



by Betty S. Mata

AFTER finishing the job in Leyte and cutting the Japanese forces in half, the Sixth U.S. Army, supported by naval and air forces, made the long-awaited landing on Luzon on January 9, 1945. Seizing and securing the Lingayen beachhead, and establishing an army base there, it crossed the great Agno river, seized Clark Field, and so outwitted the enemy that at no time had he been able to launch a sizeable counter-attack. These, the Sixth Army did in 19 days: In those 19 days, General Walter Krueger's force had set the stage for the capture of Manila.

The Drive to the City

On January 30th, the drive towards Manila began in earnest. The 43rd and 25th Divisions (I Corps), held the northeastern flank on the edge of the mountains. The XIV Corps, in addition to its 40th and 37th Divisions was assigned the 1st Cavalry Division, reinforced by the 44th Tank Battalion (less Co "C") of the 13th Armored Group, protected the southwestern flank against the enemy forces in the rear of Clark Field. The central plain was in the clear for the attacking forces. The familiar fatalistic at-

titude on the part of the Japanese became apparent: he was fighting with suicidal fanaticism, and the resistance on both flanks was bitter.

The Manila drive was unleashed on February 1. The 1st Cavalry Division, having been selected to spearhead the attack on Manila, poised at Guimba, Nueva Ecija. From there, it made a southward advance and crossed the Pampanga river at Cabanatuan. The 37th Division crossed the same river at Calumpit, Bulacan, to make a two-pronged drive.

While the 1st Cavalry Division struck no real opposition, the 37th Division encountered a forceful one only in the vicinity of Plaridel, Bulacan. By midnight of February 1, 1945, the two divisions had made contact.

The next morning, the 1st Cavalry Division, swinging wide, struck through Santa Maria and Novaliches, smashing enemy resistance there. The two divisions now stood abreast some 15 miles outside Manila.

That night, the 1st Cavalry stood at Grace Park, inside the city limits. The 37th Division on the right finally ran into strong enemy opposition behind a series of demolished

• bridges on the main highway. On February 3rd, however, the 37th Division joined the 1st Cavalry, and together, the two divisions moved into the heart of the city.

The 1st Cavalry, spearheaded by tanks, entered Manila from the north at twilight of February 3rd. The column rolled by the Chinese cemetery. The enemy opened fire from the tombstones while the Cavalry troops returned shot for shot from their vehicles.

Sto. Tomas Internees Freed

By midnight of February 5th, the 1st Cavalry Division had taken Sto. Tomas University liberating 3,521 Allied internées, and stood on the bank of the sluggish, tide-

bound Pasig River, while the 37th Division captured old Bilibid prisons, liberating 1,024 prisoners of war internees, and was also on the Pasig River in force.

Mercilessly, and with wanton disregard of laws and ethics, the Japanese deliberately set fire to the business district of Manila where the liberation troops were even then cleaning out pockets of resistance. Demolitions and fire became weapons of vengeance on the hopeless civilians.

It was here, on the banks of the Pasig River, that the enemy was met in force by the XIV Corps. It was obvious that the river crossing was going to be a terrific battle



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because the enemy was in the midst of a last-ditch suicidal stand. He would have to be driven from building to building, in that deadliest of all fighting: hand-to-hand combat. Furthermore, the enemy was entrenched behind the thick stone-walls of Intramuros, the ancient walled city in which he made his final, desperate stand.

Action of the Eighth Army

When the Sixth Army initiated its drive toward Manila, Headquarters SWPA ordered Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger, Commanding General of the Eighth Army, to initiate amphibious attacks against the Batangas and Zambales coasts. These Eighth Army operations,

known as Mike 6 and Mike 7 were in the nature of double feints to make the enemy believe that the main attack would be made in the south with Mindoro and Marinduque as bases.

The Eighth Army units which were ordered to participate in these operations were of the 11th Airborne Division with elements of the 24th Infantry Division attached, the 41st Infantry Division, the 38th Infantry Division. The 11th Airborne Division (with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 19th Infantry, 24th Division attached) was directed to make an amphibious landing, for the Mike 6 operations.

For the Mike 7 operations, the XI

Corps under Major General Charles P. Hall with the 24th Regimental Combat Team of the 24th Division attached was to land on the Zambales coast and then make a swift dash across the top of the Bataan peninsula towards Manila.

The 11th Airborne Division was to land on the coast of Batangas, drive inland toward Laguna de Bay and from thence north towards Manila to intercept enemy troops who would escape south from it.

