

THE MARCH OF WAR

WARFARE IN THE PHILIPPINES

(October 17, 1944, to February 10, 1945)

LEYTE

ON October 17, 1944, US forces put into Leyte Gulf; but bad weather prevented immediate landing maneuvers. As the storm abated, carrier-based air squadrons of the invaders attacked the island, and on October 19 the first disembarkation took place at 9 a.m. at Cabalian. Thus the first US troop contingents set foot again on the Philippines almost two and a half years after the capitulation of Corregidor. The Cabalian landing was followed by another at Tacloban, only to be repulsed despite a heavy artillery barrage from US naval forces. The attempt was repeated on the following day, and this time part of the invaders managed to reach shore and establish a bridgehead, to which they added another one at Dulag on October 21. Pouring reinforcements into the beachheads of Tacloban and Dulag, the Americans pushed from here northwestwards toward Carigara Bay and due west toward Burauen and the airfields in the vicinity of that place.

While Japanese ground forces battled against the some three US divisions that had been landed, Japanese air formations attacked the enemy transport fleet and the escorting warships. The real counterblow was begun on October 24, when the special attack corps of the Japanese air force went into action against three US task forces in waters east of the Philippines, to be joined on October 25 by Japanese naval forces. In this "Sea Battle off the Philippines," which lasted until October 26, and in repeated engagements in Leyte Gulf (October 19 to 25), the American Navy lost 8 aircraft carriers, 5 cruisers, 3 destroyers, 9 transports, and numerous landing barges sunk; 500 planes destroyed; and 4 battleships, 9 aircraft carriers, 2 cruisers, and 3 destroyers damaged. The Japanese losses amounted to 1 battleship, 1 aircraft carrier, 2 cruisers, 2 destroyers, and 126 planes, 1 additional aircraft carrier being damaged. The greater part of the American losses was accounted

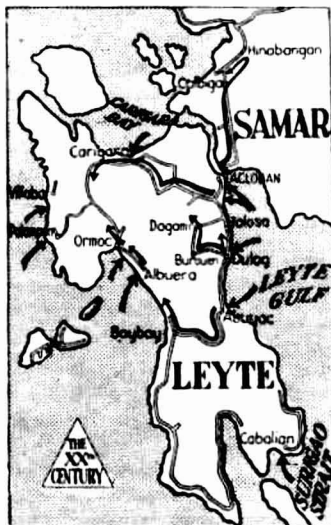
for by Japanese naval forces which, after penetrating into Leyte Gulf through Surigao Strait, wrought havoc among the assembled enemy fleet.

The Japanese brought up troop reinforcements via Ormoc, and on November 8 General Tomoyuki Yamashita was appointed Commander in Chief, replacing General Shigenori Kuroda.

The enemy divisions initially landed, belonging to the 6th US Army under Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, had meanwhile been strengthened, and another landing was effected early in November at Abuyoc. Having gained a foothold in the eastern plain of the island—which is separated from the western part by mountains and jungles—the American command aimed at gaining access to the western coast by way of the corridor leading from Carigara Bay to Ormoc, with an excellent road to count on. But the 24th US Division, advancing along the road from Carigara, met with extremely fierce resistance and, moreover, found itself in a precarious position when Japanese formations succeeded by means of infiltration tactics in cutting it off. Reinforcements, including the 32nd US Division, were hastily landed by way of Carigara.

The advance from Abuyoc across the island to Baybay and thence northward was also checked; but here the US command could outflank the defenders by landing operations further north. Disembarkations were carried out at Albuera and further to the northwest early in December for the purpose of capturing the Japanese supply base of Ormoc and gaining access to the corridor leading to Carigara Bay. After strong resistance, Ormoc finally fell on December 12. The battle now went on further to the north and west where, during the second half of December, the Americans landed at Palompon and, on January 1, just south of Villaba.

In the Burauen sector the defenders took the initiative early in December. In a series of well co-ordinated ground and air-landing operations they re-



captured three airfields and lashed out in the direction of Dulag and against positions in the Tolosa sector. Although General MacArthur claimed at the end of December that the Leyte campaign was terminated, the Burauen airfields were in Japanese hands on January 5, and at the time of writing fighting is continuing on the island in spite of the supply difficulties confronting the defenders.

