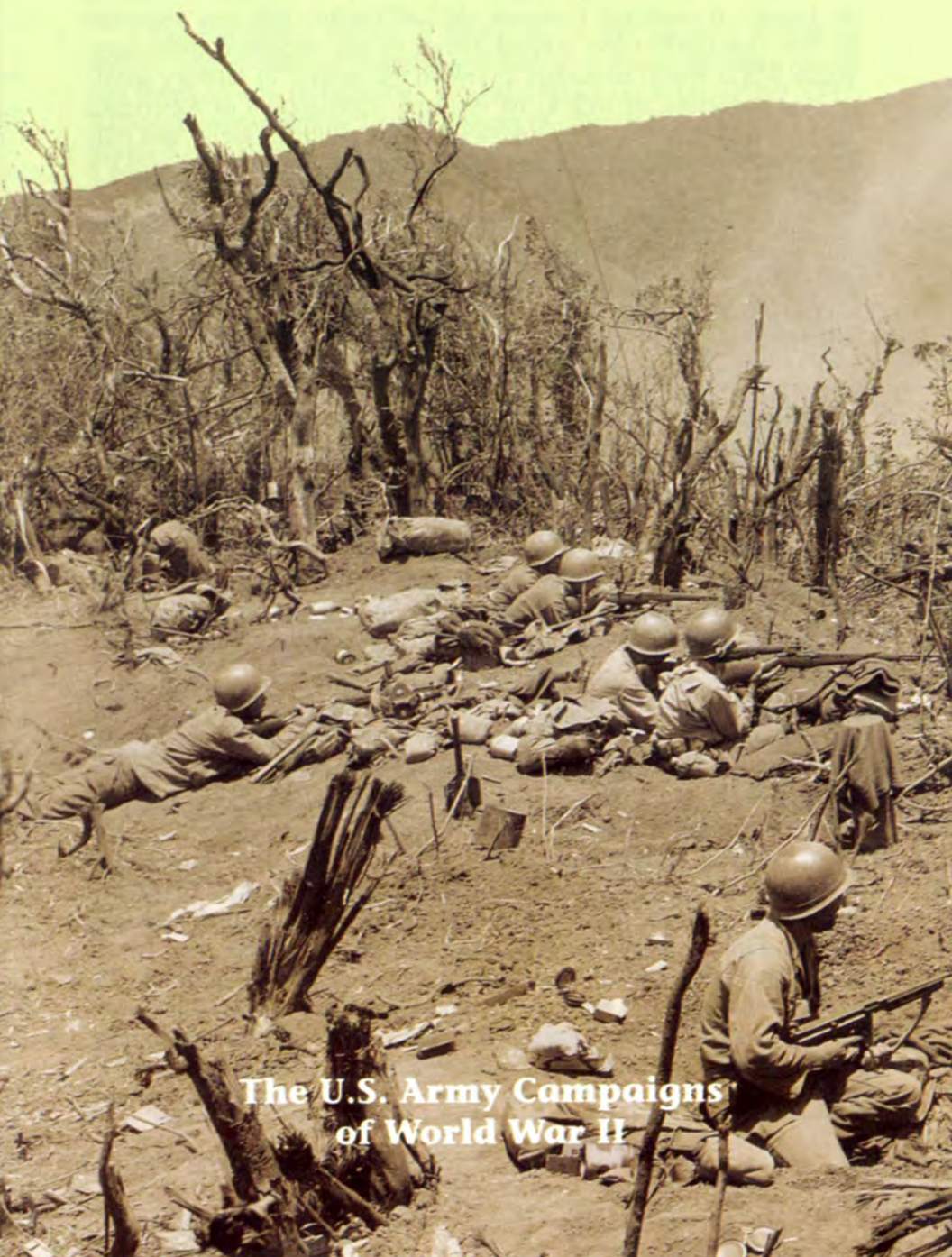


# LUZON



The U.S. Army Campaigns  
of World War II

# Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Dale Andradé. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

GORDON R. SULLIVAN  
General, United States Army  
Chief of Staff

# LUZON

*15 December 1944–4 July 1945*

“The Philippine theater of operations is the locus of victory or defeat,” argued General Douglas MacArthur, as Japanese planes strafed and bombed key installations around Manila on 8 December 1941. Although overwhelming Japanese strength ultimately forced the United States to relinquish the Philippines, MacArthur began planning his return almost immediately from bases in Australia. Throughout the long campaign to push the Japanese out of their Pacific bastions, these islands remained his crucial objective. “The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines...for the purpose, as I understand it, of organizing the American offensive against Japan, a primary object of which is the relief of the Philippines,” MacArthur said when he took over as Allied commander in the Southwest Pacific. “I came through and I shall return.” As the Pacific campaign dragged on, MacArthur never strayed far from that goal, and every move he made was aimed ultimately at recapturing the lost archipelago.

## *Strategic Setting*

In March 1942 a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive established two U.S. military commands in the Pacific: the Southwest Pacific Area, headed by General MacArthur, and the Pacific Ocean Areas, under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. The decision clearly violated the principle of unity of command. However, with naval officers objecting to MacArthur, the senior officer in the region, as overall Pacific commander and with MacArthur unlikely to subordinate himself to another, the ensuing division of authority seemed a workable compromise. Given the size of the theater and the different national contingents involved, it may even have been a blessing. But it left no single authority in the Pacific to decide between conflicting plans or to coordinate between the two. Even MacArthur later wrote that “of all the faulty decisions of the war, perhaps the most unexplainable one was the failure to unify the command in the Pacific, [which]...resulted in divided effort; the waste, diffusion, and duplication of force; and the consequent extension of the war with added casualties and cost.”

From a strategic perspective, this divided command had a direct impact on decisions leading up to the invasion of the Philippines.

During the spring of 1944, the Joint Chiefs debated the merits of seizing Luzon or the Chinese island of Formosa as an initial point for direct operations against Japan. Admiral Ernest J. King, the Chief of Naval Operations, had long objected to landings in the Philippines, and by May 1944 he was joined by Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and Army Air Force Chief of Staff General Henry H. Arnold. Marshall felt that MacArthur's Luzon plan would be "the slow way" and that it made more sense to "cut across" from the Mariana Islands to Formosa. MacArthur, on the other hand, argued that the Formosa route was militarily "unsound" and that the Philippine Islands provided a more sensible staging area for the final assault against the Japanese home islands. As commander of the Philippine defenses in 1941, MacArthur felt a strong moral responsibility to free the entire archipelago of the brutal Japanese occupation. Making the Philippines a major Pacific objective gave his Southwest Pacific command a key mission.

By July 1944 most planners agreed that an invasion of Formosa was not logistically feasible in the near future. In September the Joint Chiefs thus approved a December starting date for MacArthur's invasion of Leyte Island in the central Philippines. The invasion would be followed by an assault on either Luzon, the large, northernmost Philippine island, on 20 February or Formosa on 1 March. But it was not until October that Admiral King finally agreed that Luzon was the better choice.

From the Japanese perspective, control of the islands was vital. Loss of the Philippines would threaten Japan's overseas access to foodstuffs and critical raw materials, especially oil, from the East Indies and Southeast Asia. Thus, Tokyo's naval and army leaders vowed to make the defense of the Philippines their major war effort for 1943-44. For these purposes the commander of Japanese land forces in the Philippines, General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the former conqueror of British Malaya and Singapore, had some 430,000 troops stationed all across the islands, while Japanese naval leaders were prepared to commit the entire battle fleet. If the Americans could be stopped here, then perhaps the entire tide of the war could be changed or, at least, Japan's position greatly strengthened.

