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## Guerrilla Warfare in the Philippines: Dispersion, Cooperation, and Desperation

Alexander William Decker

*Missouri State University*, [Alexander645@live.missouristate.edu](mailto:Alexander645@live.missouristate.edu)

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**GUERRILLA WARFARE IN THE PHILIPPINES: DISPERSION, COOPERATION,  
AND DESPERATION**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, History

By

Alexander William Decker

May 2020

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# **GUERRILLA WARFARE IN THE PHILIPPINES: DISPERSION, COOPERATION, AND DESPERATION**

History

Missouri State University, May 2020

Master of Arts

Alexander William Decker

## **ABSTRACT**

Guerrilla warfare in Central Luzon from 1942 to 1945 was extremely limited by available resources and manpower, especially following the mass surrender of U.S. troops in the Philippines to Imperial Japan during the surrender at Bataan on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942. By closely analyzing the primary accounts of Luzon guerrillas Doyle Decker and Robert Mailheu, I seek to confirm, confront, and consider many established expectations of guerrilla warfare, especially since much of the established literature espouses a loose set of guidelines for irregular warfare. In this paper, I analyze the pre-war Philippines in order to establish the decisive disadvantages that American forces were faced with prior to guerrilla warfare, after which these limitations were only compounded with the dissolution of U.S. command structure in the Philippines following the surrender. I then heavily analyze primary interviews and accounts given by Decker and Mailheu in order to present concrete examples of local cooperation, military limitations, and environmental hazards that the guerrilla soldiers of the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit faced in Central Luzon. This study's purpose is to present a new avenue for analyzing guerrilla tactics through individual accounts and case studies, so that the human element of decision-making in such strategy can be taken into account more frequently and incorporated into broader discussions of guerrilla tactics.

**KEYWORDS:** guerrilla, survival, Pacific, Philippines, Japan, U.S., Luzon, Bataan, jungle, interview

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May 2020

Approved:

Sarah Panzer, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

Michelle Morgan, Ph.D., Committee Member

Eric Nelson, Ph.D., Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to Doyle Decker, Robert Mailheau, Frank Gyovai, Clay Conner Jr., Joe Donahey, Bob Campbell, and Clinton Wolf, as well as the Fassoths and countless other civilians who helped them along the way.

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## INTRODUCTION

World War II stands as a defining moment in U.S. history for many reasons, particularly because of the United States' transition from relative isolation to an overwhelming global and industrial power in less than a decade. The codified image of the U.S. is that of a grand industrial power fueled by millions of workers, all unified by a common desire to overcome the shocking losses incurred during Japan's raid on Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. The United States experienced one of the greatest industrial booms in history on the promise of retaliation against Japan, and quickly produced one of the most formidable military machines in the world. Japan's accompanying invasion of the Philippines on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941 however, has failed to garner similar interest, and those who defended Bataan from December 1941 to April 1942 held none of the advantages that this boom provided. The U.S. defeat was swift and brutal, and those few who avoided capture after the surrender on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942 resolved to fight in the surrounding terrain of Luzon, Mindanao, and the Visayan Archipelago. Their struggle contrasts bitterly with the common image of the U.S. during WWII. U.S. guerrillas in the Philippines were malnourished, under-equipped, and under-manned throughout the three years preceding the U.S. military's return in 1944. The story of the guerrillas of Central Luzon in particular demonstrates that for all of the U.S.'s industrial progress that was made during the 1940s, it was still a country in transition, and the guerrillas experienced every disadvantage and trial posed by that transition.

### **Context of Japanese Occupation**

For Japan, the invasion of the Philippines in late 1941 was both heavily dependent on and coordinated with the strike on Pearl Harbor, and both severed U.S. troops in the Philippines from

critical reinforcements and supplies. A combination of defensive weaknesses, upcoming independence, and a dependence on naval reinforcements all contributed to the fall of the Philippines and the U.S. guerrillas' ensuing dependence on assistance from civilians. The Philippines were a remote zone of exile for decades, a place where rival politicians like Paul McNutt and troublesome military personnel such as Douglas MacArthur were sent in order to distance them from the mainland United States, either for purposes of political expediency or career sabotage.<sup>1</sup> Equipment and manpower was sparse, due to both the isolationist atmosphere of peacetime and widespread reservations throughout the U.S. about allocating further funds to defensive efforts.<sup>2</sup> The Philippines were the closest U.S. territory to the Japanese mainland, and the imperial expansion of the Japanese in the 1930s necessitated an invasion of the Philippines as a jumping-off point for expansion throughout the Pacific. While the defense of the Philippines was able to resist the invasion for roughly four months, the Japanese attack pushed into the Philippines with great efficiency, and surrender on Bataan came on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942.<sup>3</sup>

Following the surrender, hundreds of Filipino and U.S. soldiers were soon brought together in small groups in order to be taken to Japanese POW camps in what has become known as the Bataan Death March. The Bataan Death March is one of the most emotionally charged events of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, and has become a potent symbol of wartime cruelty among others such as Nanking, the Holocaust, the Rape of Berlin, and the atomic bombing of Japan. Bob Mailheu was one of the soldiers forced to endure the Death March, and the brutality that he witnessed stayed with him for decades.<sup>4</sup> The occupation years following the

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<sup>1</sup> Dean J. Kotlowski, "Breaching the Paper Walls: Paul V. McNutt and Jewish Refugees to the Philippines, 1938–1939," *Diplomatic History*, 33 no. 5 (2009), 878.

<sup>2</sup> Kerry Irish, "Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines: There Must Be a Day of Reckoning," *The Journal of Military History*, 74 (April 2010), 440.

<sup>3</sup> Doyle V. Decker, *Why I Joined the Army and How I got to the Philippines* (From Postwar Interview with Wayne Sanford, 1984), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, ed., *The War Years* (Military History Section, Indiana Historical Society, 1984), 1-5.

Death March in the Philippines were defined by a chaotic mix of different ethnic populations, economic turmoil, and national propaganda, but debates still rage concerning the core factors that informed Japan's conduct.

Some like historian John Dower cite the idea of the Japanese Yamato race, which influenced Japanese policy by automatically placing other cultures like those of Korea, Formosa, and the Philippines on a lower societal and cultural level than the Japanese.<sup>5</sup> While older books such as "Backgrounds of Conflict" published during the 1940s more directly related Japanese racial hierarchies to a widespread Japanese belief in the Emperor's mythical origins, Dower's explanation provides a more societally consistent explanation for the lack of compassion exercised by Japanese soldiers who were expected to view other conquered populations as inferior.<sup>6</sup> One of the most prominent reasons for the Japanese conquest of the Philippines was to compensate for the lack of a strong agricultural base in Japan which was needed to feed its soldiers and citizenry, and this led to a common tendency to place the agricultural needs of Japanese soldiers above that of the local population.<sup>78</sup> This did not endear the new government to citizens in the Philippines, who had already been promised independence by the U.S. government.

But what of the soldiers who escaped capture? Options were limited, and many were trapped on the islands that they had been assigned to either by chance or by choice. The Japanese occupation persisted for nearly three years, and many soldiers within Luzon and even relatively well-organized regions like Mindanao struggled to counter the Japanese occupation or maintain

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<sup>5</sup> John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986), 284.

<sup>6</sup> Kurt London, *Backgrounds of Conflict; Ideas and Forms in World Politics* (New York, 1945), 191.

<sup>7</sup> Carel A. Grunder and William E. Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States* (Westport, Connecticut, 1951), 238.

<sup>8</sup> Francis K. Danquah, "Japan's Food Farming Policies in Wartime Southeast Asia: The Philippine Example, 1942-1944," *Agricultural History*, 64 no. 3 (1990), 62.

cohesion.<sup>9</sup> The individual stories of those who persisted and resisted until the time of their liberation or death warrant further analysis, and these individual accounts highlight the inherent difficulties of forming guerrilla movements. Organization required stability, and the latter was in short supply for months following the surrender. Even in previous U.S. conflicts that involved guerrilla warfare, soldiers were mostly confined to the U.S. mainland, and were able to use geographical familiarity to their advantage. The Philippines however were not the permanent homes of most of the U.S. soldiers who were stranded there, and their lack of familiarity with survival techniques nearly resulted in the death of soldiers like Private Doyle Decker in the initial weeks of the occupation. Survival and direct resistance in Central Luzon was not always simultaneously achievable, and the struggle to survive often proved to be more pressing concern than organization.

### **Historiography of Guerrilla Warfare in the Philippines**

Historiographically speaking, within traditional military accounts of the Pacific War the Philippines are mostly discussed in terms of their strategic location, and their fall is attributed to the U.S. Navy's failure to reinforce and resupply soldiers during the Japanese invasion due to both the losses sustained at Pearl Harbor and the coordination of the Japanese strike.<sup>10</sup> While some historians such as Richard Connaughton and Kerry Irish have written works that focus more on popular figures like Douglas MacArthur (especially Connaughton, who has written multiple books on the subject), they usually concern the pre-occupation Philippines or focus on higher-level leaders in guerrilla warfare rather than the everyday soldiers who carried out their orders. While some works that more specifically focus on irregular warfare by historians like

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<sup>9</sup> David W. Hogan, *U.S. Army Special Operations in World War II* (Washington D.C., 1992), 70-73.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Morton, *Strategy and Command: the First Two Years* (Washington D.C., 1962), 99.

David Hogan have stated that MacArthur planned on the potential need for guerrilla warfare in the Philippines (setting up networks with local planters, etc.), Hogan himself admits that his capacity to do this was limited by the U.S. army's lack of a dedicated doctrine or preparation regarding guerrilla warfare.<sup>11</sup> U.S. soldiers in the Philippines were prepared to resort to guerrilla warfare when the time came to surrender or flee, but had no formal preparation to do so, which cost them in the opening weeks as they struggled to procure food and navigate through jungle and mountain terrain.

The Bataan Death March and invasion of the Philippines are common historiographical topics of interest, but the guerrilla warfare that followed is seldom covered outside of scattered and generalized descriptions of larger-scale movements and supply operations.<sup>12</sup> Efforts are often made to mention guerrilla warfare in the Philippines within works about World War 2 in the Pacific and in larger studies of guerrilla warfare, but there are fewer works that exclusively focus on World War 2 in the Philippines or Central Luzon. I am mostly responding to more generalized military and social histories, such as the military history work of Louis Morton and the numerous smaller histories that have been told regarding individual soldiers or families in the Philippines. Many authors take the social history approach or write historical fiction within the Philippines, such as "The Crucible: an Autobiography by Colonel Yay" which have told more individualized stories with a secondary focus on analysis.<sup>13</sup>

In many ways, U.S. guerrillas in the Philippines occupy an interesting space within schemes of irregular warfare. Authors frame irregular warfare in different ways, and while some

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<sup>11</sup> Hogan, *U.S. Army Special Operations in World War II*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* 70, 74.

Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines* (Washington D.C., 1953), 503.

<sup>13</sup> Panlilio Yay, *The Crucible: An Autobiography by Colonel Yay, Filipina American Guerrilla* (New Brunswick, 2010).

like Max Boot contend that irregular warfare is personality-based around leaders such as Robert the Bruce and Mao Zedong, others define irregular warfare by the complete absence of an official command structure.<sup>14</sup> In addition, while writers on the subject such as Colonel Napoleon Valeriano (writing from a counter-guerrilla Filipino perspective) contend that motivations for irregular warfare are often rooted in a desire to overthrow an ideologically weak state, soldiers like Bob Mailheau and Doyle Decker fought initially to avoid surrender rather than overthrow the occupation.<sup>15</sup> Based on Mailheau and Decker's accounts, they were focused more on survival than creating a widespread rebellion focused on wresting control of the islands from the Japanese (often because the latter goal was much more unrealistic), and while their resistance meets much of the criteria prescribed by historians like Russell Crandall (such as a lack of a clear hierarchy, diplomatic engagement, or not acting as representatives of their state), their descriptions also deviate in significant ways.<sup>16</sup> Instead of serving as the initial plan of the United States, guerrilla warfare was a strategy that individual soldiers employed after defeat in order to survive and subsist until the U.S. returned.<sup>17</sup>

### **Approach and Sources:**

My approach will primarily concern Mailheau and Decker's experiences, and what they reveal about guerrilla warfare in Central Luzon after the fall of the Philippines. Avoidance, concealment, and relationships with civilians are the primary strategies described in said accounts, and violence was often only employed by necessity. While the aforementioned

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<sup>14</sup> Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: an Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York, 2013), xxi.

<sup>15</sup> Napoleon Valeriano, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience* (New York, 1962), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Russell Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror* (New York, 2014), 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

qualifications for irregular warfare that have been provided in works like Crandall's book "America's Dirty Wars" are useful for the purposes of definition, analyzing the reasons that irregular warfare was employed in the Philippines help distinguish the U.S. guerrillas from common patterns of irregular warfare. While in normal military circumstances irregular warfare is often a carefully considered option, in the Philippines it was a necessity for the displaced remnants of a defeated army. For example, while Crandall's qualification that irregular warfare involves the lack of an official command structure is useful, Decker's account specifically illustrates that the former chain of command mattered much less than individual merit after the surrender, which specifically addresses Crandall's theory. While in many respects the guerrillas of Central Luzon meet the accepted qualifications of irregular warfare, the reasons that they met those criteria provide a more personal point of analysis through which to view the often undermanned guerrilla movements of the Philippines.

The purpose of my first section is to provide context for the dire circumstances experienced by guerrilla fighters in the Philippines from 1941-45, and to then present the experiences of soldiers Bob Mailheu and Doyle Decker in Central Luzon in my second and third sections. My primary body of sources consists of several interviews with Mailheu and Decker conducted by historian Wayne Sanford in the 1980s, in which they offer their experiences and perspective on the war and their time in the Philippines. For example, Decker stated that he joined the army primarily so that he could have a job and support his family, and was assigned to the Philippines rather than being able to choose his posting.<sup>18</sup> These details partially explain Decker's initial shock at Japan's invasion, as well as his constant focus on survival. Bob Mailheu conversely stated that he joined the army out of fears of military

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<sup>18</sup> Malcolm D. Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker* (From "Transcription of Tape," April 4, 1984), 1.

expansion in Germany, voluntarily choosing the Philippines as a posting far from potential German-American conflict.<sup>19</sup> While Mailheau's reasoning was more motivated by worldwide factors, he still viewed the Philippines as remote and averse to conflict, which further emphasizes the Philippines' status as a remote territory in U.S. jurisdiction. While both Decker and Mailheau eventually joined together in the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit, both were forced to resist as a matter of survival in an unfamiliar region long before any talk of organization could be made a reality. Their accounts are specific to Luzon, so they can only speak to the levels of communication and supplies present where they were, and the specificity of my primary sources means that I will be discussing guerrilla warfare in Luzon rather than warfare in other regions like Mindanao.

One of the more significant sources that I will use is a series of transcribed journal entries written by Decker throughout his time in the Philippines. These entries are primarily useful for their accounts of aid from civilian sources and Decker's commentary concerning his efforts to survive. In addition, Decker's focus on food supplies is constant (much more than concerns of ammunition or other weaponry), and this again indicates that survival was a more pertinent factor to him than continued military sabotage and resistance. He distinguishes several sources of aid throughout his account, among them aid from the Fassoth family in the form of a stable camp for U.S. guerrillas to stay at and various Filipino and Negrito sources that vary from one-time transactions of money in exchange for "cigarettes, sugar and rice" to being contacted by a guerrilla leader in Manila.<sup>20</sup> His accounts describe a life constantly on the move prior to finding Mailheau, and the first two years of his foray into Luzon were fraught with confusion, caution, and a constantly shifting roster of fellow guerrillas.

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<sup>19</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon: Narratives by: Robert T. Mailheau* (Military History Section, Indiana Historical Society, 1984), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Doyle V. Decker, *Doyle Decker's Journal Entries in the Philippines* (From Transcription conducted by Malcolm Decker), 13, 36.



I am mostly interpreting my sources for the purposes of understanding the soldiers' survival techniques as well as the numerous difficulties they encountered attempting to form larger groups. Survival was their top priority in many cases, and their accounts indicate that the guerrillas constantly roamed from place to place, with only brief pauses at locations like Fassoth's Camp.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the interviews taken after the fact are useful for understanding the war's longer-term impact on Decker and Mailheu, as well as their perspectives in retrospect. I can compare larger-scale claims from secondary works on guerrilla warfare to the perspectives of the guerrillas themselves, and analyze discrepancies or consistent aspects. For example, while books like "The Philippines and the United States" detail the struggles of the U.S. and Japanese governments to secure the aid of local populations through promises of independence, the shelter and navigational aid provided by Fassoth's camp and local tribesmen that is described in Decker's account indicates that U.S. guerrillas were helped by multiple class groups in the Philippines (specifically Luzon) throughout their survival in the jungle.<sup>22</sup> Specific examples like these help to more concretely demonstrate the relationships that the guerrillas had with different groups around them, and the situations in which these relationships were formed.

## **Conclusion**

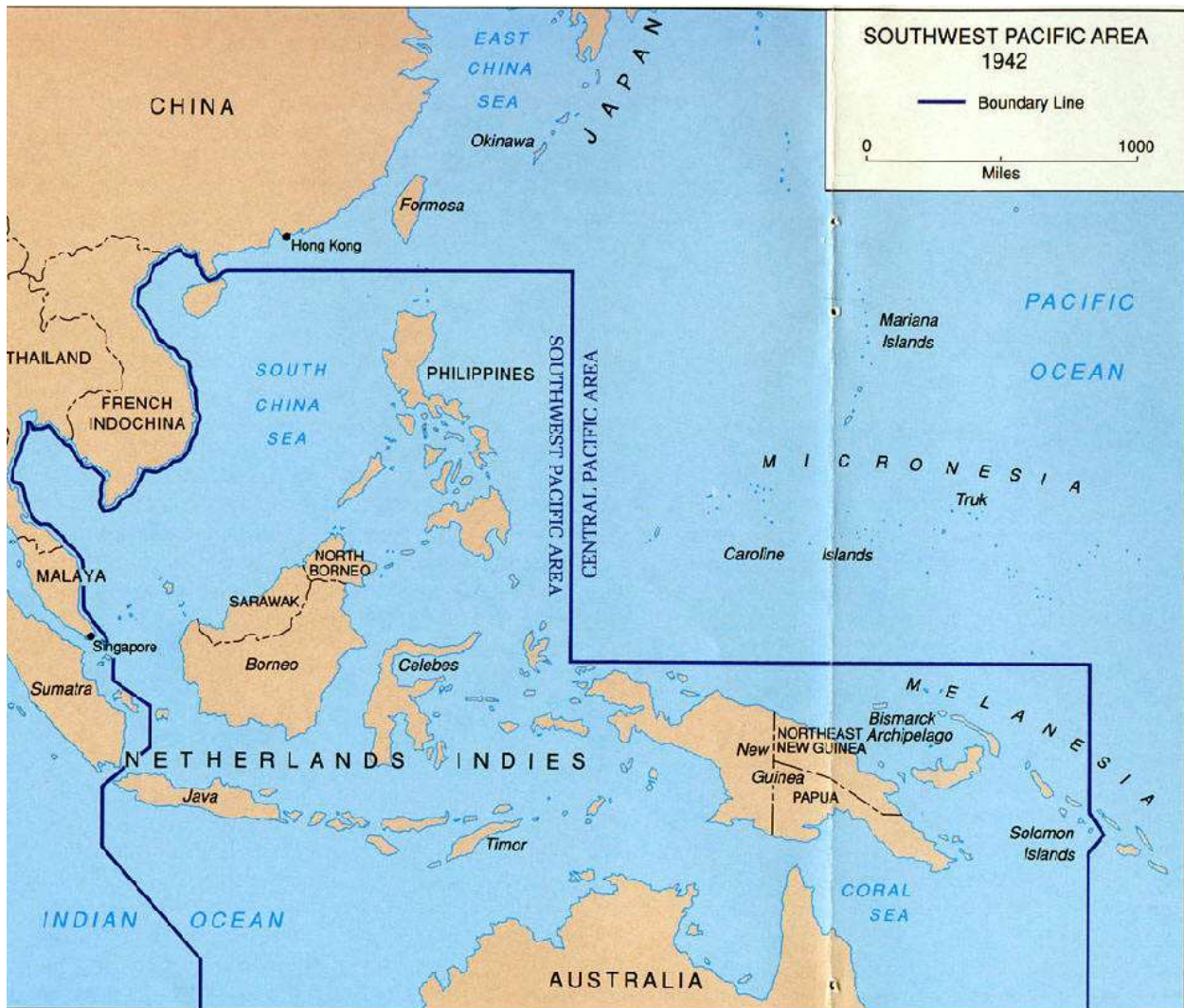
Decker and Mailheu's experiences demonstrate that guerrilla warfare can be just as unfamiliar and daunting to the guerrillas themselves as it is for the enemy tasked with countering it. While their knowledge of local terrain grew over time, both soldiers were caught off guard by the sudden victory of the Japanese, as well as the failure of the U.S. government to provide support until late 1944. Japan's foothold in the Southwest Pacific was solidified by victories in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Grunder and Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States*, 247.

the Philippines, Borneo, and China, and had the resources necessary to maintain a grip on their new territories (see Figure 1, the “Map of the Southwest Pacific” on page 11 for geographical reference to these four locations). Decker and Mailheu were forced to improvise constantly in Central Luzon (shown within the Philippine islands in Figure 2, “Map of the Philippines, 1944”) , and while there were glimmers of ingenuity, many of their earlier efforts resulted in painful lessons that nearly killed them, and were only salvaged by the generosity and skills of the disparate groups who supported them. Without the contributions that Filipino and Negrito populations made, neither Decker or Mailheu would have survived the war or formed the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit, and their examples demonstrate the necessity of support more clearly than other, larger-scale analyses can. My sources will primarily consist of Decker and Mailheu’s account (many thanks go to my grandfather, without whom I would not have access to transcriptions of these accounts), and while this will not be a comprehensive account of guerrilla warfare in the Philippines, it will hopefully provide some insight into the numerous daily challenges involved with waging it.



