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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 503D, PARACHUTE INFANTRY
REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM IN THE RECAPTURE OF
CORREGIDOR ISLAND, 16 FEBRUARY - 8 MARCH 1945
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Observations of a Parachute Battalion Commander)

Type of operation described: AIRBORNE ASSAULT
BY A PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM ON THE
RUGGED TERRAIN OF A SMALL ISLAND

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team in the airborne assault on Corregidor Island, Philippines during the period 16 February - 8 March 1945, and the part it played in the reopening of Manila Bay to Allied shipping.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

Early in January 1945, the forces of the U. S. Sixth Army were poised and ready to strike at the major Japanese forces on Luzon Island, Philippines. Organized resistance on Leyte and Mindoro had ceased by the end of 1944. Thus the first two phases of the overall plan to liberate the Philippine Islands were completed. (1) (See Map A)

Troops of the U. S. Sixth Army steamed into Lingayen Gulf, Luzon Island. Preceded by an intense aerial and naval bombardment, these forces landed on 9 January 1945 and pushed inland to secure this beachhead. Continuing their relentless advance, spearheads of these forces had reached the northern and eastern outskirts of Manila by 3 February 1945. (2) (See Map A)

In the meantime, to cut off Manila from the south, additional U. S. forces had landed in Batangas Province, Luzon, and drove toward Manila from the south. These forces were approaching the southern edges of the city by 11 February 1945. (3) (See Map A)

Troops of the XI U. S. Corps had secured the Subic Bay area and early in February 1945 were pushing east to isolate Bataan Peninsula. (4) (See Map A)

(1) A-1, p. 1; (2) A-1, p. 1; (3) A-1, p. 2; (4) A-1, p. 2.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

With all indications pointing toward the early liberation of Manila, it became imperative to formulate and complete plans for the reopening of Manila Bay at an early date. With the relentless drive continuing toward Manila by the forces to the north, south and east of that city and with the neck of Bataan Peninsula being sealed off by troops of the XI U. S. Corps, it was believed that the Japanese troops being sealed up on Bataan Peninsula and in the city of Manila would follow the same course, adopted by the hard pressed troops under General Wainwright in 1942. This course had been a general withdrawal of troops from Bataan and Manila to the fortress of Corregidor with a consequent increase in the defensive strength available to the commander on Corregidor Island. (5)

A study of a map indicates the strategic importance of Corregidor Island. Sitting astride the entrance to Manila Bay, the possession of this island insures control of the harbor entrance to the possessor. From its cliffs, lookouts had for past centuries signalled the approach of Chinese junk, Moro vinta and craft of all types as they neared Manila, the "Pearl of the Orient." (6) (See Map B)

The plan for reopening Manila Bay, as submitted by the Sixth Army Commander and approved by General MacArthur, called for troops of XI U. S. Corps to land on the southern tip of Bataan Peninsula in the Mariveles Bay area on D-Day. Other troops of the Corps were to drive south down the east coast of the peninsula to effect contact with the troops landing in the Mariveles Bay area. The force making the landing at Mariveles Bay was to be accompanied by a reinforced infantry battalion. This battalion was not scheduled to land unless enemy action made their landing necessary for safety reasons. On D plus one, the 503d Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team, mounted by Eighth Army from Mindoro, was to drop on Corregidor Island. When airborne, command of this RCT passed from Eighth Army to the Commanding General of the Fifth Air Force. Upon landing,

(5) A-1, p. 2; (6) A-2, p. 1.

the airborne force came under the command of the XI U. S. Corps of Sixth Army. In conjunction with the airborne assault, the reinforced battalion accompanying the Mariveles Bay force was to make an amphibious landing on Corregidor Island. Upon completion of their amphibious landing, this battalion passed to the control of the Commanding Officer of the Parachute RCT. D-Day was set for 12 February 1945. (7) (See Map B)

AIRBORNE COMMANDERS ESTIMATE AND PLAN

On 8 February 1945, a copy of Sixth Army Field Order No. 48 embodying details of the operation was delivered to the Headquarters of the Parachute RCT on Mindoro by the Airborne Liaison Officer of Sixth Army. (8)

It might be well at this point to briefly outline the forces available for the airborne assault. The infantry units of the RCT consisted of three infantry battalions; a service company; and a headquarters and headquarters company. Each battalion had three rifle companies, each company consisting of three rifle platoons and a 60-mm mortar platoon (3 mortars); a battalion headquarters company consisting of a 30 cal. light machine gun platoon, an 81-mm mortar platoon, a communication platoon and an attached medical detachment. In addition to the infantry units, the RCT had as organic forces, a field artillery battalion and an engineer company. The artillery battalion consisted of a headquarters and service battery; 3 gun batteries armed with the 75-mm pack howitzer (A, B, C); and 1 battery armed with the 50 caliber machine gun (D). The engineer company consisted of a company headquarters platoon and three engineer support platoons. This RCT had never operated as part of a larger unit but operated directly under Army or GHQ control. (9)

Immediately upon receipt of the Sixth Army order, the staff and battalion and separate company commanders were alerted. Map studies of the island were begun and checks and inspections initiated to complete the equipment of subordinate units. (10)

(7) A-1, p. 49-50; (8), (9), (10) Personal knowledge.

A map study of the island immediately disclosed several salient features of the terrain. Corregidor is a tadpole shaped island, running east to west, at the entrance of Manila Bay. The head of the tadpole (the west end of the island) is called Topside. It is a 500 foot plateau that drops into deep ravines and cliffs to the water's edge on all sides. This part of the island is approximately 2,500 yards in diameter. The thin waist of the tadpole is called Bottomside. It is about 500 yards wide and rises to about twenty-five feet above water level. Over-looking Bottomside, and to the east of it, is the steep, jagged mass of Malinta Hill towering 400 feet into the air. This hill sits squarely across the narrow waist of the island. It is approximately 800 yards long from north to south and only 300 yards wide. From Malinta Hill, the tail of the island stretches out for about 3,000 yards to the east. This tail averages from 50 yards wide at its eastern extremity to about 800 yards where it reaches Malinta Hill. A hog back ridge rising to about 175 feet runs along the entire length of the tail. (See Map C)

Aerial reconnaissance flights over the island were begun to make a close study of possible drop areas. These flights disclosed that there were only three possible drop areas. One was an abandoned airstrip (Kindley Field) approximately 100 yards wide and 500 yards long near the eastern extremity of the island. Troops dropped here would be exposed to enemy fire from high ground at Malinta Hill and from Topside. An attack from this area would have to move against heavily defended higher ground. No further consideration of this tentative drop area was given as a landing here achieved nothing more than could be achieved by an amphibious assault. (11) (See Map C)

The other two possible drop areas were located on Topside. (12) These areas were the only other places on the island that had any resemblance to open ground. Area "A" was the old pre-war parade ground and approximated 100 yards by 150 yards. (See Map C) Area "B" was an

