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US ARMY DOCTRINAL EFFECTIVENESS ON BATAAN, 1942:
THE FIRST BATTLE

A thesis presented to the faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

JOHN W. WHITMAN, MAJ, IN
B.A., San Jose State College, 1968

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

1984

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO. AD-A147751	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) US Army Doctrinal Effectiveness on Bataan, 1942: The First Battle		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Master's Thesis
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s)		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027		12. REPORT DATE 1 June 1984
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 134
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) This study examines the first battle of World War II: the defense of the Philippines on the Bataan Peninsula. Only those units properly equipped, adequately trained, and led by officers who were knowledgeable on the current doctrine are examined. A detailed narrative explains what happened. (Continued on reverse side.)		

20. ABSTRACT (Continued)

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Approved for Release by NSA on 05-08-2014 pursuant to E.O. 13526

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of candidate: MAJ John W. Whitman

Title of Thesis: US Army Doctrinal Effectiveness on Bataan, 1942: The First
Battle

Approved by:

Roger L. Watson Jr., Thesis Committee Chairman
MAJ Roger L. Watson, Jr., BA.

Roger Cirillo, Member, Graduate Faculty
MAJ Roger Cirillo, MA.

Dr. Lawrence A. Yates, Member, Consulting Faculty
Dr. Lawrence A. Yates, Ph.D.

Accepted this 16th day of May 1984 by Philip S. Smithe,
Director, Graduate Degree Programs.

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ABSTRACT

US ARMY DOCTRINAL EFFECTIVENESS ON BATAAN, 1942: THE FIRST BATTLE, by Major John W. Whitman, USA, 134 pages.

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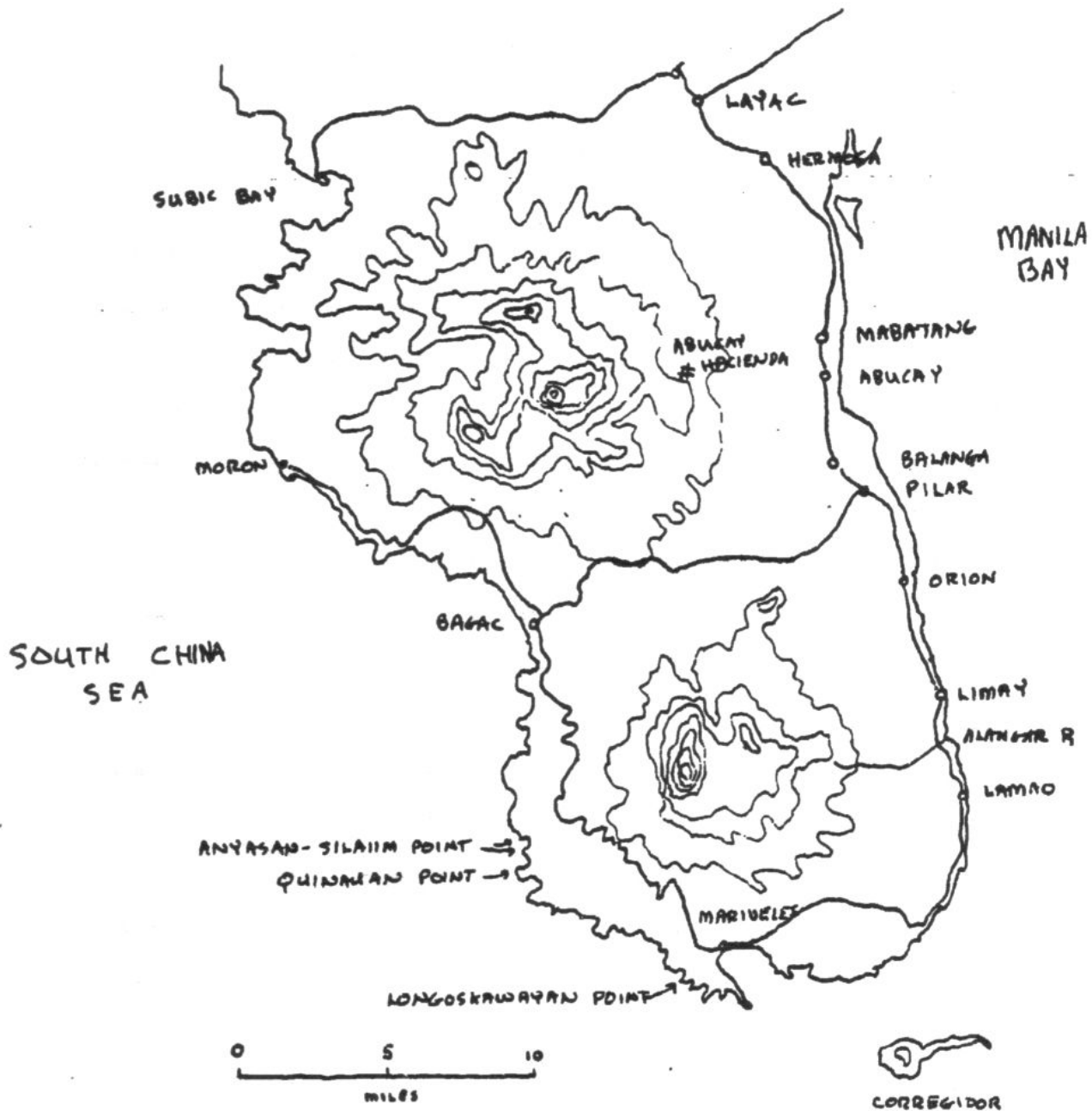
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BATAAN 1942



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Doctrine provides leaders with a standard, sometimes battle-proven process to follow when solving tactical problems. Doctrine states how an army expects to fight. Critics of the military charge that the military always plans to fight the last war rather than preparing for future conditions. Is this true? Our current doctrine professes to prepare the Army for the first battle of the next war. But how effective is doctrine when it meets the test of combat? One way to shed light on this issue is to examine past doctrine and determine how it fared when the US Army went to war. If past doctrine always failed, or if it always succeeded, or if any pattern emerges, some conclusions about today's doctrine might be drawn.

The purpose of this thesis is to see if pre-World War II doctrine met the test of combat in World War II's first battle for the United States, that of the Philippines in 1941-42. The method of research to be used in this thesis will be historical. War Department field manuals will be used to determine what military units should have done in accordance with doctrine. Then a determination will be made as to whether or not units on Bataan actually followed the principles set forth in the field manuals. Additionally, it will be determined if local conditions were key to whether or not units followed doctrine. After taking into consideration constraints of materiel, personnel, and training, did General Douglas MacArthur's forces follow doctrine? Was

pre-World War II doctrine effective on Bataan? Offense, defense, and retrograde doctrine will be examined. This research will focus on the tactics of infantry, armor, and artillery from corps to battalion.

General MacArthur's Filamerican army began its defense of the Bataan peninsula on 6 January 1942. The United States defended the Philippines using War Plan Orange 3 (WPO-3). Ever since the United States conquered the islands, Joint Army-Navy Boards had developed and updated plans to defend the Philippines against potential enemies. The planner had completed the most recent revision, one covering war between the United States and Japan, only eight months before World War II began. Because no other enemies or allies were assumed, events proved the simple, two-sided war envisioned by WPO-3 to be obsolete. But tactically, the plan was sound and adaptable to any number of contingencies. Two major assumptions were that war would come with too little warning to reinforce the garrison on the islands, and that the attack would occur during the dry season, sometime in December or January. In retrospect, both assumptions held true.¹

Under WPO-3, no attempt would be made to defend all the islands. Instead, planners directed all efforts toward holding central Luzon. If the worst were to happen, the Army would hold Bataan at all costs. The key to the plan was to deny Manila Bay to the enemy by holding Bataan and Corregidor. Philippine Army forces were expected to hold for six months. By then, the US Navy would have fought its way across the Pacific, destroyed the Japanese fleet, and landed on Bataan with massive reinforcements. The strengthened Bataan garrison would sally forth and drive the now-isolated enemy into the sea. The planners almost realized the first half of their plan, that of holding Manila Bay for six months. Corregidor fell one day shy of five months, and armed resistance in the southern islands did not end until as late as 9 June, six

months and two days after the war started. The second half of the plan, relief from the United States, failed.²

Defense of the Philippines rested with MacArthur's Philippine Army controlled by headquarters, United States Army Forces Far East (USAFFE). To man his army, MacArthur trained two contingents of Filipinos each year, each period consisting of five and a half months of individual training emphasizing scouting and patrolling. Annual training of as few as 5,000 men proved to be a great drain on the Commonwealth's treasury, and more training was fiscally unpopular. Lacking cadre and equipment, MacArthur could do little in the area of field and weapons training. Unit training was first attempted in 1941, before the big call up of reserves, and even then it was restricted to small units (companies) for a period of two weeks.³

The Philippine Army which fought on Bataan had been organized just a few short months before the war began. By late 1941, the international situation was becoming bleaker. Although Philippine Army mobilization cantonements were not complete and could not accommodate full divisions, the most recent five and a half month training period had just ended thereby freeing existing camps. MacArthur decided to mobilize increments of each reserve division in these camps. So in August of 1941, he issued orders calling into service by 1 September ten infantry regiments, one regiment for each of the ten reserve divisions. Upon mobilization, units and personnel were inducted into the armed forces of the United States. Cadres of the other divisional elements were also called to the colors. Reservists were called up, and able-bodied men ages twenty to thirty were accepted as volunteers. The Philippine Army would total 120,000 men, but only 76,750 were on Luzon, the island fated to serve as the decisive area of combat.⁴

In bits and pieces, the first regiment mobilized, and as soon as

cantonment space became available, other regiments assembled and started training. The shortest time required to raise and train a division in the United States in 1941 was about one year, and this assumed the necessary equipment, training areas, and instructors were available. In the Philippines, divisions were mobilized in haste, fielded in confusion, and sent into battle in less than four months. At best, the lucky soldiers had three months of training before they fought. The unlucky men were trained on Bataan during the fighting. There was a shortage of every type of equipment, from antitank guns to artillery, as well as engineers, medics, support, and signal troops. Three divisions had to convert their artillery regiments to infantry after they failed to receive cannon. Filipino lieutenants with little experience--even brand-new 3rd lieutenants--commanded battalions. Staff officers were new to their jobs, with most never before having held a staff position. Headquarters units, staffed by men expected to organize, equip, and train the new formations, were in no better shape than their subordinate units.⁵

The Philippine Army divisions were by necessity light divisions, never receiving the materiel and support standard to American divisions. As equipment became available from the United States, it was shipped to the islands. In this fashion, the old equipment held by the Filipinos would be replaced with more modern items. But time did not allow completion of this modernization, and never would a Philippine Army division reach half the strength of an American division. Corps, Army, and Communication Zone troops never mobilized; they were to have been formed in 1942.⁶

One small bright spot in the military situation was the elite, high-spirited 10,400-man Philippine Division. It was a regular division stationed in the Philippines and carried on the rolls of the United States Army. It had three infantry regiments, all well-equipped and well-trained, supported by

engineer, signal, medical, and light artillery troops. The 31st Infantry (US) was composed exclusively of American officers and enlisted men and was the only American infantry regiment in the Philippines (exclusive of the 4th Marines on Corregidor). The 45th and 57th Infantry (PS) were led by American officers and manned by Philippine Scout enlisted men. The Scouts were equipped with the same individual gear standard to American infantry and were well-known throughout the Army for their superb marksmanship and their love of soldiering. Filipinos considered selection to the Scouts a great honor, and entry standards were strict.⁷

Although the Philippine Army was led by Americans, the handicaps under which it operated were so great that it is impossible to draw conclusions about doctrine from its actions. Because only American and Scouts units were sufficiently trained and led by men who were familiar with doctrine, only those units will be analyzed in this thesis. Even then, caution must be exercised because of difficulties in equipment, supplies, and leadership. All action on Bataan was influenced by pre-World War II doctrine. Because this was the first battle for the Americans in the war, the leaders could not draw on previous lessons learned. Instead, they had to follow the lessons and guidance they had received during peace-time training. In short, they had to follow doctrine.

The Bataan campaign started on 6 January 1942 and concluded a disorderly delaying action during which time MacArthur's army beat a hurried retreat from all corners of Luzon. General Masaharu Homma's 14th Army had landed in both north and south Luzon and had easily routed the Philippine Army beach defenses. Unable to contest these landings, the Philippine Army retreated toward Bataan. Filipino forces defended eight different delay lines just long enough to force the Japanese to maneuver out of march formation for an attack. Then the Filipinos withdrew, scattered, or deserted. Those collected by

their officers repeated the process on the next line. The steady influence of American light tanks, self-propelled artillery, and Philippine Scouts of the 26th Cavalry were barely sufficient to dignify the maneuver as a withdrawal rather than a rout. In desperate circumstances and under constant enemy pressure, the untried Philippine Army, spread across north and south Luzon, withdrew in a dangerous double retrograde, joined, and retired into Bataan. Here the Filamerican army would fight for three months, from 6 January until 9 April 1942. At first, the defenders severely mauled the Japanese, but they finally succumbed to starvation and a rejuvenated Japanese army.

Endnotes, Chapter I

1. Louis Morton, United States Army in World War II The War in the Pacific The Fall of the Philippines (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, US Government Printing Office, 1953), pp. 61-64.
2. Ibid.
3. James V. Collier, "Notebooks," 1:13; and Jonathan M. Wainwright, General Wainwright's Story: The Account of Four Years of Humiliating Defeat, Surrender, and Captivity (New York: Modern Literary Editions Publishing Company, 1945), pp. 12-13.
4. Morton, Fall, p. 26.
5. Wainwright, Wainwright's Story, p. 16; Morton, Fall, pp. 26-27; Jonathan M. Wainwright, "Report of Operations of USAFFE and USFIP in the Philippine Islands, 1941-1942," p. 22; and Wainwright, "Report of Operations of USAFFE and USFIP," Annex V, "Report of Operations of South Luzon Force, Bataan Defense Force and II Philippine Corps in the Defense of South Luzon and Bataan from 8 December 1941-9 April 1942," p. 2.
6. Morton, Fall, pp. 34-37.
7. Ernest L. Brown, "The Operations of the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (Philippine Scouts) at the Hacienda at Mount Natib, Luzon, 15-25 January 1942 (The Bataan Campaign)(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)," p. 3; and Wainwright, "Report of Operations of USAFFE and USFIP," p. 16.

