MARINE AVIATION in the PHILIPPINES


PHILIPPINE ISLANDS
0 25 50 100 150 200
MILES
MAP I
BABUYAN IS.
Aparri
SOUTH CHINA SEA
LINGAYEN GULF
San Fernando
Baguio
Mangaldan
Lingayen
PACIFIC OCEAN
LUZON
POLILLO IS.
LEYTE-SAMAR 20 Oct 1944
MAG-12 (3 Dec 44)
VMF(N)-541 (3 Dec 44)
MAG-14 (2 Jan 45)
BATAAN PENINSULA
CORREGIDOR I.
MANILA BAY
MANILA
LAGUNA DE BAY
MINDORO 15 Dec 1944
MAG-12 *
VMF (N)-541 *
CATANDUANES I.
LUZON 9 Jan 1945
MAG-24
MAG-32
MAG-12*
MAG-14*
MARINDUQUE I.
BURIAS I.
SIBUYAN I.
Legaspi
SAN BERNARDINO ST.
MINDORO
CALAMIAN GROUP
San Jose
MASBATE
SAMAR
SAMAR SEA
SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES
ZAMBOANGA-SULU Arch. 10 Mar 1945
MAG-12
MAG-32
MAG-14*
PANAY 18 Mar 1945
MAG-14*
CEBU 26 Mar 1945
MAG-14*
MINDANAO 17 Apr 1945
MAG-24
MAG-12
MAG-32
MAG-14*
*Supported operation shown from boses on other islands
VISAYAN SEA
PANAY
Tacloban
Ormoc
Tanauan
Guiuan
HOMONHON I.
Iloilo
Bacolod
LEYTE
LEYTE GULF
CEBU
Cebu
SURIGAO ST.
DINAGAT I.
NEGROS
BOHOL
PALAWAN
MINDANAO SEA
SULU SEA
L. Lanao
Malabang
Parang
Davao
MORO GULF
DAVAO GULF
ZAMBOANGA
BASILAN I.
JOLO I.
SULU ARCHIPELAGO
MINDANAO
SARANGANI B.
NORTH BORNEO
TAWITAWI GROUP
CELEBES SEA
RD 759E

MARINE AVIATION

IN THE PHILIPPINES

HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS
U. S. MARINE CORPS

Major Charles W. Boggs, Jr. USMC

1951

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COVER: DIVE BOMBER over Luzon. Marine airmen flew these SBD's (Douglas Dauntlesses) in over 20,000 individual sorties against the Japanese on the islands of Luzon, Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago. Primary mission: close air support of U. S. Sixth and Eighth Army ground troops. Marine air liaison parties directed many of these strikes against enemy positions as close as 100 yards to friendly troops.

Foreword

The return of Allied forces to the Philippines in the fall of 1944 further throttled Japan's already tenuous pipe line to the rich resources of Malaya and the Netherlands Indies, and with it the last vestige of her ability to meet the logistical requirements of a continuing war. The Battle for Leyte Gulf marked the end of Japan as a naval power, forcing her to adopt the desperation *kamikaze* tactic against the United States Fleets.

The Philippine victories were primarily Army and Navy operations. Marines, comprising only a fraction of the total forces engaged, played a secondary but significant role in the overall victory. The campaign was important to the Corps in that the Marine aviators, who had battled two years for air control over the Solomons, moved into a new role, their first opportunity to test on a large scale the fundamental Marine doctrine of close air support for ground troops in conventional land operations. This test they passed with credit, and Marine flyers contributed materially to the Philippine victory. Lessons learned and techniques perfected in those campaigns form an important chapter in our present-day close air support doctrines.

C. B. CATES
GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

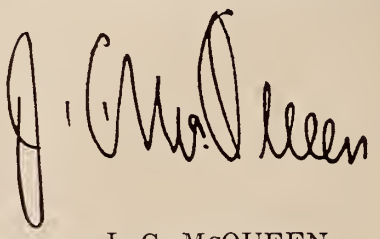
Preface

MARINE AVIATION IN THE PHILIPPINES is the ninth in a series of operational monographs, based on official sources and documented in detail, being prepared by the Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps. The purpose of these monographs is to afford both military students and casual readers a factually accurate account of the several Marine Corps operations in World War II.

The scope and treatment of this monograph must of necessity be somewhat different from that of the rest of the series. Not only was the reconquest of the Philippines primarily an Army story, but the Marine aviation forces that took part in the campaign were under an overall Army Air Force command. The scope of this monograph has been limited to Marine activities, except for other details necessary to proper perspective and background.

Valuable information and assistance have been contributed from many sources. To the several hundred participants in the actual operations who furnished comments, corrections, and elaborations, grateful acknowledgment is made herewith. Special thanks are extended to: Division of Naval Records and History, Department of the Navy; Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army (in particular to Dr. M. Hamlin Cannon and Mr. Robert R. Smith of the Pacific Section); Historical Division, Air University Library, Department of the Air Force; Naval Records and Library; Departmental Records Branch, Adjutant General's Office, Department of the Army; the Philippine Embassy; and finally to Captain John A. Gibson, Jr., USMC, and Mr. Jefferson D. Bates for their extensive assistance in the preparation of this monograph.

Maps were prepared by the Reproduction Section, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia. Official U. S. Marine Corps photographs have been used except as otherwise noted.



J. C. McQUEEN
BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
DIRECTOR OF MARINE CORPS HISTORY

Contents

CHAPTER 1 Background

FROM THE BEACHES of Normandy to the beaches of Saipan, events of mid-June, 1944, marked a time of extraordinary importance to Allied Forces in both hemispheres. The consolidation of beachheads in Normandy signified that the Allies had returned to France to stay, and the long push to Berlin was in the making. On the opposite side of the globe, the landings at Saipan on 15 June heralded, to Allies and Axis alike, the ultimate conclusion of the war in the Pacific.[1]

Normandy and Saipan were easily recognizable, even at the time, as events of major consequence to all the world. But also on 15 June 1944, although overshadowed by bold black headlines, some other events of considerable significance were taking place: General Douglas MacArthur, USA, Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, on that date reassumed control of an area that included most of the Solomon Islands west of Guadalcanal. At the same time, Admiral William F. Halsey, USN, who had held the dual title of Commander Third Fleet and Commander South Pacific (ComSoPac), was relieved of the latter duty by Vice Admiral John H. Newton, USN. Thus freed of area command, Halsey could return to sea with his fleet.

(For areas of responsibility of MacArthur, Halsey, and Nimitz, see Map 2.)

Technically, MacArthur had at no time relinquished strategic control of the Solomons west of Guadalcanal during U. S. operations back along the island chain. Actually, however, for reasons of military expediency, while MacArthur directed the operations in eastern New Guinea and because Halsey was already in operational command of the Guadalcanal area, the latter was also temporarily given control of the rest of the Solomons.[2] With the change of command in SoPac on 15 June 1944, control of the area was restored to MacArthur, who immediately assumed control over the forces located there as well. (See Map 2.)

ORGANIZATION OF FAR EAST AIR FORCES

With General MacArthur's reassumption of control over the Solomons west of the 159th meridian came many new administrative problems for the SWPA commander and his staff. The SWPA command was now augmented by a number of organizations that had previously been under SoPac control. These organizations included elements of the Thirteenth U. S. Army Air Force, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and some New Zealand and U. S. Navy air units. Addition of these forces produced a new organization of the air units in MacArthur's domain.

[1] Another extremely important mid-June event in the Pacific theater was the first B–29 strike against Japan, from airfields in China.

[2] JCS 238/5/D, 28Mar43, had put operations in the Solomons under Halsey's direct control subject to MacArthur's "general directions."

Lieutenant General George C. Kenney, USA, commanding air forces under MacArthur, had been holding a dual title. Kenney, who "had two hats," as he liked to call it, commanded both the Allied Air Forces, SWPA, and the Fifth U. S. Army Air Force. As Commander Allied Air Forces, SWPA, he exercised operational control of the Fifth Air Force, the Royal Australian Air Force Command and attached Netherlands East Indies units, and Aircraft Seventh Fleet. This Allied headquarters, originally heavily staffed with

Australian officers when it was organized in 1942, had become more and more of an American body as the Fifth Air Force had dwarfed the RAAF Command in size; by June 1944 the Allied Air Forces staff was also, with the exception of the Directorate of Intelligence, the staff of Rear Echelon, Fifth Air Force.[3]

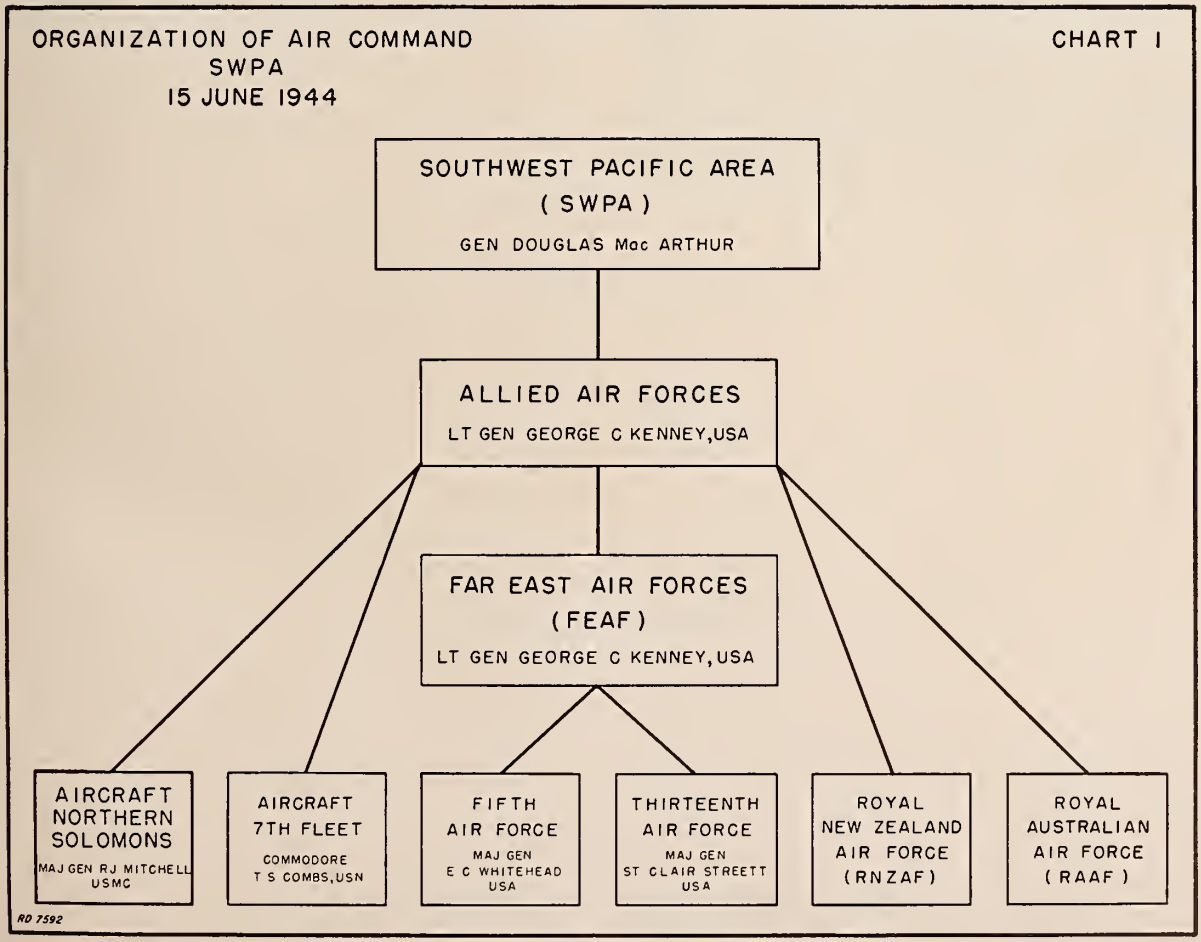
Because of the dual nature of the Allied Air Force-Fifth U. S. Air Force command, the transfer of the Thirteenth U. S. Air Force and other American units, including the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, to SWPA was additionally complicated. It was no longer feasible for Kenney's setup to continue, since it meant that the Rear Echelon, Fifth Air Force would be serving, in effect, as the supreme air headquarters in SWPA and thus controlling another American air force.[4]

A new organization was therefore created to exercise control of Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces. This new command, designated U. S. Far East Air Forces (FEAF) was taken over by Kenney during the general administrative reshuffle of 15 June. Having created another hat to wear, he then passed one of the old ones to a subordinate. Kenney retained command of Allied Air Forces, SWPA, but turned over command of Fifth Air Force to Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, USA. (See Chart 1.)

Organization of FEAF took care of the administrative details of the Thirteenth Air Force, but still another arrangement appeared necessary to facilitate Allied Air Forces' control of Marine and Navy air units now in

[3] *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol IV, Guadalcanal to Saipan*, 646–647. Hereinafter cited as *AAF in WWII*.

[4] *Ibid*, 646.



MAJOR GENERAL RALPH J. MITCHELL, ComAirNorSols and commanding officer of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, made every effort to get the Wing a fighting assignment in the Philippines.

SWPA. Prior to the 15 June transfer of authority, intertheater conferences had covered this problem. During these conferences SoPac, utilizing the latitude permitted the Navy in the organization of task forces, established a new headquarters designated Aircraft Northern Solomons (AirNorSols) under Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, USMC, with headquarters at Torokina, Bougainville Island.

Mitchell, like Kenney, now wore two hats. Upon assuming the AirNorSols command, he simultaneously took over the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW), which became the controlling air unit of AirNorSols—a composite of Marine, Navy, New Zealand and Army Air Force units then based in the Marine general's area of responsibility. (See Map 3.)

So it was that on 15 June 1944 a veteran body of aviation Marines (battle-hardened by 22 months of aerial combat from Guadalcanal up the Solomons chain to Bougainville) suddenly found themselves under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, at a time when his long heralded return to the Philippine Islands was imminent.

HIGH-LEVEL PLANNING

From the time General MacArthur left the Philippines in early 1942 to take over the new Allied command forming in Australia, one concept had dominated his thinking—to return to the Philippines as soon as possible. Only a short time after he had set up his General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, he began to plan that return. Lacking carriers or prospect of receiving any, he had to project a series of amphibious "leap-frogging" operations along the northern coast of New Guinea, each step limited by the effective range of land-based fighters. In February 1943 his strategic concept for the approach to the Philippines was expressed in the first of a series of RENO plans which, outlining operations for the approach, was drawn up at his GHQ.[5]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), on the other hand, were not entirely convinced that liberation of the Philippines would be essential to the ultimate objective—the early defeat of Japan. The more direct and decisive Central Pacific route, held by enemy garrisons both smaller and more easily isolated than those in New Guinea-Philippines, gave promise of the quickest, cheapest victory. Furthermore, the long-legged carrier weapon combined with the Pacific Fleet Marine Force to offer the key to unlock Japan's Central Pacific stronghold. As a result, during early planning phases there were some pronounced differences as to the best route to take. Consequently, MacArthur's proposed drive along northern New

[5] Robert Ross Smith, *"The Approach to the Philippines,"* (manuscript copy), I, 10, a volume in the series *U. S. Army in World War II, The War in the Pacific.* Hereinafter cited as *Approach.*

Guinea up through the islands between the Vogelkop peninsula to Mindanao was weighed against a Central Pacific drive advocated by JCS planners, via the Marshalls, Marianas, Carolines, and Palaus.

As a result of compromise between these widely separated points of view, operations in the Pacific during 1943 and early 1944 were two-pronged, with priority of forces going to Nimitz's drive. MacArthur's forces moved along New Guinea's northern coast, while the main effort under Nimitz was exerted along the Central Pacific axis.[6]

On 12 March 1944 the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a directive for action in the Pacific theater during the remainder of the year. The two-pronged concept continued, but as a result of developments during the previous several months, JCS had decided that a speed-up of the entire Pacific timetable was in order.[7] There was good reason for this apparent optimism: the Marshalls operation (30 January to 20 February 1944) had been executed both speedily and economically; Task Force 58's carrier strikes against the supposedly impregnable Japanese fortress of Truk (16-17 February 1944) had revealed the surprising fact that it was weaker by far than had previously been supposed; and finally, MacArthur had been able to advance his target date for the Admiralties operation by a full month (from 1 April to 29 February 1944).[8]

The 12th March directive was especially important to MacArthur, for it instructed him to conduct operations along the New Guinea coast, after the seizure of Hollandia, preparatory to operations against the Palaus and Mindanao, (the southernmost major island of the Philippine archipelago). This was the first JCS directive to assure him of returning to at least a part of the Philippines.[9] As a result, both MacArthur and Nimitz formulated a schedule that included an invasion of Mindanao, at Sarangani Bay, on 15 November 1944. (See Map 1.)

JUNE PROPOSALS OF THE JCS

But even as MacArthur and Nimitz were completing plans to carry out the 12 March directive, the JCS were considering ways and means to speed still more the progress of the war in the Pacific. They presented to the Pacific commanders three alternative proposals for acceleration, and asked for comments and recommendations. These proposals included the by-passing of the Philippines in favor of Formosa.[10]

Both Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur objected to these new proposals from Washington. Admiral Nimitz' opinion was that the operations proposed by MacArthur in RENO V were reasonable and that the method of attack was sound. Nimitz "considered short-cuts and exploitation of favorable situations to be of great importance, but felt that offensive operations must be conducted so as to insure control of sea and air during major assaults." The invasion of Formosa, he pointed out, would depend upon land-based air neutralizing the Japanese airfields on Luzon. "He felt that land-based air should be used to the maximum extent possible, and that the use of carriers to support protracted fighting ashore should be avoided. Carriers could be used to better advantage on strategic missions," in the admiral's opinion.[11]

General MacArthur also had no encouragement to offer when he replied to the Joint Chiefs' request for recommendations. In a message dated 18 June 1944, he pointed out that "logistic problems in the SWPA would make it impossible to accelerate the schedule of planned operations in his theater," and that forces in the area "were straining their

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[6] *Approach*, I, 9–10, which cites TRIDENT Papers, 11–12.

[7] JCS 713/4, 12Mar44, "Future Operations in the Pacific."

[8] Maj Carl W. Hoffman, *The Seizure of Tinian*, 17.

[9] Mindanao was the only island of the Philippines actually specified by the JCS at this time.

[10] JCS 713/8, 13Jun44, "Future Operations in the Pacific," in OPS File, ABC 384 Formosa (8Sep43), Sec 1–C, rad, JCS to CINCSWPA and CINCPOA, 13 June 44, CM–OUT–500007.

[11] USSBS, Military Analysis Division, *Employment of Forces Under the Southwest Pacific Command*, 36. Hereinafter cited as *Employment*.

resources to the utmost" in order to meet scheduled target dates. He was strongly opposed to any direct move against Japan, since he believed that such a move would depend upon ample land-based air support and a great increase in assault shipping for success. He opposed "by-passing the Philippines in favor of a direct move against Formosa, since he considered the Formosa operation impracticable until land-based air support was available on Luzon. Finally, said General MacArthur, by-passing the Philippines would be tantamount to the abandonment of those islands and would result in a great loss of prestige for the United States throughout the Far East."[12]

THE 1ST MARINE AIRCRAFT WING ON BOUGAINVILLE

In June 1944, while the strategy for the course of the Pacific war still hung in the balance among top level planners, there were some Marine Corps airmen engaged in neutralizing by-passed Japanese garrisons and installations in the Northern Solomons and the Bismarck Archipelago. These flyers were assigned to units of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1stMAW).

Two 1st Wing squadrons (VMF-223 and VMSB-232) had been the first Allied air units to fight from Guadalcanal's Henderson Field in August 1942. (See Map 3.) Thereafter, the 1st MAW had participated in all of the campaigns up the Solomons chain, including several decisive naval engagements. They supported landings in the Russells in February 1943, and a fighter squadron of the wing was the first unit to be based there.[13] First Wing airmen participated in daily raids against Munda on New Georgia, and carried on extensive neutralization attacks against the Japanese throughout the Northern Solomons in mid-1943. During the last six months of 1943, while Marine pilots whittled away steadily at the enemy's numerically superior air strength, they also flew air cover for Allied convoys and supported the Allied landings up the island chain: Rendova, New Georgia, Vella Lavella, Choiseul, Treasury—and finally—Bougainville.

During the advance up the Solomons, a composite command organization known as Aircraft Solomons controlled all the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wing units, land-based Navy squadrons, U. S. Army Air Forces and Royal New Zealand Air Forces that operated in the area under ComSoPac. On occasion, various commanding generals of the 1st Wing also commanded Aircraft Solomons (ComAirSols) as did Major General Ralph J. Mitchell[14] from 20 November 1943 to 15 March 1944, with headquarters first at Munda and later at Bougainville.

Newly constructed airfields on the Allied Bougainville beachhead in late 1943 served as a base for a concentrated aerial assault against the enemy stronghold at Rabaul, New Britain.[15] (See Map 3.) In December 1943, General Mitchell, as ComAirSols, directed all of the South Pacific air forces in the area in a major offensive against Rabaul. In three months this offensive cost Japan 705 planes and brought about the complete downfall of the enemy's South Pacific air power.[16]

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[12] *Approach*, XIX, 6–7, documented by Rad, CINCSWPA to CofS USA, CX–13891, 18Jun44, CM–IN–15058.

[13] VMF–121 of MAG–21 was based on the island of Banika in the Russells on 16Jun43. The first echelon of MAG–21, consisting of two officers and 50 enlisted men, had arrived on 14Mar43.

[14] Gen Mitchell had relieved MajGen Roy S. Geiger as CG, 1stMAW, on 21Apr43. While still wing commander Mitchell relieved BrigGen Nathan Twining, USA, as ComAirSols on 20Nov43; he retained both titles until, on 15Mar44, he was relieved of the latter duty by MajGen H. R. Harmon, USA, and of the 1st Wing by BrigGen J. T. Moore.

[15] This was a combined intertheater offensive that had been started by Fifth Air Force with heavy strikes in October. When ComAirSols moved to Bougainville, Fifth Air Force turned its attentions westward.

[16] USSBS, Military Analysis Division, *The Thirteenth Air Force in the War Against Japan*, 7. Hereinafter cited as *USSBS–Thirteenth AF*. Actually, almost all of the casualties were inflicted on the Japanese in about two months of heavy fighting. An American carrier strike against Truk in mid-February caused most of the Japanese planes in the Solomons to reinforce against the Truk threat, leaving relatively few enemy aircraft in the Rabaul area. The above reference states that the aerial battle over Rabaul ". . . had come to an end by the last of February 1944," although light opposition continued until

TOROKINA FIELD, Bougainville headquarters of 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and ComAirNorSols.

In the months that followed, after seizure of Green Island, northwest of Bougainville, and Emirau, in the St. Matthias group, the Marine wing's mission degenerated into a monotonous chore of blasting Japanese positions on the by-passed islands in the area, or pounding ground objectives on Bougainville,[17] where two divisions of the XIV Corps were guarding the Empress Augusta Bay perimeter against incursions by the remaining Japanese forces on the island.[18]

Such duties constituted the mission of the 1st MAW on 15 June 1944 when Major General Ralph J. Mitchell arrived at the Torokina (Bougainville) headquarters and relieved Major General James T. Moore as Commander Aircraft Solomon Islands (henceforth the command was to be known as Commander Aircraft Northern Solomons) and as Commanding General, 1st MAW.[19]

Colonel Clayton C. Jerome was assigned duty as Chief of Staff, ComAirNorSols, on the same day; two days later Colonel Stanley E. Ridderhof became Chief of Staff of the 1st MAW.

During the 15 June administrative reshuffle, 1st Wing units still on Guadalcanal

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the end of March. "According to statements of Japanese naval officers after the war the high rate of loss of experienced pilots in the Solomons and over Rabaul weakened their Navy Air Force more than any other operation of the war."

[17] History of the 1st MAW, July 1941 to June 1946, 12.

[18] *The 37th Infantry Division in World War II*, Washington, Infantry Journal Press, 125-173.

[19] Gen Moore remained temporarily as Deputy Commander, Air Operations, ComAirNorSols, and as Ass't Wing Commander; BrigGen Claude A. Larkin assumed these posts on 3Aug44.

were ordered to move across the 159th meridian and become a part of the new AirNorSols command. By the end of June (with previously assigned units plus those newly assigned from Guadalcanal and vicinity), the 1st MAW consisted of: Marine Aircraft Group 12, Marine Aircraft Group 14, Marine Aircraft Group 24, and Marine Aircraft Group 61.[20]

SEARCH FOR A COMBAT MISSION

As early as May 1944, when it first became evident that the Solomons-Bismarck area was to be allocated to CinCSWPA, General Mitchell knew he was to be designated as Air Commander for the area;[21] he went at once to Brisbane, Australia, headquarters of Admiral Kinkaid (Commander, Seventh Fleet), General MacArthur, and General Kenney. Mitchell pointed out to these men the fact that "there were in this newly acquired area a large number of thoroughly trained and experienced air units most anxious to get into any projected operations to the westward."[22]

Mitchell also pointed out that the South Pacific air forces had been fighting continuously since August 1942, that these forces were completely equipped, and that they were ready, by virtue of continuous combat, for future operations. He also emphasized that Japanese air power in the Northern Solomons-Rabaul area had been whipped and there was no further enemy air resistance.

The following month, when Allied Air Forces assumed operational control and AirNorSols was officially set up (15 June) with Mitchell in command, General Kenney directed the new organization to support the operations of the U. S. Army XIV Corps along the Solomons-New Ireland axis. The Marines of the 1st MAW were not at all pleased with the new assignment, which they considered nothing more than a "milk run." Spoiling for action, they felt that striking against 70,000 by-passed Japanese,[23] whose air power had been crumbled with the demise of Rabaul, was simply "kicking a corpse around."[24] General Kenney, in a letter to General Mitchell on the subject, assured him that such was not the case, and that he considered the mission an important one.[25]

The 1st MAW carried out its routine assignment conscientiously, but General Mitchell, with dogged determination, continued his struggle to obtain a fighting assignment for the wing in a forward area. On 6 August he paid a second visit to Brisbane headquarters, and "further needled General Kenney for as much combat activity as possible."[26] As a result of the conferences between Mitchell and Kenney, plans were laid at CinCSWPA headquarters for the 1st MAW (augmented by certain Army air units) to have command of shore-based air in the Sarangani Bay operations at Mindanao, scheduled for 15 November 1944.[27] This was the planned location for first reinvasion of the Philippines.

However, General Mitchell's jubilation over the prospective combat assignment was short-lived; a chain of events was already in progress that would rob him and his Marine wing of a job. As General Kenney explains it, during this period

> . . . the movement forward of any air units in the Southwest Pacific depended upon the location of the unit under consideration, the availability of shipping and the availability of airdromes in the forward zone.[28]

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[20] Also certain units not assigned to groups: Marine Air Base Squadron 1, VMB–413, VMD–254, VMF–212, VMF–215, VMF–222, VMJ–152, VMJ–153, VMSB–235, VMSB–236, and VMSB–241.

[21] Since his relief as ComAirSols and CG, 1st MAW on 15Mar44, Gen Mitchell had been CG, Marine Aircraft South Pacific; and from 1 May to 15June44 he was also ComAirSoPac at Guadalcanal, relieving Vice Adm A. W. Fitch by order of Adm Halsey.

[22] Memo, Mitchell to MajGen Field Harris, USMC, dtd 26Mar46.

[23] An intelligence estimate at that time. Actual figures taken after the war indicated approximately 80,000 Japanese at Rabaul alone. USSBS, Naval Analysis Division, *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 1Sep46, 36.

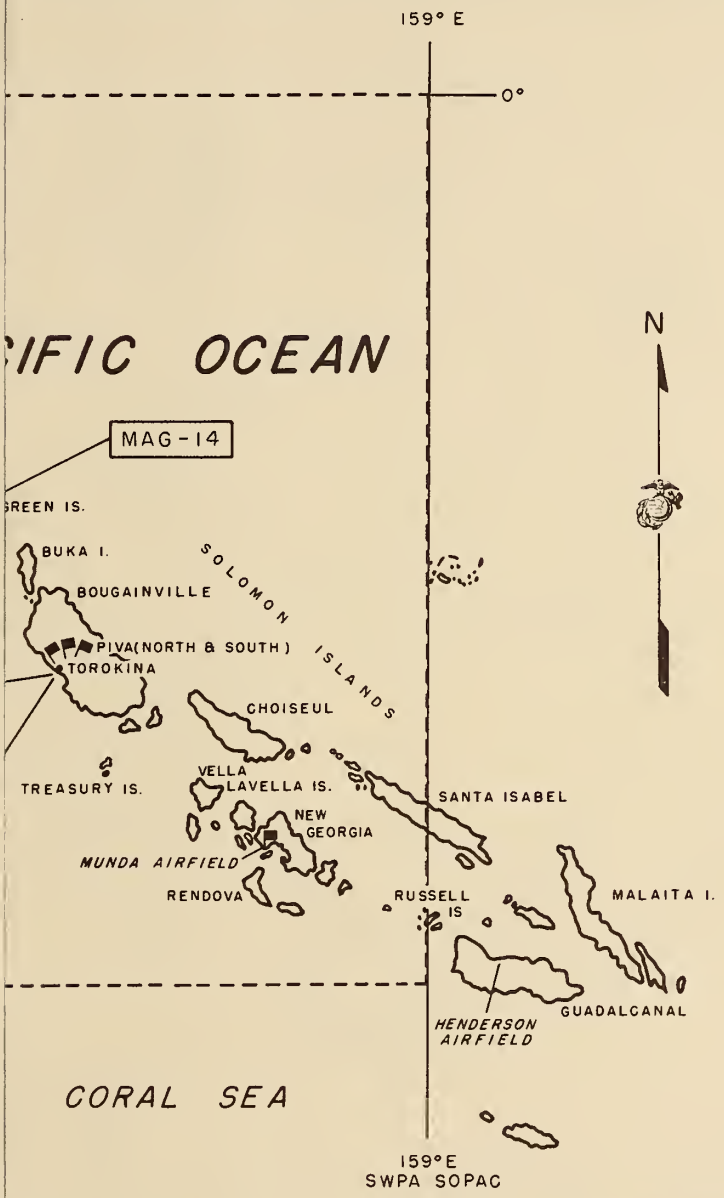
[24] *AAF in WWII*, Vol IV, 647.

[25] Ltr, Kenny to Mitchell, 26Jun44.

[26] Memo, Mitchell to Harris, 26Mar46.

[27] *Ibid.* Document does not specify what Army air units were to be included in Mitchell's command.

[28] Ltr, Gen Kenney to author, 270ct50.

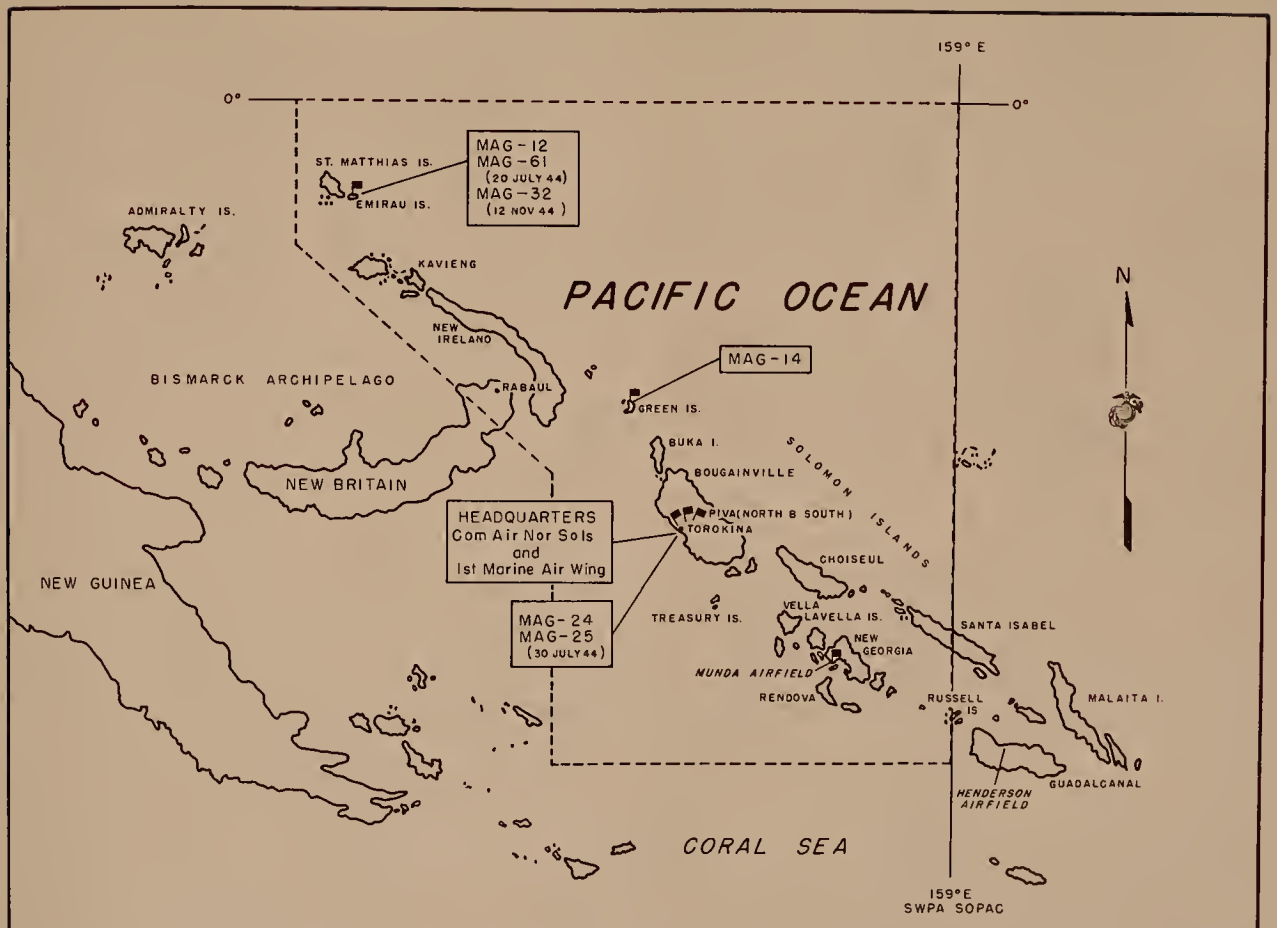


PONSIBILITY
NORTHERN SOLOMONS
NE 1944

E UNITS OF 1st MAW

100 200 Miles

3



AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY
COMMANDER AIRCRAFT NORTHERN SOLOMONS
15 JUNE 1944

---- AREA BOUNDARIES

F BASES OF SUBORDINATE UNITS OF 1st MAW

100 0 100 200 Miles

RD 7592

MAP 3

All of these factors combined against Mitchell and the 1st MAW by late August. Shipping was critical; "rapid turnaround" was a prime consideration at all times. A shift in objectives from Sarangani Bay and southern Mindanao to targets farther to the north, Leyte and Luzon, made the Bougainville-based Marines less and less likely as candidates for a Philippines assignment.

Finally, on 26 August an army staff officer at Kenney's Brisbane headquarters informed General Mitchell and his AirNorSols chief of staff, Colonel Jerome,[29] that the 1st MAW's assignment at the Sarangani Bay landings had been cancelled.[30] General Mitchell thereupon went on leave to the United States, leaving Brigadier General Claude A. Larkin in command of AirNorSols and the 1st MAW.[31]

There was still one glimmer of hope. General Kenney was at least aware of the wing's existence and its capabilities. He wanted to assign later at least a part of the organization, specifically the 1st MAW's dive bomber squadrons (see Chapter III), to the projected Luzon campaign, still a tentative plan. As Kenney said,

> . . . even AIRNORSOLS, long stuck in the Solomons, might be moved up to the Philippines in the course of time.[32]

THE TIMETABLE MOVES UP

The plans made so carefully by General MacArthur and his staff (first RENO; later MUSKETEER, derived basically from RENO V), calling for a preliminary two-division landing in the Sarangani Bay area of Mindanao (target date: 15 November 1944), followed by further landings on the northwestern part of Mindanao and on other islands to the north, were never consummated. On 29 August General MacArthur dispatched a representative to Washington to take the latest revision of MUSKETEER to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their consideration. But about the same time MacArthur's spokesman set out for Washington, Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet began a probing operation in the western Carolines and the Philippines. His carrier planes struck at Yap and the Palau Islands on 7 and 8 September; on 9 and 10 September they hit Mindanao, "giving strategic support to impending landings (15 September 1944) on Morotai and Peleliu."[33]

On the morning of 12 September, Admiral Halsey struck the central Philippines, disclosing an unexpected enemy weakness in the area. Surprisingly little air resistance was encountered, and defensive preparations apparently were not as strong as had been previously estimated. As General Marshall tells it, "[Admiral Halsey] . . . arrived at a conclusion which stepped up the schedule by months." General Marshall explains:

> The OCTAGON Conference was then in progress at Quebec. The Joint Chiefs of Staff received a copy of a communication from Admiral Halsey to Admiral Nimitz on 13 September. He recommended that three projected intermediate operations against Yap, Mindanao, and Talaud and Sangihe Islands to the southward be canceled [he also recommended that the Palaus be canceled, but this portion of the recommendation was not favorably considered], and that our forces attack Leyte in the central Philippines as soon as possible. The same day Admiral Nimitz offered to place Vice Admiral Theodore Wilkinson and the 3d Amphibious Force which included the XXIV Army Corps, then loading in Hawaii for the Yap operation, at MacArthur's disposal for an attack on Leyte. General MacArthur's views were requested and two days

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[29] While in Brisbane, Col Jerome, in order to see at first hand how assault operations would be conducted by the Army Air Forces, asked for, and received, permission to accompany the Fifth Air Force during forthcoming landings at Morotai. As a result, he went ashore as an observer of that operation on 15Sep44 with the senior commanders of the 310th Bombardment Wing (H).

[30] Notation by Gen Mitchell on chronology of events prepared by author.

[31] Ltr from LtGen Claude C. Larkin (Ret) to author, dtd 29Jul50. Hereinafter cited as *Larkin letter*. General Larkin had relieved MajGen Moore as Ass't Wing Commander and Deputy Commander, Air Operations, AirNorSols, on 3Aug44. Larkin had previously been CG, Marine Aircraft South Pacific until that organization was dissolved on 31Jul44.

[32] Far East Air Forces, *Leyte*, Gen George C. Kenney, 3. Hereinafter cited as *Kenney-Leyte*.

[33] *Employment*, 18.

THIRD FLEET PLANES strike Cebu, 11Sep44. Unexpected lack of enemy air resistance during Halsey's daring raid led to a two-month speed-up in the Philippine invasion.

later he advised us that he was already prepared to shift his plans to land on Leyte 20 October, instead of 20 December as previously intended. It was a remarkable administrative achievement.[34]

As a result of Halsey's communication of 13 September, Admiral Nimitz' Central Pacific forces previously assigned to the now-canceled preliminary operations were released to General MacArthur for use in the Leyte campaign. The forces actually transferred included: XXIV Corps (totaling some 50,250 men); garrison forces (20,000 men); 77th Division (area reserve); four transport groups with associated escorts, landing control, and mine craft; fire support (six old battleships, three heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and escorts; a support group (18 escort carriers with their screens); and miscellaneous service units.

The only ground troops of the Marine Corps that would see action in the Philippine campaign came to be part of MacArthur's forces by reason of their temporary attachment to the U. S. Army's XXIV Corps when the latter had been slated for the Yap operation. All artillerymen, these Marines belonged to two battalions and a headquarters and service battery from the V Amphibious Corps.[35] (See Appendix V.)

The 15 September decision of the JCS to by-pass Mindanao in favor of Leyte apparently killed what little chance the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had of getting a Philippine assignment. But only five days after this decision, Brigadier General Claude A. Larkin received oral notification from Far East Air

[34] *Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff, United States Army, July 1 1943 to June 30, 1945, to the Secretary of War*, 71.

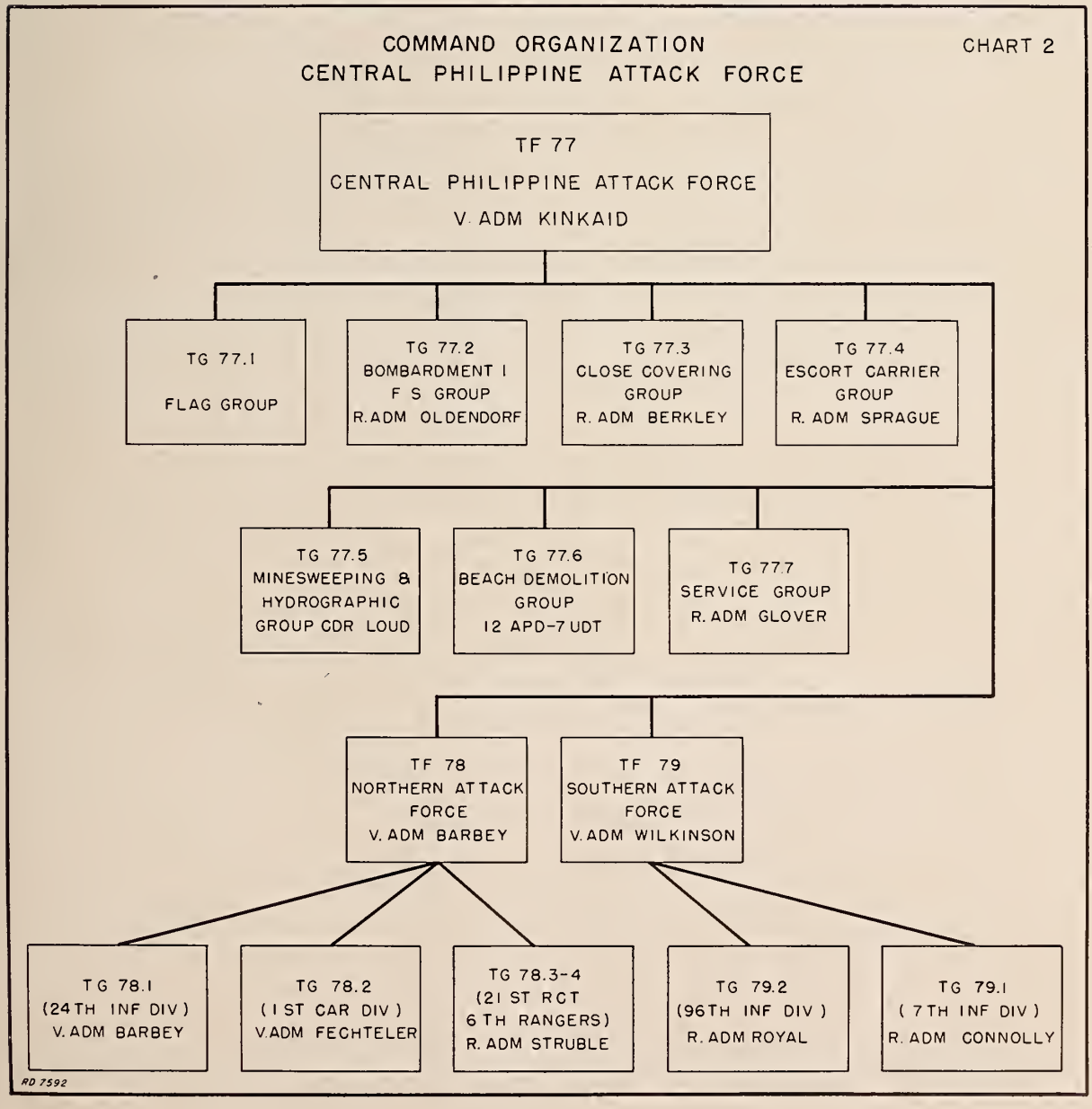
[35] BrigGen Thomas E. Bourke, USMC, regularly CG of V Amph Corps artillery, commanded the Marine component and the entire XXIV Corps artillery as well. Participation of these Marine units was limited to the first six weeks of the Leyte operation; see Appendix V for a narrative account of their participation.

Forces that seven 1st Wing dive bomber squadrons would be used in the Luzon campaign.[36]

[36] This particular episode is discussed in Chapter III. It is pertinent to note here, however, that orders were oral. At this time, because there had still been no definite decision from JCS as to whether Luzon or Formosa would be invaded, both were considered as potential targets until 30Oct44, when JCS set a target date of 20 December for Luzon.

LANDINGS AT PELELIU AND MOROTAI

On the same day the JCS made their momentous decision to by-pass Mindanao (15 September), simultaneous landings were made on Peleliu in the Palau group, and Morotai. Major General Roy S. Geiger's III Amphibious Corps landed the 1st Marine Division against strongly fortified Peleliu, and the 31st and the 126th RCT of the 32d Army



Divisions went ashore against no resistance on Morotai.

With the seizure of airbase sites on Morotai and in the Palaus, the Allied forces in the Pacific theaters completed the approach to the Philippines. MacArthur's flanks were protected for the forthcoming invasion. (See "Table of Distances" map, inside back cover.)

PLANS FOR THE LEYTE ASSAULT

Allied planning for the landings on Leyte (target date 20 October 1944), now went into detailed consideration of participating units, times, places, and dates. The forces involved, as designated by the final plan, were to be under the overall command of General Douglas MacArthur. Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, Commander, Seventh Fleet, would direct all naval amphibious and support forces for the landing. Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, Commanding General, Sixth Army, would command ground forces, and Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet[37] would render air support for the operation until such time as Army air units could relieve the carriers with land-based aircraft operating from Leyte itself.

On 29 September a conference was held between General Kenney, Admiral Kinkaid, and Admiral Halsey, for the purpose of assigning tasks for the neutralization of enemy air power in the Leyte-Central Philippines area. The following agreements were reached:

AIR FORCES

Third Fleet:

Most of the air operations for the Leyte landing centered about Third Fleet planes; their mission (assigned by Central Pacific Command) was: "to neutralize the hostile air forces in Okinawa, Formosa, Northern Luzon, Bicol, and Visayan areas prior to A-Day [20 October] and support landing operations in coordination with the Seventh Fleet."[38]

Seventh Fleet:

"Allied Naval Forces, Southwest Pacific Area (Seventh Fleet), was assigned responsibility for providing air cover for the convoys and direct air support of the landing operations until relieved by land-based aviation. The Commander, Seventh Fleet, was also designated as the coordinating agency for requesting carrier strikes from the Third Fleet for operations in the objective area."

Assault Air Force:[39]

The Fifth Air Force (Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, USA), designated the "Assault Air Force," "was charged with destroying hostile air forces in the Celebes Sea area, protecting the western flank of the operations until relieved by the Thirteenth Air Force, neutralizing hostile air forces in Mindanao south of 8°45′ N. and protecting convoys and naval forces within range of land-based air."[40]

Supporting Air Forces:

Of the other air units under MacArthur's SWPA, two major commands, the Thirteenth U. S. Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force, were designated to perform supporting roles, "neutralizing enemy air forces on the east coast of Borneo and supporting the Fifth Air Force in the southern Philippines as requested."[41]

Long range support would be provided with sweeps along the China coast and Formosa made by the XX Bomber Command staging through its China base at Chengtu, and by the Fourteenth Air Force from Central China. From widely scattered bases through the Central Pacific, elements of the Seventh and

[37] Third Fleet (as well as submarines designated for the operation) remained under overall control of Admiral Chester E. Nimitz (Central Pacific Forces).

[38] *USSBS–Fifth AF*, 35.

[39] The term "Assault Air Force" was "a commonsense designation of the Air Force which would control air effort in the objective area. It was used in contradistinction to 'Supporting Air Force' . . . " —Information furnished by Air University Library, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

[40] *USSBS, Fifth AF*, 35.

[41] USSBS, (Military Analysis Division), *Air Campaigns of the Pacific War*, 36. Hereinafter cited as *Air Campaigns*.

PLANNING OFFICERS for the Third and Seventh Fleet roles in the Philippine invasion. Left to right: Commodore H. W. Graf, Chief of Staff, Seventh Fleet; RAdm D. E. Barbey, Commander Amphibious Forces, Seventh Fleet; VAdm T. C. Kinkaid, Commander Allied Naval Forces, SWPA; VAdm T. S. Wilkinson, Commander, Southern Attack Force; RAdm Forrest P. Sherman, Deputy Chief of Staff, POA; and BrigGen Wm. E. Riley, USMC, War Plans Officer on Adm Halsey's Third Fleet staff.

Twentieth Air Forces would strike enemy-held air bases, aircraft and shipping east of 140° East Longitude, including Chichi Jima, Truk, Yap, and Jaluit Islands.[42]

GROUND FORCES

The overall assignment given Lieutenant General Walter Krueger's Sixth Army (X and XXIV Corps) was to continue the offensive to reoccupy the Philippines by seizing and occupying objectives in the Leyte and western Samar areas and establishing therein naval, air, and logistic facilities for the support of subsequent operations.[43]

Ground operations on Leyte were to be divided into three tactical phases. Phase One consisted of an amphibious operation to secure the entrance to Leyte Gulf. Phase Two consisted of major amphibious assaults to seize the coastal strips of eastern Leyte from Tacloban to Dulag, including the airdromes and base sites in the area; the opening of San Juanico Strait and Panaon Strait; and the seizure of the Carigara Bay area on the north central coast. Phase Three included the destruction of hostile forces remaining on Leyte

[42] *COMINCH P–008. Amphibious Operations, Invasion of the Philippines, October 1944 to January 1945*, United States Fleet, Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, 1–7.

[43] Sixth United States Army, *Report of the Leyte Operation*, 17Oct44–25Dec44, 19. Hereinafter cited as *Sixth Army, Leyte.*

and the clearing of hostile forces from southern Samar. (See Map 4.)

Individual assignments of ground units in carrying out these phases were as follows: the X Corps[44] (Major General Franklin C. Sibert, USA) was to seize the Tacloban-Palo area and advance northward to control the San Juanico Strait. The XXIV Corps[45] (Major General John R. Hodge, USA) was to carry out a landing in the Dulag area and advance westward across the island. The 21st Regimental Combat Team would land on the southern part of Leyte's coast and seize control of Panaon Strait, which led into Sogod Bay. The 6th Ranger Battalion was to occupy the islands of Homonhon, Suluan, and Dinagat in the mouth of Leyte Gulf, prior to 20 October.

SEVENTH FLEET

Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet, heavily augmented by a fire support group of six old battleships, 18 escort carriers, and four transport groups from the Central Pacific, was to take the assembled forces at Hollandia, New Guinea, and Manus Island, on the 1,400-mile passage to the Leyte beaches. The two principal subdivisions were troop-carrying attack forces under Rear Admiral Daniel E. Barbey, USN, and Vice Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson, USN.[46] (See Chart 2.)

SITUATION OF JAPANESE FORCES—FALL 1944

After Japanese defeats in the Marianas in the spring of 1944, Imperial Headquarters realized that any further westward advance by Allied Forces would end their remaining hope, not only of success, but even of prolonged resistance. Much of Japan's war material had been coming from the rich Southern Resources Area, captured by the Empire early in the war; oil, rubber, and many other products needed to wage an all-out effort were being shipped to Japanese bases and to the homeland through the China Sea, behind the screen of the Philippine-Formosa-Ryukyu Islands. Lone wolf Allied submarines in marauding attacks had already cut down this vital traffic; now, as the Combined Chiefs of Staff put it, in an estimate of the enemy's situation, ". . . Allied occupation of Mindanao would greatly increase the threat to Japan's position . . . occupation of Luzon would make the passage through the South China Sea precarious . . ."[47] Japanese holdings, if split into halves, would diminish in value and wither on the vine.

JAPANESE PLANS FOR DEFENSE OF THE PHILIPPINES

After the loss of the Marianas, the Japanese planners, knowing strong offensives against their protecting island chain were now inevitable, developed a series of four defense plans labeled "Sho" (Japanese character meaning "to conquer"). Sho No. 1 provided for the defense of the Philippines, Sho No. 2 for the Formosa-Nansei Shoto-Southern Kyushu area, Sho No. 3 for Kyushu-Shikoku-Honshu, and Sho No. 4 for Hokkaido. Sho No. 1, the Philippines, was considered by the planning staff as being the most probable.[48]

To defend the Philippines, therefore, the Japanese Army concentrated on reinforcing that archipelago. "Insecure at sea and in the air, they met the problem of how to be strong everywhere at once by the best possible compromise." They strongly manned Luzon, and prepared "a mobile counterlanding force to

[44] X Corps included the 1st Cavalry (MajGen Verne D. Mudge, USA) and the 24th Infantry Division (MajGen Frederick A. Irving, USA).

[45] XXIV Corps was composed of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions, commanded by MajGens Archibald V. Arnold and James L. Bradley, respectively.

[46] VAdm Wilkinson commanded the Southern Attack Force (TF 79), which transported the XXIV Corps from Manus. RAdm Barbey commanded the Northern Attack Force (TF 78), which carried the X Corps from Manus (1st Cav Div) and Hollandia (24th Div).—Annex "A" to Commander Task Force 79 Attack Plan A304–44.

[47] Statement from CCS 643/1, 9Sep44, "Estimate of the enemy situation, Pacific-Far East, as of 8Sep44."

[48] The "Sho" plans were not mutually exclusive; i.e., the activation of any one plan against a threat in a given area would not prevent the activation of another in a different area if necessity demanded. As events later transpired, Sho No. 2 (Formosa-Kyushu line) was activated when Halsey's carriers sortied against Okinawa; Sho No. 1 (Philippines) followed when Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet entered Leyte Gulf.

FOR THE

AR OPERATION

HREE PHASES

Phase Two

Phase Three

10 20 30 MILES

MAP 4

PLAN FOR THE

LEYTE-SAMAR OPERATION

THE THREE PHASES

Phase One — Phase Two — Phase Three

10 0 10 20 30 MILES

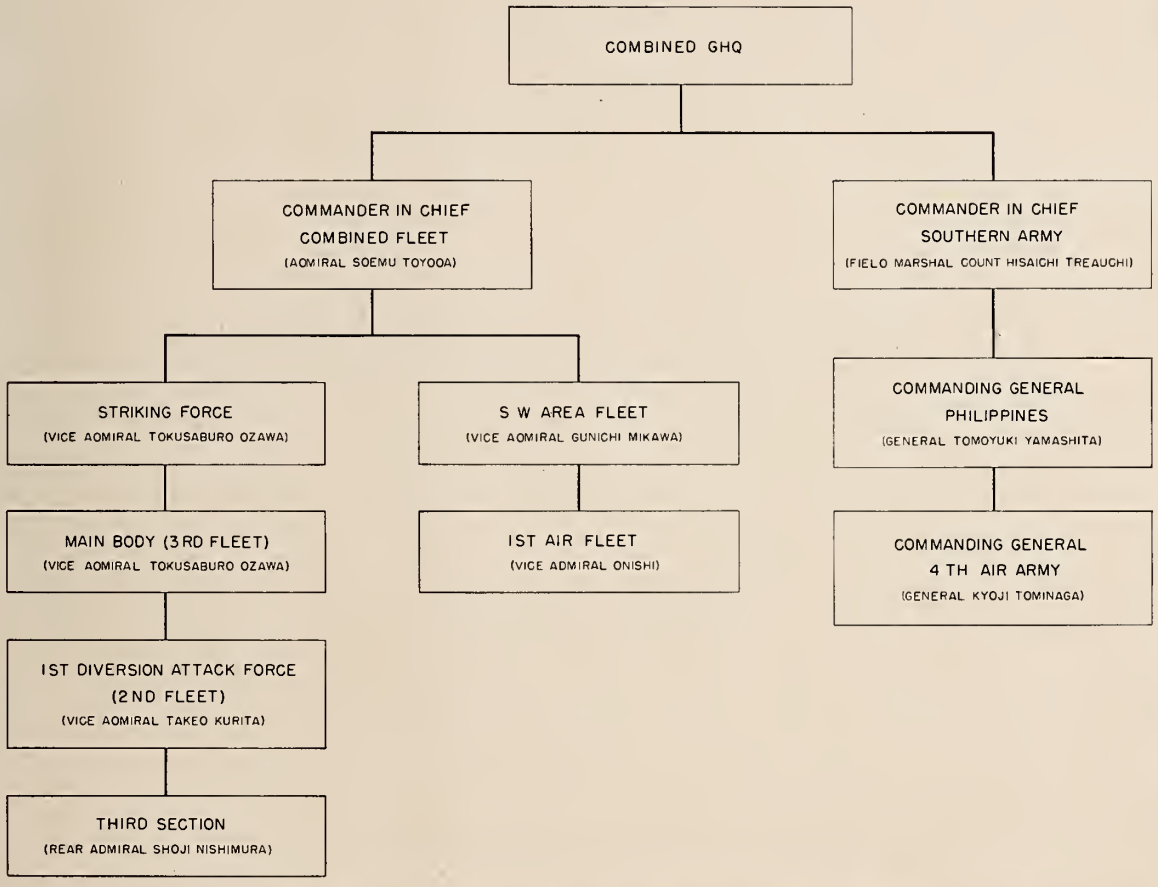
MAP 4

RD 7592

CHART 3

JAPANESE COMMAND ORGANIZATION

DEFENSE OF THE PHILIPPINES AS OF 1 OCTOBER, 1944 *



(*) USSBS NO 113 NAV NO 29 INTERROGATION OF CAPT MITSUO FUCHIDA, IJN

RD 7592

delay or if possible throw back" American troops after they had committed themselves to a specific objective.[49]

The Japanese fleet, still powerful, but now shorn almost completely of air power, stood by, ready for an all-out commitment regardless of where U. S. forces might land. Depending upon gunnery strength almost exclusively, the Japanese fleet would wait until Allied transports were concentrated in the landing area; then, if possible, they would decoy away the U. S. fleet and destroy our shipping. The situation had come to a point where the Japanese Navy, "hopelessly outnumbered, and as imminent events would prove, even more hopelessly outclassed, could not risk the sort of fleet action it had previously desired, but was forced to expend itself in suicidal attack upon the United States transports." Admiral Soemu Toyoda (Commander in Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet), testifying after

[49] USSBS, Naval Analysis Division, *The Campaigns of the Pacific War*, 281–282. Hereinafter cited as *USSBS, Campaigns.*

the defeat of Japan, summed up the Japanese point of view:

> Since without the participation of our Combined Fleet there was no possibility of the land-based forces in the Philippines having any chance against your forces at all, it was decided to send the whole fleet, taking the gamble. If things went well we might obtain unexpectedly good results; but if the worst should happen, there was a chance that we would lose the entire fleet; but I felt that that chance had to be taken. . . . There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the loss of the Philippines.[50]

DISPOSITION OF JAPANESE FORCES

In the late summer of 1944 Japanese air defense of the Philippines was provided by the Navy's First Air Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Takajiro Onishi, and the Fourth Air Army under General Kyoji Tominaga.[51] Because of heavy attrition of planes and pilots as a result of American strikes, the Japanese were forced to bolster their air power with the Second Air Fleet from Formosa.[52] The combined force became known as First Combined Base Air Force, under the command of Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome. This augmenting of Japanese air power brought their total air strength in the Philippines to some 600 planes,[53] 200 of which were Army planes (General Tominaga), the rest, Navy.

The 14th Japanese Area Army, under the command of General Tomoyuki Yamashita, would be in charge of Philippine ground defenses; this army consisted of an estimated 260,000 troops scattered throughout the Philippine archipelago. Defense of Leyte would fall to the Japanese 35th Army, whose 16th Division was already on the island.[54]

Commander in Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet was Admiral Soemu Toyoda, with headquarters in Tokyo. Under him was a "Striking Force" (First Mobile Fleet) commanded by Vice Admiral Tokusaburo Ozawa, who also commanded the "Main Body" (3d Fleet). The First Diversion Attack Force (2d Fleet) was under the command of Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita; the Second Diversion Attack Force (Fifth Fleet) was under Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima; both of the latter forces were subordinate to the First Mobile Fleet. The Sixth Fleet (Advance Expeditionary Force) under Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa rounded out the combined Fleet. (See Chart 3.)

U. S. AIR INTELLIGENCE

FEAF intelligence reports in the month prior to the Leyte invasion indicated that Japanese Air Forces would be swamped by U. S. Navy air attacks and forthcoming B-29 raids on the Japanese homeland. It was therefore predicted that enemy aerial reinforcements would be only on a token scale. The First Air Fleet of the Japanese Navy was expected to take the major role in air defense of the Philippines, and its strength was being sapped drastically by Admiral Halsey's carrier raids. In all, FEAF estimated that the Japanese would defend from 65 known operative airstrips with 692 airplanes in the Philippines and immediately supporting areas, while 1,082 other aircraft in more distant locations (Formosa and Borneo) might be drawn upon.

