

*Photo  
Army  
- Pasig River*

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 37TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
IN THE CROSSING OF THE PASIG RIVER  
AND CLOSING TO THE WALLS OF INTRAMUROS, MANILA  
7 - 9 FEBRUARY 1945  
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY DIVISION IN ATTACK

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 37TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 37th Infantry Division in the crossing of the PASIG RIVER and closing to the walls of INTRAMUROS, MANILA, LUZON CAMPAIGN during the period 7 - 9 February 1945.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major planning phases of various levels of command leading to the actual execution of the operation.

Most of us recall the fall of the Philippines which started with an intense air bombardment by the Japanese on 8 December 1941. (1) This and subsequent enemy gains in the Philippines resulted in General MacArthur's receiving an order from the President of the United States to leave Corregidor in order to establish and assume command of General Headquarters in Australia. (2) This outstanding leader departing with his small group via PT boat made the now famous statement, "I shall return". (3)

In June 1944 General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area announced a very broad plan designed to liberate the Philippines just when the Sixth Army was about to gain

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(1) A-2, p. 32-33; A-7, p. 70  
(2) A-2, p. 63-68  
(3) A-1, p. 62, 230; A-2, p. 172, 176

control of the northern coast of New Guinea. (4)

On 30 September 1944 Headquarters Sixth Army received a staff study from GHQ of the plans for the LUZON CAMPAIGN. On 12 October 1944 GHQ announced that Sixth Army would be the force which would make the initial landings on the Island of LUZON in the Philippine group. This directive came just in the middle of preparations for the movement to LEYTE. (5)

#### SIXTH US ARMY PLANS

Early in November 1944, on order of GHQ, the Sixth Army Commander submitted his plan, based on the concept previously set forth by the Commander-in-Chief of the SWPA area for the Sixth Army participation in the LUZON CAMPAIGN.

The features of this plan were divided into the three following phases: Phase I - An amphibious operation to seize beachheads in the LINGAYEN-DAMORTIS area of LINGAYEN GULF; Phase II - To attack and destroy all enemy forces north of the AGNO RIVER and to seize and hold crossings over the AGNO RIVER; Phase III - The destruction of hostile forces in the Central Plain area and the continuation of the attack to capture MANILA. (6) (See Map A)

The major combat units assigned to the Sixth Army for the LUZON CAMPAIGN were: (7)

Headquarters I Corps	37th Infantry Division
Headquarters XIV Corps	40th Infantry Division

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- (4) A-3, p. 5  
(5) A-3, p. 5  
(6) A-3, p. 6  
(7) A-4, p. 5; A-3, p. 6

6th Infantry Division	43d Infantry Division
25th Infantry Division	11th Airborne Division
158th Infantry Regiment	13th Armored Group

#### THE XIV CORPS PLAN

The XIV Corps planned to land amphibiously two divisions abreast in the LINGAYEN area of LINGAYEN GULF, the 37th Division on the left and east of the 40th Division. (8) Each division was to have a landing beach of approximately 2000 yards.

Objective for S-Day (9 January) was to seize ground running generally east to west from DAGUPAN to crossings along the CALAMAY and AGNO RIVERS within the Corps zone. (9)

All units were to push vigorously to the south; the 40th Division to protect the right flank of Army and the 37th Division to maintain contact with the I Corps, on the left, thus accomplishing phase one.

The second phase of the Corps plan called for the 37th Division to push through the Central plain of LUZON to the south and the 40th Division down the west coast of LUZON and clear the CLARK FIELD-STOTSENBURG area of all hostile forces. (10)

The third phase of the Corps plan called for the 40th Division to clear and secure the rugged ZAMBELES MOUNTAINS to the west of the FORT STOTSENBURG area. The 37th Division was to seize the line MALOLOS-SIBUL SPRINGS-CABANATUAN and

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(8) A-4, p. 35  
 (9) A-6, p. 5  
 (10) A-4, p. 59

be prepared to advance promptly to MANILA on order. (11)

(See Map A)

#### ENEMY LOCATIONS AND STRENGTHS

Enemy strength on the island of LUZON at the time of the landing at LINGAYEN GULF was estimated by various commands as 150,000 minimum to a maximum of 235,000 Japanese troops.

