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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 503d PARACHUTE
INFANTRY REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK ON
CORREGIDOR ISLAND, 16 FEBRUARY - 2 MARCH 1945
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Regimental Adjutant)

Type of operation described: PARACHUTE REGIMENT
IN A VERTICAL ENVELOPMENT

Major Lester H. Levine, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. I

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INTRODUCTION

An objective of this monograph is to show how the first principle of war, mass, can be violated successfully despite heavy odds in favor of a well protected, well entrenched, fanatical enemy. In short, this study is an account of the parachute assault of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, known as the 503d Regimental Combat Team (Parachute) along with its attachments, on Corregidor Island, Philippine Islands, 16 February to 2 March 1945, during the Luzon Campaign.

A second objective is to point out that when the principle of war, mass, is violated, compensation for the violation can be obtained by a vigorous and aggressive exploitation of other principles. For example, the principles of surprise, simplicity, and offensive were employed with such telling effect, that the lack of mass was hardly a consideration. In fact, the method of transportation for one third of the Regiment to the target area was ordered changed at the eleventh hour, which change resulted in an intentional delay of twenty-four hours.

Too, an attempt will be made to show that the action on Corregidor might well have been labeled "Operation Cooperation", so ideal was the cooperation between the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Prior to a discussion of the assault on Corregidor, it seems fitting to give a brief account of the action which preceded that which took place on Corregidor. As a result of a decision reached at the Octagon Conference, 15 September 1944, The Sixth Army, X and XXIV Corps, under General Walter Krueger landed 20 October 1944 on the northeastern shores of Leyte Island, Philippine Islands, (see map A) for the invasion of that archipelago, which contained about 260,000 ^{1st Lt} enemy. XXIV Corps immediately began pushing inland, while X Corps was making an assault on the south coast of Samar (see map A) and a short amphibious move to seize the north coast of Leyte. Bitter fighting for the island of Leyte ensued, and all the more so in that the enemy was continually reinforcing his troops at the northwestern part of the island in the vicinity of Ormoc. Although our Navy caused the enemy to take heavy troop losses during his reinforcement operations, he was, nevertheless, able to make sizable gains in his troop strength. Added to this handicap were violent rain storms and deep ~~(and I mean "deep")~~ mud, which ^{the} situation required the use of hand-carry for all supplies. However, by 1 December seven American divisions and the separate 503d Regimental Combat Team (Parachute) were firmly located in the mud at Leyte. Five airfields were in operation, and the contiguous waters were controlled by our navy. The 77th Infantry Division, after taking off from the eastern side of the island, made an amphibious assault on the west coast on 7 December, just south of the town of Ormoc. The hard and relentless drive to the east was on. Finally, on the night of

21 December, the last 500 exhausted, defeated enemy quit and fled. Leyte was ours but we unwillingly shared the air overhead with the Kamikaze pilots. (1)

The next goal in the American advance to recapture the Philippines was the ambitious one of Luzon Island (see map A). However, the distance from Leyte, where we had our only airfields in the Philippines, to Luzon was too great to expect satisfactory fighter-plane cover. Consequently, the flat, smooth plains of southwestern Mindoro Island (see map A) in the area of San Jose Beach, about 150 air miles from Manila (see map A) were selected as the possible sites for fighter airstrips. The 503d Regimental Combat Team (Parachute) was selected to jump in this ideal-for-jumping area, but the airfields at Leyte could not support such an operation. As a result, the assault was to be amphibious with two RCT's -- the 19th ^(see map A) and 503d. (2)

Both RCT's assaulted the island of Mindoro on 15 December 1944 against no opposition. Within a matter of a few hours a fighter strip was under construction; within twenty-four hours American planes and PT boats were in operation against southern Luzon. The two RCT's established a strong perimeter around the town of San Jose to protect the construction and operation of the airstrips. From the moment of landing until the landing in Luzon itself, took all their attention, Japanese planes bombed and strafed the airstrips and other military

(1) A-11, pages 133-141; (2) Statement of Lt Col John L. Erickson, formerly Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; Personal knowledge.

installations almost twenty-four hours daily; but the construction continued, and our planes rapidly began to secure air superiority. (3)

Elements of the Japanese navy assaulted the installations on Christmas night 1944, but our own planes drove them off just about the time that the supply of bombs became exhausted. As each B-25 dumped its last load of bombs, it took off for Leyte, inasmuch as an amphibious and/or airborne assault was expected to follow the naval shelling. The 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, then in Leyte, was alerted to drop at San Jose and reinforce our forces there, if the need arose. Fortunately, the enemy did not follow up his bombardment with a landing. At any rate, airstrips had been constructed and secured to assist in the invasion of Luzon Island. (4)

By means of a series of feints and guerrilla diversions, the enemy on Luzon was in a state of confusion as to when and where the invasion would come. Two corps of Sixth Army, I and XIV, hit the beaches at Lingayen Gulf (see map A) on 9 January 1945, and by nightfall 68,000 troops had developed a beachhead fifteen miles wide and 6000 yards deep. By means of his deceptive measures, the confusing tactics of the guerrillas, and the activities of our Air Force, General MacArthur had succeeded in the diversion of every major, hostile, combat organization from the beachhead area except one division and a mixed brigade. The enemy was in an impossible position, in that other than the two exceptions, all his combat organizations were in motion and were forced into piecemeal commitment. (5)

(3) Personal knowledge; (4) Personal knowledge; (5) A-11, pages 144-145.

Sixth Army was quick to take advantage of the confusion of the enemy, and the advance to Manila was launched. Slight opposition only was encountered until the troops approached Clark Field (see map A). At that point I Corps encountered heavy opposition from enemy strongly entrenched on the high ground. In order to keep the supply line from the north open, I Corps held up where it was. (6)

The XI Corps, part of Eighth Army, landed on 29 January on the west coast of Luzon near Subic Bay (see map A). Opposition was light, so that XI Corps pushed eastward and southward to cut off the Bataan peninsula where USAFFE forces three years earlier had made such desperate stands against the Japanese. (7)

The 11th Airborne Division, assigned to Eighth Army, minus its parachute regiment, the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, made an unopposed amphibious landing on 31 January at Nasugbu, south of Manila (see map A). The 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment on 3 February jumped on the high ground dominating the Cavite area (see map A), while on that same night troops of the 1st Cavalry Division, Eighth Army, reached the north-eastern portion of Manila. The situation in the city looked bad for the enemy, especially so in view of the pressure of Sixth Army troops from the north, northwest, and south. (8)

It is at this point in the situation that the reason for the assault on Corregidor Island (see map A) becomes apparent. Without Corregidor Island, the Port of Manila after its capture could not be effectively utilized, as coastal guns on the island

(6) A-11, p. 145; (7) A-11, p. 145; (8) A-11, p. 145.

could hamper our shipping. Too, Corregidor was believed to harbor so-called Japanese suicide "Q" boats. (9)

The situation, briefly, is that the time was early February 1945, the city of Manila was about to fall, and the Island of Corregidor had to be taken before the Port of Manila could be utilized. All that remained was the decision relative to the method of assault and the organization which would be assigned the mission. A discussion of the principles and considerations involved in the employment of parachutists will follow to show the line of reasoning which might have been used in the selection of the method of assault; all that remained, therefore, was the assignment of a specific organization.

*Sixth Army should have had
short range or medium range
enemy selection*

(9) Personal knowledge.

SELECTION OF THE METHOD OF ASSAULT

Of primary importance in the ultimate decision as to the feasibility, suitability, and acceptance of a parachute combat mission is the availability of drop zones and their immediate surroundings. A discussion, then, of the desirable features of a jump zone, as well as the actual features of Corregidor at the time of subject parachute drop, is in order at the outset of this study in order to present what might have been the commander's estimate of the situation. Jumping from planes which are flying at about 100 miles per hour, each paratrooper will land approximately forty to fifty yards from any other individual, (10) and ^{*}"sticks" form normally an elliptical pattern on the ground. The interval between jumpers is increased as the altitude above the ground becomes greater, in view of the drift of the parachutes as a result of wind velocity and air currents. "A jump of regimental size when placed on one DZ [Drop Zone] is best executed if the three (3) battalions are dropped at intervals of sixteen (16) seconds. (This [sic] will result in three (3) separate battalion concentration areas totaling approximately five thousand (5000) yards by twelve hundred (1200) yards". (11)

Corregidor Island (see map B) is less than two miles square, and presented but three possible drop zones. One zone was the emergency landing strip located on the tail of the polywog-shaped island, but this strip could be immediately discarded, inasmuch as no advantage would be gained which could

(10) A-4, p. 63; (11) A-4, p. 63.

*

not be secured by an amphibious assault. The assaulting force would have to gain the topmost part "Topside", initially, in order to prevent the enemy from having the advantage of observation down on the assault force; which advantage the enemy would have were the strip used, inasmuch as the emergency strip is situated on the lower, tail portion of the island.

The other two possibilities were the parade ground and the golf course on "Topside". However, the parade ground was 250 by 150 yards, and the golf course was approximately 75 yards longer but the same width as the parade ground. "...the two [parade ground and golf course] combined provided the smallest area into which an air drop of combat troops in any number has yet been made." (12) As if the size of the contemplated drop zones was not sufficiently discouraging, the actual condition of the fields presented a very short future for the potential parachutists: splintered trees surrounded the small drop zones, as did tangled undergrowth and wrecked buildings; the areas themselves were both pocked-marked with bomb craters, and littered with rocks, scrap iron, tin roofing, and all sorts of debris which all together closely approximated natural and man-made, anti-parachute invasion obstacles. To guarantee that there would be nothing favorable about either of these drop zones, both fields are contiguous to precipitous cliffs 600 feet high, which drop off abruptly to the boulder-strewn beach. Too, the prevailing winds of 15 to 25 miles per hour are seaward and unless the proper exit point was

(12) A-2, p. 2.

chosen, parachutists would be carried to their deaths over the edge of the cliffs or, at best, dropped into the sea. Drop casualties alone were estimated to run as high as 20 percent. (13)

Why, then, in view of all the disheartening features of corregidor, should a parachute assault be considered feasible?

