

CHAPTER XV

The impact of the ominous tidings of Japanese successes deepened the pregnant hush that settled over the Cagayan sector with the launching of Mindanao operations in the Cotabato-Lanao area on Hirohito's birthday. It was becoming alarmingly clear that our ill-equipped forces in those sectors could not long hold out in the face of the armor and artillery being hurled against them. Initially they had resisted stubbornly and given ground slowly, but lack of ammunition for prolonged engagement was spelling the doom of these courageous troops. It was becoming more and more dubious that they would be able to carry out the plan of a coordinated withdrawal to the mountain fastnesses and establish there one of the loci of continued American resistance.

Even with the knowledge of this disaster now engulfing our defenders to the west it was almost impossible to bring the reality of it into sharp focus against the pervading peace and serenity of blue skies reflected in the untroubled waters of Macajalar Bay. It was difficult to picture this tranquil beauty erupting into the pathetic nightmare of terrified villagers fleeing the maelstrom of battle; to envision this peaceful scene transformed in the twinkling of an eye to an hideous mortal struggle - the vicious crack of explosive - the whine and scream of flying metal - the subtle cataclysm of violent death.

How would our untried, sketchily-trained troops respond to this trial by fire? What temper had been imparted through discipline and training to these normally carefree souls? They were so tiny and childlike in their abbreviated uniforms and with heavy rifles taller than they. Their eyes alone mirrored the questions their lips refused to frame, and tightened muscles strove to subdue the mouse-like fear that gnawed away at the roots of their courage.

Quieter voices attempted to belie the mounting tenseness. The weariness induced through the Herculean labor still required to prepare our reception for the inevitable visitor provided our only nepenthe.

The Filipino is inherently a gay insouciant. The will to strife and conflict he wears lightly, with no particular stomach for violence unless the odds are predominately in his favor. As a result of the threat of impending battle the early morning Mass now took on a deeper significance for these Filipino soldiers. The messages of the Chaplains met with unusually rapt attention and customary insouciance gradually gave way to a soberer decorum.

Here and there the chrysalis of resolution made itself evident. Querying one of the machine gunners as to his final protective lines, he was asked, "If the Japs break through the barbed wire entanglements, what then?"

His reply came proudly. "Ser, I am Ilongo. Ilongo do not run!"

If this spirit could be translated into action there was a

distinct possibility that our reception of the Emperor's troops might still be a creditable one.

Even to the staunchest, the news of our reverses to the west was depressing. Continual effort to bolster wavering morale became a commander's dominant duty, which called for an unceasing display of confidence to counter the discouraging trend of events.

It must be remembered here that the unchanged mission of the Cagayan Division was to repel the Jap landing and, if necessary, die on the beaches in the attempt. The association of this mission with an ammunition level which still stood at 60 rounds per rifle, 600 rounds per .30 caliber and 500 rounds per .50 caliber machine gun, has never ceased to be a source of wonderment. Sans artillery, sans mortars, sans armor, sans air, sans every supporting weapon, it was not a mission to relish.

Mistakes in training would loom mountainous now. Time for perfecting techniques and discipline had run out. Before us was the showdown. Would that our merciful God might give us the grace to die like soldiers, with some small achievement on the favorable side of the ledger!

It was during this period that General Sharp, unquestionably motivated by the conviction that a word from the Commanding General was needed to further fortify the morale of these soldiers, visited each of the regiments. At each place the officers and non-commissioned officers were assembled to receive the General's message. What they heard was perhaps one of the most remarkable bits of unintentional

morale destruction that has ever been promulgated.

The text of this talk is unfortunately not available. What the General purported to convey was the necessity for steadfastness, loyalty and devotion to duty. Had he stopped there it would have been splendid. But demoralization set in with the next act.

Calling one little corporal after another, who could scarcely speak or understand English, to the front of the assembly, he posed this question to each of them in turn: "Whose corporal are you?" Surprise, doubt and confusion spread quickly through the ranks. As each of these soldiers admitted to being the corporal of his own battery or company commander his answer was met by a pained and disappointed expression on the General's face, and as he continued his remarks it was patent that carefully nurtured morale was being dealt an almost mortal blow.

"You are not your company commander's corporal. You are not your battalion commander's corporal. You are not your regimental commander's corporal. You are not your Division commander's corporal — you are MY corporal!

He might as well have told them that they were the corporals of the Secretary of Agriculture.

To well-trained American soldiers the implication of this exhortation would have been appreciated, or at least understood, but to these lads who were struggling to understand even basic English, to say nothing of basic military requirements, it came as a bewildering and stunning shock.

After General Sharp's departure the Filipino officers seriously questioned their immediate American commanders to know if they no longer had the authority to direct the activities of their men; and the non-coms were even more perplexed and confused as to just where they stood in this "new" organization. It took hours of explaining and repeated reassurances to partially restore the morale wrecked by this unhappy miscarriage of intentions. It was never possible to completely counteract the destructive effects of this tragic incident.

Our ammunition supply had continued so critically inadequate that we had been unable to get authority to expend even a few rounds per soldier to familiarize him with his weapon. True, long hours had been devoted to patient, meticulous repetition in simulated operation and firing, but nothing, in the final analysis, can take the place of learning by doing. A few rounds fired by the soldier would have demonstrated to him the capability of his weapon, acquainted him with its recoil, and paid dividends in steadier marksmanship. It was something to realize that we were taking into battle these Filipinos who had not fired their weapons even at inanimate targets, and of course had never been under fire!

While things were going badly with General Fort's command in Lanao and with General Vachon's Cotabato contingent, the Macajalar area was in the midst of the calm before the storm. As yet no direct threat of a landing against our sector was in evidence. Father O'Keefe, our regimental chaplain, wished to take this opportunity to make a last

hurried trip to the convento in El Salvador to pick up a few of his belongings. He asked that I ride over with him. The Division commander granted authority for me to make the visit.

(Map #4)

This was Saturday, May second - a beautiful morning as Father O'Keefe and I set out for El Salvador. The natives who had not already sought sanctuary in the hills were going about their normal peaceful pursuits with no outward indication of alarm. How blue the bay looked, with an occasional white cap sparkling in the sun. And how pleasant this small change of scenery seemed. We had been for so long tied to our sector that we had forgotten that sky, water and land existed anywhere else. Here were no soldiers - no military preparations - a fresh decor.

We tarried no longer than was necessary to gather O'Keefe's things and drink a welcome bottle of beer which the convento provided. I began to be uneasy at being away from my command. We started our return ride as soon as possible, although I am sure I detected in the good Padre a desire to linger for a baby's christening ceremony, which was about to begin.

As we were nearing Cagayan on our return the road became progressively more congested with moving humanity. It is difficult to remember now whether the realization of an unusual condition crept slowly into our reveries, or whether it exploded suddenly into reality. We were definitely fighting our way slowly against an increasing stream of hodge-podge traffic moving relentlessly in the opposite direction. Pedestrians - young and old - bent under the burden of

their worldly possessions; carabao carts piled high with all manner of household effects, topped with the children too young to walk; a few head of cattle and pigs being urged along before this grim multitude. There were no gay smiles now such as usually greeted the Americanos - only here and there was a hand raised timidly in the customary V salute.

The significance of this pathetic migration smote us with considerable shock, but the surge of pity that swept over us faded rapidly into acute anxiety for the situation confronting our troops.

Had a landing already been effected in broad daylight? No firing was audible. Reason argued against such a contingency following so closely the morning communique of "No hostile ships in immediate vicinity". The natives were excited and incoherent and little of value could be learned from them.

