

# Liberation of the Philippines \*

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**A**FTER THE LEYTE landings of October, 1944, had Admiral King had sufficient troops available to bypass Luzon and attack Formosa and Amoy, as he advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Communist China's history might have been altered. Similarly after mopping up Borneo months later, had General MacArthur been allowed to restore Dutch rule in Java, Sukarno's revolutionary movement might have been arrested. Samuel Morison, however, seldom pauses over such provocative speculations but pursues the actual outcome of decisions made.

Rather than chance an invasion of lukewarm Formosa, MacArthur insisted on honoring the promise of total liberation made when he fled Corregidor. Spruance seconded him, advising that Iwo Jima and Okinawa were better approaches than China to Tokyo targets. Consequently, while the AAF consolidated Leyte, baby flat-tops supported a landing on Mindoro, December 15, closing Manila Bay some 90 miles away and protecting the straits between for troop movements to Lingayen. Despite an unopposed dry landing, "suicide boats" and 200 kamikazes made Mindoro's D-plus days as costly as Anzio's. Only saturation flights (called the "Big Blue Blanket") over Luzon airfields by Halsey's Task Force 38 secured Mindoro.

Unfortunately, while refueling in the Philippine Sea on December 18, Halsey's force collided with an unpredicted typhoon that cost 800 lives and three destroyers—the worst Navy storm damage since the 1889 Samoan hurricane. The fact that planes, respecting radio silence, made weather reports

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\* Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines: Luzon, Mindanao, the Visayas, 1944-45* (Boston Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1959).

normally twelve hours late was partly responsible. Nevertheless, collecting ships now dispersed over 2500 square miles, Halsey struck Formosan airfields to protect Lingayen during the invasion which meanwhile was underway.

In Lingayen Gulf on January 6, naval units preparing the beachhead for troops transported from sixteen Pacific bases, took the full force of kamikaze explosions. One ship was sunk, eleven damaged, and a USNR rear admiral, a British lieutenant general and hundreds of others were killed. Afraid of worse slaughter during disembarkation, US planes were asked to interdict Luzon airfields. In Philippine waters one out of every four kamikazes hit its target, and one in every 33 sank a ship. The rate of kamikaze effectiveness off Okinawa was only half so great because protective measures were devised. On the other hand, less support from naval gunfire was required at Lingayen than at any other major Pacific beachhead. There was little resistance to actual landings, January 9, because of extensive guerrilla action (as on Mindoro) and because of Yamashita's decision to withdraw to the Mountain Province in a delaying action that allowed Kyushu to prepare defenses.

**W**HILE MACARTHUR pretended a continued local emergency, Task Force 38 cruised 3800 miles, attacking Camranh Bay, Hong Kong, and Hainan, and other units prepared for the Iwo Jima assault. All that prevented Krueger's Sixth Army from dashing 100 miles south to Manila was its having become so accustomed to amphibious landings that it had little engineering equipment for overland movements! Meanwhile separate beachheads sealed off Bataan peninsula; and, south of Manila, Nasugbu. As soon as the 32nd and 1st Cavalry divisions arrived, the drive down the central plains began; and on February 3, prisoners of war at Sto. Tomas and Bilibid were freed.

**U**NFORTUNATELY, JAPANESE naval units refused army orders to evacuate Manila. Instead, 20,000 troops held out one month, reducing the "open city" to a rubble worse than Cologne. It was this same navy which held Corregidor until the 11th Airborne's drop hit Topside, February 16, and US destroyers sealed defense caves with shellfire.

In 44 days of the remaining months before V-J Day, MacArthur and the Seventh Fleet completed 38 landings through-

out the Visayas and Mindanao, in spite of Yalta's decision (February 1) to leave these campaigns to Philippine Commonwealth troops. Only on Cebu was there any resistance. Philippine guerrillas handed over every other beachhead (the Japanese had never secured more than five percent of Mindanao), and helped hunt the enemy out of the hills. When the British, preferring to be in on the Kyushu push at the expense of American supplies, refused to rescue their own territories, the Seventh Fleet and Australian infantry liberated Borneo, as well, their mine sweepers and frogmen working courageously under fire.

Aside from such occasional British pettiness and MacArthur's tendency toward personal dramatization, the liberation of the Philippines as Morison records it was an interdependent operation. Under such circumstances, although he is a naval historian, the scope of Morison's intelligence does not allow diminution of any part of that effort. Without editorializing he also makes clear that the spirit of the liberators was endeavoring to match the self-sacrifice of men like Tomas Confesor, governor of Iloilo, whose reply to puppet-President Laurel that he surrender is recorded in Morison's epigraph: "We shall never win or deserve the esteem and respect of other nations if we lack principles and if we do not possess the courage and valor to defend those principles at any cost."

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