The disposition of enemy forces on LUZON was broken down more concisely as indicated below:

(1) Northern LUZON - 37,500 men, of which 23,000 were combat troops.

(2) Central LUZON - 77,000 men, of which 47,000 were combat troops.

(3) BATANGAS area - 31,000 troops, of which 21,000 were combat troops.

(4) BICOL PENINSULA - 15,500 troops. (See Map B) (12)

#### THE 37TH INFANTRY DIVISION SITUATION

During the night of 8-9 January the convoys carrying the XIV and I Corps entered the LINGAYEN GULF. The convoys were supported by the Third and Seventh Fleets of the US Navy, and the Fourteenth and Twentieth Air Forces of the US Army Air Corps. (13)

The 148th Infantry on the right (west) of the division zone with two battalions abreast had the mission of advancing inland to the left along the beach to DAGAPAN. Support

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(11) A-8, p. 25  
(12) A-8, p. 15; A-4, p. 3  
(13) A-5, p. 22

by tanks, tank destroyers and artillery was available, and support by naval gunfire and air would be available on call. (14)

Progress was rapid and contact was made with the 40th Division on the right immediately, but contact was not made with I Corps (on the left) until S plus 2 (11 January).

The 129th Infantry advanced immediately southeast to the village of DAGUPAN and crossed the DAGUPAN RIVER where a perimeter defense was set up for the night of 9 January. Using the LUPIS-BIDMALEY highway as an axis of advance, the 148th Infantry advanced to the CALMAY RIVER on S-Day. The 145th Infantry was in Corps reserve until 10 January, busily engaged in the unloading of LST's and repairing the LINGAYEN Airfield. All bridges across both the DAGUPAN and CALMAY RIVERS within the division zone had been destroyed. Destruction of these bridges represented a small portion of the some fifty-one highway bridges that were destroyed by the retreating Japanese between LINGAYEN GULF and MANILA.

The bridge situation severely hampered the division's progress. Although foot troops could usually wade across the streams and rivers, heavy vehicle traffic was impossible for as long as three days at a time. The reason for this being that the Bailey Bridges, although available for the purpose, were scattered over several ships and arriving piecemeal, making them very hard to find and assemble.

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(14) A-5, p. 224; A-6, p. 19



Shortly after the landing the division was faced with many civilian problems which continued to exist throughout the entire operation. Often violent demonstrations would break out between various political and guerrilla factions. Civilians began to "flock" into medical installations for food, shelter and much needed medical care. Having to take care of this situation from the time of the landing of the division and throughout the entire campaign, medical personnel were subjected to severe strain and medical services to troops were seriously impeded. (15)

The assault regiments spent the next three days (until 16 January) establishing and securing the army beachhead line. (16)

On 16 January the assault regiments started moving south on Corps order to occupy the AGNO RIVER line and out-post the CAMILING-PANIQUE line. The advance thus far had met very little enemy resistance. (See Map A)

From 16 January to 24 January the division moved generally south by bounds cleaning out small pockets of enemy resistance along the way.

On 25 January the division received a Corps warning order to advance south, seize and secure the line, FORT STOTSENBURG-ANGELES-MAGALANG. (See Map C)

It now appeared that the rapid advance of the XIV Corps was at an end as the I Corps on the left had encountered bitter enemy resistance; and therefore, an exposed flank of

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(15) A-4, Appendix p. 1-3, 140-141; A-6, p. 315  
(16) A-6, p. 21, 13, 287; A-5, p. 224-225

about fifty-three miles existed on the east. The division had advanced almost seventy miles and held a front of forty-seven miles in the first seventeen days of the campaign.

At the same time the 40th Division on the right was meeting stubborn resistance in the little town of BAMBAN to the northeast of FORT STOTSENBURG.

