

ADA in Bataan

A Retrograde Operation

by Maj. Charles E. Kirkpatrick

Years after the end of World War I, the operations of the two anti-aircraft machine gun battalions and two anti-aircraft gun battalions of the American Expeditionary Force were still being pointed to as one of the best examples of anti-aircraft coverage for attacking corps. Despite these units' successes in 1918 at St. Mihiel and on the Meuse-Argonne front, the U.S. Army's anti-aircraft artillery in the decades between the wars had an entirely different focus.

Protection of the field army gave way to defense of critical strategic assets because anti-aircraft defense was seen to be relatively immobile and short-ranged. Anti-aircraft defense was therefore considered the final close-in barrier to air attack on sensitive points, particularly the critical harbor defenses along the East and West coasts and in the Pacific.

In World War II, the branch once more turned its attention to the division, with anti-aircraft automatic-weapon battalions permanently attached to each infantry and armored division. Anti-aircraft gun battalions were available for reinforcement as required. The first step in the anti-aircraft artillery's return to the field, however, was not one blessed by victory—the Philippine Defense Campaign of 1941-1942. The anti-aircraft forces in that campaign were, for the most part, committed to critical-asset defense and devoted their energies to coverage of the maneuver element only after the war was well underway.

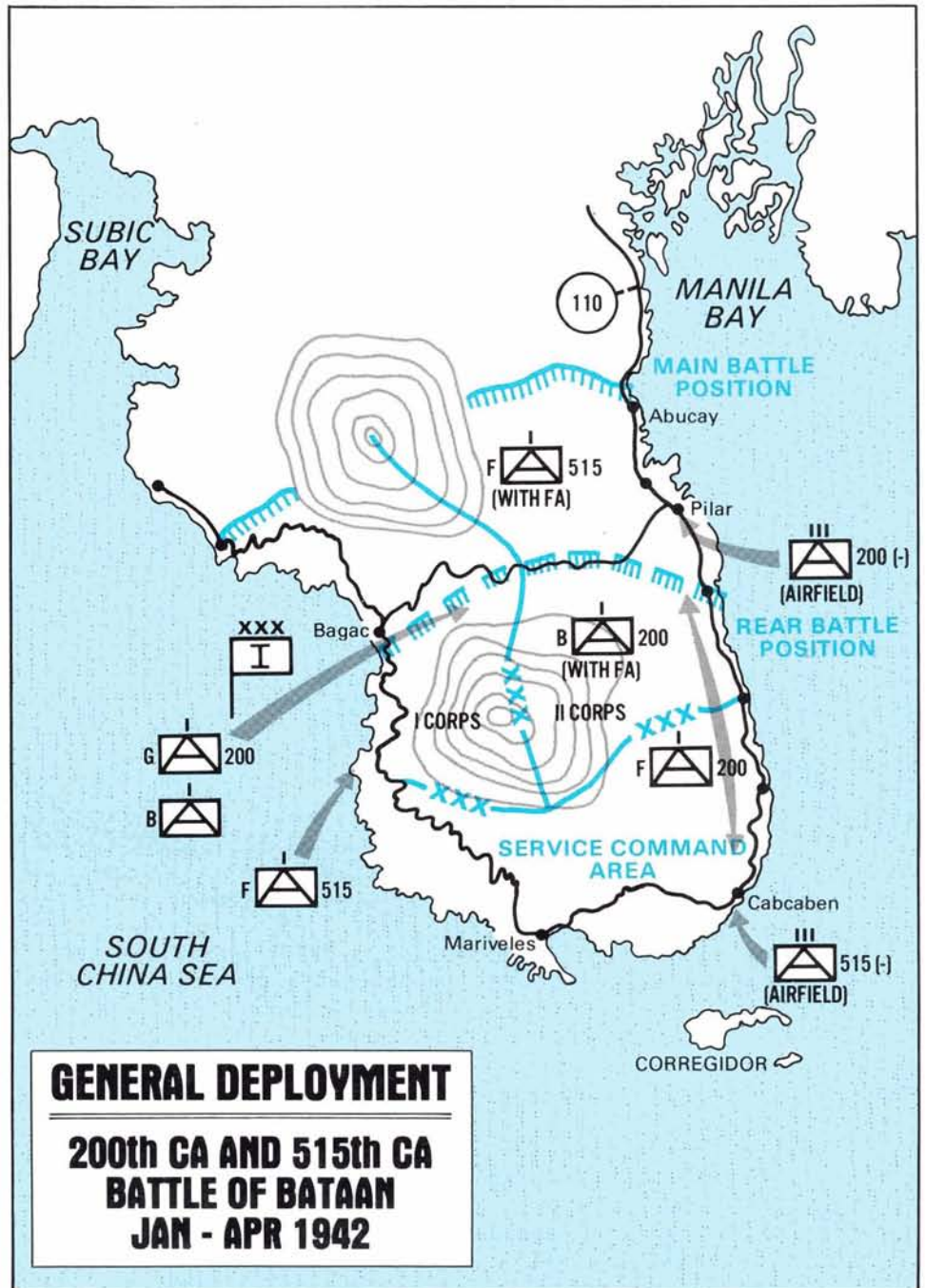
The lessons to be learned remain valid ones nonetheless, especially since they illustrate a tactical problem that the Army has, thankfully, rarely had to face—the conduct of a retrograde operation in the face of a strong opposing air threat, which is surely one of the most taxing and fascinating of tactical operations to execute properly, both for maneuver and for anti-aircraft elements.