It seemed an interminable period - actually it could have been no more than an hour - before we reached our command post. There was no confusion here. We learned that Jap transports convoyed by destroyers had been sighted off Salauan Point, heading generally east toward Camaguin Island. This, then, was the alarm which had precipitated the civilian hegira. (Map #3)

A motorized patrol from Webb's command, which occupied the Cagayan sector, ordered west along the coast to scout for the hostile warcraft during the late afternoon reported their position still near Salauan Point. It looked as though our time to play host had arrived. Colonel Morse came in shortly for a discussion of the situation

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and a final check on plans. All motor transportation and supplies not needed in combat were sent from the beach positions into rear areas on the plateau. We were ready.

It was a relief to have so many aeons of expectant waiting about to end in the reality for which we had so painstakingly prepared with our paucity of resources. Our lines were at last clear of civilians as we faced the bay to wait our the few remaining hours.

Darkness, ushered in by a brilliant full moon, still placed the enemy convoy near Salauan Point. Near midnight, with lookouts and outposts doubled, our troops slept on their arms in battle positions, but no further word as to the convoy's probable destination had been received. Lewis, waking from a short nap, took over our periodic contact with the battalions while I lay down, thinking to relax for a moment - then someone was shaking me - I had dropped off to sleep. The hands of my watch pointed to 12:30. The observation post had phoned in stating that four transports and two destroyers were anchoring offshore immediately in front of our position.

Hurrying to the CP on the rim of the plateau, the dark silhouettes of the ships stood etched against the moonlit water. How we longed for some good old "Long Toms" with which to blast hell out of this complacent expedition! The metallic clinking of the ship's winches was borne faintly across the still water - our guests were about to come ashore.

Suddenly fireworks broke loose in the direction of Cagayan. Prepared demolitions to deny the enemy use of docking facilities had

been touched off. The gallant little Katapunan, which had done such invaluable service since her narrow escape at Villanueva, anchored at the Cagayan dock was included in the demolition, her sunken hulk then successfully blocking one approach to the wharf. Two circuits on the north end of the dock, which failed to fire in the first explosion, necessitated speedy rewiring. Webb, with the able assistance of two volunteer officers*, rewired the demolition under fire from the destroyers' batteries and succeeded in completing the destruction of the dock less than thirty minutes before the first assault wave landed at this point.

I remember exulting a little as the 61st's guns remained silent when our positions over Tagaloan way and at Cagayan opened up on the landing barges directed at these points. Battalions had been contacted and cautioned again to conserve ammunition for landing-boats and -parties only but our great concern was that some nervous trigger finger would set off a contagion all along our front and thus expend our pittance of ammunition in an hysterical and futile outburst of firing.

(Map #4)

The telephone operator at the OP handed me the phone - Colonel Morse's voice came over the line, cool and crisp. "Are all your motors out of the area?" To my affirmative he said, "Notify your troops that the Sayre Highway demolitions will be touched off in exactly twenty minutes. Got it?"

I had it, but remember thinking this a bit premature. Then - "Are you engaged with the slant-eyes?"

*First Lieut. Edwin Lee Miller and Second Lieut. Hamid, a Moro.

"Not yet."

"Well, give 'em hell!"

Shells from the destroyers' desultory fire were thudding far back on the plateau. Machine gun fire from the landing barges directed against Tagaloan and Cagayan appeared, as outlined by occasional tracer, to be high and not too effective. The fire being returned by beach positions seemed too intensive for sustained resistance in view of limited ammunition.

Then came the news from Lt. Cantago, commanding the right flank battery* of the 61st Field Artillery, that contact had been lost with troops to his right. These troops were a detachment of the 30th Bomb Squadrom, 19th Bomb Group, Air Corps, which had been attached to the 81st Field Artillery and charged with the defense of the mouth of a small canyon which gave comparatively easy access to the heights just east of the Sayre Highway. Assigned to this highly vulnerable spot in the belief that American troops would be more dependable and steadfast, less likely to panic than native troops, as far as can be reliably determined this detachment left the scene of action with the first Jap landing attempt, without firing a shot. Some of these men were picked up at the straggler line well to the rear. None returned to action in the Cagayan-Tagaloan area.

Cantago's patrols to the east made fleeting contact with the left of the 81st Field Artillery, which by daylight had withdrawn to the heights a short distance to the south. Communication with Woodbridge was still okeh and revealed that the initial Nip assault in

*It is reiterated that the artillery units fought as infantry, with rifles.

this sector had been concentrated against the Tagaloan dock and adjoining beach positions. Although the vastly outnumbered battalion of the 81st had clung tenaciously to the positions, the bitter but brief action had culminated in the loss of all eight machine guns on the beach, as well as six gun crews - but at a cost to the invader conservatively estimated at some 700 casualties.*

The collapse of this sector of his front had badly shaken the morale of the remaining units and this astute officer had his hands full in stemming a snow-balling withdrawal of his green troops. He reported that his right flank was seriously threatened by Jap cavalry which was working its way up the Tagaloan Canyon, and he was having to refuse this flank.** To better face this threat he asked that the 61st FA make dispositions to cover the gap between the 61st and 81st created by the defection of the Air Corps detachment.

The .50 caliber machine gun emplaced east of the highway to cover the main demolition could only partially control this critical pocket. Accordingly Cantago was ordered to refuse his right flank slightly in order to prevent a penetration at this junction. This he was unable to do without establishing a new position some 300 yards to the rear, which was promptly accomplished.

The command post of the 61st FA was now ordered from its exposed position on the coastal flats to a location on the plateau some 600 yards south of the bluffs. At this time communication

*From Lt. Colonel Woodbridge's report of the action.

**In military terminology, to refuse a flank is to swing back the threatened end of the line in order to present a continuous front to the enemy.

went out with Trinidad's 2nd Battalion, which was disposed west of the Little Agusan River, and with Webb's 103rd Regiment, whose wire line hooked into Trinidad's switchboard. Repeated attempts to reestablish this contact failed. Line repairmen failed to return. Runners failed to come back. An officer patrol disappeared. There was one inevitable conclusion - these men had all succumbed to "evacuation fever".

It may or may not be appropriate here to hazard the conjecture that many of these, as well as other evacuees, terrified by impending combat, were later counted among the stalwart guerrillas whose fame has been so loudly sung since the victory. But what of those who stayed to slug it out with his Nipponese Nibs? The disgrace of surrender and the humiliation, starvation and torture of prison camps. Perhaps there is no reason for a nation to be grateful to soldiers who fight and are forced to surrender. Perhaps it is fitting to bestow honor on those who run from combat and turn up later as heroes. This was graphically demonstrated in the social ostracism suffered by the Filipino who loyally stood by his American commander and endured the rigors of prison camps, as against the approbation extended his brother who ran from such a fate.

As daylight broadened it gave us a chance to take stock of our situation. Some small changes in dispositions were indicated and made. A lone airplane came roaring out of the south, skimming the scrub trees on the plateau, headed straight for my command post.

I remember hitting the dirt about the instant his machine guns opened up with a deafening staccato. A glance upward revealed the white star of a P-40, directing its fire against the Japs on the beach. Available records do not reveal this pilot's name but he had the unique distinction of providing our only air support against the Macajalar invasion. It is said that he returned safely to his field, and it is hoped that he reached home safely also.

Just at this time one of my native officers came racing into the command post, revolver in hand, white with fear. His glazed eyes, quaking knees and incoherent speech unmistakably indicated the loss of his reasoning faculties.

I took his weapon out of his violently trembling hand - he relinquished it docilely enough - and queried him as to his command. The only words he could utter were "The Japs! They are coming!"

"Where are the Japs?" I asked.

He pointed in the direction of the front. "There!" he screamed. "They are after me!"