Bearing in mind the usual excessive attrition of incoming replacements, Fifth Air Force thought it possible that the Japanese would not be able to put more than 340 planes into the air for defense of the archipelago. The quality of both pilots and maintenance personnel had deteriorated greatly since the Battle of the Philippine Sea, with a resulting drop in the number of operational aircraft available at any given time. Fifth Air Force intelligence studies believed it possible that the enemy might react with only 130 airplanes in the Leyte area on A-Day.[55]

Nevertheless, it was believed that the air aspect of KING II (code name for the Leyte

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[50] *Ibid.*, 280–281.

[51] James A. Field, Jr., *The Japanese at Leyte Gulf*, 18.

[52] The reinforcements arrived in the Philippines on 23Oct44, 3 days after the landing of American forces on the mainland of Leyte.

[53] USSBS No. 193, Nav. No. 44.

[54] Staff Study of the Operations of the Japanese 35th Army on Leyte, 10th I. & H. S., Eighth Army, 1.

[55] *Intelligence Annex*, Fifth AF.

GENERAL MacARTHUR reads his Proclamation of Liberation at Tacloban, Leyte, soon after U. S. landings. In background, left to right: VAdm T. C. Kinkaid, LtGen Walter Krueger, CG Sixth Army, unidentified AAF officer, and President Sergio Osmena.

operation) would be somewhat hazardous until airfields on Leyte were prepared to receive fighters. Even with the enemy's air power smothered by the big carrier strikes, he could still average an estimated 113 sorties a day during the first 10 days after the invasion. His target priority list was likely to be shipping, beachheads, air bases, and supply dumps, with night attacks predominating. His forward bases were San Jose and Miagao on the southern tip of Panay, supported by Bacolod and Fabrica in the northern sector of Negros Island. The airfield system on Luzon and Mindanao was excellent for defense, provided the Japanese had planes in number there. Airfields on Leyte, however, were reported by guerillas to be inoperative.

The Japanese ground garrisons expected American landings on Luzon, and accordingly had almost doubled their forces there in the spring and summer of 1944. They had also reinforced Mindanao, and to some extent, the entire archipelago. In contrast, Leyte, with its relatively small garrison[56] was an especially tempting target. Some disturbing signs of enemy reinforcements and activity on the island before A-Day did not alter the fact that Japanese ground forces were not prepared to offer strong resistance to a Leyte Gulf landing.

On the morning of 20 October 1944 that landing took place and the Philippines campaign was afoot.

[56] Approximately 16,000 combat troops on A-Day, according to *Sixth Army, Leyte*, 41–42.

CHAPTER II Leyte and Samar Campaigns

THE LEYTE LANDINGS

On 11 October 1944, nine days prior to "A-Day" for the Leyte landings, powerful U. S. task groups sortied northward from New Guinea and the Admiralties. Six days later, the first part of these forces, destroyer transports bearing the 6th Ranger Infantry Battalion, steamed into Leyte Gulf and headed toward Dinagat, Suluan and Homonhon Islands. (See Map 4.) Phase One of the operation—securing the entrance to Leyte Gulf—depended upon control of these three islands. Unopposed landings were made on Dinagat and Suluan on the 17th and on Homonhon the following day.[1] The capture of the three islands proceeded without serious hitch and Phase One was over.

On A-Day, 20 October, the main landings (Phase Two) began at 1000 on an 18-mile front between Dulag and Tacloban on Leyte's east coast. [2] Two days of heavy naval bombardment terminated just before the landing forces—X and XXIV Corps of the Sixth United States Army—went ashore.

Opposition at the landing beaches was negligible. First day casualties resulted primarily from a few well-placed Japanese mortar and artillery pieces not silenced by the preliminary bombardment. By mid-afternoon, the assault troops had advanced 1,800 yards inland.

Unloading was somewhat delayed by swampy terrain to the rear of one beach, and sporadic enemy mortar and artillery fire hampered the discharge of LST cargo and artillery. Conditions along the 18-mile beachhead varied, but snipers, enemy mortar fire and a lack of unloading personnel were the major deterrents to speedy disembarkation of men and material. None of these, however, delayed the establishment of beachheads and infantry advances inland.[3]

Sixth Army quickly expanded its initial gains. In the X Corps (north) zone of action, the 1st Cavalry Division captured Tacloban Airfield on A-Day and Tacloban itself on A-plus 1. By A-plus 5, 1st Cavalry elements were advancing northwestward toward Carigara. (See Map 5.) The 24th Infantry Division had taken Palo on A-plus 1; thereafter it moved rapidly into the Leyte Valley, gaining contact on 29 October with the 1st Cavalry Division south of Carigara. Elements of these two divisions captured Carigara on 2 November, in a coordinated attack.[4]

In the XXIV Corps (south) zone of action, the 7th Infantry Division seized Dulag air-

[1] Extremely rough seas hampered minesweeping activities and delayed the Homonhon landing.

[2] The 21st Infantry Regiment (Reinforced) had gone ashore at Panaon Strait a half hour earlier, at 0930.

[3] *Employment*, 41.

[4] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 3.

LEYTE LANDING, 20 October 1944. First wave of troops approach beach still smouldering from U. S. naval gunfire.

strip on A-plus 1, swept westward to capture three airfields in the Burauen area by 25 October, and four days later secured Dagami in spite of heavy enemy resistance. Meanwhile, other elements of the 7th had turned south, secured Abuyog, then pushed westward over the mountains to occupy the coastal town of Baybay. (See Map 5.)

The 96th Infantry Division, temporarily bypassing strongly-held Catmon Hill, seized that part of the southern Leyte Valley lying within its zone of action. This done, the 96th assaulted Catmon Hill on 28 October and by 31 October overcame all opposition there.[5]

This two weeks of fighting and maneuver gave Sixth Army control of Leyte Valley and its airfields by 2 November. It further opened both Panaon and San Juanico Straits, and secured Carigara (north central coast) and Baybay (west coast). Phase Two of the Leyte operations plan was successfully completed.[6]

THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF (23–26 October)

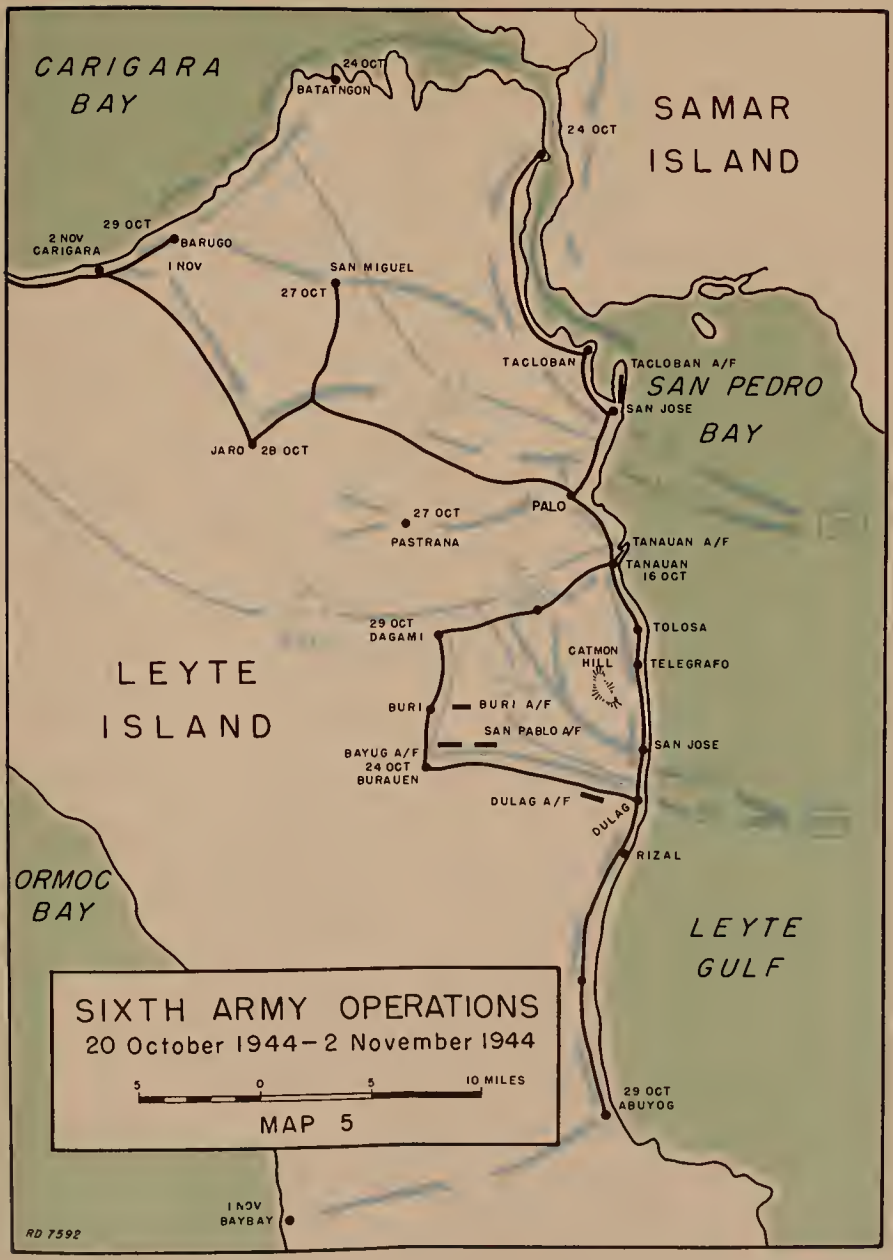
The Japanese High Command had recognized the American landing at Leyte Gulf for what it was—their final chance, short of a last ditch defense of Japan itself, to stem the U. S. advance. They hurriedly activated Sho No. 1: the seaborne equivalent of a *Banzai* attack.

Three days after U. S. troops landed on Leyte, most of the still powerful, but unbalanced, Japanese fleet steamed toward Leyte Gulf in a three-pronged attack. The "Sho" plan was simple but daring: a decoy carrier force advancing from the north would divert the main U. S. strength; two other heavy surface forces approaching Leyte Gulf through Surigao and San Bernardino Straits (see Map 6), covered by Japanese Army and Navy planes based on Luzon, Samar, and other nearby islands would destroy American ship-

[5] *Ibid.*, 3.

[6] *Ibid*, 3.


SAMAR
ISLAND
24 OCT
TACLOBAN
TACLOBAN A/F
SAN PEDRO
BAY
SAN JOSE
PALO
27 OCT
TANAUAN A/F
TANAUAN
16 OCT
TOLOSA
CATMON
HILL
TELEGRAFO
BURI A/F
SAN PABLO A/F
SAN JOSE
DULAG A/F
DULAG
RIZAL
LEYTE
GULF
RATIONS
ember 1944
10 MILES
29 OCT
ABUYOG


CARIGARA BAY
24 OCT
BATATNGON
SAMAR ISLAND
24 OCT
29 OCT
2 NOV
CARIGARA
BARUGO
1 NOV
SAN MIGUEL
27 OCT
TACLOBAN
TACLOBAN A/F
SAN PEDRO BAY
SAN JOSE
JARO
28 OCT
27 OCT
PASTRANA
PALO
TANAUAN A/F
TANAUAN
16 OCT
29 OCT
DAGAMI
TOLOSA
CATMON HILL
TELEGRAFO
LEYTE ISLAND
BURI
BURI A/F
SAN PABLO A/F
SAN JOSE
BAYUG A/F
24 OCT
BURAUEN
DULAG A/F
DULAG
RIZAL
ORMOC BAY
LEYTE GULF
SIXTH ARMY OPERATIONS
20 October 1944 – 2 November 1944
5 0 5 10 MILES
MAP 5
29 OCT
ABUYOG
1 NOV
BAYBAY
RD 7592

JAPANESE CRUISER, on horizon, straddles U. S. escort carrier with gunfire during Battle for Leyte Gulf. This vital engagement took place in a running sea battle east of Samar Island on 25 October 1944, and ended in a decisive U. S. naval victory when all Japanese forces were defeated and repulsed in their attempt to disrupt MacArthur's invasion.

ping off the landing beaches. The risk was great but calculated: utter victory, or utter defeat.[7]

Enemy fleets never quite reached Leyte Gulf, but on 24 October the decoy force successfully drew off[8] the main body of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet to the north. That night the Japanese central force, still powerful even after it lost one of its super battleships (and suffered crippling damage to one heavy cruiser and several other ships) to Third Fleet planes, passed through San Bernardino Straits. On the morning of 25 October this enemy naval force, possessing overwhelming local superiority, penetrated close to U. S. transports in Leyte Gulf. But with victory in reach after a running battle east of Samar Island with six escort carriers, three destroyers and four destroyer escorts of Admiral Kinkaid's defensive forces, the Japanese commander ordered his own wounded fleet to withdraw. This decision he later attributed to: lack of expected land-based air support and air reconnaissance, fear of further losses from air attack, and worry as to fuel reserves.[9] The decision ended the last serious threat to the U. S. reinvasion of the Philippines.

In the meantime, the southern Japanese force had been virtually destroyed in a night surface engagement with Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet in Surigao Straits,[10] and elements of Halsey's Third Fleet, to the north, had sunk four enemy carriers off Luzon. When it was all over (26 October), the Japanese had lost one large and three light carriers, three battleships (including the 63,700-ton *Musashi*), six heavy and four light cruisers, nine

[7] USSBS, *Campaigns*, 281.

[8] But at terrible cost to itself: Halsey's Third Fleet destroyed virtually all remaining Japanese naval-air power in the resultant action.

[9] USSBS, *Summary Report, Pacific War*, 8. Hereinafter cited as *USSBS, Summary Report*.

[10] Battle forces were under the command of RAdm J. B. Oldendorf, Commander, Bombardment and Support Groups.

ORPHAN CARRIER PLANES sought refuge at Dulag Airfield, Leyte, when their carriers were sunk or damaged during the Battle for Leyte Gulf, 25 October 1944.

destroyers and a submarine. The Japanese Navy "as a Navy, had ceased to exist."[11]

The U. S. victory had not been won, however, without losses. These losses included: one light carrier (*Princeton*), two escort carriers (*Gambier Bay and St. Lô*), two destroyers, one destroyer escort, and one PT boat sunk; one light cruiser, six escort carriers, three destroyers and one destroyer escort damaged.

On the afternoon of 25 October Admiral Kinkaid, who was responsible for air support to the landing troops, notified General MacArthur that his escort aircraft carriers were seriously crippled by air and surface attack. Nevertheless, every baby carrier still operable kept sending its aircraft out all day, flying patrols over the Seventh Fleet and the shipping in Leyte Gulf, and attacking the withdrawing ships of the Japanese central and southern fleets.[12]

[11] *USSBS, Campaigns*, 286.

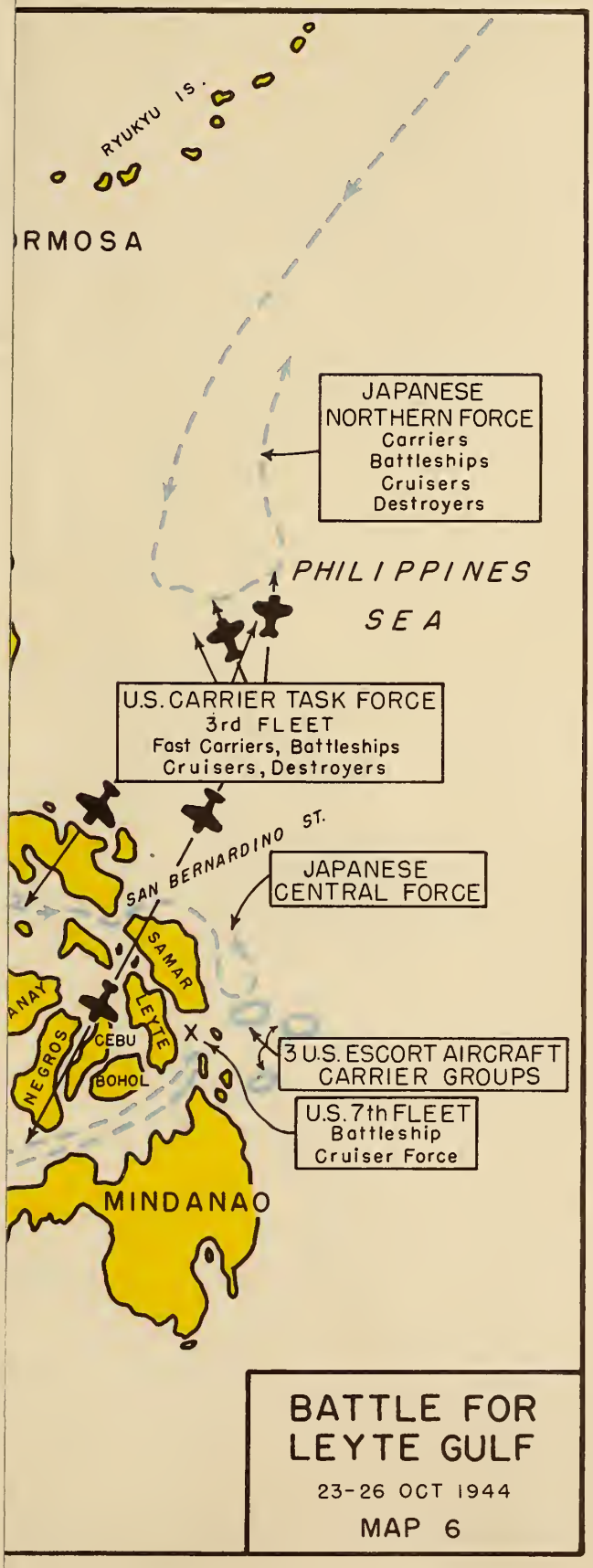
[12] General George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, 459. Hereinafter cited as *General Kenney Reports*.

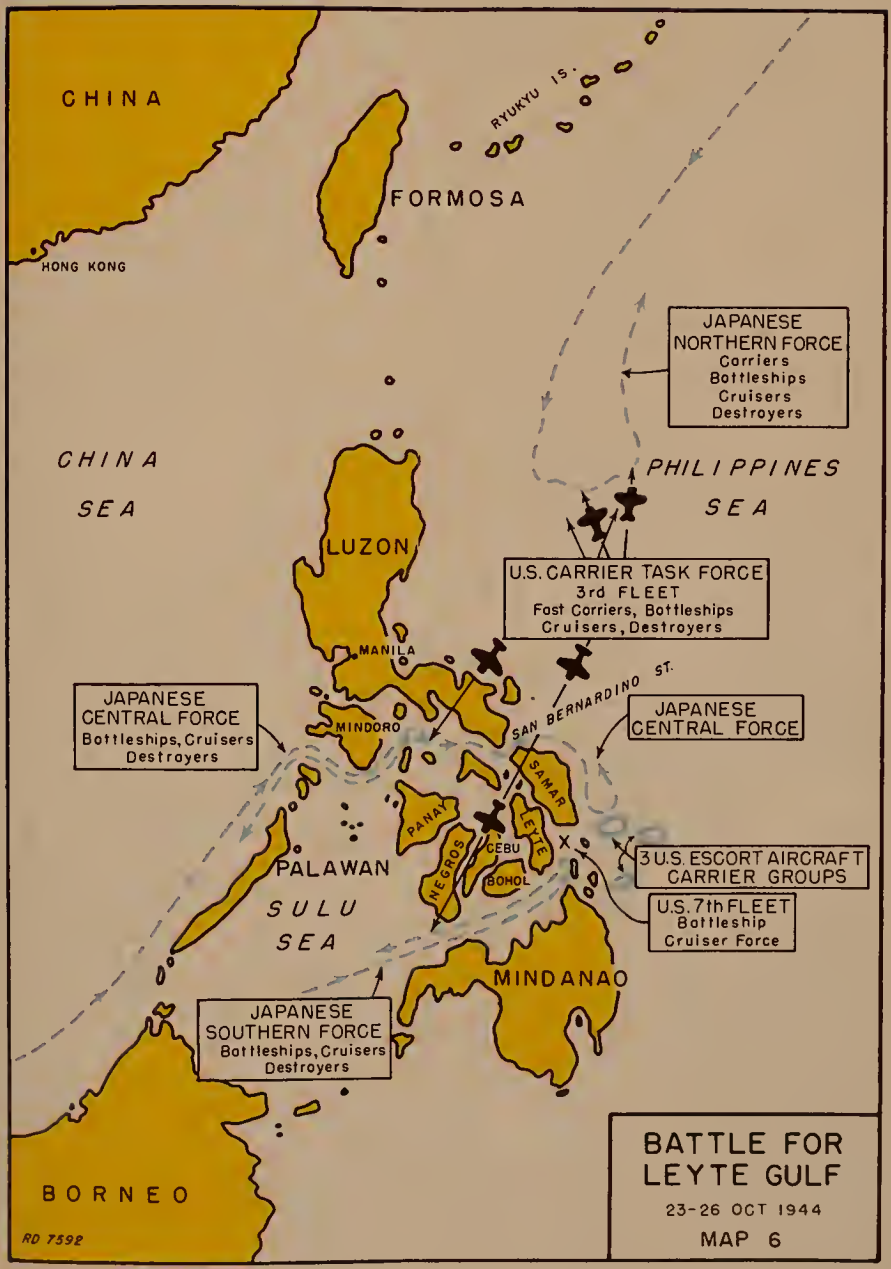
TACLOBAN AIRDROME, LEYTE

Many of these aircraft returned from missions to find their carriers sunk or badly damaged. On 25 October over a hundred of these Navy aircraft flew into airstrips at Tacloban and Dulag when their gas ran low. The field at Tacloban, captured by U. S. forces on A-Day, "had been churned into muck" by hundreds of amphibian vehicles.[13] Although construction work had been started by Army engineer troops, the strip was still very soft and in no shape for landings; there was no choice.

On Tacloban Field were four officers temporarily detached from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, still back in the Solomons. The wing's commander, Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, had made every effort to get his wing an assignment for the Philippines campaign. When his efforts failed, he obtained permission for himself and three of his staff

[13] Vern Haugland, *The AAF Against Japan*, 235. Hereinafter cited as *AAF Against Japan*.


RYUKYU IS.
RMOSA
JAPANESE
NORTHERN FORCE
Carriers
Battleships
Cruisers
Destroyers
PHILIPPINES
SEA
U.S. CARRIER TASK FORCE
3rd FLEET
Fast Carriers, Battleships
Cruisers, Destroyers
SAN BERNARDINO ST.
JAPANESE
CENTRAL FORCE
SAMAR
LEYTE
CEBU
NEGROS
BOHOL
3 U.S. ESCORT AIRCRAFT
CARRIER GROUPS
U.S. 7th FLEET
Battleship
Cruiser Force
MINDANAO
BATTLE FOR
LEYTE GULF
23-26 OCT 1944
MAP 6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Corriers
Bottleships
Cruisers
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PHILIPPINES SEA
LUZON
U.S. CARRIER TASK FORCE
3rd FLEET
Fast Corriers, Bottleships
Cruisers, Destroyers
MANILA
SAN BERNARDINO ST.
JAPANESE CENTRAL FORCE
Bottleships, Cruisers
Destroyers
MINDORO
JAPANESE CENTRAL FORCE
SAMAR
PANAY
LEYTE
CEBU
NEGROS
BOHOL
3 U.S. ESCORT AIRCRAFT CARRIER GROUPS
U.S. 7th FLEET
Battleship
Cruiser Force
PALAWAN
SULU SEA
MINDANAO
JAPANESE SOUTHERN FORCE
Bottleships, Cruisers
Destroyers
BORNEO
RD 7592
BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF
23-26 OCT 1944
MAP 6

officers[14] to attend the Leyte landing as observers. The four Marine air officers had come ashore on A-Day with the 308th Bombardment Wing of the Fifth Air Force.

General Mitchell saw that the Navy planes would have to make emergency landings; as a pilot, he also saw that from the air they would be unaware of the danger of landing on the soft sand strip, just graded preparatory to the laying of steel matting. To the right of the field was the only safe landing place, the old original sod, still firm.[15] Acting with characteristic promptness, General Mitchell seized a pair of signal flags lying nearby and ran to the end of the strip, where he wagged in more than 40 of the 67 planes[16] making their emergency landings at Tacloban strip.[17]

General Kenney further describes the situation at Tacloban:

. . . We hurriedly rolled the surface, gassed up the Navy aircraft, and loaded them with bombs and ammunition. They then took off and joined the rest of the 7th Fleet aircraft in hunting down the withdrawing Jap ships . . . These lads of Kincaid's [sic] did a great job during that day of October 25th. In spite of all they had gone through and in spite of the fact that almost every Liberty boat and landing craft in the harbor shot at them coming and going whenever they got in range, they turned in an excellent score for the day. Three Jap heavy cruisers and a destroyer were sunk and two other cruisers heavily damaged.[18]

[14] LtCol Stewart W. Ralston, CO of VMB–413; LtCol Rivers J. Morrell, Jr., Asst Wing Opns Off., and Capt Franklin McCarthy, Wing Intell. Off.

[15] Ltr from Col Stewart W. Ralston to author, dtd 11Feb51. ". . . the landing area wasn't much more than the width of an aircraft. The General did an excellent job and certainly averted a very large number of crackups . . . I heard from numerous Navy pilots that they certainly would have landed on the soft sand if they had not seen . . . signals . . ."

[16] John A. DeChant, *Devilbirds*, 179. Figures on number of planes washed out vary. *General Kenney Reports*, 459, gives the number as 20. History of the 49th Fighter Group, Chap. 12, Oct44, 6, shows 22.

[17] At Dulag strip (another field 20 miles south of Tacloban then being conditioned) 40 planes landed; eight cracked up. There was no gasoline, ammunition or bombs at Dulag, and arrangements were made to send some down in barges so that the aircraft could fly next day. *General Kenney Reports*, 459.

[18] *General Kenney Reports*, 459–460.

KENNEY ASSUMES RESPONSIBILITY FOR AIR OPERATIONS OVER LEYTE

For the first few days of the Leyte Operation, Navy flyers from the CVE's furnished all air support for the ground troops. Sixth Army reported:

. . . During the period 20 October to 29 October, these [carrier-based] aircraft in aerial combat destroyed 200 enemy aircraft and lost only 10 of their own planes, from which all but three pilots were saved. The close support provided ground forces during the initial days of the operation by naval aviation was of the highest order.[19]

After the Battle for Leyte Gulf commenced, however, the escort carriers' maximum effort was expended in defending themselves. Battle damage and aircraft losses incurred in the Battle off Samar had forced one of the three U. S. escort groups to retire, and a second group was badly hurt by suicide attacks.[20] In the effort to combat the new and serious threat of the fanatical *kamikaze* pilots,[21] there was a consequent decrease in fighter cover for Leyte, especially in direct support of ground troops. An immediate need for land-based aircraft became evident.[22]

[19] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 43.

[20] *USSBS, Campaigns*, 286.

[21] A. R. Buchanan (Ed.), *The Navy's Air War*, 250–251. Hereinafter cited as *Navy's Air War*. "Prior to this engagement there had been instances of pilot's crashing or attempting to crash on carriers and warships after they had been severely hit, but this is the first instance in which the attack seemed to be organized and planned as a suicide maneuver."

[22] Plans for the Leyte operation did not specify the exact date for the transfer of the direct support mission from Allied Naval Forces to Allied Air Forces. According to GHQ, SWPA, Operations Instructions Number 70, dtd 21Sep44, the Commander, Allied Air Forces would assume "the mission of direct support of the operations in the LEYTE-SAMAR area at the earliest practicable date after the establishment of fighters and light bombers in the Leyte area, as arranged with the Commander, Allied Naval Forces." The same OI instructed Sixth Army to "establish air facilities in the LEYTE area with objectives as follows: (a) First Objective: Immediately following the assault and by A+5 for: 1 fighter gp (P–38) 1 fighter gp (P–40) 1 night fighter sq. (b) Second Objective: Additional by A+15: 1 tactical reconnaissance sq, 1 photo sq, 1 medium bomb gp plus 1 sq P.O.A., 3 PBY sqs (tender-based), 1 VMR sq (Marine)."

ARMY ENGINEERS work fast to get Tacloban's steel matting laid before arrival of Fifth Air Force P-38's to take over air support over Leyte, 27 October 1944.

Preparing the Tacloban strip for AAF planes on such short notice called for fast work by the engineers. The runway was muddy and working conditions were extremely difficult, but 2,500 feet of steel (Marston) matting were laid in only two days. One squadron of Fifth Air Force P–38's had been alerted for movement to Tacloban. Although the field's runway was still quite short for the speedy "Lightnings," the planes landed on the unfinished strip at noon on 27 October; during the final hour before their arrival the engineers rolled coral into the sand for another 1,000 yards at the end of the strip in case any of the planes should overrun the steel runway.[23]

With the arrival of the P–38's, air control passed officially from the Navy to Commander, Allied Air Forces (General Kenney). At 1700, enemy planes attacked. The Lightnings shot down six of them; 26 more were shot down that night by AA.[24]

But FEAF aircraft were too few in number to do more than provide a defense against enemy aerial attacks. There was simply no space from which any large number of land-based planes could operate. The Tacloban strip was the only operational strip on Leyte;[25] its aircraft parking facilities were extremely limited. Planes parked almost wingtip to wingtip were extremely vulnerable to enemy attack. By 30 October hostile bombing raids had destroyed one P–38 and damaged seven others; these losses coupled with operational accidents left only 20 of the 34 P–38's on the Tacloban strip in a state of combat readiness.[26]

As a result, although MacArthur had directed that after 27 October Task Force 38 refrain from striking land targets without specific request, he changed his order shortly thereafter,[27] and carrier planes remained in direct support until 25 November.[28]

Admiral Halsey was disappointed at having to stay on an assignment that he felt should not have been his responsibility; his memoirs are not a little critical of General Kenney and Fifth Air Force on that score.[29] *Sixth Army Report*, however, gives an evaluation considerably less severe:

> What then, was the basic reason for the inadequate aerial strength on Leyte, a condition that obtained throughout most of the operation despite the fact that the Fifth Air Force had numerous aircraft at rear bases ready to move forward to Leyte? Stated simply, the answer was a lack of air facilities on the island;

[23] *General Kenney Reports*, 467. After the planes arrived, another 1,000 feet of matting was laid by 1600, 27 October.

[24] *The AAF Against Japan*, 236.

[25] The strip at Dulag was occasionally used for emergency landings.

[26] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 43. Admiral Halsey reports 27 Tacloban-based planes lost in a single night to enemy bombing alone. Adm William F. Halsey, Jr., *Admiral Halsey's Story*, 230. Hereinafter cited as *Admiral Halsey's Story*.

[27] *Employment*, 43.

[28] *Navy's Air War*, 252.

[29] *Admiral Halsey's Story*, 242.

in fact, the Tacloban airstrip was the only operational strip on Leyte during Phase II. (During Phase III the slow conditioning of other airstrips, which was caused by heavy rains, poor drainage, and unsatisfactory soilbases, resulted in inadequate air facilities and thus so strongly restricted the Fifth Air Force that it was able to provide only limited direct support.)

The absence of Leyte-based light and medium bomber aircraft placed upon the fighter aircraft the additional burden of furnishing striking power at a time when these fighters had all they could do to provide defense and protective cover for the objective area. The ability of the Japanese to reinforce their Leyte garrison — and to prolong the Leyte operation —can be attributed in some degree to this fundamental change[30] in the original plan for air support. The fighter aircraft were able to provide only limited direct support which did not include any close support for ground troops.[31]

More than anything else, the weather caused the delay in commencing full-scale aerial operations from Leyte airfields. The rainy season, which had commenced earlier than usual, was considerably more severe than U. S. planners had anticipated. Three typhoons occurred in less than two weeks, between A-minus 3 and A-plus 8; one occurring on 28 October 1944 was accompanied by a 70-mph gale. Because of these typhoons, and the accompanying heavy rains (35 inches in 40 days), the important supply roads of the island turned into deep sticky mud that bogged down vehicles and retarded offensive activities. To keep the all-important lines of communication open, engineer troops had to be diverted from airfield construction. Captured airstrips, located on low, poorly drained ground, were found to be in complete disrepair. It was not possible to condition these strips for bomber operations within a reasonable time. As a result, the arrival dates of light and medium bombers were deferred indefinitely.

[30] If conditions had permitted adherence to the original plan for air support, four squadrons of medium bombers would have been operating from Leyte by A+15 (4Nov). Actually medium and light bombers were not based on Leyte until late in December.

[31] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 44.

TACLOBAN AIRSTRIP, first and most important U. S. field on Leyte. This photo, taken in 1946, shows a field in much better condition than it was during the critical days immediately after invasion.

THE NOVEMBER STALEMATE

The dangerous lack of air power was felt more and more strongly as the campaign progressed. It became apparent that the enemy intended to hold Leyte at all costs, even after the loss of his fleet. Initially, Leyte operations had promised to be relatively short. Japanese combat troops defending Leyte had numbered only 16,000 on A-Day, and had been unable to check the U. S. advance. In a short time, however, the Japanese had successfully reinforced the Leyte garrison by landing two divisions (1st and 26th), an infantry regiment (41st Infantry Regiment, 30th Division), four independent infantry battalions (from 102d Division), and other troops. The Sixth Army felt that these reinforcements might "have been prevented from landing, and Allied aerial superiority could have been quickly secured, had the Fifth Air Force been able to base at Leyte" all aircraft originally scheduled.[32]

On 2 November, a large Japanese convoy bearing reinforcements entered Ormoc Bay, on the west coast of Leyte Island. The plane shortage of Fifth Air Force was so drastic at this time that its air task force on Leyte, the 308th Bomb Wing, planned to use only eight P–38's to attack the convoy; the Thirteenth Air Force, utilizing bombers as far away as Morotai, staged in through Tacloban strip to strike the transports, but only one enemy cargo ship was sunk.[33]

A similar situation existed a week later when, on 9 November, an enemy convoy consisting of two cruisers, 10 destroyers, and four transports moved into Ormoc Bay and landed the Japanese 26th Division. Enemy transports completed unloading on the morning of 10 November, and sailed from the bay at 1100. At 1115, B–25's from Morotai[34] attacked the convoy, sinking one frigate and two cargo vessels,[35] Unfortunately, as on previous occasions, these aerial blows had been too late to prevent the landing of Japanese reinforcements.[36]

As a consequence of all these events, Phase Three of the Leyte operation (the destruction of hostile forces remaining on Leyte and the clearing of hostile forces from southern Samar) assumed much larger proportions in execution than had been contemplated in planning. On 3 November, the X Corps sent the 24th Infantry Division westward from Carigara; this division took Pinamopoan next day and turned southward toward Ormoc. Shortly thereafter, it met heavy opposition on Breakneck Ridge, which was not overcome until 16 November.

In the XXIV Corps (southwestern) zone of action, the 96th Infantry Division overcame strong resistance west of Dagami as the 7th Infantry Division concentrated at Baybay for a northward push along the west coast. (See Map 5.)

Countering the Japanese reinforcements on Leyte, the Sixth United States Army "was reinforced by the 32d Infantry Division and the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team on 14 November, by the 11th Airborne Division on 18 November, and by the 77th Infantry Division on 23 November."[37]

Simultaneously with X Corps' advance from the north toward Ormoc, the 96th Infantry Division and the XXIV Corps' 11th Airborne Division drove "westward over difficult mountain trails," and the 7th Infantry Division pushed "slowly northward along the west coast of Leyte. Commanding General, Sixth Army, continued plans to land troops in the Ormoc area, cut off the flow of enemy reinforcements," and attack the now large Japanese forces from the rear.[38]

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[32] *Ibid*, 83.

[33] *Ibid.*, 43.

[34] *MS. COMMENT*, Air University Library, USAF: "From the Fifth Air Force's 38th Group, operating under Thirteenth Air Force." [The use of *MS. COMMENT* in this and subsequent footnotes indicates that the material documented has been received from reviewers of the original manuscript of this monograph.]

[35] *Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, Japanese Naval and Merchant Ship Losses During World War II By All Causes.* Hereinafter cited as *JANAC.* One destroyer is credited to Navy aircraft in same action.

[36] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 58.

[37] *Ibid.*, 4.

[38] *Ibid.*, 3–4.

MUD AND RAIN constituted formidable obstacles, delaying troop movements and greatly impeding airstrip construction. This was the living area of Marine night fighter pilots first to land on Leyte.

Meanwhile, troubles in getting operational airstrips continued. As early as 3 November, Bayug airstrip (see Map 5) was put into use by P–40's of the 110th Reconnaissance Squadron, and Buri airstrip, (like Bayug, classified a "dryweather strip") became operational for fighter planes on 5 November. Both strips remained operational only a very short time; the 35 inches of rain that fell in 40 days quickly terminated the use of either strip.

The Dulag strip, captured 21 October, was not operational until 19 November in spite of the combined efforts of three engineer battalions. Torrential rains, poor drainage, faulty soil bases, and poor access roads finally prompted Fifth Air Force representatives to agree to the abandonment of Buri and San Pablo airstrips. Three engineer battalions and one naval construction battalion had labored for two weeks on the San Pablo strip before its abandonment on 23 November. Work on Buri airstrip ended on 30 November when it became clear that engineer means were insufficient to develop all airdrome sites under the existing conditions. Sixth Army felt that Bayug airstrip, third and last of the three strips in the Burauen area, would not remain operational because of unsatisfactory subgrade soil conditions, even if Marston mats were laid.

Fifth Air Force, however, chose to hold Bayug strip, even though "access roads to this airdrome required great engineer effort and in certain areas the quantity of rock per mile

placed in the subgrade would have constructed 20 miles of road under normal conditions."[39]

Engineer units made available when the Buri and San Pablo airstrips were abandoned went to work at once on a new airstrip near the coastal town of Tanauan, between Tacloban and Dulag. (See Map 5). This site was readily drained, had a good sandy surface and proved excellent for airstrip construction. The Sixth Army Command Post, which had been located on the proposed airfield site at Tanauan, moved to Tolosa on 28 November so that work could begin on the Tanauan strip.[40]

But in spite of the slow development of airstrip facilities, by the end of November land-based air (which at the beginning of the month had consisted of only two squadrons of day fighters and one squadron of night fighters) had been increased to a total strength of three day fighter groups, two night fighter squadrons, a light bomber group, and a photographic unit. Navy units operating in this area included three VPB (patrol bombing) squadrons, a Liberator (PB4Y) squadron and a Ventura (PV) squadron.[41]

Progress on the ground had also been slowed by the mud and rain, but at month's end U. S. troops controlled all of Leyte except the Ormoc Bay area and the northwest coast of the island. (See Map 4). There the reinforced Japanese, with their sea communications still intact in their rear, resisted strongly.

Operationally the Leyte situation seemed to deteriorate rather than improve, notwithstanding the fact that air power had been augmented, the Sixth Army had seven divisions ashore, and the Navy had driven the Japanese fleet from the waters surrounding Leyte. But Japanese reinforcements continued to pour in through Ormoc Bay; in spite of losses both enroute and unloading, total enemy reinforcements were estimated at approximately 47,900 (44,400 Army troops plus 3,500 Imperial Marines).[42] Estimated enemy casualties by 30 November numbered 24,287 killed and 186 captured—only about half of the number of Japanese reinforcements brought in during the same period.[43]

In accordance with basic AAF doctrine, the Fifth Air Force until 2 November had "utilized all available planes in a struggle to gain air superiority" and applied "only limited means to the second priority mission of preventing the movement of hostile troops" to Leyte. "The efforts involved in carrying out these tasks and the insufficient number of available aircraft precluded until late in the campaign the employment of aircraft upon close support missions."[44]

MACARTHUR AND HALSEY REQUEST MARINE SQUADRONS

At General MacArthur's request, naval aviation was still in the area, helping AAF cope with the air situation. By 27 November, Admiral Halsey and his carriers had already stayed in the Philippines "almost a month

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[39] *Ibid.*, 69.

[40] *Ibid.*, 69.

[41] *Navy's Air War*, 255.

[42] 10th Information & Historical Service, 8th Army, A Staff Study of Operation of the 35th Japanese Army on Leyte. Interrogation of MajGen Yoshiharu Tomochika.

[43] Troop strengths and casualties of the enemy, as estimated at various times and by various sources, vary widely. The 47,900 figure reported above, for example, is at odds with USSBS, *Campaigns*, 287, which reports total reinforcements of 30,000 troops "landed in nine echelons between 23 October and 11 December." Other sources give yet different figures—USSBS, *Employment*, 45, estimates that ". . . The enemy lost approximately 55,000 troops, the majority of which had been members of first line combat units." This would indicate total reinforcements of 39,000, since there were 16,000 Japanese troops on Leyte at the time of invasion. But regardless of which of these figures are accepted, if any, it can safely be said that reinforcements amounting to at least twice the original garrison were successfully landed during the campaign, and that the Japanese eventually committed to Leyte about one-fifth of their total strength in the entire archipelago.

[44] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 44. The first direct support strike by land-based aircraft during the Leyte operation did not occur until 26 Nov., when four P–40's strafed enemy positions to assist the advance of the 7th Division. According to this report, only six direct support missions were flown by Fifth Air Force during the entire Leyte campaign.

longer than had been planned."[45] From 3 November, when Halsey again began to give air support to the operation, until 27 November, when he was finally relieved, his planes made 6,062 sorties, of which 4,198 were combat strikes. During this period 54 enemy warships, totaling 140,600 tons, had been sunk, more than three times that tonnage damaged, and 768 enemy aircraft had been destroyed by Task Force 38.[46]

But Halsey was unhappy because he was not released to strike Japan's home islands. Admiral Kinkaid was worried as *kamikaze* pilots continued their damaging suicide strikes on Seventh Fleet ships. General MacArthur seemed particularly dissatisfied with his air defense at dawn and dusk. In the midst of this all-round dissatisfaction, MacArthur proposed a trade with Nimitz:[47]

> Japs operating Oscars as night bombers which are too fast for P–61's.[48] In Palau enemy employing bombers which P–61 can effectively cope with. Would appreciate your considering a temporary swap of night fighter squadrons, the Marine squadron at Palau to operate from Leyte and P–61's to go to Peleliu.[49]

The Marine squadron MacArthur had requested was Marine Night Fighting Squadron 541 (VMF(N)–541) At about the same time, Admiral Halsey moved to accomplish that which General Mitchell had attempted so many times – to move 1st Marine Aircraft Wing into the Philippines fight. In Halsey's own words:

> I had had under my command in the South Pacific a Marine Air Group which had proved its versatility in everything from fighting to blasting enemy vessels. I knew that the group was now under MacArthur's command, and I knew, too, without understanding why, that when Kenney was not keeping it idle, he was assigning it to missions far below its capacity. Kinkaid's complaint of insufficient air cover prompted me to take a step which was more than a liberty; to a man of meaner spirit than MacArthur's it would have seemed an impertinence. I called these Marines to his attention. He ordered them forward, and within 24 hours of their arrival, they had justified my recommendation.[50]

Thus, within two days, both VMF (N)–541, (Marine night fighter squadron in the Palaus) and four squadrons[51] of Marine Aircraft Group 12 in the Solomons, were alerted to move to Tacloban.

MARINE NIGHT FIGHTERS ORDERED TO LEYTE FROM PELELIU

VMF(N)–541, as part of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing on Peleliu, had for two and a half months performed a wide variety of night missions throughout the Palaus. Equipped with F6F's (Grumman-built planes popularly called "Hellcats") fitted with radar devices for night intercept work, these pilots were eminently qualified for night combat by both training and experience. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Peter D. Lambrecht, (who had activated the organization at Cherry Point, North Carolina, nine months earlier), had specialized knowledge of night fighter and night intercept techniques obtained from a tour of duty in England. Upon his return to Cherry Point he had transmitted this knowledge to his new command by an intensive training program.

The first combat assignment of the squadron had been in the Palaus; now the outfit was scheduled for a short but busy tour at Leyte. It was intended that the organization would remain at Tacloban only a couple of weeks. As things turned out, it stayed for five.

When informed of this new task, Colonel Lambrecht flew to Tacloban Field (28 November) to arrange for accommodations there. Air echelon of the Marine squadron simply exchanged facilities[52] with the air echelon of

[45] *Employment*, 43.

[46] *Navy's Air War*, 255.

[47] Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Aviation in World War II*, (manuscript copy) Philippines I, 11-12. Hereinafter cited as *Sherrod.*

[48] 421st AAF Night Fighter Squadron.

[49] CINCSOWESPAC TO CINCPOA CAX–11868, 26Nov44; however, FEAF, Vol. I, says: "Because of the slowness of the construction progress at Leyte the 22d Bomb Group (H) and the 421st Night Fighter Squadron were moved to Palau to operate from facilities constructed by POA."

[50] *Admiral Halsey's Story*, 231. Gen Kenney's reasons for not bringing in Marine aircraft at an earlier date are given in Chapter I.

[51] VMF's–115, 211, 218, 313.

[52] Including both material and personnel; each unit would utilize the other's quarters, parking strips and rear echelon service troops.

AAF's 421st Night Fighter Squadron, the P–61 unit that General MacArthur was sending to Peleliu as agreed with Admiral Nimitz.

Five days later (3Dec44) VMF(N)–541's 12 Hellcats set out on the 602-mile overwater flight to Tacloban. Accompanying were three "Commandos" (R5C's) of VMJ–952, carrying the remainder of the air echelon. They arrived at Tacloban Field at 1030, 3 December 1944.

By late afternoon of the same day, some of the Hellcat pilots had flown their first Philippine mission. Under the operational direction of Fifth Air Force's 308th Bomb Wing, six planes flew last-light cover for PT boats in Surigao Strait and provided air cover over Ormoc Bay. No incident occurred, but for VMF(N)–541 and for other Marine pilots (who arrived on Leyte on the same day) there was action aplenty in store.

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP 12 MOVES TO LEYTE

As a result of Admiral Halsey's recommendation to General MacArthur, Allied Air Forces sent a dispatch on 30 November to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at Bougainville, ordering one of its fighter groups to move to Leyte immediately. Next day General Mitchell ordered Colonel William A. Willis' Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG–12), to transfer its four fighter squadrons[53] to Tacloban; upon arrival there not later than 3 December, to report to the 308th Bombardment Wing, Fifth Air Force, for duty.

MAG–12's combat operations in the Solomons ceased immediately. All hands turned to

[53] Of the four squadrons, VMF–115, VMF–211, and VMF–313 were based at Emirau Island, and VMF–218 was based at Green Island.

RADAR-EQUIPPED NIGHT FIGHTERS, Hellcats of the type flown by VMF(N)-541, the "Bateyes."

packing and loading for the forthcoming move.

General Mitchell, a Philippine assignment in hand at last, took steps to expedite the movement. He requested and received from Fifth Air Force transportation for the minimum men and materiel of the ground echelon required for plane maintenance at Tacloban; from the Commander Seventh Fleet, logistic support for the forward echelon.[54]

At dawn on 2 December, 85 F4U's from MAG–12,[55] and 12 PBJ's from MAG–61 (one Marine PBJ was sent as a guide plane with each flight of Corsairs) took off from the Solomons for Hollandia, the first leg of their journey to the Philippines. Refueling there, the planes continued to Owi, a small island near Biak.

On 3 December they flew to Peleliu, arriving four and a half hours after VMF(N)–541's night fighters had departed for the Philippines. Sixteen Corsairs were delayed at Peleliu with minor mechanical difficulties, but by 1700 on 3 December, 66 of MAG–12's F4U's landed on Leyte.

At Tacloban conditions were still primitive. The muddy strip had practically no operative taxi-ways or parking facilities; operations were formidable even in good weather. On 4 December rain kept planes on the deck, but the newly arrived Marines used the time to set up camp in the only spot available—a mudhole 300 yards due west of the southern end of Tacloban strip.

FIRST MARINE AIR ACTION OVER LEYTE

Pre-dawn patrol on 5 December brought the Marines their first Philippines aerial combat. Four night fighters of VMF(N)–541 were covering a convoy of minesweepers in Canigao Channel, between Bohol Island and south Leyte when a Japanese *OSCAR* (single-engine, single-seated fighter) swept in toward the ship formation. Second Lieutenant Rodney E. Montgomery, Jr., dived steeply and opened

SECOND LIEUTENANT RODNEY E. MONTGOMERY, first Marine pilot to shoot down an enemy plane in the Philippines, 5 December 1944.

fire on the *OSCAR*, knocking it into the black waters of the channel below.[56]

On the same day, MAG–12 pilots had their first Philippines skirmish. Of the twenty-two flights of four planes each assigned flight missions,[57] only one made contact with the enemy. Ordered to cover a naval task group in the vicinity of Dinagat Island (east of Leyte) Marine pilots arrived on station just as several Japanese *ZEKES* (single-seated, single-engine fighters, popularly called *ZEROS*) attacking the ships.[58] Captain John D. Lindley (VMF–115), the flight leader, spotted one *ZEKE* that had just finished a run on a ship.

[54] War Diary, MAG–12, Dec44.

[55] Three Corsairs of a scheduled 88 did not get off from Emirau because of operational difficulties. At Hollandia, three more were stopped temporarily.

[56] War Diary, VMF(N)–541, 5Dec44.

[57] Other MAG–12 missions during the day included two four-plane flights to escort "Dumbos," the slow and unprotected flying boats (PBY's) used for air-sea rescue missions. The first operational pilot casualty took place during the initial patrol of the day, when Lt Jerome G. Bohland of VMF–211 crashed and was killed while taking off. War Diary, MAG–12, 5Dec44. *MS. COMMENT*, Capt R. F. Blanchard: "I believe he was flight leader—hence the first MAG–12 pilot to take off from Tacloban." *MS. COMMENT*, Capt R. W. Cline: "The strip was lighted with pots which were spaced too far apart for the Corsair with its poor forward visibility . . . This made a predawn takeoff very difficult. With only 70 feet [width of runway] you really must hold . . . straight down the runway."

[58] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt D. G. Frost: "One ship had been hit by the time we arrived (I believe the *Nashville*)."

Nosing over from about 13,000 feet, he fired on the plane until it began to smoke and went out of control.[59]

As for many nights to follow, VMF(N)–541 Night Hellcats were back in the air again that evening, to fly last-light patrols and individual night patrols, working with Army Ground Control Intercept personnel, (ground radar units known as GCI). They reported no enemy activity.

Dawn and dusk patrols proved to be the biggest assignment for the night fighters—it was obvious that these morning and evening assignments were of paramount importance, since these were the times most popular with raiding Japanese planes. However, although the Night Hellcats were well suited to such missions, it seemed to the pilots that their special training in night fighting tactics was not receiving full utilization; therefore, on squadron initiative, they also frequently carried out night patrols against enemy intruders, cooperating closely with the Army GCI setup.[60]

During the early part of the month, such night flights as the Bateye squadron did make were not entirely satisfactory. Difficulties stemmed from the fact that they were not operating with the Marine ground controllers with whom they had trained; the Army's ground radar men used different procedures, which frequently led to misunderstandings until flyers and controllers became familiar with each other's ways.

Initially, therefore, night interceptions left much to be desired. When the enemy used low approaches and swift recessions, controllers were unable to vector[61] the Night Hellcats within range of air-borne radar before the "bogeys"[62] left ground radar range. Practice together, however, brought immediate improvement in teamwork and procedures.

Other difficulties stemmed from crowded airstrip conditions and excessive air-borne traffic. The Base Operations Center was unable to permit test flights to check air-borne radar. Ground tests of such radar left much to be desired. Many interceptions failed because of air-borne radar inadequacies not shown up by ground tests.[63]

Like the night fighters, MAG–12's fighter pilots found themselves on missions different from those they had expected. Called into Leyte to reinforce air support and cover for the Philippines operation, they anticipated flying "close support," which to them meant coordinated air-ground attacks against enemy targets near the front lines.

That assigned targets were not close to the front lines should have come as no surprise. Although Marine Aviation had long considered support of ground troops a primary mission, basic AAF doctrine relegated such efforts (described as efforts "to gain objectives on the immediate front of the ground forces") to a third priority.[64]

Consequently, daily missions of the Marine flyers included bombing and strafing of enemy airfields, air cover over Allied convoys and beachheads, escorting bombing raids and supply and rescue missions, and attacking Japanese troops, supplies, shipping and communications throughout the Central Philippines.

But one type of mission, execution of which was probably the group's most important contribution to the campaign, was more familiar: attacks on Japanese shipping. It was primarily the performance of these fighter-bomber airmen against enemy warships and transport vessels that would earn for Marine Aircraft Group 12 the Presidential Unit Citation. (See Back Cover.)

[59] *Ibid.*, "When I came up behind this Jap at about 1000' he was smoking from hits by Lindley's guns . . . This kill was later confirmed by an Army P–38."

[60] War Diary, VMF(N)–541, 4Dec44.

[61] Vector: to direct fighter approaches as demanded by relative enemy and friendly positions determined by radar and radioed to the attacking fighter.

[62] Bogeys: unidentified aircraft "pips" or markers as shown on a radar screen, or, in many instances, the planes themselves.

[63] War Diary, VMF(N)–541, Summary of Month's Operations, Dec44.

[64] War Dept FM–100–20, *Command and Employment of Air Power*, 21Jul43, para 16–a, 10–11. The first priority of missions was "to gain the necessary degree of air superiority . . ." while the second was "to prevent the movement of hostile troops and supplies into the theater of operations or within the theater."

THE BIG JOB: TO ATTACK JAPANESE REINFORCEMENTS

In many ways the Leyte campaign was a contest between U. S. and Japanese reinforcement capabilities. Japanese seaborne reinforcement of their Leyte garrison had begun shortly after Sixth Army's October landings. In spite of losses en route the Japanese reinforced Leyte during November at a rate twice their losses to American ground action. (See p. 26.) Far East Air Forces had sunk at least a dozen enemy ships,[65] but usually after Japanese troops had already debarked on Leyte. Navy carrier planes had been more successful,[66] even though at the same time they were busy defending their carriers against *kamikaze* attack.

Admiral Halsey said:

> Our adjustment to the *kamikazes* was complicated by the enemy's stubborn refusal, despite his staggering naval defeat, to consider Leyte lost. He began to pour planes into his fields . . . and to rush troops through his inland waterway, across the Sibuyan Sea. Kenney could neither stop them nor protect our own troops and shipping. His fighters were useless against convoys, and he had few bombers . . .[67]

Reinforcements had more than tripled the Japanese troop strength on Leyte. If the ground campaign on the island were not to continue dragging on for months, continuing to be costly in lives, time, and materiel, the reinforcements would have to be stopped. And participation in the stopping of these reinforcements became one of MAG–12's big assignments.

CONVOY STRIKE—7 DECEMBER

First Marine strike against these convoys came on 7 December 1944. Army Intelligence had reported in briefing that three enemy destroyers and four cargo ships were steaming into Ormoc Bay and would still be some distance at sea at the time of attack. At 0930, 12 Corsairs of VMF–211 set out to intercept the convoy, only to find that the four cargo ships had already anchored in San Isidro harbor (see Map 4.), and the three destroyers were departing from Leyte in the direction of Manila. Acting on the assumption that the cargo ships would have to remain in port until later in the day, the flight leader, Major Stanislaus Witomski, immediately ordered the flight to attack the destroyers. Two of the Japanese war vessels had turned in combat formation at sight of the Corsairs, leaving one destroyer separated slightly from the other two.[68]

Army P–47's had been scheduled to furnish air cover for the Marines, but failed to arrive.[69] Nevertheless, the Corsairmen dived in through the protecting Japanese air cover (eight to ten *ZEKES*) and dropped their bombs,[70] picking out the single destroyer as their target. No direct hits resulted, but near misses started an oil leak on the DD, leaving it "almost dead in the water."[71] While the rest of the flight re-formed as protection from the Japanese fighter planes still attacking, one division of four planes remained to strafe the disabled enemy ship. With six separate straf-

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[65] According to *JANAC*, between 27 Oct and 1 Dec, AAF planes sank 1 frigate, 2 subchasers, 5 cargo ships, 3 tank landing ships, and 2 light cruisers (shared with Navy carrier-based aircraft) in the waters of the central Philippines. [*JANAC* figures should not be considered as the maximum assessment. Unfortunately, the standards set up by the Committee have not been clearly stated. The report does not include any ship of under 500 tons, nor does it include a number of ships sunk and subsequently salvaged. In addition, in cases where there was more than one agent of sinking, little or no effort was made to determine the share of each. Therefore, a fair evaluation must of necessity take these factors into account and figures in disagreement with *JANAC* are not necessarily incorrect.]

[66] Again according to *JANAC*, during the same period Navy planes sank 10 destroyers, 2 heavy cruisers, 1 light cruiser, (plus two shared with AAF planes), 25 cargo ships, 5 tankers, 1 minesweeper, 1 patrol boat, 1 subchaser, 1 frigate, 2 high-speed transports, and 4 tank landing ships.

[67] *Admiral Halsey's Story*, 230.

[68] *MS. COMMENT:* 1stLt D. M. Oster.

[69] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt J. W. Miller: "[VMF bombers] . . . always had an escort of our own planes after this incident."

[70] Army Air Forces A–2 Periodic Report #579, 7Dec44: "Enemy planes were aggressive and some followed our planes down on bomb run but the F4U's continued attack without jettisoning bombs."

[71] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt D. M. Oster.

ing runs, the Marine pilots started a fire that soon spread from stem to stern of the destroyer. The Corsairs left the ship in flames, leaking oil badly, and barely underway.[72]

The action was not without cost to the Marines. Fire from the enemy planes and ships downed three Corsairs. All three pilots bailed out, but one was lost and another died later of injuries.[73]

Other MAG–12 pilots took vengeance in the afternoon, when 21 Corsairs swept in on the rest of the seven ship convoy, just as it weighed anchor in San Isidro Harbor. Led by Major Joe H. McGlothlin, Jr., the planes launched their attack from the land side, gliding steeply in toward the sea and dropping their 1,000-pound bombs into the broadsides of the ships, from an altitude of less than 150 feet. Army P–40's also joined in the attack, and shared with Marine pilots of VMF–211 and 313 the credit for sinking one Japanese cargo ship. Two pilots of VMF–211 exploded another freighter; four VMF–218 pilots accounted for yet another, which broke in two and sank amid smoke, flames and steam. The fourth freighter went down under the bombs of four flyers from VMF–313.[74]

The flight leader, Major McGlothlin, and Lieutenant Clyde R. Jarrett (VMF–313), in a masthead attack on a destroyer, landed their 1,000-pound bombs aft of the rear stack; two VMF–211 pilots crippled another destroyer, and Lieutenant William E. Bradley skipped his bomb through the superstructure of the last destroyer.[75] Final score for the afternoon of 7 December: four cargo ships and a high-speed troop transport sunk, and two destroyers seriously damaged; all without the loss of a single Marine plane.[76]

CONVOY STRIKES—11-12 DECEMBER

On 11 December the Japanese made their final large-scale attempt to reinforce and supply their beleaguered Leyte garrison. For almost two months, at an ever increasing cost, their convoys had run the Allied air gantlet. Their 7 December attempt had been especially costly; now the MAG–12 flyers, having received word that a ten ship enemy convoy (consisting of six cargo ships and troop transports, escorted by four destroyers and destroyer escorts) was Leyte-bound, set out to make this attempt even costlier. In a morning attack, 27 Corsairs from the four MAG–12 squadrons intercepted the convoy off the northeast tip of Panay Island. Planes carried half-ton bombs, set with a fuze of four to five second delay.[77]

The morning's combat opened when eight planes from VMF–313 began a dive bombing attack on a troop transport. Two of their bombs hit amidships, and six more 1,000-pounders were near misses. One cargo ship was hit by VMF–115 planes, who scored one hit just aft of amidships, setting it on fire. VMF–115 planes also put three near misses alongside another Japanese cargo vessel. The eight planes of VMF–211 made no direct hits on the convoy. Their attack was interrupted by ten to fifteen *ZEKE* fighters. The ensuing aerial dogfight saw four Japanese planes shot down.[78]

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[72] War Diary, MAG–12, 7Dec44. A few days later Army planes reported the destroyer beached at Semirara Island, just south of Mindoro.

[73] Lt L. W. Reisner bailed out near Carnasa Island and was never seen again. He was the first Marine pilot killed in Philippines combat. Lt Jacques Allen bailed out south of Tacloban, suffered a fractured skull, and died two months later, after having been evacuated to the U. S. Major Stanislaus Witomski, CO of VMF–211, bailed out safely over Leyte, was rescued, and returned to his squadron later the same day.

[74] War Diaries, VMF's 211 and 313, 7Dec44.

[75] ACA–1 Report, VMF–313, 7Dec44.

[76] *JANAC* identifies the four cargo ships as HAKUBA MARU, AKAGISAN MARU, SHINSEI MARU, and NICHIYO MARU; it gives Army Air Force planes joint credit with Marine planes for these sinkings. The high speed transport (Transport No. 11) sunk at the same coordinates as the other four ships is credited by *JANAC* to Army Air Force planes only. ACA–1 Report, VMF–313, 7Dec44, says: ". . . Army P–40's finished off the final cripple . . ."

[77] This fuze setting allowed the bomb to penetrate the enemy ship before exploding, and greatly increased potential damage.

[78] War Diaries, VMF's–313, 115, 211, for 11Dec44.