CHAPTER II

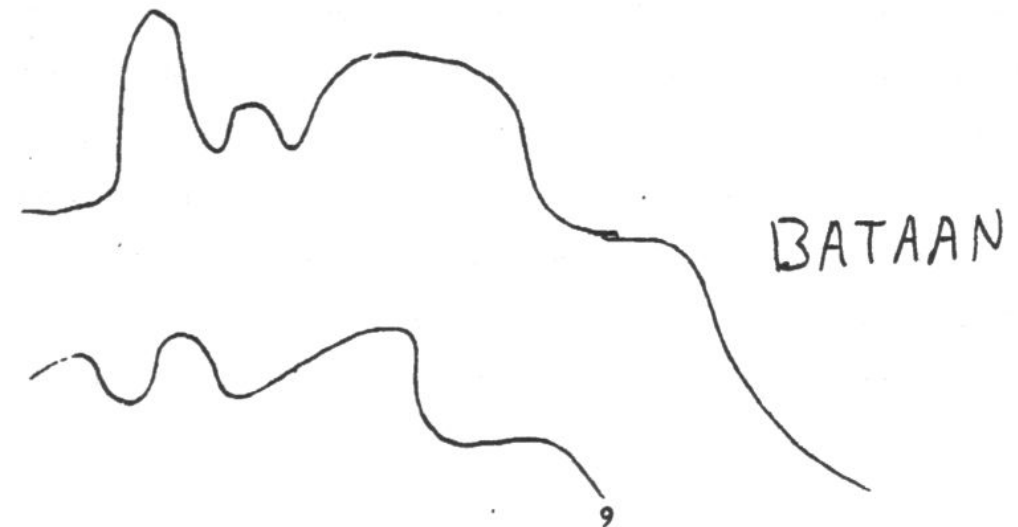
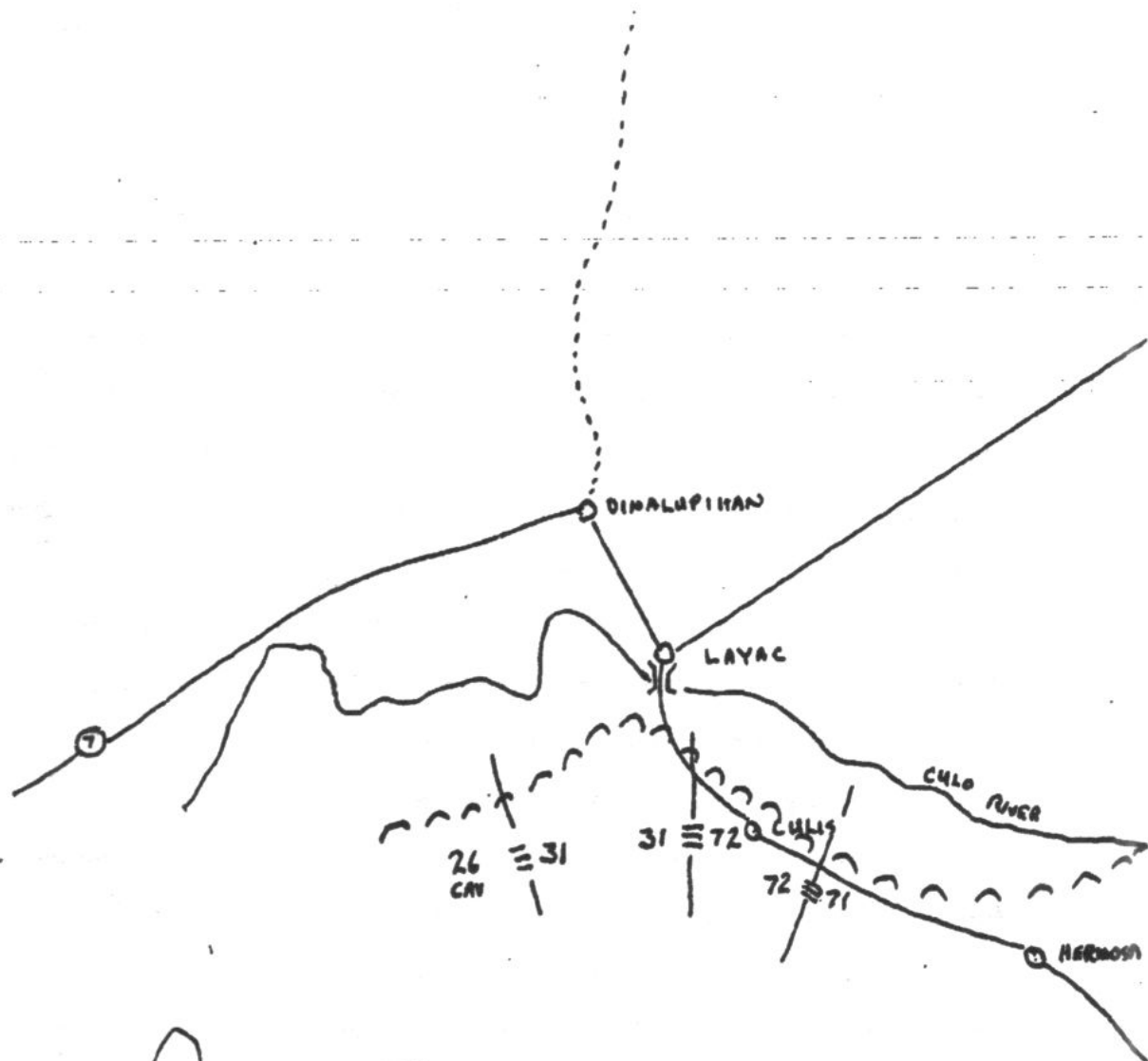
DISCUSSION

Divisional Covering Force at Layac, 6 January 1942

On 6 January 1942, after the withdrawals from north and south Luzon were completed and the Philippine Army had retired to Bataan, one last position remained between the Japanese and the main American line at Abucay. American positions on Bataan were divided into two corps sectors, a physical necessity posed by Mount Natib which divided the peninsula into west and east coastal plains. Major General Jonathan M. Wainwright's I Philippine Corps defended the western approaches, while Major General George M. Parker's II Philippine Corps defended the Manila Bay side.

The origins of the Layac covering force position lay in War Plan Orange 3, so there was little surprise when orders came to occupy the position. MacArthur ordered Wainwright to organize the line before turning it over to the commanding general, Bataan Defense Force. In turn, Major General Parker was told that Layac would be given to him and held until a coordinated attack forced a withdrawal. Brigadier General Clyde A. Selleck, commanding the 71st Division, received actual responsibility for establishing the Layac line. Wainwright alerted Selleck on 2 January and instructed him to hold the position for several days. He would thereby cover the withdrawal of the 11th and 21st Divisions and gain time to prepare the Abucay line.¹

Selleck placed his 71st Infantry on the right of the line. The 71st



Infantry's right was partially protected by marshy tidal streams and water-covered ground, while the remainder of the ground was monotonously flat. To the left of the 71st Infantry stood the 72nd Infantry, and to the left of the 72nd Infantry was Colonel Charles L. Steel's 1,600-man American 31st Infantry. Although this regiment was unique in not having seen any action up to that point, its strength was low, for many of the most experienced men had been pulled from their units and sent to instruct or command the new Filipino outfits. On the far left of the covering force line, the reduced 26th Cavalry Regiment with 657 men reached Selleck the night of 5 January and extended his line west to the foothills of the Zambales Mountains. The cavalry began reconnaissances the morning of the 6th, but even then the 2nd Squadron on the extreme left did not get into position until 1400 hours, well after the fight started. The cavalry regiment established a standing screen of patrols from the mountains on the left to the American regiment on the right; the bulk of the regiment massed so as to be ready to react to enemy penetrations.²

Selleck's 71st Division Artillery consisted of two two-gun 75mm batteries and one four-gun 2.95-inch pack howitzer battery, a total of eight guns in his 71st Artillery. In general support of Selleck's line were two batteries of the 23rd Artillery and two batteries from the 1st Battalion, 88th Artillery. Both were corps artillery units, both were armed with 75mm guns, and both were well-trained Scout units. For some reason, maybe because of an oversight, no one gave Selleck any long-range 155mm support. The cannon could have been positioned either close to or well behind the line in order to cope with either enemy artillery or enemy infantry. The absence of the big guns would prove a major error. A USAFFE organization, the Provisional Tank Group, was also in support with eighty light tanks, forty-two half-tracks, and fifteen Bren gun carriers. Two battalions of USAFFE self-propelled 75mm artillery

covered tank approaches; in a pinch, they could act as anti-tank artillery as well as normal field artillery.³

Occupation of the line had begun on 3 January, but without engineer support--Selleck's battalion of divisional engineers was working for North Luzon Force--progress was slow. The construction effort at Layac was the first time the 71st Division had ever tried to string barbed wire or build obstacles, and with few exceptions, the tired and dispirited Filipinos made very little progress organizing the ground and entrenching. A visiting American engineer found little desire on the part of the 71st Division to hold their positions for even a short time. The American 31st Infantry entrenched reasonably well, but even here, an all-out effort was missing.⁴

Across the entire front, the Layac position was weak. The right of the line faced east and could be enfiladed from the west, while the center of the line faced north and could be enfiladed from the east. The low, rolling hills were hardly more than bumps in the uniformly flat ground. The tiny Culis River itself did not provide an obstacle, and even the larger Culo River was fordable by dismounted troops. The Culo's steep, almost vertical banks made vehicular traffic difficult, but an engineer effort could cut approaches for a crossing. The best Selleck could organize was a series of mutually supporting strong points entrenched and wired as much as time and materiel would permit.⁵

At 1030 hours on 6 January, Selleck's artillery stopped the Japanese advance by driving the lead infantry and artillery off the road. The Japanese began to deploy about two-and-a-third miles north of Filamerican lines. A half hour later, Japanese artillery replied. Japanese 75mm and 150mm shells, directed and corrected by aerial spotters, who dropped as low as 2,000 feet in their search for targets, began to fall near the defending artillery. Little escaped the air observers' attention, and Japanese artillery grew more accurate.

Because the big Model-4 150mm howitzers firing 10,000 yards outranged the smaller Filipino 75mm's, the Japanese were untouched by counterbattery fire. Filipino artillery was severely shelled and took several direct hits. By mid-afternoon, every gun in the 71st Artillery had been hit at least once, and four were damaged beyond repair. Changes in gun position made little difference because of Japanese aerial observation, for no sooner were the guns in a new location than they were once again under fire. Concealment was scarce, cover was nonexistent, and the old artillery maxim "a battery seen is a battery lost" held true.⁶

Under galling fire, the Filipinos from the 1st Battalion, 71st Artillery abandoned their guns, carrying away the firing pins and keys to the prime movers. Bamboo thickets surrounding the eight cannon of the 23rd Artillery caught fire and threatened the guns more than did the enemy shelling. The evening before, B Battery's prime movers were collected at battalion headquarters, where they would be safe. Now, as the bamboo fire approached the immobile guns, there was no way to move the pieces out of danger. Because telephone lines were cut, B Battery could not tell battalion headquarters to send the vehicles forward. When the fire reached the pits occupied by the gunners, the men jumped out, and the guns were lost.⁷

Enemy artillery also hit the American infantry manning the main line of resistance. At 1400 hours, the Japanese succeeded in putting several infantry battalions across the small river, and patrols probed the junction between the 31st Infantry and 72nd Infantry. The Japanese brought small arms fire against the American B Company, and the entire company panicked and broke. The adjacent C Company held, but the battalion reserve could not regain the line. Colonel Steel called on his reserve battalion, and two companies counterattacked. One of the companies broke under enemy artillery, but the

second advanced successfully and re-established the main line.⁸

Although the 31st Infantry had now restored its line, the situation still looked bad. Most of Selleck's artillery was out of action, enemy planes left him without concealment, and all his infantry reserves were committed. If the Japanese broke through the 71st Division on the right of the line, they would cut the only road leading south and trap the entire covering force. Light firing was continuing along the American regiment's front into the early evening, still more Japanese were arriving at Layac, and Japanese movements forward of the 72nd Infantry were increasing. Selleck was forced to assume the bulk of General Homma's 14th Army faced him. Selleck's mission was to delay the enemy, not to fight a pitched battle. He had already lost the two-battery 23rd Artillery and the 1st Battalion, 71st Artillery. Two American rifle companies had run and were out of the fight, the reserve battalion was committed, and the Filipinos along the 71st Division's front--even though they had not been seriously pressured--were shaky and ready to bolt.⁹

At 2000 hours, Colonel Steel explained the 31st Infantry's situation to Selleck, but Selleck refused permission to withdraw. A second report to Selleck stressed the possibility of a disastrous daylight withdrawal the next day if the men did not get out that night. This time Selleck agreed and asked II Corps for permission to withdraw. When General Parker received Selleck's request, he initially considered reinforcing Selleck and counterattacking at dawn, but he dropped the idea after his artillery staff told him it was impossible to position cannon at night and shoot at dawn without a daylight reconnaissance. So at 2200 hours, II Corps ordered Selleck to conduct a night withdrawal.¹⁰