This would constitute the second half of the envelopment designed to trap the Japanese in or around Manila. January 29 was designated as the D-Day for the operations of the Eighth Army on Luzon.

Landings at Nasugbu coast took place at 8:30 A.M., January 29, 1945, following an air-naval bombardment, opposed by light machineguns and 75-mm artillery fires. First to land was the 187th Glider Regimental Team which began to press forward quickly, silencing artillery fire that opposed them and by 3:30 in the afternoon seized a vital bridge across the Palico River gorge on the Nasugbu-Tagaytay Road. The advance was so swift that although the bridge was mined for demolition, it was captured intact, thus saving a long detour over a secondary road far to the south.

Determined to exploit his gains to the utmost, Lieutenant General Eichelberger ordered the 11th Airborne to press onward to Tagaytay City through the night of January 31st. Japanese Q-boats attacked the landing fleet at Nasugbu bay that same night, but was quickly dispersed, with the loss of one American patrol

boat.

In the face of poorly-coordinated enemy machinegun and artillery fires, the 11th Airborne Division made a quick dash to the lower slopes of the Tagaytay Ridge. On February 2, the Division was ready to begin the ascent against the main enemy defenses on Tagaytay Ridge. That night, the liberation troops had secured Calaway, advanced two miles further, and were prepared to launch an attack against the principal Japanese position on Tagaytay Ridge.

Premature Jump

On the morning of February 3rd, forty-six C-47 planes loaded with men of the 511th Parachute Regiment dispersed their trooper passengers over Tagaytay Ridge. An unfortunate incident, the accidental dropping of a parachute with supplies from one of the planes, however, caused the premature jump of many paratroopers which landed them about six miles northeast of the intended drop zone. When the second lift, consisting of fifty-one C-47s arrived over the Tagaytay area most of the troopers again jump into the wrong area having misled by the collapsed chutes on the ground.

Fortunately, no opposition of any consequence, was met, and that paratroopers who had landed in the wrong area were able to assemble and move to their proper drop zone, without difficulty. There they cleared Tagaytay Ridge and joined forces with the 188th Glider Infantry, approaching along Highway 17, at one o'clock in the afternoon of February 3rd.

And so, on the 4th of February,

the Airborne units began to advance towards Manila. The advance to Manila of this southern force was extraordinary: the road to Manila at many points was filled with cheering crowds waving American and Filipino flags. In many communities, the liberation forces were greeted by bands.

At early dawn, February 5th, the 511th Parachute Infantry succeeded in crossing the Parañaque River, southwest of Nichols field, and approached the airfield itself.

From this time on the fighting of Airborne soldiers was concentrated in the Nichols Field area where the enemy had strong defenses, having expected originally that the main attack against Manila would come from the south rather than from the north.

Although the fighting in Nichols Field was still going on, the backbone of enemy resistance had been broken, when, on the afternoon of February 10, the operation was turned over to the Sixth U.S. Army. The 11th Airborne Division remained to carry out the conclusions of the task under the control of the Sixth Army.

Role of the Guerrillas

The account of the battle of Manila would not be complete, however, without mentioning the assistance given by members of the guerrilla units under Captain Alejo Santos and Major Alfredo Cabangbang, the R.O.T.C. and the Cavite Guerrillas under Major General (then Colonel) Mariano Castañeda. When the liberation forces were starting the Manila drive, the officers and men of these guerrilla units were

attached to the Sixth Army and were employed as special intelligence agencies that spied on enemy positions along Highways Nos. 3 and 5. Selected teams were sent weeks ahead to Manila to locate and harass enemy positions. In fact, the first casualty during the first night of liberation of Manila was a guerrilla intelligence officer and veteran of Bataan, Captain Manuel Colayco. He was at the head of the column that smashed the gate of the Sto. Tomas University interment camp. While he led the tanks and jeeps safely to Sto. Tomas University, a Japanese guard threw a grenade hitting the jeep in which he rode. Colayco died a few days later from serious injuries and wounds.

The value of the work done by the advance units of the guerrillas was clearly seen in the almost unopposed capture of the northern section of the city. When the northern section fell into the hands of the 1st Cavalry and 37th Divisions, these guerrillas were employed in ferreting enemy stragglers from their hiding places among boxpiles in bodegas, and in ceilings of residential and business houses. By supplementing the personnel of American mopping-up detail in the city, it made possible the use of the greater portion of the effective strength of the 1st Cavalry Division in active combat operations against the enemy elsewhere.

