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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 503D PARACHUTE INFANTRY  
REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM IN THE RECAPTURE OF CORREGIDOR ISLAND,  
16 FEBRUARY - 23 FEBRUARY 1945  
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Observation of a Parachute Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION ASSAULTING A  
SMALL PACIFIC ISLAND

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
ORIENTATION.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	4
Dispositions and Plan of the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team.....	5
The Battalion Situation.....	10
The Battalion Plan of Attack.....	10
The Air Movement to Corregidor and Final Preparations for the Attack.....	11
NARRATION.....	12
The Attack on Corregidor Island.....	12
The First Night and Second Day on Corregidor.....	14
The Third Day on Corregidor.....	16
The Third Night and Fourth Day on Corregidor.....	18
The Sixth, and Seventh Day on Corregidor.....	22
The Last Day of Organized Resistance for the 2d Battalion on Corregidor.....	23
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	25
LESSONS.....	27
MAP A Operations in Philippines from 10 November 1944-11 February 1945	
MAP B Manila Bay Area	
MAP C Terrain Map of Corregidor Island	
MAP D Corregidor Operations 16-18 February 1945	
MAP E Corregidor Operations 18-23 February 1945	

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion 503d Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team in an unusual airborne assault on enemy held CORREGIDOR ISLAND, PHILIPPINES, 16 February - 23 February 1945, and the part it played in reopening the PORT of MANILA to Allied shipping.

In order to orient the reader it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

Early in January 1945, the forces of the US Sixth Army were organized and ready to make an invasion of the LUZON ISLAND, PHILIPPINES, in the third and most important phase in the overall plan for the liberation of the PHILIPPINE ISLAND. By the end of 1944, organized resistance had ceased in the LEYTE and MINDORO Operations. Thus the first two phases of the overall liberation of the PHILIPPINE ISLAND were completed. (See Map A) (1)

On 9 January 1945 troops of the US Sixth Army, consisting of I and XIV Corps, hit the beaches in the LINGAYEN GULF Area after a naval, air, and surface bombardment previously unequalled in the Southwest Pacific warfare. The Sixth Army immediately launched a swift and aggressive offensive toward MANILA and finally arrived at the northeastern outskirts of the city on 3 February 1945. (See Map A) (2) On 29 January 1945, troops of the US XI Corps under the strategic direction of the US Eighth Army landed on the west coast of LUZON near SUBIC BAY, with the mission of driving eastward and isolating BATAAN PENINSULA. (See Map A) (3) By

- (1) A-1, p. 1
- (2) A-1, p. 1
- (3) A-1, p. 2

14 February these forces had reached halfway down the east coast of BATAAN with little or no organized resistance. (4)

Meanwhile the final closing of the perimeter encircling MANILA was made with the landing of US Forces on BATANGAS PROVINCE, Southern LUZON, and by the 10 February 1945 these troops were approaching the southern outskirts of the city. (See Map A) (5)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

While the Battle of MANILA raged at its height, the immediate availability of the port facilities for further operations against the Japanese was therefore imperative. (6) One single position presented an opportunity for a brilliant stroke that would insure the possessor complete control of MANILA HARBOR and surrounding islands. Sitting astride the entrance to MANILA BAY and guarding its approaches from the CHINA Seas, stood CORREGIDOR ISLAND, a mass of rock that rises abruptly from the sea. (See Map B) (7)

The Sixth Army plan for this coming attack divided the operation into three separate invasions. For the first invasion, US XI Corps would land in the MARIVELES BAY Area on D-Day; secure a beachhead and establish control over the southern tip of BATAAN. One reinforced infantry battalion would accompany the MARIVELES force to be used in conjunction with the second and third invasions by combined airborne and amphibious landings on CORREGIDOR ISLAND. In the airborne and amphibious phase, D plus 1, the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team, mounted by troops from the US Eighth Army, on MINDORO ISLAND, PHILIPPINES, would drop on CORREGIDOR ISLAND. Control of the 503d would pass to the XI Corps upon completion of the drop. The third and final assault of this plan called for the 3d

- (4) A-1, p. 51
- (5) A-1, p. 2
- (6) A-1, p. 1
- (7) A-3, p. 1

Battalion, 34th Infantry, reinforced, to make an amphibious assault on SAN JOSE BEACH, CORREGIDOR, two hours after the parachute landing. This battalion was to be mounted for its shore-to-shore operation from MARIVELES BAY. (See Map B) (8)

Tactical planning for the assault on CORREGIDOR involved the highest degree of coordination of operations by ground, sea, and air forces.