<sup>23</sup>Figure 1. Map of the Southwest Pacific, 1942, including the Philippines, China, Australia, and the Southern tip of Japan

<sup>23</sup> Charles R. Anderson, "Map of Southwest Pacific Area, 1942," *Archives.gov*, accessed December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/philippine/maps.html>.



Figure 2. Map of the Philippines, 1944, including Luzon, Bataan, and Corregidor.

<sup>24</sup> Leyte Center for Military History Brochure, “Map of the Philippines, 1944,” *Archives.gov*, accessed December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/philippine/maps.html>.

## **GUERRILLA WARFARE IN THE PHILIPPINES: BROKEN DEFENSES AND THE WAR FOR SUPPORT**

The harsh conditions that soldiers Doyle Decker and Robert “Bob” Mailheu faced from 1941 to 1945 in the Philippines were the result of decades of uncertain rule by the U.S. and burgeoning Japanese military expansion. When Japan invaded the Philippines on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the island chain’s defenders were woefully underprepared, and lacked the necessary equipment, support, and manpower that they needed. By April 1942, Japan secured military victory in the Philippines, and the few remaining U.S. soldiers who refused to surrender were forced to retreat into the surrounding mountainsides and jungles in order to conduct guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare had not been officially prepared as part of the U.S.-Pacific strategy, but was instead used by soldiers as a means of survival. The complete absence of official military support throughout the Japanese occupation of the Philippines was a direct result of both inadequate defensive planning and the Philippines’ political placement within the United States, both of which made the Philippines an easy military target for Japan. Japan achieved victory through both its own military efficiency and the weakness of the United States’ hold over the Philippines, and the guerrilla warfare employed by U.S. soldiers was a matter of necessity created by disastrous defeat.

### **Guerrilla Warfare: Tenets and Reasoning**

First, it is important to clarify what the term guerrilla warfare implies as it is used here, since it has become a broad label with several interpretations. While there are several terms for it including guerrilla warfare, irregular warfare, and insurgent warfare, the most consistent

characteristic of the term is the use of non-traditional tactics in order to compensate for military disadvantages.<sup>25</sup> The term “non-traditional” is highly subjective, but it is mostly used in reference to standards of official warfare given by the Geneva Convention, such as clear military hierarchies, openly carried weapons, and adherence to international rules of war.<sup>26</sup> Groups have embraced guerrilla warfare for a wide variety of reasons, but it is almost always utilized as an alternative to traditional warfare when facing a militarily superior opponent that would be difficult to defeat conventionally.<sup>27</sup> The measures employed by guerrillas defy both strict military hierarchies and the Geneva Convention’s given characteristics (including the abandonment of open military dress, openly carried firearms, and other markers of official military status), and these measures are utilized to overcome disparities in military power, either through forcing a political stalemate or whittling down opposing forces throughout a prolonged period of time.<sup>28</sup>

The character or ethical nature of guerrilla warfare has also been a matter of debate, and the ideological nature of many guerrilla movements such as the Viet Cong, Mujahedeen, and Al Qaeda have tied guerrilla warfare to strong ideologies by association.<sup>29</sup> However, while this ideological association and extremism are consistent components of guerrilla warfare, it is not required for guerrilla warfare to be employed. Survival is as strong a motivation as any political inspiration to instill reform or instill a new government, and survival was a constant challenge during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Some modern interpretations also associate guerrilla with a kind of “romantic” thrill that attracts younger recruits, who are worn

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<sup>25</sup> Crandall, *America’s Dirty Wars*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony James Joes, *Modern Guerrilla Insurgency* (Westport, Connecticut), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Washington D.C., 2009), ix.

<sup>29</sup> Valeriano, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations*, 5.

down over time by the hardships of survival.<sup>30</sup> This kind of initially romantic view, however, is not readily apparent in primary accounts that describe guerrilla warfare on Luzon, and the struggle to merely survive repeatedly plagued U.S. soldiers even prior to the occupation. Food ran low constantly, disease ran rampant, and tensions ran high, and many of these problems were apparent early on as soldiers scrambled to retreat into the mountains and jungles of the Philippines.<sup>31</sup> Securing sufficient food and ammunition had been a constant issue even during the defense of Bataan weeks before the surrender, and this lack of basic necessities did not encourage a romantic view of the situation. The Luzon Guerrillas' situation following the U.S.' surrender was dire, and rather than instilling a new government, their initial goals were to survive and establish a somewhat stable environment to operate from.

Guerrilla warfare in the Philippines was not initially planned, but instead arose from the chaos following Japan's invasion. For many U.S. soldiers stranded on Luzon after the army's surrender, guerrilla warfare was one of the only options for survival, and chose to employ it out of pragmatism rather than extremism. Many recent writers on guerrilla warfare associate 21<sup>st</sup> century guerrilla warfare primarily with either underdeveloped societies or insurgencies, but guerrillas in the Philippines were the remnants of the defeated army of a major world power.<sup>32</sup> The defense of the Philippines in December 1941 began with a meager amount of military resources and ended with the complete dismantling of the U.S. chain of command, leaving soldiers to fend for themselves in order to survive. Guerrilla warfare as a means of survival or as an alternative to surrender is tricky to define, since the difference between group-scale survival and dedicated resistance is subjective at best. While writers on guerrilla warfare often

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<sup>30</sup> Joes, *Modern Guerrilla Insurgency*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 257.

<sup>32</sup> Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars*, 8.

acknowledge the importance of individuals maintaining a steady food supply and base of operation, they often do so in passing rather than analyzing the true importance of a stable environment in creating guerrilla cells.<sup>33</sup> Luzon guerrillas were not strongly motivated by strong ideological concerns such as forming a new government independent from the U.S. or Japan, but were instead focused on establishing moderately stable conditions in order to more effectively survive and coordinate stranded soldiers.

### **Struggle for Control: The U.S. in the Philippines**

One of the essential reasons that the United States' defeat in the Philippines was so swift was that the islands were on the verge of independence in 1941, and had already been considered remote in terms of both geography and administration. By the time of the invasion on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the United States possessed the Philippine Islands as a colonial territory since 1898, when it acquired them from the Spanish following U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War. The Treaty of Paris, ratified by the Spanish in 1898, ceded the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and a number of other assorted Spanish colonial possessions to the U.S., which dramatically increased the country's role in global affairs and trade despite its isolationist identity.<sup>34</sup> However, while the U.S. was granted legal control of the Philippines, a number of problems arose when U.S. rule was resisted throughout 1898 and the early 1900s. The forces of Filipino resistance leader Emilio Aguinaldo had already employed guerrilla warfare for years to resist Spanish rule before the U.S. was granted legal control, and had already declared an independent Philippine Republic by 1898.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. now had to conquer sovereign territory in order to maintain its

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<sup>33</sup> Joes, *Modern Guerrilla Insurgency*, 6; Valeriano, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations*, 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2011), 55.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 58.



claim to the Philippines, and the same guerrilla tactics that had been used by Aguinaldo's forces to defeat the Spanish were now employed against the newly arriving U.S. army, which ironically employed similar tactics against the Japanese nearly five decades later.

The guerrilla tactics used against the U.S. during the Philippine-American War were nearly textbook examples, and were much more organized than the initial resistance of U.S. guerrillas towards the Japanese in mid-1941. Resistance forces under General Aguinaldo often avoided open confrontation, and preferred consistent military harassment over large-scale conflicts with the U.S. army. Choosing the time, place, and pace of combat is one of the core tenets of guerrilla warfare, and Aguinaldo's forces were already familiar with resisting larger military powers.<sup>36</sup> The U.S. army's answer to this tactic was a "seek-and-destroy" mentality, which ultimately resulted in additional civilian casualties and failed to contribute to a longer-term military strategy.<sup>37</sup> While the U.S. sought a decisive battle, Philippine resistance forces were unwilling to fight conventional battles, increasing the frustration of U.S. army forces in the Philippines. The U.S. army presented an enormous threat in open combat, so resorting to every available advantage was the only option for the revolutionaries. While this worked in the short term, it also meant that the U.S. army was now aware of the Philippine forces' unwillingness to fight openly, and the army employed extreme methods to counter it.

While the U.S. was able to knock out several military targets throughout the initial fighting in 1899 with relative ease, little effort was made to form or enact any long-term strategy.<sup>38</sup> Victory was defined by the defeat of the enemy instead of fulfilling tactical objectives, which was an unwise doctrine to employ against a guerrilla force determined to prosecute a

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<sup>36</sup> Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars*, 74.  
Valeriano, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

prolonged conflict of attrition.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the U.S. did not have the necessary interpreters or experience to adequately communicate with the civilian population in the Philippines, severely limiting its ability to establish working relationships or compromise instead of applying further military force.<sup>40</sup> Even if U.S. intentions had been inherently peaceful, the restlessness of soldiers combined with the experiences of many commanders in the Indian Wars and the inherent frustration caused by guerrilla warfare resulted in an extremely brutal conflict marked by mass killings and bloody displays of military force.<sup>41</sup> By 1902, the U.S. had quashed Aguinaldo's resistance and secured the majority of the Philippines despite making several key mistakes, but its rule throughout the following decades was distant and reluctant. Despite the force employed to conquer the Philippines, the new territorial government struggled to reconcile its colonial rule with traditional U.S. ideals of sovereignty for nearly forty years.

While the U.S. and Japanese invasions both involved extreme amounts of violence, the critical difference was that the U.S. had the time to capitalize on its conquest. Through the successful implementation of the Monroe doctrine, the U.S. was able to stave off foreign interference while strategically projecting its interests at home and overseas, which was one of the many reasons that it was able to maintain control over its territories. While the U.S. used the Philippines for cash crops and built its own systems of education and trade in the region, it had nearly five decades to form institutions in order to reinforce its rule without direct competition from other empires. Japan lacked this period of uninterrupted development after it conquered the Philippines in 1941, and ultimately had less than four years to accomplish what the U.S. had in over forty. The U.S. occupation of the Philippines was not benevolent, but was definitively

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<sup>39</sup> Record, *Beating Goliath*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Grunder and Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States*, 51.

<sup>41</sup> Go, *Patterns of Empire*, 58.

fading by 1934 with a direct legal promise of independence, a promise not granted to other U.S. colonies such as Guam and Puerto Rico.

Once it had mostly eliminated resistance in the Philippines, the U.S. government formed a territorial government rather than admitting the Philippines to the Union as an incorporated state, which is one reason why the Philippines were never widely viewed as a true part of the U.S. by many in the continental U.S..<sup>42</sup> While statehood for continental territories was similarly convoluted (especially throughout the Southwestern United States), the Philippines' geographic remoteness contributed to its perception as an irrelevant and distant possession, and congressional debates regarding "the Philippine Problem" of the territory's right to sovereignty continued throughout the early 1900s.<sup>43</sup> Prior to the passing of the Tydings-McDuffie act in 1934, stateside debates over the granting of Philippine independence consisted of political posturing with little effect. While congressional Democrats generally advocated for the independence of the Philippines from 1898 to 1911, it was little more than a symbolic gesture without a majority in either the House of Representatives or the Senate.<sup>44</sup> Even when pro-independence Democrats secured a house majority and presidential victory through the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1913, the U.S. government still could not reach an agreement regarding independence by the end of Wilson's term. Advances were made in smaller concessions such as trade agreements and export taxes through legislative policies like the Jones act in 1916, but the core problem of colonial rule by the U.S. went unresolved until the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>43</sup> United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Territories, *New Statehood Bill* (Washington D.C., December 10, 1942), 1; Grunder and Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States*, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Grunder and Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States*, 146.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 155.

By 1934, the U.S. government finally expressed a concrete desire to grant the Philippines independence, and began to reduce its defensive military presence in the process, which in turn was one of the key reasons that Japan was able to defeat the U.S. defenses so swiftly. The passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act was a critical moment for the U.S. administration, since it expressly promised independence to the Philippines by 1946.<sup>46</sup> During the U.S. invasion of the Philippines in 1898, Philippine hopes of independence were facilitated by General Aguinaldo's resistance after negotiations between Spain and the Philippines worsened in 1897.<sup>47</sup> By 1941, the U.S. issued a legal promise of independence, and while there was arguably no guarantee that the U.S. would honor its agreement, the Tydings-McDuffie act was the most direct contract that the U.S. could legally make. While the U.S. tenure in the Philippines from 1898 to 1946 was relatively short, it still took nearly forty years to shift from U.S. colonial rule to Philippine independence, and this meant that the Japanese invasion of 1941 struck at a vulnerable point during the transition to independence. This interruption was one of the key reasons that defenses in the Philippines were weakened when Japan invaded in December 1941, but was also one of the reasons that Japanese rule encountered numerous difficulties from April 1942 to 1945.

### **The Defensive Situation in 1941: Military Capabilities**

Just prior to the Japanese invasion at the end of 1941, the defensive capabilities of the U.S. army in the Philippines were very limited in terms of both available manpower and modernized equipment. Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the defense of the Philippines was hampered by available defensive budgets and the overall Pacific strategy of the U.S., and U.S.

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<sup>46</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Grunder and Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States*, 14.

Pacific planners quickly believed that a total defense of the Philippines was untenable.<sup>48</sup> Plans were made to establish a more significant air presence in order to compensate for the Philippines' dependence on naval support, but the invasion struck before any meaningful number of planes could be transferred. As early as 1926, the Joint Board of the army and Navy (established in 1903) had begun to advocate for a strategy based more on strategic bombing and naval capability than the use of the Philippines as a hub within the Pacific, and adopted a defensive posture that shaped the Philippines into a military choke point.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of the inherent difficulties of securing funds during peacetime, the Philippines were placed in a precarious position within the U.S. Pacific strategy, and were left vulnerable.

The budget for the defense of the Philippines was very limited compared to the strategic aims of Philippine officials such as Major Dwight Eisenhower and General Douglas MacArthur, who was appointed as Military Advisor to the Philippines in fall 1935.<sup>50</sup> Despite attempts to secure an effective defense budget from the National Assembly of the Philippines, financial limitations continued to hound the defensive development of U.S. army forces in the islands, and throughout his tenure as Military Adviser, MacArthur was unable to meaningfully improve defenses in the Philippines prior to the invasion in 1941.<sup>51</sup> Even a proposition by General MacArthur to train 20,000 Filipino volunteer soldiers at the beginning of 1937 was deemed impractical by Eisenhower, who realized that the 1936 defense budget for the Philippines had left no room for training, paying, or arming such a force.<sup>52</sup> To put this in perspective, the U.S. army estimated that Japan could "transport to the Philippines a force of 300,000 men in 30

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<sup>48</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 22, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Irish, *Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur*, 439.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Connaughton, *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines* (New York, 2001), 75.

<sup>52</sup> Irish, *Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur*, 455.

days... (while) the Americans would then have to meet this attack with... 11,000 troops of which 7,000 were Filipinos...”<sup>53</sup> Simply put, the gap in numbers alone left defensive forces in the islands very vulnerable without sufficient naval support and reinforcements, and attempts to lessen the gap as well as develop the Philippines’ base of manpower rather than committing U.S. troops were unsuccessful or unsupported.

Reasons for the aforementioned reductions in budgets vary, but arguments for increased funds proved difficult to make throughout the inter-war years. Undoubtedly, however, the relative lack of funding was a result of both the Philippines’ upcoming independence and the peacetime priorities of the U.S. government. The Philippines were set for independence in 1946 via the Tydings-McDuffie act, meaning that direct U.S. investment in establishing longer-term defenses was inherently limited, and investment in future defenses did not directly benefit the U.S.. Any military assets such as defensive fortifications would be lost in a decade aside from a few scattered “naval reservations and refueling stations”, limiting the United States’ long-term military investment in the region.<sup>54</sup> This also hindered efforts to divert more U.S. troops to the Philippines than was strictly necessary, which was one of the many reasons that MacArthur attempted to expand the role of local volunteers with mixed success. Without any long-term incentive to develop the Philippines defensively, the U.S. adapted its overall Pacific strategy, which left the islands vulnerable to attack from superior air and naval power. The Japanese had both, and existing U.S. defenses were inadequate without support from allied ships.

Air power in the Philippines was also in a transitional stage during late 1941, and could not adequately match Japan’s world class air force on its own. While the existing transfers of

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<sup>53</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government : Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 425; History, Art and Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Historian, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Congress, 1900–2017, *The Philippines, 1898–1946* (Washington, D.C., 2018).

planes conducted by the U.S. army could have potentially given the Philippines impressive offensive capability in a matter of years, the process was far from complete and defensive airpower was completely outclassed.<sup>55</sup> Even relatively modern planes such as P-35 fighters and B-17 Flying Fortress bombers were only available in very limited numbers, and less than half of the over 300 aircraft stationed in the Philippines were even “suitable for combat.”<sup>56</sup> Clark airfield (which was north of Manila) was the only airfield capable of housing and utilizing available heavy bombers like the B-17, of which there were only 35.<sup>57</sup> By the Army Air Force’s given estimates, there were 35 heavy bombers, 90 operational “pursuit planes” (which would later be re-dubbed fighter planes), 12 older and outdated fighter planes, and 21 other miscellaneous aircraft.<sup>58</sup> By 1941, the Zero fighter utilized by Japan had already proven itself to be extremely competent and capable of destroying larger forces of lesser quality in a matter of weeks. Against China’s limited air force in 1937, “approximately thirty Zeros accounted for 266 confirmed kills,” one of several proving grounds in which the Japanese army achieved a great deal of success.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the Philippines were left vulnerable, as even the air power that was expected to compensate for reduced naval assets was extremely limited and failed to significantly aid the defense of the Philippines in 1941.

These numerous problems related to budgeting, supplies, and the approaching independence of the region also affected attempts to rebuild local forces. While General MacArthur made attempts to substantially develop the Philippine army through conscription, his

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<sup>55</sup> Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. army, 1999), 69.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Army Air Forces Historical Office, *Army Air Forces in the War against Japan, 1941-1942* (Washington, 1945), 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Dower, *War without Mercy*, 104.

plans were hampered by all of the aforementioned problems.<sup>60</sup> The reluctance of the Philippine or U.S. governments to provide more substantial resources meant that even establishing training facilities was difficult, which crippled basic efforts to create a sustainable defense force.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, standard equipment was also poor among U.S. soldiers (including many WWI-era rifles such as the Enfield and M1906 Springfield Rifles), and the Philippine army did not receive much better.<sup>62</sup> Japan's military (the army specifically) had already proven that it could defeat foes with similar equipment when it battled Nationalist Chinese forces, who had also used a loose collection of outdated equipment.

Opinions regarding the possibility of a Japanese invasion of the Philippines were also mixed at best. While news of the Japanese invasions of China and Manchuria had reached some Chinese-Filipino populations in the area who later resisted Japanese rule, it took time for American soldiers like Bob Mailheu to realize that the Philippines were a viable military target for Japan.<sup>63</sup> Prior to the outbreak of war in the Philippines, the Chinese community resisted Japan's invasion by donating to the "salvation movement," a financial cause formed by overseas Chinese populations in order to aid anti-Japanese defensive efforts following the invasion of China in 1937.<sup>64</sup> Anti-Japanese sentiment rose alongside further Japanese invasions like Manchuria and especially China among the Filipino-Chinese community, and this sentiment could even be measured economically (by some estimates over \$2,000,000 worth of funds had been donated to defensive efforts against the Japanese in Manchuria by the Philippine Chinese

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<sup>60</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Irish, *Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur*, 455.

<sup>62</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 2.

Connaughton, *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines*, 211.

<sup>63</sup> Yuk-wai Yung-Li, *The Huaqiao Warriors: Chinese Resistance Movement in the Philippines, 1942-45* (Hong Kong, 1995), 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 14.



alone).<sup>65</sup> Despite this, only specific groups like the Chinese-Filipino population directly considered a Japanese invasion of the Philippines, and even in light of Japan's military buildup and the U.S. government's responses like the oil embargo, many were unprepared for a direct attack.

