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“The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: The Promise Made Good to General MacArthur”

Submitted By

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This research project was an effort between CPT Eugene Harding (INNG), Mr. Harold Skinner, and myself, it dealt with the involvement of the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during World War II and their combat operations within the Pacific Theater. Our presentations will be centered on the timeline events of this operation and will be presented in a narrative form. This paper will present the connection between the 38<sup>th</sup> ID and the state of Indiana followed by discussing the first two phases of the operation: the initial landing on Luzon and the drive through the Zig Zag pass, followed by the action in the southern portion of the Peninsula ending on April 14, 1945. CPT Harding then will proceed to present on the following three “phases” and the re-occupation of the Philippines by General Douglas MacArthur.

Hitler’s rise to power in Germany in the mid-1930s and his clearly defined intentions, outlined for the world in “Mein Kampf,” combined with the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, were all serious estimates of future incidents. In 1939, Secretary of War William H. Woodring envisaged a 400,000-man force of regular Army and National Guard troops to refute any possible aggression.<sup>1</sup> Woodring was adamant about taking advantage of peacetime to prepare for the possibility of war. Although our military development at this time was respectfully more advanced than prior to World War I, it was not any more successful with Congress.<sup>2</sup> When hostility exhibited itself in late 1941, we once again would not be organized or equipped, and it would take nearly three years before the U.S. could provide any noteworthy contributions to the outcome of the conflict.<sup>3</sup> On August 27, 1940, Public Resolution #96 of the 76<sup>th</sup> Congress authorized the entire National Guard to be called into federal service for one year.<sup>4</sup> This congressional resolution was three days before the completion

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1967), 427.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> R. Ernst Dupuy, *The National Guard, A Compact History*, (New York: Hawthorn Publishing, 1971), 117-119.

of the first three-week annual field training period ever conducted by the Indiana National Guard.<sup>5</sup> On September 16, 1940, Congress endorsed the first national peacetime “compulsory service legislation” after continuous pressure from President Roosevelt.<sup>6</sup> Draftees were called into service for one year, the regular Army was happy to have the draft and was concerned that it came none too soon for national safety.

In January of 1941, the Indiana National Guard was summoned into active federal service. Very few citizens in our country or state comprehended at the time that it was to be for a much longer period and that these citizen-soldiers were to fight in one of the most significant wars in history. Several days after President Roosevelt’s address, on January 17, 1941, the Indiana National Guard was mobilized and entered into active federal duty. Nearly 9,000 men from Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia were mobilized into the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Camp Shelby, Mississippi, was the 38<sup>th</sup> Division’s initial journey. It had been the home-base for the 38<sup>th</sup> ID during World War I. When the 38<sup>th</sup> arrived at Camp Shelby, construction was still under way and there were gaps in the leadership ranks. Several thousand volunteers and draftees from the states of West Virginia, Kentucky and Indiana would inflate the strength level to roughly 18,000 in a short period of time. An interval of simple training followed by constant unit training forged the 38<sup>th</sup> ID into an operative military force.<sup>7</sup>

In August and September 1941, which has been referred as the “First Louisiana Maneuver,” the 38<sup>th</sup> ID participated as a part of the Third Army activities. These maneuver activities took place area roughly 300 miles from Camp Shelby close to the western border of

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<sup>5</sup>William J. Watt and James R. Spears, *Indian’s Citizen Soldiers: The Militia and National Guard in Indiana History*, (Bloomington: Indiana State Armory Board, 1980) 165.

<sup>6</sup> Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 430.

<sup>7</sup> Watt and Spears, *Indian’s Citizen Soldiers: The Militia and National Guard in Indiana History*, 168.

