

MacArthur and the Fall of Bataan and Corregidor

by James "Ski" Schiaffino Post 1814

In October 1940, President Roosevelt instituted the first peacetime draft in US history. This Selective Service Act required that men who had reached their 21st birthday but had not yet reached their 36th birthday to register with local draft boards. Ostensibly, this was to prepare the armed services for the impending two front war. The military was severely undermanned, especially the Far Eastern Command.

Scottish poet Rabby Burns wrote "The best laid plans of mice and men aft gang a-gley." From October 1940 to December 1941, the US military was knee deep in a-gley. Events just didn't seem to be going the allies way. At the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, (we really weren't planning to get engaged in Europe too much) there were plans to evacuate the forces protecting Wake Island, Guam Island and the Philippines. The "surprise" attack on Pearl Harbor offered a convenient excuse for their failure to enact the plans. But if truth be told given the state of American naval preparedness those plans were, to put it politely, overly optimistic. For example there was a single ship the *USS Gold Star* assigned to withdraw the 550 defenders and their equipment on Guam. (She was withdrawn prior to the outbreak of hostilities.) There were no vessels assigned to remove the defenders of Wake Island. With the outbreak of hostilities, the troops protecting Wake and Guam Islands were for all intent and purpose - abandoned.

One of the worst examples of abandonment was the Philippines. The high command was drafting plans to evacuate the Philippines when war broke out. If the pre-war military didn't have the resources to withdraw the approximately 1,000 soldiers from Wake and Guam, how could they possibly withdraw a hundred times that number of troopers from the Philippines?

The battle for the Philippine Islands is often considered the worst military defeat in US history. Of the 135,000 American and Filipino military personnel involved, 25,000 were killed, 21,000 were wounded and approximately 100,000 were captured. As a positive counterpoint; their heroic but tragically futile defense slowed the Japanese advance in South East Asia by almost five months. This allowed the allies to prepare Australia as a base of operations and kept it out of the control of the Japanese.

The heroic defense by the American and Filipino forces allowed the US military time to regroup and was a key factor in the Battle of The Coral Sea. This battle marked the first time since the start of the war that a major Japanese advance had been checked by the Allies. More importantly, it deprived the Japanese fleet of the carriers *Shōkaku* and *Zuikaku*, the former seriously damaged and the latter depleted of its aircraft complement, were unable to participate in the Battle of Mid-

way the following month.

This battle greatly lifted the morale of the Allies after a series of stinging defeats by the Japanese during the initial six months of the war in the Pacific Theater. As opposed to common assumptions, it was also the first battle (not Midway) in which aircraft carriers engaged each other and the first in which the opposing ships neither sighted nor engaged each other directly in battle.

The Japanese were thwarted in their attempts to control the islands north of Australia. Which brings us to general MacArthur. From 1935-41 he served as Philippines military adviser (and field marshal) to the Philippines government. He retired from the Army in December 1937. He was recalled in 1941 but by a special act of congress still held his position within the Philippine government.

General Douglas MacArthur was in charge of the defense of the Philippines. It was his responsibility to recruit, equip and train a sizable Filipino army. The more or less official rationale for the loss of the Philippines was that the Japanese surprise attack on the Philippines prevented MacArthur from completing his training of the Filipino forces. It continued that in spite of this, he conducted a successful fighting retreat of his forces to the Bataan Peninsula and the island of Corregidor where he made a heroic stand against furious Japanese assaults. That was a very compelling story, however the reality was vastly different. As is true with most "historical" events there is also another side to the story.

So what really happened? There was no "surprise" Japanese attack. The Japanese did not attack the Philippines until eight hours after Pearl Harbor. During those eight hours General MacArthur essentially did nothing. He didn't even put his forces on alert. The inexcusable failure by MacArthur to place forces in the Philippines on a proper war footing immediately following news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor fatally compromised the defense of the Philippines. American intelligence knew there was a Japanese fleet on Formosa. They also knew it was ordered to attack the Philippines. The orders from his superior officers were specific. He was to launch an immediate attack on the Japanese fleet assembled on Formosa. He didn't. The dereliction of his duty to the US military resulted in the effective elimination of American air power in the western Pacific a few days following the Japanese attacks and by 15 December 1941 throughout Southeast Asia. Further it forced the complete withdrawal of the US Asiatic Fleet from Philippine waters,

So how did all of this happen? He had more than ample time and money to train, clothe and arm the Filipino troops and he simply failed to do so. When or-

dered to execute the prewar battle plan he completely ignored the direct order. Instead of using the prewar defensive lines he had built, he chose, instead, to meet the invaders on the beach. It was only after failing to stop the invasion on the beaches did he finally order a retreat to the pre-established positions. By then he had suffered serious casualties and squandered his advantage in both men and equipment.