For one reason, the terrific toll that the Japanese had had to pay in lives lost in their amphibious assault in early 1942 on the very same island was still well remembered. Especially did this factor take on an added significance when it was realized that the enemy had had almost three years of concentrated effort during which to refortify the island against attack from the sea. Coupled with an amphibious attack was the necessity of making an uphill attack, once the actual landing had been effected. (14)

The estimated enemy strength was 850 (14) and, consequently, expected jump casualties of an airborne attack would still not reduce an assault force composed of a parachute regimental combat team below an effective strength, especially in view of the anticipated surprise which would be gained from a vertical descent. All in all, casualties from an airborne assault would possibly be less than an amphibious assault. "It was correctly assumed that the Jap was adequately prepared for the latter [amphibious] assault but, in all probability, would be caught flat-footed by the former [parachute]. All other factors considered, the parachute descent was acceptable and the decision

(13) A-2, p. 2; (14) A-3, Appendix A to Annex #1

was made". (15) In fact, later confirmation from both a prisoner of war and a recovered Japanese diary proved that the Japanese commander of the island had actually been warned of an approaching airborne attack. The commander had made an estimate of the situation and after a careful terrain analysis, decided that a parachute attack was not feasible. Consequently, he made no preparations for one. Had he prepared strong defenses against such an attack, to include anti-parachute obstacles as originally rumored to exist, this particular monograph might never have been written. (16)

The discussion just presented indicates that despite the fact that Corregidor lacked every desirable characteristic for a jump zone, vertical envelopment was nevertheless decided upon as the type of assault to be attempted. In fact, the island by its very nature was considered immune to a parachute attack, and this consideration by the enemy undoubtedly assured the success of the parachute attack against tremendous odds.

(17)

(15) A-2, p. 2; (16) A-1, p. 8; personal knowledge;
(17) A-1, p. 8; personal knowledge.

PHASE I - PREPARATION

As has already been stated in the "General Situation", the 11th Airborne Division on 31 January 1945, made an amphibious landing at Nasugbu south of Manila (see map A). On 3 February the 511th Parachute Infantry of the Division jumped on the high ridge dominating the Cavite area (see map A). To assist these units in their attack on Manila, the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment was alerted for the probable mission of jumping on Nichols Field (see map A). (18) At the time this alert was given, the 503d Parachute Infantry, a separate regiment, was located in San Jose, Mindoro, Philippine Islands (see map A). The organization was the principal and infantry element of the already-famous 503d Regimental Combat Team (Parachute), which in addition to the Infantry included the 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and Company C, 161st Airborne Engineer Battalion (later redesignated 161st Airborne Engineer Company). (19)

On 31 January 1945, the RCT had concluded the Mindoro - Island phase of the Western Visayan Campaign. Although the phase extended officially over a forty-five day period and included an amphibious assault (without too much prior training therefor), the operation consisted mainly, as has been previously stated, of establishing and maintaining an extended perimeter around the town, as well as absorbing daily enemy air attacks and a surprise enemy naval shelling. The operation had not been costly in men (only four KIA) or materiel, but, nevertheless, (18) A-5, p. 5; personal knowledge; (19) Personal knowledge.

equipment had to be checked and replaced, inasmuch as the alert was for a contemplated parachute drop, which would in addition to other details require the fabrication of cargo containers designed by one of Assistant Parachute Maintenance Officers of the Regiment. Too, detailed planning for the airlift and resupply had to be initiated, as well as the numerous other preparations which, of necessity, are associated with any combat mission. However, no one in the 503d Parachute Infantry was the slightest bit surprised when two days later, 5 February 1945, with the target date of 8 February, the alert was cancelled: the Regiment had been on and off an alert status many times prior to this one. (20)

The next day, 6 February, found the Regiment again alerted, but the signs of the time appeared to indicate that "this is it", in that a few days earlier a topographic relief model of Corregidor, Philippine Islands, had arrived. (21) Corregidor was to be the target this time. (22) Needless to relate, the planning and preparations continued on the basis of the new mission, with the target date set for 16 February 1945.

One of the most serious problems at this time was the shortage of equipment containers and the lack of time to pack personnel parachutes. There was sufficient^{*} webbing available, thanks to the excellent cooperation of the Air Force, and, consequently, the Parachute Maintenance Platoon began operations on a twenty-four-hour basis to fabricate slings and containers

(20) Personal knowledge; (21) Statement of Technical Sergeant Thomas G. Mitchell formerly Intelligence Sergeant, HQ, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; (22) Personal knowledge.

of a type designed by members of the platoon. This type container, called AA6, was suitable for dropping much of the equipment, but, in addition, considerable improvisation had to be effected. (The Parachute Maintenance Platoon had just recently completed its move from Leyte to Mindoro and was in the process of setting up its equipment at the time the alert was received. As a consequence of the lack of shelter and ship-unloading facilities at the location of the Regiment at Leyte, the weather, mud, and salt water had taken a heavy toll of parachute supplies and equipment). There were, however, sufficient cargo canopies. Nevertheless, the problem was aggravated by the fact that parachutes and containers used for aerial resupply would have to be considered totally lost during the operation. (23)

The second half of the problem relative to parachute maintenance and supply, that is, the lack of time during which personnel parachutes could be packed, was solved in part by the cooperation of the 11th Airborne Division. (As has been stated, the 503d Parachute Infantry was a separate regiment, an organic part of no division). However, the 11th Airborne Division gave the Regiment 1500 packed, personnel parachutes. (24) The remainder of the required number of personnel parachutes plus the usual 10% allowance for faulty packcovers, webbing, and similar deficiencies was packed by the Regiment's own Maintenance Platoon, which was working on a twenty-four-

(23) Statement of Captain Elden C. Campbell, formerly Parachute Maintenance Officer, and Commanding Officer, Rear Base, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; (24) Statement of Captain Elden C. Campbell, formerly Parachute Maintenance Officer, and Commanding Officer, Rear Base, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment.

hour basis. Long-range planning proved its worth at this time in that the many hours previously spent by the platoon on the fabrication of "home-made" carrying pouches of all types resulted in a sufficient supply of this type equipment.

Supply plans included a detail of three officers and fifty men who were to bring on D minus 4, supplies and equipment to the airstrip in the Subic Bay area. (See map A). These supplies and equipment consisted of the squad kit bags, one unit of fire of 75-mm ammunition, flame-throwers, and communication equipment; from Subic Bay the detail was to transport these items via water on D plus 2. The squad kit bags, actually Air Corps parachute bags carefully labeled for rapid identification, contained for each man in the squad a blanket, one pair of jump boots, one set of coveralls, fatigue cap, two pairs of socks, and one pair of drawers. (25)

Initial resupply, that is, resupply after the jumpers had dropped with their accompanying bundles, was to be by air. Twelve C-47's were allotted for this purpose and were to begin discharging their loads after the completion of the third lift, the scheduled drop of the First Battalion (Reinf). (See Phase II-Plan of Assault). These twelve C-47 planes were to continue daily aerial resupply until such time as the situation permitted the use of water transportation. As was customary in all operations participated in by the 503d Parachute Infantry, direct radio communication with the Rear Base would be established as early as possible. By means of this communication, the Rear Base would be kept constantly advised of the unexpected needs

(25) A-6, Supply Annex, p. 1.

of the organization and would include the requested supplies along with those which were to be dropped daily on an "automatic" basis. (26)

On 4 February 1945, just a few days prior to the alert for the operation on Corregidor, about 250 replacements had arrived from the Zone of the Interior. This personnel had to be integrated into the units, indoctrinated, and prepared for the pending operation within a relatively short time. Informal range firing and small unit problems were initiated. With the arrival of these replacements, the Regiment was just about up to T/O strength, and it is at this point that a comment relative to the strength of an airborne infantry unit at the time of the operation (February 1945) is in order, in that such a unit differed so radically from conventional, infantry units. (27)

The T/O strength of a parachute rifle company was eight officers and 119 enlisted men; each rifle platoon had a platoon leader and an assistant platoon leader. The organization of the rifle company was an organization of three rifle platoons of the two rifle squads and one 60-mm mortar squad in each platoon. However, experience had indicated that the rifle company organization, as included in the then-current War Department T/O, was inferior to the provisional one which utilized three rifle platoons of three rifle squads each and a fourth platoon of the three 60-mm mortars. The Regiment was organized on that latter basis and had been for fifteen months prior to the operation. (28) There was no heavy weapons company;

(26) A-5, p. 6; Statement of Captain Elden C. Campbell; personal knowledge; (27) Personal knowledge; (28) A-6, p. 7; statement of Lt Col John N. Davis, Executive Officer and later Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; statement of Lt Col John L. Erickson.

the 81-mm mortars (four) were assigned to Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company, as were the twelve light machine guns -- there were no heavy machine guns authorized for use by the parachute infantry. In addition, there was no cannon company nor was there an anti-tank company; in fact, the only anti-tank weapons in the Regiment were the 2.36-inch rocket launchers. (29)

There was one part of the preparation phase which actually took place, unwittingly and unintentionally for this operation, during the preparation phase of the preceding operation -- the amphibious assault on Mindoro Island (see map A), 15 December 1944. At that time when the decision to employ the RCT in an amphibious rather than a parachute role had been made, the First Battalion was given training in the use of assault boats. As will be pointed out in Phase III, this prior training proved extremely valuable, unexpectedly. (30)

To return to the preparation phase for the operations on Corregidor Island; the topographic relief model was set up in a pyramidal tent and kept under constant guard. Briefings were given with the aid of this model and were supplemented by the personal observations of personnel (two officers and four enlisted men) who had previously been on Corregidor and were, therefore, detailed by higher headquarters to work with the Regiment. Beginning on 12 February these briefings were supplemented by actual flights of all key personnel, especially jumpmasters, over the drop zones. These flights were made in

(29) Personal knowledge; (30) Personal knowledge.

the bombers which were engaged in the Air Force phase of the assault (see Phase III) and proved of inestimable value in the analysis of the terrain. Too, a very prevalent rumor at this time was the report that the enemy had erected sharp poles and other anti-parachute obstacles on the proposed drop zones, which were already inadvertently prepared by nature and bombings to resist parachutists. Very close scrutiny of the drop zones from the bombers, which "buzzed" the island intentionally low, proved the fallaciousness of the rumor, but did confirm the intelligence relative to the hazardous conditions to be expected. (31)

Inasmuch as the RCT area on Mindoro Island was located close to the departure airfields, it was not necessary to move to a so-called marshalling area -- a term uncommon to the personnel of the RCT. Colonel John Lackey, Commanding Officer of the 317th Troop Carrier Group, which had transported the Regiment on other missions, was a frequent visitor and, consequently, extremely close liaison with the Air Force was effected. (32)

Although no wire fence was erected around the camp site (a practice not used by the Regiment) as a prevention of leaks in security (33), adequate security precautions were maintained. On the afternoon of 15 February, the day before the jump, the RCT Commander, Colonel George M. Jones held a formation of the

(31) Statement of Lt Col John L. Erickson; statement of Technical Sergeant Thomas G. Mitchell; personal knowledge; (32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-7, p. 3.

entire command (less the Third Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, which would not become part of the RCT until that unit had arrived on Corregidor) and briefly explained the operation, wished all "good luck", and had the Adjutant announce that all personnel was restricted to the camp. That evening captured Japanese films of the enemy's attack on Corregidor in early 1942 were shown. (34) The ruggedness of the terrain was again emphasized.