His wild arrival had drawn the absorbed attention of the entire personnel about the command post to whom his hysterical panic was now visibly spreading. Palid faces, wide eyes, the whispering shuffle of bare feet emphasized the mounting tension prefacing a stampede. It was necessary to sting the fugitive officer's face with a sharp slap to quiet his hysteria and halt his frantic gibberings, but some damage had already been done. The civilian headquarters cook and his soldier assistant were sidling unobtrusively

into the brush.

"Where in hell d'you think you're going?" I demanded of them.

They all but wrung their hands in their agony to be gone. Both talking at once, they paraded dependent families, sick grandmothers, winding up with the inevitable "Oh, Ser, we go home now!"

Well, the sooner we learned who the staunch ones were, the better. These two we could do without. The soldier had been of negative value from the beginning. The other's services could be easily dispensed with since there would be little to cook from now on and no time to eat, anyway.

But the possibility of a small infiltrating patrol as the cause of all this rumpus could not be lightly dismissed. Lewis with his customary sang-froid had assembled four or five riflemen and started forward at once to investigate. He returned after about thirty minutes, bathed in perspiration and disgust. His only comment was "Nerts!"

Little disturbing incidents now followed in rapid succession. For two or three minutes I had been mentally noting the frequent ~~questioning glances being exchanged between several of the soldiers~~ on duty at the command post. It became so apparent as to distract my attention from other pressing matters. Then suddenly I was aware of the soft, quick whisper that unmistakably indicated rifle fire passing over our heads. An occasional leaf or twig, clipped by a bullet, fell lazily to the ground. Snipers had evidently succeeded in getting through our lines. Now our little problem was to find

them so we could carry on without this added menace.

A small patrol was dispatched to locate and eradicate this nuisance. A brief word of encouragement to the command post group and a reassurance that there was no cause for worry until dirt could be seen kicked up by the bullets seemed to allay their uneasiness. Again it was gratifying to observe the sturdiness of these men who stuck to their posts. A few more days of this would develop an outfit of soldiers - at least the goats would be gone! The patrol soon discovered the snipers across the Little Agusan River Canyon in Trinidad's sector and succeeded in driving them off.

At the outburst of firing by our patrol I had gone over toward the canyon and ran smack into one of my rifle platoons being hastily led south (to the rear) by a young officer in whom considerable confidence had been placed. He was surprised and extremely disconcerted at finding his path blocked by the regimental commander. When questioned as to his destination he replied that he had heard firing to his rear and fearing that his platoon had been surrounded had decided that it was high time to extricate his command from the mess. He was assured that there was no threat in the rear of our front lines and ordered to return his platoon to position. This he was most reluctant to do and offered an argument as to the advisability of doing so together with a scathing criticism of the intelligence back of the order. Again ordered in explicit terms to lead his platoon back to its front line position, he refused. The fire power of these rifles could ill be spared, neither could this entering wedge of

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insubordination be countenanced. It was imperative to take drastic measures with this officer. The man then offered no further objection to being led back into the position they had abandoned. This same platoon later performed most creditably under the stress of combat.

Buck Lewis had gone over to confer with Cantago, whose troops had again lost physical contact with Woodbridge's left at the Sayre Highway, when information was brought in by runner from Gavino that a sniper patrol had succeeded in slipping past our shore positions into the Tino Canyon. Captain Wald at the observation post was queried about this incursion but admitted that the Tino was in dead space as far as his visibility was concerned. He promised an immediate personal reconnaissance and report.

Some minutes later - perhaps thirty - bursts of machine gun fire mingled with rifle fire of smaller caliber from the direction of Tino Canyon were accented against the curtain of heavier explosions and distant musketry. Upon questioning the OP it developed that Wald had pulled a .30 caliber machine gun from an unengaged position near the OP and, accompanied by one soldier, had gone off in the direction of the Sayre Highway. The racket in the canyon died out almost as suddenly as it started.

On my way to check into this development I met Wald, not far from the gorge. A broad grin spread over his dirt-smearred face.

"We got there just in time!" he yelled, still deaf from the machine gun's bark. "The bastards were damn' near up on the plateau - three of 'em are! There - see?" pointing to three widely spaced

crumpled objects. "Boy! Was their aim lousy!"

We went on to the machine gun, past the three dead Japs who had gotten in behind it. The soldier was still studying the slopes of the canyon with Wald's field glasses and enthusiastically pointed out to me nine more victims of Wald's machine-gunning.

This had been a close one for Wald and the Filipino. We went on forward to search the dead Japs for documents or papers - there were none of any description. Then we went back to the three on the plateau. It was only then that I discovered that they had succumbed to expertly directed fire from a .45 pistol. Wald preferred to remain modest but my admiration for the youngster for this exploit has never dimmed.

It was now reported that several tanks had entered the comparatively wide, flat mouth of the Tinao Canyon on our right. While this interposed no serious threat to the situation, since armor could not negotiate the steep, winding trails which provided the only access to the plateau through this corridor, it was still necessary to insure that accompanying infantry also could not.

The regimental reserve consisted of only a handful of Headquarters troops with one caliber .30 machine gun. Lt. Miranda, commanding Headquarters Battery, volunteered to lead this Lilliputian reserve into the canyon to engage the dismounted elements of this penetration. They went off in good order - and vanished into oblivion. Neither hide nor hair nor skeleton nor rumor was ever seen or heard of them. What we did learn however, was that the report of the

armored penetration was false and that our machine gun on the beach in front of the canyon mouth was still operating and in position. This gun crew, earlier that morning, had withdrawn prematurely from the line as a result of ambiguous orders but had reoccupied position and regained control within its sector of fire. Shortly thereafter, under a vicious machine gun and mortar attack launched against this point, these stalwarts held their position until - their ammunition exhausted - they were overrun and annihilated.

About this time, perhaps 0900 hours, Cleofe reported small caliber artillery fire falling on Cantago's front, which started serious fires in the dry grass and underbrush forcing this unit to pull back farther up the slope to escape being roasted alive in the intense heat and smoke. Considerable perturbation was felt upon determining the direction of this artillery fire to be from our rear. It was indeed serious if the Nip had gotten artillery behind us.

Of little solace was the explanation of this contretemps. Major Phillips, commanding the 2.95 gun detail, (which now consisted of three guns, 1 mortar and about 70 Philippine Army soldiers) had been ordered into action as additional protection for the main demolition on the Sayre Highway. Here he was joined by Captain Jefferson Speck as observer. Evidently under the impression that our front lines had crumbled and inspired by the ideals of the true artilleryman, he had opened fire on what he believed to be Nip positions. Before a runner from the 61st could reach him over the almost perpendicular canyon trails, his firing had ceased.

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Fortunately we suffered no dead from this barrage but several men were severely burned by the grass fires. Whether Major Phillips' information concerning the front line situation emanated from some misinformed individual at Force Headquarters, or whether he placed over-much credence in the lurid tales poured out by the many "evacuees" from the beach positions, is not clear. Even so, this does not quite explain the fire directed on areas occupied by friendly troops, since no evidence is available of any liaison having been attempted between the artillery and the 102nd Division - or more to the point, with subordinate units which he may have endeavored to support by this fire.

Almost immediately after Phillips had withdrawn his guns farther to the rear a lone Jap bomber smeared his vacated position with a full stick of high explosive.

The remainder of the morning and early afternoon were characterized by extremely light pressure against the center of the division, enemy efforts in this sector being limited for the most part to attempts at infiltration. Occasionally a sniper who had succeeded in getting through our lines would reveal his success by setting off a chain of fire-crackers to create the illusion of their light machine gun fire in the rear of our lines. For the first time or two this little ruse created considerable alarm, but we soon learned to recognize the difference in sounds. In almost every case the sniper was located and eliminated - but not without the expenditure of considerable effort and time.