(11) A-2, p. 2; (12) A-2, p. 2.

old golf course about 150 yards by 250 yards located just south of Area "A". (See Map C) Aerial reconnaissance disclosed that these fields were surrounded by wrecked concrete buildings, pock-marked with bomb and shell craters and covered with rocks, scrap iron and tin roofing. Small trees on these fields had been bombed to such an extent that only stumps of from two to eight feet in height remained. The danger of being impaled on one of these tree stumps was apparent to all. To add to the hazards, the drop fields sloped sharply at their extremities to end in sheer cliffs. However the hazards of the drop areas would simply have to be accepted. There was nothing else to do. These fields were accepted and plans for the mission of the units began to take form. (13)

Now that the decision to drop on Topside had been made, it was necessary to plan for naval and air bombardment of this area to reduce to a minimum the enemy forces maintained on Topside during daylight hours, as this was the time the drop would be made. (14) To secure the fire support and coordination necessary to successfully accomplish this mission, conferences had already begun on the higher levels of command. The first of these was held at Sixth Army Headquarters on 5 February and at XI Corps Headquarters on 7 February. On 8 February the final details for this support and coordination were planned aboard the flagship of the Commander, Amphibious Group Nine. Those present for this conference were the Commanding General, XI Corps; the Commanding General, 54th Troop Carrier Wing; the Commander, Seventh Amphibious Forces; the Commander, Cruisers Seventh Fleet; the Commander, Amphibious Group Nine; G-3, XI Corps; A-3, Fifth Air Force; G-3, Sixth Army; the Commanding Officer, 503d Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team; the Airborne Liaison Officer, Sixth Army; and various staff officers assigned to the headquarters and commands named. (15)

The final detailed plan evolved as a result of this last conference called for the 151st Infantry Regimental Combat Team to make the landing (13 Personal knowledge; (14) A-1, p. 50; (15) A-3, p. 58-59.

on the southern tip of Bataan Peninsula in the Mariveles area on D-Day. This RCT would stage from the Subic Bay area. The 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment reinforced by 3d Platoon, AT Company and 3d Platoon, Cannon Company of the 34th Infantry Regiment would accompany the 151st RCT, remain aboard landing craft in the Mariveles area, and would make the amphibious landing on Corregidor on D plus 1 after the airborne assault had begun. The 503d Parachute RCT would begin its landings early on the morning of D plus 1. All three forces would be under the command of the Commanding General, XI U. S. Corps. (16) (See Map B) In the meantime a recommendation to postpone D-Day to 15 February 1945 had been approved by General MacArthur. (17)

The air support phase of the Corregidor operation actually began as early as 23 January 1945 when 180 two hundred fifty pound GP (general purpose) bombs were dropped on the island, and strafing of gun positions was carried out. By the day of the airborne assault (16 February 1945), 1,012 sorties had resulted in 3,128 tons of bombs being dropped on the island. The results of this bombing can best be shown by the diminishing antiaircraft opposition encountered. This opposition went from intense during early bombing raids to none by D-Day. Most of these bombs were dropped on enemy installations on Topside, the area where the airborne assault would be made. Corregidor was subjected to the heaviest and most intensive aerial pounding to which any area of comparable size (less than one square mile) had been subjected during the entire war in the Pacific area. (18)

The Naval softening up of the island began on 13 February 1945 when a task force, consisting of five cruisers, six destroyers, PT boats and other vessels, began shelling pillboxes, water line caves, tunnels and gun emplacements on Mariveles and Corregidor. This shelling continued through the landing made on Corregidor on 16 February 1945. (19)

In the meantime, planning at the headquarters of the Parachute RCT (16) A-4, p. 2; (17) A-1, p. 51; (18) A-3, p. 59; (19) A-3, p. 60.

was rapidly being completed. (20) Liaison had been established with the 317th Troop Carrier Group based on Mindoro Island. This unit had the mission of transporting the airborne troops from Mindoro to Corregidor, and for supplying the necessary transport for aerial resupply until water transported resupply could be effected. This unit had 51 C-47 planes, 15 of which were equipped with artillery dropping para-racks. These planes were capable of dropping approximately 1,000 troops at one lift, plus bundles of supplies and equipment not carried on the person of the individual. (21) The limited capacity of the airborne lift at one time dictated that the Parachute RCT would have to be transported in three lifts since the total strength of the RCT approached 3,000 men. (22)

Sand table models of the island had been constructed and all troops studied these models along with aerial photographs. Detailed instructions as to the part to be played by each individual in the operation were covered. Every jumpmaster was flown over Corregidor and made an aerial reconnaissance of the drop fields. Relief and form maps of the island were flown to Mindoro from General MacArthur's headquarters. As an indication of the importance attached to this mission by GHQ, General MacArthur dispatched Major General Marquat, his staff advisor on Coast Artillery and antiaircraft matters, to Mindoro to brief the parachute units on all that he knew about the terrain on Corregidor. General Marquat had been on Corregidor with General MacArthur and was evacuated from the island in 1942 along with General MacArthur and other members of his staff. (23)

As the softening up of the island by air continued, all available intelligence of enemy forces and dispositions of his troops was being gathered. Several officers and enlisted men of the Parachute RCT had served on Corregidor prior to 1941 and were invaluable sources of information about the tunnels, gun emplacements and underground barracks and storage areas. Known facts, based on previous occupation of the island by American troops, were that Malinta Tunnel runs through the base of Malinta Hill from east to west with a main entrance at each end. North and south wing tunnels join the main tunnel inside and come out at

(2) Personal knowledge; (21) A-4, p. 4; (22) Personal knowledge; (23) Personal knowledge.

smaller entrances on the north and south sides of the hill. The rugged terrain of the island makes it an excellent site for the creation of an almost impregnable fortress. American forces prior to the war developed these natural features extensively. The defenses consisted of an elaborate system of concrete and steel reinforced emplacements, pillboxes, underground storage sites for ammunition and supplies, and underground barracks. All major defensive installations were connected by an effective system of tunnels. These underground installations would be impervious to direct hits by bombs and naval gun fire. Any additional installations erected by the Japanese during the period of occupancy were unknown. The approximate strength of enemy forces was unknown and there was no way of gathering this information without endangering the security of the coming operation. It was estimated that his defensive plan would generally follow that adopted by General Wainwright in 1942. After the assault had been made, this estimate of his plan proved accurate. This estimate was briefly a disposition of approximately half of whatever troops he had available on the island perimeter to ward off an amphibious landing any place on the island. The balance of his force would be held in reserve in the tunnels of Malinta Hill to contain any landing made on the tail of the island; to ward off an amphibious landing on the waist of the island just west of Malinta Hill; and to reinforce his perimeter troops at any point. (24)