MacArthur's return to the Philippines began on the island of Leyte in October 1944. Prior to the amphibious assault, the Japanese carrier force had been decimated in the battle of the Philippine Sea on 19-20 June of the same year. Moreover, the battle of Leyte Gulf in October saw most of the Japanese surface fleet destroyed with little to show for its sacrifice. Japan's once formidable air force was also decimated, leaving

the skies over the Philippines open to American air power. Yet the primary objective of assaulting Leyte was to provide a staging area for a much larger effort, the assault against the island of Luzon where most of the Japanese land defenses lay. The operations on Leyte in December gave the Americans little more than a foothold in the Philippines.

## *Operations*

Before Luzon could be attacked, MacArthur needed a base of operations closer to his objective than Leyte. He picked Mindoro, an island with minimal Japanese defenses just south of Luzon. About half the size of New Jersey, Mindoro is blanketed by mountains, with a few narrow plains along the coast. The high peaks trap clouds moving up from the south, causing almost daily rains and high humidity and making the island a breeding ground for malaria and other tropical diseases.

From MacArthur's point of view Mindoro was important only for its potential airfields, could supplement the unsatisfactory ones recently constructed on Leyte. Landing areas in the northeastern part of the island were best, but constant inclement weather and the airfields' proximity to what was left of Japanese air power on Luzon ruled them out. Instead, planners chose to secure beachhead and airfield sites near San Jose, in the southwest corner of the island. Although not ideal, the region lay near Mangarin Bay, Mindoro's best anchorage. This location would provide a base for the amphibious invasion fleet and allow land-based American aircraft to intensify their attacks against the Japanese on Luzon.

MacArthur assigned the seizure of Mindoro to Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger's Sixth Army. Krueger, in turn, gave the task to Maj. Gen. Roscoe B. Woodruff, commander of the 24th Infantry Division, who was to employ one organic regiment, the 19th Infantry, and the separate 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team. Although the airborne unit was originally scheduled to jump into the battle area, the limited capacity of the Leyte airfields dictated that they arrive by sea, alongside the infantry. In any case, naval support for the small landing was substantial, with 6 escort carriers, 3 battleships, 6 cruisers, and many small warships providing direct support.

For the amphibious assault vessels and supporting warships, the main threat came from Japanese land-based kamikaze suicide planes. The Japanese had begun the practice as a desperate measure during the final stages of the Leyte Campaign, perfecting it during December. On the 13th, two days before the scheduled assault on Mindoro, the light



*U.S. troops land and prepare for attack. (National Archives)*

cruiser *Nashville* was hit by a *kamikaze*, killing over 130 men and wounding another 190. Among the injured was Brig. Gen. William C. Dunkel, commander of the landing force. Later *kamikaze* attacks damaged two landing ships, tank (LSTs) and disabled several other ships. U.S. Army and Navy aviation did what they could during the first weeks of December. The Army claimed to have destroyed about 450 Japanese planes in the air and on the ground throughout the Philippines and the Navy 270 more.

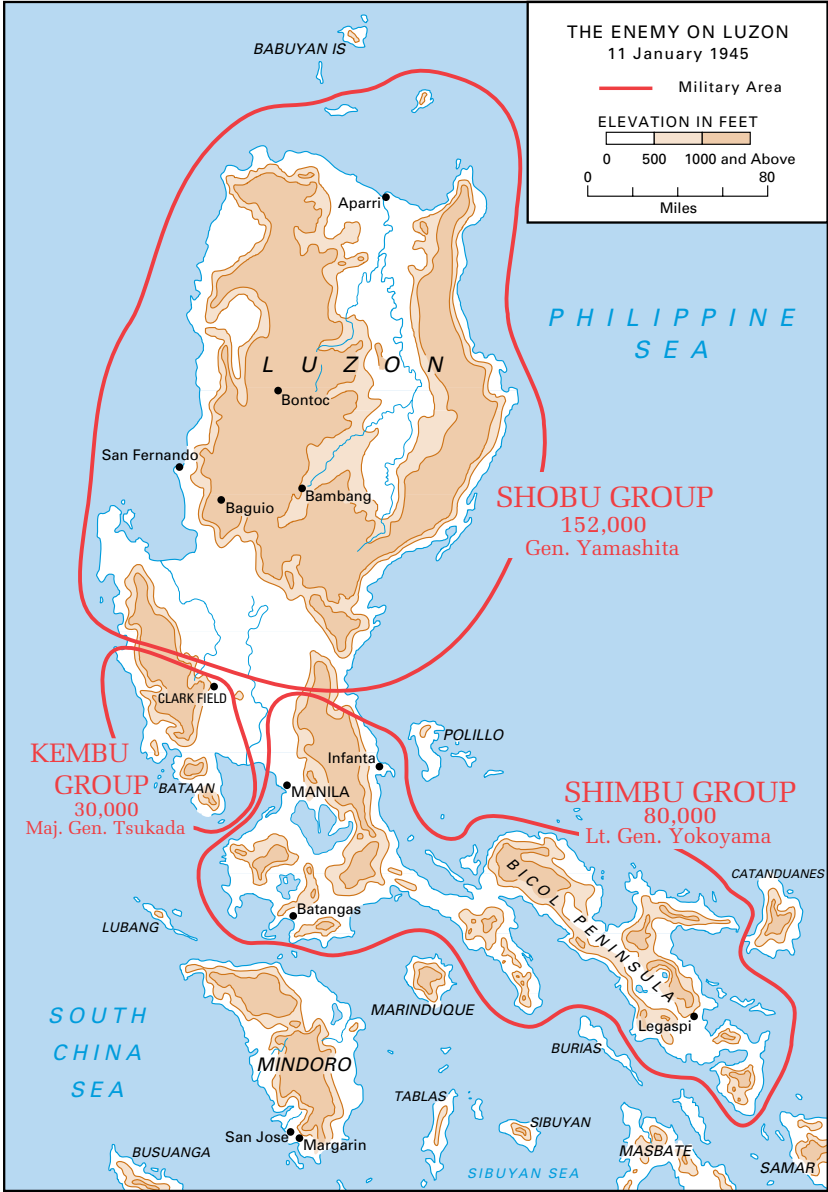
The invasion of Mindoro began on 15 December. Clear weather allowed full use of U.S. air and naval power against virtually no Japanese resistance. The ensuing landings were also unopposed. With only about 1,000 Japanese troops on the large island, plus some 200 survivors from ships sunk off Mindoro while on their way to Leyte, the defenders could do little. By the end of the first day, Army engineers were hard at work preparing airfields for the invasion of Luzon. The first was completed in five days; a second was ready in thirteen. Together the airfields allowed American aircraft to provide more direct

support for the planned Luzon beachhead, striking kamikaze airfields before aircraft could take off and harrying Japanese shipping between Luzon, Formosa, and southern Japan.

From his headquarters in Manila, General Yamashita realized that he could expect little outside support. The Japanese naval and air arms had done their best in the preceding months but to no avail, and they had been largely destroyed in the process. Moreover, Yamashita's forces on Luzon, some 260,000 strong, were weak in artillery, transport, armor, and other modern equipment. They would be unable to face the well-equipped American Army units in open warfare. Thus Yamashita decided to fight a delaying action, keeping his army in the field as long as possible. During his 1941–42 defense of the Philippines, MacArthur had considered Manila, the central Luzon plains, and the Bataan Peninsula critical, with their harbors and airfields. The Japanese commander, however, had no intention of defending these sites. Instead, Yamashita planned to withdraw the bulk of his forces into three widely separated mountain strongholds and settle down for a long battle of attrition.

