

Executing the Double Retrograde Delay:

The 194th Tank Battalion in action during the Luzon Defensive Campaign 1941-42

by Major William J. VandenBergh

As the United States' participation in World War II loomed in 1941, much of America's early fighting strength came from the U.S. Army National Guard. The 194th Tank Company was one of them.

Arriving at Fort Lewis, Washington, on 22 February 1941, the 194th Tank Company reorganized with two other National Guard tank companies to form the 194th Tank Battalion. Company A from Brainerd, Minnesota; Company B from St. Joseph, Missouri; and Company C from Salinas, California, were relieved of their prewar assignment to the 34th (Minnesota), 35th (Missouri), and 40th (California) Infantry Divisions.¹ The 194th Tank Battalion, commanded by Major Ernest B. Miller, now joined her sister National Guard battalions, the 191st, 192d, and 193d for training.

The American defensive plan had been set for several years. The task of the Philippine army and U.S. Army ultimately would be to defend Manila Bay with the purpose of denying Japan its use, and to allow for reinforcement from the Territory of Hawaii.² The Philippine Division would assume these tasks. Manila Bay could only be denied Japan by occupying the Bataan Peninsula and the Island of Corregidor, which guarded the harbor.³ The plan was to defend for up to 6 months, until relieved by the U.S. Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor. The final reorganization was converting the Philippine Division into five separate commands — the North Luzon Force, South Luzon Force, Visayan-Mindanao Force, Reserve Force, and Harbor Defenses of Manila. The 194th Tank Battalion was allotted to the South Luzon Force, while the 192d Tank Battalion was reassigned to the North Luzon Force.⁴

Intelligence reports confirmed that Japanese forces had made several small landings on Luzon between 9 and 10 December 1941.⁵ Unable to introduce

U.S. combat power against these remote sites and unwilling to divide forces, U.S. forces could do nothing but wait for Japanese troops to arrive.

U.S. forces, along with the Philippine army, planned to occupy multiple consecutive defense lines oriented from west to east on Luzon. The tactical plan was to delay along these lines until reaching their final line that ran from west to east along the Bataan Peninsula. By 1800 hours on 12 December, a warning order was received from Tank Group Headquarters directing the movement of the battalion toward the strategic Calumpit Bridge.⁶ The Calumpit Bridge was the decisive point of the campaign. Located at the intersection of the road to Bataan, its capture by Japanese forces would leave friendly forces stranded. Movement began late in the evening. The reconnaissance platoon would lead the way. The battalion had over 160 vehicles, consisting of 54 tanks, 19 half-tracks, and the rest were jeeps, trucks, reconnaissance cars and a few motorcycles.⁷ Night movement was difficult and fraught with danger. Civilian traffic clogged the roads and several tanks and trucks went off the road. The battalion finally reached its position at 0600 hours on 13 December 1941. The tankers were mentally and physically exhausted, while their uniforms were soaking wet from humidity and perspiration. Lieutenant Ted Spaulding and the reconnaissance platoon had done its job well. Captain Charles Canby, the battalion executive officer, and Captain L.E. Johnson, the S3, led quartering parties to their battle positions. Miller lit a cigar and lay down on the steps of a local elementary school, and within seconds he was asleep. He was awakened 10 minutes later by Captain Spoor, the S2, who was incredulous when he observed Miller sleeping with a cigar protruding from his mouth. Miller, Canby, and Spoor mounted two half-tracks from the reconnaissance pla-



toon and departed for Tank Group Headquarters.⁸

The battalion maintained these positions until 24 December 1941. On 22 December, Miller was ordered to Manila to meet with Brigadier General James R.N. Weaver. Weaver, newly promoted, informed Miller that his Provisional Tank Group Headquarters was relocating to Fort Stotsenburg so that it could support either the North Luzon or South Luzon Force. Miller was ordered to withdraw his battalion and support the North Luzon Force in opposing the landings that had just occurred in the Linagayen Gulf. The following day, the battalion was ordered more specifically to the Agno River near the town of Carmen. Company C, along with a maintenance section, would be detached and left with the South Luzon Force.⁹ The only map the S2 could find was a civilian Standard Oil map. Soldiers in the battalion could see Japanese aircraft moving high overhead as clouds of black smoke arose nearby when bombs struck their targets. Company A had been at the receiving end of one of these attacks as they passed between Cabanatuan and San Jose along Highway 3. Luckily, the bombs had just missed them. By 1900 hours on 24 December, the battalion was in its new position. Meanwhile, south of Manila, Company C made its way slowly southeast past Manila along Highway 1. The South Luzon Force was moving to block enemy landings in the East at Lamon Bay.¹⁰

For the North Luzon Force, the first defensive line ran from the central part of Luzon, west to east. Known as the Carmen Line, named for a town along the Agno River, this was where the men of the 194th Tank Battalion would receive their baptism of fire. The 194th Tank Battalion took up positions just south of the Agno River, defending a crossing site into the town of Carmen. Filipino engineers had rigged the bridge for detonation earlier. The battalion was given the mission of defending a 25-mile front from Carmen to the east, to Highway 13 to the west. Conducting a quick terrain analysis with the S2, Miller determined that tanks, friendly and enemy, could not operate successfully along most of the 25-mile front. Miller dispatched Filipino infantry patrols along the Agno River, west to Highway 13, to detect Japanese infiltration. Company A, commanded by Captain Ed Burke, would defend from battle positions to the immediate east of Carmen, while Company D, commanded by Captain Jack Altman, would defend to the west of Company A. One platoon of Company A would be north of the river.¹¹

In South Luzon, Company C had reached the town of Soria. The Japanese 18th Infantry Division had landed at Mauban and Atimonan.¹² Japanese troops were moving west along two axes aimed at Soria and the larger city of Lucena. Company C was directed against the Mauban landing. The terrain was very rugged and mountainous between Soria and Mauban. It was poor tank country with abundant antitank ambush positions. One section of half-tracks was assigned a liaison mission to patrol Highway 21 just east of Mt. Banahao. This patrol was charged with maintaining contact between the 1st Infantry to the north and the 52d and 53d Infantry in the south.¹³ Major Ralph E. Rumbold, an adviser to the Philippine army, approached 2d Platoon from Company C and directed its members to move up a narrow trail, travel like "hell," and shoot their guns.¹⁴ The platoon leader, Lieutenant Robert F. Needham, begged Rumbold to allow them a quick reconnaissance of the trail to assess the terrain and enemy situation, but he refused. Rumbold explained to him that his task was to perform a demonstration with the purpose of improving the morale of the Philippine soldiers. Additionally, he claimed to know

that the Japanese had nothing bigger than a .50 caliber machine gun. One last plea for caution failed to convince Rumbold, and Needham ordered his five tanks up the trail.¹⁵

The five tanks spread out in column formation. As the lead tank turned the first sharp corner, the second tank in order of march lost sight and accelerated to regain visual contact and close the distance. One second later, a thunderous crack of a Model 95, 75mm antitank gun echoed through the valley, reverberating along the mountain walls. The split-second acceleration of the second tank sent the round flying past the turret, impacting harmlessly between the number two and three tanks. With no place to back up, the tanks roared forward, machine guns firing suppression.¹⁶