Anti-aircraft units in the Philippines in mid-1941 were assigned entirely to

fixed critical-asset defense. As war neared, the 60th Coast Artillery (AA), was brought up to the full strength of three battalions and augmented by four batteries, two each from the 59th Coast Artillery and the 91st Coast

Artillery. Those four batteries were transferred from harbor-defense assignments to anti-aircraft duties. The 60th, however, was deployed to protect the Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic bays, not the Philippine Division of the Philippine Army. By late 1941, senior officers in the Far East began to convince the War Department to provide anti-aircraft units for purposes other than the defense of Manila Bay.

A 1939 War Department study centered on critical shortages of anti-aircraft units and materiel in various war scenarios did not rate the Philippines a likely theater of war, but the



men never actually fired their weapons, but much of the ammunition was faulty and did not detonate. Finally, the Japanese generally flew above the effective altitude of the 3-inch anti-aircraft guns that had the best chance of reaching them.

A large group of officers and men was detached from the 200th Coast Artillery and sent to Manila where, brought up to strength with Philippine Army reservists, they activated the 515th Coast Artillery (AA) and set up anti-aircraft defenses around the city. Their mission was the protection of the city itself, Nielson Airport, Nichols Field and the port area. At first their fire was understandably erratic, but the men of the 515th Coast Artillery managed to keep Japanese bombers above an altitude of 20,000 feet, decreasing enemy bombing accuracy.

Coverage of the Retrograde Operation

As soon as it became evident to MacArthur that his revised plans for meeting and stopping the Japanese had failed, he ordered War Plan Orange 3 into effect. The plan involved the withdrawal of all ground forces into the Bataan peninsula where they would form a defensive line in the north while the fortified islands of Manila Bay held the southern approaches.