What did MacArthur have to oppose the Japanese invasion? While he had fewer aircraft, he had sufficient numbers of bombers and attack aircraft to attack the fleet at Formosa. As the fleet was unable to sail due to heavy fog, more than likely the attack would have been successful, if only in delaying the attack on the Philippines. He had prepared defensive lines. His troops also outnumbered the attackers 3 to 2 and had enough tanks, naval support, (1 heavy cruiser, 2 light cruisers, 25 submarines, 6 PT Boats.) supplies and munitions to survive an extended siege. The defense did not necessarily have to end in abject failure. Especially considering that the War Department considered General MacArthur to be their 'best' field commander.

Returning to the aforementioned aogley, in the event that the Japanese attacked America, General MacArthur was ordered to immediately relocate his family to Australia and activate the pre-planned defense of the Philippine Islands, War Plan Orange - 3. He did neither. Sensibly enough, the first stage was to be an attack by B-17 bombers on the staging area at Takao, Formosa. Followed immediately by a second attack later in the day. This was intended to disrupt the Japanese timetable for the attack. Eventually, he did send a photo reconnaissance bomber to Formosa.

When the Japanese invasion did occur, the American and Filipino troops were to man the already constructed lines of prepared defensive positions behind the beaches. Simultaneously, the FEAF (Far East Air Force Command) was to carry out offensive attacks from their scattered bases against specific Japanese targets, again a sensible plan. Then, if the invaders were not stopped at the barriers, the defenders would carry out an orderly fighting retreat through the series of pre established defensive lines while the supplies of medical, food and ammunition were to be transferred to the easily defended Bataan Peninsula. Then MacArthur would withdraw his troops into the mountains of the Bataan Peninsula and await better - trained and equipped American reinforcements or removal. It was a fairly comprehensive and sensible plan. Unfortunately, it did not happen.

One must ask, why didn't it happen? The defense forces available in the Philippines consisted of approximately 135,000 troops, about 85 % of which were Filipino. The Americans were equipped with M1 Garand rifles, and 108 M3 tanks. In addition, General MacArthur was given \$10,000,000 to equip the Filipino forces and upgrade existing facilities and add extra airfields. Neither were facilities upgraded nor the extra airfields built throughout the islands. Anti aircraft batteries also were not installed (the ones that would have protected his vulnerable air force from Japanese attack.) Nor

were the Filipino forces equipped or trained properly. This leads one to wonder exactly where the 10 million dollars went. Additionally, he had 107 P-40 fighter aircraft, however when the attack occurred only about 91 were serviceable and 100 B-17 Flying Fortress bombers. Yet the Philippines still lacked critical maintenance and repair facilities and enough airfields to permit the proper dispersal of aircraft. Yet, MacArthur had two years to build them. Their greatest weakness was the inadequate air-raid-warning service and antiquated antiaircraft artillery which left the growing air forces vulnerable to enemy raids.

The Philippine Army received clothing that was of poor quality. By way of example their rubber shoes would wear out within weeks. There were shortages of nearly every kind of equipment such as blankets, mosquito nets, shelter halves, entrenching tools, gas masks, and helmets. The Philippine Army was forced to continue using the old WW I Enfield and Springfield 103 rifles. Again where did all that money go?

One can rationalize the lack of equipment on the fact that the Philippines were essentially on the other side of the world making delivery difficult. Overlooking the fact that the Philippines were not a "third world" country and had existing manufacturing facilities. One can also explain the failure to deliver the M1s. The need to equip newly trained American forces for the war in Europe took precedence.

However, there can be no excuse for the fact that the Filipino troops never received adequate training or uniforms. At the onset of hostilities, many Filipino units went into battle without ever having fired their weapons. Many of the troops had also never even seen an artillery piece fired let alone load, aim, fire and maintain one. However, one unit of the Filipino forces, the Philippines Scouts, was trained and equipped properly and they departed themselves accordingly. They entered the history books On 16 Jan 1942 when they performed the last cavalry charge in American military history.

The Japanese plan was for simultaneous attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines and Guam. American code breakers already knew the location of the Philippine invasion force, and felt an offensive maneuver, attacking the build-up on Formosa, would delay the impending invasion by disrupting the Japanese timetable. The bombing attacks never occurred. In yet another departure from War Plan Orange -3, MacArthur was ordered to defend only Luzon. Instead he decided to defend all of the Philippine islands. He spread his resources thinly throughout the islands.