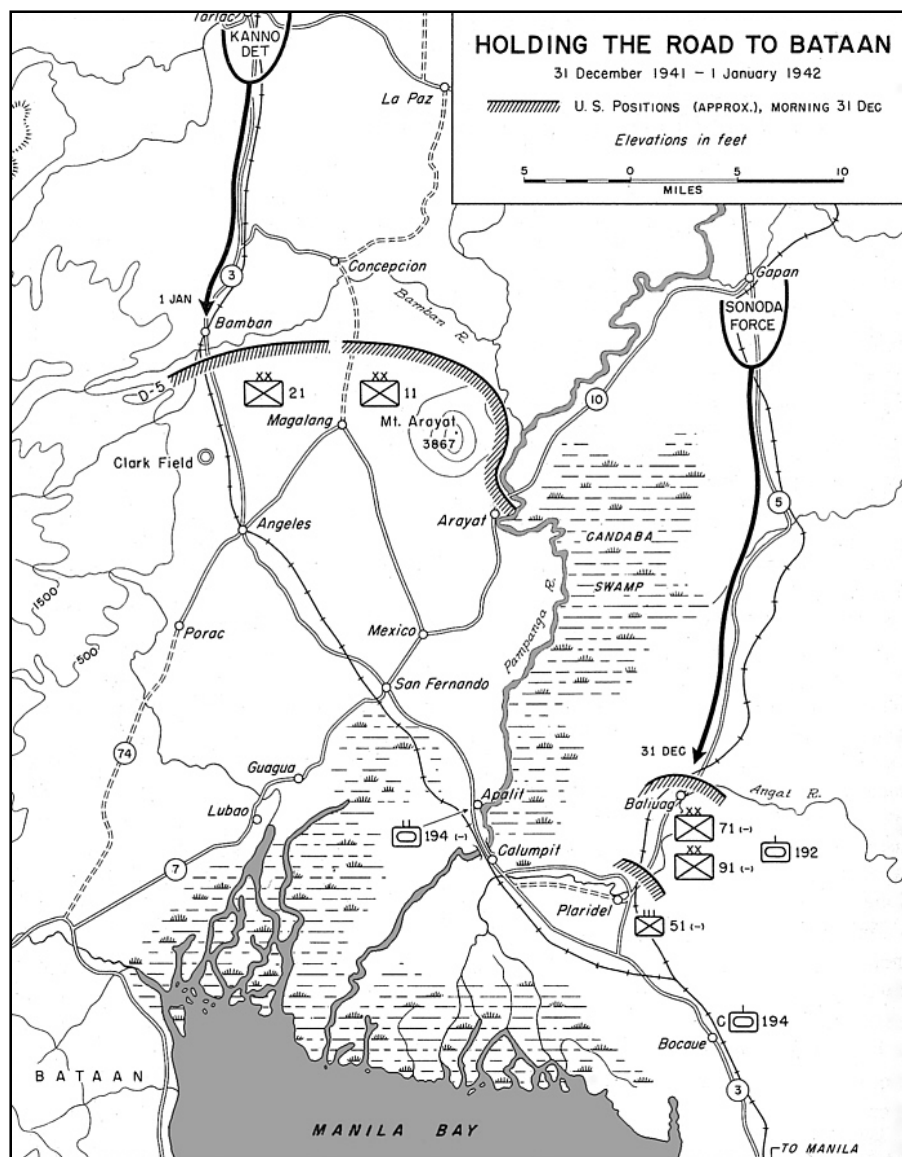
The next obstacle was a roadblock comprised of wood logs built up in a square. Japanese soldiers had set the logs on fire, adding branches with leaves to create a thick smoke. The second tank lost contact with the first tank and smashed through the obstacle, cleared the smoke, and ran straight into another log wall with a second 75mm gun facing them. With no other option available, other than certain death, the driver smashed through the logs and drove right over the antitank gun. The three-man Japanese crew barely got out of the way in time. The second tank continued for another quarter-mile, destroying Japanese positions and machine-gunning their crews.

Finally the tank commander realized that the only way out of this jungle hell was to turn around and head back. As he headed back, the crew continued to destroy Japanese machine gun positions.¹⁷ As the second tank approached the ambush site, the first tank could be seen off the trail in a rice paddy. Black smoke was rising from it and many machine gun impacts were observed. Needham lay dead with this crew. As the second crew looked for a way out, a Japanese 75mm antitank gun hit their tank. A direct hit destroyed the idler sprocket, but more seriously sheared off the rivets, which flew around inside the turret like machine gun bullets, wounding one of the crew. Several crewmen could be seen evacuating the survivors, but the platoon had no combat power. The number two tank crew decided to play dead. They closed their

hatches and remained silent.¹⁸ Two separate groups of Japanese soldiers attempted to enter the tank, only to give up. The Japanese soldiers departed the area by 0500 hours on 26 December, allowing the crew to escape and evade through the jungle.¹⁹

Returning from a tank group commander's call, Miller and Spoor approached the tactical operations center (TOC) in their jeep, observing heavy Japanese artillery fire coming down on the battalion. As they pulled up to the TOC, they watched in dismay as one of the battalion transportation section trucks loaded with tank ammunition caught fire and detonated. Taking cover behind a large tree, Miller, Johnson, and Spoor, avoided the blast, but received the detonated and still smoldering remnants of a main gun round that landed next to them.²⁰ They moved away quickly. The staff gave Miller a quick update and informed him that the battalion had been in contact with the enemy since shortly after his departure. Facing them across the river was the 2d Formosa and the 4th Tank Regiment, with artillery in support.²¹ Japanese forces had attempted setting up several gun positions and river crossings, all of which had been repelled at long range by the 37mm main guns on the tanks. The M-3s would have to shoot and then scoot to a new position to avoid the artillery and mortar counterfire. The Philippine infantry had been intimidated by the attacks and had melted away into the jungle. Several hundred Japanese soldiers lay dead or wounded. The Japanese were relentless in their use of indirect fire and intensified its use throughout the day. Probing continued throughout the evening as small groups of Japanese crossed at dusk.

During one action, Captain Ed Burke drove north in a jeep toward Carmen to check on Lieutenant Harold E. Costigan's platoon. He was ambushed, fell out of the jeep, and rolled wounded into a ditch as Costigan's platoon fired their turret-mounted .30 caliber machine guns. Sergeant James A. Bogart, a tank commander, ordered his gunner to fire. The gunner put three belts of .30 caliber ammunition through his machine gun, eliminating a large amount of Japanese soldiers. The accurate, withering fire tore apart the small Japanese patrol, eliminating it as a threat. By this point, the town was crawling with Japanese soldiers. Costigan moved his platoon to



Map from *The Fall of the Philippines*

supplementary positions on the south bank. Burke was later recovered by the Japanese and interned. During the move, the platoon discovered a roadblock position that Japanese soldiers had set up. Not missing a beat, the platoon fought its way through the roadblock. Just as they were clearing the position, a Japanese infantryman jumped on one of the tanks and attached a thermite grenade covered with sticky glue. Within a matter of minutes, it burned through the armor, and the crew was forced to abandon the tank. Costigan recovered the injured tankers and moved to his next position.²²

At 0250 hours on 27 December 1941, the battalion detected significant Japanese vehicle and track movement from north to south along Highway 3 that led to Carmen. This element was the advanced guard for the Japanese 4th Tank Regiment.²³ The lead Japanese recon-

naissance car moved slowly down the road with its lights dimmed. The blocking position was comprised of three M-3 tanks and two half-tracks. Though small in size, the battalion had carefully built a battle position defense that tied in all barriers and obstacles with direct fire from the tank main guns, machine guns, and a 75mm gun mounted on a half-track. The barriers were comprised of logs placed vertically in the roadway, supported by barbed wire, razor wire, and tangle foot. When the lead vehicle of the Japanese column was about 150 feet away, Miller initiated the ambush by firing his main gun at the lead vehicle. A fusillade of deadly fire swept away the Japanese armored column. The 37mm and 57mm main gun rounds hit their mark, while .30 caliber machine-gun fire cut the survivors to ribbons as they attempted to dismount. After a 15-minute battle, the surviving Japanese soldiers retreated north to

await reinforcements. The ambush had so shaken the Japanese that they halted their advance and dug in a defense at Carmen, fearing a counterattack.²⁴

The battalion's retrograde from Carmen that morning was haphazard. Radio difficulties prevented effective communications between Company D in the west and the rest of the battalion. Captain Jack Altman was aware of Captain Burke's apparent loss and was concerned that the battalion had departed or was no longer combat effective. Several attempts had failed to locate the battalion TOC. Having heard the heavy action in Carmen and concerned about being flanked, Altman took the initiative and moved his remaining nine tanks, Company A's six tanks, and one half-track along an old carabao trail they had reconnoitered the day prior. It led them to a railroad bed that would eventually parallel Highway 3. A short distance from the town of Moncada, the tanks crossed over to Highway 3 and moved toward the bridges in the town. To their dismay, they discovered that the Philippine engineers had blown the vehicular bridge too early, and the railroad bridge was in shambles. Apparently the 11th Division commander had countermanded Miller's order to keep the bridges intact.²⁵ The river bank was steep and the river was deep and wide, preventing their crossing. Altman ordered the main guns and several key components removed and cached in the jungle. Upon completion, Altman discreetly marked his map and effected a river crossing with his men. His plan was to linkup with the battalion and determine a new crossing site so he could recover his tanks. This decision had been made with hope that some of the men could return later with guides and bring the tanks south. This expectation could not be fulfilled, and the tanks were lost for the rest of the campaign.²⁶ Soldiers used the collapsed bridge girders to work their way across the river. Across the river, Altman sent a team to the town of Tarlac for help. A short distance away they discovered a jeep on patrol, which they used to contact the battalion headquarters. Shortly thereafter, they were picked up by battalion trucks and issued K rations.²⁷ Miller and the battalion prepared for the next fight.