Throughout the morning efforts were continued to reestablish contact with Trinidad and Webb. These efforts were unsuccessful. However one small patrol did return about 10:00 AM with the information that Trinidad's 2nd Battalion had abandoned the ground between the beach and the hills; that no enemy were in evidence in that sector, which was subjected only to very light gunfire from the destroyers.

In order to better deny use of the beach road to the enemy from their established beachheads at Tagaloan and Cagayan and to obviate presenting a flank to enemy naval craft and possible landing barges, the 1st and 3rd battalions were now moved into organized positions just south of the National Highway which paralleled the beach at an average of 150 yards from the water. Two well-concealed and -protected .30 caliber machine guns were left in their original positions, at considerable risk of isolation, to provide cross-fire on critical parts of the road.

The initial beachhead established by the enemy on Macabalan Point was largely regained during the morning when two companies of Webb's regiment, supported by one mortar squad under Lt. McLaughlin, staged a determined counter-attack. A stubbornly-retained Jap toe-hold on the tip of the point however, was reinforced and expanded, forcing Webb's troops back as his right flank - which had been uncovered by Trinidad's* unwarranted withdrawal beyond his second battle line - fell back from their forward positions which controlled the beach highway (National Highway). Webb later contended that this

*Left flank battalion of 61st FA.

was necessitated by serious enemy pressure from the direction of the 61st FA and along the highway. If this attack against his right did develop from the direction indicated, additional landings must have been made at or near the mouth of the Cugman River after Trinidad's defection, since no hostile troops at any time crossed the front of the 61st FA.

In midafternoon Webb ordered Curaming's 1st Battalion to fall back on Kiliog to prevent the enemy from cutting his line of retreat. At the same time Jaldon's 2nd Battalion was ordered into a third prepared position at Indahug. Meanwhile the 3rd Battalion, Webb's right flank, commanded by Major Robert B. Bowler, stubbornly held out against vigorous attacks on a second line between the beach and the Indahug hills until ordered to withdraw south of the Indahug hill mass. Company "I", as rear guard, covered the withdrawal of this battalion in splendid fashion, inflicting heavy casualties on a confident adversary. One of its machine guns remained in a concealed position until the Nips started a victory parade at barrio Gusa, whereupon it opened up with telling effect, accounting for at least fifty dead.

(Map #4)

The road from Cagayan around the Indahug hills to Libona, which had been constructed at the cost of so many man hours and expenditure of so much explosive under the tireless supervision of Major Webb, was ordered destroyed by Force Headquarters on 2 May as invasion became imminent. This decision removed the only means of easy union of force on a general line of retrogression and compelled Webb's

units to withdraw farther to the west over poorly defined, hazardous and circuitous trails. This not only precluded a coordinated withdrawal toward a rendezvous but made impossible the evacuation of the wounded to established medical facilities. As a result of this the 103rd Infantry was dissipated over a wide area in its retreat and was never reorganized.

About 4:00 PM Division telephoned that due to the isolation of the 103rd Infantry in the Cagayan area and the deteriorating situation on the right, especially along the Tagaloan River, the 61st and 81st would break contact with the enemy on the beach after dark and occupy prepared defensive positions astride the Sayre Highway at Alae, ten kilometers to the south. The regimental commanders involved in this disposition would make a daylight reconnaissance of the Alae positions prior to occupation. Attempts would be made to reestablish telephone communication with the regiments on the new positions and that Division Command Post would close at its present location at 5:30 PM and open at Tankulan at 5:31 PM.

By the time orders could be evolved to effect this withdrawal and transmitted to all echelons of command, little of daylight remained. Consequently, Woodbridge and I found ourselves on the Alae position as dusk was settling. Night falls fast in the tropics so most of our familiarization was accomplished stumbling over strange terrain in darkness. We had not gone far before a glimmer of light pierced the blackness nearby. Investigating, we found a Filipino captain and several soldiers apparently engaged in setting up a

regimental headquarters.

"Who're you and what are you doing here?" I demanded.

"I am Captain Juan de la Cruz, ser. We were ordered in here to prepare for Colonel Thayer's 62nd Infantry to take over the defense of Alae and cover the withdrawal of the 102nd Division to Dalirig".

(Map # 18)

This threw a different slant on the picture which had not been covered in orders, particularly in view of the Captain's unshakable contention concerning the 102nd's withdrawal beyond Alae. Somebody was obviously off base.

There was no communication with any higher echelons at this time except by messenger. Accordingly, two distinctly perplexed regimental commanders set out for a hurried visit to Division Headquarters for clarification of dispositions.

In the direction of Tankulan the skies were aglow with extensive fires which looked prophetic and disturbing. We made our way past the fires and through the delirium of truck traffic moving farther inland and were finally able to discover the command post. It was a relief to step out of the eerie light of blazing fires and frenzied, confused activity into the comparative calm of Headquarters.

Our expressions must have conveyed the question in our minds as to why all the hullabaloo way back here, for Morse took one look at us and answered, "Somebody's gone off half-cocked and precipitated this mess - and what in hell are you two doing here?"

M A P #18 Dalirig-Sumilao Sectors

I still wanted to know what had happened to set off all the fireworks.

"You ought to know where the Japs are," Morse retorted, somewhat tartly for him.

"I do," I replied. "We've got a lot of 'em pinned to the beach. They aren't bothering anybody back this far!"

"Okeh", he came back, "then what are you doing here?"

"Somebody's gone off half-cocked down at Alae, too," I told him, and proceeded to outline the situation as we had found it. Before we had finished talking Killen was already on the telephone in an attempt to get in touch with Force Headquarters.

Morse reached behind him for a half-full coffee pot bubbling over an alcohol lamp. "You two look tired. Maybe this will help."

Some of the fatigue passed as the strong, hot liquid seared its way to the bottom of an empty stomach. Killen with the telephone still in his hand reached for the pot just as General Sharp and Colonel Robinson came into the room. General Sharp was unconcealedly surprised at finding Woody and me there and demanded of Morse, "WHY?"

After considerable acrimonious discussion, during which everyone was brought abreast of the situation and apprised of changes in dispositions, everything was settled amicably enough. The decision was made then to establish the main defensive position along the Mangima Canyon west of Dalirig. The 81st Field Artillery would withdraw to the Mangima position via Alae-Tankulan. The 61st FA would

move by way of Alae-Sankan-an-Puntian-Sumilao.

The 62nd Infantry, which it appeared had been ordered into position at Alae, would be stopped at Dalirig and the mission of covering the withdrawal of the 61st and 81st would be assumed by Goldtrap's 93rd Infantry transferred from Libona.

Motor transportation would be moved forward from Dalirig to pick up the remnants of the 81st FA at their assembly point on the Sayre Highway at Kilometer 22 and the 61st FA at Kilometer 23 and move them to the new positions. Motor roads between Sankan-an and Sumilao were nonexistent, necessitating movement on foot for this distance.

Meanwhile, about 5:00 PM, Major Phillips had been informed by the Force Intelligence Officer, Lt. Colonel Humber, of a "serious breakthrough" on the right flank, in the Tagalcan area, and that the 81st FA was falling back to its third line of defense on the plateau slightly south of the rim of the bluffs. Phillips accordingly withdrew his detachment to a point some 300 yards in the rear of this third line with the intention of supporting the front lines and acting as anti-tank defense. Captain Duane L. Cospers volunteered to observe from the original observation post in order to register on the main demolition for intermittent unobserved fire at night. Upon returning from this OP he reported that the so-called "third line" was devoid of any troops.