MacArthur radically overestimated his troops' strength and underestimated Japan's determination. As a precaution, orders were given to move the 27th Bombardment Group of B-17 bombers southward to Mindanao, out of range of the Japanese bombers. This move was delayed, however, as the pilots were invited to a big party held in honor of Major General Lewis Bereton, at the MacArthur residence. The event was held on what was to become the night before the Japanese attack.

When the actual attack began on 8 December, (The Philippines are on the other side of the International Dateline) the B-17s were still on the ground at Manila while the crews recovered from the previous night's party. Even with the use of radar, the Army Air Corps on the island launched a limited and confused response. Many formations were aloft too long and were short on fuel when the attacks began. Other units were still refueling and were destroyed on the ground. Half of the aircraft were destroyed on the first day. After the first few days the Far East Command air force had been completely eliminated, surrendering the sky to the Japanese.

The capitol, Manila was protected by three forts, Forts Frank, Hughes and Drum at the entrance of Manila Bay. Incidentally, Fort Drum was the last American base to fall to the invading Japanese. The Pico de Lora Hills on the adjacent Cavite shore, rose to a height of 225 feet and completely dominated the surrounding terrain overlooking the forts and the entrance to Manila Bay. Under current war plans this area was to have been occupied by an infantry battalion and one battery of field artillery when the main forces found it necessary to withdraw to Bataan. For whatever reason MacArthur did not follow this plan and the Japanese were able to occupy this important observation post early in January 1942, and from it adjust heavy concentrations of artillery fire on all three forts and Corregidor Island itself.

Once again, instead of following the battle plan War Plan Orange -3, MacArthur's decision to meet the Japanese head on at the beaches allowed the Japanese to virtually eliminate what was left of his air forces in the initial stages of the invasion. It was only after they failed to hold the invasion on the beaches and suffering heavy casualties did he order the retreat their defensive lines, surrendering the air to the Japanese.

Meanwhile, either General MacArthur or his staff initially withheld the transfer of prepositioned supplies to Bataan. Other supplies were delivered under very difficult circumstances. Continuous strafing runs by Japanese aircraft frightened away the Filipino drivers and destroyed much of the pre-stacked supplies. Supplies unloaded from freighters met the same fate. More than ten million tons of rice, other foodstuffs, clothing and munitions never made it to the Bataan Peninsula leaving only a thirty day supply of field rations for over 100,000 men.

Initially, the Americans did face furious Japanese assaults. However, in early January 1942, the Japanese high command, believing that they had won the campaign, withdrew their best divisions and the bulk of their airpower and transferred them to operations in Borneo and Indonesia. So the defenders in the Bataan Peninsula faced only secondary 'garrison' Japanese forces and engaged mostly in small unit battles. Thus the Americans and Filipinos were able to hold out for four more months.

With most of his forces now in Bataan, and the remainder scattered throughout the Philippines, MacAr-

thur retreated to Corregidor. There he sent a spurious message to his troops. "Help is on the way from the United States," he said. "Thousands of troops and hundreds of planes are being dispatched. The exact time of arrival of reinforcements is unknown as they will have to fight their way through..." With the fleet crippled following Pearl Harbor he was acutely aware that help and relief were not forthcoming. Additionally, MacArthur made only one recorded visit to the Bataan front, earning him the maleducative sobriquet "Dugout Doug".

On 20 February 1942, he was ordered to depart Corregidor and take one senior staff officer with him on a submarine to an airfield on Mindanao where a B-17 would fly him on to Melbourne, Australia. There he was to assume command of all US troops. Once again he ignored a direct order (this time from the President) He delayed departure until 11 March when he finally obeyed the president's order. However, rather than leave clandestinely by submarine he commandeered several PT boats and ordered them to be re-equipped for the trip instead. The PT boats were the main offensive naval weapon he still had and now he was risking half of it for his trip.

Prior to the outbreak of war, he was ordered to send his family to a safer area. He didn't. Instead they remained with him in the Philippines. Their presence further complicated his departure. When he finally chose to depart, he took not one senior officer as ordered, but his personal staff of 22 in addition to his wife, son and their Army doctor and a special mattress for the MacArthurs. All in all 26 people were loaded onto four PT boats. Additionally, each boat was loaded with twenty 55 gallon drums of fuel. This new requirement forced the removal of 32 sailors needed to defend the boats against Japanese aircraft, putting the entire operation in additional jeopardy. The short handed and overloaded boats deftly managed to complete the perilous journey to Mindanao where the MacArthurs and staff met two hastily recruited B-17 Bombers who flew them to Darwin, Australia.