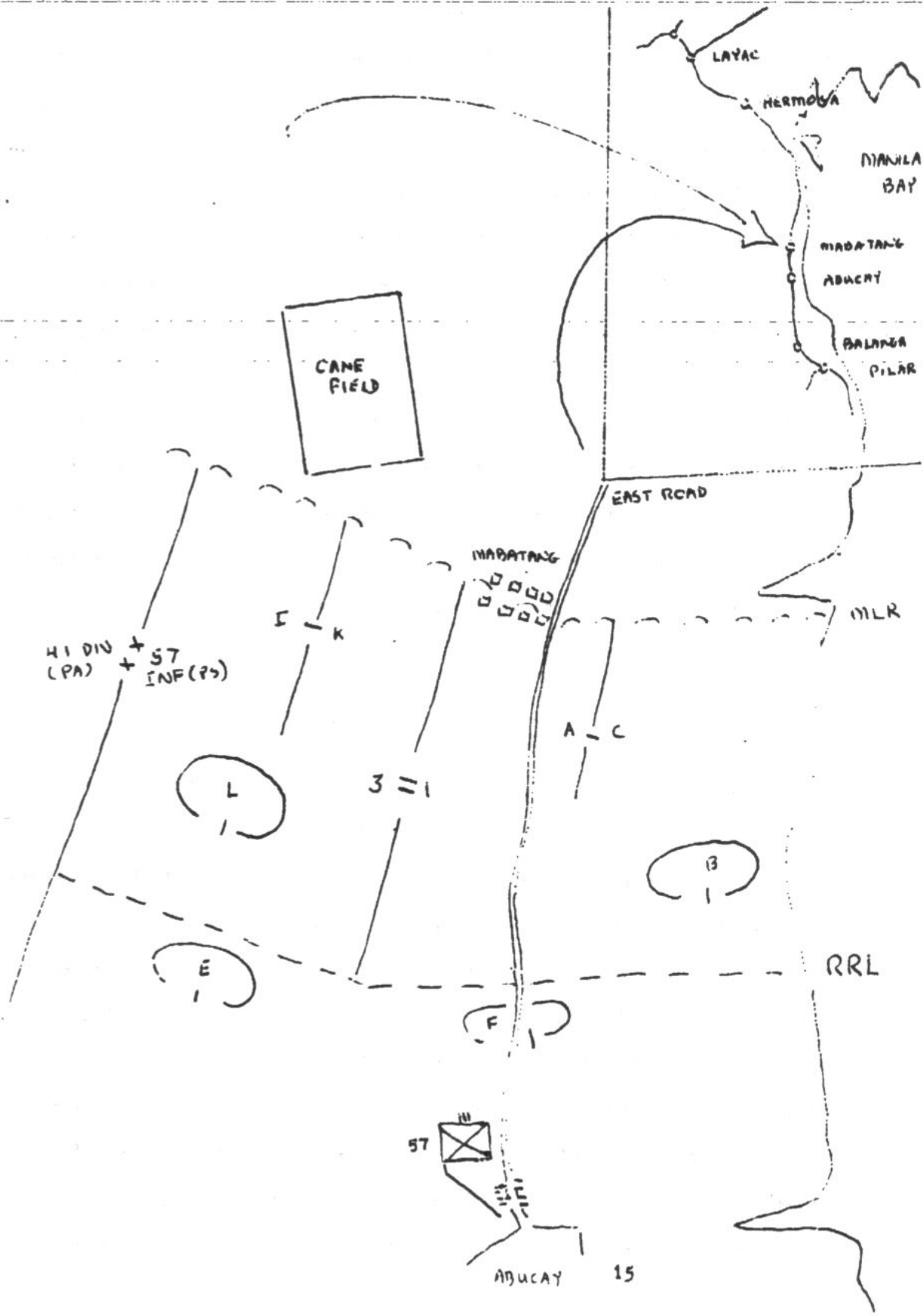
Despite local confusion, the withdrawal succeeded, and Selleck's force broke contact with the Japanese who, now unopposed, occupied Hermosa in the dark. All things considered, the delay force was lucky--the Japanese failed to

pursue and the defenders once again traded space for time. But this one-day delay proved costly, especially since USAFFE had expected more than a single day's delay out of Selleck's men.¹¹

The Japanese made an unenthusiastic pursuit of Selleck's force but failed to catch it. From 7 until 10 January, the Japanese marched south toward the main line of resistance, moved supplies forward, and repaired roads and bridges. The main Japanese force now on Bataan was the 65th Brigade, a three-regiment (seven-battalion) outfit reinforced to about 12,000 men by engineers, artillery, tanks, and various service support units. The 65th Brigade divided its left flank regiment into two single battalion columns, one moving into the foothills to the west while the second battalion marched straight down the East Road toward the Philippine Scouts of the 57th Infantry. The eastern most battalion would open the next phase of the Bataan campaign.

Regimental and Battalion Defense at Mabatang, 11-12 January

II Corps defended the right half of Bataan with two Philippine Army divisions and a Philippine Scout regiment on the main line of resistance, the Abucay line. The left of the corps line was anchored on Mount Natib's precipitous slopes. The right of the line was considered so critical that it was manned by a regiment of the Philippine Division, the only regular division in the islands. The Japanese also considered the right of the line the most promising target, and they launched their first serious assaults here the night of 11-12 January. The elite 57th Infantry (Philippine Scouts)--1,914 Filipino enlisted men commanded by American officers--blocked the most likely enemy avenue of



approach into II Corps just north of Mabatang barrio. The staunch Scouts were the best infantry in the Philippines, better than the Americans, the Philippine Army, and the Japanese. The regiment deployed with its 3rd Battalion on the left, the 1st Battalion on the right, and the 2nd Battalion in reserve.¹²

Overall, the line was strong, but trouble would come from a sugar cane field lying across the front of the 3rd Battalion. The field ran from as far out as 400 yards to as close as 150 yards from the main line. Japanese could enter the northern edge of the cane field via a dry stream bed and move south to the Scout main line. Ignorance did not leave the cane intact; there were too many professional soldiers present simply to forget to cut it. The battalion commander, his company commanders, and the regimental operations officer all agreed the cane should be cleared. Fields of fire were much too short, and the enemy could dash into the Scouts, completely avoiding long-range rifle and machine guns fires. There was ample time to clear it, and numerous reconnaissances convinced them the field was a serious threat. But the regimental commander forbade any cutting, believing that newly cut cane would show on aerial photos and indicate the presence of major defensive positions. Even after the 3rd Battalion commander asked that the "no cut" order be reconsidered, the regimental commander refused, believing Scout artillery could deny use of the cane field as an assembly area.¹³

When night fell on 11 January, the Japanese advanced and massed in the uncut cane field a scant 150 yards from the 3rd Battalion. After driving in the Scout outposts, a Japanese infantry battalion assembled here and worked its way close to the Scouts. Despite the concealed routes, the Japanese failed to move in completely undetected. Scout listening posts heard noises and sounds of significant movement, but they could not see anything because the moon had not yet risen. Their reports were relayed through company CPs to artillery FDCs,

and a call for fire went to the guns of the Scout 1st Battalion, 24th Artillery.¹⁴

At this very moment, when the 75mm cannon were being laid, the Japanese were creeping to the south edge of the cane. They first fired small arms and some light mortars at the Scouts, then they increased the tempo of their machine gun fire. Scout requests for artillery fire on the cane field reached the gunners an hour before midnight, and Scout artillerymen began their well-drilled routine. Just as the first 75mm projectiles exploded in the tall stalks of sugar, "the cane field seemed to vomit Japanese in great numbers screaming, howling, yelling 'Banzai' as they charged," recalled a company commander.¹⁵ Quickly, C Battery, 24th Artillery, which was dug in on the main line and silent until now, leveled its four 75mm guns at the inviting target and fired point blank over open sights into the mass of charging Japanese. The battery commander hastily organized his artillerymen for defense against infantry, yet kept men on the guns to maintain a hot fire. Joining the fires of C Battery were the other two batteries of the battalion.

Despite the appalling effects of massed artillery and small arms fire, the Japanese continued across the short stretch of open field. Departing the cane field, they ran downhill, crossed a small creek, then pushed uphill across moderately vegetated ground, through dry rice paddies, and into Scout barbed wire. In contrast to the 1st Battalion on the right, the 3rd Battalion was firing tracers mixed with ball ammunition, and the fiery bullets gave the Japanese a good idea of the battalion's line, especially the location of machine guns and automatic rifles. The Japanese threw themselves on the double-apron barbed wire, and succeeding squads climbed over the bodies pinned to the wire. Once over the wire, the Japanese charge pushed into the Scout foxhole line of I Company. Despite incredible confusion and the close proximity of the Japanese,

the Scouts calmly held their ground, and the Japanese lost their cohesion. But the Japanese were as determined as the Scouts, and they worked their way from foxhole to foxhole. Some Scouts were physically manhandled out of position with the men on both flanks suffering the most. I Company's commander asked for help, and the reserve company commander pleaded to be allowed to counterattack. But the battalion commander said no--he was unwilling to commit his reserve this early.¹⁶

To the right of I Company was K Company, and the Japanese attack lapped into K Company's left flank. At 0130 hours, the Japanese formed a casualty bridge over the barbed wire and swamped I Company immediately adjacent to K Company. Realizing he would lose his entire left flank if it remained in place, the K Company commander moved a section of machine guns behind his left flank and began a careful withdrawal of the left flank platoon and the two reserve squads. Luckily, previous construction left ready-made works into which the Scouts safely settled. The move was beautifully executed.¹⁷

Sometime after 0200 hours, the I Company commander started an inspection of his lines accompanied by his first sergeant and two riflemen. At 0315 hours, his party came upon Japanese occupying three foxholes in the center of the line, and a quick fire fight ensued. Five Japanese died, but rifle fire also shattered the company commander's hip. He could not walk, so his soldiers dragged him back to his CP while confused fighting raged across the dark battlefield. Just before dawn, the acting I Company commander set out to tour his platoons. The company's right and left flanks were destroyed or dispersed, but the center and the CP still remained, both now well forward of Japanese on either flank. The Scouts, seriously short of rifle ammunition, crawled from foxhole to foxhole collecting rounds from the dead and wounded.

Returning to the CP, the acting company commander reached the parapet of I Company's dugout when Japanese machine gun fire from the cane field killed him.¹⁸

It had been obvious for some time that the 3rd Battalion's line was badly disorganized and that I and K companies needed help. The 3rd Battalion commander alerted his battalion reserve, L Company, for a counterattack. L Company's Scouts assembled at 0400 hours and advanced to stop the Japanese. The minute they appeared, the entire area burst into machine gun fire which hit several of the Scouts. In the dark, L Company mixed with K Company and foundered. Despite happy shouts of greeting from K Company, it was nearly impossible to tell friend from foe and extremely dangerous to approach any foxhole, so L Company's arrival created "a perfect havoc of confusion."¹⁹ K Company had taken considerable mortar and rifle fire during the Japanese attack and then had received machine gun fire as I Company was penetrated. K Company was not prepared to have a friendly company climb up its back. The counterattack only contained the Japanese and did little more than extend K Company's flank southwest to the battalion reserve line. A big hole still existed.

With the failure of the 3rd Battalion's counterattack, only the regimental reserve remained to stop the Japanese. At 0430 hours, the regimental operations officer ordered the reserve battalion's E Company into action. When preparing their defenses in early January, the 2nd Battalion officers had conducted terrain walks over areas across which they might logically counterattack. Then they held several night exercises to familiarize key leaders with the terrain. The battalion commander was aware of the 3rd Battalion's difficulties, and shortly after 0300 hours had alerted E Company for possible commitment to the left flank of the battered I Company. Regiment's

subsequent orders, therefore, came as no surprise--the 2nd Battalion was ready. E Company followed recognizable terrain features along the regiment's left boundary and attacked without error into I Company's sector. The company advanced with two platoons forward, right platoon echeloned to the right rear in anticipation of meeting the left of L Company, and filled the gap remaining to the left of L Company. The advance overran and killed five small teams of Japanese, but E Company stopped when it became apparent there was still vigorous M-1 rifle fire coming from I Company's area. Certain they would kill more I Company Scouts than Japanese if they continued in the dark, E Company went to ground and dug in. E Company's effort, although not reaching the main line of resistance, stalled the Japanese and contained the penetration.²⁰

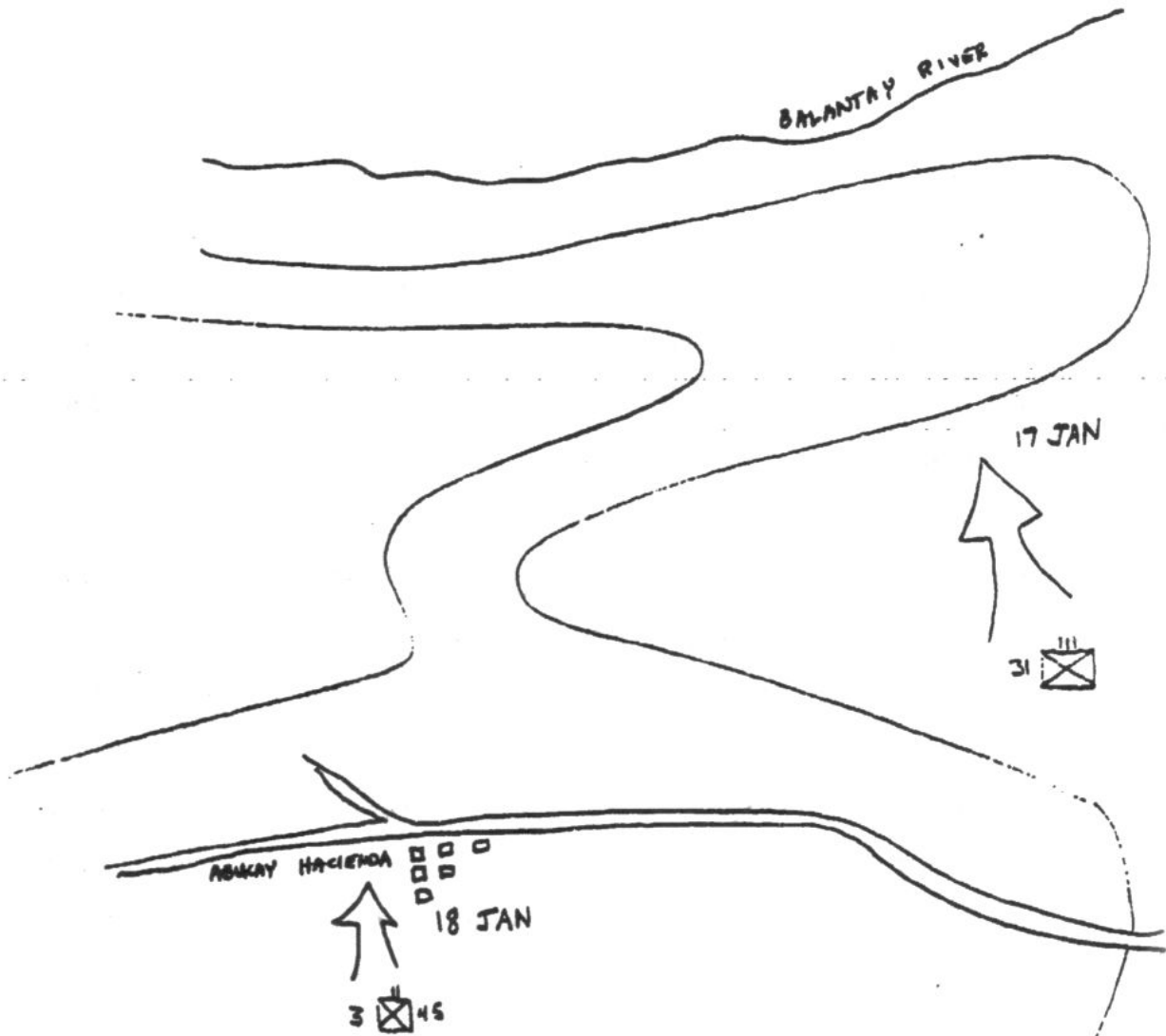
The fighting at Mabatang continued for several more days, and the Scouts ultimately prevailed. Concurrent with the attacks against the Scouts, six battalions of Japanese infantry were deeply involved in attacks against Filipino units off to the west. The Philippine Army's 41st and 51st Divisions extended II Corps' line west from the Scout 57th Infantry. From 11 to 16 January, the Japanese repeatedly assaulted the 41st Division, drove several Filipino battalions off the main line back to the regimental reserve lines, and inflicted heavy casualties on the poorly trained defenders. In response, II Corps heavily reinforced the 41st Division using elements from the 21st and 31st Divisions. The Japanese finally stopped their attacks and moved their efforts farther west against the 51st Division. Here, at the Abucay Hacienda, they had more success. On 16 January, they routed the 51st Infantry and drove the 53rd Infantry from the field. Fortunately for II Corps, the Japanese did not immediately realize the extent of their success, and the 65th Brigade failed to push into the abandoned 51st Division line for more than a full day. This respite allowed commitment of the Philippine Division in a corps counterattack role.