Rather than continue the advance to the south with the 37th Infantry Division and take a chance of a strong enemy counterattack against the 40th Division from the west, which if successful would cut the main supply line, the corps commander decided to leave one reinforced RCT of the 37th Division to protect the left flank, and hurl the remainder of his forces against the strong enemy positions in the CLARK FIELD-FORT STOTSENBURG area.

On 26 January the 37th Division launched an attack to the west on the CLARK FIELD-STOTSENBURG area in conjunction with the 40th Division, with the 129th Infantry on the right and the 145th Combat Team on the left. Other than sporadic small arms fire movement was rapid. By moving west the 37th Division soon drew abreast of the 40th Division on the right, which had launched its attack the same day in the hills northwest of CLARK FIELD in the vicinity of BAMBAN. (See Map C)

Although the Japs defended every yard stubbornly, they were unable to stop the attack. On 31 January the largest airfield in the Philippines, CLARK FIELD, was in American

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hands. The enemy, however, continued to resist bitterly in his mountain defenses west of FORT STOTSENBURG.

The primary mission of the XIV Corps being to advance to the south and capture MANILA, the corps commander issued orders directing the attachment of one regiment of the 37th Division to the 40th Division to assist in the clearing of the Japanese mountain defenses west of CLARK FIELD and FORT STOTSENBURG as the security of the area hinged on driving the enemy deeper into the western mountains. The 37th Division was to continue its advance to the south. (17)

On 27 January the 1st Cavalry Division landed on the beach at LINGAYEN GULF. Based on the fact that the I Corps was well occupied to the north and east of the 37th Division, some fifty miles back, and that the enemy showed signs of disorganization, the 1st Cavalry Division was placed under XIV Corps control and ordered to move with all possible speed south on the 37th Division's left flank toward MANILA.

From the 27th of January to 31 January inclusive, the 37th Division units that had been engaged in the CLARK FIELD-FORT STOTSENBURG action were busy clearing out small pockets of resistance to the west and securing the area which they had taken from the enemy.

On 1 February the 148th Infantry moved back into the southeast abreast the 145th Infantry to continue the advance to the south along the original axis of attack (Highway 3) and toward MANILA. (18) This advance was impeded by the

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(17) A-6, p. 23-35; A-5, p. 233, 238; A-8, p. 21, 27

(18) A-4, p. 82; A-6, p. 31-35

necessity of constructing bridges at every water course; mainly the wide PAMPANGA RIVER at CALUMPIT. Although foot troops, jeeps and a minimum of supplies were transported across the river by amphibious tractors, the bulk of the division loads were stalemated until completion of a pontoon bridge by the engineers. Here again, as many times before, the engineers ran into supply difficulties as sixty feet of the bridge decking material was missing. (19)

On 2 February the 129th Infantry which had been attached to the 40th Infantry Division at FORT STOTSENBURG was released from attachment and immediately began its advance south toward MANILA to join the division.

Both the 145th and 148th Infantry continued southward on Highways 3 and 51 on February 3 and 4. During this movement and up until the division reached the north bank of the PASIG RIVER on 7 February, the two regiments met continuous enemy artillery barrages, small arms fire and definite strong centers of resistance. Due to falling debris and difficult stream crossings, the division was unable to reinforce the infantry units with armor. (20)

#### NARRATION

##### BATTLE OF MANILA

As elements of the 37th Division began to push to the north banks of the PASIG RIVER on 7 February, they found that the enemy's main defensive positions were organized in that part of MANILA lying south of the PASIG RIVER. (21)

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(19) A-6, p. 37

(20) A-4, p. 86; A-7, p. 28; A-6, p. 35-42

(21) A-3, p. 37

(See Map D) These positions were occupied by 18,000 enemy troops, three-fourths of which were Navy personnel, under the command of a Japanese Admiral.