Louisiana and ranging into eastern Texas.<sup>8</sup> The following September of 1942, nearly a full year after the division had been reorganized into the “triangular” fighting doctrine from the old-World War I “square” organizational structure doctrine, the 38<sup>th</sup> ID left once again for a smaller scale maneuver in Louisiana. At the conclusion of this exercise, the division was then directed to Florida for amphibious and village fighting training and then back to Camp Shelby to begin training new draftees.<sup>9</sup>

In January 1943, the division mustered to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, for additional training in fighting techniques against pillboxes, wire entanglements, and fortified bunkers. In January 1944, the 38<sup>th</sup> ID moved once again, this time to New Orleans, where they filed onto troop ships and embarked through the Panama Canal for Hawaii for additional intensified training period of six months. Initially, the 38th was integrated into defensive positions of the island of Oahu, and its three infantry regiments were rotated for jungle and survival training. In July 1944, the 38th departed on several troop transports for an 11-day voyage to an unknown destination, which proved to be Oro Bay, New Guinea. And upon arrival was followed by more intensive training along with being acclimated with the customs of the local headhunters.<sup>10</sup>

The island of Leyte was identified as a strategic point to the Pacific Theater. General MacArthur insisted that liberating Luzon was a stepping stone to Japan. On October 3, 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed General Douglas MacArthur to invade Luzon. It was now November 1944, US Army senior leaders decided that the division was in fact a well-trained combat unit. The soldiers of the 38<sup>th</sup> ID were ready to do what they had been training so long for.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>10</sup> William J. Watt. “The Indiana State Guard,” *The Indiana Military History Journal*, (January 1976): 45.

The first encounter of combat for the division in World War II came on December 6, 1944, where troops of the 38<sup>th</sup> landed under fire in Leyte Gulf. While traveling to the gulf, the 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry was attacked by a Japanese suicide plane that dove onto the deck of the SS Marcus Daly, the result was the lost 122 men.<sup>11</sup> Although this was a short-lived engagement, it was an opportune combat experience that refined the division for their next encounter. In one month, the 38<sup>th</sup> ID would land on the island of Luzon and ultimately avenge the loss of the Bataan Peninsula, thus leading some reports of General Douglas MacArthur later to referencing to the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry as the “Avengers of Bataan”.<sup>12</sup>

On Christmas Day, 1944, the division staff was briefed on Operation Plan M-3, which directed the landings on Luzon by the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. On January 19, 1945, these plans were amended. The new plans were for the Division to participate with XI Corps and issued the Operation Plan M-7. The new plan necessitated changes in command and staff planning at every leadership level. This situation led to additional confusion that was already caused by the lack of adequate communication devices, inaccurate plans and drawing of ships that were to be loaded and difficulties of coordination with other units landed on Luzon with the division. On January 30, 1945, the mission would once again be modified to include participation in an amphibious operation south and east of the Bataan Peninsula. Although the Luzon campaign has not officially been labeled as a “phased” military operation, many researchers and military historians have used this narrative terminology to simply group the more important geographical and sequential combat operations in order to make them clearer and more comprehensible.

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<sup>11</sup> Center for Military History. *The Campaigns of World War II*. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1954). 263.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

Phase I- Was the time schedule for the initial landing on Luzon on January 29, 1945, through the fight for Zig Zag Pass which terminated on February 14, 1945.

Phase II- This was the action in the southern portion of the Bataan Peninsula, including the military operations to gain control of two significant roadways. This operation began on February 11, 1945 and ended on April 17, 1945.

Phase III- This operation began on March 7, 1945 west of Fort Stotensberg, the purpose was to cut off Japanese escape routes to the north. It terminated on April 30, 1945. (CPT Harding material)

Phase IV- Operations from April 30, 1945 through June 30, 1945 to secure the area east of Manila. (CPT Harding material)

Phase V- All combat actions on Luzon after June 30, 1945.<sup>13</sup> (CPT Harding will material)

