Pacific Hurtgen:
The American Army in Northern Luzon, 1945
PACIFIC HURTGEN
THE AMERICAN ARMY IN NORTHERN LUZON, 1945
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I dedicate this book to my son Nicholas who for years begged me to finish something I had longed talked of, so his sister would not be the only one I had dedicated a book to. Thank you Nick.
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During the fall and early winter of 1944, 8 U.S. Army divisions were bloodied and debilitated in a wet, cold, dreary part of Western Europe called the Hurtgen Forest. Falsely, this campaign is trumpeted as perhaps the most unnecessary and wasteful endeavor of the American military during World War II. Much of that belief devolves from the European Theater of Operations (ETO)-centric belief of the preponderance of World War II historians and the misguided fallacy of the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) existing solely as a naval war. Even the famous land campaigns of the PTO are heralded as the achievement of the U.S. Marine Corps. Unknown to many is the part played by the U.S. Army in the Pacific. The U.S. Army in the Pacific experienced their own Hurtgen Forest on the Philippine island of Luzon during the spring of 1945. Seven infantry divisions would wither away in an entirely unnecessary series of battles, all at the behest of the Supreme Commander of what became known as the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), General Douglas MacArthur. Three of those divisions (6th, 25th, and 32nd Infantry Divisions) would be little more than a shell of once proud units when the battle ended. Four other infantry divisions (33rd, 37th, 38th, and 43rd) would also pay a hard price for questionable objectives. Rather than fighting in a cold, wet, and dreary environment, these divisions struggled in a hot, mountainous, jungle area against a resourceful, fanatical enemy. The fight for northern Luzon would become the “Pacific Hurtgen,” as a sense of misery and despair engulfed the troops that would fight and die there.
The Philippine Islands
The Southwest Pacific Area
THE PACIFIC WAR TO THE CAPTURE OF MANILA

General Douglas MacArthur is a very recognizable name in American military history. His family had fought during the American Civil War; he had graduated from West Point, served with honor and distinction during World War I (WWI), rose to Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, and then became Army Chief of Staff for President Herbert Hoover. During his tenure as the Army’s top officer, he advised the President to use force to disperse the “Bonus Army,” a peaceful gathering of World War WWI veterans who had fallen on hard economic times during the Depression and were seeking early payment of their bonuses. This shameful act would lead, either directly or indirectly, to President Franklin Roosevelt sending MacArthur to the Philippines to serve as the military advisor to the U.S. territory. He would be restored to active duty when World War II (WWII) began.

While in the Philippines General MacArthur, in addition to his role as a Philippine military advisor, also bore responsibility for the American army and air power stationed in the vast island chain. Much was made in military circles at the time and in historical circles since, about responsibility for the debacle of December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor. Yet, little attention is paid to the debacle that occurred hours later in the Philippines. MacArthur was informed of the Japanese attack shortly after it happened yet when Japanese bombers appeared over the main American air base of Clark Field on the island of Luzon, a fate similar to that of the planes in Hawaii happened. MacArthur’s planes were caught on the ground and his forces quickly outflanked by Japanese
units landing at will. In fairness, there was little MacArthur or anyone else could have done at this point to stop the Japanese but his planes should have been dispersed. No reinforcements were available, the closest U.S. base was thousands of miles away, and U.S. air and naval power were nonexistent. The Philippines were lost. As all collapsed around him, MacArthur was personally saved by President Roosevelt, who ordered him to leave to Australia to begin the process of rebuilding the American military presence in the Pacific. Before speeding away on a PT (Patrol Torpedo) boat, he made the famous boast that would become the basis of the Pacific War, “I shall return.” He would also receive America’s highest military honor for losing the Philippines. The first few months of the war had not been kind to America’s situation in the Pacific. The Japanese had taken the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, most of Southeast Asia, and controlled the vast maze of Pacific islands to the doorsteps of Midway, a small island several hundred miles from Hawaii. President Franklin Roosevelt believed that America needed a hero and recommended MacArthur for the Medal of Honor. The citation read:

For conspicuous leadership in preparing the Philippine Islands to resist conquest, for gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action against invading Japanese forces, and for the heroic conduct of defensive and offensive operations on the Bataan Peninsula. He mobilized, trained, and led an army which has received world acclaim for its gallant defense against a tremendous superiority of enemy forces in men ad arms. His utter disregard of personal danger under heavy fire and aerial bombardment, his calm judgment in each crisis, inspired his troops, galvanized the spirit of resistance of the Filipino people, and confirmed the faith of the American people in their Armed Forces.”

The sheer absurdity of that citation defies explanation. MacArthur did face enormous odds and had no hope of reinforcement or relief. But heroic defensive and offensive operations? General Wainwright conducted a heroic, hopeless stand on the Bataan Peninsula and would spend the next three years in a Japanese prison camp. There were no offensive operations of any kind worth mentioning. Further, in the hours after Pearl Harbor, MacArthur took no steps to disperse his aircraft at Clark Field and they were caught on the ground, eliminating his one major asset capable of stunting Japanese actions. General Walter Short, the army commander in Hawaii, was relieved of his command for allowing his planes to be caught on the ground. Admiral Husband Kimmel was relieved of his command of the Pacific Fleet. MacArthur received the Medal of Honor. His boast of returning to the Philippines would dominate the strategic debate in the Pacific Theater of Operation for the next three years.

When MacArthur reached Australia after fleeing the Philippines there was little to work with. Nevertheless, U.S. forces would quickly be thrust into action. To the north of Australia is the world’s second largest island, New Guinea. Should the Japanese occupy New Guinea, especially the harbor of Port Moresby on the island’s southern coast, Australia itself would be threatened. In May 1942, the Japanese attempted a seaborne invasion of New Guinea, with Port Moresby the ultimate prize. U.S. signal intelligence figured this out and two U.S. aircraft carriers, the Lexington and Yorktown, sailed to meet them. The resulting engagement, the Battle of the Coral Sea, was a tactical victory for the Japanese but a strategic victory for the United States. The United States lost the Lexington and the Yorktown suffered extensive damage. U.S. carrier planes sank the Shoho, a light Japanese aircraft carrier, and devastated the air groups of two Pearl Harbor veterans, the Shokaku and Zuikaku, putting them out of action for several months. The Japanese force turned for home, and their commander loath to risk his precious ships despite the fact that he outnumbered his enemy. During the fall of 1942, a Japanese force
landed on New Guinea’s northern coast and proceeded to make a treacherous overland march towards Port Moresby. Jungle, disease, the Owen Stanley Mountains, and starvation; all contributed to the virtual skeletons that stopped short of Port Moresby at Buna. Buna, an old coconut plantation, now had a couple of vital airstrips that could threaten Port Moresby and Australia. With only the 32nd and 41st Infantry Divisions (IDs) available, both National Guard units completely unprepared for jungle warfare, MacArthur made the controversial decision to commit his meager force to the capture of Buna in November 1942.

The 32nd Infantry Division would do the preponderance of the fighting and suffering in the coming battle. The Japanese constructed sturdy pillboxes on all the approaches to the airstrips and developed positions throughout the dense jungle. Attack after attack was repulsed. MacArthur’s historic impatience appeared and the main casualty would be the 32nd’s commander, General Edwin F. Harding. Harding immediately realized that his infantry alone could do little against the stout enemy positions. He needed and pleaded for heavy weapons, especially tanks. His entire division had but one artillery piece and it had the wrong type of ammunition for a jungle environment. Harding’s pleas went unanswered by MacArthur, who placed the blame on poor leadership and weak soldiers. Despite never visiting the ground, despite his own intelligence underestimates of Japanese strength and capabilities, and despite sending his men into a battle they were unprepared and underequipped for, MacArthur relieved Harding. His replacement would be General Robert Eichelberger, a commander who would earn the nickname “MacArthur’s Fireman” for the multiple times he would save his boss’ campaigns. Eichelberger had actually evaluated the 32nd ID in the summer of 1942. He had rated them “barely

2 The lone American artillery piece was initially outfitted with proximity fuses, which exploded on contact. Given the large amounts of jungle growth the Japanese placed on their positions, the artillery did little more than blow everything around. Delayed action fuses would not arrive until later in the battle.
satisfactory,” noting their lack of physical acclimation to a jungle environment and inexperience in night problems and the general art of soldiering. He instituted a rigorous training program that had yet to bear fruit at the time the 32nd was committed to battle. When told he was on his way to Buna to save the situation, Eichelberger received MacArthur’s farewell message:

I want you to go to Buna and capture it. If you do not do so I don’t want you to come out alive and that applies to your Chief of Staff also. Do you understand Bob! Time is of the essence! I want you to relieve Harding Bob. Send him back to America. If you don’t do it I will. Relieve every regimental and battalion commander. Put corporals in command if necessary. Get somebody who will fight. When do you want to start Bob?

It was a really inspiring send off. Eichelberger went to Buna and set to fix the mess MacArthur had created.

Mindful of his superior’s orders, Eichelberger launched an attack against the airfields soon after arriving at Buna. It was, as those previously launched, stopped cold. Eichelberger completely understood the feelings of helplessness that must have encumbered General Harding. He steadfastly refused to launch any further attacks until his lone artillery piece received the proper ammunition and his men secured armored support. It begs to question how an entire U.S. infantry division could have but one 105 mm gun in its entire inventory. The 32nd ID was clearly not ready for combat, either in the battle readiness in a jungle environment of their men or their basic equipment. Several M3 Stuart light tanks would arrive soon thereafter and completely change the course of the battle.

The Stuarts allowed the infantry of the 32nd ID to finally

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4 Introduction to the Eichelberger Papers.
overwhelm the bunkers that had frustrated them for nearly two months. The Stuarts were small compared to the giants that would become famous in WWII and had only a 37 mm gun. But, the Japanese had no armor available and no anti-tank weapons of any note. Buna and its airstrips fell in January 1943. It could have been November 1942 had MacArthur provided these same tanks when General Harding had initially requested them. With Buna secure, what next? MacArthur’s ground forces would reenter the fray during the spring of 1944 after spending the preceding months training and bolstering their strength. While his qualities as a commander or person can be questioned, MacArthur’s inherent military genius cannot. Historians have lauded the island hopping campaign across the Central Pacific by Admiral Chester Nimitz as an act of brilliance. MacArthur would launch a similar campaign along the northern coast of New Guinea that would place his forces in perfect position to strike at the Philippines and fulfill his promise to return.

MacArthur’s strategic intent to hop from point to point along New Guinea’s northern coast was brilliant. Major enemy garrisons would be outflanked and left to wither away while all operations could count on land-based air support. Yet, problems did exist on the tactical level, primarily limited ground forces and impatience. Nevertheless, this masterful drive across New Guinea never involved more than the elements of five infantry divisions. Several of these divisions were involved in multiple operations simultaneously. The pattern that emerged was initiating new battles before previous ones ended. This stretched MacArthur’s limited man-power unnecessarily and prevented support and reinforcements when needed. A new U.S army, the Sixth, under the command of General Walter Krueger, would be created to manage the various divisions involved in the New Guinea campaign. Krueger would often show the same impatience as his boss but did have to man-age both the army and MacArthur’s meddling and egotistical de-cisions at the same time. Fortunately, the first operation of this campaign, at Hollandia, would face no
real obstacles and result in a resounding success.

Hollandia was attacked and secured in April 1944. It was lightly defended and the perfect position from which to stage future operations, possessing several excellent airfields and a large port. The seizure of Hollandia cut off an entire Japanese army in eastern New Guinea, though that army would reenter the picture several months later. ULTRA, the top-secret name for the Allied effort to break the Japanese and German military codes, informed MacArthur that Hollandia was lightly defended and that he could also cut off an entire Japanese army by landing there. This was a brilliant campaign but it did have some quiet help. With Hollandia secure the Sixth Army would set its sights on Wakde, a small island off of New Guinea’s northern coast.

Wakde was as close to perfect as any military operation of the Second World War. The small island had a vital airstrip and elements of the 41st Infantry Division were tasked with its capture. The 41st had entered the Buna operation in its final days and in the year that followed they honed their skills in both jungle warfare and combined arms, small unit actions. Unlike Buna, modern tanks and artillery were available in abundance. In addition, naval gunfire and air support were readily available. It took the 41st two days (May 18th and 19th, 1944) to secure the island. U.S. casualties were light; the entire Japanese garrison of several hundred was eliminated. Across the water lay Sarmi and the infamous Lone Tree Hill.

Given Wakde’s position very close to New Guinea itself, General Krueger worried that Japanese forces could still threaten it. The 158th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) landed in New Guinea and on May 23rd, 1944 began its advance west. Several times the advance was blunted by stout Japanese defenses and heavy jungle but the 158th continued to edge forward. Lone Tree Hill, a point several thousand yards west of the Tirfoam River and the last enemy position before a vital airfield, stood in the way.
Lone Tree Hill, so dubbed by the American infantry who fought for it, was approximately 175 feet high, 1,200 yards long, and 1,100 yards wide.\textsuperscript{5} It was steep, rocky, and had a twisting stream (Snaky River) flowing before its eastern face. A defile also existed between Lone Tree Hill and the nearby Mt. Saskin. Many would fight and die in that defile. For several days, beginning on 26 May, the 158\textsuperscript{th} RCT would try to secure Lone Tree Hill. After only two 2 days, the unit sustained nearly 300 casualties, dead and wounded, and had accomplished little. They were pulled off the line because the 158\textsuperscript{th} RCT was earmarked for the invasion of Noemfoor, a point 300 miles further west. The 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division would replace the 158\textsuperscript{th} but not launch their first attack until nearly a month later, on 20 June. This began a pattern in MacArthur’s operations; a new campaign would start before an earlier one finished. He had to keep up with the pace of Nimitz's drive across the Central Pacific, a topic to be discussed in a later chapter. Lone Tree Hill and the surrounding area should have been secured before continuing the move west. When new operations began they took with them naval and air support as well as potential reinforcements. The 6\textsuperscript{th} ID would toil in the heat and jungle of Lone Tree Hill for 10 days before it was finally secured. Reinforcements that could have brought a swift end to the battle were instead fighting on the island of Biak.

Biak is another island off New Guinea’s northern coast. Substantially larger than Wakde, it contained three major airfield complexes. These airdromes were needed not only to support MacArthur’s own New Guinea operations but also Admiral Nimitz’s operations against the Mariana Islands, scheduled to commence on 15 June. The landings on Biak by the 41\textsuperscript{st} ID began on 27 May 1944. The operations in the Sarmi area and specifically Lone Tree Hill were still in progress. Each operation could have gone both quicker and easier if they were the only one progressing at any given point. Biak would not be officially secured until 22 July.

\textsuperscript{5} Young, \textit{They Too Fought The Japanese}, 91.
Biak was a mountainous Pacific island, boiling hot, and abound with natural coral. The coral and caves of Biak allowed its Japanese defenders to give the Americans the airfields while still denying them their use as they dominated the high ground overlooking them. MacArthur actually declared Biak secure on 21 June. He did have the airfields but was unable to support Nimitz’s operations or his own because they were not operational. Thousands of bombs, tens of thousands of artillery and mortar rounds, and finally thousands of gallons of gasoline poured into crevices within the coral and caves and then electrically ignited finally ended the murderous fighting on Biak. MacArthur was edging closer and closer to his return to the Philippines. However, another fight that he had not anticipated was brewing far to his east.

The Hollandia landings had cut off the Japanese 18th Army in eastern New Guinea. A total of 55,000 men were all but forgotten by MacArthur and even their superiors in Tokyo. That 55,000-man force, facing starvation or eventual surrender if they remained static, began moving west, hoping to link up with other Japanese units once passing the narrow Driniumor River. ULTRA informed MacArthur and Krueger of this movement, a movement which if successful placed the airfields and storage facilities in the Hollandia/Aitape area in significant peril. Yet, the American generals did as little as possible to meet this impending threat. To shift forces east would have dissipated efforts on Biak, at Sarmi, and future operations further west at Noemfoor, Sansapor, and Morotai. MacArthur even knew the general day of the attack, 10 July, and still made no major effort to bolster his forces. It wasn’t even called a defense; instead, it was referred to as a covering force operation. Two regiments of the 32nd ID and the understrength 112th Cavalry Regiment, later supplemented by elements of the 31st Infantry Division (one regiment of approximately 3,000 men), were all that stood before the 55,000 men of the Japanese 18th Army.
Five infantry battalions (approximately 800 men each) were supposed to be waiting for the Japanese when they attacked. They were responsible for five 5 miles of jungle-infested front, an impossible task. Krueger, through ULTRA, knew where the Japanese were (ULTRA information did not go below army commanders), but could not infer that information to his subordinates. He ordered a two-battalion reconnaissance in force along the flanks of the American line several days before the anticipated Japanese attack. Unfortunately for the three infantry battalions still covering the Driniumor, ULTRA did not take into account the thick jungle of New Guinea. The two battalions that deployed for the reconnaissance in force never saw the Japanese. The jungle was so thick and overwhelming that two battalions could easily miss an entire army. The 18th Japanese Army would attack a very weak line when they came screaming out of the jungle on a humid July night.

The American line had substantial artillery support and the guns had previously registered key points along the line, as ULTRA told them where the Japanese would attack. Sheer weight of numbers would find holes in a severely undermanned, extended line, despite the roar of the American guns. Eventually, the American forces would fall back, a decision for which General Krueger would loudly criticize his commanders. The line would be stabilized and over the following weeks the Japanese 18th Army would be destroyed, its remnants scattering into the jungle. It was an American victory but did it have to be such a difficult victory?

Reinforcements would have made this a far easier task. MacArthur and Krueger were both aware of where the Japanese attack would take place. Another infantry regiment, or even better, a full infantry division would have made all the difference. With operations occurring concurrently on Biak and Sarmi, with future battles staging further west on New Guinea, help would come in small increments. Perhaps MacArthur was hesitant to surrender the headlines to Nimitz as he successfully secured the
Marianna Islands. Perhaps MacArthur feared the final defeat of his winning the war through the Philippines argument if he could not point to continuous progress. Despite the aforementioned campaigns and the inherent difficulties within them, by the close of July 1944 New Guinea was essentially secure. Several smaller operations would still occur but the anticipated landings in the Philippines scheduled for early 1945 now seemed unnecessarily far into the future. It was agreed in Washington that the momentum MacArthur possessed should be exploited. Circumstances and a lack of Japanese opposition would move up the timetable for the landings. Admiral William “Bull” Halsey’s Third Fleet began attacking Mindanao in September and was shocked at the sparse Japanese opposition. Attacks against the Visayas, a small group of islands between New Guinea and the Philippines, were also very successful and largely unopposed. Halsey then suggested that the timetable for the Philippine invasion be moved up and his request was approved. In October 1944, MacArthur affirmed his vow to return to the Philippines when General Krueger’s Sixth Army landed on the island of Leyte.

The Philippine island of Leyte is most famous for history’s greatest naval battle, the Battle of Leyte Gulf. When MacArthur’s forces approached Leyte, the Japanese high command knew that the war was beyond hope if American forces controlled the Philippines. This was also the time for the great naval battle the Japanese had been anticipating for the entire war. This was a battle of annihilation between large capital ships. Their vital supplies all (oil, metals, rubber, and food) came from conquered territories in Southeast Asia. American submarines and aircraft operating from Filipino bases would strangle the Japanese military and civilian population. The major remaining units of the Imperial Japanese Navy sortied for Leyte. Despite several mistakes made by the American naval commander, Admiral Halsey, the Japanese fleet was savaged, never again to pose a

threat to U.S. forces. The landings on Leyte were an overwhelming success and after vicious fighting, the island was secured. The main Philippine island of Luzon was the next obvious target.

Luzon, the largest island of the vast Philippine archipelago, was also home to its capitol city, Manila, and the largest Japanese army east of China. Over 250,000 soldiers under the command of General Tomoyuki Yamashita awaited MacArthur and Krueger’s Sixth Army. It was a battle the Japanese commander knew he could not win. Yamashita hoped to delay the inevitable as long as possible, digging into the rugged mountains and jungles of northern Luzon and allowing MacArthur’s forces to attack him. Should MacArthur not attack his entrenched forces but instead satisfy himself with the capture of Manila and the surrounding areas, which Yamashita did not intend on defending, the Japanese commander could do little to influence events. He lacked supplies, air support, transport, and any hope of reinforcement or relief. He was in the exact same situation as MacArthur in 1942 but he did have considerably more strength, at least in numbers. The only way Yamashita could affect events was if MacArthur ordered his forces to attack his forces in Luzon’s rugged northern mountains, which is precisely what happened.

Elements of General Walter Krueger’s Sixth Army began landing in southern Luzon and the island’s Lingayen Gulf in January 1945. Their immediate objectives were Manila, the Bataan Peninsula, and Clark Field. By the beginning of March, all would be either occupied or secure. Manila would pay a terrible price for its liberation; the city was destroyed and hundreds of thousands of civilians killed. U.S. forces would also face bitter battles in the

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7 Halsey would fall for a Japanese decoy, empty aircraft carriers and pursue with most of his battle fleet a portion of the Japanese fleet away from Leyte. Japanese tepidness, severe acts of bravery by minor American naval units, and some luck would save the landing force and allow other forces to pound the Japanese Navy to impotence.

8 For a complete description of the Battle of Manila see the article *The 1945 Battle of Manila* by this author in the Aug–Sep 2015 edition of World at War magazine.
Bataan Peninsula. But, MacArthur had what he needed. The airfields and port facilities in the Manila area were perfect to use as a base from which to launch his part of what would undoubtedly be an invasion of Japan. MacArthur was also free of the threat of Yamashita’s still formidable army of 200,000 remaining effectives, far to the north on the island. It was time to rest and refit. Yamashita could not attack him, a covering force like the one used on New Guinea would have been adequate, with vast air assets ready to assist. Instead, it would see the senseless battering of several American infantry divisions in attacks against General Yamashita’s large but strategically insignificant force in northern Luzon.
Before even examining the tactical scenarios that would so befuddle the U.S. Army on Luzon, it is first necessary to determine if any type of campaign in the Philippines was indeed necessary to win the war. Once again operations and in this case debate, concerning the Pacific Theater, were overshadowed by the war in Europe. There were numerous debates on the course of the war against Hitler, none more energetic and at times vitriolic than how best to defeat Germany after the breakout from the Normandy beachhead. What history has called the broad front versus. narrow thrust debate created extremely contentious arguments amongst the Allied powers. The broad front approach, as espoused by Allied Supreme Commander General Dwight Eisenhower, called for an attack across the entire frontier of Germany. Three army groups with seven total armies, four of which were American, would advance simultaneously, overwhelming their outnumbered enemy. America's military leaders favored this approach. The narrow thrust, which would have encompassed a 40-division drive into northern Germany (22 of those divisions American) under the command of British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, was naturally the preferred option of the British. Feeling increasingly overshadowed by the far stronger United States, it gave them the preeminent position in the alliance they once dominated. Throughout the late summer and fall of 1944, the arguments grew louder and though the alliance was under no threat of fracture inter-allied squabbling became as prominent an enemy as the Germans. A similar argument raged in the Pacific, how best to defeat the Japanese?
It was an entirely American debate and in many ways more vicious than even those that took place in the European Theater of Operations.

The debate on how best to proceed in the Pacific followed two principle avenues of approach:

1. The Navy, led by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King and Commander of the Pacific Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, wanted a drive across the central Pacific, ending with an invasion of the island of Formosa. Occupation of Formosa would isolate Japanese forces in China and provide an ideal base from which to launch strategic air attacks against and eventually, invade Japan.

2. A return to the Philippines. This was of course the choice of General Douglas MacArthur. He would cite American honor, the fate of Filipino civilians under Japanese occupation, and military advantages for this route of advance.

Many a month would be spent debating the above-mentioned options. The ultimate decision was to be made by President Roosevelt, who would never issue an ironclad directive giving priority to any one approach. A third option existed, one preferred by Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall. It would involve a drive across the Central Pacific, as the Navy wanted, but would bypass Formosa and the Philippines, striking directly at the Japanese home islands from the island of Okinawa. Unfortunately, resources would be distributed rather than concentrated. Victory would be achieved but could have been accomplished far quicker and at less cost if only one drive, preferably the central Pacific option, was selected.

The vast Pacific Ocean was Japan’s natural barrier to invasion. To have any hope of success in any such endeavor, a staging area, with adequate port facilities and airfields, was needed. The Philippines, Formosa, and Okinawa all offered those assets. Okinawa was far closer to Japan than either of the other
alternatives. Tactical air support if Formosa or the Philippines were the primary base would have to come from Nimitz’s aircraft carriers rather than land-based air. Okinawa was close enough to Japan that land-based air power could be employed. Distance was but one of the rationales behind General Marshall’s idea. It was an idea, not a proposal. Marshall was not even at the conference in Hawaii in July 1944 when President Roosevelt decided that both MacArthur and Nimitz’s plans would be supported. Inexplicably, the President’s most trusted advisor was absent from such an important conference and without his presence MacArthur was able to get President Roosevelt to go along.

Marshall’s idea was certainly the most direct route to Japan and mirrors in many ways the arguments he had with his British counterparts in Europe over how to best defeat Germany. The British continually pushed for operations that would not directly confront the Germans, through Italy or even the Balkans. Marshall would have none of it. From the moment America entered WWII, he moved towards the American strategy born in the Civil War campaigns of General Ulysses Grant, to attack the enemy in their heart. It was Marshall who actually called for an invasion of Europe as early as 1942, despite obvious deficiencies in men and resources. It was also Marshall who would never allow the OVERLORD (invasion of France) operation to be indefinitely postponed or cast aside despite the misgivings of the British and a small few in his own inner circle. Germany would be defeated in Germany. To do that in the shortest amount of time and with the most strength required an invasion of France.

Marshall’s plan was the same as the Navy’s with the exception of his bypassing of Formosa. Okinawa offered all the advantages of Formosa and half the distance. Marshall’s approach also required only limited ground forces to execute. Few of the Japanese positions on the various islands of the central Pacific were garrisoned in overwhelming numbers. Many would be bypassed. Several Marine and Army divisions would be all that was needed to reach
Okinawa, though an entire army would be needed there. To invade Japan would of course require massive numbers of ground forces and the Marines and what would become MacArthur’s army would provide them. This plan took advantage of the Navy, which by 1943 was developing into the greatest sea force history has ever known.

To span the vast distances of open Pacific Ocean required a massive fleet. The requirements went far beyond a combat fleet. A huge support apparatus was also created to support the hundreds of combat ships and transports that would bring America to Japan’s doorstep. Further, it was only in the central Pacific that this force could be properly utilized. It is testament to Marshall, an Army general, that he saw the Navy as the best means to defeat Japan. This approach would allow the Navy to have the opportunity to eliminate the Japanese fleet while keeping ground casualties to a minimum. Okinawa was the key to this approach. King and Nimitz liked this approach but believed that the ultimate prize for the Navy, short of Japan, was Formosa.

General Marshall was not one to dismiss different options simply because they didn’t coalesce with his own. In his usual analytical, professional manner, he outlined his misgivings about both the Formosa and Philippine options. Formosa was in the immediate proximity of mainland China and would require significant numbers of men and weapons, both of which could weaken the European war effort and not necessarily enhance America’s position to hasten the final defeat of Japan. Further, Japan’s largest contingent of ground and air forces was in China, but a few hundred miles away, and could strike at any attempted landing. Robert Ross Smith, the Army’s official historian for the Philippine Campaign, commented on these concerns:

> Army planners quickly decided that Nimitz’ new plans possessed major drawbacks. The Japanese would hardly allow Allied forces to sit unmolested in southern Formosa. Instead, the Japanese would mount strong
counterattacks from northern Formosa with troops already on the island and with reinforcements staged in from China. Occupying and defending one beachhead on southern Formosa and another at Amoy would involve problems far different from those that the Allies had encountered previously in the Pacific. So far during the war, the Japanese had usually been hard to move air and ground reinforcements against the island perimeters that Allied amphibious task forces had seized. In the southern Formosa-Amoy area, on the other hand, the Allies would not have the protection of distance from major Japanese bases that they had enjoyed in earlier campaigns. The Allies did not have sufficient aircraft in the Pacific to keep neutralized all existing Japanese airfields within the range of southern Formosa and Amoy. In addition, the experience in the Pacific had demonstrated that Allied air and naval forces could not be expected to forestall all Japanese efforts to move strong reinforcements across the narrow strait between China and Formosa.9

Thus, General Marshall and his vast planning staff, while still supporting the Navy’s plan to drive across the Central Pacific, displayed the trouble with Formosa. There would be no bypassed islands or garrisons unable to offer support. The preponderance of Japan’s military could create problems no matter what steps were taken by the Navy’s planners. The drive across the Pacific need have gone no further than Okinawa. From that island an invasion of Japan could and had it actually happened would have started. When debating his naval counterparts there was service pride involved, but the military merits of the plan and the vast size and capabilities of the Pacific Fleet drove the argument. When it came to MacArthur and the Philippines, General Marshall found himself having to continually remind his subordinate, a fact I

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wonder MacArthur even recognized, that the best “military” options had to govern the decision-making processes of America’s senior leadership ... The following is a cable Marshall forwarded to MacArthur during the summer of 1944, when the debate was its most contentious and in MacArthur’s case, personal. The Chief of Staff was actually lecturing the SWPA Commander, stating, “We must be careful not to allow our personal feelings and Philippine political considerations to override our great objective, which is the early conclusion of the war with Japan.”

Japan’s defeat would free the Philippines, as it would all Asia then under Japan’s occupation, and bypassing was in no way akin to abandonment, a concept MacArthur repeatedly inserted in the discussion whenever he felt the Navy’s argument seemed to be gaining steam.

Was the plan advocated by Admirals King and Nimitz a viable one? It was so long as the size and capabilities of the Navy increased. As in Europe, 1943 was a building year in the Pacific. Several operations would occur: the reduction of Rabaul, the invasion of the Gilbert Islands, most notably Tarawa, and Bougainville, in the Solomon Islands. The main drive for Japan would begin in 1944. In Europe, the Army and Army Air Force were the dominant forces. The war against Japan was the Navy’s fight. The vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean and Japan’s reliance on its combat and merchant fleets were only vulnerable to the U.S. Pacific Fleet. By the spring of 1944, 15 fleet aircraft carriers spearheaded a force of 535 ships taking direct aim at Japan.