Unable to communicate with General Sharp's Headquarters, which was at this time in the process of moving from Del Monte to Dalirig,

Phillips withdrew his guns to previously selected positions near Alae. There the first platoon, with two of the 2.95 guns, under Captain Fritts, took up position near Kilometer 76; the second, with one gun and one mortar, was emplaced along the Alae-Damilog road. During the night, by Force order, Fritts with the first platoon was pulled out and sent back to Dalirig, the second remaining in support of Goldtrap's 93rd Infantry in covering the withdrawal of the 61st and 81st to their new positions.

At midnight 3-4 May the 61st FA, covered by Gavino's first battalion, began its withdrawal to the designated entrucking point. The 81st FA also successfully broke contact with the enemy and reached the Sayre Highway at Kilometer 22.

Motor transportation which was supposed to arrive at these destinations by 1:00 AM had not put in an appearance, yet the sound of motors in the distance toward Tankulan could be discerned by the attentive ear. Time, which was of the essence in effecting a clean break away, was slipping past and still no evidence of the expected transportation. Elements of Gavino's battalion were beginning to arrive in the assembly area, so leaving Lewis with instructions to start the movement by marching if there were no visible signs of the scheduled motors within thirty minutes, I set out toward Tankulan to find the convoy.

At Alae a big six-by-six truck had been abandoned and set afire by the side of the road, the acrid stench of its blazing tires filling the night. Farther on, beyond a hill around which the road

curved sharply, the brilliant glow of many powerful headlights illuminated the sky, advertising to the enemy that something unusual was afoot by the blatant disregard of blackout restrictions. The racing of engines and the clashing of gears were plainly audible, yet the sounds did not appear to come any closer. Upon rounding the shoulder of the hill which had screened this activity there was revealed the most indescribable scene of pandemonium and confusion that could be imagined. The convoy was halted and in panic.

Here the narrow road, scarcely wide enough for two vehicles to pass, writhed along the face of a cliff, sheer rock towering on the one side - an abrupt drop hundreds of feet to a boiling river on the other. Yet here many of the drivers, in unreasoning fear, were maneuvering to turn their trucks and busses around, snarling the column into a hopeless tangle, without design or leadership.

The convoy commander was not in evidence and the road appeared to be thoroughly blocked by the many vehicles which had managed to complete only a partial turn. Some engines were stalled, the drivers staring vacantly ahead; other engines raced madly, adding their noise and blue fumes to the inferno.

Laboriously proceeding along the column I found Lt. Colonel Johnson, Force G-4, who was personally in charge of the movement. I shall never forget his harried expression as he admitted that the situation had panicked in his face.

Trucks in the rear of the column had already succeeded in

turning at more favorable points and were now speeding toward safety. Making our way to the lead vehicle we found it headed in the right direction, but with motor dead and the driver clutching the steering wheel with both hands, staring fixedly before him. It was difficult to arouse him to any semblance of intelligent reaction. To repeated orders to start his engine he would respond by momentarily stepping on the starter switch and repeating pitifully, "But, Ser, the Japs are there!"

During one of his brief cranking efforts while attempting to discover the cause of the balky engine, I turned the ignition key. The motor roared into life. This was no subterfuge on his part - he had forgotten, in his hypnosis, that he had previously cut the switch.

Pulling the vehicle ahead and getting six or seven more out of the mess and in column behind the lead bus, I started back with them toward the rendezvous. Johnson was feverishly engaged in extricating other vehicles from the tangle and promised to dispatch them toward Alae one by one as they became disentangled.

Most of the 61st had passed Alae by marching on Sankan and only a small detachment of Gavino's rear guard were at the assembly point watching over a few sacks of rice when I arrived with three of the vehicles - the others had vanished in the covering darkness. It was daylight when we pulled into Sankan where we took time to reorganize, cook breakfast of lugao* and rest the troops for an hour.

Then the gruelling march under blazing skies began. The motors

*A thin rice gruel.

accompanied us part way up the narrow and almost perpendicular defile leading out of Sankanan Gorge - only the four-wheel-drive truck, driven by an American Air Corps man made it to the plateau. The two busses were turned across the road, their tires cut and the engines smashed by heavy boulders, as an obstacle to Japanese progress.

Jap air was active throughout the day and kept the column fairly well scattered. Toward mid-afternoon even the truck was unable to further negotiate the trail. Its few remaining supplies were entrusted to several of the already more than weary soldiers. We headed her toward the rim of a five-hundred-foot chasm and put her into low gear - the driver jumped clear as it got under way on a true course for the brink. The sound of the crash came up faintly from the wooded depths.

We struggled on toward Puntian. Impenetrable darkness overtook us as we reached the floor of Mangima Canyon. Without guides familiar with this country the decision was reached to bivouac, rest the command and await that hour when an almost full moon at its zenith would assist in dispelling the inky blackness that shrouded us.

The exhausted soldiers slept to an obligato of tumbling waters and whining mosquitos. For Lewis and me sleep was out of the question. Fatigue was no anaesthesia for the viciousness of these hungry pests. A treasured can of coffee entrusted to one of the soldiers could not be located. There was nothing to do but fret it out. We sat down together and kept warm by slapping mosquitos.

A flashlight reconnaissance failed to discover any vestige of a trail. Hours later when the moon shone directly overhead, the exit trail that was finally discovered would have taxed the capabilities of a Rocky Mountain goat. How these tiny Filipinos, carrying a machine gun or its tripod, negotiated this trail is a mystery, but they did it. At many places it was necessary to progress on all fours, and that by clinging to grass and brush. As we gained the top of the canyon the predawn winds chilled our sweating bodies to the marrow. How welcome the warming sun as it rose in the direction of our destination. That we had, in the darkness, missed the main trail was soon apparent. This meant more tortuous hours in crossing other canyons that interposed between us and Puntian.

Arriving at Puntian about 1:00 PM 5 May, Colonel William F. Dalton acquainted me with Sharp's message attaching the 61st FA to his Sumilao sector. This sector extended the Dalirig position south of the Dalirig hills. The command was halted and rested as the guests of the Sumilao headquarters for a meagre ration of rice for the Filipinos. I remember stretching out on an unswept board floor and sharing a small can of squid with Lewis. It was our first nourishment since early morning of the preceding day. It tasted like the nectar of the gods then, but I am sure it would make me actively ill today. And after a stretch in Japanese prison camps that is fantastic!

Meanwhile Woodbridge had succeeded in corraling sufficient transportation to move his remaining two hundred officers and men to

Dalirig, where they were bivouaced in Division reserve. Morse's 102nd Division now consisted of the remnants of the 31st FA in reserve and Thayer's 62nd Infantry attached from Force Reserve. Webb's 103rd Infantry had been cut off south of Cagayan and the 61st FA was attached to Dalton's Sumilao command.

Major Allen L. Peck's provisional Scout battalion consisting of three American officers, Companies "C" and "E", 43rd Infantry, totaling 136 Philippine Scouts and 31 attached Philippine Army troops, covered Thayer's occupation of position astride the Sayre Highway and west of Dalirig on the night of 3 May and had then been moved back of Dalirig in Force Reserve.

To the south, Dalton's brigade, consisting of the 61st FA on the right and Goldtrap's 93rd Infantry on the left, extended the Dalirig position along the Mangima canyon. The 61st FA, which was in physical contact with Thayer's left, occupied a regimental sector between the Dalirig hill mass and the junction of the Puntian and Mangima canyons. Goldtrap's 93rd, covering a front of eleven miles with its left flank considerably refused and in the air near Licoan, completed the dispositions of this command.