Another squadron, VMF–218, sent four Corsairs into the same attack. The results of their bombs on the convoy were unobserved; the Marines were too busy fighting off the *ZEKES* that tried unsuccessfully to break up their attack. Seven *ZEKES* had come in from 10,000 feet in formation, then had broken off to attack individual planes. After the bombing run one *ZEKE* was shot in the wing and was seen smoking as it went into a cloud bank; black smoke drifted from the cloud but the *ZEKE* was never seen again. Another Corsairman got on the tail of a *ZEKE* and followed it down to 4,000 feet, firing on it all the way. It was observed to crash on the beach at Buncayao Point on Panay Island.[79]

After the planes of VMF–313 had pulled out of their bomb run, they sighted and engaged six to eight *ZEKES* and *OSCARS*. In a running fight, two of the Japanese fighters were shot down; two U. S. planes suffered superficial damage.[80]

All of these actions, were marked by intense anti-aircraft fire from the Japanese destroyers and cargo vessels. VMF–218 flyers received especially accurate fire from the ships' 20 and 40mm guns. Several Marine planes were holed, and one pilot was forced to make a water landing.[81]

As the Marines broke off their attack, the Japanese convoy was observed steaming toward Ormoc Bay. That afternoon 26 Corsairs and 16 P–40's (Army) were sent out from Tacloban to hit it again, this time five miles from Palompon. (See Map 4.) Captain Rolfe F. Blanchard (VMF–115), who led the strike, tells the story:

. . . preparations were made, in collaboration with Army Air Force operations to launch a strike. It was decided that the strike would be composed of about 30 P–40's carrying 500# instantaneous fused bombs and 28 F4U's[82] carrying 1000# 4–5 second delay bombs. The Army flight was to strike first, by dive bombing, and we were to follow with a masthead attack. A joint briefing was held for all pilots, Army and Marine, and thoroughly briefed by [Captain] Roger Haberman [VMF–211, acting group operations officer]. A second briefing was held for Marine Pilots in which detailed tactics were laid out. The plan was to strike at mast head level in three waves spaced far enough apart to allow the preceding wave's bombs to detonate safely . . .

When the ships were sighted (there was a broken layer of cumulus between 6–7,000 feet) the Army started peeling off in groups of 2 and 3 planes and dove from 10,000 to about 5,000, released bombs and pulled back through the overcast. They accomplished nothing except to make interesting splashes in the water and wake up the Japs. AA immediately became very intense. As the last Army bombs were falling our Corsairs were in position and coming in fast and low. The Japs never saw us coming until we started to shoot (we received no fire until past the screening destroyers) . . .[83]

COLONEL WILLIAM A. WILLIS, Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 12, first Marine group to arrive in the Philippines, 3 December 1944.

Primary targets of the afternoon attacks were the six transports and cargo ships in the center of the convoy (surrounded by four destroyers or destroyer escorts, one at each corner).[84] VMF–313 pilots scored three hits on the largest troop transport (AP), damaged it

[79] War Diary, VMF–218, 11Dec44.

[80] War Diary, VMF–313, 11Dec44.

[81] Lt W. D. Bean, later picked up in the waters of the Visayan Sea by guerilla forces, and returned to his base nine days later. See Appendix VI for his survival report.

[82] According to War Diary, VMF–211, 11Dec44, 26 F4U's and 16 P–40's actually took part in the strike.

[83] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt R. F. Blanchard.

so badly that it sank almost immediately.[85] Other pilots of the same squadron sank one medium cargo ship, one destroyer,[86] and left two freighters aflame and beached on a little island five miles west of Palompon.[87]

Meanwhile, two pilots of VMF–211 sank a destroyer with their bombs, and four more shared another. Three more sank a troop transport,[88] and other ships in the convoy were strafed and bombed, but damage could not be determined.[89]

VMF–115's eight planes on the mission made a masthead attack, with one plane scoring a direct hit on a large freighter; the bomb hit amidships on the waterline.[90] Two hits were scored on another freighter, one aft and one forward of the superstructure, leaving the ship listing and burning. Four to five *ZEKES* jumped the VMF–211 planes, coming in fast from 13,000 feet, and forced the Corsairs to give full throttle and go into dives to evade the enemy.

[84] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt M. D. Lane, Jr.: ". . . The attack was coordinated to come in line abreast . . . Capt Lane released his bomb on the forward starboard destroyer so as not to crowd his flight centered on their run on the primary targets . . ."

[85] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt R. Reed, Jr.: ". . . believed to be a troop transport sunk by Lts W. S. Sharpe and D. E. Masters on a flat skip run . . . witnessed by myself . . ."

[86] *Ibid.*, ". . . believed to be destroyer sunk by myself . . . Bomb hit just forward of bridge and ship sank in approximately same time as ship sunk by Sharpe and Masters. Due to confusion at base a report on this ship and that sunk by Sharpe and Masters was not made to intelligence."

[87] War Diary, VMF–313, 11Dec44.

[88] This transport may be the same one claimed as sunk by VMF–313.

[89] War Diary, VMF–211, 11Dec44.

[90] Pilots of VMF–313 confirmed the fact that this ship sank a little later. *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt M. A. Gudor: ". . . This is probably my hit since in 'booting' my aircraft around immediately after making the run to avoid anti-aircraft fire, I observed my bomb hit amidships a cargo ship . . . *MS. COMMENT.* Capt Martin D. Lane, Jr.: "All 8 masthead bombed; however, the flight leader and his wingman failed to release on this run and these two made a second run —a dive bombing run."

Two planes of VMF–218 came in on the low-level attack on the convoy, scoring one direct hit on a destroyer escort, striking the ship at the water line. The pilots saw steam and smoke rising from the ship as they returned to base. Another VMF-218 plane made a direct hit on the large AP, the lead ship in the convoy, but final results were unobserved.[91]

Pilots of all squadrons reported the AA as terrifically intense 40mm, three-inch, and automatic weapons. Four planes of VMF–313 were hit, two of them being badly damaged.[92] Second Lieutenant Stanley Picak of VMF–211 was seen spinning in from about 1000 feet, after having been hit by AA fire. He crashed into the sea and was killed, only a few minutes after he had downed a Japanese plane.[93] First Lieutenant Harry J. O'Hara of VMF–211 was the other pilot killed in the 11 December action.

Two pilots of VMF-115 forced to bail out were more fortunate. Listed by their units for a time as "missing in action," they were rescued by Filipino guerillas and later returned to their base.[94]

[91] War Diary, VMF–218, 11Dec44. This AP is probably the same one claimed as sunk by VMF–313.

[92] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt M. D. Lane, Jr.: "One of of these flown by Capt M. D. Lane, Jr., who had been hit twice, *once* by machine gun fire when he was strafing a DD at such a low altitude that it was necessary to lift his right wing at the last moment to clear the masthead; and second when he was at 6500 ft 5 to 7 miles south of the shipping formation he was hit again by heavy AAA. Had about 300 holes in the aircraft."

[93] *MS. COMMENT*, C. H. Slaton, Jr.: "Second Lieutenant Stanley Picak of VMF–211 was seen at 200 feet roll over on his back and to crash into the water at a very slight angle. He was firing his machine guns until he crashed."

[94] The two pilots were 1stLt W. J. Rainalter (who had just scored a direct hit on a transport before he was shot down) and 2d Lt M. A. Gudor. *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt Paul K. Becher: "1stLt W. J. Rainalter was also credited with downing a Jap fighter on this same mission. *MS. COMMENT*, 1st Lt M. A. Gudor: ". . . Young and I joined up and scouted for . . . Zekes. We sighted two Zekes pulling away from a dogfight the Army cover was having. We had an altitude advantage of a few thousand feet and pulled in on their tails. As Young got off his first burst he was jumped by two more Zekes and dived out and

The final box score for the Marine attacks on enemy shipping, morning and afternoon strikes of 11 December: four to seven enemy ships sunk[95] plus at least two more damaged, out of a total of ten ships; eight enemy planes shot down, plus one "probable." Marine losses: four planes shot down, with two of the four pilots saved.

The Marines got one more crack at the remnants of the enemy convoy on the following day (12 December). Early in the afternoon, a report was received of two enemy destroyers and a tank landing ship under way about 15 miles off the northeast tip of Panay. At 1600, 35 Corsairs from three MAG–12 (VMF's–211, 115, and 313) set out from Tacloban to add the finishing touches to their previous day's work. Combining forces with eight AAF P–40's in masthead and dive bombing[96] attacks, they sank one of the destroyers (*YUZUKI*), set fire to the tank landing ship and left it "dead in the water,"[97] and also left the other destroyer burning and badly crippled.[98] Twelve planes (eight from VMF–218, four from VMF–313) furnished air cover during the attack. Three of the Corsairs were holed by AA fire, but there were no Marine casualties.[99]

AIR COVER OVER U. S. SHIPPING—11-12 DECEMBER

While most of the Corsairs chewed away at the ten ship Japanese convoy on 11 and 12 December, other MAG–12 planes were protecting U. S. ships in Leyte Gulf against just such aerial depredations by the Japanese. During the afternoon of 11 December, four Corsairs of VMF–313 were patrolling U. S. shipping through Surigao Straits.

They had been on the mission for almost four hours when, at 1715, 16 Japanese *ZEKE* fighters with 500-pound bombs under each wing came in from the west at an altitude of

returned to base. I tailed in on my Zeke, fast overtaking him. At approximately 100 yards, I was 10 degrees or so off the dead astern position and put a burst of .50 cal. through the engine and brought it back through the cockpit. The Zeke smoked, suddenly nosed down and spiraled into the sea. I then climbed for more altitude looking for Young for I didn't know he had been jumped.

Two Zekes at the same altitude turned towards me, so I turned into them for the book says—"In a head on run a Jap plane will either turn aside or blow up." Evidently this Jap hadn't read the book for he kept coming. We were closing fast prop to prop. All my six 50 cal. guns were going and pieces were flying off the Zeke's cowling. At the last possible instant I nosed my Corsair violently down. The Zeke passed over and sheared off half of the rudder and left stabilizer. I immediately had my hands full. Being worried about the companion Zeke didn't help . . . I dove for the ocean but at 400 knots the plane vibrated like it would fall apart. Also, the oil pressure went down to zero and the propeller froze stock still. At 800 feet altitude I leveled the plane and bailed out into the sea. During the night the convoy we had hit was burning and the explosions rent the air about 10 miles to the southeast of me. The next day about 5 p.m. a beautiful Navy PBY set down on the sea and picked me up."

[95] Since each of the squadrons made a separate report of the action, it is possible that there is some duplication, with the same ship being claimed as sunk by several squadrons. According to available evidence, out of a total of ten ships in the convoy, MAG–12 planes sank from a minimum of four ships to a maximum of six or seven. *JANAC* lists only two, MINO MARU and TASMANIA MARU, both cargo ships, and credits the sinkings to Army and Marine land-based aircraft. On 12Dec44 (the following day) when 35 MAG–12 and 8 Army planes hit the remnants of the convoy, there were only three vessels left in it. This supports a figure of six or seven ships sunk on 11Dec. *JANAC* credits no aircraft with sinking other ships of that convoy on 11Dec44.

[96] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt M. A. Kime: ". . . Capt Jay McDonald (VMF–313) led the bombers . . . As we approached the enemy ships, which were in column and under forced draft, Capt McDonald ordered two divisions to skip bomb the destroyer and the remaining divisions to dive bomb the forward two ships . . . The attack was very low and fast, after dropping my 1,000 lb. bomb, I had to pull up slightly to clear the stern gun turret . . . skip bombers just cleared the ships as the dive bombers released their bombs . . ."

[97] War Diary, VMF-313, 12Dec44. This ship evidently sank later; *JANAC* lists Transport No. 159, Tank Landing Ship, as sunk in this area on this date by Army and Marine Air.

[98] VMF–313 War Diary notes that "This DD was caught the following night making 2 or 3 knots and sunk by a Navy surface ship." *JANAC* lists a DD (*UZUKI*) as sunk by surface craft on 12 December, at a point very near to where the Marine action took place; this is probably the ship mentioned.

[99] War Diaries, MAG–12, VMF–115, VMF–211, VMF–218, and VMF–313. Lt Robert E. Dunk (VMF–211) bailed out near Tacloban, was picked up by a PT boat, returned to his squadron next day.

MARINE CORSAIRS armed with 1,000 pound bombs fly over water en route to a strike in the Philippines.

2,500 feet. They were hidden from observation by a rain squall until they were only about 2,000 yards from the convoy, and had not been picked up by radar. They were first sighted by a destroyer, which immediately opened up with AA fire. As the *ZEKES* came in to attack the convoy, the Marine flyers, led by Major Theodore Olsen, dived in through the hail of friendly AA fire and engaged the *ZEKES*, shooting down five of them and driving the remainder away after two or three had dropped their bombs.[100] One bomb hit an LST, leaving it dead in the water. Two *ZEKES*, one of them in flames, deliberately crash-dived into the fantail of the destroyer USS *Reid*, exploding its depth charges and sinking it[101]

In this engagement, against four to one odds, every Marine in the patrol shot down at least one enemy plane. Second Lieutenant Clyde R. Jarrett got two. The patrol headed back for the base, pancaking at 1845. Only damage to the Corsairs was from our own AA.

During the same afternoon, VMF–218 had maintained five patrols of four planes each over Ormoc Bay. The first patrol had encountered a *VAL* (the easily recognizable Japanese dive bomber, with non-retractable landing gear), and prevented its escape as the Japanese pilot dived through the clouds in a frantic evasion attempt. A two-plane section bracketed the *VAL* from either side and each plane made a firing run on it. One plane followed it down to 600 feet, firing into its tail, and the *VAL* crashed into the water in Kawit Strait.

The next two patrols over waters west of Leyte were negative, but the fourth patrol ran into eight *HAMPS* (code name for one model of the *ZEKE*) west of San Isidro Bay. The Japanese sent one plane to the side and above the Corsairs, evidently to act as a decoy; the other planes came in and attacked the formation. The Corsairs kept all their planes together in defense; one *HAMP* was shot down, crashing into the water near the convoy, and

[100] War Diary, VMF–313, 11Dec44.

[101] Summary of War Damage, NAVShips A–4 (424), 15Mar 46.

another was damaged in the right wing as pieces were seen to fall down from it.[102]

The last VMF–218 patrol encountered four *ZEKES*, one separate and the others together. One *ZEKE* made a pass at the division leader and his wingman, but a section leader and his wingman turned on the *ZEKE* and chased it into the water. Later, the division leader, Captain Oscar M. Bate, Jr., got on the tail of a formation of three *ZEKES*, and when one turned to the left and one to the right, Captain Bate flew straight through the formation firing into the lead plane. The *ZEKE* went fully out of control when flames broke out in its cockpit. It was last seen plunging earthward.[103]

The Night Hellcats of VMF(N)–541 on their assigned mission of dawn and dusk convoy cover did not get their share of the action until their early morning patrol of 12 December, when a three-plane division was airborne at 0615 to cover a convoy returning from the Ormoc Bay sector. They were almost immediately vectored northwest of the convoy; ship's radar had picked up many "bogeys" (unidentified aircraft, as spotted on the radar screen) orbiting to the northwest. Meanwhile, a four-plane "Bateye" division was airborne at 0650 to cover PT Boats in Carigara Bay. At 0705, as the bogeys proceeded on a south vector, land-based GCI called the four-plane division, then turned it over to ship control just as the Japanese planes began to turn in toward the convoy, Captain David W. Thomson, leading the three-plane division, sighted them and turned his division head on into the center group, causing the enemy pilots to jettison their bombs and turn away from the U. S. ships. The three-plane division shot down three enemy aircraft on this first pass and within the next few minutes destroyed two more and damaged a third.

About ten minutes after the initial contact, the four-plane division came in from the north to join the action, and in a whirlwind attack destroyed six enemy aircraft. At one time, a total of 33 Japanese aircraft were counted by ground observers. These aircraft, consisting of torpedo bombers, dive bombers, and fighters, were unable to inflict serious damage on the convoy. Many of the planes reached the U. S. ships, but the attack by the Night Hellcats had so broken up their flight formation and discipline that bombing was inaccurate.

During the battle it was observed that the Japanese pilots attempted evasion on several occasions by diving or climbing. The Hellcats easily outdived the *ZEKES*, and in most instances outclimbed them. The enemy planes almost consistently turned to the port side, since it seemed that both *OSCARS* and *ZEKES* could turn inside the Hellcats on a left turn.

The Japanese aircraft seemed to have little protective armor and were generally poorly constructed. Most planes burst into flames when hit; on three occasions, parts of the tail sections of *OSCARS* and *ZEKES* were shot away from the fuselage.

According to the Aircraft Action Report of the Marines on the mission, the enemy showed poor air discipline and evaded air combat whenever possible, although they outnumbered the Marines by eleven to one at first sighting.[104] Nevertheless, total "Bateye" score for the morning of 12 December: 11 enemy aircraft destroyed, one damaged; no Marine casualties.

OPERATIONAL ACCIDENTS

While attacking enemy shipping and protecting U. S. shipping, Marine casualties and aircraft losses were relatively light. But with the crowded conditions and the almost uniformly bad weather at Tacloban Field, there were inevitable operational accidents, some minor, some serious. What was probably the worst operational accident suffered by the MAG–12 Marines during the entire Leyte campaign took place before dawn on 13 December. At 0530 on a murky morning characterized by a low ceiling and extremely poor

[102] War Diary, VMF–218, 11Dec44.

[103] *Ibid. MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt J. W. Miller: ". . . on this mission . . . 2dLt R. E. Eaccobacci was lost . . . He was Bate's wingman in this flight."

[104] War Diary, VMF(N)–541, 12Dec44; Aircraft Action Report, 1944–Dec–7.

visibility, six Corsairs of VMF–313 started out on a mission with two planes of the Night Hellcat squadron to escort a friendly convoy. During takeoff, the plane of First Lieutenant William E. Bradley (VMF–313), just after becoming air-borne, fell off on the left wing and crashed on the left side of the runway.[105] The plane ran into a jeep, injuring the two occupants, then into an ambulance, some refueling trucks and a crash truck in front of the field operations building, killing four others. Fires from the plane and several gasoline refueling trucks broke out, preventing the rest of the planes in the flight from taking off.

But the bad news was not yet over. Major Theodore Olsen of VMF–313, leader of the ill-fated flight, had taken off safely before the accident took place, but a short time later was killed bailing out of his defective[106] plane.

AIR COVER FOR MINDORO

Allied landings on Mindoro Island had been scheduled to follow those on Leyte and Samar, with a target date of 5 December 1944. Located almost due south of Manila Bay, the large island of Mindoro would furnish the Allies with important air bases for land-based planes. (See Map 1.) From these fields missions frequently could be flown against targets on the island of Luzon when the planes at the more distant Leyte bases were weathered in; even more important, land-based planes would be more readily available to cover the invasion shipping for the landings at Lingayen on 9 January, as the convoys passed through the waterways of the central Visayas.

But the 5 December target date for Mindoro could not be met. On 1 December GHQ had directed that Sixth Army postpone initiation of the operation for ten days. This delay was necessitated by the insufficiency of air support at that time, which in turn had been caused by the slow development of airfields on Leyte.

This postponement of the Mindoro operation had some very direct effects on progress of the bogged-down Leyte campaign. First, it released engineer troops originally scheduled to move to Mindoro, making them available for work on a new airfield on Leyte—completion of this field, about seven miles south of Tacloban at Tanauan, would greatly increase the number of land-based planes that could operate from Leyte. (All MAG–12 planes would move from Tacloban to Tanauan between 21–27 December). Second, the landing of Allied troops at Ormoc, last stronghold of the Japanese on Leyte, was made possible on 7 December through the employment of the amphibious shipping and naval support made available from the postponed Mindoro operation.[107]

The delay also gave the Marines a chance to get in on two important landings. Marine planes had arrived on Leyte (3 December), in time to give air support for the Ormoc landing (7 December) as well as the Mindoro Island landings when they eventually took place on 15 December.

On that date assault troops[108] went ashore at Mindoro, landing at San Jose Bay shortly after daybreak. No opposition was encountered and no casualties reported during the day. The ground was hard and dry, excellent for quick airdrome construction. Engineers were at work on two airstrips before dark.[109]

Although there was no opposition on the ground, there was plenty in the air. Air cover

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[105] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt R. W. Cline: "The tower operator . . . cleared Bradley for takeoff and another aircraft to taxi at the same time. In the attempt to miss the other aircraft Bradley pulled up sharply and fell off on a wing." *MS. COMMENT*, Maj J. E. McDonald: ". . . After becoming airborne his landing gear hit a tent adjacent to runway. It was the tent that caused aircraft to lose flying speed and fall on jeep . . ."

[106] War Diary, MAG-12, 13Dec44. *MS. COMMENT*, Capt M. D. Lane, Jr.: "Mayor Olsen was unable to start the aircraft he regularly flew . . . and was forced to take an assigned spare . . . the aircraft which Capt Lane had flown on 11 December, which had been holed 300 times on that date; it had been patched up, but had not been flown since."

[107] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 69. The Ormoc landing had been previously planned, but the time was dependent upon shipping availability.

[108] Elements of Sixth Army, including a regimental combat team from the 24th Division, the 503d Parachute Regiment, and engineer and air troops.

[109] *General Kenney Reports*, 493-494.

TANAUAN AIRSTRIP, seven miles south of crowded Tacloban, furnished desperately-needed space for U. S. planes. All Marine squadrons on Leyte moved there, 23–27 December 1944.

was being flown by various units of the Fifth Air Force, including Marine planes of MAG–12 which had been assigned to the mission. Over the beachhead four planes of VMF–211 encountered five *ZEKES*, all bent on suicide attacks on U. S. shipping in the harbor just off the beach. The Marine planes dived in fast and shot down all five. No damage was done to the U. S. ships, and the Marines emerged unscathed.[110]

Seventeen Corsairs of VMF–313 were also assigned to cover the Mindoro landings, but they were called back early by the Army fighter director because of very bad weather conditions between Tacloban field and the beachhead.

The Night Hellcats of VMF(N)–541, however, arrived over the beachhead early enough to miss the bad weather. Four F6F's had set out at 0530 from Tacloban to act as fighter cover for the convoy, having drawn this early morning mission because of their ability to fly during the hours of darkness. They arrived over the target area, approximately 260 miles from Tacloban, at 0700. At 0805, the shipborne air controller informed them of two "bogeys" heading toward the convoy. As the

[110] War Diary, VMF–211, 15Dec44.

information was incomplete, and no altitude reading could be given, the "Bateyes" were vectored south for an interception. The four-plane division was flying at 8,000 feet when one of the pilots sighted two *VALS* 6,000 feet below. He dived on one of them, firing accurately into its fuselage until the *VAL* turned to port, flipped over, and crashed into the water. The remaining Japanese dive bomber turned into the sun, broke visual contact, and escaped.[111]

Twenty minutes later, the shipborne air controller radioed information of more "bogeys," coming in low over the water, about 30 miles away. At 0840, the Night Hellcats made visual contact with two *VALS* and four *JILLS* (single engine torpedo bomber carrying a three-man crew). Captain Harlin Morrison, Jr., who was division leader, and Second Lieutenant Carl D. Williams made runs on three *JILLS* that broke away from the formation. Morrison shot away part of the wings of one *JILL* on this run, then turned and came in again from below. The *JILL* spiraled from 3,000 feet into the sea. Williams scored hits from the tail to the nose of another *JILL*, and apparently hit the pilot, as the Jap pulled up abruptly, then nosed down and crashed into the water. Second Lieutenant Robert F. Marr sighted two *ZEKES* racing toward the *JILLS;* the lead plane peeled off to the left and the other slow-rolled to the right. Marr made a run on the second plane, drawing flames from the port wing. He continued firing until the *ZEKE* exploded.

The shipborne controller informed the night fighters that radar showed no more "bogeys" and that no Japanese planes had broken through to the convoy. The Night Hellcats, by now short on fuel, returned to base. Total score for the four Marine pilots: 1 *VAL*, 2 *JILLS*, 1 *ZEKE*,[112] and a U. S. convoy unscathed during the Hellcat pilots' stewardship.

For three days after the Mindoro landings Marine flyers continued to fly cover missions over the beachhead. On such a mission a VMF–115 pilot[113] shot down a lone *OSCAR* on 18 December, but opposition in the air was becoming increasingly scarce. As a result of this lack of aerial opposition, the beachhead and convoy cover missions (that had been of such prime importance a few days earlier at the time of the 77th Division's landings near Ormoc, and during the first days of the amphibious assault at Mindoro), now gradually became smaller parts of the missions assigned to the Marine pilots. Japanese airpower in the Leyte area was becoming virtually non-existent; Corsairmen began to find little aerial opposition except in the north, over the island of Luzon.

There, on the night of 22 December, one night fighter found Japanese planes to spare. Technical Sergeant John W. Andre[114] was flying south along the west coast of Luzon after a long and fruitless single-handed pursuit of three enemy planes, when he spotted four burning smudge pots, marking the enemy airstrip at Bulan. To the south he sighted an aircraft coming into the field with wing lights burning. The Night Hellcat circled the field, turning in behind the Japanese. As he accomplished this, he saw another Japanese aircraft turn on its wing lights. All three aircraft circled until a white signal light was flashed from the field. Then, as the two *JACKS* (single engine, single-seated fighter plane) went into their landing approaches, Andre dived in behind one of them, fired, and it burst into flames. He immediately gunned up behind the second plane and fired again. The enemy plane crashed on the field and burst into flame as the gas tanks exploded. Sergeant Andre then made four strafing runs over the north-south runway, leaving three aircraft (unidentified types) in flames, and two other large

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[111] VMF(N)–541, War Diary, 15Dec44; Aircraft Action Report 1944–8.

[112] *Ibid.*

[113] 1stLt E. A. Hammers. On a similar mission in the afternoon of the same day, 1stLt R. M. Robinson, VMF–218, was shot down by 20mm AA fire from a friendly PT boat, and later returned to his base. *MS. COMMENT*, Capt W. R. VanNess: "Robbie bailed out over the water and was picked up by the same PT boat that shot him down . . ."

[114] One of the few Marine enlisted pilots still flying in the Pacific area by December 1944.

fires, believed to have been gas trucks, still burning as he headed for home.[115]

GROUND SUPPORT MISSIONS, LEYTE

Direct aerial support of Leyte ground troop action by land-based planes was negligible during the first month of a campaign characterized by practically a complete lack of coordinated *close* air support throughout.[116] According to a Sixth Army report:

. . . The situation in fact was such that the first close support air strike by land-based aircraft during the Leyte Operation did not occur until 26 November, when four P–40's strafed enemy positions on Hill 918 to assist the advance of the 7th Division. Seven P–40's in a close support strike mission bombed Hill 918 again on 2 December, one air strike on an organized hostile position at Matagob on 23 December, and two air strikes on Palompon on 23 December, completed the list of close support air strikes carried out by land-based aircraft. The combined effort of the air and ground forces to gain objectives on the immediate front of the ground forces would undoubtedly have shortened the operation and reduced ground force losses.[117]

Such combined effort with ground forces was entirely within the capability of Marine Aircraft Group 12 which was in position to support the Sixth Army. However, the Marine group did not at any time receive an assignment to fly the sort of close support missions against Leyte targets that it and other Marine groups would fly later in the Philippine campaign; there had been no ostensible effort made between ground and air forces to make use of existing air-ground liaison facilities to direct and control air strikes close to ground troops.[118]

Marine pilots did fly a number of strikes in support of ground troops, but they were of the sort better described as direct support rather than close support. There was never any ground control once the flight became airborne. Instead, these missions were all prebriefed at the air base from target assignments issued the day before the strike.

The first of these missions took place on 10 December when 12 Corsairs each loaded with one 1000-lb. bomb struck an enemy bivouac area at San Isidro on the west coast of Leyte. (The closest friendly troops were at least 10 miles away.) All 12 bombs hit in the bivouac area, started several fires, and demolished part of a pier with one direct hit.[119] The area was then thoroughly strafed, but results could not be assessed.[120]

The second Marine strike against a land target on Leyte also took place on 10 December, when four Corsairs were sent to bomb the enemy bivouac area at Ormoc. The leader of the flight was unable to locate the target, so the Corsairmen dropped their bombs on the town of Ormoc itself. All bombs hit in the target area, but results were unobserved.

The next strike in support of ground troops took place on 17 December, when 32 Corsairs were sent on a strike over Cananga Town, at the junction of the Palompon and Ormoc roads. Each plane carried one 1,000-pound bomb, instantaneously fuzed. Planes of VMF–218 got all their bombs in the area and a large amount of smoke was seen rising from it after the run, but exact damage was not assessed. The 12 planes of VMF–211 scored a direct hit on a warehouse in the area which later exploded, and also got several good hits on the personnel quartered there. The planes of VMF–115 got all their bombs in the area and

[115] War Diary, VMF(N)–541; Aircraft Action Report 1944–9.

[116] Carrier-based planes flew many close support missions with considerable success during the first three days after the landing, but were forced to stop them after the Battle of Leyte Gulf commenced.

[117] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 83–84.

[118] There were Joint Assault Signal Companies (JASCO's) on Leyte, with complete air-ground communication facilities and personnel to operate the various aircraft request and control networks, but no evidence has been found to indicate that there was any front-line control of close support strikes at any time during the Leyte campaign. (One possible exception is the period from A–day to A–plus 5, when the Navy was in charge of close support of ground troops. See AAF Evaluation Board POA Report No. 3.)

[119] During the bombing of San Isidro, Lt F. W. Krieger was shot down by 20mm AA coming from the pier. He was rescued almost immediately by "Dumbo." (Air-sea rescue plane.)

[120] Returning from the mission, the Marines encountered three *DINAHS* (twin-engined reconnaissance planes) over Carnasa Island; two of them escaped into the clouds, but the third was boxed in and shot down by two pilots of VMF–115, Lieutenants Norman W. Gourley and Marion B. Collin.

completely destroyed one large building. All planes then strafed, but no fires were started.

On 19 December, the Corsairs struck again at ground targets. A flight of 12 planes hit the Japanese supply base in the town of Palompon, on the northwest coast of Leyte. The four planes of VMF–115 dropped their 1,000-pounders in the town, but saw no fires or other damage as a result. Dust and smoke prevented observation of results of VMF–211's four bombs, but they all landed in the town proper. The four bombs of VMF–313 started a fire in the western portion of the town, but once again, no other results were observed.

It was five days later before another such mission was assigned. On 24 December, a flight of seven Corsairs hit Daha, on the west coast of northern Leyte, in support of ground operations. Eleven quarter-tonners were dropped in the town, which was left in flames after the bombing and strafing. They met no enemy opposition.

Simultaneous with this action four Corsairs hit the Jap supply base at Palompon (see Map 4) in a dive bombing attack. The planes also strafed in the attack; again no opposition was encountered. Four other Corsairs hit Tabacqa Island off Palompon in a bombing and strafing attack, to wind up ground support operations for the day.

Christmas Day, 12 Corsairs flew a strafing mission over the town of Kampokpok, making five passes and setting several houses and other buildings afire. Other Christmas Day missions were more or less routine: Marines escorted Army C–47's and Dumbo's to various points, and seven Corsairs bombed and strafed the town of Butuan, Mindanao, with excellent results.

SIXTH ARMY RELIEVED

By 26 December the Leyte campaign had come to a climax. On Christmas Day a battalion of the 77th Division had landed at Palompon,[121] the last remaining Japanese port on Leyte's west coast. The capture of this town by U. S. forces successfully sealed off remaining enemy troops on the island. Their last chance for either reinforcement or retreat was now cut off.

There was still much fighting to be done. The mopping-up lasted for the better part of five months, and by 8 May 1945, had resulted in the killing or capturing of an additional 25,000 Japanese.

But the job of Sixth Army on Leyte was done. On 26 December control of further Leyte operations was relinquished to the Eighth Army (Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, USA); the Sixth now began preparations for a forthcoming assault on Luzon, target date—9 January 1945.[122]

CLOSING MARINE AIR OPERATIONS, 1944

Marine Corsairmen, in a flurry of activity at year's end, on missions ranging from convoy cover to strafing and bombing, found more lucrative targets, both in the air and on the ground, than they had seen since the Ormoc (7 December) and Mindoro (15 December) landings.

During one of the last actions of the year, VMF–218, while carrying out a mission of convoy cover near Mindoro Island, added three more enemy planes to the totals for the month. On 29 December, a four-plane flight of Corsairs encountered a Japanese *OSCAR* flying toward Negros Island. The flight leader ordered two of the Corsairs to bracket the *OSCAR*, one on either side, while he and his wingman gained altitude and approached it from the rear. Lieutenant Otis E. Millenbine, on one side, slid in and fired two short bursts at the *OSCAR*. At the first burst, parts of the right wing and fuselage fell off and the plane exploded in mid-air.

That afternoon, on a similar mission, another flight of four planes from VMF–218 was vectored by the convoy below toward a formation of three approaching *JUDYS* (Japanese single-engine dive bombers). Seeking to escape the attacking Marines, two of the enemy planes dived to within 50 feet of the water; Lieutenant Waldemar D. Maya, diving close behind, fired two short bursts that sent one

[121] The port town struck by Marine Corsairs on 24 December, the day before the landing.

[122] *Sixth Army Report, Leyte*, 4.

of them into the ocean. He then turned sharply to the second, fired again, and killed its gunner with a long 90° deflection shot. Simultaneously, Lieutenant Miles Smith fired a burst into the plane, causing it to explode as it fell into the water.

MAG–12 wound up the year 1944 with two days of strafing between Laguna de Bay and Legaspi, a 200-mile sector extending southeast from the outskirts of Manila. Planes from all four squadrons participated in these sweeps, lashing out at ammunition and supply trains, locomotives, storage tanks, oil refineries, factories, supply dumps, power plants, and all targets of opportunity that presented themselves. One *OSCAR* was destroyed on the ground, one *ZEKE* in the air, at least 20 locomotives were destroyed, and a Japanese motor torpedo boat, found camouflaged, was strafed and burned.[123]

Another mission scheduled for 30 December called for a joint Marine-Army strike on Clark Field near Manila, with 48 Marine Corsairs from MAG–12 flying cover for Army B–24's. The Marine planes reached the rendezvous point and circled about for more than an hour, but the bombers failed to appear. After unsuccessful attempts to contact the bombers by radio, the Corsairs returned to their base.

In less than a full month of operations—from 3 to 31 December—MAG–12 had flown a total of 264 missions of all types, ranging from convoy and beachhead covers to fighter-bomber strikes against enemy shipping in Visayan waters and ground installations on southern Luzon, as well as ground support missions on Leyte. MAG–12's Corsairs had destroyed more than forty enemy planes in the air and on the ground. They had sunk seven destroyers, nine cargo ships, three troop transports, and three luggers; they had damaged at least 11 more ships of various types. The Marine fighters had wreaked daily devastation on Japanese troops, material and communications. For this contribution to the Philippine victory, the Marines had paid with the lives of nine flyers and 34 planes.

For its achievements in the first half of the month, the Group received the following citation from the Army it was supporting:

The Marine Fighter Squadrons 115, 211, 218 and 313 are cited for outstanding performance of duty in action in the Philippine Islands from 2 to 15 December 1944. During this period, at a critical stage in the operations on Leyte, first battleground in the campaign to liberate the Philippines, these Marine fighter squadrons not only carried out their primary mission of providing aerial cover, but also gave close support to our ground troops and intercepted large and heavily escorted enemy convoys . . . The gallantry and fighting spirit of the Marine pilots and the skill and tireless fidelity to duty of the ground personnel, who so well carried out their arduous task of maintaining and servicing the aircraft under the worst possible conditions, constituted a major contribution to the success of the Leyte operations and initial American victory in the Philippines. The achievements of the Marine Fighter Squadrons 115, 211, 218 and 313 are in keeping with the highest traditions of the armed forces of the United States.[124]

MARINE NIGHT FIGHTERS RETURN TO PALAU

The night fighter squadron, VMF(N)–541, originally scheduled to stay only two weeks at Leyte, had stayed almost five. On 6 January 1945 MacArthur released the squadron and it returned to its home base at Peleliu. During these five weeks[125] of operation the "Bateyes," operating daily with 10 to 15 planes, had flown 924 combat hours, or an average of more than two hours per plane per night. They had destroyed 23 enemy aircraft, at least five more "probables," sunk one enemy ship, and damaged another. Most important achievement: during the period when the squadron furnished air cover for ship convoys, not one Japanese plane penetrated that cover to strike a convoy.[126]

[123] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt Edmund Buchner, Jr.: ". . . one plane was lost on the 30 December 44 hop. It was hit by AA at Naga, Luzon. 1stLt Glenn McCall . . . made a successful water landing in San Miguel Bay and was returned by guerillas."

[124] War Department, General Order #123, dtd 18Oct46.

[125] 3Dec44 to 6Jan45.

[126] Flying under the most difficult of conditions, from crowded and muddy strips, during extremely rainy and bad weather, and specializing in missions at dawn, dusk, or after dark, the Night Hellcats had lost no personnel, no planes in combat, and only one plane from an operational accident.

For their work the Bateye Squadron received the following Letter of Commendation from the Fifth Air Force and V Fighter Command:

The outstanding performance of your organization during its operations at Tacloban, Leyte Province, Philippine Islands, from 3 December 1944 to 6 January 1945, deserves the highest praise and commendation. Operating under difficult conditions on missions of all types, the coordination and skill as exemplified by your combat pilots was exceptional. The maintenance of the combat status of aircraft by your ground crews has also been carried out with exceptional proficiency.

At a critical stage of the Leyte campaign, your organization moved in and made an important contribution to the control of the air that is now assured our forces, and in preventing reinforcements of enemy positions. In the attacks you continually carried out, your organization destroyed approximately twenty-three (23) enemy planes in the air and participated in more than two hundred (200) sorties under the most hazardous conditions and weather elements.

It is desired to pass on to you the highest commendation, as well as the personal appreciation of the members of this command for your cooperative spirit and outstanding performance during this period.

General MacArthur also wanted to pass on his evaluation of VMF(N)–541's performance. Shortly before its departure he sent the following message to Admiral Nimitz:

With your concurrence plan to relieve 541 Marine Night Fighter Squadron from Operations at Leyte and recall the 421 Night Fighter Squadron from Palau on or about 9 January. If this plan has your concurrence, request you advise this headquarters with information to Commander, Allied Air Force and Commander Fifth Air Force. Your night fighter squadron has performed magnificently repeat magnificently during its temporary duty in this area and your assistance in furnishing the squadron is appreciated.[127]

PREPARATIONS FOR LANDINGS ON LUZON

After the Leyte campaign was declared closed except for "mopping up" on 26 December, the next big step in the liberation of the Philippines was a landing on the island of Luzon. The landing, which was to take place at Lingayen Gulf, 150 miles north of Manila, wes set for 9 January. The target date (called "S-Day") had been originally set for 20 December but had been delayed by several factors: (1) General Kenney considered that lack of adequate air base facilities on Leyte had prevented sustained neutralization of enemy airbases on Luzon by the proposed December target date. (2) Postponement of the Mindoro operation had tied up shipping necessary for the Lingayen landing. (3) Lack of airstrip facilities on Mindoro would hamper Luzon strategies.[128]

But these difficulties had been overcome by 3 January 1945, when the Sixth Army, covered by Allied Naval and Air Forces, began its seaborne move toward Lingayen Gulf, selected landing spot for the Luzon invasion.

Sixth Army's landing was supported by: Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet; the Allied Naval Forces (SWPA), commanded by Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, USN; the Allied Air Forces (principally Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces) under Lieutenant General George C. Kenney, USA; and the 20th and 14th Air Forces, Brigadier General Curtis B. LeMay, USA, and Major General Clair Chennault, USA, respectively.[129]

Marine aviation's only direct contribution to the preparations for landing on Luzon consisted of fighter sweeps as far north as Manila (and sometimes as far as Clark Field),[130] starting two weeks before the landing and continuing even after it had taken place. Main purpose of these fighter raids was to deny mobility to the enemy by striking highway and railroad bridges, and disrupting transportation in any way possible. Such little air-to-air combat as the Marines met with in January took place on these sweeps.

Number one targets for the Marine Corsairs of MAG–12 were two vital Luzon railway bridges – one at Calumpit (north of Manila) and the other at Calauag (Tayabas

[127] Message from GHQ, SWPA to CINCPOA, sgd MacArthur, 1Jan45.

[128] *Report of the Luzon Campaign*, Sixth U. S. Army, 9Jan45 to 30Jun45, Vol. I, 5. Hereinafter cited as *Luzon, Sixth Army.*

[129] *Ibid*, 5.

[130] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt M. A. Kime: "MAG 12 did send planes north of Manila and Clark Field. On 6 January 1945, four of us from VMF 313, Major McGlothlin, Jr., leading, went to the Lingayen Gulf, Luzon. This was a 5 hour flight escorting two photographic P–38's, stationed on Leyte."

Province). Marine and AAF pilots struck these and other vital river crossings on mission after mission until they were completely destroyed. (See Map 7, Chapter III.)

En route to Calumpit bridge on 6 January, 12 Corsairs of VMF–211 spotted one *TOPSY* (twin-engine transport), one *BETTY* (medium bomber), and one unidentified single-engine plane, all three streaking eastward very low over the waters of Manila Bay. The Marines could not give chase because of their assigned primary bombing mission.

They continued to Calumpit, and one by one the fighter-bombers peeled off and dived on the target, wrecking the rail approaches to the bridge. As First Lieutenant Frederic L. Rockefeller pulled up after releasing his bomb load, he sighted a twin-engine *NICK* (fighter) proceeding due west along the north shore of Manila Bay. His primary mission now completed, Lieutenant Rockefeller took advantage of the speed gained in his diving run and gave chase. He closed rapidly on the Japanese plane, fired two bursts from his .50 calibre machine guns and knocked the *NICK* into the water. Rockefeller rejoined his flight as it concluded the day's onslaught by blowing up two ammunition trucks and setting fire to several others on strafing runs along the highway near Manila.

Foul weather frequently diverted these proposed attacks on Luzon targets; the rainy season was still going on, and the flight from Leyte to the Manila area or beyond was at least 370 miles each way—such a distance did not allow much deviation from a direct course, nor did it allow much time to be spent over the target. When inclement weather prevented the Corsairs from reaching the originally assigned targets, they made forays against objectives of opportunity along rail lines, striking locomotives and boxcars, stations, warehouses, staff vehicles and trucks.

LUZON ATTACK FORCE CONVOY: THE KAMIKAZE ATTACKS

While these softening blows were being made against Luzon targets by Marine and also by Fifth and Thirteenth Air Force squadrons, the main invasion body of the Luzon Attack force moved out from Leyte Gulf.[131] The challenge of this huge convoy movement was not ignored; the Japanese air command began to expend its depleted air strength with the most terrible and efficient tactic at its command—*kamikaze* attacks.

On 4 January, a suicide plane crashed into the escort carrier *Ommaney Bay*. With planes on deck fully gassed and armed the ship was shortly an inferno of uncontrollable fires and explosions. *Ommaney Bay* had to be abandoned and sunk. Another escort carrier, the *Lunga Point*, narrowly escaped a similar fate the same day. On the next day (5 January), the intensity of the attacks increased and seven suicide planes crashed into Allied ships. The heavy cruiser *Louisville* and a destroyer in the van group, and the Australian heavy cruiser *Australia*, two escort carriers, *Manila Bay* and *Savo Island*, and a destroyer and destroyer escort in the rear group, were hit; some were badly damaged, but all were able to proceed with their groups.[132] On the 6th, *kamikazes* wrought even more serious damages upon the Seventh Fleet, striking a total of 16 vessels, including the USS *New Mexico*.[133]

Although not assigned to cover the main Lingayen-bound convoy on 6 January, Marine flyers were ordered to cover another smaller U. S. convoy headed for Lingayen by a different route. Planes of VMF–218 provided its fighter cover as it passed through the Visayan Sea. Only one apparent *kamikaze* attempted to

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[131] During the initial phase of the movement Marine aircraft of MAG–12 served as convoy cover for the Luzon invasion forces. As the convoy approached Lingayen, other planes were assigned cover. It was during this phase of the movement that the *kamikaze* raids on the fleet commenced.

[132] *Navy's Air War*, 261.

[133] A *kamikaze* plane struck the bridge of the *New Mexico*, causing 130 casualties, among them the ship's captain. Witness to this costly opening of the Luzon campaign was the man who was to direct Marine Aviation's contribution to that campaign, Col Clayton C. Jerome, on board the *New Mexico* en route to Lingayen Gulf. His dive bomber pilots of Marine Aircraft Groups 24 and 32 were in the Solomons awaiting the Luzon campaign and a chance to give close air support to the soldiers of the Sixth Army. (See Chapter III.)

reach this convoy; it was immediately shot down by two Marine pilots of the CAP.[134] There was no further encroachment upon the safety of the smaller convoy that day.

CARRIER-BASED MARINE SQUADRONS

Meanwhile, simultaneously with Seventh Fleet's departure from Leyte Gulf, fast carriers of the Third Fleet directed air blows at Formosa and the Ryukyus in an attempt to stem Japanese efforts at reinforcing Luzon air garrisons. In two days of strikes (3–4 January) on these distant targets, more than 100 enemy aircraft were destroyed, most of them on the ground.[135]

Participants in this action included Marine Fighting Squadrons 124 and 213 from the carrier *Essex*. On 3 January a seven-plane flight of VMF–124's Corsairs accounted for 10 planes destroyed on the ground and one in the air, in south central Formosa. This marked the first instance of fast carrier-based combat by Marine fighting squadrons.[136]

In the midst of Halsey's Formosa sweep, the success of *kamikaze* attacks to the south began to make one fact increasingly apparent —the land-based air forces on Leyte and Samar could not keep all the Luzon airfields neutralized. There were still more than 70 operational airfields in the Philippines (mostly on Luzon) from which attacks on U. S. forces could be made. The Seventh Fleet's escort carriers had had their hands full with assigned missions at the target area. Continued losses or heavy damages to the ships would seriously impair success of the whole operation. As a result, therefore, General MacArthur immediately requested Third Fleet's fast carriers to swing south from the Formosa area and give support with air sweeps over the central Luzon airfields. On 6–7 January, Navy and Marine airmen from Halsey's carriers made repeated strikes on the objective island, destroying over 100 enemy planes.[137]

Following the combined efforts of fast carrier sorties, land-based fighters and escort carriers, the percentage of Japanese air strength was considerably reduced. The air forces of Japan in the Philippines were in actuality defunct; the Japanese naval air commander left for Singapore on 8 January, and the commanding general of the Fourth Air Army retired to the hills of Luzon.[138]

ASSIGNMENT OF MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP 14 TO THE PHILIPPINE CAMPAIGN

Less than a week before the carrier-based Marines struck Luzon (6–7 January), the first planes of another Marine air group from the Solomons had arrived in the Philippine, setting down at a newly built airstrip on Samar Island.

About a month before, on 8 December 1944 (five days after Marine Aircraft Group 12 and VMF(N)–541 had landed at Leyte) Marrine Aircraft Group 14 (Colonel Zebulon C. Hopkins) had been alerted by Allied Air Forces for movement to the Philippines. This Solomons-based group[139] (like MAG–12 a part of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing) immediately cancelled all combat missions in preparation

[134] On this, the last of four missions of the day, four planes of the CAP were vectored by the shipboard controller to investigate a bogey skimming only 50 feet above the surface of the water, eight miles astern of the convoy, and evidently stalking it. Diving in from the rear, two Marine pilots blasted the lone *ZEKE* into the sea. War Diaries, VMF's 211 and 218, 6Jan45.

[135] *Campaigns*, 288.

[136] Commander Air Force Pacific Fleet, *Analysis of Air Operations, Luzon and Formosa, 3–9 January 1945*. A part of one Marine observation squadron (VMO-155) had been in the CVE *Nassau* for the Attu operation in May 1943.

[137] VMF's 124 and 213 were assigned missions over Aparri and Camalaniugan airfields on the northern tip of Luzon. No serviceable aircraft were spotted on the ground or in the air, but airfields were strafed and ground installations damaged by the Marines.

[138] *Campaigns*, 289. It must be added, however, that although the number of Japanese aircraft remaining operational was now extremely small, they continued to harass operations for a week or two more to an extent far out of proportion to their number. By this time almost all planes remaining were dedicated to suicide missions.

[139] Hqs and Serv Sqdns and VMF–222 were based on Green Island; VMF–212, VMF–223 and VMO–251 were based on Bougainville.

CARRIER-BASED MARINE CORSAIR comes in for a landing on Third Fleet's USS ESSEX (CV-9). Two Marine squadrons, VMF-124 and 213, struck Philippine targets from this carrier.

for the move. Developments rendered the cancellation more than a little premature.[140]

Actual orders for MAG–14's departure for the Philippines awaited the construction of a strip, to be located near the town of Guiuan in southeastern Samar.

The rainy season was still at its height. The combination of mud and rain that had proved such a formidable obstacle at Tacloban and Tanauan airstrips was no less a problem at Guiuan, fifty miles eastward across Leyte Gulf. The Seabees of the 92d and 61st Naval Construction Battalions worked long and hard, but not until late in the last week of December was space available at Samar for one squadron of MAG–14.

The squadron chosen by 1st MAW was Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) 251.[141] This unit, although officially designated as an observation squadron, was equipped (like the seven VMF squadrons of MAG–12 and MAG–14) with Chance-Vought Corsair (F4U)

[140] Missions were later resumed until immediately prior to departure for Samar.

[141] Ltr, Col Z. C. Hopkins to author, dtd 20Feb51. Col Hopkins (then commanding MAG–14) states: "There had been some confusing handling of this move, in that the first information the Group Commander had of the move was when the Squadron Commander, Major Humberd, visited me on Green Island and told me he had orders from the Wing to go to the Philippines the next day."

fighter planes and was fully capable of operating in a fighter squadron capacity.[142]

Leaving Bougainville Island on 30 December 1944, VMO–251's flight echelon flew via Emirau, Owi, and Peleliu, arrived at Samar on 2 January with 22 F4U–1D's and two R4D's, escorted by three PBJ's.

The freshly packed coral surface of Guiuan Airstrip was still under construction. In anticipation of the planes' arrival, Seabees had moved their heavy equipment off to the side of the 4,000-foot single runway.[143] Extending east and west almost from beach to beach, the strip had been cut through a grove of coconut trees on the narrow peninsula at Samar's southeastern tip. Trees and undergrowth still reached almost to the edges of the runway. There was no room for aircraft dispersal, and not until later was there even so much as a taxiway; the planes had to be parked along the muddy shoulders of the strip.[144]

The two R4D's accompanying the fighters had transported extra pilots, aircraft mechanics with their hand-carried tool kits, and personal equipment of the Marines making the trip, but only a minimum amount of squadron organic equipment, including tents. This equipment shortage was alleviated by the Seabees, who shared their limited facilities with the newly arrived Marines. All hands were fed in their mess, and all but a few found first night shelter by sharing tents with the construction men.

MAG–14, like the other Marine aviation units in the Philippines, was to be under operational command of Fifth Air Force. Notifying the higher command of the squadron's arrival fell to Major William C. Humberd, skipper of VMO–251. With no communications facilities between the new field and the senior unit at Tacloban, notification was delayed until investigation located an Army Signal Corps station about four miles away; before midnight a message had been sent and acknowledgment received that the Marines were on Samar.[145] In the interim, Major Humberd had instigated a four-plane combat air patrol over the field during remaining daylight.

MAG-14 BEGINS COMBAT OPERATIONS

The following day (3 January), when Humberd's squadron was ordered by Fifth Air Force to begin operations, it had 20 out of 22 aircraft in commission. By noon, in spite of rain and mud, the ground crew had repaired one of the two disabled planes, on a hastily constructed "line."

These planes flew daily combat air patrols over Samar and Leyte Gulf without contacting any enemy. Starting on 5 January, another assignment began—the escorting of Army C–47's to nearby islands in the central Visayas. Other responsibilities were convoy covers, bombing and strafing sweeps, and attacks on enemy installations in southern Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao. Occasionally they spotted an enemy plane on the ground, but air opposition was nil.

As Seabee construction work progressed, space became available for the flight echelons of MAG–14's other squadrons. On 11 January, the first flight echelons of VMF–212, VMF–

[142] This unit was redesignated as a fighter squadron, VMF–251, on 31Jan45.

[143] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt Vincent Serio: ". . . the Seabees were extending it northeastward until it eventually became a total of 6,000 feet . . . [they] worked day and night . . . literally moving mountains of live coral rock to fill in the swamp through which the strip was laid. The strip was high and well drained and was wetted and regraded every night. MAG–14's campsite lay on the southeast side and about three-quarters of a mile of unfilled swamp lay between us and the strip. In fact the Seabees cleared a road by pushing over palm trees with bulldozers in order for us to drive our equipment to the area, and then the mud was up over the axles!"

[144] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt M. B. Bowers: "At that time . . . there was no electrical field lighting system. During that period, we procured one and five-gallon cans from every mess hall we could locate, filled them with sand and lined the strip with them. When a predawn takeoff was scheduled, I took two men and a jeep and made the rounds of the cans and put gasoline in them and fired them up a few minutes before the scheduled time of takeoff. Later, lights were installed, but there were not enough to go completely around the airstrip. The blank spaces were filled with the home made smudge pots . . ."

[145] Interview with LtCol W. C. Humberd, 17Oct49.

GUIUAN AIRSTRIP, Samar, was the home of MAG-14 throughout its campaigning in the Philippines.

222, and VMF–223 arrived at Guiuan, and within a day or two the rest of their fighter planes had arrived on the strip.[146]

Airlift by the transport squadrons of MAG–25 and PBJ's of MAG–61 had accomplished the transfer of the minimum requirements of men and materiel for the group. Headquarters and Service Squadrons (and some personnel and heavy equipment of the fighter squadrons), however, were to accomplish their move to the Philippines much more slowly by surface craft.[147]

OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES AND ACCIDENTS AT GUIUAN

Except for absence of enemy air opposition, operational difficulties encountered at Guiuan were strongly reminiscent of those at Guadalcanal. The strip was still under construction, messing and billeting facilities were scanty, and poor coordination in the choice of campsite areas necessitated moves costing hundreds of working hours. A shortage of material and equipment, including aircraft replacement parts, transportation, building materials, and maps, added to the difficulty. Communications offered an especially difficult problem.[148]

As a result of inadequate dispersal space for aircraft, MAG–14 was encamped on both sides of Guiuan strip, with their supply tents set up only a few feet behind the planes. These

[146] Col Z. C. Hopkins, the Group CO, arrived with his staff and set up Hqs at Guiuan strip on 12Jan45. He reported in person to the CG, V Fighter Command, for orders on the following day.

[147] Most of the personnel embarked on the Liberty Cargo Ship *Richard Harding Davis*, putting to sea on 16Jan45. After layovers at Hollandia and Leyte Gulf (without going ashore), they proceeded to Mindoro, and remained aboard ship off the coast for 14 days; then, because of cancellation of a plan to establish 1st MAW headquarters on the latter island, they came back to Samar and unloaded there on 24 February.

[148] Because of lack of equipment, as late as 31Jan45 there was still no communication setup between the airstrip and the camp area.

COLONEL ZEBULON C. HOPKINS, Commanding Officer of Samar-based Marine Aircraft Group 14.

crowded conditions were largely responsible for the exorbitant number of operational accidents during the month of January.[149]

The worst of these accidents occurred on 24 January at the Samar field. During a downwind takeoff run by Second Lieutenant Karl Oerth, VMF–222, his Corsair hit bad bumps in the runway, a tire blew out, and the plane left the runway out of control. It struck a large coral rock, caromed cartwheel fashion through tents housing intelligence material, and parachute and oxygen departments, before finally coming to a stop.

Officers and men in the vicinity rushed to the scene of the crash and attempted to extricate the pilot from the smouldering wreckage. In the midst of rescue operations, the plane suddenly exploded and started to burn fiercely. The toll of the accident mounted to 13 dead, 54 injured by burns. Of the men burned 13 required evacuation to hospital ships.[150]

In this as in all such operational crashes on or near airfields, Marine ground personnel demonstrated their loyalty to pilots and their courage in the face of danger. Aware that their lives might be snuffed out by a sudden violent explosion, ground crewmen rushed to the scenes of plane crashes with one dominating idea: pull out the pilot. Among the 17 Marine squadrons that participated in the Philippines reconquest, many pilots owed their lives to such efforts.

WORK OF MAG-14 GROUND CREWS

The morale of ground crew personnel of MAG–14 manifested itself not only in the way that they met emergency situations, but in the manner they accomplished their daily duties.

Each aircraft within a squadron was flown six to nine hours per day in order to fulfill the heavy schedule of combat missions assigned by Fifth Air Force. To keep a plane in the air for such long periods each day, day in and day out, meant tight scheduling of work loads for plane maintenance. When a periodic plane check became due on an F4U, crews teamed up to expedite this work as soon as the pilot cut the engine after the day's last mission. All-night work was frequently necessary to accomplish the job.[151]

[149] Nineteen MAG–14 aircraft were stricken as noncombat losses in Jan45, most of them as a result of landing accidents at Guiuan; use of the runway by 24 B–24 heavy bombers, also based at Guiuan, made the landing surface extremely rough and hazardous for the lighter fighter planes. Also, since the Seabees were constantly working to improve the field by lengthening runways and installing hardstands, necessitating the frequent use of dynamite, the planes were subjected to an additional hazard—owing to the crowded conditions on the field there was no place for them to disperse. They just had to sit and take it.

[150] Since many of the injured personnel were evacuated from the Philippines, it is almost impossible to obtain a completely accurate count.

[151] *MS. COMMENT*, Capt J. F. Koetsch: ". . . the move of MAG–14 to Samar left the squadrons without any nearby aircraft spare parts supply facilities. Airplanes were kept flying which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been grounded . . . Some of the . . . conscientious and experienced aircraft company representatives, who were civilians, were of

The combination of a heavy bomb load and an extremely ragged taxiing surface played havoc with aircraft tires. Sometimes as many as three or four main or tail wheel tires ruptured while a 16-plane flight was moving into take-off position. The ground crews did not let this situation disrupt or delay the flights. Instead, they organized teams, trained them in rapid wheel changing, and stationed them along the taxi route in advance of each flight. If tire failure occurred, the plane or planes affected were pulled off to the side, and a quick change was performed by practiced ground crewmen. The repaired aircraft would soon be back on the end of the line, ready to take off at the end of the flight without a break.[152]

Methods of improving plane availability and bettering ground crew performance were frequently devised. A device worked out by Master Technical Sergeant Robert E. Conroy of VMF–251 was typical of the way some of the various maintenance problems were solved: the coral dust of the Guiuan strip threatened to cause serious and continuing hydraulic troubles in the landing gear mechanism of the Corsairs; the grit that settled onto the wheel struts would accumulate within the hydraulic seals when the strut retracted upward upon the impact of landing. Conroy, working with the facilities available on the field, manufactured some metal scrapers, which he rigged snugly around the struts at their housing base. This device prevented the accumulation of coral dust and by decreasing subsequent hydraulic repair, materially increased plane availability.[153]

The maintenance record of all the MAG–14 squadrons was excellent; that of VMF–251 was particularly outstanding. In an official recommendation for commendation for this organization, the commanding officer of MAG–14 wrote:

> During the month of January 1945 . . . this squadron [23 planes] flew 626 combat flights, totaling 2,403 hours. Since . . . 1 October 1944, until 15 February 1945, this . . . ground crew has maintained in commission 98% of the squadron's assigned aircraft. Not once, from June 1944, has it failed to execute an assigned mission because of failure to have the necessary planes in commission . . . Since 23 July, 1944 . . . this squadron has not lost a plane or pilot because of failure or malfunctioning of its aircraft.[154]

ROUTINE OPERATIONS

By mid-January all four squadrons of MAG–14 were in full-scale operation and had joined the MAG–12 fighters in carrying out the wide variety of missions designated by Fifth Air Force. Actual strikes were not carried out by the two groups on a joint basis, but their assigned tasks were of a similar and frequently overlapping nature.

One of their primary tasks was an almost daily, routine plane hunt and airstrip bombardment. For, characteristic of the enemy's last ditch nature, he had carefully hid, and on occasion used, the few aircraft he had remaining. Ever since the close of 1944, Japanese aerial opposition to Allied thrusts in the central Philippines had come to a virtual standstill. With the realization that neither plane nor pilot replacements would be forthcoming, Japanese commanders became daily more reluctant to commit their remnant air forces for the defense of areas already lost. The majority of those enemy planes that had survived the furious actions of November and December therefore moved to northern bases when they considered the U. S. push to Luzon was inevitable.

The resultant situation permitted Marine airmen to execute their missions throughout the central Philippines[155] with a modicum of aerial interference. These missions were usually unspectacular, and results were difficult

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great assistance in working with the ground crews to improvise the repairs or replacements of malfunctioning parts."

