



## THE SECRET OF JAPANESE LANDING SUCCESSES

By LIEUTENANT GENERAL MASAHARU HOMMA

*Among the outstanding features of the first year of the Greater East Asia War were the countless successful landings of Japanese forces on enemy shores. All operations of the Imperial Army against US, British, or Netherlands forces had to be preceded by landings, whether it was in the fog-bound Aleutians or the tropical regions of the south.*

*What is the secret of the successes the Japanese have had with these extremely difficult operations? The most outstanding Japanese specialist in this field, Lieutenant General Homma, the conqueror of the Philippines, has kindly consented to put down his experiences and some of his ideas on the subject. He does it with the simple and forceful clarity of a great soldier.—K.M.*

**I**N the Pacific war, a large number of landing operations were conducted by the Japanese forces under the Southern Cross: in Malaya, Hongkong, Djawa, Sumatra, Borneo, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, and other islands. Without a single exception, these operations have proved to be remarkable successes, thus upsetting past theory, which regarded landing operations as a matter of extreme difficulty.

Just as we find very few battles in the history of war which were fought in similar circumstances, no two of the above landing operations resembled each other in such points as the ratio of the army, naval, and air forces of the two opponents, the conditions of enemy defense on land, the coast line and the conditions on the coast, the distance between port of departure and destination, wind and waves (especially the height of breakers), etc. Consequently, it is unsafe to draw any basic conclusion from a limited number of examples. However, it is not necessarily mere speculation to seek for a general outline of landing operations from among many experiences.

I am not trying to compose a fundamental outline of this kind from my own experiences. I shall only attempt to put down some of these experiences as proof of one or the other contention, which may be of some value.

### EXPERIENCES IN GALLIPOLI AND CHINA

The failure of the British landing operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula during the Great War offered much material for study with reference to operations of this kind. At the same time, this crushing defeat resulted in the idea that the strategy of landing operations was extremely difficult, even to the extent of their being almost impossible. Hence, the success of a series of landing operations conducted during the course of the China affair, including the famous landings in Hangchow Bay and Bias Bay, as well as those on the banks of the Yangtze River, the coasts of Hainan Island, at Foochow, etc., constituted a miracle in the war tactics of that time, necessitating a revision of the ideas formed by the Gallipoli operations. The reason for these successes is to be found in the fact that strategic secrecy was

fully maintained and that the operations took the enemy by surprise.

Even though our enemies are on the lookout for our landings, it is impossible for them constantly to station powerful forces everywhere along their extended line of defense. Precaution is, after all, only precaution. If a defender attempts constantly to maintain powerful units at a frontal line where it is by no means certain whether his opponent will try to make a landing, the defender is bound soon to feel a shortage of men at other, more urgent fronts. In other words, the defender has a weak point which it is difficult for him to eliminate. If it is possible for a raider to take advantage of this weak point and surprise the enemy both at the opportune time and at the proper point, it is more or less certain that the landing will be a success. Therefore the key to the success of a landing operation is to take the enemy by surprise. This is an iron rule.

#### AVIATION AND AMERICAN PREPARATIONS

The progress of aviation has made landing operations more difficult than at the time of Gallipoli, since a landing attempt may now be discovered by the enemy's scouting planes long before the landing point is reached and, after reaching its anchorage, the group of transports becomes a target for enemy bombers. For this reason, the acquisition of the command of the air is an indispensable condition for large-scale landing operations. Such operations without command of the air make communications with the rear extremely difficult.

In the operations in the Philippines, I could not rid myself of the impression of the failure of the Gallipoli undertaking, notwithstanding the successes achieved in Hangchow and Bias Bays. So I was prepared for the loss of an enormous amount of vessels, man power, and material.

We knew that the US Far Eastern Fleet had its base on Luzon Island, and from various information we had to assume that the American air force in the Philippines had been reinforced so

as to number more than 300 aircraft just before the outbreak of the war. Moreover, we were aware that the US-Filipino forces believed that Japan would undertake her main operation in Lingayen Gulf in the case of a landing attempt and had been constantly holding maneuvers in this district. Hence it was against all our expectations for us to gain such easy successes in our landing operations there.

#### SUCSESSES OF THE VANGUARD

Immediately after the commencement of hostilities, our vanguards carried out successive landings on Luzon at Aparri, Vigan, and Legaspi, and on Mindanao at Davao (see maps in January 1942 issue, p. 16, and February 1942 issue, p. 148). Our forces were not discovered while aboard the transports and were offered no resistance from the land worth mentioning except at Davao.

However, after reaching their anchorage at all of these places, our vanguard was subjected to the attacks of the enemy aircraft. Also, and particularly at Aparri, our transports were attacked by enemy submarines while at anchor. Fortunately, our losses caused by these attacks were trivial. At Aparri, seven or eight torpedoes discharged by enemy vessels passed under the bottoms of our transports and hit the shore. Although enemy bombers also followed us tenaciously, not a single vessel was dealt a fatal blow.

Following these vanguard units, the main units of our forces, divided into a number of transport groups, departed from home escorted by a convoy fleet. Together with squadrons of warships they headed for Lingayen Gulf and Lamon Bay in stately formation. By this time, our campaign against the enemy air force had already scored remarkable successes, and the greater part of the latter had been annihilated. Nevertheless, a considerable number of enemy planes were still continuing their activities. Moreover, several enemy submarines were keeping a vigilant watch, cruising about in certain waters. We therefore thought it unavoidable that our fleets of transports would, because of their size, be

eventually discovered, no matter how cautiously we chose our courses.