As the units of the 37th Division and the 1st Cavalry moved in from the north, they found the major enemy defensive positions facing the wrong way as the garrison commander had anticipated that American forces would invade by way of southern LUZON. (22)

Even though it appeared that the division had the "drop" on the enemy his forces fought stubbornly, and ruthlessly destroyed most of the city as well as all the key bridges in the northern and southern sectors of the city. Except for certain bridges across the PASIG RIVER, which were blown on or about 7 February, all other important ones were blown prior to the entrance of American forces into the city. (23)

Although the enemy's resistance north of the PASIG RIVER up to this date paralleled that of a delaying action, he had converted the heart of the city, south of the PASIG RIVER, into a fortress. Each building became a strong point. All streets were heavily mined, barricaded and covered by planned fires of anti-tank and automatic weapons located in pillboxes at key street intersections. (24)

On the morning of 7 February the 37th Division had reduced all organized resistance north of the PASIG RIVER. This day was one of many confused situations. First of all, just as the second phase of the battle of the PASIG RIVER

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(22) A-8, p. 27

(23) A-3, p. 37; A-9, p. 15; A-11, p. 7

(24) A-11, p. 3-6

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line was to start, the boundaries of the 37th Division were shifted <sup>FROM</sup> to the line RIZAL AVENUE-QUEZON BRIDGE all inclusive on orders from XIV Corps. In spite of past successes against the enemy so far, as in other engagements since the entrances into north MANILA, it was found impossible to force the enemy to withdraw. Rapid advances by division troops had resulted in bypassing and isolating enemy strong points and garrisons, particularly in the TONDO district. This created a menace to the main supply route which resulted in having to send large forces back to this vicinity to destroy bypassed enemy groups. While mopping up went on and units began to close in on the PASIG RIVER line, the first crossing of the PASIG RIVER was initiated on this date in the vicinity of the Presidential Palace, in compliance with the Corps Commander's order. (25)

Upon arrival of amphibious tractors and assault boats, elements of the 148th Infantry under the direction of the division commander made an amphibious crossing of the river just east of the palace. The regiment began its crossing at 1515 hours under the covering fire of artillery including an ineffective smoke screen. By 1600, elements of the regiment had advanced approximately 1500 yards from the opposite bank. The first wave received little if any opposition, but succeeding waves received intense mortar, artillery and machine gun fire throughout the remainder of the day and night. Despite this, the regiment continued to

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(25) A-5, p. 261; A-8, p. 28; A-3, p. 37

The 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry, was directed to cross the PASIG RIVER in division reserve. The 2nd Battalion which had been relieved of the mission of securing the north bank of the PASIG RIVER by a special security force advanced to the northeast to eliminate the gathering resistance in the TONDO area. This growing enemy resistance was threatening the entire XIV Corps supply line. The operation soon developed into fierce house to house and street to street fighting. The 3d Battalion was busily engaged in the Polo area blocking the enemy's route of escape and denying him access to areas adjoining the Corps supply line. (29)

The 129th Infantry less one battalion crossed the PASIG RIVER and advanced to the southwest with its right flank hinged on the PASIG RIVER and left flank abreast the 148th Infantry.

All crossings of elements of the division, including the division reserve, were completed by 081655 February. Ground opposition throughout the day was only spasmodic, but shelling by mortar, artillery and rockets was extremely intense. (30)

On 9 February elements of the division had crossed to the south bank of the PASIG RIVER, were well on the way in an enveloping movement to encircle the strong enemy position within INTRAMUROS, and make contact with the 1st Cavalry Division, which was making a wide envelopment to the south

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(29) A-4, p. 91; A-6, p. 47; A-5, p. 366

(30) A-5, p. 272; A-6, p. 48-49; A-10, p. 98

east and the 11th Airborne Division which was attacking from the south.

On the morning of 9 February the 148th Infantry, supported by artillery, 4.2 inch mortar fire and three light tanks, continued the attack to the southwest where it met bitter resistance in the vicinity of PACO Railroad Station and PACO Church. Enemy resistance managed to limit the regiment's advance to 300 yards for the entire day.