A thorough knowledge of all defensive measures taken by the enemy island commander would be extremely interesting. However this information is not available. Enemy personnel captured during the course of the operation disclosed that the island commander had been directed by the senior Japanese commander in the Philippines, General Yamashita, to take appropriate defensive measures against a possible airborne assault. In compliance with this directive, the island commander had made a reconnaissance and announced to his staff that an airborne assault could not take place due to lack of suitable landing areas. However, to cover

(24) Personal knowledge.

himself, he had extensive mine fields placed on the landing strip (Kindley Field) on the eastern end of the island. (See Map C) No other antiairborne defensive measures were adopted. (25)

The total minimum estimated enemy forces on the island were announced as 850. (26)

Since the limited lifting capacity of the available aircraft would allow a force of battalion size, reinforced, to be dropped at one time, the supporting machine gun fire of each battalion was trebled by re-organization of the battalion headquarters companies. Two additional machine gun platoons were added to each battalion, giving each battalion three light machine gun platoons (4 guns each). The organization of the additional machine gun platoon presented no problem as every man in the regiment had received instruction in the firing of all weapons organic to the infantry regiment. Since each battalion lift would have its proportionate share of artillery support, this in effect made each battalion a small, but well balanced combat team within itself. (27)

The regimental field order (FO No. 9) was issued on 14 February 1945. This order designated the troops to comprise each lift, their mission, and the equipment to be carried by the assault echelons. The first lift, to be dropped beginning at 0830 hour on D plus one, carried a detachment of Regimental Headquarters' Company and Service Company; the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; Battery A (75-mm Pack Howitzers) and one platoon of Battery D (.50 caliber Machine Guns), 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion; and Company C, 161st Parachute Engineer Battalion. The second lift, to be dropped beginning at 1215 hour on D plus one, was composed of the 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; Battery D (75-mm Pack Howitzers) and one platoon of Battery D (.50 caliber Machine Guns), 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion; a detachment of Service Company and the balance of Regimental Headquarters Company. The third lift, to be dropped at 0830 hour on D plus two, was composed of 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; Battery C (75-mm Pack Howitzers) and one platoon of Battery D (.50 caliber Machine Guns), 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. (25) Personal knowledge; (26) A-5 (Int. Est.); (27) Personal knowledge.

Artillery Battalion. The Headquarters and Service Battery of the Field Artillery Battalion was divided between the first two lifts. 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry (reinforced), was to land amphibiously on San Jose Beach, Corregidor, at 1030 hour on D plus one, and pass to control of the Parachute RCT commander upon landing. (28)

Each parachutist was to carry one unit of ammunition on his person for the individual weapon, and four meals of the "K" ration plus two canteens of water. Ammunition for the crew served weapons, of necessity, had to be dropped in bundles. Medical aid men were to drop with their platoons and the Battalion and Regimental Aid Station Groups were to drop with the Battalion and Regimental Headquarters respectively. (29)

An interesting innovation, born of necessity, is worth mentioning here. The doctrine taught at the Parachute School prior to leaving the continental U. S., envisaged dropping all weapons, except the small individual weapon, by container. Combat experience gained during the course of the regiment's fight from Australia to the Philippines, most of this in jungle terrain, demonstrated that the recovery of these bundles was in all cases difficult and in some impossible. Therefore in this operation, every weapon in the regiment, with the exception of the artillery pieces, .50 caliber machine guns, flame throwers and 81-mm mortars, were jumped on the person of the individual soldier. This system extended to all signal communication equipment with the exception of the SCR-284 radio set. (30)

All resupply was to be by air until the tactical situation allowed supplies to be moved in by water. 12 C-47s were allocated for these aerial resupply missions. (31)

Initial missions had been assigned units as follows:

3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry--Drop on Fields "A" and "B" commencing at 0830 hour on D plus one; secure the drop area; set up a perimeter generally along the 500 foot contour line of

(28) A-5, par. 3; (29) A-5, (Adm. O.); (30) Personal knowledge; (31) A-1, p. 53.

Topside; support by fire the amphibious landing of 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry at 1030 and, upon relief along the defensive perimeter by units of the second lift, to drive toward Malinta Hill to effect contact with the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry. (See Map C)

2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry--Drop on Fields "A" and "B" commencing at 1215; relieve the 3d Battalion from defense of the drop zone, and exploit the terrain north and west of the drop zone. (See Map C)

3d Battalion, 34th Infantry (reinforced)--Land on San Jose Beach at 1030, secure beachhead and Malinta Hill area and effect contact with the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment. (See Map C)

1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment--Drop on Fields A and B commencing at 0830 on D plus 2 as RCT reserve and be prepared, on order, to exploit terrain south of the drop zone. (See Map C)

462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion--Elements of this unit to drop with the infantry battalion they were supporting and to furnish fire support as directed by the infantry battalion commander. (See Map C)

Company C, 161st Parachute Engineer Battalion (less one platoon dropping on Field "A" with the 3d Battalion) to drop on Field "B" and be prepared to erect road blocks, destroy enemy fortifications by demolition as directed by RCT commander and to be prepared to attach one platoon to the 2d Battalion and one platoon to the 1st Battalion, 503d RCT upon their landing. (32) (See Map C)

Since nothing was definitely known of the actual enemy strength or dispositions, the detailed missions assigned units would depend on the

(32)-5, par. 3.

situation confronting the RCT Commander after the landings had been made.

With all plans completed, the units waited impatiently for 16 February. All personnel were restricted to the area on the night of 15 February. Captured Japanese movies showing the fall of Corregidor in 1942 and the insulting treatment of the American flag and prisoners of war were shown the troops of the RCT. (33)

THE EXECUTION OF THE PLAN

Early on the morning of 16 February, the first lift of the Parachute assault element was airborne and headed toward Corregidor. The formation flew in two columns of single planes in trail, one column over each field. The prevailing wind from northeast to southwest and the smallness of the fields had dictated a plan whereby each plane contained not more than 24 parachutists plus a maximum of three bundles. A maximum of eight men plus one bundle would leave the plane at each pass over the field. Planes would follow a west to east course, flying into the wind, circle and fly the second pass. This completely disregarded the approved doctrine of getting the maximum number of men on the ground in the minimum time interval. Furthermore it meant that each plane exposed itself to ground fire three times. This condition had to be accepted. The prevailing wind generally followed the long axis of the field which meant that the jumpmasters had to wait until the drop zone had been passed before giving the command to jump. A control plane containing the Parachute RCT Commander would continue to circle the island at a greater height than the troop carriers and, by voice radio with the carriers, attempt to make corrections in the line of flight of the carriers or alter the count of the jumpmasters based on observation of sticks of men already dropped. A "Go" point had been selected for each of the two drop zones. In each case this "Go" point was a prominent terrain feature known to the pilots, co-pilots and each jumpmaster. The procedure adopted for (33) Personal knowledge.

dropping the men from each plane was:

(1) A red light flashed by pilot five minutes before reaching the "Go" point.