Along with dozens of smaller escort and light aircraft carriers, nearly 2,000 naval aircraft were airborne at any time to seek out the Japanese Navy and support any amphibious operations. This immense force could only be employed effectively in the central Pacific. Adding further merit to the Navy argument was the small ground forces needed to accomplish this strategy, only a

11 Van der Vat, The Pacific Campaign, 317.
few Marine and Army divisions. General Marshall believed that the German Army had to be defeated in Germany for the war in Europe to end. Admirals Nimitz and King believed that the defeat of the Japanese fleet would end the war in the Pacific. Nimitz stated:

> When conflicts in timing and allocation of means exist due weight should be accorded to the fact that operations in the Central Pacific promise at this time a more rapid advance toward Japan and her vital lines of communication; the earlier acquisition of strategic air bases closer to the Japanese homeland; and, of greater importance, are more likely to precipitate a decisive engagement with the Japanese fleet.\(^\text{12}\)

The Admiral would be right. The invasion of the Marshall Islands would begin on January 31, 1944. The seizure of the Marshall Islands of Kwajelein and Eniwetok provided the staging area for an invasion of the Marianna Islands, which included the U.S. territory of Guam. The seizure of that island chain would place American long-range bombers within range of the Japanese home islands and forced Japan’s hand. Patently aware of the implications of American ownership of the Mariannas Japan sorted their fleet. In history’s second largest naval battle, the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Japanese naval air power was eliminated from the war. Several carriers and hundreds of planes were lost and those Japanese carriers that survived the battle returned to Japan devoid of their aircraft. American losses were negligible. Most of the planes lost were the result of running out of fuel in pursuit of the retreating Japanese. With the Mariannas secure the strategic argument between the Navy and MacArthur, who was wrapping up his campaign in New Guinea, would escalate.

Admiral King wanted to continue moving towards Formosa. Nimitz agreed with his superior but unlike Admiral King he did

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not want to entirely bypass the Philippines. A trek to Formosa without a base in close proximity was alarming. A few lightly or even undefended islands in the southern or central part of the vast archipelago would be an ideal base from which to invade Formosa. Formosa would require the dozen or so divisions then under MacArthur’s command. Admiral King was correct, in a purely military sense, to bypass the Philippines. He stated:

The idea of rolling up the Japanese along the New Guinea coast, throughout Halmabera and Mindanao, and up through the Philippines to Luzon, as our major strategic concept, to the exclusion of clearing our Central Pacific line of communications to the Philippines is to me absurd. Further, it is not in accordance with the decisions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who made their decisions after hearing all the points of view ...  

Formosa was not necessary to accomplish his goal. Okinawa would serve the same purpose and while an army of 110,000 Japanese soldiers defended Okinawa, they could not be reinforced as Formosa could so easily from the Chinese mainland. The Pacific Fleet was invulnerable (to Japanese naval units, not kamikaze planes as all would soon discover) in the waters around Okinawa but around Formosa, with the Chinese mainland in the immediate proximity, that invulnerability disappeared. The word Formosa created an instant emotional reaction in MacArthur. Should that island become, short of Japan, the Pacific Theater of Operation’s ultimate goal, Luzon, his ultimate goal, would be forgotten. He could not allow the Navy, no matter the merit of their arguments, to win the war. Just as Nimitz’ forces were set up to invade the Marshall Islands, MacArthur outlined his own strategic thoughts in a cable to General Marshall. It wasn’t just a request that strategy follow his thoughts but also a push that he essentially become the Eisenhower of the Pacific, with at least

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operational control of all of America’s military assets, including the Pacific Fleet. A scene of Admirals King and Nimitz telling both General Marshall and President Roosevelt “Over our dead bodies” comes vividly to mind. MacArthur confidently stated:

I need only that which is now in the Pacific is sufficient if properly directed. I do not have to call on men or supplies being sent to the European front. That decision is one for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I do not want command of the Navy, but must control their strategy, be able to call on what little of the Navy is needed for the trek to the Philippines. The Navy’s turn will come after that. These frontal attacks by the Navy, as at Tarawa, are tragic and unnecessary massacres of American lives. The Navy operations proposed for the Marshall Islands would be the same. The Navy fails to understand the strategy of the Pacific, and fails to recognize that the first phase is an Army phase to establish land-based air protection so the Navy can move in.14

Where to begin? I’m sure the Navy would have also accused MacArthur of having no concept of successful strategy in the Pacific. Land-based air power was unnecessary when the Pacific Fleet could call on over 2,000 combat aircraft on the mobile launch platforms which their carriers provided. Several vicious, protracted battles would be necessary to complete the drive across the Central Pacific but those battles would be few in number. An invasion of the Philippines would require many protracted battles and cast the Pacific Fleet away to the role of spectators. Historian Stanley Falk, a critic of MacArthur’s strategic designs and the motivations behind them, offers the following analysis:

What MacArthur could not accept was that the Central Pacific offered the shortest and most direct route to bring early and decisive naval and air pressure to bear on the heart of Japan. Once they were available, the highly mobile carrier and amphibious

14 Pogue, Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945, 440.
forces, cruising freely across the open Pacific with their great floating logistical bases, would be able to advance further and faster and bypass enemy strong points far more readily than MacArthur’s land-bound units.15

Militarily MacArthur’s arguments were valid, if a better option did not exist. Japan was dependent on Southeast Asia for the preponderance of their vital natural resource needs. Oil, rubber, metals, etc., all traveled by ship northward along the Asian coast towards the Japanese home islands. Should that lifeline be severed Japan could be broken, possibly without even a direct invasion. The Philippines were the ideal location to interdict that supply line, a point MacArthur repeatedly stated.16 The Philippines were also perfect to build bases or even enhance old American positions like Clark Field (vast air base on southern Luzon), bases from which an invasion of Japan could be launched.17 As with Nimitz’ invasion of the Mariannas, the Japanese recognized how precarious their strategic situation became with American occupation of the Philippines. They sent the Imperial Navy, that which survived the Battle of the Philippine Sea, to contest the American landings on the Philippine island of Leyte in October 1944. The Battle of Leyte Gulf, history’s largest naval battle and an overwhelming American victory, in some degree validates MacArthur’s claim as to the military value of the Philippines. Why else would the Japanese send all the major units of their fleet, devoid of naval air cover, against the more powerful American Navy? MacArthur’s forces were ashore, but again, was this step necessary?

The argument that occupation of the Philippines would sever Japan’s economic ties with Southeast Asia is superfluous, that connection had been severed before the U.S. Sixth Army ever landed on Leyte. U.S. submarines had savaged Japan’s merchant

17 Pogue, Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945, 443.
fleet, depriving the military and home islands of many of their most basic commodities, especially oil. A total of 603 Japanese merchant ships went to the bottom in 1944 alone. Luzon itself wasn’t even invaded until January 1945. These 603 ships totaling 2.7 million tons, over half of Japan’s merchant fleet, also took 60% of Japan’s bulk imports with them. These submarines were based in Hawaii and would remain so until the end of the war. Further, Okinawa was a far better base from which to invade Japan, only 350 miles from the Japanese home islands as compared to the roughly 1,200 mile trek from the Philippines. The Mariannas could serve the same purpose as the Philippines and were already occupied, with major air bases. In the following chapter approximate Japanese troop strength will be discussed and analyzed. At a glance it is once again obvious why Okinawa was a far more ideal target than either the Philippines or Formosa. A Japanese army of 110,000 defended Okinawa. While undoubtedly being a significant force it was barely one third of the Japanese army in the Philippines or Formosa. MacArthur had conducted his own variation of an island hopping campaign across New Guinea’s northern coast during the spring and summer of 1944. He had bypassed strongpoints and even cut off an entire Japanese army of 55,000 men when his forces landed at Hollandia in April. Rabaul, the powerful Japanese base on New Britain, north of New Guinea, was MacArthur’s main objective until his New Guinea campaign began. It was a powerful base with a significant defending force. To secure Rabaul would have undoubtedly been a long and costly process. Rather than subject his troops to a potential bloodbath, MacArthur’s Fifth Air Force isolated and battered Rabaul to the point of uselessness. It was a brilliant campaign and one that demonstrated the flexibility and cunning of a great commander. Why wasn’t that displayed here? The answer is simple, the recapture of the Philippines was personal to MacArthur and his superiors deserve equal blame for catering to him.

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18 Van der Vat, *The Pacific Campaign*, 375.
“I shall return” are perhaps the most famous words of World War WWII, eclipsed only by FDR’s “a day that will live in infamy.” General MacArthur would never again mutter those words after he fled the Philippines in 1942. Honor replaced return. Whenever the military merits of his arguments seemed to falter, MacArthur would go to honor, both his own and that of the nation. Consider some of his following statements and dispatches:

... personal integrity, indeed my personal honor is involved if the Philippines were not a military objective.\(^{19}\)

... the need to go back to the Philippines “where our unsupported troops were destroyed by the enemy. We have a great national obligation to discharge. Moreover, if the United States should deliberately bypass the Philippines, leaving our prisoners, national and loyal Filipinos in enemy hands without an effort to retrieve, then at the earliest moment we would incur the greatest psychological reaction.\(^{20}\)

Subordinates also believed that his personal glory was a factor in his decisions. General William Gill, the commander of the 32\(^{nd}\) Infantry Division, commented:

... General MacArthur’s great desire was to capture the Philippine capital so that his return would be dramatized for the natives and other people.\(^{21}\)

Admiral Nimitz also noted the MacArthur vitriol after a conference with him between March 25 and 27, 1944:

Everything was lovely and harmonious until the last day of our conference when I called attention to the last part of the ... directive which required of him and

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\(^{19}\) Pogue, *Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945*, 444.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 443.

me to prepare alternate plans for moving faster and along shorter routes towards the Luzon–Formosa–China triangle ... he (MacArthur) then blew up and made an oration of some length on the impossibility of bypassing the Philippines, his sacred obligations there—redemption of the 17 million people—blood on his soul—deserted by the American people, etc., etc.22

When that wasn't enough he would insert politics, which is in no way the purview of a military commander:

I daresay that the American people would be so aroused that they would register most complete resentment against you (President Roosevelt) in the fall.23

Nor was he averse to ignoring the chain of command. When he felt General Marshall was not accepting his point of view, he stated:

... that I be given early opportunity personally to present the case to the Secretary of War and to the President before finally determining my own personal action in the matter.24

He also believed that everybody was hampering his conduct of military operations. Once he had returned to the Philippines and the campaign was underway, he had most of his transports recalled. MacArthur was not happy about that:

At this critical juncture (approaching Manila) I received a shocking order from Washington to release 70 of my transport ships at once. They were to return to San Francisco, and be used to carry supplies and munitions to the Soviet forces at Vladivostok. I

24 Pogue, Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945, 441.
protested violently. The abrupt removal of these trans-
ports endangered the entire Philippine campaign and
threatened the loss of thousands of our men fighting
in north Luzon. No heed was given to my warnings.
The government apparently had made up its mind
that, in order to win the war against Japan, Russian
help was needed. My views as to whether such a step at
this late date in the war would be advisable were never
solicited. As it turned out, all of the supplies carried
to Vladivostok by those ships, and hundreds of thou-
sands of other tons, were eventually used in Korea and
China against our own forces. So far as I know, not one
shell, not one pound of food, not one stitch of cloth-
ing, and not one gallon of gasoline was ever used by
the Soviet Army in the brief war they finally fought—if
it can be called a war.25

The above-mentioned statement was written after the Korean
War when MacArthur was undoubtedly trying to restore a rep-
utation tattered by his removal from command. This was a par-
anoid man. I just don’t see the rationale for such paranoia. If re-
ceiving an undeserved Medal of Honor were not enough, then
no interference from above in any way affected his New Guinea
campaign. He had his own air force, the Fifth, and his own naval
support, the Seventh Fleet, both of which he controlled. Despite
this situation, a situation most of history’s commanders could
only hope to operate in, MacArthur saw enemies all around
General*, offers the following synopsis:

MacArthur feared that institutional and personal ene-
mies in Washington opposed his drive for ignorant or
selfish reasons. To counter this opposition he worked
hard to sell his strategy and accomplishments to the

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Institute Press.
American public and relied on the influence of anti-New Deal political leaders and newspaper moguls. He alternatively cajoled and threatened, begged, and demanded so much that the President and Joint Chiefs committed greater resources to the Southwest Pacific than they thought wise. His wartime accomplishments were as much a testament to his public relations abilities as to his military skill.26

A definite ego was in place here. The personal aspect of this went beyond what he saw as elements undermining what MacArthur believed was the best way to win the war. There was a move towards public adulation, at the expense of subordinate commanders and the troops who fought and died in the Southwest Pacific. General Robert Eichelberger, along with Walter Krueger, was MacArthur’s top ground commander. Eichelberger had saved the day at both Buna and Biak. Yet the public knew little of him. MacArthur ruthlessly controlled the press in his part of the war and Eichelberger, in a letter to his wife, explained why:

... (MacArthur) not only wants to be a great theater commander but he also wants to be known as a great front-line leader. This would be very difficult to put over if any of his particular leaders were publicized. He leaves the impression with the people back home that he has been the one who has been doing the front-line fighting. This does not mean that he does not appreciate what I have done or that he does not give me a lot of mental credit. He just wants it all for himself. Unless one understands this dual feeling on his part of wanting to be a great strategic ... and also a frontline leader it will be impossible for anyone to understand the setup here.27

This appraisal was not limited to senior commanders. The

following poem displays how many of his men viewed the SWPA commander:

And while possibly a rumor now,
Someday it will be fact
That the Lord will hear a deep voice say
“Move over, God—it’s Mac.”
So bet your shoes that all the news
That last great Judgement Day
Will go to press in nothing less than
Doug’s Communique!28

If there were no campaign in the Philippines then America and the world would forget General Douglas MacArthur. He could not accept that and through his political connections and overt insubordination, a commander does not tell his superior that he wants to go over his head to the Secretary of War or even the President, he would remain relevant in the war. MacArthur would be given far more latitude than any commander of that era to redeem his personal honor. Until his firing by President Harry Truman for insubordination during the Korean War, he continued to push a personal agenda, often to the detriment of the nation’s interests. Ironically, honor was the strongest part of MacArthur’s argument, far stronger than his military points. But, it was not his personal honor but the honor of the nation that offered the SWPA’s commander’s most compelling arguments. MacArthur stated in his post-war memoirs:

I argued that it was not only a moral obligation to release this friendly possession from the enemy, now that it had become possible, but that to fail to do so would not be understandable to the Oriental mind. Not to do so, moreover, would result in death to thousands of prisoners, including American women, children, and men civilians, held in Philippine concentration camps. Practically all of the 17,000,000 Filipinos remained loyal

28 Schaller, Douglas MacArthur, 73.
to the United States, and were undergoing the greatest privations and sufferings because we had not been able to support or succor them. To bypass isolated islands was one thing, but to leave in your rear such a large enemy concentration as the Philippines involved serious and unnecessary risks.29

The above-mentioned fact is a reality that many did not consider. MacArthur had spent many years in the Philippines prior to World War II and grown very fond of the Filipino people. Many of those suffering under Japan's iron fist were members of his command, the command he had left in 1942. While he may have been egotistical and self-centered he did feel for those in the Japanese prisoner of war and concentration camps. Later in the campaign, when word came to him that an opportunity to save American prisoners presented itself, he jumped:

I was deeply concerned about the thousands of prisoners who had been interned at the various camps on Luzon since the early days of the war. Shortly after the Japanese had taken over the islands, they had gathered Americans, British, and other Allied nationals, including women and children in concentration centers without regard to whether they were actual combatants or simply civilians. I had been receiving reports from my various underground sources long before the actual landings on Luzon, but the latest information was most alarming. With every step that our soldiers took toward Santo Tomas University, Bilibid, Cabanatuan, and Los Banos, where these prisoners were held, the Japanese soldiers guarding them had become more and more sadistic. I knew that many of these half-starved and ill-treated people would die unless we rescued them promptly. The thought of their destruction with deliverance so near was deeply repellent to me.30

29 MacArthur, Reminiscences, 198.
30 Ibid., 246.
The famous Los Banos Raid would follow immediately thereafter. The Filipino people, American prisoners, all were in a desperate way. That was a valid argument for action, one that could have and should have been made more forcefully.

U.S. territory was attacked and occupied by the Japanese during World War WWII. Wake Island, Guam, Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians, and the Philippines were all victims of Japan’s incredible success in the Pacific war’s first six months. The basic duty of government, of all government, is to protect its people. Attu and Kiska possessed no military value and were only occupied by the Japanese to distract American attention away from their intended target of the island of Midway in June 1942. Yet, in the spring of 1943, both islands were invaded and secured. Attu was a very costly operation. Guam was retaken during the Marianna operations, Wake would be handed back after Japan's surrender on September 4, 1945, a victim of the central Pacific island hopping strategy. The Philippines were American territory. Even if it made little sense militarily, and a far stronger argument existed for the Philippines than either the Aleutians or Wake, the American government has a legal and moral obligation to its people. This should have been all MacArthur stated. It may not have carried the day but was unassailable. Political threats and nonsensical paranoia are trumped by reality, both legal and moral. The thousands of American prisoners and millions of Filipino civilians living under the sword of Japanese brutality deserved a voice as well.

In the end, President Roosevelt did not make a decision. Both the drive across the central Pacific and MacArthur’s return to the Philippines would continue. It is testament to the immense strength and resources of the United States that both campaigns were adequately supported and ultimately successful. A return to the Philippines was not as militarily decisive as the central Pacific drive. It should have been, as historian Dan van der Vat stated, “a
one-horse race with a single jockey.” Nevertheless, MacArthur’s personal honor, as he saw it, could now be redeemed. A significant Japanese army defended the Philippines. Its entire strength need not have been confronted. Once the landings started at Leyte in October 1944, it was inevitable that Luzon, the main island of the Philippines and home to the capitol city of Manila, would follow. A limited landing on Luzon would have achieved all the strategic purposes (ability to interdict Japanese lines of communication and supply, establishing staging areas for an invasion of Japan) which MacArthur had previously detailed when pushing for this operation. However, when MacArthur returned to the Philippines he meant ALL of the Philippines. No matter the strategic irrelevance, no matter the enemy strength, or the weakness of his own forces, the Japanese would not be permitted to control any Filipino territory.

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Once FDR made the decision to allow MacArthur to return to the Philippines, setting the operation into motion was quite easy. MacArthur’s staff had been planning this operation for over a year. Manila was the primary objective, with nearby Clark Field and the Bataan Peninsula also high on the SWPA commander’s mind. Manila would be the staging area, in MacArthur’s mind, for a future invasion of Japan. Clark Field was needed for the massive amounts of airpower such an invasion would require and to use the vast port of Manila the Bataan Peninsula would have to be cleared. Major landings on Luzon by the U.S. Sixth Army’s three corps began in the Lingayen Gulf area. The I Corps began moving, slowly, northeast. The XI Corps drove southeast towards Manila, the XIV Corps towards Clark Field and Bataan. What awaited them?

General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Japanese commander on Luzon, harbored no illusions either about his mission or his chances. If he could not defeat the Sixth Army then he could make it pay a terrible price for every gain they made. He apportioned his strength in three main groups, himself commanding the main concentration, the *Shobu Group*. This group occupied the formidable mountainous terrain of northern Luzon, with the Cagayan Valley to their back. The Cagayan Valley was Yamashita’s main food source after the loss of the Central Plain north of Manila. If the Cagayan Valley was lost then he would be defeated and with that his mission of delay would be lost as well. The *Shobu Group*, 152,000 strong, was his primary force. The *Shimbu* and *Kembu* Groups would see the bulk of the early fighting as
they occupied the Sixth Army’s primary strategic objectives: Manila, Clark Field, and the Bataan Peninsula. Yamashita would have liked to reinforce his own group with most of the Shimbu Group; he had no desire to fight for Manila. However, the 16,000 men of the Manila Naval Defense Force garrisoned Manila and they ignored Yamashita’s orders to abandon the city. Manila would pay a horrible price for that decision. Over 100,000 thousand civilians, 1,000 American soldiers, virtually the entire Japanese Manila Defense Force, and the city itself died in the battle. The remainder of the Shimbu Group would occupy the rugged mountainous terrain northeast of Manila, on the approaches to the Wawa and Ipo Dams.

The Kembu Group would face the U.S. 38th and 43rd Infantry Divisions. They would conduct a deliberate, stubborn defense but were eventually overcome. The Shobu Group was the opponent of the I Corps and its three infantry divisions: the 25th, 32nd, and 33rd. General Yamashita’s force appears formidable, in numbers. However, they were severely limited. All the Japanese could hope to do was defend every position, from the smallest slit trench to the biggest mountain, as a fight to the end strongpoint. Numbers hide the massive supply problems Yamashita faced. His Chief of Staff stated, “Supply shortages had reached unexpected pro-portions.”\footnote{Robert Ross Smith, \textit{Triumph In The Philippines}, 91. 1963. Washington D.C.: Center Of Military History.} Food and ammunition were of course the two most pressing needs of his troops. Yamashita had been stockpiling ammunition for three years. Food, for the most part, came from the Cagayan Valley. Getting them to his troops was the problem.
Japanese Strength on Luzon
The Topography of Luzon

Note the elevation of most of the land on Luzon. The Cagayan Valley in the north and Central Plain were the only level ground on the entire island. Yamashita would not oppose MacArthur on a flat ground.
Fuel was in desperately short supply. Even if more were available, the Japanese lacked the means to move it. Vehicles were scarce. Japanese infantry divisions had but one-fourth the authorized vehicle strength of their American counterparts, 500 as compared to 2,125, and few of them were serviceable.33 The other option, the Filipino rail system, wasn't an option. Three years of Japanese occupation had seen it degraded to such a point that it was of little use. Further, American air attacks destroyed anything that moved and a rejuvenated Filipino guerilla force sabotaged key transportation chokepoints and infrastructure throughout Luzon. Yamashita’s troops were left to fight with what they had where they had it. It was a desperate situation but the Japanese made up for shortages with tenacity and superb natural and prepared defensive positions.

One may ask why Yamashita did not elect to directly oppose the landings in Lingayen Gulf. It was the obvious and really only location an invasion could take place. The Japanese preferred to fight in Luzon’s many hills and mountains. The aforementioned transportation problems partially contributed to that decision. The other consideration was avoiding American tanks and firepower.34 Caves became prominent positions throughout Luzon and were formidable:

The physical aspects of these cave and tunnel positions ... were an essentially novel technique of defense. Not only were these defenses used as firing points, but also living and working quarters were built underground and in many instances the positions were interconnected, enabling the enemy to go from one to another without appearing above ground. Supplies were stored in the caves, and blast walls were constructed to protect the interior from bomb and artillery hits. The

33 Ibid.

34 Sixth Army, Enemy on Luzon, 22. 1945. Headquarters: Sixth United States Army.
enemy even sited artillery pieces within the caves, rolling them to the cave mouth to fire and then withdrawing them into the interior. These practices reduced the effectiveness of our artillery fire. In most cases a direct hit was needed to inflict material damage.

Wherever possible the enemy prepared these defenses in belts. When one position became untenable, battle began anew. The enemy followed this practice in the hills east of Manila, northeast of the Central Plain, and west of Stotsenburg. The Bamban hill area, west of Stotsenburg, was the best example of this defense from successive, prepared cave positions; for here the enemy defended on a 12,000 yard front to a depth of 20,000 yards.35

This was typical of Japanese ground tactics in the Pacific War. Though General Yamashita harbored no illusions as to the ultimate fate of he and his men, he would not sacrifice them uselessly. Previous battles on New Guinea and throughout the Central Pacific had seen scattered Japanese forces easily isolated and destroyed, though these actions were still costly for American forces. The doctrine of mutually supporting positions would exact a price for any attempts at flanking maneuvers or isolation. The 6th Infantry Division would encounter this at Mts. Mataba and Pacawagan, the 25th ID as they approached Balete Pass, the 32nd ID in the many hills above the Villa Verde Trail, and the 33rd ID in the vicinity of Baguio.

The most troublesome category of Japanese cave defenses were the “Jack-in-the-Box” positions. These were intended to not only protect their own forces while inflicting maximum damage on their American counterparts but also to harass them as well. The following illustrates the Japanese mindset in this regard:

35 Ibid., 27.
Because of the difficulty of infiltrating into enemy bridgehead areas which are covered by intensive nets of fire and are obstructed by obstacles, establish surprise “Jack-in-the-Box” positions (caves as attack key points) in advance. In coordination with attacks from our positions, our men will appear unexpectedly among the enemy, create confusion and annihilate them.36

This doctrine, when combined with ferocious determination, was certainly formidable. This would also be the first time in the Pacific War that a Japanese garrison outnumbered the attacking American force. General Yamashita had 262,000 men on Luzon. At its peak strength, 12 February 1945, the U.S. Sixth Army mustered 12,215 officers and 202,237 enlisted men.37 This was 2,035 officers and 30,598 enlisted men below its authorized strength. Throughout the months to be examined in later chapters one quarter of that U.S. strength would not be available. Even at peak strength the Sixth Army was outnumbered by Yamashita’s force. It is true that all 262,000 Japanese soldiers on Luzon weren’t in one location but then again neither were the Sixth Army’s. U.S. doctrine had always called for superiority in numbers when attacking. What was the Sixth Army and SWPA Headquarters appraisal of Japanese strength on Luzon?

General Charles Willoughby, MacArthur’s G-2 (Intelligence Officer), put Japanese strength in the entire Philippines, not just Luzon, at 239,000 men.38 That did not even cover Luzon! Through various sources including ULTRA, captured documents, guerilla reports, and the few available prisoners, the number was later raised to 243,000, after deleting Japanese losses on

36 Ibid., 31.
Willoughby told MacArthur and Sixth Army that there were only between 115,000 and 140,000 Japanese military personnel on Luzon. Willoughby’s track record on these enemy strength forecasts should have instilled as much uncertainty in MacArthur as they did in the leadership of the Sixth Army. He had been wrong at Buna and along the Driniumor River.

Willoughby placed the Shobu Group strength at 115,000. It was actually 152,000. He forecast the strength of the Shimbu Group at to be 15,500. It was 80,000! The strength of the Kembu Group, 30,000 men, was in line with Willoughby’s assessment. The Sixth Army G-2, Colonel White, put Japanese strength on Luzon at 234,500. While that number was still 10% below the actual Japanese strength on the island, it was certainly more accurate than Willoughby’s assessment.

General Krueger, the Sixth Army commander, was concerned about what he believed were the Japanese forces awaiting him. When the time came to brief MacArthur on the Sixth Army’s plan for Luzon, he dispatched his Chief of Staff, General Clyde Eddleman. Eddleman brought up his number on Japanese strength and received the following reply from MacArthur: “Bunk! I don’t (like what I’m hearing). It’s too strong. There aren’t that many Japanese there.” A 100,000-man difference wasn’t enough to interest the SWPA commander. The personal agenda again reared its ugly head. Historian Edward Drea analyzed this critical point perfectly: “Though accused of many things, MacArthur was never a fool and he was a shrewd judge of men ... Audacity, calculated risk, and a clear strategic aim were MacArthur’s attributes. Now, so near to his goal of liberating all the Philippines and entering Manila as a conquering hero, he again cast aside counsels of caution.”

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39 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 186.
42 Ibid., 187.
of the situation in the American Civil War. In that conflict, Union General George McClellan had taken inflated numbers on Confederate strength in Virginia’s Peninsula from his intelligence chief, Allen Pinkerton. Even though his Army of the Potomac greatly outnumbered the Confederates, McClellan used those enormously inaccurate forecasts to conduct a slow, painfully deliberate campaign. It gave him the justification not to attack. Pinkerton, to a degree, can be forgiven; he was not a professional soldier. Willoughby, supposedly, was a professional soldier but made the same mistake. He told his commander what he wanted to hear. Unlike McClellan, MacArthur wanted to attack and the Japanese troop strength given to him by his G-2 solidified that decision. Even if Willoughby had given him accurate numbers, MacArthur still would have proceeded with the invasion of Luzon. Personal and national honor would have been in every sentence he spoke. The future of his men would not.

The Sixth Army was responsible for the conquest of Luzon. It started the campaign with nine divisions (seven infantry, one cavalry, and one airborne). They were as follows:

1st Cavalry Division
6th Infantry Division
11th Airborne Division
25th Infantry Division
32nd Infantry Division
33rd Infantry Division
37th Infantry Division
38th Infantry Division
43rd Infantry Division

The following chapters will detail the unnecessary debilitation of seven of the above divisions after the capture of Manila. The disparity in numbers between Sixth Army and the Japanese has already been demonstrated. There were units available to put the
numbers significantly in America’s favor. The 24\textsuperscript{th}, 31\textsuperscript{st}, 40\textsuperscript{th}, and 41\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Divisions, along with the Americal Division (a standard infantry division) were taken from General Krueger and given to General Eichelberger, to form the U.S. Eighth Army. That army was tasked with securing the strategically valueless southern Philippines. While those operations will be briefly addressed in a later chapter, it’s the forces the Eighth Army took with them, forces that could have bolstered the thin ranks of the Sixth Army, especially after those units were being ground down in tough fighting, that add to the coming tale.

On paper the Sixth Army had nine divisions. To head north the I Corps had its three infantry divisions, the drive east toward the Wawa Dam but one, the 6\textsuperscript{th} ID. The 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry Division protected the flank of the 6\textsuperscript{th} ID and was rehabilitating after fighting in Manila. The 37\textsuperscript{th} ID garrisoned Manila and was unavailable for several months. The 11\textsuperscript{th} Airborne Division, understrength as compared to a standard infantry division, was clearing the approaches to Manila. The 38\textsuperscript{th} and 43\textsuperscript{rd} IDs were also unavailable for several months as they completed the arduous task of clearing the Batann Peninsula. While invading the Philippines at all may have been questionable once ashore these operations made sense. The question to be answered was what’s next? Consider the following possibilities:

1. A covering force operation, as along the Drinumor River in New Guinea the previous summer, by the I Corps north of Manila.

2. I Corps used along with the 6\textsuperscript{th} ID against the Wawa and Ipo Dams.

3. If insisting on an attack in the north, wait for the 37\textsuperscript{th}, 38\textsuperscript{th}, and 43\textsuperscript{rd} IDs to complete their missions, refit, and drive north along with the I Corps.

Of the above-mentioned possibilities, the covering force operation made the most sense. Setting up a flexible defensive line
south of the main belt of Yamashita’s mountain fortresses, supported by overwhelming artillery and air power, would have held at bay any attempt by Yamashita to interfere in the Manila area. The fact that Yamashita had no intention of doing so nor did he have the mobility to conduct any major attack, also made a covering force highly favorable. Employing the second option would have made the movements against the dams far easier, but without a covering force to the north left Manila vulnerable to at least Japanese infiltration. The third option would encompass a bit of a covering operation in the north, some added strength with the 6th Infantry Division in the east, and then, when all else was complete and units given time to rest and return to strength, a seven division drive to the north could begin. In the months preceeding this drive Yamashita’s supply situation would continue to deteriorate. But, it was not to be.