[152] *MS. COMMENT.* 1stLt T. R. Perry: ". . . A tail wheel was hardly considered a delay . . ."

[153] Interview with Major Thomas W. Furlow, 17Oct49.

[154] Extracted from official recommendation for commendation submitted by Col Z. B. Hopkins, 21Feb45.

[155] *MS. COMMENT,* Maj R. F. Flaherty: "Upon completion of our convoy escort missions in the Sibuyan Sea, returning CAPs were directed to expend ammo upon targets of opportunity . . . An Army (Air Corps) observer was stationed in the hills above [Cebu City, the capital of Cebu] . . . and as we flew

CAMOUFLAGED ENEMY FLOATPLANE in a revetment near Ormoc Beach, Leyte. As the Philippines campaign progressed, Japanese planes became increasingly hard to find.

to evaluate. An increasing number of missions involved flights far south into Mindanao on searches for enemy planes and serviceable airstrips. These missions involved flights of six and seven hours duration, wearing for fighter craft and pilots. Such isolated enemy planes and strips as the Corsairmen found would have offered little tactical threat, but for the inordinate capability of even a single suicide plane's crashing into a U. S. convoy, troop concentration or other installation.

Marine pilots on such searches made recorded strikes on 41 different airstrips on Mindanao, Negros, Panay and Cebu during January and February. (See Map 1.) Many of the enemy strips were bombed and strafed time and again as the Japanese struggled desperately to keep them serviceable for the occasional Japanese planes flying in from Borneo, 300 miles southwest of Mindanao. As a result of the bombing and strafing of these airfields, some definitely serviceable enemy planes were detected and destroyed. Others, previously damaged, were worked over again to remove any doubt of their utility.

As Japanese air power in the Central Visayas faded away, the barges with which the Japanese sought to supply their troops in the Visayan Islands became a lucrative target for the Marine flyers. Coordinating with U. S. surface craft two MAG–14 pilots, Majors Robert F. Flaherty and Donald S. Bush, staged the most successful barge shoot of the month on 22 January. Flying at an altitude of 500 to 1,000 feet, the pilots, upon sighting a barge, immediately radioed a friendly Patrol

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over he would call us if he had a suitable target . . . control was informal with directions being given in relation to the main streets or in reference to prominent land marks. The results were of a harassing nature, but a welcome change from the long CAP missions."

Torpedo Boat, giving the enemy's bearing and distance from a pre-determined reference point. While awaiting the arrival of the PT boat, the Corsairs orbited over the Japanese vessel just out of range of its guns. When the Torpedo Boat was in position, the attack began with the Corsairs and PT craft coming in on the target simultaneously, from three directions. Six barges were sunk and two damaged by this tactic that day.[156]

This type of attack proved highly successful throughout the remainder of the Philippines campaign, and finally forced the Japanese to give up the use of barges entirely.[157]

Because of their late arrival on the scene, the pilots of MAG–14 flew many missions without contact. More and more often, reports of daily activities would end with "No enemy contacts." One brief summary of operations in a MAG–14 squadron report included this statement:

> Our operations are characterized by many long missions with the greatest difficulty being the finding of suitable targets. The few good remaining targets are often protected by their locations, being situated in or about civilian communities, and consequently are rendered safe from attack.[158]

Nevertheless, the Corsairs of Leyte and Samar continued to extend fighter-bomber strikes into Luzon, against the enemy's lines of communication, his harbors and escape routes. They kept his airfields useless by repeated poundings, and diminished his rolling stock and motor transport steadily; they flew missions into the central and southern Philippines almost daily. The Leyte and Samar campaigns would soon be over, but the Corsairs of MAG–12 and MAG–14 would take part in the VICTOR Operations of the Central Visayas soon to be commenced by Eighth Army. (See Chapter IV.)

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[156] War Diary, VMF–223, 22Jan44.

[157] By the end of January, VMF–222 destroyed or severely damaged 18 barges; VMF–223 destroyed 13 barges, damaged 10 barges and 1 AK; VMF–212 damaged 1 Motor Torpedo Boat, 2 Launches, 4 barges; VMO–251 destroyed 4 barges, strafed 2 more thoroughly. These figures compiled from squadron war diaries, VMF–222, VMF–223, VMF–212 and VMO–251, Jan45.

[158] War Diary, VMF–222, January 1945.

CHAPTER III

Luzon Campaign

ASSIGNMENT OF A MISSION

The story of Marine Aviation in the Luzon campaign is a story of close air support for ground troops. It is a story about some good flyers, an obsolete airplane, and the development of techniques to carry out a concept as old as Marine Aviation itself.

By mid-September 1944, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, roosting fretfully in the Northern Solomons, had literally "missed the boat" twice in the planning stages of two Philippine assault operations. Prior to the 15 September decision to by-pass Mindanao and strike Leyte, the Marine wing had expected assignment of shore-based air command at Sarangani Bay, proposed focal point for southern Mindanao landings. The short cut to Leyte also by-passed Major General Ralph J. Mitchell's 1st Wing. In actuality, the wing had already lost its originally promised assignment at Mindanao even before this change took place. In the face of an anticipated shipping shortage, the Solomons, then the location of the wing, were considered to be too far from the target area; a paucity of shipping had also excluded Marine air units from the forces allocated to the Leyte assault, for the same reason. (See Chapter I for more complete discussion of early planning and changes thereto.) Until just one month before the Leyte landings took place, it appeared that General Mitchell's Marine command had only an indefinite hope of eventual participation in the Philippine campaigns.

General Mitchell, having been informed in Brisbane on 26 August that the prospective assignment for the 1st Wing was called off, took leave to the U. S. during September. His deputy commander, Brigadier General Claude A. Larkin, had charge of the 1st MAW and Aircraft Northern Solomons in his absence, when, on or about 20 September, an air officer from General Kenney's Far East Air Forces arrived on Bougainville. This officer informed General Larkin that all of the dive-bombing squadrons attached to the 1st Wing would be used in a campaign against Luzon, an operation scheduled to take place after seizure of Leyte and Mindoro. The emissary of the U. S. Army air command in the Southwest Pacific Area seemed surprised that the Marines had no information about the movement.[1]

The oral order contained too little detailed information for Larkin to begin full-scale preparations, but he quietly initiated a reorganization of subordinate units that included seven dive bomber squadrons (known as Marine Scout Bombing Squadrons; brief designation, VMSB) scattered through three

[1] *Larkin letter.* Source further commented: "We almost invariably got oral preparatory orders from FEAF Staff Officers for any operation movement; this was routine, usually it was confirmed in writing at a later date." Available 1st MAW records do not reveal identity of FEAF officer nor the exact date of his arrival.

of the wing's five air groups.[2] Closest group at hand that could be converted into an all dive bomber unit was MAG–24, based at Piva North Airfield on Bougainville. As of 1 October, MAG–24 shed two fighter squadrons and received two dive bombing squadrons in return. This gave the group a strength of four dive bombing squadrons, consisting of VMSB's 133 and 236 on Bougainville, 241 on Munda, and 341 on Green Island. Of the wing's three remaining VMSB units, two (142 and 243) continued under control of MAG–12 on Emirau, and the last one (244) under MAG–14 on Green Island.[3] (See Map 3, Chapter I.) An additional organization at group level would be required for administration and servicing of these last three squadrons.

In spite of the reshuffle, operations went on much as usual in the Northern Solomons; the news of forthcoming combat in a new zone, for at least a segment of the wing, had not spread.

It was 10 October before additional information concerning a move to the Philippines reached Bougainville. General Mitchell had returned from leave on the 3d, but remained with his command for only a week; then he departed to observe the Leyte landings, which were set for 20 October. Only a few hours after General Mitchell's departure, a group of FEAF staff officers arrived from Hollandia. In a conference with General Larkin, they confirmed the assignment of Marine flyers to the Luzon operation. They also transmitted an order for the acting Marine commander to request ships for the movement of two air groups, additional evidence that the assignment was firm. Through oral instructions issued by the FEAF officers, the mission of the Marine dive bombers was divulged at last: close air support of Army ground troops.[4]

General Larkin immediately called in Colonel Lyle H. Meyer, commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group 24, broke the news of the assignment to him, and ordered an intensified training program initiated at once to prepare all dive bomber personnel for their coming specialized role.

At the same time, the 1st Wing sent a request to the Commanding General, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific at Pearl Harbor, asking for immediate assignment of an additional group headquaters to the wing. As a result, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing's MAG–32, then operating in the Hawaiian area, received orders on 14 October, transferring its Headquarters and Service Squadrons to the 1st Wing. All tactical squadrons of the group were detached directly to the 3d Wing on oral orders. Within three days, Lieutenant Colonel John L. Smith, Guadalcanal ace and acting commanding officer of MAG–32, had loaded some 50 officers and 600 enlisted men aboard four LST's. As a parent echelon for VMSB's 142, 243 and 244, they headed for Emirau Island to take over a new brood.[5]

On 12 October came the first published orders for the Luzon campagn. Operations Instructions Number 73, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, without specifically mentioning air units to be used in the operation, stated, in part, that Sixth U. S. Army was to "establish air facilities in the LINGAYEN area in the following priority: Target Date entire installation S+15. 2 PBY squadrons (tender based), 2 fighter groups, 1 night fighter squadron, 2 tactical reconnaissance squadrons, 1 photo squadron, 1 liaison squadron, 1 dive-bomb group (7 squadrons), 1 medium bomb group."

Briefly stated, Sixth Army's missions were: (1) to land in the Lingayen-Damortis-San Fernando (La Union) areas of Luzon; (2) to establish a base of operations, including facili-

[2] In Sep44 the 1st MAW, in addition to its headquarters organization, was composed of MAG's 12 (Emirau), 14 (Green), 24 (Bougainville), 25 (Bougainville), and 61 (Emirau). MAG's 12, 14 and 24 contained varied-type squadrons—fighter, dive bomber, and observation. MAG–25 had two transport squadrons and MAG–61 was made up of medium bomber squadrons. War Diary, Hq 1–MAW, 1–31Oct44.

[3] War Diaries, MAG's 12 and 14, Oct44.

[4] *Larkin letter.* Conference was held in Bougainville headquaters of MajGen O. W. Griswold, USA, U. S. Army XIV Corps commander. The XIV Corps was also slated for Luzon.

[5] War Diary, MAG–32, Oct44.

ties for uninterrupted naval and air operations; (3) to advance southward and seize the Central Plain-Manila area; and (4) by subsequent operations, as directed by General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, to establish control over the remainder of Luzon.[6] (See Map 7.)

Five days later, orders from Kenney's Allied Air Forces, SWPA, based on MacArthur's 12 October orders, gave more detailed instructions, naming actual units. MacArthur's orders had simply specified "1 dive-bomb group (7 squadrons)." Kenney's orders of 17 October specified the seven dive bomber squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

The Marine air units were to be attached to the Fifth Air Force, as part of the air assault force. Target date for Lingayen landing: 20 December 1944.[7]

These same orders offered promise of an eventual share in Philippine operations for the remainder of the wing. Mitchell, directed to continue control over all Army, Navy, New Zealand and Marine aircraft in the Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago as Commander, AirNorSols, was, as the same time, to "prepare for forward movement in future operations and for transfer of responsibility for control of air operations in the Solomons to the Royal New Zealand Air Task Force."[8]

On 7 November, Colonel Clayton C. Jerome, AirNorSols' Chief of Staff, was selected by General Mitchell as the commanding officer of MAG–32. By virtue of seniority, Colonel Jerome also would become over-all commander of both groups (MAG's 32 and 24) during their combined operations.

On the same date, Commander Aircraft, Northern Solomon Islands, issued Operations Instructions Number 24–44. These orders stipulated, in part, that all dive bombing squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Headquarters and Service Squadrons MAG–24 and Headquarters and Service Squadrons MAG–32 were assigned to the Fifth Air Force for operational control and as reinforcement to the Fifth Air Force.

Fifth Air Force, in turn, was part of Allied Air Forces, which were charged to "support the operations of the Sixth U. S. Army in the occupation of the Lingayen Gulf – Central Luzon Plains area by: intensified air activities against hostile installations; destruction of enemy air and surface forces Celebes Sea area, and assigned areas in the Philippines Archipelago; air defenses of existing bases and forces in transit."[9]

Squadrons (VMSB) 133, 142, 236, 241, 243, 244, and 341 (all units of the 1st MAW) were directed by the same order to prepare for ". . . occupation of target areas immediately following the assault and by S – plus 15." These units were also to "provide direct support for ground operations in the Lingayen area and Central Luzon at the earliest practicable date after arrival on target."

Headquarters and Service Squadrons MAG's 24 and 32 were ordered to take station in the Lingayen area at the same time and establish, at the earliest practicable date, base and servicing facilities for accommodating VMSB squadrons.

The commanding officer, 308th Bombardment Wing (H), as Task Force Commander for Fifth Air Force, was to assume direct operational control of Marine air units subsequent to their arrival in the target area and until relieved by Fifth Air Force headquarters.[10]

On 12 November MAG–32 disembarked at Emirau Island. The following day this organization took over Marine Scout Bombing Squadrons 142, 243, and 244, and on 14 November Colonel Jerome took command of the newly augmented group.

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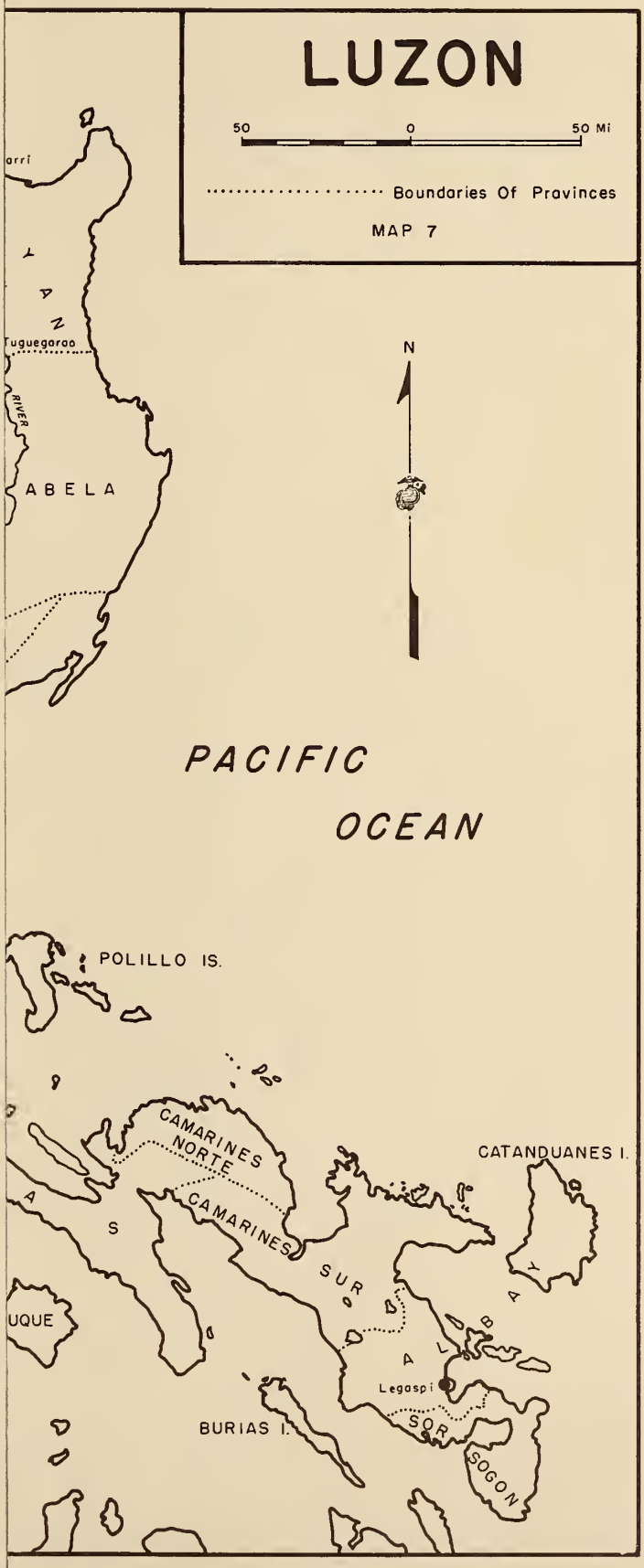
[6] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 1.

[7] Operations Instructions, No. 73, Hq Allied Air Forces, SWPA, dated 17Oct44. These orders based upon MacArthur's GHQ, SWPA, Operations Instructions, No. 73, dated 12Oct44, which did not designate specific air units of air assault force.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] ComAirNorSols Operations Instructions 24–44, dated 7Nov44, based upon Operations Instructions No. 73, Hq., Allied Air Forces, SWPA, dated 17Oct44, and upon Operations Instructions, No. 7, Hq., 5th Air Force, dated 26Oct44.

[10] *Ibid.* By the time this order was published, Fifth AF had assumed responsibility for all land-based aerial operations in the Philippines (27Oct), and its Hq. was established at Leyte.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Bontoc
Luna
San Fernando
Baguio
Bayombong
Mangaldan
Lingayen
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Gulmba
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A STUDY OF CLOSE AIR SUPPORT

Since 10 October, when General Larkin had received the oral orders from FEAF officers that the 1st MAW would receive a change in combat mission, the unexpected news had caused one question to loom large before the MAG–24 planning staff: what techniques must be employed for aircraft to render direct and effective support to the infantry, and at the same time insure maximum safety to friendly troops? The first step in the preparation of the group for its assignment was to make an analysis on the subject of close air support.

The making of such an analysis was complicated by a number of factors. Close air support was by no means a new concept—it had, in fact, been developing piecemeal since World War I. It had always possessed something of an improvised quality, varying according to service viewpoint, the circumstances and the tactical needs of the moment.[11] In the different branches of service, and in different theaters of operation, close air support had grown to have almost as many definitions as there were units which had made use of it.

In World War II, for example, the first really close air support by American planes took place at Guadalcanal, in planes flown by both Marine and Army pilots. The situation was unusual in the fact that the pilots were stationed so close to the front lines that, prior to flying a support mission, they frequently walked up far enough to take a look at their targets. All briefing for the missions took place on the ground, and radio communication was not called upon for too important a role. But as the island-hopping continued, to Bougainville and Peleliu, coordination continued to improve.

With the U. S. Navy, air support was taking yet another turn. Extensive shipboard radio networks had been designed especially for air support control, and they functioned successfully at Tarawa and continued with improved effectiveness in subsequent amphibious operations. At Tarawa 650 close-support sorties were flown with what was generally described as "excellent results."[12] But Navy facilities and control organization were geared for carrier-based air support, not for a mobile, landmass campaign.

In late 1943 specially trained air liaison parties (ALP's) were organized to foster closer coordination of air-ground operations. Thirteen of these parties were to be attached to each Marine division (and later, Army divisions), as the air liaison section of the newly designated joint assault signal company (JASCO). Each ALP originally was made up of one aviation intelligence officer and three to seven aviation communication technicians.

These air liaison parties were organized and trained to transmit requests for aerial support with the greatest possible speed, to direct strikes or to assist a support air controller (SAC) in briefing and directing an air attack on a desired objective.[13]

The officer specialist on each team knew aviation capabilities, and could evaluate requirements for air support missions; he could also advise ground commanders concerning the use of such support. With the rest of his team and the much improved communications gear with which they were equipped, he was able to make close liaison a fact rather than a hope.

Close air support was progressing rapidly in 1944, but there was still no unified approach to the problem. There existed in the various doctrines many differences of procedure and nomenclature. Still more important, however, were the differences inherent to the variety of operations and situations for which they had been devised. Army and Navy doctrines steadfastly maintained centralized radio control of attacking aircraft from a support air controller well behind front lines[14] or on shipboard. (The support air controller and his

[11] A discussion of the differing U. S. concepts concerning employment of air power may be found in "Unification and Integration," Commodore Dudley W. Knox, USN (Ret), *Infantry Journal*, Feb 1950, 8–11.

[12] *Sherrod*, Philippines II, 4.

[13] Interview with Maj Lyford Hutchins, 2May51.

[14] Usually located with divisions and higher units.

EARLY FORERUNNER OF THE RADIO JEEP was this 1925 Navy cargo truck, which Marines of Observation Squadron One (at Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego, California) fitted with radio equipment to produce the first air-ground communications vehicle. Motive power for the system's electrical generator was furnished by a jacked-up right rear wheel and a belt drive.

assistants comprised the support air party–SAP.)

Marine planners on Bougainville, and other airmen thinking concurrently along the same lines, persisted in a firm belief that on many occasions *front-line ALPmen could and should talk planes onto a target by direct communication; this, they felt, was far more efficient than relaying the information through intervening echelons and a far distant controller.*[15]

At Guam, in July 1944, Colonel Frank C. Croft, air officer for General Geiger's III Amphibious Corps, persuaded the Navy to allow his well-trained ALP's to assume direct control from shore positions for many close air support missions that were being flown by carrier-based naval aircraft.

All these operations and many more were studied and evaluated by the planners of MAG–24.[16] Then, under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel Keith B. McCutcheon, group operations officer, a detailed doctrine for air support organization was drawn up, making use of all these evaluations. Additional considerations were: types of communications equipment that would be available, and operational requirements to be expected in the Philippines.[17]

[15] Interview with LtCol K. B. McCutcheon, 13Apr51.

[16] Bibliography of MAG–24 doctrine contained reference to 23 sources.

[17] LtCol K. B. McCutcheon, "Close Support Aviation," report in CMC files; hereinafter cited as *McCutcheon.*

The doctrine decreed this basic premise:

> Close Air Support is an additional weapon to be employed only at the discretion of the ground commander. He may employ it against targets that cannot be reached by other weapons or in conjunction with the ground weapons in a coordinated attack. It should be immediately available and should be carried out with deliberation and accuracy and in coordination with other assigned units.[18]

TRAINING FOR THE MISSION

At Bougainville on 13 October, just three days after the first given word of the new assignment, pilots, crewmen, communicators, air combat intelligence officers (ACI) and operations officers began attending classroom lectures. During the next two months they received an intensive basic course of 37 lectures that presented a diversified curriculum covering every conceivable phase of close air support. Ground study included such subjects as organization and tactics of U. S. and Japanese infantry units, map reading, communications, artillery spotting, and target identification, all presented in the greatest detail possible. There was also specialized instruction about the Philippines, with the range of subjects including a study of the people of the islands, geography, and weather.

Instruction was under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, assisted by a staff of instructors with a wide and varied background of experience. It included several wing and group intelligence officers who had participated with Marine divisions in the Marianas as air liaison officers;[19] specialists from Seventh Fleet Intelligence Section and the Army's 37th and Americal Divisions. (These divisions were also in the Northern Solomons preparing for the Philippine campaign.)

During the next two months there existed between the islands a veritable revolving schoolhouse—ACI officers and other representatives of VMSB squadrons on outlying islands attended Bougainville classes as students, then went back and became teachers at Emirau, Green and Munda. In all, some 500 pilots and gunners received the course and were examined on their acquired knowledge.

Shortly after the school for airmen began, various conferences were held with representatives of the Fifth Air Force to discuss plans for the impending operation. In these conferences, according to Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon, one important difference in concept of air strike control was brought out:

> . . . the Fifth Air Force would furnish the Support Air Parties, but they were not contemplating using direct communication between the Air Liaison Parties and the planes in the direction of the mission. The Navy concurred with the Air Force in this respect. It seemed to . . . [MAG–24 that front-line control] was the only logical way to conduct close support so further emphasis was placed on training its own Air Liaison Parties. These parties were actually a combination of the Air Liaison Party and the Support Air Party . . .[20]

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[18] *Ibid.*, 3–4.

[19] In mid-September 1944, six air combat intelligence officers were assigned to the 1st MAW from the Hawaiian Islands. These were Captains John Pratt, Stanley Ford, Franklin McCarthy, Francis R. B. Godolphin and Samuel H. McAloney. Three of these men had been trained at the Naval Air Intelligence School, Quonset Point, R. I., and three at the Army Air Force Intelligence School, Harrisburg, Pa. – all had been trained further at the Air Liaison School at Camp Bradford, Virginia. They had then been attached to the 4th Marine Division and had participated in the assault landings and campaigns of Roi Namur, Saipan and Tinian as air liaison officers with the 4th Division. Memo from McAloney to author 15Dec50.

[20] *McCutcheon*, 9. An official AAF Standing Operating Procedure (Headquarters, Allied Air Forces, Southwest Pacific Area, APO 925, Standing Operating Procedure Instructions Number 12/2, dtd 1Oct44, COOPERATIVE ACTION OF LAND-BASED AND CARRIER-BASED AIRCRAFT IN SUPPORT OF LANDING OPERATIONS, based on SOP Instructions No. 16/2, GHQ, SWPA, dtd 26Sep44) contains the following definitions: "... SUPPORT AIRCRAFT CONTROLLER (COMMANDER SUPPORT AIRCRAFT)—An air officer who exercises control over all aircraft in the objective area, and who, assisted by the Fighter Director and Fighter Controller, insures coordination between Air Support, Naval Gunfire, Ground Artillery fire, and Fighter Aircraft activities. SUPPORT AIRCRAFT PARTY (SUPPORT AIRCRAFT CONTROL PARTY)—An Air Force party consisting of Support Aircraft Controller, necessary officer and enlisted assistants, and equipment designed to transmit and receive requests for air support between supported force commanders and supporting air commanders and to control air support missions. AIR LIAISON PARTY – A small communications

In order to carry out this Marine concept of a dual-purpose ALP (to be used both as a requesting agency for air strikes and a direct controller of those strikes), teams of officers and enlisted men were selected for specialized training. All personnel who would be involved in elements of the air-ground radio networks underwent exhaustive drill to perfect coordination of procedure. Indoor training initiated the program and parties were dispersed to simulate a regiment in assault with two battalions in advance. Colored cardboards indicative of the various radio nets involved were given to the appropriate unit. Typical requests for air support were sent back through the proper channels and then mock strikes were orally directed to fulfill the requests. As the parties became more experienced in these oral drills, more complicated problems were set up. When a satisfactory degree of proficiency was attained the class moved outdoors and did the same thing using radio equipment, including

team which transmits requests for air support to Support Aircraft Controller (or Support Aircraft Controller Ashore) and keeps him informed of positions of front line troops, results of close support missions, and location of remunerative targets." Under "Procedures," this SOP states further: ". . . Air Liaison Parties, attached to infantry battalions and such higher headquarters as may be necessary, will assist the commander of the unit to which attached in requesting air support missions." There is no mention of Air Liaison Parties *directing* strikes.

GUNNER'S VIEW of bomb blast, taken as Marine SBD zooms up from dive bombing run against enemy position in Central Luzon.

seven radio jeeps and two radio vans (SCR–299).[21] In the final stages of training, the teams directed planes to the vicinity of the jeeps and controlled them, first on dummy runs, later on live ones.

Air liaison parties would be attached to infantry units down to and including battalions, and from front-line positions would function much like forward observers. Outfitted with their radio jeeps, ALP's could keep pace with advancing command posts yet remain a continuing element of the liaison system. In situations requiring the air liaison officer to take position away from the jeep, he kept uninterrupted contact with the planes through a hand-carried radio.[22]

The Marines obtained some of their most practical training experience through a working arrangement with the 37th Division, then on Bougainville. Pilots observed from the ground various infantry maneuvers of this organization, and then, with a much keener concept of the doughboys' problems, took to the air to join them in realistic assaults on mock enemy positions. Marine ALP's accompanied division troops and directed planes in dummy runs over requested targets while the groundmen's fire blazed away beneath them. Squadrons from Green and Munda Islands flew in for several of these exercises; to spread participation as far as possible, extra pilots sometimes replaced gunners in rear seats during the practice flights.

One of the most important outgrowths of the joint training was the development of a solid foundation of mutual confidence between the ground and air units involved; the Marines would join forces with the 37th Division again when the chips were down at Luzon, and a full acceptance of close air support by these former partners-in-training would not be hindered by unfamiliarity and distrust.

[21] Each jeep was fitted with both VHF (Very High Frequency) and MHF (Medium High Frequency) transmitters and receivers, used for short range work; the vans used similar equipment capable of much longer range.

[22] Sometimes the ALP used a field telephone to keep in touch with the jeep's radio operator, who in turn relayed messages to the planes.

LUZON LANDINGS TO BE DELAYED

The first move toward assemblage of scout-bomber units began on 22–23 November when, by air ferry and four LSI's VMSB–241 moved from Munda to Bougainville.

In the meantime the Leyte campaign was underway, but difficulties being encountered there (Chapter II) would necessitate a 10-day delay in Mindoro landings (from 5 December to 15 December). Therefore, because most of the same shipping would be required for the assault of Luzon, the original target date for the latter (20 December) would not be met. On 30 November[23] General MacArthur ordered the Commanding General, Sixth Army, by dispatch to effect Luzon landings on 9 January. On the following day the dive bombing squadrons secured from combat flying, so that all their aircraft could be maintained in operational readiness for duty in the Philippines. Until then, along with their close support and embarkation preparations, all tactical units of MAG's 24 and 32 had continued the monotonous chore of blasting, with daily regularity, the by-passed islands in the 1st Wing's area of responsibility. (See Map 3, Chapter I.)

MOVEMENT TO LINGAYEN GULF

Departure of the various ground echelons began on 12 December from Bougainville, 16 December from Green and 19 December from Emirau. In all, six transport vessels were employed for the long and devious journey to Lingayen Gulf.[24] Personnel, equipment and supplies of the two groups were scattered through the six transports which themselves were widely spread over Southwest Pacific waters. Christmas Day, for example, found two ships anchored and troops disembarked at

[23] It was on this date, too, that dispatch orders alerted MAG–12's Corsairmen for immediate action on Leyte. See Chapter II.

[24] MAG–24 units were aboard the SS *John T. McMillan*, SS *Wm. S. Stewart*, SS *Julian W. Mack*, and USS *President Polk*. MAG–32 embarked in SS *Joe C. S. Blackburn* and SS *James B. Francis* at Emirau; it's Green-based VMSB–244 was transported aboard the SS *Julian W. Mack* with MAG–24 personnel. Sqd War Diaries, Dec44.

AIR STRIP AT EMIRAU in the Bismarck Archipelago is shown under construction in April 1944. Eight months later 173 SBD's of Marine Aircraft Groups 24 and 32 left this field on a 2,500 mile flight via Momote, Owi, Peleliu and Leyte to Mangaldan Airdrome, P. I. The long flight was made without loss of a plane or injury to personnel.

Milne Bay, on the eastern tip of New Guinea; one, a cripple,[25] was in dry dock at Manus Island; still another was weighing anchor at Emirau; the remainder were on the high seas.

Meanwhile, all squadron flight echelons gathered at Emirau by mid-December for a month of final preparations, and to await call into Philippine action. Instruction continued, planes were given final touches of maintenance and, on 19 December, 108 SBD's from the combined squadrons participated in a bombing raid on Kavieng, New Ireland;[26] the

[25] On 8 December, while being loaded at Emirau, the SS *Joe C. S. Blackburn* broke from her moorings in a strong wind and wound up rolling on the rock and coral beach. By 19 December it was refloated, loaded and forced to accept a tow to Manus because of a broken rudder. Misfortune continued to hound her, for while trying to enter dry dock at Manus the *Blackburn* rammed another ship, took until 5 January to complete repairs, and arrived at Lingayen 16 days after the first Marine-carrying transport.

[26] Raid was originally planned for Rabaul; bad weather prevented hitting the primary target. Kavieng was an unplanned secondary, and had not been previously mentioned or briefed.

two groups had mated into a single team. (See Map 3.)

Confident that his flyers were primed for decisive action, Colonel Jerome took leave of his planes and men and Emirau on 26 December, and boarded a transport plane for Leyte, springboard for the Luzon invasion fleet. It was his task to continue close liaison with Army forces to be supported and to integrate plans with immediate AAF superiors.[27] While Marine surface echelons plowed slowly toward the rear of the Lingayen assault convoy, and air echelons awaited a base from which to operate, Colonel Jerome would accompany forward Army elements to establish a "beachhead" for his command.

With the colonel was his advance party, Lieutenant Colonel Keith B. McCutcheon, MAG–24 operations officer, and Corporal Ladislaus J. Blasko, the colonel's driver. Upon arrival at Tanauan airstrip, the three men drove in their jeep to Tacloban, where 308th Wing was loading equipment on LST's. Corporal Blasko was instructed to get himself, the jeep and sundry stores aboard one of these vessels somehow. The trio separated further when Colonel Jerome went aboard the USS *New Mexico* and Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon the USS *Mississippi.*

LINGAYEN LANDINGS AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN AIRBASE

On 9 January 1945, Sixth Army units made unopposed landings on a two-corps front, and by nightfall positions were secured three to five miles inland along approximately 15 miles of southern Lingayen Gulf shoreline. (See Map 8.)

First Marine to hit Lingayen beach was Corporal Blasko, when, the day after initial assault, USS *LST–1025* nosed ashore to disgorge its load. Colonel McCutcheon also disembarked that day, but Colonel Jerome was ordered aboard the USS *Wasatch* from the

[27] In early December Maj J. F. Larimer, USA, reported for duty on Col Jerome's staff as air liaison officer from 308th Bombardment Wing, and on 11 December Jerome and Larimer flew to Leyte for a two-day conference with 5th AF concerning preparatory details of the operation.

COLONEL CLAYTON C. JEROME, commander of MAGSDAG-UPAN (and later of MAGSZAMBOANGA) and his driver, Corporal Ladislaus J. Blasko, first Marine ashore on Luzon, 9 January 1945.

New Mexico for a day of conferences and did not reach shore until 11 January.[28] There, stranded without baggage amid the turmoil of a supply-strewn beach, the senior Marine of the invasion joined 308th Bombardment Wing's encampment where McCutcheon soon found him. With welcome surprise, the two officers saw driver Blasko, jeep and all, bounce across cluttered sands toward them to consolidate forces.

The camp site chosen for the wing was three miles east of the town of Lingayen. Between this site and gulf-side Lingayen lay a pre-war airstrip, 3,900 feet long, which Army engineers began to scrape, lengthen and surface with steel matting. As it turned out it was 17 January before this strip became operational;[29] even at the outset, activity already

[28] Muster rolls, Hq. Sqds., MAG's 24 and 32, Jan 45.

[29] "History of the 308th Bombardment Wing (H), Luzon Campaign," 1–7. On this date the Lingayen Defense Force was dissolved and eight CVE's departed for Ulithi to prepare for the Okinawa invasion while six others left for Mindoro to stage for Subic Bay landings on 29 January. Air responsibility was turned over to Commanding General, Allied Air Forces by Commander, Allied Naval Forces on 17 Jan.

begun convinced Colonel Jerome that there would be no room for Marines there. With a potential need of operating 500 Army and Marine aircraft of all types, one strip would not suffice.

Word came that Fifth Air Force's Brigadier General Paul B. Wurtsmith (who then headed the V Fighter Command, but who would soon be given command of the Thirteenth Air Force by General Kenney) had selected an undeveloped site for a second airfield on the shoreline some 15 miles east of Lingayen. After one night in the AAF camp, the three men piled into the jeep; if a new strip was to be in the making, they intended to be on the spot to oversee ground work for Marine accommodations. They drove eastward behind XIV Corps lines, across Dagupan River by barge into I Corps area and continued through already-captured Dagupan town. Then, coming upon a small river over which the road bridge had been destroyed, they solved a seeming impasse by driving across a railroad trestle. Their route continued eastward across the path of a tremendous inland movement of men and supplies keeping pace with the south-driving front, until, at their destination, they had crossed almost the entire breadth of S–Day's landing zone. (See Map 8.)

The proposed airstrip locale, being adjacent to a beach west of San Fabian (see Map 8), offered minimum trouble for unloading supplies from ship to base, and inland foliage supplied fair concealment for camp sites. But the terrain available for a landing strip was extremely narrow, and the ground promised little assurance of holding up in wet weather. Nonetheless, Jerome set up a temporary headquarters in a bombed-out schoolhouse and began staking out areas for camps, shops and aircraft dispersal.[30]

In the meantime, Colonel Meyer, who had directed the ground echelon's movement, arrived in Lingayen Gulf on 11 January aboard USS *President Polk* with 14 MAG–24 squadron pilots, 278 enlisted men and five corpsmen. While engaged in unloading their equipment and awaiting call to their own base, the Marines aided the shorthanded Sixth Army Engineers in unloading and laying steel matting on the Lingayen strip, a task concerning which Sixth Army's Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, on 20 January, wrote the following to Colonel Meyer:

> Upon the successful completion of the construction of the Lingayen air strip, I desire to express my personal appreciation and official commendation of the 24th Marine Air Group for the outstanding manner in which it performed its part in that important task.
>
> The rapid completion of this strip was mandatory. When a critical manpower shortage developed that jeopardized the construction program, the 24th Marine Air Group responded magnificently in the emergency by providing excellent working parties to assist in the unloading and laying of landing mat. Although having no previous experience in work of this nature, the men performed their duties enthusiastically and efficiently. Their efforts represented a valuable contribution to the speedy completion of the Lingayen air strip and reflect great credit upon the officers and men.

On 14 January, Meyer and his men, loaded on borrowed Army vehicles, moved to the chosen site just in time to find that heavy grading equipment had dug too deeply into the thin crust of top soil and lost all chance for a solid undersurface. There was compensation, however, for this seemingly unfortunate delay —a more suitable site was selected between Dagupan and Mangaldan. (See Map 8.) Along both sides of a road connecting the two towns stretched a broad expanse of rice fields, a site not outwardly fit for launching and landing hundreds of high-powered military aircraft.

But in the wide open space afforded, Jerome vouchsafed that such terrain could be converted successfully into an airbase. From experience gained during Philippine duty in 1927, he knew that a paddy field,[31] properly graded and packed, made a good surface with a solid foundation—at least during the comparatively dry season, and monsoon downpours were not due for another three months —plenty of time for the job at hand.

Men and equipment backtracked about six miles southwestward and work began afresh at this new site; Mangaldan Airdrome was in the making with a 6,500-foot east-west run-

[30] Interview with BrigGen C. C. Jerome, 9Feb50.

[31] From the Malay word "padi," literally, rice, whether growing or cut.

THIS IS THE LINGAYEN GULF SHORELINE where Sixth Army landed on 9 January 1945. Ten miles to the east, across the rice fields and the Dagupan River, is Mangaldan Airdrome, home base of the Marine dive bombers on Luzon.

way emerging north of the road and a camp area south of it. In this second effort by Army engineers to prepare a strip, light bulldozers were employed and extreme care was exercised to knock off only the crusty paddy ridges which left a flat surface with foot-deep rice roots as a firm foundation.[32]

During days following, other ground echelons arrived and unloaded men and supplies at San Fabian, five miles north of Mangaldan. All hands pitched in on camp construction and organization of facilities that everything might be in readiness for full-scale operations just as soon as the strip stood ready for its brood of planes.

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUPS, DAGUPAN

While this base was building, official combining of command for the two groups came about through a 308th Bombardment Wing directive designating Colonel Jerome as Commander, Air Base, Mangaldan, and Commander, Marine Aircraft Groups, Dagupan.[33]

[32] Interview with BrigGen C. C. Jerome, 9Feb50. The water table in this area was about 2½ to 4 feet. There was a 12 to 18 inch surface of dried mud with rice roots. Once the top crusty layer was broken through to the ooze below, it was very difficult to patch the soft spot. Therefore the bulldozers (actually a lighter vehicle called a "motor patrol" was used here) made very shallow cuts, and the surface was compacted with rubber tired "wobble dollies."

[33] *Sherrod*, in Philippines III, 5, (preliminary draft), explains: "Mangaldan is halfway between San Fabian and Dagupan. Since the latter word

Colonel Jerome, in turn, directed Colonel Meyer to assume duties as Deputy Commander of both posts. Lieutenant Colonel John L. Smith[34] and Lieutenant Colonel McCutcheon became executive officer and operations officer, respectively, of MAGSDAGUPAN, and Major Sherman A. Smith[35] took over the duties of "Strip Commander." In like manner, officers of both 24 and 32 would be pooled to perform all operations, intelligence and other functions relevant to coordinated tactical operations.

To the infantry and the combat correspondents, flyers of this combined enterprise came to be known as "The Diving Devildogs of Luzon." The seven squadrons operated under colorful nicknames: Flying Eggbeaters (VMSB–133), Wild Hares (VMSB–142), Sons of Satan (VMSB–241), Black Panthers (VMSB–236), Flying Goldbricks (VMSB–243), Bombing Banshees (VMSB–244), and the Torrid Turtles (VMSB–341).[36]

All seven of the Marine squadrons were equipped with a type of plane that had been declared obsolete by this stage of the war. The SBD, or Douglas Dauntless, had already compiled a brilliant war record and was ready for retirement, but still another chapter of history was destined to be written about the sturdy little plane.

At the entry of the U. S. into World War II in late 1941, the SBD was the only American dive bomber in current production, and it was, therefore, the best plane of its type in early action. By June 1944, however, only two of the seven Navy carriers operating with dive bombers were still flying the SBD, and on 21 July the last of the SBD's (No. 5,936) rolled off the Douglas Aircraft Company's assembly line.[37] The faster and more heavily armed Curtiss SB2C was replacing the Dauntless.

Marines used the SBD for the first time in combat in June 1942 at Midway. Later it gave valiant service with Marine air units of the 1st Wing all the way from Guadalcanal up the Solomons chain to Bougainville. The plane had many characteristics that made it extremely desirable as a dive bomber—the accuracy with which SBD pilots pin-pointed targets on Bougainville had been likened to threading a needle—but the SBD was not an unmixed blessing. It had plenty of limitations, too.

> The strafing power of the plane is limited to two guns, the speed is slow [normal cruising speed approximately 140 knots with 1,000 lb. bomb load], and they require fighter cover in enemy contested air.[38]

The Fifth Air Force had abandoned the dive bomber, which they considered an uneconomical weapon, in favor of using the fighter bomber.[39] General Kenney, former commander of the Fifth Air Force, says:

> Back in 1942 we did have one squadron of A–24 [Army designation for the SBD] dive bombers which had insufficient range for our work in New Guinea. Moreover they were too slow to argue with the Zeros at that time, so I quit using them and asked the Air Force to send me B–25s and A–20s which were much better for the skip-bombing technique which we were finding much more effective against shipping than dive-bombing and which also did excellent support work for the Australian and American ground troops . . .[40]

The combat radius of the Dauntless was only about 450 miles, a figure based upon fuel consumed during engine warm-up, take-off,

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makes a better combination the Marines chose MAGSDAGUPAN as their designation, rather than MAGSMANGALDAN or 'First Provisional Marine Air Wing,' which is what one of their earliest close support clients, the Sixth Division, labeled them." At any rate, it was the name of MAGSDAGUPAN, born of local exigency, and not the official unit name or names, which gained wide recognition throughout the area.

[34] Interview with BrigGen C. C. Jerome, 9Feb50. "Smith was Exec of MAG–32 but he actually ran the group. I was too involved in handling the overall picture."

[35] *Ibid.* "As strip commander, Major Sherman Smith had the job of coordinating operations for all the various Army and Marine units operating from the strip, responsibility for all field facilities, repair, tower operations, and a great many other housekeeping tasks. He did an excellent job."

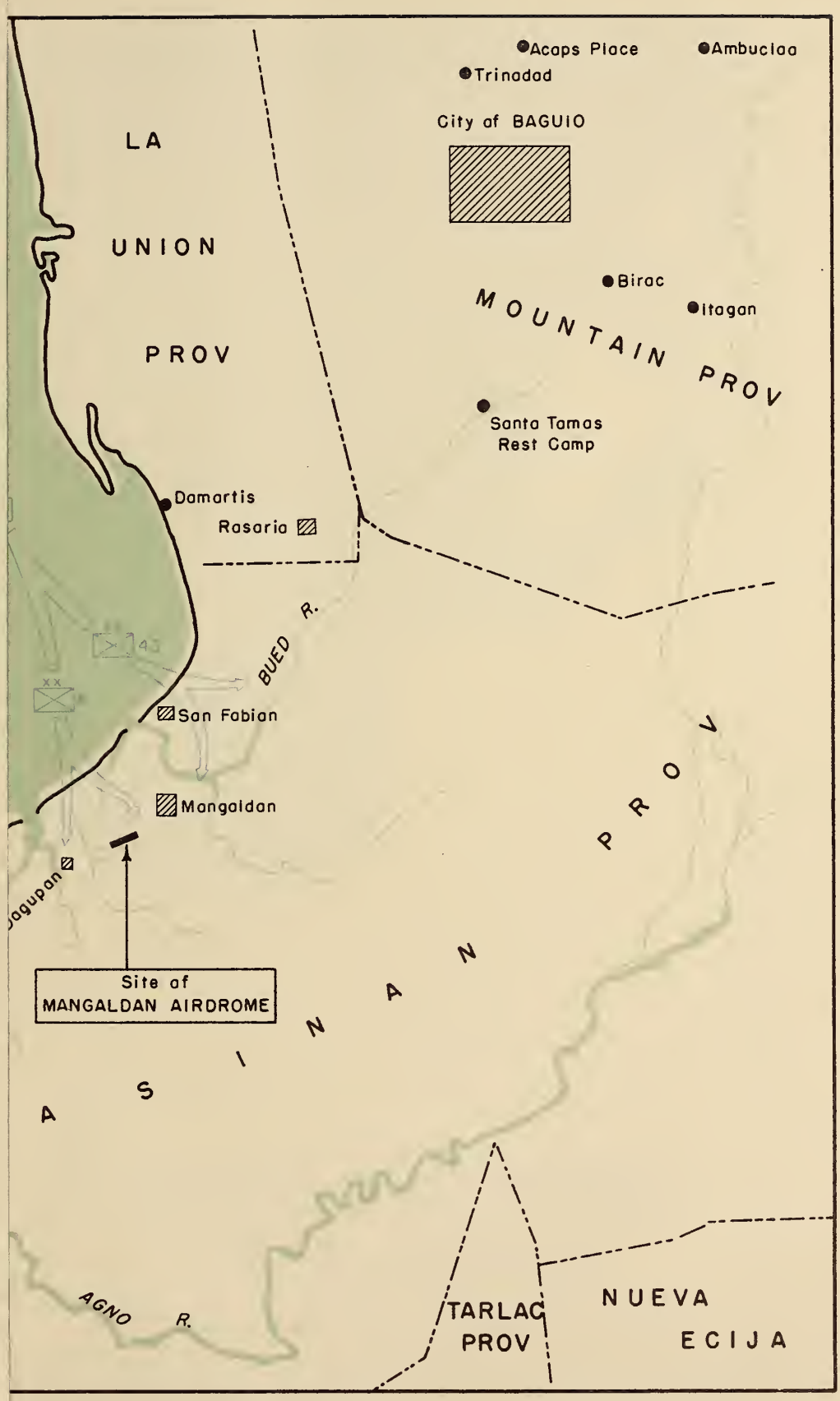
[36] John A. DeChant, *Devilbirds*, 182.

[37] "War Record of the SBD," BuPers Info Bulletin, Sep44, 32–33.

[38] *McCutcheon*, 11.

[39] USSBS, Military Analysis Division, *The Fifth Air Force in the War Against Japan*, 76. Hereinafter cited as *USSBS Fifth AF*.

[40] Ltr from Gen George C. Kenney, USAF, to author, 27Oct50.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BUED R.
San Fabian
Mangaldan
Site of
MANGALDAN AIRDROME
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AGNO R.
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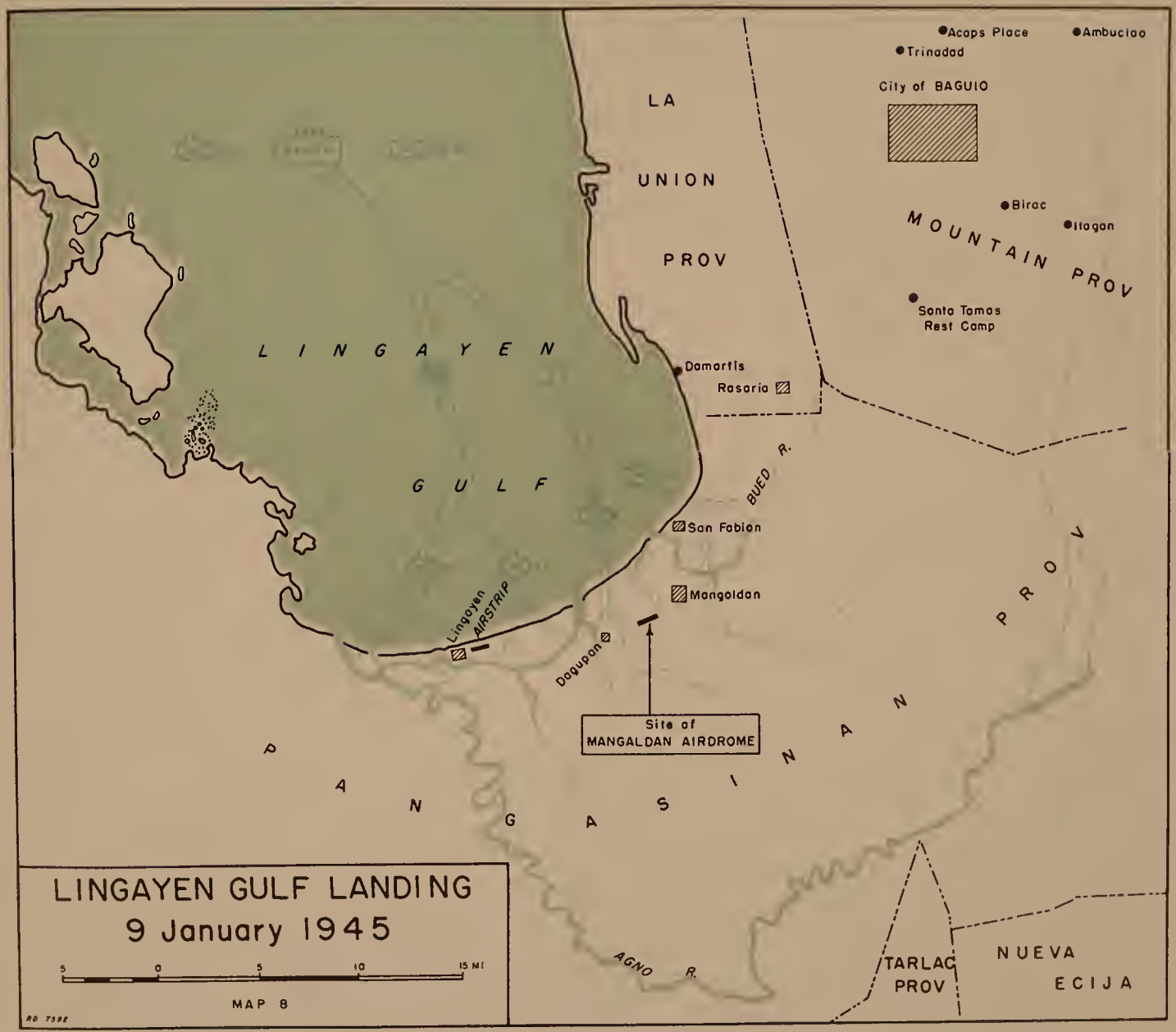
Acaps Place
Ambuclao
Trinidad
City of BAGUIO
LA
UNION
PROV
Binac
Itogan
MOUNTAIN PROV
Santo Tomas
Rest Camp
LINGAYEN
GULF
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San Fabian
Mangoldan
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Site of
MANGALDAN AIRDROME
PANGASINAN PROV
AGNO R.
TARLAC
PROV
NUEVA
ECIJA
LINGAYEN GULF LANDING
9 January 1945
5 0 5 10 15 MI
MAP 8
RD 7592

rendezvous, flight to target, 20 minutes over the target and the return flight to base. The maximum cruising range of the plane was not overly long either, even with the most economical power settings: approximately 1230 statute miles at 142 m. p. h.

Bomb loadings varied with the targets assigned. The usual load per plane was one 500-lb. bomb plus either two 250-lb. or two 100-lb. bombs. When a 1,000-pounder was carried, it usually constituted the sole bomb load, but on occasion, two 100-lb. bombs were also carried.[41]

ARRIVAL OF FLIGHT ECHELONS AT MANGALDAN

In spite of starting from scratch a full six days after S-Day (9 January), progress on and about the strip indicated that requirements set forth in original plans back in October (to be on station by S-plus 15) would be met on schedule. On 19–20 January, two of MAG–24's dive bomber squadrons, VMSB's 133 and 241, moved up from Emirau, by way of Momote and Owi, to Peleliu and awaited there a further green light.[42] The signal came on 25 January. Led by Major Lee A. Christoffersen (commanding VMSB–133) and Major Benjamin B. Manchester III (commanding VMSB–241), and escorted by R4D's for navigational purposes and PBY's for air-sea rescue,[43] 46 SBD's completed a one-day, one-stop-at-Leyte, flight from Peleliu to Mangaldan without serious incident.[44]

Within three days, VMSB–142 (commanded by Major Hoyle R. Barr), VMSB–236 (Major Fred J. Frazer), VMSB–243 (Major Joseph W. Kean, Jr.), and VMSB–341 (Major Christopher F. Irwin, Jr.) had started on the long flight to Lingayen. Last of the seven squadrons, VMSB–244 (Major Vance H. Hudgins), left Emirau on 28 January, and by month's end, assemblage at Mangaldan was complete.[45] One hundred and sixty-eight SBD's, 472 officers and 3,047 men gathered on the ex-rice field.[46]

But the Marines were not to be alone at Mangaldan Airdrome. One day prior to the first SBD arrivals, a squadron of Army P–47's had flown over from the Lingayen strip to base there. Shortly afterward, between 200 and 250 AAF planes came to operate from the field. They, as well as the Marines, were under the operational control of 308th Bomb Wing, but local base operations and combined camp facilities were the responsibility of Colonel Jerome.

Mangaldan's airstrip soon became a busy one. Its two flanking, oiled parking strips were jammed with aircraft, as was the entire perimeter surrounding the landing strip and taxi-ways. The assortment of planes ranged from single-engine fighters and dive bombers

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[41] "Marine Dive Bombers in the Philippines," an analysis and summary of the operations of VMSB Squadrons based on Luzon, P. I., for the month of February, 1945—made from War Diaries and ACA–1 reports; prepared by Intelligence Section, Division of Aviation, Hqs, USMC, 5May45, 5. Hereinafter cited as *Dive Bombers in the Philippines.*

[42] At the time of departure from Emirau, orders were for planes to go all the way to Lingayen. However, the movement was halted at Peleliu when word was received of the relocation of the airstrip from which the planes were to operate.

[43] Each squadron was split into two twelve plane flights, each with an R4D type aircraft (supplied by MAG–25 at Bougainville) for navigational purposes. LtCol John P. Coursey was senior R4D pilot. Each squadron also had a PBY (Dumbo) for air-sea rescue; however, these planes were so slow that they departed about one half hour ahead of each SBD squadron and arrived behind them at each destination.

[44] One plane (1stLt L. M. Carlson, VMSB–133) remained at Peleliu with engine trouble, but arrived at Mangaldan two days later. 2dLt S. L. Hammond's SBD (VMSB–241) developed a rough engine after Leyte take-off, and over Manila Bay his engine quit while at 10,000 feet; pilot and gunner jettisoned wing tanks and gear; at 500 feet engine again started, and Lt Hammond made an emergency landing at Lingayen field. Sqn War Diaries, VMSB's 133 and 241, Jan45.

[45] Not a single SBD was lost on the 2,500-mile flight over water from Bougainville to Luzon. Partly for his role in this operation, LtCol Wallace T. Scott, operations officer of MAG–32, later received the Legion of Merit. Citation reads, in part: "... Lieutenant Colonel Scott was responsible for planning, briefing and executing the flight of 168 dive bombers and their escorting planes from Emirau . . . to Mangaldan Airstrip . . . an operation so excellently prepared that no plane was lost and no personnel injured . . ."

[46] Compilation of figures from War Diaries of all units; includes Navy medical personnel.

to four-engine heavy bombers. In addition to the SBD's there were: P–47's, P–51's, A–20's, C–47's, a few transient B–24's, and even some PBY–5A's (amphibian model of the Catalina patrol plane) for air-sea rescue.[47]

COMBAT OPERATIONS BEGIN

After one day for aircraft maintenance, the two first-arrived dive bombing squadrons were ready for combat assignment. The pilots, too, were ready and eager to give the type of close air support for which they had prepared. In the beginning, however, missions were not what the Marines had expected. Targets assigned to them were far beyond the front lines. No attempt was made to establish liaison from the ground during strikes except that each flight reported by radio its departure for an objective to a support air party of the 308th Wing. It became apparent immediately that these AAF and infantry units were not accustomed to air support really close to the troops. Furthermore, it was not Allied Air Force doctrine to control aircraft strikes directly from a front-line observation post.[48] The Marines had to await an opportunity to put their own liaison teams into forward areas with the troops.

As MAGSDAGUPAN operations began, all request for air strikes first were processed through the chain of command within the Sixth Army. When approved all the way up the line, these requests then were passed along to the 308th Wing whose operations officer designated the subordinate air units to carry out the various assignments. As a result of this processing, one day's requests were set up that evening for action on the following day. The MAGSDAGUPAN operations office usually received its daily assignments during the early morning hours. For each mission delegated to the Marines, the number of

[47] "Black Cats" from ComAirSeventh Fleet.

[48] AAF policy, as set forth in their SOP, was to maintain control of aircraft strikes at a considerably higher echelon than was used by the Marines. However, there are individual cases on record in which AAF Air Liaison Parties did exercise front-line control of aircraft strikes, as early as 29Feb44, in the invasion of the Admiralties, according to information furnished by the Air University Library, Maxwell AFB, Ala.

DOUGLAS DAUNTLESSES are directed back to the "line" after flying a mission in close support of Sixth United States Army ground troops on Luzon.

planes, and time to be on target was specified, but type of ammunition to be used, and selection of the squadron or squadrons to participate was their own. Obviously targets assigned in this delayed manner only infrequently would be close to the front lines, for not often could an infantry commander afford to wait a full day for air support on an objective at close range.[49]

There were two other procedures, however, that would soon come into use to decrease the time required between request for, and execution of, air support. The first of these was known as a "ground alert" during which planes and pilots stood by at the airbase ready to be in the air on 30-minute call. Requests then channeled back over a support air request net, and mission assignment and target briefing took place in rapid order prior to take-off. This method was, of course, much faster than the one previously mentioned. Even faster than the "ground alert," however, was another method which became increasingly popular—the "air alert," which provided for planes to be continuously on station in the air orbiting a designated stand-by point, and ready to be ordered to whatever target the liaison men on the ground might designate for them. This elimination of the middlemen,[50] coupled with the fact that planes could be directed onto targets immediately when such targets presented themselves, made close air support a much more versatile weapon.

At 0900, 27 January, 18 VMSB–241 SBD's took off on what the squadron recorded as MAGSDAGUPAN Mission No. 1.[51] The flight received fighter cover from four P–47's of 35th Fighter Group over a 35-mile route to target, the town of San Fernando, La Union province. (See Map 7.) Assigned to attack heavy and medium gun positions, bivouac areas, oil dumps and selected buildings, pilots released 36 100-lb. and 18 500-lb. bombs while gunners strafed on low flying runs. The bivouac area was razed, all designated buildings heavily damaged, and Second Lieutenant Edward M. Fleming made a confirmed, direct hit on an oil dump. Smoke resulting from this strike rose some 3,000 feet and could still be seen by returning pilots in the landing circle over Mangaldan, 35 miles away.

An afternoon flight of 18 VMSB–133 planes struck in the opposite direction at much-attacked Clark Field Air Center, 50 miles north of Manila (see Map 9), and with equally successful results blasted supply dumps and scattered debris over a wide area. This first day's action gave the Japanese a liberal sample of precision bombing that troops from the Land of the Rising Sun would learn to know and fear in days to come.

The pattern for flying these dive bombing raids had been firmed into a generally uniform system or standing operating procedure; tactics employed were quite different from those of other types of bombing groups. When going on a mission, the Marine flyers usually took off from the Mangaldan strip in sections of three planes.[52] Once air-borne, the entire flight joined up in a very tight formation for mutual protection. Once joined, and while still climbing to an altitude of approximately 15,000 feet, the flight proceeded toward its target.

The planes approached the objective area at an altitude normally about 10,000 to 11,000 feet above the target. The flight would then extend its formation so that each pilot could locate the target; once they had made positive identification, the attack began. The lead pilot

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[49] *MS. COMMENT*, Air University Library: ". . . The target assignments implied in this paragraph were usually not ground support requests but air force orders based on information supplied by guerrillas, reconnaissance, or photographs and as such, of course, were usually behind the front lines."

[50] Higher echelons monitored requests (open channels) and they could voice immediate disapproval of any mission called for by front-line units. Silence by high air and ground echelons denoted approval. MS. COMMENT, Air University Library, adds: ". . . If there were other more important strikes, the 308th Bomb Wing or division or corps SAP would cut in."