The Double Retrograde Delay to the Bataan Peninsula

The second defensive line was formed to the south of the Carmen Line and

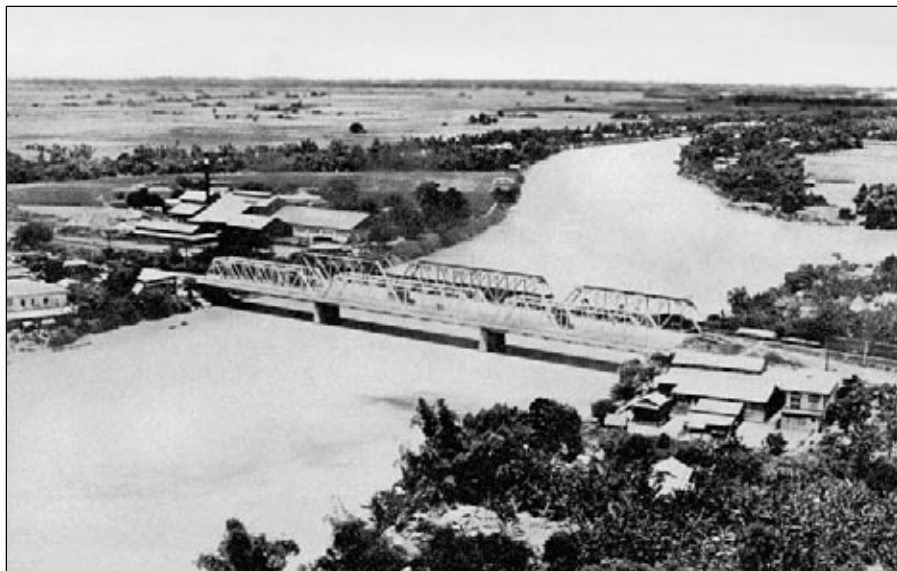
was known as the Tarlac Line. Reconnaissance and preparation of the line was conducted on 28 December 1941, and defensive positions were prepared. Events began to rapidly overtake the carefully laid plans.

U.S. Army and Philippine units from the North Luzon Force to the east were in heavy contact, and were obliged to continue movement south to the next line at the Bambam River. At 1930 hours, Miller and Johnson met with Weaver and confirmed the move.²⁸ Weaver informed the others of his plan to retain the 192d Tank Battalion, along with one platoon from the 194th Tank Battalion in the north, to cover the retrograde to Bataan. The 194th Tank Battalion was to move quickly south and secure the Calumpit Bridge. They were progressing toward the most critical part of Phase II of War Plan Orange III. Miller recalled, "The Tank Group Commander ordered me to hold the Calumpit Bridge at any cost and to shoot anyone who attempted to blow it."²⁹

On 28 December, the battalion departed in good order to the Bambam Line. The move was made at night, but under full illumination from the moon.

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The tankers had suffered from a steep learning curve, both tactically and technically, but were bringing their collective experience to a new level. This time, the battalion had prepared for the trip by caching 55-gallon fuel drums at regular intervals to allow for refueling. Miller sent what was left of the reconnaissance platoon forward to confirm the route. This was fortuitous as several miles north of the bridge lay a well-concealed ambush comprised of several 37mm towed antitank guns, manned by jittery Philippine troops.³⁰ The area to be defended was the strategic Calumpit Bridge, a key chokepoint and mobility corridor to both Manila and the Bataan Peninsula. Comprised of two spans, they were the single most important real estate on Luzon, with the exception of Bataan and Corregidor. The bridges were modern steel girder bridges over



The 194th Tank Battalion was tasked to secure and hold the Calumpit Bridge, shown above, a key chokepoint to both Manila and the Bataan Peninsula.

300 feet in length.³¹ One bridge was for rail, the other for vehicles. Upon arrival, the battalion established battle positions to defend the bridge. Additionally, battalion officers liaised with U.S. engineers who had mined and rigged the bridge with enough explosives to ensure no future use by the Japanese. There was no room for error or premature destruction. Thousands of soldiers and hundreds of vehicles would need to pass across the bridge, or the defensive strategy for Bataan would be compromised. Shoot-to-kill orders quickly re-established civil and military order.³² For 10 days, the 194th Tank Battalion held the bridge on both sides of the river, allowing the South Luzon Force to evacuate to the Bataan Peninsula.³³

Back in Southern Luzon, the tank crew from 2d Platoon, Company C, having met several other platoon survivors, had just spent 5 torturous days escaping the enemy and evading capture in the jungle back trails that led to Manila Bay. As the survivors entered Manila, they discovered that the Philippine army and the U.S. Army had evacuated the city earlier that day. They headed straight to the Philippine general hospital for treatment, then managed to catch the last boat to Corregidor. From there, they reached the battalion field trains located on Bataan, completing their venture.³⁴

Around dusk on the evening of 31 December, the maintenance section that supported Company C arrived at the bridge. Around midnight, Company C made the crossing and the battalion regained combat power.³⁵ At around 2200

hours, Weaver and his aide, Major Pettit, visited Miller's TOC. Miller recalled, "They notified me that I had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel effective December 19th."³⁶ After the formalities, Weaver pulled Miller to his map and briefed him on the next phase of the operation. The 194th Tank Battalion would move to San Fernando. There it would find a position where it could defend the critical four-way intersection of Highways 3 and 7. By this time, Japanese forces could see that U.S. and Philippine forces were moving toward the Bataan Peninsula. Both the North and South Luzon Force had to cross through this intersection to get to Bataan. The road intersection at San Fernando would become hotly contested in a very short time. By 0500 hours, the battalion had pulled out from its Calumpit battle positions knowing that the bridges would be blown soon. As the battalion moved in column down Highway 3, a large explosion could be heard above the roar of the tanks.³⁷

The battalion closed in on its new battle positions around 0400 hours on 1 January 1942. As tanks were ground guided into their positions and concealed, Miller realized that it was New Year's Day. As the soldiers caught up on their rest, Miller walked from position to position and shook their hands. Later that day, Miller ordered additional reconnaissance and surveillance patrols to the east, near the small town of Mexico.³⁸ A 194th Tank Battalion platoon lay hidden in covered and concealed positions, listening for enemy movements. Japanese air activity had been heavy, but few U.S. or Philippine

targets had been successfully destroyed. From the east, over the din of aircraft, came the sound of mechanized movement, which began one of the few tank-on-tank engagements of the Luzon Campaign, and for that matter, the entire war in the Pacific.³⁹ The sounds seemed to come from enemy tanks, but up to this point, there had been no tank-on-tank combat. Through his binoculars, the platoon leader observed five Japanese Model 89A medium tanks approaching. The Japanese platoon had elected not to conduct a reconnaissance of the area, and stopped in the middle of an open field to determine its location. The Japanese would quickly learn that they were in the middle of the 194th engagement area. Wasting no time, U.S. forces initiated fire, beginning a short, lopsided engagement. Within several minutes, all five Model 89s had been destroyed, and several others had black smoke pouring out of the turrets.⁴⁰

By 0100 hours on 2 January, the Philippine army began its withdrawal from San Fernando. Within an hour, the very last element of the 192d Tank Battalion crossed the Highway 3 River Bridge just south of San Fernando.⁴¹ Miller displaced the battalion and at his command, observed the bridge disappear in a geyser of water and a cloud of black and gray. The battalion completed its move to their new defensive line; the Guagua-Porac Line.⁴² The Guagua-Porac Line was a defensive line 10 miles long that blocked the two remaining roads that led to the Bataan Peninsula. Porac was to the north and Guagua was located on Highway 7. After meeting with his S2, Miller concluded that the major Japanese push would be along Highway 7 to Guagua.⁴³ Therefore, he decided to set up a defense in depth just south of town. Not willing to be surprised by the Japanese, he further directed the establishment of three combat security outposts in all directions from which the Japanese could approach. In the northeast, one platoon from Company C moved to establish and maintain a combat security outpost near the village of Betis. The two other positions were located to the south along Highway 7 in the town of Lubao and in a swampy approach from the village of Sexmoan.

Japanese forces initiated their attack on Betis on 3 January. Under intense artillery fire, the platoon was obliged to withdraw back to Guagua. The rest of the day was spent eliminating small

pockets of Japanese soldiers who were attempting to infiltrate the battalion's position.⁴⁴

Several days later, Japanese artillery fire from the 48th Mountain Artillery became much more intense. Miller was concerned about the lack of infantry support from the 11th Infantry Regiment of the 11th Division that he had been promised. He decided to send out his reconnaissance platoon leader to find them. Lieutenant Ted Spaulding jumped into a jeep, headed toward San Jose, and found the 11th Infantry Regiment north of Layac.⁴⁵ Before his eyes were a column of soldiers completely asleep in their trucks and tracks. Apparently, the lead truck stopped to get directions long enough for the entire column to fall asleep! Spaulding cautiously walked from vehicle to vehicle to awaken the troops and explain their route back to the 194th. They were a pitiful sight — tired men with their dead tied to their jeeps.⁴⁶