Long before the American invasion began, General Yamashita divided his Luzon forces into three groups, each centered around a remote geographical region. The largest of these groups and under the direct command of Yamashita was *Shobu Group*, located in northern Luzon with about 152,000 troops. A much smaller force, *Kembu Group*, with approximately 30,000 troops, occupied the Clark Air Field complex as well as the Bataan Peninsula and Corridor. The third major force, *Shimbu Group*, consisted of some 80,000 soldiers occupying the southern sections of Luzon, an area that included the island's long Bicol Peninsula as well as the mountains immediately east of Manila. Most Shimbu units were in the latter area and controlled the vital reservoirs that provided most of the capital area's water supply.

On the American side, General MacArthur intended to strike first at Lingayen Gulf, an area of sheltered beaches on the northwestern coast of Luzon. A landing there would place his troops close to the best roads and railways on the island, all of which ran through the central plains south to Manila, his main objective. Also, by landing that far north of the capital, MacArthur allowed himself maneuvering room for the large force he intended to use on Luzon. But once the beachhead was secure, his initial effort would focus on a southern drive to the Filipino capital. Possession of this central core, as well as Manila Bay, would allow his forces to dominate the island and make a further coordinated defense by the Japanese exceedingly difficult. Ultimately ten U.S. divisions and five independent regiments would see action on Luzon, making it the largest





campaign of the Pacific war and involving more troops than the United States had used in North Africa, Italy, or southern France.





The weather on 9 January (called S-day) was ideal. A light overcast dappled the predawn sky, and gentle waves promised a smooth ride onto the beach. At 0700 the preassault bombardment began and was followed an hour later by the landings. With little initial Japanese opposition, General Krueger's Sixth Army landed almost 175,000 men along a twenty-mile beachhead within a few days. While the I Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. Innis P. Swift, protected the beachhead's flanks, Lt. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold's XIV Corps prepared to drive south, first to Clark Field and then to Manila. Only after the Manila area had been secured was Swift's I Corps to push north and east to seize the vital road junctions leading from the coast into the mountains of northern Luzon.

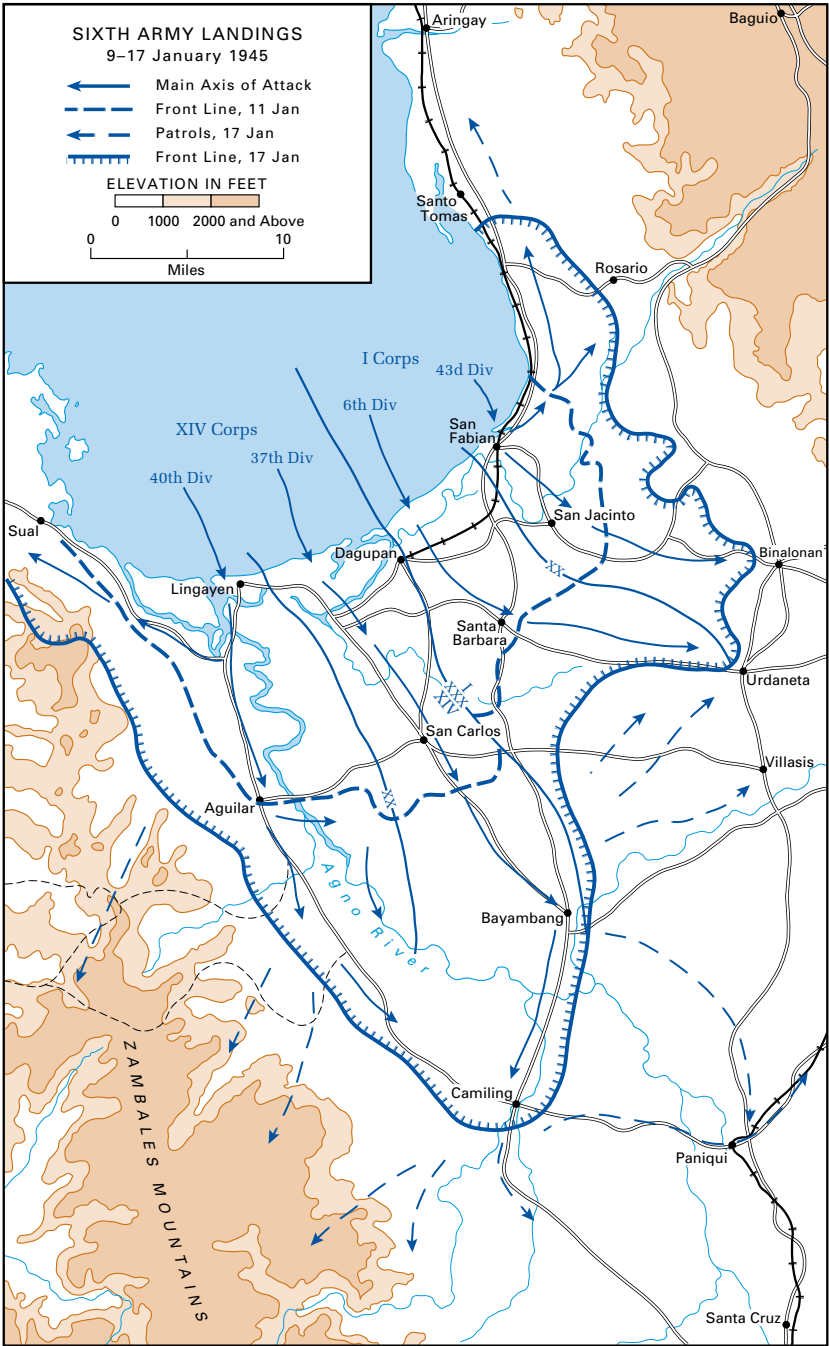
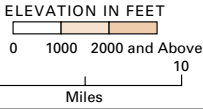
Almost from the beginning there was friction between MacArthur and some of his subordinates. Krueger wanted the I Corps to secure the roads leading east into the mountains before the XIV Corps advanced south. Already, he pointed out, I Corps had encountered opposition on the beachhead's northern, or left, flank, while the XIV Corps had found little resistance to the south. Cautious, Krueger hesitated before committing his army to a narrow thrust directly toward Manila with his eastern flank open to a possible Japanese attack.

MacArthur disagreed. He thought it unlikely that the Japanese were capable of mounting an attack in Sixth Army's rear or flank and directed Krueger to follow his prearranged plans, seizing Clark Air Field and the port facilities at Manila as soon as possible. So on 18 January Griswold's XIV Corps moved south with the 37th and 40th Infantry Divisions, leaving Sixth Army's eastern flank undefended as it proceeded from the beachhead area. But with Yamashita's *Shobu Group* relatively inactive, Krueger's concerns proved unwarranted. As at the beachhead, the Japanese put up little opposition to the drive south, having evacuated the central plains earlier. Only when Griswold's troops reached the outskirts of Clark Field on 23 January did they run up against determined resistance, and it came from the relatively weak *Kembu Group*. For more than a week the Japanese fought a stubborn battle against the advancing Americans, and it was not until the end of January that the airfield was in American hands. Leaving the 40th Division behind to occupy the area, Krueger regrouped the XIV Corps and on 2 February continued south toward the capital.