After a short rest at Puntian the 61st FA arrived on its position in the late afternoon of 5 May. The regiment at this time consisted of the 1st and 3rd battalions and a remnant of its headquarters battery now commanded by a capable Scout soldier, Inigo Corpin, who had been commissioned 2nd Lieutenant on 12 April. Cleofe's 3rd battalion was on the right and Gavino's 1st on the

left, with the regimental command post in a depression to the east of Nangka. Outposts were pushed across the canyon to the west, guarding known access trails, while others dug foxholes with bayonets and sharpened bamboo sticks in an effort to materialize a defensive plan. Daylight of the 6th May found some semblance of organization of position, but with far too few troops to effectively block the approaches. Attrition in man power and weapons had been alarming, but the extent of our losses was not too forcibly realized until now when it became necessary to stretch the two remaining battalions - which had dwindled to 200 effectives each - over unreasonable frontages. But morale was high and each assignment was attacked in commendable style. Ammunition was collected and redistributed to insure uniform distribution.

Wollman had requisitioned a couple of decrepit carabao from protesting taos, to move our meagre rations from Sumilao over the precarious trails. These beasts made one trip with two sacks of rice and four boxes of machine gun ammunition before they were recaptured, at night, by their owners. Wollman resented to the end that he had not served carabao steaks with the pittance of rice.

After this all of us were reduced to living on cassava, which fortunately grew wild and in considerable profusion. An occasional black brew of coffee from laboriously gathered wild - and wormy - coffee beans, parched over a camp fire, furnished a means of washing down the pure starch of the cassava.

Goldtrap to the left had on 6 May sent out reconnaissance

patrols as far as Sankanan and Kalugmanan. Since no contact had been made with the enemy in these areas, he dispatched Lt. Weiland with "I" Company and a machine gun section to Sankanan to recover rice and some sugar which had been stored there in a small bodega. Supply problems dogged our every effort and were never solved, since each unit was, for lack of supply organization in rear echelons, left to its own resources.

In the early afternoon of the 7th, Captain R. C. Burlando with one rifle company and a section of caliber .30 machine guns was ordered by Goldtrap to Sankanan to establish an outpost. Just at daylight the following day Burlando's outpost was taken under heavy machine gun fire from the west. Ten truck loads of Japanese detrucking 600 yards northwest of Sankanan on the Tankulan-Sankanan road decided Burlando to withdraw across the gorge to the southeast of the barrio and join forces with Lt. Weiland's command already in position on the east rim of the canyon. During this withdrawal Burlando lost two of his platoons via the "buckwheat" route*, one machine gun destroyed by a direct hit from a Nip mortar and another captured.

Burlando and Weiland, reinforced by a section of mortars, stubbornly contested the Jap thrust. Captain Orson, the V-M Force veterinarian, who was in the area on a special mission personally assumed command of the left flank platoon and acquitted himself well.

Further reinforced by Company "C" of Finnigan's 1st battalion and a section of machine guns, the finally halted the enemy advance.

*See footnote Chapter 13, page

Continuous pressure together with a counter-attack launched by "C" Company drove the Nip to the northwest and relieved for the time being the threat against Puntian and Sumilao.

At about noon on the 6th, Trinidad's (2nd Bn 61st FA) lost battalion rejoined my regiment, after a march from Santa Fe via Danilog-Alae-Tankulan-Sankanán and Puntian. This battalion encountered no enemy during this period and at Tankulan found considerable food stuffs together with a sedan and three trucks in operable condition which were utilized to transport a part of his command to Sankanán.

The reprimand administered for his premature withdrawal from the Macajalar position was tempered somewhat by the delight of having additional weapons and effectives again with the regiment. He was consequently directed to take over Gavino's 1st battalion sector. Gavino's command was ordered into regimental reserve and held responsible for security to the rear and toward the right flank, since infiltrating enemy snipers were still to be reckoned with.

Beginning just before dusk on 7 Msy and continuing for an hour and a half, the left of the 62nd Infantry and the right of the 61st FA positions, including Phillips artillery detachment located farther back on the hills, were heavily shelled with light artillery from positions near the Sayre Highway east of Tankulan. Again at 7:00 AM the following morning the right of the 61st FA was heavily shelled. Casualties continued light with only five dead and three wounded. Artillery fire was spasmodic throughout the day.

Enemy planes continued active throughout, harassing our positions with fragmentation bombs and an occasional demolition bomb dropped on rear areas. Their fighter planes continually strafed our forward positions and infiltrating riflemen constantly threatened within and behind our lines. The Nips were particularly skillful at individual camouflage and were very adept at slipping through our lines to create confusion and cause casualties within our rear installations. The unsteadiness of our troops in many instances can be directly traced to the fear generated by these tactics of individual infiltration.

On the afternoon of the 8th confirmed reports of heavy enemy reinforcements concentrated opposite the sector boundary between the 62nd Infantry and the 61st FA, together with increased patrol activities and unusually intensified machine gun and artillery fire, indicated an early push against the Dalirig hills. An enemy patrol had succeeded in penetrating Thayer's left flank but had been driven off. Light thrusts against the right of the 61st FA had made no progress. Descending darkness brought a lull in artillery fire but multiplied the activities of snipers who had gotten behind our lines with the disturbing chain fire-crackers which simulated their light-caliber machine guns.

Toward dusk of that afternoon reports had come from Cleofe that he was no longer in physical contact with Thayer's command and that officer patrols had been unable to make contact with the headquarters of that left flank battalion. There was also reliable

evidence that small hostile elements had passed north of Cleofe's right and were now on the hills to his rear. This information was substantiated by a note from Captain Wald who was at that time on a staff mission to Cleofe. Wald further stated that unless otherwise ordered he would remain with the battalion.

Cleofe was ordered to refuse his right flank slightly to the east and Gavino, in reserve, directed to place a strong combat patrol in the area to protect this right flank.

Contact with Dalton at Puntian was entirely by runner but it had been impossible to get messages through to him since noon - runners either disappeared entirely, or returned stating that they had been fired on behind our own lines. Movement within our lines had become hazardous because all troops were now sniper conscious and fired on anything that moved, in the best traditions of our deer hunters back home.

So far the 61st was intact, but was subjected to artillery fire of increasing intensity. Hostile patrols became steadily more active on the southwest slopes of the Dalirig hills, forcing back slightly Cleofe's extreme right. Continuing efforts to gain contact with elements of Thayer's regiment had produced only negative results.

The growing seriousness of the situation demanded that Dalton be advised, in order to promote a closer coordination of effort between the Dalirig and Sumilao commands. Lateral communication between Morse and Dalton existed only through General Sharp's

Headquarters, now at Impasugong, on an overloaded and unreliable provincial telephone line, which was not infrequently cut by saboteurs or infiltrating enemy. So to discuss the situation with Colonel Dalton - and incidentally test the veracity of runners who maintained their inability to get through to Puntian - I took the trail, accompanied by a rifleman, just as dusk was falling. In the darkness those seven or eight kilometers took a good two and one-half hours to negotiate but we did get through, and with no interference other than that interposed by the exceedingly rugged terrain.

Dalton's information from other sources had been sketchy indeed, but after a thorough patching together of our combined scraps of information it appeared that the left battalion of Thayer's regiment had simply folded up. Permission to stage a counter-attack to recapture the ground lost by Cleofe and to recover control of this part of Thayer's area was immediately requested, and granted, Dalton ordering a mortar section from the 93rd Infantry attached in support.

Trinidad's battalion*, which was relatively unengaged, was selected to make the counter-attack; Goldtrap's 3rd battalion,** part of which had been in action for two days and was withdrawing from the Sankanan area to the Mangima canyon, would take over this comparatively quiet sector; Gavino's reserve battalion being moved to the Fortich ranco to better cover the north and east.

It was near midnight by the time I was able to assemble Trinidad, his battery commanders, and Gavino, at the command post. After orders were issued for the new dispositions and the attack, I asked our

*2nd Battallion 61st Field Artillery.
**93rd Infantry

beloved padre, Father O'Keefe, to offer a prayer for the success of our undertaking.

