

*How MacArthur came back*

# Leyte Landing, 1944



**O**N OCTOBER 20, 1944 a fleet of about 600 ships gathered at Leyte Gulf. The ships ranged in size from tiny PT boats and minesweepers to giant troopships. This naval maneuver was the first phase

**By Andres Cangco**

in the liberation of the Philippines.

Leyte was selected by the American General Staff because

of its geographical position in the archipelago. It was to be used as the site of major air and supply bases for the conduct of the Philippine campaign. The landing at Leyte was designed "to establish an air and logistical base in Leyte in order to support operations in the Luzon - Formosa - China coast area and particularly to nullify Japanese strength in Luzon."

Before the Americans landed at Leyte, the Filipino guerrillas had been worrying the Japanese forces. Attacks on Japanese patrols, demolition of supply dumps and communication points and actual skirmishes with large Japanese contingents had sapped the strength of the enemy. The Filipinos at this time were supplied by submarines.

On October 21, 1943, General Douglas MacArthur sent this message to Colonel Ruperto Kangleon, the area commander: "I desire that you establish and maintain direct communication with this headquarters at your earliest opportunity and thereafter you keep me informed of major developments involving enemy movement, dispositions and other activity within your area and observation."

The guerrillas intensified their attacks on the Japanese. But the enemy probably sensed that something big was up because reinforcements were sent to Leyte. The 16th division and



6,000 naval troops from Samar and Palau were sent to Leyte. The enemy strength was estimated at over 21,700 soldiers. However, during the battle, more and more Japanese soldiers came.

THE CODE name for the Leyte operation was King II. The orders for its planning and conduct was given by General MacArthur on August 31, 1944. The day of the attack was October 20. Never in the history of Philippine warfare has such concentration of military might been used. Besides the naval strength, ground troops from the Central and Southwest Pacific were joined under the command of MacArthur. The air assault of the enemy installations lasted for days.



Three days before the attack, minesweepers scurried around the gulf to remove mines and obstructions. On the evening of the 19th a convoy advanced as near as 3,000 yards from the Dinagat shoreline. All ships arrived on schedule, entering south of the gulf. As the naval maneuvers were taking place, the air attacks became more and more intense. The Japanese were not even given a chance to fire at the fleet. After the ships had taken their positions, the big naval guns were let loose. The naval bombardment lasted up to nine o'clock the following morning. The firing stopped and the destroyers and cruisers moved nearer to the shore.

The first assault is vividly narrated by an army historian:

"Flanked by rocket and gun-boat LCI's and preceded by amphibian tanks, the 5th and 12th Cavalry Regiments which formed the 1st Brigade and the 7th Cavalry, which with the 8th Cavalry composed the 2nd Brigade, raced for the shore of Leyte. The escorting rocket ships laid down a heavy barrage which covered the beach defenses to depth of 1,800 yards inland and left the enemy incapable of organized resistance. As the boats neared the shore, only small arms and machine-guns opposed the landing. As planned, the regiments landed abreast, the 7th Cavalry Regiment on the right and the 12th Cavalry Regiment on the left ... both squadrons landed on schedule with only slight opposition, and immediately be-

gan to execute their assignments. The 2nd Squadron, within fifteen minutes after landing, knocked out two pill-boxes on the beach killing eight Japanese in one and five in another. It then organized rapidly and pushed on to secure its first objective: the town of San Jose. In the town, the squadron engaged in a house-to-house search but found few Japanese. By 1230, 24 Japanese had been killed, San Jose was in American hands, and the Cataisan peninsula was sealed off. The 7th Cavalry Regiment established its command post on the west side of the town at 1245 ..."

The enemy had fled the town and were hiding in the swamps and abandoned houses along the road. After the 1st Squadron and the 7th Cavalry had secured the Cataisan airstrip, more landings were made at

White Beach. By 1130 all the troops were ashore.

THE OBJECTIVES fell one by one. The resistance was very light. The naval and air bombardments were paying off. The contact between the Americans and the Filipino guerrillas was made and together they proceeded to mop up the area.

When news that American forces had secured Leyte reached President Roosevelt, he radioed to MacArthur the following message: "You have the nation's gratitude and the nation prays for success as you and your men fight your way back."

General MacArthur with President Osmeña waded ashore. When they reached dry land, the General turned to his staff and to President Osmeña and said with deep emotion: "I have returned."

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### Safety First

*The sergeant glared at an undersized, sharp-eyed rookie and demanded, "You, there, what's the first thing you do when you clean a rifle?"*

*"Look at the serial number," was the immediate reply.*

*"The serial number!" roared the sergeant. "Why?"*

*"To make certain," explained the rookie, "that I'm cleaning my own rifle."*

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