Division/Regimental Offense at the Abucay Hacienda, 17-22 January

The morning of 17 January dawned as another in which the fortunes of war could swing dramatically in favor of the Japanese. If the Japanese could complete the turning II Corps' left flank--a likely prospect following the destruction of the 51st Division--the Abucay Line would become untenable, and II Corps would be forced to retreat. American hopes now depended on the performance of the 31st Infantry.

On 16 January, two regiments of the elite Philippine Division moved out of reserve toward the Abucay Hacienda. Although the American 31st Infantry made the march without difficulty, the Scout 45th Infantry attempted a night march cross country, only to get lost in a maze of trails. So only the 31st Infantry arrived on time. The 31st Infantry approached the Abucay line with the 2nd, 1st, and 3rd battalions in line of march. The antitank company, engineers, and the self-propelled artillery followed the 3rd Battalion. Information reached the troops in fragments with promises of more to come later, and leaders urged everyone to hurry. Japanese planes were active and dove occasionally at the column, but because the Americans dispersed well, little damage was done.²¹

The regiment marched for two solid hours before the first halt. It was a hot, hard, tiring uphill march of thirteen miles. Some men sickened in the brutal, dusty heat and fell out of the line of march. The regiment reached the left of the 43rd Infantry at 1900 hours, well after sunset but with a little light in the sky. During the last hours of daylight, Japanese observation planes watched the regiment, but they refrained from launching any attacks. The Americans thankfully bivouaced about 2,000 yards east of the Abucay Hacienda, and leaders rushed to get in a quick reconnaissance. The regiment established local security, soldiers paired off, and everyone tried to make themselves



comfortable. The Americans had outmarched their support, and they went to sleep hungry.²²

Night had long since fallen when the battalion commanders of the 31st Infantry met with Colonel Steel at his regimental command post. Steel had little information about enemy strengths or locations, but he passed on what he had. His briefing was followed by orders for the next day's attack. Sunrise was at 0724 hours, and the attack would start at 0800 hours with the 1st Battalion on the left, west, and the 2nd Battalion straddling Trail 12 on the right, east. The 3rd Battalion was in reserve. Direction of attack was north. The officers returned to their battalions an hour after midnight.²³

Everything now depended on the American 31st Infantry. If their attack succeeded, II Corps' line could hold for some time to come. The Japanese did not have unlimited power, and if stopped here, they would need to reorganize before mounting another effort. But if the Americans failed, and especially if they were routed, the entire Filamerican line would have to retreat, probably under heavy Japanese pressure. And if the Americans broke, as B and I Companies did at Layac, little hope could be placed in the less well trained Filipinos.

The 31st Infantry attacked at 0815 hours with two battalions abreast. Jumping off from their line of departure, the men initially encountered few enemy. On the left, following trails in the thick jungle, the 1st Battalion drove ahead even after encountering substantial resistance, some of which dissolved into hand-to-hand fighting. The Americans met more resistance at a sugar cane field full of Japanese where close combat was the rule because of the thick vegetation and broken ground.²⁴

The 2nd Battalion was on the right of the regiment's attack. As the men walked 800 yards up the Hacienda Road early on 17 January, they passed

through a mango grove containing some wounded Filipinos, filled canteens from a water pipe near the Hacienda, and when dawn broke, made a 90-degree right turn up to their line of departure. The 2nd Battalion attacked with G and E companies abreast and a machine gun platoon attached to each. After crossing the line of departure, the Americans received mortar and small arms fire interspersed with a terrific cracking and banging of Japanese firecrackers. In G Company, the left flank platoon pushed forward 400 yards until stopped by automatic weapons firing down lanes cut in a sugar cane field. The cane field was badly tangled with strong vines which the Americans had to hack clear before they could advance. Then, G Company's right flank platoon stumbled into an unexpected seventy-five foot deep ravine.²⁵

In an unusual and baffling move, the 2nd Battalion commander withdrew his left flank company and switched it to the battalion's right. He then pushed F Company, the battalion's reserve, into the hole left by G Company's departure. Unhappily, F Company was hardly more successful than G. Enemy machine gun fire was so intense here that it cut swaths of cane and stacked it on the ground as if ready for harvesting. A few men from F Company, bellies hugging the ground, crept forward and used hand grenades to reduce the closer gun positions. The 2nd Battalion called a halt for mortars to work over the Japanese. After the mortars stopped, it was the infantry's turn again. As the 2nd Battalion's three companies worked their way across the deep ravine, they ran into even heavier fire. The rifle company commanders voted, two to one, to make a concerted effort. As soon as heavy machine guns could be carried into position, each company would attack. But before the attack was launched, a runner from battalion arrived and ordered the three companies back to the south side of the ravine. The rifle companies, exhausted by the day's fighting, made their way across the big ravine. The three companies then set up for the

night.²⁶

When the 2nd Battalion hit resistance, and when the 1st Battalion shied to the left, a gap developed between the two battalions, so regiment tapped the reserve battalion for one company to fill the hole. K Company moved into position between B and G companies. The terrain over which K Company moved was wooded and broken, and it had difficulty establishing contact with B and G companies and had even more difficulty maintaining contact. Men disappeared into gullies or vanished behind thick vegetation. All things considered, the day's progress would have been much more agreeable had the Scout regiment been there to help. Only on the left, in the 1st Battalion, did the Americans reach their objective, the Balantay River.²⁷

With the coming of enough light to lead them out of the trail maze, the 45th Infantry spent 17 January trying to get into position. The regiment marched most of the day through tall cogon grass across rugged ground where every ridge line seemed to run perpendicular to the line of march. Two hours after midnight, guides met and escorted 45th Infantry officers to the command post of the 41st Division. There they hashed out plans for the next day, the 18th. The pre-dawn conference resulted in agreement to continue the attack. The 45th Infantry would attack any Japanese found between the American right and the left of the Philippine Army 41st Division. The Scouts would provide the main effort with battalions echeloned to the right. The American regiment would launch a holding attack. Unfortunately, the plan miscarried almost immediately. The Scout 3rd Battalion missed the 45th Infantry's assembly area, continued marching to the west, and finally stopped next to the left flank of the 31st Infantry facing the Hacienda. Making a virtue of necessity, the 3rd Battalion was allowed to attack from its present location. It would relieve some of the pressure building to the left of the American 31st Infantry.²⁸

At 1200 hours, as the 3rd Battalion's point squad approached the sugar plantation, a shot rang out and the lead Scout fell dead, shot between the eyes. The other Scouts quickly fanned out and advanced through the area without meeting resistance. The Scouts reformed just south of the seven one-story buildings. The battalion commander made a risky decision and placed all three companies on line, leaving none in reserve. Time was short, too short to allow for a reconnaissance. With platoons in column, companies on line, L, I, and K from left to right, the 3rd Battalion crossed the Hacienda at 1300 hours and pushed north. The machine gun platoons, with four .30-caliber water-cooled guns each, were attached one platoon to each company. The battalion's single .50-caliber and lone 81mm mortar were set on the line of departure in support of the battalion. The left flank company advanced in squad column, three platoons on line with scouts forward. Pushing their way through sugar cane with visibility limited to a few feet, the men hiked forward for 250 yards before coming out of the uncut cane into a burned area. Here, Japanese automatic weapons cut accurately through L Company. As the Scouts threw themselves to the ground, the attached machine gunners trotted into action and returned a hot fire. The remainder of L Company deployed on the skirmish line formed by the foremost men. An officer went to the rear to request mortar fire, but when he tried to locate the enemy on a map, the map was so different from the actual terrain that he could not pinpoint the spot. The mortar fired some rounds in the general direction, but none came close.²⁹

As L Company continued forward, Japanese fire increased, all of it coming from the left flank. A large draw, covered by enemy fire, delayed the Scouts, but the Scouts crossed the obstacle without too much trouble. North of the ravine, enemy fire became very heavy. The Scouts returned the fire and subdued the enemy's initial enthusiasm, but not before L Company and attached

machine gunners suffered thirty casualties. The direction of attack was running the men laterally across the front of the Japanese machine guns. The Japanese, not unnaturally, lost little time in taking advantage of the targets. Helping them in their firing was an east-west trail that provided an excellent field of fire. When the Scouts were within 100 yards of their objective--the abandoned foxholes of the 51st Division--the companies received an order from battalion headquarters to return to the line of departure. This they accomplished but not before L Company suffered more men killed and wounded as they again passed in front of the Japanese.³⁰

When II Corps heard of the halt, they countermanded the order and told the badly used battalion to advance again. Once more, the men rose from the protection of the ground and walked forward. Once again, the Japanese cut up the left flank company. But this time, by a quick rush across some open ground, the 3rd Battalion reached its objective. The soldiers closed on the scrub-lined ravine overlooking the Balantay River and contacted the American 31st Infantry to their right. The time was 1630 hours, three and a half hours after the attack started. The battalion's front was 1,400 yards wide with a completely exposed left flank.³¹

The Americans attempted a coordinated attack the next day, 19 January. The 3rd Battalion was to attack east against the right flank of the enemy, the 2nd Battalion would push north along Trail 12, and the two 45th Infantry battalions were to attack the Japanese left. The 41st Artillery provided some artillery fire in support of the effort, but artillery support was limited. It was difficult to get cannon far enough west into the rough terrain where they could shoot effectively. Those guns in range could do little because of dense forests, bad maps, and inadequate communications.³²

The 2nd Battalion deployed, F, G, and E companies from left to right.

After a few rounds of artillery, the men entered the big ravine, but fragmented in the thick underbrush. Men became lost, leaders disappeared when they went scouting, and confusion prevailed. Crawling up a dry waterfall and using rifles to hoist and pull each other up, one rifle and one weapons platoon worked their way out of the ravine. But it was dark when they reached the top. Behind them, another platoon reached the top and engaged a group of Japanese. In the dark, no one could tell what was happening, and a coordinated effort was impossible. Both platoons received orders to return to their start point. Similar troubles were experienced by all units. A full battalion effort might see one or two platoons actually fighting while the remainder stumbled about looking for the enemy.³³

In a frustrating stalemate, the Americans and Scouts launched attack after attack on 20 and 21 January, while their higher headquarters watched the Japanese increase their pressure on the far left battalions. Although Japanese attacks were steadily weakening American and Scout units, losses were also mounting in Japanese units. By the close of 22 January, the 65th Brigade recorded losses of 342 men killed and 777 wounded, losses completely unacceptable if a quick result could not be obtained. Despite all they could do to force the issue, the Japanese admitted that "the enemy, showing no signs of retreating, was resisting with increased tenacity."³⁴

Gloom was equally thick in Filamerican units. Ominous reports were reaching II Corps headquarters of Japanese moving south along the eastern slopes of Mount Natib. On 19 January, a three-man Scout patrol hiding on Mount Natib watched the Japanese 9th Infantry walk by, just yards from their position. The 9th Infantry's march through the jungle, clinging to the side of Mount Natib, was horrible. Countless ravines and valleys, cut by heavy water flows, ran across its line of march and slowed the column to a crawl. Some

gullies were absolutely impossible to climb and utterly defeated the tired infantrymen until they strung climbing ropes or cut zig-zag trails by hand. Trails along the mountain wandered aimlessly or came to abrupt halts. Even pack horses could not keep up with the men, and the animals had to be hauled up and down cliffs with ropes. The effort expended in moving the regiment's heavy weapons was enormous. When elements broke contact, they found it virtually impossible to find one another again. When the Japanese ran out of food on 23 January, they found and killed a few carabao, dug and ate grass roots, and resorted to every field expedient possible to gather food. Resupply from their own lines as far south as they were was impossible, and air drops were unreliable. The 9th Infantry needed to link with other Japanese units, and the only way to do that was to drive out the defenders.³⁵

During 20 and 21 January, the Japanese facing II Corps completed preparations for what they hoped would be the final attack of the Abucay fight. Colonel Takeo Imai was gradually shifting the bulk of his 141st Infantry westward, around the open left flank of the Scout 3rd Battalion. Despite extensive use of Scout mortars to break up enemy movements, the high proportion of duds in the 3-inch rounds rendered the mortars relatively impotent. At noon on 22 January, the Japanese launched another effort. They massed large air and artillery forces, and the bombardment fell most heavily on the American 1st Battalion. All available Japanese bombers and fighters swept in to help their infantry. Japanese pilots amused themselves by diving low across the battlefield, grinning and waving at the frustrated Americans. Knee mortars added to the pounding. So many rounds impacted that dust and smoke hid the advancing Japanese. Brush fires burst out in dry cane fields and raised curtains of smoke. With visibility disappearing, the Americans became disorganized. On the heels of the Japanese air and artillery came the infantry.