This occasion is an indelible memory: We knelt behind a screen of shelter-halves, which hid the feeble gleam of the candle we had used to illuminate our map, as the good padre said a prayer to the Virgin Mary which, he said, was invoked only under the most extreme circumstances and which could not fail. As we listened to the quiet voice of faith it seemed that I saw the nervousness fall away from my officers and a spirit of calm determination enter the assembly,

Daylight came at 6:00 AM. That was the hour of attack. There was scarcely time for Trinidad's battalion to reach the line of departure over difficult terrain lighted only by a waning moon. Gold-trap's outfit completed occupation of Trinidad's former sector just before dawn, and Weiland with a section of infantry mortars reported to me about two kilometers northwest of Mangka and went into position on commanding terrain somewhat in enfilade of the line of departure.

The attack was launched on schedule and made steady headway until reaching the sharper slopes of the hills where it came under heavy machine gun and artillery fire. Progress became slow but was continuous until it was halted to prevent over-extension of force. We had more than gained our objective, retaking not only the portion of ground lost by Cleofe's troops but capturing a large part of the area which had previously been occupied by Thayer's missing left flank battalion. When the mopping-up of isolated individuals and groups of enemy by-passed in the main attack had been completed the

area was clear of Nips and our lines extended up the slopes well into the area of the 62nd Infantry. Weiland, who had been unable from his position to distinguish between friendly and hostile troops, had not attempted to bring mortar fire on our objectives.

Our casualties in this action were comparatively light, which can be attributed to the excellent concealment and protection afforded by the many shallow ravines which traversed this section. Japanese casualties were estimated at approximately 70 dead - no wounded - no prisoners.

It was later learned that the disintegration of Thayer's left had been precipitated by an illegal order to withdraw to Maluko, presumably transmitted by an English-speaking Nip who had infiltrated to one of the company command posts. Because of the intense artillery, mortar and machine gun fire these troops had endured, coupled with a rather heavy casualty list, with withdrawal quickly spread to adjacent units.

During the evacuation of these troops Major Phillips mortar squad, engaged in firing on the bridge that spanned the Mangima river, was fired on at extremely close range by an enemy automatic weapon. This touched off a heavy exchange of fire from both sides which kept the mortar squad under crossfire for a long fifteen minutes. Through the personal efforts of Lt. Colonel Thayer, who recklessly exposed himself to fire from all sides, the sector was quieted down.

Two of the derelict platoons straggling back toward Dalirig were halted by Phillips, who was told by the men that there were no longer any of our infantry in position. Colonel Killen, notified of this

reported turn of events, and of Major Phillips consequent decision to occupy position farther to the rear, ordered in the Scouts to plug the gap and cover the withdrawal of the artillery.

Between 8:00 and 9:00 AM on 9 May Thayer's troops, outflanked on his shattered left, were ordered to fall back on Maluko by occupying alternate defensive positions with the Scout battalion. Toward noon, as the hotly pursued rear guard of the 62nd reached Dalirig, the Jap launched a well-timed strong attack simultaneously from astride the highway and from the hills commanding the barrio. So vicious was the onslaught that the Scouts and remnants of the 81st IA, defending on a line through Dalirig, were thrown into considerable confusion. Through the staunchness of the Scout soldiers and the gallantry of Peck and Breitling the initial force of the thrust from the road was stopped. But the position, subjected to terrific small arms and artillery fire from the hills, augmented by dive bombers' attacks, soon became untenable. The Scouts were ordered to burn about three truck loads of clothing, food and ammunition placed in their custody. The barrio was already in flames.

The second shock of the attack came quickly and our forces, caught in a tight ring of fire, broke and retired in disorder over open ground raked by enemy fire. From here on it was every man for himself or- as one Filipino officer phrased it, "everybody was seeking for his own safety!"-and all semblance of unit cohesion was lost.

Peck and Breitling in an effort to complete destruction of abandoned equipment became separated from the battalion and rejoined

friendly troops only after many trying hours.

The Jap, as so frequently noted during his Mindanao invasion, made no attempt to exploit his advantage beyond Dalirig during the remainder of the day. This enabled Colonel Morse to assemble some 150 officers and men - virtually all that was left of the 102nd Division - to cover the destroyed bridge and road just south of Maluko.

Meanwhile to the south, Goldtrap's 1st battalion covering the Nangka trail across the Mangima, sharply repulsed at daybreak a determined effort to penetrate this sector. This effort was not repeated but the entire position throughout the day was harassed by expanding infiltration tactics and spasmodic mortar and artillery fire. The 61st successfully resisted several weak tries at crossing the Mangima, but more and more of our troops had to be diverted to the job of cleaning up the snipers that were sieving through our thinly held lines. With this extremely annoying menace, together with the clearly visible build up of hostile forces across the canyon, our position was becoming increasingly precarious.

As stated before, communication with Dalton was still solely dependent on runners. Since 9:00 AM there had been no contact with higher headquarters in spite of repeated efforts to get messages through. Several couriers had tried and turned back with the inevitable frightened story that the Japs lay between us and Puntian, where Dalton was supposed to be. The necessity for contact with the commander of the Sumilao sector became clearly urgent with the

arrival of a Scout soldier from the action at Dalirig: "The Nip cavalry are watering their horses in the municipal square. There is no more fighting along the highway. Captain Bücher is dead, Captain Breitling and Major Peck are missing. Our soldiers are all seeking their own safety!"

The seriousness of the situation had begun to pyramid with the loss of contact with Thayer's command the evening before. The extent of our reverses along the highway and northern slopes of the hill mass, we had been in ignorance of. Even so, too many patrols had been frittered away. Now, with Nip troops definitely behind us, our right flank in the air and a reinforced enemy facing us, contact with Dalton had to be accomplished. It was now that I decided to again leave Lewis in command and make a final effort to reach Dalton's headquarters. The firing all along the line had ceased perhaps thirty minutes before. Darkness was not more than an hour in the offing and we felt reasonably sure that nothing would develop prior to daylight.

When I announced my decision to make the visit to Puntian, and this time alone, Buck said very quietly, "You are not going alone! This time you are going to take orders from me. You are going to have some sort of fire power against these goddam snipers."

I acquiesced and we settled on Lt. Wollman, the Scout soldier with his M-1 and two real hand grenades, and two riflemen.* We started out paralleling our front and according to best patrol tradition. Wollman insisted that he be the point. The Scout soldier

*M/Sgt. Renato Aguirre and PFC Mansueto Antojado.

was placed in the danger flank and the others disposed to complete the diamond. We had been gone perhaps thirty minutes when behind us in the distance came the sound of a short outburst of firing. It died out as suddenly as it started. We continued and as we approached the junction of the 61st and 93rd we were fired on from across a small arroyo about a hundred yards distant. The fire picked up in intensity, but observing what I believed to be a group of Filipino soldiers I forbade returning the fire, thinking this was another case of mistaken identity. Since we refused to enter into a fire fight, our attackers became bolder and exposed themselves a little more carelessly. Yes, unquestionably they were uniformed as Philippine Army soldiers - the dying rays of the sun glinted on their varnished fibre helmets. I directed one of my Filipinos to call to them in as many dialects as he could manage, to acquaint them of the fact that they were firing on their own friends. This was greeted with a "Banzai!" and redoubled rifle and tommy gun fire. Friends or no friends, this was a scrap and the devil take the hindmost.

Wollman was superb. Snatching up the Enfield from a wounded soldier, he recklessly exposed himself and did wonderful execution. The behaviour of this little bodyguard was extremely comforting, and of the fifteen or sixteen Japs who so blithely took us under fire, only three made good their escape. Where the others fell I'm sure the grass grows greener on the Puntian plain.