(2) A green light flashed by pilot at the "Go" point.

(3) The jumpmasters to count so many seconds after passing the "Go" points before leading the stick out of the plane. The determining factor as to the length of the count depended on the jumpmasters observation of how sticks already dropped had landed or receipt of orders from the RCT Commander flying overhead. The RCT commander would jump after the drop of the first lift had been completed. (34)

To lessen the enemy opposition to the drop, naval gunfire by cruisers and destroyers, and a heavy air bombardment and strafing of the entire island preceded the parachute drop. 960 two hundred fifty pound fragmentation bombs were dropped between 0745 and 0800 hours. B-25 planes began bombing and strafing the southern half of Topside at 0801 hour dropping 80 one hundred pound bombs and expending 1,600 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in strafing runs. Twenty-five A-20s bombed and strafed the landing areas until 0829 hour. Precisely at 0830 hour, the troop carriers arrived over the drop zones and began discharging their cargo. While the drop was underway on Topside, thirty-four A-20s bombed and strafed the Malinta Hill area and the eastern tail of the island. Additional planes arrived and kept up a continuous bombardment and strafing of areas outside the drop zones. Surprise had been complete and little enemy opposition was encountered. (35)

By 0945 hour the last man of the first lift was on the ground and these troops were busily consolidating their position. (36)

To effect proper naval and air support after the landing had been made, a detachment of JASCC (Joint Assault Signal Company) and SAP (Support Aircraft Party) had jumped with this lift and established communication with the naval and air support units. This was the first

(34) A-2, p. 5; Personal knowledge; (35) A-3, p. 60; (36) A-1, p. 53; Personal knowledge.

parachute jump for any of these men. Two destroyers were in continuous support of the ground units from the moment of the first drop to the end of the operation; one destroyer supporting troops on the western part of the island and one ready to fire for units on the eastern area of the island. Aerial support, usually P-47s with two 500 pound bombs or two belly tanks of Napalm, was overhead continuously during daylight hours for the duration of the operation. With the air and naval liaison units ashore with the ground troops, a mission usually required only a few minutes to secure. (37)

At 1030 hour the amphibious landing was made on San Jose Beach, just west of Malinta Hill, by the 3d Battalion, 31st Infantry (reinforced) staging from Mariveles. This assault was covered by close naval fire. This force found the beach area extensively mined and suffered heavy personnel and equipment losses from these mines before they secured the top of Malinta Hill. Opposition was stunned by the preparatory fires and the battalion's objective was quickly taken. The naval gunfire had started landslides and some of the tunnel entrances of Malinta Hill had been sealed by these slides. After securing the crest of the hill automatic weapons were sited on all known entrances to the tunnels to keep the enemy bottled up inside Malinta Hill. (38) (See Map D)

It is noteworthy that the preparatory softening up of Topside was so effective and the enemy was driven so deeply into his underground sanctuaries, that the airborne troops were able to give the amphibious unit .50 caliber machine gun support during its landing. (39)

The author of this monograph commanded the 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment. In order to effect a speedy relief of the 3d Battalion on its defensive perimeter positions, the Battalion S-3 and the executive officers of Companies D, E and F had been sent along with the first lift to be able to quickly acquaint their respective commanders with the situation upon arrival of the second lift and to expedite moving (37) A-6, p. 19; (38) A-1, p. 53; (39) A-2, p. 7.

these units into position. (40)

The second lift became airborne and approached Corregidor Island about 1220 hour. Unknown to 2d Battalion Commander was the fact that the RCT Commander had radioed to XI Corps requesting that the drop of the second lift be cancelled and that this unit move in amphibiously the following day. This action by the RCT Commander was based on two suppositions on his part:

(1) That the troops of the first lift had gained such a tactical advantage that they could not be overrun by the enemy.

(2) Jump casualties had been so heavy on the first lift that the effective strength of the assault forces could very adversely affect the outcome of the operation if the same conditions prevailed during the second drop. Also considered was the fact that the enemy had been alerted and the second lift could expect intense ground fire to be directed at the planes and personnel as they floated earthward. This message failed to clear in time and the drop of the second lift began about 1230 hour and by 1345 hour the entire lift was on the ground, being assembled preparatory to moving into position to relieve the 3d Battalion. (41)

Enemy fire directed against the troop carriers of the second lift was heavy but few casualties were suffered. An element of good fortune entered into the drop of the second lift. When the planes were only a couple of minutes away from the "Go" point, the wind which had reached a velocity of about 30 miles per hour died down to a very gentle breeze. Consequently the casualties suffered as a result of jumps were negligible when compared with those of the first lift. (42)

By 1500 hours the companies of the 2d Battalion had moved into position, assisted in expanding the perimeter to more favorable terrain and were preparing for the following day's operation. (43) (See Map D)

Patrols of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry had made contact with the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry patrolling west from Malinta Hill but the route from Yopside to the beach area was far from secure. (40), (41), (42), (43), Personal knowledge.

By this time it was apparent that the estimate of 850 enemy on the island had missed its mark by many thousands. (44) (See Map D)

By the end of the day 2,065 personnel had landed on the island by parachute. The total jump casualties mounted to 222 or 10.7% of the total force jumping. The first lift suffered about 75% of these jump casualties. It had been estimated that 20% of the force might be incapacitated as a result of jump injuries. It was felt by all concerned that making the assault vertically, even though it was the most difficult and hazardous mission ever assigned to a parachute unit, would result in fewer casualties than those to be expected as a result of an amphibious assault alone. (45)

Conditions encountered by the troops of the first lift caused many men to land over the sides of the cliff bounding "B" Field and some individuals were even blown into the ocean. These men were immediately rescued by patrol boats standing by for just such an eventuality. Some of the men landing over the cliff gathered on the beach and were picked up by boat. However one group landing near Breakwater Point decided to find their way up the cliff sides and steep ravines and rejoin their units on Topside. Captain Ijn Itagaki, the Japanese Commander on Corregidor had been informed of the approach of boats carrying the amphibious units and had gone from his CP inside Malinta Tunnel to an OP near Breakwater Point. There his party ran into this group of paratroopers and in the ensuing skirmish the Japanese Commander was killed. This must have added immeasurably to the confusion of the enemy. (46)

By late afternoon, 16 February 1945, the area held on Topside was about 1,000 yards by 500 yards. Included in this area was both drop fields, the bombed remains of the barracks, officers quarters and various headquarters buildings. These buildings were all constructed of reinforced concrete and would afford excellent gun sites and OPs to ward off any attack. The RCT CP, 2d Battalion CP, artillery CP and fire control center (44), (45), Personal knowledge; (46) A-2, p. 7;

plus the improvised hospital had all been established in the old barracks ruins. The three storied building was approximately one-quarter mile long. All recovered artillery pieces were massed on the parade ground (Field "A"). (47) (See Map D)