[51] Maj B. B. Manchester, III, won the honor of leading the first strike by the toss of a coin with Maj L. A. Christoffersen, according to Combat Correspondent Wallace R. McLain.

[52] Occasionally six planes took off simultaneously, with one three-plane section rolling directly behind the other. In at least one instance a nine-plane take-off was made.

TOWN OF SAN JOSE Nueva Ecija province, important road and railway junction at the entrance to Balete Pass. Marine and Army aircraft bombed and strafed this key objective preliminary to its seizure by the 6th Infantry Division against little opposition in early February 1945. Japanese units cut off to the south were thereby denied an escape route through the Pass to Cagayan Valley.

pointed the nose of his plane down, followed by the rest of his flight, one plane at a time. Dive flaps were opened to keep the planes from gaining too much air speed while in dives approaching 70 degrees,[53] and to give the SBD stability in its near-vertical flight. While going down to the target pilots had to allow for windage and a slight amount of ship's yawing.

With the target held in the sights, bombs were released at an elevation of about 2,000 feet,[54] after which the nose of the plane was pulled toward the horizon and the dive-flaps closed quickly for added speed. By this time the bombers would be about 1,000 feet above the ground, in a slightly nosed down position.[55] The planes continued losing altitude quickly

[53] Indicated air speed in a dive while using flaps was about 250 knots.

[54] Reflector sights were bore-sighted for 2,000 feet (release altitude) above target.

[55] With instantaneous fuze settings, pull out was usually completed at 1,000 feet, in order to avoid bomb blast. On some missions, however, a delayed fuze setting of 2/10 second was used, which allowed planes to pull out at treetop height and still be ahead of the explosion zone of the bomb. Less plane damage

until they were at treetop level, using their accumulated air-speed for violent evasive maneuvers to avoid enemy fire. Thereafter the planes continued to a rendezvous point for another bombing attack, or perhaps several strafing runs before the final rendezvous for the return flight to the base.

First strike of the Black Panthers (VMSB–236) and Torrid Turtles (VMSB–341), on 30 January, combined 36 of their aircraft to render a devastating blow on a far northern town of Tuguegarao, Cagayan province. (See Map 7.) Seven large craters, by visible count, were left in the airstrip there which had been used as a receiving base for Japanese replacement aircraft flown in from Formosa. Eight enemy fighter planes in two revetments along a bamboo-lined road received a thorough strafing treatment. Supply areas were left ablaze, 10 barracks buildings demolished, and three direct hits found their mark in a large school building that guerilla sources had reported as an enemy headquarters. The flyers left below them a scene of mottled disarray; the sting of the obsolescent Dauntless was still a potent one.[56]

Between 25–31 January, five Marine squadrons participated in a total of 17 missions (255 individual combat flights), dropped 207,800 pounds of bombs and expended 25,895 rounds of machine gun ammunition. Targets of the period extended in an 180 degree arc from north through east to south, ranged up to 150 miles distant from Mangaldan and included 10 towns in five different Luzon provinces.[57]

One assignment on 29 January, although lacking anticipated doctrinal procedure, did amount to close support of ground troops; it was executed without direct control after a thorough ground briefing of the target area. Doughboys, meeting dogged defensive action a bare 20 miles northeast of the Marine base, requested aerial assistance. XIV Corps and the right flank of I Corps had pushed steadily southward down the Central Plains, but I Corps, while continuing southeast, was committed to attack eastward into the mountainous regions along a north-south front to protect an elongated Sixth Army flank. On the corps' pivotal left, or northern, flank the 158th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) had fought slowly inland from Lingayen Gulf past Rosario against enemy forces which resisted tenaciously from dug-in positions. On the west bank of the Bued River, a few miles east of Rosario (see Map 8), the 158th RCT was halted and called for assistance through air support; 29 Dauntlesses (from VMSB–241 and 133) responded by dropping 55 bombs into an east bank area of 2,300 by 3,500 feet, and, although pilots saw no activity in the objective area, Sixth Army later reported the division was well pleased with results.

During January operations, all flights continued to be escorted by from four to six Army fighters (P–40's, P–47's, P–51's or P–38's), but no enemy air opposition was encountered, and after the first part of February such escort was generally discontinued. However, Marine attackers were subjected often to AA fire that, on the second day of operations, accounted for the first MAGSDAGUPAN fatalities. During a combined strike of several squadrons in the Clark Field vicinity, a 20mm shell hit the engine of a plane carrying First Lieutenant Gordon R. Lewis and Corporal Samuel P. Melish (VMSB–133) just after its bombs were dropped; the SBD never pulled out of its dive.

THE FINAL DRIVE TO MANILA

By 1 February (S–plus 23), Lingayen Gulf beachhead was considered secure; the main ground effort turned to concentrate upon the next phase of the campaign, capture of Manila.

I Corps' left flank had battered stubborn enemy resistance in the Rosario area far enough eastward to dissipate threat of long-range artillery on the landing beaches; its right flank had driven 50 miles southeast of the gulf to Talevera, and the corps front was swinging east to seal off enemy forces in the

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resulted from shrapnel using this type of fuze setting, and also allowed for closing dive flaps while the plane was still vertical, before the pull out maneuver took place.

[56] War Diary, MAG–24, 30Jan45.

[57] Compilations taken from Aircraft Action Reports, VMSB's 133, 142, 236, 241 and 341, Jan45.

mountains north and northeast of Central Luzon Plain. (See Map 9.)

XIV Corps units had captured Clark Field Air Center and Fort Stotsenburg, and were pushing westward into the Zambales Mountain all along its right flank from Lingayen. The Marines' old Bougainville friends, the 37th Division, had reached the most southerly point of advance, Calumpit, site of the highway and railroad bridges destroyed earlier by MAG–12's Corsairs. Manila: 25 miles away.

Moreover, two additional assault landings had been successfully completed in the last days of January, both by units of Eighth Army. In the first, XI Corps came ashore at San Narcisco, a few miles northwest of Subic Bay, in a move designed to cut off Bataan Peninsula and open Subic Bay to Allied shipping. By 1 February, XI Corps forces, having passed to the control of Sixth Army, completed the opening of Subic Bay and were driving eastward to join XIV Corps along the shores of Manila Bay. Meanwhile, on 31 January, 15 miles south of the entrance to Manila Bay, the 11th Airborne Division hit the beach in ship-to-shore landings to open a drive toward Manila from the southwest under the leadership of Eighth Army's commander, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger (USA). Three days later, the division's parachute regiment made a bold air-borne landing on Tagaytay Ridge, and the southwestern foothold on Luzon became secure.[58]

Still another newcomer to the Luzon fray was Major General Verne D. Mudge's 1st Cavalry Division, which landed at San Fabian, Lingayen Gulf, on 27 January and by 31 January concentrated its forces 40 miles inland at Guimba (see Map 9) where General MacArthur personally bade General Mudge: "Go to Manila. Go around the Nips, bounce off the Nips, but go to Manila. Free the internees at Santo Tomas. Take Malacañan Palace and the Legislative Building."[59]

To assist this dramatic effort, flyers of MAGSDAGUPAN stood ready on 1 February, with all seven squadrons then available for assignment, to begin a new phase of their recently begun Luzon operations; they were about to get their first real chance to prove the worth of close air support. From the 308th Bombardment Wing came these orders: provide an "air alert" of nine planes from dawn to dusk over the 1st Cavalry Division.

Assignment to a continuing "air alert" status was just what the Marines needed to prove a basic element of their doctrine: aviation as an immediately available, additional weapon at the hands of an infantry commander, able to function with the highest degree of coordination and accuracy under on-the-spot direction of a front-line observer. "Air-trained" liaison teams, in personal contact with forward ground commanders, could call into instant action their air-borne weapons, already in the vicinity. By a variety of means (radio, panels, pyrotechnics, flashing lights, smoke, etc.), ALP's would provide ground-to-air briefing of targets and indicate friendly troop disposition. The ALP's then would make certain, by observing a dummy run by the flight leader, correctness of the pilot's intended target, and during the attack, alter instantaneously any errors in subsequent runs. The "air alert" system was ideal for support of fast moving forces, and the 1st Cavalry Division was to be such a force. Here, then, was an opportunity for the Marines to win the confidence so sorely needed for support aviation.

One minute after midnight on 1 February, 1st Cavalry Division's motorized units, spearheaded by a "flying column" under Brigadier General William C. Chase, moved out from Guimba to begin its historic dash to the Philippine capital city.[60] (See Map 9.) At dawn they approached Cabanatuan (capital of Nueva Ecija province), their first major objective; with them were two radio jeeps and

[58] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 29–32.

[59] Maj B. C. Wright, *The 1st Cavalry Division in World War II*, 126. Hereinafter cited as *1stCavDiv in WWII*.

[60] *Ibid.*, 126. General Chase was temporarily relieved of his command responsibility of the 1st Cavalry Brigade to lead the "flying column," a highly mobile task force composed of three "serials;" including Reconnaissance, Anti-Tank, Medical, Field Artillery, Tank, Engineer, Machine Gun and Engineer units, brought together in a balanced striking force.

1st CAVALRY DIVISION'S COMMANDING GENERAL Verne D. Mudge, confers with Brigadier General William C. Chase who led the "flying column" into Manila on the night of 3 February 1945. Accompanying these first Americans to return to the Philippine capital were two Marine air liaison parties.

a radio truck, manned by Marines of groups 24 and 32.[61] These were the first MAGSDAGUPAN air liaison parties to do front-line duty with the infantry on Luzon.[62] In the radio jeeps were Captains Francis R. B. Godolphin and Samuel H. McAloney, each with one enlisted man.[63] In the radio truck (used to maintain coordination between the jeeps and Mangaldan) was Captain John A. Titcomb, MAG–24's communications officer, assisted by two enlisted men.[64]

[61] McCutcheon, 10.

[62] They reported, on verbal orders, on 31 January.

[63] T/Sgt R. B. Holland with Captain Godolphin; PFC P. E. Armstrong with Capt McAloney.

[64] S/Sgts A. A. Byers and P. J. Miller.

From the first they were given excellent cooperation by the division's support air party, which did everything in its power to make it easy for the Marine liaison unit to direct missions. Captain McAloney and his jeep driver worked closely with General Chase, staying always near at hand. The general frequently rode in Captain McAloney's jeep. Captain Godolphin (a former professor of Greek and Latin at Princeton University) directed many a strike during the 38 days he was in the front lines as an air liaison officer.

Working under the direction of these men, there were always nine SBD's droning overhead in a lazy circle, ready to pounce down-

1st CAVALRY DIVISION troops advance toward Manila amid the cheers of Filipinos who line both sides of the Angat River, at a point 25 miles from Manila. Marine flyers blasted points of enemy concentrations and stood aerial guard over the division's entire left flank during the cavalrymen's 100-mile dash to Manila between 1–3 February.

ward to stop any threat to the on-rushing mechanized cavalrymen.

For three days the Marine divebombers stood aerial guard over the exposed left flank of the "flying column," searched an area 30 miles ahead and 20 miles behind advance ground patrols and reported enemy troop or motor movement that might threaten interference or attempt to cut the division's swiftly extending lines of communications.

While intelligence garnered by the aerial informants indicated a general eastward fleeing of motley enemy forces away from the line of advance, it also provided information as to areas from which opposition might be anticipated and accordingly afforded a basis for employment of rear security forces. Presence of our aircraft, cruising menacingly above the network of roadways available to Japanese transport, tended to keep enemy movement at a minimum during daylight hours.[65]

Thus aided, cavalrymen in trucks and jeeps and tanks forged rapidly southward, actually in three separate columns, down Luzon's Route 5 highway or over more primitive roads and even across paddy fields. Whenever possible, they swept around places of isolated enemy concentrations and faced their most time-consuming impediment at points where bridges lay demolished. Advance scouting by air of the many rivers which had to be crossed would disclose condition of bridges prior to arrival of the column and thereby often eliminate devious rerouting.

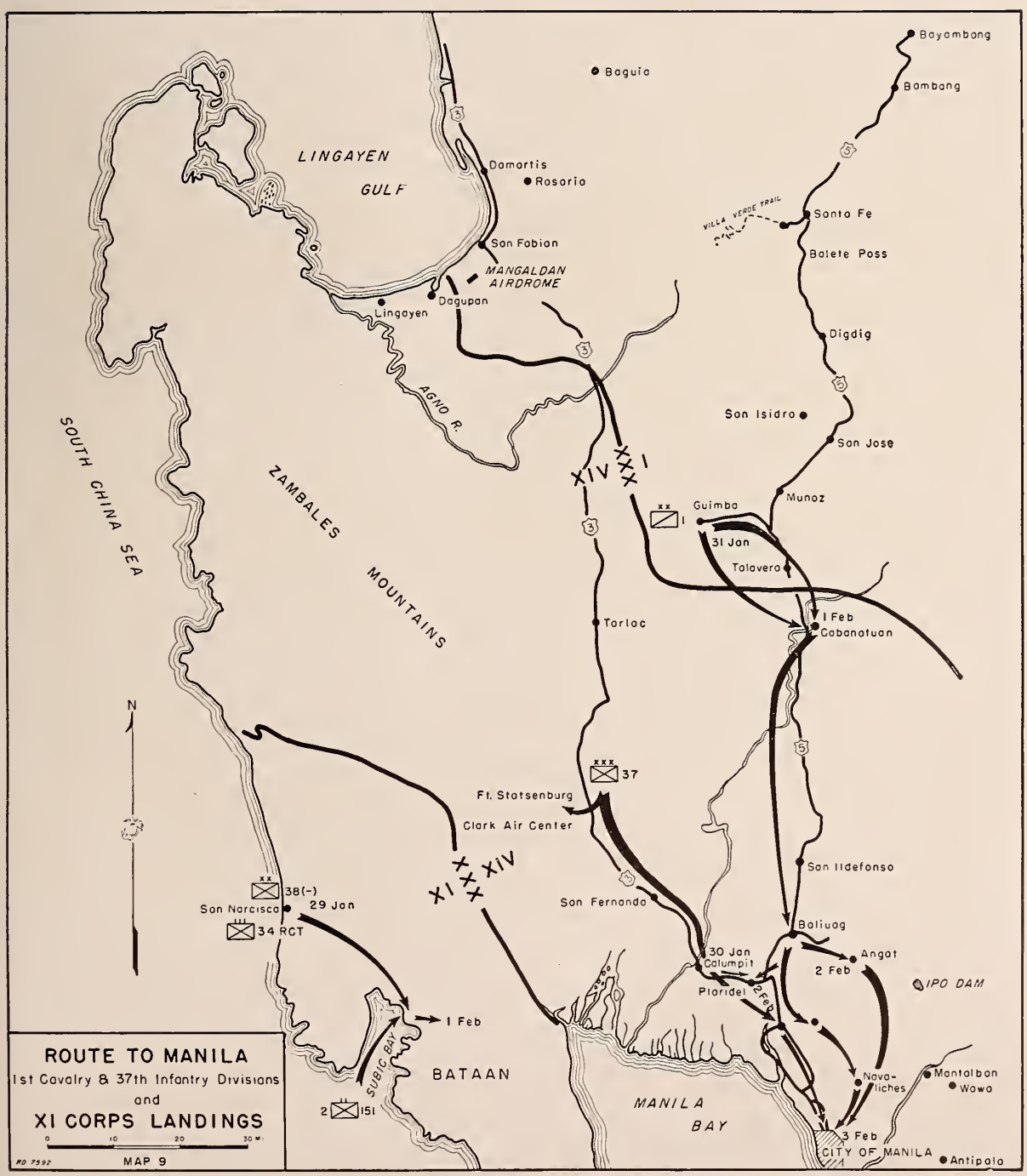
Pointing specifically to this type of assistance, the 1st Cavalry Division's historian later proclaimed in generous tribute:

> Much of the success of the entire movement is credited to the superb air cover, flank protection, and reconnaissance provided by the Marine Air Groups 24 and 32. The 1st Cavalry's drive down through Central Luzon was the longest such operation ever made in the Southwest Pacific Area using only air cover for flank protection.[66]

[65] *Dive Bombers in the Philippines*, 3.

[66] *1st CavDiv in WWII*, 127.

During the first three days of supporting the 1st Cavalry Division, Marine close air support disciples displayed a convincing combat performance which mixed all ingredients of air-ground coordination, and did everything except drop bombs in the immediate front of our troops. That they could strike close-range targets with a reasonable degree of safety was perceived and acknowledged by groundmen whose occupation of target areas followed so closely that no doubt was left as to precision obtained. These visually evaluated results indicated the aerial marksmen could repeatedly confine hits within a small target zone.



Lending official expression to such conclusions was a statement made by the "flying column's" General Chase: "I have never seen such able, close and accurate air support as the Marine flyers are giving us."[67]

Moreover, these groundmen became accustomed to aircraft availability; they found air-ground liaison simple and thorough, for mission requests were fulfilled promptly and target identification made in a dependable manner; they found, too, that positive control of planes from the ground need not be the questionable factor of bygone days. Indeed, MAGSDAGUPAN'S performance on the road to Manila was a major step forward toward establishing a confidence in their close support wares on the part of the ground troops.

Certainly Japanese failure to launch a major counter-offensive on the Central Plain abetted the division's swift progress, yet straggling enemy forces there were capable of serious harassment. Because General MacArthur had ordered the 1st Cavalry to reach Manila as soon as possible, it followed that all effort was made to avoid large-scale battle enroute. To this end, the several requested SBD strikes helped dissipate resistance before the motorcade reached it.

On the first day of "air alert" operations, while the horseless troopers busied themselves at Cabanatuan, two separate nine-plane flights were sent ahead to attack Angat, another struck San Jose del Monte; both towns contained concentrations of enemy troops. Each mission thoroughly blasted designated objectives in the towns. On 2 February, 45 planes of VMSB's 133, 142 and 241, after taking-off on a prearranged assignment, were diverted by division-level ground control (SAP) to bomb and strafe San Isidro, a town within sight of the "flying column." (Three planes of the "air alert," then on station, received SAP permission to join the San Isidro attack.) All bombs fell within a specified area, only 200 by 300 yards in size, and Army observers reported "target left in shambles."[68]

Later that day, division troops pushed further south, made contact with elements of 37th Division near Plaridel, and after fording the Angat River met their strongest enemy resistance of the day. Between Plaridel and Santa Maria, the 2d Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, came upon a well-entrenched Japanese battalion "in a position capable of withstanding an entire division."[69]

ALPman Godolphin, in company with the unit's commander, had an idea to offer. Through radio contact with SAP, he cleared a request for immediate use of the patrolling SBD flight. Soon they were on station and had received a briefing in the air. Then they "struck" in a novel, yet effective, manner. Of this action, 1st Cavalry records have this to say:

> Here the dive bombers of MAG 32 made several strafing passes at the Japs without firing a shot, due to the proximity of friendly troops, and enabled the squadron to slug its way into the defensive position and rout the occupants.[70]

Assistance was not all one-sided. A VMSB–236 patrol, on 3 February, carried out a reconnaissance mission for one Marine ground liaison team at Baliuag. It followed up with a similar task for the other ALP near Santa Maria, and finally was directed in search of a reported antiaircraft position. Flight leader, Captain Glen H. Schluckebier, who had previously turned over the lead to another plane when his radio failed, tagged along in silence. But while enroute to carry out the last request, his ignition system failed completely (apparently inoperative from an enemy bullet), the engine stopped and a crash landing became inevitable. With but little altitude to maneuver, Schluckebier jettisoned a 1,000-lb. bomb, picked out a rice field and landed, wheels up, without injury to himself or his gunner, Sergeant Donald M. Morris. Cavalry troopers reached the downed airmen, at a point one mile southeast of Baliuag, almost before they had extracted themselves from the crashed aircraft. A division Piper Cub soon picked up the Marines and took them to Guimba, where

[67] War Diary, MAG–24, Feb44.

[68] Sqd War Diaries, 1 and 2Feb45.

[69] *1st CavDiv in WWII*, 128.

[70] *Ibid.*, 128.

they remained overnight. They returned to Mangaldan next day by truck.[71]

By nightfall of 3 February, just 66 hours after rolling forth from Guimba, leading cavalry elements crossed Manila city limits, and that very night their tanks stormed the gates of Santo Tomas University to free over 3500 emaciated Allied prisoners interned there.[72]

The Philippine story, of course, was not complete, nor did entry into the capital entirely conclude one of its long-planned chapters, for many days of bitter street fighting ensued before a "secure" sign could be posted. But upon reaching Manila, a statement from the cavalry commander, Major General Verne D. Mudge, gave sweeping testimony of the high regard he held for Marine air support during the historic dash:

> The Marine dive bomber pilots on Luzon are well qualified for the job they are doing, and I have the greatest confidence in their ability. On our drive to Manila, I depended solely on the Marines to protect my left flank from the air against possible Japanese counterattack. The job they turned in speaks for itself. We are here.
>
> I can say without reservation that the Marine dive bomber outfits are among the most flexible I have seen in this war. They will try anything, and from my experience with them I have found that anything they try usually pans out. The dive bombers of the First Marine Air Wing have kept the enemy on the run. They have kept him underground and enabled troops to move up with fewer casualties and with greater speed. I cannot say enough in praise of these dive bomber pilots and their gunners and I am commending them through proper channels for the job they have done in giving my men close ground support in this operation.[73]

MAGSDAGUPAN activity had not been limited exclusively to support of the cavalry division. Each "air alert" flight, prior to takeoff, had customarily received briefing on a secondary target assignment. In case their bombs were not expended before relief by the succeeding flight, the nine Dauntlesses would proceed to the preselected objective area, check in with its controlling support air party and deliver their bomb load at targets then considered vital by Sixth Army. During the three days of air cover over the cavalrymen, 15 separate flights took part in the rotating assignment, five per day; of these 10 hit alternate targets before completing their missions.

It was not necessary for pilots simply to await their turn on the "air alert" schedule, for, in addition, other operational commitments continued during the three-day period. Seven combined-squadron missions were carried out with from 26 to 45 aircraft participating.

As during initial Mangaldan operations, many missions were against strong points in the rugged terrain of tightly defended La Union province. More prominent, from a direct support standpoint, were several highly destructive assaults on San Jose, Nueva Ecija province. This town was of strategic importance as the gateway to Balete Pass, escape route of Japanese forces to northern Luzon and Cagayan Valley. Seizure of San Jose also would deny to enemy forces in the north access to the Central Plain and would remove the last remaining threat of large scale counterattack against the Sixth Army left flank. By 1 February elements of 6th Infantry Division had quelled resistance in Munoz, seven miles southwest of San Jose.[74] (See Map 9.)

Upon the division's request a VMSB–133 flight strafed along the road connecting the two towns, knocked out a well-camouflaged pillbox that fired on them, left burning an abandoned bus, and finally, dropped bombs on a total of 16 buildings still standing in San Jose.[75] On 4 February, 6th Division troops entered the well-leveled town and met but slight opposition.[76]

Completion of flight operations on 3 February was coincident with the entry into Manila. In circumstance, if not in fact, this date marked the end of one operational phase for MAGSDAGUPAN—if any such differentiation could be made during the campaign.

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[71] War Diary, VMSB–236, 3Feb45.

[72] Capt McAloney and his crew went with Gen Chase and the advance column that broke through to Santo Tomas the night of 3Feb45. McAloney to author, 15Dec50.

[73] War Diary, MAG–32, 10Feb45.

[74] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 33–35.

[75] War Diary, VMSB–133, 1Feb45.

[76] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 33–35.

Rain came down in torrents during the night; stiff winds slapped the camp area, and planes were put under double tie-downs to withstand the heavy blow. Water left the strip a quagmire, and on the 4th and 5th, flight operations were impossible.

This breather gave all hands time to improve their living conditions. After order was restored from the windstorm, personnel pitched in on building projects and shower installations. Also, for the first time, enough equipment was in place to serve three hot meals a day.

PLANS ARE MADE TO USE MARINES ON MINDANAO

By this time success of the Luzon campaign was assured. But fierce fighting yet remained ahead, and its conclusion was a matter of methodically driving the stubborn enemy back into areas of ever-decreasing size. It would be five months longer before Sixth Army considered the entire island under its control and passed responsibility to Eighth Army for final annihilation of some 25,000 trapped Japanese remnants.[77]

Widespread action on Luzon, concurrent with the seizure of Manila, called for an increase in American forces, both ground and air. The 309th Bombardment Wing (H) arrived from Leyte to begin operations from the Clark Air Center area on 4 February, while 310th Bombardment Wing (M) continued supplementary support from Mindoro.[78] The 33d Infantry Division made a scheduled appearance at Lingayen on 10 February, thus bringing to nine the total of U. S. Army divisions.[79]

However, the offensive was going well on Luzon, and plans were taking final shape for the concluding phase of the entire Philippine campaign. General MacArthur, by using Lieutenant General Robert E. Eichelberger's remaining Eighth Army forces, soon would be ready to set in motion scheduled operations against by-passed Central Visayas and Mindanao. (VICTOR Operations)

Even though his squadrons were just beginning to win recognition for their close support capabilities, Colonel Jerome foresaw a sharp decline in Luzon aerial operations within a month or so. He was eager for his dive bombermen to be in on any shift of scene that might offer continuing use of their talents. Opportunity came in the form of a request that he attend a planning conference of air organizations called by General Kenney at Leyte for 11 February.[80]

Advance notice of the meeting was short; Colonel Jerome had to leave for Leyte within 24 hours after hearing of it. The colonel felt unable to commit his units to further engagement without approval of General Mitchell, so he immediately dispatched to Bougainville an urgent request for instructions. The next day, he delayed his departure from Mangaldan Airdrome as long as possible; still no reply from the 1st Wing commander was forthcoming. At Leyte, the reply came from General Mitchell himself who had been enroute and landed at Tacloban the same day.[81]

Even then, Mitchell's Chief of Staff, Colonel Verne J. McCaul, was on Mindoro Island scouting a location for a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing base of operations. But a once-promising expectation of the wing's departing from the Northern Solomons grew increasingly remote. Fifth Air Force Headquarters soon would move to Luzon from Leyte, and the Thirteenth Air Force would assume responsibility for all of the Philippines south of Luzon.[82]

Yet it did not have to be all or nothing for the Marine general; he continued to seek real combat for more of his units. Amphibious assault by Eighth Army's 41st Division against Zamboanga, western peninsula of Mindanao Island, was set for 10 March. Before the conference ended, Marine airmen

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[77] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 97–98. Command of Luzon operations passed to Eighth Army 1Jul45.

[78] *Ibid.*, Air Support Annex 99.

[79] *Ibid.*, Vol II, from diagrams showing disposition of friendly forces.

[80] Interview with BrigGen C. C. Jerome, 9Feb50.

[81] *Ibid.* Date of gathering at Leyte confirmed in muster rolls, 1st MAW, Feb45.

[82] *General Kenney Reports*, 521.

were slated for a major role in that campaign, for several of the decisions reached by 13 February affected the Marine wing units then in the Philippines and also included plans for a few newcomers from the Bougainville command.

In spite of Sixth Army reluctance to lose any of its air support on Luzon, MAG–32 was released by General Kenney in order for it to support the Eighth Army on Mindanao. Ground echelons of Jerome's group would begin immediate preparations for an initial move to Mindoro Island for final staging, but its tactical squadrons were to continue, supported by MAG–24, full-scale Luzon operations until Zamboanga facilities were readied.

MAG–12 would leave Leyte and, like MAG–32, move to Mindanao Island. MAG–12's Corsairs would cover Zamboanga troop landings from Dipolog, Mindanao, a guerilla-held base. Headquarters and Service Squadrons 12, never yet united with Leyte-based squadrons,[83] would be joined by ground echelons of MAG–12's tactical squadrons for staging at Mindoro with MAG–32.

MAG–24, to be left at Mangaldan to complete its commitment to Sixth Army, would eventually join its sister units on Mindanao. But to round out the proposed SBD–Corsair team, Mitchell was heartened by a Philippine assignment for at least a few 1st Wing newcomers. One medium-bomber squadron, VMB–611 (PBJ's), and two air warning squadrons, AWS–3 and 4, were to move up from the Solomons.

After these plans were settled, General Mitchell remained in the Philippines for almost a month. He visited each of his unit commanders on Leyte, Samar and Luzon. He observed from front lines on Luzon the style of Marine close air support being rendered there, and he also oversaw Zamboanga invasion preparations at Mindoro. Toward the end of the month, illness of MAG–12's Colonel Willis prompted the general to hasten Colonel McCaul (still at Mindoro) to Leyte to take command of the fighter group.[84] Mitchell departed from Leyte for his Bougainville duties on 4 March, confident that his airmen, flight crews and all ground personnel were performing in a satisfactory manner. The general was by now unhappily aware that the original plan of displacing wing headquarters to the Philippines had been shelved, that his responsibilities as Commander AirNorSols bound him to Bougainville and permitted only occasional visits to his forward units.

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT TAKES HOLD

Meanwhile, resumption of flight operations at Mangaldan on 6 February marked the beginning of a period which not only brought SBD close air support closer, but which found more and more Army ground commanders appreciating the capabilities of such support. That appreciation, and the close support missions it brought, was won by a campaign of salesmanship firmly backed by performance.

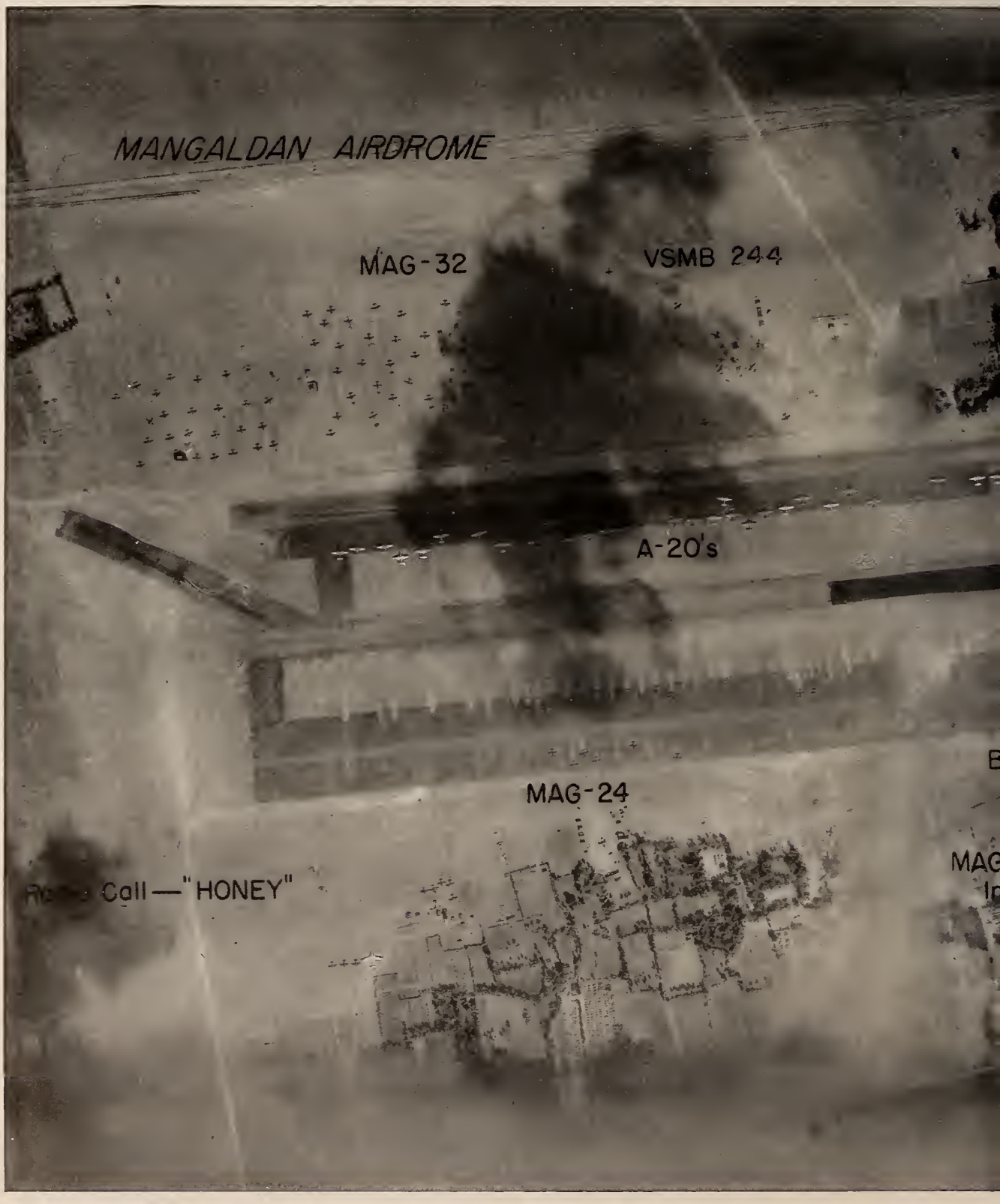
Colonel Jerome, when not engaged in directing his own groups, coordinating (as Commander, Mangaldan) a base crowded with numerous and varied types of air units, or maintaining liaison among Army Air Force organizations, visited top commanders within Sixth Army to urge maximum use of the CAS (close air support) weapon. His talks with I Corps' Major General Innis P. Swift, USA, and XIV Corps' Major General Oscar W. Griswold, USA, cleared the way for direct approach to division generals, the commanders who had to be convinced that close support could help the infantrymen.[85]

MAG–32's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Smith, made the rounds of all infantry divisions being supported by 308th Bomb Wing and told them of the Marine liaison organization available for their use. After explaining the way front-line control of air support worked, Smith made arrangements to have division operations or intelligence officers ride along in the rear seats of planes

[83] USS *Jack London*, with part of HqSq and ServSq personnel, dropped anchor off San Jose, Mindoro, 11Feb. USS *Nathaniel Macon*, with the remainder, arrived Leyte Gulf 12Feb and sailed for Mindoro the next day. War Diary, Feb45, HqSqd and SMS–12.

[84] Col McCaul assumed command of MAG–12 on 26Feb45. WD, MAG–12, Feb45.

[85] Interview with BrigGen Jerome, 9Feb50.



MANGALDAN AIRDROME. From this ex-rice field over 300 Marine and Army planes operated in combat missions against

the Japanese on Luzon.

on actual missions to see the results for themselves.[86] Evidence that such contacts paid off came by month's end; seven radio jeeps, and a like number of Marine forward air control teams, were in service with various divisions.[87]

Continuance of direct contact after supporting operations began proved a fruitful link in providing excellent coordination. Marine intelligence officers and air coordinators drove forward to learn the area's tactical situation at division command posts, looked the terrain over from the ground and then returned to brief pilots. Ofttimes, squadron pilots themselves made similar forward excursions, a practice encouraged within the groups. Army infantrymen never ceased to profess amazement in discovering "fly-boys" right beside them in forward outposts. The arrangement was advantageous in two ways: the pilot's concept of his mission improved, and his very appearance there demonstrated obvious interest that in itself made the groundmen more confident in accepting close support from these flyers.[88]

One of Colonel Smith's early trips, however, did not meet with the hoped-for success. Jeeping to a point midway between Munoz and San Jose, Smith gained a near-front-line interview with Major General Edwin D. Patrick, USA, commanding the 6th Division. Accompanying the colonel was Captain James L. McConaughy, Jr., one of the assistant MAG–32 intelligence officers and a would-be air liaison officer. Of the ensuing talk, McConaughy has this to say:

> Smith put on a good sales talk, offered to rear seat any of the general's operations or intelligence officers who might want a look. He [the general] was scared of airplanes; that is, scared of their accuracy and lack of ground control. He was polite but absolutely firm.[89]

Yet the idea had been planted with the skeptical General Patrick. It bore fruit a couple of weeks later when his division was shifted from I to XIV Corps to fight in an area east of Manila alongside the 1st Cavalry Division.[90] The latter organization's bountiful enthusiasm for CAS trickled over, bolstering Smith's claim of adequate control mechanism; General Patrick decided to have a cautious try.

Given the assignment, McConaughy left the ranks of unemployed air liaison officers. He reports the success of trial offerings:

> I got the job of running strikes for the 20th Infantry Regiment, and everything went to perfection. Targets initially were 1000 yards and more away, gradually we worked into 500 yards and sometimes a bit under. We worked all the tricks, like dummy runs while infantry advanced under them. When the Japs caught on to this, we'd bring in the first section and have them drop, then infantry would advance while the second and third section (usually nine plane flights) dove on the target but did not drop.[91]

The 20th Regiment liked what it saw of close air support, and day by day increased the number of requests for it, although other regiments of the division, 1st and 63d, did not immediately fall into line with such complete endorsement. However, that success of SBD air support had caught division fancy is indicated by an order directed to all subordinate units on 25 February. It pointed out that air units granted strikes on a basis of profitability of targets and affirmative results of previous strikes. Then, in ordering all units to submit "every scrap of information" on strikes in the division's zone, Patrick promised that if his headquarters could provide accurate evaluation, "the air forces will continue to give this command an increasing number of support aircraft throughout the present operation."[92]

Immediately, reports began to filter in; thereafter, a daily message emanated from General Patrick to General Griswold, commanding the XIV Corps, summarizing air activities. Typical of these summaries is one of the first, written on 27 February, which records the almost-incessant, though largely unspectacular, Marine aerial effort against the enemy in a rugged mountainous area.

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[86] Letter from James L. McConaughy, Jr., to Robert Sherrod, 13May48. (Copy in Marine Corps Historical Division.) Hereinafter cited as *McConaughy*.

[87] *McCutcheon*, 11.

[88] *McConaughy*.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Assignment of 6th Div to XIV Corps effective 17Feb45.

[91] *McConaughy*.

[92] G–3 Journal, 6th Div, 25–28Feb45.

1. Nine SBD's made two strafing runs and dropped bombs at 0900 on caves, foxholes and road along Mariquina River.
2. Nine SBD's strafed and dropped bombs at 0800 in Wawa area. Targets were dump areas and gun positions.
3. Eight SBD's strafed and dropped bombs at 1420 on troop concentration. Target was a clearing on a knoll and the area was well covered . . . estimate 100 Japs in target area . . . many killed.
4. Nine SBD's . . . at 1540 . . . numerous caves SE of Wawa. All bombs in target area.
5. Nine SBD's . . . at 1600 . . . gun positions and bivouac at road junction.
6. Nine SBD's . . . at 0900 . . . caves and supply dump.
7. Nine SBD's . . . at 1000 . . . huts and supply dump. All bombs on target, destroying at least five buildings. Direct hit on what is believed enemy CP.
8. Seven SBD's . . . troop concentration from 1300 to 1450 with good results.
9. Six SBD's hit gun emplacements marked by smoke. Ground observers report 4 direct hits.
10. Weather was extremely bad throughout the day. Visibility was poor in all target areas. No B-24 strike on Metropolitan Road this date due to weather.
11. Total sorties: Seventy-five.[93]

This pick-and-shovel activity, in the same region, accounted for more than half of the Marine missions during this period in support of both 6th and 1st Cavalry Divisions.

Successful example continued to bring about an increase in the number of Army ground commanders requesting Marine air support. 1st Regiment's Colonel James E. Rees, USA, had had sincere reason to shun the tactic in proximity to his troops. Three weeks earlier, on 4 February, soldiers of the 1st Regiment had entered San Jose. Ground control of an Army Air Force flight above the village was from division headquarters some miles to the rear. Resultant confusion led to misdirected strafing of his troops, "causing some casualties and lowered morale and combat efficiency."[94]

Nonetheless, Colonel Rees was given reason to revise his opinion on 28 February. A message from regiment to division, that date, describes a situation that led up to a spectacular display of bombing precision:

During the night a small group of 15 or 20 men began withdrawing from high ground and fell or tumbled into a 40 foot ravine. At the time they were carrying Lt. Stock on a litter. There are about 12 men and Lt. Stock in the ravine, and they refuse to leave until [he] dies or they can get him out . . . At the present time the ravine is covered by enemy fire. No plans for advance until men have been cleared out . . .[95]

ALPman McConaughy, already nearby with the 20th Regiment, was summoned hastily to move his team and radio equipment within sight of the trapped men—actually almost a mile away, but "terrain visibility was superb." In McConaughy's own words, the action of the drama:

There were Japs a couple hundred yards away [from the stranded patrol] . . . After a very thorough briefing, all by radio, the regimental commander (after one dummy run by the flight leader was right on) said the lead plane could drop one wing bomb. It was beautiful to watch. We were on a high cliff on one side of the valley and it was a clear day. The first drop was dead on. The colonel was impressed and allowed that we could let the lead plane come in again and drop his belly and other wing bomb. It took the SBD 20 minutes to climb up again and we could watch the whole show as if it were the movies. His second dive was fantastically accurate, too, and the colonel said he was convinced, so the other eight planes followed the squadron leader down. The bombing was fantastically successful—the farthest one of 27 bombs being 30 (honest, only thirty) yards off target. They got the party out thanks to this discouragement to the Nips and from then on the colonel couldn't get enough planes for his regiment—literally, he asked for nine flights (9 planes each) as a standing, daily order.[96]

General Patrick personally witnessed the performance; in his air summary for 28 February, he described the feat as "superb."[97]

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[93] *Ibid.*

[94] *1st Infantry Regiment, History of the Luzon Campaign*, Action Reports, 4Feb45.

[95] G–3 Journal, 6th Div, 25–28 Feb.

[96] *McConaughy.* The writer states, "Patrick finally, in effect, ordered" the strike.

[97] G–3 Journal, 6th Div, 25–28 Feb. On 14 March, in the Wawa-Antipolo sector, a sudden burst of Japanese machine gun fire directed at the 1st Regiment's forward OP instantly killed Col Rees and mortally

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT STRIKE, MARINE STYLE, for ground troops in Central Luzon. Douglas Dauntless dive bombers come down on a target marked with white phosphorous shells as strike is directed from front-line position on the ground.

Except for the special significance that this mission had to the observers on the ground, and the fact that all results were clearly witnessed and recorded, it would probably have slipped by as a routine bombing, as did so many others of perhaps comparable success. The "fantastically accurate" pilots who participated were unaware of their good deed; perhaps they still are.[98] Back at Mangaldan, 115 air-miles away, squadron action reports for the day were of an oft-repeated nature—Results of damage: "Unobserved."

In the meantime, the SBD's had been striking in all directions. Only during the first two days of Manila street fighting was the "air alert" not on station in support of the 1st Cavalry Division: the bad weather of 4–5 February had halted operations at Mangaldan. Thereafter the Marines stood ready for any request to blast special targets within the Philippine capital, although most frequent use of "on station" planes was made with an eye to the division's future operations.

wounded Gen Patrick. *First Infantry, History of the Luzon Campaign*, 47.

[98] By study of the *Aircraft Action Reports* as to time, location, and bomb load, plus cross-references to ground unit documents, the writer believes the following members of a VMSB–244 flight took part: Major John L. Dexter (flight leader and squadron executive officer); Captain "H" L. Jacobi; First Lieutenants Howard W. Hambleton, Frederick D. Martin (later KIA on Mindanao), Morris E. Mayo, Vance H. Fallon, and Joseph F. Marty; Second Lieutenants Lewis B. Van Allen and Raymond C. McKinister.

Less than five miles east of the city, across the Mariquina River, was strongly held Japanese territory. Along a broad front (Antipolo-Montalban-Ipo) were entrenched an estimated 20,000 enemy troops.[99] (See Map 9.) In that ruggedly mountainous region, made more imposing by the long-prepared Shimbu Defense Line established therein,[100] a bitter hand-to-hand infantry struggle was inevitable following Manila's capture.

Consequently, for the most part, the division support air party (and our own liaison teams) held sway on the eastern rim of American holdings. When not specifically needed for Manila objectives, Marine flights were directed across the Mariquina River. The flyers would come to know the topography of this region intimately for there they would fly the great majority of their forthcoming missions.

Although La Union province continued to receive heavy pounding and the Balete Pass area also felt the sting of frequent bombings, strikes east of Manila rapidly multiplied in number. In addition to SAP-originated assignments, there began a concentrated strategic air assault to soften these defenses.

Between 6–10 February alone, SBD pilots struck 15 different towns in Bulacan and Rizal provinces. (See Map 7.) They found targets, too, on roads, along river banks, in valleys and on mountain tops. They blasted buildings, supply and ammunition dumps, caves, and gun emplacements; they strafed and demolished dozens of enemy vehicles of all types, destroyed three river boats and rained machine-gun bullets down upon troop concentrations. Important, also, was the reconnaissance information supplied by the flyers which materially aided current Army intelligence.

Strikes grew ever larger, too, in the number of SBD's participating in single missions—36, 46, 48, 50, 63—and on 10 February, 81 planes from five VSMB squadrons combined to carry out their biggest strike of the campaign. This force hit the Wawa-Montalban area with a greater total might than usual, and while considerable destruction was wrought, the attempt to use so many planes in a concentrated target space proved unwieldy.[101] Subsequent large strikes were dispatched in column with an interval between smaller flight units.[102]

In and around the Manila area, the Marines, when called upon, delivered support to speed the collapse of isolated Japanese resistance.

Initially, the 1st and 37 Divisions were alone in fighting their way through the city from the north. However, by 8 February the 11th Airborne Division approached from the southwest to within range of Japanese artillery from Nichols Airfield, located on the southern outskirts of Manila. The light 75mm pack howitzers of the division had proven largely ineffective against the concrete pillboxes surrounding the airfield.[103] To combat the impasse, aerial assistance became necessary. The call for help went out, and a Marine flight, already in the air over another locale, was dispatched to the scene.

This instance was a typical example of aviation's flexibility, once endowed with good ground-air liaison, in rendering support on short call wherever and whenever needed. Thirty-six planes of VMSB's 133 and 341 had taken off, proceeded to a designated area northeast of Mangaldan, but when unable to contact the Army SAP in that sector, the flight headed for Wawa, 125 miles south. Reporting there to the zone's controlling liaison team, the SBD pilots were then directed to check in with still another support air party, south of Manila, which had a mission for them. Without delay, the means to fit an immediate need was delivered.

In minimum time, while circling Nichols Field, the Marines were thoroughly briefed to coordinate their attack with 11th Airborne troops. Then, in a five-minute onslaught through an intense antiaircraft barrage, the 36 Dauntlesses hurtled downward in 70-de-

[99] *Luzon, Sixth Army,* Vol I, 39.

[100] The Shimbu Line consisted of a network of cunningly constructed pillboxes, strong points, caves and gun emplacements assiduously camouflaged. The enemy had stored vast quantities of food, medical supplies, ammunition, fuel and motor parts in this region.

[101] Also, bomb smoke from so many planes made accuracy progressively more difficult.

[102] *McCutcheon,* 10.

[103] *Luzon, Sixth Army,* Vol I, 38.

gree dives from 9,000 feet to loose their 1,000-pounders upon Nichols Field objectives. And as it so often turned out, two hours after take-off a mission was successfully completed in exactly the opposite direction from pre-flight anticipation.

At the end of the attack the ground controller reported the results "excellent." A small ammunition dump blew up with a violent explosion; some 15 buildings and an unassessed number of pillboxes received heavy damage. But the losses were not completely one-sided. Second Lieutenant Edward E. Fryer and radio-gunner, Sergeant John H. King, were shot down by enemy ground fire and were seen to crash in flames in Manila Bay. Pilot Fryer was recovered alive only to die later of severe burns.[104]

[104] War Diaries, VMSB's 133 and 341, Aircraft Action Reports, 8Feb45.

On other mid-February days MAGSDAGUPAN flyers again worked with the 11th Division near Nichols Field. The Philippine Racing Club and Paco Railroad Station were among the prominent landmarks to fall prey to Marine bombing. Also on several occasions Marine flyers were pressed into action against targets within Japanese-held Fort William McKinley, then under attack from 1st Cavalry troopers.[105]

Two assignments over this latter objective illustrate the variation in devices attempted. One flight was specially called upon merely to orbit above the fort in order to worry enemy artillery into inaction. It did just that. Another twist from normal routine came about through a highly successful experiment with air-borne strike control. Major Jack L. Brushert, executive office of VMSB–241, had flown

[105] War Diary, MAG–32, Feb45.

SANTO TOMAS UNIVERSITY, where 3500 Allied internees were freed by the 1st Cavalry's "flying column" which stormed the gates within a few hours after entering Manila's city limits on 3 February 1945.

CORREGIDOR

to Quezon strip and landed for a few days of ground control observation. On 14 February Brushert took to the air with the 1st Cavalry's Marine ALPman, Captain Godolphin, in the rear seat of his plane. They preceded a dive bomber flight over Fort McKinley, and while the pilot orbited the plane near the target area, the usually grounded control officer directed the other airmen by radio in an attack on Japanese artillery positions within the fort.[106]

Meanwhile, "the most concentrated bombardment" staged in the Pacific Theater had been leveled upon the historic island fortress lying in the entrance of Manila Bay—Corregidor. (See Map 7.) On 16 February, 2,065 troops of the 503d Parachute Regiment landed on it from the air, and 1,000 more soldiers crossed the channel to hit the beaches against negligible opposition.[107] But for 10 days prior to the landings Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces' medium and heavy bombers had struck with all-out effort against the tiny parcel of land on which American forces had so heroically withstood Japanese assault until 6 May 1942.

MAGSDAGUPAN flyers had but one small opportunity to avenge directly the Marines who died or were captured on the Rock three years earlier. On 9 February 1945, 18 young men in nine SBD's of VMSB–341 bombed docks and buildings on Corregidor, starting several fires with their nine tons of bombs.[108] And though they knew this was only an infinitesimal share of the total bombings, the pilots and their enlisted gunners came away satisfied that they had left their mark in memory of the old-timers who had gone before.

On 19 February (while brother Marines were initiating their assault on Iwo Jima) a 48-plane strike was launched on derelict ships inside the Manila Harbor breakwater to assist their old Bougainville friends, the 37th Divi-

[106] Daily Intelligence Summary, MAGSDAGUPAN, 14Feb45.

[107] *General Kenney Reports*, 520. "About 3,000 tons of bombs per square mile" were dropped on Corregidor in the 10-day period.

[108] War Diary, VMSB–341, 9Feb45.

sion. The division was slowly penetrating enemy strong points in the city's waterfront sector, known as Intramuros. From three battered Japanese vessels standing offshore had come harassing medium-caliber fire. For over a half hour the Marines bombed and then strafed the hulks, to put out of commission once and for all the floating gun platforms. Direct hits were confirmed on each of the half-sunken freighters, and as the flyers set their course north to Mangaldan, a towering column of black smoke reached skyward.

One bomb was laid directly on its mark by Colonel Meyer who had tagged along as an observer, as he often did. The MAG–24 commander, unable to resist the temptation, had become an active participant.[109]

As planned in the training period at Bougainville, pilots were to serve as ALP's. From every squadron a few flyers came forward to rotate as members of the various teams as they worked in, and then east of, Manila. What the pilots learned doing ALP work was reflected later in their own air discipline and close support flying.

A conclusion of one squadron commander, Major Fred J. Frazer (VMSB–236), regarding the use of pilots as air-ground liaison officers, indicates both advantage and drawback in their use on Luzon. Frazer, himself a frequent front-liner, points out (in comparing them with the intelligence officers who were "ground" Marines) that the flyers were better acquainted with the capabilities and limitations of the aircraft and the tactical ability of their flying mates. Use of pilots as close support controllers led to more effective support in many respects. In one respect, however, they were deficient—most junior pilots lacked an adequate knowledge of ground tactics.[110] Nevertheless, when the two types of officers worked together, as they usually did, a well-balanced team resulted.

The only logical means for Mangaldan pilots to get to the front—Mangaldan is 110 air-miles from Manila—was to fly. Within three days after American entry into Manila, the 1st Cavalry Brigade had established itself in the vicinity of Quezon City, a suburb in the eastern outskirts of Manila. A widened Quezon boulevard, turned into a makeshift airstrip, became a familiar roosting spot for SBD's. Especially did it facilitate pilot forays to front lines for ground liaison duty or observation. A MAGSDAGUPAN skeleton crew later was maintained at the "strip" to service Marine planes landing there, and two jeeps were kept on hand for transportation forward.

But on a great number of occasions, Quezon served still another purpose. Within a 20-mile radius of Quezon City were flown almost all of the many missions in support of the 6th, 37th, 1st Cavalry and 11th Airborne Divisions during the rest of February. The boulevard-strip, as an emergency landing field during these operations, had something more than incidental utility. For a time, an average of one SBD per day had reason to seek refuge there because of damage from antiaircraft fire, mechanical difficulties or fuel shortage.

About the middle of February the 1st Cavalry Division was relieved from the heavy fighting in Manila, and on the 20th the push to the east began in earnest. In the Mariquina Watershed area where Shimbu defenses caused slow and tedious ground progress, daily air support was provided with increasing weight and intensity. By the division's own words much credit for breaking resistance at this point was given to the concentrated air support rendered.[111]

An indication of the effect the air attacks had, regardless of observed damage, is seen in two excerpts from a Japanese diary captured by the 1st Cavalry:

15 February 1945: Since dawn enemy airplanes have been coming over and we were unable to move.

16 February 1945: Due to the fact that an enemy plane has been flying around since morning the unit has been unable to move.[112]

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[109] War Diary, MAG–24, Aircraft Action Report, 19Feb45. 2dLt Donald E. Johnson (VMSB–133) was shot down on this mission. Later listed as "Killed in Action."

[110] "Close Air Support in the Luzon Campaign," LtCol F. J. Frazer. Unpublished monograph, AWS-SC, MCS Quantico, 1950, 22. Hereinafter cited as *Frazer.*

[111] Action Report, 1stCavDiv, 27Jan–30Jun45.

[112] Quoted from MAG–32 War Diary, 21Feb45.

MANILA, once known as the "Pearl of the Orient," as it appeared after the February-March battle for the city. In the foreground is Intramuros, the ancient walled city.

In addition to the immobility imposed upon the Japanese by the mere presence of U. S. aircraft, real damage was often assessed to the credit of aviators in after-action evaluation by groundmen. In the words of MAG–32 War Diary:

. . . a patrol from the 7th REGIMENT of the 1st CAVALRY picked up 11 unmanned heavy machine guns after a bombing and strafing attack near the water filters 4 miles south of NOVALICHES LAKE on about the 9th of February. These guns represent about ¾ of the chief defensive fire power of a full battalion.[113]

OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES AND INNOVATIONS

While dive bomber devastations continued in all directions, flyers and ground liaison teams persistently endeavored to improve their procedures and coordination. After initial trials on 19 February,[114] further experimentation in the use of an air-borne coordinator proved so successful that it became standard doctrine for many missions, particularly those involving a large number of planes.

On "ground alert" assignments, a single plane, piloted by the air coordinator, reported to the SAP and ALP prior to arrival on target of the strike flight. Ground radio tendered him all target and friendly troop identification and, when the flight came upon the scene, he would be ready to make a marking run on the objective for their benefit. Full-fledged attack could begin immediately.

Even on "air alerts" improvement of coordination was apparent. The method saved time and did not necessitate a flight leader to absent himself from the rest of the his planes

[113] Quoted in War Diary, MAG–32, 21Feb45, from a 1st CavDiv report to the group.

[114] Two air alert flights of VMSB–241 were first to use air coordinator. Missions were flown in Antipolo area. The first was directed by Major Brushert; second, by Major Manchester—ExO and CO of the squadron. War Diary, VMSB–241, 19Feb45.

for a separate dummy run. It also eliminated prolonged subjection of the entire flight to enemy ground-fire; the main force of SBD's could stay clear of a dangerous area until the air coordinator was positive of correct target and had again gained altitude for the final identifying run.

About this time a serious kink in the very life line of good close air support came into sharp focus. With greater U. S. air traffic than ever operating on Luzon, and all aircraft communication being handled on four VHF (very high frequency) radio channels, the confusion caused by so many planes on the same frequency was often a hazard to positive control at critical moments.

Fortunately, radio facilities incorporated in the SBD permitted a workable solution to the problem although a heterogeneous situation already existed with regard to aircraft radios within the two different models of the Douglas dive bomber then assigned to MAGSDAGUPAN. The SBD–6 was equipped with a four-channel VHF radio and a two-channel MHF (medium frequency) set. But SBD–5's had only the MHF. Under these conditions it had been necessary for each flight of –5's to attach themselves to a flight of –6's to work inside the forward bomb lines. When working alone, in the early stages, these less-adaptable planes were usually assigned longer range targets.[115] Wisely, the earlier model Dauntlesses were not intermingled throughout the squadrons, but were assigned exclusively to VMSB–243 and VMSB–244.[116]

After finding the VHF channels too crowded, all MAGSDAGUPAN squadrons and their radio jeeps switched to medium frequencies for air-ground liaison.[117] The –6's were still able to monitor one VHF channel simultaneously with lower range transmissions, and the –5's thus became able to perform support of the closest type.

Constantly there was a search for improved efficiency. Along with the experiments and changes in communications, there were experiments in tactics and in weapons, always with the hope of doing it better. Sometimes, of course, these experiments did not succeed.

One of the most effective implements of aerial-delivered destruction employed on Luzon was the napalm bomb. This weapon, which consisted of napalm jelly mixed with gasoline and released like a bomb in droppable fuel tanks, came to be used in great quantity by Army air units. The fire-spreading bombs, ignited on impact by the detonation of an armed fuze, were very successful in burning off wide areas of lush vegetation in many Luzon sectors. Interrogated prisoners revealed that enemy troops had a great fear of the "fire bomb."[118] Napalm attacks were particularly useful in following up normal bombing raids that had reduced many debris-strewn towns to veritable tinderboxes, easy prey to the fire-provoking bomb.

Army air units dropped 6,555 tons of napalm on Luzon, a figure representing roughly one sixth of the total explosive tonnage released over the island.[119] Marines had almost no part in its use. Altogether, only some 583 *gallons* fell from the bombracks of SBD's. This very small quantity was loosed during two experimental missions, both of which were extremely unsuccessful. The effort was given up entirely, not without good reason.

A short supply of SBD auxiliary fuel tanks made it impossible to expend any of them for releasing napalm. By 15 March, however, MAGSDAGUPAN had come into possession of some captured 53-gallon Japanese belly tanks. Two of these were filled with jelly and gasoline for experimental bomb use. The tank fittings were not the proper size for easy suspension on the Dauntless' bomb shackle, but with considerable effort, the misfits were rigged. One plane, so loaded with napalm, accompanied a flight against targets east of San

[115] "The Employment of Marine Dive Bombers in Support of the Sixth Army on Luzon." LtCol L. A. Christoffersen. Unpublished monograph, AWS–SC, MCS, Quantico, 1950.

[116] These two squadrons employed one plane, equipped with both types of radio, to receive ground instructions on VHF and relay information to the rest of the flight on MHF.

[117] *McCutcheon*, 11.

[118] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 106.

[119] USSBS, *Employment*, 55.

Fernando. Observers in an accompanying plane watched the first air release, and saw the Japanese fuel tank tumble end over end in a very erratic flight path.

A second trial took place on 20 March, with nine SBD's loaded with the makeshift bombs. Of the nine tanks released, only one landed near the intended target; the rest dropped anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000 yards short. Further experimentation was abandoned.[120]

There were other difficulties at Mangaldan, too. The lack of adequate maps was a serious handicap to pilots. Only through the familiarity gained by repeated flights over the various areas was the problem minimized, and it was never overcome completely. A great duplication in the names of towns was particularly confusing; it was necessary always to specify the province as well as the name of the town in designating a target.

The Philippines had been in the sphere of American influence for nearly 50 years, yet, of the 42,000-odd square miles of Luzon, only about 5,000 square miles had been adequately mapped, and these were mainly in the Central Plains-Manila area.[121] None of the maps were of a scale suitable for cockpit manipulation and still fit for the needs of close air support work. Aerial photographs and guerilla sketches, when available, were useful only for gen-

[120] War Diary, MAG–32, 15 and 20 March 45.

[121] *Luzon, Sixth Army,* Vol IV, 11.

HALF-SUNKEN JAPANESE FREIGHTER in the foreground is one of the derelicts in Manila harbor from which stranded enemy seamen continued to harass U. S. troops in the city with machine gun fire. On 19 February, 48 Marine Dauntlesses bombed and strafed three of these hulks to silence them once and for all.

eral orientation, rather than identification of specific objectives. Oral briefing by the ALP's, who had direct observation of the target, supplied the necessary precision.[122]

DEPARTURE OF MAG-32 GROUND ECHELONS FROM LUZON

Even as the Marine squadrons were working out their operational problems and flying a full schedule of combat missions, there were other matters of immediate concern at Mangaldan Airdrome.

When it had been decided at Leyte (between 10–13 February) that MAG–32 would be used in the Mindanao campaign, it was planned that the group's ground echelon would move into Zamboanga with Army assault forces on 10 March. With these landings less than 30 days away, immediate preparations for the movement were necessary.