Simply put, all of these factors meant that the U.S. was unable to adequately prepare the Philippines (specifically Luzon and Bataan) for the Japanese invasion in December 1941. The Japanese army had proven its offensive capabilities in Manchuria and China, and considering the Philippine defense's resources, had a clear military advantage. The approaching independence of the Philippines lessened potential investment in its defense, and the United States' overall Pacific strategy was devised to work around the Philippines' air complement and reinforcements from the U.S. Navy, which was destroyed at Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, one day before the invasion of the Philippines. While defeat was not certain, the coordination and rapidity of the Japanese assault on both the Philippines and Pearl Harbor meant that both American and Philippine forces on the island faced a very steep challenge, and had to face a highly competent and well-equipped Japanese invasion force with outdated equipment, limited aerial support, and (most crucially) an inability to receive the supplies than most of their defense strategy was built around. Circumstances were not in the U.S. army's favor, and too many elements of the Philippines' defense were compromised in one or more critical ways.

### **Japanese Motivations and Reputation Prior to the Invasion**

Despite the numerous defensive weaknesses of the Philippines, a Japanese invasion was not a foregone conclusion in 1941, even in light of its earlier military expansion throughout East

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 22.

Asia during the 1930s. However, Japan's growing economic dependence on foreign materials and proximity to the Philippines contributed significantly to the selection of the Philippines as a military target. Additionally, the Philippines were a prime target for its geographical position, its economic resources, and its numerous defensive weaknesses. Japan's invasions of Manchuria and China in 1931 and 1937 respectively had already demonstrated its willingness to dismiss global opinion, and an oil embargo by the U.S. only compounded the strategic importance of Japanese expansion. In addition, while defensive buildup in the Philippines was limited, the U.S. was beginning to assemble a bomber complement in the Philippines that would be dangerous to Japanese naval forces if allowed to continue unabated.<sup>66</sup> Following a U.S. oil embargo in the summer of 1940, Japan had more than adequate motivation to commence with a military strike, and the failure of U.S. planners to recognize these motivations only accelerated the Japanese conquest of the islands.<sup>67</sup>

While Japanese expansion became directly relevant to the U.S. following the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines in December 1941, it had already been prevalent in Asia throughout the 1930s.<sup>68</sup> Japanese expansion began at least as early as the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and arguably extended back to the annexation of Korea in 1910. While Japan both invaded and secured territory at an alarming pace throughout the 1930s, it was severely limited by its dependence on foreign oil, a critical strategic weakness that became much more pronounced after the U.S. oil embargo in 1940.<sup>69</sup> While Japan proved that it could easily act in spite of international opinion (particularly the ineffectual League of Nations) during the invasion

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<sup>66</sup> Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 69.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>68</sup> Bob T. Wakabayashi, "Emperor Hirohito on Localized Aggression in China," *Sino-Japanese Studies*, 4, no. 1 (October 1991), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 64.

of Manchuria, it was still dependent enough on foreign resources that it could not engage in rampant militarism without consequence. Japan's goal was to become militarily and economically self-sufficient, and in order to do so it could not stop at Manchuria and China. Conquering the Philippines fulfilled several of Japan's military and diplomatic objectives, including securing a point of invasion for other surrounding islands like Borneo, conquering an isolated target free of initial influence from U.S. naval forces, and expanding Japan's evolving economic sphere.<sup>70</sup>

Japan's primary motivation for its expansion into Asia during WWII has been debated endlessly, but the desire to oust Western influence from the region and assert the Japanese empire as the savior of Asia was one of the most prominent. One of Japan's goals was to create buffer zones against Western empires, and the Pan-Asian state that Japan was attempting to form was part of their greater effort to oust these empires that were viewed as invasive interlopers.<sup>71</sup> By establishing a network of allied powers across Europe and expanding its own influence throughout Asia, Japan would create a shield against foreign intervention and enable itself to promote its interests unhindered by western interventionism. The largest of these "buffers" would have consisted of Japan, Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. While this may seem a contradictory combination given Germany's later incursion into the Soviet Union and the long-standing rivalry between Japan and Russia, at the time this choice of allies had a fair degree of merit. The Soviets had signed non-aggression pacts with the others, and the geographical locations of Japan's various allies would place a zone of protection around the entirety of Japan.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> John Dower, *War without Mercy*.

<sup>71</sup> Yukiko Koshiro, "Eurasian Eclipse: Japan's End Game in World War II," *The American Historical Review*, 109 no.2 (April 2004), 421.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 421.

For these reasons as well as many others, Japan decided to invade the Philippines, thus provoking the entry of the U.S. into WWII. One of the primary reasons for invading the Philippines was to procure a more stable food supply and to incorporate the Philippines into a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.<sup>73</sup> Following the invasion of French Indo-China in September 1940, Japan was economically crippled by the ensuing U.S. oil embargo, meaning that Japan was now on a strict time limit if it could not become self-sufficient.<sup>74</sup> These issues of supply and consumption meant that Japanese strategy (particularly by the army) now had to rely much more on the conservation of military resources and constantly conquering resource-rich areas in order to sustain Japan's military machine. The Japanese army and navy disagreed on how to address these shortages. The Navy advocated for more cautious plans while the army tended to argue for speed and decisive strikes.<sup>75</sup> The overriding consensus between the two branches, however, was that a protracted conflict with the U.S. would be impractical, and that that to prevail the Japanese military would have to secure victory quickly and decisively. Japan's strategy in the southeast Pacific revolved around establishing control over the Philippines and using it as a base to advance "step-by-step" through nearby regions, including Borneo, Java, Sumatra, and Malaya, whose natural resources (especially petroleum) were essential for sustaining Japan's military machine.<sup>76</sup>

The Philippines were included as a target in most of Japan's military plans, and the combination of its geographical location with the relative weakness of its defenses meant that the Philippines were a prime target for invasion. While the Navy advocated for a step-by-step plan, the more rapid strategies forwarded by the army called for immediate strikes on multiple regions

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<sup>73</sup> Dower, *War without Mercy*, 211.

<sup>74</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 51.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

including Guam, Malaya, and the Philippines.<sup>77</sup> Even the Navy's more cautious plans called for simultaneous strikes, and this was ultimately how the attack was carried out in December 1941. The Philippines were geographically isolated, and simultaneous strikes were excellent for severing U.S. supply chains and taking advantage of the limited defenses available on the islands. One of the only critical factors that remained was an opportune moment to attack, and the lackluster Philippine defenses meant that the U.S. Navy was the primary concern. The Navy was the primary avenue for reinforcements and support available to the Philippines, and needed to be taken out to limit the U.S.' defensive efforts as much as possible.

### **The Invasion and Fall of the Philippines**

Despite the numerous defensive and political shortcomings of the Philippines in 1941, the efficiency with which Japan was able to seize the islands and decisively cut off any hope of reinforcement was beyond the United States' worst fears. Japan's well-equipped amphibious infantry and air assets quickly annihilated the meager air force afforded to the Philippines in mere days and coordinated perfectly with the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941. The invasion of the Philippines was nearly a worst-case scenario, and every tactical flaw inherent in the use of Bataan as a defensive point for reinforcement was exploited and maximized by a series of highly coordinated strikes. While there had been some debate surrounding Japanese strategy and the scope of their targets, the sheer number of targets attacked "almost simultaneously" by Japanese forces extended far beyond Pearl Harbor, surpassing the expectations of many U.S. planners who did not believe that the Japanese could strike multiple substantial targets at once.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>78</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 131.  
Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 71.

These simultaneous attacks accomplished the dual goals of taking U.S. forces by surprise and completely seizing the initiative in the Pacific, and the larger scope meant that the conquest of the Philippines would be unhindered by additional reinforcements or supplies.

Japan eliminated most of the U.S. army's air power within a matter of hours by conducting low-flying strafing runs, and the most critical airfields on Luzon such as Clark Field were crippled in less than 24 hours.<sup>79</sup> In addition to the inability of naval forces to respond after the strike on Pearl Harbor, forces in the Philippines now lacked air support, and Japan's world-class planes were able to attack without fear of interception. However, this did not mean that they had free reign, and by Doyle Decker's account (who was in the 200<sup>th</sup> coastal artillery, anti-aircraft section at the time) anti-air batteries enjoyed more success than the available air corps. He recalled, "I was in the anti-aircraft section. We were having pretty good luck knocking the Jap planes down and we were several miles behind the lines... but when they began to cut rations we began to feel we were not going to get any help soon. Then when the army ordered MacArthur out, I think we all realized it was hopeless."<sup>80</sup>

The destruction of much of the U.S. naval forces at Pearl Harbor was one of the most decisive components of the Japanese victory, and it completely crippled existing strategies. The pre-war defensive strategy in the Philippines was designed to allow U.S. soldiers and the Philippine army to fall back to Bataan on the island of Luzon and entrench themselves in order to allow time for reinforcements to arrive. While supplies could be rationed and temporary defenses could be created, the primary means of reinforcement and resupply was eliminated when Japan destroyed a critical number of U.S. ships at Pearl Harbor. This inability to receive support was nearly incomprehensible to soldiers like Mailheau, who stated that "when the Japs first attacked

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<sup>79</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 136.

<sup>80</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 4.

that first day over there, my god, we knew we were vulnerable as hell... But that was the damnest [sic] thing. We never once figured that the Americans would not be able to make their way over for support... we even felt that way on Bataan, right up to, practically, the day of the surrender.”<sup>81</sup> The U.S. and Filipino soldiers were cut off, and the Japanese were now able to conduct naval landings with limited reprisal.

The Japanese conducted several landings (six in total, of which all but two were centered on the island of Luzon), and did so on December 8<sup>th</sup>, only one day after initial contact with U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor.<sup>82</sup> None of the landings experienced substantial enough resistance to prevent the Japanese Navy from fulfilling its objectives, and the Japanese had established a solid hold on Luzon by the 17<sup>th</sup>, taking only 10 days to accomplish all of its preparations (cutting off reinforcements, supply lines, and taking territory critical to U.S. defensive efforts).<sup>83</sup> While Japan had expected an even more rapid victory, their ability to cut off aid from the Philippines still proved critical in their military success, and was one of the key reasons that they were able to conquer most of the Philippines by May 1942.<sup>84</sup> Official strategy still dictated that U.S. soldiers were to move back to Bataan, and preparations for a fall back to Bataan began as early as December 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>85</sup> By March 12<sup>th</sup>, the situation had worsened enough to prompt General MacArthur’s withdrawal, which dealt a significant blow to morale.<sup>86</sup> Resistance continued for several months, but as the siege of Bataan progressed Japan’s severance of critical U.S. supply lines caused resources to run low, and food soon became a primary concern among the defenders of Bataan.

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<sup>81</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 14-15.

<sup>82</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 98.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Center of Military History, *The War against Japan* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 2.

<sup>85</sup> Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 161.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 416.

By early April, all hope of holding out had run out, and negotiations for an official surrender began. The reinforcements and supplies that had been cut off continued to critically hamper any attempts to mount substantial counter-attacks, and even defense was now unfeasible due to the food shortages that now plagued the defense of Bataan.<sup>87</sup> Military pressure from Japanese forces was constant, and the continued attack wore down the various battalions left for the defense of the city, and, -contrary to the orders that General King had been given, he chose surrender rather than to fight to the last man, the latter of which both MacArthur and Roosevelt had ordered.<sup>88</sup> Once the surrender order was issued to U.S. soldiers, many instead chose to retreat into the jungle in order to avoid capture.<sup>89</sup> Decker wrote, “At this time several of us began plans to escape to the mountains. When the surrender came, we all realized it would only be a matter of time before the Japs were on us.”<sup>90</sup> The combination of inadequate defenses, Japanese expansion, economic maneuvering by the U.S., and the complete severance of critical support structures hastened Japan’s conquest of the Philippines, which was complete in less than four months. The U.S. and Philippine army were both soundly defeated in short order, and those who had withdrawn to Bataan were now either captured or wandering in the surrounding jungles and mountainsides. Japan had invaded and conquered with a degree of military efficiency that impressed even optimistic officers at the time, and the flaws in existing U.S.-Pacific strategy proved to be the downfall of the United States’ entire defensive effort throughout not only the Philippines, but the entire Pacific theater.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 457.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 458.

<sup>89</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 4.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>91</sup> Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 426.



However, not all soldiers either American or Filipino had fallen back to Bataan, and while the islands had been largely conquered, remnants of the American army survived. While many had chosen to stand and fight on Luzon, local Philippine volunteers had the opportunity during the opening stages of the invasion to reintegrate into their former communities instead of surrendering alongside the Americans, which significantly complicated the distinction between soldier and civilian later on.<sup>92</sup> Soldiers outside of the city like Doyle Decker made plans to escape into either the jungle or mountains (the mountains were more specific to Luzon), and throughout the next three years, the Philippines housed several independent pockets of resistance until official U.S. forces returned in 1944.<sup>93</sup> Luzon was the dedicated location for the U.S. forces' last stand, and it was now a survival zone for hundreds of displaced soldiers who were faced with occupation by a foreign power and limited supplies that could not be replenished. The time for direct conflict between the U.S. and Japan in the Philippines ended in April 1942, and did not resume until MacArthur's return in 1944. Instead, the pace of conflict was dictated by irregular warfare for nearly three years, and the survivors of the invasion were forced to improvise.

### **Japan's Government: Rhetoric and Reality**

The Japanese occupation of the Philippines was a tenuous balance of cooperation and retaliation, and while there were numerous shortcomings with Japan's approach to governing the Philippines, they were presented with a politically delicate and tense situation. While they had conquered the Philippines with startling speed, Japan now had to balance the extraction of

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<sup>92</sup> Travis Ingham, *Rendezvous by Submarine; the Story of Charles Parsons and the Guerrilla-Soldiers in the Philippines* (Garden City, New York, 1945), 26.

<sup>93</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 4.

resources and the elimination of guerrillas with fostering a cooperative territorial government, and it proved impossible to achieve both. The U.S.'s invasion of the Philippines in 1898 was a similarly bloody affair to the Japanese invasion, but the U.S. government had the advantage of time with which to promote its interests and culture in the region. Japan was placed on a much more limited and intense time-table due to its limited resources, which placed it in an even more uncomfortable position than the U.S. of 1898. While Japan's occupation government attempted to create positive relationships with the Filipinos, it ultimately settled on a harsh strategy of retaliation against the guerrillas by punishing any individuals who aided or housed guerrillas throughout the islands, primarily in the forms of burning property, maintaining regular patrols, and killing suspected U.S. collaborators.<sup>94</sup> Collaboration with the new government was heavily encouraged, and Japanese forces took available opportunities to infiltrate and subvert guerrilla movements from within by working with informants in order to disrupt or eliminate guerrilla cells.<sup>95</sup> While this strategy was at times effective in turning public opinion against guerrillas, it also undermined valuable Japanese pretenses to peace and cooperation. It promoted more decisive commitments to either side, and the U.S. promise of independence complicated Japan's pledges of freedom from Western empires, considering that the Philippines had already been legally promised such autonomy.

Initial impressions of the new Japanese occupation were unfavorable and marked by atrocity. Japan's wartime reputation for brutality was first brought to the forefront in the Philippines during the forced march of U.S. and Filipino prisoners to Japanese internment camps in April 1942, which became infamously known as the Bataan Death March. During the march,

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<sup>94</sup> Air University (U.S.). Aerospace Studies Institute, Concepts Division, *The Role of Airpower in Guerrilla Warfare (World War II)*, (Alabama, 1962), 101; Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 69.

<sup>95</sup> Air University, *The Role of Airpower in Guerrilla Warfare*, 101.

both U.S. and Filipino soldiers were treated with a degree of cruelty that is still discussed as one of the foremost examples of Japanese wartime atrocities alongside the massacre at Nanking, China in 1937. While disease was a common cause of death during the march, starvation and random killings by Japanese soldiers were also leading causes of the nearly 600-750 American and 5,000-10,000 Filipino deaths, and the seeming randomness of these murders was viewed with suspicion and bewilderment by both soldiers at the time and modern historical writers.<sup>96</sup> The brutality shown during the Death March compounded outrage at the U.S.' surrender in April 1942, since the surrender at Bataan had now additionally resulted in the suffering and deaths of thousands of Filipino soldiers in addition to U.S. forces. Approximately 65,000 of the 75,000 prisoners were Philippine army instead of U.S. servicemen, inciting additional anger among Filipinos at both the U.S. for abandoning the islands and towards the Japanese for their blatant cruelty.<sup>97</sup> While in reality surrender had been enacted in response to dwindling supplies and an inability to even feed the defenders of Bataan, the brutality that ensued meant that initially, the surrender was considered tantamount to abandonment by the U.S. government.

Nevertheless, the new territorial government knew that it had to act quickly in order to establish its legitimacy, and it soon declared the creation of an independent Philippine government in 1943. In theory, this was a beneficial political move that both undermined earlier U.S. promises and encouraged a better working relationship between Japan and the Philippines, maintaining the appearance of independence while in reality relegating the Philippines to a puppet government of the Japanese Empire. The many problems with this were in its execution, which mainly served to alienate potential collaborators and undermine the advantageous pretense

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<sup>96</sup> J.P. Cervone, "Remembering the Bataan Death March," *Military History*, 16 no. 30 (May 1999), 31; Edward J. Drea, *Researching Japanese War Crimes Records: Introductory Essays* (Washington D.C., 2006), 31.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Mansoor, "History Milestone: The Bataan Death March," Ohio State University, accessed August 10th, 2019.

of independence. While the U.S. promise of independence had gone through a number of alterations and delays, MacArthur had nevertheless cultivated an impressive image for himself in the Philippines alongside President Quezon throughout his tenure, and time had rendered the U.S. administration both tired and the distribution of military forces sparse. Conversely, Japan was faced with a limited timeframe of both resources and available manpower, and while its initial strike had been devastating, fully seizing control of each island and eliminating all U.S. soldiers who had not surrendered were very difficult tasks.

The continued presence of remnants of the U.S. army, however, damaged Japan's local relationships over time. While searching for U.S. soldiers, Japanese occupation forces burned camps and various villages, and smaller-scale atrocities increased in frequency as they attempted to flush out U.S. guerrillas.<sup>98</sup> The Philippines had faced colonial occupations at least twice before the Japanese under the Spanish and Americans, and the continued presence of Japanese soldiers undercut the notion that the Philippines were finally freed from colonial influence. While the Tydings-McDuffie act would not completely free the Philippines from U.S. influence (especially American business interests), it was still the most direct promise of a legal escape from colonial rule that had been proposed since Spain claimed the islands in the sixteenth century. The Japanese implementation of colonially administered independence was severely flawed, but there were very few alternatives in retrospect. Had the Japanese government stated its intentions honestly, the offer would have seemed doubly unattractive. The granting of independence in name only eroded the messaging of the new government as the occupation progressed, and the presence of U.S. guerrillas meant that Japanese forces needed to balance their efforts at flushing out guerrillas with local cooperation.

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<sup>98</sup> Hogan, *U.S. Army Special Operations in World War II*, 69.

Though the adopted methods of retaliation and strict punishment came with significant disadvantages, the Japanese measures were effective in securing limited acceptance. Despite the inherent contradiction of an independent government within the economic sphere and oversight of a larger empire, the Japanese decision to grant independence found strong support among some pro-independence groups in the Philippines including the Patriotic League of Filipinos (or Makapili), most of whom rallied behind the Japanese promise of independence even near the war's end in 1945 as American forces were retaking the Philippines.<sup>99</sup> This loyalty even resulted in an open declaration of war by the Makapili against U.S. forces as they re-took the islands as late as 1945.<sup>100</sup> Despite Japan's difficult goal of establishing the second major reorganization of Philippine government in less than fifty years, they managed to secure support from certain elements that had been waiting for a chance to retaliate against the U.S., and worked with them in order to defend Japan's new territory.

Despite the intensity of this support from groups like the Makapili, it was not enough to compensate for the damaging diplomatic effects of Japanese conduct throughout the majority of the occupation. An intensely loyal minority is not enough to secure victory in a protracted guerrilla conflict, which requires healthy relationships with the wider public in order to limit strategic opportunities for resistance forces. Specifically, the Makapili are only estimated to have numbered around 5,000 members, a tiny number in a region with a population of 16,000,303.<sup>101</sup> In addition, a significant amount of the zeal shown towards the Japanese promise of independence had existed long before the war, and Japan took advantage of pre-existing revolutionary ideals rather than instilling widespread Japanese nationalism, one of the necessary

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<sup>99</sup> Motoe Terami-Wada, "Lt. Shigenobu Mochizuki and the New Philippine Cultural Institute," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 27 no. 1 (1996), 104.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

components of establishing a greater Asian Co-Prosperity sphere.<sup>102</sup> Even the legitimate developmental strides and working relationships that Japan made with local groups could not help them achieve widespread acceptance in the Philippines, and the Japanese administration's inability to make good on their rhetoric and promises of true independence and Pan-Asian cooperation contributed to "rampant Anti-Japanese sentiments" in the Philippines by the end of the occupation.<sup>103</sup>

Despite these tactical and diplomatic shortcomings, however, the anti-guerrilla tactics adopted by the Japanese were at times effective in their intended functions, which were to punish guerrilla sympathizers and eliminate pockets of resistance. On Luzon, for example, the Japanese succeeded in hiring "civilian collaborators" in order to infiltrate guerrilla cells, providing information and intelligence that was crucial in countering guerrilla movements.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the reprisal against civilians who aided Americans was not a strategy devoid of merit, since in some communities the harsh punishments created resentment towards guerrillas by association rather than the Japanese, which was what the tactic was designed to accomplish.<sup>105</sup> By making resistance undesirable and cooperation beneficial, the occupation sought to balance its reputation with ample amounts of fear and admiration, and it was effective, albeit mostly in the short term.

