

A look back



World War II, Part III: The 38th ID in the Philippines

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The 38th Infantry Division operations in the Manila Bay Islands were wrapping up. Movement from the Bataan Peninsula and west coast of Luzon were being focused inland toward the Zambales Mountain range.

Division Soldiers expanded their operations to include what was known as the Stotsenburg Area, March 7, 1945. The area included Fort Stotsenburg and Clark Field originally established in World War I by the U.S.

The 43rd Infantry Division was ordered to re-mission elsewhere and the 38th Infantry Division elements took over area command and control. The division elements regrouped forming the 38th Division Advance (Task Force) and used assigned units from the 169th Regimental Combat Team, B and C Companies of the 640th Tank Destroyer Battalion and B Company, 82nd Chemical Battalion headquartering in the Fort Stotsenburg vicinity.

Soldiers pushed Japanese forces west out of the Stotsenburg Area and into the Zambales Mountains. This forced the enemies toward Mt. Pinatubo.

Soldiers then navigated into unfavorable terrain conditions.

Streams flowed between dangerous steep ridges. Individual hills were covered with

thick cogon grass and thickets of bamboo, and shrubby trees made foot paths and enemies virtually invisible. Vegetation covered numerous dugouts and caves hiding enemies, weapons and supplies. The dwellings allowed enemy forces to hide within during artillery bombardment. Direct fire from artillery, self-propelled cannons and antitank weaponry stopped attacks but adjacent enemy fire from similar hideouts prevented entry to their positions.

Further south and west, the roads were more difficult to construct and maintain. Engineers were required to make roads, which aided troops and supplies forward in battle. The engineers bulldozed supply routes, destroyed caves and blasted tunnels full of enemy supplies. Eventually the terrain was too treacherous to use the heavy machinery. Supply routes were lengthened to the point of having to hand-carry provisions, so troops began to use whatever resources they could from neutralized enemy emplacements.

Troops encountered fierce resistance March 13 to 15 while reporting to the areas of Spence Ridge, Flat Top Hill and High Peak. Artillery batteries bombarded the enemy. Light artillery teams expended more than 8,500 rounds and 81mm mortar batteries launched more than 1,000 rounds onto enemy

locations in a three-day span. Their effort softened the enemy and burned away brush covered emplacements, enough for the 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry and the 2nd Battalion, 169th Infantry Soldiers to advance by March 16 to 17.

Troops continued toward Pinatubo where they encountered small pockets of enemies. Eventually key positions such as Spence and Sawtooth Ridges and the Japanese Motor Pool were overtaken. Surviving enemies scattered and retreated following the streams toward rice paddies of the lowlands. Japanese who retreated were killed or captured. Those captured provided intelligence to enemy movement and the whereabouts of positions.

The task force patrolled killing enemy stragglers on Spence and Sawtooth Ridges on foot, April 3 through April 4. Mortar, artillery and ammunition supplies were conserved as part of the tactical plan to wage an all-out attack on Sacobia River forces. However when the time came, the task force was met with little resistance.

For the most part the 38th's mission to clear the Stotsenburg area of the enemy had been achieved. The 38th's focus was now to take Pinatubo and eradicate any and all opposition west of the Stotsenburg Area in the Zambales Mountains.

By April 18, the plan was



made to attack Mt. Pinatubo from all sides with four Infantry battalions backed by artillery. The battalions worked into their positions over the last weeks of fighting. The 1st Battalion, 152nd Infantry was stationed to the south of Pinatubo, 3rd Battalion 152nd Infantry was stationed to the west, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry to the east and the 2nd Battalion, 149th Infantry attacked from the north.

While clearing enemies from the face of the volcano, units were met with minimal resistance compared to earlier battles. Log pillboxes and hasty fighting positions held the remainder of the forces throughout the mountainside, most would not hinder troop movement or attack unless provoked to do so.

A field order was sent by the headquarters of the 11th Army Corps the next day notifying the 38th elements of a sector exchange with the 6th Infantry Division by May 5.

On April 25, each battalion made movement with a goal to physically contact each other on Pinatubo. After meeting, the 152nd Infantry battalions concluded their missions and

reported their missions complete to headquarters.

The next day the infantry battalions started to be relieved by new elements and gradually withdrew. The 38th had completely broken any organized opposition of the Japanese forces in the area. The Japanese could no longer function as a cohesive fighting force. Through constant, persistent attacks, 38th Soldiers had helped claim victory in the Stotsenburg Area.

Photos:
Indiana National Guard 38th Infantry
Division Public Affairs Office,
1944-1945

Bibliography:
Story information gathered
from the 38th Infantry
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