Japanese experience in 1942 had demonstrated that an amphibious assault on this island could be extremely costly. The means to avoid a costly amphibious assault were available. Also, points of our own choosing to land would make it possible by surprise to seize the key terrain features of the island before the enemy could react to thwart our action. (9)

#### DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 503D PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

On 4 February 1945 the 503d was in the process of integrating, training, and orienting replacements that had recently arrived on MINDORO ISLAND, PHILIPPINES. (10) Early on the 6 February 1945, the Headquarters of the 503d received an alert order for the assault on CORREGIDOR. (11)

Available forces and composition of the 503d at this time were as follows: three infantry battalions; a Headquarters and Headquarters Company; and a Service Company. Each infantry battalion consisted of three rifle Companies and Battalion Headquarters Company. Each rifle Company consisted of three rifle platoons and a mortar platoon. The Battalion Headquarters Company contained a light machine gun platoon, 81-mm mortar platoon, communications platoon, and a medical detachment. The Field Artillery Battalion consisted of: three gun batteries armed with the 75-mm pack howitzer, one battery of .50 caliber machine guns, and a Headquarters and Service Company. The Engineer Company consisted of a Company Headquarters

(8) A-1, p. 49-51

(9) A-1, p. 51

(10) Personal knowledge

(11) A-4, p. 1

Platoon and three engineer support platoons. (12)

On 8 February 1945, a copy of the Sixth Army Field Order Number 48 was received by the 503d RCT, and a thorough staff study of the airborne aspects of the operations immediately followed. Maps and charts were procured, sand tables erected and all battalion and separate company commanders were alerted. (13)

A map study brought out the important features of CORREGIDOR before a decision was made as to the selection of possible drop zones. CORREGIDOR is a tadpoled-shaped island only 7,000 yards long. Its bulbous head, commonly called Topside is 2,300 yards in diameter and surrounded by precipitous cliffs that rise well over 500 feet out of the water. It gradually tapers down to the North and South Docks and is commonly called Bottomside. The distance between the North and South Docks is 500 feet and does not exceed 25 feet above the water's edge. Arising almost straight up from Bottomside to a towering 400 feet is MALINTA HILL, the second most important piece of key terrain on the island. This key terrain feature dominates all the remainder of the island that extends to East Point on the eastern tip of the island. (See Map C) (14)

From this terrain study, three possible drop zones were selected. Of the three, one was a pre-war emergency air strip (KINDLEY FIELD) just north of MONKEY POINT, immediately discarded since landing there would be tactically unsound. The main Jap positions were located in and around MALINTA HILL which completely dominated the air strip. (See Map C) (15)

The other two were on Topside and were respectively designated "A" and "B" drop zones. (16) "A" area was the pre-war parade ground and approximated

(12) Personal knowledge

(13) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Lawson B. Gaskey, Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 5 November 1949

(14) A-6, p. 59

(15) A-7, p. 125

(16) A-7, p. 125

250 yards by 150 yards. (See Map C) "B" area was a small area that formerly passed as a golf course. It was barely 300 by 150 yards and located on the slope of a hill. (See Map C) Aerial photographs of areas further revealed these drop zones to be covered with bomb craters, sharp cement boulders, tin, glass, steel blown from the nearby buildings, and sharp tree limbs sticking skyward. (17)

The natural defensive installation had been further elaborated on by the United States at the time it occupied the island, with at least eight 12-inch disappearing guns, concrete barracks, and a series of underground shops, and tunnels, all reinforced by five feet of concrete and steel. The road network was of the standard military construction, leading to the guns, magazines, quarters, and shops. (18) The pounding that the island had taken from the Jap artillery in 1942, changed the very topography of the island. Hills and hummocks were depressions. Paved roads in many cases were covered with landslides or dotted by craters. (19)

This operation represented one of the most difficult ever carried out by paratroops. (20) The high degree of coordination required by the ground, sea, and air forces had already begun at Sixth Army Headquarters, on 7 February, and on the flagship of the Commander, Amphibious Group Nine on 8 February. The conference aboard the flagship was attended by: the Commanding General, XI Corps; the Commanding General, 54th Troop Carrier Wing; the Commander, Seventh Amphibious Forces; the Commander, Cruisers Seventh Fleet; the Commander, Amphibious Group Nine; G-3, XI Corps; A-3 Fifth Air Force; the Commanding Officer, 503d RCT; and various staff officers assigned to the headquarters and commands

(17) Personal knowledge

(18) A-5, p. 5

(19) Personal knowledge

(20) A-8, p. 2

named. (21) Frequent and personal visits between the Commanding Officer, 503d and Commanding Officer, 317th Troop Carrier Group, afforded extremely close liaison on matters concerning the drop. (22)

To summarize the final plan for the CORREGIDOR Operations, the 151st Regimental Combat Teams would by amphibious assault land in MARIVELES BAY on 15 February 1945. The 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry reinforced by the 3d Platoon, Antitank Company and 3d Platoon Cannon Company of the 34th Infantry would accompany the 151st to MARIVELES and prepare for its shore-to-shore assault on CORREGIDOR. On 16 February 1945, the 503d Regimental Combat Teams would drop on CORREGIDOR, secure a perimeter for the following airborne drops, and support by fire the amphibious landing. (23)

On 12 February 1945 all planning had been completed and all units received the Regimental Command Teams Field Order Number 9. (24) Using terrain models, aerial photos and sand tables all troops were briefed on the mission. Detailed instructions on each phase of the operation was clearly defined. Reconnaissance flights by all jumpmasters were flown over CORREGIDOR. Major General Marquat, Artillery Officer on CORREGIDOR prior to its capture, personally addressed the officer and men of the 503d Regimental Combat Team and further elaborated on exacting details of the terrain and important locations. (25)