SAMAR AND MINDORO

Around November 10 the Americans also crossed the channel separating Tacloban from Samar Island and advanced to Hinabangan, only to be thrown back to Calbiga.

Of greater tactical significance was the appearance of an American task force in Surigao Strait on December 13. It pushed on into the Sulu Sea and began landing maneuvers on the southern part of Mindoro Island at San José, where the Americans managed to gain a foothold and lay out airfields in preparation for the invasion of Luzon.

The American forces engaged in battle on Leyte and Samar, aggregating some seven divisions, suffered heavy casualties. Moreover, the US Navy sustained serious losses in warships and transports in addition to those already mentioned. They were largely inflicted by the "body crashing" tactics of the special attack corps of the Army and Navy—the famed Kamikaze (Navy) and Banda, Fugaku, Yasukuni, Hakko Ichiu, Gokoku, Sekicho, Teshin, and Kinno (Army) formations—the results between October 25 and December 22 totaling 128 units either sunk, damaged, or set ablaze.

These special attack corps are composed of airmen who, after intense physical and spiritual training, go out on their mission of destroying enemy targets from which there will be no return. Crashing into their objective, they cannot fail to hit it; and in their spirit of self-sacrifice they demonstrate their nation's supreme will to win in spite of any material superiority of the enemy.

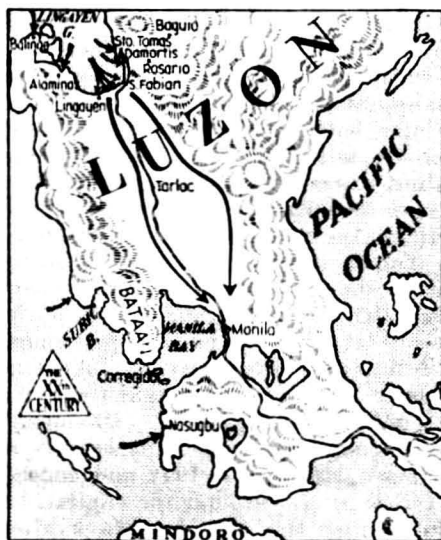
LUZON

The entire costly Leyte enterprise could only have a meaning for the Americans if it was regarded as a first step toward the conquest of Luzon, Leyte itself being of little value to the Americans as long as it was surrounded by islands occupied by the Japanese.

Since December 3, Luzon was exposed to heavy American bombing attacks, and since December 27 the Japanese press continually reported the movements of large American troop convoys, all of them obviously destined for Luzon. It may be remembered that, before the landing at Leyte, the American Task Force 58 had appeared off Taiwan in order to keep the Japanese fleet away from the Philippines. And when another task force appeared again off Taiwan on January 3, this also indicated a new

big blow against the Philippines.

Which coastal area had been chosen by the Americans for their landing became obvious on January 6 when a large convoy including 70 to 80 large landing vessels entered Lingayen Gulf on the northwest coast of Luzon and started an intensive naval and air bombardment on the coast. Certain indications seem to point to the fact that a landing from the first convoy had been planned for January 8. However, the stiff Japanese resistance, and particularly their special attack corps, forced the convoy to change its course on the morning of 8th toward the west and to wait for the arrival of the second convoy, which may have originally been intended as a second landing wave. Disembarkations began on January 9 at 9.40 a.m. If the American Commander in Chief General MacArthur has declared in his communiqué that the landing found the Japanese unprepared, this can, in view of the above facts, be dismissed as nonsense.



What were the reasons leading the Americans to the choice of Lingayen Gulf? The same which caused the Japanese on December 22, 1941, to land the bulk of their troops for the capture of Luzon there too. The Gulf, which is only 180 kilometers from Manila, has (1) numerous small harbors; (2) a road system leading toward Manila; (3) the railway Damortis/Tarlac/Manila; (4) flat country favoring motorized troops.

The landing took place in the innermost part of the Gulf between San Fabian and Lingayen. The Americans first established four beachheads which they then proceeded to connect. On 11th another landing was made at Damortis north of San Fabian. By the third day, some 100,000 Americans had disembarked on Luzon. All in all, about 800 Allied ships of all types, including ten aircraft carriers, participated directly or indirectly in the landing. The

divisions that were landed belong to the 6th US Army under Lieutenant General Krueger, the participating air forces were under the command of General Kenny, while the 3rd and 7th US fleets taking part are commanded by Admirals Halsey and Kinkaid.