General Krueger would attack north with less than ideal strength. Each of the three divisions of the I Corps would move along a single route towards a main objective. The 33rd would move up Route 11 towards Baguio, the 32nd along the Villa Verde Trail towards Santa Fe, and the 25th north to the Balete Pass. The Cagayan Valley and Yamashita’s food supply would then be threatened, as would any lateral communication between his forces. The Sixth Army also had supply problems. None of the three divisions of I Corps had a good route of supply. Highway 5 wasn’t really a highway, Route 11 was severely lacking, and the Villa Verde Trail was just that, a trail. The enemy wasn’t only the Japanese but for the I Corps it was constructing supply routes under fire. Severe shortages, especially in artillery ammunition would result, though much of that shortage is attributed to Sixth Army giving Eighth Army units significant quantities of shells from their own allotments. Each of the divisions of I Corps would end WWII fighting on horrendous terrain as a shell of their former selves.

The Sixth Army’s Plan of Advance into Northern Luzon
The following chapters will detail the struggles of protracted combat for several American infantry divisions in the SWPA. A basic overview of the structure of the units involved, their command organization, and combat assets and detractors will display the challenges faced by U.S. soldiers in the mountains and jungles of Luzon.

The Sixth U.S. Army was the organization that created and administered the campaign on Luzon. Under the command of General Walter Krueger it did not directly lead in the campaign. With over 200,000 men and dozens upon dozens of subsidiary units to actually lead the campaign was impossible. Beneath the Sixth Army were several corps. A corps is a group of anywhere from two to five divisions and could conduct on its own a battle for an extended period of time. For this study three corps are of specific interest: I, XI, and XIV. The XIV Corps, under the command of General Oscar Griswold, initially held domain over the drive from Manila to the Wawa and Ipo Dams. XI Corps replaced XIV Corps under the command of General Charles Hall, in April, for the duration of that campaign. The majority of this work will focus on the divisions of I Corps, under the command of General Innis Swift. Little mention will be made of Sixth Army or any of the above-mentioned corps in the following pages unless they are directly tied to the operation then being discussed. The divisions of Sixth Army were responsible for their own individual battles and are the focus of the forthcoming analysis.

The American infantry division of WWII was a standard organization in all theaters though attachments and
detachments could either swell or dissipate its strength. An infantry division had an authorized strength of 14,253 men. The number sounds impressive but not all of the men within an Infantry Division were riflemen. The basic combat structure of the ID was its three rifle regiments. The structure of those regiments will be taken up shortly. Those three regiments each had an authorized strength of 3,118 men. Thus, only 9,354 men in an Infantry division were actually combat soldiers though even that number is not as it seems. What tasks fell to the other 5,000 soldiers of an Infantry division?

Below are the standard organizations within the standard infantry division:

- Infantry Regiments (3)
- Artillery Regiment
- Headquarters Company
- Combat Engineer Battalion
- Medical Battalion
- Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop
- Ordnance Company
- Quartermaster Company
- Signal Company
- Military Police Platoon

With the exception of the infantry regiments none of the above-mentioned list contained any riflemen. Yet, all were vital. Supplying troops with food and ammunition, ensuring communications remained open, and treating the wounded; all were vital aspects in the operation of the Infantry division. Of the above, the standard rifleman would say that the Combat Engineer Battalion and Artillery Regiment were most vital to their ability to do their own job. Given the terrain on Luzon and generally throughout the Pacific, engineers were a vital commodity. They built roads, cleared jungle, dug defensive positions, etc., etc.
Tanks were a vital asset in many of the fights described in later chapters and except on rare occasions could not be employed without the efforts, under fire, of divisional combat engineers. The infantry could always seemingly count on their artillery. A division had 54 105 mm howitzers and 12 155 mm howitzers. They could also, if the situation dictated, count on corps artillery assets such as 240 mm and eight-inch howitzers. These big guns added heavy power to the already substantial guns of the division. Rounding out the division’s organic assets were 13 M8 armored cars, 5 halftracks (vehicle with two front wheels and tank treads covering the rest of the vehicle), and 1,371 vehicles. Those 1,371 vehicles moved all the division’s vital supplies and its soldiers. It could not operate truly effectively without them. Given the nature of the combat on Luzon and the inaccessible terrain, those vehicles played a minor role in the coming operations. At times, native carriers would transport as many supplies forward as would division vehicles.

How were tanks immersed in the organization of the Infantry division? In Europe, they were for the most part organized in armored divisions. The Pacific had neither the ground nor the opposition to necessitate the use of entire armored divisions or their large maintenance and support structures. The Pacific did have independent tank battalions (40–60 tanks) and were seldom employed in detachments larger than four vehicles. The direct fire capability of tanks was invaluable against Japanese positions unassailable by the average rifleman.

An armored division would have over 300 tanks. For every tank there were a minimum of two support and maintenance vehicles. The supply needs of an armored division, from fuel to ammunition to spare parts, dwarfed the needs of an infantry division. Maintenance parks were also needed for repairs and recovery. There wasn’t enough ground for this. The amount of shipping that would also be needed to transport and then support such an organization was beyond the capabilities of the PTO, where shipping was catered to an infantry centric war.

Caves and tunnels are self-explanatory. Bunkers and pillboxes made up most of the rest of Japanese positions. A bunker is a position dug into the ground and slightly elevated to allow observation and fields of fire,
Beneath the division was the rifle regiment, itself a vast organization. Of its 3,118 men only 916 were actual infantry. Thus, only 2,916 men in an entire Infantry division were actually earmarked for combat. Under the command of a colonel, it contained the following:

**Infantry/Rifle Battalions** (3)—860 men per battalion

**Headquarters Company**—108 men (included service personnel, communications platoon, and reconnaissance platoon)

**Anti-tank Company**—165 men, 9 towed 57 mm anti-tank guns, minesweeping platoon

**Cannon Company**—118 men, 6 six 105 mm self-propelled howitzers

**Service Company**—115 men to include staff personnel and a transportation platoon that moved all vital supplies

**Medical Detachment**—135 men to include doctors, aids, and medics, a section for each battalion

Again there was a vast organization but very short of actual riflemen. One-fifth of an entire Infantry division was actually fighting the enemy. This shortage of trained foot soldiers became apparent once the battles began. Losses grew and there weren’t

primarily for automatic weapons. A pillbox is a manmade position built entirely above the ground.

46 There was little need for the anti-tank guns against Japanese armor but they were useful against pillboxes and bunkers, if they could get into position.

47 A self-propelled howitzer was the typical 105 mm gun in its own vehicle. It could go anywhere a vehicle could go and was able to provide invaluable fire support.
trained infantry within the organic division to replace them. The battalions themselves faced similar problems.

Within each infantry regiment were three infantry battalions, each with an authorized strength of 860 men. The battalion, under the command of a lieutenant colonel, had three rifle companies, a heavy weapons company, and a headquarters company. The Headquarters Company had various service elements in addition to communication, ammunition & pioneer, and antitank platoons. The Heavy Weapons Company had six 81 mm mortars (the battalion's own available fire support) and eight 30 caliber machine guns. The basic unit of infantry combat was the company. Under the command of a captain, it had approximately 180 men in three rifle platoons, a headquarters element, and a weapons platoon. Each platoon, commanded by a second lieutenant, had three squads of 12 men each. Those squads, led by a sergeant, were the swords of the company. The weapons platoon had a section each of 60 mm mortars and 30 caliber machine guns. In the end, American infantry divisions from the division itself to the platoon were heavy on firepower, and it was needed, but short of riflemen.

It was the men in the rifle companies hit hardest in combat. As the war progressed, those fortunate enough to remain unscathed offered experience that is incalculable in a combat unit. By the time the landings on Luzon took place many of these men were also tired. It was the company commanders, platoon leaders, squad leaders, and basic riflemen who were killed and wounded in battle. They were also the hardest to replace. Nothing can assume the importance of an experienced combat leader. A division of 14,000 men was rendered combat ineffective if one fifth of its total strength, its actual infantry, were incapable of fighting. The entire rifle platoon, company, battalion, or regiment didn’t have to be eliminated for this to happen. As casualties increased, even a few day to day, the strength of those affected units dissipated. A basic combat organization like a rifle platoon or company is ineffective if it
has lost one-third of its strength. As this unnecessary campaign progressed many of those leaders and men fell and replacements were never able to make up the difference, either in numbers or in ability.\footnote{All statistics of unit composition and numbers derived from divisional operations reports, Hugh Foster’s *The Infantry: Organization For Combat, World War II*, (Accessed 5/1/16. www.trailblazersww2.org/history.) and Kent Roberts Greenfield’s *The Army Ground Forces: The Organization Of Ground Combat Troops*, 162–193 and 231–251. (1987. Washington D.C.: Center of Military History.)}
The sightseers who left the Shimbu Line for their new stations in west central Luzon were red-eyed and worn, their faces reflecting the sleepless nights and agonizing days that had been their lot for almost two and one half months on the Shimbu Line, facing the heaviest concentrations of artillery, mortar, and rocket fire that the Japs had used in the entire Luzon campaign. The fighting men of the 6th had completed 112 days of uninterrupted combat from the landing on 9 January to their relief on the Shimbu Line on 30 April; it was the only division in the Pacific to face such concentrated enemy might over so great a period of time without a break.49

Public Relations Staff,
The 6th Infantry Division in World War II, 1939–1945

After the recapture of Manila by American forces all was not well in the Filipino capitol city. The hundreds of thousands of dead civilians and utter destruction of both the major and minor structures within the city did not end the problems for all those residing there. Water was the most immediate problem. The city’s water supply had to be restored before wholesale medical epidemics resulted. The 6th Infantry Division would get the primary mission (the 1st Cavalry Division would be withdrawn soon after the advance began and it would be two months before

other units arrived) of securing the dams responsible for supplying the city’s water: the Wawa Dam on the Marikina River and the Ipo Dam, 12 miles further north, on the Angat River. The Wawa Dam was only a few miles from the 6th ID’s positions outside Manila. They had not yet reached it when relieved at the end of April.

Though separate of I Corps, they would actually be part of the XIV Corps and then the XI Corps, the 6th ID is relevant to this scenario because they too would toil fruitlessly in unforgiving mountains with little purpose after the fall of Manila. The 6th was also put together after the war began. They arrived in Hawaii during the summer of 1943 and trained in jungle warfare until February 1944, when the division moved to New Guinea. They would continue training until June when they entered the fighting around Sarmi and the infamous Lone Tree Hill. Though ultimately successful, the division was severely depleted by that battle. Given little time to recuperate they landed on 30 July on the island of Sansapor and remained there until the end of the year. Being one of the first units to land at Lingayen Gulf on 9 January 1945, they initially drove south, fighting in the Cabanatuan Hills and Bataan. They then moved east and would fight the Shimbu Group in the mountains controlling access to the dams supplying Manila’s water. The division was commanded by General Franklin Sibert during the New Guinea campaign and until March 1945 by General Edwin Patrick on Luzon. General Patrick was killed and replaced until the end of the war by General Charles Hurdis. The 6th would garner the distinction, one they most surely didn’t want, of serving the most continuous days in combat of any American unit on Luzon.

Two significant intelligence failures plagued this part of the Luzon operation from its inception. Appraisals of Japanese strength were incredibly low. Both SWPA and Sixth Army Intelligence pegged enemy strength before the 6th to be 20,000.\textsuperscript{50} XIV Corps, to

\textsuperscript{50} Sixth United States Army, \textit{Report of the Luzon Campaign: 9 January–30
which the 6th was initially attached in this operation before moving to the XI Corps, put the number even lower at 17,000.\textsuperscript{51} Given these ridiculous numbers, army and corps commanders harbored no hesitancy in sending a division like the 6th against the Japanese occupying the heights approaching Wawa. The 6th had been in combat since landing at Lingayen Gulf on 9 January and was severely understrength (2,650 men less than the day they landed).\textsuperscript{52} The 1st Cavalry Division would initially march alongside the 6th ID before their withdrawal. The 1st Cavalry had its own personnel problems. Already considerably lower in terms of troops than the standard Infantry division, they could muster only 5,100 of the 7,625 men on the division rolls after fighting on Leyte and then landing on Luzon with little rest.\textsuperscript{53} Once on Luzon they were one of the units to fight for Manila. The two divisions together had approximately equal the strength of the lowest estimates of Japanese numbers on the Shimbu Line. The danger and stupidity of this intelligence assessment is dwarfed by the other prominent failure of the campaign.

As sad as it is to contemplate, the 6th ID attacked the wrong dam. The Wawa Dam had stopped supplying water to Manila in 1938.\textsuperscript{54} 1938! It is absolutely stunning that no one in MacArthur’s headquarters was aware of this considering he commanded the American army in the Philippines since the mid-1930s. Did no one at SWPA headquarters speak with any of Manila’s city engineers when planning this campaign? It was not MacArthur’s way, or more specifically his G-2 General Willoughby’s way, to look at all critical information when creating plans. By mid-April, two months after the campaign started and with the 6th ID on its last

\textit{June 1945, 57.}


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 367.
legs, General Krueger finally received word of the Wawa Dam’s irrelevance. He informed MacArthur of this and was then told that the Ipo Dam was the “preferred objective.” The 6th wasted two months fighting for Wawa and when they were pulled from the line other units replaced them. The Wawa Dam was not bypassed, despite playing no part in Manila’s water problem. These units would suffer as the 6th had suffered. The decision to reinforce a useless operation is baffling. Further, other than Robert Ross Smith’s official history of the Luzon Campaign and this specific work, no mention is made of this colossal intelligence failure. The memoirs of MacArthur, Krueger, and Willoughby do not broach the subject. MacArthur and Willoughby’s post-war memoirs barely even acknowledge the campaign. The Sixth Army, XI, and XIV Corps (both of which the 6th was at one time attached to), the 6th Infantry Division and its three infantry regiments, the 1st, 20th, and 63rd Infantry Regiments (IRs), all their After Action Reports (AAR) fail to mention this mistake. As with most of the ground occupied by the Japanese on Luzon it was far more favorable to the defender than the attacker.

As the 6th ID moved forward at the end of February they knew little of the exact location and strength of individual Japanese positions. They did know of their general intentions, noting:

> It was apparent that the Jap intended to defend the IPO-NORZAGARY-MONTALBAN line from positions made as impregnable as possible to air and artillery bombardment, and that he would probably attempt extensive harassing and demolition raids on CP’s, supply dumps, artillery positions and lines of communication, particularly along the main North–South route

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55 Ibid., 404.

56 MacArthur’s Reminiscences gives 3 paragraphs to all post-Manila operations. Willoughby’s MacArthur 1941–1951 devotes 3 pages, 1 of which is a map, to the campaign from the day of the first landing, January 9, to the Japanese surrender on the island.

57 Sixth United States Army, Report Of The Luzon Campaign, 41.
to MANILA. In the light of our greatly extended front, a substantial counter attack was a continuing possible threat.\footnote{58}{Ibid.}

The terrain itself was imposing:

To the Northeast, on the Division’s left front and overlooking the PURAY RIVER valley and foothills to the South and West was MT. ORO. Some 1,000 feet in altitude, this heavily wooded hill mass afforded excellent observation and concealment for artillery and heavy mortars. Moving South across the heavily wooded PURAY RIVER, two prominent North–South ridges rise 500 to 800 feet above the MONTALBAN-MARIQUINA RIVER valley and afford a natural defense line commanding the rice fields and foothills to the West. South of the MARIQUINA RIVER and East of MONTALBAN, MT. PACAWAGAN rises 1,500 feet above the valley floor and offers unlimited observation of the whole NOVALICHES WATERSHED and MANILA area. Its West approaches are very precipitous and inaccessible to vehicles. Portions of the mountain are thickly wooded, supplying the best of cover for gun positions, OP’s, and ground defenses. Both the forward and reverse slopes of the mountain are cut with deep, wooded ravines furnishing ideal sites for heavy mortars.

MT. PACAWAGAN and the 1,400-foot MT. MATABA to its South are divided by a deep gorge made by the MANGO RIVER, which flows out of the mountains Southeast of MONTALBAN. MT. MATABA, the same kind of steep, heavily vegetated mountain as MT. PACAWAGAN, commands the MARIQUINA VALLEY and MANILA area.
Roads were non-existent and trails were poor in the Division zone of operations, with the exception of an all-weather road which leads from MONTALBAN to WAWA through a deep winding gorge ...\(^5\)

Mt. Mataba (left) and Mt. Pacawagan, ominously guarding the flow of the Marakina River into the Wawa Dam, were located behind these imposing heights. The 6\(^{th}\) ID would have to move towards these heights through an open valley with the Japanese watching their every move and Japanese guns in the mountains taking a terrible price in American blood.

To the men of the 6\(^{th}\) Infantry Division the names of mountains such as Mt. Pacawagan, Mt. Mataba, and Mt. Oro would become synonymous with their fight towards the Wawa Dam. Every move forward would involve a fight against deeply entrenched Japanese soldiers in caves, tunnels, and rocky embra- sures. Limited progress and at no time was progress anything but limited, was dampened by the ominous towering mountains before them, mountains that allowed the Japanese to watch the formation and progress of any American attack. Each of the division’s regiments would aim for a specific piece of high ground:

1\(^{st}\) Infantry Regiment—Mt. Pacawagan

A tired division, already understrength, now moved forward. Initially, the 6th made decent progress and opposition was light. That changed as American units moved closer to the mountains. At that point timidity was no longer part of Japanese tactics, nor was customary banzai style suicide attacks. The Japanese were more than content to let their enemy come to them. The XIV Corps After Action Report notes this tendency:

... Numerous caves had been encountered along the SHIMBU LINE, many elaborately equipped and supplied. Here he seemed content to remain until he was burned by flamethrowers or, rushing into open areas, met devastating fire from our machine guns. A striking illustration of this happened on 10 March on a hill (BM11) with the enemy occupying a cave on the hills north slope. Flamethrowers were sent to flush the enemy out ... After several bursts of the flamethrower, our operators withdrew just in time, for from the cave there came more than 100 of the enemy with clothes and hair burning, but each with a rifle or tommy gun in his hand. The Japanese fired and continued to fire until they fell victims to the flames or to our weapons. A total of 147 dead enemy were found in front of the cave, and an investigation of the interior disclosed that the total for this one operation exceeded 200.  

14 March is the point that operations picked up momentum, in pace not progress, but the preceding months had not been without cost, to the U.S. or Japanese forces. U.S. casualties were 295 dead and 1,040 wounded (predominantly 6th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions), while XIV Corps units had killed 3,350

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60 XIV Corps, After Action Report, XIV Corps, M-1 Operation, 149.
Japanese soldiers.\textsuperscript{61} Having been in continuous combat since their 9 January landing, non-battle casualties became an issue in the 6\textsuperscript{th}. Fatigue, sickness, and psychological problems resulted in 1,500 non-battle casualties.\textsuperscript{62} On 15 March, the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division would pass from the XIV Corps to the XI Corps and would for several weeks have sole responsibility for capturing Wawa Dam.

Of the three infantry regiments of the 6\textsuperscript{th}, the 63\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Regiment initially had the least difficult time. It had a hold on a portion of Mt. Pacawagan, though they didn’t control the entire position and were subject to artillery fire from Japanese guns on Mt. Mataba. Enemy machine gun nests were all over Mt. Pacawagan and each had to be eliminated, though it would take two months. The 1\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Regiment had advanced towards the high ground overlooking the Boso Boso River, in close proximity to another mountain, Mt. Baytangan. In this area the Japanese positions were very strong, mutually supporting, and occupied in depth.\textsuperscript{63} The toll on the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division at this point in the campaign is clear in the various unit reports. Words and phrases like slow, costly, tiring, and hard fighting became at this point very frequent. There were limited successes but those successes weren’t exploited due to a lack of troops. In the 20\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment’s sector, while moving toward Mt. Mataba, they were “unable to make huge gains because even limited successes had to be consolidated and reinforcements were not available to exploit success.”\textsuperscript{64} Those divisions given to the Eighth Army for the islands of the southern Philippines would certainly have helped. The 20\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment wasn’t even at full strength as one of its

\textsuperscript{61} Robert Ross Smith, \textit{Triumph In The Philippines}, 384.

\textsuperscript{62} XIV Corps, \textit{After Action Report, XIV Corps, M-1 Operation}, 145.

\textsuperscript{63} 1\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Regiment, \textit{First Infantry History of the Luzon Campaign}, 8. 1945. Headquarters: 1\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Regiment, 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division.

\textsuperscript{64} 20\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, \textit{A History Of The 20\textsuperscript{th} U.S. Infantry Regiment In The Luzon P.I. Campaign}, 9 January. 1945–30 June 1945, 8. 1945. Headquarters: 20\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division.
infantry battalions was the division reserve.\textsuperscript{65} This was all about small fights, as the XI Corps history of the operation states:

Fighting for limited objectives in a series of independent battalion attacks over mountainous terrain, honeycombed with natural caves and prepared positions, our forces suffered heavy casualties from unusually accurate Japanese artillery fire. With control of the commanding ground and excellent observation of our position, the enemy shelled all exposed troop or vehicle concentrations with artillery, 120 mm and 150 mm mortars, and 8” and 15” rockets.\textsuperscript{66}

The 1\textsuperscript{st} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiments alone had by this time destroyed 332 Japanese caves and tunnels.\textsuperscript{67} Progress was slow and concern growing about the condition of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division and its regiments. Its 1\textsuperscript{st} and 20\textsuperscript{th} regiments were respectively, at strengths of 2,150 and 2,085 men, far below their authorized strength of over 3,000 troops.\textsuperscript{68} The men were tired. Having no break since the January landing on Luzon, the only momentum the 6\textsuperscript{th} was gaining was toward its being rendered combat ineffective. The Sixth Army had no reinforcements to give as April began, nor did the XI Corps. The 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division would have to drive on.

A definitive pattern had now emerged in this operation. Units would attack for a few days, make some gains, not substantial, then consolidate and reorganize, then attack again. No reinforcements were available. Had another division or two backed up, the 6\textsuperscript{th} attacks could have been exploited. With only the 6\textsuperscript{th} in the line, shifting its regiments to bolster attacks would have left flanks open to Japanese counterattacks and infiltration. During these days of consolidation and reorganization, constant artillery

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{67} 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, \textit{After Action Report}, 59.
\textsuperscript{68} Robert Ross Smith, \textit{Triumph In The Philippines}, 394.
and mortar fire continued to hit American troops. The Japanese in the mountains watched. Their guns were in caves and tunnels, wheeled out only to fire and then quickly pushed back to their safe havens. American firepower (tanks, artillery, and self-propelled howitzers) and air power tried to turn the tide but could not. For many within the 6th, this firepower became the preferred option due to the debilitated state of the division’s ground troops. Consider the 1st Infantry Regiment’s view in the first week of April:

Up to this time the Regiment had been in combat for 84 consecutive days, and the battalions had been decimated to such a point that they were no longer capable of carrying out the powerful offensive thrust necessary to breach the enemy’s heavily fortified position. Taking this fact into consideration it was decided to maintain present positions and pound the enemy with mortars, artillery, and air strikes until such times as our forces were able to attack again.69

Those troublesome and dangerous individual Japanese positions continued to be a problem, and they were everywhere. The infantry could overcome them only with prohibitive casualties. Tanks and M-7 self-propelled howitzers were very effective. However, the roads and bumpy ground prevented the widespread employment of armored vehicles. Engineers worked fervently, under heavy enemy fire, to build usable roads, not just for the tanks and guns but also as a supply and evacuation route. Did Krueger or MacArthur even know what was going on here?

On 2 April, the attacks continued. None of the primary objectives were yet secure after a month of bitter fighting. The question of Krueger and MacArthur’s knowledge of the plight of the 6th Infantry Division is pertinent because in the past neither had shown much patience when offensives bogged down. Krueger’s silence here is understandable. He knew that XI Corps had no

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help to offer and he certainly had none in Sixth Army through-out the month of March. With April now here, elements of the 37th, 38th, and 43rd Infantry Divisions began moving forward. What of MacArthur? In the past he would have been tormenting Krueger who in turn would torment his division commanders. MacArthur had relieved commanders at Buna and on Biak for slow progress. When the holding force along the Driniumor River in New Guinea had fallen back, he was critical of that decision. Now he was at his headquarters contemplating an invasion of Japan, once again thinking of the future when the present had yet to be resolved. He was not lighting up his radio net screaming for faster movement because this part of the war was of little use to him.

Part of the problem for the 6th was that they had taken on this fight almost entirely on their own. After the withdrawal of the 1st Cavalry Division, the 6th was responsible for far too wide a front, its regiments could not support each other. XI Corps, with the impending arrival of additional units, shortened their front so all three of the division’s weakened infantry regiments could simultaneously attack.

The 1st Infantry Regiment began moving forward at 0800 hours on 2 April. With the support of a Chemical Mortar Company (120 mm), a platoon of M-7 self-propelled howitzers (105 mm gun), and a platoon of Sherman tanks (75 mm gun), the 1st hoped for better than their previous results. A quick 5-minute artillery preparation of enemy positions did little to help. The 1st managed an advance of a mere 100 yards before all varieties of Japanese fire: machine guns, rifles, mortars, and artillery stopped them cold. With no positions in which to seek cover the regiment pulled back to their assembly area. The brief but vicious fights had seen heavy casualties in the 1st and ON 10 April, the unit once again reorganized while patrolling for weak points in the Japanese line that didn’t exist. The Japanese were not dormant during this time. They continued infiltration and night attacks,
as well as harassing artillery and mortar fire. The nerves of the tired soldiers of the regiment continued to degenerate. Times of rest were never really rest. The regiment began rotating men to the rear for a few days, hoping that would improve combat efficiency. By 17 April, the regiment was ordered to resume their attack. A hill, Hill 1300, and a point called Woodpecker Ridge would end the 1st Infantry Regiment’s fight on Luzon.  

Initially, the 1st Infantry Regiment was tasked with securing Mt. Pacawagan. Unable to make it to that position they still had to deal with the high ground en route, including Woodpecker Ridge. Elements of the regiment began moving out at 0700 hours on 17 April and by the late afternoon, despite heavy Japanese fire, was secure across the ridge. As with previous operations, Japanese outposts on both Mt. Pacawagan and Mt. Mataba were able to observe this attack and soon after the 1st reached the ridge the artillery and mortar fire arrived. As American casualties began to mount the decision was made to withdraw. Woodpecker Ridge was needed before any more forward movement was possible but the breaking point was reached. It was seen that future attacks would produce little but more American casualties. The regiment was too weak, the Japanese positions too strong. While mopping up and patrolling would continue for another week, the battle for the 1st was over. They were relieved on 25 April and pulled off the line. To quote the regimental history, “This relief terminated the most difficult phase of the Luzon operation for the 1st Infantry.”

The 20th Infantry Regiment had through April made as little progress as had the 1st Infantry Regiment. They also resumed the attack on 2 April. Some decent progress was made, at some points up to 500 and 800 yards. Then, within throwing distance

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70 Ibid., 10–11.
71 Ibid., 13.
of their objectives, the 20th was thrown back. Repeated attacks were repulsed. Adding to the frustration was the uselessness of strong preparatory fires against known Japanese positions, not suspected ones but known ones. This was a problem throughout the campaign. The 6th Infantry Division’s artillery fired 186,644 rounds of ammunition (105 mm & and 155 mm), destroying the following Japanese material: 14 tanks, 42 vehicles, 1 armored car, 27 field artillery pieces, 4 47 mm guns, 9 machine guns, 1 rocket launcher, and 5 mortars. That is a small contingent of Japanese arms for such a massive amount of artillery ammunition. It was also just a fraction of what the Japanese had available. The task for destroying enemy positions and weapons fell to the exhausted infantry.

These repeated American infantry engagements followed a familiar pattern. A Japanese position holding up the advance was identified. It was on some type of high ground, thus requiring significant physical exertion in the tropical heat to get into position to assault. Artillery and mortar fire works over the Japanese position. The infantry hope, though at this point they know it is false hope, that the preparation will make their job easier or completely destroy the enemy position. Four continuous months of ferocious, small unit combat has not only tired the ground troops but also deprived them of their best junior leaders. Squads are led by 19 year olds, platoons by men in basic training less than a year earlier. The tiring climb to their attack position has placed the objective in sight, a Japanese cave from which enemy artillery has exacted a large price from each American attack. In the past, this attack would have been rather simple. The Japanese positions would fight as isolated bastions, neither desiring nor expecting help from any nearby friendly units. On Luzon, that changed. Enemy positions are usually mutually supporting, each attempt to outflank one strongpoint encounters another one. These attacks require at least a company (at full strength,

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3 three platoons of 36 men each, plus a headquarters element). Companies are now severely understrength. One platoon fixes the entrance to the cave with machine gun and BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) fire, while another platoon attempts to move to the cave’s entrance, where hand grenades and satchel charges of explosives can either eliminate the enemy soldiers or seal them in. The third of the company’s platoons waits in support, the platoon moving towards the cave’s entrance may need help and the threat of Japanese infiltration attacks from hidden positions always loomed. Japanese mortar fire is now falling on the U.S. troops and machine gun fire from another enemy position further up the hill has killed several and wounded many others. The platoon attempting to reach the cave's entrance is stopped, the platoon fixing it decides to charge forward. Despite more casualties that platoon throws a dozen grenades into the cave. Several explosions tell them of their success, as do the Japanese soldiers fleeing the cave, which are quickly cut down by machine guns. 20% of the American company are casualties, Japanese losses are unknown. The cave is destroyed. But, other Japanese positions are now firing on the company. It is now midday and no further advance is possible. Maintaining its current position is quickly becoming untenable as the volume of fire they receive continues to increase. No help is coming from the battalion; its other companies are similarly engaged against other Japanese positions. The Company Commander decides to pull back. As he gives the order he is struck by a sniper’s bullet. The senior platoon leader now takes over and tries to get the company moving, himself an officer who only a month earlier was a corporal.