As we proceeded in the rapidly gathering dusk we again were

fired on from a little nipa shack overhanging the trail. Closing in on this new threat we succeeded only in glimpsing two or three silhouetted figures make good their escape into the dense growth farther up the slopes.

Darkness dropped like a blanket, slowing our progress over the elusive trail, and upon arrival at Puntian it was discovered that Colonel Dalton and Sector Headquarters had pulled back to Sumilao. Goldtrap was engaged in breaking contact with the Jap on the Puntian position for immediate withdrawal to Sumilao and occupation of position along the Maluko canyon.

Force orders to Dalton to effect these new dispositions had not included any change of position for the 61st FA, nor had the 61st been previously informed of the movement which would completely uncover this regiment's left and therefore suspend it between the enemy force, whose axis of advance along the Sayre Highway had already passed beyond its right flank, and the force which Goldtrap had successfully opposed astride the Puntian-Sumilao trail. With the pressure that had been constantly building up against the front of the 61st, the situation began to take on a disquieting resemblance to Custer's last stand where - as in the Battle of the Little Big Horn - we'd have to fight it out in a tightening ring of fire.

It is presumed, although not established, that the intended mission of the 61st FA was to cover the left flank of our forces retiring along the Sayre Highway. To do this, this regiment should have been apprised of the plan of maneuver in order to make disposi-

tions to protect the principal access route to the Sayre Highway through Puntian and Sumilao.

Goldtrap possessed no information which threw any light on the overall plan of action. All he could answer to my queries was the sympathetic comment, "You're in one hell of a spot!"

Trouble always comes like bananas - in bunches. From Goldtrap I learned also that Captain Almojuela, my regimental doctor, and Lieut. Ambal, regimental dentist, had proven again that bad news travels swiftest. They had broken all speed records for cross-country running in an attempt to intercept me somewhere along the trail with the news of the raid on my command post a matter of minutes after I had left it. Arriving at Puntian considerably ahead of me, they had blurted out to Goldtrap that Colonel Lewis had been fatally wounded in the chest - was, in fact, already dead - and the command post captured. Whereupon they had departed into the night. My distress at this news met understanding sympathy in Goldtrap, whose own favorite officer - Lt. Kieth Williams - had been killed in action the previous evening.

But the knock-out blow came with Goldtrap's whispered remark, "I have it on pretty fair authority that General Sharp is ordering a surrender at daylight!"

Keeping the Scout soldier with me, Wollman and the two riflemen were immediately ordered back to the command post with instructions for Major Gavino to re-establish the Regimental Command Post, with his battalion staff if necessary; and further, that should I

for any reason be prevented from getting back to the regiment, or unable to find his new location by 1:00 AM, to break contact, fall back on Sumilao and report to Colonel Dalton.

In further discussion of the situation with Goldtrap, he reiterated that there would be a surrender of all forces at daylight. Was this day to write "finis" to our resistance? As bad as our situation was, it certainly was not hopeless. We still had a few rounds of ammunition - the soldiers that were still in position were steady and dependable - this was no way to go out of action.

In spite of the sick feeling at the pit of my stomach in the loss of Lewis, and the shocking intimation of early surrender - surrender which had never been taught in the American military code - it was mandatory that communication be established with Dalton in order now to coordinate the action of the 61st FA with the general plan being put into effect. The paramount consideration at the moment, however, was getting back to the regiment for a resurvey of conditions there. It is difficult to describe the enormous obstacles to speed over indistinct precipitous trails in utter darkness. Shoe-soles slick with prairie grass - rolling gravel on the sharp inclines - the maze of ravines and occasional jungle swamps.

Through sheerest chance I stumbled over Lewis, painfully making his way to medical attention in Sumilao, assisted by two loyal soldiers* who had bandaged his wounds and attended him faithfully during the absence of medical officers. My morale took a tremendous upsurge at finding this fine soldier and friend alive and not

*PFC Sulpicio Azucema and his brother Pvt. Lamberto Azucema, both of the Medical Detachment, 61st FA.

seriously, although quite painfully, wounded. Here I learned that the Command Post had been considerably demoralized by the raid, but actual casualties had been very light - that Lieut. Inigo Corpin had displayed conspicuous gallantry in quickly reorganizing the scattered personnel of the Headquarters Battery and driving off the perpetrators of this sneak raid - that command had already been turned over to Gavino and orders already issued for withdrawal to Sumilao according to Wollman's message. Lewis expressed the opinion to me then that the regiment would have had to pull back anyway to shorten our lines and consolidate our positions because too many Nips had filtered through and everyone was jittery because of it. I told him that Goldtrap had been ordered back on Sumilao, whereupon he echoed the conviction previously expressed by Goldtrap, "Then we are in a hell of a mess!"

I saw Lewis disappear in the darkness toward Sumilao and went on to my Command Post where I found that Gavino had departed to turn over his command to Captain Ferrer, (Air Corps, Philippine Army) a fine officer who had acted as his executive, and Corpin busily organizing for withdrawal of the Headquarters Battery.

He informed me that Lieut. Gasendo, who had been at the observation post, was probably dead or captured. It would take several hours for all elements of the regiment to be alerted and placed on the trails toward Sumilao.

It was too late now to attempt to maintain our lines on the Mangima, and besides Sumilao lay astride the vital Nipponese route

from his Puntian area to the Sayre Highway, and covered the left flank of the retreating force.

The Scout was still with me and I remember, as I looked at him, wondering if I appeared as tired and bedraggled and exhausted as he. It is quite probable and yet I felt for him a twinge of pity as we stumbled on to Sumilao for the urgent conference with Dalton.

That trail was a phantasmagoria of fatigue and mixed emotions. Surrender! We couldn't surrender! What fantastic brain had conceived that idea? Dalton would never surrender! Not since the dark days of 1780 when General Benjamin Lincoln's troops of our infant Republic, outnumbered and surrounded, had been compelled to surrender to the superior forces of Sir Henry Clinton had an American Army bowed to a foreign power.

The miles seemed to unravel with agonizing tediousness, yet we made remarkable speed in reaching Sumilao. The little Scout and I must have presented an astonishing apparition as we stumbled into the lamplight of Dalton's Headquarters where were assembled his staff and Goldtrap. I was handed a coffee pot from the stove and a glass. The pot was almost empty and I remember draining it into my glass, eagerly straining the hot liquid through my teeth and chewing the grounds - the first food of any sort to pass my lips in more than forty-eight hours.

Dalton, watching, asked, "Did you receive my message?"

"No", I replied, "but where do I take up position now that

Goldtrap has been withdrawn?"

But instead of answering, he repeated intently, "You have received no message from me?"

"No!" - wondering what the hell difference it made, now that I was here.

"Lieutenant", said Dalton quietly, "Bring me the carbon copy of that last message to the Commander of the 61st FA." He took it and handed it to me:

C. O. 61st FA.

SURRENDER AT DAYBREAK 10 MAY. RAISE
WHITE FLAG. DO NOT DESTROY ANYTHING.
STACK ARMS. ALL AT THE COMMAND OF
C. G. VMF. REGRETS. BEST OF WISHES.

C. O. SUMILAO SECTOR 9:25 PM

W. F. DALTON, COLONEL, INF.

This was the end, then. The rumors were true. Anger, disappointment and sick chagrin swept over me at the thought of so great an humiliation to the proud history of American arms. The valiant deaths - the confident plans and strivings - all futile.

But we were still unconquered! We might - would - lay down our arms, as directed, but the invisible citadel which is the heritage of every American would never surrender!

"Colonel Dalton," I said. "I have already ordered my regiment to Sumilao - but there are no white flags in the 61st F"