The 503d Regimental Combat Team (Parachute) was ready to retake Corregidor.

(34) Personal knowledge.

PHASE II - PLAN OF ASSAULT

1. ENEMY SITUATION

*See map of island
with 503d Infantry
position*

A study of the information known about the enemy, as presented in the Intelligence Annex to Field Order No. 9, 503d Parachute Infantry, dated 13 February 1945, shows that there was little known except an estimated strength of 850. (The reader is requested to remember this figure). In fact, higher headquarters had intended to utilize one reinforced parachute battalion (35), but the Commanding Officer of the Regiment succeeded in having the entire RCT committed to the operation; later developments more than substantiated the commander's reasoning.

As for enemy equipment, there were seven stationary pre-war guns reputedly repaired and in working condition: two 12-inch, two 10-inch, two 6-inch, and one 3-inch; in addition, there were two 3-inch mobile AA guns, two 37-mm split trail guns, plus six Japanese 75-mm guns. Guerrilla reports indicated that the island was well stocked with food and ammunition. Ships in the area tended to confirm these reports.

The water around the island was mined considerably. Too, there were reports of land mines, as well.

In general, however, despite natural expectations, photo interpretation intelligence indicated that little attempt had been made during the Japanese occupation to improve the island or repair the damage done during the 1942 assault. There were tunnel entrances, though, which suggested underground installations as well as fortified positions and small

(35) Statement of Lt Col John L. Erickson

weapons pits.

Enemy capabilities included artillery fire from Fort Hughes (Caballo Island), Cavite, Fort Drum, or the South Bataan coast (see map A) from any batteries which had not been destroyed by our Air Force or Navy. The enemy could concentrate forces on Corregidor prior to D-day, if he were warned of or suspected a landing on the island. In addition, the reported artillery battalion on Corregidor could bring fire to bear on our troops. (36)

It will be recalled that a rumor relative to the presence of anti-parachute obstacles had been proved fallacious by observers in low-level bombing flights. The inference, therefore, was that enemy capabilities did not include defenses prepared especially for a parachute assault. (37)

2. THE OVERALL PLAN OF ASSAULT

The capture of Corregidor was part of an operation assigned to XI Corps, the operation to secure the entrance to Manila Bay (see map A), as discussed in the section entitled, "General Situation". On D-day (15 February 1945) elements of the 38th Infantry Division were to make an amphibious assault in the Mariveles Bay area of southern Bataan (see map A), seize and secure the beachhead at that point, and then on D plus 1 were to move the 3d Battalion (reinforced), 34th Infantry Regiment from the Mariveles Bay area to land via assault boats on San Jose Beach, Corregidor, (see map B) at 1030 hours.

(36) A-3, Appendix A to Annex #1; (37) Personal knowledge.

On D plus 1, the 503d Regimental Combat Team (Parachute) was to drop via parachute on Corregidor at 0830 hours. (38)

3. AERIAL SUPPORT

On 23 January 1945, shortly after noon, the Fifth Bomber Command, using B-24 Liberators with 500-pound bombs, was to begin a daily pounding of the island. The bombing was to continue until the landing of the reinforced 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment. From 0745 to 0800 hours on D plus 1, one group of heavy bombers, each carrying 260-pound fragmentation bombs, was to round out the final pounding of the island. At 0800 hours, one group of A-20's was to bomb the island and that of the adjacent Caballo Island (see map A) with 250-pound para-demo bombs, as well as continue with the strafing.

After 0830 hours (H-hour for the initial drop) bombing was to be confined to areas as indicated on map C, but from 0830 to 0930 hours two groups of A-20's were to have the mission of covering the unrestricted areas. At 0930 hours the parachutists of the first lift would be on the ground and from that time air support would be limited to three squadrons of A-20's on air alert. One of these squadrons was standing by on call in order to fly smoke missions, while the other two were prepared to support the second air drop of troops at 1230 hours. (39)

(38) A-2, paragraph 1 b; (39) A-1, p. 2; A-8, pages 9 - 10.

4. NAVAL SUPPORT

Naval units of the Seventh Fleet were first to conduct mine-sweeping and bombardment operations in the area through which the amphibious elements were to pass enroute from southern Bataan to Corregidor. (The 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, was to accompany the force to Mariveles Bay on D-day so as to be in a more favorable position for the amphibious assault on D plus 1). PT boats had previously assisted in spotting the location of gun emplacements by encircling Corregidor in order to draw fire intentionally. (40) Naval gunfire was set up to fire heavy concentrations on D plus 1 in the unrestricted areas in close support of the amphibious phase of the assault at 1030 hours. In addition to the "on call" fire missions in general support which were to be requested via JASCO personnel who were to jump with the airborne units, the naval units were to furnish night illumination on call. Star shells were to be used along with illuminating mortar shells. (41) PT boats were to skirt the island during the parachute drop in order to pick up parachutists who dropped over the cliffs into the sea. (42)

5. ASSAULT VIA AMPHIBIOUS FORCES

As has been previously mentioned in the overall plan of assault, the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment was to make an amphibious assault at San Jose Beach, Corregidor at 1030 hours on D plus 1. The unit was to pass to the control of

(40) Statement of Technical Sergeant Thomas G. Mitchell;
(41) A-1, p. 2; A-2, p. 8; (42) Personal knowledge.

the Commanding Officer, 503d RCT (Parachute) on landing on the island. (43) The dual mission of that Battalion was first to secure the beachhead at San Jose, and rapidly seize and secure Malinta Hill area (see map C) as its initial objective; the second part required the Battalion to effect contact with the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, to the west. (44)

6. ASSAULT VIA AIRBORNE FORCES

The parachute elements were to enplane at Mindoro Island (see map A) in three lifts: 0700 hours 16 February, 1045 hours 16 February, and 0700 hours 17 February, respectively. There would be fifty-one C-47 planes in both the first and second lifts, and forty-three planes in the third lift. A fourth lift of twelve C-47's would follow the third lift and drop the initial resupply bundles. (45) In view of the extremely small drop zones, strong winds, proximity of drop zones to the edge of the 600-foot cliffs, and the nature of the terrain aggravated by man-made rubble and debris, a minimum of two or three passes was to be made by each plane. No more than eight men were to be dropped at each pass. "If one adds the imponderables of gusts, fishtailing, sharp diminution of wind velocity, and the nature of the terrain to the human errors, the margin of safety was nil and the hazardous nature of the drop is fully apparent". (46) The planes were to fly in two columns of single planes; one column over each of the two drop zones.

(43) A-3, paragraph 1 b (7); (44) A-3, paragraph 3 f;
(45) A-3, Annex 5; A-2, p. 4; (46) A-2, p. 4.

The misnamed parade ground was to be Field "A" and the so-called golf course was to be Field "B" (see map C). (47)

It is superfluous to state that coordination between pilots and jumpmasters and the selection of an appropriate "go point" had to be perfect. A control plane would remain aloft during the jumping and by means of voice radio supervise the actual jump: necessary corrective action to be taken by each succeeding plane would be radioed to the planes. (48)

The first lift was to be composed of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, reinforced by the attachment of Battery "A" and one platoon Battery "D", 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and the 3d Platoon, Company "C", 161st Airborne Engineer Battalion. The mission of the 3d Battalion with its attachments was to drop on Fields "A" and "B" on D plus 1 at 0830 hours and secure the drop zones. The 2d Battalion was to relieve the 3d Battalion immediately upon the completion of the drop of the former, at which time the 3d Battalion was to advance and seize the high ground approximately 600 yards northeast of the hospital site and the commanding ground approximately 1000 yards east of the hospital site (see map C). During the amphibious landing of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, was to support that assault by fire and effect contact with that Battalion, once the landing had been accomplished. (49)

The 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, with Battery "B" and one platoon of Battery "D", 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, attached, comprised the second lift.

(47) Personal knowledge; (48) Personal knowledge; (49) A-3, paragraph 3a.

This lift was to drop on Fields "A" and "B" on D plus 1, as was the case with the first lift, but the time of drop for the 2d Battalion and its attachments was 1215 hours. The mission of this lift was to relieve the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, immediately from the defense of the drop area. The 2d Battalion was then to exploit the terrain to the north and west of the drop areas (see map C) and destroy all enemy encountered. (50)

The third and last personnel lift was to be composed of the 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, with Battery "C" and one platoon of Battery "D", 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, attached. This lift was likewise to drop on both fields, but at 0830 hours on D plus 2 (17 February 1945). This Battalion was to be RCT reserve, but, in addition, was to be prepared on order to exploit the terrain south of the drop area (see map C) and to destroy all enemy encountered. (51)

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 503d Parachute Infantry, was given the mission to drop on both fields on D plus 1, in conjunction with both the 3d and 2d Battalions. This personnel was then to perform the normal duties of administration and communication. The Demolition Sections of the Company would, however, drop with their respective battalions, but would revert to the control of Regiment after their initial landing. (52) Service Company was to drop on D plus 1 at 1215 hours on Field "B" in conjunction with the second lift.

(50) A-3, paragraph 3b; (51) A-3, paragraph 3c; (52) A-3, paragraph 3g; statement of Lt Col John L. Erickson; personal knowledge.

