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**THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 92D INFANTRY,
PHILIPPINE ARMY; 3 JANUARY 1942,
24 MARCH 1942
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)**

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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 92D INFANTRY,
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company A, 92d Infantry of the 91st Division, Philippine Army from the reorganization of the Regiment on 3 January 1942 to 24 March 1942 and the evacuation of the Company Commander.

The introduction to this monograph is necessarily long in order to give the reader a complete and understandable picture of the organization and training of Philippine Army troops; also the relation of American officers commanding Filipino units. The background of these troops should be kept in mind at all times as it reflects and characterizes the fighting in the Defense of Bataan.

The 92d Infantry Regiment was activated and inducted into Federal Service late in 1941 on the islands of Leyte and Samar. These troops were supposed to have had five months of military training. American officers assigned to these units were designated as Unit Instructors and acted in a supervisory capacity in directing training. Many of the soldiers were illiterate and spoke dialects foreign even to their own officers. Such was the case in the 92d Infantry where the troops were Visayans speaking only Hurai-Hurai or Cebuano, and the officers were from Luzon speaking only Tagalog or dialects of Luzon. To make matters more difficult, the American instructors spoke only English. Instruction consisted of the Americans lecturing to the Filipino officers in English, who in turn translated to the non-commissioned officers in Tagalog. The NCO's

then translated to the Hurai-Hurai group or Cebuano group. Colonel Sharpe, Commanding the Visayan-Mindanao Force, in answer to a plea for a solution to the language problem, wired Lt.-Colonel John C. Rodman, Commanding the 92d Infantry Regiment, PA, "Try Esperanto."

The American officer just arriving in the Philippines was given about two hours of orientation so that when assigned to Philippine Army units in the Islands, he usually found himself the only American man in the Province and everything completely foreign.

The Filipino soldier is inclined to be lackadaisical but gifted with a remarkable native ingenuity which saw its worth time and again in the jungle fighting. He is very affectionate and sentimental almost to an extreme. Many would march holding hands or even leave their fox-hole to ask permission to visit a friend. Many Filipino soldiers had a dormant tuberculosis which became active after a road march or strenuous training. Close supervision of training was essential.

Philippine Army troops were clothed in short pants, short-sleeved shirts, and very poorly made tennis shoes. Their helmets were made of guinip (coconut palm fiber) and heavily shellaced which made them a gleaming target in the sunlight. They carried a light canvas pack. The Filipino Infantryman was armed with an Enfield rifle and bayonet. When attached, the rifle and bayonet usually exceeded the height of the average Filipino soldier. The heaviest gun in the Filipino regiment was a 350-pound water-cooled, Colt, 50 caliber machine gun. In the Combat Company of the regiment is found the old Stokes Mortar. Some

assembly-type ammunition was issued. The mortars and water-cooled .30 caliber machine guns were TH for the Heavy Weapons Company. Organic transportation was nonexistent.

Actually the 92d Infantry Regiment (PA) at the outbreak of the war was a poorly trained, poorly equipped outfit made up of ordinary native troops used to their own locale (Samar-Leyte) and to whom the American officer was a novelty.

At the end of the Bataan campaign these same soldiers were battle-hardened, vicious, disease-ridden, jungle-fighting experts.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF BATAAN

Geographically the Bataan Peninsula is a mountainous, forest-tangled tongue of land about thirty-two miles long and twenty miles wide at its broadest point. Its base lies in the valley between the Zambales Mountains and Mount Natib, through which runs the east-west highway to Olengapo. The northern half of Bataan is dominated by Mount Natib, to the south of which is another valley, which separates it from the Mariveles Mountains. The latter is the dominant terrain feature of the southern half of the peninsula. Through this second valley runs the Bagac-Pilar road, which connects with the east-coast highway. It is the only major route of communication across the peninsula. A long narrow plain stretches along the east coast of Bataan. In the north the shore is marshy, but in the south it is firm and there are good sandy beaches. (1)

The west coast is very irregular and has numerous fingers of land that jut out into the sea. The mountains extend to the coast in many places, and steep cliffs and

tropical forests line the shore. Trails and narrow dirt roads are the only means of north-south communication on this side of the peninsula. (2)

This monograph will concern only the west coast of Bataan from the rice paddies south of Moron to the main battle position just south of the Hagao-Pilar Road.