By 5 January, rounds from the Japanese 48th Mountain Artillery were dropping on top of the battalion. Enemy aircraft were making sweeping runs at targets of opportunity. Japanese infantry small-arms fire was striking the hulls of the tanks. By 1300 hours, Miller received the radio call to withdraw to Porac. The 194th Tank Battalion, however, would block Japanese forces until all U.S. and Philippine soldiers had passed. Spoor and Johnson were very concerned about the blocking positions to the south. Little had been heard from either force, so Miller sent Spoor and Johnson down to investigate.⁴⁷ To their dismay, they found that the positions had been evacuated. Miller ordered the two officers to remain in position at Lubao with their tanks until relief arrived. As the S2 and S3 drove off, Captain Fred C. Moffitt dismounted and re-established the blocking positions. Hustling to conceal the tanks, one of the TCs observed three Philippine constabulary officers approaching along an open field with white flags of truce. Behind them were between 500 and 800 Japanese soldiers from the 3d Battalion and the 2d Formosa, with the towed artillery from the 48th Mountain Artillery.⁴⁸ The two tanks and two half-tracks opened fire. Machine guns roared at cyclic rate as brass shells began bouncing off the floor of the half-tracks. The Japanese soldiers had placed too much faith in the U.S. soldiers not firing at the Philippine constabulary and now they were being massacred in the open

with no cover. The firing ceased several minutes later. The moans and screams of several hundred wounded Japanese soldiers could be heard along with an occasional gunshot. The surviving Japanese soldiers crawled away to regroup. Minutes later, Japanese fighters arrived and bombed the town of Lubao. The fires created an inferno that leveled the town.⁴⁹ At Lubao, the 194th Tank Battalion and Company A, 192d Tank Battalion established new defensive battle positions overlooking a turnip field. There was no infantry to support them. During its movement to Lubao, the battalion was issued 20 Bren Gun Carriers that had been diverted to Luzon. The Japanese attack marooned a vessel belonging to the Canadian government and carrying a cargo of universal carriers for two Canadian motorized infantry battalions in Hong Kong.⁵⁰ The men mounted .30 caliber machine guns among the half-tracks and M-3 tanks. As the men completed their defense, Quinlan, the S4, arrived with hot food. Spirits rose!

As night arrived, the full moon afforded excellent visibility. That night, Miller became concerned about the lack of communications between the Tank Group Headquarters and his battalion. He dispatched the S3 to group headquarters a little after midnight. Miller and Spoor decided to get some much-needed sleep. Spoor kept tossing and turning. "What in the hell's the matter with you?" asked Miller. Spoor was uncanny in the way he could almost literally smell trouble.⁵¹ Shortly before 0200 hours, the two officers heard soldiers challenge what sounded like a Filipino. Moments later, shots were fired and a Japanese soldier replied, "We are the peepul who are not afraid to die by boolets."⁵² Following this dialog, he preceded to grunt and moan in Japanese, causing both officers to smile from the perverse humor. A second shot made the soldier go quiet.

Soldiers scrambled to their tanks, half-tracks, and carriers. Japanese soldiers could be seen advancing across the open field and belatedly attempted to use smoke to conceal their movement. The battalion opened fire and the normal slaughter occurred. Tracers flew through the air and small fires were burning. One was near U.S. positions and was directly threatening the highly flammable M-3 tanks. Lieutenant Petree and his platoon were near the fire. On his own initiative, Petree dismounted the tank and put out the fire. As he ran

back to his tank, he was shot down. Noticing the manner in which the officer dropped, Miller drew a line to the rear of his battalion's position! There, in a palm tree sat a Japanese soldier. Miller swung the turret mounted .30 caliber machine gun around and blasted the tree. Shortly after, a badly mangled body dropped to the ground. Petree survived his wounds for a week, but eventually died. By 0300 hours, the Japanese gave up the attack and withdrew, leaving hundreds of dead and wounded on the turnip field. Japanese forces would cease all local operations for 2 days.⁵³

By 0200 hours on 7 January 1942, Phase II of War Plan Orange III was completed when the last unit — the 194th Tank Battalion — passed through the defensive line on the north end of Bataan near the town of Layoc. The Luzon Campaign had been costly for both the Americans and the Japanese. The North Luzon Force was reduced from 28,000 soldiers to 16,000 largely by the deserting Filipino soldiers who returned to their homes.⁵⁴ The South Luzon Force had 14,000 of its original 15,000 troops remaining. The Japanese suffered close to 2,000 casualties since the landing. This number included 627 killed, 1,282 wounded, and 7 missing.⁵⁵

The 194th Tank Battalion contributed significantly to the success of the double retrograde delay to the Bataan Peninsula. The timely application of shock and effect consistently delayed the Japanese and bought the defenders of Bataan critical time to reorganize for the final battles. In the end, the Philippine Defensive Campaign was doomed.

For the first time during World War II, a Japanese offensive had been blocked with no hope for victory without reinforcement. It quickly became apparent that a long siege for the Bataan Peninsula was about to begin. As time went by, the men began to suffer from dengue fever, malaria, diarrhea, dysentery, and famine.

On 12 March 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur back from the Philippines and to Australia to orchestrate the American offensive in the Pacific. Lieutenant General Jonathan M. Wainwright assumed command of all forces on Bataan and Corregidor. The stalemate continued until the final Japanese assault on 3 April 1942. Within 7 days, American resistance ended. Following the surrender of forces on Bataan, weary sur-

vivors began the infamous Bataan Death March. Thousands of Americans and Filipinos would die from random acts of Japanese brutality. The Philippines now began a brutal occupation that came to an end with the return of U.S. Armed Forces in October 1944.

The lineage of the 194th Tank Battalion is perpetuated by the 1st and 2d Battalions, 194th Armor, Minnesota Army National Guard; and Company C, 1st Battalion, 149th Armor, California Army National Guard.

Notes

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⁵Mariano Villarin, *We Remember Bataan and Corregidor*, Gateway Press, Baltimore, MD, 1990, 37.

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⁷Ernest B. Miller, *Bataan Uncensored*, Hart Publications, Long Prairie, MN, 1949, 83.

⁸Ibid.

⁹FitzPatrick, 18.

¹⁰Villarin, 49.

¹¹FitzPatrick, 24.

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¹⁴Miller, 117.

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¹⁶Robert A. Doughty, *World War II Total Warfare Around the Globe*, D.C. Heath and Company, Lexington, MA, 1996, 73.

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¹⁸Villarin, 50.

¹⁹Miller, 120.

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²³Morton, 177.

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²⁹Ibid.

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³³Ibid., 127.

³⁴Villarin, 50.

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³⁶Ibid., 122.

³⁷FitzPatrick, 29.

³⁸Miller, 123.

³⁹Morton, 221.

⁴⁰Miller, 123.

⁴¹Morton, 215.

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⁴⁴Ibid., 125.

⁴⁵Ted Spaulding, *Itchy Feet*, South Dakota, unpublished, 1999, 102. Firsthand account of the 194th Tank Battalion from the reconnaissance platoon leader.

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⁴⁷Miller, 126.

⁴⁸Morton, 222.

⁴⁹Ibid., 223.

⁵⁰Morton, 121.

⁵¹Miller, 128.

⁵²Ibid., 130.

⁵³Miller, 132.

⁵⁴Morton, 230.

⁵⁵Ibid.

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Employing an Armor QRF in the Area Defense:

*"Area defense is a type of defensive operation that concentrates on denying enemy forces access to designated terrain for a specific time rather than destroying the enemy outright. The bulk of defending forces combine static defensive positions, engagement areas, and a small, mobile reserve to block enemy forces. The reserve has a priority to the counterattack...but may also perform limited security force missions."*¹

U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0

by Major William J. VandenBergh

As the United States' participation in the Second World War loomed in 1941, much of America's early fighting strength came from the Army National Guard. The 194th Tank Battalion had been organized from three National Guard tank companies, Company A from Brainerd, Minnesota; Company B from Saint Joseph, Missouri; and Company C from Salinas, California. The 194th Tank Battalion had deployed to the Philippines during the fall of 1941 in support of its defense from a possible Japanese attack.

The American defensive plan had been set for several years. The task of the Philippine and U.S. Army ultimately would be to defend Manila Bay with the purpose of denying the Japanese its use, and to allow for reinforcement from the Territory of Hawaii.² Manila Bay could only be denied to the Japanese by occupying the Bataan Peninsula and the Island of Corregidor,

which guarded the harbor.³ Retention of the Bataan Peninsula was the center of gravity for the entire Luzon Defensive Campaign. The plan was to defend for up to 6 months, until relieved by the U.S. Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor.

Initial Japanese landings on Luzon occurred between 9 and 10 December 1941.⁴ Unable to introduce combat power against these remote sites and unwilling to divide forces, U.S. forces could do nothing but wait for Japanese troops to arrive.

