

# Can the Philippines Be Defended?

By General Douglas MacArthur  
*As Told to Burnett R. Lester*



*The whole question of the status of the West in the Orient has been revived by the Japanese offensive in Southern China, where Great Britain possesses political and property interests. This possible threat to British holdings focuses attention upon the status and safety of America's Far Eastern interests, notably the Philippine Islands, General Douglas MacArthur, long in the United States Army, has been directing the organization of national defense for the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines since 1935 under designation as Field Marshal. In the following article he explains the difficulties in the way of any military attack upon the Islands.*

IF THERE ARE THOSE who scoff at the thought that Filipinos can successfully defend themselves, when once their citizenry has been trained in the profession of arms and after equipment in reasonable amounts has been accumulated, let us not forget that the idea of Philippine self-sufficiency in this respect is essentially a new one.  
Those who belittle the difficulties of conquering the Philippines know nothing of war and next to nothing

about the potentialities of the Filipino people, Philippine assets, and Philippine terrain. They forget that the Philippine Islands are numerically stronger than such nations as Turkey, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Siam, Portugal, Persia, Norway, Hungary, Greece, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Chile, Argentina, Austria, Bulgaria, and many others now armed to the teeth.

Canada has about two thirds of the population strength of the Philippines. Mexico about the same population as the Philippines. Brazil is the only nation besides the United States in the American continents that has a greater population. Indeed, only 14 nations in the world, I have been informed, have a greater population than the Philippines.

In the general staffs of the world you would find no dissenting voice to the assertion that, when the Philippine defense plan has reached fruition, it will represent a defensive strength that would cause even the strongest and most ruthless nation in the world to hesitate about attacking the islands.

The Philippine army, to be composed principally of a reserve force of citizen soldiers, contains also a small regular element made up of individuals who follow the

profession of arms as a career and who are constantly in the service of the Government. The reserve force is to consist of those able-bodied, male citizens between the ages of 21 and 50 who have been duly selected for military service, and thereafter assigned to the reserve force

To attain a high level of efficiency at little cost in the reserve force, the Philippine defense plan requires the individual to undergo military training as a duty to the slate Under this system, generally known as universal military service, training is normally accomplished by the annual conscription of young men of a given age, and their **intensive training under professional soldiers**

To satisfy the somewhat conflicting considerations of adequate training and minimum sacrifice to individuals during productive years, the Philippine system resorts to various expedients. It provides for elementary military training as a by-product of public school education and affords military instruction on Sundays and holidays to young men not attending school. Later, during the years that the individual remains subject to military service after completion of his principal tour of instruction, the



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THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER THE ARMISTICE  
General MacArthur Revisits the World War Zone  
and Looks Upon His Headquarters in France



PHILIPPINE ROADS ARE ENGINEERING FEATS—THEY ARE BEAUTIFUL IN PEACE:  
SWIFT IN MILITARY USEFULNESS

plan provides for short refresher courses, mainly on week ends.

By liberal use of these and similar methods, the length of the principal training period is limited, for the average trainee, to five and one half months, whereas none of the larger European countries has felt justified in reducing its period below 12 months, while some have fixed it at 24.

The law provides for the annual registration of all 20-year-old men in the Philippines. The registration period is fixed as the first week in April. The response of young men required by law to register in April, 1936, was exemplary. The number recorded, almost 150,000, even exceeded the figure that had been estimated.

Although registration is legally prescribed as a civic duty devolving upon individual citizens, the promptness, enthusiasm, and splendid results that characterized the first registration can be considered as no less than an expression of the determination of Filipinos to create an effective defense for their nation.

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The first class of trainees to undergo a full period of instruction were assembled Jan. 1, 1937. They numbered 20,000, and were succeeded by a group of equal size on July 1, 1937.

The regular force, because of its higher unit cost, is to be maintained at the lowest numerical level consistent with performance of its missions. It will have four principal duties, of which the first is to operate the training system for civilians; the second is to provide, in peace and in war, technical and administrative overhead required by the entire military establishment, the third is to insure continuous availability of a reasonably strong and highly trained military force for whatever use the Government may choose to make of it; and the fourth is to perform the police work throughout the islands that has heretofore been carried out by the Philippine constabulary. Ultimate strength of the professional element will be 930 officers and approximately 10,000 enlisted men, supplemented by a modest air com-

ponent and an off shore patrol of small torpedo throwing boats

An army developed under the principle of universal service is necessarily a progressive growth that can attain its maximum results only after there has elapsed a period of years equal to the length of time the trained citizen remains attached to the reserve force. Under the Philippine law, this total length of obligation is to be 30 years, of which the first ten comprise the individual's assignment to the first reserve, and the two succeeding decades his service in the second and third reserves, respectively.

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**The first objective of the Philippine plan is the training, organizing, and equipping of the first reserve, of 400,000 civilian soldiers.** Forty thousand will be trained each year, to be organized into reserve divisions, supported by auxiliary arms and services. Each division will be located in and responsible for the defense of the particular geographical

area in which its individual members ordinarily reside.

