

Series B (Part II)

"Mac Arthur Here - Mac Arthur There"  
(continued)

President Roosevelt visited Honolulu in the summer of 1944. He discussed plans for future activities in the Pacific with Mac Arthur and Nimitz.

Soon afterward, the Palau Islands and Halmahera <sup>(Morotai)</sup> were invaded by American forces.

The Navy got off easy at both places, for the Japanese Navy was soundly thrashed a few months before. The Army and Marines took a fightful beating and had high casualties, especially at Pelilieu (Palau Islands). At Pelilieu, the Americans faced the Japanese Imperial Marines - the very best fighting men that the Japs had.

After the LST 558 left Palau

~~The~~ ship went to Hollandia, New Guinea <sup>12</sup>. Later, we went to the Admiralty Islands.

Everyone knew that the next move would be to invade Yap, just north of Palau.

As we steamed into Manus (Admiralty Islands - north of New Guinea), we saw 6 Battleships, 6 Cruisers, 21 aircraft carriers, and 45 destroyers leave that harbor. This was a massive task force.

Something bigger than Yap was in the mind.

Then we got the real news - "the Island of Yap is going to be bypassed. While the Japs are still trying to repair their ships, we are going to strike and strike hard!!"

Those words could mean but one L3  
thing - The Philippine Islands !!!

The Philippines !! But we aren't ready to tackle a job like that yet! Give us time! Bomb those islands for another few weeks! Those are the thoughts that ran through our heads.

But nevertheless, we loaded with the 821<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion.

On the way to the Philippines, everyone kept his ears glued to the radio during any spare time. Each day, news of the bombardment of Leyte kept flowing in. The big task force that we saw leaving a few days ago, was already at work. This was part of Admiral Spruance's Seventh Fleet. Also, we knew that Admiral Halsey and his Third Fleet

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with Admiral Mitscher and his Task Force 58 were all on the lookout for a possible Japanese attack.

If we tuned in radio Tokyo, we would hear "Tokyo Rose" saying to us: "Why don't you boys turn back? We will wipe you out if you try to invade the Philippine Islands. A great Japanese navy is waiting for you there."

But we heard her dish out stuff like that prior to the invasion of Palau. And I had heard "Nazi Sally" give the Moffett similar baloney while I was in the Atlantic. It was an attempt to scare.

The landings at Leyte took place on October 20<sup>th</sup>, and it was

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preceded by a heavy shore bombardment.

Then, at noon on October 24<sup>th</sup>, we saw our first Japanese planes. They were very high, and identified as "4 Bettys" - bombers. Hundreds of ships in the harbor were firing. They were too high for our 20 millimeters. I ordered the 40 millimeters to "commence firing!" They were still too high, and I ordered "cease firing." The planes continued to circle. When they made an attempt to dive, some Cruisers and Destroyers with 5 inch guns drove them off.

at 4 P.M. some "Zeros" and "Vals" came in so low that I could see the pilots' faces. We were still on the beach unloading

Hundreds of guns in the harbor L6  
fired at them.

They came in directly at us and were making a definite attempt to stop our unloading by blowing us up.

A gun "commenced firing" a split second late. Reason: for a moment I thought the planes were "F 6 F Hellcats". They were moving at us about 350 miles an hour.

But when I did order "commence firing", the three that were coming in were immediately taken under fire. They strafed us with bullets. They each dropped bombs on us, but even ~~as~~ as I saw the bombs falling, I could see that they would miss us. They did miss us, and they hit the LST 555 and 552.

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several were killed and injured on those ships.

Meantime shrapnel was heavy and all around us. We all had heavy life jackets and helmets on to help protect us. Our gas masks were close by us too.

Five more planes came in about two minutes later. They strafed and strafed and strafed.

We were firing behind a fast moving target. This was bad!

"Lead those planes", I screamed.  
"lead - lead - lead !!!"

a minute later, a "Tony" came in. This time the men on the ship fired with blood in their eyes. They opened up with everything. One 40 millimeter hit the gas

tank and the plane caught fire. 18  
Then the ship poured bullets into  
that plane viciously. The plane  
crashed into the water and exploded.

The "558" had shot down her  
first plane.

A started to congratulate them,  
but A no sooner got the words  
out of my mouth, and bombs  
started to fall all around the  
harbor. They were high altitude  
bombers. Too high.

By nightfall we were unloaded.  
We moved out into the harbor  
where hundreds of Transports,  
Cruisers, Destroyers, LST's, LCI's  
and other vessels were anchored.

Tacolban and Dulag air strips  
had been won, but the Jap planes



still came over.

When we were about two miles off shore, a terrific explosion from the beach knocked me down. A Jap plane sneaked in <sup>on the beach</sup> and had blown up our ammunition dump. The beach shook violently and the flames soared upward. It was a sight that I won't forget. Ships near the beach were wrecked and many sailors and soldiers were killed. The dump exploded at 9 P.M. All night long, ammunition at the dump kept exploding until the following morning.

The flames lit up the whole harbor and the hundreds of ships made a perfect ~~silhouette~~ silhouette for Jap planes. The planes

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could see us, but we couldn't see them. It was a perfect set up for the Japs, and they took advan-  
tage of it! Only one factor kept the Japs from making a slaughter out of us - all ships in the harbor made smoke with their fog machines to hide <sup>all of</sup> us. The harbor became covered with a huge mass of white smoke made by fog oil. It was hard to breathe that night, due to the smoke. The fog was so thick that it was impossible to see past our own ship. Our ship, just as all the others, sat in complete silence off the beach at Tacloban. Every once in a while an explosion would be heard -

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the ammunition dump was still exploding. And, even more terrifying - the loud roar of an airplane motor that came diving down on a ship that was not completely covered by smoke. The planes kept circling around until they saw a hole in the fog. Then they'd spot a ship and dive bomb it. The japs laughed.

But if all of this was frightening, it was mild - tame - compared to what still lay ahead for the Navy !!! The worst had not yet come !!!

at midnight on that same night, our ship had by that time been to General Quarters

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every minute of the time since the first attack came that noon. The men were tired, but this was rough business and they dared not fall asleep. Coffee and sandwiches were hastily prepared and brought to them by the galley personnel.

Every one had to be on the alert. Meantime, things on the beach had been going pretty well for the soldiers and marines. The Japs had been expecting the landings to take place at Mindanao, which is South of Leyte. Engineers were working hard to get the air fields in condition.

at 1 A.M. in the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, the radio men down in the radio

shack gasped when they picked up  
the following message from Admiral  
Barber's ship:

" All ships be alert xxx all  
lights out on beach immediately  
xxx expecting bombardment by  
Japanese navy "

With this message stunning  
everyone on the beach and in the  
harbor, everybody held their  
breaths as to what might  
happen.

The "Battle of Leyte Gulf",  
more popularly and famously  
known as "The Second Battle of  
the Philippines" was on!

Benny.