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 92D INFANTRY (PA)

The 92d Infantry Regiment (PA) prior to the war had never functioned tactically as a unit. It had helped delay the Japanese advance south and had been bombed, strafed, cut off, pierced by tanks and bicycle troops. It lost its Regimental Commander and four other American officers in the withdrawal to Bataan--a matter of six days. } 2
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where?

The 92d Infantry Regiment (PA) was reorganized 3 January 1942 at Colis in the Province of Bataan. 1st Lieutenant Beverly N. Skardon was placed in direct command of Company A, 92d Infantry (PA). The Company consisted of one American officer, five Filipino officers, and one hundred and ten enlisted men. The men were mainly replacements consisting of ex-artillerymen, medics, ROTC cadets, civilians. Enfields were distributed.

RE-ESTABLISHING CONTACT BETWEEN BATTERIES OF THE

31ST FIELD ARTILLERY (PA)

The first mission assigned Company A was to re-establish communication between the batteries of the 31st Field Artillery (PA), now infantry, high up on Mount Silanganan. Snipers had worked through the jungle and had paralyzed this unit. Company A moved by night up to the rear communication point along the trail up Mount Silanganan. The Company Commander was oriented by the Filipino contact officer. Trail blocks were established and the plan for the next day's

mission was given to the officers. No enemy had been seen or heard during the night. The plan was simple: combat patrols consisting of an officer and ten men, including a BAR, and ^a guide from the Field Artillery ⁶ Battalion would re-establish contact with the batteries. Early the next morning firing broke out down the trail, and it was found the trail back down the mountain had been cut. The patrols went out on schedule, however, and by afternoon contact was made. There was considerable firing all day long; the Japanese seemed to be working in pairs with one soldier carrying a machine rifle. The unique situation caused by the rapid reverberations of the Japanese machine rifles down in the valleys caused some ^{concern (?)} consternation as to where the firing was coming from. Both outfits were now cut off from the main road. It was with dismay that the Company heard the firing work around its position on the trail and to its rear. During this action the Japanese used a large gong or cymbal which they pounded periodically during the night--the echo carried well and added to the eeriness of the situation. Also during this operation, the baying of dogs was clearly heard. The long mournful howl of the dog had its effect on the soldier ^s high up in the mountains. This dubious sounding report was submitted to the Regimental Commander in good faith.

The 31st Field Artillery Commander announced that he was withdrawing up) the mountain and then down the back slope in hope of a way out. This commander refused to support any plan of the commander of Company A even though ^{what type of plans} he had food and ammunition and had suffered very few casualties.

As Company A was now dependent on scavenging for food, and ammunition was low, ^T the Company withdrew up the mountain

in good order after reconnaissance patrols had failed to find a way down through the jungle. There were no maps of the area for troops although a bench mark high up on the trail was found with a Lt. Winfield Scott's name on it. Along the trail the men cut the heart out of palms and banana trees for food and sucked water from rattan vines. The hardship in this brief encounter seemed to bind the men more closely although approximately fifteen of their number were ^{lost?} missing.

COVERING THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE 1ST REGULAR DIVISION (PA)

ALONG THE TRAIL ON THE COAST OF THE CHINA SEA

Company A had been in the mountains approximately four days when it rejoined the Regiment. The following order was given verbally by the Regimental Executive officer to the commander of Company A when he reported in: "Take your Company with this guide to block the trail and cover the withdrawal of the 1st Regular Division along the cliffs on the coast of the China Sea. There are no orders for your withdrawal; however there is a possibility of being relieved ^{your} by constabulary units. Everybody else is in the line trying to hold the Moron Road." Back to the jungle with hungry, footsore, tattered soldiers! There was no such thing as finding out where anyone was so fluid was the situation. Even the Regimental Commander was on his belly firing a rifle.

The trail was blocked in depth and the stream of disorganized soldiers who had thrown away their equipment in order to "travel light" was a disheartening sight. Then came the wounded whose evacuation) was aided by the men of Company A. Rice and salmon were issued twice a day. Fortunately the Company was relieved and withdrew to the new Regimental rendezvous. On the withdrawal the column

was bombed and strafed by low-flying enemy aircraft but quick action and previous conditioning prevented casualties.

As ~~an~~ explanatory note; all orders emanated directly from the Regimental Commander and the battalion command functioned only administratively. This was due to the extreme shortage of American officers and the extremely fluid situation.