During the succeeding ten-year period the second reserve of 400,000 soldiers will be similarly organized, equipped, supported, and, finally, the third reserve will accumulate for employment as replacement, maintenance, and auxiliary troops

The development of a satisfactory program of armament procurement and maintenance for the Philippine Army presents many unusual difficulties. Among these may be listed the total lack of steel, aircraft, and explosive manufactories, and a consequent dependence upon outside sources of weapons, equipment, and ammunition: the lack of a fleet whereby importation could be guaranteed in case of naval blockade, and the resulting necessity to maintain sizable reserve stocks; the urgent and continuous necessity for economy in this as all other phases of preparatory activity, and, finally, the relatively short life of certain classes of ordnance material in tropical climates.

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Against these disadvantages are to be listed the conditions that tend to minimize the seriousness of the situation. The purely defensive mission of the Philippine army eliminates any need for great quantities of those classes of munitions normally designated as offensive in character, among which are huge guns for the demolition of fortresses, and tanks, combat cars, and aircraft in the quantities needed in major offensives. Only moderate programs in procurement of field artillery material and motor transport, and in construction of repair and machine shops will be executed

Nature has endowed the Philippines with defensive possibilities. It would be an impossibility for any potential enemy to bring to the Philippine area anything like a preponderant portion of his army. He would indeed have difficulty in concentrating into the vital

area as large a force as the Philippine army which would oppose him. Any conceivable expeditionary force might actually find itself outnumbered.

The Philippines has the enormous defensive advantage of being an island group. Hundreds of miles of water separate it from any other land. The protective value of isolation has time and time again been demonstrated in military history. No other operation in warfare is so difficult as that of transporting, supplying, and protecting an army committed to an overseas expedition

The English Channel has been the predominant factor in the freedom from invasion enjoyed by the British islands throughout their modern history of many wars. Although Europe has, time and again, seethed with supposedly invincible armies, of which at least two have made elaborate and definite preparations for the invasion of the island kingdom, never since modern armies have come into being, with their enormous size and huge amounts of impediments, has Great Britain been compelled to drive off a land attack from its shores. The British Navy has, of course, been a powerful factor in sustaining this security But in this dual combination of defenses, the ocean obstacle has been the first and more important, and the navy has been the one to increase the effectiveness of the first.

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The United States undoubtedly owes its existence as an independent nation to the friendly Atlantic The war of the Revolution would most certainly have resulted in ignominious defeat for the colonies had geography separated them from the mother country by a mere land frontier rather than 3,000 miles of ocean. In the war of 1812 this factor again permitted the colonies to withstand the forces of the mightiest empire then existing and preserved the American nation from resubmission to British control.

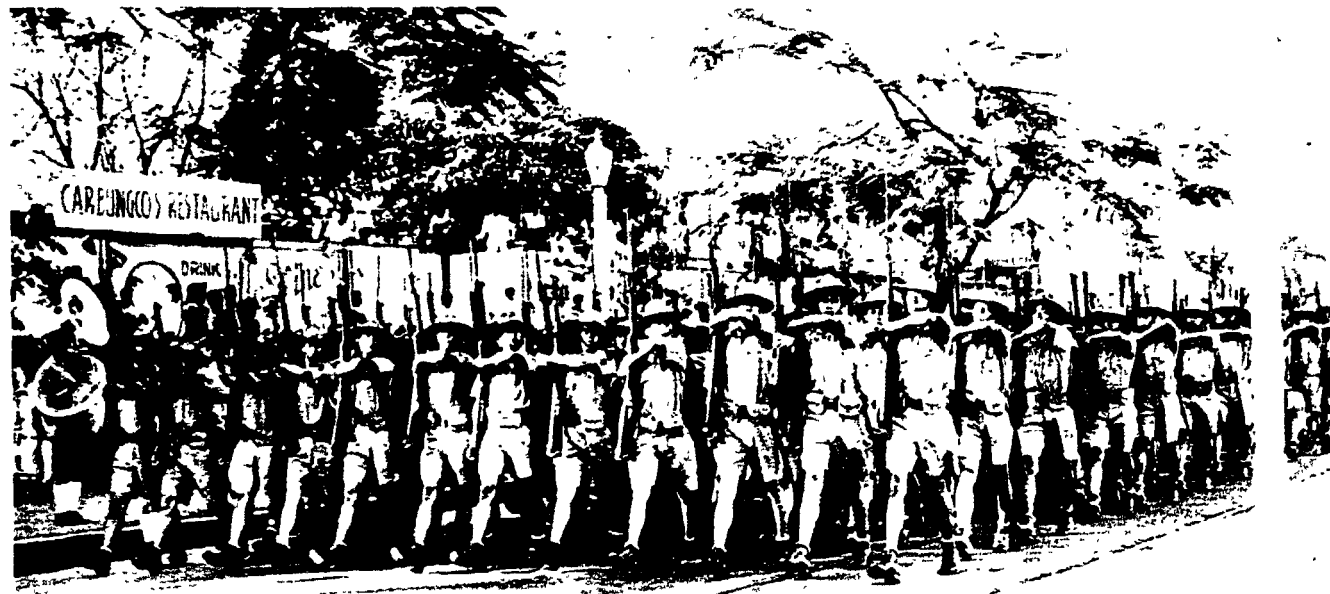
But geography did not cease its defensive favors to the Philippines when it made them an isolated group Nature has studded these islands with mountainous formations, making practicable landing places for large forces extremely few in number and difficult in character. The vital area of Luzon, in which dwell approximately 7,000,000 Filipinos, presents in all its long shore line only two coastal regions in which a hostile army of any size could land Each of these is broken by strong defensive positions, which, if properly manned and prepared, would present to any attacking force a practically impossible problem of penetration.