The above is a general hypothetical of what combat was like for the 6th Infantry Division and all those fighting to drive Yamashita's Japanese army from their mountain strongholds. As for the 20th Infantry Regiment, they were making no progress and on 2 April an alarming fact appeared, their own casualties now exceeded those of the Japanese.74 As with the

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74 20th Infantry Regiment, *A History Of The 20th U.S. Infantry Regiment*
1st Infantry Regiment, the 20th had reached its limit. The unit AAR notes:

At this time the regiment’s morale was at its lowest point since its landing at Lingayen Gulf on Jan. 9. After 87 days of continuous contact with the enemy, the men were tired and worn. The two battalions which were still in the assault had suffered 17 dead, 45 wounded, and 53 injured in action from April 1 to April 4 ... Company strength was very low, some units having as few as 26 men available for fighting duty.75

With the 1st and 20th Infantry Regiments now removed from action it was left to the 63rd Infantry Regiment, which had been cleaning up pockets of resistance around Mt. Pacawagan, to complete the capture of the elusive mountains.

The 63rd’s first objective was Mt. Mataba. On 6 April, they advanced, made good initial progress, and were then hit hard by the usual compliment of machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire from the mountain’s caves and pillboxes. Repeated attacks on 7 April also produced no tangible results. 8 and 9 April were spent organizing for an attack on the 10th to finally break the stalemate. A massive artillery barrage preceded the attack but 8’ howitzers, a far heavier gun than the usual 105 mm and 155 mm in standard artillery battalions, were also employed. Attacking up two slopes simultaneously they secured with the exception of the mountain’s northwestern tip, all of Mt. Mataba.76 Though the mountain was mostly secure, there were isolated Japanese strongpoints that had to be eliminated. The 63rd undertook the same tiring, costly processes that had so debilitated the 1st and 20th Infantry Regiments. The 63rd then launched an attack to

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75 Ibid.
76 6th Infantry Division, After Action Report, 72.
secure the northwestern tip of the mountain, the last remaining Japanese strongpoint. The first attack of 14 April was driven back; 15 April saw gains of 400 yards against formidable Japanese positions, on 16\textsuperscript{th} April another 150 yards were gained and on 17 April Mt. Mataba was finally completely secure.\textsuperscript{77} The first of the two mountains that dominated the river leading to the Wawa Dam was secure. It had taken two months and Mt. Pacawagan remained under Japanese control.

Mt. Pacawagan’s capture would not only open the route to the Wawa Dam but would also break the main Japanese line in the Shimbu Group area. It was as usual a formidable position, both in its natural and manmade capabilities:

> There are no easy approaches to the summit of MT. PACAWAGAN, its slopes are precipitous all around ... Parts of the mountain are heavily wooded; other parts are comparatively open. Patrol reports and captured documents disclosed that the strongest part of the enemy positions was located on the north end. Here the Jap had built a complex system of pillboxes, trenches, tunnels, and caves on the triangle formed by the three mutually supporting knobs.\textsuperscript{78}

The 63\textsuperscript{rd} would not be the primary assault force against Mt. Pacawagan. Worn down, as had its brother regiments, in the earlier fighting against Mt. Mataba, it would support the 37\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division’s 145\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment’s attack, though that unit was also far from full strength. While occupying Mt. Mataba, the 63\textsuperscript{rd} could observe Mt. Pacawagan and its Japanese positions.\textsuperscript{79} The advantage of complete domination of the high ground no longer belonged to the Japanese. By 29 April Mt. Pacawagan was secure.

The 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division was no longer an effective combat unit.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 73.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 74.
For what purpose? Two months were wasted trying to secure a dam that didn't even supply water to Manila and the 6th never made it there. Had they received reinforcements, such as the division's 63rd Infantry Regiment was given by the 37th Infantry Division after the capture of Mt. Mataba, perhaps the 6th could have made it to Wawa Dam, though it would have been an empty victory. Wawa Dam played no role in supplying water to the city. The division's losses were heavy: 335 killed, 1,000 wounded, and 5,000 non-battle casualties. Over half the division's strength had been some type of casualty. The non-battle casualties were both troublesome and disheartening. The division itself had tried to do something about this, hoping a rest camp would do the trick. It was opened on 13 March and men throughout the division, the highest numbers coming from the infantry regiments, were given 4 days of rest before returning to their units and further combat operations. It was not enough time. Combat fatigue, after three to four months of continuous fighting, was inevitable. Though the 6th Infantry Division was pulled off the main line at the end of April they continued fighting in smaller engagements, mostly mopping up, until the end of June. Though officially secured, there were still Japanese positions in the area and they had to be destroyed. The resulting state of mind of the tired soldiers was evident to the Division Surgeon:

The element of fatigue contributed greatly to the number of psychoneurotic cases admitted, particularly during the first 26 days of April. The Division rest camp that was operated during April produced gratifying results. During June, there was an increase in psychoneurotic cases. Among the reasons for this were high ASR scores making men reluctant to jeopardize themselves, the arrival of unscreened replacements and a move into mountainous jungle terrain. On the


other hand, there were fewer mental casualties caused by less artillery and mortar fire. Men were sometimes sent back from hospitals with promises of easier jobs, which failed to materialize. This too aggravated the general situation.\footnote{Ibid., 9.}

An entire division was wasted for both a strategically and tactically useless objective. Robert Ross Smith’s conclusion of this campaign: “The Sixth Army’s twin milestones of the Luzon Campaign—lack of combat replacements and lack of strength to effect timely rotation of units in contact—had weighed heavily upon the division,” is perfect. To the north, more American divisions also faced seemingly endless Japanese positions on imposing high ground and thick jungle. The plight of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division may have been eclipsed by what the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division faced on the Villa Verde Trail.
VI

REINFORCING FAILURE: THE DRIVE FOR IPO DAM

... Elements of the 1st Infantry Regiment had previously attacked the mountain and been hurled back by the Japanese defenders. Later, elements of the 63rd Infantry Regiment had again stormed the summits only to be driven back. The 145th Infantry, at greatly depleted strength from its fighting in Manila, 2,269, was expected to succeed where two of our finest Regiments had failed.

145th Infantry, Tactical History of 145th Infantry Regiment, Luzon Campaign, 18

The drive towards Wawa Dam had physically defeated the 6th Infantry Division. Regrettably, the campaign did not end there. Two more Infantry divisions, the 37th and 38th, would continue the offensive. Neither division was fresh; the 37th had liberated Manila in bitter fighting, while whereas the 38th battered away at Japanese defenses in the Bataan Peninsula. A third Infantry division, the 43rd, would enter the fray to seize Ipo Dam, the structure where some of Manila’s water actually came from. Each of these three divisions would face the same formidable foe in the same harsh terrain, as had the 6th Infantry Division.

Only one of the 37th Infantry Division's rifle regiments, the 145th, was involved in this part of the Luzon campaign. The 37th had been very busy since arriving on Luzon in January. The division began the war in June 1942 when they arrived in the Fiji Islands. They would train there until the spring of 1943, when
they moved to Guadalcanal. The division would continue training there until landing on New Georgia, where they mopped up remnants of the Japanese garrison. From New Georgia the 37th moved to Bougainville, where they manned the area’s defenses and drove back repeated Japanese attacks. The division would remain at Bougainville, training, until staging for the invasion of Luzon, landing at Lingayen Gulf on 9 January. The 37th fought in January around Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg but the battle for the city of Manila would forever etch itself in military history. Along with the 1st Cavalry Division they would liberate the city in bitter fighting that would leave Manila destroyed and the entire Japanese garrison eliminated. The battle was costly for the 37th as well. 1,000 were killed and another 5,000 wounded. The division was depleted and exhausted. This blatantly obvious fact led those in command to keep the 37th in Manila, as the city’s garrison, after the battle ended. They would remain there for three weeks in March. Lack of troops and a general stalemate around Wawa Dam and throughout the I Corps Area of Operations in northern Luzon would return the 37th to the fight before they were ready. The division’s 145th Infantry Regiment moved to relieve and take up the fight of the 6th Infantry Division.

Mt. Pacawagan, one of the several formidable mountains that earlier frustrated the 6th Infantry Division, was the primary objective of the 145th. The regiment estimated Japanese strength to be approximately 4,000, nearly double the 145th’s own number of 2,269. Further, the Japanese force had plentiful automatic weapons, mortars, and artillery. Pacawagan’s natural difficulties were alluded to in the previous chapter. No adequate reconnaissance of the area was possible. Any movement forward brought


Japanese fire from their many positions on the surrounding high ground. Given these limitations the 145th's plan of attack was:

... the 3rd Battalion to attack from the vicinity of San Mateo and secure the Southern portion of the west arm of Pacawagan. The 1st Battalion, attacking from the vicinity of Montalban, was to assault the west center of the mountain while simultaneously making a strong diversionary attack with a reinforced company into the Mariquina Gorge toward the village of Wawa. The 2nd Battalion was directed to protect the left flank of the Regiment and Division to stage diversionary demonstrations in the Mount Oro-Hill 400 area north of Mount Pacawagan.\(^8^5\)

The attack would commence on 21 April. The narrative at this point differs little from that of the 6th Infantry Division. Same enemy, same problems, and same tired American infantry. The first attacks saw movements up steep slopes, in the Regiment's 3rd Battalion sector the climb was an angle of 53 degrees, and in the 1st Battalion sector an even steeper 65 degrees. Then, the Japanese opened fire and the battalions would spend the rest of the day fighting to eliminate countless Japanese positions. They were up against a “series of dug-in trail blocks along the entire advance which made it a continuous fight to overcome and seal cave after cave and bunker after bunker.”\(^8^6\) Even tanks couldn’t turn the tide. A diversionary attack through the Mariquina River Gorge by a platoon of Sherman tanks was driven back by heavy artillery fire and a well-placed minefield. 22 April saw more of the same. A mere 200 yards were gained. 23 April saw immense artillery fire hit the Japanese positions, suspected positions, but the attack was once again driven back by Japanese artillery and mortar fire. Even when a hill or Japanese position was taken, enemy fire from other high ground often made holding such gains

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 19.
untenable. Frustration began setting in.\textsuperscript{87}

The 145\textsuperscript{th} saw itself eliminating bunkers, sealing caves, and burning pillboxes. But, more appeared. The Regiment’s summary of 25 April highlights this dilemma:

An attack by the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion against Hill X was hurled back by enemy defenders. Repeated attacks, each covered by intense supporting fires, all met the same fate. Casualties were heavy. The not observed results of the day’s heavy fighting was the destruction of numerous bunkers on Hill X. But hydra-like new positions opened up to replace those destroyed. The hostile system of tunnels and caves permitted easy reinforcement.\textsuperscript{88}

On it went. The intensity of Japanese opposition was actually increasing as they rushed reinforcements to the area. Attacks on 26 and 27 April seemed to be making progress despite these attacks being conducted by understrength units. The rifle companies of the 145\textsuperscript{th}’s infantry battalions were severely depleted, many of its companies fielding two weak platoons rather than the standard three. The Regiment’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion’s rifle companies were down to two platoons and total strengths of approximately 70 men.\textsuperscript{89} Yet, these remarkable men drove on. Combat engineers dragged self-propelled howitzers up hills and on 29 April those guns alone destroyed 50 Japanese positions.\textsuperscript{90} Infantry, in impossible terrain, moved forward. They did it. Mount Pacawagan was secure, though the Japanese still had isolated bastions on the mountain. No position ever seemed to be totally secure in this

\textsuperscript{87} Statistics and general overview of the 145\textsuperscript{th} Infantry’s first attacks derived from the 145\textsuperscript{th} Infantry’s \textit{Tactical History of 145\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, Luzon Campaign}, 18–20. 1945. Headquarters: 145\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 37\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
campaign. The plight of the 145th was not yet over. They passed to the control of the 38th Infantry Division and were ordered to, as of 4 May, resume attacking towards Wawa and several other mountains (Mt. Binicayan and Sugar Loaf Mountain). They also had to retain hold of Mt. Pacawagan.

The 145th was in an impossible situation. With only 1,800 men available they had over 4,000 yards of front to deal with. They had lost 25% of their strength since the operation began. Fortunately, the Japanese faced a similar dire situation. Growing weaker with each passing moment they were unable to stop the quick occupation of Mt. Binicayan but did put up a bitter fight for Sugar Loaf Mountain. Bitter fighting ensued and in the final destroyed bunkers 100 dead Japanese soldiers were counted. The fight was over for the 145th Infantry Regiment. Its AAR notes:

In 25 days of what the Supreme Commander referred to in official communiqués as the “bitterest opposition in the Philippines, the 145th Infantry had captured three major mountains comprising over six square miles of vital watershed area and most important the key terrain features of the center of the Shimbu Line which afforded complete observation of the entire watershed. Terminating the action with a strength of but 1,566 present for duty, it had killed over 1,300 Japanese by infantry section and accounted for the annihilation of hundreds of others by artillery ... with a loss of 100 Americans killed and 476 wounded.

91 Ibid., 23.
92 Ibid., 25.
Of the 1,566 still present for duty it is easy to conjecture that many of them were at the point of total exhaustion. The division records do not offer details on non-battle casualties. Given the extended combat the 37th Infantry Division's regiments had seen since landing on Luzon and the 6th Infantry Division's own comments on the subject, they had to exist. To the 6th's 355 dead, 1,000 wounded, and 5,000 non-battle casualties could now be added to
the 600 casualties of the 145th Infantry Regiment. Further, neither the Wawa nor Ipo Dams had been taken. The 6th Infantry Division had been ordered to Wawa because of fears for the civilians within Manila if their water supply was not secure. Three months had passed. The 6th Infantry Division and 145th Infantry Regiment were rendered combat ineffective with the objective of the campaign yet to be realized. There were no urgent calls from Manila, Krueger, or MacArthur that the situation was critical. There were also no orders to suspend the campaign. The pattern of fighting for insignificant territory would continue. As April turned to May, the 38th Infantry Division would add itself to this futile operation.

The 38th Infantry Division would be the unit that finally secured the tactically and strategically insignificant Wawa Dam. The 38th was a late participant in the Pacific War. They arrived in Hawaii in January 1944 and remained there most of the year, training and preparing for their first taste of combat. That would happen on Leyte in December of that same year. They would land on Luzon on 29 January, 1945. They would spend February battling for the infamous (as far as the Division was concerned) Zig-Zag Pass before clearing the Bataan Peninsula in extremely vicious fighting. March and April would see some of the bitterest fighting of the entire Pacific War as the 38th fought to recapture the island of Corregidor and subsidiary positions such as Caballo Island, Carabao, and Fort Drum. Each operation that involved the 38th entailed an assault on a heavily fortified Japanese position. Casualties were high but no rest was forthcoming as the Division moved forward to Mt. Pacawagan, ready to finally seize Wawa Dam.

The 145th Infantry Regiment was attached to the 38th but by 4 May their part of the fighting essentially ended. The 38th’s 152nd Infantry Regiment would do most of the fighting from that point forward. “Woodpecker Ridge” and “Twin Peaks” would be among the more noteworthy Japanese positions the 152nd would
fight for in the following weeks. Their first attack of 7 May saw only modest gains despite air strikes, heavy artillery and mortar fire, a platoon (4) of Sherman tanks, and several quadruple machine gun vehicles from the division’s anti-aircraft battalion. The fighting differed little from anything previously seen with the exception of tank and in this case, anti-aircraft vehicle support. Most of the day was spent clearing individual Japanese positions. The attacks would continue through 10 May when a lack of significant progress compelled a halt. 11 to 15 May would see the 152nd patrolling, looking for exact locations and weaknesses in the Japanese positions.94

The area here was as every other area faced by American infantry on Luzon appeared, completely favorable to the Japanese. It:

... consisted of a series of barren hills, studded with dug-in, well-camouflaged machine gun positions, and accompanying entrenchments for riflemen. Excellent fields of fire and the lack of concealment for assaulting troops made each hill a major obstacle in itself. These hills were mutually supporting and attempts to isolate and occupy one met effective fire from those on the flanks and front.95

Ammunition shortages also played a role here. There were shortfalls for both mortars and artillery and these limitations made it impossible to consolidate gains. American artillery could not silence Japanese fire on adjacent hills and every objective secured could be lost as enemy fire fell upon vulnerable infantry.96 By 21 May engineers had pushed a road forward enough that tanks entered the equation. “Twin Peaks,” after two days fell to the 152nd.

94 Overview of the 152nd Infantry Regiment’s initial operations derived from the 38th Infantry Division’s Luzon report, Report Of The M-7 Operation, 19 January 1945 to 30 June 1945, 98–100. 1945. Headquarters: 38th Infantry Division.

95 38th Infantry Division, Report Of The M-7 Operation, 19 January 1945 to 30 June 1945, 100.

96 Ibid.
Approximately 330 dead Japanese soldiers were found with many more likely sealed within the its many caves and tunnels.97

The local victory in the “Twin Peaks” area gave the 152nd some much-needed momentum. “Woodpecker Ridge” and neighboring high ground saw a well-supported attack on 22 May (tanks, flamethrower tanks, artillery, and mortars; ammunition had been stockpiled). Many caves, bunkers, and tunnels would be destroyed and sealed. The Division AAR gives much of the credit to the now available armor, especially the tanks fitted with flamethrowers:

Flamethrower tanks aided greatly in the advance. The tanks burned out numerous caves occupied by the enemy, which could not be reached by the assault troops. One ridge was successfully cleared by an assault team composed of a bulldozer followed and covered by a medium tank, followed by flame throwing tank, followed by a platoon of infantry. The bulldozer scraped a road on the knife edged ridge for the tanks to follow, Japanese riflemen being driven to cover by tank and mortar fire. When the flamethrower opened up, the Japanese started running in all directions, and over 30 were killed in as many seconds.98

If only such firepower were employable throughout the campaign. It was available but harsh terrain made it impossible to be utilized properly. Despite the 152nd’s success it had been a costly few weeks. 102 were dead and another 417 wounded.99

Several positions not completely sealed during the fighting told American commanders why this particular battle, and in essence all the fighting on Luzon, was so difficult and time consuming. “Regimental Objective Hill,” one of the many pieces of

97 Ibid., 101.
98 Ibid., 105.
high ground in this area, had a very impressive Japanese complex within the hill:

The Japanese OP and machine gun nest of REGIMENTAL OBJECTIVE HILL, which had withstood continued bombardment by our artillery and mortars, was found to be built between several large boulders. Access was gained by ladders in a vertical shaft 20 feet deep, connecting with a large cave over 50 feet in length. This cave in turn was connected by a shell proof cut and cover trench to a second cave 30 feet lower down the hill ...

Something all failed to consider, or simply ignored, was just how long the Japanese had to prepare these positions. The last American forces in the Philippines surrendered in May 1942. The Japanese had two and one half years before the first landing in Lingayen Gulf to get ready for these battles. The above was one position. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands of others. Each was sturdily constructed, had stockpiled ammunition, and could fight for an extended period of time. They could have been left to wither away. They should have been left to wither away. This was unnecessary but so was the entire battle for Luzon.

The 152nd was finished but still had not reached Wawa Dam. One of its sister regiments, the 149th, finally accomplished that on 28 May. Though the battle was over, the casualties continued for the 38th Infantry Division. It reported 779 neuropsychiatric cases, the preponderance of which happened in February and May, the heaviest months of combat. As is obvious through repeated examples, this brand of non-battle casualty was not unusual for the fighting on Luzon. They are not unusual in war. Protracted combat produces psychiatric problems. They’re inevitable. The truly tragic part of this campaign with regards to these affected

100 38th Infantry Division, Report Of The M-7 Operation, 19 January 1945 to 30 June 1945, 107.
101 Ibid., 182.
soldiers is that it wouldn’t have happened if the invasion of Luzon not taken place. The Division Surgeon noted: “There were two important factors in the relatively high number of combat reactions: the lack or previous combat experience and the rough fighting into which the men were thrown for their first baptism of fire.” Green replacements and tough combat, two factors abound in a unit fighting a determined enemy over an extended period of time. Making matters worse was the 38th Division’s Medical Clearing Station, where all these cases were initially diagnosed, did not have the trained personnel to deal with such numbers. No American Infantry division did. Consider the following numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total neuropsychiatric cases</td>
<td>779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to duty from Division Clearing Station</td>
<td>558 (71.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evacuated to hospitals</td>
<td>221 (28.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to duty from hospitals</td>
<td>76 (9.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total returned to duty</td>
<td>634 (81.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

558 of these men never received proper care; they never even made it to a hospital. Even one third of those sent to hospitals were sent back to their units, the duration of their stay and the help they received is not indicated in the division reports. The Surgeon notes that “the basic factor in treatment is the provision of adequate personnel to insure that every patient receives personal attention.” The mind is as big a casualty of war as is the human body. To this day, the resources dedicated to the psychological well being of those exposed to combat is are entirely inadequate.

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102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 183.
104 Ibid., 186.
Eight miles as the crow flies is eight miles if you are a crow. If you are not a crow it is apt to be more, and if you are an infantryman, fighting your way along, eight miles may be nearer thirty by the time you are through. The Ipo Dam campaign as a physical ordeal ranks among the stiffest in the regiment's history.\textsuperscript{105} 

\textit{43\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Division, Historical Report: Luzon Campaign}

The final part of this picture is Ipo Dam. The 43\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Division would move towards the dam that both Generals MacArthur and Krueger realized at the end of April was the facility that actually supplied part of Manila’s water.\textsuperscript{106} The 43\textsuperscript{rd} arrived in the Southwest Pacific during the fall of 1942. They trained on various islands during 1943, though they did see limited action on the small island of Arundel. They would continue training until July 1944 when they arrived at Aitape, New Guinea, and participated in the Driniumor River campaign. The 43\textsuperscript{rd} launched the offensive that finished off the Japanese 18\textsuperscript{th} Army. Landing along with most of the Sixth Army in Lingayen Gulf on 9 January they would fight on Luzon’s Central Plain, around Fort Stotsenburg and in the Zambales Mountains. It had suffered losses of approximately 800 killed and 2,300 wounded before advancing towards Ipo Dam in the first week of May.\textsuperscript{107} A new, fearsome weapon would aid the 43\textsuperscript{rd} in this endeavor but the cost to the division was still substantial.

The terrain was as formidable as that in the Wawa Dam area.

\textsuperscript{105} 43d Infantry Division, \textit{Historical Report: Luzon Campaign}, 76. 1945. Headquarters: 43d Infantry Division.

\textsuperscript{106} The propaganda from Sixth Army and SWPA Headquarters appeared to reach the 43\textsuperscript{rd}. The division records and that of all three of its infantry regiments mention that they had to secure the city’s water supply, three months after the first attack towards Wawa Dam began.

\textsuperscript{107} 43d Infantry Division, \textit{Historical Report: Luzon Campaign}, 54.
Further, there seemed to be only one possible avenue of approach to the Dam:

Reconnaissance of the approaches to Ipo Dam revealed that but one logical route led to the Dam, and that was the METROPOLITAN Road, a two-lane hard surface highway twisting through the steep PALISADES at BIGTI, and then running EAST through towering hills to IPO. The enemy had fortified this approach thoroughly. The cliffs at BIGTI were organized into a veritable fortress of caves, natural underground supply vaults, command posts, and hospitals. Approximately a regiment of infantry held the BIGTI CLIFFS, while disposed in depth along the METROPOLITAN Road.\(^{108}\)

On the NORTH the ANGAT River gorge was a formidable barrier to any attempt to flank the BIGTI positions. On the South the extremely severe terrain was sufficient obstacle in itself to preclude its likelihood as a route of approach to the Dam.\(^{109}\)

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 45.
The 43rd decided to go against the grain. They would demonstrate against the main Japanese defenses at Bigti, while Filipino guerrillas attacked north of the Dam and the main effort was made in the South.

Initially, progress was excellent. The attack began on 6 May and by nightfall on 7 May advances of approximately 8,000 yards were made all along the front.\textsuperscript{110} Things continued to progress nicely until 11 May when Japanese resistance suddenly stiffened. Thousand yard advances became hundred yard advances.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 45.
as Japanese artillery and mortar fire poured down. Yet, the basic plan seemed to be working though Filipino guerillas were hit hard and the division’s 172nd Infantry Regiment was suffering heavy casualties to the south. However, the Japanese seemed to focus on the attack towards Bigti, which gave the southern approach a chance. Repeated enemy attacks against the 169th Infantry Regiment did little more than sap Japanese strength. By 12 May, they realized that the 172nd attack to the south was the main American effort and launched a major attack against that regiment’s 2nd Battalion, occupying a position called Hill 815. A heavy artillery barrage preceded the attack but when it was over 181 Japanese soldiers were dead. One American soldier was killed. Just as victory approached nature entered the fray. Heavy rains stopped everything. Roads became seas of mud and supply became dependent on 1,000 Filipino carriers who could do little for the forward units. By 15 May, plans were made to finally end this campaign. The division would not accept the stalemate that broke the 6th Infantry Division. The 43rd would use air power and their newest type of ordnance, napalm, to end the battle.111

Napalm is jellied gasoline that was placed in airdropped canisters. It ignites upon impact and burns incredibly hot. Once it ignites it burns everything it touches and is impossible to extinguish. It would clear jungle foliage, bunkers, and caves. It is perhaps the most ferocious weapon available to military commanders short of a weapon of mass destruction and on 16 May was unleashed on the Japanese.

Early on 16 May, 185 American fighter-bombers dropped 50,470 gallons of napalm on the Japanese. 17 May saw 220 more planes and another 62,660 gallons.112 Its effect was as much physical as psychological, the division history noting: “The horrifying effect of this tremendous assault by fire was as inspiring to tired infantry soldiers as it was demoralizing to the Jap defenders.”113 It

111 Ibid., 47–49.
112 Ibid., 50.
113 Ibid., 52.
had the desired effect as Bigti, the last main point of the Japanese defenses before the dam, fell with little opposition that same day.

By 20 May, Ipo Dam was secure but the usual mopping up operations in the surrounding areas would continue through 2 June. Another 1,300 Japanese soldiers were killed and U.S. casualties mounted as well.\textsuperscript{114} The entire Ipo operation had cost the 43\textsuperscript{rd} ID 172 killed and 708 wounded.\textsuperscript{115} It could have been far worse but for the new equalizer, napalm. The 103\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry leaves little doubt as to how the battle was finally won:

More vital than in any other action in which the division participated on Luzon was the air corps’ part in the reduction of the enemy installations guarding the objective. The artillery pieces emplaced in the rocky cliffs along the Metropolitan Road have already been mentioned. As was feared they proved to be tremendously difficult targets for our supporting artillery ... The air corps supplied Napalm bomb strikes, and it was the right “secret weapon.” It was the first time the firebombs had been used in close support of the regiments. The blazing jelly reached caves, dugouts, nooks and crannies inaccessible to conventional high explosives. The strikes, particularly that of May 16, induced the Jap to abandon the majority of their big guns, many of which were damaged anyway by the Napalm.\textsuperscript{116}

If only this weapon were available when this campaign began. The jungle would be negated, the Japanese and their impregnable positions rendered meaningless. Of course there would still be losses but they would be far fewer. As the I Corps moved into northern Luzon, they would not have the benefit of this new weapon.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{116} 103d Infantry Regiment, \textit{History Of The 103d Infantry Regiment}, 80. 1945. Headquarters: 103D Infantry Regiment, 43D Infantry Division.
 Admiral Nimitz makes his case to President Roosevelt. To the President's left is Admiral William Leahy, the President’s Chief of Staff. MacArthur sits to the President’s right.
He has returned! Perhaps the most overemphasized picture in history.

The M8 armored car. Armed with a 37 mm gun and two machine guns it could provide limited firepower. Its greatest use was as a reconnaissance vehicle and was the primary asset of the division’s Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop.
A Japanese pillbox in the Pacific. Dirt and debris placed on its roof protected it from most artillery fire except the heaviest guns (240 mm and 8 inch howitzers). Machine guns in its firing ports could command any approach troops made to destroy it.
A Sherman tank with accompanying infantry in typical Philippine terrain, 1945

M-7 self-propelled howitzer on Luzon, June 1945
Quadruple 50 Caliber Machine Gun Vehicle. It was capable of pouring thousands of rounds of ammunition against a suspected Japanese position every minute. Its ability to elevate made it particularly effective against the Japanese in the heights above the 152nd Infantry Regiment’s advance.

Ipo Dam and the heights surrounding it.
This was a mauling fight against the Jap in his remarkable defensive positions, against the terrain, supply, and climate. In those 119 days, the Red Arrow boys fought 22 miles, sometimes 35 yards at a time, with the Jap never more than 30 feet away. The division killed 9,000 Japs and took 50 prisoners. It lost 4,226 men, about a third of the division strength.\footnote{John Carlisle, \textit{Red Arrow Men: Stories About the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Division on the Villa Verde}, 7. 1990. Nashville: The Battery Press.}

While the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division flailed away aimlessly trying to reach Wawa Dam, three other U.S. Army Infantry divisions prepared to move north. The I Corps, comprising the 25\textsuperscript{th}, 32\textsuperscript{nd}, and 33\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Divisions would attack Yamashita’s main force, the Shobu Group, in the mountains of northern Luzon.\footnote{Throughout this chapter the reader will notice the 32d Infantry Division with both the abbreviation 32d and 32\textsuperscript{nd}. Different reports refer to the division in different manners. When I refer to it I will use the 32\textsuperscript{nd} rather than 32d because that is how the division referred to itself.} They hoped to deprive the Japanese of Luzon’s Cagayan Valley, Yamashita’s main source of food and supply. Each division would move north along a different route. The 33\textsuperscript{rd} ID would drive for the town of Baguio along Route 11, a workable road compared to the other two avenues of approach. The 32\textsuperscript{nd} would occupy
the center of the I Corps offensive, moving up the Villa Verde Trail towards the town of Santa Fe. At Santa Fe it was hoped they would meet the 25th, after that division had secured the Balete Pass, a key point of entry into the Cagayan Valley. The 25th would drive north through the thick jungle surrounding Highway 5. All three divisions would have their problems but none to the degree experienced by the 32nd and its three infantry regiments, the 126th, 127th, and 128th, along the Villa Verde Trail.

The 32nd Infantry Division was a National Guard division that entered federal service early in 1942. They would arrive in Australia in May 1942, the first combat division of MacArthur’s new command. When the Battle of Buna began in the fall of 1942 it was the 32nd sent into action. Unprepared for jungle war and ill-equipped (no heavy weapons and a lone artillery piece), they would futilely attack Japanese bunkers only to be repeatedly repulsed. The lack of progress led an impatient MacArthur to relieve the division commander, General Edwin Harding. By January 1943, Buna was secure and the 32nd bloodied and tired. They would spend the next 14 months in Australia training before entering the New Guinea campaign at Hollandia in April 1944. During that summer they would constitute most of the covering force along the Drinumor River and withstood repeated vicious Japanese attacks. Given little time to rest, the 32nd would hit Leyte in November and participate in most of that island’s major battles. Again, given little time to rest, they would within a month of securing Leyte land at Lingayen Gulf on 27 January 27, 1945 under the command of General William Gill. The 32nd Infantry Division was the most overused and underappreciated unit of the Pacific War.