Grudgingly, out of touch with friends on both flanks, the 31st Infantry recoiled.³⁶

Seeing this movement, the Scout battalion on the far left spent a nervous hour before it received orders to withdraw south of the Hacienda to act as a reserve for the Americans. Under orders, the Scouts broke contact. Beginning at 1400 hours, the 3rd Battalion withdrew under the cover of four machine guns, a squad of riflemen, and the battalion executive officer. The 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry, now exposed on both flanks, also withdrew. Despite forcing the Americans backwards, the Japanese did not feel they were making any progress. Their slight advances were accomplished only after extreme efforts against a cohesive defense. By late afternoon of 22 January, the Philippine Division was back to its 19 January positions after losing heavily in men and equipment. Some companies had lost sixty percent of their strength.³⁷

Conflicting conclusions were drawn by General Parker at II Corps and General Nara at the 65th Brigade at the close of 22 January. General Parker surveyed his corps and realized, "It was now evident that the MLR in the 51st Division sector could not be restored by the Philippine Division."³⁸ The counterattack that might have saved the Abucay line had failed. The situation was now so bad the Japanese might drive all of II Corps against Manila Bay and end the Bataan defense. The biggest threat was the emergence of the Japanese 9th Infantry after its trek along the "impenetrable" slopes of Mount Natib. Only its continuing difficulty with the terrain kept it from sweeping through II Corps' rear.

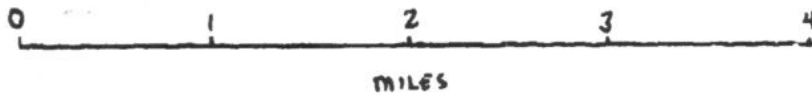
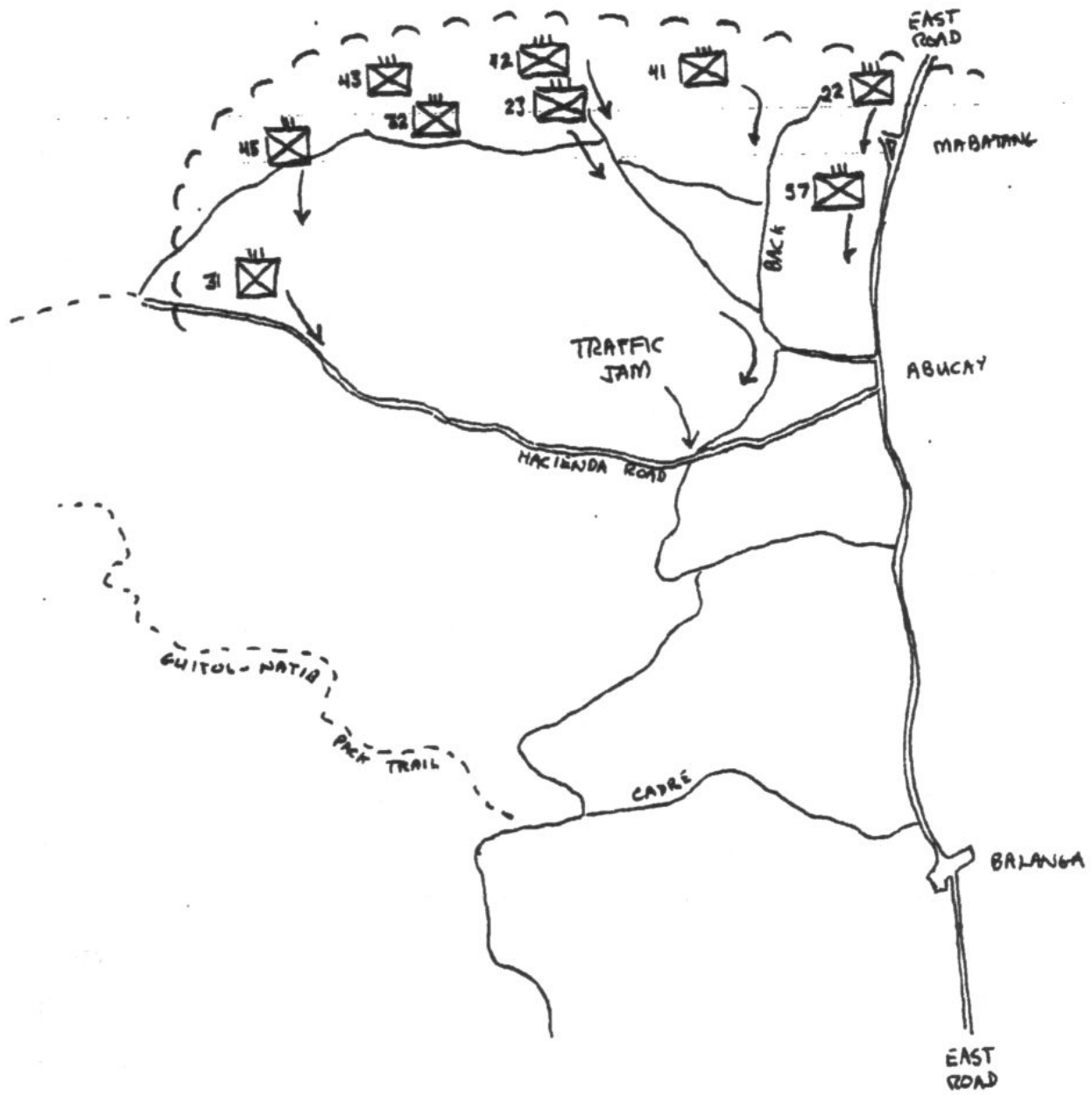
Despite their relatively advantageous position, the Japanese were still displeased with the progress of the 65th Brigade. Indications were that all their efforts had been in vain, and they saw no end to the punishing fighting.

The volume of Filipino artillery fire was increasing again, the Japanese worried about another counterattack, and restrictions placed on Japanese artillery prevented them from doing all they could. Numerous targets were sighted, but orders forbade the Japanese from engaging them so as to save ammunition. If this bloody fighting continued, the Japanese felt sure they would run out of soldiers. Every time it seemed they might break through, they were hit by a vicious counterattack. As serious as the loss of personnel was the decline in spirit. Both sides were ready to quit.³⁹

Because the Japanese were continuing their regimental-sized turning movement around II Corps' left flank, and because I Corps off to the west had been driven from the main line of resistance, further action at the 51st Division's original line was fast losing relevance. Even if the line could be restored, the Japanese were about to flank it from the west. MacArthur's Chief of Staff came to Bataan on 22 January to see if a general withdrawal to the reserve battle position was necessary.

Corps Withdrawal, 23-26 January

MacArthur's Chief of Staff did not have to look very long to come to a decision. The Japanese had overrun the left of II Corps, and counterattacks had failed to restore the line. So a decision to withdraw was "timely and necessary if more than regrettable."⁴⁰ Retreating to the reserve battle position along the Pilar-Bagac Road was not an admission of defeat. The defense of Bataan had always been envisioned as a defense in depth with both a main and reserve battle position. The northern Abucay line had never meant to be the location of a last-ditch stand. The line was to be held as long as possible for two reasons: to keep the Pilar-Bagac Road, valuable for its lateral communications, in



friendly hands, and to enable the reserve battle position to be prepared.⁴¹

Detailed withdrawal orders already existed in draft, so finalizing them took only a matter of hours. MacArthur's headquarters issued Field Order Number 9 the night of 22 January to both corps headquarters. II Corps held a meeting the morning of 23 January to alert commanders to the upcoming move. General Parker's staff published II Corps Field Order Number 2 and distributed it the next day to confirm instructions issued on the 23rd. Initial withdrawal of some artillery and support troops the night of 23 January proceeded without alerting the Japanese, a real surprise considering Japanese command of the air. But the Japanese were not flying at night, and their artillery practically never fired at night, so the blacked-out convoys rolled south unmolested.⁴²

Pre-war plans had already selected a reserve battle position, but no construction effort had gone into the line before the war. And during the fighting along the Abucay line, almost nothing had been done to prepare the new line for occupation. At the beginning of January, the reserve battle position was scarcely more than a line sketched on a map. By 22 January, when MacArthur decided to occupy it, it was not much better, even though two companies from the 301st Engineer Combat Regiment (PA) and 600 other soldiers rushed to work on the line. The 14th Engineer Battalion had been the only unit working full time on emplacements since late December.⁴³

The Japanese had turned the left of II Corps' line in the area defended by the American 31st Infantry and the Scout 45th Infantry. Movement of II Corps' elements here would begin at 1900 hours; order of withdrawal was from right to left, 41st, 42nd, and 43rd Infantry followed by the 22nd, 45th, and the American 31st. Reconnaissance parties were dispatched, and heavy baggage, ammunition, and rations were collected at dumps for movement by truck. Each

unit was tasked to provide its own covering shell, normally a third of the infantry bolstered by machine guns. Some light artillery pieces would stay in place until the last moment, and they would withdraw just ahead of the infantry of the covering shell. Each division's artillery regiment would leave one 75mm battery for each infantry regiment of the covering shell. Additionally, both battalions of light tanks supported by self-propelled 75mm artillery scattered themselves all across II Corps' line as a backstop to the withdrawing troops. Because of their mobility, they could remain longer and withdraw quicker than could the infantry.⁴⁴

The covering shell's mission was to screen the vulnerable main body as it marched south. The shell would hold until 0300 hours on 25 January and then pull south. Some regiments left a battalion as their screening force, while other regiments used a company to screen each battalion. Japanese artillery hit the main line at 1800 hours, and infantry launched probes a half hour later. On the left of the 31st Infantry were the troops of the 1st Battalion's covering shell. A and B companies marched away just before dark; just after dark, D Company gathered its men and heavy weapons and followed the route taken by the two rifle companies. C Company positioned itself as the battalion's screen. C Company repulsed a Japanese attack and then withdrew through another battalion's screening force. This screen, in turn, withdrew under pressure through a line of five light tanks. The five tanks shot up the Japanese and then withdrew.⁴⁵

Across the entire II Corps front, the night began badly and degenerated to chaotic. Planning for the withdrawal had been incomplete, and execution of the planning which had been accomplished was poor. Road nets, in particular, made the withdrawal difficult. As early as 1600 hours, the main north-south road was jammed with buses going south or trying to turn around. But the

greatest confusion developed along the left and center of the corps' line. As the front line infantry--except for the small covering shell--withdrew, they jammed onto the one road leading to safety, and at the intersection of the Back Road and the Abucay Hacienda Road was "the worst traffic jam imaginable."⁴⁶ The mass of six regiments of infantry concentrated here, and military police were not present to control traffic. Units did not come out intact. They came out as hordes of men with their commanders and instructors trying to organize them for further movement south. The soldiers were badly packed on roads and trails, and if the Japanese had fired artillery seriously that night, the withdrawal would have turned to rout.⁴⁷

When the 41st Infantry--five battalions strong at the moment--marched up to the junction of the Back Road and the Hacienda Road, they found it jammed even though they should have been the first unit to arrive there. As the senior instructor recalled, "<We>* couldn't find anyone to give us orders so we moved the 41st Inf<antry> column right through the stalled columns and thereby started some of the others."⁴⁸ The 22nd Infantry joined the mess at 2200 hours--a full hour ahead of schedule--and blocked motor movement to the east. Next, the American 31st Infantry arrived earlier than planned while trying to reach the East Road and ran into the 22nd Infantry. Both regiments claimed the single road. Then the 45th Infantry arrived and demanded priority on the Back Road because they had the longest distance to travel. Without anyone to regulate the traffic, soldiers poured uncontrollably into the intersection, but few departed despite the pressure added by each new unit.⁴⁹

As the situation became increasingly difficult, more and more commanders left their units and waded into the press to direct traffic. Colonel

* < > are used in place of brackets.

Thomas W. Doyle of the 45th Infantry found vehicles bumper to bumper and "not a wheel turning," so he tried to send them east along the Hacienda Road while directing foot traffic south along the Back Road.⁵⁰ Colonel Malcolm V. Fortier of the 41st Division stepped into the crossroads to take charge and sent two officers down the Back Road. These two men found the cause of the blockage; at a stream just a half mile south, Filipinos were trying to keep their feet dry by walking on rocks. The water was only ankle deep, yet because of an absence of supervision here, disaster threatened. The two officers ran the men across the stream at a double time, and the jammed column sluggishly started moving.⁵¹

Earlier that evening, at 1900 hours, the corps covering force extricated itself from the main line, marched south, and established a line from Balanga west to Guitol through which both II Corps' main body and its covering shell would withdraw. The covering force consisted of the remnants of the routed 51st Division, one-third of the American 31st Infantry, a third of the Scout 57th Infantry, all the 33rd Infantry, and a battalion of the Philippine Army 31st Infantry. Tanks and self-propelled 75mm's would support the covering force. The tracked vehicles left their reserve positions during daylight on the 24th and occupied their covering force positions. The covering force, supported by four 155mm guns, would stay in position through 25 January. After the main body and the covering shell passed through, the covering force would withdraw the night of 25 January.⁵²

The covering force took up its positions and held the line all day on the 25th. The Japanese, however, were so slow to pursue that the only action seen by the covering force concerned artillery. Observers from Major Joseph Ganahl's self-propelled artillery spotted the Japanese coming down the East Road. Ganahl's 75mm cannon were backed under nipa shacks with an observation

post in a church tower. The first salvo struck in the middle of the Japanese, and the 75mm guns continued firing until the Japanese had completely dispersed. The Japanese failed to reach the covering force which withdrew without trouble that night. As a rear guard, the covering force left the 194th Tank Battalion to delay the next day's pursuit. ⁵³

It was well past daylight on 26 January when the tankers, delayed from withdrawing until the last Filipinos and Scouts cleared the road, left their delay positions. After a short drive, the M-3 tanks settled into temporary positions, now only a kilometer north of the new main line. Supporting the light tanks were four self-propelled 75mm's. The tankers had orders to delay the Japanese, so when the Japanese stepped into sight, the tanks took them under fire. The self-propelled guns were in excellent positions, and they fired everywhere the Japanese jumped for cover. The battalion's half-tracks were interspersed among the tanks, and their .30-caliber and .50-caliber machine guns added to the carnage. The fight started at 1030 hours, but it was not until noon that the Japanese finally unlimbered some artillery and fired at the tanks. Once the fire became dangerous, the tankers broke contact and retired into the new main line. ⁵⁴

From the new Orion-Bagac line, the Filamerican army successfully repulsed strong Japanese attacks in late January and early February. Noteworthy was the fact that three Japanese regiments attacked fewer Filipinos and were bloodily repulsed. No American or Scout units took part in the fight, partly because most of the Scout battalions had been drawn off to repulse Japanese amphibious landings along the west coast. The landings began on 23 January, but Japanese planning for the effort had started even earlier.

