

ran up to the edge of the perimeter and fired several rounds of cannister into the battalion. Failure to provide adequate anti-tank protection resulted in twenty-three men being killed and several more wounded by the Japanese tanks. The next day the battalion again attacked through the heavy undergrowth against heavy automatic fire and was again stopped by the tanks. Artillery fire was placed on them and one was knocked out. A lucky round from an 81MM mortar knocked out the other. On this same day our company was sent around the left flank of the 2nd battalion on a patrol mission. Our mission was to make contact with the 152nd. An incident that happened on this patrol is worth repeating because of the lesson learned. The leading squad had a small fire fight with five Japanese and killed all of them. The squad leader had the Japanese searched and brought back some documents to the company commander. He told the company commander all the Japanese had been thoroughly searched. Two days later we passed these dead Japanese again and the Company Commander thought he would search them again for good measure. As it turned out he found a map of the area sewed in the lining of a coat. The map showed the entire defense plan of the eastern end of the pass. This proved a valuable lesson to us as it brought out to the men in the company all Japanese had to be searched beyond the usual hunt for souvenirs.

On 11 February an attack was launched from both east and west. The forces moving eastward through the pass were the 151st and 152nd Infantry. Advancing from the east the 149th was encountering moderate to heavy resistance. Attacking with BARS, grenades and rifles the infantry knocked out positions that had withstood heavy artillery and mortars for days. The advance was steady but slow and the end was now in sight. On 12 February patrols from the 149th Infantry Regiment and the 152nd Regiment contacted each other and the main bodies of troops were separated by only a half mile. On 14 February the two regiments linked up in strength on the south side of the road. At noon the road was once again open to traffic. By dark the same day the 149th attacking strong points as shown on the captured map had reduced the last remaining organized resistance in the pass. While the 149th drove through Dinalupihan and down Bataan Peninsula to link up with its third battalion the 152nd began the task of mopping up pockets of the Japanese force that remained hidden in the jungles of Zigzag.

During the battle 1846 Japanese were killed and eighteen captured. The bulk of the Japanese 39th Infantry Regiment with attached combat and service troops was annihilated. Zigzag Pass was open. Bataan was denied the Japanese as an escape haven. The battle of Luzon had been appreciably

shortened.

Listed below are some of the lessons learned in the operation. First, I will discuss enemy tactics. When the Jap has plenty of time to prepare a defensive position he will usually be very well dug in. A heavy artillery barrage will not force him to evacuate a position. Usually it took Napalm, high explosive bombs and the good American soldier with his grenades and his rifle to shake the Japs loose.

A hasty reconnaissance should be made of all suspected defense positions. Along the route of advance the Japanese would allow leading elements of a column to pass by them without exposing themselves, then they would ambush the main body of troops. It is always good judgement to give your enemy credit for being as smart as you are. We found that the Japanese picked their defensive positions in a manner much like ours. Therefore all such positions should be considered as occupied. Reconnaissance by fire normally forced the enemy to disclose his position.

The role of the infantry has always been to locate the enemy, then kill or capture him. It was an easy job to convince the men in the companies that it was either kill or be killed. Sometimes this was drilled so thoroughly in our soldiers' heads that we had to order them to capture an occasional Japanese for G-2 purposes. The author believes