The Villa Verde Trail was exactly that, a trail. The Japanese 2nd Tank Division defended it, though the 32nd would not see any Japanese armor. The trail was a formidable natural obstacle:

The terrain in this area was much worse than any which the Division had so far encountered. Hills with
nearly perpendicular slopes and deep, precipitous ravines made all movements exceedingly difficult. The enemy had, moreover, utilized the terrain to best advantage by constructing numerous mutually supporting cave positions, which had to be reduced one by one, in order to permit the eastward advance of the Division to continue. The advance was, moreover, flanked 1,500–2,000 yards north of and parallel to the Villa Verde Trail by Mt. Imugan, on the forward slopes of which the enemy had established defensive positions and artillery observation posts. The Mt. Imugan positions dominated a stretch of over two miles of the Villa Verde Trail and his observation stations enabled the enemy to adjust his artillery fire on troops and vehicles moving along the trail, which ran along the crest of razor back ridges and formed the only route of advance. Besides, the Mt. Imugan positions enabled the enemy to repulse any direct attack through the valley north of the trail and constituted an ever-present threat to the line of communications of the 32nd Division. Under the circumstances, with the enemy holding Mt. Imugan, the 32nd Division had no choice but to crack the enemy defenses on the dominating hills directly in its front some four miles west of Imugan village, since bypassing them was impossible. The resulting struggle was slow and bloody and demanded the utmost of valor and fortitude on the part of our troops, especially since the division was unable to bring all its power into play, because it had to protect its rearward communications all the way from its front lines to Saint Nicolas.119

Again the lack of troops is telling. Ordinarily, as the 32nd moved

forward another unit would secure its communications and lines of supply. The 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division would quickly discover that which the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division discovered, no such units existed. Five divisions were originally earmarked for the drive north. General Krueger took away two of those divisions, though not by choice.\textsuperscript{120} The 37\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division was needed to garrison Manila, and the 38\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division was still finishing its work on the Bataan Peninsula. Of course there were the divisions of the Eighth Army but they were toiling in their own questionable operations in the southern Philippines. Further, the 32\textsuperscript{nd} was worn down. They landed on Luzon but a few weeks after finishing off Japanese resistance on Leyte. They had seemingly been involved in every major operation in this theater: Buna, Hollandia, the Driniumor River, Leyte, and now Luzon. The enemy here would not come to them.

![The Villa Verde Trail, all of it dominated by easily defensible high ground.](image)

\textsuperscript{120} Sixth United States Army, \textit{Report Of The Luzon Campaign}, 81.
They were forced to seek him out, which is exactly what the Japanese wanted them to do and the Sixth Army knew this. It begs to question, then why do it? Why not just let the Japanese wither away? It is clear MacArthur would not allow that. The spring of 1945 would be the darkest days of the war for the 32nd Infantry Division.

The main portion of the 32nd’s fight for the Villa Verde Trail would encompass 10,000 yards. That 10,000 yards, not even six miles, was the distance between Santa Maria, the jumping off point to Santa Fe, the ultimate objective. The division would never reach that objective. To even reach their start point of Santa Maria required a month of tough fighting. The landings had proceeded smoothly and the advance had also gone well, though mopping up operations were tiring and more costly than the general advance. The division was understrength when it landed and the general problem of replacements would plague the 32nd throughout the campaign. A total of 11,000 officers and men were in the ranks when the operation began, 4,000 below their authorized strength. With so many concurrent operations in the SWPA (Eighth Army landings, XI Corps against the Dams, XIV Corps in the Bataan Peninsula), there were no replacements to be found anywhere. Thus, when the Japanese made their isolated stands the division’s strength further eroded. The division’s 126th Infantry Regiment would spend nearly a month clearing two ridges that threatened its main supply route. The ground was bare and ceaselessly pounded by artillery. Infantry then pressed

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121 The Sixth Army notes this on p. 80 of its AAR, stating: “... by making us come into the mountains after him, he hoped to meet us on ground of his choosing, inflict maximum casualties, and compel us to maintain a large force in northern Luzon for a long time to come, thus correspondingly reducing the forces which we would have available for operations elsewhere.”


forward. Each position was taken in a series of skirmishes which inevitably involved other Japanese strongpoints. All were not successful and continued the gradual debilitation of the exhausted infantry. The 6th Infantry Division’s accounts of battles progressed before acknowledging the exhausted state of its men. The 32nd’s report noted this almost from the beginning of their operations.

Further complicating matters for the 32nd was their main supply route. They didn’t have one. It had to be built while the division advanced, under enemy observation and constant artillery and mortar fire. Japanese machine guns were everywhere. It was a daunting task, a point made very clear by General William Gill, the division commander.

... the 32nd Division was headed for the Villa Verde Trail, which was nothing more or less than a foot trail over the mountains. As far as our 32nd Division was concerned, our first job was to build some kind of a road ... We had to supply ourselves with food and water, and while the road was being built we were fighting at the same time ... General Krueger came up to see me quite often on the Villa Verde Trail (once we got road enough for a jeep to come up) and he says in his book of having made several personnel inspections, that his conclusion very definitely was that it would be a long, slow, and costly operation. And indeed that’s what it turned out to be. Morale was poor because the men were tired. They had been in there in combat for months, they had had only a little rest after Leyte and during January, February, March, and April we had to fight the Japs on the trail and build the road at the same time.124

This would be an infantry fight, up close and personal at all

times. Tanks and M-7 self-propelled howitzers could not move up the trail, and artillery and air were often useless because of the close proximity of the Japanese to American forces. All of the above facts further degraded the strength and state of mind of the infantry.\textsuperscript{125}

The fight along the trail became all about numbered hills (501, 502, 503, etc.) and the Salacsac Passes. Those hills watched over all movement on the trail, just as Mt. Mataba and Mt. Pacawagan had stared at the advance of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division for two months. The 32\textsuperscript{nd}'s AAR described the ground they would toil on for the next three months:

The VILLA VERDE TRAIL writhes over the harsh, rugged landscape, winding around and between high conical peaks which are separated by deep, chasm-like ravines. Before the battle the slopes and peaks were covered with the secondary growth of the rain forest, which under artillery pounding became a matted, tangled mass. For the sake of clarity the peaks or hills in the SALACSAC PASS area were numbered. From west to east from 502, with certain omissions; , to Hill 533. SALACSAC PASS proper is the stretch of the VILLA VERDE TRAIL between Hills 504 and 508. Entrance to the PASS from the west is between Hills 504 and 505. This was designated SALACSAC PASS #2. The name SALACSAC PASS #1 was assigned to the gap through which the trail ran between Hill 508 to the south and the unnumbered hill to the north. Another mammoth ridge jutting generally west from MT IMUGAN and

\textsuperscript{125} General Gill addressed this point on the first page of the division AAR: “It is doubtful if the campaign for the Japanese Homeland will present a sterner test of the junior leaders than did the VILLA VERDE TRAIL battle ... The enemy’s use of caves and underground passages in his defense system largely off-set the advantage accruing to us from our immense superiority of firepower. Thus, it fell to the subordinate commanders to make up in ingenuity and determination, for this limitation on the effectiveness of supporting weapons.” (32d Infantry Division, 1.)
paralleling the VILLA VERDE TRAIL some 1,000 yards north of it, came to be known as YAMASHITA RIDGE. From the vastness of this ridge, the enemy harassed our troops along the trail with long-range machine gun and heavy mortar and artillery fire.126

The battle in the coming months would be conducted in two phases. March and the first half of April would see heavy fighting with little American progress around the hills overlooking Salacsac Pass #2. The second phase would move to Salacsac Pass #1 and Yamashita Ridge, which dominated the pass, and continue to the end of May, when the division was pulled off the line.

“Fiercest enemy resistance continued to be met along the VILLA VERDE TRAIL west of IMUGAN where the Japanese were taking full advantage of high ground studded with mutually supporting pillboxes and caves. Routes of advance offered only sparse cover, making concealed maneuver virtually impossible.”127 This is the general description of what the 32nd faced between 1 and 7 March. Position after position, cave after cave, hill after hill. It took two 2 weeks for two battalions of the 127th Infantry Regiment to move 1,000 yards from Hill 502 to Hill 505.128 Hill 502 was typical of the fight waged by the 32nd Infantry Division throughout this campaign. Two full squadrons of P-51 Mustangs (32 planes) and a battalion of artillery (12 guns) pulverized the hill. The bombing was very inaccurate. The artillery fire was very inaccurate. It is hard to bring effective firepower into a fight when the enemy was always upon you and the jungle made visibility near impossible. Further worsening the situation was the absence of accurate maps. No maps existed of the Villa Verde Trail, at least not the

126 32d Infantry Division, After Action Report, p. 20.
portion where the 32nd was fighting. It would be 15 days after the battle began before aerial photography was such that semi-accurate maps could be created but even then there was were no map reproduction facilities in the Philippines. The maps would go back to America for reproduction and would return when the battle was nearly over. Artillery needs grid coordinates, distances, or prominent terrain features (an entire hill is not a target when it has dozens of caves and positions) to be effective. Much ammunition from both the air and ground was wasted because exact targets could not be accurately pinpointed. The infantry had to do the work.

After the ineffectual air and artillery bombardment the infantry began climbing. It was a steep hill and the mangled jungle that resulted from the pre-attack bombardment actually made pinpointing Japanese positions even harder. Men moved forward as they began to engage Japanese positions to their front and the enemy in the caves behind them also appeared from their newly camouflaged holes and opened fire. Caught in a vice the lead platoons in the attack were cut off and though they eventually made it back to their own lines casualties were heavy. Leaders pondered the situation, how could the Japanese continue to fight so doggedly under such heavy air and artillery attacks?

Finding the EXACT positions of the Japanese required extensive patrolling and weak points were found, exploited, and then lost when enemy machine guns from neighboring positions opened fire. This happened again and again. Eventually the hill was taken but that did not mean it was secure. For several more days caves on the hill’s slopes were cleaned out. This process is best explained in the division AAR:


131 Ibid., 23.
The laborious and costly process of reducing the cave position is best understood by the movements of Co. C for the next two days. Troops of this company found, after several failures, that to reduce the cave system it was necessary to attack two or more positions simultaneously while keeping those on the flanks neutralized by machine gun and mortar fire. In this manner two platoons inched their way from the top of Hill 502 down two noses, which were supported by a ravine. These two platoons provided cross-supporting fire for each other, while the heavy weapons company from positions at the bottom of the hill, protected the flanks. Once on top of the caves, various methods were used to deal with the occupants. Smoke grenades, when thrown into an entrance revealed that the caves were connected by tunnels, since smoke would often come out of another hole some distance away. This led our troops to seal the entrances by caving in the ceiling with demolitions and by piling spoil in front from above. Jap reactions to this tactic provided some uneasy moments to our troops. After sealing the caves during the day, our troops were kept awake during the night by the muffled sounds of the Japs trying to dig their way to the surface of the ground in the middle of the company perimeter.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 23-24.
The winding, treacherous Villa Verde Trail and the hills that dominated it, from Santa Maria to Santa Fe. Nearly 3 months would be needed for the division to move from the approaches to Salacsac Pass #2 to Salacsac Pass #1. The hills and dominating ridge looked down upon the 32nd as they pressed forward.

Despite being secure the fight for Hill 502 was not over. Far from it. While the attacking units regrouped, the 127th Infantry Regiment’s 3rd Battalion took three days in the heat and heavy rain (an ever increasing problem for the infantry as the rainy season approached) to march from Santa Maria to Hill 502. Exhausted upon arrival they moved to attack the main Japanese position of Hill 505.

133 Ibid.
32nd Division forces continued to meet savage, well-organized resistance from Japanese dug in on the Villa Verde trail. While the 1st Battalion of the 127th Infantry Regiment continued attacking east from positions 4,200 yards west of the IMUGAN making only slight gains, the 3rd Battalion of the 127th Infantry Regiment on 8 March struck to the north from positions in VALDEZ and drove a wedge to the rear of the Japanese opposing the advance of the 1st Battalion ... The well-organized Japanese responded quickly to every thrust from the west as well as from the east with heavy artillery, machine gun, mortar, and small arms fire, and in addition attempted numerous infiltration and banzai charges each night. Fog and rain were another handicap to our forces.

I Corps, I Corps: History Of The Luzon Campaign, Philippine Islands, 1945, 64

One would think that the 32nd was accustomed to war in such an environment. They had fought in the jungles of New Guinea and the mountains of Leyte. This took tropical mountain warfare to another level. The Villa Verde Trail offered no room to maneuver and made supply and casualty evacuation dangerous, if not impossible. It could take days for supplies to reach the forward troops and they came by native carrier. The road being built was too far back to help; heavy equipment couldn’t operate under heavy fire or on the narrow, sloping ground. It was having a pronounced effect on the infantry of the 32nd. As previously stated, the division was severely understrength and tired when they landed on Luzon. Through the first three weeks of March, casualties were heavy, particularly in the 127th Infantry Regiment, which to that point had done most of the fighting. The 126th and 128th Infantry Regiments were responsible for the rest of the 32nd front, which on 21 March was too large and prevented...
a concentrated attack along the trail; the geography would not have allowed it. By 23 March, the 127th had suffered losses of 110 killed, 225 wounded, and 500 non-battle casualties, mostly sickness and combat fatigue. The battle fatigue and nervous disorders overwhelmed the Regimental Hospital. The Regimental Surgeon noted in his AAR that high-level commanders were increasingly frustrated with the increasing numbers of hospitalized but also stated: “As usual however, no suggestions on how to combat these problems were forthcoming, nor was any credence placed in the explanation of the medical officers immediately concerned with the problem.”¹³⁴ Numbers were low before this happened, frustration and ambivalence were not solutions. The 127th’s problem was symbiotic of that which plagued the entire division, exhaustion. The regiment had only 2,100 men available when the operation started, a shortfall of 1,100 troops, and most of its front-line combat leaders were gone (dead, wounded, or worn out). The regiment was relieved, though it would return to the fight a few weeks later. It was time for the 126th and 128th Infantry Regiments to enter the fray.¹³⁵

The entire 32nd Infantry Division needed reinforcements. They needed relief and a long term of recuperation even more. General Gill inquired to his Corps Commander, General Innis Swift, about the possibility of help. Swift’s answer was straightforward and honest, “there were no reinforcements available either in the corps or in General Krueger’s army.”¹³⁶ He was also told his mission would continue and it was expected to be accomplished. General Gill lamented on his exasperation after the war:

It's all well and good to sit back and say that (accomplish


the mission without reinforcements) ... But there are casualties other than battle casualties, particularly after a long period of hard fighting and exposure to the elements, to the diseases and to all the things that go to reduce the capabilities of fighting men. For example, we had all sorts of dysentery and malaria cases, the weather was bad ... Those things contributed a great deal to the lessening of our fighting abilities.137

The 32nd received replacements in the six 6 months it was on Luzon. They can’t be considered reinforcements because they replaced the deleted ranks, they didn’t bolster them. 238 officers and 6,661 enlisted men joined the 32nd after they landed. It seems like an impressive number and would have seemingly brought the division above full strength. Unfortunately, they didn’t all arrive at the same time and when they did they weren’t given time to acclimate or learn from veterans, they were immediately sent forward to bolster the infantry companies. These units were now often led by men who a few weeks earlier were themselves only privates or corporals, the attrition of combat leaders in rifle companies was that severe. The 32nd also saw men return from hospitalization, 214 officers and 5,747 enlisted men, more than half the division’s original number. Further, those returning from a stint in the hospital were seldom fit to resume combat duty, the division AAR going as far as saying “such personnel should be assigned directly to some service installation.”138

Was any of this necessary? The Villa Verde Trail served no military purpose other than Japanese soldiers controlled it from their formidable positions on the many hills that dominated it. Another division was being slowly grinded down, just as the 6th Infantry Division had in its failed drive towards the Wawa Dam. MacArthur was nowhere to be found, his eyes focused on Japan

137 Ibid.
138 Statistics on replacements and programs to integrate them taken from the 32d Infantry Division After Action Report, Annex#1, G-1 Report, p. 1–3.
itself. Could General Krueger have presented the facts of the situation on the ground and the error of the campaign in general to General MacArthur? Yes. Would it have mattered? Most likely not. General Krueger would have been replaced and nothing would have changed. The I Corps would drive on. The 32nd advanced no more than a mile during the month of March. April would be more of the same.

In the central Pacific and even on Leyte the Japanese had based their positions essentially on the philosophy of stand-alone, fight to the death. Support was neither given nor expected. It was different on Luzon. The endless high ground offered such incredible advantages that a shift in Japanese tactical doctrine to a standard of mutually supporting positions was adopted. The fight for Hill 504 is the perfect example. The hill itself had numerous caves and tunnels, all of which had to be rooted out. While fighting for Hill 504, American infantry was under constant machine gun fire from Hill 503, which was occupied by American troops but obviously not secure. Hill 503 then had to be dealt with, while other Japanese positions on Hills 505-507 fired on Hill 504. To defeat multiple enemy positions required multiple attacks. The manpower did not exist to employ such a strategy. The 32nd needed the help of at least one more infantry division. In the absence of that, there was little to be done other than slow, costly attacks.\footnote{32d Infantry Division, After Action Report, 27–29.}

The first phase of this campaign was for Salacsac Pass #2, the ravine between Hills 504 and 505. When Hill 504 was finally taken, the 128\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment went to work against Hill 505. Hill 505 was another one of those positions that both frustrated and depleted American ground forces. For a month an estimated 1,800 Japanese defenders threw the 128\textsuperscript{th} back.\footnote{Ibid., 32.} Two prominent caves held up the advance. No amount of artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire mattered. Assault teams could not get into

\begin{footnotes}
\item 139 32d Infantry Division, After Action Report, 27–29.
\item 140 Ibid., 32.
\end{footnotes}
position where flame-throwers and demolitions would work.\textsuperscript{141}

Finally, an entire battalion dug sapper trenches to within a few feet of the cave entrances. It took 18 hours and several hundred exhausted men, all took their turn digging, before demolitions blasted the caves, assault teams took out the machine guns that had stymied the advance, and more explosives then sealed the caves. Two caves held up an entire infantry battalion. The 126\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment faced similar problems in its nearby sector. It was all now about taking the numbered hills overlooking the Trail. It would often take days, or in the case of Hill 505 a month, to occupy a hill, establish a roadblock, or wipe out stubborn Japanese resistance. Then it would start all over again. With the enemy so close and visibility limited by the endless jungle, artillery and air power, two of the American infantry’s best friends, were of little use. Their other normally formidable asset, tanks, had not been able to negotiate the Trail. There was hope as engineers had moved the road they were building since the beginning of the campaign to the vicinity of the exposed infantry, offering both a respite and needed firepower. The 128\textsuperscript{th}, which had arrived at the end of March to relieve the 127\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, was pulled off the line in mid-April, after the capture of Hill 505. The 127\textsuperscript{th} “had been in contact with the enemy for 27 days and had made substantial gains against a strong and determined enemy who had selected his ground well and had used every means possible to hold our advance. Casualties had been high and the bitter struggle had sapped the strength of our troops.”\textsuperscript{142}

Substantial gains for the regiment and the entire division in six 6 weeks amounted to little more than a mile. They were worn out. The 127\textsuperscript{th} noticed as the 128\textsuperscript{th} moved out that “they showed considerable evidence of battle fatigue demonstrated by short

\textsuperscript{141} Robert B. Vance, Lt. Colonel, \textit{Action On Hill 505}, 2. 1945. Headquarters: 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, 128\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division.

\textsuperscript{142} 128\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, \textit{Historical Report: Period 27 January. 1945 to 30 June 1945}, 15. 1945. Headquarters: 128\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division.
temper and general harassed feeling throughout.”

Had their effort accomplished much at this point in the campaign?

The Japanese could not do much except fight and die in their formidable positions. Many of those positions were simply inaccessible and the entire Trail was under their observation. Nothing had changed, as noted by the Sixth Army G-2 Estimate of 19/20 April: “Although the enemy is thoroughly immobilized, there has been no let up in the stubborn opposition offered from cave-like positions covering the several approached to Imugan.”

The hopeless tactical situation was also noted in the I Corps history of the campaign, stating that between 9 and 15 April “... numerous caves and dugouts were sealed during the period, but the area was so honeycombed with interconnecting installations and Japanese resistance was of such a nature that their defensive capabilities were but little affected. The Japanese launched continuous night counterattacks, and harassed our forces with heavy concentrations of mortar and machine gun fire.”

The Japanese were also about to get additional help from nature as the rainy season approached.

When the 127th returned to the fight after a few weeks of rest the regiment noted an air of urgency. Rain would bring all movement to an end, they had to get moving. When the 127th arrived, according to their AAR with excellent morale and the troops ready to fight, despite “that wherever we take up position now, the Japanese have a better one. They are emplaced on all the really strategic high hills and mountains. It is impossible to


144 Southwest Pacific Area G-2. G-2 Estimate of 19/20 April, 2. 1945. General Headquarters: Southwest Pacific Area, Military Intelligence Section, General Staff.

145 I Corps, I Corps, 74.

146 127th Infantry Regiment, History of the 127th Infantry Regiment—Luzon Campaign, 4.
locate their artillery, mortar, or machine gun emplacements. They are masters of camouflage.”  

This optimistic state of mind, despite the above honest appraisal of their enemy and the obvious state of the unit the 127th replaced, was on 18 April. By 21st April, it was totally different. Nothing is more depressing than endless rain for soldiers with little protection from the elements. For a new soldier fresh from basic training in the United States it was even worse. By 21 April, only three days after arriving in such good spirits as a unit, morale was “questionable,” and psycho-neurotic cases were on the rise. The veterans were just tired. But Hill 508, one half of the anchor of Salacsac Pass #1, had to be taken and the 127th was ordered to take it. This began the second phase of the campaign for the 32nd Infantry Division.

Hill 508 was the most obvious immediate target, seen by the 127th as the main line of Japanese resistance. Little progress was made. The Japanese continued to fight ferociously, air and artillery continued to be of little help, and little knowledge existed on enemy strength. Yet, the regiment moved forward. By 29 April, a company of infantry was on the ridge of Hill 508 and were attacked by the Japanese. In a single hour the company, supported by their parent battalion’s 81 mm mortars, repulsed the attack. 105 dead enemy soldiers were before them; their own losses were 3 dead and 11 wounded. Keeping the company supplied and reinforcing it were the main tasks during the following days. Neighboring Hill 507 was also a concern. It was also occupied and on that one hill 65 caves were sealed. Those 65 caves were not the only Japanese positions as rifle and machine gun fire continued to pour from Hill 507 onto the exposed American troops on Hill 508. Despite all these problems, Hill 508 was declared officially secure on 29 April. The first half of Salacsac Pass#1 was now in American hands, Hill 526, the other anchor of the

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147 Ibid., 5.
148 Ibid.
pass would be attacked by the returning 128th Infantry Regiment, its brief rest now over. Before looking at their battle we have to finish the Luzon campaign for the 127th Infantry Regiment. They did not rest after the capture of Hill 508. They would spend the month of May mopping up and clearing out isolated pockets of Japanese resistance. Between 2 and 27 May they would confirm the deaths of 392 Japanese soldiers. Those were the enemy they were able to identify, there were far more. Those other enemy soldiers were scattered amongst the 319 caves which the 127th sealed during the same period. 319 caves! During this second phase of the Luzon campaign this regiment alone sealed nearly 500 caves. The Japanese were a resourceful enemy but the end was coming, for both sides. 150

The 128th was still a weak unit when it moved out against Hill 526. Their first attack was on 9 May and the typical hard fighting resulted in minimal gains. The regiment’s 2nd Battalion on Hill 527 was attacked throughout the morning. To further burden the regiment its supply trail, a crude carrier trail that no vehicles could negotiate, was cut when the Japanese ambushed a group of medical evacuees. The route was re-opened but the attack would not resume until the following day. By the evening of 10 May, the ridge connecting Hills 508 and 526, Salacsac Pass #1, was finally taken. Further attacks to expand this gain were limited to a few hundred yards and subject to repeated Japanese counter-attacks. What would become infamous in the history of the 32nd in this campaign, Yamashita Ridge, was the next objective. However, the Japanese had set up a blocking position on the Trail between Hills 425 and 516 and it would have to be taken before reaching the ridge. Snipers and machine guns were everywhere and the troublesome supply trail frequently cut by the Japanese on 11 and 12 May. Further attacks against this trail block, along with the additional support of two companies of Filipino guerillas on 13 May also made little progress. On 14 May a single company

150 All statistics and accounts of the battle taken from the 127th Infantry Regiment's history of the campaign, p. 7–32.
of infantry (about 80 men of an authorized strength of approximately 110) managed to bypass the trail block and by 16 May it was finally eliminated. An entire week was expended after taking the vital pass destroying a single Japanese stronghold, the trail block, by elements of two infantry battalions. Fortunately, the miniscule supply trail was now also open. The 128th would fight on until 23 May, eventually breaking Japanese resistance in the Salacsac Pass #1 area and finally opening up the Villa Verde Trail. Assault teams had spent the previous two 2 weeks cleaning out Japanese positions on both Hills 508 and 526. Even though the 128th had scaled those hills they weren't fully secure. It seemed nothing was ever secure in this campaign. The regiment would continue mopping up operations until finally being pulled off the Trail on 31 May.151

The entire campaign for the 32nd, each specific battle, was not covered in detail. Instead a few engagements were introduced to display the general pattern of what the American soldier faced on the Villa Verde Trail. The fights on a few obscure hills involving the 127th and 128th Infantry Regiments were the main focus. The 126th Infantry Regiment also played a prominent role in this fight, particularly in April. The 126th spent most of March assisting in the drive to Baguio, west of the Trail, before being relieved by the 33rd Infantry Division. Unfortunately, their AAR does not specifically focus on the Luzon campaign but their involvement in the war as a whole, from September 1942 (right before the Battle of Buna) to the 32nd Infantry Division’s deactivation in November 1945. A few pages are all that is devoted to Luzon and the tone of those pages is very general. It was far easier to paint a picture of this campaign through the papers of the 127th and 128th Infantry Regiments. The 32nd Infantry Division AAR was even more useful in the specifics of battles. What the 126th report does offer is numbers, their losses in the campaign. In an approximate month of action the regiment’s losses were 184 killed, 454 wounded, and the unbelievable number of 1,198

151 128th Infantry Regiment, Historical Report, 16–23.
non-combat casualties. That is a 70% casualty rate, given the regiment’s initial strength of approximately 2,500 men. It is the non-battle casualties that are the most disheartening part of this campaign, not just along the Villa Verde Trail but also in all of northern Luzon. Consider the following numbers:

32nd Infantry Division strength at the start of the Luzon operation: 625 officers and 10,499 enlisted men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIA</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>2,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIA (Injured in Action)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died of Wounds</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick (includes all non-battle casualties for disease, combat fatigue, and psychoneurotic cases)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>4,754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

916 men died fighting on that Trail, and over 2,500 were wounded or injured (triple the number of killed and two and one half times the number of wounded as suffered by the 6th Infantry Division). Replacements could not keep pace with losses, especially when nearly half the division would eventually leave the battle, though not all at the same time. While most of the division staff sections produced outstanding reports on their activities in the campaign, the G-1 and G-2 (Administration and Intelligence) worthy of the most praise, the division Medical Section did not. Its report covered movements and general actions but stunningly did not cover the issue of non-battle casualties. The most pertinent information involved the lack of water and the health problems it caused.


(nausea, vomiting, etc.) though it does note “the lack of water together with the intense heat and difficult terrain caused troops to become exhausted very quickly.”¹⁵⁴ The word psychoneurosis is not mentioned. Fortunately, the 127th Infantry Regiment’s Surgeon explained exactly what was happening with the troops on the Villa Verde Trail.

The 127th had a tiring, costly fight here. They were in the fight, given a three week respite, and then returned to action. As previously described, they returned seemingly rejuvenated. Many new men had joined the regiment, both replacements from the United States and veterans recycled after their brief rest. The replacements were not ready for the emotional strain of fighting in a “hot, wet, harsh jungle environment.”¹⁵⁵ They had never experienced the constant shelling, the fruitless attacks, and the continuous nighttime harassment that pushed even veterans to the breaking point. These were kids, most 18–20 years old, and many became psychiatric casualties. Veterans returning to the fight and seeing no change whatsoever in the tactical situation continued to break down. Some had seen combat for nearly three years. Matters were made even worse when several attacks saw bombing runs fall short and result in friendly casualties.¹⁵⁶ And of course there was the rain. The fact that by the end of May the Japanese line on the Villa Verde broke is testament to the dogged determination of the American soldier. The 32nd Infantry Division was broken as well.

The 127th Surgeon makes some interesting observations in his report. He, above all else, is critical of the pattern of diagnosing soldiers with combat fatigue rather than psychoneurosis.¹⁵⁷ This is critical because they are treated differently. Combat fatigue


¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.
cases would receive a brief rest or even a sedative and then return to duty. Most would be back in the hospital again, few were ever again effective soldiers. Higher headquarters did not want soldiers marked as psychological cases, fearing the stigma attached to that designation. The Surgeon noted:

... the diagnosis of combat fatigue or exhaustion, instead of psychoneurosis, was attached in accordance with directives from higher echelons cautioning against the use of the diagnosis of psychoneurosis in combat and thus fix in the patient's mind that he was “psycho” or mentally ill. The connotation of “fatigue” and “exhaustion” denotes in the mind of the patient that quiet and rest lead to complete recovery.¹⁵⁸

The 32nd had approximately 5,000 non-battle casualties. Most were labeled fatigue rather than psychoneurosis. Many undoubtedly returned to the hospital after quickly returning to their unit. Instead of extended rest, therapy, and an acclimation period, the normal treatment for psychoneurosis, they were allowed a few days away from combat before returning.¹⁵⁹ They had secured a few miles of the Villa Verde Trail. What impact did that have on the war? Very little.