Regimental and Battalion Offense,

Longoskawayan, Quinauan, and Anyasan-Silaim Points,

23 January to 13 February

Longoskawayan Point, 27-31 January

As the fighting continued along the Abucay line through mid-January, the Japanese decided to make an amphibious landing along the left flank of the Filamerican lines, along Bataan's west coast. General Homma pointed out that similar amphibious operations had succeeded against the British in Malaya, where General Tomoyuki Yamashita had continually cut behind defending lines, forcing them to withdraw, thereby avoiding costly frontal attacks. Homma went so far as to order landing craft moved from Lingayen Gulf to Olongapo, and planners set Caibobo Point on Bataan's west coast as the operation's beachhead and the West Road as the objective.⁵⁵

General Mitsuo Kimura, commander of the 16th Division, selected Lieutenant Colonel Nariyoshi Tsunehiro's 2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry, to make the amphibious end run. Tsunehiro's amphibious operation was not to be an independent affair. At the time Homma made his decision to flank I Corps by sea, Japanese infantry had penetrated Wainwright's main line, so the amphibious operation would support Kimura's overland thrust after he defeated I Corps and turned against II Corps. If the Japanese succeeded, and if they could reinforce their landing, they could destroy all of Wainwright's I Corps by cutting off its line of retreat.

Embarking from Mayagao Point near Moron the night of 22 January, the 900-man 2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry (reinforced), immediately sailed into



trouble. Encountering strong tides, pitch-black skies, and rough seas, the soldiers jammed aboard the landing craft were further plagued by a PT boat. Because of the tide, heavy seas, and disrupting influence of the PT boat, the Japanese, relying on inadequate maps and now badly separated from one another, came ashore at two different points, neither of which had been designated in the plan. Disorganized and lost, the only advantage the Japanese held was that of complete surprise. One group of 300 men landed at Longoskawayan Point, ten miles south of the intended landing point, on a ridge running off the hill mass of Mariveles Mountain.⁵⁶

Local defense forces composed of a grounded Air Corps pursuit squadron and a naval battalion contained the Japanese, but they could not evict the invaders. After four days, Philippine Scouts were alerted. The Navy and Air Corps had done their job; they had held the enemy when there were no regulars available, and now the veterans of Mabatang were at hand. At dusk on 27 January, 475 Scouts from the 2nd Battalion, 57th Infantry arrived at Longoskawayan. Colonel Hal C. Granberry spent the afternoon reconnoitering the enemy's most advanced positions and picked a big gap in the Naval Battalion's line to be the Scout line of departure. Granberry planned to attack southeast, parallel to the Pucot River to clean out the most easterly Japanese, then swing 90 degrees to his right and seize the high ground fronting Longoskawayan Point.⁵⁷

Colonel Granberry put his two most experienced company commanders on line, E Company on the left and F Company on the right. Working in the dark, the company commanders each deployed a single platoon on line with the remaining platoons following closely behind the deployed formations. Fighting was serious, but the disciplined Scouts drove the Japanese through tangled second growth and the more open virgin jungle, made their 90-degree right turn,

and took the high ground which overlooked Longoskawayan. Here, G Company relieved F, leaving G and E in place. Both companies then put a second platoon on line, giving the battalion a four-platoon front. Then the men settled down to wait for daylight.⁵⁸

Preparation for the upcoming day's work was thorough. Scout mortars registered, and machine guns dug in to cover the advance. Covered by small arms fire and artillery support, the Scouts attacked at 0600 hours on 28 January and made steady progress until their supporting weapons were masked by a small hill. After a platoon of machine guns shifted to cover the immediate area and a platoon of D Battery, 88th Artillery moved until it could once again cover the advance, the Scout infantrymen resumed their attack and forced the Japanese to the lower third of the small peninsula. In hopes of keeping friendly losses to a minimum--the Scouts were literally irreplaceable--the battalion planned extensive artillery fires for the next day's attack.⁵⁹

The morning of 29 January, the Scouts pulled out of the way of the scheduled artillery preparation. Despite the 12-inch shells from Corregidor falling on the top of Longoskawayan, not all the Japanese were impressed by the shelling. Some followed the morning withdrawal of the Scouts and reoccupied the positions lost the day before. After stopping the Japanese, the Scouts spent four hours evicting them from the same ground won the day before. When Colonel Granberry committed his reserve F Company, it took only three more hours to finish the job. By 1900 hours, the Scouts stood triumphant on Longoskawayan.⁶⁰

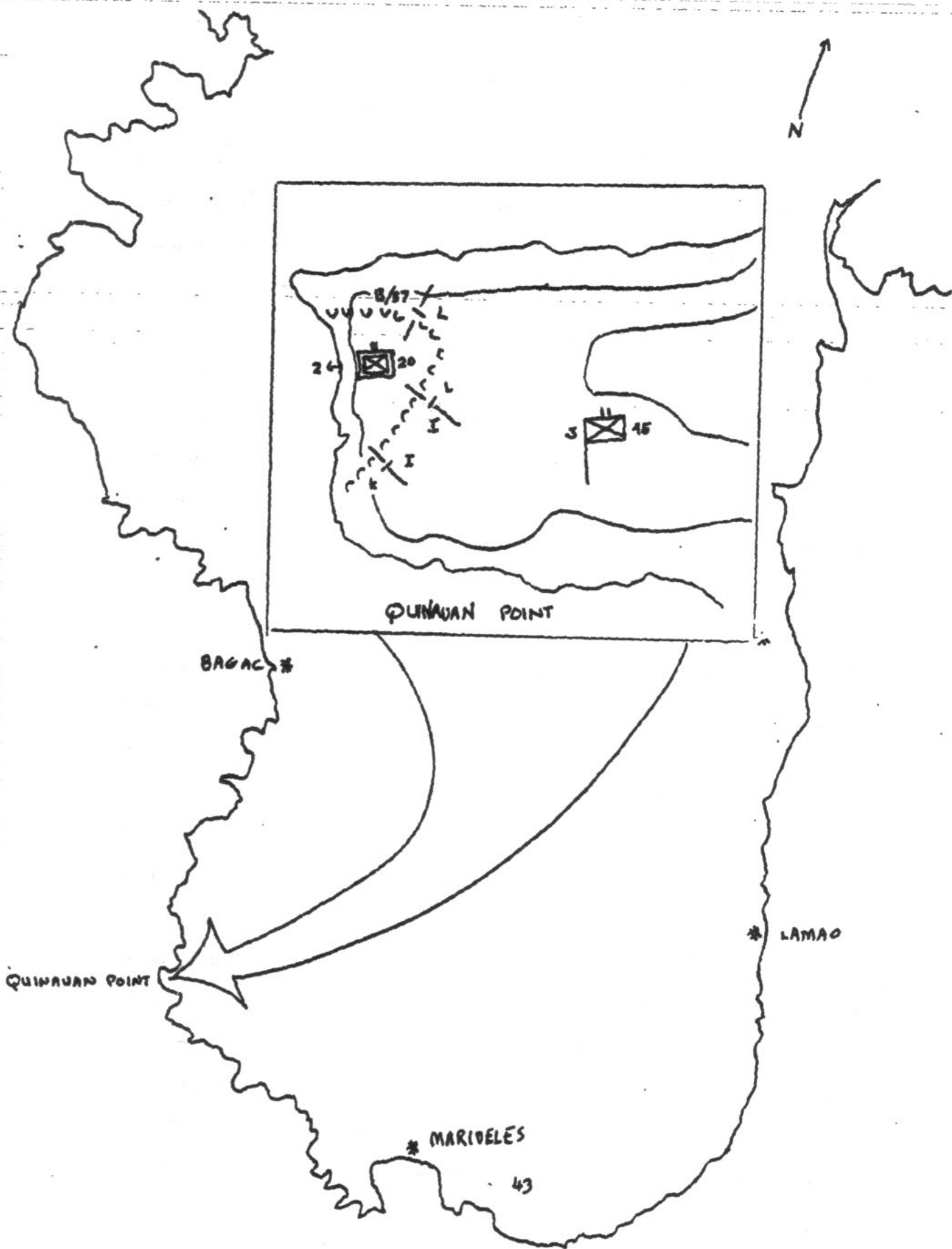
NO TANKS

Quinauan Point, 27 January to 8 February

The second and larger part of Lieutenant Colonel Tsunehiro's battalion came ashore at Quinauan Point. Barges carrying a portion of Tsunehiro's invasion force tried to land at the proper location, Caibobo Point, but several craft which stood in close to the shore sailed into Air Corps .50-caliber machine guns. Abandoning a few sinking craft, survivors swam to barges standing farther off shore. After rescuing the bedraggled swimmers, the little Japanese flotilla sailed south. By now, the navigators were badly confused and the boats scattered. Edging east, they found another piece of terrain more hospitable than Caibobo. Still having no idea where they were, the Japanese--big, well-equipped men--splashed over the rocky, ankle-turning beach without opposition.⁶¹

Reports from different American Air Corps listening posts soon indicated the Japanese were landing, but the posts could not determine specific landing sites or enemy strengths. The beach defenders reported the enemy's general location to General Selleck at 0230 hours on 23 January, six hours sooner than he learned about the Japanese who landed further south at Longoskawayan. General Selleck knew the 34th Pursuit was not strong enough to stop them, so he alerted his reserve. But until his Constabulary battalion arrived, the 34th Pursuit had to fight alone.⁶²

When the grounded 34th Pursuit advanced to meet the enemy, heavy Japanese fire stopped the airmen cold, and the Americans discontinued active efforts to dislodge the Japanese. Although further offensive movement was impossible, the 34th Pursuit's fumbling efforts were enough. The Japanese, concerned over the noisy reaction to their landing and missing a full third of their force--lost somewhere at sea that confusing night--looked for a place to



dig in. Without his missing 300 men, now fighting at Longoskawayan, Colonel Tsunehiro felt too weak to press on toward the West Road. Unfortunately the Japanese, Tsunehiro's decision was a serious mistake. The 600 infantrymen then ashore could have scattered the airmen by simply advancing. By hesitating, the Japanese lost their best chance to cut the road.⁶³

As was the case at Longoskawayan, efforts to destroy the Japanese with Air Corps and Constabulary failed. Once again, the call went out for regular infantry. When the first reports of the Japanese landing reached the 3rd Battalion, 45th Infantry, they were told only twenty-five to fifty Japanese needed to be evicted. At Quinauan Point, a Scout representative met with the units facing the Japanese and received a briefing as to terrain, enemy positions, and Filipino deployments. The Scouts decided to begin the relief, Scouts replacing Constabulary, at 2000 hours. The Scouts arrived and began the involved process of moving into positions held by another unit. The relief took four hours and concluded at midnight. All three Scout rifle companies went on line, K, I, and L from left to right, covering a front of 900 yards with a machine gun platoon attached to each company placed where resistance was expected to be the strongest. The gunners were tasked to shoot apart trees which might contain Japanese--a mission of no little difficulty--for the area was heavily forested with trees climbing sixty to eighty feet high.⁶⁴

Beginning at 0830 hours on 28 January, the Scouts attacked through the thick jungle, but were held to surprisingly small gains. The bamboo was so thick that even heavy .30-caliber rounds glanced off the tough wood. The most effective weapons would have been 60mm and 81mm mortars, but no 60mm ammunition existed in the Philippines, and a severe shortage of 81mm ammunition reduced the effectiveness of that weapon. In place of the 81mm round, mortarmen used inaccurate 3-inch (75mm) projectiles. Despite the

expertise the Scouts held in infantry fighting, the day's progress was less than 100 yards, while at some points they gained only ten. That evening, B Company, 57th Infantry was attached to the 3rd Battalion, 45th Infantry. Even with the extra rifleman and the arrival of D Battery, 88th Artillery, the attack the next day failed to make any progress, for the Japanese fought furiously, especially in the center.⁶⁵

On 30 January, the Scouts fired an hour-long mortar barrage in hopes of softening the Japanese. The vegetation was too dense to observe the fall of the shells, so men on the front lines listened to the bursts and fed information to mortar crews over telephone lines. When the mortars stopped firing, the Scout riflemen built up a tremendous volume of fire with M-1 rifles, machine guns, and even pistols. Scout infantry pressed themselves as close to the protecting ground as possible as they inched forward. At the rate of one round a minute, friendly howitzer shells thumped into the Japanese. After an effort lasting forty-five minutes--fighting in tight jungle and a deafening world of noise--L Company Scouts gained only twenty yards at the cost of eleven men killed and wounded. The Japanese were well entrenched, and even the most sharp-eyed Scouts could not spot their positions until they were within a few feet of them. The Scouts gained so little ground that the battalion ordered everyone to return to the foxholes dug the previous day; it was easier for the men to spend the night there than expend the energy in building a new line.⁶⁶

The next day, 31 January, events paralleled those of the previous day--terrific firing, an attempt to advance, and fourteen Scouts from L Company carried to the rear. At the close of the effort, the frustrated Scouts reoccupied their old foxhole line. Even the addition of the 192nd Tank Battalion to the Scout attack had little impact on the enemy's powers of resistance. Fallen trees impeded the tanks, and thick vegetation reduced their

fields of fire. Besides that, the tanks operated hesitantly. Of the twenty-three tanks in I Corps, only three were committed, and they spent most of their first day making short rushes into the tangled jungle to clear paths for the infantry. The same three M-3 tanks were used continuously, and the tankers neared exhaustion in their oven-like vehicles. Even when the tank platoon in contact was given the normal five tanks, use of tanks in such small numbers proved futile.⁶⁷

In the center of the line, the net result of L Company's attack, just one of four rifle companies taking part in the 2 February effort, was seventeen killed and wounded, leaving but two officers and twenty-seven men alive. The next day, two more Scouts died and two disappeared somewhere along the front line. Then on 4 February, five more men were lost. Losses in the rifle companies continued to rise with some, like L Company, suffering horrendous casualties until everyone was worn down both physically and mentally.⁶⁸