ESTABLISHING THE OPLR FOR THE 92D INFANTRY REGIMENT

ON THE MAIN BATTLE POSITION IN BATAAN

At the Regimental rendezvous the following verbal order was received: "Your Company will form the OPLR generally along the Bagac-Pilar Road. Contact the 71st Division on your left and the 45th Infantry (PS) on your right. After you have made contact with the Nips rejoin us about 800 yards (jungle) to the rear. The Regiment will be digging in and putting in wire." The Company was also to assist in carrying wire, engineer tools, and ammunition to the rear which had been dumped at this point.

The units on the right and left were contacted; however, due to the large frontage this contact was never ^{maintained?} re-established.

incomplete sentence

Small contact patrols, sentry posts were posted. One platoon rested, washed, performed routine Company duties while the other two were active on the OPLR. This particular area just south of the Bagac-Pilar Road lacked visibility or observation, therefore it was imperative to ^{necessary?} walk all trails and institute a "revving OPLR." The inadequacy of this OPLR was soon evident.

Large numbers of stragglers and civilians were passing through the lines. It was impossible to check them all; consequently ^{why?} firing broke out in rear of Company A,

and it was found that the Japanese had skillfully infiltrated and run against the MLR. Company A was again on a limb.) Following lines of drift to the east, the Company made a passage through the 11th Division (PA) and again rejoined the Regiment. The Company was placed in Battalion reserve and given missions of patrolling and hunting down snipers.

Due to the non-availability of records concerning the 92d Regiment all dates are approximate except in outstanding cases. The above mentioned operations took place in the middle and latter part of January 1942.

COMPANY A IN THE TOUL POCKET *taken*

Early in February, Company A was pulled from battalion reserve and attached to the 11th Division (PA) which was attempting to close the pocket along the Toul River; later known as the Toul Pocket.

A limited attack along with the Philippine Constabulary and 11th Division units was launched to re-occupy foxholes in the MLR; however it found that a Japanese Regiment had passed through the gap approximately 50 yards wide and had exploited their breakthrough so as to endanger I Corps installations. This fighting proved to be the most bloody and bitter of the campaign for Company A. Due to hospitalization the Company Commander missed the initial assault which caused nearly 40 per cent casualties and demoralized the unit. The Company was then given the mission of holding the ground which had proved so costly to take and act as a buffer as the bottom of the pocket was being pinched off. It was necessary for the men to be placed not over six feet apart to prevent the infiltration of the enemy. The Japanese, determined to hold their ground, fought with

such tenacity that many attempts to drive them out of their reverse slope positions resulted in unusually high casualties. Grenades were used as often as they could be obtained. So close were the two lines that automatic weapons of the enemy were thought to be friendly guns unless the "pound" of the Jap 7.7 could be detected or the "slip-slip" of the machine rifle could be distinguished.

The sector of Company A was under 100 yards in width; nevertheless the matted bamboo, fallen trees presented such concealment that men crawling forward sometimes found themselves dropping in on top of a Jap soldier and vice versa.

Bamboo grenades improvised by the Engineers were made and used; however their immediate result was not known. An attempt was made to fire some of the old mortar ammunition but only about three rounds out of thirteen exploded; later many of these duds were found in the center of the Japanese maze of trenches and foxholes. Due to the lack of Signal Corps equipment, it was necessary to tie up three separate circuits to fire this fiasco.

One tank from the 194th Tank Battalion was led down into the jungle in order to utilize its 37 mm gun. However, the jungle so effectively covered all targets that an area or spot was given as a probable target location.

The men lived in their foxholes for approximately eleven days. If killed, the man was covered in his hole. Evacuation of the dead was nearly impossible due to the intensity of enemy fire. Malnutrition had sapped the strength of the Filipino soldiers so that the evacuation of the wounded turned out to be a problem of physical strength.

Feeding was a laborious and extremely dangerous process. The men were fed twice daily. Their ration consisting

of a canteen cup of rice and a spoonful of salmon gravy. A canteen cup traveled the entire length of the company line, being passed from foxhole to foxhole to the sheltered position of the chow-carriers and back again.

All movement at night was prohibited; all trails were blocked as soon as darkness fell.

The ^{re-}appearance of the Company Commander in the foremost foxholes seemed to steady the troops and bolster morale.