The 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, continued to hold against small enemy attacks in the Polo area. This was considered a most important mission as it not only denied the enemy his main route of escape, but also denied him access to a position from which he could attack the Corps main supply route. The 2nd Battalion engaged in fierce fighting and encountering well established pillboxes and emplacements, managed to clear the TONDO area and continue the attack further to the north in order to secure the TONDO area. The use of rocket launchers, pole charges and direct fire anti-tank weapons contributed to this success. The 1st Battalion remained in division reserve south of the PASIG RIVER. (31)

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 129th Infantry spent the entire morning of 9 February seeking a time and place to launch an attack on the Provisor Island which was only twenty-five yards from the south bank of the PASIG RIVER. Capture of this island was very important as the largest

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(31) A-6, p. 49



single unit of electrical supply of the MANILA ELECTRIC COMPANY occupied the major portion of the island. An attack on this strong point with any sizeable force would be suicide. Elements of G Company launched an attack with eighteen men in two small boats. One boat made shore successfully but only a few scattered men of the second boat were successful, as it was hit by enemy 20mm and machine gun fire. At the time this foothold was made it was considered hopeless. The remaining men managed to hold out throughout the day. That night an attack was launched supported by heavy mortar and artillery concentrations. This attack plus succeeding attacks over a period of three days finally proved successful. Throughout the operation the 2nd Battalion had forty-five men killed and ninety-six men wounded in action. (32) (See Map D)

In summary I think that it can be said that the division had accomplished its mission thus far by crossing the PASIG RIVER and seizing a major portion of the heart of MANILA south of the PASIG RIVER in preparation for the launching of the attack against the "WALLED CITY" (INTRAMUROS). Capture of this last enemy stronghold would definitely mean the end of the Battle of MANILA.

To date the division had accounted for approximately 13000 enemy killed and 459 enemy prisoners.

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(32) A-10, p. 98-103; A-6, p. 49

## ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

### 1. ENGINEER BRIDGING MATERIALS

From LINGAYEN GULF to MANILA the division's advance was impeded by bridging difficulties over the various streams and rivers, as the enemy had destroyed fifty-one bridges behind them as they withdrew south to MANILA.

*None of the preliminary documents*

It wasn't that the division did not bring sufficient Bailey bridging units to meet its needs, but planning for the loading of the equipment was faulty. The material was distributed among many ships. Once the equipment was assembled there were no construction difficulties. The principal difficulty was trying to find the equipment and assemble in units. The reason for this being that the material was unloaded over many sectors of the beach.

### 2. CALCULATED RISKS

In compliance with provisions of a Sixth Army field order to advance to the south and to seize and secure the CLARK FIELD-FORT STOTSENBURG area, the Corps Commander of XIV Corps had to take one of two courses of action to accomplish the mission:

(1) Contain the enemy on its right with the 40th Division and continue the advance on MANILA with the 37th Division, or

(2) Leave a portion of his command such as one reinforced RCT to hold a frontage of forty-seven miles and to protect an open flank on the left of fifty-three miles and

to attack the CLARK FIELD-FORT STOTSENBURG area with the bulk of his forces.

Let us consider some of the existing factors that the Corps Commander considered in making his decision. First, it was quite apparent by now that the enemy occupied the CLARK FIELD-FORT STOTSENBURG area in such numbers as to be able to retard the Corps advance to MANILA by launching a strong counterattack against the 40th Division, which, if successful might result in the cutting of the main supply route of the remainder of the Corps. Secondly, it was also known that the enemy had strong enough forces to the east to attack the flank of the division line (which was to be held by the reinforced RCT) in such force that if successful, would not only cut the main supply route, but would also delay the Corps considerably in accomplishing its final objective, the capture of the city of MANILA.

The Corps Commander decided to run the risk of a possible enemy attack on the left flank of the Corps and attack the enemy to the west in the CLARK FIELD-FORT STOTSENBURG area with the bulk of his forces. This decision is considered one of wisdom although it does not adhere to the teachings of military manuals.

3. INTELLIGENCE

Throughout the division campaign from LINGAYEN GULF to MANILA, intelligence operations were greatly affected by the great volumes of civilian and guerrilla information which

*Based on preliminary documents*

was in most cases inaccurate or exaggerated. The Combat Intelligence Section of G-2 was inadequate to handle this situation. It became necessary to set up additional interrogating teams with inexperienced personnel, which proved most unsatisfactory. These teams were not well grounded in the basic principles of Combat Intelligence. As a result much time was wasted in lengthy interviews with both civilians and guerrillas. In many cases these interviews proved to be of no value to the division G-2 in securing the much needed enemy information.