Sixty per cent of the national terrain consists of great forest areas, impenetrable by powerful military units The mountainous terrain, the primeval forests, and the lack of communications, combine to create a theater of operations in which a defensive force of only moderate efficiency and strength could test the capabilities of the most powerful and splendidly equipped army that could be assembled there.

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Complete subjugation of the Philippines must include the destruction of the defenses on Luzon On this island is located almost half of the country's population. In view of the strength of the defending forces that will be built up in Luzon, the size of an overseas expedition would have to be correspondingly large. Continuous waves of attacking troops would have to arrive in quick

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A PEOPLE IN ARMS—UNIVERSAL CONSCRIPTION IS DESIGNED TO ENABLE THE ISLANDS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES

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R Moulin From Ewing Galloway. N. Y.  
TRANQUILLITY UNBROKEN BY STRIFE

Natives in the Rural Districts of the Philippines Build Their Nipa Shacks on Tall Stilts for Protection From Floods During the Rainy Seasons. Fish, Fruit, and Nuts Are Abundant and Living Is Simple. The Woman Shown Is Balancing a Basket of Fish on Her Head

## ... the Philippines...

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succession to support any initial success.

Based upon past experience, an expeditionary force of 300,000 men would require at least 85,000 animals. 25,000 vehicles. 400 field guns, 2,200 machine guns, 800 trench mortars, and 23,000 tons of rations for 30 days' supply. It would require 190 transport ships, averaging 8,000 tons each, perhaps 100 battleships with auxiliary cruisers.

An invading army would necessarily be troops of the highest possible training and efficiency. The consignment to this single enterprise of such a body, with adequate supporting elements of supply, maintenance, and special services, which would involve another 75,000 individuals, to say nothing of the monthly replacements of some 40,000, would expose any attacking nation to serious risks from other potential enemies, and this possibility would give additional reason for reluctance to undertake an operation of the necessary proportions.

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In all history there is no example of this kind of attack being attempted on a comparable scale, since the invasions of Greece by the Persians in the fifth century B. C. were mainly accomplished by land marches. Even so, those invasions resulted in complete failure.

There remains the possibility of an attacker attempting to defeat the Philippines through naval blockade. This slow, laborious, and expensive method will hold less and less effective threat for the islands as agriculture and industry are adjusted to a more nearly self-sustaining basis.

Since the defense plan pro-

vides for the gradual accumulation of reserve stocks of those types of munitions that must be obtained from, outside sources, and so insures a prolonged wartime effectiveness in the land forces, the principal hope of the blockading fleet would be starvation of the population.

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Assuming success in the effort to make Filipinos self-sustained in food and the ordinary necessities of life, the reduction of the islands by passive blockade would entail a protracted occupation of neighboring waters by the hostile fleet. This would compel constant interference with the great number of international trade routes taking their course through this region. Every type of diplomatic pressure would be applied to bring the blockade to an end. Ensuing friction might easily bring into the conflict on the side of the Philippines powerful armies, who would break the blockade by force.

Manifestly the keystone of the defensive arch necessary to create this relatively strong position in the Philippines is the trained citizen army which will compel every attack to assume the character of a major overseas operation, and will confront the enemy with the certainty of

staggering costs in money and men. Failure to provide such defensive force will expose every section of the archipelago to capture even by small organized forces and will permit any potential invader to seize and dominate the inlands at will.

History is replete with instances to prove that areas that are rich in actual and potential resources will always fall prey to predatory force unless the inhabitants thereof are prepared, efficiently prepared, to impose a cost of conquest on the invader that will exceed any hope he may logically entertain of political or economic advantage.

This is the degree of protection envisioned by the Philippine defense plan. Its object is to insure peace—a peace of self-respect and self-reliance—a peace which upholds, the Christian virtues and defies the threat of rapacious greed—a peace that will mean continued happiness and freedom for God-worshipping and democratic people. Without the stability of safety the very foundations of modern civilization—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—become impossible.

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It cannot be too often repeated that the Philippine defense plan is founded on the basic concepts of a free people. Its full intent is to enable the Filipino citizenship, organized under a government of its own choosing, to protect itself from violence, regardless of origin. It is especially encouraging to note that as the people become more conversant with the plan itself and with its modest, objectives, spontaneous and effective support is invariably given it.

The Filipino citizenry and the government and their servant the army, are embarked upon a great civic enterprise, of which the purpose is to secure to all the people that protection and that security necessary to their social, economic, and cultural progress.

There can be no doubt that so long as the population is imbued with the spirit of patriotism and determination it now so clearly evidences, success is assured.