From the beginning, MacArthur remained unhappy with the pace of the advance. He personally drove up and down the advancing line,

**SIXTH ARMY LANDINGS**  
9-17 January 1945

-  Main Axis of Attack
-  Front Line, 11 Jan
-  Patrols, 17 Jan
-  Front Line, 17 Jan



inspecting units and making suggestions. On 30 January, after visiting the 37th Division as it advanced south from San Fernando toward Calumpit, MacArthur sent off a message to Krueger criticizing “the noticeable lack of drive and aggressive initiative.” Later, while visiting the 1st Cavalry Division, which had just arrived in Luzon to reinforce the XIV Corps, he told the division commander, Maj. Gen. Verne D. Mudge, to “Go to Manila, go around the Nips, bounce off the Nips, but go to Manila.” In response, Mudge formed a mechanized task force under the 1st Cavalry Brigade commander, Brig. Gen. William C. Chase, commanding two motorized cavalry squadrons reinforced with armor and motorized artillery and support units. This “flying column” rushed toward Manila while the rest of the division followed and mopped up.

At the same time MacArthur added additional forces to the drive on the capital. On 15 January he launched Operation MIKE VI, a second amphibious assault some forty-five miles southwest of Manila. On 31 January, X-ray Day, two regiments of the 11th Airborne Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Joseph M. Swing, landed unopposed. The paratroopers seized a nearby bridge before the surprised Japanese defenders had a chance to demolish it, and then the paratroopers turned toward Manila. The division’s third regiment, the 511th Parachute, dropped in by air to join the advance, which by the following day was speeding north along the paved highway toward the capital to the cheers of throngs of grateful Filipino civilians along the way.

Originally the 11th Airborne Division, one of Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger’s Eighth Army units, had been slated to contain Japanese troops throughout southwestern Luzon. But acting on MacArthur’s orders, Eichelberger pushed the division north. On 3 February one battalion of the 511th encountered determined Japanese resistance near the town of Imus, five miles south of Manila, where some fifty defenders clung to an old stone building despite a fierce bombardment by the battalion’s 75-mm. howitzers. Observing that the artillery had had little effect, T. Sgt. Robert C. Steel climbed onto the building’s roof, knocked a hole through it, poured in gasoline, and then threw in a phosphorous grenade. As the Japanese dashed out, Steel’s men shot them down.

Another three miles up the road lay the Las Pinas River bridge. It was set for demolition and guarded by a small detachment of Japanese who were dug in along the north bank. Despite the fierce firelight less than an hour before at Imus, the Japanese were surprised by the appearance of the Americans. The paratroopers secured the span before it could be blown. With one battalion guarding the bridge, another passed over on trucks toward Manila, hoping to enter the city from the south.

It was not to be. By dawn on 4 February the paratroopers ran into increasingly heavy and harassing fire from Japanese riflemen and machine gunners. At the Paranaque River, just south of the Manila city limits, the battalion halted at a badly damaged bridge only to be battered by Japanese artillery fire from Nichols Field. The 11th Airborne Division had reached the main Japanese defenses south of the capital and could go no further.

The “race” for Manila was now between the 37th Division and the 1st Cavalry Division, with the cavalry in the lead. Since the operation had begun in late January, its units had been fortunate enough to find bridges and fordable crossings almost everywhere they went. On 2 February Chase’s flying column was dashing toward Manila, sometimes at speeds of fifty miles per hour, with individual units competing for the honor of reaching the city first. The 37th Division, on the other hand, was slowed down by difficult crossings which forced it to either ferry its artillery and tanks across or wait for the engineers to build bridges.

On 3 February elements of the 1st Cavalry Division pushed into the northern outskirts of Manila, with only the steep-sided Tullahan River separating them from the city proper. A squadron of the 8th Cavalry reached the bridge just moments after Japanese soldiers had finished preparing it for demolition. As the two sides opened fire on one another, the Japanese lit the fuse leading to the carefully placed explosives. Without hesitation, Lt. James P. Sutton, a Navy demolitions expert attached to the division, dashed through the enemy fire and cut the burning fuse. The way to Manila was clear.

That evening, the 8th Cavalry passed through the northern suburbs and into the city itself. The troopers had won the race to Manila. As the sun set over the ocean behind the advancing Americans, a single tank named “Battling Basic” crashed through the walls surrounding Santo Tomas University, the site of a camp holding almost 4,000 civilian prisoners. The Japanese guards put up little resistance, and soon the inmates, many of whom had been incarcerated for nearly two years, were liberated.

Despite the initial American euphoria, much fighting remained. Although the approach to the city had been relatively easy, wresting the capital from the Japanese proved far more difficult. Manila, a city of 800,000, was one of the largest in Southeast Asia. While much of it consisted of ramshackle huts, the downtown section boasted massive reinforced concrete buildings built to withstand earthquakes and old Spanish stone fortresses of equal size and strength. Most were located south of the Pasig River which bisects the capital, requiring that the Americans cross over before closing



*Sniper fire keeps infantrymen low as medium tanks advance.*  
(National Archives)

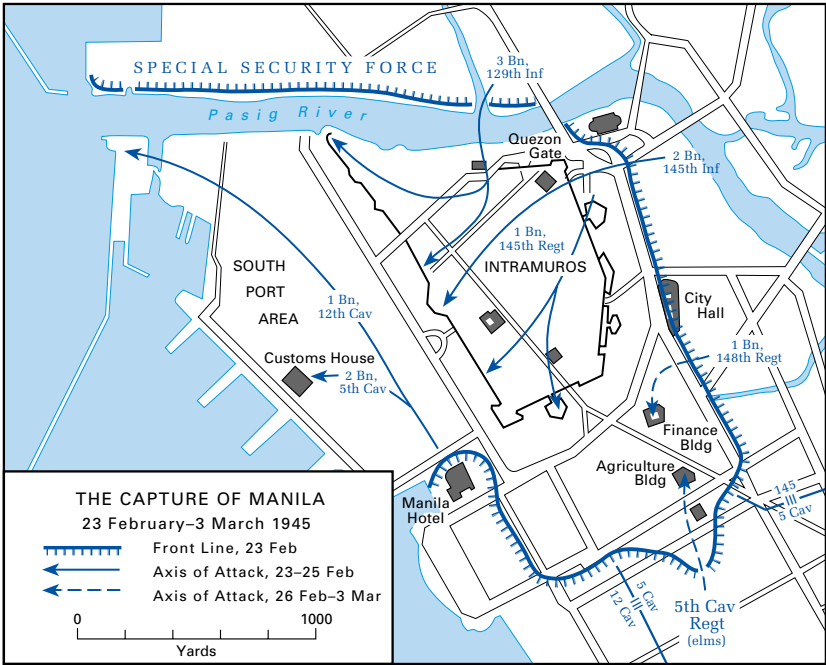
with the enemy. Even a half-hearted defense was bound to make Manila's recapture difficult.

Regarding Manila as indefensible, General Yamashita had originally ordered the commander of *Shimbu Group*, General Yokoyama Shizuo, to destroy all bridges and other vital installations and evacuate the city as soon as strong American forces made their appearance. However, Rear Adm. Iwabachi Sanji, the naval commander for the Manila area, vowed to resist the Americans and countermanded the order. Determined to support the admiral as best he could, Yokoyama contributed three Army battalions to Iwabachi's 16,000-man *Manila Naval Defense Force* and prepared for battle. The sailors knew little about infantry tactics or street fighting, but they were well armed and entrenched throughout the capital. Iwabachi resolved to fight to the last man.

