

# A look back



## World War II, Part II: The 38th Infantry Division In the Philippines

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In the last issue of the *Guardian*, the 38th Infantry Division had completed its initial landing. The 38th Soldiers cleared Zig Zag Pass, the east to west Highway 7, and occupied the Pilar-Bagac Highway, which runs north and south.

This was by no means the end of the 38th's mission in the Philippines. The mission, in its entirety, was dubbed the M-7, or "Mike-7," Operation. The combat phase of the M-7 Operation Historical Report is broken down into four parts: (1) Initial landing to the Zig Zag Pass; (2) Bataan - adjacent islands; (3) Stotsenburg Area; and (4) East of Manila. This article is about Phase II, Bataan - adjacent islands.

The 38th Infantry Division was given the mission of landing at Mariveles, Bataan's southern province. The 38th troops' task was to seize and secure a beach head and establish control of the southern tip of Bataan.

Once accomplished, they would help the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment secure Corregidor Island, and then secure three other islands in Manila Bay, Caballo, El Fraile aka Fort Drum, and Carabao.

Once the northern task force secured Highway 7, 3rd Battalion 34th Infantry, a regiment attached to the 38th, and Indiana's 151st Infantry Regiment, with special detachments from the engineers, medics and special troops, were preparing to sail to the Mariveles Harbor in the south.

The assault waves landed at 10 a.m., Feb. 15, 1945. While the Japanese harassed the ships docked at Mariveles Harbor with "Q-boats," egg-shaped vessels with their bows full of explosives, the 151st Soldiers unloading the ships had a great view of the capture of Corregidor as the 503rd jumped

in and 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry, carried by the 592nd Amphibious Engineers, landed on Corregidor Island's San Jose Beach.

Once Corregidor had been taken, the 151st Regimental Combat Team, the south force, moved to Corregidor to secure the other islands.

According to the generals at the time, these seemingly insignificant little pieces of land had to be taken, as they were all in the entrance to Manila Bay.

Manila Bay was one of those sweet, strategic ports that every general dreamed of. It is secluded, operational, and best yet, can be guarded and defended by those little pieces of land strategically located at either side of the entrance.

Whichever force controls the islands, controls the gate, the entrance to Manila Bay. The Japanese were entrenched in these little islands south of Corregidor. The nearest one was Caballo Island.

"Caballo is a little island in Manila Bay, but it was the scene of the most merciless, exhausting battle for its size ever seen in the Southwest Pacific," said John Cashman, International News Service War Correspondent.

Bombardments from Indiana's 163rd Field Artillery from Corregidor and Indiana's 150th Field Artillery from the Bataan mainland started the battle on March 27.

Caballo contained huge concrete-reinforced pits with tunnels running from them constructed by U.S. forces prior to the Japanese invasion. The island also had two hills with catchy names, 'Hill 1' and 'Hill 2.' Hill 2 was described as a 'Mini Suribachi,' an homage to the volcanic mountain on Iwo Jima, and it was defended by the Japanese as such.

The battle lasted for 20 days, and the 151st Infantrymen endured 36 hours of

heavy mortar and machine gun fire, all without food, water and minimal medical facilities. The Hoosier Soldiers also withstood a Banzai attack, a last-ditch effort by the Japanese force.

"Resupply of the troops atop the hill and evacuation of their casualties now presented a serious problem. The troops were without food and water for 36 hours before an LCM (landing craft) in the water at the foot of the cliff catapulted a rope by means of a rope gun to the top of the hill. It was used to haul up necessary supplies.

Later, after several unsuccessful attempts, a liaison plane was able to accomplish an air drop of water and another length of rope. The two ropes were used in lowering casualties down the side of the hill. Pfc. James R. Fawcett, of Scranton, Pa., didn't wait for the rope, however. He strapped one seriously wounded man to his back and had himself lowered down the cliff.

"Tech 4 Walter S. Korba, of East Chicago, Ind., crawled up the hill to establish a forward aid station at the top. Although under continual fire, he stopped several times along the way to minister to wounded comrades, and when he reached the top, cared for the casualties until more help could be secured."<sup>1</sup>

The two hills were taken nine days after the operation began, and the mortar pits needed to be destroyed. Artillery and mortar fire did little damage to the fortifications and the enemy forces occupying them, as the enemy troops simply went into the tunnels until the bombardment ended. The plan was then tweaked to pour a burning mixture of diesel oil and gasoline down an exposed ventilator shaft which had been attempted earlier in the battle to clear the pits, but was foiled due to heavy sniper and mortar fire.