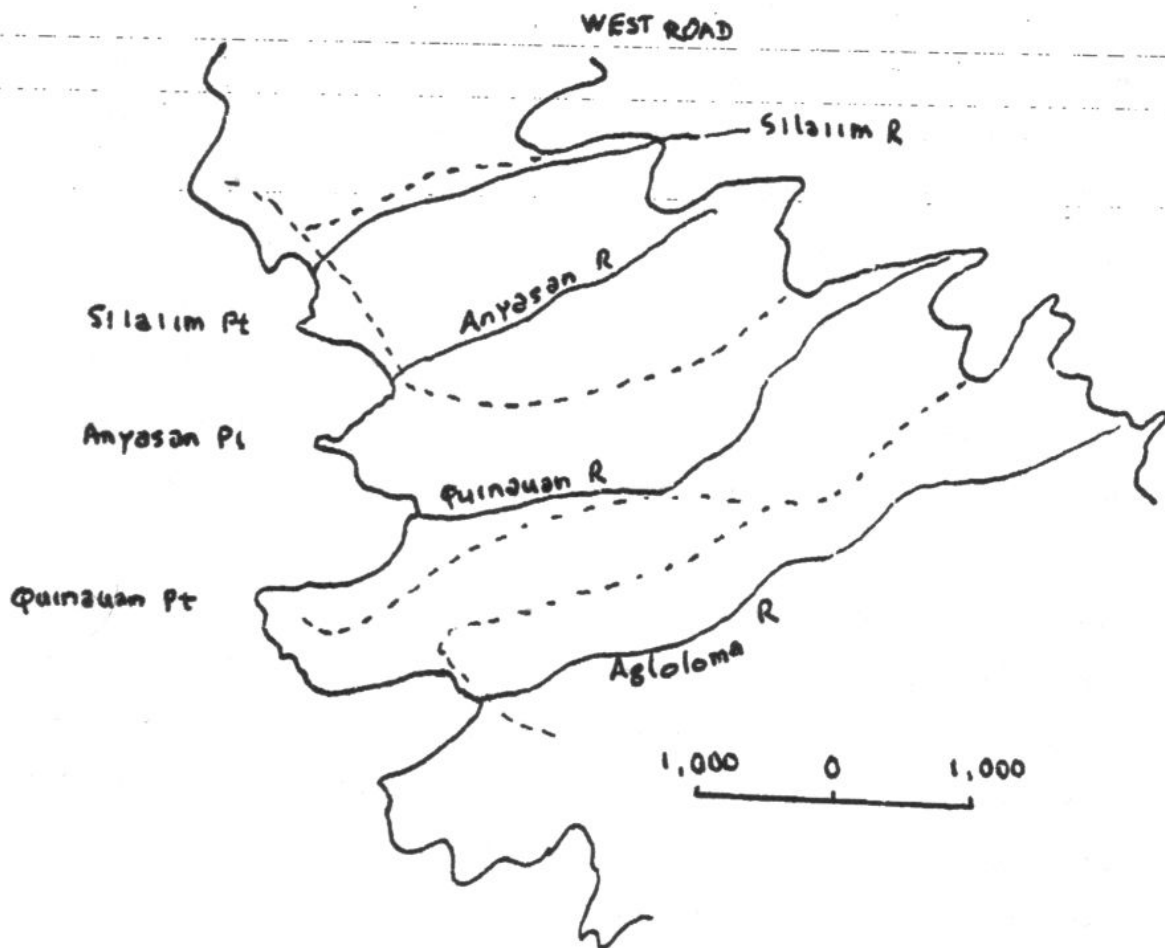
Finally, on 4 February, a coordinated attack using tanks and close radio control forced the faltering Japanese into a shrinking perimeter only fifty yards from the cliffs at the very edge of Quinauan Point. The tanks were the deciding factor now. The once thick, concealing vegetation had been shot away, allowing the tanks to see and maneuver. Guided by radio, they moved forward, firing at targets spotted by nearby infantrymen. They shot apart Japanese positions or crushed them with their 13-ton weight. Surviving Japanese retreated until they occupied a perimeter slightly larger than a football field. Then the remaining Japanese jumped up, ripped off their uniforms, leapt off the cliff, and scrambled down the crumbling ledges. Exultant Scouts and Americans fired machine guns and rifles into the enemy killing scores of them.⁶⁹

The battle for Quinauan was over. The Japanese 2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry, was totally destroyed, its 900 men dead. To General Homma, the battalion had been lost "without a trace."⁷⁰ Every depression and foxhole was filled with Japanese dead, and pictures of wives and children fluttered over the bodies. Friendly losses at Quinauan were five times those suffered at Longoskawayan, nearly 500 Filipinos and Americans killed and wounded. More than fifty Filipinos from the 1st Constabulary were lost, and of four American instructors assigned, one was killed and two wounded. Scouts of the 3rd Battalion, 45th Infantry, had carried the brunt of the battle. They entered the fight on 27 January with 500 officers and men. Just twelve days later, only 212 men remained. Most impressive was the fact that every man in the battalion was accounted for as either present for duty, buried, or evacuated as wounded; there were no stragglers or deserters.⁷¹

But before the Americans could consider the west coast secure, the results of two more landings had to be countered. In another effort to outflank I Corps from the sea, one company of Japanese from the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry landed on 27 January, and the remainder of the battalion came ashore the first night of February.

Anyasan - Silaiim, 31 January to 13 February

On 25 January General Homma ordered the 16th Division commander, Lieutenant General Susumu Morioka, to leave Manila with two of his infantry battalions and the 21st Independent Engineer Regiment headquarters and to assume command of the operations against Wainwright's corps. Morioka decided to reinforce the Quinauan landings with one company from his 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry. But once again, poor seamanship, a dark night, and difficulty in



spotting landmarks along Bataan's coast brought the Japanese 2,000 yards short of their objective. Although the spot at which the Japanese came ashore looked much like Quinauan Point, the 200 Japanese actually landed between the Anyasan and Silaiim Rivers, just north of Quinauan Point.⁷²

There were men along the coast who might have made a fight of it, but ~~elements of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Constabulary, fled.~~ When this news reached Brigadier General Clinton A. Pierce, the Sector commander, Pierce ordered the 17th Pursuit Squadron—one of his reserves—to advance to the beach. With their point element out, the airmen entered the abandoned headquarters of the panicked Constabulary battalion. With the airmen just 300 yards past the Constabulary bivouac and only 400 yards west of the vital West Road, three Japanese stepped into view and opened fire with automatic weapons. The airmen tried to deploy out of column into a skirmish line, but the jungle was so dense that this maneuver proved impossible. This was the first time many of the Americans had ever fired their rifles, and because they could not see anything, their firing was high. Probably feeling they had too few men, and already a mile inland, the Japanese outposts fell back toward the beach, and the firing died. American airmen had once again bought time for reinforcements to assemble. Earlier that day, the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Constabulary, received orders to join the fight. The battalion moved from its reserve location and joined the 17th Pursuit that night.⁷³

At I Corps, Wainwright became more and more concerned over the safety of his corps as one Japanese landing after another splashed ashore behind his main line. On the afternoon of 27 January, he sent a memorandum to MacArthur recommending consideration, and consideration only, of moving both corps further south to shorten the flanks.

My coastal flank is very lightly held, so lightly that the Japs appear to infiltrate through it at night at points selected by them. If I take troops off

my front to thicken the Coast Defense, they will certainly crash through the front. They already attacked there today with infantry and artillery and have tanks in position.⁷⁴

Wainwright was also concerned over his inland right flank units, his 11th Division and 2nd Philippine Constabulary. Without roads upon which to move--only narrow foot trails--they stood in serious danger of being cut off if the Japanese broke through to the West Road. When Wainwright wrote his memorandum, he was faced with a penetration of his main line of resistance and the beginning of a pocket similar to the one which forced him from his original position. And when he looked seaward, all he could see were Japanese coming ashore and threatening his lines of communications. Even his retreat could be threatened, so he had reason to be concerned. But MacArthur refused to order further withdrawals, and rightly so. There was too little space remaining on Bataan, and a last-ditch stand had to be made somewhere. Here was as good a place as anywhere.⁷⁵

The day after the landing, the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Constabulary, and the 17th Pursuit launched another but it was only after a battalion of Scouts from the 45th Infantry arrived the next day that any progress was made and the situation considered under control. The 2nd Battalion, 45th Infantry arrived on 29 January just in time to prevent a Japanese sortie from succeeding.

On 27 January, General Homma ordered General Morioka to reinforce Quinauan Point and seize Mariveles Mountain. Assigned this huge task was the rest of the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry. Like its lead company, the 1st Battalion moved to the coastal town of Olongapo and embarked for the trip to Quinauan to reinforce the stranded 2nd Battalion. There was little time to plan and rehearse, for Major Kimura received his orders on 31 January and had to sail the next evening. The 500-man battalion was in trouble even before it left

friendly shores the first night of February. A captured Japanese order revealed Japanese intentions of reinforcing the western landings and driving to Mariveles Mountain. The Americans took immediate action to counter the expected landings. Staff officers alerted observers along the west coast and dispatched one of the two American tank battalions to the threatened area. Just after dark, P-40 fighter aircraft went on strip alert.⁷⁶

With his plan already compromised, Major Kimura encountered a second serious problem soon after his boats sailed. Three Navy signalmen perched atop a tree spotted his flotilla in the light of a full moon. The signalmen sounded the alarm, and the carefully laid defense plan--the first coordinated air-sea-land action of the campaign--slipped into gear. Navy PT boats sped into the area, and the 26th Cavalry left I Corps' reserve for Caibobo Point riding Bren-gun carriers and buses. Four P-40's roared from their dirt strips, climbed over Mariveles Mountain, and dropped toward the sea to attack the twelve or more enemy barges. On each pass, the low-flying pilots subjected the barges to murderous fire from six wing-mounted .50-caliber machine guns. Five barges sank, carrying the equipment and ammunition-encumbered Japanese with them. The P-40 blitz was a shock for the Japanese, until then confident in their undisputed aerial superiority. The American planes returned to base, made a night landing without loss, and quickly rearmed for another strike. After eight sorties--flown individually as soon as a plane was rearmed--four fresh pilots replaced the original fliers and took off for yet another strike.⁷⁷

The slaughter continued. After heavy 155mm guns of E Battery, 301st Artillery, and then light 75mm cannons of D Battery, 88th Artillery, found the range, they were joined by the unmistakable rapid booming of heavy .50-caliber ground-mounted machine guns from Scout and Air Corps units. As the Japanese drew closer to land, Scout infantry fired their shorter range weapons; their

light machine guns and rifle fire chopped into the water. Finally, PT 32 dashed about firing machine guns and two torpedoes at the Japanese minelayer Yaeyama which was supporting the attack. After losing half their force before even touching shore, the thoroughly battered Japanese turned about and limped north. But either because of his tenacity or because his damaged boats could not make the return trip to Moron--the closest safe harbor--Major Kimura beached the survivors of his battalion at Silaim Point and joined his one company already there.⁷⁸

The Japanese who landed with their equipment at Silaim were full of fight. Some supplies were lost, some men were dead, and some equipment was missing, but fighting spirit remained. To keep the Japanese off balance, two batteries of Filipino and Scout artillery poured a thousand rounds of 75mm and 155mm high explosive into the beachhead in the first twenty-four hours after the landing. At least this time there did not have to be haphazard improvisation, no juggling of Constabulary, Air Corps, Philippine Army, and Scouts. Sufficient forces were on hand. Two battalions of the 57th Infantry, the 1st and 3rd, had arrived.⁷⁹

The 57th Infantry brought friendly forces to three battalions of Scouts, a battalion from both the Constabulary and Philippine Army, and a pursuit squadron. The Scouts would be the main maneuver force while the airmen, Constabulary, and Philippine Army would protect the flanks and patrol rear areas. Fighting along Bataan's west coast had sucked up five of the six Scout infantry battalions on Bataan, and it was imperative that the job be finished quickly so as to return these elite troopers to reserve. The staff finalized preparations for the next day. Because it knew the enemy's general trace, it could assign specific objectives for each battalion. The 1st Battalion received the mission of taking the southern-most objective, Anyasan Point, while the 3rd

Battalion, north of the 1st, was assigned Silaiim Point and the mouth of the Anyasan River. The 2nd Battalion, 45th Infantry, was to take the mouth of the Silaiim River and the north side of the point. Philippine Army, Constabulary, and Air Corps units were kept in reserve against a sudden Japanese breakthrough toward the West Road.⁸⁰

In the predawn darkness of 2 February, the two 57th Infantry battalions departed their West Road assembly areas, 1st Battalion on the left and 3rd Battalion on the right. It was still dark on the jungle floor at 0600 hours, but rather than providing surprise and concealment for the Scouts, the darkness only hampered the attack. Not needing light, the Japanese simply fired their pre-arranged fires and forced the Scouts off the trails into the jungle. Formations mixed, and leaders fought a losing battle to find and control their men. It quickly became apparent nothing could be done until the sun rose, so the Scouts went to ground and waited for daylight.⁸¹

When it was light enough to start again, progress was slow and fighting at close quarters. The Japanese were dug into a series of well-organized self-contained strong points, each prepared for all around defense, connected by communication trenches and possessing good fields of fire. The advance was slow and cautious. Line of sight was five to ten yards, and runners were hindered by an absence of lateral trails. By the end of the first day, Scout gains were negligible. The 1st Battalion spent the day pushing its way through amazingly thick vegetation along the only two trails in the area.⁸²

On 3 February, the infantry received some support from nine light tanks from C Company, 194th Tank Battalion. The west coast was bad for armor everywhere and completely impossible in the 1st Battalion's area. The only place the 1st Battalion could operate was opposite Silaiim Point, and even here it was restricted to a single narrow trail walled in by trees. Scout infantry

guided the tanks forward, and the tankers found the close support most welcome. Very few Scout and tank bullets found a mark, but the huge volume of fire prevented the Japanese from shooting back, and Scout infantry could crawl forward with minimal losses. Despite the tanks, it was still an infantryman's battle, and the foot soldiers relied on rifles, bayonets, and untrustworthy hand grenades. Because of thick vegetation and small fields of fire, the Scouts attached their heavy machine gun platoons to the rifle companies. But as the 3rd Battalion advanced away from the West Road, and as fields of fire and visibility both declined, the effectiveness of machine guns diminished. More important, the problems of bringing adequate ammunition over the rough terrain resulted in machine gunners being used as ammunition bearers for the riflemen.⁸³