“It’s pretty hard to tell you know, after all these years, just how I felt during the battle on the Villa Verde Trail in Luzon, beginning in January and lasting until the end of the summer. But it was a fact that the 32nd Division was given a mission that was too big for its ability. No question in my mind.”¹⁶⁰ These are the words of General Gill. He was absolutely right. The Villa Verde Trail, given Japanese strength and their formidable positions, was too much for a single, understrength division. The fact they advanced so far is remarkable. The result was the depletion of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.
¹⁶⁰ Edward Jaquelin Smith, Always A Commander: The Reminiscences of Major General William Gill, 87
their own division and the destruction of the enemy. The 32nd was not alone in receiving near impossible tasks. The 6th Infantry Division also faced such a situation. The entire Sixth Army faced that situation. They were understrength and did exactly what General Yamashita wanted; they attacked him in his formidable mountain positions. Another veteran American Infantry division, the 25th, was on the 32nd’s right, moving up, or attempting to move up Highway 5 through the Balete Pass. They, like the 6th and 32nd, would fight in horrible conditions against a tough, resourceful enemy.

General Gill’s message to the 32nd after the end of the fighting on the Villa Verde Trail:

The 32nd Division has accomplished its mission. The enemy has been destroyed and the Villa Verde Trail secured. A passage has been forced through the Caraballo mountains from the Central Plain to the entrance of the Cagayan Valley, thus hastening the completion of the Luzon Campaign.

After 120 days of fierce hand to hand combat over terrain more difficult than any yet encountered in this war, the “Red Arrow” again pierced the enemy’s line. You have crushed completely another of the enemy’s so-called impregnable defenses, brilliantly concluding the Division’s 5th Campaign in the Pacific Theater.

I desire to express to every officer and enlisted man in the Division, as well as those attached, my heartfelt appreciation of the courage and determination each has shown while playing his vitally important role in this long and arduous campaign. You have outfought and destroyed a cunning and determined enemy, an enemy occupying elaborately prepared defenses on ground of his own choosing. Your victory was impressive and
decisive and one of which you may well be proud. It is with justifiable pride and complete confidence that I look forward to your continued success into the heart of Tokyo.¹⁶¹

VIII

THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION ON HIGHWAY

... Except along Highway #5, movement to the NORTH was restricted to the ridges which parallel the Highway and along these ridges the Jap conducted a dogged defense in depth. Highway #5 was completely covered by fire from artillery, anti-tank, and automatic weapons and could be opened for traffic only after the hills to either side had been cleared. Our problem, thus, was to advance to the NORTH, pulling our supply roads behind us as the front line troops advanced. To the Division Engineers fell the herculean task of constructing and maintaining these supply roads.

25th Infantry Division, Operations Of The 25th Infantry Division, Mike One, Luzon, Philippine Islands

The I Corps drive north-involved three divisions. The center of that drive along the Villa Verde Trail belonged to the 32nd Infantry Division. On its right flank was the 25th Infantry Division. They were to advance along Route 5 to a point north of Balete Pass, where they would unite with the 32nd ID.162 The 25th would not utilize Route 5 in a similar fashion. While not a highway or improved road in the American sense, it was still an obvious route of advance and Japanese guns could fire upon it at any and all points from the high ground that surrounded it. The 25th would move along either side of Route 5 through heavily

162 The road that is the center of this campaign is referred to in some reports as Route 5, in others as Highway 5. I will use Route 5 unless directly quoted as Highway 5.
It was as frustrating and exhausting as what the 32nd, but a few miles to their west, experienced on the Villa Verde Trail. The main differences were the state of the 25th Infantry Division at the start of the operation and the firepower they utilized.

The Area of Operations (AOP) of the 25th Infantry Division on Luzon
The 25th Infantry Division was involved in the war against Japan since the attack on Pearl Harbor. Entrusted with the defense of Hawaii many members of the division died when Japanese planes strafed Schofield Barracks. Most of 1942 would be spent in training with the division moving to Guadalcanal at the end of the year. Mopping up operations were bitter and costly. After securing (February 1943), along with the Americal Division, the rest of the island, the 25th would rest for several months before landing on the island of New Georgia on 21 July, 1943. Fighting in an unforgiving jungle for the next month they ended organized Japanese resistance by 25 August. The beauty of New Zealand and then the island of New Caledonia would be home for the next 16 months. Rest and training would occupy that time until 11 January, 1945 when the 25th Infantry Division, under the command of General Charles Mullins, landed on Luzon at San Fabian. The division would fight its way across the island’s Central Plain (the fertile land between Manila and the Caraballo Mountains) to Highway 5, where it would occupy the right wing of the I Corps drive north.

Unlike the 6th and 32nd Infantry Divisions, the 25th entered the battle on Luzon in excellent condition. They had last seen action 15 months earlier, on the island of New Georgia. All three of its rifle regiments, the 27th, 35th, and 161st, were at full strength in both men and equipment. When the 25th joined the I Corps battle they had already been fighting on Luzon for a month. As of 21 February they had suffered approximately 1,000 casualties. That was the seemingly easy phase of the operation. However, as 1,000 casualties attest there were no easy phases in the fighting on Luzon. The terrain and enemy were simply too ferocious. Beginning 21 February, the 25th would spend the next ten weeks mired in the abyss of the jungle infested mountains along Route 5.

The 25th began moving north on 23 February. The division

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commander, General Charles Mullins, devised a three prong attack up Route 5 to Digdig, clearing the road and both flanks. Initially, the 25th saw little determined opposition. By 3 March, Digdig was occupied and by 5 March, Route 5 was also clear to that point. The next objective was Putlan, 5 miles north of Digdig. Some tougher fighting occurred during this phase, especially by the 161st Infantry Regiment. By 15 March, after the 27th Infantry Regiment finished mopping up their zone, Putlan and Route 5 to Putlan, were secure.\footnote{Ibid., 513–516.} The overwhelming success of the 25th was not to the division’s long-term benefit. Their zone of responsibility would expand as I Corps looked to reinforce success, especially when measured with the slow, costly movements of the 32nd on the Villa Verde Trail. I Corps ordered the division further north to Kapintalan, five miles away. Upon reaching Kapintalan, the division would proceed through the Balete Pass, approximately three miles further north of Kapintalan and two 2 miles short of the junction of the Villa Verde Trail and Route 5 at Santa Fe, the ultimate objective. Santa Fe would take two months to reach. Opposition to this point had been light but was about to get tougher for the 25th Infantry Division.

This is where the 25th would spend the next two months:

> The dominating terrain feature of the area is BALETE RIDGE which extends EASTWARD from an unnamed mountain, altitude 4,625 feet, located 4,000 yards SOUTH of IMUGAN to MT. MINAMI, altitude 4,530 feet, located 6,000 yards ENE of KAPINTALAN. The low point in this ridge is BALETE PASS proper, altitude approximately 3,000 feet. In addition to the peaks mentioned above, the ridge includes: MT. HARUNA, altitude 3,825 feet, located 1,000 yards west of the PASS; LONE TREE HILL, altitude 3,800 feet, located 1,500 yards SE of the PASS; MT. MYOKO, altitude 4,600 feet, located 5,500 yards SE of the PASS;
and MT. KABUTO, altitude 4,600 feet located 1,500 yards S of MT. MINAMI.

From the western extremity of BALETE RIDGE, a second major ridge extends due SOUTH roughly parallel to and 3,000–4,000 yards WEST of Highway #5. This ridge, which formed the WESTERN boundary of the division zone of action, is practically unbroken and the average altitude is over 4,000 feet. From this major ridge a series of subsidiary ridges rose sharply down to the DIGDIG RIVER on the EAST. The ridge crests are uniformly narrow and the sides are precipitous, canalizing movement along the topographic crests. The ravines which separate these successive ridges are choked with underbrush. Three of these subsidiary ridges are worthy of description as they play an important role in the defense of the PASS. NORTON KNOB RIDGE branches off from the main NS ridge 2,000 yards SW of KAPINTALAN and extends SW for approximately 3,500 yards. CRUMP HILL has its origin just NORTH of BANZAI RIDGE and extends SE 2,500 yards to a point just NORTH of KAPINTALAN. KENBU PLATEAU runs abruptly from the river valley 2,000 yards N of KAPINTALAN and extends NW to a junction with BALETE RIDGE and the main NS ridge 2,500 yards WEST of BALETE PASS.

East of Highway #5 the BALETE RIDGE, previously discussed, from the point of origin for two critically important subsidiary ridges: MYOKO RIDGE, which originates at MT. MYOKO and slopes sharply SW for 5,000 yards to a point 1,000 yards NORTH of MINULI; KAPINTALAN RIDGE which originates at LONE TREE HILL and slopes sharply SW to KAPINTALAN a distance of 3,500 yards. Of considerable importance also is a subsidiary ridge, unnamed, which extends SE
from MT. KABUTO to the PUTLAN RIVER VALLEY. The general characteristics of these ridges are the same as those of the ridges located WEST of the Highway...

With the exception of a few grass covered ridges and some open grassland in the DIGDIG VALLEY the entire area is heavily wooded. Dense tropical rain forest and a tangled undergrowth of tropical shrubs and vines interspersed with clumps of bamboo restrict observation and fields of fire to an absolute minimum.

The only existing road is Highway #5, a two-lane gravel road badly in need of repair. Bridges are either blown or too poorly constructed to bear heavy military traffic.\textsuperscript{165}

There were several significant problems associated with this advance. Route 5 was not an adequate supply road for the division’s many needs nor was it ideal for the employment of armored vehicles. A road would have to be created in the midst of the fighting, exactly the situation faced on the Villa Verde Trail. The road would be built on a formidable ridge southeast of Route 5, a ridge that was “a razor-back formation with steep slopes averaging over eighty degrees. The absence of lateral fingers or more gentle slopes prevented any appreciable flanking movements, and the only alternative was a direct drive along the ridge line.”\textsuperscript{166} This is a familiar overture. Frontal assaults, due to impenetrable jungle terrain, encumbered the 25\textsuperscript{th} as it did all units fighting the Japanese on Luzon. Adding to the American infantryman’s many problems was visibility. The jungle was so thick in this area that clear fields of fire did not exist and targets for artillery and air-strikes were impossible to pinpoint.\textsuperscript{167} The Japanese once again

\textsuperscript{165} 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, \textit{Operations Of The 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, Mike One, Luzon, Philippine Islands}, 50–52. 1945. Headquarters: 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division.

\textsuperscript{166} Twenty-Seventh United States Infantry, \textit{Battle Report: Luzon Campaign}, 22. 1945. Headquarters: 27\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division.

\textsuperscript{167} Robert Ross Smith, \textit{Triumph In The Philippines}, 518.
also controlled the high ground dominating the 25th’s advance, as they had in the Areas of Operation for both the 6th and 32nd Infantry Divisions. By the end of the battle, the fresh division that landed on Luzon in January was a battered, exhausted shell of its once formidable self.

“... Japanese resistance along Highway 5 remained at a high level. Supported by numerous close support air strikes, the division continued to attack north along high ground flanking the highway, enveloping and destroying successive enemy positions.”

The aforementioned would be the norm. The main move north began on 16 March. By the 19th approximately four miles were gained. They were almost halfway there. San Jose was a bit over 5 miles further north. Then, everything turned and not for the better. Route 5 became the Villa Verde Trail. Between 20 and 28 March, gains were measured in yards as Japanese fire poured on the advancing 25th. The 161st Infantry Regiment was busy with an objective called Norton’s Knob, a peak reaching an elevation of over 3,000 feet. To reach the Knob the 161st labored through dense jungle, exhausting itself in the process. For nine days (18 through 26 March) little progress was made. Any and all available firepower pounded the area: air strikes, mortars, and artillery; thousands of rounds of ammunition engulfed Norton’s Knob. The final attack of 27 March was made from three directions with anti-tank gun (37 mm), self-propelled howizer, and tank support. Due to incredible efforts by combat engineers, a group of men whose achievements have received scant recognition from military historians, two Sherman tanks mounting 105 mm guns, were able to directly support the infantry and on 28 March Norton’s Knob was secure.

Tanks had made all the difference in this specific engagement and would continue to do so throughout the fighting along Route 5. It had been a costly fight for the 161st; 40 were dead, another 155

168 I Corps, I Corps, 66.
169 Robert Ross Smith, Triumph In The Philippines, 522.
wounded. The 27th and 35th Infantry Regiment’s were also facing difficulties in the vicinities of Mt. Myoko and Mt. Kabuto.\footnote{25th Infantry Division, \textit{Operations Of The 25th Infantry Division, Mike One, Luzon, Philippine Islands}, 53–54.}

Japanese skill in the defense was obvious in their dispositions and tactics. The division AAR noted:

... The Regiments making the flanking maneuvers were operating over exceedingly difficult terrain. The Japanese appreciation and organization of this terrain was of a very high order. All commanding features were organized in detail and consisted of an elaborate integrated system of interconnected caves, pillboxes, and emplacements. A complete realization of our artillery and aerial supremacy was evidenced by the Japanese emplacement of their artillery in caves which afforded excellent protection against bombing and counter-battery fire.\footnote{Ibid., 55.}

Japanese skill in avoiding American artillery fire was aided by an acute shortage of ammunition in the 25th’s artillery battalions, a problem faced by other American units as well. Throughout the operation the division’s artillery expended an impressive amount of ammunition:

\begin{itemize}
  \item 105 mm howitzer: 216,053
  \item 155 mm howitzer: 40,069
  \item 155 mm general purpose: 6,369
  \item 8” howitzer: 4,366
  \item 240 mm howitzer: 1,827
  \item 90 mm: 7,846
\end{itemize}

Over 275,000 total rounds of ammunition may boggle some

\footnote{25th Infantry Division, \textit{Artillery Annex}, 160. 1945. Headquarters: 25th Infantry Division.}
minds. However, the Division Artillery Officer notes the restrictions placed on ammunition expenditures throughout the campaign, often during the most critical stages of the operation. Precarious supply lines compounded this problem and the offensive abilities of the division dissipated as troops were forced to protect those lines from Japanese infiltration. General Mullins decided to stop the advance of his 35th Infantry Regiment because he saw little point in incurring further casualties in the forbidding terrain, stating: “that the casualties incurred in continuing the advance would be prohibitive as the terrain permitted no room whatsoever for maneuver.” The 25th also faced the problem of responsibility for too wide a front, nearly six miles. Further, it was of course not open terrain but dense jungle, visibility for American troops was limited, and opportunities for Japanese spoling attacks plentiful. The 25th faced a similar predicament to that of other American divisions, not enough strength for its assigned area of responsibility. Nor were Japanese numbers slackening. When the 25th began its advance at the end of February their strength was approximately 4,000 men. As April began it was anywhere between 8,000 and 10,000. April would see the 25th assume the offensive for most of the month but little progress was made as the tenacious Japanese contested every yard of the American advance.

The first ten days of April were a very busy time. The 161st assaulted a position called Crump Hill, using Norton’s Knob as a base of fire. By 8 April, the hill was occupied, though it continued to receive heavy Japanese fire from the area of Balete Pass. All moves were under enemy observation. All available firepower poured onto Crump Hill; thousands of rounds of artillery and mortar ammunition undoubtedly aided in the seizure of the hill’s

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173 Ibid.
western slope, not the entire hill. Yet, the 161st could not follow up their success. The 27th and 35th Infantry Regiments were having trouble keeping up in the harsh jungle and the 161st’s commander did not want his flanks vulnerable. The 161st dug in.

The 27th had its hands full on Myoko Ridge. Hoping to garner some momentum the regiment bypassed several Japanese strongpoints. One of the bypassed positions was called the “Scar,” another a few hundreds northeast of that position. Then the 27th encountered: ”Woody Hill, a densely forested prominence almost 4,000 feet high centering ¾ of a mile northeast of the Scar ... Near the center of Woody Hill lay a forested Knob designated the Pimple, 300 yards further northeast, on the northern slope of Woody Hill, was another knob, dubbed the Wart.”

For two weeks, the 27th would fight on these knobs and hills. They would advance a mere 1,000 yards! Hours and days were spent clearing isolated pockets of resistance in the hard, costly fighting that was symbiotic of the ground war against the Japanese. The cost was high for both American and Japanese soldiers. The Wart finally fell on 16 April. However, attempts to seize further objectives bore little fruit. Hopes for armor support were dashed when a single tank couldn’t negotiate the precarious, steep road being built by the engineers. Advancing wasn’t only treacherous for tanks. At points the ground was so steep and broken that men were arm to arm. The 27th faced a stalemate, a situation the regimental commander

Colonel Philip Lindeman, refused to accept. The division was still 2¼ miles from Balete Pass. He personally did an aerial reconnaissance of the area and found ground 1,000 yards west of Mt. Myoko that offered an easier route to Balete Ridge. A few patrols scouted the area, finding the jungle as miserable as ever and the Japanese ever vigilant. A reinforced platoon was then sent

177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 528.
in but found a better route and arrived on the southern slope of Balete Ridge undetected. Colonel Lindeman quickly reinforced this small unit and a gap in the Japanese line now existed. A battalion was sent forward to Balete Ridge while another battalion still continued the attack towards Mt. Myoko.

This brilliant move left Balete Ridge, between Elbow and Lone Tree Hills (just two more in the endless names and numbers of high ground American infantry dealt with on Luzon), wide open. However, Japanese resistance did not slacken. The Sixth Army’s Intelligence Estimate of 19/20 April noted:

The enemy continues his active defense of the approaches to Balete Pass. Astride Highway 5, he is meeting the points of our three penetrations with intense infantry weapons fire; his positions are well constructed and are disposed in considerable depth. Generally, conduct of defense in this zone, has been well coordinated with small scale but determined limited objective counterattacks supported by artillery ... There are no indications suggesting a crumbling of resistance south of Balete Pass; current tenor of combat and continued movement of small enemy groups south into strong points under attack point to the enemy’s intent to maintain this defense sector in both personnel and material.179

A new variable would enter the equation, in small numbers, but would nonetheless turn the tide in several of these local engagements. Tanks were able to participate and their effects were enormous. One of the many enemy strongpoints holding up the 25th’s advance was along a ridge line dotted with pillboxes and caves. All avenues of approach were covered by Japanese automatic weapons. A battalion of the 27th Infantry Regiment, supported

179 Sixth Army, G-2 Estimate of the Enemy Situation, 19 and 20 April 1945. 1945. Headquarters: Southwest Pacific Area, Military Intelligence Section, General Staff.
by a single Sherman tank, attacked. Pre-attack artillery and air
strikes allowed the tank to be pushed into position along the
ridge line; several times the tank nearly went over the side.180
Often firing at point-blank range the position was eliminated.
The enemy strongpoint had no anti-tank weapons, few Japanese
positions did. They must not have believed that any armor could
maneuver, in most cases they were right. It must have been an
overwhelming sight. The division AAR notes: “The tanks also
had a psychological effect on the enemy. There were several in-
stances where the enemy, upon sighting the tanks, abandoned
his position and attempted to flee, only to be cut down by closely
supporting infantrymen.”181 This was a weapon seldom available
to either the 6th or 32nd Infantry Divisions.

A few hundred yards away another Japanese position stymied
the advance. The hills slopes were ridiculously steep, “practical-
ly perpendicular.”182 Engineers bulldozed a Sherman tank into
position and the tank methodically reduced the strongpoint.
A new pattern was emerging. Rather than fruitlessly attacking
these strongpoints tanks, even single ones, were turning the tide.
Infantry were receiving both support and relief. A new tank,
one fitted with a flamethrower, also entered the fray at the end
of April. As with previous described engagements, this tank
was usually pushed into firing position by engineers and per-
formed very well. Those Japanese that remained in their pillbox-
es and caves died there or were cut down by American riflemen.
Consider the following hypothetical view of a Japanese officer on
one of the many ridges the enemy controlled in the path of the
25th Infantry Division’s advance:

A Japanese captain, in command of 70 men and several pillbox and
cave positions, ponders his situation. He is understandably proud
of his own performance as well as the performance of his troops

180 25th Infantry Division, Artillery Annex, 60.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
thus far. He placed his pillboxes perfectly, they support each other and his natural cave positions provide added strength. American artillery fire has repeatedly hit the vicinity of his elevated positions but superb camouflage, both natural and manmade, has prevented an exact bearing of his location and thus recorded no direct hits. Even his supply situation is acceptable after months of stockpiling ammunition and food. Every American attack has been driven off. Today will undoubtedly bring another attack and at 1200 hours the customary American artillery and mortar fire begins falling. His men know not to fire until the artillery fire has ceased, the Americans do not know the exact positions of his strongpoints. Once their infantry begins scaling the steep cliffs leading to his location he will give the order to fire. The artillery and mortar fire has ended. Within 30 minutes his command post will get word of the advancing American infantry and his machine guns will do the rest. He hears something he does not recognize. It is a mechanical sound. It must be the remnants of the American artillery. But, the sound is continuing and now he hears the sounds of ALL his machine guns. A runner comes frantically into his cave command post. He yells, “Sir, tanks are scaling the cliff!” The captain is dumbfounded. It is impossible. No tank could reach this point. He runs out of the cave and observes two tanks, one with a flamethrower, being pushed up the hill by American armored bulldozers. What can he do? He has no anti-tank weapons, why would he? Neither he nor his superiors ever thought a tank would appear here. His pillboxes, all four of them, are being eliminated. The tank with the flamethrower has burst past the pillboxes and is pouring its inferno into his caves. A massive explosion tells him that his main ammunition dump is no more. The men lucky enough to have escaped the pillboxes are being cut down by American infantry. He also sees enemy infantry fan out from behind the flame throwing tank and engage his caves. All are now burning. Finally free of the lethality of his own machine guns at least a platoon of enemy infantry is rushing towards his cave command post. He and his staff are prepared to fight to the end. The tank is now in sight and its flames
force he and what is left of his command deeper within the cave. The scorching fire ends and as he moves forward to assess his situation machine gun fire drives him back once again. His situation is hopeless, both he and his men know this. After a few minutes a series of loud explosions rock the cave. They have been sealed in.

While this is a hypothetical scenario it is in many ways what was faced by the Japanese once American armor could be effectively employed. They had proven their value on Norton’s Knob, where their ability to fire directly into Japanese positions turned the tide in that engagement. The 27th Infantry Regiment was now on Balete Ridge but was essentially isolated until a viable supply route was open. The 35th Infantry Regiment would eventually open that route after an eventful April of their own.

In 35th Infantry reports discussing this operation two words appear most frequently: pillboxes and caves. From approximately 22 March until 4 May, it was one pillbox after another, one cave after another. Until 5 April nothing but frustration was met as casualties increased and the dangerous monotony of fighting entrenched Japanese dominated operations. But, on 5 April, two tanks joined the fight and everything changed. On that day five pillboxes were destroyed. 6 April saw more of the same. “(3rd Battalion) continue pushing slowly but steadily up the little finger in front of their positions. They are encountering an endless chain of pillboxes.”183 The tanks destroyed 15 pillboxes. On 7 April it was another 13. The advance was slow but continuous. 8 April saw seven Japanese strongpoints eliminated. Exhaustion may have struck the regiment had it not been for the welcome support of two tanks. The engineers who labored getting those tanks into position were most certainly physically spent but they had saved the lives of many soldiers through their efforts.184


Each day saw more Japanese positions eliminated. 18 April was a particularly busy day:

(1st Battalion) “B” and “C” Companies in yesterday’s movement down draw sealed 7 seven caves, captured one stickmortar and knocked out 1 one additional MG ... “B” and “C” Companies started advance down draw and have destroyed 11 caves, 6 pillboxes and an uncounted number of spider holes, 2 MGs, and one knee mortar. (2nd Battalion) During afternoon “E” Company destroyed 5 caves, killed 21 Japs, and knocked out 2 Heavy MGs ... advancing slowly against numerous enemy caves.\(^{185}\)

It would continue as described above but by 20 April the 35\(^{th}\) had cleared Route 5 to Kapintalan. They continued to encounter heavy resistance from well dug-in Japanese positions. To make it even more difficult, these positions were in “thickly wooded areas which are very difficult to locate.”\(^{186}\) By 4 May, the entire 25\(^{th}\) Infantry Division was reorganized as they prepared to make the final push to Balete Pass.

After over two months Japanese resistance had not at all slackened. The Sixth Army’s G-2 Estimate of 24/25 April so attests:

Despite 2½ months of intense combat, during which he sustained heavy losses in both men and material, the enemy continues to cling to his prepared positions interdicting the approaches to Balete Pass. Sharp fighting has been and is still in progress. Only isolated instances have occurred evincing some lessening of resistance; such indications have probably been associated only with position consolidation for, throughout

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186 Ibid., 4 May.
the Balete area, no positive evidence has been revealed relative to collapse of any one defensive sector. Some ground has been relinquished, but only under the strongest pressure. Enemy command control appears to remain at a fairly high level of efficiency; artillery and other support weapons fire has been coordinated with localized ground action. Tactical development of the terrain has been exceptionally good and appears to be continuing in both forward and rear areas. Troop deployment has been maintained at the points of our penetrations and recent observations suggest that it has been expanded to include a flank threat to our rear areas and supply lines, particularly along Highway 5.187

While the Japanese continued to fight on, what was the condition of the 25th Infantry Division?

The 25th had seen the type of fighting in the same type of terrain as had the 6th and 32nd Infantry Divisions. This part of the I Corps operation made as little strategic sense as did the assault up the Villa Verde Trail and what the 33rd and 37th Infantry Divisions were doing on Highway 11 (the next chapter). The 6th and 32nd reports acknowledge throughout the exhausted state of their men. That is not found in the AARs of the 25th or its infantry regiments. Non-battle casualties were acknowledged in the division AAR Medical Annex but never when discussing specific operations. From the time the division landed until 21 February, it had already suffered 1,000 total casualties. As of 4 May, another 480 men were killed and 1,415 wounded, only slightly less than the losses of the 32nd Infantry Division on the Villa Verde Trail during the same period (650 killed, 1,500 wounded).188 Non-battle casualties due to sickness and disease were also increasing though not at the rate of the 32nd Infantry Division. Unlike the


32nd and to a lesser degree the 6th Infantry Division (which had approximately six months of rest before landing on Luzon) the 25th was in excellent shape when this battle started. Nearly 3,000 casualties since landing changed that. The division was far from its peak four months later with the Balete Pass still before them. For their final drive they would have received help from the 37th Infantry Division’s 148th Infantry Regiment.

While the Japanese positions facing the 25th were still certainly formidable and their fighting spirit as energetic as ever, their numbers were significantly reduced from their peak strength of approximately 12,000 at the beginning of April. 3,000 Japanese soldiers now opposed the 25th in the Balete Pass area.189 The division commander’s plan for the coming operation would have the recently arrived 148th Infantry Regiment securing the division’s rear and supply lines while also clearing any remaining Japanese personnel from Mt. Myoko. The 27th and 161st Infantry Regiments, while also eliminating Japanese pockets of resistance in their areas, would envelop Balete Pass, the 27th from the east, and the 161st from the west. The Pass itself was the objective of the 27th. The 35th Infantry Regiment would continue moving up Route 5, securing it all the way to Balete Pass. The Japanese no longer had the strength to stop the 25th’s advance but they could frustrate it a while longer.

Kapintalan Ridge was the last bastion of Japanese strength before Balete Pass. As usual, the Japanese resisted fanatically. The ridge’s main strongpoint would take six days to eliminate, as described in the division’s AAR:

This strongpoint required six days to reduce and employed the use of three companies on successive days. This was another reverse slope situation which covered three high points 50 to 75 yards apart. Every inch of ground was carefully organized with enemy entrenched in deep caves. Artillery and mortar fire

189 Ibid., 533.
caused little damage to these caves, and it was not until the 81 mm mortars on LONE TREE HILL were brought into action that the caves were hit. The flaw in the enemy defense of this area proved to be unprepared for an attack from the South and East. The surprise move of one platoon to this point together with the employment of mortars and flamethrowers was the beginning of the final reduction of the strongpoint.\textsuperscript{190}

All three of the division’s regiments struggled but by 11 May had united on Kapintalan Ridge. Though a junction was effected the division’s work was not done. Over 200 caves were discovered on the ridge and each had to be destroyed, burnt out, or sealed. Some were so extensive that they encompassed the entire ridge line. 954 dead Japanese soldiers were found on the ridge; more were undoubtedly buried within its 200 caves. With Balete Pass 900 yards away, the 35\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment moved forward only to be stopped once again by the remnants of the Japanese force. The decisive weapon of this campaign, the tank, entered the fray. A platoon of Sherman tanks were able to drive to the Pass while infantry enveloped it from the east and west. On 13 May Route 5 to Balete Pass was secure. Mopping up operations would continue until 22 May. The war was over for the 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division.

Thankfully, the atomic bombs made an invasion of Japan unnecessary. Had the bombs not been employed and an invasion become necessary, the 25\textsuperscript{th} would have joined its sister divisions the 6\textsuperscript{th} and 32\textsuperscript{nd} on the sidelines. Luzon had rendered the division incapable of such a massive future operation. Its losses were as follow:

\textsuperscript{190} 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, \textit{Artillery Annex}, 67.
Over 1,000 were dead and over 3,000 wounded. Further, though they were only employed with the 25th for a brief period, the 37th Infantry Division’s 148th Infantry Regiment also had 25 killed and 140 wounded. Those numbers include just the battle casualties. Naturally, most of those casualties occurred in the division’s infantry regiments. Those regiments also saw most of the non-battle casualties. Nearly 7,000 men during this campaign would fall to disease, exhaustion, or neuropsychiatric problems. Well over half of the division’s strength (15,000) were casualties of some kind. Over 3,812 men were returned to duty but they seldom were in superior condition. Half of those were returning non-battle casualties and though no numbers were provided, undoubtedly, as in the 6th and 32nd Infantry Divisions, many would return to the hospital. Replacements could not keep up with


192 Robert Ross Smith, Triumph In The Philippines, 539.
the losses. In fact, 1,400 replacements were sent forward from a quarantine zone for mumps before their period ended because there was such a desperate need for troops. Reinforcements were nowhere to be found, a problem throughout the theater, so men not ready for action were still sent forward.

Then of course there are the psychneurotic cases. Only 589 are listed in the division records, perhaps as with the 32nd Infantry Division trying to avoid stigmatizing soldiers with a neurological designation. The number most striking is 504. That is the number of psychneurotic patients returned to duty. Since most of these cases, and this is a supposition on my part since no exact records affirm it, were most likely riflemen, this meant they were returned to combat. That is a return rate of over 80%. Given the shortage of psychiatric personnel available in the standard American combat unit, the Infantry division, many sick personnel returned to combat without receiving the help they needed. Most non-battle casualties occurred after 21 February, when the 25th joined I Corps’ unnecessary campaign against northern Luzon. The name MacArthur has not yet appeared in this chapter but it can’t conclude without once again noting another fine unit was wittled down for no sound strategic gain.