This personnel was then to perform its normal functions of supply, administration, and evacuation. (53)

The Rear Base would contain a minimum number of personnel to support the operation and would be commanded by the Platoon Leader of the Parachute Maintenance Platoon. The Regimental Personnel Section, the bulk of the Parachute Maintenance Platoon, the Regimental Motor Section, and elements of the Regimental S-4 office composed the Rear Base, along with a representative from each company to look after personal and company property. The total would be about sixty men and officers. It is to be pointed out that the complete Regimental Staff personnel (minus the few S-4 personnel) were to jump; all the staff officers and some of the enlisted men would be among the first few to jump with the first lift, and the remainder would jump with the second lift. (54)

Although not exactly within the scope of this monograph, the missions and activities of the closely supporting field artillery and engineer units are so inextricably associated with those of the 503d Parachute Infantry that they will be considered too. The 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion was to attach batteries and platoons, as previously indicated in this phase, and support the respective battalions by fire as directed by the Infantry Battalion Commander. (55) Company "C", (less one platoon), 161st Airborne Engineer Battalion, was to drop on Field "B" on D plus 1 in conjunction with the drop of the first lift. The company would, after assembly, be prepared to erect road blocks and destroy enemy fortified

(53) A-3, paragraph 3h; (54) Personal knowledge; (55) A-3, paragraph 3d.

installations by demolitions, in accordance with orders from the Commanding Officer, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment. Inasmuch as the exact nature of the obstacles to be encountered could not be predicted, the Engineer Company was to be prepared further to attach one platoon each to the 2d and 1st Battalions, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, upon their landing. (56)

Of necessity, plans for the ground action had to be very simple and flexible. The reason is fairly obvious. The action would depend upon the enemy strength, equipment, dispositions, organization, and movements---and very little information, if any, was known about any of these matters. Consequently, the mission of the Regiment might well be stated merely "to seize Corregidor and destroy the enemy forces". (57)

The reader is reminded that D plus 1 would be 16 February 1945 and would be the first day of the assaults (both parachute and amphibious) on Corregidor. D-day was to be 15 February 1945, but the assault on that day was to take place in Mariveles Bay, Bataan Peninsula, as explained in the over-all plan of assault.

(56) A-3, paragraph 3e; (57) A-2, p. 5; personal knowledge.

PHASE III - THE ASSAULT

In accordance with previous plans, the Air Force phase of the assault began on 23 January 1945 and during the next twenty-five days Corregidor was presented with 3,128 tons of bombs. (58) The naval bombardment, too, went according to schedule, but all bombing ceased at 0830 hours, 16 February 1945, on "Topside". Preceded by the two groups of strafing A-20's, the first lift, which had enplaned at 0700 hours and taken off at 0715 hours from Mindoro Island (see map A), began to drop its human cargo at 0833 hours. (59)

The planes were flying at an altitude of 600 feet from the southwest and in a flight pattern of two columns of single planes in trail. The leading plane contained the Commanding Officer of the 503d Regimental Combat Team (Prcht), Colonel George M. Jones, who controlled the actual jumping from the plane in which he was flying, as it hovered above the drop areas. Control was effected by means of voice radio communication in the clear with the troop carriers; the control plane was to make all necessary corrections in the flight plan and/or to adjust the jumpmaster count based on actual observations of the jumpers as they landed. (60)

A distinct, so-called "go point" (a definite, unmistakable terrain feature on or contiguous to a drop zone and which is used by jumpmasters as a reference point from which the probable extent of drift is estimated) had been selected for each of the two drop zones. Original plans required the jumpmaster

(58) A-8, pages 9-10; A-1, p. 2; (59) A-5, p. 7; A-1, p. 2; personal knowledge; (60) Personal knowledge

to count three seconds from the "go point" and then allow the eight-man stick to jump. However, Colonel Jones in the hovering control plane saw that some jumpers were being carried to the cliff as a result of the 15-20 miles-an-hour wind with occasional gusts of 25 miles-an-hour. (61) Consequently, the "Rock force" Commander (The Corregidor force was known as the "Rock force" -- (62)) through the control facilities ordered the pilots to fly at an altitude of 500 feet in order to minimize the extent of drift by shortening the drop time and ordered the jumpmasters to allow an interval of six seconds from the "go point" in order to compensate for the excessive wind velocity. These corrections were made, and the jump pattern improved accordingly. (63)

For one hour and ten minutes the two columns continued to pass over the respective drop zones in two giant counter-rotating circles, as eight men at a time jumped out on a signal from the jumpmasters. The intermittent enemy anti-aircraft fire was kept to a minimum by the A-20's which were strafing on each flank effectively. Some fire by the enemy was directed, also, on the descending parachutists, but this action, too, was greatly ineffective. When the tail plane of the first lift had discharged its last group of eight men, at 0940 hours, Colonel Jones then jumped from the control plane and began the job, which Major General Charles P. Hall, then Commanding General of XI Corps, termed "...the best handled of any that I have seen during my military career". (64)

(61) Personal knowledge; (62) A-1, p. 2; (63) A-1, p. 6; personal knowledge; (64) A-1, p. 6; A-10; personal knowledge.

The terrain was worse than had been expected. Continuous bombing had ripped trees in two, scattered debris and rubble in all directions, performed a superior chore of defoliation, and, in general, created a scene of total desolation. Fields of fire were usually very poor, in view of the remains of masonry buildings, thick undergrowth, and strewn boulders. Observation varied considerably, but the enemy was so well located in his adroitly concealed caves, tunnels, and pillboxes that although we held the high ground, we still did not have observation of him. Cover and concealment favored the enemy in that he had had nearly three years in which to perfect his dugouts. (It is noteworthy to point out at this time that the enemy had made very few changes in or erected any new installations above ground. The impression he wished to convey was that the island was lightly held -- he had succeeded. The G-2 estimate was 850 enemy on the island!) There were no outstanding terrain obstacles as such but the sheer cliffs, the partially demolished buildings, the heavy undergrowth, and the rugged terrain were not ideal features over which to operate. There were two roads, hard packed gravel, which formed the main routes of communication to the beach. (65)

During the descent of the first lift, aerial bombardment and naval shelling continued east of the bomb line (see map C) to minimize fire on this lift. The strafing which had preceded the first lift had been successful in that almost complete surprise had been secured for much of this personnel. The continued bombing east of the bomb line added to the con-

(65) Personal knowledge.

fusion of the enemy and, consequently, he remained below ground practically completely unaware that a battalion combat team (parachute) and most of a regimental combat team (parachute) staff were dropping on him. The caves, as well as the gun positions, were so constructed that the enemy was unmolested by the bombing and much of the pre-invasion bombardment had been in vain. (66)

As a consequence, the element of surprise acted in favor of the parachutists and enabled them to drop in the very midst of the enemy. Scattered enemy groups only were able to bring fire on the jumpers, but as has been stated, this fire was ineffective. However, some parachutists were carried beyond the intended drop zones by the high wind, and these groups engaged in action with enemy entrenched along the coast in caves and dugouts. (67) In fact, it was at 0920 hours in one of these scattered, uncoordinated actions that an unknown parachutist killed the Japanese Commander of the island at Geary Point (see map D), as he watched the paratroopers do what he had considered an impossible feat. (68) The loss of their commander was a heavy blow to the leader-conscious enemy.

The first lift, a battalion combat team, in spite of the wide dispersal of the jumpers and with an effective strength of about 750 officers and enlisted men out of the 1000 who had jumped began to organize its "enclave". (Not all the 250 ineffectives were casualties, however, in that some men were engaged in collecting equipment bundles which were essential to combat). The perimeter was small at first -- the size of

(66) A-1, p. 8; personal knowledge; (67) Personal knowledge;
(68) A-2, Overlay 4; personal knowledge.

the drop zones -- but the initial advantage was ours, thanks to the surprise gained, and so the troops immediately organized to begin the task of expanding our area. The three, lettered companies of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, had the assignment of enlarging and organizing the perimeter while the Regimental Headquarters Company, the Battalion Headquarters Company, and the Engineer Company performed the mop-up within the perimeter. (69) Initially, the coordinated action was the clearing of the buildings and area in the region of the drop zones, plus the preparations for supporting the scheduled amphibious assault at 1030 hours. To accomplish this latter phase of its mission, the Battalion Commander set up .50-caliber heavy machine guns and a 75-mm howitzer from the attached elements of the Field Artillery Battalion. (70)

From the movement of contact with the enemy, his strength, disposition, equipment, locations, organization, and movement remained unknown quantities because of the nature of his underground system of caves, tunnels, pillboxes, bunkers, and ammunition storage casements. This arrangement was not confined to "Topside", but was found later to exist all through the island fortress. In fact, although we were constantly in contact with the enemy via heavy sniper and machine-gun fire as troops moved out to secure initial objectives, even the nature of his displacement remained a mystery for the first few days. The Regimental Command Post, as well as those of the Battalions received their share of harassing machine-gun and sniper fire. At one point, members of the Regimental Staff

(69) A-2, p. 7; (70) Personal knowledge.

were lying on the floor, yet conducting business as usual. (71)

Inasmuch as we now held the high ground (see map D), the enemy could not effectively concentrate a numerically superior force for a coordinated attack or defense nor was he free to use his chief lines of communication. One fact, had it been known by both sides at this time (1000 hours 16 February), might have radically affected the action: this fact was the strength of the defender and the attacker. Our forces numbered less than 1000, whereas the enemy believed we numbered 8000-10000; the enemy numbered 5500-6000, whereas we believed he numbered 850: (72)

The Regimental Command Post had been established in the former enlisted men's barracks (see map D) which is contiguous to field "A". The 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, the Engineer Company and Regimental Headquarters Company had likewise established their respective Command Posts in the same what-was-once-a building. The Medical Detachment had policed up a large section of the barracks and by 0930 hours had established a dispensary, which rapidly assumed all the earmarks of a hospital with dozens of patients but few facilities. (73) By 0920 hours communication had been established via radio between the RCT Command Post and the Command Post of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment; by 1000 hours * "5 by 5" communication had been established with the Rear Base at Mindoro Island (see map A). (74)

(71) A-6, Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge; (72) A-6, Intelligence Annex and S-2 Report #7; (73) A-6, Medical Annex; personal knowledge; (74) A-6, Communication Annex.