Ultimately, severe time constraints and a core inability to keep rhetoric and policy consistent damaged Japan's effectiveness as the colonial administrator of the Philippines. While Japan's counter-guerrilla strategy adapted and made strides in cooperation with local populations, the decentralized nature of the guerrilla movements and collaboration between civilians and remnants of the U.S. military meant that the complete elimination of resistance by 1945 was

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>103</sup> Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 212.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Army Air Forces Historical Office, *Army Air Forces*, 101.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 101.

nearly impossible. With more time and ability to commit resources, the new administration may have been able to make good on its promises of cooperation and economic partnership, but the constant issues of dwindling military resources and an imperative to defeat the guerrillas led to drastic measures that undercut said pledges. The U.S. returned in late 1944, and in the end, three years proved to be far too short a timeframe for success. The wounds of invasion were still fresh, atrocities undermined attempts to create provisional relationships, and economic conditions proved too extreme to develop the cooperation necessary to create a new Philippine-Japanese union. While punishment served its intended function, it also came with costs, and guerrilla cells were ultimately able to capitalize on them by forming local relationships that the new occupation simply could not.

## **Conclusion**

The defense of the Philippines crumbled in less than five months, and the complete defeat of the U.S. army caused a scattering of U.S. soldiers who were not captured during the surrender of Bataan. These were the conditions in which Decker and Mailheu became guerrilla fighters. Mailheu had served in the defense of Bataan, and like many soldiers on Luzon, suffered greatly during the Bataan Death March. He was one of the few (estimated to be less than 400) to escape it, joining with other soldiers after coming extremely close to starvation and death.<sup>106</sup> Decker had the benefit of fleeing into the surrounding jungle, but faced extraordinarily harsh survival conditions that nearly killed him during the critical initial weeks of the occupation. While large-scale political and historical conflict between the U.S. and Japan had resulted in the U.S. army's defeat in the Philippines, it was now individual soldiers like Decker and Mailheu who now had

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<sup>106</sup> Malcolm Decker, *From Bataan to Safety: The Rescue of 104 American Soldiers in the Philippines* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2008), 1.

to live with the consequences and salvage what they could from complete disaster. For nearly three years from 1942 to 1945, they survived in the jungle and resisted Japanese rule however they could. Without the help that they received from fellow soldiers, local tribesmen, and citizens throughout the occupation they would almost certainly have perished in the opening weeks.



## **BOB MAILHEAU: PERSEVERENCE AND COOPERATION IN RESISTANCE**

Robert “Bob” Mailheau took a very active approach to guerrilla warfare, despite being prevented from doing so on multiple occasions by the Japanese occupation and Central Luzon’s environment. By March 1945, he had survived the Bataan Death March, a severe tonsil infection that left him nearly unable to function, and multiple skirmishes with Japanese soldiers. He could not have done so without the assistance of several civilians, former Philippine army soldiers, and Negrito tribesmen, but his survival was also due to his persistence and his willingness to take an active role in forming a larger resistance movement. Mailheau was instrumental in forming the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit, and was able to create a lasting rallying point in Central Luzon alongside soldiers Clay Conner and Frank Gyovai. While other groups in the region fractured internally and constantly struggled over leadership, the tactics of the 155<sup>th</sup> that Mailheau helped create molded the group into a cooperative entity with the surrounding villages, and formed a mutual relationship with the civilians that had already saved his life multiple times by 1943. Mailheau joined the army out of the fear of involvement in a European conflict, but quickly adapted in order to resist the Japanese occupation by establishing relationships with both U.S. soldiers and local forces, which undoubtedly contributed to the 155<sup>th</sup>’s success and ensured Mailheau’s survival.

### **Life Prior to the War and the Surrender on Bataan**

Importantly, Bob Mailheau served in the Philippines as a matter of choice rather than circumstance. When he joined the U.S. army on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940, he was given the option to choose his posting, and selected the Philippines under the assumption that they would be far

from any potential military conflict in Europe.<sup>107</sup> While he was somewhat aware of Japan's reputation as a world power, most of his attention prior to 1941 was focused on Germany's military buildup during the 1930s. Throughout his school life in Southern California, most discussions regarding another potential world war were the subject of humorous jabs between students. In one of Mailheau's post-war accounts compiled by historian Dwayne Sanford during the 1980s, he stated that while some comments were made towards Japanese students regarding "which side" Japan would be on in a hypothetical future war, he dismissed it as schoolyard talk at the time rather than any attempts at insightful political commentary.<sup>108</sup>

Throughout these 1980s interviews, Mailheau was adamant that the turning point for him and many of his friends was the arrival of several Jewish families who had immigrated to their neighborhood in California in 1940.<sup>109</sup> After discussing the political and military situation in Germany with the families in his neighborhood, Mailheau was convinced that a German-American conflict was disturbingly possible. Mailheau volunteered alongside two of his high school friends for the army Air Corps in August 1940 and chose to go to the Philippines, citing that its remoteness and distance from Europe were the key reasons for his choice.<sup>110</sup> Mailheau also viewed the Philippines as an opportunity for something of a vacation, directly summarizing his rationale as "What the heck, let's do some travelling."<sup>111</sup> For Mailheau, talk of German expansion motivated him to seek a posting as far from his fears of conflict as possible, which meant that he chose the remote Philippines. While he succeeded in this regard, it also placed him much closer to Japan's military sphere.

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<sup>107</sup> Robert T. Mailheau, *Pre-War Account 3/23/85* (March 23rd, 1985), 2.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>111</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 2.

Prior to the outbreak of the U.S.-Pacific War in December 1941, Mailheau's rationale held true, and his experiences mostly consisted of guard duty with scattered rumors of activity among small radical political groups in the Philippines. There were minimal concerns regarding Japan, and Mailheau stated that "the atmosphere at that time was *le se faire* [sic]. There was nothing to be concerned about."<sup>112</sup> While there were worries about scattered resistance from domestic organizations like the Communist Hukbalahap group (referred to as "Huks" by Mailheau), most of it amounted to concentrated areas in the Philippines like the city of Angeles, where Mailheau was frequently called in for guard duty.<sup>113</sup> Suspicions were mostly directed primarily towards civilians asking about sensitive military information, including the numbers of aircraft at varying airfields in passing conversation.<sup>114</sup> While Mailheau spoke of multiple brawls between American soldiers and Filipino civilians in certain communities like Angeles, most of it resulted from conflicts between individuals or small groups in town rather than any orders to investigate radical or Communist political activity. Some political groups such as the Ganap (a group comprised of pro-Japanese Filipinos) made attempts to provoke action from the Hukbalahap group, but it did not prompt any serious discussion regarding Japan. At the time, Mailheau and the soldiers around him were aware that they needed to exercise caution when speaking in towns on guard duty as a general rule, but speculation of direct invasion was rare.<sup>115</sup>

The previously relaxed atmosphere in the Philippines shifted to renewed concern for Mailheau when news of the Axis pact between Italy, Germany, and Japan in September 1940 came, citing that initial worries of U.S. involvement in war began to spread around October

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 5.

1941.<sup>116</sup> Specifically, he later stated that as of October 1941, “It looked more and more like we were going to be involved in Europe. The Axis forces had announced their allegiance, so it kind of just added up—one plus one equals two.”<sup>117</sup> The Axis Pact initiated Mailheau’s fears of war with Japan, who in the event of war with the U.S. would be brought into the conflict by proxy. By Mailheau’s accounts, the possibility of a conflict directly initiated by Japan had not crossed his mind. He even went so far as to state that “up to a couple of months before Pearl Harbor, we (he and his fellow soldiers) never gave the Jap threat a second thought.”<sup>118</sup> While in hindsight this attitude seems strange, Japan had been an Allied country throughout World War I, and its reputation had not soured substantially enough to warrant concern from Mailheau or the soldiers around him. While Mailheau began to consider the likelihood of a Japanese military invasion over time, another conflict with Germany was still the most pressing issue in his mind, and despite Japan’s numerous invasions throughout the 1930s and the United States’ economic responses (such as the oil embargo), he and his fellow soldiers only seriously considered war with Japan as a primary enemy mere months before the invasion.

Despite the extremely limited defenses in the pre-war Philippines described earlier, soldiers felt that they had little cause for widespread concern prior to the crippling of the U.S. Navy in December 1941. Despite the budgetary shortcomings faced by the U.S. defense in the Philippines, Mailheau was still somewhat confident in the army’s defensive capabilities prior to the invasion, with the notable exception of the outdated air complement. While the soldiers’ equipment was somewhat outdated, Mailheau and his fellow soldiers each had a respectable array of items, including “rifles... side arms, helmets, gas masks... a knapsack with a blanket,

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>118</sup> Mailheau, *Pre-War Account 3/23/85*, 3.

and a few food items,” as well as water canteens.<sup>119</sup> According to Mailheau, he did not appraise the situation as either overly hopeless or fortunate, but knew that their air force was a weak link in available defenses. Specifically, he stated that prior to the invasion “we didn’t feel that confident, but we didn’t feel that vulnerable either. But we knew our Air Force was a big joke.”<sup>120</sup> Mailheau was particularly aware of the outdated aerial equipment due to his posting in the Tow Target Squadron at Clark Field, which towed aerial targets to various locations around the base for later use as training targets for anti-aircraft and planes.<sup>121</sup> As mentioned previously, Mailheau was also under the impression that the U.S. Navy would be able to reinforce the Philippines, and the possibility that the United States’ naval capability could be wiped out was not widely considered.<sup>122</sup> This confidence, however, was founded with very limited knowledge of Japan’s military efficiency, as well as its plans to cripple the Philippines’ means of reinforcement and supply.

Mailheau saw the devastating effects of the invasion as early as the first day December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and his stationing at Clark Field (a major U.S. airstrip) meant that he witnessed Japan’s air assault firsthand.<sup>123</sup> Mailheau recalled that, “When the war started, the Japs pretty well wiped us out at Clark Field. What few planes that were flyable... flew down to the southern islands, and we didn’t have many fighters to speak of. None of the squadron survived.”<sup>124</sup> With the destruction of the planes at Clark Field, many of the personnel dedicated to flight training such as Mailheau were moved west in order to secure underbrush cover from enemy planes until they

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<sup>119</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 1; (Note concerning Tow Targets) These aerial targets were hitched onto U.S. training planes in order to be flown through the sky, at which point they served as targets for training anti-aircraft batteries or U.S. planes.

<sup>122</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 14-15.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>124</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 2.

could be moved to Bataan. Soldiers were soon ordered to carry weapons at all times and to prepare to fall back to Bataan in the case of retreat, which had already been discussed as basic protocol in the event of invasion.<sup>125</sup> Fortunately, Mailheau was able to more easily transition into an infantry role due to universal infantry training at the time of his enlistment, and he was soon incorporated into the 24<sup>th</sup> pursuit group, where his role was primarily to engage in anti-sniper patrols.<sup>126</sup> Throughout the following months, Mailheau was involved in defensive efforts to drive back Japanese landings around Bataan and fend off attacks from Bataan's rear, but he ultimately received the surrender order in April 1942.

When Mailheau was given the surrender order, he and a number of fellow soldiers immediately decided against it.<sup>127</sup> Mailheau's decision was not based on pre-existing information about Japan's wartime treatment of prisoners, but rather on considering the surrender foolish.<sup>128</sup> Mailheau's initial plan was to rendezvous with like-minded soldiers on the slopes of Mount Bataan, and he stashed weapons and ammunition in order to prepare.<sup>129</sup> However, his attempts were rendered completely unsuccessful when he was intercepted by a large group of Japanese soldiers on his journey to the rendezvous point.<sup>130</sup> While he considered either fighting or escaping, in the moment he decided to surrender in order to survive, and threw up his hands. Though he had been openly dismissive of any form of organized surrender, he chose it when confronted with the immediate threat of violence. While Mailheau recalled that the Japanese soldiers "bullied him a little bit," they otherwise captured him without incident, and moved him

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<sup>125</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 4.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

to a nearby base camp where he was kept for four days before being placed in the infamous Bataan Death March.<sup>131</sup>

### **Death March and Escape**

Mailheau's worst fears of capture were exceeded by the hostility that he faced throughout the following weeks, and while accounts of the Bataan Death March's brutality are widely available, Mailheau's descriptions are nevertheless unnervingly specific. The primary trait of the march that Mailheau emphasized in later interviews was the needlessness and frequency of the brutality demonstrated towards American soldiers, recalling that, "...slaughter and brutality was a continuous thing, believe me. It didn't happen once every three days... It happened in my case damned near every fifteen, or twenty minutes."<sup>132</sup> The brutality that Mailheau witnessed was frequent, and Mailheau expressed difficulty in adequately conveying the daily experience of the march. When describing it, Mailheau stated that "What I say here, you might have heard several times. I know, most of you have seen captured war films of the Bataan Death March. And all of those programs that they show you on television are limited to half-an-hour, or an hour, and they jump from here to there, to somewhere else. And you don't really get to see the full impact of what went on."<sup>133</sup> While his early impressions during the Death March convinced Mailheau that the experience was going to be unpleasant, its constant tortures motivated Mailheau's escape attempt on the tenth day of the March by wearing down his willingness to cooperate over time. It convinced him of the importance of both resisting the occupation and working with civilians in order to do so, and inspired many of his later strategies.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 8.

The Bataan Death March is already one of the more extensively analyzed atrocities of the U.S. Pacific War, but its importance in shaping perceptions of Japan's wartime character cannot be understated. Shortly summarized, it was the forced march of Filipino and American POWs to internment camps by Japanese forces in the aftermath of the surrender at Bataan on April 9<sup>th</sup>. The Bataan Death March (referred to simply as the "Death March" by Mailheau) has become infamous for the several hundreds of Filipino and U.S. casualties inflicted by Japanese soldiers along the march's path, and has become emblematic of Japan's capacity for wartime brutality during WWII.<sup>134</sup> The Death March only lasted approximately 5 days, but resulted in the loss of hundreds of U.S. soldiers and thousands of Filipino soldiers.<sup>135</sup> While the 1930s and 40s witnessed similar massacres and displays of random violence carried out by many militaries, the Death March stands as one of the most brutal atrocities inflicted on U.S. throughout WWII, and is one of the most direct examples of Japan inflicting the same colonial violence upon its conquered populations as the empires it was attempting to supplant.<sup>136</sup> In addition, Filipino casualties were much greater than American losses, which did not help to support Japan's claims of liberation.<sup>137</sup> Japan attempted to paint itself as a savior of Asia through its anti-Western rhetoric and retaliation against Western colonial power, but repeated several mistakes perpetrated by the empires that it was attempting to replace.

While determining the causes of such frequent atrocity is complicated given the individual and state-level factors of Imperial Japan, Mailheau surmised that many of the displays of cruelty that he witnessed were perpetrated in order to dissuade the public from aiding the

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<sup>134</sup> Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War*, 200.

<sup>135</sup> Cervone, *Remembering the Bataan Death March*, 31.

<sup>136</sup> Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War*, 200.

<sup>137</sup> Cervone, *Remembering the Bataan Death March*, 31.



surrendered U.S. and Filipino soldiers.<sup>138</sup> While Japan's adherence global conventions of warfare throughout WWII was complicated by anti-Western sentiments and conflicts between individual Japanese officers and the government, this made little difference to Mailheau at the time, who was instead concerned by the numerous shows of violence that he witnessed and experienced along the Death March's path.<sup>139</sup> On one occasion, Mailheau recalled Japanese military trucks deliberately attempting to knock marching U.S. soldiers off of the side of the road, as well as other executions of POWs.<sup>140</sup> In another case, he described Japanese soldiers slicing U.S. soldiers with a bayonet on the side of the road as both a method of direct punishment for disobedience and as a public deterrent to empathetic civilians.<sup>141</sup> While Filipino civilians continued to provide food to the soldiers in spite of this, these showings still shocked Mailheau and other marching U.S. soldiers, who were unprepared for the extent of violence that they witnessed and suffered. While secondary works have chronicled the brutality of WWII-era Japan for decades since, at the time Mailheau and the soldiers around him had only previously regarded Japan with mild apathy, which meant that their reactions to these atrocities were particularly intense.

Mailheau and his fellow soldiers also had to contend with limited resources, especially as it soon became clear that their captors would provide little. Food and water were both particularly scarce during the Death March, and Mailheau had to rely on his pre-existing stores of food and canteen water for fourteen days. Judging by Mailheau's remarks, he and several other soldiers were initially uncertain about whether or not they would be provided with food,

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<sup>138</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 12.

<sup>139</sup> Danny Orbach, *Curse on This Country: The Rebellious army of Imperial Japan* (Ithaca and London, 2017), 1.

<sup>140</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 7.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

but were soon aware that this would not generally be the case.<sup>142</sup> Fortunately for Mailheau, he had been able to prepare food and fill his canteen with enough water for at least a few days, and was able to ration its contents effectively enough to use it for around four days. Aside from these small stocks, they were dependent on their guards and friendly civilians for any resupply, and the resources that they were able to procure from Japanese soldiers was inconsistent at best.<sup>143</sup>

Once again, support from civilians was shown very early on following the surrender, and the contributions that they made saved the lives of Mailheau and other prisoners. Food was tossed to soldiers by onlookers whenever possible, and these provisions were some of the only food that Mailheau and his fellow soldiers received throughout the march.<sup>144</sup> Mailheau stated that even while Japanese soldiers continued to execute U.S. POWs as a deterrent, “the Filipinos continued to line up on the sides of the road and toss whatever they could give.”<sup>145</sup> While aid from Japanese cooks or even occasionally soldiers did occur, it was also much more inconsistent than help from civilians during the march, and considering the lack of any food or water given to Mailheau during the fourteen days of capture and ten days of physical marching (outside of canteen refills occasionally allowed by Japanese guards), it could well have been the difference between life and death for soldiers forced to participate in the march.<sup>146</sup> Mailheau directly attested to this, and stated decades later in an interview that “I tell you... if it wasn’t for the Filipinos... If it hadn’t been for them, myself (and many others) would (not) be around today. And we’re so grateful [sic]. And you know, they didn’t have to do that. If humanity could take a lesson from the Filipinos... I’m sure the world would benefit.”<sup>147</sup> The nearly thankless aid that

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 13.

civilians provided left such an impression on Mailheau that he continued to praise their efforts throughout his interviews in 1984, and his gratitude could not have been more direct. It was not the last time that Mailheau depended on support from Filipino civilians to survive, but their willingness to aid U.S. soldiers despite direct deterrents and personal risk left a lasting impression on Mailheau, and his gratitude was repeated throughout his later recollections.

To his surprise, Mailheau managed to procure food from individual Japanese cooks and soldiers during the Death March, and mentioned that his guards were more likely to share rice following large meals with excess amounts of food.<sup>148</sup> In one case, a Japanese cook not only provided Mailheau with food, but also multiple U.S. soldiers after Mailheau indicated that they were also in need.<sup>149</sup> Despite the tremendous cruelty that characterized most of his experience in the Death March, Mailheau still received support from Japanese personnel, albeit in limited amounts. Considering that punishment would have been swift for these Japanese soldiers for providing any aid, it is surprising that they were willing to do so at all with the possibility of execution by their commanders, and while the Death March has justifiably earned a negative reputation, there was a natural variance in the soldiers' capacity for cruelty.<sup>150</sup> Brutality was not universal among the Japanese soldiers, and Mailheau's accounts of their genuine contributions at significant personal risk dispel many of the narratives of inherent Japanese cruelty despite the otherwise horrid conditions of the Bataan Death March. Whether or not it compensates for the widespread killing of POWs is up for debate, but considering Mailheau's understandable vehemence towards the Death March, it is surprising that he made note of the help he received from Japanese soldiers decades later in 1984. However, it was not enough to convince Mailheau

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 11, 12.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>150</sup> Orbach, *Curse on This Country*, 1.

that he could survive the Death March, and by the tenth day, Mailheau had resolved to either escape or perish.