\*\*\*\*Debating about the Intel reports\*\*\*\*

With little enemy opposition, Phase I of the Luzon campaign began when the first waves of the 38<sup>th</sup> ID hit the beaches at 0830 on January 29, 1945, on the west coast of Zambales Province between the towns of San Felipe and San Narcisco.<sup>14</sup> The 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry was on the left (north), the 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry in the center, and the 152<sup>nd</sup> Infantry on the right (south). The 34<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT), as a part of the corps force, landed south in the geographical area of San Miguel.<sup>15</sup> The airstrip at San Marcelino as well as other assigned beachhead objectives were secured in quick order, and all components were advancing inland. The east-west portion of Highway 7, which ran from Olongapo on the west to the vicinity of the XIV Corps boundary near Dinalupihan on the east. Highway 7 was roughly 20 miles of winding road, with unaltered surface, sharp curves and lying in a generally heavy forest and dense underbrush. It was a devious and complicated path that became known as Zig Zag Pass.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Watt and Spears. *Indiana's Citizen Soldiers: The Militia and National Guard in Indiana History*, 167.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Morton. *The War in the Pacific-The Fall of the Philippines*. (Washington DC: US Printing Office 1956). 100.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Control of the Zig Zag Pass was vital to the success of the entire operation. The territory was formally referred to as Highway 7, but it was little more than a tortuous trail across the neck of the Bataan Peninsula. When secured, it would alleviate any escape route to the Japanese army when forced from Bataan. It would also accelerate the opening of Subic Bay for shipping purposes, which would be vital for logistical reasons. While Zig Zag Pass was only one of several steps of the campaign, the battle for this territory was the real initiation for the soldiers of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division and stood out as a historic victory over tremendous barriers and a proud and dedicated enemy. The pass was a trail with sharp turns and a dissolute jungle which gave sanctuary to the Japanese forces. Exceedingly heavy undergrowth and rugged terrain with steep cliffs concealed the enemy, who was most proficient in the use of natural and artificial camouflage. A complex system of entrenchments, which included caves with linking tunnels and pillboxes permitted the enemy to establish pre-determined interconnecting fire, additionally firepower from reverse slopes created countless situations that made the smallest advance challenging and bloody.<sup>17</sup> The M-7 report pictures “one of the world’s largest field mortars was captured intact by infantrymen of the 152<sup>nd</sup> Infantry during the battle. The captured mortar was considered of enough interest and importance that it was sent back to the United States for ordnance study.<sup>18</sup>

While the 152<sup>nd</sup> was continuing a systematic advance in its sector within the vicinity of what was to later be labeled “Bloody Ridge,” the 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry was given the task of seizing the Santa Rita trail north of the highway and then return to the highway from the east on the enemy’s rear. By doing this, the 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry crossed a series of challenging and heavily wooded ridges

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>18</sup> Center for Military History. *Pictorial Record-The War Against Japan*. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1952). 360.

and ravines. Since the advance was cross country, everything had to be hand carried, which in turned added to the slow movement. Advancement was also laborious and rough for the 152<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, each hilltop was crowned with a series of foxholes, and interlocked with other foxholes by tunnels extending from the bottom thus allowing each hilltop to have mutual supporting fire. Taking an emplacement usually required direct fire by artillery or mortars, or frontal attack by individual riflemen, and when the top was taken, there was always the risk of Japanese suicide operations. Fields of fire were often cleared through the prolific use of white phosphorous and other artillery fire.<sup>19</sup> From documented correspondence and reports, the performance of the artillery was outstanding. There are documented reports that a capture Japanese prisoner commented about the American troops as jungle fighters: “The Americans do not fight in the jungle; they remove it.”<sup>20</sup> Combat skirmishes in the pass was so tight and the situations changed so rapidly at times that the infantry and field artillery units were constantly changing missions in order to mutually assist sister units at critical periods of time. In one instance, elements of the 152<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was ordered north of Highway 7 to assist the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry, which could not be disengaged. Both regiments were intermingled in the same fight, and Executive Officer of the 152<sup>nd</sup>, Lieutenant Colonel Jesse McIntosh was placed in control of all units north of the highway.<sup>21</sup>

On February 15, 1945, Control of Highway 7 and Zig Zag Pass were secure. The Japanese had defended one of the most complexed and completely fortified system of positions

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<sup>19</sup> Louis Morton. *The War in the Pacific-The Fall of the Philippines*. (Washington DC: US Printing Office 1956). 128.

<sup>20</sup> John Shively, “The Avengers of Bataan,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, *Indiana Historical Society*, (Spring 2002): 10-14.

<sup>21</sup> Center for Military History. *Reader's Guide: United States Army in World War II*. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1992). 263.



of all times. The Japanese did not give an inch, nor did they withdraw. The ferocity of the Zig Zag Pass fight can be attested to by the fact that almost 2,400 of the enemy were killed and only 25 prisoners were taken. Losses for the 38<sup>th</sup> Division were heavy. When the battle ended, half of the second lieutenants had only a few weeks earlier been enlisted men who had displayed leadership in taking up when their officers became casualties.