On 4 February 1945, General MacArthur announced the imminent recapture of the capital while his staff planned a victory parade. But the battle for Manila had barely begun. Almost at once the 1st Cavalry Division in the north and the 11th Airborne Division in the south reported stiffening Japanese resistance to further advances into the city. As one airborne company commander remarked in mock seriousness, "Tell Halsey to stop looking for the Jap Fleet; it's dying on Nichols Field." All thoughts of a parade had to be put aside.

Following the initial American breakthrough on the fourth, fighting raged throughout the city for almost a month. The battle quickly came down to a series of bitter street-to-street and house-to-house struggles. In an attempt to protect the city and its civilians, MacArthur placed stringent restrictions on U.S. artillery and air support. But massive devastation to the urban area could not be avoided. In the north, General Griswold continued to push elements of the XIV Corps south from Santo Tomas University toward the Pasig River. Late on the afternoon of 4 February he ordered the 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry, to seize Quezon Bridge, the only crossing over the Pasig that the Japanese had not destroyed. As the squadron approached the bridge, enemy heavy machine guns opened up from a formidable roadblock thrown up across Quezon Boulevard. The Japanese had pounded steel stakes into the pavement, sown the area with mines, and lined up old truck bodies across the road. Unable to advance farther, the cavalry withdrew after nightfall. As the Americans pulled back, the Japanese blew up the bridge.

The next day, 5 February, went more smoothly. Once the 37th Division began to move into Manila, Griswold divided the northern section of the city into two sectors, with the 37th responsible for the



western half and the 1st Cavalry responsible for the eastern part. By the afternoon of the 8th, 37th Division units had cleared most Japanese from their sector, although the damage done to the residential districts was extensive. The Japanese added to the destruction by demolishing buildings and military installations as they withdrew. But the division's costliest fighting occurred on Provisor Island, a small industrial center on the Pasig River. The Japanese garrison, probably less than a battalion, held off elements of the division until 11 February.

The 1st Cavalry Division had an easier time, encountering little opposition in the suburbs east of Manila. Although the 7th and 8th Cavalry fought pitched battles near two water supply installations north of the city, by 10 February the cavalry had extended its control south of the river. That night, the XIV Corps established for the first time separate bridgeheads on both banks of the Pasig River.

The final attack on the outer Japanese defenses came from the 11th Airborne Division, under the XIV Corps control since 10 February. The division had been halted at Nichols Field on the fourth and since then had been battling firmly entrenched Japanese naval

*General MacArthur and members of his staff at a ceremony of the American flag being raised once again on the island of Corregidor. (National Archives)*







troops, backed up by heavy fire from concealed artillery. Only on 11 February did the airfield finally fall to the paratroopers, but the acquisition allowed the 11th Airborne Division to complete the American encirclement of Manila on the night of the twelfth.

For the rest of the month the Americans and their Filipino allies mopped up enemy resistance throughout the city. Due to the state of Japanese communications, Yamashita did not learn of the efforts of his subordinates in defending Manila until about 17 February, after it was too late to countermand the order. The final weeks of fighting were thus bloody, but the results were inevitable. On 4 March, with the capture of the giant Finance Building in the city center, Griswold reported that enemy resistance had ceased. Manila was officially liberated. But it was a city no more. Some observers commented that the destruction was more complete than in Cologne, Hamburg, or even London. Amidst the devastation, Manila's residents tried to resume their lives.

Just before the last fighting ended, MacArthur summoned a provisional assembly of prominent Filipinos to Malacanan Palace and in their presence declared the Commonwealth of the Philippines to be permanently reestablished. "My country kept the faith," he told the gathered assembly. "Your capital city, cruelly punished though it be, has regained its rightful place—citadel of democracy in the East."

### *Bataan and Corregidor*

Securing Manila was significant for both military and psychological reasons, but from a logistical point of view the seizure of Manila Bay was especially crucial. The supply lines at Lingayen Bay, which had so ably supported the American advance south on the capital, were strained almost to the breaking point. Yet, despite the fact that Manila's world-class harbor was in American hands, it could not be used unless the Bataan Peninsula, which encompassed the bay's western shore, was secure.

Even as XIV Corps forces drove on Manila, MacArthur had thus ordered Krueger's Sixth Army to seize Bataan, including Corregidor, the small island fortress at its southern tip. Since Griswold's troops were fully occupied, MacArthur supplemented Sixth Army with the XI Corps from Leyte, commanded by Maj. Gen. Charles P. Hall. With the 38th Infantry Division and the 24th Division's 34th Infantry, the XI Corps was to land on the Zambales coast some twenty-five miles northwest of Bataan and drive rapidly east across the base of the peninsula, and then sweep south, clearing the entire peninsula including its eastern coast.

Prior to the assault, American intelligence had badly overestimated enemy strength, predicting that the Japanese had nearly 13,000 soldiers on Bataan. However, having decided that the defense of Manila Bay was also beyond the capabilities of his forces, General Yamashita had the *Kembu Group* commander, Maj. Gen. Rikichi Tsukada, place fewer than 4,000 of his troops on the peninsula. The main defensive force was *Nagayoshi Detachment*, a regiment from the *10th Division* under Col. Nagayoshi Sanenobu.

On the morning of 29 January, nearly 35,000 U.S. troops landed just northwest of the peninsula. Elements of the 38th Division immediately dashed inland to take the San Marcelino airstrip, but found that Filipino guerrillas under the command of Capt. Ramon Magsaysay, later president of the Republic of the Philippines, had secured the field three days earlier. Elsewhere, surprise was complete. In fact, the only casualty on that first day was an American enlisted man, who was gored by an ornery bull. The next day Subic Bay and Olongapo were occupied.

The Japanese chose to make a stand in the rugged Zambales mountains at the northern base of the peninsula, which Americans dubbed the "ZigZag Pass." Colonel Nagayoshi had plenty of supplies and ammunition for a long battle, but his main defensive line was a mere 2,000 yards long, leaving his position open to flanking maneuvers. On 31 January Hall's forces advanced east, seeking out both Japanese flanks. But unfavorable terrain and determined resistance by the Japanese made it difficult. During the next two weeks, elements of the 38th Division struggled to open the ZigZag Pass, and by 8 February they had overrun the main Japanese positions, killing more than 2,400 defenders. Colonel Nagayoshi and 300 of his men escaped farther south and joined other defenders who held out until the middle of February. But before then the vital shoreline of Manila Bay had been secured.

Although Corregidor lacked the importance to the Japanese defense that it had held for the Americans in 1942, it merited a separate attack. MacArthur's plan involved a combined amphibious and airborne assault, the most difficult of all modern military maneuvers. The airborne attack was obviously risky. At just over five square miles, Corregidor made a small target for a parachute drop. To make matters more difficult, the paratroopers were required to land on a hill known as Topside, the dominant terrain feature on the island. On the other hand there was little choice. From Topside the Japanese could dominate all possible amphibious landing sites. In addition, the Japanese would certainly not expect an airborne landing on such an unlikely target.