The RCT Commander requested, and the Commanding General, XI Corps approved, the cancellation of the drop of the third lift of parachutists (1st Battalion reinforced) scheduled to drop at 0830 hour the following day. Instead of dropping, they were to fly over the island, drop only their equipment bundles on Field "A", proceed to the airstrip in the Subic Bay area and land, and from there be moved amphibiously to Corregidor. This change would eliminate the depletion of the strength of this unit resulting from expected jump casualties. Another factor involved here was the fact that casualties could not be evacuated until the route from Topside to the beach area had been secured. The heavy casualties suffered during the day were overtaxing the medical facilities that had been brought in by the assault echelons. A hospital had been improvised by combining all the aid stations under control of the regimental surgeon. (48)

The cost in casualties for the first day due to enemy action had been light (21 killed), when the odds against the attackers are considered. The counted enemy losses were 51 men due to ground fire by the assault forces. For several hours less than 1,000 men had defied 6,000, well-equipped and well-entrenched enemy troops. Even after the second lift was on the ground and the amphibious troops ashore, the enemy outnumbered the attackers 2 to 1. The total American forces on the island the first day was slightly in excess of 3,000. It later developed that the enemy force numbered about 6,000 Japanese Marines. (49)

Enemy opposition the first day was confined to small arms, mortar and automatic fire directed against the perimeter from all sides. This fire grew in intensity as dark approached. It was apparent that the enemy was recovering from the initial shock of the unexpected assault. Very few (47) Personal knowledge; (48) A-1, p. 54; (49) Personal knowledge.

enemy personnel were seen. His fire was coming from the many underground emplacements and caves in the area. (50)

Before dark, automatic weapons had been sited to cover the most likely avenues of approach into the perimeter. Mortar and artillery pieces had registered concentrations along these avenues of approach. It was felt that the position could be held against whatever forces the enemy could throw against the perimeter. Occupation of Malinta Hill and the critical terrain on Topside had split the enemy forces. (51)

Being familiar with the enemy habit of putting his wire communications above ground, the pre-assault shelling and bombing must have completely disrupted his wire system. The nature of the terrain was such that radio communication would be difficult due to the cliffs, land masses and deep ravines. This assumption later proved correct as a coordinated attack by all his forces at one time never did develop. This apparent lack of communication facilities was one of the contributing factors to the enemy's failure to obtain coordination of his efforts. (52)

During the night artillery and mortar kept up harassing fires on likely avenues of approach to discourage any enemy thoughts of a banzai attack. The two destroyers supporting the ground forces illuminated the entire island at irregular intervals throughout the night. Enemy fire during the night was constant and heavy, but harassing in effect. (53)

At dawn, 17 February 1945, units of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, supported by one company of the 2d Battalion, launched a coordinated attack against Morrison Point and the hill just southeast of this point. This hill dominated the route to the beach area. By 1000 hours this critical terrain feature had been taken against surprisingly light opposition. Failure of the enemy to defend this area was one of the worst blunders he made during the entire campaign. It should have been apparent that the first efforts of the attackers would be to effect contact between the forces on Topside and those on Malinta Hill. (54)

(See Map E)

(50), (51), (52), (53), (54), Personal knowledge.

Thus, the objective of a gradual enlargement of the perimeter with constant reduction of the enemy, while the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry contained the defenders inside Malinta Hill, had been launched. (55)

Coincident with the attack on Morrison Point, and Morrison Hill, the remainder of the 2d Battalion launched its first assault on the old battery position north of Wheeler Point. This concrete and steel reinforced position was the former site of a 16 inch Coast Artillery piece, and was characterized by underground storage spaces, tunnels, ventilator shafts and innumerable apertures for automatic weapons fire. When driven underground, the enemy simply kept moving from one position to another. It was not until late on the following day that the position was finally cleared when one of the many white phosphorus grenades dropped inside through the ventilator shafts finally ignited powder and ammunition stored inside. (56) (See Map E)

During the day water, rations and ammunition were replenished when an aerial resupply was accomplished on "A" Field. This resupply mission was carried out by a detachment of the RCT Service Company who had set up a rear supply base at the airstrip on Mindoro. An interesting feature of this resupply was that of 1,250 gallons of water dropped free (i.e. without parachute) from a height of about 400 feet, more than 80% of it was recovered intact and undamaged. (57) The water was particularly welcomed as the canteens each man had when he landed had long since been consumed and there was no water to be had in the area held on Topside. A disagreeable feature of each aerial resupply was that as soon as the bundles began to land, the enemy would lay down a heavy mortar and automatic weapons barrage on the field from his hidden positions. This meant that everyone was pinned down during the barrage, including the artillery gun crews. Why these barrages were not fired at other times remains an oriental mystery. (58)

The third lift of the Parachute RCT (1st Battalion, reinforced) flew over the island as scheduled, dropped their bundles and proceeded (55), (56), Personal knowledge; (57) A-7, (Supply Report, p. 1); (58) Personal knowledge.

to the airfields at Subic Bay. Here another example of the excellent cooperation and coordination characterizing the whole operation occurred. Trucks were waiting at the airstrip and rushed this unit to the docks where it embarked on the waiting APDs (Attack Personnel Destroyers). This operation was not anticipated or scheduled, yet it was organized on the briefest of advance warning and operated perfectly. (59) As the unit was approaching the San Jose beach area, it came under heavy fire from caves looking seaward located in the faces of the cliffs. These caves could not be fired on by either the troops on Topside or those on Malinta Hill. The APDs pulled away from the beach and our "floating artillery", the two destroyers, moved in and silenced the enemy guns. Having spotted the cave openings during the Japanese firing, the destroyers fired point blank into the cave openings and must have accounted for numerous enemy personnel. Here again we see excellent coordination and cooperation between the military and naval forces. (60)

By 1630 hours the 1st Battalion had landed, moved inland from the beach for a few hundred yards and set up a perimeter for the night. (61) (See Map E)

Two jeeps landing with the 1st Battalion attempted to make the run from the beach area to Topside. Although the distance to be travelled was only about 1,500 yards along a fairly serviceable paved road, these jeeps ran a gauntlet of enemy fire and one was so badly damaged by enemy fire that it barely completed the trip and never was used again. The other jeep was invaluable for hauling ammunition and moving artillery pieces. It was the only transportation on Topside. (62)

With the jeeps having run this gauntlet of enemy fire and our other battalion being on the island, the spirits of everyone rose as it was felt that the way to the beach area would soon be open and our dead and seriously wounded could be evacuated. (63)

The end of 17 February 1945 saw the perimeter of the previous day (59) Personal knowledge; (60), A-1, p. 54; (61), (62), (63), Personal knowledge.