The 194th Tank Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Ernest B. Miller and was comprised of M3 tanks, half-tracks, jeeps, and motorcycles. For nearly a month, the 194th Tank Battalion had fought along a series of phase, obstacle, and holding lines, executing a retrograde delay from both North and South Luzon. It had fought a number of sharp actions and contributed significantly to the success of the orderly delay of American and Filipino forces back to the Bataan Peninsula. (Map 1)



The 194th Tank Battalion in action during the Luzon Defensive Campaign 1941-42

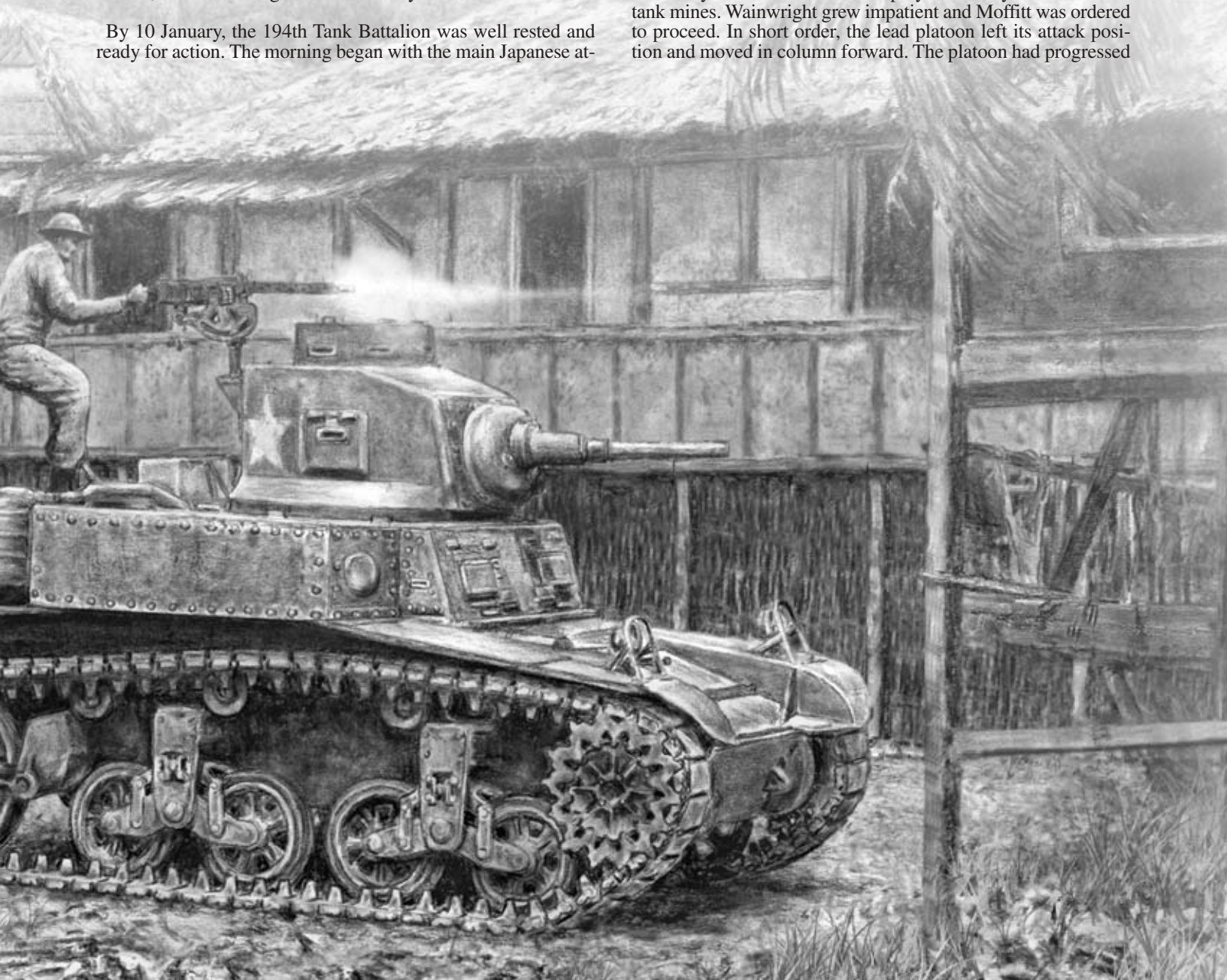
The peninsula of Bataan is 20 miles wide and 25 miles long. Its existence is owed to two large extinct volcanoes, Mount Natib in the north and Mount Bataan in the south. They tower 4,222 and 4,722 feet respectively.⁵ From the volcanoes, scores of streams race through the jungle down deep ravines. The jungle cover is so thick that Japanese reconnaissance from the air was nearly impossible. Bataan had numerous trails that, with lack of use, quickly grew over and road systems were few and undeveloped.⁶ In the north, traveling from west to east was Highway 7. In the east, Highway 110 began far to the north and followed the coast south, then west and north to Moron. The west side of Highway 110 was designated as West Road, the east side as East Road. In the center of the Bataan Peninsula was the Pilar-Bagac Road. It cut directly across the center, providing the only lateral route.⁷ The final defensive battles occurred on the Bataan Peninsula. The first line was known as the Abucay-Hacienda Line.⁸ (Map 2) Along this defensive line were two higher headquarters, I and II Corps. I Corps had been the North Luzon Force and II Corps was the former South Luzon Force. The 194th Tank Battalion was allocated to II Corps in the east. The II Corps front was 15,000 meters long from Manila Bay to Mount Natib.⁹

By 10 January, the 194th Tank Battalion was well rested and ready for action. The morning began with the main Japanese at-

tack within II Corps' area of operation (AO) near Abucay. Here, the 194th Tank Battalion moved forward to support the 57th Infantry (PS). The 57th Infantry was opposed by the Japanese 1st and 2d Battalion, 142d Infantry, 65th Brigade.¹⁰

As the battalion fulfilled its mission, Miller received a desperate early morning call. The Japanese had attacked in the I Corps and made a deep incursion. Captain Fred C. Moffitt and his Company C was sent into action. Lieutenant General (LTG) Jonathan M. Wainwright met Moffitt personally. Wainwright directed the company to attack north along a small trail. The Japanese 3d Battalion, 20th Infantry had successfully infiltrated south from Mount Silangan using the deep gullies and streams to mask their movement. Now they established defensive positions just to the north.¹¹

Wainwright's plan had the scouts (dismounted for the attack) from the 26th Cavalry clear the route ahead of time but no infantry was available to support the tank movement. Moffitt quickly identified the need for a leader's reconnaissance and additional infantry support to walk next to the tanks to deny the Japanese the ability to ambush them or employ the deadly model 93 anti-tank mines. Wainwright grew impatient and Moffitt was ordered to proceed. In short order, the lead platoon left its attack position and moved in column forward. The platoon had progressed





Map 1.

The Fall of the Philippines — United States Army in World War II, Louis Morton, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., p. 246.

Pilar. Here, the covering force would continue its mission, allowing the main body time to re-establish a coherent defense. Miller was pleased with the plan and was impressed with the learning that had occurred at the higher level.¹⁴

By 1800 hours, the withdrawal was underway. The undertrained Filipino troops attempted an orderly movement, but it quickly degenerated into a mob movement. Miller and a number of trained Filipino soldiers attempted to instill discipline, but the task was difficult. By 1900 hours, the Japanese sensed these movements and their attack began.

The II Corps' line in this sector was comprised of the 31st and 45th Infantry Regiments.¹⁵ The 31st and 45th Infantry covering forces fought savagely through the night, but by 0100 hours, it became apparent that their combat power was rapidly dwindling. Their successful withdrawal to new positions within a few hours and stabilizing the line over the next two-and-a-half days of fighting would determine whether the new defensive line would hold.¹⁶

As the 194th Tank Battalion provided the covering force for the 31st and 45th Infantry, Miller took some desperate radio traffic from Weaver. The left flank of II Corps was threatened with collapse and additional combat power was needed.

Moving slowly west along a small trail, the tanks and half-tracks approached their positions. It was during this movement that one of Company A's tanks, commanded by Sergeant Bernie FitzPatrick, ran partly off the side of a bridge and became stuck.¹⁷ With little time to effect a recovery, Miller ordered it destroyed. A single 37mm round from another M3 set the tank on fire. It was quickly pushed into the stream. The move had to be made before the moon rose, but this aided in their concealment. The tanks and half-tracks were set into position and opened fire. A deadly massing of 37mm fire from the M3s and 75mm fire from the half-tracks stopped the Japanese attack cold. The infantry covering force withdrew and mounted buses that took them to safety. By 0300 hours, the operation was complete.¹⁸

By 26 January, the 194th Tank Battalion was positioned just south of the Orion-Bagac defensive line.¹⁹ (Map 3) It was arrayed from north to south, along Back Road. As 1030 hours approached, several half-tracks, performing their security mission, sighted a Japanese officer and soldier as they crawled out of the jungle and walked to the south toward the intersection of the Back and Banibani Roads. Private Nordstrom manned the half-track's .30-caliber machine gun. A well-placed burst of his .30-caliber machine gun tore the two apart. Within a matter of minutes, the entire defensive line opened fire and a new battle

only a short way when Moffitt heard an explosion. The two lead tanks had hit a minefield. As the company evacuated the two tanks, Japanese infantrymen crawled away and made good their exfiltration. From concealed positions, the Japanese fired their lightweight model 11, 37mm guns. Because of the thick vegetation, both sides had difficulty targeting. With some difficulty, the remaining tanks provided cover fire, as the two lead tanks were evacuated.¹²

Moffitt's executive officer sent back a contact report to Miller who reciprocated by draining the battalion's maintenance section of its last track links and idlers. Wainwright finally accepted the need for more infantry and moved forward the 3rd Battalion, 72nd Infantry, along with a motorized squadron from the 26th Cavalry.¹³ From there, the American infantry reformed the line correctly and advanced north, checking the Japanese incursion and restoring their previous positions.