Promptly at 1030 hours the 3d Battalion (reinforced), 34th Infantry Regiment, covered by close naval gunfire directed on the areas east of the bomb line and on enemy gun positions close to the beach, made its landing at San Jose Beach (see map C) with slight, active resistance. The chief obstacle to the landing was the presence of land mines, not the machine-gun and other small-arms fire which was directed at the troops prior to and during the landing. The mines took a heavy toll of vehicular equipment including one of the three tanks landed and the radio set with which communication was to have been established between "The Rock Force" and XI Corps Headquarters. (75)

Despite heavy personnel and vehicular losses, the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, secured the creast of Malinta Hill (see map C) against surprisingly light opposition. The paratroops on the high ground of "Topside" were able to keep the enemy sufficiently diverted to allow the amphibious forces to occupy the Hill in thirty minutes. (76) The Battalion then began its mission to block Malinta Tunnel (in Malinta Hill) and the enemy on the eastern end of the island, while the 503d RCT secured and mopped up the island. The southwest entrance to the Tunnel was blocked by a landslide started by the bombing, and the west entrance was covered by .50-caliber machine guns and the disabled tank. (77)

While the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, on "Topside" was increasing the size of the perimeter, recovering

(75) A-1, p. 6; A-6, Communication Annex and Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge; (76) A-1, p. 6; A-2, p. 6; (77) A-1, p. 6.

injured personnel, securing equipment bundles outside of the perimeter, and assisting the amphibious assault on the beach, the second lift enplaned at 1045 hours and took off from Mindoro Island (see map A) at 1100 hours. In fact, by 1100 hours the drop zones were relatively free of enemy fire. The wind velocity had increased, and at 1250 hours, when the parachutists began their jumps, the Rock Force Executive Officer in the control plane ordered the necessary changes to be made in jumpmaster and pilot technique. The change in wind conditions had been anticipated, so that appropriate instructions had been issued prior to the take-off. The same pilots who had flown the first lift flew the planes of the second lift, and thereby the experience gained during the earlier drop resulted in more effective and accurate dropping.

(78)

However, the surprise gained by the first lift did not accrue to the second, in that the presence of friendly troops on "Topside" precluded strafing and bombing by A-20's on the flanks of the two columns of C-47's. The enemy took advantage of his opportunity to hamper the second lift, and, consequently, continual although ineffective antiaircraft fire was directed at the planes and descending parachutists. Ten transports received hits, which merely put holes in them and one crew member was wounded. There were far less jump casualties in this lift as a result of the experience gained during the first drop. However, more men were shot while in the air or immediately upon landing. (79)

(78) A-1, p. 6; A-5, p. 7; (79) A-1, p. 8; A-5, p. 7.

The drop was completed at 1342 hours, and the 2d Battalion immediately began to relieve the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, which had already seized its initial objectives. The latter was then to take over the key terrain features commanding a view of and controlling the route to the beach, South Dock. (See map C). The 2d Battalion was to continue the expansion of the perimeter. (80)

By late afternoon it was quite apparent that the G-2 estimate of the situation relative to enemy strength was more than just a little off. (81) The 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, from its position on Malinta Hill could keep the forces on the eastern part of the island from joining the forces on "Topside" for a coordinated attack or defense. However, the road from "Topside" to San Jose Beach (South Dock) was not secure, despite a physical meeting of patrols from both 3d Battalions. (82)

The 2d Battalion having taken over the perimeter, which surrounded an area 1000 yards by 500 yards and included the former enlisted men's barracks and both drop fields, the Battalion Command Post was set up in the barracks, also. Headquarters, 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment remained within the perimeter along with "I" Company, which was to continue the attack the next day. "H" and "G" Companies formed their own individual perimeters outside of the RCT perimeter (see map D). (83)

(80) A-1, p. 8; personal knowledge; (81) A-1, p. 10;
(82) A-1, p. 10; personal knowledge; (83) A-2, Overlay #6.

The two batteries of field artillery which had dropped with the first and second lifts were in position on the parade ground. Fire Direction Center was located in the barracks, which all units seemed to prefer as a change to the mud of the jungle. The threat of enemy air attack was very slight, so that full advantage was taken of what was left of the buildings on the island. Too, there was sufficient room in the barracks, which were a shambles from the Japanese bombing in 1942 and the American bombing in 1945, in that these barracks were considered the largest in the world. (84)

Also in the barracks was the American Red Cross comfort station, which had been established by the ARC Field Director attached to the Regiment. He had jumped with the first lift and had had hot coffee available prior to noon. With the scarcity of water and parched throats from very hot weather, the comfort station was just that for those who were able to visit it. (85)

A detachment of 592d JASCO and a detachment of 6th Support Air Party, which had also jumped (six men of these groups for the first time) were both operating their communication equipment in the barracks. It is at this point in the discussion that concrete proof is found for the term "Operation Cooperation". These support parties were willing, eager, accurate, and cooperative, and their enthusiasm seemed to be shared by the units to which the requests for aerial or naval strikes were sent.

Drop casualties were estimated in advance as 20%, but actually ran about 11%. It is believed the control by the

(84) Personal knowledge; (85) Personal knowledge.

lead plane did much to reduce the original estimate. Of the 2065 officers and men who jumped on 16 February, 203 were injured on landing, thirteen were killed prior to or on landing, and six were missing. Seventy-five percent of the jump casualties occurred in the first lift; no serious wounds were received prior to landing. All planes discharged their passengers except the plane carrying the Demolition Section of the 3d Battalion. This plane developed engine trouble, flew toward Luzon (see map A), where the troops bailed out to avert a crash landing. (This group of one officer and thirteen men arrived the following day via boat). (86)

The cost in lives for the first day was comparatively light, 21 killed, when the odds against the attackers are considered. The enemy lost fifty men from ground action. For four hours less than 1000 men had defied 6000, well-equipped, well-entrenched enemy troops. Even after the arrival of both the second lift and the amphibious element, the ratio was still two-to-one against the attacker, who should ~~properly~~ heavily outnumber the defender. There were, in addition to the 2065 parachutists, 1138 officers and men of the amphibious force. The total American forces on the island the first day was 3203. (87)

In view of the heavy jump casualties, which, incidentally could not be evacuated in that our forces still did not have access to the road to the beach, it was decided to have the third lift merely drop its cargo bundles (0830 hours, 17 February)

(86) A-2, p. 6; personal knowledge; (87) A-6, Medical Annex and S-1 Annex.

and then land at Subic Bay (see map A). This element could then be water-borne to South Dock, San Jose beach the same day: intact, and on hand almost as soon as originally planned. The Commanding Officer of the "Rock Force" at 1830 hours, 16 February sent an urgent request to the Commanding General, XI Corps, for approval of the foregoing plan; approval was granted, and the Rear Base was advised accordingly just as the third lift was enplaning at 0700 hours, 17 February. (It is superfluous to mention that such an announcement would be received with mixed and varied reactions). (88)

The Assault Phase closed with the paratroops holding a tight perimeter on "Topside", the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment holding the top of Malinta Hill, and everyone holding his breath: rumor had it that the island was prepared for destruction by carefully located demolitions, which could be detonated electrically and remotely. Harassing mortar and field artillery fires were maintained on ravines and other likely avenues of approach to discourage enemy thoughts of a banzai attack. Star shells were provided by the Navy for illumination at irregular intervals. (89)

(88) A-1, p. 10; personal knowledge; (89) Personal knowledge.

PHASE IV - THE SEIZURE

1. Western Sector

No time was wasted by the Rock Force Commander in his attempt to seize the island. At dawn on the next day, 17 February, after an unspectacular night of constant and heavy fire, which was merely harassing in nature inasmuch as the enemy was unable to reorganize, the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, with support from the 2d Battalion, began a coordinated attack on Morrison Hill, the high ground in the vicinity of Morrison Point (see map E). The high ground was a critical terrain feature which favored the defense, so that our forces were rather surprised when by 1000 hours they had secured the hill against light opposition. (90) Thus, the objective of a gradual enlargement of the perimeter with constant reduction of the enemy, while the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, contained the defenders in Malinta Tunnel, had been launched. Coincident with the attack on Morrison Hill, the 2d Battalion launched its first assault on Wheeler Battery (see map E), and not until late in the afternoon of 18 February was the position taken. The Japanese merely went below the ground deep into their recesses of the position; they would then reappear at another opening. The position was a former coast artillery, heavy gun location, and the enemy had converted the installation into a strong fortress without visible evidence of the improvement. This position was one of the most difficult to subdue and typified the character of the installations which were to be encountered during the operation.

(90) A-1, p. 10; A-5, p. 8.

In accordance with previous plans, the third lift took off from Mindoro Island at 0700 hours, 17 February, but merely dropped its cargo bundles as it passed over Field "A" in a column of single planes at 0830 hours. As stated in the preceding phase, this lift was to proceed to the Subic Bay area (see map A) where it would land and then be seaborne to Corregidor Island. It is interesting to note that this lift received the heaviest antiaircraft fire of all the lifts, as it passed over the "Rock", as Corregidor was familiarly called. Several planes received bullet holes and five crewmen were wounded. The enemy was recovering from his surprise of the preceding day. However, these gun positions were silenced by our artillery to such an extent that when the first resupply mission of thirty-three C-47 planes flew over the same field in the afternoon for a total of 191 passes not a plane was damaged. (91)

James Ravine (see map E) controlled the road to the beach, so that after the seizure of Morrison Hill, this area received attention. Meanwhile, troops of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, continued with their primary mission by improving their position on Malinta Hill. (92)

"Operation Cooperation" functioned even off the Island of Corregidor, for when the third lift (1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, with Battery "C" and one platoon "D" Battery, 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, attached) arrived in the Subic Bay area, trucks rushed this personnel to the docks, where APD's took them to South Dock, Corregidor

(91) A-1, p. 10; (92) A-1, p. 12; personal knowledge.