The regiment planned to have the 3d Battalion, reinforced by Battery C, 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, Company C, 161st Airborne Engineers, one platoon of Battery D (.50 Caliber Machine Guns), 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and elements of the Regimental Headquarters Company make the initial drop on CORREGIDOR at 0830 hours on

- (21) A-6, p. 57
- (22) Personal knowledge
- (23) A-1, p. 51
- (24) A-4, p. 2
- (25) Personal knowledge

16 February 1945, and secure both "A" and "B" drop zones for the second and third airborne lifts. They would also support by fire the amphibious landing which would follow shortly after the first drop. (See Map C)

The 2d Battalion, reinforced by Battery B, 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, Service Company, Platoon Battery D (.50 Caliber Machine Guns); 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and elements of Regimental Headquarters Company constituted the second lift, would drop on "A" and "B" fields at 1240 hours on 16 February 1945, and upon landing would relieve the 3d Battalion of perimeter responsibility to enable it to make contact with the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry. (See Map C) The third lift consisting of the 1st Battalion, Battery A, 462d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the remainder of Regimental Headquarters Company were to leave MINDORO ISLAND at 0700 hours 17 February 1945 and drop on "A" and "B" fields upon arrival. (26)

Each parachutist was to carry one unit of ammunition for his individual weapon, two canteens of water, and four meals of K ration on his person for the drop. (27)

All resupply would be by aircraft until replaced by amphibious resupply as soon as contact was completed between airborne and amphibious forces. Our major supply problem was water, as no information was available as to water supply condition existing on the island. (28)

The regiment adopted a flight pattern of two columns of single C-47 type aircraft in trail, one column over each field, each plane to make a minimum of two or three passes, dropping a stick of 6 to 8 men on each pass. The drop point for each field was a distinct ground feature, and on the green light "Go" signal from the pilot, each jumpmaster was

- (26) A-9, par 3
- (27) A-9, Administrative Officer
- (28) A-4, Supply Annex

to count three seconds and jump. (29)

To further eliminate the vulnerability that is always present immediately after the jump, mortars, Browning automatic rifles, and light machine guns were jumped on the individual person. (30)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

After the battalion had been alerted for the CORREGIDOR mission, each jumpmaster was required to make a practice spot jump from an altitude of 500 feet, followed with unit assembly problems on the ground. (31)

Since the regimental plan of attack did not call for the 2d Battalion to make the initial parachute drop, and in order to expedite the relief of the 3d Battalion after dropping, Major Lawson B. Caskey, Battalion Commander, made arrangements to have his S-3 and Company Executive Officers drop with the initial wave in order to expedite the relief of the 3d Battalion upon arrival. (32)

Morale was extremely high throughout the battalion. On the night before the battle, captured Japanese movies showing the fall of CORREGIDOR in 1942 and the insulting treatment of the American prisoners of war and American flag were shown the troops. Aside from the sentimental aspects of the retaking of "The Rock", the urge for revenge surged in every man.

#### THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK. (33) (See Map C)

Since little was known of the actual enemy's strength or dispositions other than the general estimation of 850 troops, the battalion commander was well aware and ready for the changing situation that could confront the Regimental Combat Team Commander after the parachute drops had been made.

(29) A-3, par 7

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) Personal knowledge

(32) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Lawson B. Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander, 5 November 1949

(33) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Lawson B. Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander, 5 November 1949

All unit commanders were warned to allow for great flexibility in their plans and be ready to change on a moments notice. (34) Immediately after dropping on "B" field, Company D, reinforced, would assume responsibility for the northeast and eastern sector of the regimental perimeter, and continue to "mop up" in and around the immediate area. (See Map C) E Company would drop on "A" field, and assume responsibility for the northern and northwestern portion of the perimeter on Topside, and be prepared to attack JAMES RAVINE on order. (See Map C) (35) Company F would drop on "B" field and cover that portion of the perimeter on Topside between E and D Company's flanks. Upon attachment of supporting fires, they would attack and secure Wheeler Battery. (See Map C) (36) Battalion Headquarters Company would establish the Command Post and Aid Station in the long barracks on Topside. (See Map C) (37) The Battalion Communication Platoon, upon landing, would enter into the regimental net and at the same time establish the battalion net. With the uncertainty of the situation, no attempt would be made to wire the companies with battalion. The only means of communication available at that time would be the radio and messenger. The aerial resupply of water being the only known assurance of water, all personnel were warned against the danger of consuming the majority of the water contained in their two canteens.