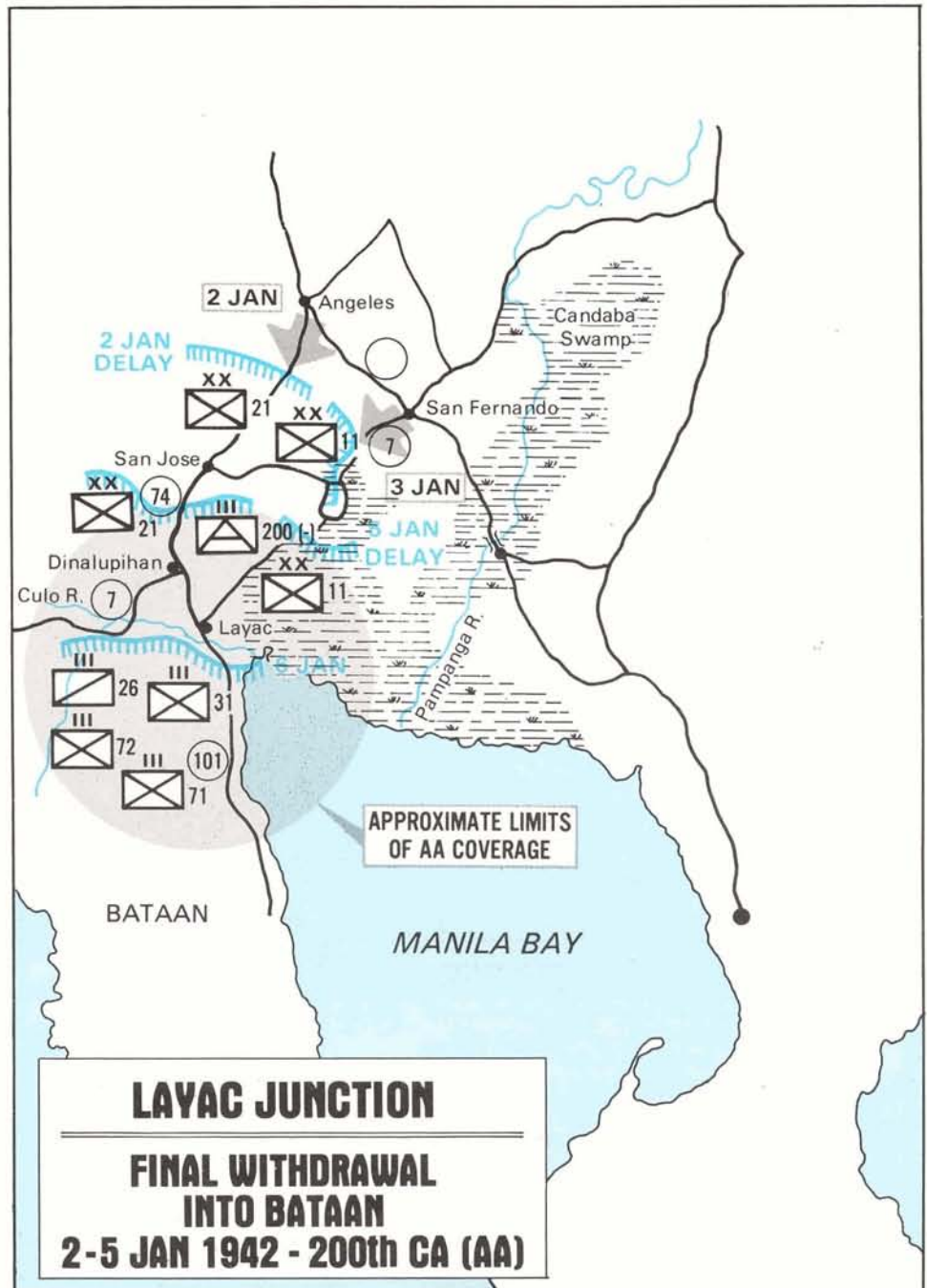
Once entrenched, the troops were expected to hold out for six months—the estimated time that it would take the Navy to fight its way back across the Pacific to relieve them. The essential element of the plan was the successful withdrawal into Bataan of the North Luzon Force that was then meeting the Japanese north of Fort Stotsenburg, and the South Luzon Force which was deployed in the approaches to Cavite province. It was a difficult and delicate operation that required careful timing to succeed.

The plan also required adequate anti-aircraft protection of withdrawing troop units and, more particularly, defense of critical choke points. Brigadier General George M. Parker Jr. had command of the South Luzon Force of two infantry divisions. His units and the two divisions held in reserve near Manila had to move north around the top of Manila Bay and hence into Bataan. At the same time, Maj. Gen Jonathan M. Wainwright's four infantry divisions and one cavalry regiment of the North Luzon Force had to move

directly south into Bataan. In each case there was a choke point that, if not properly guarded, could be locked, leaving the two forces separated outside of Bataan and susceptible to being defeated in detail.