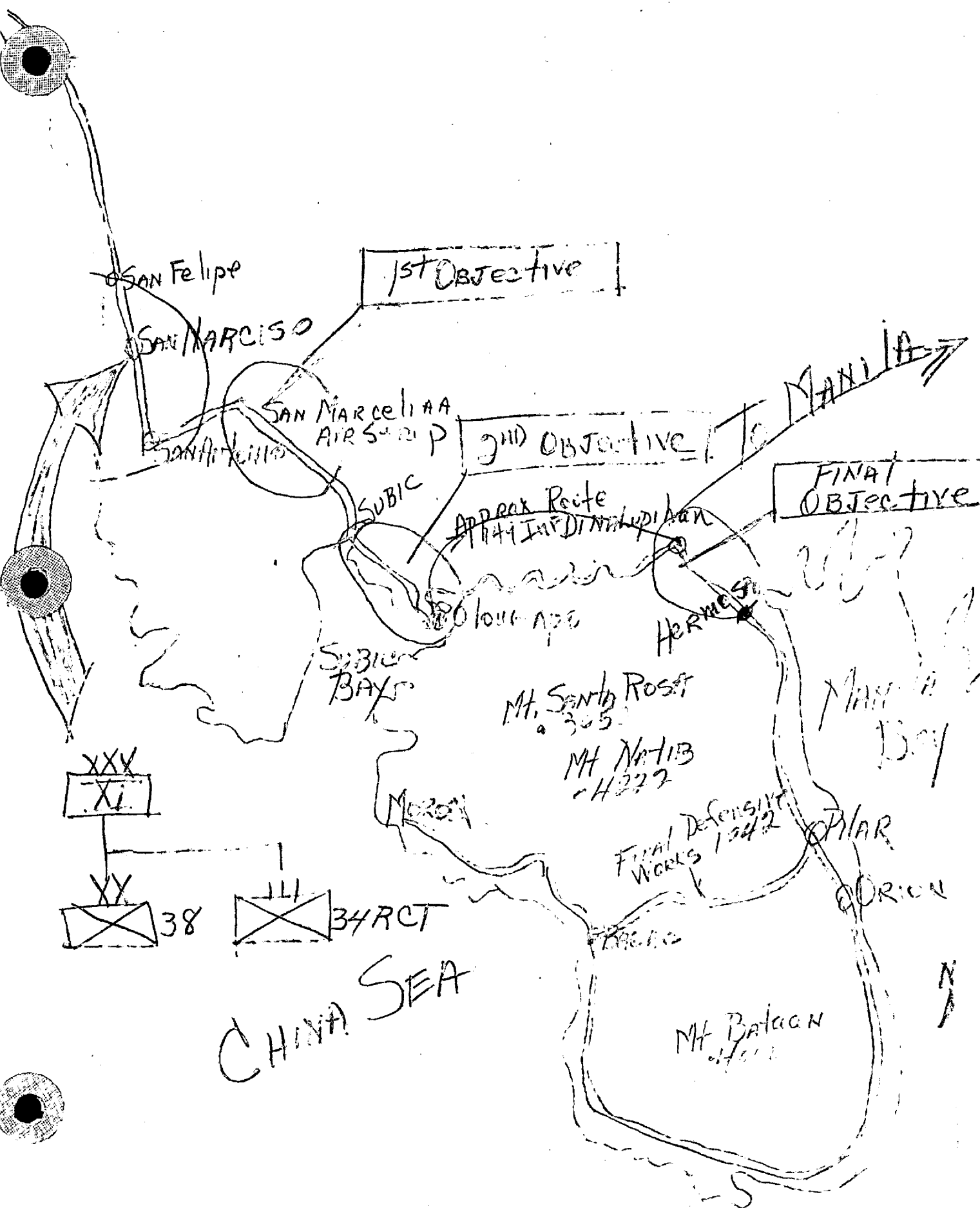
the American soldier's desire to kill Japs was a healthy desire, and we always strove to keep our men in the frame of mind that, "The best Jap is a dead one". Regardless of how terrain conditions are, all plans should provide for the complete destruction of the enemy. Block all escape routes to prevent the enemy from scattering into the hills or moving to more favorable defensive positions.

Whenever possible and especially over difficult terrain, the soldier should travel with as light a load as the situation will permit. The use of civilian carriers to transport food, ammunition, heavy equipment and supplies whenever possible, to relieve the soldier of those duties, is a wise idea. Every soldier should be provided with an extra canteen as water was very hard to get. Removal of casualties was very difficult and civilian labor was used to great advantage in this job. Supply discipline must be enforced and more emphasis placed on this during training long before the troops ever reach the combat zone.