Later that evening, Brigadier General (BG) James R. N. Weaver, commander, 1st Provisional Tank Group, called a commander's huddle with both the 192d and 194th Tank Battalion commanders. The main body of front line troops would exfiltrate rearward that night leaving behind a small covering force. By 0300 hours the next morning, the covering force would also withdraw to positions north of the Orion-Bagac line near the town of

began. The half-tracks replied by opening fire with their 75mm guns.

Prior to the battle, the gunners had identified several gullies and pieces of low ground that provided concealed and covered infiltration routes. As the battle began, the 75mm guns poured their fire into the gullies with devastating effect.²⁰ As the Japanese made it out of the smoke, dazed and suffering from the concussions, they were greeted with machine gun fire that succeeded in killing many of the survivors. Action was hot all along the road. From the north to the south, the battalion replied to the attack with deadly fire. Several times their positions were almost overrun, defended only by the 194th Tank Battalion support troops manning Thompson submachine guns and .45-caliber pistols.²¹

By 1130 hours, the Japanese artillery and mortar fire was zeroing in on the battalion's position.²² At 1200 hours, Miller was forced to order a retreat behind the main line of resistance. The battalion's withdrawal was met by a determined Japanese air attack on the convoy.²³ The .50- and .30-caliber machine guns that were mounted on tanks and half-tracks met the attack the best they could. Accuracy for both the Japanese and the Americans was difficult, as the tanks and half-tracks were moving down the dirt road so quickly that the gunners and enemy pilots had great difficulty seeing through the dust.²⁴

Weaver was quick to issue the 192d and 194th Tank Battalions a fragmentary order. The 194th Tank Battalion was to continue to provide an armor reserve for II Corps, while it gained an on-order mission to defend the beaches from the front line in the north to the town of Cabcaben in the south. Miller was frustrated with the command arrangement, as Weaver directed him to take orders only from Tank Group Headquarters rather than a more simplified chain of command directly from II Corps Headquarters. To facilitate better liaison, Miller complied with the orders but sent his reconnaissance platoon leader, Lieutenant Ted Spaulding, to Corps Headquarters as the battalion's liaison officer.²⁵

General Masaharu Homma, commander of Japanese forces in the Philippines, met with his 14th Army staff on 8 February. All attempts at reducing the American position had failed miserably. Now, with his attack force spent, he looked at new options for victory.²⁶ The original Japanese plan had contemplated an order of battle that included the elite 48th Division attacking at Linagayen Gulf, the 16th Division at Lamon Bay, and reinforcement at Linagayen by the 65th Brigade.²⁷ The campaign would last 50 days at most.

As early as January, Homma had received word from the Southern Army that the 48th Division was to be withdrawn to support operations in Java. The fight for Bataan began with only the 16th Division, the 7th Tank Regiment, and the 65th Brigade. Neither unit had a very good

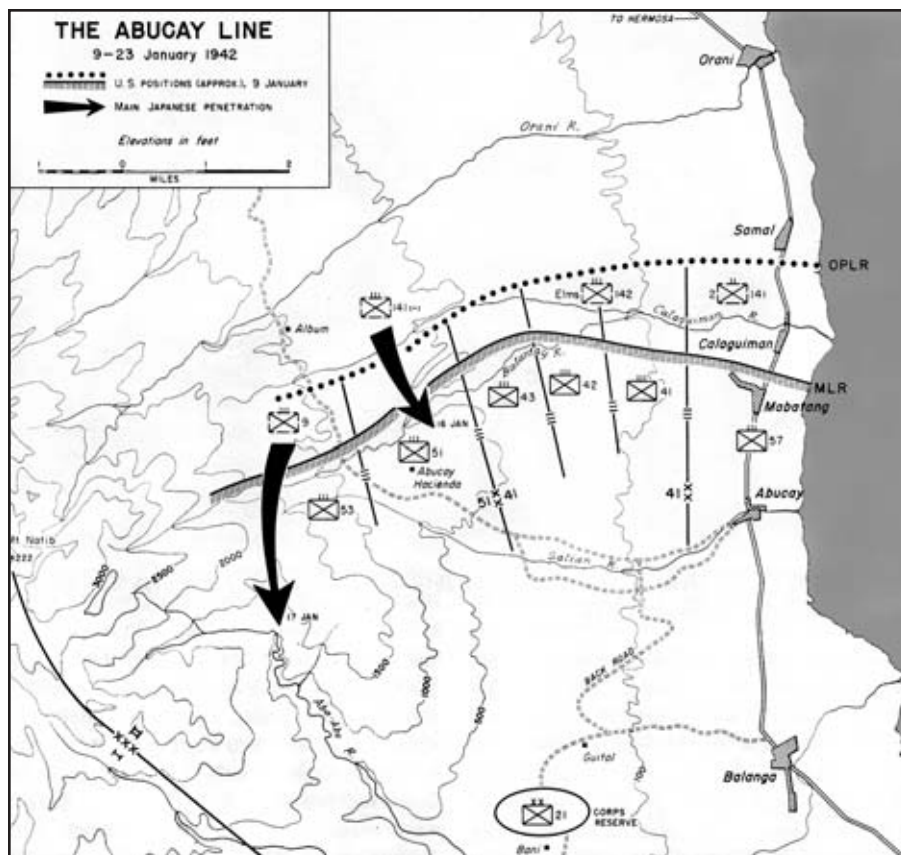
reputation after the first battles for Bataan.²⁸ Homma was overwhelmed by a sense of private and international humiliation. Here, for the first time during World War II, the Japanese had been stopped cold in their tracks with no hope for victory without reinforcement.

Meanwhile, significant work was completed in the preparation of the Pilar-Bagac line.²⁹ Fighting positions with overhead cover were built. Mines were laid to cover dead space that rifle fire could not cover. Time was found to further train the remaining Filipino troops and Miller ordered classes for the tankers on how to support the infantry.³⁰

The morale of the troops was very high. The Japanese had been fought to an utter standstill. Desertions and discharges on the part of the Philippine Army had helped to reduce the unmanageable size of the force on Bataan. Combat effectiveness had increased markedly as combat experience weeded out the weak and brought forward the soldiers with leadership potential.



"Prior to the battle, the gunners had identified several gullies and pieces of low ground that provided concealed and covered infiltration routes. As the battle began, the 75mm guns poured their fire into the gullies with devastating effect. As the Japanese made it out of the smoke, dazed and suffering from the concussions, they were greeted with machine gun fire that succeeded in killing many of the survivors."



Map 2.

The Fall of the Philippines, p. 267.

lery exposed itself by returning counter battery fire, highflying Japanese dive-bombers dropped their bombs, one by one, taking them out. Action occurred in the south as well. Company A, 194th Tank Battalion had received the on-order mission to defend the coastline and was in position that evening when several Japanese barges, armed with 75mm field guns, fired at the shoreline. Company A returned fire and the Japanese decided to retreat.³⁹

On 4 April, Miller was summoned to Tank Group Headquarters. Weaver detailed the plan that II Corps was preparing to counterattack and needed one tank company for support. Additionally, one company from the 192d Tank Battalion would replace Company A in their defend mission. Miller returned to battalion headquarters to conduct an abbreviated military decisionmaking process. Company C, followed by the battalion tactical command post (TAC), would head

It was during this time that the II Corps G2 section detected a massive build up of Japanese forces. The Japanese 4th Division had arrived from Shanghai. The 21st Regiment (part of the 21st Division) had been diverted in route to Indo-China. Finally, several thousand replacements arrived to revitalize the 16th Division and the 65th Brigade.³¹ Japanese air attacks became progressively larger reaching a total of 77 bomber sorties in just one day. The Japanese set up artillery across Manila Bay and fired accurately with the help of highflying aerial observers.³²

As the tankers dug in, dengue fever, malaria, diarrhea, and dysentery afflicted many of the soldiers. Men became prone to dizziness as black spots raced across their view. Captain Leo Schneider, senior medical officer of the 194th, and Lieutenant Hickman, junior medic, set up an infirmary in the rear echelon as they now had a number who were sick. The inadequate amounts of medicine available only amplified the severity of what would have been very treatable afflictions.³³ During the first week of March 1942, soldiers began to be issued quarter rations.³⁴ Not long after this, General Douglas MacArthur left the Philippines and Major General Edward P. King Jr., was given command of Luzon.³⁵