"Lt. Col. Fred C. Dyer, Indianapolis,

Ind., and Capt Emory Williams, of Tulsa, Okla., decided that a pipeline could probably handle the necessary amount of the mixture. And this gave birth to the 38th Division's famous 'Rube Goldberg' - so called because it resembled any of his zany inventions - was an LCM fitted with two Navy Cubes (a pontoon cube) and a centrifugal pump."<sup>1</sup>

While under fire, on April 5, 1945, Indiana's 113th Engineers built a 700-foot pipe. Approximately 2,600 gallons of the volatile mixture were pumped into the ventilator and ignited with white phosphorous mortar shells.

There were several explosions after the initial blast. The second pit was given the same treatment, however with less success as the Japanese had cut the lines.

"Two 500-pound bombs were lowered down the ventilator shaft, and equal weight of demolitions placed at the east tunnel entrance, and 2,600 gallons of oil pumped into the pits.

At 1400 (2 p.m.) on the afternoon of April 7 this terrible charge was set off, resulting in 20 explosions from the interior of the emplacements."<sup>1</sup>

A captured Japanese soldier reported that there were 20 Japanese soldiers left in poor physical condition with 10 rifles and 10 rounds each. At the end of the operation, on April 15, 1945, 38th Soldiers determined that there may have been one Japanese soldier still out there, but he was never found.

Two islands down, two to go.

"Fort Drum is a concrete block in the shape of a ship, built on a reef, El Fraile, in the entrance to Manila Bay. It was built between 1912 and 1922 of reinforced concrete, and mounted two turrets with two 14-inch guns each and double 6-inch guns in casemates on each side. These had been

rendered inoperative when the American forces surrendered in 1942."<sup>2</sup>

The Rube Goldberg oil pumping device was again employed to take this island. After a good blasting from air and naval units, the gas and oil mixture was pumped into ventilator shafts at the top of the concrete island, and then ignited. The blast blew a steel plate, six inches thick by 144 square feet, 300 feet into the air.

It was as if the island had been blown out of the sea. Except for some ineffective small arms fire and one pesky sniper, the operation went off without a hitch, according to the 38th Infantry Division, Avengers of Bataan.

"In actual time of pumping oil and setting fuses it had taken just 30 minutes to settle the fate of the impregnable concrete fortress, probably the shortest assault operation on record and executed by what Time Magazine called the 'War's oddest naval task force.'"<sup>1</sup>

One teeny tiny island to go - Carabao. After a 30-minute bombardment, the first wave of U.S. troops went in and secured the island. Once secured and the extensive tunnels were examined, and reconnaissance determined that the enemy had long left the area.

"...The only sign of life discovered was a hog in fairly good condition. There were evidences that the (enemy) garrison had withdrawn just prior to the landing."<sup>1</sup>

Just as the Japanese were resourceful in their development of their defense systems, tunnels, spider holes, etc., the 38th Infantry Division was even more resourceful in their methods of eradicating the Japanese from the islands in the Manila Bay.

There were still two other parts of the M-7 operation combat phase, so there will be more to come in the next issue of *Guardian Magazine*.

Photos from left: Soldiers of the 151st Infantry attempt to eradicate enemy soldiers from the reinforced concrete mortar pits on Hill 2 (Mini Surabachi), Caballo Island, Philippines.

Soldiers of the South Force move toward Hill 2, nicknamed "Mini Surabachi." The ferocity with which the enemy defended it was much like their defense of Mount Surabachi on Iwo Jima.

The 113th Engineers, 38th Infantry Division, assemble the pipeline for the Rube Goldberg device on Caballo Island, Philippines

Indiana National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Ed Androse 38th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 1944-1945

### Bibliography:

<sup>1</sup> 38th Infantry Division, Avengers of Bataan', World War II History Book, published 1947

<sup>2</sup> 38th Infantry Division, M-7 Operation Historical Report