When he finally got his chance, Mailheau successfully escaped from the Bataan Death March, which was rare but not unprecedented. Reliable estimates for the number of successful escapees are difficult to come by, but the combined number of American soldiers to escape or avoid the Death March was no greater than 400, a paltry number compared to the more than 10,000 U.S. soldiers who were placed on the march (especially since the figure of 400 includes those who avoided the Death March entirely).<sup>151</sup> While Mailheau described his guards as constantly observant, he also noticed a potential opportunity for escape between various points on the road, especially after patrols began to loosen. His guess for the cause of the lessened security was that “By then [ten days into the journey] we had lost so many of the fellows that I guess the Japs figured that none of us had the energy to make an escape.”<sup>152</sup> Noticing this lull in concentration, Mailheau determined that he would be able to successfully escape by slithering off through the various brush areas and thickets along the way, and move into the rice paddies.<sup>153</sup> Fortunately, he was also somewhat familiar with the surrounding geography due to his stationing at Clark Field prior to the invasion.

He encouraged others to take advantage of similar opportunities along the march’s path, but to do so one at a time so as to not draw attention or reveal that escapes were being planned.<sup>154</sup> Mailheau recalled that the other soldiers who he discussed his plans with told him not to attempt escape, still believing that the Geneva Convention would be honored. What they witnessed in comparison to Mailheau is unknown, but these statements still stand out as fairly

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<sup>151</sup> Cervone, *Remembering the Bataan Death March*, 1; Malcolm Decker, *From Bataan to Safety*, 1.

<sup>152</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 16.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

odd considering the notorious conditions of the Death March, as well as the nearly universally negative reputation that it has garnered. Nevertheless, Mailheau's escape plans were not leaked to the Japanese guards, and Mailheau soon made good on his promise to attempt escape. He managed to "crawl from the side of the road, at one of the infrequent rest stops to the rice paddies..."<sup>155</sup> and successfully escaped, marching for an undetermined distance before collapsing from exhaustion and being discovered by a group of Filipinos. Help could not have come at a more opportune time, and throughout the following weeks, Mailheau was again saved by Filipino civilians. He was in desperately poor physical condition when he was found, and by his own recollection, he weighed "a hefty 72 pounds" compared to his usual 190 following his escape from the Death March.<sup>156</sup> After two weeks of infrequent food and water, Mailheau was overjoyed to discover that the Filipinos who took him in were willing to share food with him, and even when it soon became clear that Mailheau's physical condition was not meaningfully improving, they also sent him to a Catholic convent in order to recover. He recalled,

They had food with them. They had a watermelon—a basketball watermelon. God, that tasted good!.. Then they took me several hundred yards beyond that, into a little grass shack... It was a good place for me to hide for about ten days, or so. I really wasn't getting any better physically, and there wasn't a heck of a lot they could do for me, so they arranged for me to go to the Catholic convent in Santa Rita. And the nuns literally nursed me back to a start to being healthy again.<sup>157</sup>

Had Mailheau been treated with any less care or encountered an enemy patrol, he would have certainly died in the rice paddy where he was found. He was severely weakened both physically and psychologically (even admitting that when he was found, he no longer cared

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<sup>155</sup> Mailheau, Robert T, *Bob Mailheau's Letter Dated January 25, 1984* (January 25, 1984), 1.

<sup>156</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 20.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

whether they were friendly or hostile out of sheer exhaustion), and the lengths that his caretakers went to in order to facilitate his recovery were extraordinary.<sup>158</sup> He was able to stay in the convent from May until September, and throughout his stay “met many people, learned their feelings, strengths, weaknesses, economics & [sic] politics.”<sup>159</sup> He also became convinced that the continued presence of U.S. guerrillas was having a tangible effect on local morale, and believed that the relationship between civilians and U.S. guerrillas was crucial for each group’s long-term survival. He stated that

We [U.S. guerrillas] had to be on our toes. Actually our lives were in the hands of all the natives we came in contact with. The one thing that made us comfortable with the populace was the fact that we [Americans in general] were very well like(d) [sic] before the war and ugly incidences [sic] involving the GI were at a minimum. Another was the fact that the Japs invaded, killed, raped, stole and ravaged at every turn. He treated the Filipino as a conquered animal and never made an attempt to show friendship or concern.<sup>160</sup>

Despite Japan’s political attempts to incorporate the Philippines, Mailheau personally observed cruelty severe enough to convince him that Filipino and Negrito support was a direct response to it. Many of the instances described by Mailheau and Doyle Decker show that support from Filipino populations came too early to be solely motivated by Japanese wartime cruelty, and said support persisted beyond the opening weeks of the occupation. The presence of the American guerrillas provided native populations with a new option through which they could directly disrupt Japanese rule, as well as provide information in a manner that would not leave them as vulnerable to direct reprisal as open conflict. However, Mailheau could not operate on his own for long, and needed to find other guerrillas as soon as possible.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

## **Guerrilla Warfare after Escape: Resistance in Transition**

While he had escaped the Bataan Death March, Mailheau was now concerned with finding other guerrillas to cooperate with, and while he managed to do so fairly quickly, he was nearly killed by a U.S. soldier in the process. After drifting between various barrios (small villages in the Philippines that surrounded major cities such as Angeles), he was able to meet with fellow guerrilla and friend Joe Donahey, who was staying nearby.<sup>161</sup> They managed to secure shelter in a shack in a nearby village, but Mailheau was nearly killed one night during an unexpected meeting with soldiers Clay Conner and Edwin Ramsey. While Mailheau and Donahey had been expecting company that night, they had not planned on meeting Conner or Ramsey at the time, who unexpectedly arrived the same night. While Mailheau was not hostile towards them (only stepping out to check if they were the company that he and Donahey were expecting), Ramsey surprised Mailheau by directly aiming a .45 caliber Colt pistol at him and demanding to know who he was.<sup>162</sup> While Mailheau managed to convince him that he was not an enemy spy, he was certain that Ramsey fully intended to kill him if he could not be persuaded, and this incident was the most direct threat that Mailheau encountered from another soldier. Tensions were extremely high regarding guerrilla information, and fears of betrayal or infiltration by Japanese collaborators nearly resulted in Mailheau's death.

Thankfully, Mailheau did not encounter any soldiers as directly hostile as Ramsey throughout the rest of his experience in the Philippines, and only knew Ramsey for a few days before joining with Conner and Donahey prior to the formation of the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit. Shortly after meeting Ramsey, his group numbered four (Donahey, Mailheau, Ramsey and Conner), and all but Donahey sought to create a larger guerrilla unit. Donahey's reticence was

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 23.

not without merit, considering that even groups of four Americans could easily attract unwanted attention or be described to Japanese anti-guerrilla forces. Over the next few weeks, their small group traveled throughout nearby foothills and made plans to head north and link up with Russell Volckmann's guerrilla unit in Northern Luzon, which had made significant strides in organizing guerrilla resistance throughout the region.<sup>163</sup> However, Donahey preferred to remain hidden in the jungles of Banaba, and debates over joining with larger guerrilla units delayed their ability to link with Volckmann, and ultimately rendered their efforts unsuccessful.<sup>164</sup> Mailheu recalled that they "had heard information—not a lot of information--- of Volckmann's and Blackburn's activities, and it just seemed like that was the logical place for soldiers to get to, and try to survive."<sup>165</sup> Ramsey, by contrast, had given Mailheu the impression that he wanted to be a part of a larger official military organization again, and that guerrilla warfare did not appeal to him. Whether this was what caused Ramsey to split from the unit is unknown, but even in a group only comprised of four members, it was difficult to decide on a course of action, let alone agree on the reasons for doing so.

Unfortunately, despite only receiving limited information regarding Blackburn and Volckmann's guerrilla activities, Japanese forces cut off central Luzon from the north, and succeeded in preventing any of the group from rendezvousing with northern guerrillas.<sup>166</sup> Throughout the following months, Mailheu and Conner drifted between multiple groups and took multiple precautions in order to guard against discovery by Japanese patrols, especially as rumors of any groups of American soldiers tended to spread quickly. In Donahey's absence,

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<sup>163</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reports of General MacArthur Volume 1: The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific* (Washington D.C., 1994), 320-321.

<sup>164</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 25.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, 24-25.



Mailheau and Conner met up with a soldier named Frank Gyovai, who also later joined the 155<sup>th</sup>. However, despite their best attempts to split their ranks, Japanese soldiers still followed up on rumors of five American soldiers in their area (since they had joined up with two other soldiers in the meantime), and Mailheau's group was forced to escape and backtrack into familiar territory.<sup>167</sup> Any attempts to form or maintain a larger group were constantly hindered, and the heavy Japanese activity both to the North and South prevented Mailheau's differing guerrilla groups from making much progress. Japanese anti-guerrilla efforts were much more prevalent in Central Luzon than the North, and were able to prevent the various regional guerrilla units from combining or organizing effectively.<sup>168</sup> Until the formation of the 155<sup>th</sup> (which still employed smaller subgroups in order to prevent discovery), Mailheau was unable to find or remain with a stable guerrilla unit, and Japanese efforts to contain guerrilla movement, seek out organized activity, and punish supporters all effectively prevented him from joining a larger unit for months.

### **Creation and Operation of the 155<sup>th</sup> Guerrilla Unit**

By April 1943, Mailheau and Conner joined with guerrilla Frank Gyovai around the Banaba area of Central Luzon, which was roughly nine miles southwest of Clark Field.<sup>169</sup> Around this time, they began to make plans to form a guerrilla unit themselves rather than joining a pre-existing force, likely due to their unsuccessful efforts to travel north of Central Luzon. Mailheau, Conner, and Gyovai decided to create the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit, which they named after the 155 mm. "Long Tom" artillery pieces used by the U.S. army.<sup>170</sup> Soon after their

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>168</sup> Hogan, *U.S. Army Special Operations in World War II*, 76.

<sup>169</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 27.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 28.

decision to form the 155<sup>th</sup>, they came into contact with Bob Campbell and Doyle Decker, the latter of which soon joined with Mailheau and began intelligence operations.<sup>171</sup> The group ultimately consisted of six core members, which included Clay Conner, Bob Mailheau, Frank Gyovai, Joe Donahey, Doyle Decker, and Bob Campbell. Mailheau and Decker began to organize a defense network throughout the barrios that surrounded the Banaba lowlands (see Figure 3, “Map of the Bataan Peninsula, including Central Luzon” for Banaba’s location relative to Fassoth’s Camp), through which they could receive information concerning Japanese garrisons and cooperate with civilians.<sup>172</sup> By creating a cooperative network, the 155<sup>th</sup> could expand without attracting additional attention, and its members were already well aware of the dangers of organizing too many American soldiers in one location. While Mailheau, Conner, and Gyovai’s experiences constantly prevented them from linking up with other guerrillas, the lessons that they learned in the process ultimately allowed the 155<sup>th</sup> to endure for the remainder of the war.

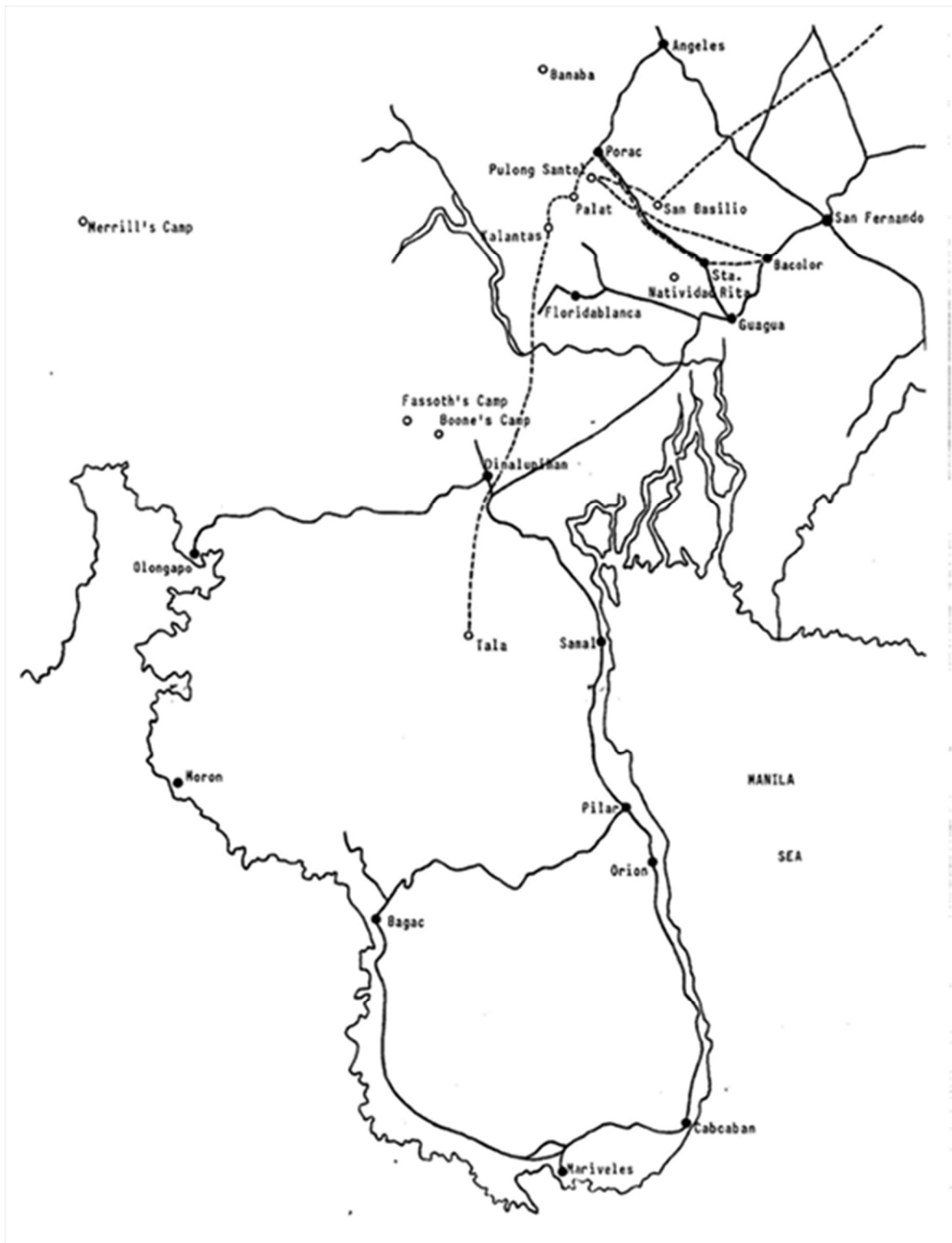
Over time, Mailheau and Decker worked with each other more than any of the other members, and Decker shifted from survival with Campbell to active organization alongside Mailheau. Throughout the initial months of the group’s formation, Mailheau and Decker “were pretty involved in organizing. This meant many trips to lowland villages gaining the cooperation of the elders & [sic] youngsters alike, primarily to help us establish a barrio defense system, through which we could keep tabs on Jap patrols, movements, etc.”<sup>173</sup> Mailheau and Decker concentrated on barrio recruitment and building support networks while Conner and Gyovai focused on organizing Negrito resistance, though neither task was exclusive to either pair.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 28.



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Figure 3. Map of the Bataan Peninsula, including Banaba in relation to Fassoth's Camp and Olongapo.

<sup>174</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, ed., "Map of Bataan Peninsula, Central Luzon," from Collection of Bob Mailheau Postwar Letters and Interviews, 1984.

While Donahey and Campbell “weren’t keen on becoming active members in the Guerrilla movement” and were left to work on their own initiative, the splitting of priorities between the two pairs (Decker and Mailheau along with Conner and Gyovai) allowed the unit to cover more ground and also reduce the risk of the unit’s elimination by dividing its components.<sup>175</sup> By maintaining two dedicated pairs and targeting different elements of the Philippines’ population, the 155<sup>th</sup> was able to form a substantial network in surrounding villages that ultimately expanded the group’s range far beyond the six Americans who directly formed it. Without the relationships that the 155<sup>th</sup> created with Negrito and Filipino populations, it would not have been as successful in persisting and gathering intelligence.

The group’s focus on garnering support from Filipino and Negrito populations led to a number of advantages during its operation, and allowed the 155<sup>th</sup> unit was able to expand its capabilities far beyond its core membership. The group regularly travelled alongside Filipino and Negrito allies, many of whom were often armed. While some more modern schemes of guerrilla warfare list the concealment of weapons as a common trait, neither the American members of the 155<sup>th</sup> or their allies adopted this tactic.<sup>176</sup> Mailheau recalled that the group “carried side arms all the time. And there were rifles available to us whenever we wanted them. And there was ammunition in and around. I think that Frank (Gyovai) eventually assembled quite a supply. Now, we didn’t go heavily armed all the time. Most of the time we did have either Humbo, or Mario, or some other Negritos with us, with their bows and arrows... Some of them had rifles. So we were sufficiently protected...”<sup>177</sup> The 155<sup>th</sup>’s allies aided it militarily, medically, and especially geographically, as indigenous populations were able to provide valuable advice and

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>176</sup> Crandall, *America’s Dirty Wars*, 7.

<sup>177</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, ed., *Telephone Interview with Robert T. Mailheau on March 12, 1984*, (Indiana Historical Society, March 12, 1984), 4.

techniques that gave guerrillas an advantage over Japanese soldiers, who only occupied the islands for a couple of years. As mentioned previously in Decker's experience, Negritos provided medical aid to the guerrillas on multiple occasions, and the unit's ability to mobilize both groups' efforts towards a common cause provided a wide berth of dependable backup for the 155<sup>th</sup>.

Mailheau was one of the more sociable members of the group, and despite rare personality conflicts at the time, believed that the unit's members coexisted fairly well (especially in light of his more extreme experience with Lieutenant Ramsey). Most of the social discord within the 155<sup>th</sup> resulted from tensions brought about by harsh survival conditions, as well as the adverse effects of living in a tropical climate for an extended period. One of the only conflicts that Mailheau could recall was an incident with Frank Gyovai that nearly came to blows, later remarking that,

The only tiff I remember, and I remember this clearly, was in our so called No.2 headquarters, according to Frank's maps... we had a little tiff. Rainy Season... more Japs, and since we didn't know from one day to the next what the hell would happen... we almost came to blows, but Donahey and Conner calmed us down. From that point on, I never felt that Frank and I had any differences... My God, after all we'd gone through, I never felt closer to them [Mailheau referencing all of his fellow guerrillas including Gyovai].<sup>178</sup>

While Conner referenced the conflict between the two in one of his writings, Mailheau never considered it at the time, and Gyovai wrote to him years after the war in order to re-establish their friendship and deny any ill will towards Mailheau.<sup>179</sup> Aside from this incident, the group operated rather smoothly, likely aided by the decision to split the unit into various pairs.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

<sup>179</sup> Frank Gyovai, *Letter from Frank Gyovai to Bob Mailheau, the first in many years*. (May 4, 1984), 1.

While the members of the 155<sup>th</sup> came from a number of different states and religious backgrounds, they were able to cooperate for the remainder of the war, which was not a given in guerrilla warfare in Central Luzon.<sup>180</sup>

The 155<sup>th</sup> unit was not a monolithic entity nor an organization with a completely focused mission, but it was a stable and limited collection of guerrillas who survived by adapting to the capabilities of their enemy and splitting tactical responsibilities. It faced significant limitations regarding manpower, but was ultimately able to persist far longer than a more traditionally powerful unit would have because of its more measured approach to resistance. The varying willingness of its members to engage in direct resistance also altered the group's approach, and rather than focusing on additional weaponry or increasing its number of U.S. soldiers, it was able to cooperate with both estranged ex-Philippine army soldiers and civilians in order to subvert the Japanese government's efforts to root out guerrilla resistance.<sup>181</sup> The delegation of various tasks to different pairs limited the amount of American personnel in any given location at once, and the enlistment of civilians made information-gathering much more efficient and able to serve the disparate groups all involved in the 155<sup>th</sup>'s operations. It was the definitive proving ground for Mailheau's belief that mutual resistance was essential, and the 155<sup>th</sup> was accordingly able to spread far beyond its initial scope and become a hub of resistance for both Negrito and Filipino forces as well as recruit formerly hesitant soldiers like Doyle Decker, Bob Campbell, and Joe Donahey. Its operations were not without significant difficulty, however, and the environment continued to pose major difficulties throughout the group's period of operation, primarily in the form of tropical rain, winds, and debilitating infections.

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<sup>180</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 15.

Hogan, *U.S. Army Special Operations in World War II*, 76.

<sup>181</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 30.