Japanese Defenses

The Japanese forces which were holding the city of Manila amounted to some 20,000 defense and serv-

ice troops, both army and navy. These had been thrown together into a provisional unit at the last minute. (General Muto, Yamashita's chief of staff, later claimed that these forces were primarily under navy control.)

For the last stand, the enemy had turned the city of Manila into one huge fortress with the core of his defense in Intramuros.

All bridges over the Pasig had been blown up and the bridge approach areas mined. Possible crossings were defended by high-powered weapons. Every building was a pillbox; every wall a fortification; and every street a tank trap. Even artillery pieces had been placed on the upper floors of buildings. The Corps Commander ordered the 37th Division to drive straight ahead into the enemy and directed the 1st Cavalry Division to make the envelopment around to the east, with a special force from the 7th Cavalry Regiment to capture the Novaliches Dam, another key installation to the Manila Water System, together with the important Balara filters.

The 1st Cavalry seized the dam and the filters intact on February 7, while the 37th Division made an assault crossing the Pasig River to historic Malacañang Palace. The crossing was preceded by a devastating artillery bombardment. A float bridge was thrown across the river (later replaced by a pontoon bridge capable of carrying all heavy divisional equipment.) By midnight of the next day, the 37th Division had a bridgehead on the south bank of the Pasig nearly a mile deep and almost over a mile

wide. On the north bank of the Pasig, the 1st Cavalry's wide enveloping movement crushed all enemy resistance. By February 10th, the 1st Cavalry crossed at two points: the Philippine Racing Club and at Makati, Rizal, which was unopposed. It was on that afternoon, that the 11th Airborne Division stood at the edge of the Nichols Field. Thus, three divisions—one infantry, one cavalry, and one airborne—had the Manila enemy encircled.

The 1st Cavalry Brigade

The 37th Division fighting almost inch by inch, reached the eastern edge of Intramuros on February 16, while the 11th Airborne Division came up from the south to make a junction, opening the door to new tactical dispositions.

The Corps commander realized that he could now veer his attention to the enemy force along the eastern mountains. While the bulk of the 1st Cavalry Division was moved up to the new battle zone in the nearby mountains to prepare operations there, he ordered the 1st Cavalry Brigade (which was standing along Dewey Blvd.) to help in the final assault on Intramuros, passing it to the control of the 37th Division.

This left the 37th Division, reinforced by one Cavalry Brigade, to make the final mop-up in Intramuros and the Port Area, while the 11th Airborne held the line south-east of the city.

First of all, the troops fought their way into the High Commissioner's residence, along the bay. Then, they battled into the Army-and-Navy Club. And finally, after



Organized resistance in the city of Manila was ended on March 4, 1945, after building to building fight with artillery fire support to blow out reinforced concrete walls.

two days, crossed the Luneta to battle for the Manila Hotel. Each of these buildings were individual and difficult forts defended not only with automatic weapons but also with artillery pieces sticking out the windows. It took three days, for example, to capture the Manila Hotel, with the enemy making suicidal counter-attacks from the floor to the next. After that, the American troops concentrated on the enemy's core of defense.

Intramuros

North of Manila Hotel lay Intramuros. By February 23rd, heavy artillery, employing direct fire, had knocked two huge holes into its ancient Spanish stonewalls. The final assault started at 7:30 P.M. with a terrific artillery preparations. Before the infantry moved in through the hole, 105, 155 and 240-mm howitzers, 3-inch guns and tanks had dropped 185 tons of high explosives and white phosphorous shells from 4.2 mortars. The bombardment lasted for an hour, after which, three

regiments—the 129th, 148th Infantry and the 12th Cavalry—closed in for the kill.

The 129th Infantry made the entrance through the north wall. The 148 Infantry entered through the east wall. The 12th Cavalry struck through the Port Area, just outside the west wall.

Through the rubble, smoke and flames, these three forces advanced from building to building, from house to house, and from room to room, until on February 24th, the enemy had been annihilated of Intramuros.

Organized resistance in the city of Manila was ended except for three strongpoints in the Agricultural, Finance and Legislative buildings, monument government structures in the capitol area. To gain these buildings, direct artillery fire at point-blank range was necessary to blow out the reinforced concrete walls. The last enemy in these buildings was finally destroyed on March 4, 1945. The battle of Manila was over