#### THE AIR MOVEMENT TO CORREGIDOR AND FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK

Preparations for the assault on CORREGIDOR had begun as early as 23 January 1945, when twenty 13th Air Force B-24s dropped one hundred and eighty 250-pound general purpose bombs on the island and sixteen 5th Air Force A-20s bombed and strafed the island. From 23 January on, the

- (34) Personal knowledge
- (35) A-3, overlay 4
- (36) A-3, overlay 4
- (37) A-3, overlay 4

tempo of the bombing increased steadily up to the day of the actual drop. By the day of the airborne assault, 16 February 1945, a total of 1,012 sorties had dropped 3,128 tons of bombs. (38)

On 13 February elements of a US Navy Task Force, consisting of five cruisers, six destroyers, motor torpedo boats, and other vessels began shelling MARIVELES HARBOR and CORREGIDOR ISLAND. The shelling of CORREGIDOR was directed against pillboxes, water line caves, tunnels, and visible gun installations. The shelling continued through the landings made at MARIVELES on 15 February and CORREGIDOR on 16 February 1945. (39)

Early on 16 February 1945, twenty-four 5th Air Force B-24s hit gun positions on CORREGIDOR with nine hundred and sixty 260-pound fragmentation bombs. One minute after that had lifted, eleven B-25s bombed and strafed, dispersing eighty 100-pound bombs, and 1,592 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition. Simultaneously, twenty A-20s bombed and strafed both "A" and "B" fields. At 0830, just one minute after the last bombing and strafing was lifted, the first aircraft from MINDORO ISLAND started to discharge the paratroopers of the first lift. As the C-47s circled over the island and continued to drop their passengers, A-20s bombed and strafed the eastern half of the island. (40)

At 1030 hours, the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, reinforced, began storming the beaches at Bottomside under heavy enemy fire. (See Map C) (41)

#### NARRATION

##### THE ATTACK ON CORREGIDOR ISLAND

At 1240 hours with the element of surprise no longer existing, troops

(38) A-6, p. 59

(39) A-6, p. 60

(40) A-6, p. 60

(41) A-1, p. 53

of the 2d Battalion 503d led by Major Lawson B. Caskey, Battalion Commander, began dropping on "A" and "B" fields over a murderous hail of enemy ground fire. Grazing enemy fire covered both drop zones and surrounding areas. The stunned Japanese, apparently partially recovered from the initial surprise shock, started to leave their holes and caves in a fanatical manner to shoot or bayonet the descending troopers. (42) As parachutist hit the ground with a thud, one was never sure whether he was going to be capable of walking away from the landing. Many of the radios that were fastened to the legs of the troopers for the descent were smashed beyond use. Thirsty and hot, many started to consume large quantities of water from their limited supply.

The counterattacking Japs started towards Topside from all directions. By 1500 hours, with the assistance of the 3d Battalion's fire power, the 2d Battalion swiftly effected the relief as planned and established the regimental perimeter around Topside. (See Map C) (43)

At 1600 hours Company F reported to battalion that it was receiving heavy machine gun fire from the vicinity of Wheeler Battery. At this point, Private Lloyd G. McCarter of F Company crossed thirty yards of open terrain under intense enemy fire, and at point-blank range silenced a machine gun with hand grenades. (See Map C) (44)

Out in front of Company F's perimeter, dangling in their suspended harness which had caught in trees, were those few unfortunate parachutist who will never know what it was like to make that final landing. Scattered troopers, who had drifted from the drop zones, could be observed fighting their way back to rejoin the perimeter. Due to the lateness of the day, Major Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander, ordered the attack on Wheeler Battery and JAMES RAVINE cancelled for the time being, and instead

(42) Personal knowledge

(43) Personal knowledge

(44) A-10, p. 364

ordered positions to be consolidated for the evening. (45)

No logical conclusions could be arrived at as to how the Japanese defenders would attempt to destroy the invaders, or keep them from firmly establishing themselves on Topside. However, several captured prisoners revealed that CORREGIDOR was commanded by Captain Ijn Itagaki of the Japanese Navy. He had approximately 6,000 assorted troops to man its defense. (46) Later, captured staff personnel related how Captain Itagaki, after being informed of the approaching amphibious assault left his Command Post to go to an Observation Post near BREAKWATER POINT. There he ran into a group of paratroopers and in the ensuing skirmish the Japanese Commander was killed. (47) It was further learned that Captain Itagaki had been directed to look into the antiairborne defense of the island. He then announced to his subordinate commanders that an airborne landing would not take place because it could not take place. All these incidents added immeasurably to the confusion of the enemy. (48)

#### THE FIRST NIGHT AND SECOND DAY ON CORREGIDOR

At dusk the enemy could be heard and seen advancing toward Topside. Each and every trooper had heard of or experienced those well known night infiltration tactics of the Japanese. They also knew that the firing of weapons, unnecessarily, would bring on an attack in force.

About 2300 hours that evening the expected infiltration of the enemy started all through the battalion perimeter. The first firing on the infiltration took place in F Company's sector and was immediately answered with a volley of enemy grenades on attempts of penetration. The enemy mortar shells started to land on top of the buildings housing perimeter troops. The Nips were crawling all over the slopes not more

(45) Personal knowledge

(46) A-7, p. 129

(47) A-3, p. 9

(48) A-7, p. 129

than 25 yards to the front. The men did not have to be told to hold at all cost. Movement toward Topside would bring down a friendly preparation that would be sure death to all who attempted to move in it.

Much movement could be heard and seen in the vicinity of Wheeler Battery which was located directly in front of F Company's position. There was no doubt that the enemy was reinforcing this key piece of terrain. (See Map C) (49)

On the morning of the 17th, the regimental commander decided not to drop the 1st Battalion as planned. Instead they would fly over the island as scheduled, drop their equipment bundles and supplies and after landing on BATAAN, move amphibiously to CORREGIDOR, (50) to lessen casualties that would result from an Airborne landing.