## Disease, Stress, and Hostile Environment

While the 155<sup>th</sup>'s surrounding support networks allowed the group to maintain a supply of medicine, the tropical environment still inflicted adverse and crippling effects on Mailheau and his men. Following the creation of the Barrio defense network in January 1944, Mailheau contracted a severe tonsil infection and dysentery, the former of which incapacitated him for weeks. He was unable to carry out any intelligence work, and faced significant difficulty in maintaining his own physical health after the tonsil infection prevented him from swallowing any food. His only source of nutrition was a liquid banana mixture made by Decker and Gyovai, and by the end of the process Mailheau weighed around 125 pounds compared to his usual weight of 190.<sup>182</sup> Decker attempted to administer medical treatment to the best of his ability and wrote, "His tonsils are the worst I have ever seen. Each looks like a glob of yellow puss. I am trying to doctor him the best I can. I have been swabbing his throat with three drops of iodine in a spoonful of water."<sup>183</sup> According to Mailheau, Decker acquired the iodine after traveling into the lowlands, and decided to utilize it based on a "grandma's tale" that it would work as a last-ditch cure.<sup>184</sup> Unbeknownst to Decker, he was using a rather extreme amount of iodine given the situation, and Mailheau coughed up his own tonsils after it was administered.<sup>185</sup>

Needless to say, Mailheau was completely incapacitated by the process, and every day that passed that he was ill, the sub-headquarters of the 155<sup>th</sup> were critically compromised. In addition, Decker also contracted dysentery around the same time, and while it did not affect him as severely as Mailheau's ailments, it halted most of the progress of Decker and Mailheau's component of the unit and forced them to depend on the support networks that they had created

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>183</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 38.

<sup>184</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 39.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 39.

for protection. Once again, the group's remoteness and relationships throughout the surrounding area paid off, and Decker and Mailheau were not attacked or discovered by any patrols during the process. However, Mailheau had gone through another period of severe physical degradation (the first being his time in the Bataan Death March), and the experience's effects on his morale and autonomy were dire. When recounting the experience, Mailheau stated, "God, I was down... Decker had practically saved my life on that," and stressed multiple times that he completely attributed his survival to Decker's improvised treatment.<sup>186</sup>

The emotional effects of guerrilla warfare in Central Luzon were similarly severe. While Mailheau's depression from his tonsil infection affected his ability to physically function, fellow guerrilla Frank Gyovai nearly perished as a result of the psychological effects of long-term survival and isolation. Whereas Mailheau was so severely impeded by his ailments that he could do little to directly put himself at risk, Gyovai came close to death on at least two occasions as a result of his mental stress, and while the exact causes of his behavior are unknown, two incidents described by Mailheau and Decker reveal that Gyovai's judgement was severely impaired by his mental state. Following his personal conflict with Mailheau brought on by poor morale and weather, Gyovai was reported by Conner to have contemplated suicide by jumping from a nearby waterfall.<sup>187</sup> Gyovai ultimately decided against it or was convinced not to by another, and Mailheau ultimately attributed the incident to the stress of the situation as well as the possibility that U.S. reinforcements would never come.<sup>188</sup> The second incident however posed a much more direct threat to Gyovai's physical health, when he suddenly began to adopt the limited dress of a

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<sup>186</sup> Sanford, *Telephone Interview March 12, 1984*, 15.

<sup>187</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, *Interview by Telephone with Robert T. Mailheau Conducted on 25 March 1984* (Indiana Historical Society, March 25, 1984), 12.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 12.



Negrito tribesmen and move in the open even during dangerous weather. Decker directly witnessed Frank's strange behavior and wrote,

Frank [Gyovai] seems to think that he is invincible. He has donned a G-string like a Negrito and goes in all kinds of weather. He will have to pay. Even the Negritos won't get out in the rain... Today we received word that Frank is sick. He must have pneumonia—no medicine. He will be lucky if he survives. Today the natives gather at Conner's shack. They have come to practice their native medicine on Frank. I have seen this before used on a Negrito. He survived and I hope Frank is as lucky.<sup>189</sup>

While Gyovai survived the described treatment, the recklessness that he displayed by openly traveling during the rainy season with practically non-existent clothing was abnormal, especially considering the unit's prior experiences with extreme weather. Adapting to the rainy seasons in the Philippines was already a constant challenge, and both Decker and Mailheau were forced to seek shelter on multiple occasions in order to avoid it.<sup>190</sup> Decker also mentioned the Negritos' avoidance of rainy weather, indicating that Frank's behavior would have posed a significant danger even for natives of the jungle climate. Alongside Frank's contemplation of suicide, it is one of the most extreme behavioral responses that either Decker or Mailheau personally described, and proof that their isolation exacted an alarming amount of mental strain. While all six members of the 155<sup>th</sup> survived, the Philippines' debilitating environment remained a threat that they could never successfully eliminate. Local support was again crucial in their survival, since in many cases the members of the 155<sup>th</sup> were forced to either experiment (i.e., Decker's operation on Mailheau's tonsils) or consult their allies in order to counter the negative effects of their stay in the jungle. They were able to survive until American reinforcements arrived because of their local cooperation, and operated independently of any support from the

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<sup>189</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 37.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

United States until sighting planes in October 1944. Mailheau later rendezvoused with U.S. forces in spring 1945 alongside Gyovai and Decker.<sup>191</sup>

After years of desperate struggle, isolation, and physical torment, Mailheau still planned to remain with the army for as long as he could following his recuperation, but the long-term effects of his time in the Philippines had taken their toll on him. After he was reincorporated into the U.S. military in 1945, Mailheau continued his military career in the following years, and was promoted to Major in 1947 and then Lieutenant Colonel in 1953.<sup>192</sup> Despite joining the military to preempt U.S. involvement in Europe, Mailheau had aspirations to continue serving for as long as he could, but was prevented from doing so by the physical toll of his experiences.<sup>193</sup> Mailheau stated in a letter written in 1984 that he “retired (military disability) as a lieutenant colonel in May, 1955... I seriously planned on staying with the service till old age would force me out. However, the Bataan/Guerrilla experiences took their toll on me physically, and so my career was short lived...”<sup>194</sup> While Mailheau did not elaborate on why he wished to do so, his willingness to continue his service in the U.S. army despite his experiences was remarkable, and another example of his willingness to persevere against adversity. However, the physical costs of his harsh treatment by the Japanese and his multiple bouts of severe weight loss prevented him from continuing, and Mailheau instead went into banking.

## **Conclusion**

Mailheau faced constant dangers to his physical health from 1942 to 1945, and yet his persistence against overwhelming hardship was intense even among the other guerrillas of the

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<sup>191</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 43.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

155<sup>th</sup>. Most of the challenges that faced him were completely unexpected, and he improvised constantly in order to survive the Japanese occupation. Mailheau joined the army to avoid conflict, but was forced by circumstance to engage in a protracted conflict for nearly three years. The guerrilla war that he took part in came about by accident, following a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Japanese army and weeks of brutal treatment that forced Mailheau to choose between a potentially lethal escape and continued cruelty at the hands of Japanese soldiers. Despite this series of unexpected challenges, both Mailheau's own resolve and the widespread help provided by those around him enabled him to take part in resistance, and ultimately survive the war. While he was somewhat familiar with the Negrito tribe's relationship with the U.S. government, he could not have anticipated how crucial they would be in helping to resist Japanese rule, as well as how much they would contribute through navigation, medical aid, and the reinforcement of Luzon guerrillas. Filipino households contributed immeasurably, and in Mailheau's case, directly saved his life following his escape from the Bataan Death March. Mailheau would have perished without his cooperation with the inhabitants of the Philippines or his own tenacity, and the combination of both allowed him to achieve far more than he would have been able to with one alone.

## **PRIVATE DECKER: PRIORITIZING SURVIVAL BEFORE RESISTANCE**

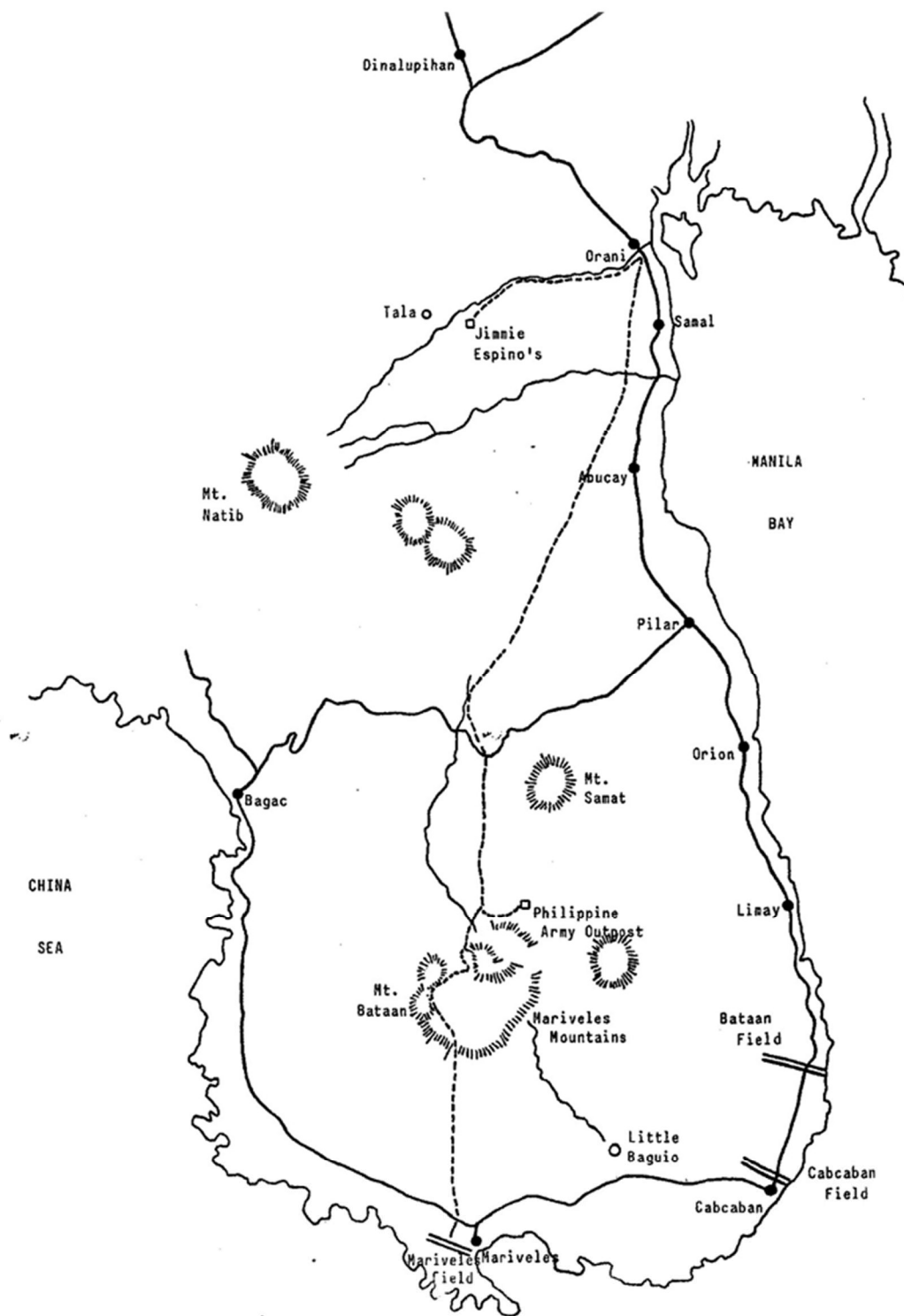
Private Doyle Decker's experience in the Philippines was filled with desperation and constant pressure from hostile patrols and an unforgiving environment. Throughout the invasion of the Philippines in December 1941, he carried out his orders hoping that the situation would improve, but it soon became clear to him that defeat was approaching as MacArthur departed and supplies dwindled. When he and four other soldiers retreated northwest into the mountainside (either towards Mt. Natib or the Mariveles Mountain Range, both pictured in Figure 4, "Map of Bataan mountain ranges") after the destruction of their artillery unit, they struggled to last beyond the first few weeks of the Japanese occupation as they struggled to evade enemy patrols and scavenge for food.<sup>195</sup> Decker was saved on numerous occasions by the sacrifices and aid of Filipino and Negrito civilians, and while guerrilla warfare has come to be deeply associated with a "home turf" mentality, Decker's cooperation with civilians was often based on necessity as he and his men constantly struggled to adapt to their surroundings. Decker was primarily motivated by survival, and while Mailheau and Conner's 155<sup>th</sup> unit eventually gave him an opportunity to participate in a larger unit, his early experiences taught him that to survive, the help of civilians was ultimately the most important factor.

### **Decker's Military Background**

Prior to becoming a guerrilla in April 1942, Decker served as an anti-aircraft gunner with the 200<sup>th</sup> New Mexico National Guard, coastal artillery unit, anti-aircraft battery H.

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<sup>195</sup> Doyle V. Decker, *Explanation of Answers to the Questionnaire [sic]*, from series of Letters and Interviews Conducted by Wayne Sanford in 1984, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1984, 1-2.



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Figure 4. Map of Bataan mountain ranges, including the Mariveles Mountains and Mt. Natib.

<sup>196</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, ed., "Route of Gyovai's escape from the southern tip of Bataan," from Collection of Bob Mailheau Postwar Letters and Interviews. 1984.

Decker's motivation for enlistment was mostly to get a steady job as well as serve his mandatory year of military service required by the peacetime draft in September 1940.<sup>197</sup> He chose March 1941 as the starting date of his draft year, after which he would either find an alternative job (a difficult prospect during the Great Depression) or remain in the army.<sup>198</sup> His motivations were mostly pragmatic, and he chose military service to survive the Great Depression. While Mailheau's goal in the Philippines was to avoid potential conflict, Decker's was to avoid poverty. After training, Decker was ordered to proceed to San Francisco before being transported to Manila, Philippines.<sup>199</sup> Decker seemed to have little direct input regarding his posting, while Bob Mailheau stated that he and some other volunteer soldiers made the decision to go to the Philippines themselves.<sup>200</sup> Considering this discrepancy, while the military had final authority regarding military postings, the relaxed nature of peacetime allowed some to arrive by choice rather than by forced transfer. For Decker, however, the Philippines were supposed to be a temporary posting in order to provide him with a job, not a promise of hardship in jungle terrain for nearly three years.

When Decker learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was already stationed in Sternburg hospital in Manila with orders to be sent back to the U.S. after contracting a tropical fever.<sup>201</sup> He learned of the attack through a newspaper on the morning of December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and the news came as a severe shock.<sup>202</sup> While the potential for conflict had been previously discussed in passing, substantial proof of it was a different matter, and Decker soon feared the

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<sup>197</sup> Kristy N. Kamarack, *The Selective Service System and Draft Registration: Issues for Congress* (Washington D.C., 2016), 5.

<sup>198</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 2.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> Sanford, ed., *Resistance on Luzon*, 1.

<sup>201</sup> Malcolm Decker, *From Bataan to Safety*, 7.

<sup>202</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 1.

possibility that he would never see his home again.<sup>203</sup> He did not have long to process this information, as wounded soldiers began to pour in from Clark Field after it was attacked on December 8<sup>th</sup>. While they had received prior warning of the enemy advance due to the news regarding Pearl Harbor, there was little time to capitalize on this information. The destruction of most of the U.S. Navy the day prior meant that the possibility of naval reinforcement was now nonexistent, and that additional resources would be more difficult to acquire. However, the soldiers were not aware that most of the Pacific fleet had been lost, and only knew that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.<sup>204</sup> Even barring this knowledge, the Japanese invasion on December 8<sup>th</sup> irreversibly shifted Decker's duties from a temporary posting to a long, bitter struggle for survival. As truckloads of wounded soldiers arrived from Clark Field, Decker helped to take the wounded into Sternburg Hospital as best he could.<sup>205</sup> While Decker transferred to Bataan weeks later and continued to serve with the 200<sup>th</sup> Coastal Artillery Unit, the opening days of the invasion set a harrowing precedent, and the situation did not improve throughout the coming months.

Wounded continued to arrive throughout December and January, and Japanese planes continued to strafe Manila.<sup>206</sup> While the 200<sup>th</sup> did experience some success shooting down Japanese planes, it was slowly becoming clear to Decker that conditions were not improving.<sup>207</sup> In particular, the gradual cutting of rations and MacArthur's retreat on March 11<sup>th</sup> were particularly demoralizing to Decker and the soldiers around him, and upon reflection Decker stated that "...when the army ordered MacArthur out, I think we all realized it was hopeless."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>204</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 4.

<sup>205</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 1; Malcolm Decker, *From Bataan to Safety*, 7.

<sup>206</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 1-3.

<sup>207</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 4.

<sup>208</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 4.

No matter the strategic reasoning, the removal of MacArthur could only be taken as a lack of confidence in the U.S. military's ability to retain control of the islands, and it appropriately dampened the morale of Decker and the soldiers around him. Additionally, even direct messages from President Roosevelt to General Wainwright failed to give definitive instructions, and the military situation continued to worsen. Dwindling food supplies and a complete lack of outside support also failed to soothe the concerns of many soldiers now faced with operating without their initial commander, which significantly dampened morale.<sup>209</sup>

These dual problems encouraged Decker and a handful of soldiers around him (notably his Mess Sergeant Clinton "Red" Wolf) to begin making plans to escape to the nearby mountainside, and began doing so well before any official news of surrender reached them. Decker wrote at the time, "I have decided to take to the mountains when the time comes. I will never surrender. I prefer to die in the mountains than to die in prison. We all feel the same way; we are just marking time; the surrender will come soon."<sup>210</sup> The hopeless tone of this entry stands out, as well as his description of the atmosphere around him. His attitude cannot merely be dismissed as individual pessimism considering his statement that the soldiers around him shared his feelings, and the hopelessness of defending Bataan after MacArthur's departure drove several soldiers to make preparations for defeat. Interestingly, he does not mention any particular cruelty by the Japanese prior to this decision in his original journals, only beginning to take note of the atrocities that they committed as he encountered evidence of them along the way. His motivation for resisting was not based on any particular knowledge of Japanese cruelty, and instead by a more basic desire to avoid capture by any enemy party. While Japan's wartime reputation has been thoroughly documented by secondary literature and the guerrillas' own

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<sup>209</sup> Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 562.

<sup>210</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 9.



accounts (especially those concerning the Death March and occupation), it was not known by Decker or Mailheau prior to their encounters with Japanese soldiers and tactics. In any case, once plans were made, Decker and Wolf began to make preparations for retreating into the mountains if or when news of surrender reached them, which it soon did in April 1942.

Despite their prior preparations to store weapons in a supply cache, Decker and Wolf were not able to capitalize on them when they were cut off from their unit. Ironically, Decker and Wolf departed from their unit on the afternoon of the surrender to get cigarettes from a neighboring ordinance company, and later found the company overrun by Japanese forces.<sup>211</sup> By the time they resolved to return to their unit, it had already become dark, and they were unable to successfully navigate their way back.<sup>212</sup> When they finally managed to return, they learned that their unit had been overrun, but had to wait until daylight returned in order to move out.<sup>213</sup> Decker and Wolf eventually reunited with their battery commander and two other soldiers, and set out for the mountains as a group of five total as soon as possible the day after the surrender. While the signing of the surrender on April 9<sup>th</sup> ended official hostilities, responses from U.S. soldiers were a different matter, and Decker, Wolf, and others around them decided against surrender in any capacity. As of April 9<sup>th</sup>, however, the conflict with Japan was officially over, and from that point onwards, many were forced to choose either resistance or surrendering to the Japanese in hopes of more favorable treatment that they seldom received. Decker resolved to choose the former, but was faced with much more pressing problems before he could militarily resist, and the most pressing by far was procuring long-term food and shelter. His group of five had little or no training in this regard, and it nearly cost them their lives.

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<sup>211</sup> Decker, *Explanation of Answers*, 1.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>213</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 5-6.

## Struggle during the Opening Weeks

The opening weeks of the occupation were some of the most grueling for Decker and his four fellow soldiers (Dallas Vinette, Red Wolf, Manuel Montoya, and Nino Lucero) as they attempted to survive in the jungle.<sup>214</sup> While the threat of capture or execution by Japanese soldiers was their first consideration, hunger and disease were equally hazardous. Despite their plans to flee into the mountainside prior to the surrender, neither Decker or the soldiers around him had any extensive survival training, and had very little time to adjust to their new situation before the climate and maintaining a steady supply of food became distractingly important.<sup>215</sup> The struggle to survive was more pressing than attempts to form any kind of long-term resistance, and the opening weeks of his survival in the jungle were particularly dire and disorganized. During the crucial opening weeks, staying alive and healthy became a grueling task, and before guerrilla units could be organized, Decker and his companions had to learn how to adapt to their surroundings and learn several crucial lessons that they would later use during the occupation.

Unsurprisingly, obtaining and maintaining a supply of food had already been one of the most harrowing challenges Decker faced prior to the surrender at Bataan, and this became an even direr issue with the dissolution of U.S. command.<sup>216</sup> Without a steady food supply, Decker and fellow guerrillas struggled to procure food from their environment, which many of them were unfamiliar with. Even prior to the surrender, supplies dwindled within Decker's artillery battery, and as the defense of Bataan progressed, it soon became clear that starvation was becoming a distinct possibility. Decker remarked in his journal that "... our rations are cut

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>215</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 7.