But before Colonel Jerome left the Leyte conferences, on 14 February, to initiate these preparations at Mangaldan, he received approval from General Mitchell to make certain changes in the organization of his departing air group. With MAGSDAGUPAN operating as a composite tactical unit, attachment of squadrons to either of the groups had been definitive for administrative purposes only. But impending separation dictated reshuffling the squadrons for two reasons.

First, anticipated requirements for Zamboanga operations indicated that MAG–32 should embark upon the new campaign with four of the tactical squadrons. Until this time it had been composed of only three—VMSB's 142, 243 and 244.

There was still another consideration, however, in reassigning the units. The problem of personnel rotation to the United States was acute at the moment. Because transportation required to effect the relief of personnel was more available to and from Luzon, it was decided to retain at Mangaldan, in MAG–24, those squadrons which had the greatest number of men due for immediate return to the States.[123] Other swaps of individual short timers were made from the less affected departing units.

From Leyte, General Mitchell alerted his headquarters in Bougainville of the contemplated organization changes, and on 15 February a wing dispatch officially transferred dive bomber squadrons 236 and 341 from MAG–24 to its sister group; VMSB–244 was shifted from 32 to 24.[124]

While there was no break in hammering at the enemy by flight echelons, Headquarters and Service Squadrons–32 and the ground echelons of VMSB's 142, 236, 243 and 341 immediately began to pull up their camp stakes. The stay at Mangaldan had been so short for the last surface arrivals at Lingayen that the order to repack came on the very day the remnants of gear were finally broken out. The men dubbed themselves "Stevedores Union, Local 32."[125]

The surface echelon included the executive officers of each squadron, most of the attached ground officers, an average of 10 pilots from each squadron, Navy doctors, the Protestant chaplain and one civilian, the Red Cross representative. All enlisted men were taken except a skeleton maintenance crew. In all there were 90 officers, 1251 enlisted Marines and 41 corpsmen comprising MAG–32's ground echelon.[126] This contingent, by 20 February, had moved with all their gear to White Beach near San Fabian, ready to board 10 LST's.

While the Marines were closely grouped on the beach, a lone Japanese plane made a sudden and unexpected appearance from the east across the nearby hills. The enemy craft streaked over the loading area, dropped a single bomb and was gone. Luckily the bomb fell some distance away from the main concentrations of personnel, wounding only two men. Directly hit, however, was a large stack of oil drums, which burst into flames, threatening large quantities of precious supplies. Nearest the scene was Mr. Arnold F. Mitchell, the Red Cross representative, who courageously took the lead in extinguishing the fire by com-

[122] Memo to author from LtCol K. B. McCutcheon, dtd 10Dec50.

[123] Interview with LtCol J. L. Smith, 20Apr50.

[124] 1st MAW Special Order No. 13–45.

[125] MAG–32 unit history, 1945, 2.

[126] Figures compiled from unit muster rolls, Feb45.

mandeering a bulldozer and its driver, Staff Sergeant Junior F. Hill. Both men rode the vehicle back and forth into the blaze and pushed sand on the fire until it came under control.[127]

Lieutenant Colonel Smith, by now a seasoned LST troop commander, took charge of the Lingayen Gulf to Mangarin Bay (Mindoro Island) movement. Loading was completed in one day, but the open-mouthed vessels remained in the gulf for three days before final departure, 23 February. Fifteen days later their occupants would take part in J-Day assaults in the Victor IV Operation, Zamboanga, Mindanao, P. I.

Some of the MAG–32 staff remained temporarily, taking leave of Mangaldan between 26–28 February by air transport. Colonel Jerome, since the conclusion of the Leyte conference, had been kept on a continual round of air junkets between Mangaldan, Mindoro and Leyte. In order to give his undivided attention to movement and staging of MAG–32, Jerome ceased to direct Marine operations on Luzon on 19 February. The following day Colonel Meyer became officially designated as Commander, Marine Air Groups, Dagupan and Commander, Air Base, Mangaldan.[128]

ENEMY AIR RAIDS ON MANGALDAN

During the entire course of MAGSDAGUPAN aerial operations, there was no instance of enemy aerial opposition to confront the SBD's. As previously noted, enemy air power had been decisively humbled. Yet a few Japanese planes had eluded destruction. They continued to escape detection by careful camouflaging at strips deep in enemy-held territory. Once in a while they were wheeled out, usually at night, to strike quickly at selected American targets and dash back to protective cover.

From the first days of camp construction at Mangaldan, "red alert" signals were piped to the airfield through the Army air warning system whenever approach of enemy aicraft was suspected. The first actual raid, and only one of two altogether at Mangaldan, came at 0210 on 29 January when one enemy plane, believed to be a *TONY*, droned overhead. It dropped four small bombs along the runway and departed as suddenly as it had come. The bomb holes were easily and quickly covered; no greater damage had resulted.

In the early morning hours of 1 February, an alert was followed by sounds of a plane and of bombs exploding harmlessly somewhere to the east. That was the last night intruder heard for a whole month although personnel were alerted on 2, 6, 7, 19, 20 and 22 February.

Following these false alarms all hands were considerably more at ease when raid signals were circulated. But following a "red alert" early on 2 March, a very real attack was launched at 0200 when a *BETTY* (twin-engine bomber), flying very high, was picked up by the searchlights. Every AA gun in the area fired at it, filling the sky with tracers. Almost everyone stood up in his foxhole to watch the show. Then two more *BETTY's* came over the camp area at an altitude of 300 feet or less, on a course 90 degrees from that of the first plane. They dropped approximately 260 anti-personnel bombs in the Marine camp area. The distraction caused by the high flying plane made the low-level attack a complete and costly surprise.

Seventy-eight Marine officers[129] and men sustained injuries; four were dead as a result of the crucial blow struck at Mangaldan. Many tents were damaged, the roof of one mess hall caught fire, direct hits were scored on a quartermaster stockpile and debris was well scattered throughout the area.

Across the road, 11 500-lb. bombs struck the west end of the airdrome and runway, burrowed deeply into the ground but did not explode. A fragmentation bomb, however, directly hit one SBD to write it off as a complete loss. Another SBD was holed, but a wing change remedied the damage.

Camp facilities were quickly restored from physical effects of the bombing. Morale re-

[127] MAG–32 unit history, 1945, 3. The men wounded in this action were Cpl George F. Wegner and PFC Jack R. Broome.

[128] Muster rolls, MAG's 24 and 32, Feb45.

[129] Col Meyer and LtCol W. T. Scott, MAG–32 operations officer, were among the officers wounded.

MARINE SBD PULLS AWAY after bombing an enemy position in the mountains west of Bambam, Luzon, just before U. S. Infantry advance to take it.

mained high. Air operations were not disrupted. The enemy's earnest effort to knock out the strength and operational efficiency at Mangaldan was completely fruitless. The next day the Marines took off over the bomb craters, flew a total of 149 sorties, and dropped 72½ tons of bombs on targets ranging from Manila to San Fernando.[130]

CLOSE SUPPORT ALONG A SPRAWLING FRONT

After MAG–32's ground echelon departed, air operations continued in much the same vein although each day's added experience increased the ease with which support activities functioned. The doctrine and its mechanical techniques were proving simple, thorough, effective and highly adaptable through many variations of combat application. Time and practice influenced considerably the smoothness of coordination and brought about adjustment of small details that led to safer execution of assault missions. Division and section leaders learned to attack along lines of approach which provided the safest direction of pull-out. Pilots acquired a skill for comparable accuracy on shallow glide-bombing runs when low-cloud cover precluded the use of the normal steep dive. Experience also taught them to string out their attack to permit the ground controller to lead each plane onto the target.[131]

Greater and greater became the demand for Marines and SBD's. By March their ability to pin-point targets in the recesses of barbarous terrain had become well known to all the Army divisions on Luzon. The call for this special talent did not recognize a geographical restriction such as was set up early in that month among the major Fifth Air Force units. By joint agreement between Sixth Army and

[130] WD's MAG's 24 and 32, 2Mar45.

[131] Squadron History VMSB–241, 1Jan–1Aug45.

Fifth Air Force the three bomb wings were each given the mission of supporting a corps. The 308th Bomb Wing (and the Marines continued operations under the 308th was to work with the I Corps, the 309th with XI Corps and 310th with XIV Corps.[132] Adherence to these limits was not rigid, however; consistent with the principle of economy of force, available aircraft were often employed in a zone other than that to which they were regularly assigned. The Marine dive bombers, in particular, were frequently shifted from one corps' zone to another to accommodate the needs of the ever-changing situation.

Throughout February they had been called upon frequently to strike at enemy cave positions west of Fort Stotsenburg in support of the 40th Division, then in XIV Corps' zone. (See Map 9.) High-altitude and glide-bombing attacks had been found of dubious value against the caves. Skip and dive bombing tactics proved the most successful,[133] hence, assignment of the SBD regardless of proposed zones for air action. In early March penetration into this region of the Zambales Mountains was undertaken by the 43d Division until it, in turn, was relieved by the 38th Division on 15 March. Under each successive command the Marines were found no less useful, and in delivering strikes for the 38th Division MAGSDAGUPAN airmen had rendered support to some extent to each of the nine U. S. Army divisions then fighting on Luzon.[134]

That area east of Manila, where close air support was most thoroughly exploited, lay entirely in XIV Corps' domain until 15 March, and no slackening of SBD assignment resulted from the zoning arrangement. Nor were Marine missions fewer after 15 March when XI Corps assumed control of operations east and northeast of Manila with the 6th and 43d Divisions.[135] The 1st Cavalry was given a much-needed rest for a week before pressing south of Manila with the XIV Corps.[136] The Shimbu Line in the Antipolo area had begun to crumble, but heavy air attacks by Marine and Army flyers against the high ground north and south of Antipolo continued unabated.

After mid-February in the I Corps zone (or roughly the northern half of Luzon), close-support missions gave way to longer-range assaults against the enemy's lines of communication, especially along Highway 5 north of San Jose through the Balete Pass, the Villa Verde Trail and up the Bued River Valley. (See Map 9.) Although it was known that only partial blocking of Balete Pass was possible, it was found that continued strikes greatly hampered Japanese ability to reinforce and resupply his front lines. Marine and Army daytime attacks so successfully halted motor transport in the mountains that the Japanese resorted to torch-lit night movement. Even this effort by the enemy was doomed to almost complete curtailment by flights of Army night fighters and bombers.

VMSB pilot reports often related the belief that their bombs hit ammunition dumps, and occasionally they spotted and knocked out artillery positions. Credence is given to these beliefs by Sixth Army reports which indicated

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[132] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 105.

[133] *Ibid*, 104. One of the most successful strikes against cave positions west of Ft. Stotsenberg took place on 23Feb45, according to an account by 1stLt W. E. Dickey, Jr., who took part in the mission. "18 VMSB–142 planes were called in to bomb some Japs dug in on the brink of a hill that neither artillery or mortar had been able to faze. The air-ground jeep called for Capt Austin Wiggins to dive singly at a given target, marked by white phosphorous mortar shells. He went down and thereafter we went in, one plane at a time, each plane having personal control by the jeep on the ground. He would tell us—'Now the next plane drop your bomb 50 feet west of the last one —or 100 feet south, etc,' until all 18,000 pounds of bombs had been placed exactly where he wanted them. The Army then moved forward with no opposition. All the time we were in the attack the jeep was very elated and would tell us after each bomb hit—'Man, that was right in their laps.' . . . I never before or later . . . heard of . . . success to equal this particular strike in close support."

[134] Although this statement is not contained in any document consulted, its accuracy has been established from a cross-check and comparison of infantry division zones of action and Marine air targets on given dates.

[135] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 72.

[136] *1st Cav Div in WWII*, 144.

AIR LIAISON PARTY jeep of Marine Aircraft Group 24, surrounded by guerillas in northern Luzon where Marine ALP's directed close air support for the Filipino fighting forces.

a noticeable decrease in enemy artillery fire following aerial assaults.[137]

A veritable backyard fight still existed east of Lingayen Gulf after a month and a half of Luzon hostilities. One sample of close-to-home fighting occurred on 23 February when a VMSB–133 flight was credited with destruction of an active enemy 75mm gun a bare 15 miles from Mangaldan.[138]

First priority, however, was given to targets in Baguio, summer capital for the Philippine Islands and gold-mining center of Luzon.[139] Lucrative targets were known to exist in almost every important building of this mountain city, and with united effort American airmen systematically destroyed these objectives.[140]

Many other places in the environs of the summer capital also felt the sting of SBD bombing and strafing: Trinidad, Acop's Place, Santo Tomas Rest Camp, Ambuclao, Itogon, Bokod and Birac. (See Map 8.) Still other flights struck much farther northeast into the Cagayen Valley. A supply dump, said by Army ground patrols to be the largest in Mountain province, was destroyed at Rizal. Bombs were dropped on and near a house reported to be a Japanese general's quarters in Isabela province. The target was demolished and enemy troops running for cover were strafed.

SUPPORTING THE GUERILLAS

So went the Marine Corps' aerial war in support of the United States Sixth Army. But in the MAGSDAGUPAN story is recorded still another chapter of close air support: in behalf of the Filipinos who, pathetically ill-equipped and decisively out-numbered, fought stubbornly, and with very little assistance, a cat-and-mouse war to rid their homeland of the Japanese intruders. For the Marines this phase, which ran through a full gamut of doctrinal evolution, is all the more remarkable in that, for once, very close support by air was accepted eagerly from the first. This acceptance came in spite of unavailable refinements of coordinating technique in the early stages.

Four American Army officers who had been hiding out since Bataan had whipped together a group of guerilla Filipinos in northern Luzon before the U. S. forces returned to the Philippines. Heading this band, and directing its harassing and intelligence activities, was Lieutenant Colonel Russell W. Volckmann, USA.[141] After the Lingayen landings Colonel Volckmann established liaison with the Sixth Army, and received some supplies and equipment for his men, but his guerillas continued to fight alone along the west coast of Luzon, well north of U. S. ground penetrations. These combatants gained organizational status under the title USAFIP, North Luzon—or United States Armed Forces in the Philippines.[142]

[137] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 104.

[138] War Diary, MAG–24, Feb45.

[139] Baguio, although located on top of a mountain, was actually in the center of what appeared to be an extinct volcano, often described by the pilots as being in the shape of a deep saucer.

[140] One very successful strike took place on 9Feb45, according to Capt E. R. Ciampa, Jr., ". . . VMSB–243 made one of the first strikes against Baguio. One target was one particular wing of a Jap Hospital. We were told by intelligence that this wing was used to store ammo and quarter troops. We were to leave the other hospital buildings alone. That one wing was hit and an explosion resulted; the reminder of the hospital was left intact."

[141] Wayne Parrish, "On the Beam," *Liberty* Magazine, 23June45, 13. The other U. S. officers were: LtCol George M. Barnett, USA; LtCol Parker Calvert, USA; and LtCol Arthur Murphy, USA.

[142] Guerilla forces were also referred to as USFIP, or United States Forces in the Philippines.

These troops had no artillery, no tanks, not even 37mm antitank guns. Rifles, automatic rifles, a few machine guns and a few mortars were all that they had. With no supporting weapons to assist them, the guerillas were hard put to conquer a strong enemy. That did not stop them from trying.

For several months the only substantial, active support received by Volckmann's USAFIP came from Marine and Army airmen, but until late February liaison between ground and air was circuitous and coordination haphazard.[143]

Intelligence garnered by the Filipinos, however, served as a basis for many missions on mountain towns, Japanese troop concentrations and hostile gun positions in La Union and Ilocos Sur provinces. The first MAGSDAGUPAN mission, on 27 January, was against San Fernando, a La Union port city under the watchful surveillance of USAFIP. Thereafter, hardly a day went by during which VMSB strikes did not register pinpoint assaults within the guerilla area, either as primary or secondary target assignments. Throughout the Marines' Mangaldan operations it was almost standard procedure for flights to proceed to USAFIP zones when weathered out from southern targets.

Of a certainty, results had telling effects on enemy dispositions there, but the strength of Filipino forces was inadequate to push back the numerically superior Japanese from any sizeable area. Besides, even the well-equipped U. S. divisions could measure their gains only in terms of yards in similar rugged terrain 30 miles to the south.

The only radio contact with Americans was from Volckmann's headquarters; strikes to support guerilla operations were groundbriefed at the Lingayen airfields, and thereafter contact, if any at all, between air-borne flights and guerillas fell back upon visual aids such as panels or mortar-laid smoke signals. In spite of sole reliance upon these basic devices, many closely knit support missions were run off without infliction of casualty to the native infantrymen.[144]

In time, reports made by Filipino units of specific air strikes filtered back to the Marines via Army channels. Many such messages were recorded in MAGSDAGUPAN unit diaries, and while sometimes they perhaps contain an overly generous estimate of enemy casualties, they do make clear the high regard USAFIP-men had for the help they were getting from Allied aviation.

Interesting, too, is the Filipino attempt to Americanize the wording of their reports. Typical is this sample that reported results of 18 VMSB–244 planes that "swooped down along the river from Bokod to Ambulac" on 12 February:

> At Bokod Central the schoolhouse was directly hit and was reduced to ashes. According to information the Japs were out from the school building when the building was bombed, however, there were unknown Jap casualties at Fidmin's and Bisaya's house, where the Japs were exactly staying. Those that failed to scram out of the house were believed to have been burned to death. The sentry at his post was directly hit by firing from the planes.
>
> A Gurel, KP 49, three bombs were dropped along the 14 houses fully occupied by around 200 Japs. These houses were instantly reduced to ashes. When these houses were in flames loud explosions of different volumes of sound were heard by our men and civilians. Believed a large amount of Jap ammunition and property were reduced to ashes. The number of Japs killed could not be definitely ascertained . . .

More about this same action came in the words of the commanding officer of "M" Company USAFIP, North Luzon:

> The Allied planes made an excellent job in bombing Bokod and civilian houses . . . Before the planes started strafing the Japs, many more Japs came to reinforce their companions. The planes machine-gunned them. They scrambled to the bushes. Our men who were ready to attack the Japs, waited until the strafing stopped. Immediately after this our two platoons went down to Bokod to do their job, causing Rosio Delmas to be wounded. Our men had benn [sic] engaging the Japs until it was dark after which they withdrew up into the maintains. The Japs along the river were machine-gunned from Bokod to Ambuclao. Japs stationed at Gusaran, Ambuclao, were also given a lot of hell. The house where they were staying received the right dope . . .[145]

[143] "Marine Close Air Support in the Philippines," a paper by Capt Samuel H. McAloney, on file at Marine Corps Historical Division, 8.

[144] *Ibid.*, 9–10.

[145] Guerilla excerpts from "Supplement to War Diary," VMSB–244, Feb45.

TYPICAL PINPOINT TARGET the Marine dive bombers were called upon to strike is this small bridge over a mountain river in the wild country of central Luzon. Strikes on such targets interdicted enemy supply lines and impeded enemy movement.

Even with such generally successful results, there was need for closer and more direct liaison. Increased effectiveness, according to MAGSDAGUPAN concepts, demanded that plane control be on the ground near the focal point of attack.

On 21 February, Captain Samuel H. McAloney (who had previously flown to 308th Hq. to obtain permission to work out plans for better guerilla support), Captain James I. Best, and Captain John A. Titcomb flew in a TBF with Major Ernest E. Pegau, MAG–32's assistant operations officer, to Luna airfield.[146] (See Map 7.) This prewar emergency landing field in La Union province, 30 miles north of the closest American lines along Lingayen Gulf, lay only a few yards from the surf. There the Marine officers conferred at guerilla headquarters with Colonel Volckmann, and ar-

[146] War Diary, MAG–32, 20Feb45. Besides SBD's, there were two TBF–1's (torpedo bombers) and one R4D attached to the Marine groups.

rangements were worked out for a special Marine air liaison party to join the guerilla forces.

Within a week a radio jeep, radio truck, six enlisted technicians, Captains McAloney and Titcomb and Second Lieutenant Sydney H. Taylor had been transported up the coast by LCT and put ashore near Luna. They were ready to direct close air support, Marine style. Later, Captain Best joined the team.

Communications with Mangaldan and Lingayan commands were established over the radio truck's facilities and by L–5 aircraft.[147] The newly landed personnel were not long in getting into the thick of battle. With native help, the Marine crew worked miracles in driving and dragging and pushing the jeep into the most inaccessible spots imaginable. And the guerillas began to move ever-deeper into enemy strongholds. They hacked their way forward behind aerial blastings integrated with all manner of dummy-run tricks. Yard by yard, through valleys and over mountains, they dislodged and routed dug-in Japanese.

Mostly, air support came from dive bombers, but occasionally Army A–20's and Mustang's (P-51's) were brought down to hit just in front of the ever-present white panels that outlined the farthest guerilla advance. In many planned ground pushes, coordination with air was so well executed that, as an example, SBD's would pin-point their bomb drops, A-20's would follow closely on a strafing run and P–51's would set the debris ablaze with an immediate napalm attack. That kind of versatility paved the way for guerillas to overun positions that they found deserted except for the enemy dead and their abandoned equipment.

Yet, frequently the Filipinos did not have the means to hold their gains. Sometimes they were pushed back, but on another day the whole air-ground process of dislodging the Japanese would be repeated until USAFIP eventually forged ahead with appreciable conquest to their credit.

[147] A light liaison plane most frequently used for artillery spotting.

Such was the pattern for guerilla siege and capture of the vital town of San Fernando before a division-sized U. S. landing could be launched. By 25 February USAFIP units were ready to seize a foothold on Bacsil Ridge, a dominating bit of terrain, strongly implanted with the enemy, just north and east of the port town. This proposed point of battle was less than 20 miles south of Luna. Radio truck, jeep and liaison party moved to the front. The truck was put in operation in a field only a few miles behind the ridge, to keep in touch with both Luna and airbase headquarters. Then by cover of night, Filipinos cut a rough trail and manhandled the jeep to a good vantage position up the ridge's northern end. Panels were laid, and all was in readiness for a big air strike and ground assault on the 26th.

First planes to arrive were A–20's. In turn, the flight of 12 planes reported to the truck, were vectored to the ridge and then were turned over to the jeep director for final instructions and strike control. From aerial photos, previously marked with pertinent features by the guerillas, and by careful radio cross-checking, the flight acknowledged its identification of friendly positions.

After a go-ahead order, down came the Army planes in sections of three. At minimum altitude they streaked over the length of the ridge and dropped 100-pound parafrags at close interval, starting at a point hardly 100 yards in front of the guerillas. Three strafing runs quickly followed. Then, by prearranged signal to the troops—three mortar shots fired in rapid succession—and by voice call to the planes, a realistic dummy-run was launched. As the planes came over, the native soldiers charged ahead 1,000 yards to their first objective—without a casualty.

Soon, after reentrenching themselves and bringing the jeep forward, the USAFIP witnessed an aerial encore. This time the attack was pressed by 18 VMSB–142 and –243 planes which pounded the next section of the ridge with 500-pound GP bombs and assisted in strafing clear a path for another advance. Thus, in one day, the forceful little groundmen

were enabled to take and hold positions beyond the strategic crest of the ridge.[148]

McAloney, coach-by-radio of the day's air team, had this to say:

> At the end of this day, there was no doubt in anyone's mind as to the accuracy and effectiveness of planes in air support when there was good communication between the planes and someone close to the front lines who could direct the planes and who could coordinate planes and troops.[149]

Back at Mangaldan pilots stated that "our SAP's must be made of iron . . . their radio jeep was out in the open right up to the guerilla front lines."[150]

This tribute had its ironical side; three days later, on 1 March, Captain Titcomb, while directing a close support mission, was killed by a sniper's bullet. Records indicate that he was coordinating a strike with the 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry, USAFIP, at the point of deepest penetration along the same Bacsil Ridge.[151]

The guerilla surge did not halt for the moment, nor in the days to come. Air and ground teamwork continued unabated to capture Bacsil Ridge, then Reservoir Hill, and finally the Japanese were pushed out of San Fernando altogether.[152] True close air support was the key to this conquest.

For the period 5–31 March, 186 separate missions were flown in northern Luzon to support the guerillas. Sixty missions in the San Fernando area represented the largest concentration of strikes. Thirty-two missions were flown against the Solvec Point area, 50 miles north of Luna. Seventeen strikes hit the San Quintin area northeast of Solvec Point, and 13 more in and around Bangued. (See Map 7.) In addition, there were approximately 20 other scattered missions flown in guerilla territory during March.[153]

MAG-32 AIRMEN LEAVE FOR ZAMBOANGA

Meanwhile, although landings had been made at Zamboanga on 10 March (see Chapter IV), departure from Luzon of the four MAG–32 squadrons had been stayed awaiting complete readiness of facilities at the southern island. Moreover, delay was further extended because Sixth Army appealed for the dive bombers to continue Luzon support for as long as possible. Consequently, the Corsairs of MAG–12 were on station at Zamboanga over a week before release of VMSB squadrons from Luzon was ordered.[154]

At 1700, 23 March 1945, after a full day's assortment of missions from Mangaldan, word was passed to prepare for movement of squadrons in relays beginning the next day. Flight echelons of VMSB–236 and VMSB–142 initiated the 650-mile redisposition on the 24th in 42 SBD's;[155] VMSB–341 followed on the 25th with all 24 of its Dauntlesses; and VMSB –243 took up the rear with the last of the group's planes on 26 March. Over the three-day period, three R4D's from Marine Aircraft Group 25 shuttled back and forth to carry all extra personnel, squadron equipment, and personal gear. Displacement of the group from Luzon to Mindanao was complete and was successfully accomplished except for the loss of one plane and two men.[156]

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[148] Events above were taken from "Is Air Support Affective?", by Capt S. H. McAloney, *Marine Corps Gazette*, Nov45, 38–39, and from squadron war diaries, 26Feb45.

[149] "Is Air Support Effective?", McAloney, *Marine Corps Gazette*, Nov45, 39.

[150] War Diary, MAG–32, 26Feb45.

[151] War Diary, HqSqd, and muster rolls, MAG–24, 1Mar45.

[152] Exact date of San Fernando's fall does not appear in documents consulted.

[153] *Luzon, Sixth Army*, Vol I, 107. As mountain-going as was the jeep, often it met its match in some of the terrain. At such times Marine air liaison officers took to the air in L-5 liaison aircraft to spot and mark targets, hover near the scene and direct attack planes in destroying objectives.

[154] Interview with BrigGen C. C. Jerome, 2Dec49.

[155] Five additional SBD's failed to get off the first day because of mechanical difficulties, but all proceeded safely to their destination with the later-leaving squadrons.

[156] On the flight from Mangaldan to Zamboanga on 24March, 2dLt Charles T. Rue (VMSB–142) encountered engine trouble off Panay Island. One of the escorting transport planes accompanied Rue's SBD to a point over a small strip at San Jose on the SW coast of Panay. This strip had been labelled as friendly according to intelligence reports prior to take-off. Rue executed a safe landing, and he and his gunner, SSgt

ADVANCING GROUND TROOPS AFTER AN AIR STRIKE. Members of the 145th Infantry Regiment, 37th Division, move up Highway #5 after a dive bombing attack on enemy positions just ahead in the hills.

So ended MAG–32's 56-day participation in the campaign to retake Luzon Island from the Japanese. Of their services in this campaign, General Walter Krueger, Commanding Sixth Army, wrote later to the Commanding General of the 1st Marine Air Wing:

During the period 28 January to 23 February [actually 23 March] the 32d Marine Air Group of the 1st Marine Air Wing supported the operations of the ground forces under my command in the crucial stages of the Luzon Campaign. This support was of such high order that I personally take great pleasure in expressing to every officer and enlisted man in that group my appreciation and official commendation for their splendid work.

Commanders have repeatedly expressed their admiration for the pin-point precision, the willingness and enthusiastic desire of pilots to fly missions from dawn to dusk and extremely close liaison with the ground forces which characterized the operations of the Marine fighter groups. By constant visits of commanders and pilots to front line units in order to observe targets and to gain an understanding of the ground soldier's problems, by the care which squadron commanders and pilots took to insure the maximum hits, and by the continuous, devoted work of the ground crews in maintaining an unusually high average of operational aircraft, the 32d Marine Air Group exemplified outstanding leadership, initiative, aggressiveness and high courage in keeping with the finest traditions of the Marine Corps.

As we approach the last ramparts of Japan, I and every soldier under my command would be pleased to

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Robert R. Stanton, were seen to wave by the pilots in the transport before it continued on to Zamboanga. (The strip was too short for the heavily-laden transport to attempt an evacuation of the men.) As it turned out the strip was actually in enemy hands, and both Marines were taken prisoner. Later, when San Jose came under U. S. control, it was established that Rue and Stanton had been killed by the Japanese and buried near the airstrip.

BALETE PASS served as one of the few overland passageways between the Central Plain and Cagayan Valley of northern Luzon. Japanese forces strongly defended this pass. Marine Corps airmen flew several hundred sorties against the enemy's motor transport, artillery positions and his entrenched troops along this winding mountain arterial.

have the 32d Marine Air Group of the 1st Marine Air Wing serve with us again.[157]

LUZON FINALE FOR MAG-24

On the morning of 24 March, the once-crowded parking area on the west end of Mangaldan airstrip seemed comparatively deserted; only three dive bombing squadrons (MAG–24's squadrons 133, 241, and 244) now remained on Luzon. But while the four squadrons of MAG–32 were enroute to a new assignment in Mindanao, the Marine squadrons left behind continued to pound the enemy. For the next ten days, bombing missions were carried out with unabated pressure on targets to the north and east—no more missions were needed in the direction of Manila.

Though there were far fewer SBD's than before, the requests for Marine air support took no corresponding drop. Nine and 18-plane flights continued to be sent on most strikes, but in order to fulfill more of the requests that kept on pouring in, MAG–24 began to send out frequent three-plane sections to stand "air alerts."

Air support targets were centered mainly in three specific areas of enemy resistance: in the guerilla zone of Ilocos Sur province, in and around Baguio, and in the Santa Fe-Balete Pass sector. During a 10-day period, MAG–24's three squadrons flew 122 separate mis-

[157] Ltr from Gen Walter Krueger, Commanding Sixth Army, to Commanding Officer, 1st Marine Air Wing, dated 16 May 1945. MAG–24 received a similar letter from Krueger covering the period of its participation.

sions, 38 of them being ground-directed attacks near Solvec Bay on the northwest coast, 35 in Balete Pass, and 14 in the vicinity of Baguio.

An end came to these operations, at least temporarily, on 2 April 1945, when Marine Aircraft Group 24 issued orders to the squadrons to halt combat operations after the last flight on that day and make ready to follow MAG–32 to Mindanao. The squadrons immediately began breaking camp, and in a very few days had started moving gear to White Beach at San Fabian.

Packing and moving chores were greatly hampered by heavy rains and the sticky mud of the Philippines that can bog down even a bulldozer. In spite of these difficulties, however, by 7 April most of the ground personnel were either already on shipboard, or just getting ready to board.

On this same day came a change in orders which indicated that, for flight personnel and a skeleton ground crew, at least, the Luzon campaign was not yet over. Air operations were to be resumed by special request of the Sixth Army. The orders had been channeled down through Fifth Air Force and the 308th Bomb Wing before being received by MAG–24.

Unfortunately, however, because of the rainy weather and the extremely muddy condition of the airstrip, planes were inoperational until 10 April. Meanwhile, when VMSB –241 struck camp, their flight personnel moved to VMSB–133 area, joining the mechanics and pilots from that outfit who had remained to service and fly the planes.

Ships carrying ground personnel of VMSB–133, 241, and 244 formed into a convoy on 10 April and were underway for Mindoro at 1500. The convoy consisted of the USS *Wasatch* and USS LST's 463, 470, 473, and 806, five cargo ships, one destroyer, and two destroyer escorts.

Colonel Meyer had decided that in order to facilitate arrangements in Mindanao, it would be expedient for him and the commanders of the three squadrons[158] to precede their flight echelons and travel with the convoy, in order that everything would be in readiness for the squadrons when the airplanes were flown to Malabang, Mindanao Island, later in the month. The flight echelon was left in the command of Major Manchester (now group operations officer), with each squadron being commanded by its executive officer.

The convoy dropped anchor in San Jose harbor, Mindoro, on 12 April and two days later departed for Mindanao.

Back on Luzon the last air action of MAG–24's units was taking place on 14 April, mostly in the Balete Pass area, which had been struck heavily every day since the 10th in direct support of the 37th Division.[159] Mangaldan operations were being brought to an end because there was every indication that rain and mud would soon make the strip completely inoperative.[160] Since personnel and equipment were already prepared for an air lift to the south, the entire Marine flight echelon flew in relays to the concrete, all-weather runways at Clark Air Center. This movement was completed on 16 and 17 April. No combat missions were flown by Marine flyers after the arrival at Clark Field; all time was spent in maintenance and checks prior to the over-water flight from Clark Field to Malabang, a flight scheduled to be made as soon as the latter field had been readied.

On 20 April, 24 VMSB–241 planes left Clark for Malabang; the next day the flight echelon of VMSB–133 followed suit, and on 22 April, 22 SBD's of VMSB–244 and two of Service Squadron–24's planes, plus three R4D's loaded with gear left Luzon and landed safely in Malabang. With this landing in Mindanao,

[158] Majors Cummings, Hudgins and Brushert. LtCol J. H. Earle, Group ExecO also accompanied the surface echelon.

[159] LtCol Manchester now reports that from 10–14 April the 308th Bomb Wing released MAG–24 from all other duties to support the 37th Division in Balete Pass. The division sent a radio truck and operators to Mangaldan. Control of close support strikes was exercised over the radio by the division G–3 who followed the Marine doctrine of having the controller in position to observe the target. *MS.* COMMENT: LtCol B. B. Manchester, III.

[160] Col Jerome had been correct, when selecting the site for Mangaldan Airdrome, in his estimate that the strip's surface would hold up for three months.

Marine flyers had written "Finis" to their portion of the fighting in Luzon.[161]

SUMMARY OF MARINES' LUZON OPERATIONS

No other air organization on Luzon had carried on the fight against the Japanese with greater perseverance than MAGSDAGUPAN. They had maintained a consistently high operational schedule – for 45 consecutive days (after the rains of 4–5 February and until the departure of four squadrons) the average number of sorties flown was 159 per day, or 1,113 per week.[162] These figures take on deeper meaning if they are considered in conjunction with a comparative analysis of statistics embracing the entire Fifth Air Force.

A table prepared by the Fifth Air Force, and contained in the Sixth Army's *Report of the Luzon Campaign,* lists a total of 68 varied-type squadrons which "operated under the Fifth Air Force and furnished close air support for the Sixth Army during the Luzon Campaign." These units comprised a grand total of 1,294 aircraft.[163] The seven Marine squadrons, therefore, represented 10 per cent of all participating squadrons, and all of the SBD's (average number attached to MAGSDAGUPAN–177) represented less than 13 per cent of the total aircraft.

During the entire Luzon campaign, Fifth Air Force flew 57,663 support sorties, total for a period of approximately six months. Over a 76-day period (27 January to 14 April), Marine dive bombers flew 8,556 support sorites (four of the squadrons contributed to this total for 56 days only). Therefore, although operating for less than half the period of the campaign, MAGSDAGUPAN accounted for almost 15 per cent of the six-month campaign totals. Comparative figures on a weekly basis are even more revealing: Fifth Air Force averaged 2,240 sorties per week; as previously stated, the seven VMSB squadrons alone averaged 1,113 sorties per week. With 13 per cent of the Luzon-operated aircraft, the SBD's flew 49.7 per cent of the individual sorties.[164]

Several factors contributed to this high percentage of operational performance. The Marines had no other mission than to support ground troops, and in carrying out that mission they maintained almost continuous air alerts, a reason in itself for a busy flight schedule. Many of the AAF targets were long-range, as for example raids on Formosa, while SBD missions were always comparatively close to base and of fairly short duration. One cannot overlook, however, the proficient MAGSDAGUPAN maintenance crews which kept an average of 81 per cent of the SBD's in combat readiness and made it possible for individual aircraft to be flown frequently up to nine hours per day.

The aerial operations of the final phase of the Luzon campaign did not differ greatly from the earlier stages except in one respect—the Marine system of close air support control was by now widely accepted throughout the Sixth Army. By the end of March, all Marine close support missions were directed from the *front lines,* regardless of whether the ground controllers were Army or Marine personnel. In both cases, there was but one common objective – to direct planes onto enemy targets with maximum speed and efficiency. Just how well this objective was accomplished may be shown best in a summary report from Sixth Army—it reads:

> Joint air-ground operations in the Luzon Campaign reached a state of perfection never attained heretofore in the Southwest Pacific Theater. The earnest desire of the air and ground components to employ their forces as a team in order to exert their combined maximum power against the enemy, the establishment of an efficient air-ground liaison system and the application of proven tactical principles and procedures, were the outstanding features of the close air support operations. These operations disrupted the enemy's lines of communication, destroyed many of his ammunition and supply dumps, much of his motor transportation, and inflicted thousands of casualties upon him.[165]

[161] See Appendix VIII for Navy Unit Commendations awarded MAG's 24 and 32.

[162] These averages derived from Daily Intelligence Summaries, MAGSDAGUPAN, 7Feb–22Mar45. While the number of individual flights remained almost constant, the mission totals, of course, fluctuated with the varying size of flights. Often recorded, however, were as many as 13 separate "air alert" flights on a single day, along with perhaps seven to ten special ground-assigned missions.

[163] *Luzon, Sixth Army,* Vol I, 100–101.

[164] Statistics covering Fifth Air Force are from USSBS, *Employment,* 55.

[165] *Luzon, Sixth Army,* Vol I, 108.

CHAPTER IV Southern Philippine Operations

STRATEGIC BACKGROUNDS FOR THE VICTOR OPERATIONS

As February 1945 neared an end, the Sixth United States Army had, in four months of almost continuous battle, swept across Leyte, seized the island of Mindoro, and pushed the Japanese into the corners of Luzon. Lieutenant General Eichelberger's Eighth Army had taken over at Leyte to finish the job when the Sixth moved on to make the Lingayen landings. The Eighth Army had also secured Samar, landed some of its units on Luzon to help isolate Bataan and take part in the drive to Manila, and sent still other units into some of the lesser islands in the Visayan and Samar Seas. Now the Eighth was ready to begin major offensives of its own: to seize Palawan, the elongated island that stretched southwestward almost to Borneo; to take Mindanao, the big island at the southern end of the Philippine Archipelago; and finally to close in on the last area of Japanese entrenchment, the southern Visayan Islands (Cebu, Negros, Panay, and Bohol). For planning purposes these operations were known as VICTORS I through V.[1] (See Map 10.)

As early as 6 February General Douglas MacArthur had issued orders directing General Eichelberger to seize by overwater operations the Puerto Princesa-Iwahig area on the island of Palawan, the Zamboanga area on the island of Mindanao, and certain portions of the Sulu Archipelago.[2] The ultimate objective of these operations was the complete destruction of enemy forces in this part of the Philippines and the establishment of air and naval bases throughout the islands surrounding the Sulu Sea.

The control of this "inner corridor" from Borneo was of great importance to future operations in the area. As explained in the *Report of the Commanding General, Eighth Army, on the Mindanao Operation,* VICTOR IV:

> The peninsula and its pendant islands lie at the intersection of two important sea lanes; the north-south route from the Netherlands East Indies to China and Japan and the east-west route from Samoa and Guam to the seaports of the Philippines and Singapore. In

[1] These operations did not proceed in strict numerical and chronological sequence. (See Map 10.) In actuality, VICTOR III (the invasion of Palawan) took place first, 28Feb45, followed by: VICTOR IV (Zamboanga and the Sulu Archipelago), 10Mar45; VICTOR I (Panay), 18Mar45; VICTOR II (Cebu, Negros, and Bohol), 25Mar45; and finally VICTOR V (main body of the island of Mindanao), 17Apr45.

[2] *Report of the Commanding General, Eighth Army, on the Mindanao Operation,* VICTORS III and IV, 5. Hereinafter cited as *ComGen,* VICTORS III and IV.

addition, the peninsula and the archipelago dominate three vital waterways: Basilan Strait between Zamboanga and Basilan Island; Sibutu passage at the center of the Sulu Archipelago; and Alice channel in the vicinity of Tawi Tawi. Here also are to be found the first, large and safe harbors on the southeast approach to the Philippines.

From this it can be seen that control of the Zamboanga-Sulu region would deny all waters between Borneo and the Philippine Islands to the Japanese, and afford air and naval bases for the coming assault on Mindanao proper. Therefore, the seizure of these strategic areas was the logical prologue to the Borneo landings and the ultimate clearance of the southern Philippines.[3]

On 17 February the Eighth Army issued its plan for two VICTOR phases, both to be carried out with the 41st Infantry Division as the assault force; 28 February was set as H-Day for the landing on Palawan and 10 March as J-Day for the attack on Zamboanga.[4] The strike at Palawan was designated the VICTOR III Operation: the Zamboanga-Sulu actions, VICTOR IV.

Air support for these two operations was to be furnished by Thirteenth Air Force, as part of an overall mission that included aerial support of Eighth Army throughout the Philippines south of Luzon.[5] Marine air groups already on Leyte (MAG–12) and Samar (MAG–14) became reinforcing units to the Thirteenth Air Force; Marine dive bombing units on Luzon (MAG–24 and MAG–32) were scheduled to move south to Mindanao and further augment Thirteenth Air Force as soon as they could be released from supporting Sixth Army. Marine Aircraft Groups 12, 14 and 32 were directed to participate in the VICTOR IV Operations by providing direct air support missions during the landing at Zamboanga and subsequent ground operations as arranged with the Commanding General, 41st Infantry Division.

The assault on Zamboanga province was to be focused on the southern tip of that peninsula, at the town of Zamboanga. (See Map 10.) Although a part of Mindanao, the peninsula was almost completely isolated from the rest of the island. Only a narrow isthmus connected Zamboanga with the main body of land; there steep mountains and thick jungle formed an almost inpenetrable barrier. Consequently, Zamboanga-Sulu and Mindanao were considered as separate operations and were planned as such. (VICTOR IV and VICTOR V, respectively.)

Guerilla reports indicated a force of approximately 8,000 Japanese troops garrisoned in the area of Zamboanga town. Less than two miles inland from the waterfront town lay two enemy-held airstrips. One of these, Wolfe Field, had only a short runway and was inadequate for the operation of American combat aircraft. The other strip, San Roque, located on the plain between Zamboanga town and the foothills, was larger and more nearly adapted to U. S. needs. From this field a few Japanese planes (sometimes augmented by planes flown in from Borneo, 200 miles away) carried out occasional harassing missions.

San Roque Airfield, after seizure by the American assault troops as one of their prime objectives, would serve as a base of operations for Marine Aircraft Groups 12 and 32. Colonel Jerome was to be commander of the base, all the Marine units there, and certain Thirteenth Air Force squadrons which would also operate from the field. Most of the Thirteenth Air Force units, however, would conduct strikes against the Zamboanga area from bases on Leyte, Morotai and Palau.

Marine Aircraft Group 14 would continue to operate from Samar. Although the Zamboanga area was outside the practicable combat range of MAG–14, the group would support operations by strikes throughout northern and central Mindanao. In addition to its role on the air team for VICTOR IV, the Samar-based Corsair group would also fly close support missions for the VICTOR I and II Operations.

The first phase of VICTOR I was scheduled to be carried out by the 40th Infantry Division (relieved from fighting on Luzon for this mission) with an assault landing in the Oton-Tigbauan area of southern Panay on 18 March

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[3] *ComGen*, VICTOR III and IV, 37.

[4] Eighth Army Field Order No. 20, dtd 17Feb45.

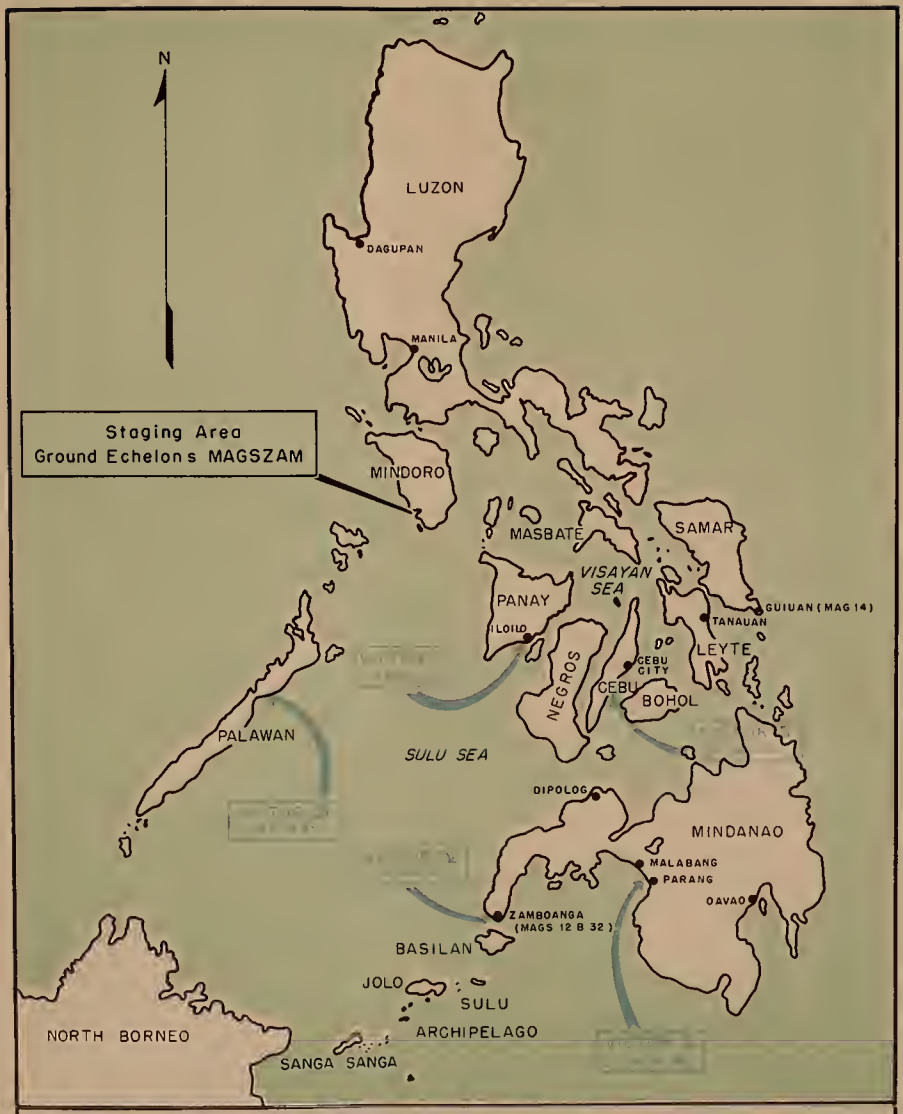
[5] Fifth Air Force (with headquarters on Mindoro) was given responsibility for Luzon operations. Thirteenth Air Force headquarters were moved from Morotai to Leyte, and MajGen Paul B. Wurtsmith became the new C. O., relieving MajGen St. Clair Streett.

LANDINGS OF THE

OPERATIONS

200 400 Mi

MAP 10



INITIAL LANDINGS OF THE VICTOR OPERATIONS

0 200 400 Mi

MAP 10

RD 7592

(G-Day). The second phase would be an attack by the same division against Negros Occidental (northwestern side of Negros Island) on 29 March (Y-Day).

The VICTOR II Operation, for which the Americal Division would furnish the assault troops, included the seizure of Cebu, Negros Oriental (eastern side of Negros) and Bohol. Target date for Cebu was 25 March (E-Day).

Plan for the final operation in the Southern Philippines was known as VICTOR V, the assault phase of which would be initiated in the Malabang-Cotabato area (west of the Mindanao "mainland") on 17 April. Ground operations were assigned to the Eighth Army's X Corps, which included the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions. As in the other VICTOR Operations, the Thirteenth Air Force would retain over-all responsibility for air missions, but the shore-based air assignment in the assault area would be given to Marine Aircraft Group 24. The Marine group would be relieved of its duties on Luzon and moved to Malabang as soon as the airfield there was seized by the assault troops.

The role of Marine air units in the VICTOR Operations had been decided at the Leyte conferences of mid-February (discussed in Chapter III). In addition to committing the four Marine air groups already in the Philippines to these operations, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing received approval from Allied Air Forces to send additional wing units from the northern Solomons to augment the fighter and dive bomber groups in forthcoming operations. Two of these units were air warning squadrons, whose ground radio and radar equipment enabled their trained personnel to operate a fighter-director center, warn of enemy air intrusion and render homing service for lost Allied aircraft. One of the air warning squadrons would join MAG–32 at Zamboanga, the other MAG–24 at Malabang. Another new arrival to the Philippines, destined for flying duty at Zamboanga, would be a Marine medium-bomber squadron from Emirau Island in the Bismarck Archipelago.

PRELUDE TO ZAMBOANGA

From Bougainville to Luzon, at widely scattered bases, Marine air units began preparation for their new assignment. In several instances ground and air echelons of the same organizations were staging from different locations. MAG–32's ground personnel were on Mindoro Island in early March, readying themselves for an overwater movement to Zamboanga with the Army assault forces. (See Map 10.) With them, preparing for the same mission, were the ground echelons of MAG–12, recently moved from Leyte.[6] The air echelon of MAG–32, meanwhile, was still supporting the Sixth Army on Luzon, and the four Corsair squadrons of MAG–12 (commanded by Colonel Verne J. McCaul after he relieved Colonel William A. Willis on 26 February) were conducting pre-assault missions from Tanauan Field in Leyte. Arrangements had been completed for movement of both these latter units to Zamboanga as soon as possible after San Roque Field had been seized for a base there.

MAG–14, under the command of Colonel Zebulon C. Hopkins, had flown four Corsair squadrons from Bougainville and Green Island in early January, landing at Guiuan, Samar, where the group was still based. (See Map 10.) From there it would support the VICTOR IV Operation, flying missions over the Visayas and Mindanao as directed, then returning to the home field at Samar.

Two other Marine aviation units had moved into the Philippines and were preparing for final staging toward their first combat operations there. Air Warning Squadron 4 (AWS–4) had come in from Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands, arriving at Leyte Gulf on 4 March.[7] The other newcomer to the Philippines was the ground echelon of Marine Bomb-

[6] A portion of MAG–12's ground personnel had never rejoined the flight echelon since the squadrons left Emirau; they came by a circuitous route from Emirau to Mindoro, disembarking there in mid-February.

[7] AWS–4 staged directly from Leyte Gulf to Zamboanga on 8 March, and made the J-Day assault landing with the other Marine units there.

ing Squadron (VMB)–611,[8] which landed at Mindoro on 25 February.

While preparations for the Zamboanga move proceeded on Mindoro Island, eight F4U squadrons continued daily aerial operations from Leyte and Samar. MAG's–12 and 14 had been flying almost identical missions since January. Eighth Army, conducting mopping-up operations on Leyte and Samar, occasionally requested the Marine airmen to make direct attacks on isolated enemy troops still holding out on those islands. The Corsairmen also spent many hours in the air covering shipping in Leyte Gulf. They regularly flew combat air patrol missions over U. S. convoys throughout central Philippine waterways and as far west as the Sulu Sea, off the coast of Panay Island.

The majority of their assignments, however, had been to strike enemy troops and installations in southern Visayas and Mindanao. They engaged in all manner of operations designed to soften up enemy forces throughout the area to be encompassed by the VICTOR Operations. They kept dozens of Japanese airfields pitted with bomb craters; they spotted, strafed and destroyed occasional camouflaged enemy aircraft parked near the strips. They cooperated with PT boats to hunt down and destroy supply barges vital to the isolated Japanese forces.

Strikes on Negros Island, in the southern Visayas group, were usually carried out at the request of guerilla forces. Coordination was achieved by preliminary briefing on the ground, since there were no Marine ALPmen on the island. Results of the strikes were usually unobserved, for the same reason, except for occasional reports from guerilla leaders.

MAG–12 and MAG–14 flew many of their missions over the island of Cebu during the period before the landings at Zamboanga. Both groups had started flying close support missions for guerilla forces early in February. Although the Japanese were in nominal control of Cebu, an airstrip at Taburan (near the northwest coast of the island) was in guerilla hands. Some radio jeeps had been flown in to the field by the Army,[9] and missions to support guerilla activities were controlled with this equipment. Sometimes Corsair pilots made landings on the Taburan strip and at such times were given direct briefing on targets by the Filipino forces.

One such target was at Japanese-held Cebu City, where guerillas had reported two midget submarines hidden under a pier. On their first try, Marine pilots located the pier but failed to hit it; later that day the same pilots returned, and in a low-level bombing attack, released their bombs from a height of only 50 feet, to skip-bomb 500-pounders directly into the pier. One midget submarine received a direct hit and was destroyed; the end of the pier was ripped off and a motor launch which was moored to it severely damaged with a second bomb. Still another bomb hit the pier squarely, leaving a large oil slick visible to the pilots as they pulled away.

A war diary entry finished the story:

. . . This command received a dispatch from the Commander, Seventh Fleet, via the commanding general of the Thirteenth Air Force, commending the pilots for destroying one submarine and probably destroying a second at Cebu City on 25 February.[10]

As the time for the VICTOR IV Operation drew nearer, many of the Marine fighter groups' more important assignments dealt with targets on Mindanao. For two months the Corsairs from Leyte and Samar had pounded the island's numerous Japanese airstrips to keep them unserviceable for any camouflaged enemy planes that might have escaped detection. When hidden planes were spotted, the Marine fighter pilots raked them into uselessness with machine guns, on low-

[8] VMB–611's ground echelon had departed from Hawaii five months before; it had been shipborne off Leyte, off Samar, and finally off Lingayen, before its landing at Mindoro. It remained at Mindoro until after the Zamboanga landings and did not proceed there to join MAG–32 until 15 March, arriving at Zamboanga on 17 March. (The air echelon of this same unit, in a stage of final training at Emirau, was transferred by 1st Wing order from MAG–61 there to MAG–32 as of 3 March. This was an administrative attachment only, however, since its flight echelon did not actually arrive at Zamboanga until 30 March.)

[9] A U. S. Army detachment was stationed at the Taburan airstrip for a time.

[10] War Diary, MAG–12, entry for 27Feb45.

DIPOLOG FIELD, a guerilla-held strip in northern Zamboanga province. Marine Corsairs flew cover for the Zamboanga invasion from this base.

level strafing runs. They also had strafed troops and vehicles when the enemy had dared move them during daylight hours. The frequency of such strikes was stepped up considerably during the early days of March, against targets on western Mindanao and along the Zamboanga peninsula.

On Mindanao, as on Negros and Cebu, bands of Filipino guerillas held various localized areas against the intruders of their homeland.

They controlled over half a dozen airstrips where Army transport aircraft, escorted by Marine F4U's, aften landed with necessary supplies.

One of these fields held by Philippine natives was at Dipolog, 150 miles northeast of the town of Zamboanga, near the northern tip of the province. (See Map 10.) Not far from the town, in a clearing right next to the water's edge (Sulu Sea), lay a narrow grass-surfaced airstrip with importance out of proportion to the relatively small facility it afforded. General Eichelberger and his Eighth Army staff had noted the airfield at Dipolog in planning VICTOR IV Operations and were counting on it as a base from which to stage a MAG–12 fighter squadron to cover landings and subsequent assault operations in the vicinity of Zamboanga town. It seemed necessary to insure friendly control of Dipolog, at least until San Roque Airfield could be seized and readied for aircraft operations.

Guerillas had held Dipolog field and a small area inland from it for several months. Many times during January and February, Marine pilots from both Leyte and Samar had landed at the airstrip on supply missions, or simply seeking haven for their planes when weathered away from their bases. But because of increasing pressure from Japanese forces in the area, the guerillas were finding it increasingly difficult to hold Dipolog.

For this reason, the first American invasion of the Zamboanga peninsula took place at Dipolog on 8 March (two days before Zamboanga's J-Day) when two companies of the 24th Infantry Division were brought in by air to Dipolog Field.[11]

On the same day (8 March), naval bombardment units began a pre-assault pounding of the beaches at the other end of the peninsula, near the town of Zamboanga, and the main body of the invasion fleet departed from Mindoro, where they had been assembling for the assault. Combat air patrol for the bombardment units was furnished by Marine planes already temporarily stationed at Dipolog;[12] within the next two days, 16 planes from MAG–12 had been flown to the little airstrip,[13] and as the task force approached its objective from Mindoro, these planes flew cover over the convoy.

THE LANDINGS AT ZAMBOANGA—VICTOR IV

On the morning of 10 March 1945, J-Day of the VICTOR IV Operation, the 41st Division and other elements of the Eighth Army, augmented by staffs and ground crewmen of Marine Aircraft Groups 12 and 32, plus Air Warning Squadron 4, made an assault landing on beaches at San Mateo point, four miles west of the town of Zamboanga. Their purpose was to capture the town and nearby San Roque Field, as a first step toward securing the southern portion of Zamboanga peninsula. This initial phase would be followed with leapfrog operations southwestward down the Sulu Archipelago towards Borneo, and in mid-April with landing and overland operations against the rest of the island of Mindanao (VICTOR V).

Air cover for the assault forces was furnished by planes from MAG–12, flown down from the strip at Dipolog. B–24's, B–25's, and A–20's from the Thirteenth Air Force made bombing runs over the area; no aerial opposition was encountered.[14]

The first wave of assault troops landed at 0915 and found the heavily fortified beaches only lightly defended. An elaborate and well-

[11] *ComGen*, VICTOR III and IV Operations, 46. The 24th Division was at Mindoro preparing for the main invasion of Mindanao—VICTOR V.

[12] Maj E. H. Railsback and 1stLt. M. B. Cooper (VMF–115) downed a *TOJO* during this patrol mission. The enemy plane was about to come in for a landing at San Roque Field, the Japanese-held airstrip at the town of Zamboanga.

[13] "Dipolog Airfield . . . was occupied by minimum personnel necessary to stage one fighter squadron from 8 March through 22 March and thereafter, as deemed necessary. A temporary fighter control center was also set up there from 6 March until such time as the fighter control center could be established at Zamboanga."—*ComGen*, VICTOR V, 41.

[14] *Report on Amphibious Attack on Zamboanga, Mindanao*, Commander Amphibious Group Six, Task Group 78.1, 27–28. Hereinafter cited as *Phib Group Six*. Two B–24 flights arrived late and failed to check in with the shipboard air controller before bombing. Fortunately, no American casualties resulted because swampy terrain had held up the troops' advance before they reached the bombed area.

MORET AIRDROME, Zamboanga, formerly San Roque Field, named in honor of LtCol Paul Moret. MAGSZAM headquarters was located at this field. Zamboanga town and Basilan Island are in the background.

camouflaged defensive system of heavy concrete pillboxes had been abandoned shortly before the arrival of U. S. troops. During the initial assault no enemy fire was observed. Twenty minutes after H-Hour, however, mortar and small caliber artillery shells began to fall inaccurately in the beach area; most of the rounds droppd into the water. The Japanese had moved back quickly to the nearby hills after exerting only token resistance to the U. S. landing, but for two days they maintained sporadic fire upon the American beachhead.[15]

Advance infantry elements reached the perimeter of San Roque Airfield, one of the primary U. S. objectives, on J-Day. Colonel Jerome and members of his staff scouted the strip in a jeep that afternoon and again on the following day. But San Roque was not firmly in American hands until J-plus 2, at which time the Marines began to erect a camp on the inland side of the strip.[16] They promptly renamed it Moret Field, in honor of a Marine flyer, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Moret, who was killed in a plane crash at New Caledonia in 1943.[17] Soon personnel from MAG's–32 and 12 had the setting up on installations well under way.

The Japanese launched a counterattack on the night following the field's capture. The aviation Marines set up a secondary defense line and spent the night in foxholes; however, units of the Army's 41st Division manning the main line of resistance quickly repelled the attack, and there was no enemy penetration. The Japanese again retreated to the foothill's directly behind the field, so close that their mortar shells frequently hit on and around the strip, but Marines suffered no casualties from the shelling.[18] An Army howitzer bat-

[15] *Phib Group Six*, 52, notes that: "If 8,000 [enemy] troops had been present [the number originally estimated by American ground forces to be in the area; estimate based on guerilla reports] it is likely the elaborate defenses would have been manned." *The Jungleers, A History of the 41st Infantry Division*, 148, reports a count of 3,000 enemy dead and 2,000 estimated survivors in the Zamboanga (town) area, after the first week of the operation.

[16] Airfield was captured on 12Mar45 by 2d Bn, 163d Inf, 41st Div.

[17] Public Information Histories, History of MAG–32, 45. Herinafter cited as *PubInfoHist–32*.

[18] In the beach area, one Marine from AWS–4 was hit while assisting in erecting a radar site. Other Marine casualties during the early days of the operation were caused by land mines and booby traps.

talion adjacent to the field retaliated, but results could not be assessed.