The planners were correct in their assumptions. On the morning of 16 February the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team floated down on the surprised defenders while a battalion of the 34th Infantry stormed ashore. During fierce fighting, the Japanese tried to regroup, and at one point, on the morning of 16 February, they threatened to drive a salient into the paratroopers' tenuous foothold on Topside. Pvt. Lloyd G. McCarter charged a key enemy position and destroyed a machine gun nest with hand grenades. For his bravery, McCarter was awarded the Medal of Honor. His actions and those of many other paratroopers and infantrymen during the nine days that followed helped defeat the Japanese on Corregidor. The island fell on 26 February, and, six days later, MacArthur returned to the fortress he had been forced to leave in disgrace three years before.

### *Shimbu Group*

The battles for Manila, Bataan, and Corregidor were only the beginning of the Luzon Campaign. Both *Shobu Group*, securing northern Luzon, and the bulk of *Shimbu Group*, defending the south, remained intact. With about 50,000 men at his disposal, the *Shimbu Group* commander, General Yokoyama, had deployed some 30,000 of them immediately east and south of Manila, with the remainder arrayed along the narrow Bicol Peninsula to the southwest. The main Japanese defenses near the capital were built around the *8th* and *105th Divisions*, with the rest of the manpower drawn from a jumble of other units and provisional organizations. East of Manila, their positions were organized in considerable depth but lacked good lines of supply and reinforcement. Shimbu Group's eastern defenses obviously presented the most immediate threat to American control of the Manila area and would have to be dealt with first.

By mid-February Krueger's Sixth Army staff had begun planning operations against those *Shimbu Group* forces closest to Manila. Although still concerned about *Shobu Group* troop concentrations in northern Luzon, both Krueger and MacArthur agreed that the Manila area, the potential logistical base for all American activities on Luzon, still had first priority. Nevertheless, MacArthur made Krueger's task more difficult in the coming weeks by continually detaching troop units from Sixth Army control and sending them to the southern and central Philippines, which had been bypassed earlier. These diversions greatly impaired Krueger's ability to deal with both *Shobu* and *Shimbu Groups* at the same time.



*Men of the 122d Field Artillery Battalion, 33d Division, fire a 105-mm. howitzer against a Japanese pocket in the hills of Luzon. (National Archives)*

By 20 February Krueger had positioned the 6th and 43d Infantry Divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division, and the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team for an offensive in the rolling hills east of Manila. In addition, as soon as Manila was secured, he wanted the 11th Airborne Division to clear the area south of the capital, assisted by the indepen-

dent 158th Infantry. He hoped that the first effort could begin immediately and that the second would start by the first week in March.

The main objective of XIV Corps' attack against *Shimbu Group* was to gain control of the Manila water supply, most of which came from dams along the Angat and Marikina Rivers some twenty miles northeast of the city. Here the coastal plains gave way to rolling mountains and plunging valleys carved by rivers flowing toward the sea. But two crucial errors affected the operation before it even began. First, the Americans did not realize that the Wawa Dam, thought to be one of Manila's sources of water, had been abandoned in 1938 in favor of the larger Ipo Dam in the Marikina Valley. The Wawa Dam could have been bypassed, but Krueger did not realize his error for almost two months. Second, intelligence badly underestimated *Shimbu Group's* strength, reckoning that there were fewer than 20,000 Japanese troops east of Manila when, in reality, there were about 30,000. Enemy defensive positions were strung out along a thin line about thirty miles long running from Ipo Dam in the north to the town of Antipolo in the south. The Japanese positions alone were of little strategic value, but together they commanded all the high ground east of Manila.

On the afternoon of 20 February the XIV Corps launched its attack. Griswold assigned the 6th Division the task of capturing the dams in the north and ordered the 2d Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, to attack the southern half of the Japanese defenses and secure the town of Antipolo. Both units traversed the broad Marikina Valley unmolested but encountered fierce resistance as they moved into the hills and mountains forming the valley's eastern wall. There the Japanese had honeycombed the area with subterranean strongholds and machine gun positions covering all avenues of approach. Despite massive Allied air support, the cavalry advanced slowly, on some days measuring progress in mere yards: Not until 4 March did the troops reach Antipolo. But success was bittersweet. The brigade had lost nearly 60 men killed and 315 wounded, among them the 1st Cavalry Division commander, General Mudge.

To the north the 6th Infantry Division fared only slightly better. Its initial objectives were Mount Pacawagan and Mount Mataba, two strategic high points crucial to capturing the Wawa Dam. Both mountains were defended by extensive Japanese artillery and infantry positions. By 4 March the infantry's southernmost elements had gained a precarious foothold on the crest of Mount Pacawagan, but they could go no farther. Just to the north the Japanese continued to deny the Americans any gains in the Mount Mataba area. Not until 8 March did





the infantry regain its momentum, gouging the Japanese defenders from their positions as they advanced.

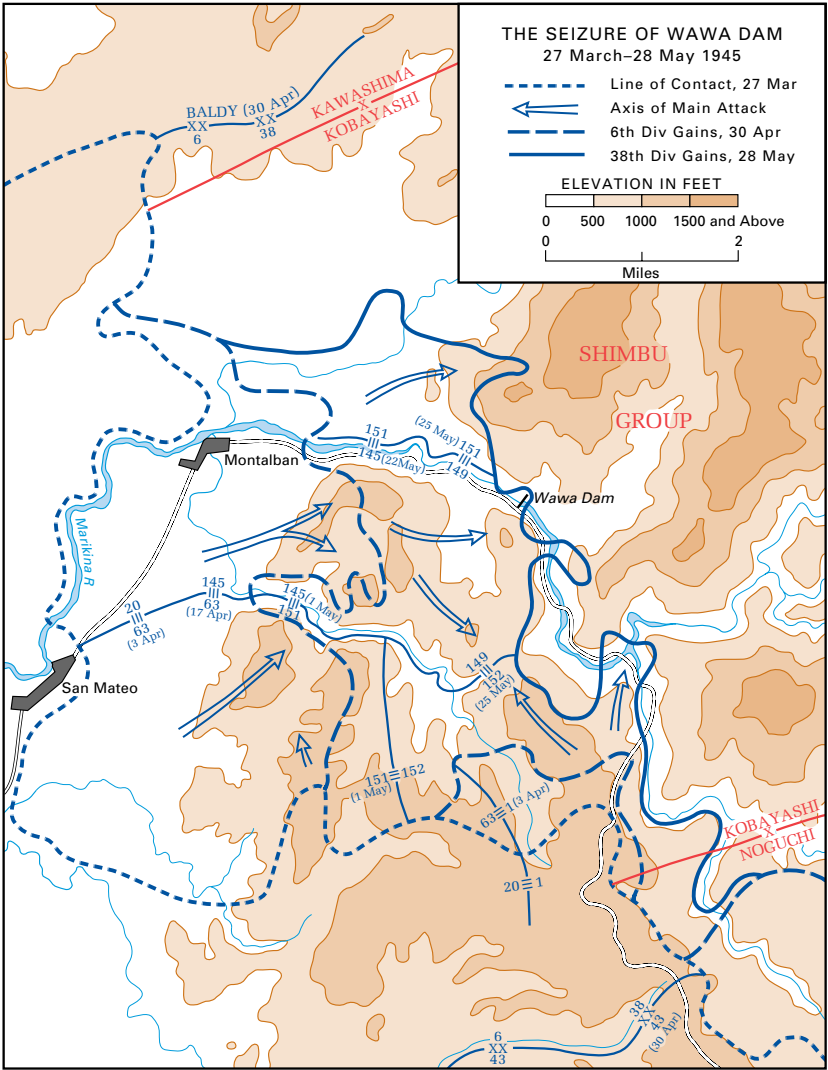
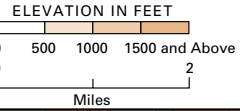
From his vantage point in the mountains, General Yokoyama was concerned by these advances that threatened to envelop both his flanks. Unwilling to abandon his excellent defensive positions on Mataba and Pacawagan, he decided instead to launch a counterattack aimed at the advancing 6th Division. His plans and their subsequent execution typified major Japanese tactical weaknesses throughout the war. Yokoyama scheduled a series of complicated maneuvers that required meticulous coordination in difficult terrain, necessitating sophisticated communications that *Shimbu Group* lacked. In addition, the Japanese artillery was neither strong enough nor suitably deployed to provide proper support. Still, the counterattack began on 12 March with three reserve battalions assaulting three widely dispersed positions along the American line. How Yokoyama expected these scattered attacks to succeed is unclear, but to make matters worse, they ran straight into another major offensive of the 6th Division. In fact, the counterattacks were so weak that the Americans had no idea they were even under attack. The entire effort demonstrated only that *Shimbu Group* was incapable of effective offensive action and that the original defensive strategy was the best course. But the Japanese were irretrievably weakened by the failed counterattack, and to Yokoyama the ultimate fate of *Shimbu Group* was a foregone conclusion. All he could do now was trade lives for terrain and time.