At 0830 hours, Major Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander ordered F Company to proceed with their mission of taking Wheeler Battery. (See Map C) (51) By 0900 hours the 3d Platoon, F Company with supporting fires advanced rapidly toward the battery which was located about 50 yards in front of and slightly below their perimeter. All supporting fires were lifted just as the platoon started on top of Wheeler Battery. At the same time the Japs started to emerge from the countless openings screaming and firing with fierce determination to chase the attackers back. It became almost useless to try to hold what had been gained. As one Nip would fall another would emerge to take his place. Slow but sure the 3d Platoon was forced to withdraw. The overwhelming enemy force had killed the platoon leader and wounded seven before the last man had withdrawn to the safety of the perimeter. (52)

E Company's attack on JAMES RAVINE started on schedule at 0930 hours,

- (49) Personal knowledge
- (50) A-8, p. 12
- (51) Personal knowledge
- (52) A-11, p. 19

but were forced to withdraw when the leading element was suddenly enveloped and cut off from the rest of the company. The combined efforts of the 81-mm mortar platoon, a section of light machine guns and the assistance of naval shelling finally freed the trapped force. It wasn't until 1610 that afternoon that the last man was able to rejoin his company. (See Map C)

At 1630 hours on 17 February the 1st Battalion landed amphibiously on Bottomside under heavy fire coming from caves located along the water's edge. The entire beach remained under fire until offshore destroyers moved in and silenced the enemy guns. (53)

No exact figure for the battalion's dead or enemy killed are available, but the Regimental Command Team's total to date were 29 killed in action or died of wounds while counted enemy dead was announced at 364. (54)

(SEE ON BOTTOM OF PAGE)

#### THE THIRD DAY ON CORREGIDOR

On the morning of the 15th the 1st Battalion took over the 2d Battalion's Southern Sector, thus making it possible for the battalion commanders to use larger forces in a more aggressive manner to clear their sectors. (See Map D) (55)

By 0700 hours with the 2d Battalion perimeter firmly established in the northwest sector, Major Caskey lost no time in ordering the assault on Wheeler Battery and JAMES RAVINE once again.

Due to the ineffectiveness of air strikes against Wheeler Battery's sunken position, the position had to be taken by the infantry using a system of securing and sealing each entrance or outlet. Under the support of heavy machine gun fire and 75-mm howitzer fire, a reinforced rifle platoon from D Company assaulted the battery swiftly and with a

(53) A-8, p. 12

(54) A-2 overlay 4

(55) Personal knowledge

SEE ABOVE

In most cases only first aid was administered to the wounded and injured. The Portable Surgical Unit attached to the 503D was not able to run the gauntlet from Bottomside to Topside. Finally, on 18 February 1945 the medical unit was able to reach Topside to supplement the overburdened medical situation.

determination to stay this time. Again the sons-of-heaven emerged from their holes only to be met with hot fire from our flame throwers. The blast of ignited liquid shot into a passage way by a flame thrower gave off a back blast that almost inflicted serious casualties on our own troops. Our preponderance of fire started to force the Nips to rout. Apparently realizing their defeat they withdrew into the darkness of the battery. Sealing and blocking the entrances D Company reorganized their positions on Battery Wheeler. Over twenty-four enemy dead were counted and only minor wounds inflicted to our forces. (See Map D) (56)

Before the day ended we had learned to shoot the unignited liquid from the flame throwers into the caves and with a white phosphorus grenade cause it to ignite. This action set the pace for the day. The order of the day by Major Caskey was: "Drive the Japs from your areas. The battalion objective is to establish a new perimeter at contour level 250 by 1600 hours." (See Map D) (57)

Following an air attack against JAMES RAVINE by F-47s loaded with Napalm and 1,000 pound demolition bombs, E Company, with two platoons abreast, moved out to capture JAMES RAVINE. Again the Nips retaliated with a mass of impenetrable machine gun and mortar fire, forcing a halt to the advance. Rather than taking the risk of receiving a large number of casualties at this time, the battalion commander ordered a halt and instructed E Company to contour level 250 and <sup>to</sup> be prepared to tie-in with the battalion perimeter for the night. (58)

Meanwhile D Company advanced toward contour 250 under the support of a heavy artillery concentration. With the aid of attached flame thrower

- (56) Personal knowledge
- (57) Personal knowledge
- (58) A-11, p. 20

teams and engineer demolition crews they advanced rapidly toward Battery Cheney. (See Map D)

Sniper fire was heavy but not effective enough to slow down their advance. The infantrymen soon learned to leave the closing of caves and demolition work to the closely following engineer demolition teams. Up to this point they had a tendency to waste too much time blocking the entrances to caves and as a result slowed down their advance and gave the enemy sufficient time to reorganize. By 1600 hours that afternoon Company D had reached contour level 250 and set up their Command Post in the vicinity of Wheeler Point. (See Map E) (59)