The build up of Japanese troops was completed 2 weeks later. (Map 4) The stalemate continued until the final Japanese assault on 3 April 1942. Arrayed against I Corps from west to east, were the Japanese 65th Brigade, the 4th Division, and a regimental team from the 21st Division (Nagano Det).³⁶ The fighting began at 1500 hours with a massive barrage of indirect fire from over 150 artillery pieces and mortars, quickly backed up by tank and antitank gun direct fire. The artillery fire was so intense that much of the north face of Mount Samat became engulfed in an uncontrollable forest fire. Entire units were destroyed. American and Filipino soldiers, already weakened from malnourishment, simply had no energy to retreat.³⁷ The focus of the attack was the west flank of the II Corps sector.³⁸ As American artil-

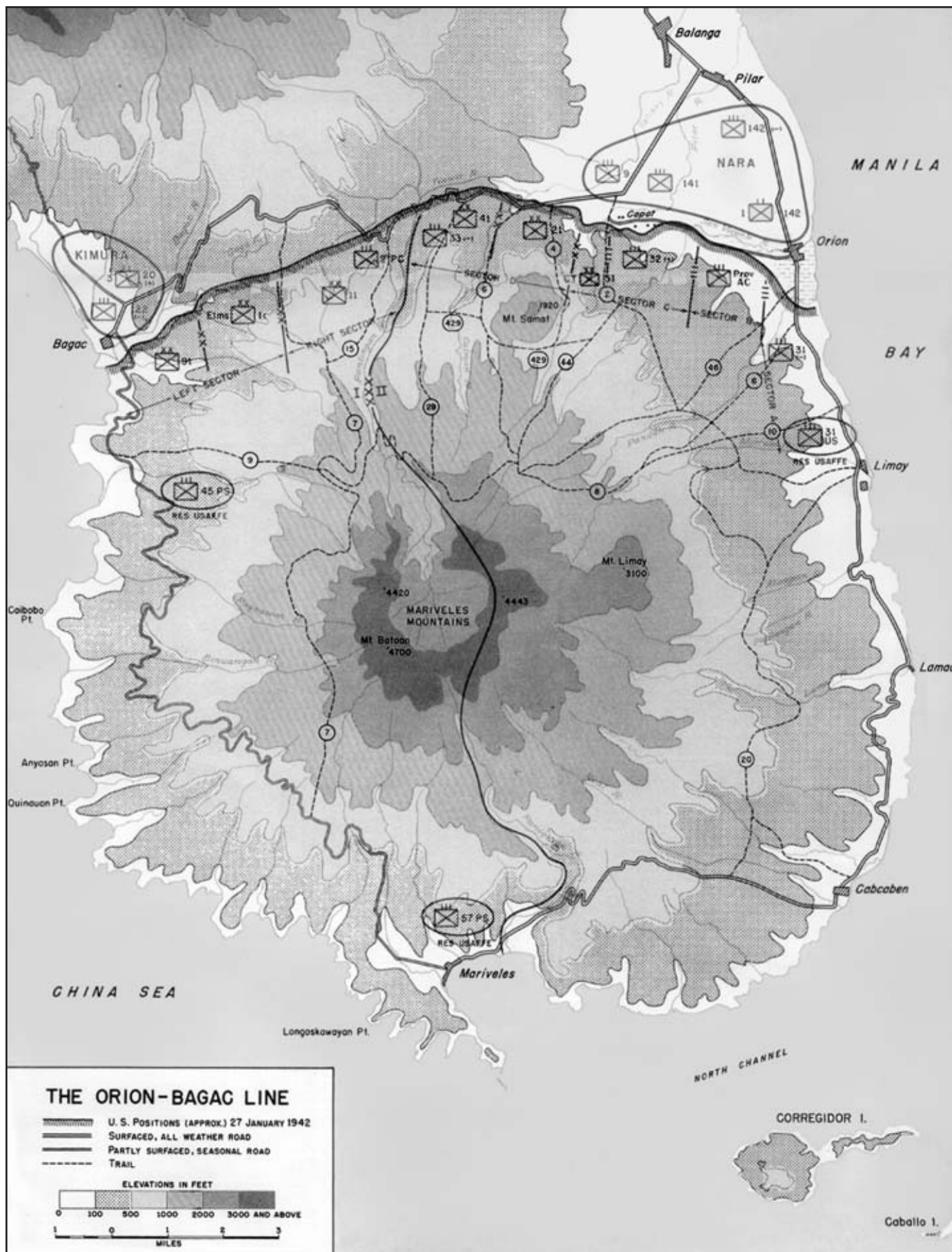
north. The TAC would be comprised of Miller and Captain Spoor, the S2, operating out of a jeep. Major L.E. Johnson, the S3, would take charge of the remaining combat units while Major Charles Canby, the XO, commanded the field trains.⁴⁰

After a wild ride up the narrow trail, Miller and the TAC located the Philippine division headquarters. The plan was for the 45th Infantry Regiment (on loan from I Corps) to attack north along Trail 29. They would flank the Japanese to the right, forcing a withdrawal. Company C would move its tanks on mountain trails to join the 45th Infantry in the attack. The plan was simple, but the men were worn out.

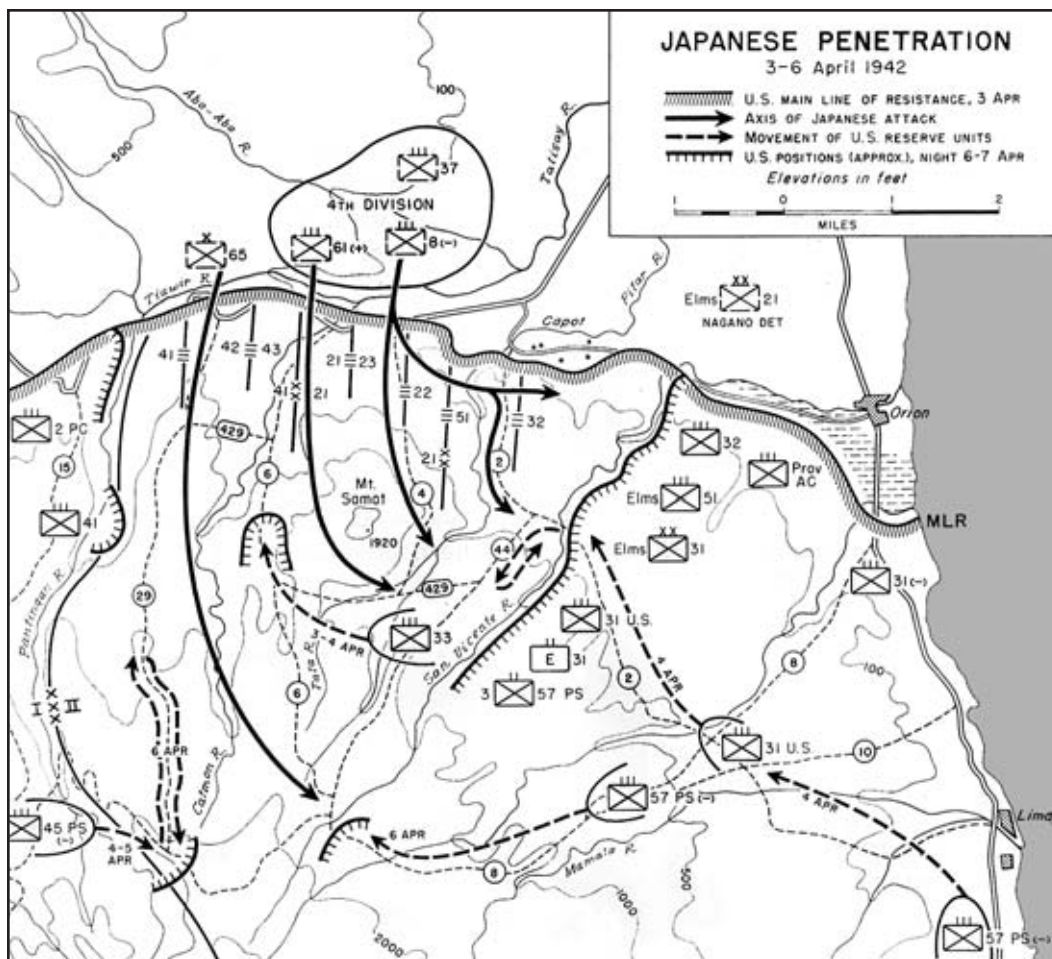
By 1600 hours on 6 April 1942, the TAC arrived at the south end of Trail 29. On arrival, they met Colonel Thomas W. Doyle, the commanding officer of the 45th Infantry. After much discussion and a reconnaissance, the TAC departed at 1900 hours to bring up Company C who was still occupying its tactical assembly area to the south.⁴¹

The trail to the south was jammed with confused traffic. Wounded soldiers were being evacuated, and broken down vehicles littered the battlefield creating massive traffic jams. The ride north would be even more harrowing. The battalion TAC led the way up the trail. At every turn it would find a wreck or obstacle that required evacuation from the route. Precious time was spent dismounting tanks and assessing the best way to deal with the wrecks. Company C tanks would push and pull the wrecks off the trail and then push and pull each other up and down the route.⁴²

Company C arrived at Trail 29 at 0610 hours that morning. They were 10 minutes late in supporting the attack. The 45th Infantry had just begun its movement to contact, allowing the tankers time to quickly catch up. Progress was slow as thick jungle met the trail on either side. The only place to maneuver the tanks was on the trail. This made Miller very uneasy. The infantry and armor advanced cautiously and did not make contact with the Japanese until 0900 hours. After a series of minor en-



Map 3. The Fall of the Philippines, p. 324.