A famous quote everyone knows by heart really didn't happen the way it was presented. When he relinquished command to Major General Wainwright he actually said, "When I get back, if you're still on Bataan, I'll make you a Lieutenant General." Wainwright replied: "I'll be on Bataan, if I'm still alive." As he was leaving, MacArthur spoke to Major General George F. Moore, the commander of the Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bays. He told him, "George keep the flag flying. I'm coming back."

On Bataan, the reaction to MacArthur's escape was mixed, with many American and Filipino troops expressing bitterness and betrayal. Under General Wainwright's remarkable direction, the combined American and Filipino forces heroically and astonishingly defended Bataan for almost three more months. On 20 March, MacArthur did make a speech at Terowie, South Australia in which he said, "I came out of Bataan (he didn't) and I shall return."

One of the abandoned Americans on Bataan, Brigadier General William E. Brougher, probably expressed the views of most of the men when he described the order to leave and his lie about reinforcements as: "A foul trick of deception played on a large group of Americans by a commander-in-chief and his small staff who are now eating steak and eggs in Australia".

In 1979, historian Carol Petillo discovered a memorandum from the papers of chief of staff General Sutherland that revealed a conveyance of \$640,000 made in January 1942 from the Philippine Treasury to the personal bank accounts of MacArthur and his immediate staff. Before President Quezon left to establish a Government in Exile in the US, he made the conveyance as a concept of "utang na loob," a kind of reciprocal bond of obligation between family or close friends. In addition to the ten million dollars, Philippine Commonwealth President Quezon had provided MacArthur, personally, a bonus of 1% of the defense spending up to 1942, and yet the Filipino troops were not provided proper uniforms, shoes, helmets or even weapons. This discovery led to many rumors and speculation as to the real purpose of the MacArthur mattress.

Despite his repeated refusal (7 times) to follow direct orders, his disastrous defense of the Philippine Islands, the resulting barbaric Bataan Death March forced on his abandoned troops and the missing funds, no official inquiry was held. Unlike General Kimmel and Admiral Short at Pearl Harbor, who were relieved of command, President Roosevelt awarded "Dugout Doug" a Medal of Honor.

The desperate defenders of Bataan called themselves the "Battling Bastards of Bataan". A poem was written by American correspondent Frank Hewlett in 1942:

Battling Bastards of Bataan
We're the battling bastards of Bataan
No mama, no papa, no Uncle Sam
No aunts, no uncles, no cousins, no nieces,
No pills, no planes, no artillery pieces
And nobody gives a damn.
Nobody gives a damn.

Without sufficient food, munitions and seemingly being abandoned by their leader, the heroic American and Filipino troops held out until 8 May 1942.

Sources:

The Bastards of Bataan: General Douglas MacArthur's Role in the Fall of the Philippines during World War II By: Lahia Marie Ellingson

Wikipedia: Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bays Philippine Campaigns 1941-42

Historynet: MacArthur's Defense of The Philippines

www.PBS.org MacArthur- The Secret Payment

www.britannica.com/biography/Douglas-MacArthur

Time.com Why MacArthur is one of America's most overrated generals

Navy War College Review- MacArthur and Defeat in The Philippines

The Story of the Philippine and Bataan Quartermaster Depots. by Cpt. Harold Arnold, QM-Res.

A PERSONAL CONNECTION

My uncle, Harold Ray Taves, Sr (1912-1995), married to my mother's youngest sister. On 14 March 1941, he enlisted in the Army as a Cpl, in C Battery, 515th Coast Artillery Regiment (anti-Aircraft).

After basic, he was sent to the Philippines, where his Regiment wound up at Corregidor.

On 9 Apr 1942, they were captured by the Japanese at fall of Corregidor. He survived the Bataan Death March and was sent to Tokyo POW camp Shinjuku, Tokyo Bay area 35-140.

After Japan surrendered, on 27 Sep 1945, he was liberated and returned to US military control.

He had served ten months, twenty-one days stateside, and four years, two months, three days overseas.

Harold was awarded the Philippine Defense Ribbon with 1 Bronze Star, American Defense Service Medal with 1 Bronze Star, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, Distinguished Unit Badge with 2 Oak Clusters. (At that time, there was no POW medal.)

On 6 Apr 1946 he was transferred to Camp Beale, California for discharge.

Needless to say, my uncle never talked about his experience, but my cousins and I all knew he had been a prisoner. My mother told me she thought he had been sent to work in the mines. He was a kind and gentle man, quiet in demeanor, who unfortunately, eventually drank himself to death.

As with many WW II veterans, he suffered quietly from what we would now call PTSD.

So, don't bother asking me what I think about that General, "Dugout Doug".

—Jo Lawrence, Managing Editor



Coast Artillery gunners in the Philippines, 1942.