Phase II of the campaign began during the final days of the Zig Zag Pass confrontation. On February 11, 1945, the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry began organizing what was known as the “South Force” to conduct a series of amphibious landings at the southern tip of Bataan. An “East Force” from the 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry began preparations for a move south along the east coast of the peninsula. The Highway 111 terrain was similar to that of Highway 7 at Zig Zag Pass but was not defended in depth or to the extent that the pass was. In fact, a great number of the Japanese had infiltrated north out of the Bataan Peninsula itself. The East Force moved down the peninsula without heavy resistance.<sup>22</sup>

On February 15, 1945, the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry landed on the beaches of Mariveles with virtual ease. It was on this same day that a motor column was sighted moving rapidly south along the Manila Bay coast that was spared from being fired upon because of an order to closely observe and identify before engaging any target. It turned out to be General MacArthur and his staff. The General had kept his promise to return, and men of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division were there to greet him. It took the 38<sup>th</sup> Division only seven days and by February 24, 1945, the southern Bataan Peninsula

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<sup>22</sup> John Shively, “The Avengers of Bataan,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History, Indiana Historical Society*, (Spring 2002): 10-14.

had been secured. On this same day the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry had provided a force that landed on Corregidor to assist in the final stages of that operation.

On March 17, 1945, troops of the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry landed on Cabello Island, they made steady progress until they encountered two large concrete mortar pits in the center of the island. These emplacements could not be taken because of the protection afforded by them and the surrounding terrain. Finally, with the assistance of the Navy, division engineers constructed what they called their “Rube (Ruth) Goldberg.” It was a ship fitted with pumps and gas pipelines, which were strung onto the shore and up the hill to the mortar pits. Diesel oil and gasoline were pumped from the ship, up the hill and into the pits. Two bombs were lower into the ventilation shafts, the oil was ignited, and the resulting internal fire and explosions caused complete destruction of the emplacement.<sup>23</sup>

El Fraile, a tiny reef near Corregidor in the entrance to Manila Bay, was the site of the most unusual fortification. Built between 1912 and 1922, it took the form of a battleship, a concrete structure roughly 350 feet long and about 150 feet wide, with the sides 18-30 feet thick. The deck was 40 feet above the water and 15 feet thick. It housed two turrets, one with a fourteen-inch gun, the other a six-inch gun. When the Americans surrendered in 1942, all guns had been rendered inoperative. The interior of this structure had three levels, bunkers and galleries. Ventilator shafts from the top connected with ducts that led through the interior. This was Fort Drum!<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Watt and Spears. *Indiana's Citizen Soldiers: The Militia and National Guard in Indiana History*, 173-174.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Morton. *The War in the Pacific-The Fall of the Philippines*. (Washington DC: US Printing Office 1956). 128.

Once again, senior leaders felt the oil treatment seemed appropriate and the “Ruth Goldberg” was summoned. But new problems were presented, the sides were high and vertical, they were also sloped off near the top. With the ingenuity of medieval warriors’ engineers decided to build a drawbridge structure called the “Trojan Horse.” A Navy ship would run alongside of the fort, hold it in place and then troops could move across this “assault tower” onto the deck of Fort Drum.<sup>25</sup> On April 13, 1945, elements of the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry and the 113<sup>th</sup> Engineers undertook the assault mission on Fort Drum and except for some minor drawbacks the strategy worked out well. It is documented that the resulting explosion sent steel plates into the air hundreds of feet. By day five the smoke had cleared, and the fort was cool enough to enter, the division troops descended to where they discovered 60 Japanese soldier’s dead. Casualties for the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were limited to few minor injuries. Thus, on April 17, 1945, the entire south Bataan Peninsula and all the islands approaching Manila Bay were securely in the hands of United States forces which concluded Phase II operations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Watt and Spears. *Indiana’s Citizen Soldiers: The Militia and National Guard in Indiana History*, 174.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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