Island. This phase of the operation was completely unscheduled and not anticipated, yet it was organized on the briefest of warnings and functioned smoothly. However, as the LCVP's from the APD's approached the Corregidor shore (see map E) at 1400 hours, the enemy in cave openings on the face of the "Topside" cliffs which looked down at the beach directed heavy, sustained, automatic fire on the paratroops-turned-amphibians. The entire beach area was under intense fire, and the cave openings were not in a position to be fired at by our weapons on the island. The LCVP's pulled back from the beach, and destroyers moved in. Direct fire of five-inch gunfire into the mouths of the caves terminated the fire from these positions, and the LCVP's were beached. (93)

The 1st Battalion with its attachments landed at 1630 hours and made its way about 600 yards northwest from the beach (see map D). In that area the Battalion, under the Regimental Executive Officer, organized a perimeter for the night. The Demolition Section of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, had joined the waterborne, parachute battalion at Subic Bay; it will be recalled that this Demolition Section had had to bail out of its defective plane over Luzon on the preceding day. (94)

The operations for the second day concluded with one company of the 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, occupying the high ground of Morrison Hill. The commanding ground was a critical terrain feature, in that the expansion of the perimeter

(93) A-1, p. 12; A-5, p. 8; (94) A-2, Overlay #7; personal knowledge.

could logically begin from this point. The main perimeter for the night was slightly larger than the one of the preceding nite, in spite of the extensive patrolling and assaults of the day. The principle employed was to exploit during the day but withdraw at night. The enemy during the night would return to the locations at which he had suffered such heavy casualties during the day (cumulative total - 364), and the good hunting would commence in the morning. (95) It was evident, therefore, that the enemy plan of operation was to allow our forces to assault these well-defended and well-organized installations while he defended them. However, we lost eight men killed in action during the day and still could not evacuate any wounded. (96)

In addition to the systematic reduction of the pill-boxes, bunkers, and underground installations in the vicinity of Wheeler Battery, artillery fire and infantry assaults had been utilized to secure equipment bundles and suppress enemy fire on the drop zones. Enemy fire from all sources now was moderate to heavy. (97)

Two jeeps arrived from the beach area with trailers of loaded five-gallon water cans. As a result, water was now plentiful; two canteens a day instead of one! Only one jeep was suitable for use by the Regimental S-4 in the collection of scattered equipment bundles; the other had been rendered unserviceable by gun fire enroute. (98)

The routine artillery and mortar fire was employed

(95) A-2, p. 8 and Overlays #7 and #9; personal knowledge;

(96) A-6, Medical Annex; personal knowledge; (97) A-2, Overlay #7; A-6, Intelligence Annex; (98) A-6, Supply Annex.

during the night in the role of harassing fire. As was customary, the night rule of "anything which moves is an enemy" was in effect as always, and on this night 200 such "anythings" moved west along the road from Malinta Hill toward "Topside" in order to launch an expected banzai attack. However, this unit was observed and taken under fire. (99)

The road to the beach was fairly free of enemy fire by 18 February, so that evacuation finally began. To assist the RCT in the care of the sick and wounded, the 18th Portable Surgical Hospital was attached. That organization arrived from the beach area on the 18th, too, and set up its facilities adjacent to the Regimental Aid Station on the first floor of the barracks. Too much praise cannot be given for the services provided by this medical installation and attached surgical teams. (100)

On the same morning, 18 February, the 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, was moved under enemy fire to "Topside" from its position near the beach. A rearrangement of parachute battalion sections was effected so that the 1st Battalion was given the responsibility of clearing the southern zone, the 2d Battalion from the north to the southwest, and the 3d Battalion from the north to the southeast. (See map E) (101) With this readjustment in sectors, the pattern of ground action became very familiar and effective, aided and abetted by the enemy's own actions of blowing himself up in his underground arsenals. (102) Direct fire of the 75-mm artillery was used as the ground assaulting fire on enemy

(99) A-6, Intelligence Annex; (100) Personal knowledge;
(101) A-2, Overlay #12; (102) A-1, p. 13.

emplacements; this fire was frequently coupled with naval and/or aerial strikes. Immediately after the assaulting fires had lifted or were being lifted, the aggressive and vigorous ground assault began. This ground assault was conducted by patrols, supported by the battalion heavy weapons (60- and 81-mm mortars) and field artillery, 75-mm howitzers, and accompanied by demolition personnel. (103)

The patrols functioned as assault teams, inasmuch as the enemy generally followed the tactics of getting or remaining in his hole, be it pillbox, bunker, cave, tunnel, or underground installation of varying degrees of elaborateness. Thompson sub-machine gunners and riflemen were stationed to cover the men armed with flame throwers and WP grenades who advanced toward the openings. The streams of flame and exploding white phosphorous either inflicted casualties and/or drove the enemy deep within his lair. Some enemy, often ablaze or covered with burning phosphorous, would try to make an escape from the openings, but they were cut down by automatic or rifle fire. The final step in this assault procedure was to seal the opening by demolition. An interesting comment is in order at this point in the discussion relative to the use of flame throwers. Instead of the conventional system of projecting ignited fuel into a cave, unignited fuel was often sprayed into the cave, and then a WP grenade thrown in afterwards to ignite the fuel. As a result of this procedure, maximum distance into the inner recesses of the cave was obtained, as well as an opportunity for both the flame thrower operator and

(103) A-2, p. 8.

the grenade-thrower to get back beyond the back-draft. (104)

This system worked so well that by 2400 hours, 18 February, 1,090 enemy dead had been counted, and no prisoners of war had been taken. (The number of enemy who were sealed in the tunnels and who later died will probably never be known.) The enemy, therefore, decided to change his tactics to the offense. (105)

Consequently, at 0130 hours on 19 February the enemy exploded an underground arsenal in the vicinity of Breakwater Point (see map E), above which elements of the Regiment were in position in a perimeter defense. There were casualties on both sides. However, twenty enemy of the group of forty who had been there were not killed, but these survivors were not to be left behind by those who had joined their ancestors. The twenty Japanese formed a circle, simultaneously armed grenades, held them to their stomachs, and joined their ancestors, too. That is, all twenty minus one who at the last moment got "cold feet". (106)

In the 1st Battalion area of responsibility, the southern part of the western sector, the cliffs were so steep that the hand-carrying of supplies and evacuation of personnel was not feasible. Here, again, naval cooperation came to the rescue. LCVP's operating from South Dock (see map E) supplied the Battalion by water and evacuated dead and wounded on the return trip. Too, it is to be noted that SCR-300 radios were totally useless in the deep ravines, even for very short distances. (107)

(104) A-2, p. 8; personal knowledge; (105) A-6, Intelligence Annex; (106) A-6, Intelligence Annex; (107) Statement of Lt Col John N. Davis.

The change in enemy tactics was noted again when at 0300 hours that same morning, 19 February, 400 enemy launched, in the vicinity of Cheney and Wheeler Batteries (see map D), the first coordinated, banzai attack against our perimeter. The attack was finally halted at 0845 hours, but not before enemy had reached the 2d Battalion Command Post located in the barracks along with the Regimental Command Post and other installations. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting developed in this attack, but the enemy suffered heavy casualties and was forced to withdraw before he could consolidate his temporary gains. We sustained heavy casualties, but far less than the enemy. (108)

This change in enemy tactics was further evidenced by stronger resistance and a marked increase in the number of banzai attacks. Too, there were definite indications, such as the early-morning attack on the 2d Battalion sector, that coordination had at last been effected, as well as increased use of automatic fire. All units located on "Topside" reported infiltration during the night. At Malinta Tunnel, despite heavy fires placed on all exits, many enemy managed to leave the tunnel. At any rate, the total counted enemy killed had risen to 1583, and as further evidence of a change in tactics, three prisoners of war had been taken. (109)

Our forces continued the pattern of patrol assaults on emplacements during the day, but withdrawal to the ever-expanding main perimeters at night. (110) Rock, Wheeler and Breakwater Points (see map E) were scenes of some of the

(108) A-1, p. 12; A-2, p. 8; A-6, Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge; (109) A-6, Intelligence Annex; (110) Personal knowledge.

heaviest and bloodiest fighting. "On 20 February, 53 caves and tunnels were sealed in the Breakwater Point area alone".

(111) Air and naval fire support was excellent and used extensively in the assaults on the northern portions of the western sector. (112)

On the afternoon of 20 February during a naval strike, the eastern entrance to Malinta Tunnel was hit by shells from the destroyer bombardment, and the resulting landslide closed the tunnel from the east. This development may or may not have influenced the enemy's next major action, but, at any rate, at 2130 hours, the next day, Malinta Tunnel was rocked by an internal explosion. "Not only did Corregidor roll like a ship at sea but the Bataan Peninsula verberated and trembled, so great was the explosion. Flames poured from all the tunnel entrances. There were landslides and casualties but the question that had been in the minds of all for days was answered, [sic] Malinta Hill survived". (113)

From prisoner of war statements as well as captured documents the fact had been established that the tunnel had contained huge quantities of ammunition, demolitions, and about 2000 enemy. After the explosion, later prisoners admitted that the explosion had been intentional, as well as controlled, but it had exceeded their own estimate in magnitude and had killed many inside. The purpose of the explosion was to destroy the troops guarding the western entrance and then launch an immediate attack in force against the paratroops on "Topside".

(111) A-1, p. 13; (112) A-1, p. 13; (113) A-1, pages 13 and 16.

Many enemy were killed in the dash for escape, but several hundred did make their way to the eastern end of the island, when it was discovered that the resulting landslide had blocked the road on the south side of Malinta Hill. The group, which had tried to attack around the north end ran into the mortar concentrations, heavy machine-gun fire, and tank fire of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment. The enemy withdrew, but not before he had suffered several hundred casualties. We, too, had lost some men in the landslide. (114)

The last major enemy assault on the western sector occurred about 0930 hours, 23 February, at which time about 400 desperate enemy tried to penetrate our perimeter in the vicinity of Wheeler Point (see map E). He made temporary gains after a heavy fire fight, but was forced to withdraw. This drive marked the close of the concentrated effort of all our forces to seize the western portion of the island. The 2d Battalion was to continue to mop up in this sector, where some bitter and heavy fighting was yet to ensue, while the 1st and 3d Battalions, 503d Parachute Infantry, began the task of seizing the eastern sector of the island. Up to 24 February, the enemy had suffered 2,466 counted dead, six prisoners of war, and untold numbers sealed in caves, tunnels, and other underground installations. (115)

(114) A-6, pages 3 and 4 and Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge; (115) A-6, Intelligence Annex, personal knowledge.