Company F with the aid of air and artillery cover also moved rapidly toward contour 260 systematically destroying pillboxes and snipers located in the many caves. This system which consisted of a base of fire being laid down while a rifle squad, armed with Tommy guns and automatic rifles, would advance far enough to throw hand grenades and white phosphorus into the openings of the emplacement, proved to be very effective and afforded rapid advancement. Late that afternoon, Company F reached contour level 250 and after tying-in with D and E Companies settled down for the night in their fox holes. (See Map E) (60)

During F Company's advance to their objective, Private McCarter continually pushing ahead with the leading element had personally accounted for six more enemy dead. (61)

#### THE THIRD NIGHT AND FOURTH DAY ON CORREGIDOR

By 1600 hours 18 February the battalion perimeter had extended from Wheeler Point to JAMES RAVINE, a distance of about 2,000 yards. All three rifle companies on line, and as a reserve the 81-mm mortar platoon,

(59) Personal knowledge

(60) Personal knowledge

(61) A-10, p. 364

elements of the battalion medical detachment, and clerks and supply personnel. D Company with their Command Post near Wheeler Point, tied-in their left flank with the 1st Battalion 503d. E Company located in the vicinity of JAMES RAVINE, tied-in their right flank with the 3d Battalion 503. (See Map E) (62)

Before dark automatic weapons were placed in sectors to cover the most likely avenues of approach into the perimeter. Mortars and artillery barrages were registered on those areas that were masked by slopes and cliffs. Commanding the high ground and being able to look down in the direction of the enemy, there was no doubt that the perimeter could hold under any type of attack that the enemy would attempt. (63)

At 1800 hours that evening, Major Caskey and his staff started out on one of their many and frequent inspections of the company positions. The usual reports of enemy movement directly in front of the perimeter was received at all positions and as a result all personnel were alerted for an expected counterattack that night.

About 2300 hours that evening the Japs started, what was to be their first organized attack, in any force, by letting off a series of explosions in the underground positions in D Company's sector. (64)

Lieutenant Joseph A. Turinsky, D Company Commander, called battalion at about 0200 hours on 19 February and reported unusual activity below and in front of his position had been noted, and requested illumination flares to light the area. Upon the battalion commander's request, the naval supporting forces commenced to drop star shells in the area. (65) The light revealed a large body of Japanese moving in between D and F Companies and startled them into a fanatical attack. The star shells

(62) A-3, overlay number 12

(63) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Caskey, 5 November 1949

(64) Personal knowledge

(65) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Lawrence S. Browne, S-3, 2d Battalion, 15 June 1949

were requested to continue until ordered stopped. The Japs turned and started to attack D Company from the rear. The first report of contact with the enemy came from D Company's right flank. Then reports were received that penetrations were being attempted throughout the entire company sector. Immediately afterwards the attack materialized and communications, both wire and telephone between D Company and battalion ceased. It was suicide to attempt to reinforce D Company. Nips could now be seen moving everywhere. The artillery and mortar fires laid down did not seem to stop them. (See Map E) (66)

A report from F Company revealed minor attempts of penetration of their perimeter. During the conversation, heavy fire broke out on F Company's left flank. Private McCarter seeing a large force of Japs attempting to avoid F Company's fire, moved swiftly to an exposed position and in blocking their passageway drew their fire and forced the Japs to attack his position. Several men from Company F moved over to assist McCarter. The fanatical and superior force wounded McCarter and two other men. Out of ammunition, McCarter again drew the enemy fire as he exposed himself to get the much needed ammunition. Upon return he was wounded again but still continued to shout encouragement to all around him to carry on the fight. This continued until the break of dawn when the company Commander of F Company could reinforce McCarter's position. Though wounded and weak McCarter stayed on until the enemy ceased to attack. Over 30 enemy dead could be counted in front of the position. For this heroic deed Private Lloyd McCarter was later awarded the Medal of Honor. (67)

Just about the time F Company was penetrated the 2d Battalion Command

(66) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Browne, S-3, 2d Battalion, 15 June 1949

(67) A-10, p. 364

Post was showered with enemy hand grenades. (68) The Nips were all over the place.

At the break of dawn the Navy ceased firing the star illuminating shells. Radio contact came in from D Company, and the Executive Officer stated, "that the enemy attack was stopped, but not without a great deal of loss; there were many dead and wounded: and that reinforcements were needed immediately if they were to hold." He further requested additional first aid men and blood plasma. Major Caskey then told D Company to "hold at all cost". (69)

By 0630, a reinforced platoon, consisting of the battalion surgeon, engineers, mortarmen, and clerks, proceeded by a close pattern of supporting artillery fire, began to fight their way to D Company. (See Map E) By the time this relief had reached D Company, over 150 Japanese were counted laying dead along the trail. (70)

The counterattack had been stopped at approximately 1100 hours. He ordered D Company to secure its present position and prepare to move back to the 500 yard contour perimeter.