Experience throughout the entire operation from LINGAYEN GULF to the outskirts of MANILA has proved that in an operation of this nature either the existing Table of Organization of a G-2 Section should be expanded or specially trained interrogation teams should be attached to supplement the present organization of the division G-2 Section.

#### 4. SURPRISE

The rapid advance of the division from LINGAYEN GULF to MANILA can partially be credited to surprise on the part of American forces in their landing and direction of attack on the island of LUZON.

At the time of the American landing approximately 36,000 enemy troops were within striking distance of the beachhead. Whether surprised or not the enemy forces were in a complete state of confusion trying to regroup and reorganize. As a result our forces encountered only local and piecemeal attacks by small enemy groups. Another major indication of

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surprise was evident in the manner in which the enemy set up his defense of MANILA. When the division entered MANILA from the north the Japanese Commander in MANILA was completely surprised. Indications of this were that all of his major defensive positions were facing to the south as he thought that the American forces would invade the island from that direction.

5. MEDICAL SERVICES TO CIVILIANS

When the division landed at LINGAYEN GULF the medical personnel were subjected to severe strain and medical services to troops were seriously impeded by civilians who "flocked" in to the medical installations for food, shelter and much needed medical care. The few remaining hospitals and medical supplies in the hands of the civilians prior to the return of the American forces were either destroyed by severe bombing and shelling throughout the campaign or taken by the enemy as he withdrew to the south.

Many types of diseases were encountered among the civilian populace from LINGAYEN GULF to MANILA. The most popular were malnutrition, malaria, dysentery and venereal diseases. Medical service although inadequate had to be provided from division medical personnel throughout the entire operation.

6. ENEMY TACTICS - WITHDRAWAL

Throughout the entire campaign against the Japanese, mainly in cities or built-up areas, it was found impossible to force him to withdraw. Using orthodox methods of attack

to cope with the enemy's methods of defense resulted in the bypassing of strong enemy points and emplacements. For example in the TONDO sector of MANILA, it was necessary to send a strong force back in order to destroy the enemy pockets of resistance that were bypassed in the initial stages of the attack, as they were threatening the main supply route of the Corps. In most instances this type of operation proved to be most difficult.

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#### 7. CIVILIAN POPULATION

All along the route of advance, from the LINGAYEN GULF to MANILA, civilian problems of all types began to arise. The main problems that confronted the division were demonstrations, evacuation from combat areas and numerous relief problems. Quite often violent demonstrations would break out in small barrios and towns between the various political and guerrilla factions. This condition in most cases necessitated the use of combat troops to break up and control such activities.

Based on preliminary movements

Problems of relief, housing and evacuation of personnel from combat sectors were much greater than anticipated. Shortly after the arrival of the division and other elements of the Corps in MANILA, they were confronted with over 350,000 needy civilians who had to be placed on direct relief.

OK but heavy

#### LESSONS

1. In planning an amphibious operation it is believed better practice to make plans to carry materials for a complete bridge on one ship, rather than scatter parts on several ships.

2. Although military manuals do not teach us to run the risk of leaving one reinforced RCT to hold a frontage of forty-seven miles, commanders are forced to take such risks in order to accomplish their mission.

3. All intelligence personnel, whether replacements or supplementary, must be well grounded in the basic principles of Combat Intelligence.

4. Tactical surprise, once achieved, must be exploited immediately before the enemy can react accordingly.

5. In planning for an operation of this type, adequate provisions should be made for additional medical supplies and personnel to care for civilian sick and wounded.

6. In fighting an enemy who refuses to withdraw, it is essential to have an adequate force available to destroy bypassed enemy groups.

7. In an enemy occupied area all types of civilian problems must be anticipated in order not to hamper the efforts of combat elements of the command.