<sup>216</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 9.  
Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*, 257.

almost daily. We have already eaten the cavalry horses and mules... How much longer can we hold out?"<sup>217</sup> No matter what the tactical reality was, the Decker and Wolf did not believe that they could hold out much longer, and while they stayed with the battery to the best of their ability (even moving the battery's kitchen multiple times), they ultimately decided to flee into the mountains if the situation continued to deteriorate, which it soon did.

Conditions worsened once Decker traveled into the mountains, and inconsistent food supplies frequently hampered his and fellow soldiers' ability to effectively reason with each other, let alone organize their efforts. Decker's group was able to initially rely on rice during the first few days of their journey into the northern mountainside, but their existing supplies only lasted 5 days.<sup>218</sup> Ten days into their trek through the jungle, tempers quickly flared among he and his fellow four soldiers as food ran desperately low.<sup>219</sup> Throughout the initial ten days, the group subsisted entirely on leaves and bugs in the absence of any effective substitute (or at the very least, any that they were aware of).<sup>220</sup> By the tenth day of their journey, they were forced to kill a wild chicken and eat it nearly raw out of sheer hunger. They were only saved when they were found by a passing group of three Filipinos who decided to take them in.<sup>221</sup> While they later observed the eating habits of local tribesmen and learned to survive on papaya, banana, and coconut plants, their initial unfamiliarity with foraging in the wilderness limited the resources they were able to use. The opening weeks of survival in the mountains were dangerous, frightening, and confusing, and the thought of organizing a guerrilla unit in these conditions bordered on ludicrous.

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<sup>217</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 9.

<sup>218</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 6.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>220</sup> Decker, *Explanation of Answers*, 2.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Organization was also made much more difficult due to the absence of formal logistics and a lack of preparation for guerrilla fighting, and soldiers had few definitive ways of proving simple information such as their former ranks in the military. Soldiers may normally have used dog tags for identification, but Decker also stated that many (including him) had lost their dog tags in the months following the fall of the Philippines, either through intentional or accidental neglect.<sup>222</sup> In his specific words, “90 percent of us couldn’t have proved [sic] we was anything, because as I recall, I don’t even recall having any dogtags... most men I ran into, didn’t have.”<sup>223</sup> In this case, the abandonment of proof regarding rank was not a considered strategy, but instead resulted from a decrease in the value of rank following the U.S. army’s defeat. Decker’s priority was not to maintain the protocol and strict hierarchy of the U.S. army, but was instead to survive and find whatever soldiers he could that he could depend on during the occupation. In cases such as his later meeting with Lieutenant Henry “Clay” Conner, Decker opted to rely on his instincts and personal impressions, gravitating towards soldiers like Conner and Mailheu based on their merit instead of former rank.

Even when identification was not an issue, partnerships were potentially unreliable, and even prior chains of command did not ensure success. As food began to run low five days into the occupation, Decker’s personal relationship with Vinette quickly soured as it became clear that the latter was not well suited to survival in the jungle or the dissolution of command. Decker described Vinette as being somewhat abrasive, and that he often insisted on being treated with his former degree of authority, which did little to inspire confidence as Decker’s group struggled to merely obtain food.<sup>224</sup> In one poignant example, Decker stated that “Captain Vinette...

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<sup>222</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 10.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>224</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 11.

threatened to shoot me because I wouldn't go fill his canteen after dark."<sup>225</sup> While the group stayed together for approximately ten days, Captain Vinette set out one morning alongside another soldier to scout out the terrain, and never returned.<sup>226</sup> It is unknown if they were intercepted by any patrols, taken in by any other groups, or simply deserted Decker and his other fellow survivors, but it is certain is that they set out and failed to return, reducing the group's numbers by two. While relationships between Decker and the other two soldiers who were with him improved shortly thereafter, Captain Vinette's disappearance confirmed that the prior chain of command was not a mark of reliability, and that individual relationships would be more relevant to survival than adhering to the military's codes of command and loyalty.

Immediately following the surrender, the rules of life in Luzon completely changed. The chain of command was no longer a marker of reliability, rank became a secondary concern compared to basic necessities, and Decker and his fellow men now had to contend with a survival situation that they all had scarce training for. While the threat of force from Japanese patrols was a serious concern, the U.S. soldiers' lack of familiarity with the terrain, foraging techniques, and securing shelter became much more pressing challenges after they fled into the jungle. While Decker, Wolf, Lucero, Vinette, and Montoya had been stationed on the island for months, this did not mean that they had a solid grasp of the local geography beyond the bases and cities that they had been stationed at, and they all began at a disadvantage as they attempted to evade capture or death at the hands of the Japanese forces. The line between survival and resistance remained thin throughout Decker's experiences as a guerrilla, but was the narrowest during this initial period. While the Japanese were the invaders, this did not mean that the U.S. soldiers held much of an advantage in terms of knowledge or navigation, and ultimately,

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>226</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 6.

Decker's survival came down to the acts of a number of local groups that were able to provide him with important lessons about living in the jungle.

### **Local Aid**

The aid given to soldiers like Decker by various groups in the Philippines undeniably made their survival possible beyond the first few weeks of the occupation. Local planters like Bill and Edith Fassoth, native tribesmen in the mountains, and a range of Filipino citizens (some of whom had either been members of the volunteer army) all aided the 155th's members in some capacity. Decker and Mailheu deeply appreciated their frequent help, remembering it decades after the war had concluded. It is not an overstatement to say that Decker would most certainly have died without their help, and he detailed specific instances of this need for help in his wartime journal. This help came in the form of refuges, navigational guidance, and resources provided by various groups throughout Central Luzon despite the best efforts of the new Japanese territorial government to prevent these kinds of aid. The contributions made by the Philippines' inhabitants were materially and psychologically significant, and they deserve recognition for their part in aiding potentially hundreds of U.S. soldiers who were now trapped throughout Luzon.

Initially, there was no guarantee that local aid would be reliable or freely given, and tensions were high following the surrender. While some writers at the time such as Catherine Porter of the American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations were optimistic that U.S. promises would be valued above those of the Japanese, for the time being the U.S. had departed in the event of enemy attack.<sup>227</sup> The Philippines had been militarily abandoned following

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<sup>227</sup> Catherine L. Porter, *Crisis in the Philippines* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 144.

MacArthur's retreat and Wainwright's surrender, and the poor support provided to the defense of the Philippines did not instill confidence in the United States' ability to make good on its prior promise of independence, even to its own soldiers.<sup>228</sup> While Wainwright's decision to surrender had been made based on rapidly dwindling resources and numerous defensive shortcomings, there was no way to accurately judge how groups in the Philippines would react in the wake of conquest. In reality, while some collaborated with the new Japanese government in the opening months, Decker and Mailheu's accounts both reveal that there were immediate and significant pockets of support that provided food and shelter to U.S. soldiers throughout Central Luzon during not only the opening weeks, but nearly their entire stay. Regardless of this, many soldiers could not easily determine who was friend or foe, and the new Japanese government heavily encouraged collaboration. The support that Decker received, however, was not only extensive, but was given fewer than two weeks into the occupation.

The housing and food that many groups in the Philippines (including both Filipino citizens and native tribesmen) provided were some of the most essential in the initial weeks, especially when soldiers like Decker or Mailheu were on death's door. One day after Vinette's aforementioned departure (when the group caught and ate a chicken nearly raw), a Filipino family took Decker's group to their house just as he thought he was going mad from hunger, and it is no exaggeration to say that their hospitality saved Decker and his fellow men. Decker wrote,

When we reach their house they begin to cook some rice. The aroma of the rice cooking is driving me mad. If they don't ask me to eat I know I am going to kill them. I must have food. As I sit there with these awful thoughts going through my mind, I realize how suddenly a man can turn into an animal. Then I hear the woman say, "Come eat. We have cooked this for you." How ashamed I feel. Tears come to my eyes. This is my first

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<sup>228</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 4.

encounter with the Filipino people. What lovely people. I know I will never forget these people.<sup>229</sup>

At a critical moment of physical and emotional vulnerability, Decker was given another chance to survive, and the significance of this chance was not lost on him. Extreme survival conditions nearly drove him to violence, and yet he was provided with the food that he desperately needed mere moments before lashing out. It was not the last time that he was provided food or housing by Filipino citizens, but it was one of the most important cases, and between this instance and Mailheau's recuperation following his time on the Bataan Death March, it is clear that neither man would have survived without civilian aid. The direness of the initial conditions that Decker and his men faced in the Philippines should not be underestimated, and even the gift of individual meals was crucial in ensuring their survival, especially given their initial unfamiliarity with foraging, finding shelter, or communicating with civilians. In Decker's case, he did not speak any of the local languages (such as Tagalog and Spanish) other than English, had never previously lived in a jungle environment, and was very unfamiliar with the mountainous terrain in the region.<sup>230</sup> There was no guarantee that other guerrillas had any of these skills, and there was a great need for direction and resources in order to simply survive, let alone evade capture or death.

However, the Filipinos were not the only significant group inhabiting Luzon, and even tribesmen in the mountains coordinated with U.S. soldiers throughout the occupation. The extent of support provided by one of the indigenous tribes in the Philippines (dubbed Negritos, and no modern name has popularly surfaced) is difficult to ascertain, but they actively organized attacks on Japanese forces and procured resources for both themselves and Luzon guerrillas on multiple

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>230</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 11.



occasions. The only other name mentioned for their tribes by Decker is “Bulugas,” the Filipino term used at the time. Decker recalled, “I traveled the mountains a lot. As a matter of fact, I crossed them twice. And they [Filipinos] used to accuse me... the Filipinos called the Negritos, Bulugas, and they always accused me of traveling like a Buluga.”<sup>231</sup> It is unclear whether the term Buluga is merely descriptive or holds a more dismissive meaning. Historically, the Negritos are believed to have migrated to the Philippines nearly 30,000 years ago alongside Malay tribes via a land bridge, and continued to live on Luzon within the mountains.<sup>232</sup>

They were not as disorganized as their tribal structure would imply, and they served under a tribal Commander-In-Chief by the name of Kodario Laxamana.<sup>233</sup> Decker and his fellow guerrillas often worked closely with the Negritos in order to bolster their numbers, since large groups comprised of Americans tended to arouse greater suspicion from Japanese patrols. Guerrilla leader Henry “Clay” Conner Jr. (who later personally organized the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla group, the only persistent guerrilla group that Decker was involved with) later personally sent a story to Life Magazine in 1949 in order to express his gratitude and regard for Kodario, who Conner described as a “close companion during the war (who) rallied the Negritos to organize Guerrilla Force 155.”<sup>234</sup> While his accounts were generally accepted both by his comrades and researchers as being romanticized, Kodario’s group cooperated closely with the 155<sup>th</sup> and provided them with a much greater pool of manpower. Conner claimed in at least two articles that Kodario had personally killed 50 Japanese soldiers during the occupation before his death. However, in historian Dwayne Sanford’s conversations with Decker during his initial research

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>232</sup> Ronald E. Dolan, *Philippines: a Country Study* (Washington D.C., 1993), 4.

<sup>233</sup> Clay Conner Jr., *Clay Conner Salutes Filipino Negrito Who Fought For America*. (Letter to the Editor: Life Magazine, November 21 1949); (Note) Beyond this point, Kodario Laxamana will be commonly referred to by his first name, primarily due to Conner referring to him as such in the article cited above.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

into guerrilla actions on Luzon, Sanford stated that Conner had a tendency for telling “extremely good stories” that had some basis in truth, but were likely exaggerated in their presentation (in all likelihood referring to impressive figures such as 50 alleged kills and 17 decapitations that Conner claimed Kodario personally carried out).<sup>235</sup> Exaggerations aside, Kodario and the Negritos both significantly aided soldiers like Decker, Conner, and Mailheu, and engaged in active military resistance against the Japanese alongside American guerrillas.

There are also scattered accounts of smaller-scale help provided by Negrito tribesmen on Luzon, and the descriptions given by Doyle Decker indicate that while verbal communication with tribesmen was often limited, they formed working relationships with guerrillas on Luzon that directly contributed to their survival. Decker directly described his difficulties with communicating with the Negritos in a telephone interview decades later, during which he stated that he and a fellow soldier named Bob Campbell,

Couldn't have possibly told the Negritos anything, because neither one of us spoke the Negrito dialect [sic], and we just about half-assed spoke Tagalog, and that was just enough to get in trouble and not enough to get back out. And I spoke just a little bit of Spanish. But the only Negrito that I ever talked to outside of sign language, was to three Negritos that we had taught to speak English... You don't talk to [sic] much in sign language; you can get what you want to keep from getting killed, I guess.<sup>236</sup>

Even in the absence of reliable verbal communication, Luzon guerrillas were able to form close relationships with Negritos on the island, and soldiers like Conner and Decker both praised them for being unexpectedly and thoroughly supportive of American soldiers. When reflecting on his time in the Philippines, Decker stated that “We began to organize the Negritos, which were very primitive people but true-blue and loyal to the Americans. If there was ever a traitor

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<sup>235</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 11.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

among the Negritos, I never heard about it.”<sup>237</sup> Despite the help that he also received from Filipino families, Decker only described the Negrito tribesmen as being legitimately trustworthy, and Mailheau also attested to their patriotism and loyalty.<sup>238</sup> Decker also engaged in multiple transactions with Negritos throughout his time in the Philippines, including at least one case in which he compensated them with salt to act as navigational guides.<sup>239</sup> Accounts of these transactions are scattered, but Decker’s interactions were not limited to temporary deals. He also stayed with Negrito tribesmen for extended periods multiple times, including one stretch during which he stayed alongside them for at least a week at Fassoth’s Camp, a friendly camp for U.S. soldiers located in the mountains.<sup>240</sup>

Fassoth’s Camp was a refuge created by local planter Bill Fassoth along with his wife Edith, and it served as one of the most useful resources for Luzon guerrillas during the first few weeks of the occupation. The camp provided many essentials that were otherwise unavailable, including consistent shelter, a steadier food supply, and a location unknown to the Japanese for a period longer than a few days. All three of these factors were particularly important considering that the primary goals of many guerrillas in Central Luzon were to survive and avoid the Japanese in order to link up with larger units.<sup>241</sup> Decker’s account indicates that for him and the soldiers around him, one of the most difficult challenges they faced was maintaining an adequate supply of food and lasting shelter, and the temporary camps that the soldiers created were no replacement for dependable housing. While it is difficult to truly determine the relative fame of the camp due to the chaos of occupation, Decker stated that he and another soldier were told

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>238</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 17-18.

<sup>239</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 27.

<sup>240</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 13.

<sup>241</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 24.

about Fassoth's camp by other soldiers while hunting, which implies some degree of dissemination among American soldiers trapped on Luzon.<sup>242</sup> In Decker's words,

We met some men who told us about Fassoth's Camp and offered to guide us there...After at least a day's travel, we came to a barrio at about noon. Our guides left us and went into the barrio and didn't return until almost dark... Later on in the night we were awakened and told that we were leaving for Fassoth's Camp. We walked all night and finally arrived at Fassoth's later the following day.<sup>243</sup>

Decker personally attested to the camp's significance, and it helped him both to recover his strength and begin finding other U.S. guerrillas. He described the camp as a particularly helpful and welcome refuge, and even stated that the Fassoths provided aid without asking for anything in return save for occasional trips into the jungle to procure meat.<sup>244</sup> Decker stated that the soldiers were able to stay at the camp for "several weeks" (there is no exact dating since information regarding time was limited), and during that time soldiers stayed alongside other guerrillas, Filipinos, and even Negrito tribesmen who all stayed at the camp.<sup>245</sup> The camp hosted a variety of individuals, including even Catholic Priests in one case, who had presumably come to the camp to provide religious guidance. In one case of unfortunate misunderstanding, Decker clarified that he was a Baptist when asked if he needed help by one of the Priests, to which the priest broke into tears and replied "I am here to help everybody, not just the Catholics."<sup>246</sup> While there were smaller-scale misunderstandings like this that naturally arose from the sheer variety of individuals within the camp, it nevertheless served as a focal point for aid at a time when several different groups needed such a location. Food came from several sources (including a buck deer

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<sup>242</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 10.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>245</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 24.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

brought in by the Negritos in at least one case), but Decker nevertheless stated that the camp was everything that he and his fellow group had heard that it was, and that he “always held them [the Fassoth Family] in the highest respect.”<sup>247</sup>

However, the camp was eventually abandoned by Decker and other U.S. guerrillas as discovery by the Japanese grew more likely, and he described the departure of soldiers as a slow and cautious withdrawal rather than a concentrated movement. Soldiers simply began to feel that staying in the same location for a prolonged period was dangerous, and that they needed to move on before the Japanese discovered the camp. Despite his initial reservations, Decker left the camp alongside soldiers Bob Campbell, Henry Winslow, and Sergeant Banks (whose first name is not listed in Decker’s writing). Decker recalled years later that he “didn’t want to leave the camp but we had been warned that the camp was to be raided—twice... Also, it was getting harder to get supplies each day, so after telling the Fassoths good-bye early one morning... I left camp and headed for Olongapo.”<sup>248</sup> While the direct warnings were sufficient cause for restlessness, a nagging sense of danger had weighed on Decker prior to them, and the gradual arrival of people that Decker described as “strange” also contributed to his decision.<sup>249</sup> He never specified what he meant by this in his journal, but his description of uncertainty regarding the allegiances of Filipinos means that he likely became unnerved by the numbers of people coming into the camp, and determined that the growing likelihood of information being leaked to the Japanese was high enough that he needed to depart the camp.

Decker’s fears were well founded, because the camp was indeed raided and burned shortly thereafter.<sup>250</sup> He later received word that the camp was raided the night after he left, but

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<sup>247</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 13.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>249</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 26.

<sup>250</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 1.

was never able to confirm it.<sup>251</sup> He and his three fellow soldiers evaded multiple Japanese patrols on their way Southwest to Olongapo (roughly 30-35 miles, see Figure 5, “Wider map of Central Luzon”), and walked through watery areas in order to avoid leaving any tracks.<sup>252</sup> This had the unfortunate side effect of rendering their feet nearly unusably sore, but they successfully evaded any hostile encounters and took refuge with a Filipino family in yet another critical provision of aid from the people of the Philippines. Japanese patrols were heavy, however, and soon the group of four was forced yet again to live among the Negritos in the mountains in order to evade capture or confrontation.<sup>253</sup> After departing from Fassoth’s camp, shelter and travel were once again inconsistent and daily avoidance became the primary objective.

Eventually, the group decided to split off due to the danger of travelling in larger numbers, which was a tactic used by both Decker and Mailheu in order to avoid discovery by enemy forces. Debate arose over who would comprise the new pairs after the split, so the group decided to draw straws, since it was the most impartial method they could think of.<sup>254</sup> Decker and Bob Campbell were paired through this process, and they later stayed together throughout the rest of the occupation as part of the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit under Lieutenant Conner.<sup>255</sup> While their stay at Fassoth’s camp only lasted for a brief time, it provided the environment that Decker and other guerrillas needed in order to compose themselves and plan ahead, and was some of the most important sources of food and shelter that Decker encountered in the Philippines. The camp was a meeting point of many different groups including runaway soldiers, tribesmen, and even

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 12.

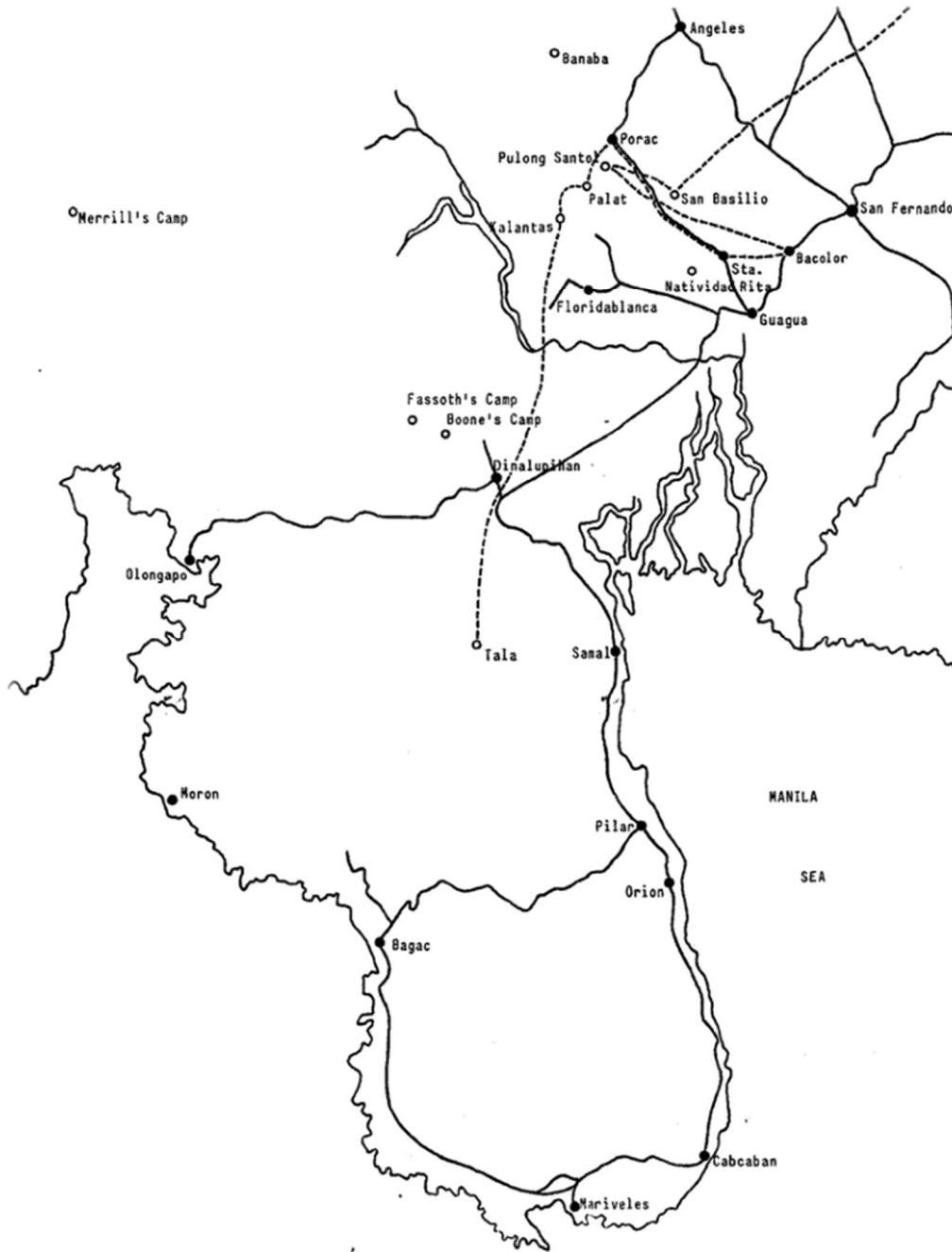
<sup>252</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 28.