In night bivouacs orders for the night must be thoroughly and clearly understood by all members of a command. Every man must dig in and hold his fire during the hours of darkness. Replacements must be thoroughly oriented as to the procedure to be used for dealing with Japanese if they do break inside the perimeter. The knife or bayonet are the best

weapons to handle those people. Our company lost a darn good platoon sergeant, and the loss of a platoon leader for several weeks just because a squad leader failed to tell his men about our rule prohibiting one of our own men from firing into our perimeter. Men should dig prone shelters in pairs to form a "V". This type hole establishes confidence in the men as it provides close contact and allows one man to sleep while the other remains on guard. Men who have nightmares and fits in their sleep should be placed inside the perimeter. Here they should sleep with a very light sleeper so he can grab them if they decide to jump up and run.

Zigzag Pass was the initial battle ground for the greater part of the 38th Infantry Division. The 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment was the only battle tested unit in the division. Zigzag proved to be one of the toughest, if not the toughest, battle in the war for our division. It was here the individual soldier learned all the little lessons that were to prove so valuable to him later on.



SAN Felipe

1st Objective

SAN NARCISO

SAN MARCELINA AIR STRIP

2nd Objective

FINAL Objective

SUBIC

Approach Route

SUBIC BAY

Mt. Santa Rosa
305

Mt. NATIB
4272

Final Defensive Works 1942

OPAR

ORION

Mt. Bataan

CHINA SEA

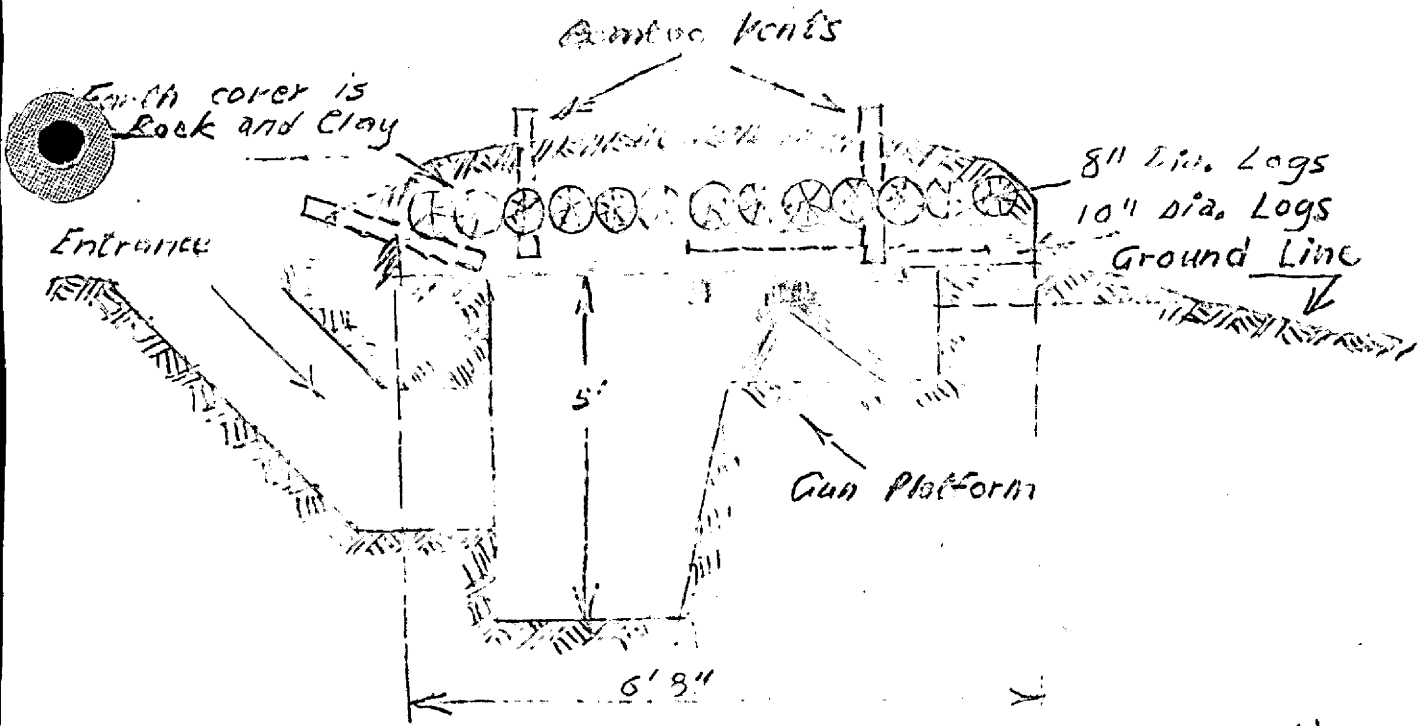
XXV
XI

XX
38

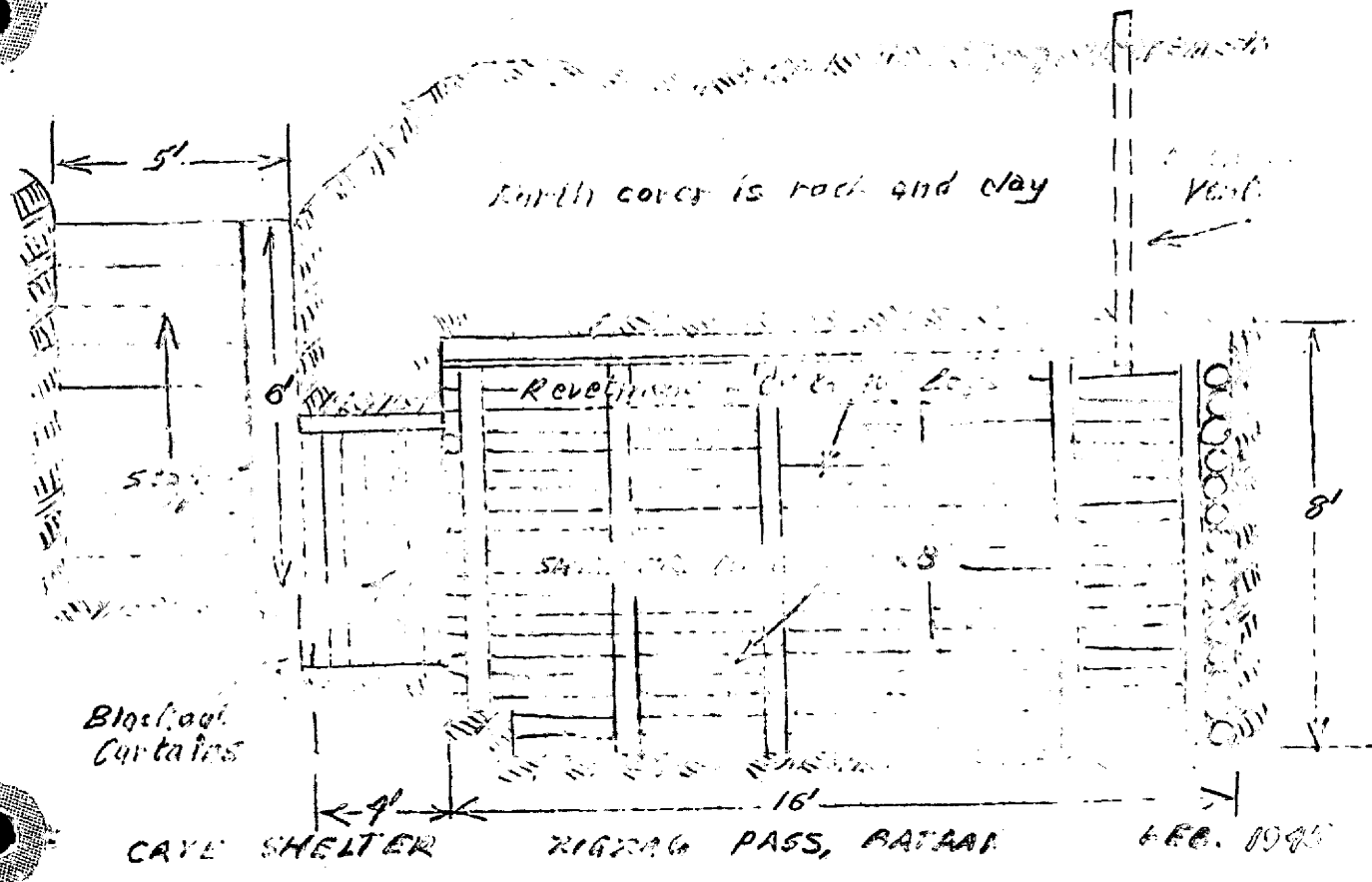
III
34 RCT

N

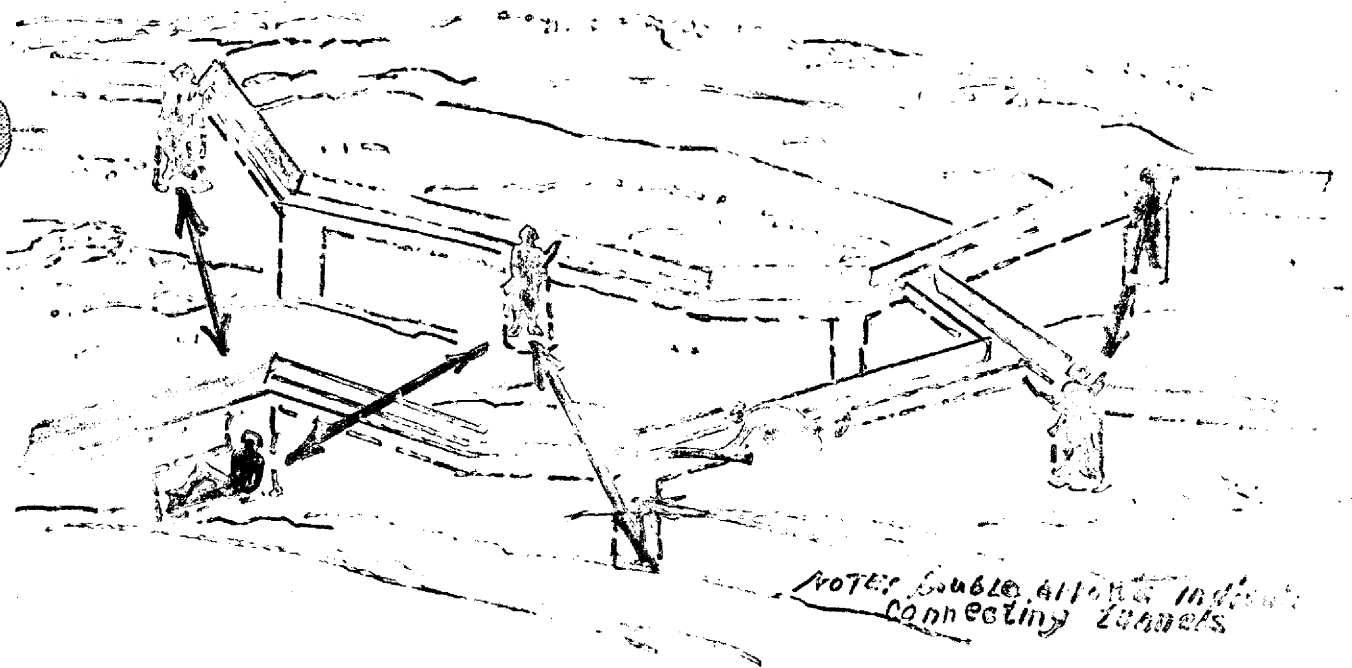
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MACHINE-GUN EMPLACEMENT (Camouflage Omitted)
 Zigzag Pass, Bataan Feb. 1945