slightly enlarged and units of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry dug in on the top of Morrison Hill. (64) (See Map E)

The operations on this day set the pattern to be followed throughout the entire operation. Patrols of platoon and company size moved out from the perimeter during daylight hours and destroyed whatever enemy forces encountered, then moved back to their perimeter positions before dark. During the night the enemy would move back into positions that had been wrested from him during the day at heavy casualties to his forces. The following day the procedure would be repeated. An SOP for taking certain positions was developed. As a matter of course, all caves taken during the day were sealed by demolitions. (65)

Our dead for the two days operations was 29 KIA or DOW, while the counted enemy dead was announced as 364. (66)

The RCT Commander's plan to use the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry as a blocking force to contain that portion of the enemy forces on the eastern end of the island and inside the tunnels of Malinta Hill, while the 503d Parachute RCT destroyed his forces on the western end of the island, was succeeding better than anyone could have hoped. (67)

The night of 17 February 1945 was again marked by intermittent harassing fire into the perimeter area. Our usual artillery and mortar harassing fire continued. During the night an enemy column, estimated at 200, was seen moving west from the Malinta Hill area. The destroyers were alerted and fired star shells for illumination and artillery fire was directed on this column. Whether this column was moving into position to launch an attack on the forces on Topside or Morrison Hill is unknown. If that was his intention, the artillery fire landing right on his column had discouraged this undertaking. Later events indicated that this force probably had been occupying positions along the route from the beach area to Topside and, after seeing the 1st Battalion land and being unable to withdraw inside Malinta Hill, were trying to make their way to the

(64), (65), Personal knowledge; (66) A-2, overlay number 4; A-7, Medical report; (67) Personal knowledge.

western end of the island to rejoin the enemy forces located there. (68)

Early on the morning of 18 February, the 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry moved through scattered enemy fire and joined the units on Topside. The three infantry battalion commanders were called to the RCT CP and a reshuffling of areas of responsibility was accomplished. Each battalion was given an area of responsibility on the western portion of the island generally wedge shaped. The southern zone went to the 1st Battalion; the 2d Battalion getting the area from the north to the southwest; and the 3d Battalion's area extending from the north to the southeast. (See Map F) The order given to the battalion commanders by the RCT Commander was probably one of the shortest and most terse operation orders ever given. "Clear the damn Nips from your area. Coordinate your operations through me or my staff." (69)

The road to the beach area was sufficiently cleared early on 18 February 1945, so that evacuation of the dead and seriously wounded to the beach area could begin. The dead and wounded were picked up at the beach by water transport. Water borne supply began for all units. (70)

Now that this route was open, the 18th Portable Surgical Hospital was moved Topside and supported all units on the island. They set up in the barracks area adjacent to the aid stations and rendered outstanding medical support for the balance of the operation. (71)

Operations on 18 February 1945 continued along familiar lines. Patrols moved out from the perimeter, accompanied by flame thrower and demolition crews from the Demolitions Platoon of the Regimental Headquarters Company and demolition parties from the Engineer Company. Reduction of the enemy strong points followed this general pattern. Fire support by point blank fire of the artillery, 81-mm and 60-mm mortars barrages and the fire of the machine guns drove the enemy below ground. The assault troops then moved forward and either destroyed the enemy by fire from the flame throwers or sealed them inside their positions by demolitions. To eliminate casualties of our own forces, caused by (68), (69), (70), Personal knowledge; (71) A-7 (Supply report, p. 2)

the back blasts of the flame thrower when fired into small cave and bunker openings, a new method of using the flame throwers was devised. After the unignited fuel of the flame throwers had been directed into the enemy positions, it was ignited by WP grenades. If the enemy position required extensive demolitions to seal its many openings, the assault troops of the paratroopers pushed ahead and dropped off engineer troops to complete the job. (72)

The perimeter was extended some 500 yards to the west in the course of the days operations. By nightfall, 1,090 enemy dead had been counted. Many enemy perished inside their underground positions or were sealed inside. (73) (See Map F)

Two incidents during the night of 18 - 19 February 1945 illustrate the confusion reigning among the enemy. The first of these incidents occurred in the Breakwater Point area when the enemy resorted to his old technique of mass suicide. An underground arsenal was exploded, killing unnumbered enemy. The survivors of the blast, about twenty in number, streamed out of the underground position, formed a circle and upon command, armed their grenades and held them to their stomachs. The other incident was a well coordinated enemy attack, launched about 0300 hour, 19 February 1945, up the ravine located on the northwestern corner of the island, against the 2d Battalion. As soon as this attack was discovered, the naval support party called on the destroyers to fire star shells to illuminate the island. This illumination was furnished and the attack was repelled by daylight. Some enemy troops succeeded in reaching the 2d Battalion CP and tossing grenades inside the building before they were finally driven off. Our units suffered heavy casualties but the enemy dead was estimated at several hundred. Many of the enemy dead resulted from their troops falling over the edge of the cliffs when rushing our position. These positions were located directly on the edge of sheer cliffs. (74) (See Map F)

The days operations for 19 February 1945 first began with a systematic elimination of the enemy who had infiltrated inside the perimeter during the early morning attack. In the area being worked over by the 1st Battalion (72), (73), (74), Personal knowledge.

(the southern sector of the main part of the island), the cliffs were so steep that hand-carrying of personnel and evacuation of casualties back up the cliffs was not feasible. To overcome this difficulty, the Navy sent LCVPs to the beach carrying water and ammunition and evacuated the dead and wounded on their return trips. (75)

The balance of the day of 19 February 1945 was spent in the systematic closing of caves and elimination of the enemy wherever found. (76)

Before dark, the perimeter was pulled back to that held previous to its expansion to the west during the operations on 18 February 1945. It was felt that the enemy had definitely recovered from his initial shock and that the thinly held expanded perimeter invited attack. (77)

(See Map G)

The cumulative counted enemy dead had mounted to 1,553, of which the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry atop Malinta Hill had accounted for 230. (78) Despite all efforts to contain the enemy forces inside Malinta Hill, each night they attempted to infiltrate out from the hill's many tunnels and some succeeded in their escape effort. (79)

The operations 20-23 February 1945 continued along the same lines. (See Map G) Patrols were being sent along the beach areas to clean out the caves that could not be cleared from above. Here it was impossible to call on the ever present air force for support. The cliffs in most of the area were sheer and rose to a height of several hundred feet. The beach area along the base of these cliffs was from 50 yards wide to a few feet in some places. The enemy had gun positions in caves along the face of the cliff that they entered from tunnels dug from atop the cliff. Some caves were located along the water line. Here the destroyers won their laurels. A parachute officer would go aboard the destroyers to point out the positions that could not be reached from the beach area or above. The destroyers would then move to within a few hundred yards (75), (76), (77), Personal knowledge; (78) A-2, overlay number 13; (79) Personal knowledge.