2. Eastern Sector

On 23 February, the commanding officers of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 503d Parachute Infantry, went to Malinta Hill to observe the eastern sector of the island. With the Rock Force Commander, plans were laid for the seizure of this, the second half of the island. Aerial, naval, and field artillery bombardment had already begun to soften up this part of the island, so that on 24 February the attacks began. At 0830 hours the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, moved around the north end of Malinta Hill and secured the high ground in the vicinity of Engineer Point (see map E). Concurrently, one company from the 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, moved down the east side of Malinta Hill to secure the road net, while the rest of the battalion pushed through the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, and repulsed a heavy counter-attack in the vicinity of Engineer and Infantry Points (see map E). The two serviceable tanks worked with the 1st Battalion to form effective tank-infantry teams. The 3d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, followed very closely behind the 1st Battalion and mopped up the enemy who were left behind in the swift forward push. (116)

The enemy realized he was being pushed closer and closer to the end of the island and eventually he would not only be at his wit's end but also at the island's end and his own. Consequently, he began to attempt to cross the two-mile stretch of water to Bataan via raft or logs. At first, attempts by the Navy were made to pick up these men, but all courtesy

(116) A-1, p. 16; A-5, p. 9; A-6, p. 4.

was ordered ended when these men were found to be armed and to resist our hospitality. Consequently, to avoid loss of American lives in attempted rescues, strafing was authorized. Fighter planes, naval craft, and even liaison planes armed with hand grenades and rifles allowed few survivors to reach Bataan. About 200 enemy were killed in this fashion, but that number is not included in RCT totals, in that the RCT neither killed nor counted them. (117)

One of the potential threats ^{of} Corregidor Island was that the Navy feared that the island harbored the so-called "Q" boats. These were plywood craft, fifteen feet long, four feet wide, and powered by a four-cylinder engine. A Jap would plow one of these boats into the side of a ship, and the 600 pounds of picric acid in the bow would blow up both ships and the Jap. At any rate, on 24 February the fears of the Navy were justified when nineteen such suicide craft were found in caves just west of the beach at San Jose (see map E). However, all of these boats ~~had~~ had holes knocked into them. (118)

Late that same day, 24 February, as the 1st Battalion was moving into favorable positions for the attack, the enemy contested this activity by heavy machine-gun fire, as well as mortar fire. At the same time, he, ~~was~~ prepared for an attack on "Topside" by the concentration of approximately 600 troops about 300 yards south of Infantry Point. However, our field artillery massed its fires on this assembly area and sent

(117) A-1, p. 17; A-5, p. 9; A-6, Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge; (118) A-6, Intelligence Annex; statement of Technical Sergeant Thomas G. Mitchell.

half of the caught enemy force to join its ancestors, while our small arms fire accounted for an additional 135 troops. The enemy attack about 2300 hours, although preceded by heavy mortar and machine gun fire, needless to relate failed, and the remaining enemy withdrew to Monkey and Cavalry Points (see map E). (119)

During that same night, 24 February, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion was holding a meeting of his staff and Company Commanders relative to the attack next day, when a mortar round landed in the group. The Battalion Commander, the S-2, and two radio operators were killed, and of the thirteen present, only two were untouched. The Executive Officer, one of those who were unscathed, immediately assumed command. (120)

The 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, on 25 February was relieved by the 2d Battalion, 151st Infantry Regiment. The relieved Battalion had done a splendid job and had accounted for 815 enemy dead. The platoon of the Cannon Company which had landed with the original amphibious assault forces remained with the relieving unit and maintained its M-7, 75-mm, self-propelled, vehicles, and its two, M-4 tanks. With the departure of the relieved unit, a total of 3,703 enemy dead had been counted, and a total of sixteen prisoners of war had been taken; the majority of the latter were picked up trying to escape from the island. (121)

(119) A-6, p. 4 and Intelligence Annex; (120) Statement of Lt Col John N. Davis; personal knowledge; (121) A-2, p. 9; A-6, p. 4 and Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge.

As can be seen from map E, Monkey Point is about the last point of favorable terrain on the route of withdrawal of the enemy to the east. Consequently, as our forces continued to push him to a last-ditch stand, he followed his usual tactics of destroying himself and trying to take as many of our forces as possible along with him. At 1100 hours, 26 February, he made his last act of desperation. While the 1st Battalion (about 500 troops), was in position on a hill near the underground radio installations in the vicinity of Monkey Point just prior to the attack, the enemy blew up the hill, an underground arsenal. "A ravine was created where a hill had been". (122) One of the tanks was blown into the air and landed upside down; our men died without a visible sign of a wound or injury; in all, 196 Americans were killed, wounded, or injured, and the 1st Battalion was disorganized. The closely-following 3d Battalion immediately lent aid to the survivors, as well as pushed forward to assume the lead position in the relentless drive to the east. This last act of the enemy eliminated the sole remaining concentration of his forces, along with 150 counted dead and many others mangled and buried in the debris. (123)

The 3d Battalion on the next day, 27 February, reached the eastern tip of the island, after the final assault. The 1st Battalion returned to "Topside" to reorganize. (124)

(122) A-6, p. 4; (123) A-1, p. 17; A-6, p. 4 and Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge; (124) A-1, p. 17; personal knowledge.

3. Mop-up

Although the island was now occupied by our forces from tip to tip, a great many enemy still remained in the caves along the outer cliffs. The 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry, continued the mopping up in its sector, "Top-side" against very heavy opposition especially in the vicinity of Wheeler Battery. The 3d Battalion assumed responsibility for the eastern sector and continued with mopping up in that area.

For the first time since 23 January 1945 there were no aerial strikes after 26 February, in that our troops now occupied the entire island. Naval gun fire, however, was still used against the coastal caves. As was to be expected, assault patrols had to do the cleaning up of these remaining pockets of resistance. The familiar procedure of assault followed by blowing the cave shut was utilized. In all, over 400 caves were sealed by the use of over seventeen tons of explosives. (125) The work of these patrols, as well as of larger attacks, had been enhanced by the translations of captured enemy documents and the interrogation of prisoners of war. Inasmuch as a Neisi interpreter at Regimental Headquarters translated the enemy documents and interrogated the few prisoners of war captured by the Regiment, the intelligence produced from these sources was often in the hands of the battalions within a very few hours of the capture of the documents or prisoners.

By this time, the island had become so infested with flies that to eat the usual type of emergency rations without

(125) A-1, pages 17 and 18.

flies was a feat in itself. The insanitary conditions under which the remaining Japanese were living had aggravated the situation to such an extent that immediate action had to be taken. Despite the rigid control exercised by our forces, flies thrived wherever there were Japanese, and, naturally, spread all over the island. However, arrangements were made with the Air Force to spray the island on 1 and 2 March with D.D.T., and as improbable as it sounds, after the spraying all the flies had disappeared as if there had never been any on the island. (126)

By 2 March 1945 the remaining enemy, (a total of 4,506 dead had been counted and 19 prisoners of war had been taken) was located in concealed water-line caves in the vicinity of Infantry, Cavalry, Engineer, and Wheeler Points (see map D). There were approximately 200-300 still remaining, but for all practical purposes the operation was officially over. On that day, the third anniversary of the activation of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, in the flag-raising ceremonies at the same flag pole from which the American flag had been hauled down on 6 May 1942, Colonel George M. Jones, Rock Force Commander, presented the island to the Commander-in-Chief, General Douglas MacArthur. (127)

Thus, in twelve days Corregidor had been wrested from approximately 6000 enemy, by 2700 parachutists (including 600 field artillery men and engineers) and 1100 standard infantrymen. The RCT suffered 165 killed, 615 wounded or injured, while the attached units lost 45 killed and 174 wounded or

(126) Personal knowledge; (127) A-6, Intelligence Annex; personal knowledge.

injured. The total casualties were 210 killed and 889 wounded or injured (in enemy explosions). (128) The operation may well be concluded 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 of skillful troops, perfectly coordinated with air and naval support, again proved an unbeatable combination". (129)

(128) A-6, Personnel Annex; (129) A-1, p. 18.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The question which immediately comes to mind after a study of the Corregidor operation is whether the assignment was too much for a parachute regimental combat team. The answer from the aggressive, hard-hitting members of Colonel George M. Jones' 503d Parachute Infantry, with their superior morale and esprit de corps, would be an emphatic, "No! Just look at the record". It must be realized that the strength of the enemy had been estimated to be 850, whereas the actual strength was between 5500 and 6000. It does not follow, though, if the actual number of enemy had been known, that two divisions (to carry through on the proportion of 850 enemy per RCT) would have been required to reduce the island fortress. However, it does appear that even though the strength of the enemy was estimated at 850 only, insufficient armor was provided.

Experience had proved all through the war in the Pacific area that the enemy even in small groups could for extended periods of time cause heavy casualties to our forces because of his uncanny ability to "hole up" in caves and emplacements. We paid dearly for that lesson. However, when Corregidor was to be assaulted, "a long prepared and fanatical enemy, strongly intrenched in numerous tunnels, caves, dugouts, and crevices, awaited the assault in commanding and extensively fortified positions". (130) Yet in spite of the lessons learned, three tanks only (to come in on the amphibious assault) were allotted to the forces; one tank was knocked out by mines when it landed on the shore.

(130) A-17

Too, one company of parachute engineers and the small Demolition Platoon of Regimental Headquarters Company were the few troops which had the tremendous task of sealing the caves, tunnels, and dugouts. The Platoon, in the twelve days of combat (mostly within the first ten days) expended 11,500 pounds of explosives and sealed over 200 caves and tunnels. In the same period, the Engineer Company expended twice as much explosives and sealed a like number of caves and tunnels.

It seems that at least a platoon of tanks and one or two more engineer platoons would have minimized our casualties and possibly have reduced the overall time required to seize the island. Inasmuch as Colonel Jones made the decision to have the third lift arrive one day after the scheduled drop, there was no need for any additional infantry troops. That is, the Parachute Regiment and the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, were sufficient to handle the situation.

One point which stands out very noticeably throughout the operation is the thorough, complete, willing, and enthusiastic cooperation between all the armed services -- the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The very close liaison between the staffs of the Regiment and that of the 317th Troop Carrier Group minimized the losses from the jump itself, in that both pilots and jumpmasters were thoroughly acquainted with the plans, limitations, and capabilities of each other. The commanding officers themselves maintained close liaison more on a personal than an austere, official, cold basis. This spirit of comradeship which pervaded the associations of the two organizations had had its inception eighteen months previously in the first combat mission of the Regiment and had grown in a subsequent

mission in July, 1944. The obvious conclusion to such a profitable alliance is that the same airborne units should work together with the same troop carrier units in all operations where a combination of the services is utilized.