Though we had accounted for over 200 enemy killed, our casualties had been heavy. <sup>Charles H.</sup> Captain/Bradford, the Battalion Surgeon, performed the almost impossible job of caring for the sick and wounded in the midst of heavy fighting and hand-to-hand skirmishes. There were between 15 and 20 stretcher cases to be evacuated to the aid station on Topside. Our casualties were ten killed and twenty wounded. Among the dead were the Commander of D Company, his radio operator, and messenger. (71)

Major Caskey, in remembering the Regimental Combat Team Commander's terse operation order of "Clear the damn Nips from your area," immediately

(68) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Lawson B. Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander, 5 November 1949

(69) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Lawson B. Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander, 5 November 1949

(70) Personal knowledge; statement of Major Lawson B. Caskey, 2d Battalion Commander, 5 November 1949

(71) A-12, p. 2

ordered E Company to take JAMES RAVINE. It was 0900 that same morning, when E Company advanced into the ravine. Passing through three unoccupied machine gun positions, the leading element suddenly opened fire on a mob of Japs, streaming out of the entrance to the underground barracks located in the ravine. It was a slaughter. Sixty-five Nips were killed before they stopped coming. (72) Placing five gallon cans of Napalm and demolition charges into the ventilation shafts and tunnel entrance, a violent explosion was set off and fire ended all resistance in that area.

Patrols were dispatched to locate immediately an electrical mine control system which controlled all mines along the beaches and off-shore. At 1620 hours that afternoon the control system was found and destroyed. Fourteen Japs and one man from E Company were killed in the skirmish that occurred during the destruction. (73)

Late in the afternoon of 19 February, Major Caskey ordered all companies to move back to contour level 500. Weary and tired from the lack of sleep the gallant men who had held their own against overwhelming odds moved back to the positions that they had occupied two days before. (See Map E) (74) It was felt that the enemy had recovered from his initial surprise and the thin and expanded perimeter invited attack.

#### THE FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH DAY ON CORREGIDOR

The preceding night had been fairly quiet and early the next morning a systematic clean-up of our area was begun. The same pattern consisting of platoon and company sized patrols, supported by bazookas, flame throwers, demolitions, artillery, air and naval support, moved out from the battalion perimeter as far as each day would allow, and return to the perimeter before nightfall. The Japs, unable to organize, continued to fight in isolated groups. (75)

(72) A-11, p. 20-21

(73) A-3, p. 21

(74) Personal knowledge

(75) Personal knowledge

Because of the small area of the perimeter, it was possible to assemble the Company Commanders in the evening to plan and coordinate the following day's operation. (76)

As the patrols reached the beach areas, it was impossible to get at the enemy emplacements half-way up the cliffs that rose to a height of several hundred feet. The cliffs were sheer and jagged and afforded the enemy excellent cover as well as concealment. At the base of the cliffs, the beach would extend fifty feet in certain areas, to impassable areas in others. One of the battalion officers would board the destroyers to point out enemy positions. The destroyers would move in and fire point blank into the emplacements. Each salvo would send hundreds of tons of rocks roaring into the waters below. (77)

At the end of the seventh day, strong and aggressive patrol action finally enabled all companies to reach the water's edge in their sectors. (See Map E)

From captured prisoners, S-2 learned between 175 and 200 Japs were holed-up in the vicinity of Searchlight and Wheeler Point. This force was the remains of the Endo Force that penetrated 2d Battalion's perimeter on the night of the 18th. (78)

At dawn of the 22d, Captain Lawrence S. Brown, S-3, led Captain Hudson C. Hill, E Company Commander and his reconnaissance group to a vantage point overlooking Wheeler Point. From there they observed the terrain and made plans for E Company's attack on the 23d.

#### THE LAST DAY OF ORGANIZED RESISTANCE FOR THE 2D BATTALION ON CORREGIDOR

Early on the 23d, E Company moved through C Company, 1st Battalion

(76) Personal knowledge

(77) Personal knowledge

(78) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Lawrence S. Browne, S-3, 2d Battalion, 5 June 1949.

to clean out the last enemy strong hold at Wheeler and Searchlight Point. With a five minute softening of the objective by destroyers and an air strike by the air cover, E Company attacked and worked to a position around Searchlight Point reaching Wheeler Point with only five casualties and 59 enemy killed. (79)

As scheduled, the destroyers let loose with a salvo at 1255 hours that afternoon and pulverized the emplacements in Wheeler Point, followed by E Company's immediate attack. Screaming, charging, Japanese hurled themselves at the attackers. One Jap Officer, swinging his shining saber, mortally wounded one of E Company's men, Lieutenant Emory Ball, in rushing to the wounded man's assistance, caught a burst of machine gun fire in the chest and stomach. Staggering back toward the rear of the skirmish he fell in his blood stained tracks and died. (80)

E Company in a final effort killed the remaining Japanese and by 1600 hours announced Wheeler Point secured.