The Toul Pocket was finally closed about the 18th of February 1942 as a result of the inching forward of Fil-American troops, gradually re-occupying the foxholes of the MLR.

After remaining an extra day to outpost the position while the Engineers replaced the wire in front of the MLR, Company A rejoined the Regiment.

PLUGGING THE LINE

After ten days of guarding the Regimental CP and getting a long-needed and well-deserved rest, Company A went back into the line as a front-line company. The position was well dug in with wire and sharpened bamboo stakes in front of the wire.

Enemy action amounted to sniper activity, nightly infiltration attempts, and occasional artillery.

In this position Philippine Scout artillery could be called for by concentration number. The artillery was comforting and seemed to discourage any concentrated Japanese attack.

Food was always a problem. The soldiers grew weaker by the day. Malaria, beri-beri, and dysentery were rampant; there was no way of evacuating the sick, and even men counted as effectives could not do much more than walk about.

Time and again various messages from President Roosevelt, President Quezon, and General McArthur were received and disseminated to the troops. Hope never died. The Company Commander became delirious with malaria and was evacuated; there were approximately fifteen or twenty men holding the Company front at this time.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In analyzing the brief campaign as described, many criticisms are in order. Studying the big over-all picture of the entire defensive forces and the small picture of a single company fighting a weird, jungle engagement, the unpreparedness of the Bataan Forces glares frightfully. The lack of arms, food, medicine in the Defense of Bataan counted heavily in favor of the enemy. While it is presumptuous to say that Bataan could have held with sufficient rations, medicine, and arms, it is not unlikely that a larger enemy force could have been diverted for a longer period of time had the defenders the necessary supplies. This is not a feeble cry or whimper; it is a screaming indictment against unpreparedness.

Looking coldly at the campaign in retrospect, it is nonsensical to discount experience however slight. The newly arrived American officer assigned to Native Troops never fully realized his responsibility in training until he went into combat with his unit. Officers going out to the Provinces as Instructors to the Philippine Army units were not properly indoctrinated or oriented as to their purpose or to the capacity in which they would serve.

Although many Philippine Army units literally disintegrated in the proximity of the enemy, other units with

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a superior type leader fought many successful engagements. And it must be remembered that Philippine Army units with a handful of American officers held over seven-eighths of the entire MLR on Bataan.

The immediate effect of the friendly propaganda was outstanding; however the after effect was debatable. The letter written by General McArthur to the troops was excellent but his leaving for Australia was hard to explain to the soldiers and keep the spirit of the letter alive.

The effect of propaganda by the enemy could be termed negative as far as these operations were concerned although his use of it was prolific.

The lack of air support, air reconnaissance, or just the sight of a friendly plane deepened the feeling of frustration and hopelessness. The situation never improved.

The faulty strategy used by the Japanese high command in the fight for the Philippines is evident; however the strategy of infiltration, night attack, and the aggressiveness of the enemy small units is due little criticism. Rather it merits closer study.

The enemy installations in the front line were excellent; his ability to quickly "dig in" was amazing. The sniper activity of the Japanese often paralyzed a whole company-- a remarkable advantage.

Communication in the operations of Company A can be marked negative due to the wide territory covered and the non-availability of signal equipment.

Some commanders let the future of their situation weigh too heavily and consequently developed an apathetic attitude instead of concerning themselves with their immediate problem. I refer to the shroud of hopelessness and inevitable situation that hung over Bataan. This problem is more

serious than low morale.

Though the entire area of Bataan had been previously mapped, no maps were to be had by units needing them most.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons that can be drawn from these operations are:

1. The age-old military axiom, "An Army Fights On Its Stomach," can readily find application in the Defense of Bataan.
2. Friendly propaganda must never exceed its saturation point as was evidenced in "personal messages" from those in high authority.
3. With aggressive leaders of a superior type, green, uninitiated troops can be developed into combat soldiers.
4. Apathetic commanders should be relieved from the zone of action.
5. Officers assigned to train native troops should be properly oriented and indoctrinated before being sent out to units.
6. Any area that is likely to become a battlefield should be mapped extensively.
7. The use of strange, terroristic devices can be used effectively.
8. The enemy tactics and installations should be studied with a view of improving our own.
9. The dissemination of information to junior commander is essential.
10. Improvisation as to weapons, barriers, and jungle lore should be emphasized in the study of jungle warfare.
11. The unusual and impossible can happen. Be prepared for it.