It was the mission of the 200th Coast Artillery and the 515th Coast Artillery to protect those critical points from Japanese air attack. The South Luzon Force moved up Route 3 to the town of San Fernando, where it turned southwest along Route 7 into Bataan. Between the towns of Calumpit and San Fernando lay the Pampanga River, a substantial barrier crossed by a pair of bridges at Calumpit. Infantry of the

91st and 71st divisions blocked the approaching Japanese forces while the South Luzon Force crossed the river. The bridges were protected by four batteries of the 515th Coast Artillery, sent there from Manila on Dec. 20. The batteries remained at the bridge for seven days before being withdrawn from Calumpit to the vicinity of Pilar, where they established an airfield defense with the remainder of the regiment. They were relieved by two gun batteries of the 200th Coast Artillery that arrived at Calumpit Dec. 27 and remained there until all forces east of the Pampanga River had crossed the bridges. The Calumpit bridges were





Members of the 200th released from Japanese prison camps enjoy a luncheon during a stopover on Oahu en route to the United States in September 1943.

then destroyed by engineers on New Year's Day, 1942.

The batteries of the 200th that had defended Calumpit bridges rejoined their regiment as soon as the bridges were destroyed. The remainder of the regiment had moved Dec. 24 to the area known as Layac Junction. Layac Junction, more properly the Dinaluphin-Layac area, was located along Route 7, just north of the Culo River, another natural defensive line. It was the next important choke point. Once through the town of San Fernando, the South Luzon Force turned southwest and withdrew directly into Bataan. The North Luzon Force continued to fall back on successive lines of delay, holding the Japanese as long as possible to gain time for the development of a better defensive line to the south.

The 200th Coast Artillery, less those batteries that were detached to protect the Calumpit bridges until Jan. 1, 1942, set up a defense of the bridges across the Culo River. By Dec. 24, most of the regiment was in place and had established a protected zone that encompassed the final delay positions of the



Anti-aircraft gun crew train in the damp heat on Corregidor.

North Luzon Force and much of Route 7 in the direction of San Fernando. The regiment remained in those positions until Jan. 5, when the North Luzon Force fell back across the Culo River and the bridges were blown up. The gunners then moved south to protect the Bataan airfield. With that action, the planned retrograde operation into Bataan was complete, and the anti-aircraft units returned to the business of airfield defense.

Critical Asset Defense on Bataan

The 200th Coast Artillery's B, C and D batteries established a defense of Bataan Field on the shores of Manila Bay the night of Jan. 5. The 515th Coast Artillery relocated to the other viable airfield on Bataan, Cabcaben Field. Those two airfields served the remnants of the Far East Air Force, a handful of P-40 fighters. Batteries detached from the two regiments guarded other critical assets. From early February, G Battery, 200th Coast Artillery, protected the I Corps Headquarters in the western sector. It was joined in March by B Battery, 515th AA, while F Battery, 515th AA, moved in March to protect the II Corps field artillery, a

small quantity of 155mm guns manned by Filipino scouts.

Other batteries served less traditional missions as well. Bravo Battery, 200th AA, moved in March to the Pelar-Bagac sector to protect the vital artillery behind the front line and give anti-aircraft protection to the infantry. One reason the battery was relocated was that the scouts' 155mm guns were seen as the most important factor in halting the attacks of Japanese infantry. Fox Battery, 515th AA, moved in March to tery, was moved in March to Sisyan Point on the west shore of Bataan where it was emplaced to repel Japanese landings behind the lines. Finally F Battery, 200th AA, was moved in March to Route 110, the main east-shore road. Its roving mission there was to combat strafing aircraft so that supplies and troops could move more freely on that critical north-south artery.

The general collapse following the Japanese breakthrough in April found the scattered batteries of the two anti-aircraft regiments reassembled in the defenses of the last available airfield, Cabcaben Field. When the surrender order came on April 9, the men de-

ployed on the high ground and just south of Cabcaben Field were prepared to fight as infantry.

Pointers

The objective of the retrograde operation conducted by the Philippine-American Army in 1941-1942 was to gain time and to permit the redeployment of the army to Bataan. The withdrawing units made effective use of terrain, particularly rivers and other natural obstacles, and left behind encumbrances to hinder rapid Japanese advances, specifically in the demolition of bridges. The employment of anti-aircraft artillery in the conduct of the successive delays likewise followed many of the guidelines with which we are familiar today.

Anti-aircraft units were kept well forward, as at Calumpit and Layac, to protect units executing the delay and defense of critical river crossings until all friendly units had passed. Although the Japanese made no determined air attacks on the bridges, and thereby forfeited an excellent opportunity to strand substantial portions of the army on the wrong sides of rivers, American anti-aircraft units were



The V for victory chalkmark is visible on the helmets of this 3-inch anti-aircraft gun crew. This picture was taken on Jan. 5, 1942.



Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Albert W. Braun, recently released from a Japanese prisoner of war camp, is assisted by Alberta Kemple of Honolulu in making a trans-Pacific call to his mother.

nonetheless positioned exactly as they ought to have been. Indeed, it was the judgment of Brig. Gen. William F. Marquat, MacArthur's anti-aircraft staff officer, that "Japanese forces definitely avoid anti-aircraft fire. In the Philippine campaign, formations of hostile planes were flown over the anti-aircraft defenses apparently for the sole purpose of studying the limits of the protective gunfire." Such a threat may have dissuaded the Japanese air force from pressing attacks on the bridges at Calumpit and Layac. Also the standard of gunnery had improved dramatically since the Clark Field attack of Dec. 8. By the end of the campaign, the 200th and 515th AA regiments claimed a total of 86 Japanese aircraft shot down. Thus the threat posed by substantial anti-aircraft defenses may have deterred serious attack. In any case, the question is moot. The units had to be where they were because, in the words of Brig. Gen. S. M. Mellnik, "uninterrupted traffic over these bridges was needed to evacuate the Southern Luzon Force from Batangas and into Bataan."

Once the friendly units had withdrawn into Bataan, the anti-aircraft units shifted to other priorities in delay operations: protection of the reserve, command posts, depots and the vital airfields. We should not lose sight of the fact that the battle on Bataan itself was essentially a sophisticated delay from beginning to end.

One of the major lessons we might gather from these operations is that prewar plans do not always equate to

wartime operations. The 200th Coast Artillery was emplaced at Clark Field specifically to defend the heavy-bomber base. The regiment was not a part of the field army, nor did it have any mission with that army. The need to defend the maneuver element came later; there were simply insufficient forces to do it properly. The U.S. Army on Luzon executed five phases of its delay, and only the last phase received anti-aircraft protection. Throughout the remainder of the battle friendly forces were subjected to continuous Japanese air attacks. The anti-aircraft assets available were emplaced during the delay to protect the two critical points through which the withdrawing units had to pass, rather than the delay positions. If the bridges at Calumpit and Layac had been lost due to Japanese air attack, the battle that had gone before would have been a fruitless endeavor and our forces would have swiftly been defeated.

With more anti-aircraft units available, however, each successive delay position, and not just those choke points, might have been protected, and the roads used in moving from position to position could likewise have been covered, with the result that delay positions could have been maintained longer and casualties would have been fewer.

Shortages of anti-aircraft protection are nothing new. The Army is fortunate it has not had an experience such as the Philippine Defense Campaign since 1942. Accustomed to air parity or air superiority, we rarely think of hav-

ing to conduct retrograde operations in such conditions. But the nature of war as fought by the United States has traditionally been such that we begin our campaigns with a *planned retrograde operation*. That is because we do not initiate wars, and must react to enemy attacks. The initial retrograde movement is made to gain time for concentration of forces. Not only maneuver units, but also air defense artillery units, must therefore give serious thought to fighting the retrograde battle and fighting it in terms of enemy air superiority. We can never guarantee friendly air power in any given battle—there may well be more demanding priorities elsewhere.

Finally, another lesson of that campaign speaks to us today. As Marquat wrote in 1943, "anti-aircraft artillery is essentially a defensive weapon and the quantity required tends to be inversely proportional to the potency of the friendly air force."

We need to make a serious assessment of the probability of friendly air support in the various theaters in which we may be called upon to fight. We must consider the possibility, as in the Philippines, of a successful preemptive strike on air bases. And, we must evaluate the need for additional air defense artillery units. Since it appears to us that these units are necessary to ensure the protection of maneuver units, then we need to publicize and sell that idea to the rest of the Army.

The Philippine Defense Campaign, seen in that light, is a source of a great many fruitful thoughts for the air defense artilleryman. In the case at hand, it represented the return of anti-aircraft artillery units to the division and a shift of priorities from critical-asset defense to defense of the maneuver unit during World War II. The experience of the units that fought that campaign confirms the appropriateness of current doctrine for air defense artillery units in retrograde operations and, therefore, deserves careful attention as we think about possible future battles.

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