Map 4.

The Fall of the Philippines, p. 423.

up defensive positions along a ridgeline north of Trail 8.⁴⁶

The officers returned to their units and began their movement south along Trail 29. As they reached the intersection of Trails 29 and 8, Company C met the Philippine division commander, Brigadier General Maxon S. Lough. He informed Miller that he was aware of the original orders, but that his G2 had informed him that the area along Trail 8 was no longer under American or Philippine control.

The column of infantry and tanks cautiously began their movement along Trail 8. Miller and Lough organized an advanced guard for the 45th Infantry and Company C. In the lead was a squad of Phil-

gagements, Doyle became worried. It was now 1530 hours and his troops had lost contact with I Corps to his left and the troops to his right.⁴³ This suggested to Miller and Doyle that the enemy had infiltrated to the southeast of their area. What they did not know for certain is how far south.⁴⁴

As the two met, a report from Philippine scouts was received and described Japanese troops preparing defensive positions just a short distance to the north. Doyle mulled over several attack options. All his regiment had left for indirect fire was a single 81mm mortar with 10 rounds. Five of the 10 shells were fired expertly, bringing significant damage to the partially prepared Japanese positions. The 45th Infantry and Company C followed up with a short, hasty attack. The Japanese were so surprised that they abandoned their artillery, mortars, and rifles, running and screaming wildly into the jungle. As night approached, Miller and Spoor inspected the Japanese positions and discovered a well-prepared minefield located on Trail 29 next to the positions. The area had been seeded with the deadly model 93 mine that had brought Company C many casualties earlier in the campaign. Once again, luck and circumstance had intervened in their favor.⁴⁵

Later that evening, Miller and Lieutenant Colonel Wright, the 45th Infantry's XO, headed back 2 miles south to re-establish contact with the regimental field trains. The situation was desperate. After arriving at the field trains, Miller and Wright were quickly apprised of the enemy's situation. The Japanese main effort had indeed advanced to the east and south of their advance north. Thus, the Japanese had made a considerable penetration south all the way to the Philippine division headquarters. The division sent the 45th Infantry and Company C new orders. The two units would advance over the mountains to the east, arriving at the intersection of Trails 6 and 8. Here, they would set

up defensive positions, followed by two of Company C's M3 tanks. Miller, Wright, and Spoor trailed in a jeep. Movement occurred without incident for some 50 minutes until the advanced guard stopped for a 10-minute rest. Just as the tanks stopped, Miller's jeep accelerated and swung quickly to the right. As they halted, the scouts could be seen passing the first tank calling out, "Japs!"⁴⁷

The Japanese 65th Brigade had beaten them to the area. At that moment, a Japanese 75mm model 95 antitank gun opened fire. Leaves and branches fell to the ground as heavy machine gun fire cut a swath of destruction on the two lead tanks. Lieutenant Frank Riley, the tank commander, attempted to return fire only to receive a direct hit in the turret from an armor-piercing round from the model 95. Luck was on his side that day as the round sliced through the side of the turret, missing his head by inches. Blood ran through his shaking fingers from the small pieces of shrapnel that had been imbedded in his eyes and face. To Riley's rear, the scouts had re-established a hasty defense and, with Tommy guns blazing, returned a murderous covering fire. Miller and Spoor low crawled along the trail back to the scouts. Japanese bullets were striking the ground to their left and right, blowing rocks and sand into their skin.⁴⁸

The second tank escaped destruction by being in a hull-defilade position in a depression. Several accurate shots from the Japanese 75mm antitank gun succeeded in hitting the turret, though. Fortunately, the rounds bounced off harmlessly and the tank, along with Riley's crew, made good their retreat. The advanced guard consolidated and treated their casualties. Miller could see that smoke was pouring from his jeep. It had received a direct hit from the Japanese 75mm gun. Wright, who had occupied the rear seat, was never heard from again. The surviving M3 tank,

along with the scouts, began movement back to the main body of the 45th Infantry.⁴⁹

Vehicle movement was slow as their column neared physical and mental exhaustion. By 0800 hours on 7 April, they had made it back to their original start point, the intersection of Trails 8 and 29. Moffitt explained that life had not been boring for Company C. Earlier that morning, a column of Japanese model 89A tanks from the Japanese 7th Tank Regiment had attempted an attack from the north along Trail 29. Two were destroyed and the Japanese column beat a hasty retreat.⁵⁰

Lough sent orders for Company C tankers to secure the intersection at Trail 8 and 29. The 45th Infantry evacuated the immediate area and moved a short distance south. Miller then received orders from Tank Group Headquarters to return to his battalion. Miller let Doyle know his orders, asked him to take care of Company C, and departed. After a quick stop at Tank Group Headquarters, Miller and Spoor mounted a new jeep and headed south. The battalion field trains had been obliged to move south into a new position due to heavy Japanese artillery fire. Miller rolled into the new location at 0400 hours on 8 April. The trains had set up directly west of the town of Cabcaben.⁵¹

By this time, the defensive line was disintegrating. The Japanese 8th Infantry (4th Division) and the Nagano Det were bearing down hard on II Corps. The Japanese progressed from Limay to Lamao on 8 April alone.⁵² II Corps tasked the 194th Tank Battalion with supporting a new deliberate attack on the Japanese. Company D, commanded by Captain Jack Altman, was being readied when events began to surpass the II Corps staff's ability to assess and react.

Altman attempted to introduce his tanks against the Japanese by providing general support along the defensive line where they could. Company D's attack degenerated quickly. Artillery rained down on the company destroying several M3s. Tanks attempted to negotiate through the retreating traffic, but to little avail. As tanks tried to bypass wrecks, they became stuck in the swampy bogs.⁵³

To the south, Company A, 192d Tank Battalion and the entire 194th Tank Battalion were in defensive positions facing northeast along the coast, directly blocking the Japanese advance. Additional half-tracks were positioned along Trail 10, providing significant information to both the battalion and II Corps headquarters until the fighting ended. That morning, 8 April 1942, the Japanese assembled a motley collection of canoes, fishing boats, and small barges and attempted a half-hearted amphibious landing directly in front of their positions. The Japanese artillery also attempted to fire smoke into the two tank companies to provide obscuration against the tankers. Instead, the rounds fell just short, landed on the beaches, and added insurmountable confusion to the Japanese landing. The Japanese withdrew.⁵⁴

That afternoon, a battalion ammunition truck pulled up next to Company A, 194th Tank Battalion. Before the company could receive their ammunition, the roar of an approaching Japanese zero could be heard. Soldiers took cover as the fighter's machine guns tore apart the truck loaded with ammo. Shells exploded in all directions, causing the ground to shake and dirt to fly. No sooner than it had started, it was over. The driver of the truck stood up from the trench where he had taken cover and dusted himself off. He grinned out of his sun burnt, dirty face and said, "When they ask me where I was at the time of surrender, I can always say I was where the shells were the thickest."⁵⁵

As the afternoon approached, orders were received from Tank Group Headquarters to have the battalion move further south. Companies A and D, 194th Tank Battalion, and Company A, 192d Tank Battalion, began movement. The trip was slow and

arduous. Military police had to stop them several times as ammunition dumps were blown to prevent capture. That evening, the remaining tanks formed a defensive tactical assembly area and waited. The battalion commander's radio operator waited for the code word "blast" on the radio. This would be the signal to destroy all remaining equipment.⁵⁶

Around 0630 hours on 9 April 42, Company C returned to the battalion. At 0700 hours, "blast" was finally received. The tankers worked feverishly to destroy their equipment. One tank fired its remaining rounds into the other tanks and several trucks from the field trains. Gasoline was poured on every major item and lit. Food was evenly redistributed and the men prepared for the unknown.⁵⁷ That night, the men ate corn beef hash and peaches and thought of home. Few could imagine the horrors that awaited them on the death march and internment, but most just wrapped up in a blanket and went to sleep.⁵⁸

The Philippines now began a brutal occupation that came to an end with the return of U.S. forces in October 1944. The lineage of the 194th Tank Battalion is perpetuated by the 1st and 2d Battalion, 194th Armor (Minnesota Army National Guard) and Company C, 1st Battalion, 149th Armor (California Army National Guard).



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Notes

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¹⁵Ashton, pp. 106, 107.

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²³Ted Spaulding, *Itchy Feet*, unpublished, South Dakota, 1999, p. 109.

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²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 59.

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³¹Morton, p. 413.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 493.

³³Miller, p. 179.

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³⁶Ashton, p. 112.

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⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 199.

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⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 205.

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