The cooperation from the Air Force was not limited to the troop carrier unit, for the Parachute Maintenance Platoon of the Regiment received superior cooperation from Air Force supply at Mindoro Island, where the Regiment was stationed at the time it had been alerted for the drop. The shortage of parachute maintenance equipment was a serious threat to attainment of the target date, but Air force supply did everything possible to assist the Regiment. The target date was met, although some improvisation was necessary. Even after the operation had commenced, the Air Forces at Mindoro continued to cooperate with assistance in aerial resupply.

Tactical cooperation from the Air Force was obtained via JASCO personnel who had jumped with the Regiment, as well as via an Air Force liaison officer who came in later by boat. Response for air strikes was rapid and accurate to an outstanding degree; an attempt was made during the discussion of the operation to show how closely the tactical air force worked with the assault patrols as well as with the assaulting battalions.

Naval cooperation, too, was outstanding beyond all expectations. From the moment PT boats picked up parachutists who had drifted over the cliffs during the jump to the taking of the Regimental Staff to Luzon at the conclusion of the operation to present the After Operation Report, the Navy was an invaluable part of the operation. Mine-sweeping to

pave the way for the amphibious assault, shelling enemy installations, direct firing on caves preceding patrol assaults, furnishing intermittent night illumination, resupplying the beachhead, and evacuating dead and wounded were among the many tasks performed by the Navy. In brief, then, the Navy because of the nature of the target area, performed services and support which would normally have been furnished an RCT by division field artillery and quartermaster units.

The support furnished by the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, was of immeasurable value to the RCT. That Battalion prevented the eastern force of enemy from joining those on "Topside" and, undoubtedly, eliminating the parachutists on the first night of the assault. Our forces on "Topside" totaled 2000 troops with minimum equipment and supplies, whereas the enemy at the time of the parachute assault had a minimum of 5500 well-fed and well-equipped troops with high morale and esprit de corps.

In like manner, the parachutists on the high ground of "Topside" were able to assist in the diversion of the enemy during the amphibious assault. Consequently, almost three years of preparation, practically all underground, and an island fortress unusually suited to withstand amphibious invasion were rendered ineffective by the vertical envelopment. The characteristic spirit of cooperation so prevalent in the entire operation existed intra-service, as well as inter-service.

An examination of the cooperative spirit between the services shows that cooperation was brought about, in addition

to the natural desire of all forces of our country to work together, by detailed and careful planning. Forward observers for both the Air Force and Navy worked well forward with assault patrols. Communication facilities to control these supporting fires were installed within a few hours of the parachute landing and functioned well and continuously. Liaison by staff officers, as well as by commanding officers themselves, in frequent conferences prior to the invasion contributed immeasurably to working out the details of the operation.

It has already been shown that the principle of mass was violated when only 1000 parachutists were initially dropped in the midst of a minimum of 5500 enemy, whereas attackers should outweigh the defenders by heavy odds. Consequently, the operation proves the value of surprise, for that principle of war along with the principle of cooperation greatly compensated for the gross violation. In fact, the surprise -- attributed mostly to the performance of an act originally believed impossible -- was so effective that the enemy actually thought our forces numbered 8000 to 10000. It was this belief that dictated the tactics employed by the enemy, tactics which saved our forces. Had the enemy pursued a course of relentless, coordinated attack early in the operation, instead of stubborn defense accompanied by suicidal activities, the outcome might have been different.

So great was the effect of the surprise on the enemy, that there is justifiable reason for doubt as to which principle, if one can be isolated, was the more important: cooperation or

surprise. A choice, of course is unnecessary, but the obvious conclusion appears to be that a very important (possibly the most important) principle of war may be violated, if adequate compensation in the form of strong emphasis on other important principles is provided.

Another point which played no small part in the success of the operation is the utter simplicity of the plan of ground action. It was apparent from the lack of detailed information and data relative to enemy strength, equipment, location, dispositions, and organization that no detailed plan of ground action could be formulated in advance of actual ground reconnaissance. Consequently, except for a few general details, the plan was extremely simple: while the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, acted as a block to keep the enemy forces on the eastern from joining those on the western sector, the 503d Parachute Infantry was to seize the island; first, the western sector and then the eastern. The western sector was to be divided into zones of battalion responsibility. In substance, that was the plan -- simplicity in itself.

However, once the landing had been effected and all through the operation, the most careful, coordinated, and methodical planning had to be made. But this planning was pertinent to each individual action and uncomplicated by detailed, extraneous plans.

The enemy, luckily for our forces, was seriously at fault in that he made the irreparable error of underestimating his enemy. The Commander of the island made an estimate of the situation, but despite warnings, eliminated vertical envelopment

as a capability of the American forces in an assault on the island. The shame on the enemy is all the more unpardonable when one considers that it was this quality of underestimation of the enemy on the part of the Allies which contributed so greatly to the early successes of the Japanese Army in 1941 and 1942.

The enemy erred, too, when he failed, apparently, to provide subordinate leaders capable of assuming immediate command, in the event of the death of the commanding officer. The enemy commander was killed within the first few hours of the operation, yet it was not until three days later that coordination of any sort appeared in the tactics employed by the enemy. Even after that fatal delay, the manifested actions were hardly commensurate with the capabilities of the enemy.

However, in one respect, the enemy succeeded: he succeeded in disposing at least 5500 men in strong installations in an area less than two miles square, yet gave the impression that his forces numbered but an estimated 850. Our country would hardly condone the execution of laborers to prevent disclosure of the installations and construction, which procedure it was rumored that the Japanese employed, of course. In addition to that reputed system, the enemy made few improvements in installations located above ground and allowed the landscape to assume all the aspects of desertions, destruction, and a prompt return to nature's development of jungle-like vegetation. At any rate, the fact remains that our intelligence agencies were successfully denied information for evaluation and interpretation. Consequently, the attackers were outnumbered two-

to-one, even after all our forces had arrived, whereas the attacking force should exceed that of the defense.

In the operation, it was¹⁰⁰ necessary to employ a pathfinder unit to locate the drop zones in advance, in that all jumpmasters and key officers had already seen the fields from bombing planes during regular bombing missions prior to the day of the jump. There was no mistaking the so-called drop zones! Despite the possibility of the loss of key airborne personnel during the time they were observers in the bombers, the advantages gained from this procedure were worth the risk. The available maps gave slight indication of the condition of the drop zones; the debris, snags, and wrecked buildings were discovered by the aerial reconnaissance conducted from the bombers; the selection of a "go point", command posts and other installations were made during these flights. As a consequence, much time was saved as well as a maximum pre-jump reconnaissance made by virtue of these bomber flights.

Another advantage which might have been gained from a pathfinder team but which was secured without its use was control of the jumpers during the actual drop. The leading plane of each lift was the control plane and made adjustments of the timing of the jumpmasters as well as the altitude at which the planes were flying all through the drop. The advantages of this procedure are especially noteworthy in this operation inasmuch as the most difficult part of the operation was the placing of the parachutists on the completely unsuitable drop zones. Jump losses were considerably fewer than anticipated as a result of this effective, immediate control plus the

the thorough briefing and indoctrination of the pilots, who were completely cognizant of the importance of precision flying over the drop zones.

During the discussion in Phase I - Preparation, a comment was made relative to prior amphibious training received by elements of the 1st Battalion for a previous combat mission. That prior training proved its worth in the unexpected and hasty amphibious move made by the 1st Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, when the drop of this third lift was cancelled. An analysis of other activities of the RCT during the operation shows, similarly, that highly trained and skillful troops can readily adapt themselves to new tactics and techniques, without prior training. Examples are found from the tank-infantry assault teams clear through to the operation of a "hospital" for three days by the Regimental Medical Department, inasmuch as evacuation facilities did not exist.

An obvious conclusion to be drawn from the success of this operation despite the handicaps and obstacles of superior enemy numbers and hazardous drop zones is that in the employment of parachutists the main consideration is tactical.

The recapture of Corregidor Island, ".....one of the most difficult missions of the Pacific war," (131) may best be summed up in the wording of the citation given the Regiment by the War Department: ".....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

(131) A-17

achieved a significant victory for the United States Army".

The Regiment was cited for its actions on Corregidor by the Commanding Generals of Sixth Army and XI Corps; under the provisions of Section IV, WD Circular 333, dated 1943, the Regiment was awarded the Distinguished Unit Badge.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned from this operation are

1. There is no substitute for personal contact in inter- as well as in intra-service liaison.
2. Parachute operations require extensive liaison to insure thorough cooperation between the interested services.
3. When an important principle of war is violated, strong emphasis must be placed on other important principles to compensate for the violation.
4. Plans for parachute drops of personnel should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate even major changes in tactical plans for the employment of parachutists.
5. Intelligence estimates of enemy strength are merely estimates and can be very misleading.
6. Use of a control plane during the actual jump can minimize casualties caused by strong changing winds and poor drop zones.
7. Parachute organizations must be prepared to administer to all casualties for long periods of time until evacuation can be effectuated.
8. Surprise, once gained, must be exploited rapidly and aggressively.
9. Infantry organizations must have thorough training in the use of assault teams with and without engineer support.
10. The use of interpreters with regimental headquarters is invaluable. This personnel should jump with command post personnel.

11. During a combat operation troops disciplined in the appropriate medical prophylaxis will have few non-battle casualties from such preventable sicknesses as malaria in a tropical area and dysentery in an area contaminated by a multitudinous quantity of flies and filth.
12. No one means of transportation should be relied on for the resupply of parachute troops.
13. In assaults of a fortified installation, infantry troops must be taught to push on after the installation has been reduced and leave the complete destruction to the engineers in the assault party.
14. Greatest advantage of aerial and/or naval bombardment of a target accrues to the infantry when the assault team follows immediately and aggressively upon cessation of the supporting fires.
15. Forward observers and contact personnel of supporting services should be well forward with assault units not only for more accurate sensing of fires, but also to recommend most suitable types of ammunition for the target.
16. When infantry units operate over terrain which lends itself to the construction of caves, dugouts, and tunnels, sufficient engineer and tank units should be attached.
17. Personnel in well constructed caves, tunnels, and other underground installations are relatively safe from bombing attacks.
18. Regardless of the extent of the bombing (at least, non-atomic) of a target, to seize and secure a target, whether it be installation or area, the most potent means of all the services combined remain the infantryman mounted on his own two feet.