of the shore and seal the caves by firing point blank into their entrances. Units of the 2d Battalion discovered and destroyed the apparatus whereby the enemy could electrically explode a series of sea mines located in the channel of the bay between the island and Bataan Peninsula about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north. (80)

The aid given by air support cannot be overestimated. As an example, 31 P-47s expended 4,000 gallons of Napalm, 38,500 pound bombs and 3,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in a support mission for one company in its assault on just one position. (81)

Knowing the enemy practice of blowing himself up when cornered, an all important question in everyone's mind was, "what would happen should he attempt to explode Malinta Hill with its many tunnels probably stored full of ammunition and explosives?" At 2130 hours the night of 21-22 February 1945 the dreaded explosion occurred. The entire island and the southern part of Bataan Peninsula shook and trembled like a leaf in the wind. Flames and debris poured from every tunnel entrance. There were many landslides. Casualties among the troops of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, atop the hill, were heavy. But the mass of the hill still stood after the explosion. (82) Later questioning of prisoners of war who were inside the hill and survived the explosion disclosed that the explosion was intentional and was meant to eliminate the troops blocking the tunnel entrances to the west so that a coordinated enemy attack could be launched against the troops on Topside. However what was intended as a controlled explosion exceeded the intentions of the enemy commander and resulted in many casualties among his own troops. In the ensuing confusion many enemy tried a dash to freedom from the tunnel entrances and those who were not killed by heavy machine gun fire and mortar concentrations, escaped to the eastern end of the island. All thoughts of an attack on Topside were abandoned. (83)

The last major enemy assault against our perimeter on Topside

(80) Personal knowledge; (81) A-4, p. 13; (82) A-1, p. 54; Personal knowledge; (83) Personal knowledge.

occurred about 0930 hour, 23 February 1945 when an attack by about 400 enemy occurred in the Wheeler Point area. After some temporary gains, this enemy force was decimated by the concentrated fire of the 2d Battalion from the land approach and the five inch naval gunfire of the destroyers from the sea side. (84) (See Map G)

By dusk, 23 February 1945 the toll of counted enemy dead had reached a total of 2,466. (85) Our dead as a result of enemy fire had risen to 99. (86)

The western portion of the island had been sufficiently cleared so that attention could be turned to the enemy forces on the tail of the island east of Malinta Hill. (87)

The plan adopted by the RCT Commander envisaged turning over responsibility for the entire eastern portion of the island west of Malinta Hill to the 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 503 Parachute Infantry would be moved to the Malinta Hill area and attack east in column down the tail of the island. (88) (See Map H)

The attack jumped off early on the morning of 24 February with the 1st Battalion leading. With excellent fire support from the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry from their positions atop Malinta Hill, field artillery support from Topside and support from naval and air units, the 1st Battalion had advanced east about 800 yards by night fall to a general line Infantry Point-Camp Point. (89) (See Map H)

The air units giving support during this phase of the operation were at times so numerous that long waits occurred before the planes could get in over the island and drop their deadly cargoes. The air observer and support party had set up their installations atop Malinta Hill which gave them excellent observation of the entire eastern end of the island. Bombers and fighter planes returning to their bases from strikes made on Luzon would fly over the island and, if they had any

(84) Personal knowledge; (85) A-4, p. 16; (86) A-7, Medical report, p. 1; (87) A-4, p. 16; (88) A-4, p. 16; Personal knowledge; (89) A-4, p. 16; Personal knowledge.

bombs or ammunition left, ask for permission to join in the continuous pounding and strafing taking place just ahead of the ground assault units. Targets for the air support units would be marked by smoke shells. At times the enemy must have thought that the entire air strength of the Pacific Southwest was directed against him. (90)

As the 1st Battalion advanced east, the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry followed close behind and mopped up the enemy who had taken refuge in his underground positions. (91)

During the night of 24 - 25 February 1945, the enemy was seen concentrating a force estimated at 600 east of the line held by the 1st Battalion. Just as his attack was launched against our positions, the concentrated fire of the parachute artillery battalion was brought down on his forces. The island tail at this point is about 400 yards wide. With the artillery fire and the fire of an entire battalion directed against this force, it was decimated. Less than 100 of the original force was believed to have survived. (92)

On 25 February 1945, the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry was relieved by the 2d Battalion, 151st Infantry. The work of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry had contributed immeasurably to the success of the operation. When they departed from the island they left behind 815 enemy who had died at the mouth of their guns. (93)

In the meantime the 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry continued their mopping up of the western portion of the island. (94) (See Map H)

As the enemy was squeezed further into the tail of the island, many tried to escape by swimming or by rafts to southern Bataan. Initial attempts were made to pick them up by LCMs and PT boats, but many of them were armed and fought off rescue. Thereafter they became targets of opportunity for fighter planes and PT boats patrolling the narrow channel separating the island from southern Bataan. (95)

Operations on 25 February 1945 extended the forces of the 1st

(90) A-6, p. 18; (91) A-4, p. 16; Personal knowledge; (92) A-7, p. 3; (93) A-7, p. 3; (94) A-4, p. 16; (95) A-4, p. 17; Personal knowledge.

Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry to a general line Cavalry Point-Monkey Point. The two days operation east from Malinta Hill had cost the enemy 1,237 in counted dead. (96) (See Map H)

The 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry continued its relentless advance east on 26 February. Just as the forces of this battalion had secured the high ground in the Monkey Point area, the enemy blew up an underground arsenal beneath the hill. This blast was so terrific that the entire hill was blown up and a ravine created where there had been a hill. The 1st Battalion suffered 196 killed or injured. (97) The 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry which had been following closely behind the 1st Battalion immediately passed through the badly shaken 1st Battalion and continued the relentless drive to the east. This act of desperation on the part of the enemy eliminated the last concentration of enemy in force on the island. (98)

By 1600 hours, 25 February advance elements of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry had reached the eastern end of the island. (99) (See Map H)

The final assault on the eastern end of the island was made on 27 February by the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry. By the end of the day our forces had reached the eastern extremity of the island. (See Map H) The 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry was withdrawn to Topside to reorganize during the day. (100)

With the 3d Battalion occupying the eastern end of the island, the 2d Battalion, 151st Infantry located in the Malinta Hill area and the balance of the forces located on Topside, the close support that had been furnished by the air units had to cease due to safety reasons. Although the major part of the enemy forces had been eliminated, he still occupied many caves along the base of Corregidor's many cliffs. The destroyers moved in and gave close support to the ground units in their mopping up exercises. This mopping up continued until the Parachute RCT was withdrawn from the island and returned to Mindoro Island on 8 March 1945. (101)

(96) A-4, -. 16-17; (97) A-7, p. 3-4; (98) A-7, p. 4; (99) A-4, p. 17; (100) A-4, p. 17; (101) Personal knowledge.