Until J-plus 5, the enemy continued to harass the field with fire from the foothills. There was also one aerial attack against Moret Field during this period, when, on 13 March, a lone Japanese pilot bombed and made two strafing runs over the strip. Little damage and no casualties resulted.[19]

By 15 March the 41st Division's 162d Infantry had secured the commanding terrain near Masilay and the high ground overlooking San Roque, and the 163d Infantry spent the day in mopping up and securing the Pasananca sector (5 miles inland from the beach), where the waterworks, supply reservoir and power plan that served the city of Zamboanga were located. MAG–12 Corsairs taking off from Dipolog had made support strikes in this area on 12 and 14 March. Dipolog-based planes had also flown daily patrol missions over the beach area during this period.

With infantrymen of the 41st Division in control of the area as far inland as Pasananca, Moret Field was secured against enemy action. Installations for full flight operations were already set up when the first planes flew in to the new Marine airbase on 15 March. First to arrive was a flight of eight Corsairs from VMF–115, led by Major Eldon H. Railsback. During the next three days, flight echelons of VMF–211, VMF–218, and VMF–313 (all from MAG–12) arrived from Tanauan Field, Leyte, and commenced operations.

Moret Field was also ready to receive MAG–32's dive bombers on 15 March, and Colonel Jerome had expected to have them available for use at Zamboanga immediately, but it was actually nine days later before the first SBD's arrived from Luzon. Sixth Army had been most reluctant to release them (see Chapter III) but displacement of the four squadrons finally began on 24 March. VMSB's 236 and 142 arrived at Moret on the 24th, followed by VMSB–341 on the 25th and VMSB –243 on the 26th.

Even before the SBD's of MAG–32 arrived, Thirteenth Air Force had designated Colonel Jerome as Commander, Marine Aircraft Groups Zamboanga (MAGSZAM), which would include not only MAG–12 and MAG–32, but also MAG–24 when it arrived on Mindanao a month later.[20] The organization for flight operations was set up by Lieutenant Colonel Keith B. McCutcheon, who, although the operations officer of MAG–24 (still at Mangaldan), had accompanied Colonel Jerome from Luzon for the express purpose of placing into effect an operations structure similar to the one used by MAGSDAGUPAN.

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT—MAGSZAM

MAGSZAM had one primary mission: close support of ground troops. For the SBD squadrons, fresh from a similar assignment on Luzon, such work was already an old story. For the Corsair squadrons, however, other missions had taken precedence over close air support during the Leyte operation. (See Chapter II). MAG–12's Corsairs had been brought into Leyte originally to serve in a fighter capacity—to provide air defense, attack enemy shipping, and escort friendly convoys and air transports. Only in a few isolated instances had they flown close support missions on Leyte, and since they did not have their own air liaison parties, even these few missions were flown without direct front-line control. Nevertheless, during the early months of 1945 they had carried out an increasing number of close support missions in the southern Visayan islands, working in close cooperation with Army ground controllers[21] or guerillas.

[19] *PubInfoHist–32*, 45. Only two aerial attacks were directed against Moret Field. The other was early on the morning of 2 April . . . when a *ZEKE* dropped two bombs that missed the tower by less than 75 feet and threw mud-clods through the wings of two PBY's from the Army's Second Emergency Rescue Squadron. No personnel was injured in either of these attacks.

[20] At Moret Field there was also a detachment of U. S. Army Air Force night fighters, ("Black Widow" P–61's) and a detachment of PBY's from an emergency rescue squadron, both operationally attached to MAGSZAM. From time to time there were other Thirteenth AF planes on the field—B–24's and P–38's, mostly transient.

[21] During these early months of 1945 there had been no actual invasion of the Visayas by U. S. Army forces, but there were small detachments of Army ground controllers, etc., aiding the guerillas on some of these islands.

As a result, by the time of the Zamboanga operation the Corsairmen had grown proficient in these duties.

The Corsairs, although designed as fighter planes, proved to be well adapted for close support work. They had three bomb racks capable of carrying a variety of bomb and napalm loadings, and they were armed with six forward-firing machine guns. Faster than the SBD's they possessed ample speed to get in and out of a target area in a hurry. Also, since Corsairs were equipped with both VHF and MHF radio sets, they fitted into the air-ground liaison system easily, without a necessity for additions or alterations to existing equipment.

After MAGSZAM operations began to get well under way, and the dive bombers had arrived from Luzon, the F4U's and SBD's frequently carried out assignments together, and they made a good team. Both were capable of delivering close and accurate support attacks, and the Corsair could serve as a fighter escort for the more vulnerable dive bomber on the way and to and from the target area.

The organization for close air support at MAGSZAMBOANGA was simpler and more effective than it had been on Luzon; simpler, because the Marines were the only aviation organization in the area (during most of the operation) and more effective, because the 41st Division permitted its regiments to request air support directly from MAGSZAM.

The Marine operations officer acted as the direct representative of Colonel Jerome, the commanding officer of MAGSZAM, to control all air operations. This included air defense and deep support as well as close support missions. He formed support air parties to be sent out to the regiments, and these SAP's sent their air liaison parties to the battalions.

Support air parties usually consisted of a captain (who was an intelligence officer), one or more first lieutenants (Marine aviators learning to take over air liaison parties), two or more radio operators and two or more radio technicians. This air-ground liaison team used two types of mobile radio equipment: one, a large van containing VHF and

FILIPINO LABORERS augment 873d Aviation Engineer Battalion's efforts to enlarge Moret Field, 23 April 1945.

MHF radios with ranges of over 100 miles; the other, a jeep that, mounting less powerful sets of both types, was used only for distances up to 15 miles. The choice of radio truck or radio jeep depending on how far away from MAGSZAM operations the parties functioned.[22]

The air liaison parties consisted of a Marine aviator (who had been trained on the job in Luzon), a radio operator, and a technician. Their equipment included the radio jeep, a field telephone which could be connected to the radio, maps, and aerial photographs.

The air-ground liaison setup was aided greatly by the additional communications facilities afforded by Air Warning Squadron 4 (AWS–4), now designated as 76th Fighter Control Center, and stationed at Moret Field. The mission of AWS–4 included steering lost aircraft back to base and detecting approaching enemy raiding planes;[23] in addition, however, it augmented existing air-ground radio circuits with its own radio and radar equipment, creating a joint support air party and fighter-director setup.[24] The air support networks, jeeps and air liaison parties were ready to operate by the time the F4U's first took station at Moret on 15 March, and the newly-arrived Corsairs flew their first close support mission from the new base on the following day, when MAGSZAM planes furnished air cover for the 41st Division's landings on Basilan Island, just off the tip of Zamboanga peninsula.[25]

During early days of operation on the peninsula, front lines were only a mile or two from the airfield. As in the fight for Bloody Nose Ridge at Peleliu, the Corsairs took off, circled, and dropped their bombs in plain sight of their own field. It was (as one of the ALPmen, Captain Samuel H. McAloney, later described it) "an intimate war." Pilots, while being briefed, could scan the target area from the briefing tent. The ALP officer who was to control the strike would point out features of the terrain that he had already observed at close quarters.[26] After the briefing, as the pilots prepared for take-off on the mission, the ALP would return by jeep to his forward observation post (OP) and direct the flyers in to the target. Mission completed, he would drive back to interrogate the pilots when they landed.

Ground personnel at the airfield could stand on the runway, only a couple of miles from the scene of action, and see the whole show. And many of the pilots who were taken to front-line positions to observe strikes learned from personal experience something of the point of view of the ground forces and the difficulties they might have when a support strike was being organized.[27]

As a direct result of the close cooperation with ground force commanders and forward artillery observers, the aviation Marines were able to work some new variations into close support tactics, usually with a high degree of success. One such variation, improvised from means readily at hand, was used in striking reverse slope positions difficult to hit with artillery. To direct the air support called for on such missions, ALPmen took to the air in artillery spotting planes. Since the artillery and air control radio frequencies were not the same, the air observer relayed directions to the planes via a forward artillery observer and another ALPman working side by side on the ground. This roundabout method was eliminated later by mounting L–5 plane radios

[22] Frequently both were used, working as a team. The radio jeep would maintain contact with the truck, which in turn would relay messages back to MAGSZAM.

[23] Since only two enemy air attacks took place against Moret Field during the entire Zamboanga operation, this phase of AWS–4's assignment proved of little real importance. Nevertheless, the radar search security mission was continued for some time.

[24] "This proved quite successful in the conduct of night support missions. [Army] P–61 night fighters were vectored onto ground targets in two instances and succeeded in quieting Jap artillery that was firing on friendly forces."—*McCutcheon*, 12.

[25] Basilan fell without opposition to one regiment of the 41st Division, on 16 March.

[26] Frequently the ALP officer would take the flight leader to the front with him, and both men would discuss the situation with a ground force commander (usually at battalion level) who wanted air support to carry out a particular objective.

[27] *PubInfoHist–32*, 46.

in the Marine planes so instructions could be given directly.[28]

But one of the most unusual air-ground devices used during the entire Zamboanga operation was employed on 27 March near guerilla-held Dipolog airstrip.[29] In answer to a request from the American officer in charge of the guerillas, Major Donald H. Wills, AUS, a division of four VMF–115 Corsairs (led by Captain Rolfe F. Blanchard) was dispatched to Dipolog.

About 150 Japanese troops, armed with two knee mortars, a light machine gun, two automatic rifles, and more than a hundred rifles, had advanced to within 16 kilometers of Dipolog. They were well-seasoned troops that had been moved into the area from Zamboanga about five weeks earlier.[30] The more than 500 Filipino guerillas who opposed the Japanese forces "were evidently keenly interested in avoiding a fight with the Japs." [31] Major Wills felt that an air strike might boost their morale and damage the enemy at the same time.

There were no maps or photographs of any kind available, no method for marking targets, and no means of communication with the troops—all these factors combined to make control of the strike by normal means impossible. But ingenuity found a way.

Into the cockpit of a Marine Corsair climbed Major Wills, who was thoroughly familiar with the enemy positions; after him climbed the smallest of the Marine pilots in the division, First Lieutenant Winfield S. Sharpe. Both men squeezed into the narrow confines of the cockpit, with Sharpe sitting on Major Wills' lap. Soon afterward, with the major pointing out targets to the pilot, the Corsair led the four plane division in six strafing passes over the enemy's positions. The planes used all ammunition with which they had been loaded; the enemy area was thoroughly strafed, compelling the Japanese to withdraw 3–5 kilometers.[32]

"AIR-GROUND COORDINATION"—2dLt W. C. Olsen and 1stLt W. S. Sharpe demonstrate the method used to carry Major D. H. Wills, AUS, leader of Dipolog guerilla forces, as he directed Marine Corsairs against jungle-hidden enemy positions.

MARINE BOMBING SQUADRON 611 JOINS MAGSZAM

MAGSZAM, with both the SBD and F4U, already possessed a wider choice of weapons than had MAGSDAGUPAN, but on 30 March its striking power was augmented even further. The flight echelon of Marine Bombing Squadron 611 (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George H. Sarles) arrived from Emirau with 16 PBJ's (Mitchell medium bombers). These versatile aircraft were capable of carrying eight rockets, 3,000 pounds of bombs, and could strafe with eight to fourteen (depending on the model) .50 caliber machine guns. Equipped with air-borne radar, dual instrument panels (one each for pilot and co-pilot), long-range radio gear and very complete navigation equipment for the navigator-bombardier, the PBJ was exceptionally well

[28] Report on Close Support Aviation, MAG–24, by LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon, 12.

[29] Two companies from the 24th Division, previously assigned to help defend the field against the Japanese, had just been evacuated.

[30] War Diary, VMF–115, Aircraft Action Report No. 27, 27Mar45.

[31] *MS. Comment*, Capt Rolfe H. Blanchard.

[32] War Diary, VMF–115, Aircraft Action Report No. 28, 28Mar45.

qualified for operating at night and in periods of low visibility.

Intensive training back on Emirau had prepared the five-man PBJ crews to render coordinated low-level bombing and strafing attacks with remarkable accuracy. Their long range surface search radar sets made it possible to conduct bombing, rocket, and even low-level strafing attacks at night with almost daylight precision.

Crews of the PBJ's were put to work almost immediately after their arrival, flying long-range reconnaissance patrols over Borneo and Mindanao, photographing future landing areas in the Sulu Archipelago, probing the seas for enemy submarines, and attacking specific targets. Because the Japanese were now traveling after dark almost exclusively, the PBJ's were used many times in night raids, to strike truck convoys and airfield areas in Mindanao, and to conduct night heckling missions on the Japanese-held islands to the southwest. The use of the PBJ's in this manner enabled MAGSZAM to keep planes in the air on a 24-hour basis, interdicting Japanese supply routes and attacking important enemy installations around the clock.

THE SOUTHERN VISAYAS—VICTOR I

While the 41st Division was pushing its way up the Zamboanga peninsula, two other Eighth Army divisions were making new assaults on the islands of the Central Philippines. VICTOR I Operations began on 18 March when elements of the 40th Infantry Division made unopposed landings on the southeast coast of Panay. Planes from three of MAG–14's Samar-based fighter squadrons were on hand to support these landings. (See Map 10.)

Twenty-one Corsairs of VMF–222 flew over the area on combat patrol during the day of the landing; no enemy planes attempted to interfere. The squadron's only attack mission was the strafing of six steel barges anchored in nearby Iloilo River. VMF–251 pilots found even fewer targets. Working in two-plane flights and cooperating closely with PT boats from Seventh Fleet, they searched Iloilo Strait (the waters adjacent to the Army's landing on Panay) in vain for signs of enemy activity.

VMF–223, however, had a more active day. Three four-plane divisions were assigned to make fighter sweeps of airdromes on western Negros; there the Marine pilots denied the Japanese use of six airstrips during the Panay landings. Enemy fields at Bacolod, Talisay, Manapla, Fabrica, Silay and La Carlota, all on Negros Island, were strafed. Two *ZEKES* (Japanese single-seater fighters) in apparently servicable condition were destroyed by machine-gun fire—one at Silay, one at La Carlota.[33]

All four of MAG–14's fighter squadrons flew continuing daylight combat air patrols over the Panay landing area for several days, encountering no enemy air opposition. Targets on the ground were equally scarce; Army forces were meeting meager resistance. Only after the third straight day of uneventful air patrolling did the 40th Division fighter-director ask four Corsairs, then "on station" in the area, to strafe a wooded section where enemy troops were believed to be concealed. The flyers thoroughly raked the designated spot.

Even on the days when the 40th Division troops had no need of close air support, however, the Marine patrol flights concluded their sorties constructively. As the Corsairmen flew over Negros or Cebu on their return trips from Panay to Samar, guerillas usually radioed suggested targets to be bombed or strafed. On one such homeward flight, four planes of VMF–251 spotted a boat towing a barge along the northwest coast of Negros. The division leader checked by radio with guerilla headquarters at Taburan and received permission to attack the surface craft. After riddling both vessels the pilots again headed for Samar until, over the town of Daga in northern Negros, they saw a 15-car freight train. It was motionless, but the two engines (one on each end of the train) both had up full heads of steam. The pilots asked for and received guerilla approval to strike this target of opportunity. Two passing Army P–38's joined in, and the

[33] MAG–14 planes destroyed six more Japanese aircraft on the ground during the rest of the month of March.

six American planes strafed the train from end to end. Most of the boxcars were left blazing, and one engine blew up with a violent explosion.[34]

THE SOUTHERN VISAYAS—VICTOR II

Eight days after VICTOR I, on 26 March,[35] VICTOR II was launched, when the Americal Division landed on Cebu Island. (See Map 10.) The initial assault was made at 0730, at a point 10 miles south of Cebu City. Throughout the day MAG–14 planes were kept busy attacking troops and vehicles as the Japanese began a hasty evacuation of the island's capital city. Targets for the airmen were plentiful as caravans of trucks and enemy troops on foot scurried into the hills northwest of Cebu City. At least 20 trucks were destroyed by the airmen's .50-caliber machine guns, and an undetermined number of casualties was inflicted upon the fleeing troops.

On 29 March MAG–14 aircraft covered the first landing in force on Negros, made by elements of the 40th Division in a shore-to-shore operation from Panay. After that the remainder of the southern Visayan operations became primarily a matter of tracking down isolated enemy troops throughout the islands.

Nevertheless, close support missions for MAG–14 increased greatly in April. In addition to the guerilla ground directors, the Army divisions' support air parties were now in full operation on all of the newly invaded islands. Thirteenth Air Force Headquarters on Leyte directed the Marine group by daily assignment schedules to report in for control by various support air parties. Air coordinators were also frequently furnished by the Thirteenth Air Force. Working in close cooperation with the Marines, air coordinators in B–24's led the flights to target areas and pointed out objectives. Because the air coordinators were well briefed on the ground situation, excellent results were obtained by this method.

Planes of MAG–14, in spite of unusually bad weather, flew a total of over 5,800 hours during April, an average of almost nine hours per day per plane. This high average per plane was necessitated by Corsair losses, both combat and operational, during March and April.[36] Replacement aircraft were available only in very limited numbers, a situation that at times even necessitated lending airplanes among squadrons of MAG–14. Sometimes squadron commanders were reluctant to have another squadron fly their planes, so they would lend both planes and pilots.[37]

By early May the need for air support in the Central Philippines had decreased. The invasion of Okinawa had commenced over a month earlier (1 April), and additional U. S. air strength was required there. Therefore, upon authority of the Commanding General, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and after approval by Allied Air Forces, Marine Aircraft Group 14 was transferred from the 1st to the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (based at Okinawa). The group ceased combat operations at Samar on 15 May; the remainder of the month was devoted to familiarization with new F4U–4's, which had finally been received to replace the older model Corsairs.

On 18 May Colonel Edward A. Montgomery relieved Colonel Hopkins as group commander, and on 24 May, Colonel Montgomery departed by air transport to make preparations for the group to follow him to Okinawa.[38]

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[34] War Diary, VMF–251, 21Mar45.

[35] E–Day was pushed back one day in the time schedule from the originally planned date of 25 March, to permit additional briefing and "landing rehearsal" for the ground troops.—*ComGen.* VICTORS I and II, 61.

[36] During March and April, 15 planes were lost through operational causes, and three as a result of combat. These losses, over and above planes not available because of overhaul, left each squadron with an average of 12 to 15 planes, instead of a normal 24.

[37] *MS. Comment,* Capt Marion Bowers: "If a squadron with 10 planes in commission was scheduled to have 12 planes in the air at once, then usually one of the divisions would be made up of two pilots of one squadron and two pilots of another squadron. Group Operations designated the division leader."

[38] Advance echelon departed for Okinawa via LST's on the same date, having joined a convoy forming in Leyte Gulf on the previous day. Forward echelon was to arrive at Okinawa about a week prior to the flight echelon, so that facilities would be available for servicing the planes upon their arrival.—War Diary, MAG–14, May45.

CEBU CITY DEFENSES were attacked by MAG-14's fighter-bombers before U. S. troops seized the city.

Effective 1 June, VMF–251 of MAG–14 was decommissioned;[39] pilots of that squadron not due for return to the United States were transferred into the three remaining squadrons of the group.

On 7 June MAG–14's air echelon began its air-borne movement from Samar to Okinawa. The first flight of planes, 32 Corsairs from VMF–212, left Guiuān Airstrip for Clark Field on Luzon, continuing on to Okinawa the next day. VMF–222 and VMF–223 followed, in that order. By 11 June all MAG–14 aircraft had departed from the Philippine Islands.

During their four months on Samar, they had flown a total of 22,671 combat hours, consisting of 7,396 individual sorties. They had destroyed 28 enemy planes on the ground, and rendered close air support for Eighth Army troops throughout the Central Philippines and Mindanao. MAG–14, although not officially a member of MAGSZAMBOANGA, had done its share in the VICTOR Operations. For its part in these operations, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, Commanding Eighth Army, later wrote this commendation:

> . . . Marine Air Group Fourteen rendered an outstanding performance in supporting overwater and ground operations against the enemy at Leyte, Samar, Palawan, Panay, Cebu, and Negros, Philippine Islands. This group provided convoy cover, fighter defense, fire bombing, dive bombing and strafing in

[39] 1st MAW General Order No. 14–45, dtd 24May45.

support of ground troops. The enthusiasm of commanders and pilots, their interest in the ground situation and their eagerness to try any method which might increase the effectiveness of close air support, were responsible in a large measure for keeping casualties at a minimum among ground combat troops.

It affords me great pleasure to commend the officers and men of the Marine Air Group Fourteen for their important contribution in the brilliant success of operations in the Philippine Islands.[40]

DRIVE INTO THE SULU ARCHIPELAGO BEGINS

Thus, VICTORS I and II had reached successful conclusions. But in no sense had these operations proceeded in strategic isolation from the rest of the Philippines campaign; for, even as elements of the 40th Infantry Division consolidated their Panay beachhead (VICTOR I) on 18 March, soldiers of the 41st Division were drawing an ever-tightening noose around the defenders of the southern portion of Zamboanga. By the end of the month effective resistance in the latter area had virtually ceased. Nor did this exhaust the compass of the sprawling campaign: The westernmost island of the Philippines, Palawan, 300 miles northwest of Zamboanga, had fallen to one regiment of the 41st Infantry Division in the VICTOR III Operation (H-Day: 28 February).[41]

On 2 April the 41st Division forces, in a continuation of the VICTOR IV Operation, thrust deep into the Sulu Archipelago, landing on the west coast of Sanga Sanga in the Tawi Tawi group, 30 miles from Borneo. (See Map 10.) The chief reasons for striking first at the extreme southern end of the Sulu Archipelago were to establish an airfield there to protect the Eighth Army's southern flank, and to provide an advance base from which the Thirteenth Air Froce could strike Borneo.[42]

There was little opposition encountered on Sanga Sanga, and later the same day Army units executed a shore-to-shore assault from Sanga Sanga to nearby Bongao Island. Marine planes covered both landings; MAG–12's commanding officer, Colonel Verne J. McCaul, served as Support Air Commander, and Captain Samuel McAloney as Support Air Controller.

The control room of the destroyer USS *Saufley* was rigged up with three air support circuits—one to control the combat air patrol (CAP), another for air-sea rescue operations, and the final one for direction of support missions on the beach.[43] At both the Sanga Sanga and Bongao landings, while Marine Corsairs and Dauntless circled "on station" overhead, a radio jeep was boated to land with the troops; once the Marine air-ground liaison team hit the beach, direction of the strike planes was turned over to them. This arrangement gave the troop commander planes for support action whenever he needed them.[44]

While the landing on Sanga Sanga was taking place as scheduled (with troops going going ashore north of a Japanese airstrip on the island, and then swinging south immediately to cross over to Bongao, where the enemy was located in greater force), 44 dive bombers of MAG–32 dropped 20 tons of bombs on Bongao under the direction of ship and shore support air parties. Nine SBD's of VMSB–236 hit a Jap observation post and a large building on Bongao with seven 500- and 14 250-pounders with good results. Eight more SBD's of VMSB–236 hit gun positions and trenches along the slope of a hill, with three tons of bombs splattering the area. A third flight of nine planes plastered troop concentrations and set fire to a building on the slopes of Bongao with nine 500-lb. and 18 250-lb. bombs.

Combat air patrol over Sanga Sanga was flown by six flights of four Corsairs each

[40] Ltr, Hqs, Eighth Army, Office of the CG, dtd 25Jun45.

[41] This was the only VICTOR Operation not supported by Marine aircraft. The island of Palawan was too far away from Marine fighter bases to permit satisfactory coverage.

[42] *The Thirteenth Air Force in the War Against Japan*, USSBS, Military Analysis Division, 15.

[43] *MS. Comment*, Capt S. H. McAloney: "To enable the Support Air Controller to control planes and guard all three circuits, the CAP and SAC nets were rigged through a split headset—left ear SAC, right ear CAP. A small loudspeaker was on ASR. A mike in each hand and one on a hook under the loudspeaker completed the lash-up."

[44] "Marine Close Support, Philippines," an unpublished monograph by Capt Samuel McAloney. Cited hereinafter as *McAloney*.

(from VMF–115 and VMF–211), a total of 24 sorties. The Corsairs also destroyed a radar station on Bongao, made a direct hit on a Japanese command post, and started a large fire and explosion with strafing (later confirmed by dive bombers). During the day Corsairs and SBD's knocked out at least three gun emplacements.[45]

For two more days the Marine flyers "on station" over Sanga Sanga and Bongao Islands were called in by the ALP's to pin-point specific targets in the mountainous terrain of the latter island, and until 8 April Corsairs continued to provide air cover, but the ground troops had no further need for direct support. For this reason, most of the air effort was speedily redirected toward the scene of the next amphibious assault.

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT AT JOLO

The same pattern used at Sanga Sanga and Bongao was followed a week later, when, on 9 April, troops of the 41st Division made a shore-to-shore landing from Zamboanga to Jolo Island, 80 miles southwest in the Sulu Archipelago. (See Map 10.) With them went a support air team from MAG–32; Support Air Commander was Lieutenant Colonel John L. Smith, and Support Air Controller Afloat, Captain Samuel H. McAloney. The Marines' landing party was headed by Captain James L. McConaughy and consisted of five officers and 11 men, equipped with a radio truck and two radio jeeps.

In many respects the Jolo campaign was almost ideal for the employment of close air support. The island was in easy range of Moret Field, only 80 miles away; the extremely aggressive Moro guerillas had crowded the Japanese troops into limited positions even before the American landings, and the problem of ground to air communications had been greatly simplified by the fact that they could be handled exclusively and directly by a MAG–32 support air team.[46]

The Japanese on Jolo had prepared their main defensive positions on five mountains on the island. The story of the operation is pri-

[45] War Diaries, MAG–12 and MAG–32, entry for 2Apr45.

[46] *PubInfoHist–32*, 46.

TAIL OF ENEMY FIGHTER PLANE furnished an appropriate emblem for MAGSZAM's base at Zamboanga, Moret Field.

marily that of a methodical reduction of those positions: Bangkal, Patikul, Tumatangas, Datu, and Daho.

Landings were made on scattered beaches in the general vicinity of Jolo town, on the northwest coast of the island.[47] The Marine ALP's and their jeeps were ordered to land from an LSM (Landing Ship, Medium) at H-plus 3 minutes. Unfortunately, the LSM could not pull in close enough to shore, and the jeeps disembarked into four feet of water. Before they could be put in operable condition, it was necessary to retrieve the jeeps, disassemble the radios, wash the parts with water from canteens, dry them with carbon tetrachloride (from fire extinguishers) and reassemble the radios.[48]

The SCR–299 (radio truck) landed at H-plus 90 minutes (on a different beach) in good working order. As coordinated close support against targets near the American lines was unfeasible until the radio jeeps were back in commission, Captain McConaughy and the regimental S–2 studied aerial photographs, and picked out targets at least a mile ahead of 41st Division troops. By the use of the grid system and a lengthy description, these targets were designated from the SCR–299 to the planes, which were then allowed to attack at their own discretion.[49]

Within a week after the Jolo landing (9 April), most of the island had been taken by American troops, and at least 1,200 of the Japanese defenders killed. Mt. Daho, four miles southeast of Jolo town, was the citadel of the island, and the last enemy strong-point to fall. A preliminary bombardment by both air and ground weapons had been directed against the heavily fortified ravines ringing the foot of the mountain, but when the 163d Regiment infantrymen shoved off, many hitherto unspotted Japanese guns in well-camouflaged positions opened up, and the Americans were forced to retreat after having reached their objective. Thirty-two casualties were sustained in a matter of minutes. The preliminary bombardment had not been heavy or precise enough.

For the next five days, from 17 through 21 April, Mt. Daho's northwest slope was thoroughly bombed and strafed. On 22 April an especially heavy strike took place—33 SBD's and four rocket-carrying PBJ's hit Japanese positions which had previously been noted by ground observers; immediately after the strike, 41st Division troops moved forward. They drew only two shots and suffered no casualties. The 41st Infantry Division History reports:

> . . . The combined shelling and bombing was so effective that the doughboys were able to move forward at a rapid pace without a single casualty. The area was found littered with bodies of 235 Japs and it was believed that many more had sealed themselves into caves and blown themselves to bits. This broke the Jap stand in the sector . . .[50]

How this intensive close air support affected the morale of the enemy was indicated in a diary written by a Japanese soldier during the Mt. Daho action:

> Airplanes can really make warfare misery for us . . . If we only had planes—even one would help. April 18—Again received artillery and air bombardment . . . Remained in air raid shelter all night. April 19—Received very intense air bombing . . . The entire mountain became bald and some air raid shelters collapsed while huts were blown apart . . . It is depressing to fight a losing battle . . .[51]

STRATEGIC BACKGROUND OF VICTOR V

The threat of enemy-held Mindanao to the Allied Forces in the Southern Philippines had been greatly lessened since the beginning of the VICTOR Operations. Even though the Japanese force on Mindanao was still a large

[47] Two Dauntlesses from VMSB–243 carried, as observers, MajGen Jens A. Doe, Commanding General of the 41st Div, and BrigGen Edwin A. Zundel, Commander of 41st Division Artillery, who were "well pleased with the flight, and had an excellent view of the landing operation." War Diary, VMSB–243, MAG–32, 9Apr45.

[48] "Close Air Support of U. S. Army Units in the Philippines." An unpublished monograph by Capt E. R. Ciampa, Jr., 19. Hereinafter cited as *Ciampa*.

[49] *Ciampa*, 19–20.

[50] William F. McCartney, *The Jungleers, A History of the 41st Infantry Division*, 152.

[51] Quoted from *Zamboanga Operation—Eight Army*, VICTOR IV, an Operational Monograph, 10Mar–20Jun45, 60.

MARINE DIVE BOMBERS STRIKE Mt. Daho, strongly held enemy position on Jolo Island, as members of a 41st Infantry Division gun crew watch.

one,[52] it was stretched thin, trying to cover a relatively wide area. A shortage of transportation, coupled with very bad roads and the dangers of moving by day under the constant threat of air attacks, made it extremely difficult for the enemy to concentrate his troops at any given point.

The basic plan for the VICTOR V Operation envisaged an assault landing in the Cotabato-Malabang area (on the west coast of the mainland of Mindanao, bordering Illano Bay—see Map 11). From an initial foothold there, American Forces would conduct a series of overland and shore-to-shore operations to clear hostile forces from all of the island.[53]

R-Day, target date for initial landings, was set for 17 April; Eighth Army's X Corps would make the assault. Divisions assigned to the X Corps were the 24th, veterans of the Leyte Operation, and the 31st, recently engaged in operations on Morotai. Corps Headquarters and troops were to be mounted out of Leyte, the 24th Division from Mindoro, and the 31st from Morotai and Sansapor.[54]

Major General Paul B. Wurtsmith's Thirteenth Air Force, reinforced by elements of the Fifth Air Force, the Royal Australian Air

[52] Actually, the largest Japanese force in the Southern Philippines — Gen Eichelberger estimated that there were nearly 60,000 troops on Mindanao, exclusive of Zamboanga, at the time the VICTOR V Operation was launched. *Operational Monograph on the Mindanao Operation,* VICTOR V, 17Apr–Jun45, Eighth U. S. Army, 9. Hereinafter cited as *OpMon-Mindanao.*

[53] *Ibid.,* 34.

[54] *Ibid.*

Command, and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, was designated "air assault force" for the Mindanao Operation.[55] Its mission prescribed a continuing air offensive over the Southern and Central Philippines to neutralize Japanese air, ground, and naval forces, and to prevent Japanese reinforcements and supplies from reaching the objective area.[56]

Fifth Air Force (less elements assigned to Thirteenth Air Force), under the command of Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, was assigned in support of the operation. It would furnish aerial reconnaissance, photography, and air cover for the convoys and naval forces.

Army Air Force planners estimated that the minimum air force necessary for the landing phase of the operation would be one fighter group, one light bomber group, and one medium bomber group to provide cover and support from R-minus 5 to R-plus 5. An air garrison was to consist of one dive bomber group, one flight of night fighters, a squadron of fighters, and one liaison squadron from the air assault forces.[57]

At the earliest possible date after R-Day, the dive bombers of Colonel Lyle H. Meyer's Marine Aircraft Group 24 would be flown from Luzon to the Malabang Airstrip and take station there, 150 miles across the Moro Gulf from the Marines at Moret Field, Zamboanga. MAG–24's ground echelon arrived in Mindoro on 12 April, and left that island two days later in a convoy with 24th Division assault troops. During its operations on Mindanao, MAG–24 once again would be under the direction of Colonel Jerome, for the Malabang-based group would be a part of Marine Aircraft Groups, Zamboanga.

THE LANDINGS AT MALABANG—VICTOR V

Even as MAGSZAM planes assisted in the assault on Jolo Island, their planes were also directing aerial effort against the west coast of Mindanao, in preparation for the forthcoming VICTOR V Operations. An estimated 600-700 Japanese trapped in the outskirts of Malabang by guerilla forces were whittled down to less than 300 in 10 days of intensive air strikes before the landing. The remaining enemy troops, having finally had enough of an aerial pounding, broke through the thin-spread guerilla forces and fled south, two days before the American troops landed; this move left Filipino guerilla forces in undisputed possession of both Malabang town and its nearby airstrip.[58]

For two weeks before R-Day (17 April—the day designated for VICTOR V assault landings), Marine pilots from Zamboanga landed their planes on the Malabang Airstrip, conferred with the guerillas, and were briefed for choice targets in the tangled undergrowth nearby. Most of the strikes at that time were concentrated on the coastal region edging Moro Gulf. (See Map 11.)

Although there were over two dozen airstrips controlled by the enemy on Mindanao, the Americans had obtained complete air supremacy, and no opposition confronted the pilots from the air as they bombed and strafed ground installations.

When, early in the morning of 17 April 1945, Rear Admiral Albert G. Noble's Task Group 78.2 began bombarding the beaches of Parang, the landing phase of the VICTOR V Operation was underway. These beaches, lying about 17 miles south of Malabang on the Moro Gulf, had been selected for the main assault area for the last operation in the Philippines; the original plan to land at Malabang was changed at the last minute. As General Eichelberger explains it:

> Originally we had expected to make our first landing at Malabang. But now we received word from Colonel Fertig [American leader of guerilla forces on Mindanao] that the guerillas had seized both Malabang town and the airfield there. While we were at sea we completely revised our assault plans. The landing force to be sent to Malabang was reduced to one battalion, and we decided to make our main effort at Parang, seventeen miles down the coast. This would

[55] Operations Instructions Number 94, Headquarters, Allied Air Forces, Southwest Pacific, dated 11Mar45.

[56] *OpMonMindanao*, VICTOR V, 48.

[57] *Ibid.*, 35.

[58] Guerilla forces had held the airstrip for several weeks prior to this time, but were under constant threat from the Japanese, whose lines were, in some cases, only 400 yards from the field.

eliminate the reshipping of supplies from Malabang to Parang and hasten our drive inland.[59]

Corsairs, Dauntlesses and Mitchells from Zamboanga had a busy day over the new beachhead. Eighteen SBD's of VMSB–341 and 17 SBD's of VMSB–142 were on "air alert" over the Parang and Malabang landing areas. An Army support air party made full use of both flights by having each of the 35 planes drop a 500-lb. bomb on targets that included enemy supply areas, troop concentrations and installations. Twenty Corsairs (VMF–211) in two-plane flights flew combat air patrol over the beaches, while 10 additional F4U's (VMF–218) covered the cruiser force supporting the landing.

As their patrol missions would terminate, the planes involved were given bombing or strafing targets or reconnaissance missions by the support air party. An important road junction just west of Kabakan (50 miles inland from the landing area) came under observation of the patrolling Marine airmen all day. The Japanese attempted to use the inland roads to resupply and reinforce their west coast positions, but F4U's and SBD's kept the highways clear by strafing any enemy vehicles that tried to move westward along them. One Corsair flight over Kabakan bombed a large building, which exploded and started a tremendous fire. Other hits by the same flight destroyed a river ferry west of the town and neutralized a machine gun position.

Two PBJ's of VMB–611 kept up the steady pounding of Del Monte airfields in north central Mindanao, dropping three tons of bombs on gun positions and scoring three direct hits. Four other VMB–611's PBJ's flew anti-submarine patrol in the Cotabato area, with no contact reported.[60]

Meanwhile, back on the Parang beachhead, the first Marine ground unit ashore was Air Warning Squadron 3 (AWS–3), which disembarked at noon on R-Day; their immediate mission was to establish a protective alert against enemy planes. For this purpose they set up an SCR–602 radar unit on the beach and established radio communication with the control ship standing off shore.[61]

In late afternoon the rest of the Marine units came ashore. Like AWS–3, the personnel of VMSB–244 landed at Parang with the main body of the X Corps invasion forces. But all the rest of the aviation Marines, including headquarters personnel and the remainder of the MAG–24 squadrons, made a separate landing with one Army infantry battalion and some engineer units, three miles north of Malabang Field. Neither the Parang nor Malabang landing parties encountered enemy opposition. In a dismal downpour of rain, and with darkness coming on, all hands turned to unloading supplies and equipment from the LST's.[62]

By 1000 on R-plus 1, AWS–3 had already completed a movement from the south of almost 20 miles to the guerilla-held Malabang Airstrip (on the coast two miles north of Malabang town) and had put its second SCR–

[59] Gen Robert L. Eichelberger, USA, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo*, 219. Confirming the word received from Col Fertig that guerillas held Malabang Field and Malabang town, LtCol K. B. McCutcheon (MAG–24) had personally reconnoitered there four days before the landing. He was flown down from Mindoro to Zamboanga, where he borrowed a Dauntless from MAGSZAM and flew to Malabang on the 13th. He remained overnight in a plantation house there in which guerilla leaders were quartered, and gathered all information possible from them. Next day he made a second trip there and stayed again at Malabang from 14 to 16 April, then flew back to Zamboanga with Maj Blow, an Australian officer leading guerillas in the Malabang sector. Both men travelled by small boat and joined the invasion convoy on the afternoon of the 16th. Information these two men furnished to the X Corps commander, firmed the decision to land at Parang rather than Malabang.

[60] War Diaries, MAG–12 and MAG–32, entries for 17Apr45.

[61] War Diary, AWS–3, 17Apr45. In connection with unloading equipment, the war diary for this period emphasizes very strongly the desirability of LST's in preference to Liberty Ships and other types of vessels for loading and unloading radar vans and equipment. Their experience with ". . . loading on a Liberty ship was generally unsatisfactory, as far too many crates of the bulk cargo were broken through rough handling, and a number of crates of vehicles suffered minor damage from the cables used to lift them to the deck and into the holds . . . moves by LST proved much easier and safer . . ."

[62] War Diaries, MAG–24; Hqs Sqdn, MAG–24; VMSB–244, MAG–24; entries for 17Apr45.

FILIPINO GUERILLAS captured Malabang airstrip and town prior to Allied landings. Marine PBJ's in the background have just landed after bombing enemy positions only 1,000 yards from the strip, which later became Titcomb Field, for MAG-24.

602 radar unit into operation. The crew of the second unit, in addition to its air warning assignment, acted as temporary field operations, guiding and instructing planes in distress and giving supply-laden transport aircraft information about landing conditions and facilities available at the air strip.

Movement to the strip from the north, where the majority of MAG–24's personnel had landed, was slow and difficult. Transportation of men and equipment was badly bogged down. The enemy in retreating had destroyed the bridges across three steep-banked streams, and the only available road was in an extremely bad condition because of the deep and sticky mud so typical of the islands. The Marines were messed and quartered on board the LST's until the unloading was completed. Supplies and equipment were piled high on the beach in an orderly semicircle, awaiting the construction of bridges by Army engineers.

Within two days the engineers had done the job, and much of the Marine's equipment had been hauled along the ragged and overgrown plantation road, crossing the newly bridged streams to the airstrip.[63]

[63] Sqdn History, Marine Scout Bombing Squadron–241, MAG–24, entry for 19Apr45. Also Hqs Sqd War Diary, MAG–24, same date.

COLONEL LYLE H. MEYER, center, Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group-24, shown with Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, left, Commanding General, Eighth Army, and Major General Franklin C. Sibert, X Corps Commander.

The Marines re-named the airstrip "Titcomb Field," in honor of Captain John A. Titcomb, who had died of wounds received while a member of a support air party on Luzon.[64] (See Chapter III.) Guerillas were used to guard the field and any planes that landed there. By 20 April (R-plus 3) when MAG–24's planes began to arrive from Luzon, the pilots and crews found an engineering line already set up and a camp area beginning to take shape.[65] First of the dive bomber squadrons to arrive was VMSB–241; on the following day the flight echelon of VMSB–133 arriver, and on 22 April the last SBD squadron, VMSB–244, landed safely at Malabang.

By 21 April AWS–3, designated as the 77th Fighter Control Center, assumed fighter direction and local air warning responsibility from the control ship assigned to the landing. By that time two radar search sets, four VHF (very high frequency) radio channels, four MHF (medium high frequency) administrative and liaison channels, and two intra-sector plotting channels had been established. The air warning squadron maintained close liaison with the Army's 116th AAA Group, which had established its command post at the squadron's temporary fighter control center. Radio and radar sets were operating 24 hours a day, guarding all channels with no interruption except for necessary maintenance periods on individual units of equipment.[66]

AIR SUPPORT ON MINDANAO

On 22 April MAG–24 commenced air operations in support of the 24th and 31st Divisions, whose forces were pushing eastward across Mindanao. (See Map 11.) Strikes were concentrated in two principal areas: (1) Davao City and environs and the western margin of Davao Gulf south to Sarangani Bay. (2) The Central Valley, from Kibawe north along both sides of the Sayre Highway to Del Monte.[67]

Air support strikes on Mindanao differed from those on Luzon in several fundamental respects. Mindanao, especially in the area northwest of Davao where many of the support missions were flown, had a relatively open and rolling terrain. The numerous rivers offered good points of reference for locating targets, and white phosphorus shells to mark the targets could be placed accurately and spotted easily from the air. The Central Valley region offered similar terrain along the Sayre Highway, and numerous small clusters of buildings were destroyed in front of the ground forces advancing both from the south and the north.[68] Few strikes were as close to the front lines of American troops as they had been on Luzon, although there were occasional exceptions.

Requests for air strikes on Mindanao were routed through the X Corps air section, and coordination of missions accomplished through support air parties of either the 24th or 31st Divisions. MAG–24 sent its forward control

[64] *PubInfoHist–24*, 7.

[65] *Sqdn History, Marine Scout Bombing Squadron–241*, MAG–24, 83. Hereinafter cited as SqdHist–241.

[66] Unit History, AWS–3, and War Diary, AWS–3, Apr45.

[67] *SqdHist–241*, 83–84. From Del Monte airstrip the last American evacuees from the Philippines had taken off during the dark days of May, 1942.

[68] *SqdHist–241*, 86.


BOHOL
SEA
MINDANAO
155
LANDING
25 JUNE
108
LANDING
10 MAY
HWY
SAYRE
D A N A O
LAKE
LANAO
Malabang
Kibawe
XX
Parang
Cotabato
Kabakan
24
Davao
Ft
Pikit
Talamo
Digos
LANDING
12 JULY
21
SARANGANI BAY
ELEBES SEA


PANAY
CEBU
BOHOL
SEA
MINDANAO
Dipolog
MAY
M I N D A N A O
SAYRE HWY
(MAG 24)
LAKE LANAO
ZAMBOANGA
Malabang
Kibawe
Parang
Cotabato
Kabakan
Davao
Ft Pikit
24
Talomo
Digos
(MAGS 12 & 32)
Zamboanga
MORO GULF
BASILAN
SARANGANI BAY
CELEBES SEA
MAIN U.S. DRIVES IN THE
VICTOR V OPERATION
Principal Roads
Kibawe - Talomo Trail
0
50
100 Mi
MAP II
RD 7592

teams to each of the divisions, and these Marine ALP's worked with flights from both Moret and Titcomb airfields. Marine pilots flew daily roadsweeps, in addition to the strikes requested on special targets. They also maintained regularly scheduled "air alerts" for strikes on targets of opportunity at the request of SAP's and ALP's. Aircraft were directed to targets either by ground or air observers or both. Usually objectives were marked with smoke or white phosphorus shells; guerillas occasionally used panels to marks the front lines.[69]

There was a greatly increased use of air coordinators. A squadron air coordinator led 22 VMSB–241 strikes, as compared with six for the same squadron on Luzon;[70] other MAG–24 squadrons showed proportionate increases. Frequently, especially against enemy positions on reverse slopes calling for planes rather than artillery, the air coordinator was airborne in an artillery spotting plane. In order to direct the strike, he had to relay messages to the Marine planes via artillery nets and air nets.

The groups also used their own air liaison parties to a greater extent in Zamboanga and Mindanao than they had at Luzon. The knowledge and experience of the flying personnel used as ground controllers was of great value in keeping planes on the right targets and clear of friendly troops. Conversely, the things pilots learned about ground problems while they were doing ALP work was reflected later in their own air discipline and close support work.

Having been chased to cover by hostile machinegun fire while trying to direct planes impressed on them the problems encountered on the ground. Their association with ground communications gave them an understanding of difficulties when air-ground contact was impaired or delayed.

To make the turnabout complete, ground personnel went on SBD dive-bombing missions, getting firsthand the flight leader's point of view.[71]

Strikes were usually directed against small enemy troop concentrations away from population centers; relatively few populated places were occupied by the Japanese on Mindanao. Davao City offered one of the few good targets for big strikes, and even it had been largely destroyed by carrier aircraft before ground operations commenced.[72]

During the drive against Davao in April and early May, air support was of prime importance to the infantry; by this time the ground troops had become well indoctrinated and were extremely cooperative in the air strikes. However, during one phase of the operation, the infantrymen of the 24th Division did not wait to sample the kind of air support MAGSZAM had cooked up for them; they dashed so briskly across Mindanao that they found themselves at the outskirts of Davao far ahead of schedule.[73] Only then did heavy opposition develop.

Once more close support came into its own, both in the Talomo-Libby Airdrome sector near Davao, and to the northwest, along the Sayre Highway. (See Map 11.) The Kibawe-Talomo Trail (running towards Davao from the northwest) became a regular hunting ground for the low-flying PBJ's of VMB–611 (in this unexplored and precipitous area, Lieutenant Colonel George H. Sarles, the squadron's commander, was lost on 30 May); and MAG–32's SBD's, together with MAG–12's fighters and the dive bombers of MAG–24,

[69] *ComGen*, VICTOR V, 117–118.

[70] *SqdHist–241*.

[71] LtCol Keith B. McCutcheon, "Close Air Support on Luzon," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Sep45, 39.

[72] *SqdHist–241*, 85. This lack of urban targets is reflected in the total number of missions flown in Mindanao, which was greater than for a comparable period in Luzon, although the number of planes taking part in individual missions was considerably lower. Figures from VMSB–241's records (a fairly representative SBD squadron) indicate: 250 combat strikes, flights and missions, 70 more than on Luzon. These involved only 1,336 sorties as compared with 1,518 on Luzon. One hundred fewer tons of bombs were dropped in Mindanao than in Luzon, and only about half as many rounds of ammunition expended.

[73] *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo*, 223–224. General Eichleberger says: ". . . Only ten days after the original landing the 24th Division had fought its way a hundred and ten miles across the island to the southern sea. Not three or four months—as General MacArthur had predicted—but ten days . . . the longest sustained land advance of Americans in the Pacific . . . If the 24th had been cautious, it would not have beaten the rainy season to Davao."

CURTIS "HELLDIVERS," SB2C-4's armed with rockets and bombs replaced SBD's of VMSB-244.

now based at Titcomb Field, also pressed the attack.

An enemy strong point in a wooded area astride the Sayre Highway near Pinamalay Lake (central Mindanao) was repeatedly struck from the air. A former participating pilot says of this action:

> . . . This was the most heavily bombed area of any in the whole Philippine campaign. The Japs were dug in underneath trees and in foxholes so well that we had to blow up the whole area before the army could advance. Our Marine observers, who were with ground liaison party in this area, said the damage was terrible and almost indescribable. Flight after flight of planes bombed and strafed this small area for days. When we began it was a heavily wooded area and when we finished there wasn't . . . anything left but a few denuded trees. It was from these Marine observers that we pilots found out for about the first time how much damage we were doing to the Japanese troops.[74]

Other portions of enemy forces pulled back into the rugged hilly terrain east of the Sayre Highway, and into the swampy region of the Agusan River basin. Here L–5 aircraft were extensively used to coordinate strikes, and targets were marked by dropping smoke grenades.[75]

Though ammunition and sortie statistics do not necessarily mirror the effectiveness of a weapon, such figures do reflect the vigor of the effort. In 3,280 sorties in the northwest Davao sector, Marine planes dropped 1,450 tons of bombs and 183 tons of napalm. A flight reported in to the 24th Division support air party every hour on the hour from 0800 to 1600 daily. The "air alert" method was used to a great extent because of the distances involved between target area and plane base.[76]

Meanwhile, VMSB–244's participation in the Philippines campaign as an SBD squadron ended on 19 May when the squadron received 13 SB2C's (Curtiss "Helldivers"). During the rest of the month, squadron pilots received

[74] *MS. COMMENT*, 1stLt Thurston P. Gilchrist.

[75] Another much used marking device during this period was the colored parachute, used at the front line as a marking panel. Targets were identified by distances and bearings in reference to these panels.

[76] *Historical Report*, 24th Infantry Division, Mindanao—VICTOR V, Annex #4, G–4 Report, 5.

lectures on their new plane, flew familiarization flights, and acquainted themselves with the plane's gunnery and bombing characteristics.[77]

On 1 June Colonel Warren E. Sweetser, Jr., assumed command of MAG–24, relieving Colonel Lyle H. Meyer. During the rest of the month the group continued to fly support for Army ground troops of the 24th and 31st Divisions, X Corps, Eighth Army. On 9 June units of the outfit had an especially good day when they flew 90 sorties, dropped 50 tons of bombs, and launched 11 five-inch rockets.[78]

On 30 June, Major General Franklin C. Sibert, X Corps commander, advised General Eichelberger that all organized resistance on Mindanao had ceased. Remnants of the Japanese 13th Division had retreated into the mountain area between the Agusan River Valley and the Bukidnon Plateau. Now they were short of supplies and hemmed in from both sides by U. S. forces. Remaining elements of the enemy's 100th Division and naval forces in the Davao area had been squeezed into the mountains skirting the Kibawe-Talomo Trail along the stretch between Tuli to the southeast and Pinamola to the northwest. The enemy on Mindanao had broken into small groups of stragglers who kept alive by pilfering Filipino gardens.

CLOSING OPERATIONS OF THE PHILIPPINES CAMPAIGN

Although the Mindanao operation was officially closed on 30 June, there was some scattered fighting going on long after that date. Sarangani Bay, which had been considered in the early planning as the initial site for General MacArthur's return to the Philippines, still contained a relatively large number of Japanese, despite the continued harassment by guerilla units operating in the area. The mission of clearing the Japanese forces from this sector fell to the 24th Division, which began preparations for a Sarangani landing in early July. On 12 July, when that landing took place, Marine flyers in the Philippines carried out what proved to be their last major support mission of the war. (See Map 11.)

With a few exceptions, by mid-July the Marines had just about exhausted all profitable targets. There was one brief flareup of enemy activity in the Sulu Archipelago; a concentration of several hundred Japanese troops west of Mt. Tumatangas on Jolo Island was located and thoroughly bombed and strafed. There were also occasional strikes against the broken enemy forces who had escaped when Davao was taken; they had been pushed up the Kibawe Trail and beyond to Upian, where they offered little further threat to American forces.

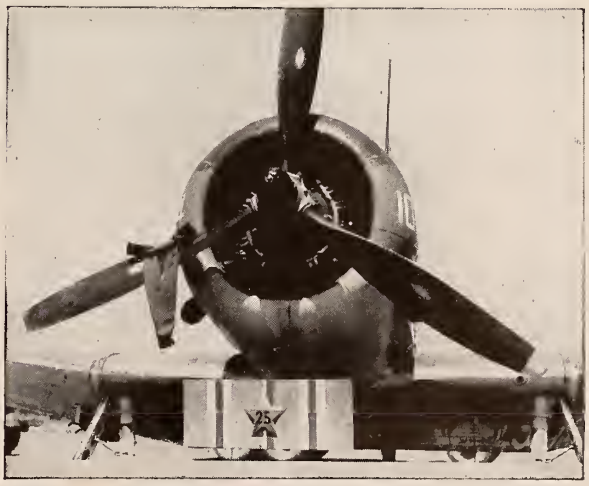
The 16th of July saw Marine Aircraft Group 24 bidding farewell to the SBD, Dauntless, the well-loved plane that had been the group's mainstay throughout its Pacific combat. Wing orders received that day directed the decommissioning of Marine Scout Bombing Squadrons 133 and 241.[79] Left as the only tactical unit in the group was VMSB–244, flying SB2C's.

The pilots who had flown the Dauntless knew its weaknesses, but they respected it for the job it had done, obsolescent though it

[77] War Diary, MAG–24, May45.

[78] *Ibid.* Rockets were launched from the new SB2C's of VMSB–244, which had been in combat action for only a very short time.

[79] 1st MAW General Order No. 18–45.



SBD RETIREMENT CEREMONY—With 25 stars on its "Asiatic-Pacific" ribbon, commemorating 25 Pacific battles since Midway, this and other Marine SBD's were retired from combat duty for obsolescence in August 1945.

CAPTURED ENEMY OFFICER ORIENTS MARINE AIR ATTACK, pointing out landmarks to Marine Mitchell bombers and Corsairs prior to attack on command post of his former outfit, the 100th Division, IJA.

was.[80] Since the morning of 7 December 1941, when a Marine in the rear cockpit of a parked SBD shot down one of a flight of Japanese planes attacking Ewa Field near Pearl Harbor,[81] the Douglas Dauntless had become almost synonymous with Marine Aviation. While other aircraft were discarded or remodeled to improve their efficiency, the SBD had continued to perform with few changes in its basic design.

And so, just before the planes were flown away to be scrapped, Colonel Warren E. Sweetser, commanding officer of MAG-24, paid final tribute to the SBD in a formal ceremony at Titcomb Field. Following the ceremony, the group's 24 remaining Dauntlesses took off on their last formal flight. Several

[80] At this time the SBD had actually been out of production for nearly a year.

[81] "Report of Action on 7Dec41," Ltr from CO, MAG–21 to CinCPac Fleet, Serial KV4/P6/PWC (1219) dtd 30Dec41.

days later they were ferried to Cebu for final disposition by the Navy.[82]

On 1 August, the four SBD squadrons of MAG–32 ended tactical operations, preparatory to being returned to the United States on the 15th of the month. Changes now began to come thick and fast. On 4 August, Headquarters of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and MAG–61 (including Marine Bombing Squadrons 413, 423, 433 and 443) were directed to move to Zamboanga from Bougainville, by a dispatch from Commander, Far East Air Forces.[83]

The assignment of the 1st MAW to the Philippines in August 1945 was in a way ironical; neither General Mitchell, who had strived valiantly and long to obtain Philippine duty for the wing with only partial success, nor his deputy, Colonel Jerome, was present to see the realization of their mutual hope. General Mitchell had been relieved of his command, both of the wing and AirNorSols, on 3 June, and returned to the United States after 26 months of service in the Pacific.[84] Colonel Jerome, the man who had directed Marine close air support activities on Luzon and Mindanao, was detached from his duties as Commander, Marine Air Groups, Zamboanga, and as commanding officer of MAG–32, just one month later.[85]

On 15 August Major General Claude A. Larkin, who had assumed command of the 1st Wing early in the month, informed wing personnel that a cessation of hostilities with Japan had been announced by President Truman. On the same day the general and members of his staff proceeded with the flight echelon of the wing to Zamboanga, arriving there on 17 August.[86]

Mitchell's dream of getting the entire 1st Wing into the Philippines had been partially realized, but the war with Japan was over. And the arrival of the wing at Zamboanga was anticlimactic in yet another way since it represented only an intermediate staging base for a further forward movement of the wing, this time to North China, where it would cooperate with ground elements in disarmament of the Japanese.[87]

Within a week after the arrival of the wing's forward echelon at Zamboanga, every MAGSZAM Dauntless had made its last flight to Mactan Island, just off the east coast of central Cebu (the last resting place of the SBD's). On 27 August the forward echelon of VMB–611 left for Peleliu to join the 4th Wing, though the squadron was still a part of MAG–32.

Finally, the dissolution of the command of MAGSZAMBOANGA was directed on 30 August, with operational control of Moret Field and air defense of Mindanao transferred to the Army's 13th Fighter Command, effective 1 September.

The work of Marine Aviation in the Philippines had been completed. Many units had already been decommissioned; others were in the process. Soon there would be only a few scattered Marine squadrons in the Philippines. The 1st MAW would move to Okinawa, and after only a short stopover there, on to China.

The work of the aviation Marines had been deeply appreciated by the ground units that had come to know it best; some of them, of course, had not had any experience with close support before. The 41st Infantry Division was one of these, and in one of its reports said:

> Looking at this campaign in retrospect, several problems presented themselves which have not been previously encountered by this command.

[82] War Diary, MAG–24, Jul45.

[83] War Diary, Hqs, 1st MAW, Aug45.

[84] General Mitchell left Bougainville on 5 June, being relieved by MajGen Louis E. Woods, the first commander of the now veteran wing. Gen Woods was relieved the next day by Col Harold Major, who was in turn relieved by BrigGen Lewie G. Merritt, who arrived 10Jun to assume command.

[85] Col Jerome was relieved on 4Jul45 by Col Stanley E. Ridderhof, formerly Chief of Staff of the 1st MAW on Bougainville. Col Jerome returned to the U. S. immediately.

[86] On the same date (17 Aug), Col V. J. McCaul, USMC, was assigned duty as Commander, MAGSZAM, upon detachment of Col S. E. Ridderhof, USMC, whom he replaced.

[87] History of the First Marine Aircraft Wing, 12.

I. First in importance was the use of close air support. This campaign was characterized by *adequate* close air support, delivered by air units who were cognizant of the problems involved and anxious to do a good job . . . A total of 142 close support missions were flown during the first 30 days. Marine air strikes were within 300 yards of our front lines using 500 lb. bombs; yet not one casualty resulted. Several reasons can be cited for this record:

a. Education of the infantry units on selection of targets for close air support.
b. Proper identification of target by attacking aircraft.
c. Marking of friendly front lines, using panels, smoke, etc.
4. Continuous control of aircraft by Air Liaison Party *at front line positions.*

It has been found that prior to each operation a refresher school on air support, given to Battalion and Regimental Commanders, will do much to insure intelligent use of the air arm.[88]

[88] *G–3 Report on the VICTOR FOUR Operation,* Hq 41st Inf Div., Section V, 1.

Before the Marines left the Philippines, several Army ground units with whom they had worked expressed appreciation. Major General Jens A. Doe, commanding the 41st (Sunset) Division, during a combined air and ground ceremony, formally presented to Colonel Jerome and his men a plaque which commemorated the close cooperation between the Army and the Marines. On the plaque, six feet high and four feet wide, and trimmed with Japanese naval signal flags, was mounted an enemy light machine gun and a silk Japanese battle flag. Inscribed on the plaque was the legend: "IN APPRECIATION – 41ST INFANTRY DIVISION." At the bottom their combined campaigns were listed: Jolo, Sanga Sanga, Basilan, and Mindanao.

During the ceremony, General Doe's message was read:

41st INFANTRY DIVISION HONORS MAGSZAM in ceremony at Moret Field, with presentation of a plaque commemorating operations at Zamboanga, Jolo, Basilan, and Sanga Sanga, when Marines furnished air support for the infantry.

It is the desire of the commanding general, 41st Division, to present this plaque to the officers and men of Marine Air Groups, Zamboanga, in appreciation of their outstanding performance in support of operations on Mindanao, Philippine Islands. The readiness of the Marine Air Groups to engage in any mission requested of them, their skill and courage as airmen, and their splendid spirit of cooperation in aiding ground troops has given the division the most effective air support yet received in any of its operations.

The effectiveness and accuracy of the support given by these groups proved a great factor in reducing casualties within the division. The work and cooperation of these groups has given the officers and men of the 41st Infantry the highest regard and respect for their courage and ability.[89]

Another tribute of which the Marines were understandably proud was paid to them by Major General Rosco B. Woodruff, commander of the 24th Division, which fought at Davao:

I take this opportunity to commend you [Colonel Jerome] and the men of your organization on the exceptionally fine air support given the 24th Division during the Mindanao operation. Every mission has been cheerfully and skillfully flown. In addition to this you have on your own initiative and the initiative of your pilots originated and carried out many missions in support of the Division which greatly aided in bringing this operation to a successful conclusion.

There have been 1964 sorties flown by the men in your organization in support of this Division. All of these involved flying over enemy territory in the face of enemy anti-aircraft fire, and were flown with determination and courage in spite of losses from enemy fire. Many missions were flown at great risk because of unfavorable weather conditions. The precision of individual attacks on pin pointed targets were greatly admired by front line troops, as was the courage with which they were pressed home at close range. It is believed that no other division in the Pacific area has had such complete and cooperative air coverage.