For the next two days, 13–14 March, the Americans battered through Japanese positions, bolstered in the south by a regiment of the 43d Division sent in as reserve for the 1st Cavalry Division. The 6th Division successfully cleaned out the extreme northern Japanese positions, securing a strong foothold on Mount Mataba. The cost, however, continued to be high. On the morning of 14 March a burst from a hidden Japanese machine gun position caught a group of officers bunched together at a regimental forward command post, mortally wounding the division commander, Maj. Gen. Edwin D. Patrick, and one of the regimental commanders. Still, the dual offensives had begun to cave in the Japanese defensive line at both the northern and southern flanks, killing an estimated 3,350 enemy troops. On the American side, the XIV Corps lost almost 300 dead and over 1,000 wounded in less than a month of fighting.

On 14 March General Hall's XI Corps took over responsibility for operations against *Shimbu Group*. With the 38th and 43d Infantry Divisions, Hall decided to continue XIV Corps' strategy, although he intended to concentrate more heavily on destroying the Japanese left,

**THE SEIZURE OF WAWA DAM**  
27 March–28 May 1945

-  Line of Contact, 27 Mar
-  Axis of Main Attack
-  6th Div Gains, 30 Apr
-  38th Div Gains, 28 May





or southern, flank. On 15 March American forces resumed the attack, and by the twenty-second, to avoid complete encirclement, the Japanese had begun withdrawing to the northeast. But the Americans followed up quickly, and by 27 March they had penetrated the hasty Japanese defenses, completely destroying *Shimbu Group's* left flank. On 17 May the 43d Division, aided by guerrilla forces and air strikes that delivered the heaviest concentration of napalm ever used in the Southwest Pacific, captured the Ipo Dam intact and restored Manila's water supply. Wawa Dam was captured, also undamaged, on 28 May against comparatively light resistance. Continued pressure forced the Japanese to withdraw deep into the Sierra Madre mountains in eastern Luzon where starvation, disease, and guerrilla attacks gradually decimated their ranks during the remainder of the war.

*Shimbu Group's* southern positions along the Bicol Peninsula fared no better. After the XI Corps had relieved the XIV Corps in mid-March, the latter concentrated on rooting the Japanese out of southern Luzon. On 15 March the 6th Division, with the 112th Regimental Combat Team attached, passed to the control of the XI Corps, and the 37th Division was placed in the Sixth Army reserve and given the mission of patrolling Manila. The XIV Corps now included the 1st Cavalry Division and the 11th Airborne Division with the 158th Regimental Combat Team attached. The corps held a line stretching from Laguna de Bay, a huge lake at the northern edge of the Bicol Peninsula, to Batangas Bay on the southern coast. Between the bays lay Lake Taal, a smaller body of water, and a crucial road junction at the town of Santo Tomas. On 19 March the 1st Cavalry Division on the northern edge of the line and the 11th Airborne Division on the south edge began a double enveloping drive around Japanese positions near Lake Taal. The purpose of the drive was to open the highway between Santo Tomas and Batangas, a move that was successfully completed by month's end. On 24 March the 158th Regimental Combat Team was taken from the 11th Airborne Division and ordered to prepare for an amphibious landing at Legaspi on the southeast coast of the Bicol Peninsula.

By 19 April, the Americans had completed their encirclement and driven all the way to Luzon's east coast. The 11th Airborne Division cut all routes leading to the Bicol Peninsula, while the 1st Cavalry Division turned north into the Santa Maria Valley in a move intended to turn *Shimbu Group's* southeast flank and prevent the Japanese from using any of the small coastal towns as concentration or evacuation points. By 25 May, the cavalry, with substantial support from guerrilla units, had seized Infanta, the largest town along the coast.

The XIV Corps was now free to proceed with the liberation of the Bicol Peninsula. The campaign had actually begun on 1 April when the 158th Regimental Combat Team carried out its amphibious assault at Legaspi on the southeastern tip of Luzon. Resistance was light because the Japanese had transferred most of their troops to the northern *Shimbu Group* positions during January. Although the 158th Regimental Combat Team encountered many prepared defenses, the opposition consisted mainly of support troops and naval service troops, together with a few remnants that had escaped from Leyte. The Americans had little trouble handling this hodgepodge of Japanese defenders, and on 2 May they linked up with the 1st Cavalry Division, which had been advancing into the peninsula from the northwest. By 31 May, all of southern Luzon was cleared of major enemy units, and on 15 June the XIV Corps was relieved of tactical responsibility in southern Luzon and transferred north.





### *Shobu Group*

Despite the hard fighting in Manila, the Bataan Peninsula, and throughout southern Luzon, the main Japanese force was in the northern part of the island. It was there that General Yamashita's *Shobu Group* occupied a large region resembling an inverted triangle, with northern Luzon's rugged geography as a shield. In the east rose the Sierra Madre mountain range, to the west the impressive hills of the Cordillera Central, and at the northern edge of the triangle, the Babuyan channel. In the center lay the Cagayan Valley, Luzon's rice bowl and a key supply area for the Japanese units. Yamashita had pieced together a defensive force made up of the *19th Division*, the *23d Division*, and elements of three others: the *103d* and *10th Divisions* and the *2d Tank Division*. Its main purpose was to harass the Americans rather than to defeat them. Yamashita expected the main attack to come from the Manila area where American forces were consolidating their gains, particularly along the handful of roads winding north through Bambang and Baguio and into the Cagayan Valley. And there was always the possibility of amphibious landings along the northern coastline.