The Scouts finally shoved the Japanese onto Silaiim Point itself, and both sides could see the end approaching. Tanks from A Company, 192nd Tank Battalion, often stood hull to hull with less than ten feet between vehicles as they flayed the Japanese. The Japanese in Major Kimura's 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, were now in desperate straits. Unless help arrived, he was doomed. Kimura messaged General Morioka of his plight. "I am unable to make contact with the Tsunehiro Battalion <2nd Battalion, 20th Infantry>. The battalion is being attacked by superior enemy tanks and artillery, and we are fighting a bitter battle. The battalion is about to die gloriously."⁸⁴ But rather than let Major Kimura's battalion die, gloriously or otherwise, Morioka ordered the 21st Independent Engineer Regiment to rescue the trapped men. The engineers departed Olongapo and sailed down the west coast the night of 7 February, but failed to locate any of their troops. When they approached the shore for a better look, they ran into two Bataan-based P-40's, artillery, and numerous machine guns.⁸⁵

With this seaborne rescue attempt thwarted, General Morioka relieved Major Kimura from his original mission of linking with the Quinauan force and ordered him to evacuate his men using whatever materials were available. On 10 February, the Japanese continued to retreat before the Scouts and Constabulary. The Scouts pushed steadily through minor opposition and neared the coast by late morning. At noon, they ran into the final enemy positions and engaged in some close combat before standing triumphant on Anyasan Point.⁸⁶

In a final effort to escape the tightening ring of Scouts, 200 Japanese launched a desperation drive out of Silaiim Point the morning of 12 February. The assault drove through the junction between E and F companies, 45th Infantry, and plowed over two Scout machine guns killing one of the crews. The second crew fired until out of ammunition and then escaped. Losing about thirty men, the Japanese broke free, turned north, and ran into the command posts of the 17th Pursuit and F Company, 45th Infantry. Just as the Japanese hit the command post's security, and just as they started firing into the Scouts with machine guns, the 3rd Battalion, 57th Infantry, arrived. Hardly had K and L companies gone on line than twenty-five Japanese overran an L Company machine gun, losing twenty of their own men in the process. Although the Japanese fought hard and skillfully, they were not in prepared positions. Their attack was broken, momentum was lost, and when the 3rd Battalion hit them, the survivors scattered. By 1500 hours the next day, the Scouts reached the beach.⁸⁷

At Longoskawayan and Quinauan, Wainwright's men wiped an infantry battalion from the Japanese order of battle. At Silaiim and Anyasan, they destroyed a second battalion, half of it at sea. Now only a single battalion remained to the ill-starred 20th Japanese Infantry, and it would soon be destroyed in a battle against Filipino troops. General Morioka's attempt to flank

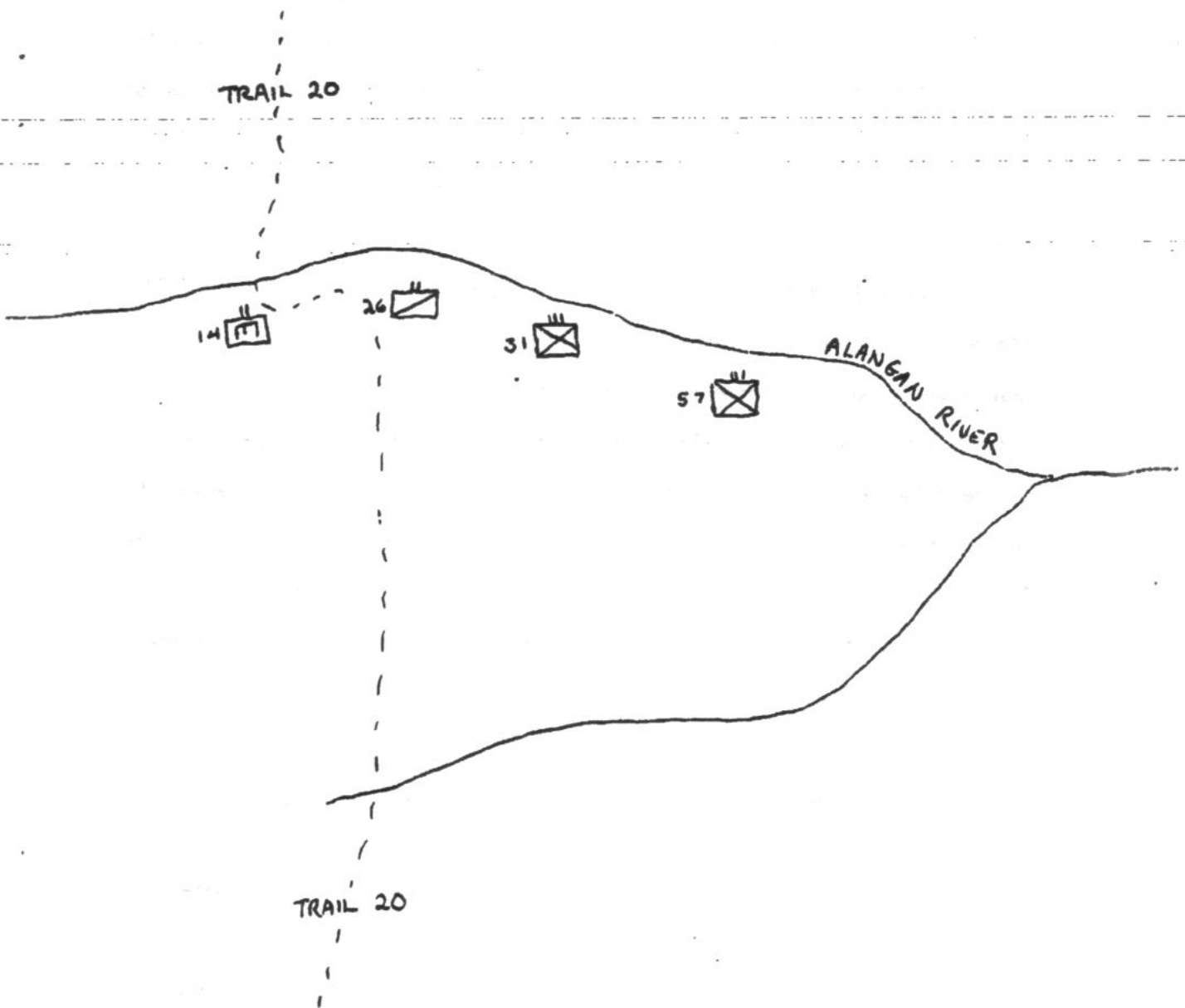
I Corps and force a speedy end to the campaign had ended in unmitigated disaster. The concept was good, and if things had gone well, the landings would have posed a real threat to MacArthur's army. But the Japanese landed without adequate reconnaissance, and were committed piecemeal in different locations on different days. Even as poorly as the maneuver was executed, the landings caused considerable concern. They forced the commitment of five Scout infantry battalions, but the net accomplishment of three weeks of bitter fighting was the complete destruction of the 1st and 2nd battalions, 20th Infantry.

The fighting along the west coast of Bataan ended active operations for nearly seven weeks. The Japanese withdrew to reorganize, receive replacements, and acclimate new units. The Filamerican army tried to do the same, but the decreasing stocks of food led to an enormous drop in the stamina of the soldiers. By the time the Japanese launched their next attacks, the defenders were on one-quarter rations and actually starving to death. The Japanese smashed II Corps' main line of resistance on 3 April, penetrated it on 4 and 5 April, pushed the defenders to another line on 6 April, and attacked that line on 7 April.

Task Force Delay, San Vicente to the Alangan, 7-8 April

The Japanese rupture of the San Vicente line the afternoon of 7 April was the start of two days of delaying actions that culminated in the surrender of the Bataan army. The motorized Scout 26th Cavalry was the first organized force to arrive and block the pursuing Japanese. The cavalry came under the command of Brigadier General Clifford Bluemel, commander of the destroyed 31st Division, who would fight the delay for the

ALANGAN RIVER 8 APRIL



next two days. The cavalry regiment's 2nd Squadron deployed across Trail 2 and prepared to execute another delaying action, a maneuver with which they were quite familiar. The 1st Squadron moved into position to protect the 2nd Squadron's route of withdrawal. The Japanese 8th Infantry hit the 2nd Squadron, and a short but lively battle developed. When the Japanese paused for breath, they were astonished to find the Scouts still in place. But rather than take unnecessary casualties, the Japanese started a flanking movement. The 2nd Squadron was forced to withdraw, and they turned the battle over to the 1st Squadron.⁸⁸

The 1st Squadron now faced the Japanese from hasty entrenchments just north of Trail Junction 2 and 10. The ground here was open, rolling, and sparsely vegetated, not the sort of terrain to offer much concealment. When the Japanese ran into the Scouts, they once again sent flanking parties around both sides of the defenders. At the same time, Japanese dive bombers fell on the cavalrymen at the trail junction, practically wiping out the 2nd Squadron's two-squad rear guard. Under the threat of encirclement, the 1st Squadron withdrew through the most severe bombing and shelling the regiment had ever experienced. The men had to cross the danger area by short rushes in small groups, and casualties were heavy. General Bluemel had foreseen the impossibility of stopping the Japanese here and had issued orders to reassemble at the Mamala River.⁸⁹

The 26th Cavalry, 31st Infantry, and trucks from the 14th Engineers all jammed the road as it dropped toward the Mamala River, and the narrow, steep-sided, one-way Trail 12 overflowed with traffic. Demoralized Filipinos, flushed by the Japanese, further choked the route. Circling overhead, Japanese airmen could hardly miss seeing the target. Pilots from the 16th Air Regiment delivered the most awe-inspiring bombing the soldiers had ever seen. One bomb

hit a cavalry ammunition truck in the narrowest part of the trail. The truck caught fire and set nearby trees ablaze, blocked the trail, and peppered men and vehicles with fragments. The air attack smashed communications trucks, ambulances, and every sort of rolling conveyance. Three scout cars had to be destroyed after the trail proved impassable. Although his men reformed on the south bank of the Mamala, Bluemel was now without transportation. Realizing he could not stop the Japanese here, he ordered an evening withdrawal to the Alangan River.⁹⁰

During the early morning hours of 8 April, fragments of II Corps occupied the Alangan River line. Straddling Trail 20 on the left of the line were 450 Scouts of the 14th Engineers. They covered a road block and refused the left of Bluemel's line. These engineers were the freshest and least disorganized of the soldiers along the Alangan River, and they tied in with the 26th Cavalry to their right. The cavalry put both squadrons on line covering 350 yards of the river. In contrast to the relatively fresh engineers, the cavalrymen had snatched but one hour's sleep in fifty-four hours and had consumed but a single canteen of water in thirty hours. Between the cavalry and the American 31st Infantry to the right was 600 yards of unoccupied, open ridge. Then the 200 Americans remaining from the 31st Infantry occupied a narrow piece of ground with no contact on either flank. Off to the right of the Americans 400 yards away, stood two reduced battalions of the Scout 57th Infantry guarding a front of 500 yards. Because of the inadequate communications situation, Bluemel controlled just the 14th Engineers and the 26th Cavalry; the 31st and 57th Infantry off to the right were on their own.⁹¹

During the morning, Japanese aircraft spotted Bluemel's men organizing their positions, and at 1100 hours, the Japanese 16th Air Regiment found both the 57th and 31st Infantry. Utterly unopposed by anti-aircraft fire, the light

bombers accurately dropped incendiaries, and fierce grass fires drove some of the men out of position. They took refuge in some woods just south of their line, waited until the fires were out, and then reoccupied their burned foxholes. At 1400 hours, advance elements of the Japanese 8th Infantry appeared before the 57th Infantry. The Japanese found both flanks open but failed to penetrate the Scouts. To the right of the Scouts, a small fragment of the American 31st Infantry fought off Japanese attacks, but with hardly four clips of rifle ammunition per man, prolonged resistance was impossible. At 1630 hours, after slowing the Japanese for ninety minutes, the Americans withdrew to a small river just south of the Alangan.⁹²

Then the center of the Alangan line buckled. Japanese artillery shelled out a platoon from the 31st Infantry's A Company, and pressure increased on the 200 Americans. As the right of Bluemel's line was withdrawing, as his center was being pressured, and as the 57th Infantry was repulsing probes from all sides, his far left entered the fight. Three companies of the 14th Engineers covered Trail 20 where the trail ran through Bluemel's lines. At 1400 hours, sporadic firing broke out in front of the engineers. An hour later, one of the companies was heavily engaged, but the engineers held. A little after 1600 hours, six tanks from the Japanese 7th Tank Regiment rolled into sight on the north edge of the river and blindly fired cannon and machine guns at the south bank. After softening up Scout resistance, the six tanks churned through the rocky river bed, climbed the narrow trail south of the Alangan, and ran into a rock-and-truck roadblock established earlier that day by the engineers. The narrow trail, steep slopes, and virgin jungle flanking the obstacle prevented the Japanese from turning around, so they sat there firing machine guns and 47mm tank cannons. The tanks had no infantry immediately available, but the engineers were without anti-tank guns and could not hurt the tanks. For a time

it was a standoff. Then the Japanese 8th Infantry, following the tanks in trucks, and already pressuring the 31st and 57th Infantry, dismounted, deployed, and hit the 26th Cavalry.⁹³

Despite tank rounds bursting in the bamboo and small arms fire cutting along the line, the Scouts held their ridge and refused to budge. But their tenacity was costly, for only an hour after the fight started, nine of the veteran cavalrymen were dead and seventeen wounded. A battery of American self-propelled guns, that when placed there earlier in the day gave the Scouts hope they could stop the enemy, received orders to hurry to the East Road to intercept a column of Japanese tanks, tanks which turned out to be American.⁹⁴

By 1630 hours, Bluemel's line was crumbling everywhere. Because he had contact with only the engineers and cavalry holding Trail 20, he did not know the status of the 31st or 57th Infantry. He knew they were east of him, but he did not know how they were faring. Luckily, both regiments coordinated with one another and withdrew when the pressure became too severe. The center 31st Infantry sent a message to Bluemel telling him this and asking that Trail 20 be held until they reached it.⁹⁵

With the 31st and 57th Infantry withdrawing, there was nothing left for Bluemel to do but order the engineers and cavalry to follow. To delay pursuit, the cavalrymen placed a broken bus and a car across the trail and pulled out from right to left. All of Bluemel's forces successfully broke contact and retreated to the Lamao River, but the night march to the Lamao broke up some of the surviving units. The soldiers were exhausted and mentally drained by the time they reached the river, and hardly 250 men remained under control. Bluemel's action on the Alangan marked the last organized resistance offered by the Americans on the Bataan peninsula. The next morning, 9 April, the Luzon Force surrendered, and the battle for Bataan was over.

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