<sup>253</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 13.

<sup>254</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 13-14.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 13.

clergy, and played a pivotal role in allowing soldiers to meet contacts and begin organizing guerrilla units like the 155<sup>th</sup>.



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Figure 5. Wider map of Central Luzon, including both Fassothe's camp and Olongapo.

<sup>256</sup> Wayne L. Sanford, ed., "Alternate map of Bataan Peninsula, Central Luzon," from Collection of Bob Mailheau Postwar Letters and Interviews, 1984.

## Formation of the 155<sup>th</sup> Guerrilla Unit

Soon after leaving Fassoth's camp, Decker and Bob Campbell made contact with Lieutenant Conner, who informed them that he was considering creating a dedicated guerrilla unit. Decker's contact with Conner was a major turning point, since it introduced him to a number of fellow guerrillas who he stayed with throughout the rest of the occupation. While it enabled Decker to settle in with a consistent group of soldiers, the struggle to survive remained severe enough that the group's capabilities were limited. While the 155<sup>th</sup> engaged in daily reconnaissance work in order to coordinate with larger U.S. forces, its members were limited by the same environmental ills that had hindered them as individual guerrillas. While the unit's resources were greater than the scope of its core six members, disease still ran rampant, and at times prevented Decker and Mailheau from fully functioning, let alone engaging in risky military reconnaissance. Decker remained with the 155<sup>th</sup> for the rest of the occupation, and despite its limitations, Conner's efforts resulted in a guerrilla unit that was not eliminated or discovered easily by Japanese patrols that persisted until the liberation of the Philippines in fall 1945.

Issues initially arose around the group's formation and scope, not helped by the guerrillas' frequent inability to prove their own rank. When Decker and Campbell first met Conner, Campbell initially questioned Conner's legitimacy as an officer despite Decker's indication that they would have been similarly unable to prove their identities.<sup>257</sup> They ultimately decided to follow Conner to his camp, and finally rendezvoused with a prospective guerrilla unit. Among the group was Bob Mailheau, who Decker quickly formed a close friendship with.<sup>258</sup> While the opening months of 1942 were defined by extraordinary hardship and an almost constant risk of starvation or capture, Decker engaged in much more consistent intelligence work

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<sup>257</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 10.

<sup>258</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 14.



following the creation of Conner's unit, which later became known as the 155<sup>th</sup> Guerrilla Squadron.<sup>259</sup> Though the unit only directly consisted of six men (Conner, Mailheu, Gyovai, Donahey, Decker, and Campbell), the group's membership also functionally extended to allied Negritos and was the most persistent organized group that Decker encountered, lasting until the end of the occupation in 1945. While the 155<sup>th</sup> Guerrilla Squadron could never address all of the risks and problems of the occupation, it did introduce a degree of stability for Decker that had not been available prior to its formation, and was a key contributor to the survival of the men who formed it.

Around the same time that Decker and Bob Campbell made contact with Conner, they attempted to organize Negrito resistance against the Japanese occupation, despite their limited ability to meaningfully communicate.<sup>260</sup> Decker and Campbell taught three Negrito brothers to speak English, which was ultimately the limit of their communication outside of limited Tagalog and sign language.<sup>261</sup> Just as it was forming defense networks throughout surrounding barrios, the 155<sup>th</sup> continued to cooperate with Negrito tribesmen, and they continued to receive guidance, shelter, food, and even medicine from the Negritos. While cooperation with mountain tribesmen may seem like a risky proposition, they were actually one of the more patriotic groups in the Philippines, and Decker stated that while "Some (Filipinos) we can trust, some maybe not... the Negritos... were very primitive people but true-blue and loyal to the Americans."<sup>262</sup> Decker emphatically and consistently vouched for their loyalty, and continued to sporadically live and work among them even after joining Conner's unit. As mentioned previously, Decker was

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>261</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 10.

<sup>262</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 35.

Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 14.

sometimes accused of traveling like a Negrito through the mountains, and the Negritos' methods inspired some of the other travel and survival techniques used by Decker and his fellow guerrillas.<sup>263</sup> U.S. guerrillas and Negrito tribesmen also successfully exchanged medical techniques on multiple occasions, and engaged in medical procedures in order to heal each other.

Decker and Mailheu's role in the 155<sup>th</sup> mostly consisted of intelligence gathering, and their location around Banaba enabled them to do so in the lowlands while relaying information to Conner at the main headquarters.<sup>264</sup> Even with a pool of six men to work with, the group's role never really expanded beyond intelligence, due to both limited resources, an overwhelming military disadvantage, and a refusal by the U.S. military to provide additional weapons. Decker requested weaponry from the U.S. army just prior to the reclamation of the Philippines to prevent Japanese incursions into the nearby mountains, but was denied due to fears of interception by the Hukbalahap group, which had already occurred in April 1942.<sup>265</sup> Decker personally believed that the group could have been capable of completely removing the Japanese presence from the surrounding mountains, but the 155<sup>th</sup> was never granted the opportunity. Considering the consistent reluctance and caution that Decker had exercised throughout the occupation, his claim was likely more than brazen speculation, but nevertheless his guerrilla unit was never given the chance to prove or refute him. The 155<sup>th</sup> continued to gather information until the U.S. invasion of Lingayen Gulf in January 1945, which was the beginning of the U.S. reclamation of the Philippines from Japan.

Despite an increased access to limited medicine, disease and nutritional issues continued to hound the unit. Malaria and dysentery were especially frequent during the rainy seasons, and

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<sup>263</sup> Malcolm Decker, *Essential Commentary Made by Doyle Decker*, 12.

<sup>264</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 36.

<sup>265</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 16.

posed a significant problem alongside the limited mobility that was often caused by intense rainfall.<sup>266</sup> Medicine was limited, and nearly all of the 155<sup>th</sup>'s members incurred a serious ailment throughout their time of operation. Decker and Mailheau both contracted dysentery, incurring additional fatigue, capacity for disease, and a dangerous lack of appetite in an environment with food that was already limited mostly to papayas, bananas, and mangos, with very little access to meat.<sup>267</sup> Mailheau additionally suffered from a tonsil infection, which completely incapacitated him. Fellow member Frank Gyovai nearly perished after contracting pneumonia, and was only saved by a medicinal ritual conducted by Negritos.<sup>268</sup> Nearly all of these diseases once again shifted focus to survival, and severely limited the ability of the guerrillas to even engage in self-defense, let alone conduct reconnaissance. No amount of organization could alter the climate or patterns of disease, and while the members of the 155<sup>th</sup> were lucky enough to survive their afflictions, they did so only after coming dangerously close to death at the hands of their environment.

### **Withdrawal from the Philippines**

Decker's first recollection of returning U.S. forces was September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1944, when he sighted American planes flying overhead as both he and Mailheau struggled with disease.<sup>269</sup> The mere sight of American planes boosted morale, and even though he did not observe or describe any decisive offensive action from the planes, the promise of the U.S. military's return inspired both Decker and Mailheau to continue their efforts of survival and information gathering.<sup>270</sup> The

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<sup>266</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 37.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, 35, 39.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>269</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 16.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

U.S. military's reclamation of the Philippines effectively began about a month afterwards on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944, when a massive invasion force began conducting landings after efforts to conduct air reconnaissance throughout the preceding months.<sup>271</sup> The 155<sup>th</sup>'s other avenue of information regarding military plans was a downed Navy pilot named Henry Hogan, who was also the only pilot that they were able to rendezvous with throughout the occupation.<sup>272</sup> He informed them of the American forces' basic plans, and both where and when they could be expected to arrive.<sup>273</sup>

Due to this information, the 155<sup>th</sup> had ample time to consider and plan around the American invasion of the Philippines in fall 1944, and their main concerns were surviving for the duration of the American reclamation and re-connecting with official U.S. military forces. While the return of American planes brought tremendous hope and promises of liberation, they also provided a newfound sense of danger. Decker expressed fear at the thought of being killed by a friendly American air strike, especially as the U.S. military presence continued to intensify.<sup>274</sup> Air strikes had become nearly daily as 1944 progressed, and the thought of death at the hands of American planes after surviving horrible conditions for nearly two and a half years was as real as fears of death at the hands of Japanese patrols. Luckily, none of the 155<sup>th</sup> were killed by friendly fire, but Decker's fears were well founded as the number of friendly air strikes continued to escalate. When the 155<sup>th</sup> received word that American forces landed at Lingayen Gulf, they began to make preparations to rejoin them while resolving to hold their position until evacuation orders were given.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> John C. Chapin, *Marines in the Liberation of the Philippines* (Washington D.C., 1997), 1-2.

<sup>272</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 16.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>274</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 44.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

Even near the end of the war, conditions were still dangerous enough to necessitate extreme caution. Japanese forces were in the midst of mounting a desperate defense, and continued to resist the American reclamation any way that they could. As military pressure from the U.S. continued to grow, Japanese forces began to destroy fuel dumps in order to hinder the American advance, and considering Japan's critical reliance on former resources, this move was motivated more by desperation than by the resource extraction that their military had previously depended on.<sup>276</sup> Even near the end, however, Japanese patrols were a constant danger for Decker and the men around him. They received orders to avoid Japanese forces at all costs, and took refuge in a Barrio in order to stay the night and reconnect with U.S. forces the next day. The night that they stayed, however, a Japanese patrol entered the barrio, resulting in the death of a Japanese soldier and the wounding of two American guerrillas.<sup>277</sup> While the incident did not result in an American fatality, it was still a brutal reminder that death was determined in a matter of moments, and that even as U.S. forces reclaimed the Philippines, they could not afford to be caught off guard.

After their last encounter with a Japanese patrol, Decker's group managed to successfully rendezvous with American forces near the city of Angeles, which had been a popular spot for soldiers on leave prior to the war. In the process, they departed from their Negrito allies, and Decker described it as a "tearful good-bye" after the two years that they had worked closely with both him and the other members of the 155<sup>th</sup>.<sup>278</sup> The rendezvous with American forces went without incident, and Decker's group caught the attention of friendly planes by waving an American flag tied to a stick, after which they were joined by a squad of infantry.<sup>279</sup> Their time

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>278</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 17.

<sup>279</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 45.

as guerrillas ended just prior to June 1945, though they did not immediately depart from the Philippines. In June 1945, Decker and Mailheu (who somehow managed to stay together throughout the entire process) flew to Manila, then Saipan in the Mariana Islands, and eventually to Honolulu, Hawaii before finally being flown stateside to San Francisco.<sup>280</sup> Finally after reaching stateside, Decker flew to Springfield, Missouri, where he remained until being discharged from the military on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1946.<sup>281</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Decker's struggle was defined by constant necessity and hardship, as well as the consistent support that he received from the Philippines' inhabitants along the way. He joined the U.S. military in order to become financially stable and quietly serve the term of his draft, not to take revenge against Germany or Japan as many did following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Despite his best efforts to prepare for the worst, he was cut off from larger numbers of U.S. troops by an ill-timed excursion rather than any conscious decision to leave, but subsisted with his best efforts. He nearly starved on multiple occasions, contracted a number of harrowing diseases, and struggled to endure the harsh conditions of the Philippines in a climate and landscape that he was unfamiliar with, only saved by cooperation from fellow soldiers and by the generosity of the Filipinos and Negritos who harbored him. Without the planters, tribesmen, and families who willingly gave him food and shelter time and time again, it is extremely unlikely that he would have survived, and the number of times that he escaped contact with Japanese patrols by mere hours was a constant reminder of the pressure that the Japanese government was able to put on guerrillas attempting to resist their rule. His experiences prove that despite

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<sup>280</sup> Decker, *Why I Joined the Army*, 18-19.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

common traits, guerrilla warfare is not a set of absolute tenets, and that the struggle to survive takes priority above weakening the enemy, striking targets, or making plans to instill a new government. Death was a constant threat, and the relationships that he formed with other guerrillas and the inhabitants of Luzon was one of the only advantages that kept him alive.

## ENDURING LESSONS, NEW PERSPECTIVES

Imperial Japanese doctrine correctly assumed that local cooperation and the flow of information were both incredibly important to its expansion, but these factors held true in the Philippines to its detriment.<sup>282</sup> Local cooperation was one of the most important factors contributing to the Luzon guerrillas' continued survival, and examples of this are prevalent throughout Mailheau and Decker's accounts. From Mailheau's rescue and months of aided recovery after escaping the Bataan Death March to the provision of food and housing to Decker in moments of near-madness, the people of the Philippines demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice their own resources and time in order to keep U.S. soldiers alive, and their importance in ensuring that guerrilla conflict persisted should not be understated.<sup>283</sup> Even when civilians in the Philippines were unwilling to directly participate in military conflict, their roles in relaying information and providing shelter allowed groups like the 155<sup>th</sup> to expand far beyond their physical scope and last until the war's end. Without help from individuals and groups like the Fassoths, Filipino volunteer army, Kodario Laxamana, or Negrito tribesmen, guerrilla resistance in Central Luzon would have been far more limited and may very well have expired before 1944, let alone the end of the war.

### **Decker and Mailheau's Experiences**

Decker and Mailheau's accounts repeatedly emphasize one critical part of guerrilla warfare: without civilian cooperation, resistance would have proven impossible. Both men nearly

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<sup>282</sup> Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War*, 204.

<sup>283</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 19-20.

Decker, *Journal Entries*, 13.



died on multiple occasions, and often survived only through the heroism and sacrifices of several families and groups throughout Luzon. Without the contributions that many made during the opening days of the Japanese occupation, Mailheau would most likely have died miles away from the Death March of complete exhaustion, and Decker would have perished from starvation or disease as he struggled to adapt to his environment during the opening weeks of his survival in the jungle. Without the guides who volunteered to help Decker, he and his group may well have wandered aimlessly through Central Luzon until they perished at the hands of an enemy patrol or wasted away from hunger. Finally, without the help that the 155<sup>th</sup> received from the barrio intelligence networks that they created, the group would not have been able to persist for as long as it did or meaningfully expand beyond its membership of six, who working alone would have been extremely limited in their capabilities.

Oftentimes, Decker and Mailheau had more positive experiences interacting with Filipino and Negrito leaders than with other U.S. soldiers. While it was clear that loyalty did not universally shift towards either the U.S. or Japan, the number of times that Decker was able to take refuge in local homes throughout Luzon was remarkable.<sup>284</sup> Mailheau became convinced that the guerrilla movement and Philippine population depended on each other for survival, especially in the wake of his experiences during the Death March. Mailheau and especially Decker received constant aid and direction from sympathetic individuals, and in many cases could not expect the same degree of cooperation from other groups of U.S. soldiers. Tensions ran high during the occupation, and along the way several smaller groups of U.S. guerrillas either quarreled with each other or kept their distance out of a fear of limited supplies or enemy spies. This paranoia caused soldiers to behave irrationally, refusing to link with other groups or even

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<sup>284</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 3, 12-14.

threatening to use force against fellow American guerrillas in desperation.<sup>285</sup> This meant that the Philippine citizenry had a direct role in deciding the fates of several guerrillas, and while they could not be universally depended on, in many cases Decker and Mailheu had little choice.

Uncertainty was widespread in Central Luzon, especially in matters of intelligence and allegiance, which meant that cooperation became extremely valuable. By aiding the resistance effort, the people of the Philippines gave credence to Mailheu's theory that for the islands to continue unhindered by Japanese rule, guerrillas and civilians would have to engage in a mutual relationship of information and aid. While the guerrilla units were able to provide rallying points for anti-Japanese sentiment, civilians directly engaged in the information-gathering that these units needed to counter the superior numbers and organizational reach of the new Philippine-Japanese government.<sup>286</sup> By tracking Japanese movements and military presence through civilian reports, guerrillas were better able to either avoid combat or wait for more favorable circumstances before engaging the enemy, which was invaluable when resources were not widely available to the guerrillas. Civilian intelligence expanded the 155<sup>th</sup>, a group primarily comprised of six American soldiers desperately trying to merely survive in a tropical environment, into a much more extensive organization capable of enduring the length of the occupation and making contact with other local sources of resistance.

The 155<sup>th</sup>'s experiences show that contrary many of the "home turf" perceptions of guerrilla warfare, U.S. soldiers had no formal survival training, and were initially reliant on assistance from sympathetic civilians. Simply put, Decker and the other soldiers around him like Wolf had no idea how to survive in the jungle environment of Central Luzon without proper

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<sup>285</sup> Sanford, ed., *The War Years*, 23.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

backup or guidance, and nearly ran themselves in circles trying to navigate the terrain.<sup>287</sup> Food-gathering also went poorly, and Decker's group nearly starved as they tried to survive with their remaining rations and whatever they could scavenge from the environment.<sup>288</sup> While the Japanese were the invading party, this did not mean that the guerrillas were more familiar with the Philippines' geography or resources. The process was not as simple as asking for survival lessons, but the functions that civilians served as navigators, providers of housing and food, and even soldiers helped Decker survive well beyond the opening weeks of the occupation and eventually operate with some modicum of efficiency in the jungle.<sup>289</sup>

There are many obvious flaws with exclusively using primary accounts to analyze guerrilla warfare, but oftentimes the human core of it is lost in secondary analysis. While there are common markers and definitions, guerrilla units are comprised of human beings. In the case of the 155<sup>th</sup>, members lacked any degree of formal guerrilla training. While the common image of the guerrilla soldier conjures feelings of rugged individuality, strategic raids, and ideological causes, these traits do not effectively apply to the experiences that I have described. Cooperation was necessary, strikes were limited in favor of evasion and intelligence, and the 155<sup>th</sup> did not fight to create a new government or take any administrative control over Central Luzon. The thoughts of fear, isolation, and paranoia present in Decker and Mailheu's accounts are much more direct than in more detached analyses, and while this detachment can make it easier to analyze the big picture of the war in the Philippines, it also communicates the tremendous losses that the U.S. suffered in the defense of Bataan less effectively. Personal accounts are beneficial because they maintain the human elements of history, especially within complex situations like

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<sup>287</sup> Decker, *Journal Entries*, 17.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, 12-13.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Taken with the proper degree of care, they can act as an excellent supplement to the existing history, and there needs to be more personalized accounts of history that are analyzed for their unique content and not merely relegated to historical fiction.

## **Final Conclusion**

Mailheau and Decker's stories reveal that relationships with the local populace are some of the most important elements of guerrilla warfare, and that information can make the difference between success and failure. Relationships with local populations are still incredibly important in modern U.S. military operations, and the 155<sup>th</sup>'s story provides several reasons as to why. The group was directly saved by intervention from local households and families in several instances and continued to build upon and create new relationships throughout the rest of their time in Central Luzon. The contributions that Mailheau and Decker received in the opening weeks were what enabled them to survive and find other like-minded soldiers like Conner and Gyovai, and cooperation with Filipino and Negrito populations was more important than ever after the 155<sup>th</sup> guerrilla unit's formation. Through information networks and cooperation with several groups, the unit enabled all six members with the support that they needed to survive and eventually return home. Decker and Mailheau's experiences were desperate and rife with uncertainty, but through their relationships with the people of Central Luzon, they were able to survive and attest to the sacrifices that were made so that they could live through three years of isolation and conflict.

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