As yet there has been no large-scale land battle. The Japanese did not attempt to prevent the landing as such but concentrated their efforts instead on inflicting as heavy losses as possible in ships, men, and material on the enemy, aiming especially at interfering with or cutting off the supplies of the landed troops by incessant attacks upon the American transport fleet. The weak spot of the Americans in the Philippines is the tremendous length of their supply lines. Even if part of the supplies are coming from New Guinea and Australia, the majority of the war material and the troops must be transported from the USA, one third of the earth's circumference away. It seems probable that the Philippine campaign was worked out in its details by the Allies in the summer of 1944, when they believed the end of the European war to be imminent and the employment of huge transport fleets in the Pacific appeared feasible. The course taken by the winter battle on the Western Front has proved the fallacy of the Allied speculation. The Allied transport problem is the link joining the Pacific and European wars.

Further American landings occurred near Santo Tomas (January 21); at Balinao and Alaminos shortly afterwards; in Subic Bay (January 30); at Nasugbu, south of Manila (January 31); and, by paratroops, somewhere east of Nasugbu (February 4). A glance at the map is enough to show that the aim of all these landings was Manila. Obviously the Americans expected the Japanese to repeat MacArthur's strategy of 1942 and concentrate their forces in and around the capital. Allied reports during the first few days after the Lingayen landing expressed the belief that the Pacific war's biggest clash and the first great tank battle between Japanese and American forces would take place in the plains north of Manila, where the Americans expected to encounter some 150,000 of Japan's best soldiers.

All the greater was the Americans' surprise—in fact, one of their biggest surprises in the present war—when they discovered that General Yamashita's main force was not standing between them and Manila. The Japanese forces the Americans encountered on their march to the Philippine capital, though bravely holding up their advance, obviously did not expect to prevent their entry into Manila for

any length of time. As a result, the American forces reached the outskirts of Manila three and a half weeks after the first landing in Lingayen Gulf. Here, however, they encountered stiff resistance.

Where are General Yamashita's divisions? Although they have not yet made an appearance, it seems that they are concentrated in the rectangular northern part of Luzon, north of the line which runs approximately from Santo Tomas via Damortis and Rosario south-eastward to the east coast of Luzon. There has been much guessing about the possible reasons for General Yamashita's surprising strategy. Among the considerations likely to have contributed to his decision are the following two.

(1) The Japanese knew that very large American forces were designated for the attack on Luzon (on February 10 the Japanese spoke of 20 American divisions already landed on the island) and that they would be able to prevent neither their landing nor, in view of the unfavorable open terrain around Manila, the fall of that city. Northern Luzon, on the other hand, with its more than 30,000 square kilometers and mountain ranges—the two largest of which, the Cordillera del Norte and the Sierra Madre, rise to heights of 2,260 and 1,280 meters respectively—is well suited as a base for protracted fighting with the landed American forces.

(2) Northern Luzon is drained by the Cagayan River, the biggest in the archipelago, about 350 kilometers long and suited for navigation, while the port of Aparri at the mouth of the river is closest to Taiwan and Japan and easier to keep open than Manila as a port of supplies.

At any rate, the Japanese appear to have settled down to a costly war of attrition for, as someone recently put it: "The Americans are after territory, and the Japanese after Americans."

For the imminent battles, both opponents possess great experience, the Americans in landing, the Japanese in fighting against landed troops. From Guadalcanal to the Lingayen Gulf, it is a 29-months' and 5,500-kilometers' long bloody trail of grim battles between landing forces and defenders.

As for the attainment of their goal of cutting off connections between Japan and the Japanese positions in Malai and Burma by the occupation of Luzon, the Americans have come too late, as the Japanese, foreseeing the danger threatening Luzon, have secured overland connections between Japan and Indo-China through their campaigns in China last year.

Reward

The American Government has distributed so many military medals and decorations (even to dogs) that they have become an object of ridicule among the American soldiers. A standing wisecrack: "He got that medal for preventing rape; he changed his mind."