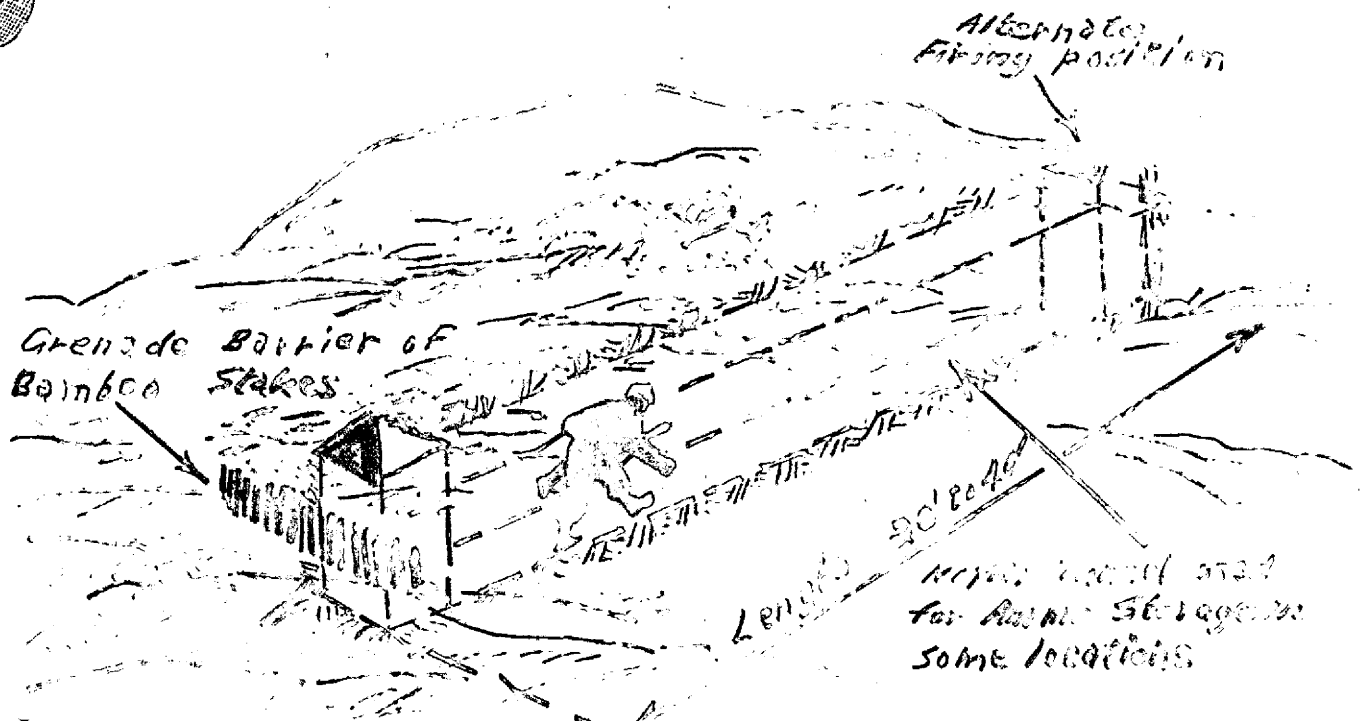
CAVE SHELTER ZIGZAG PASS, BATAAN FEB. 1945



FOXHOLES AND CONNECTING TRENCH AND TUNNEL SYSTEM
(SCHEMATIC - NO SCALE)

Zigzag Pass, Bataan

FEB. 1945



FOXHOLES AND CONNECTING TUNNEL (Continued)
Zigzag Pass, Bataan

FEB. 1945

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