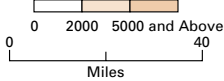
In February, as American troops gradually pushed the enemy out of Manila, General Krueger alerted the I Corps for an offensive into northern Luzon against *Shobu Group*. Originally, Krueger had planned to use a total of six divisions to gradually push north through Bambang, but MacArthur's emphasis on securing the entire Manila area first made this impossible. Nevertheless, by the end of February, General Swift, the I Corps commander, had begun probing the area

# TROOP DISPOSITIONS

21 February 1945

-  I Corps Front Line
-  Japanese Forward Defenses
-  Japanese Unit Locations
-  USAFIP U.S. Forces in the Philippines

ELEVATION IN FEET





*“Trading Rations for Souvenirs”* by Sidney Simon. Lingayen, Philippines, 1945. (Army Art Collection)

north of the original beachhead with the 33d Division, which had replaced the battle-weary 43d Division and the 158th Regimental Combat Team on 13 February. Although Swift’s forces were outnumbered two-to-one by the Japanese, the relative passivity of their foes encouraged the more aggressive Americans.

In early March Swift ordered the 33d Division to push northeast along Route 11, the easiest road into the mountains, toward the town of Bambang. But the attackers quickly discovered that this avenue was heavily defended and made little progress. Meanwhile, other elements of the division operating along the coast directly north from the Lingayen Gulf landing beaches found little resistance. After taking some small towns farther up the coast and turning inland Maj. Gen. Percy W. Clarkson, the division commander, decided to dash along Route 9 and attack Baguio—the prewar summer capital of the Philippines and currently Yamashita’s headquarters—from the northeast. To assist, Krueger added the 37th Infantry Division to the attack and with the aid of air strikes and guerrilla harassment, wore down the defenders until they were on the verge of starvation. A small garrison made a last stand at

Irisan Gorge, where the road crossed the Irisan River some three miles west of Baguio, but on 27 April the town fell to American troops.

*Shobu Group* had lost one of the three legs of its defensive triangle, but the battle on northern Luzon was far from over. Until the end of the war, Sixth Army forces continued to push Yamashita's men farther into the mountains, taking heavy casualties in the process. The 32d Division, which had also seen heavy fighting on Leyte, was worn down to almost nothing, but the defenders suffered even heavier battle casualties as well as losses to starvation and disease. By the end of the war, the Japanese were still holding out in the rugged Asin Valley of the Sierra Madre in north-central Luzon, enduring the drenching summer monsoons. Nevertheless, General Yamashita and about 50,500 of his men surrendered only after the close of hostilities on 15 August.

On 30 June 1945 Krueger's Sixth Army was relieved by the Eighth Army, whose task was to mop up scattered Japanese positions. By the end of March, however, the Allies controlled all of Luzon that had any strategic or economic significance.

## *Analysis*

Technically, the battle for Luzon was still not over when Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945. On the northern part of the island *Shobu Group* remained the center of attention for the better part of three U.S. Army divisions. Altogether, almost 115,000 Japanese remained at large on Luzon and on some of the southern islands. For all practical purposes, however, the battle for control of Luzon had been over since March.

MacArthur can be both lauded and criticized for the Luzon Campaign. On the one hand he had swiftly recaptured Manila and all areas deemed critical for further operations against the Japanese. On the other hand the enemy was not totally subdued and the Japanese troops still posed a serious threat even after several months of fighting. But many other Japanese garrisons had been left behind along the road to the Japanese heartland—just as in the European theater the Allied commanders had virtually ignored many German garrisons remaining along the French Atlantic coast and on the English Channel. After June, only a limited number of forces were needed to keep *Shobu Group* on the defensive. More significantly, *Shobu Group*, representing the largest Japanese troop concentration on the islands, contributed little to the defense of Luzon. In the end they appeared more concerned with their own pointless survival as a force in being than in interfering in any way with American designs. The Japanese decision to fight a

passive war of attrition set the tone for the entire campaign. Had Yamashita conducted a more active defense, one that did not meekly surrender the initiative to the Americans, the struggle might have been shorter but much sharper. In such a case, MacArthur's single-minded drive on Manila might have been judged a risky venture and the diversion of troops to liberate other minor islands a dangerous practice. And had the Americans suffered even minor reverses on the battlefield in the early days of January and February, the struggle might also have been prolonged until August at an even heavier cost in American lives.

Taken altogether, MacArthur's offensive had contained or taken out of the war over 380,000 Japanese, rendering them unavailable for the defense of the homeland. In the final analysis, the fall of Luzon meant once and for all that the Japanese Empire was doomed. The battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf had left its fleet in tatters, and the ground campaigns that followed turned the once-proud Japanese Army into a shadow of its former self.

Casualties on both sides were staggering. Except for those forces surrendering at the end of the war, the Japanese lost virtually all of the 230,000 military personnel on Luzon, in addition to some 70,000 casualties from the previous battle on Leyte Island. By the summer of 1945, the Americans had thus destroyed nine of Japan's best divisions and made another six combat-ineffective. Losses stemming from the battle so drastically reduced Japanese air power that the use of *kamikaze* operations was necessary throughout the rest of the war.

American casualties were also high. Ground combat losses for the Sixth and Eighth Armies were almost 47,000, some 10,380 killed and 36,550 wounded. Nonbattle casualties were even heavier. From 9 January through 30 June 1945, the Sixth Army on Luzon suffered over 93,400 noncombat casualties, including 260 deaths, most of them from disease. Only a few campaigns had a higher casualty rate.

For the first time during the Pacific war, American troops were deployed in field army strength, making for a sometimes unwieldy command structure. In earlier campaigns throughout the Pacific, the U.S. theater commanders had generally employed one or two divisions at a time to seize small islands or small portions of coastline. In contrast, the Luzon Campaign saw extended operations inland which demanded the deployment of multicorps forces supported by greatly expanded logistical and communications systems. Fortunately for the Americans, all but one of the participating U.S. divisions had had previous experience in fighting the Japanese, particularly on Leyte only a few months before. In fact, except for the urban fighting in Manila, American units were in the enviable position of applying past lessons to the battlefield. The

Americans also had the advantage of superior weapons, equipment, and supplies and by January, control of both the local seas and air. Finally, the flat open plains of central Luzon were conducive to the Americans' advantage in maneuverability and firepower. During earlier battles on the Pacific's small jungle islands, the terrain often worked to the Japanese advantage; on Luzon, the reverse was so. But again, due to the scope of the battlefield, it was the American ability to perform effectively at the larger, operational level of war that was tested for the first time in the Pacific during the Luzon Campaign.

Although the reconquest of Luzon was a severe blow to the Japanese and placed the Allies one step closer to total victory, Japan would not admit defeat. An invasion of the Japanese homeland still loomed large in American planning and expectations. But the battle for Luzon had steeled America's fighting men for the daunting task ahead. Their victory was not merely another stepping stone in MacArthur's island-hopping campaign. It marked the first time that the Japanese were driven from a strategic area that they had captured at the beginning of the war. And if American soldiers needed any other impetus, many of them received it when they saw the horror of Japanese prison camps. To many, it made the difficult battle of Luzon—and the specter of a possible invasion of the Japanese mainland—seem worthwhile.

# LUZON 1944–1945

## Further Readings

The most complete works on the Luzon Campaign are the official volumes produced by the Army and Navy, particularly Robert Ross Smith, *Triumph in the Philippines* (1963), and Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines* (1963). The best account contained in a general work on the Pacific war is Ronald Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun* (1985). Other significant general studies include John Toland, *The Rising Sun* (1970), and James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (1980). Various MacArthur biographies, such as Michael Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur: Far Eastern General* (1989), cover MacArthur's personal involvement in the campaign, but with the exception of D. Clayton James' excellent *The Years of MacArthur: Volume II, 1941–1945* (1970), go into few operational details.

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Cover: *Troops on Hill 604 fire on Japanese positions.*  
(National Archives)