193 25th Infantry Division, Artillery Annex, 189.
For three months the Division was engaged in bitter mountain fighting over the most rugged terrain of all Luzon. The battles were sharp and severe against the enemy who fought and died on his hill top positions. There was no easy route to Baguio; it was uphill over mountains all the way and we brought all our roads with us.

33rd Infantry Division G-3, *Operational Highlights Of The 33rd Infantry Division*, 1.

The final part of the I Corps drive north was the responsibility of the 33rd Infantry Division. The 33rd Infantry Division was not created until after the war began. They would arrive in Hawaii in July 1943, train in jungle warfare, and move to New Guinea during May 1944. They would perform basic security and patrol missions and then land unopposed on the island of Morotai on 18 December 18, 1944. They would remain there until landing at Lingayen Gulf on 10 February, 1945. Under the command of General Percy Clarkson they would occupy the left of the I Corps advance, along Route 11 towards Baguio, the summer capitol of the Philippines. Shortly after their drive began the 33rd would experience a rarity on Luzon, reinforcements. Two regiments of the 37th Infantry Division would advance with them, though these regiments were far from peak condition after the vicious fight for Manila. The 25th Infantry Division would fight along Route/Highway 5, and the 32nd Infantry Division along the Villa Verde
Trail. For the 33rd it would be Route 11.

While the following pages will demonstrate Route 11 was not as seemingly hopeless as either Route 5 or the Villa Verde Trail it was still a formidable obstacle. There were four possible routes into Baguio, the first of which was:

Route 11, the 33rd Division would soon learn, was the most strongly defended and most easily defensible approach to Baguio. Running northeast and then north into Baguio from its junction with Route 3 near Rosario, Route 11 lies deep in the gorge of Bued River, the headquarters of which rise within the Baguio city limits. Noses of steep-sided ridges rise sharply from the gorge in every direction, tower to a height of 3,500 to 4,000 feet within half a mile of the highway, and then ascend to mountain crests of 6,000 feet. So sharp is the gorge of the Bued that much of Route 11 can lie in deep shadow cast by the dominating ridges, while 1,000 or 2,000 feet up the slopes the sun brightly illuminates the terrain.194

This was the hardest route to Baguio. Several others were under consideration by the division’s leadership. The second possibility:

began at Pugo, seven miles north of Rosarion along a fairly good gravel road that traverses easy terrain. From Pugo, a narrow, rocky trace known as the Tuba Trail winds its way tortuously north and northeast through sometimes forested and sometimes semibarren mountains to barrio Tuba, 2.5 miles southwest to Baguio. A fairly good gravel road led from Tuba to Route 11 at the Southern edge of Baguio. Along the Tuba Trail, the terrain would again give the defenders all the advantages.195

195 Ibid., 469.
The third scenario would:

... begin at Caba, on the coast eight miles north of Agoo. A good, one-lane gravel road ran east three miles from Caba and then connected with an abandoned railroad bed. With some breaks the railroad grade continued eastward another five miles over rough mountains to Galiano, about nine miles west of Baguio and site of a small hydroelectric plant that served the city of Baguio. At Galiano another all-weather gravel road, following the old railroad bed, ran uphill through Asin—site of another small hydroelectric plant and a hot slat bath resort—to Route 9 at the western edge of Baguio. Between the end of the gravel road from Caba and the beginning of the gravel road at Galiano this
approach runs through fairly low but rugged, broken hill country. The road from Galiano to Asin, a distance of almost four miles, is easy enough, but Asin sits in a deep bowl surrounded by partially wooded mountains that rise sharply to a height of over 2,000 feet. Just east of Asin, the road passes through two, short narrow tunnels, from which it is a steady uphill climb through fairly open country to the junction with Route 9. Asin is the key area along this approach, for further progress toward Baguio demands a breakthrough across the dominating terrain at the bowl and the two tunnels.\textsuperscript{196}

The final possibility was:

Route 9 originating at Bauang, on the coast seven miles north of Caba. From Bauang this two-lane, macadam highway runs generally southeast 20 miles—straight line distance—into Baguio. Much of the terrain along Route 9 is less forbidding than that along the other three approaches, and the highway usually runs over and along ridges rather than through gorges and valleys. Altogether the easiest approach to Baguio, Route 9 still passes many points where a determined defending force could dig in and hold back a much superior attacking group.\textsuperscript{197}

The Japanese believed that the main American effort would be along Route 11.\textsuperscript{198} The division would advance along Route 11 but also send a regiment north from Pugo (Scenario #2). One of its regiments had to remain as a division reserve. The problems for the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division on the Villa Verde Trail compelled I Corps to broaden its front. In doing so they took away much of the 33\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Division's offensive power. A regiment (130\textsuperscript{th}) had to stay back to protect supply lines, guard against Japanese

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 469–470.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 471.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 472.
infiltration, and stand ready to reinforce the regiments moving forward (123rd and 136th). Initially, the 33rd did not launch a general offensive. Reconnaissances in force, aggressive patrolling, and probing attacks were the normal mode of operations. Along Route 11 the advance was often bitterly contested though it continued to move forward. Elsewhere in the division zone was both faster and easier. Through the end of March, the division continued to move but two regiments of the 37th Infantry Division, the 129th and 148th, arrived to allow a vigorous offensive towards Baguio. Each division will be examined separately. Both would see a tough fight but it never really reached the non-stop intensity of the Villa Verde Trail and the Balete Pass.

By the end of March the 33rd seemed to be making good progress. There were obstacles and each seemed to bring a vicious fight. One such battle occurred at Hill 3000, a piece of high ground before Hill 4980, yet another piece of high ground as the 33rd moved towards Baguio. Hill 3000, during daylight hours was like most positions on Luzon, offering the Japanese “such complete observation that they had been able to pin-point both the location and number of our troops.” The remedy for this situation was, a night attack. Successful night attacks had been few and far between on Luzon. The jungle and terrain made movement, visibility, and coordination exceedingly difficult. The 2nd Battalion of the 123rd Infantry Regiment during the night of 31 March moved out and by morning, 1 April, had reached the summit of the hill. The Japanese had NO idea they were there. At first light they came out to man their positions from their caves within the hill and were killed. Further down the hill Japanese troops emerged to begin their day and prepare their breakfast and were also killed by American soldiers now occupying their positions. Not a single American soldier was killed in this engagement.

200 Ibid.
The division quickly put out some basics for a successful night attack, which included:

1. Fresh, well-trained troops should be employed.

2. The objective must be well defined and easily recognized in the dark.

3. Maneuvers are to be avoided; each column must drive through without regard to other units.202

These guidelines are excellent though the word surprise should also be included. There are several glaring problems and those problems are why night attacks were so infrequent. On Luzon, there weren’t many fresh troops. Even the 33rd Infantry Division, which had entered the fight as essentially a brand new division untested in major combat, began to feel the effects of fighting the Japanese in these mountains. Fatigue became a recurring problem, mental exhaustion even entering the reports of the division’s regiments. The 136th Infantry Regiment stated that the constant fighting followed by patrolling followed by incessant Japanese infiltration and harassing attacks were sapping the Regiment’s strength, their AAR stating:

... the endurance and fortitude exacted by these missions over mountainous terrain, while under the pressure of hunting and attacking the enemy, were enormous. All patrols faced a consistent set of difficulties. The terrain was a series of razor-back ridges with only occasional normal slopes & the canyons between were steep walled and during this time of the year dry. Water was our first priority, the men becoming quickly dehydrated in the tropical sun on the ridge tops and in the bake-oven canyons ... some men because of increased fatigue and a lowered resistance broke through their...
atabrine level and became clinical malarial cases ...
There were 29 mental exhaustion cases during this pe-
period, 13 of which returned to duty.203

Finally, there also weren't many well-defined, easily recogniz-
able objectives in the dark to allow a successful night attack. The
jungle negated that. The 33rd would face the same methodical
combat: hill-by-hill, position-by-position, as that of the other
American Infantry divisions on Luzon.

As April began, the Sixth Army G-2 offered the following esti-
mate of the situation on the 33rd front:

... along the Baguio approaches only 2 to 6 mile ad-
vances toward that sector have been registered. It is
admitted that extremely difficult terrain has played
a major part in this slow movement, but determined
enemy opposition has been an equal or even greater
contributing factor. In this same period approximately
8,000 Japs have been killed in the I Corps zone (prin-
cipally the Baguio-Balete Pass area) or an average of
2,000 killed per week. In terrain which canalizes all
movements to a very limited number of approaches
and permits little maneuver, this is indeed a heavy toll.
Despite these counted losses which are undoubtedly
greatly swelled by wounded and medical casualties
over this prolonged period, the enemy’s opposition
continues unabated.204

The 33rd would see that determined opposition as it assaulted Mt.
Bilbil, a 1,500-foot mountain and Hill “X,” a knob on the south-
eastern slope of that mountain.

Seven times a battalion of the 123rd Infantry Regiment tried to

Division.

204 Sixth Army, G-2 Estimate of the Enemy Situation, 3 and 4 April 1945.
throw the Japanese off Hill “X” and seven times they failed.\textsuperscript{205} It was defended by a single company of Japanese (one-fourth the size of an American infantry battalion at full strength, no American battalions were at full strength on Luzon in April 1945) with mortars, machine guns, and 75 mm howitzers.\textsuperscript{206} These attacks forced the 123\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Regiment off the line for a rest; troops moving forward noticing: “... the haggard faces of the 123\textsuperscript{rd} troops going to the rear told them that the enemy on Hill “X” was prepared to hold out until the last man had been killed.” \textsuperscript{207} The first attack by the 130\textsuperscript{th}, with only a single company in the attack due to the constricted terrain, was preceded by a heavy air and artillery bombardment. Initial gains were for naught as the Japanese quickly counterattacked and drove the company from the hill. The Japanese still occupied Mt. Bilbil and could pour fire down upon Hill “X.” The following day, 12 April, after a night of constant artillery fire against the Japanese positions another infantry company “began its laborious climb up the steep, slippery mountain trail and advanced to within 400 yards of the crest of Hill “X” before being stopped.” \textsuperscript{208} The company dug in, drove off repeated Japanese attacks, both in light and darkness, and the following dawn attacked. Six machine gun nests were destroyed and 50 Japanese soldiers killed.\textsuperscript{209} Another piece of the puzzle eliminated. Asin and two tunnels that bear its name were the next objective.

Before attacking the ridge housing the two tunnels, the frustration so prevalent in the AARs of other Luzon units began to appear in the 33\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Division’s own history. They noted before launching this attack that:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{205} The 33d Infantry Division Historical Committee, \textit{The Golden Cross}, 180.
\item \textsuperscript{206} 130\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, \textit{History, Luzon Campaign, 10 February–30 June 1945}, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{207} The 33d Infantry Division Historical Committee, \textit{The Golden Cross}, 181.
\item \textsuperscript{208} 130\textsuperscript{th} infantry Regiment, \textit{History, Luzon Campaign, 10 February–30 June 1945}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Everything favored him: terrain, lines of supply, and location of supporting weapons. The Asin Valley here was more a gorge than a valley. Nowhere was it more than a hundred yards wide. The large ridge to the east, so ferociously defended by the Nips, could not be negotiated unless men pulled themselves up its sides, using small limbs and bushes as handholds. The vegetation on the hillside was exceedingly thick and visibility was limited to a maximum of six or seven yards.\(^{210}\)

Initially the 130\(^{th}\) tried to gain the high ground west of the tunnels. The Japanese could see the attack as it assembled and advanced. An infantry company advanced to within a mere 5 yards of the top of the ridge when a wall of fire stopped them. An estimated 10 machine guns and “Japanese soldiers swarming out of their holes like bees” stopped this attack, which could gain no momentum because of the struggles just negotiating the slopes.”\(^{211}\) Further attacks would be fruitless. For the next six days, wave after wave of aircraft and thousands of rounds of artillery ammunition poured onto Japanese positions west of the tunnels.

The division artillery was very busy during this campaign. They didn’t seem to have most of the ammunition restrictions of other divisions in theater and seemingly supported the World War WWII military axiom that never let an infantryman do what an artillery shell could do far easier. In two months of heavy action division artillery fired 130,341 rounds of ammunition.\(^{212}\) Corps artillery poured in an additional 19,595 rounds in this sector.\(^{213}\) Given the more open ground before the 33\(^{rd}\), at least

\(^{210}\) The 33d Infantry Division Historical Committee, *The Golden Cross*, 190.
\(^{213}\) Ibid.
in comparison to what confronted the 6th, 25th, and 32nd Infantry Divisions, artillery was far more effective on the Baguio front. Enemy artillery, spider holes, bunkers, what few vehicles they possessed, all fell victims to the overwhelming volume of fire. General Clarkson, the division commander, stated at the end of the campaign “50% or better of 12,196 Japanese dead in this campaign was accounted for by the Artillery.”214 This was a hard fight but different than the Balete Pass or Villa Verde Trail. Individual fights were nasty and time consuming but the fighting was not the protracted affair witnessed on other fronts. Did the artillery have the desired effect on the assault against the tunnels?

When the attacks resumed they were again stopped. The Japanese would wait out the bombardment in their deep caves, allow American troops within throwing distance of their positions, and then open fire. This approach to the tunnels would not work. A new attack, dubbed “The Blackhawk Merry-Go-Round” would break the stalemate. A battalion would be trucked from Asin to Aringay, high ground north of the tunnels. It worked to perfection. The battalion was on dominating high ground, observing Japanese movements and positions. The tables had turned and the exaltation obvious in the division assessment of their action:

Jessup’s battalion completed its truck trip without incident, immediately taking up positions on the high ground south of the highway. Dawn came and eager eyes peered through the mist in search of the objective. But—the objective was below them a thousand yards away! Below! That word danced through the 1st Battalion minds even as unit commanders began to mass their supporting weapons. It tasted good in their throats. For the first time in the 130th’s combat history, Blackhawks were looking down a few hundred Japanese throats.215

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214 Ibid., 23.
The attack would have a full complement of supporting weapons available. They would include self-propelled howitzers, 50 caliber machine guns, and 40 mm anti-aircraft guns; all of which could for the first time directly observe what they were targeting and at an effective range.\textsuperscript{216} The attack worked and pushed the Japanese off the ridge. They would launch repeated counter-attacks but were driven back. The tunnels and soon after Baguio fell. Japanese forces on this part of the I Corps front were breaking, a pursuit actually seemed possible. The 25\textsuperscript{th} and 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Divisions were never presented such an opportunity. Neither would the 33\textsuperscript{rd}. Just when it appeared a dash into the Cagayan Valley was coming they were ordered to halt by Corps headquarters, at the insistence of Sixth Army.\textsuperscript{217}

Little forward movement by the 33\textsuperscript{rd} happened after 5 May. Postwar Japanese sources made it clear that their forces north of Baguio would have been easily eliminated if a vigorous pursuit occurred.\textsuperscript{218} Instead the Japanese had time to marshal their forces, consolidate supplies, and reinforce the units still guarding the Cagayan Valley. The division wanted to keep going and General Innis Swift, the I Corps commander, initially did nothing to stop them. General Krueger had other ideas, as expressed by the Army’s official historian after the war:

\begin{quote}
The 33\textsuperscript{rd} Division had a vast area to secure, it still had some mopping up to complete in its zone, some of its units badly needed rest and time for rebuilding, it had an enormous reconnaissance responsibility, and the possibility existed that the division might become involved in a major fight for which it had insufficient strength. Sixth Army planned to employ the 33\textsuperscript{rd} Division in the invasion of Japan and therefore wanted to withdraw the unit from active combat as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{216} 130\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, \textit{History, Luzon Campaign, 10 February–30 June 1945}, 14.

\textsuperscript{217} The 33d Infantry Division Historical Committee, \textit{The Golden Cross}, 205.

\textsuperscript{218} Robert Ross Smith, \textit{Triumph In The Philippines}, 489.

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
All of the above-mentioned reasons are legitimate reasons but at the same time callous and disheartening. What of the other divisions in I Corps? Had not the 25th and 32nd Infantry Divisions badly needed rest, weren't they involved in major fights for which they had insufficient strength? May would be a time of rest for the 33rd, for the 25th and 32nd it was a time of continuous fighting without a chance for a major breakthrough, as existed on the Baguio front. The fact that the 33rd was earmarked for the coming invasion of Japan is everything. They were not being held up because as the Division itself stated “enemy resistance in the mountainous areas around Manila had remained stout in the face of heavy Army pressure. General Krueger desired to crush this opposition before committing his forces too deeply in northern Luzon. A secure Manila was vital to high-level planners.”

Manila was already secure, as were its port facilities and vital staging areas. MacArthur once again enters the picture. Always looking forward I wonder if he was even aware what was still happening on Luzon. He was preparing to lead an invasion of Japan, an operation in size and scope that may have even exceeded D-Day, Operation Overlord, the previous year. The 33rd was needed for that battle so they were pulled off the line. The other divisions fighting on Luzon were not. They continued their fight against an enemy who could do little else but wait for them to attack and exact a terrible price when they did.

The 33rd was not alone in its fight for Baguio. While they fought along Route 11 through hills and tunnels, the 37th Infantry Division, minus the 145th Infantry Regiment (which was fighting for the useless Wawa Dam), would drive up Route 9. They were far from full strength after participating in the desperate battle for Manila in February. March was a time to rest while garrisoning the city, but April would have them back in the fight as they marched along with the 33rd towards Baguio.

As the 37th moved north, they would have armor support (most

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220 The 33d Infantry Division Historical Committee, The Golden Cross, 205.
of the ground permitted at least the use of a four tank platoon), plentiful air support, and at times sporadic artillery support. Ammunition limitations affected the 37th as it did most American units in the SWPA. Initially the division’s allotment was:

1200 rounds, per day, of 105 mm ammunition

180 rounds, per day, of 155 mm ammunition

Approximately 1,000 rounds per day of all types of mortar ammunition (81 mm, smoke, white phosphorous) 221

The Division would emphasize their armored firepower as a way to offset the limited artillery and mortar ammunition then available. The 37th Infantry Division’s first attack was set for 11 April.

An airstrike and brief artillery bombardment preceded the attack. A platoon of Sherman tanks accompanied the infantry of the 129th and 148th Infantry Regiments. Of course there was fierce Japanese resistance, there always was. But, both regiments made gains of 600 to 1,000 yards, systematically eliminating enemy positions. 222 12 and 13 April saw more of the same as attacks received support from not only tanks but also tank destroyers and self-propelled howitzers. 223 Gains of over 1,000 yards were accomplished each day. They continued to move forward before reaching the main impediment to their part of the drive to Baguio, the Irisan River.

A bridge over the Irisan River and the ridges en-route to it would encompass the biggest battle of this part of the Luzon campaign for the 37th:

221 37th Infantry Division, After Action Reports, M-1 Operation Luzon Campaign, 16 November 1944–24 February 1945, 129.

222 Ibid., 130.

223 A tank destroyer looked exactly like a standard tank. The main differences were the higher velocity main gun the destroyer possessed and the lighter armor and higher speed. Survivability was gained through speed, evasiveness, and the ability to engage at a greater range than the standard
The destroyed bridge itself was in a deep ravine surrounded by eight distinct ridges, all well prepared for defense, mutually supporting and each one capable of independent defense. The terrain was heavily wooded and a few foot trails leading to the Japanese positions were narrow, steep, and covered by fire. For 200 yards on either side of the bridge the road was covered by machine gun and rifle fire, had been zeroed in with 90 mm mortars and was exposed to cleverly concealed flat trajectory artillery which was run out of caves when required. It was obvious that neither armor nor foot troops could live in this no man's land without first neutralizing the eight ridges.²²⁴

The attacks began on 17 April. The tone of the fight was immediately set when a single Japanese 47 mm antitank gun, well placed along a curve leading to the bridge, held up an entire attack. The single gun stopped four tanks, two self-propelled howitzers, four tank destroyers, engineer bulldozers, and two companies of infantry. The ground was so steep that a tank fell over the side of the road into a gorge 50 feet below. While the U.S. column was trying to extricate itself, two Japanese tanks with mines attached surged forward, disabling one American tank before both were destroyed.²²⁵

²²⁴ Ibid., 139.
²²⁵ Ibid., 139–141.
For five days the fight would continue for the lettered ridges. Automatic weapons fire would halt an attack but the 37th would drive forward. 46 enemy soldiers were initially killed on Ridge “A,” another 30 in a futile banzai attack the same night. Air strikes and artillery fire, both blanketed Japanese positions but when the attack came the Japanese would emerge from their caves and fight on. A ridge would fall and then U.S. heavy weapons would support attacks on subsequent ridges. By 21 April the 37th was at the river. The bridge would have to be replaced but as with the 33rd Infantry Division when they reached Baguio the 37th was ordered to halt. The month of heavy fighting had been costly, 131 killed and 636 wounded. The major actions of the war in northern Luzon were over.

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226 Ibid., 141.
227 Ibid., 160.
Native carriers bring infantry vital supplies on an exposed hill.

Tired infantry of the 127th Infantry Regiment look over one of the many caves they eliminated during the second phase of the Luzon operation.
Infantry crawling up one of the hills along the Villa Verde, with more hills in the background.

The endless mountains of northern Luzon.
Route 5 winds its way north towards the Balete Pass. The advantage to the Japanese in the flanking mountains is obvious.

Riflemen of the 25th Infantry Division engage the Japanese in the thick jungle of Balete Ridge.
Typical sloped, rugged terrain in the Balete Pass Area.

More impossible terrain in the Balete Pass Area.
“Mopping Up” on Balete Ridge.

33rd Infantry Division riflemen take a knee at the Bubbang River. Notice the difference in terrain between here and the Villa Verde Trail and Balete Pass fronts. There is actually open ground, which allowed for, at times, rapid advances.
The 25th Infantry Division Memorial at the Balete Pass.
Route 9 leading through the gorge to the Irisan River. Notice again the high ground and winding turns any advance would have to negotiate. Its entire length was open to ambush.
When the veterans of the 163rd Infantry Regiment debate as to which of the three great Japanese battles was the hardest, they come to this conclusion. Sananda was horrible because of its swamps and malaria. Biak was deadly because of the jagged jungled coral ridges and its invisible death. But the Zamboanga Battle will be best be remembered for the greatest concentration of artillery that the Regiment has ever fought its way through.

163rd Infantry Regiment,
_Historical Report: V-4 Operation_, 3

Sixth Army received replacements during the campaign though never enough to make good their losses. They never received reinforcements. Were there any to be had in the SWPA? There were. Previously, I briefly alluded to the U.S. Eighth Army. They too embarked on a strategically useless campaign against the islands of the southern Philippines at the same time Sixth Army toiled on Luzon. It was an army of five divisions (24th, 31st, 40th, and 41st Infantry Divisions, the Americal Division) and several independent combat teams under the command of “MacArthur’s Fireman” General Robert Eichelberger. Over 100,000 men filled the ranks of Eighth Army. They would fight as Sixth Army fought in mountains and jungles against an enemy far weaker than Yamashita’s main Japanese army on Luzon. While the battle on Luzon after the fall of Manila made little sense, it’s easy
to see how much easier those battles would have been if the 6th Infantry Division had the support of the 40th Infantry Division as it moved against the dams, if the 41st were there to assist the 32nd on the Villa Verde Trail, or the 31st the 25th Infantry Division advance towards Balete Pass. The ground in these operations was not conducive to large-scale attacks made by multiple divisions on extended fronts. However, each of the major units of Eichelberger’s Eighth Army could have rotated with the divisions of Sixth Army. No longer would the 32nd have had to continue fighting past exhaustion. They could pull back, get an extended period of rest and rehabilitation, time to integrate replacements into their rifle companies, and then support the unit that replaced them. All the while constant pressure would remain on the Japanese. Attacks could be exploited. Enough artillery ammunition would be available. Instead, Eighth Army invaded islands rendered militarily meaningless the moment the landings on Leyte in October 1944 were successful.
The invasions to be discussed accomplished one purpose: occupying ground. As Robert Ross Smith stated: “After bases were established on the Palawan and Zamboanga Peninsulas, the remaining islands ... had no strategic performance in the campaign for the recapture of the Philippines and the East Indies ... These subsequent offensives would be directed toward the seizure of Philippine real estate.”

A look at the preceding page’s map demonstrates the absurdity of what was to take place. MacArthur had when landing on Leyte and Luzon accomplished what he did previously in New Guinea and Nimitz executed in the central Pacific, “island hopping.” With Leyte secure all Japanese forces south of the island were cut off from the main army on Luzon. They could not menace American operations further north. They had no airpower or naval forces left. Mindanao, the southernmost of the Philippine Islands and home to the second largest Japanese garrison in the vast archipelago, could be left to deteriorate on its own. When Luzon was invaded, the Visayan Islands of Panay, Negros, and Cebu became equally insignificant. They were as the Japanese 18th Army was on New Guinea after MacArthur landed at Hollandia, cut off. Yet, these useless invasions would begin with landings on Palawan by the 186th Regimental Combat Team of the 41st Infantry Division.

The 41st Infantry Division, along with the 32nd Infantry Division, was among the first arrivals to MacArthur’s new command in 1942. The division first arrived in Australia in April 1942 and trained there until the end of the year. In January 1943, they deployed to the Buna/Sananada front and fought there until February. They would fight sporadic actions in New Guinea until returning to Australia in July. They continued training until landing at Hollandia in April 1944. An RCT of the division would invade and secure the island of Wakde in May before the rest of the division invaded Biak at the end of the month. Japanese positions in the heights above the airfields and the natural coral throughout the island initially rendered most U.S. weapons ineffective.

The airdromes remained inoperable for several weeks, resulting in the relief of the division commander, General Horace Fuller. MacArthur’s impatience struck once again. His replacement, General Jens Doe, would command the division until the end of the war. The 41st would remain on New Guinea until February 1945. At the end of the month, as part of Eighth Army, they landed on Palawan.

Palawan gave a false impression to all involved that the southern Philippines might be an easy affair. While those that believed so were wrong, Palawan was as quick and painless as any operation in the PTO. Palawan had a small Japanese garrison of 1,750, only a few hundred of which were actual combat troops.\footnote{Ibid., 589.} The Japanese could do little to even defend the island’s major objectives, including its two airstrips. They dug in where they could. The landings began on 28 February and by 10 March the battle was over. 890 Japanese soldiers died;\footnote{Ibid., 591.} whereas U.S. losses were 10 killed and 45 wounded.\footnote{163rd Infantry Regiment, \textit{Historical Report: V-4 Operation}, 1. 1945. Headquarters: 163rd Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division.} The remaining Japanese on the island hid in the mountains until the end of the war. Zamboanga was next and presented a far tougher challenge than Palawan.

The 41st Infantry Division’s other two regiments, the 162nd and 163rd, attacked Zamboanga, a peninsula on the western edge of the island of Mindanao. They were veterans of a long war yet many would call it their hardest fight.\footnote{163rd Infantry Regiment, \textit{Historical Report: V-4 Operation}, 1. 1945. Headquarters: 163rd Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division.} The Japanese defending Zamboanga were far more vigilant than those of Palawan, possessing higher numbers, better morale, and more plentiful weapons. The 163rd Infantry Regiment assessed the enemy at: “An estimated 8,000 troops of mixed Army and Navy personnel are located in the Zamboanga objective area. There is no evidence to indicate a shortage of arms, ammunition,
or rations. Morale and combat efficiency of the major units is presumed to be high.”

The defenses of the island took advantage of its natural terrain and Japanese ingenuity.

The terrain was typical of the PTO: mountains, jungle, and natural coral were everywhere. It was “rough and overgrown, giving way on the north to the rain forests of the partially unexplored mountain range forming the backbone of the Zamboanga Peninsula. Only poor trails existed in most of the area held by the Japanese.”

232 Ibid.

... artillery in strongly built earth and log bunkers and in caves, and notably vicious little 20mm dual purpose AckAck cannon. The black earth hills were abrupt and slippery and difficult even afoot. No longer did we have the abundant cover and low visibility of the New Guinea jungles. At long-range snipers could dominate the gaps and the ridge crests. The Regiment was committed to open fighting in wide aisléd coconut plantations, and among scattered cultivated fields.\textsuperscript{234}

Japanese positions were enhanced with booby traps, both large and small. The 163\textsuperscript{rd} encountered on 12 March Blowout Hill. The regiment notes:

Blowout Hill, on 12 March, was a memorable example of mass booby trapping by the Nipponese. Here the Japanese exploded an entire hill under the feet of our advance. But casualties were unexpectedly light. The First and Second Battalions suffered only five killed in action and forty wounded; and E Company was left with a bad case of mass shell shock. The Battalions were indeed lucky that the Japanese detonators were touched off a few instants too soon.\textsuperscript{235}

They were lucky. This campaign, as with others at this point in the war, was never in doubt. The United States would win, the only question was, at what cost? The fighting was typical of the Pacific ground war, small-unit actions for individual positions. 220 American soldiers died and another 665 were wounded for land that made ABSOLUTELY NO difference in the course of the war. Japanese losses included 1,100 prisoners of war (an unusually high number for the typically fight to the death Japanese) and 6,400 killed.\textsuperscript{236} As on Palawan, the remnants of the Japanese

\textsuperscript{234} 163\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Regiment, \textit{Historical Report}, 1.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{236} Both American and Japanese losses quoted in Robert Ross Smith’s, \textit{Triumph In The Philippines}, 597.
garrison took to the hills to wait out the final months of the war. U.S. and Japanese casualties were not all those lost in this campaign. The people of Zamboanga also suffered at the hands of the Japanese.

The 163rd Infantry Regiment’s official history of the campaign tells the story of living under Japanese occupation:

After the failure of Japanese mines on Blowout Hill, began the phase of hill fighting. No one in the regiment will ever forget the outpouring of Filipino refugees who had been trapped between our shellfire and the desperate Japanese. Some had been held as hostages. They told tales of murder and rape and mutilation by the Japanese. Even children displayed filled bolo scars. The men of the 163rd saw, concretely, as they could not in the New Guinea wilderness, all that they were fighting for.237

This horrifying episode certainly justifies this particular operation, as the regimental history attests. However, this was not known by the command of the 41st Infantry Division until those poor souls were upon them. MacArthur’s memoirs make no mention of this nor do those of his Intelligence or Operations chiefs. Their presence was not part of the planning process and no strategic use was made of Zamboanga. It was an unnecessary operation that produced an unexpected positive result.

What else could the 41st Infantry Division have occupied itself with at this time? Having last fought at Biak 8 months earlier they were fresh and at full strength. In 1943, they arrived at the end of the Buna battle and relieved the 32nd Infantry Division, ending the campaign in a few months. The 32nd, weak as it was, needed the help once again of the 41st. How different would the Villa Verde Trail struggle have looked if the 41st were there? Instead they invaded two completely useless islands.