At 1700 hours on the 23d, the Regimental Combat Team Commander ordered the 2d Battalion to take over the perimeter of all of Topside, and by nightfall, Major Caskey, redispersed his battalion to cover the western half of the island. (See Map E) (81)

On 2d March 1945, the operation was officially closed when the Rock Force Commander, Colonel George M. Jones, presented fortress CORREGIDOR to the Commander-in-Chief, General Douglas MacArthur. (82)

To sum up the results of this battle:

This operation clearly showed that parachute troops could be used under the most adverse condition. Even though the disadvantages of the vertical envelopment outweighed the advantages in the preliminary

(79) Personal knowledge and statement of Captain Hudson C. Hill, E Company Commander, 8 July 1946

(80) Personal knowledge of Hudson C. Hill, Captain, E Company, Commander, 8 July 1946

(81) A-8, p. 16

(82) A-4, p. 4

planning stages, the Japanese experience in 1942 had demonstrated that an amphibious assault on this island could be extremely costly. By landing on terrain of our own choosing, we could surprise and defeat the enemy before he was capable of reorganization. (83)

The enemy, by completely ruling out the possibility of an airborne assault in his defensive plans, enabled the 503d to do in 18 days what he had taken 4 months to do. His losses of 4,497 killed, in comparison to our 209 killed during the same period, showed the high caliber of leadership, and aggressiveness that can be obtained from the American soldier by proper training and education. (84) CORREGIDOR is a shining example of perfect teamwork between air, land and naval forces. The re-taking of "The Rock" could not have been possible without the perfect coordination and planning of all three services.

By General Order Number 112, Headquarters US Army Forces in the Far East, dated 8 May 1945, the 503d Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team was cited for outstanding performance of duty in action on CORREGIDOR ISLAND and under the provisions of Section IV, War Department, Circular Number 333, 1943, awarded the Distinguished Unit Badge.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

Re-supply on CORREGIDOR was of no problem to this regiment. Air superiority allowed complete freedom of movement by the re-supplying aircraft in sufficient quantities. The dropping of the attacking forces on top of their objective allowed the over-loading of the individual soldier with sufficient food, ammunition and water for the first few days of combat without hindering his combat efficiency. However, the

(83) A-1, p. 50

(84) A-1, p. 55

immediate treatment of the wounded and the care of the sick and injured could have been expedited by the dropping of additional surgeons and medical personnel in the initial parachute drop. As it was, the organic medical units were over-taxed and unable to properly care for the casualties sustained in the first few days of the operation. The Portable Surgical Unit was not able to reach Topside until the 18th February, and the immediate evacuation of the dead and wounded did not hinder the flow of these needed medical supplies and equipment forward.

## 2. THE OBJECTIVE

The mission assigned this regiment in the re-taking of CORREGIDOR was the perfect example of the type mission conceived by the founders of American airborne warfare. The early concepts of airborne warfare were to drop in the heart of the enemy after a preliminary bombing by air arms, expand and destroy the interior arrangements of the enemy's defensive positions and force a union and effect contact with advancing ground forces. The element of surprise was completely demonstrated by the fact that the enemy could never reorganize his forces sufficiently to make the necessary counterattacks in any size. By immediate and aggressive expansion, the troopers were able to seize the necessary key terrain without any major resistance. The bold exploitation and advancement by the 2d Battalion forced the large number of enemy in their sector to go underground and seek security in the tunnels below.

## 3. COMMUNICATIONS

Where hard landings are anticipated, additional radios should be allotted to company sized units. In many cases, the 536 radio carried on the individual jumpers were damaged beyond use during the parachute landing, thus leaving certain elements without communication. The only communication left between the platoon leaders and company commander is messenger, and unnecessary movement in and around the drop zones tend to add confusion to the already fast moving situation.

#### 4. ENEMY POSITIONS

The Japanese Commander was guilty of a great error in announcing to his subordinate commanders that an airborne landing could not take place. This seafaring naval officer could only envision mass amphibious landings and accordingly failed to extend his defense in depth to the natural defensive terrain. Had he occupied Topside, the airborne and amphibious assaults might not have been as successful. As it was, the enemy was forced to leave the natural defensive position and attempt fanatical disorganized attacks to regain control of the high ground.

#### 5. THE 2D BATTALION'S CLEARING OF THEIR ASSIGNED SECTOR

The successful clearing of the southwestern sector of Topside was made possible only by the aggressive and courageous spirit of the attacking forces. In digging out the "gopherlike" Japanese, they were forced to burn and route him from the hundreds of caves and tunnels dotting their sector. The systematic method of attacking the enemy with daily patrols from a strongly established perimeter, proved very effective. Counterattacks against this close perimeter had practically ceased, and it further allowed the maximum utilization of forces at all times.

#### LESSONS

1. Simplicity of a plan will lead to a more aggressive execution of that attack plan.
2. Additional medical personnel should be attached to airborne units where temporary isolation from regular medical support is expected.
3. Inflexibility and refusal to deviate from sound practical principles have no part in an airborne commander's plans.
4. During the assault on fortified positions, infantry troops must be taught to continue their advance without wasting too much effort in demolishing enemy positions.
5. The post of a defending commander during an airborne assault

should be at his command post. He must depend upon his outpost and warning stations for information.

6. Once the element of surprise has been gained, a vigorous and aggressive exploitation of this advantage must be continued.

7. Parachutist should be taught to conserve their water supply immediately after a parachute jump.

8. Parachutist can be used successfully to assist in amphibious landings.

9. Perfect coordination can be achieved through proper planning and training.

10. Adequate communication facilities are essential to achieve unity of effort and command.