On 2 March 1945, which incidentally was the third anniversary of the activation of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, General MacArthur accompanied by General Kreuger and a large party of dignitaries visited the island. General MacArthur presided at a flag raising ceremony on Topside and the fortress Corregidor was officially presented to General MacArthur by the RCT Commander. (102)

It would be appropriate at this point to include a few remarks about the excellent fire support given the ground forces by air and naval units. During the period 16 - 25 February, 30 close air support missions had been called for and delivered. Ammunition expended by these air units totalled 34,900 gallons of Napalm, 286 500 pound demolition bombs and 158,800 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition. The two supporting destroyers had fired 64 separate fire missions on the western half of the island alone during the period 16 - 28 February. Infantry and engineer demolition sealed over 400 caves and tunnels and expended 34,500 pounds of explosives. (103)

Thus, in about two weeks, this island fortress had been wrested from approximately 6,000 enemy by 2,700 parachutists (including 600 field artillerymen and engineers) and 1,100 standard infantrymen. The RCT suffered 165 killed, 615 wounded or injured, while the attached units lost 45 killed and 174 wounded or injured. The enemy total amounted to 4,497 dead, 18 prisoners of war and uncounted hundreds killed or sealed in the underground tunnels and caves. (104)

This operation may best be described by the following quotation:

"This strongly fortified, natural defensive area, defended to the point of annihilation by a well equipped, numerically superior, and fanatical enemy, was reduced in a period of twelve days. Careful planning, employment of the element of surprise, and the determined attack by skillful troops, perfectly coordinated with air and naval support again proved an unbeatable combination."

(105)

(102) A-7, p. 4; Personal knowledge; (103) A-4, p. 18; (104) A-4, p. 18;
(105) A-4, p. 18.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The first thought that comes to mind in an analysis of this operation is that subsequent events bear out the pre-operation estimate that the airborne assault would be more economical in American casualties than if the island's reduction had been attempted by amphibious assault alone. The element of surprise obtained by an airborne assault and the immediate occupation of the critical terrain features outweighed the advantage accruing to the enemy by his superiority in forces.

We see in the failure of the enemy to prepare antiairborne defenses a blunder that eventually led to his destruction. His assumption that airborne forces would not attempt a landing, simply because he would not dare the landing himself, led to his undoing. Here we see the Japanese falling victim to the same lesson they had taught the English at Singapore when this Naval base fell because the English considered a back door attack on the base so difficult that it would not be attempted.

The tactical naval and air support furnished throughout the entire operation demonstrated what can be accomplished when close liaison is maintained between all arms and services. The close comradeship established by having the air and naval liaison personnel jump with the assault elements paid big dividends. This fire support was available during the first critical moments of the assault which experience has shown is usually the time this support is needed most.

The failure of the enemy commander to defend the critical terrain features preventing a link-up between the airborne units and amphibious units can only be attributed to his slow recovery from the shock of the initial landing.

In an operation of this sort where little or no information is known of enemy strength or dispositions, the simple plan adopted by the assault commander proved its worth.

The skill of the Japanese Commander in disposing his troops and taking advantage of cover and concealment is evident. The job was done

so well that the best intelligence estimates of enemy forces on the island placed his strength at 850, when it actually approximated 6,000.

The hazards of the airborne assault due to unsuitable landing areas were lessened by having each jumpmaster fly over the landing areas and familiarize himself with the obstacles to be encountered. The mental and physical conditioning of the airborne assault troops contributed greatly in overcoming these hazards.

The practice of familiarization and firing of all infantry weapons by all men in this RCT proved invaluable. It enabled the RCT commander to organize six more machine gun platoons within a few days time.

This operation demonstrated that parachutists can be dropped on any area in large numbers if the high expected casualty rate will be initially accepted and plans made to diminish this rate by adjustments in the number of men dropped from each plane at each pass over the landing area.

Failure of the Japanese commander to maintain communication between the elements of his command prevented any sort of centralized control.

The rapid advance of the assault elements in this operation was possible by the practice of dropping off specialists in demolitions work plus some infantrymen to complete the job of sealing caves and mopping up by-passed enemy. More assistance can also be given the medical aid men in the treatment and evacuation of casualties if the assault elements continue to push forward instead of stopping and trying to render first aid themselves.

The establishment of a defensive perimeter was accomplished early enough during each day to enable the artillery support to register their guns for close defensive fire before dark. This practice enabled the artillery alone to break-up several enemy attacks on the perimeter.

The death of the enemy island commander on the first day of the operation illustrates a point worth noting. When an airborne assault is in progress or has been completed, the post of the commander of the

defending elements should be at his CP where he can best direct the efforts of the defending forces. It is interesting to note that a similar fate befell a German defensive division commander during the airborne assault on Normandy. He, too, had decided to make a reconnaissance and fell victim to the scattered forces of the invading airborne troops. (106)

Probably the best summation of the operation is given in General Order Number 53, War Department, 1945 which conferred the distinguished unit citation on the RCT. This order reads in part, "One of the most difficult missions of the Pacific War - - they attacked savagely against numerically superior enemy, defeated him completely, and seized the fortress. Their magnificent courage, tenacity, and gallantry avenged the victims of Corregidor of 1942 and achieved a significant victory for the United States Army."

LESSONS LEARNED

1. One principle of war may be violated if proper compensation for the violation is obtained by the aggressive exploitation of other principles.
2. It can be fatal if the capabilities and intentions attributed to the enemy in your estimate are limited to only those things that you would do yourself in like circumstances.
3. Close liaison between the supported and supporting unit is essential before proper and adequate fire support can be expected.
4. The defender of an area must exploit and defend all critical terrain features in that area if he expects to be successful.
5. Simplicity of a plan will usually lead to a more vigorous and efficient execution of the plan.
6. Full utilization of cover and concealment and an efficient dispersal of troops will lead to an under estimation of the number of troops in the area.

(106) A-8, p. 129-130.

7. No area should be considered as invulnerable to an airborne assault simply because the features of the terrain would discourage such an assault.

8. All infantrymen should be instructed in the use of all weapons organic to the infantry regiment.

9. Assault elements must always push forward vigorously. Mopping up and the care and evacuation of casualties must be left to units following the assault elements.

10. Perimeters should be established early enough during the day to enable artillery pieces to register fire close defensive fires before dark.

11. Communication between the elements of any command is necessary before centralized control and coordinated effort can be accomplished.

12. Whenever possible all jumpmasters in airborne units should make a personal air reconnaissance of their landing areas prior to their actual jump.

13. The post of a defending commander during an airborne assault on his position should be his C.P. He must depend on strategically located O.Ps. and warning stations for information he desires about the assaulting units.