But, once we had sailed, we discovered that all the planes appearing over us were our own, meant to cover our operations, and we did not see a single one marked with stars. Moreover, the enemy's Far Eastern Fleet seemed to have moved toward southern waters, since not a single vessel was sighted by us. Thus we were able to arrive at our appointed anchorage at the appointed time and cast anchors in unison. This was the case both in Lingayen Gulf and in Lamon Bay.

#### LANDING PREPARATIONS

Next morning, several enemy fighter planes came to attack our transports, but they were repulsed by our fighter planes. We were also attacked by enemy submarines, but our losses were not great. By that time, the enemy had already lost most of his bombers. If a powerful enemy airforce had still existed then, we were sure that our losses would have amounted to several times the number that we actually suffered.

Both at Lingayen Gulf and Lamon Bay the main forces of the coastal defense were in the areas close to the head of the bay, while a part of the defense was at important points some distance away from the head, where it was thought that landings could be effected fairly easily. In the Lingayen sector our transports were fired on by heavy field artillery, but our losses were negligible. As we anticipated the enemy's defense to be solid along the head of the bay, and as we also wanted to avoid having to operate in swampy areas immediately after landing, we did not select the head of the bay as our point of landing. Consequently it was only at the enemy's positions far away from the head of the bay that a part of our forces made forced landings involving fighting on the beach.

#### THROUGH THE SURF

Although the obstruction caused by enemy artillery fire was less than we had counted on, that caused by the waves

came quite unexpectedly. At this season of the year, wind and waves should have been quiet along the coast of Lingayen Gulf, and, as we had been favored with fine weather on the previous day, we carried out the landing in full confidence. However, as a result of low atmospheric pressure over the western China Sea several days before, there were huge breakers along the coast reaching to a height of nine feet. A group of vessels which went towards the coast loaded with the first landing units was immediately washed onto the beach and could not return to the transports. So we were forced to stop the landing. There was no telling whether these high waves would die down on the following day.

If the enemy commander had been ambitious and had wanted to make a positive offensive, this was his best chance. But the enemy missed this unique opportunity. At Lamon Bay the enemy likewise attempted only partial resistance, and no large-scale sally was staged.

The reasons for the success of these landing operations were (1) that the activity of the enemy naval and air forces was greatly reduced; (2) that there were big gaps in the American and Filipino defense positions; and (3) that the enemy's land defense forces had made neither plans nor the necessary preparations to start a bold offensive against the units already landed or to attack the enemy in the midst of landing.

#### LANDING ON OTHER ISLANDS

In all the later landing operations carried out in the following months on Cebu and Panay Islands as well as at Cotabato on Mindanao, the American and Filipino forces limited themselves to applying the "scorched-earth" policy, senselessly setting fire to the towns and villages along the coasts where we landed. From a military point of view, they did practically nothing except carry out a few air raids on our transports and landing forces. By no means could the enemy's resistance on the coast be called

severe fighting. This means that the enemy, although on the watch for the landing of our forces, could not take appropriate measures to cope with those of our landings which took him by surprise as regards both time and place.

In contrast to this, our landing at the Cagayan sector in Mindanao was carried out literally in front of the enemy and in the midst of enemy air raids. That entailed greater sacrifices for us, but we succeeded in the long run. This operation is a fine proof that landing units can penetrate through obstacles on the beach and through machine-gun positions if the landing is carried out with firm determination and the proper fighting spirit. Besides this sublime spirit of self-sacrifice, it is of course also necessary that the infantry units concerned should have been specially trained for landings and fighting, and that there is close co-operation between the air force, infantry, and engineering corps.

#### CORREGIDOR

Finally, a few lines regarding the forced landing at Corregidor may be of interest. This fortified island is shaped like a tadpole 500 meters long and some 200 meters wide at its narrowest part. It is almost entirely surrounded by precipitous cliffs, and its permanent batteries were equipped with big guns of 37, 30, 25-centimeter calibers, etc. Besides this, there were a large number of modern mobile batteries, some sixty to seventy antiaircraft guns, some three hundred machine guns, and it was defended by some 12,000 troops. Indeed, it seemed an impregnable fortress. If one examines the situation calmly, one might criticize the idea of attempting a landing on it as being reckless. However, once an order has been given, our forces know no such word as reckless and do not consider the impossible as impossible. They go forward to death with a firm belief in victory. Herein lies the strength of the Imperial forces. This is also the main reason for their success in attack.

The enemy defense at Corregidor was very strong, and there was hardly an inch for an ant to creep into. Almost all of the surrounding cliffs did not permit our men to climb up. The front where the height and slope of the cliff made a landing possible was very limited. Besides these, there were two further big obstacles from a strategic point of view. The first was that we had to bring the vessels needed for a landing from the outer sea into Manila Bay, passing right under the nose of the fortress batteries. The second was that the enemy obstructed our landing operations with speed torpedo boats and more than twenty other small war vessels. On the other hand, the advantages on our side were the absolute superiority of the Japanese air force and the fact that our batteries on Bataan Peninsula could effectively carry out a destructive advance bombardment as well as co-operate closely with our landing units. In this respect, the operation was more like that of crossing a big river than a landing.

#### A MATTER OF SPIRIT

If our forces' attacking spirit and confidence in victory had not been as excellent as they are, and if the American-Filipino forces had had the spirit to fight to the last man, this landing operation would doubtless have cost us greater difficulties and sacrifices. The time has not yet come to go into details about this battle.

It may not be far wide of the mark to say that, besides the application of the old principle of taking the enemy by surprise, the acquisition of command of the sea and air is an inevitable condition for the success of landing operations in modern warfare. However, the most important thing is to have an excellent morale born of burning patriotism, a fervent determination to offer one's life for one's country, as well as firm confidence in victory, and to carry out a bold operation with a superbly trained force.