237 163rd Infantry Regiment, Historical Report, 3.
From the horrors of Zamboanga, the Eighth Army moved north to the next target, the island of Panay. The 40th Infantry Division's 185th RCT and a battalion of the 160th Infantry Regiment were tasked with the elimination of Panay's enemy garrison of 2,750, of which approximately 1,500 were combat troops. The 40th Infantry Division began the war in September 1942, when they arrived in Hawaii. The division trained there until the end of 1943, when they left for Guadalcanal. From Guadalcanal it was to the island of New Britain, arriving in April 1944, and remaining there until the end of November. They then trained for the Luzon invasion, landing in Lingayen Gulf as part of XIV Corps on 9 January 9, 1945. They would fight many bitter battles on Luzon until March. The 40th was taken from XIV Corps and Sixth Army to become part of Eighth Army when it landed on Panay on 18 March 18, 1945.

Panay was hopeless and the Japanese commander knew it. He placed most of his men in the heights above Ilolio, home to Panay’s major harbor and airfields. A fighting withdrawal cost him 1,000 men, the rest surrendered at the end of the war. U.S forces, in a show of common sense far too uncommon in MacArthur’s command, did not pursue them or engage in a bitter fight in the mountains. Panay became the home of the 40th Infantry Division as it prepared to invade Japan. It cost the division 20 dead and 50 wounded.239

Immediately to the east of Panay is the island of Negros. As the ease of Palawan was followed by the struggles of Zamboanga, the ease of Panay would be followed by a protracted struggle for Negros. Two regiments of the 40th Infantry Division, the 160th and 185th, along with the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team, invaded Negros on 29 March, 1945. The fight didn’t end until 2 June.

The Japanese force on Negros had 13,500 men but lacked basic weapons and ammunition and had but a 2-month food supply.240 It was the perfect position to bypass. Of course, nothing in the Philippines was bypassed. Japanese forces were confined to the northern part of the island; Filipino guerillas controlled the rest. Northern Negros did have several excellent airfields, alcohol distilling plants, and the world’s largest hardwood sawmill but all were destroyed by U.S. air attacks.241 The Japanese could do no damage to U.S. operations on Luzon and there were no plans to refurbish the vital military facilities on Negros to even support a possible invasion of Japan.

In these operations in the southern Philippines, Filipino guerillas played a role. At no time did they directly confront the Japanese. Many weren’t even armed. Yet, they still played a valuable role.

239 Ibid., 602–604.
240 Ibid., 605.
Lt. Colonel Charles Etzler, commander of the 185th RCT’s 3rd Battalion, noted:

They (the guerillas) limited the extent of the exploitation of the resources on the island to the general line of the Bago River. They furnished information of the enemy’s activities and installations before the landing and also acted as guides and scouts in approaching the organized positions. I don’t want to give the impression that the Guerillas were sufficiently strong in men, equipment, or supplies to fight a pitched battle with the Nips, but they did prevent the enemy from being able to exploit the resources of the whole island, and thereby dealt the Jap a hard blow where he was weakest, in the “breadbasket.”

The role of the guerilla should be neither overblown nor should it be overlooked. Their actions kept Japanese forces confined to specific areas and provided valuable intelligence, contributing to the American victories in this campaign.

The fighting on Negros was hard. The 185th Infantry Regiment told the tale of a single, remarkable Japanese position holding up the advance of an entire battalion for 12 days:

An excellent example of how the Japs made the terrain work for them was the location of a tank trap in the vicinity of Lantawan. This position held 1st Battalion of 185th Infantry for 12 days. The tank trap was located in a saddle on a knife ridge. The slopes on the ridge on both sides were literally perpendicular. This ridge was the only continuous ridge leading to the Japs position within either a mile in either direction and were heavily defended.


243 Ibid.
As the advance continued strong Japanese defensive positions were everywhere. The 160th Infantry Regiment also encountered a tank trap though this one stymied the advance for only two days. They noted:

From numerous well-constructed bunkers, pillboxes, and trenches came fire of calibers from small arms to three-inch guns. A particularly strongly defended position was a tank trap encountered 4,000 yards west of San Juan. The trap, dug to a depth of 18 feet at a point where the road narrowed to a bare ten feet by sheer cliffs on either side, was covered by enemy fire. Self-propelled weapons could not be brought forward to support the infantry until the high ground beyond was secured to permit bulldozers to fill the trap. Repeated attacks were launched against the hostile positions. Each time the attackers were subjected to heavy mortar concentrations and artillery fire. After two days of bitter fighting, the area was finally cleared, bulldozers had cleared the road, and tanks rumbled forward.244

Such was Negros for the 160th and 185th RCTs. Position by position they eliminated the Japanese in a brand of war they’d grown accustomed to. The 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, the third regiment of the American force on Negros, was in unfamiliar territory when they entered the fray.

The 503rd was a standard American World War WWII airborne unit, lightly armed and designed for quick, decisive action. Due to troop shortages throughout the SWPA, the 503rd was pressed into service despite being at little more than half strength. The regiment’s Periodic Reports between 11 and 16 May note:

... Nothing like it had we seen before or would see during the remainder of the war. We were a lightly armed airborne unit and had to learn to fight with

244 40th Infantry Division, *The Years of World War II*, 131.
heavy support, that is, tanks, self-propelled guns, heavy mortars, and heavier artillery. We had to learn at the expense of good men’s lives ... we were now patrolling in the dense forest. With the companies at full strength the patrols would not have taxed us. But we were at half strength and less. A few patrols took all the men. A combat patrol with an entire company involved might be too small.245

Frustration and insufficient strength combined with Japanese tenacity and defensive preparations took their toll. American losses were often equal if not exceeding those of the enemy, an unfamiliar event in the Pacific.246 The 503rd learned, saved lives, and realized: “The only sane method of combatting such positions was to blast them out with artillery and mortars.”247 Japanese losses were 7,100 dead with again the remnants of the garrison scurrying to the hills while U.S. losses were 370 dead and 1,025 wounded.248 Before the end of the Negros operation its eastern neighbor, the island of Cebu, was invaded by the Americal Division.

The Americal Division was the first army unit to engage the Japanese in any type of offensive action. They landed on Guadalcanal in October 1942 to reinforce the 1st Marine Division. The division would fight on Guadalcanal until relieved in February 1943. From there they moved to the Fiji Islands, resting and training until December. December saw landings on Bougainville as relief for the 3rd Marine Division until March 1944, when they launched a major attack. Limited patrolling and training continued until the end of the year. In January 1945, the division moved to Leyte to clean out remaining Japanese resistance. They would do the same on several other small islands

246 Ibid.
247 Ibid.
before passing to the control of Eighth Army and landing on Cebu on 26 March, 1945.

It is important to note that each of these operations occurred simultaneously. Each invasion was an island unto itself for the American unit involved. They were on their own. On Palawan and Panay it wasn’t a problem. Zamboanga and Negros involved protracted fighting with little chance of reinforcement, other than an understrength parachute infantry regiment. Cebu was more of the same. The Eighth Army was in the same situation as Sixth Army.

The Americal was a standard American infantry division of three infantry regiments: the 132\textsuperscript{nd}, 164\textsuperscript{th}, and 182\textsuperscript{nd}, none of which were at full strength. Only the 132\textsuperscript{nd} and 182\textsuperscript{nd} were immediately available, the 164\textsuperscript{th} was still on Leyte, six months after that invasion began, “mopping up.”

Japanese strength on Cebu appeared formidable. There were 14,500 men, though only 2,500 were believed to be combat troops and included in that number were 1,700 civilian laborers.\textsuperscript{249} The division was also told to expect the help of up to 8,500 guerillas.\textsuperscript{250} All seemed ready for an easy operation.

From the onset this operation was anything but easy and developed into the “most difficult and brutal fighting the Americal Division had to date.”\textsuperscript{251} Of the 8,500 guerillas, only 2,700 were even armed, they incorrectly estimated Japanese strength on the island, and failed to warn the division of a vast minefield on the landing beaches. Nevertheless, within a few days most of the island’s major objectives were secure and the Japanese retreated into strongholds in the mountains overlooking Cebu City. They should have been left there as the 40\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division left those

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[249]{Ibid., 608.}
\footnotetext[250]{Ibid., 609.}
\footnotetext[251]{Americal Infantry Division, After Action Report: V-2 Operation, 2. 1945. Headquarters: Americal Infantry Division.}
\end{footnotes}
Japanese taking to the hills on Panay. They were not.

General William Arnold, the Americal Division commander, had only two understrength regiments (six battalions) to attack an enemy line he had little idea of as far as exact location and strength. He noted:

... situation developed to the point that approximately two thirds of the Jap positions in the vicinity of Cebu City have been contacted. The Jap left flank has not been determined. Positions now facing us are elaborately prepared for defense, including numerous tunnels with interconnecting tunnels leading into heavily constructed pillboxes. These positions are in every case on hills and are in depth. All avenues of approach are mined and barbed wire has been encountered. Many pillboxes are so strongly constructed that they withstand hits from 105SP. The whole Jap position is estimated to cover a distance of 20,000 yards around Cebu City and is manned by approximately 7,500 troops. There is no indication that the enemy is short of ammunition and he is well equipped with light and heavy machine guns. Reconnaissance in force up Highway 1 NE of Cebu City develops numerous Japs in positions armed with small arms, machine guns, heavy mortars, 75 mm artillery, and a possible heavier gun. The whole area is extensively mined. Enemy estimated in the area 1,000 to 1,050. Information believed to be reliable. Now have four battalions, seriously engaged, and additional one is covering right flank. The remaining battalion will be required to determine and attack the left of the Jap position. It is my considered opinion that operations will be slow and tedious and that expenditure of artillery ammunition will be high. Casualties are increasing and will continue to do so.\textsuperscript{252}

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid., 7.
Due to his limited troop strength, perhaps 2,000 actual infantrymen, General Arnold had little choice but to launch a frontal attack against an enemy in dominating high ground. Firepower and experience would carry an already exhausted division to victory.

Babag Mountain is synonymous of the battles that occurred on Cebu. The fight for the mountain was ferocious, as told by the 132\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Regiment:

For three weeks, field artillery and antiaircraft artillery, naval guns, and planes from the 13\textsuperscript{th} Air Force kept up an incessant pounding of the Japanese strongholds in their mountain caves. The infantry advance was slow and costly. Advances were usually measured in yards. Each hill and mountain from Babag Mountain to Horseshoe Ridge was a new Japanese fort. The enemy pillboxes studded the mountainsides. They were strongholds well protected by coral eight feet thick. These Japanese fortifications commanded excellent fields of fire and were mutually supporting of each other. The enemy’s position delivered a murderous volume of cross fire on the attacking Americans. In these Japanese strongholds, the soldiers fought “bitter and bloody,” perhaps more bitterly than any previous fighting in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{253}

As the battle came to an end, General Eichelberger commented on the bitter struggle: “Considering the forces involved and their relative strengths, the Babag Mountain position including Hills 25, 26, and 27 were the toughest to reduce, ever.”\textsuperscript{254} The cost was high. Japanese losses were approximately 5,500 but the Americal was devastated by the operation. In eight weeks it suffered 410 dead, 1,700 wounded, and the unbelievable total

\textsuperscript{253} Robert C. Muehrcke, Orchids In The Mud: Personal Accounts By Veterans Of The 132\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Regiment, 363. 1985. Chicago: J.S. Printing.

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 364.
of 8,000 non-battle casualties. Two-thirds of the division was some type of casualty. The non-battle casualties exceed even those of the 32nd Infantry Division but the circumstances of both divisions during this period of time are strikingly similar. Both fought on Leyte and were pressed into another operation understrength and with little to no rest. Even the most experienced reach a breaking point. The Americal was not fit to reinforce the Sixth Army as the other divisions, with the exception of the 40th Infantry Division which itself fought on Luzon since the beginning, could. With the non-battle casualties in the Americal it went beyond physical exhaustion. They had fought in the Pacific since October 1942 and there was a perceived reluctance to engage the Japanese, possibly playing it safe because the end of the war seemed in sight. The division itself noted:

1. Often the lack of aggressiveness was evident. Entire platoons would consider themselves pinned down when receiving fire from only three to four riflemen.

2. Failure to use maneuver combined with firepower in small units, i.e. that is, squads, platoons, and companies in many cases, caused unnecessary casualties and consumed much valuable time.

3. Some units showed unwillingness to advance as long as enemy fire was being received. Rather, these units stopped completely and engaged the enemy in long, drawn out firefights, where a quick advance by fire and movement would have succeeded and casualties among our own troops would have been lighter.

4. There were many cases where the effect of artillery, mortar, and the base of fire was lost because the infantry did not follow it up immediately.


The Japanese echoed the above-mentioned observations, noting “the Americal Division had been inordinately slow.”

Cebu was as bitter a fight as the Villa Verde Trail, Wawa Dam, or Balete Pass.

All the operations to this point were the precursor to Mindanao, an island with the second largest Japanese force in the Philippines, approximately 43,000 men. As with the other Japanese garrisons in the southern Philippines, not all the soldiers were combat troops and their supply situation was far from ideal. Despite Japanese numbers Mindanao was no different than Cebu, Negros, etc. It had no strategic value. As the southernmost of the major islands of the Philippines it made the least sense of any of the campaigns of the Eighth Army.

General Yamashita saw the role of the Mindanao garrison as the same as his own force on Luzon, delay. They were to “direct their effort to pinning down as many American units as possible in order to delay the progress of the war.”

Two Infantry divisions, the 24th and 31st, invaded Mindanao in April 1945 and were still “mopping up” when the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August.

The 24th Infantry Division was in Hawaii when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. They remained in Hawaii, training and garrisoning Oahu until September 1943, when they reached Australia. They would train in Australia until the end of the year and would continue to do so on Goodenough Island until landing at Hollandia in April 1944. A regiment of the division would fight on Biak when the 41st ID stalled there. They would invade Leyte, as part of the Sixth Army, engaging in several protracted battles. Parts of the division would engage in several minor operations after Leyte while its 34th Infantry Regiment fought on Luzon and Corregidor. The entire division then passed to control

258 Ibid., 621–622.
259 Ibid., 622.
of the Eighth Army and landed on Mindanao on April 17, 1945.

The 31st Infantry Division was created before the war as an amalgamation of various National Guard units. They trained until landing in New Guinea in April 1944. They were, along with the 32nd Infantry Division, the main American force in the Driniumor River campaign. The 31st invaded lightly defended Morotai in September and performed various other operations, none of which involved major combat, until landing on Mindanao as part of Eighth Army on 22 April, 1945.

The U.S. force conducted a brilliant, though costly campaign on Mindanao. Davao, the capital city, was the obvious target and the Japanese planned as such. Expecting a landing followed by a frontal attack against the city, they were shocked when an
overland march took the city from the rear. General Woodruff, the division commander, describes the maneuver:

... the 24th Division cut Mindanao in two in one of the most audacious and rapid infantry maneuvers of the Pacific War. I am very proud of my men and officers, I think the division has accomplished a feat which, I frankly confess, I thought in the beginning to be very nearly impossible. The men are tired but they are ready for whatever may lie ahead of them.260

Of course the campaign didn’t end there. The hardest fighting was yet to come and American forces were again reminded of the brutality of their enemy. The division’s official history recalled:

Not many days after its capture, thousands of Filipinos struggled into Davao, a sick, famished, terrified horde. Madame Baldamera Saxon, the Director of Davo’s Mission Hospital, testified that some 25,000 Filipinos had died through starvation, disease, and murder during Japanese rule. During later stages of the campaign, the Jap military embarked on an orgy of rape and murder which virtually exterminated the inhabitants of five outlying communities.261

Saving the people of the Philippines from the above was entirely justifiable. However, there is scant evidence it played any role in MacArthur’s decision-making process.

Mindanao developed into a position by position brawl. A battalion of the 124th Infantry Regiment, 31st Infantry Division, spent seven days, thousands of bombs and shells, 62 dead and 120 wounded securing an area only 1,000 yards square.262 The

261 Ibid., 30.
21st Infantry Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division killed 2,133 enemy soldiers, suffering 900 casualties of their own. The 34th Infantry Regiment would spend two weeks fighting for a single position, Pushback Hill, and while they killed 2,405 of the enemy they sustained 141 dead, 675 wounded, and 1,000 non-battle casualties, three-quarters of the manpower of the entire regiment. The campaign in the southern Philippines was over. It should have never started.

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<th>United States</th>
<th>Killed in Action</th>
<th>Wounded in Action</th>
<th>Killed in Action</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cebu</strong></td>
<td>410</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindanao</strong></td>
<td>820</td>
<td>2,880</td>
<td>14,810</td>
<td></td>
<td>22,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 1,850 U.S. soldiers died on these militarily useless islands and 6,325 were wounded. The focus of this work is the senseless fighting on Luzon, particularly after the fall of Manila.


This brief overview of further senseless fighting in the strategically insignificant southern Philippines reveals this as a theater wide dilemma, for the American soldier. Further, the Eighth Army could have reinforced the weakened units of Sixth Army. While the Americal Division may have reached the same point as the 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division, worn out after three and one-half years of combat, and the 24\textsuperscript{th} and 40\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Divisions were not at full strength, the Eighth Army was in better condition than Sixth Army. Most of these Japanese garrisons were weak. The only way to make them relevant was to engage them, which is exactly what Eighth Army did, at MacArthur’s orders.
Life magazine told its readers that the Battle of the Huertgen Forest was taking its place in American military history besides such classic struggles as the Wilderness and Argonne Forest. The comparison was apt, and for deeper reasons than those of a setting of dense, blackened woods where the attacker could never exploit any advantage in firepower, and the defender could nestle his guns and traps in a thousand places of concealment to demand an almost intolerable toll of attrition for every foot of ground.

Russell F. Weigley, 
*Eisenhower’s Lieutenants*, 364

This work began with the title: *Pacific Huertgen: The American Army’s War In Northern Luzon, 1945*. To see the parallel between the soldiers of Europe and the men of MacArthur’s command, consider the following passages from Russell Weigley’s *Eisenhowers Lieutenants*. In this author’s opinion, Weigley’s work is the zenith of accounts on the war in Western Europe after D-Day. The battles in the Heurtgen Forest, the 80 square miles of wet woodlands between Aachen, Duren, and Monschau, saw the destruction of four American Infantry divisions. To compare their ordeal to that studied here it would have to be strategically senseless, debilitating to the American soldiers fighting there, and forfeiting any and all advantages American forces had when they entered the forbidding ground. Weigley points out:
The most likely way to make the Heurtgen a menace to the American army was to send American troops attacking into its depths. An army that depends for superiority on its mobility, firepower, and technology should never voluntarily give battle where these assets are at a discount; the Huertgen could not be much of a threat if they ventured outside the Forest; but within the dark woods, battle would become a fragmented series of infantry contests, the unit cohesion lacking in the Germans’ Huertgen forces would count for little anyway, American fighter-bombers, tanks, and artillery could barely make themselves felt, and the shelter of the trees would lend strength even to unskilled and irresolute defenders.266

An almost exact parallel to Luzon. The trees of the forest were the jungles of the Villa Verde Trail and Balete Pass. Other than isolated incidents and in small numbers tanks played little part in MacArthur’s command. The Germans of the Heurtgen became important only if attacked. Yamashita’s men faced the same situation and saw the same result, wasteful attacks with no purpose. Weigley goes on:

The Germans sheltered in the pillboxes and bunkers studded through the woods could direct mortar and artillery shells to burst in the treetops and shower the Americans below with ricochet fragments. Each American regimental sector had only one narrow trail, and because the trails and firebreaks were blocked with mines and felled trees, tanks could not support the infantry. Incompletely trained in woods fighting, the Americans found merely maintaining their sense of direction an almost insurmountable problem ... The only experienced riflemen who had survived were

drained of strength and initiative, inexperienced replacements often fell dead or wounded before they learned the names of their comrades ...\textsuperscript{267}

The American infantryman was as ill-suited for the woods as he was the jungle. In Europe woods rarely became the field of battle. The jungle was always the field of battle in the Pacific. Veterans could handle it, replacements could not. However, even those veterans broke after extended combat. There were also non-battle casualties in the Heurtgen. Heat exhaustion, malaria, hepatitis on in Luzon were and frostbite, trenchfoot, and respiratory diseases in the Heurtgen. Pure physical exhaustion and psycho-neurosis did not distinguish between theatres. Four divisions of the U.S. First Army paid the price:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Killed and Wounded</th>
<th>Non-Battle Casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division</td>
<td>4,053</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division</td>
<td>6,184</td>
<td>544 (one regiment)\textsuperscript{268}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The non-battle casualties here are dwarfed by those suffered by the 6\textsuperscript{th}, 25\textsuperscript{th}, and 32\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Divisions. However, the battle casualties in Europe far exceed those on Luzon. The rationale for that is beyond the scope of this study. It is simply important to note that American soldiers were thrown away in useless campaigns on opposite sides of the world.

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 366.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 366, 368, and 420.
General Yamashita surrenders the remainder of his Philippine command on 2 September 2, 1945, the same day Japan formally surrendered aboard the battleship U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay. There were still 115,000 Japanese personnel, soldiers and civilian laborers, active or in hiding in the Philippines.

Was it worth it? The picture above in which General Yamashita surrendered his command and the 115,000 still attached to it answers the question. It was not. When MacArthur was selling this campaign to President Roosevelt among his many points was the threat of the Japanese in the Philippines and the enormous army they had there. The Japanese would fight to the end. The mass surrender after hostilities ceased debunked that theory.

When the Japanese Emperor called for all his forces to lay down their arms they did so. Had these islands been bypassed, which made the most military sense, tactically and strategically, those same forces would have surrendered, with an additional few hundred thousand of their comrades. What would have become of the American forces committed to Luzon? They would have trained and staged for the invasion of Japan that was never to come. The invasion of Okinawa in April 1945 would still have occurred, there could be no invasion without it. But, the Sixth and Eighth Armies, responsible for Leyte, Luzon, and the southern Philippine Islands, could have sat out the rest of the war. The following table is shows the losses suffered specifically by those units covered in this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Killed in Action</th>
<th>Wounded in Action</th>
<th>Non-Battle Casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>3,151</td>
<td>6,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32nd</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>2,273</td>
<td>4,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33rd</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37th</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1,392</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38th</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43rd</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,939</td>
<td>8,801</td>
<td>17,440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 30,000 total casualties in those units involved just in the battles have been examined in this work. They were not the only units involved. The 33rd Infantry Division did not leave exact numbers on losses but given the limited yet tough period of fighting they did experience, at least in comparison to divisions that spent nearly six months in fruitless combat such as the 6th, 25th, and 32nd, they were at a minimum in the 500–1000 range of total men killed and wounded. If only those were all lost in the fighting on Luzon. From the day of the first landings on 9 January, the Sixth Army suffered total losses of 8,140 men
killed and 29,557 wounded.\textsuperscript{270} More than 5,000 died and another approximately 22,000 were wounded in operations other than around the dams and in northern Luzon. The focus of this study begins after the recapture of Manila, 28 February, 1945. The following are the losses suffered by the entire Sixth Army after the city fell:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 Feb</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 March</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>3,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 March</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 March</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 April</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1,944</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>4,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 April</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>1,809</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>10,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 April</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>3,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 April</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1,748</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>5,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 May</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>3,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>5,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 May</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>4,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 May</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>4,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>3,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 June</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>3,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 June</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>4,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 June</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 June</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>4,499</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>16,503</td>
<td>3,361</td>
<td>70,443</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MacArthur was infamous for declaring the end of an operation before it was truly over. He did it at Buna in 1942 and at Biak in 1944. Once that declaration was made his interest in said campaign disappeared. Once Manila was declared secure at the end of February, MacArthur withdrew from the Luzon campaign. He looked to the invasion of Japan, an undertaking he assumed he


\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 7.
would command. He never visited the units in northern Luzon. His name is never mentioned by the commanders of those units. His ambivalence is the most severe claim that can be made against a military commander.

The senselessness of this entire campaign has been stated repeatedly throughout this study. Yes, the value of Manila as a staging area for an eventual invasion of Japan was obvious, though of course Okinawa was better. But, once the decision was made to proceed, all efforts should have ceased after Manila was taken and the approaches to the city secure. That happened at the end of February. Everything else made no sense. The Japanese waited in their mountain and jungle strongpoints for American divisions to attack them, which was the only way they could have any impact on the war from that point forward. Of course, that is exactly what happened. Looking at the above-mentioned losses is extremely depressing. Nearly 5,000 men killed throughout Luzon, not just in the affected areas of this study. Over 70,000 were non-battle casualties. Over one third of the strength of the Sixth Army was lost at one point or another after 28 February. Of course the majority of the casualties were in the infantry regiments and among those were a great many of the junior leaders who commanded the units in constant contact with the enemy. From 9 January until the end of June 89.6% (7,299) of the killed and 89.81% (26,543) of the wounded were infantry.272 The captains, lieutenants, and sergeants fell in smaller numbers than the average foot soldier because there were fewer of them but their losses were as high in proportion to their total numbers. Once those leaders fell so did the efficiency of the units they fought in.

March was the heaviest month of fighting for the 6th Infantry Division. That unit suffered total non-battle casualties of approximately 5,000. That was slightly more than half of the total Sixth Army non-battle casualties for that month. Everyone was suffering at that point in the war. The years of fighting had

272 Ibid.
taken their toll. Further, what were they fighting for? The 6th Infantry Division for a dam that had no part in Manila’s vitality? The 32nd for the Villa Verde Trail? The 25th for the Balete Pass? Baguio? Norton’s Knob? Woodpecker Ridge? Etc., etc. etc. Understrength divisions would fight until there was nothing left, in body or spirit. For all the talk both in WWII and today airpower and hundreds of pieces of artillery do not win wars, the infantry does. The missions in northern Luzon were fruitless but even had they been truly significant, the division of the Sixth Army’s I Corps did not have the strength to accomplish those missions. More units to reinforce attacks did not exist. Luzon was not the only part of the SWPA to see useless campaigns. The Eight Army attacked numerous islands just because there were Japanese troops on those islands. No other reason exists to toil along the Villa Verde Trail, or Routes 5 and 11. Given the losses listed in the previous chart one would think, rightfully so, that the Sixth Army could not operate with such diminished strength. They did receive replacements, though not nearly enough and a new sol-dier will never adequately assume the role of a combat veteran, especially a veteran junior leader. Non-battle casualties were of-ten returned to their units though seldom if ever in a better way then when they left. Consider again the following statistics:

![Table of replacements received and total losses](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 Feb</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>5,470</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>5,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 March</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>4,481</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>4,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 March</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>2,016</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2,842</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 March</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>3,364</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>2,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 April</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>7,252</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>6,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 April</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>4,403</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>12,214</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>7,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 April</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>5,297</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>5,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 April</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3,807</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>7,221</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>3,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 May</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>5,250</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>5,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>5,026</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>6,795</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1,769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were approximately 43,000 total replacements. It sounds impressive enough. Before noting the obvious shortfall between the number of replacements sent to the Sixth Army and total losses, it must be made clear that a new replacement seldom if ever walked into a veteran unit and ably assumed the role of the individual they replaced. It took time to acclimate to the jungle, to being a member of a squad, or to leading a platoon. Yet, the numbers never came close to bringing units up to even diminished strength. A shortfall of 3,578 officers is devastating to the efficiency of a combat unit. Officer casualties were not the colonels who led battalions and regiments but the captains that led the companies and lieutenants that commanded the platoons. Those negative numbers forced individuals into commands they were neither prepared nor capable of fulfilling in the middle of an active campaign. April was the hardest month of the campaigns studied here and yet note the replacements received during the heaviest fighting with the heaviest losses. One week saw three officer replacements and NO enlisted replacements. No foot soldiers to replace the 5,297 men lost to all causes in just one week and but three officers to step in where 251 had been taken off the rolls. That was the week of 18 April, the previous week was even worse. Units were being asked to do a job without the personnel to do it. Exhaustion and psychoneurosis were inevitable. Battle losses were bad enough when no measurable result was

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273 Ibid., 8.
apparent. The over 70,000 with emotional scars from fighting a campaign that a senior general deemed necessary but then ignored is one of the tragedies of the Battle for Luzon.

The other true tragedy of this campaign is how few know of the sacrifices made by the men who fought there. The war in the Pacific is dominated by images of America’s vast navy sinking Japanese ships or the Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima. Both of those events and countless more are deserving of the praise they receive. Yet, the fighting the SWPA seems forgotten. Perhaps it is because that part of the Pacific theater is so dominated to this day in historical discussion and literature by its overbearing commander, General MacArthur. The men who fought there are too easily forgotten. The Buna’s, Biak’s, Leyte’s, and Luzon’s are overshadowed by other events and personalities. Tens of thousands of American soldiers, not Marines or sailors but soldiers died in the Southwest Pacific Area. Far more were wounded. Many more were psychologically scarred. Yet, they did their duty, though it need not have extended into 1945. That year should have been spent preparing for an invasion of Japan, an invasion that thankfully didn’t happen. This war was won by the American soldier, not his senior commander.
UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

All of the Unpublished Sources in this study came from the Modern Military Records Section of the National Archives, in College Park, Maryland. Of the various units covered some kept better wartime records than others. There is no greater resource for the first-hand accounts than these records offer.


126th Infantry Regiment. 1945. *A/A Report w/attached papers—* 

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All of the below further mentioned sources are available through normal libraries. The immeasurable assistance provided by Robert Ross Smith’s *Triumph in the Philippines* cannot be overstated. It is essentially a primary source. Mr. Smith interviewed many of those involved in the actual battles, including Japanese prisoners, and was able to give an outstanding overall appraisal of the entire Philippine campaign, not just the section of it covered here. The great majority of the maps and illustrations that were taken from the Internet originated in his study.


Young, Robert. 2003. *They Too Fought the Japanese*. New York:
The City University of New York, 2003.

**INTERNET SOURCES**

*American Prisoners of War: Massacre at Palawan* (accessed on December 5, 2015).


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P. vi: www.me.ngb.army.mil (accessed on March 1, 2016).
P. x: www.worldpress.org (accessed on March 1, 2016).
P. 177 (bottom): www.ww2online.org (accessed on April 14, 2016).
P. 178: travelswithshelia.com (accessed on April 14, 2016).
P. 181: www.worldpress.org (accessed on April 14, 2016).
P. 206: www.armchairgeneral.wordpress.com (accessed on April 17, 2016).