The skill of the men in your organization is attested by the confidence which every front line soldier has in your coordinators and pilots. Such confidence and cooperation as has been shown in this operation between two branches of the armed forces can only lead to a rapid and successful conclusion of the war.

Speaking for the entire Division I want you to know that we greatly appreciate your fine cooperation and the outstandingly superior air support given us, and hope that you and your men will continue to aid us in the completion of minor operations still scheduled in the Mindanao area. We also hope your organization will be paving the way for our advances in any future operations in which the Division may participate.[90]

General Robert L. Eichelberger, who commanded the Eighth Army throughout the campaign in the Philippines, paid the Marines a final tribute in his book, *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo,* written after the war:

There were four groups of Marine fliers who, in the interest of the integration of the services, were attached to the Thirteenth Air Force. During the central and southern Philippines campaign I had personal contact with the 12th, 14th, and 32nd Groups, and that was enough to convince me. These fliers had been trained by the Marine Corps with ground troops for the *specific purpose* of supporting ground troops. Their accomplishments were superb in the Zamboanga and Mindanao campaigns. The Marine liaison officers were always in front lines with the infantry commanders, and they were as familiar with the forward positions as was the infantry. By radio they guided in the planes, and often the target of the strike was no more than three hundred yards ahead of the huddled doughboys.

Colonel Clayton C. Jerome commanded these airmen, and their accurate bombing and strafing earned them the gratitude and friendship of the 24th, 31st, and 41st Infantry Divisions. Nothing comforts a soldier, ankle-deep in mud, faced by a roadblock or fortified strong-holds, as much as the sight of bombs wreaking havoc on stubborn enemy positions. It puts heart into him. . . .[91]

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[89] Ltr to MAGSZAM from Gen Doe, dtd 31Mar45.

[90] *PubInfoHist–32,* 48–49.

[91] *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo,* 250.

APPENDIX I

Bibliography

A variety of sources have been consulted in the preparation of the Philippines monograph. Official documents have been used whenever possible, with heaviest reliance placed on the reports and war diaries of lower echelons. Squadron war diaries have been particularly valuable. These most basic of basic sources have been augmented by published works (both official and unofficial), manuscripts and unpublished monographs, letters, and personal interviews. Unless otherwise noted, the documents listed below are on file in the records of the Historical Division, Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps.

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d. Interviews

In addition to sources already cited, many officers in key positions during the Philippines operation were personally interviewed. Many of these interviews have been cited in this monograph at appropriate points. Copies of interviews are filed with manuscript comments at the Marine Corps Historical Division.

APPENDIX II

Chronology[1]

1944

15 June	Invasion of Marianas commences.
	First B–29 strikes from China bases against mainland of Japan.
	Gen MacArthur reassumes complete control of Solomons west of Guadalcanal; Adm Halsey returns to sea with fleet command upon being relieved as ComSoPac by VAdm J. H. Newton. FEAF is formed under LtGen G. C. Kenney. AirNorsols is formed under MajGen R. J. Mitchell.
19–20 June	Battle of the Philippine Sea. Japanese Navy decisively defeated.
30 July	Westward drive reaches end of New Guinea at Sansapor point.
31 July	Normandy breakout.
10 August	Marianas seizure completed with conclusion of Tinian operation.
15 August	Allies land in southern France.
15 September	Invasion of Palaus and occupation of Morotai commences.
23 September	Ulithi occupied as advance naval base.
17 October	*Landings on Dinagat and Suluan Islands in Leyte Gulf.*
18 October	*Landing on Homonhon Island, Leyte Gulf.*
20 October	*Main invasion of Leyte begins.*
23–26 October	*Battle for Leyte Gulf.*
27 October	*AAF takes over air support mission for Leyte from Navy carriers. First P–38's land at Tacloban Field.*
3 December	*VMF(N)–541 (Marine night fighter squadron) and MAG–12 (VMF's 115, 211, 218 and 313) arrive at Tacloban.*
7 December	*Major Marine air attack on Japanese convoy bringing reinforcements to Ormoc.*
11 December	*Major Marine air attack on Japanese convoy, Ormoc Bay.*
15 December	*Landings on Mindoro.*
25 December	*Leyte declared secured; Eighth Army relieves Sixth Army.*

1945

2–12 January	*MAG–14 (VMO–251, VMF's 212, 222, and 223) lands at*

[1] Entries relating specifically to the Philippines campaign are shown in *italics.*

	Guiuan, Samar.
9 January	*Landing on Luzon at Lingayen Gulf.*
25 January	*First Marine dive bombers arrive on Luzon.*
27 January	*Mission No. 1 flown by Marine dive bombers in the Philippines.*
1–4 February	*1st Cavalry Division makes drive to Manila; Marine dive bombers protect left flank.*
16 February	*Assault on Corregidor.*
19 February	Marines assault Iwo Jima (secure 26 March).
24 February	*Manila falls.*
28 February	*Invasion of Palawan, VICTOR III.*
10 March	*Landing at Zamboanga, VICTOR IV. Ground echelons MAG's 12 and 32 participate.*
15 March	*MAG 12 Corsairs begin to arrive at Zamboanga; Close Air Support of 41st Division initiated.*
18 March	*Invasion of Panay, VICTOR I.*
23 March	*MAG–32 dive bombers move from Luzon to Zamboanga.*
26 March	*Invasion of Cebu, VICTOR II.*
1 April	Okinawa campaign opens with unopposed landings (secure 22 June).
2 April	*Landing on Sanga Sanga, Sulu Archipelago.*
9 April	*Landing on Jolo.*
17 April	*Landings on Mindanao, VICTOR V. Ground echelons MAG–24 participate.*
20 April	*MAG–24 dive bombers on Luzon move to Malabang.*
22 April	*MAG–24 commences air operations from Malabang.*
1 May	Australians invade Tarakan Island, Netherlands Indies (secure 19 May).
7 May	German surrender.
3 June	*General Mitchell relieved of 1st MAW and AirNorSols commands.*
7 June	*MAG–14 commences air movement from Samar to Okinawa.*
12 July	*Marines support landings at Sarangani Bay.*

APPENDIX III

Casualties[1]

UNIT	Killed in action		Wounded		Died other Causes[2]		Total	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
MAG-12:								
HqSqd-12	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
SerSqd-12	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	4
VMF-115	1	0	4	0	3	0	8	0
VMF-211	6	0	2	0	3	0	11	0
VMF-218	4	1	2	6	2	1	8	8
VMF-313	6	0	1	0	2	0	9	0
MAG-14:								
HqSqd-14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SerSqd-14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VMF-212	1	0	2	0	3	3	6	3
VMF-222	2	0	0	0	1	11	3	11
VMF-223	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
VMF-251	4	0	1	0	0	0	5	0
MAG-24:								
HqSqd-24	1	1	8	8	0	1	9	10
SerSqd-24	0	3	4	26	0	1	4	30
VMSB-133	4	5	2	1	0	0	6	6
VMSB-236	3	5	3	2	3	2	9	9
VMSB-241	3	3	0	6	3	1	6	10
VMSB-341	1	1	2	3	0	2	3	6
AWS-3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
MAG-32:								
HqSqd-32	1	0	2	0	0	0	3	0
SerSqd-32	0	1	2	1	0	2	2	4
VMSB-142	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	5
VMSB-243	2	2	2	0	0	0	4	2
VMSB-244	2	0	0	1	0	3	2	4
VMB-611	8	16	8	16	0	0	16	32
AWS-4	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
VMF(N)-541	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VMF-124	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
VMF-213	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
GRAND TOTAL	58	42	46	81	22	28	126	151

[1] Casualty figures furnished by Marine Records Section, HQMC, in a Special Aviation Report on 19Nov47.

[2] This category includes: operational aircraft accidents, automobile, disease, accident and missing.

APPENDIX IV

Command and Staff Marine Aviation Units[1]

1st Marine Aircraft Wing[2]

Commanding General	MajGen Ralph J. Mitchell
	MajGen Louis E. Woods (5 June—1 day)
	Col Harold C. Major (from 6 June 1945)
	BrigGen Lewie G. Merritt (from 10 June 1945)
	MajGen Claude A. Larkin (from 11 August 1945)
Ass't Wing Commander	BrigGen Claude A. Larkin
Chief of Staff	Col Stanley E. Ridderhof
W–1	LtCol Carl L. Jolly
W–2	Capt William H. Powell
W–3	Col Frank H. Schwable
W–4	LtCol Otto E. Bartoe

Marine Aircraft Group 12[3]

Commanding Officer	Col William A. Willis
	Col Verne J. McCaul (from 27 Feb 1945)
Executive Officer	LtCol John L. Winston
S–1	Maj James C. Lewis
S–2	Capt John H. Pratt
S–3	LtCol Frederick F. Leek
S–4	Maj Samuel S. Logan

Marine Fighting Squadron 115, MAG–12[3]

Commanding Officer	Maj John H. King, Jr.
	Maj John S. Payne (from 30 May 1945)
Executive Officer	Maj Jacob A. O. Stub
S–3	Capt Rolfe F. Blanchard

Marine Fighting Squadron 211, MAG–12[3]

Commanding Officer	Maj Stan. J. Witomski
	Maj Philip B. May (from 31 January 1945)
	Maj Angus F. Davis (from 21 March 1945)
Executive Officer	Capt Roger A. Haberman
S–3	Capt Louis W. Rancourt

Marine Fighting Squadron 218, MAG–12[3]

Commanding Officer	Maj R. T. Kingsbury, III
	Maj John M. Massey (from 22 January 1945)
Executive Officer	Capt Gordon E. Barto
S–3	Capt Oscar M. Bate, Jr.

Marine Fighting Squadron 313, MAG–12[3]

Commanding Officer	Maj Joe H. McGlothlin, Jr.
Executive Officer	Maj Theodore Olsen
S–3	Capt Jay E. McDonald

Marine Night Fighting Squadron 541, MAG–11, 2d MAW[3]

Commanding Officer	LtCol Peter D. Lambrecht
Executive Officer	Maj Norman L. Mitchell
S–3	Capt Harlin Morrison, Jr.

[1] Changes in *commanding officers* only are shown. Officers listed in other staff positions are those who *originally* arrived with the unit in the Philippines. Original entry date of each unit in the Philippines is indicated by footnote as unit is listed.

[2] Command and staff as of 20Oct44.

[3] Flight echelon arrived Leyte 3Dec44.

Marine Aircraft Group 14[4]

Commanding Officer .....Col Zebulon C. Hopkins
Col Ed. A. Montgomery
(from 18 May 1945)
Executive Officer .....LtCol Carl W. Nelson
S–1 .....Capt Thomas E. Cowell, Jr.
S–2 .....Capt Charles C. Lee
S–3 .....LtCol Curtis E. Smith
S–4 .....Maj Donald S. Bush

Marine Fighting Squadron 212, MAG–14[4]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Quinton R. Johns
Maj John P. McMahon
(from 28 April 1945)
Executive Officer .....Capt John C. Roach
S–3 .....Capt Joseph T. Allard

Marine Fighting Squadron 222, MAG–14[4]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Roy T. Spurlock
Maj Harold A. Harwood
(from 28 April 1945)
Executive Officer .....Maj Gerald Geiger
S–3 .....Capt Clinton L. Goudreau

Marine Fighting Squadron 223, MAG–14[4]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Robert F. Flaherty
Maj Robert W. Teller
(from 25 March 1945)
Maj Howard E. King
(from 17 April 1945)
Executive Officer .....Maj Robert W. Teller
S–3 .....Capt Warren J. Turner

Marine Fighting Squadron 251, MAG–14[4]

Commanding Officer .....Maj William C. Humberd
Maj William L. Bacheler
(from 10 Feb. 1945)
Maj Thomas W. Furlow
(from 15 April 1945)
Executive Officer .....Maj William L. Bacheler
S–3 .....Capt Harold C. Wallace

Marine Aircraft Group 24[5]

Commanding Officer .....Col Lyle H. Meyer
Col W. E. Sweetser, Jr.
(from 1 June 1945)
Col Ed. A. Montgomery
(from 10 August 1945)
Executive Officer .....LtCol John H. Earle, Jr.
S–1 .....2dLt Edward J. Gebhardt
S–2 .....Capt William H. Cohron
S–3 .....LtCol K. B. McCutcheon

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 133, MAG–24[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Lee A. Christoffersen
Maj Floyd Cummings
(from 9 March 1945)
Executive Officer .....Maj Floyd Cummings
S–3 .....Capt Ernest Zalay

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 241, MAG–24[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj B. B. Manchester, III
Maj Jack L. Brushert
(from 20 Feb. 1945)
Executive Officer .....Maj Jack L. Brushert
S–3 .....Capt Horace C. Baum, Jr.

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 236, MAG–24[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Fred J. Frazer
Executive Officer .....Capt Glen H. Schluckebier
S–3 .....Capt Lorenz H. Goehe

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 341, MAG–24[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj C. F. Irwin, Jr.
Maj Robert J. Bear
(from 4 May 1945)
Executive Officer .....Maj Robert J. Bear
S–3 .....Capt John W. Canaan

Air Warning Squadron 3, MAG–24[6]

Commanding Officer .....Capt Harold W. Swope
Capt Freeman R. Cass
(from 2 July 1945)
Executive Officer .....Capt Ernest C. Dowell

Marine Aircraft Group 32[5]

Commanding Officer .....Col Clayton C. Jerome
Col Stanley E. Ridderhof
(from 4 July 1945)
Executive Officer .....LtCol John L. Smith
S–1 .....Capt Richard J. Lyttle
S–2 .....Capt James I. Best
S–3 .....LtCol Wallace T. Scott

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 142, MAG–32[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Hoyle R. Barr
Maj James L. Fritsche
(from 9 June 1945)
Executive Officer .....Capt Carl F. Eakin, Jr.
S–3 .....Capt Austin Wiggins, Jr.

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 243, MAG–32[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Joseph W. Kean, Jr.
Executive Officer .....Maj James L. Fritsche
S–3 .....Capt Elton D. Boone, Jr.

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 244, MAG–32[5]

Commanding Officer .....Maj Vance H. Hudgins
Executive Officer .....Maj John L. Dexter
S–3 .....Capt John L. Blumenstein

Marine Bombing Squadron 611, MAG–32[7]

Commanding Officer .....LtCol George A. Sarles
(KIA 30 May 1945)
Maj Robert R. Davis
(from 31 May 1945)
Maj David Horne
(from 20 June 1945)

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[4] Arrived Samar 2–12Jan45.

[5] Arrived Lingayen Gulf 9–27Jan45.

[6] Landed Malabang, Mindanao, 17Apr45.

[7] Flight echelon arrived Zamboanga, Mindanao, 30Mar45.

Executive Officer .....Maj Robert R. Davis
S–3 .....Maj Prescott D. Fagan

Air Warning Squadron 4, MAG–32[8]

Commanding Officer .....Capt Charles T. Porter
Executive Officer .....Capt John M. von Almen

CARRIER BASED MARINE SQUADRONS PARTICIPATING IN STRIKES AGAINST THE PHILIPPINES—USS ESSEX

Marine Fighting Squadron 124[9]

Commanding Officer .....LtCol Wm. A. Millington
Executive Officer .....Maj William E. Crowe
S–3 .....Capt Alfred H. Agan

Marine Fighting Squadron 213

Commanding Officer
(forward echelon) .....Maj David E. Marshall
Executive Officer Maj David E. Marshall
S–3 .....Maj Mitchell L. Parks

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[8]Landed Zamboanga, Mindanao, 10Mar45.

[9] Carrier-based strikes on Luzon targets 6–7Jan45.

APPENDIX V

Marine Ground Troops in Leyte Action

The same chain of events that deprived the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing on Bougainville of its Sarangani Bay assignment brought into the Leyte operation the only Marine ground troops to take part in the campaign—elements of the V Amphibious Corps Artillery. This employment of these 1500-odd Marines, under the command of Brigadier General Thomas E. Bourke, resulted from circumstances and an administrative trade: the Army's XXIV Corps had detached the bulk of its artillery to the V Amphibious Corps (USMC) for the FORAGER operation in the Marianas; when it became evident that these units could not be released from Saipan action in time to join the parent organization for the then-scheduled STALEMATE II (Yap) operation, the decision was made by CinCPOA to assign elements of the V Amphibious Corps Artillery,[1] then based in the Hawaiian Islands, to the XXIV Corps for the Yap operation. When this operation was later cancelled in favor of Leyte,[2] the Marine artillerymen remained with such units of the XXIV Corps Artillery as had not been committed to FORAGER, and with Marine General Bourke in command, they landed as XXIV Corps' Artillery on A-plus 1 at Leyte.

During the landing phase of the operation, General Bourke, in his staff capacity as corps artillery officer, also served as the coordinator of naval gunfire, supporting aircraft, and artillery.[3]

Two Marine artillery battalions and a headquarters battery,[4] embarked in the USS *Monitor* and the USS *Catskill* (LSV's 5 and 6), arrived in the transport area off Leyte on the morning of A-Day. About 0830 the following morning, General Bourke, on board the USS *Mount Olympus*, ordered all units of corps artillery to send advance parties to meet him

[1] The CG, VAC Arty reported to CG, XXIV Corps on 3Jul44 at Schofield Barracks, Oahu, T. H. The original plan contemplated a corps artillery composed of Headquarters Battery, V Phib Corps Arty, three 155mm Gun Battalions (1 Army, 2 Marine), two 155mm Howitzer Battalions (1 Army, 1 Marine), and one Field Artillery Observation Battalion (Army). Subsequent shipping restrictions necessitated the deletion of one Gun Battalion (Marine). *MS. COMMENT*, Gen T. E. Bourke: "1 Duck Company was later added to this force."

[2] *MS. Comment*, BrigGen Bert A. Bone: "The change was not known to the CG Corps Artillery until the evening before sailing from Pearl Harbor. Several changes in loading of the staff were made to permit planning enroute."

[3] Appendix 2, Annex "C," CTF 79 Attack Plan No. A304–44, Annex Easy to XXIV Corps SOP.

[4] 5th 155mm (howitzer) Battalion, commanded by LtCol James E. Mills; 11th 155mm (gun) Battalion, commanded by LtCol Thomas S. Ivey; Headquarters Battery, commanded by Capt. George K. Acker.

on the Blue-One Beach later that day. This beach was just north of Dulag, near the little village of San Jose. (Not to be confused with another San Jose near Tacloban. See Map 5.)

Because of a heavy overload on the ships' communications systems, only the 5th (Marine) 155mm Artillery Battalion and the 287th (Army) Field Artillery Observation Battalion received this order in time to land their representatives before dark. The Commanding General and the advance parties made a reconnaissance, and initial positions were selected.

The Headquarters Battery (V Amphibious Corps Artillery), 11th 155mm Gun Battalion, FMF, and 226th Field Artillery Battalion (Army) advance parties landed after darkness on 21 October. Early on the morning of 22 October these advance parties selected additional positions and General Bourke requested the corps commander to order all corps artillery units landed.[5]

Unloading the 226th Battalion[6] proceeded smoothly once the LST's were beached, and this battalion occupied positions ready to fire prior to darkness on A-plus 2. The 198th Field Artillery Battalion (Army) attached to the 96th Division, had been unloaded on A-plus 1. Good beaches enabled the LST's to discharge their cargoes rapidly and with no particular difficulty. The 287th Field Artillery Observation Battalion (Army) also experienced no difficulties in unloading.

However, the unloading of the remaining elements of corps artillery (Headquarters Battery, 5th and 11th Battalions, USMC) was very unsatisfactory. The USS *Auriga* (AK), carrying the equipment of these units, was ordered by the Commander, Transport Division–28, to begin unloading on A–Day. This was ordered without reference either to the Commanding General, Corps Artillery, or the Commanding General, XXIV Corps, and over the protests of the Commanding Officer of Troops and the Captain of the ship. Communication difficulties prevented the Commanding Officer of Troops from contacting the Commanding General and requesting that no cargo be discharged at this time. As a consequence by the time the advance parties reached the beach on A-plus 1, approximately 50% of the vehicles and weapons, as well as some ammunition, had been landed from the *Auriga* with no personnel on shore to handle it or direct it off the beaches into position. Equipment was scattered over several beaches, and some heavy guns were landed in areas where no positions could be obtained inland.[7]

By A-plus 3, all Marine artillery units were ashore, emplaced, and rendering support for the XXIV Corps. Initial position areas were confined to the narrow strip of high ground that paralleled the beach about a quarter of a mile inland. The infantry advanced from the landing point (north of Dulag near the little village of San Jose. See Map 5) and moved north toward a rock mountain[8] well defended with Japanese troops driven out of Dulag by naval gunfire and air strikes. Dulag had been virtually flattened by the preliminary bombardment.[9]

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[5] *MS. COMMENT*, BrigGen Bert A. Bone: "Spotting planes were ordered to fly in from their carriers. All made it safely except one. This plane, flown by a Field Artillery officer, was late in getting off, became lost in a rainstorm and landed on the south end of Samar. He was carrying parts of the operation plan. He carefully buried these, hid his plane as best he could . . . and with the help of natives made his way back to his command . . . later . . . rescue party, accompanied by the pilot, found the plans, repaired the plane, and the pilot flew the plane back to Dulag Field on Leyte."

[6] This unit's LST's landed on Violet–Two, a beach (unlike the other Leyte beaches used for landing artillery) easily accessible to LST's.

[7] Corps Artillery Operations Report, KING TWO, 5.

[8] *MS. COMMENT*, BrigGen Bert A. Bone: "This was a hill about 100 meters high, about one mile south of the CATMON MASSIVE. This hill was not shown on available staff maps. It was picked up from aerial photos available and confirmed from coast & geodetic survey data obtained from 6th Army Headquarters in Hollandia."

[9] *MS. COMMENT*, BrigGen T. E. Bourke: "During the Battle of Leyte Gulf when the Japanese Central Force penetrated close to our transports, I was ordered by Gen Hodge, the XXIV Corps commander, to turn the two 155mm Gun Battalions toward Leyte Gulf and prepare for the defense of the beachhead in that direction, against elements of the Japanese Fleet then believed to be approaching. As these Battalions were originally trained in Coast Defense methods this was readily accomplished."

The 5th 155mm Howitzer Battalion displaced inland almost immediately after the infantry's advance, to a position midway between Burauen and Dulag.[10] (See Map 5.) Within the expanding corps beachhead the only terrain feature providing a suitable site for artillery observation was the Catmon Hill massif, a ridge some 500 yards long and 1,400 feet high at its peak. Unfortunately, this hill mass was not secured until the ground action in other areas had advanced some eight to ten miles inland. The peak of Catmon Hill was seized on 30 October, but by this time its utility as an artillery observation post had been nullified by the inland advance.

On 1 November, the Marine howitzer battalion followed the infantry advance to displace inland to the vicinity of Burauen-Dagami.[11] A few days later the gun battalion also moved forward to the same general area, along with the advance echelon of Headquarters Battery, under the command of the V Amphibious Corps Artillery chief of staff, Colonel Harold C. Roberts. A Fire Direction Center (FDC) was immediately set up along the road between Burauen and Dagami, permitting the massing of fire of all artillery with the Corps across the entire XXIV Corps front.[12]

In the final beachhead area, Dulag-Burauen-Dagami-Tanauan, no terrain was available that permitted observation of the enemy positions to the west. At the same time, the terrain held by the enemy west of the Burauen-Dagami road rose gradually to mountain peaks and afforded him excellent observation of U. S. positions. Ground observations continued to be very poor; such high ground as became available was of little value to the corps artillery.[13]

For this reason, air observation played an unusually important part in employing the corps artillery; the liaison planes proved to be the backbone of artillery observation. At the outset of the operation, corps artillery had available 12 L–4 (Cub) planes, 13 pilots, and 12 observers. Pilots and planes were furnished by the Army XXIV Corps; observers were Marines and Army personnel from the Air Section of the V Amphibious Corps Artillery Headquarters, and the air sections of the battalions.[14]

The air sections acted as a unit, operating directly under a corps artillery S–2 representative stationed at Dulag airfield (later at Buri airfield) who had the advice of the senior pilot to guide him in technical matters and flight capabilities. This representative assigned all special missions requested, ordered planes into the air for conduct of fire missions upon requests from the battalions, and interrogated pilots and observers upon completion of any mission in order to gather all possible information.

In general, the Headquarters planes were employed for all special assignments such as reconnaissance, search and photographic missions, leaving battalion planes (two assigned each artillery battalion) to conduct fire missions for their respective battalions. However, when operational difficulties prevented battalion planes from performing all fire missions, Headquarters planes were substituted as necessary.[15]

To complete the XXIV Corps mission of liberating southern Leyte, 7th Division was

[10] *MS. COMMENT*, Maj J. W. Hughes: "The reason for this was the shorter range of the howitzer compared to the guns."

[11] During the Leyte campaign, the average time required to displace an artillery battalion (pieces and initial ammunition loads) was about eight hours. Reasons for the excessive length of time required for displacement: shortage of transportation and prime movers (only half the normal allowances had been brought along for the operation because of limited shipping facilities), heavy monsoon rains, poor condition of the roads, and the heavy traffic on the few serviceable roads. Special Action Report, KING TWO, VAC Arty, 28Dec44. *MS. COMMENT*, Maj M. C. Gregory: "Guns in particular had to be dug out of the mud, in one instance taking over an hour merely to get the guns on bogies."

[12] Special Action Report, KING TWO, VAC Arty, 28Dec44.

[13] *Ibid.* Like Catmon Hill, a second observation point, Hill 120, was quickly left behind by the rapid advance.

[14] *MS. COMMENT*, Col Floyd Moore.

[15] *Ibid. MS. COMMENT*, BrigGen Bert A. Bone: "The light observation planes were invaluable. Had they not been available practically no observed fire missions would have been possible by the Corps Artillery. They also performed numerous other jobs including observation for Divisional Artillery."

given the task of seizing the Abuyog-Baybay road—the only one across the mountains in the corps zone of action, and therefore essential to the plan.[16] (See Map 5.) When the 7th had accomplished this seizure, they were ready to initiate a drive up the west coast of Leyte toward Japanese-held Ormoc, the principal port through which the enemy was landing reinforcements. With them on this mission went one battery of Marine artillery.

On 14 November, "B" Battery, 11th Gun Battalion, (Capt John E. King), was detached to the operational control of the 7th Infantry Division; the battery commenced displacement for the move to this area late the same night, proceeding overland to the southwest coast of the island. Over muddy, almost impassible roads, the Marine artillerymen moved to support the advance against Ormoc.[17] For this action they were commended by Major General Archibald V. Arnold, commander of the 7th Division.[18]

Back in the Burauen-Dagami area vehicular traffic was practically immobilized by heavy rains in November, causing a stalemate to develop along the entire corps front. Lines were readjusted to defensible terrain, and as a result, the artillery battalions found themselves in many cases quite close to the front lines. Local perimeter defense, not only of the gun and howitzer battalions, but of Headquarters Battery itself, was a prime consideration throughout the campaign. Weapons were sited with emphasis on air defense during the day and ground defense at night. All units were attacked at one time or another by enemy planes; the Marine battalions, which were for some time in the vicinity of the airfields, received numerous air attacks.[19]

In addition, infiltrating Japanese frequently attempted to neutralize the artillery with small-arms fire. To escape detection, these intruders fired simultaneously with the artillery pieces. In some instances it became necessary to load the pieces and have the cannoneers take cover before firing in order to continue night fires.[20]

Since much of the enemy front line activity occurred at night, the corps artillery was obliged to maintain intermittent harrassing and interdiction fires during the hours of darkness. Keeping gun positions fully manned at night, however, left insufficient personnel available for local security purposes, and several breakthroughs resulted.

On the night of 6–7 December, at dusk, enemy planes bombed Buri airfield, on which the corps artillery air section was located. (See Map 5.) Immediately following the bombing, an estimated 250 enemy paratroops dropped in the vicinity of the field.[21] The enemy concentrated his forces, joining an additional 100 to 200 ground troops that had infiltrated the area. On the early morning of 7 December this force attacked Buri field. At this time the corps artillery air section on the Buri strip consisted of about 30 officers and men, under the command of Captain Eugene S. Roane, Jr., assistant corps artillery S–2 and senior air observer. The section was armed with individual weapons and two machine guns, one of which had been salvaged from a wrecked plane. During the morning, enemy attacks gradually drove other friendly troops from their positions back to the position held by the artillery air section. The north side of Buri airstrip was seized by the Japanese; however, Roane and his beleaguered garrison of 30 mixed Army and Marine personnel, plus about 55 men from the 392d Service Squadron, U. S. Army Air Force, and approximately 120 offi-

[16] However, Gen Krueger delayed sending all of the 7th Division over the mountains, as he wished to prevent the Japanese reinforcements from debouching into the Leyte Valley.

[17] *MS. COMMENT*, LtCol W. V. Crockett, Jr.: "In many places the road was widened to permit passage of the guns. Many of the bridges would not take the weight and fords were constructed. All in all it was a most difficult displacement. The guns were initially set up as Coast Artillery pieces at Baybay pending the drive north."

[18] Memorandum to author from Maj S. H. Fletcher, dtd 2Mar51. Hereinafter cited as *Fletcher*. Much of the information contained in this section on the V Phib Arty (USMC) was furnished by Maj Fletcher.

[19] *Ibid.* The 5th Battalion shot down two enemy planes; the 11th, one. *MS. COMMENT*, Maj M. C. Gregory: "The 11th was also accused of shooting down a B–25 over Buri, from San Pablo #2 . . ."

[20] *MS. COMMENT*, LtCol W. V. Crockett, Jr.: "The heaviest firing schedules of the 11th Gun Battalion were conducted during the night hours."

cers and men of the 866th Antiaircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion, continued to hold the south side of the strip.[22]

Captain Roane, as senior officer present on Buri Airstrip at this time, immediately assumed command of all personnel and organized a strong perimeter defense built around one 40mm gun that was adjacent to his area, and four machine guns (two previously mentioned plus two obtained from the AA units present.)

Although subjected to intense enemy fire, this force conducted an active defense that apparently confused the enemy concerning U. S. strength; no determined attack was launched by the Japanese during the afternoon. During this period Captain Roane personally led a patrol several hundred yards outside the perimeter, killing four Japanese and capturing an antiaircraft machine gun that had been seized by the enemy. Late in the afternoon an infantry battalion arrived on the airstrip. The force under Captain Roane established contact with the battalion commander and cooperated with him in the defense of the field by holding the right flank of the position during the night and throughout the next day. One enemy attack was repulsed on this flank during the night.

On the afternoon of 8 December, the Army antiaircraft personnel were ordered off the field.[23] With this loss of the bulk of his force, Captain Roane, on the advice of the infantry commander, withdrew his personnel to the infantry perimeter shortly before darkness.[24]

During the period that Roane had successfully held his position, corps artillery liaison pilots and observers repeatedly took off from and landed on the field, while under fire, to evacuate wounded and to bring in supplies and ammunition, contributing greatly to the successful defense of the position.[25] After the withdrawal from the field, a coordinated counterattack was launched, supported by artillery and mortar fire. The entire area was successfully cleared of Japanese troops by the evening of 10 December.[26]

The following day (11 December) at 0800, the V Amphibious Corps Artillery was relieved of all missions in support of the XXIV Corps; the main body of the XXIV Corps Artillery had just arrived from Saipan. Headquarters Battery, 5th Battalion and 11th Battalion embarked on LST's and sailed for Guam on 13 December, on which date they were detached from operational control of XXIV Corps.[27]

Major General John R. Hodge, commanding the XXIV Corps, said upon their departure:

> . . . The splendid performance of the Headquarters and two (2) battalions of the V Phib Corps Artillery (USMC) loaned to this Corps by CINCPOA in the absence of all but two (2) battalions of XXIV Corps Artillery on Saipan left nothing to be desired . . .[28]

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[21] Only the Marines' part in the "Battle of the Airstrips" is discussed here, owing to space limitations. M. Hamlin Cannon's "Leyte: Return to the Philippines," (preliminary draft), a volume in the series *U. S. Army in World War II, The War in the Pacific,* gives a much more detailed account, in Chapter XVI, "The Battle of the Airstrips."

[22] *Fletcher.*

[23] Special Action Report, KING TWO, VAC Arty, 28Dec44. Document does not indicate who issued these orders. *MS. COMMENT*, BrigGen Bert A. Bone: "At the time these orders came in, the observation planes were able to fly off a small strip constructed near XXIV Corps Headquarters on the beach, so that holding the strip was not vital; also, an Infantry organization had started an attack to drive the enemy from the field and had been partially successful. I believe they did clear the field by the next night. I do not know who ordered the AAA personnel from the field but my recollection is it came from the Antiaircraft command of the 6th Army as the personnel were desired at other fields, more vital to the operation."

[24] Capt Roane was later awarded the Silver Star for his part in the above-described action.

[25] Special Action Report, KING TWO, VAC Arty, 28Dec44. During these operations all planes were hit by enemy small-arms fire, and one pilot and one mechanic were wounded. *MS. COMMENT*, Col F. R. Moore: ". . . as the enemy troops were dispersed and driven away from the airfield they attempted to filter back to their own lines by a route which passed through the corps artillery position areas. As a result perimeter defenses around the artillery positions were able to inflict additional casualties on these enemy elements and the toll of counted enemy dead passed the hundred mark by the time the Marines were withdrawn from the island."

[26] Opns Report, XXIV Corps in Leyte (P. I.) Campaign, 20Oct–25Dec44, 14.

[27] Special Action Report, KING TWO, VAC Arty, 28Dec44.

[28] Foreword to *Operations Report, Leyte, XXIV Corps, 20 Oct–25 Dec 1944.*

APPENDIX VI

Pilot Survival Reports

Training for survival when forced to land or parachute in unknown or unfriendly territory or over water is an important part of the indoctrination of any combat flyer. During the Philippines campaign, many a Marine pilot shot down or caused to make a forced landing because of mechanical difficulties, lived to fight again, largely as a result of this special training. Pilots who returned successfully after such experiences were required to submit survival reports in order that fellow flyers might profit from their experiences. Reports included discussions of mistakes as well as successes, so that the survival training program might be augmented or improved.

The following survival narratives are typical; they are recounted herewith to acquaint the reader with a few of the problems involved.

SURVIVAL NARRATIVE OF SECOND LIEUTENANT WALTER DONALD BEAN, USMCR

On the morning of 11 December 1944, I became airborne as part of a four plane division, VMF–218, from Tacloban Strip. A Japanese convoy had been sighted in the Visayan Sea north of the island of Cebu. With orders to attack this convoy, our Corsairs had each been loaded with a 1000 pound, instantaneously fused bomb in addition to the normal war load of 50 calibre ammunition.

The flight to target was uneventful, but a scheduled rendezvous with Army P47's, which were to furnish cover for the strike, failed to materialize by their non-appearance. Instead, there were seven Hamps (Japanese fighters) in the area to harass our attack.

I followed my division leader, Major Robert T. Kingsbury, III, in an immediate dive from 10,000 feet, the seven "red ball" craft in hot pursuit. Our aiming point was a large destroyer serving as a convoy escort, but my glide path to target was disrupted when a 40mm shell from the ship struck my plane. I felt a sharp stab of pain in my right leg, but as I pulled out of the dive I was too busy to realize much feeling. The engine had lost power and I was unable to keep up with my division leader while climbing to altitude.

While struggling upward, a single Hamp approached head-on, both of us firing simultaneously. My already limping plane was twice hit by the Jap's 20mm, one hit the cowl and ricocheted through the canopy, the other into the engine. As I pulled up my adversary passed beneath me, smoke streaming from his right wing root, but at that moment my engine quit completely and gasoline poured into the cockpit, drenching me.

From about 8,000 feet I began a rapid descent toward the water and, until I was below 4,000 feet, a Jap followed me, firing, but I was

apparently out of his range. At 2,000 feet I jettisoned the hood and prepared for a water landing given a short radio call to that effect. The engine was dead with the propeller merely windmilling, the gauge indicated no fuel pressure but raw gas continued to spray on me.

The F4U settled easily onto the Visayan Sea and remained afloat for approximately 40 to 50 seconds. By that time I had inflated my Mae West and was in the water. While thrashing around above and beneath the surface in a vain attempt to inflate the small life raft, the air in the Mae West dissipated. This necessitated oral repumping, a tiring process which had to be repeated numerous times because of slow leakage. Attempts to inflate the raft were abandoned, for one side of the parachute had been ripped to shreds by the shrapnel in the cockpit and I could only assume that this had also caused the failure of the raft.

Thereupon, I discarded the useless raft, the chute and my shoes. Within 45 minutes I allowed my belt, from which was suspended my gun and holster, first aid packet, jungle kit and knife, to drop into the sea. Still later I gave up the leaking Mae West and all my clothing, every article seemed to drag me down and exhaust me further.

Not being an exceptional swimmer, the situation became less hopeful. Luck smiled upon me, though, for after another 45 minutes of floating and paddling in the raw I spotted a large log bobbing temptingly. Distance and time were exaggerated twofold before I reached and clutched its welcome support.

During the late afternoon I saw a total of 16 Japanese planes flying in a southwesterly direction toward Negros Island. All seemed to be straggling back in twos or threes from some mission. None of them gave any indication of spotting me.

I apparently was only semi-conscious of my surroundings during most of the night. I saw nothing of interest but was occasionally aware of small fish in the vicinity of my wounded leg and I thrashed my legs around in the water from time to time to chase them away. The current seemed to be carrying me in a southwesterly direction toward Negros, but at dawn the current reversed itself and once more I drifted toward my original position.

In the early morning light I noticed two enemy planes headed east, and later a Navy Liberator, evidently on patrol, passed to the northwest without seeing me. I felt famished that morning, and frequent cramps only served to remind me of it. A small crab found its way to my precious log, and I saw it clinging luringly to the opposite end. Sensing its danger my would-be meal disappeared before I could reach it.

I could see islands to the south of me but the current was against my progress in that direction. In the early afternoon there were a few small sailing vessels at too great a distance to query their friendliness. Later I had definite recognition of two Japanese destroyers and an oil tanker to the northwest of me. The current swept me in the direction of their course until I seemed barely 100 feet from them; a half mile would be a more rational calculation however. I felt all too conspicuous and in spite of being ready to get out of the water, I was not that eager.

I was passed unobserved and minutes later four P–38's circled twice above the enemy ships. As they started down, apparently in a strafing run, one destroyer fired a few bursts of AA at them and the P–38's pulled up without finishing their run and headed for home without firing a shot.

About the same time I spotted ten small fishing boats headed for me from the south. It was apparent that I was seen by them but because the wind was against them I was still not close enough to be recognized as friend or foe. After almost an hour all of the boats except one turned away perhaps assuming I was a Japanese off of one of the convoy ships which were still in sight.

After still another 45 minutes the last little boat approached and circled me cautiously. My closely cropped blond hair, when they were within calling distance, led them to show further caution. Was I German or American, they shouted? Once in the boat I remember nothing more of the ride, I had lost consciousness.

My next short memory was of being carried from the boat to a house, another lapse, and

then of being given artificial respiration which had caused me to vomit quantities of salt water. It was difficult to breathe, and when a native doctor arrived I was given two shots of adrenelin for my heartbeat was very irregular.

Twenty-four hours of sleep followed, and at 2000 on the night of 13 December I became aware that all of this had taken place in a native seashore shack on the island of Bantayan near the village of Madredijas. This was the northern tip of a 10 mile long island just east of the northern end of Cebu Island.

The next morning I was taken into Madredijas and there given the best of food and care. The more wealthy citizens of the town gave me clothes, shoes, soap, toothbrush and all the incidentals I needed. I had been the first American to be seen by these natives since the beginning of the war. Everyone wanted to know when the Americans were going to liberate Cebu; there had been no Japanese on Bantayan because there were no ports and the terrain was impossible for airstrip construction. The natives had had matches and chocolate bars, sent in by MacArthur in 1942 by submarine, which had emblazoned on the covers and wrappers, "I Shall Return."

Rumor had it that a Liberator crew was in the town of Bantayan to the south of the island, and on the 16th I had recuperated sufficiently to be carried there by ox cart. The same day of my arrival the natives brought in two Japanese prisoners from a dive bomber which had crashed on the seashore nearby.

The pilot appeared to be about 18 years old and the gunner was probably 20 or 21. As the two Japanese were marched into town and down the street their captors beat them with the back side of bolo knives. Although the gunner withstood his punishment, the young pilot was crying openly. One of the crew members of the Liberator was given a Japanese Luger and asked if he wanted to shoot the prisoners. The boy refused and one by one all of the Americans were given the same opportunity, all declined. The natives then made the Japs get down on the ground and told them that if they would get up and run for the woods they would be free if they could make it. Both jumped up and started to run and were shot down by the natives.

While in Bantayan I stayed in the home economics building of the school, which was being used as a hospital and as living quarters for all of the Americans. Those of us who needed any treatment were attended by a woman doctor who had received her Doctor of Medicine degree from the university of Manila. She was a young women about 26 years old, very clean and quite nice looking.

By that time I was well enough to be up and around and was free to come and go as I pleased. At each meal I was feted by one and another of the leading citizens, each attempting to outdo the other in their most generous hospitality. Several had been well educated in Philippine colleges and some few had attended universities in the United States. Most of the better class were part Spanish or Chinese. Their homes were well kept, usually maintained by servants and were fitted with many of the modern conveniences.

On Sunday the local citizenry turned out for the usual cock fights, and on this occasion the Americans and the woman doctor were the guests of honor. Another favorite pastime was the old Chinese game of Mah Jong, a social custom enjoyed by them as the game of bridge is in the United States.

I found everyone most anxious to impart to me all of the information they had as to Japanese activities on nearby Cebu. They related that the guerrillas were holding most of the island and that they wanted more weapons with which to fight. They told of gun emplacements around the city of Cebu guarding the valleys and all approaches to the city, that the town is well garrisoned with Japanese troops but the exact size of the detachment was unknown for the natives were not allowed in or near the city. I was told, too, of an airstrip on Negros Island which was three kilometers south of a large pre-war sawmill. This operationally active strip was said to be by a river and the revetments were well camouflaged and covered by coconut logs and earth.

An incident occurring earlier in the war on Cebu was related to me. A Topsy (Japanese transport), carrying a staff of Japanese offi-

cers and piloted by a German, had made a forced landing on the island. The natives killed all its passengers, and in retaliation 1000 Cebu civilians, men, women and children, were butchered. An edict was then posted threatening the death of 10 civilians for each Japanese killed, or should a Colonel or above meet with such fate the whole province would be killed.

Since my initial water rescue I had dictated messages every two or three days which departed through guerrilla grapevine. However, only one of these messages was ever known to reach Allied sources, and that relayed through a pilot by natives returning him to Leyte on a guerrilla barge.

Three days after I had been picked up two natives in a fishing boat contacted a PT boat at Calubian. Informed of the rescue of a downed pilot and given instructions as to where to pick me up on Bantayan, the PT skipper surmised it to be a Japanese trick and dared not navigate into a possible trap.

It was four days after my arrival at Bantayan, on the morning of 19 December 1944, that I departed with one native in a sail boat for Calubian on Leyte Island, a trip of about 50 nautical miles and 14 to 16 uneventful hours.

At Calubian, after spending the night with an Army artillery unit, I concluded my journey, first, on an LSM, and finally, the last leg in an Army Colonel's motor launch. It was almost nightfall on 20 December that I arrived in VMF–218's camp area at Tacloban, weary, nervous and quite run down from loss of weight.

NOTE.—Subsequent to his return, Lieutenant Bean, on advice of the squadron doctor, was sent to Emirau for a two week rest before rejoining his outfit in a flying status.

SURVIVAL NARRATIVE BY LIEUTENANT KENNETH G. POMASL

I took off from Guiuan airfield on the 23rd, [January] in a flight of eight planes scheduled to cover a convoy west of Panay. Returning from the mission, we ran into bad weather southwest of Leyte and became separated. I was unable to get directions from any radio station, and soon found that I was out of radio contact with the other members of my flight, although later I was told that they could hear me. I flew on instruments for an hour and a half, but was unable to break out of the overcast; my gas supply finally ran low and I decided to bring my plane down to make a water landing. As I came down out of the overcast, I found myself over land, at an altitude of about 500 feet. As I swung out over the water, I noticed I was being fired on by small-arms. The sea was fairly calm, with long easy swells, and I set the plane down easily, tail first. It remained afloat for about a minute, giving me plenty of time to get out of the cockpit and onto the right wing, from which I lowered myself into the water and inflated my rubber boat. It was early afternoon, and land was about a half-mile away.

After I had been on the water a short time, three small canoes put out from shore, headed toward me. The men appeared to be Filipinos and seemed friendly, so I allowed myself to be placed in one of the canoes, while my rubber raft was taken in tow by another. As we headed for shore we were met by Japanese small-arms fire; the natives all dove into the water and swam away, although all the shots landed short.

I regained my raft and had begun to drift shoreward, when I noticed a Japanese soldier paddling out toward me in a small boat. A brief exchange of shots sent the enemy scurrying back to land, followed by bullets from my .45 pistol.

I spent the rest of the day trying to keep away from the shoreline, but when I found myself still being dragged toward land by the current, I abandoned the raft and tried to swim out. At dusk the tide began to ebb, and I decided to try to swim diagonally toward the shore. After a two-hour pull, I finally came ashore in the dark on a small coral beach which ended abruptly in dense jungle a short distance from the water's edge. It had been seven hours since my plane had hit the water.

I remained on the little beach for almost two days, I was unable to walk far on the sharp coral, since I had left my shoes with the rest of my equipment on the raft. On the 25th, I started inland, and in less than an hour came

upon a group of huts in a clearing. I was unable to determine whether they were occupied by friend or foe, so I started to leave, but suddenly fifteen or twenty Filipinos appeared and ran up to me. They seemed to understand that I was the pilot of the plane which had gone down two days before, and one of them spoke a little English. They took me back into the jungle, where they brought me water and food, including rice, boiled chicken, eggs, bananas, and coconuts. I rested there until early evening on a mat they'd brought me, when my English-speaking friend returned with a pair of Japanese sandals for my feet. I learned then that my benefactor was a member of the Cebu Home Defense Force, and that we were on the narrow northern peninsula of Mactan Island, near the island of Cebu. Moving out in the dark, we crossed over to the eastern coast of the peninsula where we waited three hours for a boat which was to take us to Santa Rosa Island, the first step back towards Leyte. It appeared at about ten p. m. and added the two of us to its cargo of nine refugees from Cebu City and their household goods. At this juncture, a man who spoke fairly good English identified himself as a Captain in the Home Defense of Mactan and took charge of the situation until we made contact with American forces on Leyte. On Santa Rosa, I was hailed as a hero by the people of the island, who had not had a white visitor since 1940; I was escorted in triumph to a native village where I was provided with a hut, bamboo bed, pillows and mosquito netting, and supplied with American cigarettes, boiled eggs, and Philippine beer. My hosts were eagerly hospitable and seemed delighted to share everything they owned with me. I was able to learn very valuable information concerning anti-aircraft and land-mine defenses on Mactan. The next day, a Filipino nurse treated the coral cuts on my feet and repaired my flight suit, and once again I was well fed. When my Captain guide appeared with news that he had procured a boat for the trip to Leyte, we found it difficult to dissuade the entire village of 400 people from accompanying us. Stopping on the way at another island, Caubian, I was again received in grand style by the natives, who carried me ashore on their shoulders. I was taken to the house of a lieutenant of the local guerrilla band and given a pair of socks and GI shoes. The natives wanted to take me back to Leyte themselves, but I went on with my captain friend from Mactan, firing a 'salute' with my pistol as I left. We passed the night on another island, Nonocen, where I was again supplied with a house, cigarettes, and food, and where I slept with six natives who took turns guarding me while I slept.

Departing the next morning, the 27th, we arrived at Bay Bay on Leyte in the evening. I went ashore and contacted an American Army M. P. detachment, and reported to the Philippine Civil Affairs Unit the names of those who had aided me. After securing food for my Filipino friends, I bade them goodbye, drew a clothing issue from the army, and left the next afternoon for Burauen, where I spent the night. The next day I traveled by jeep to Tacloban, whence I was flown to Guiuan airstrip, arriving there on January 29th, six days after I'd taken off.

SURVIVAL NARRATIVE BY MAJOR PHILLIP B. MAY

On 27 February 1945 Major Phillip B. May of VMF–211, was conducting a strafing run on a Japanese airfield at Davao, on Mindanao, in the face of Jap anti-aircraft fire, when he felt a tremendous jar in his plane, lost control of the left rudder, and saw that the instrument panel was shattered:

I leveled off and headed the smoking plane for nearby Davao Gulf for a water landing, but as I passed over the airfield's runway, I saw that I was losing altitude and couldn't reach the water. I opened the hood and jumped, landing in a group of coconut trees about 100 yards off the runway, while my plane burned about 25 feet away. As I hit the ground, I fell and saw that my trousers were on fire and that a piece of shrapnel was embedded in my left lower leg. Jap bullets were striking the trees all around, but the other planes in my flight started to strafe around me, holding down the ground troops who had started after me. I quickly got out of my parachute harness and ran north along a path, but ran into a Japanese soldier running toward me. I shot twice

with my .38 pistol, and the Jap fell and rolled off the path; I ran on, following a drainage ditch, and came upon a Filipino who pointed out the direction of the Japanese. I continued to run, falling in thickets in heavily-wooded areas, passing through clearings under cultivation, and finally dropped down, in an abaca grove, tired and thirsty, after an hour's running without stop. Within a few minutes I heard Japanese voices close by, yelling and screaming, and quickly began to cover myself with grass and leaves. A Jap slowly approaching, and I pulled out my pistol and lay still and ready. The Jap passed within five feet of me but did not look down to where I was lying, and the six or seven others in the searching squad were spread out over a large area. Finally I heard them get into a truck and drive off.

I stayed in that spot for about four hours, until dark, and then set out to the north with the aid of a compass, having been briefed at the base that there were friendly Filipinos in the northern section of the Davao Gulf area. I passed one farmhouse and saw several people I took to be friendly Filipinos, but was frightened off by the barking of a dog and continued my trek to the north. The going became difficult as I came upon a muddy swamp, but when I fell into it, I noticed that the water tasted salty, so I figured that I was close to the Gulf and would be able to make better time following the water. But the tide was up when I reached the Gulf, and the beach under water. However, luck was with me, for I found a canoe there on stilts. I pulled it out into the water, climbed in and set out, using a loose seat board for a paddle. The wind prevented my continuing to the north, so I started the long pull eastwards across the gulf. After about two hours of steady paddling, I came upon another small craft with two men silhouetted in the moonlight. I could hear them talking, and assumed they were looking for me, because there were several other boats dispersed about 500 feet apart. I stopped, waiting for them to move on, which they did about an hour later, and then paddled on towards Samal Island, in the middle of the gulf, where I hoped to find fresh water. As I approached, a plane came down from the north and dropped some incendiary bombs on the island, so I decided that it wasn't worth the risk with the enemy awakened, and continued across the gulf. I found that whenever I tried to lie back in the canoe and rest I became cold and sore, so I decided it was easier to keep paddling without stopping. About five o'clock I reached the shoreline, and located a wooded area where I could go ashore to rest through the day before continuing the trip northward. I was so thirsty, though, that I started out right away by foot to locate some fresh water. I came upon a hut where I saw three women, but waited almost two hours before deciding to approach them. They ran away at first, but I sat down on a log and waited for them to appear again, and then motioned to them, holding out my arms, smiling and repeating, "I am your friend, I am an American." They came back, listened to my story, and then got me fresh water, and insisted that I go to their hut and rest. They informed me that the Japs were about 3 kilometers away, and that the guerillas were to the north as I thought; they would help me get to them. The women wanted me to stay a day and night, but I wanted to get back to friendly troops as soon as possible. When the word got around in the neighborhood that an American was there, natives started to arrive, asking me questions eagerly about the arrival of the Americans. Two men volunteered to lead me to the guerrillas, so we started out about noon. All along the beach friendly Filipinos came out to see me and try to talk with me; I was the first American they had seen in four years. At one point a whole village turned out to welcome me; the mayor made a speech and the villagers clapped and laughed and came up to touch me and to shake my hand. They were overjoyed to know that the Americans would soon chase the Japs away from the Davao Gulf area. The mayor sent runners to the guerilla lines to have an escort sent to take me to their leader. When they arrived that night, a squad of barefoot soldiers loaded with hand grenades and carrying carbines, the village had a celebration in which I played the drums in a four-piece "or-

chestra," and taught them "The Marines' Hymn."

The next morning I was taken to the guerrilla's headquarters where a doctor treated my leg. They notified the U. S. Navy which picked me up three days later in a PBM, and returned me to my base at Tacloban.

On March 7 my wingman, Lieutenant Roy Butler, and I loaded our planes with badly-needed medical supplies for my guerrilla friends and flew to their camp to deliver them. I set my plane down on a roadway, but as I was coming to a stop, it slipped off and nosed-up in a swamp; I immediately radioed Butler that it was too muddy and dangerous to attempt a landing, so he returned to the base. The guerillas were overjoyed to see me and the medical supplies. I had also brought two loaves of bread, which I doled out crumb by crumb to hundreds of the natives. While I waited at the guerrilla camp to be picked up, the natives built an airfield, hoping that other planes might come down to bring supplies. It took about four weeks and the efforts of about 2,000 men working around the clock, bringing up buckets of dirt and gravel to fill in parts of the swamp. When it was more or less completed, Guerrilla Headquarters again radioed the air base and they sent a plane out for me. During my time at the guerrilla camp, I learned that the Japs had tortured and finally killed about 50 Filipinos and their families in the area where I had been shot down, for their failure to produce me.

APPENDIX VII

Performance Data on Types of Aircraft Used by Marines in the Philippines

Designation	Manufacturer	Maximum Speed	Combat Horse Power at sea level	Range	Armament	Crew	Name
F4U–1D[1], FG–1[2] Fighter	Chance-Vought, Goodyear	365 knots	2250	850 Nautical miles (without Auxiliary tanks)	6–50 cal. (2400 rounds of ammunition) 2–100 lb. bombs 8–5″ Rockets	Pilot	Corsair
PBJ–1D Medium-bomber	North American	238 knots	2–1700	1,326 Nautical miles (without Auxiliary gas tanks)	Maximum load: 2800 lbs. of bombs and Rockets	Pilot Co-Pilot Navigator 3 gunners	Mitchell
SBD–6 Dive-bomber	Douglas	234 knots	1300	1,100 Nautical miles	2–50 cal. (360 rounds of ammunition) 2–30 cal. (2000 rounds)	Pilot Gunner	Dauntless
SB2C–4 Dive-bomber	Curtis-Wright	256 knots	1750	1,197 Nautical miles with 1,600 lbs. of bombs and 2 Auxiliary tanks	2–20mm (400 rounds of ammunition) 2–30 cal. (2000 rounds) 1–1600 lb. bomb 2–500 lb. bombs 8–5″ Rockets	Pilot Gunner	Helldiver
F6F–3N[3] Fighter	Grumman	313 knots	2250	1,100 Nautical miles with 1–150 gal. Auxiliary tank	6–50 cal. (2400 rounds of ammunition)	Pilot	Hellcat
R4D–5 Transport	Douglas	200 knots	2–1050	1,555 Nautical miles	None (will carry 27 troops with combat gear)	Pilot Co-Pilot Radioman	Skytrain

Explanation of squadron designations:

Preceded by letters V (Heavier-than-Air) and M (Marine); the letters alone or in combination indicate type squadrons using the planes:

F—Fighter. S—Scout. B—Bomber. R—Transport. J—Utility.

Example: VMF–115; Marine Fighting Squadron No. 115.

[1] F4U–1D: F—Fighter, 4—Fourth model of this fighter, U—Manufactured by Chance-Vought, 1–D—Modification of this series.

[2] FG–1: Goodyear version of the Corsair.

[3] Night fighter version.

APPENDIX VIII Navy Unit Commendations

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP TWENTY-FOUR

for service as follows:

"For exceptionally meritorious service in support of the United States SIXTH Army in the Lingayen Gulf and Manila, Philippine Islands Area, from January 23 to April 10, 1945. After landing at Lingayen with the assault forces on D-day, Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-FOUR operated continuously against Japanese forces, flying a series of more than 8,000 daring and brilliantly executed sorties despite relentless air and ground force opposition. Dauntless and determined, these units penetrated numerous hostile defenses ahead of our advancing troops, and, destroying vital ammunition and fuel dumps, bridges, gun bastions and troop concentrations, effectively reduced the enemy's power to resist and contributed materially to the sweeping victory of our ground forces in this area. The heroic achievements of Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-FOUR reflect the skill, personal valor and steadfast devotion to duty of these courageous officers and men, and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel of the United States Armed Forces serving with Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-FOUR during the above period are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP THIRTY-TWO

for service as follows:

"For exceptionally meritorious service in support of the United States SIXTH Army in the Lingayen Gulf and Manila, Philippine Islands, Areas, from January 23 to March 15, 1945. After landing at Lingayen with the assault forces on D-day, Marine Aircraft Group THIRTY-TWO operated continuously against Japanese forces, flying a series of more than 8,000 daring and brilliantly executed sorties despite relentless air and ground force opposition. Dauntless and determined, these units penetrated numerous hostile defenses ahead of our advancing troops and, destroying vital ammunition and fuel dumps, bridges, gun bastions and troop concentrations, effectively reduced the enemy's power to resist and contributed materially to our ground forces' sweeping victory in this area. The heroic achievements of Marine Aircraft Group THIRTY-TWO reflect the skill, personal valor and steadfast devotion to duty of these courageous officers and men, and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel of the United States Armed forces serving with Marine Aircraft Group THIRTY-TWO during the above period are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUPS, ZAMBOANGA

consisting of the following Marine Aircraft Groups:

Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE, March 10–June 30, 1945
Marine Aircraft Group THIRTY-TWO, March 16–June 30, 1945
Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-FOUR, April 11–June 30, 1945

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For exceptionally meritorious service and outstanding heroism in support of elements of the EIGHTH Army during operations against enemy Japanese forces on Mindinao, Philippine Islands, and in the Sulu Archipelago. After landing with the assault forces, Marine Air Groups, ZAMBOANGA, effected wide coverage of battle areas in flights made extremely hazardous by dense jungles, precipitous cloud-obscured mountains and adverse weather conditions. The gallant officers and men of these Groups penetrated hostile defenses to press relentless attacks and reduce vital enemy targets, disrupt communications and troop concentrations, and destroy ammunition and fuel dumps despite intense antiaircraft fire over Japanese objectives. The vital service rendered during these campaigns in providing convoy cover, fighter defense and close aerial support of ground forces is evidence of the courage, skill and devotion to duty of the pilots, aircrewmen and ground personnel operating as a well coordinated team, and reflects the highest credit upon Marine Aircraft Groups, ZAMBOANGA, and the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with Marine Aircraft Group 12, 32 or 24 during their respective periods of service as designated are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

FRANCIS P. MATTHEWS,
Secretary of the Navy.

APPENDIX IX

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TABLE OF DISTANCES FROM MANILA IN NAUTICAL MILES

Honolulu	4643
Tokyo	1622
Iwo Jima	1300
Okinawa	825
Bougainville	2386
Formosa	506
Guam	1378
Emirau	1979
Peleliu	903
Morotai	843
Guadalcanal	2733
Tacloban, Leyte	311
Zamboanga, Mindanao	464

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Zamboanga, Mindanao	464

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PLEASE KEEP THIS CARD IN THE BOOK POCKET.
THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LATEST DATE STAMPED.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to

MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP TWELVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Philippine Islands from December 3, 1944, to March 9, 1945. Operating from the captured airfield at Tacloban, Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE employed Corsairs as bombing planes to strike destructive blows at escorted enemy convoys and to prevent the Japanese from reinforcing their beleaguered garrisons by landing troops and supplies on western Leyte. Undeterred by intense aerial opposition and accurate antiaircraft fire, these pilots provided effective cover for ground troops, shore installations and Fleet units and, on several occasions, when ground troops were held up by heavy enemy fire, bombed and strafed Japanese positions, thereby enabling our land forces to advance unopposed. As hostile resistance lessened on Leyte, Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE expanded its sphere of operations to strike at enemy garrisons on the Visayan Islands and southern Luzon and to support the Lingayen beachheads, neutralizing the enemy's lines of communication, his harbors, airfields and escape routes, and ranging far from base to provide aerial cover for ships of the SEVENTH Fleet and merchant-ship convoys operating in the area. During February and the early part of March, this courageous Group gave direct support to Guerrilla units fighting on Cebu Island and aided in their rapid advance and the ultimate neutralization of the island. Well supported by skilled and dependable ground personnel, the gallant pilots of Marine Aircraft Group TWELVE caused the Japanese severe losses in airplanes, installations and surface craft, contributing to the achievement of air superiority so essential to the success of the campaign and thereby upholding the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the President,

Francis P. Matthews

Secretary of the Navy.