

Series B (Part IV)

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

The campaign to free the Philippines from the Japanese government moved into full swing.

With bases in Leyte, General Mac Arthur began backing away at the Japs. Leyte Gulf and Samar were excellent harbors. If necessary, thousands of ships could be anchored there. Admiral Nimitz could move his large supply and repair ships and floating docks into Leyte Gulf. The huge air strips were an aviator's dream. The lay-out for countless numbers of troops was fine. Leyte and Samar were gems for future operations. It was not long 'til they ~~became~~^{became} the biggest bases in the Pacific.

Where would the next strike be?

The Japs could never guess. There 12
are so many islands in the Phil-
ippines. Which would we pick?

One day in December of 1944, a
big invasion fleet turned up off
the coast of Mindoro, a big island
South of Manila. The invasion of
Mindoro went ahead smoothly for
the Army. But Mindoro was the
worst fate that the Navy had
ever experienced yet. The price of Min-
doro will have to be measured in
navy, not army, losses.

Ship after ship was blown to
pieces. Many died. The Navy once
again took it on the chin.

If ever you ask a sailor if he
made the invasion of Mindoro, his
likely answer will be: no, I did

not. I thank God that I did not. 13

They say that so many air attacks took place at Mindoro, that it was hopeless to try and count them.

Even the trip to Mindoro was horrible.

The Americans won Mindoro, but I am certain that the Japanese government could say, "It was worth it. We killed so many Americans and wrecked many ships."

I agree with the Japs!

Possibly the luckiest stroke of luck had come to the LST 558. For while the invasion of Mindoro was in progress, our ship was far, far to the South at Morotai, Halmahara.

Halmahara lies between New Guinea

and the Celebes Islands. 14

Halmahera was entirely held by the Japs, except for the northern tip of Morotai. The Celebes were also Jap held. In fact, the Japs still held almost all of the Pacific. The only thing is - we acquired bases near them and built air strips. We "neutralized" the Jap held land. The Japs were being by-passed all over the Pacific.

at the time we invaded Palau in September 1944, Morotai was invaded on the same day. Large air strips were built and the systematic bombing of Borneo began.

Borneo lies West of the Celebes, and contains massive oil fields

15

at Balikpapan and Tarakan. Only a few months ago, Borneo was invaded by Australian troops.

But if Morotai had good air fields, she had had the air corps engineers that put it in operation. It now became time to see what those engineers could do in another spot.

Our ship took on an engineer outfit that escapes my mind at present. I believe it was the 101st engineers.

We spent Christmas at Morotai. Each night while we were there, Japanese planes from Borneo came over. Powerful searchlights sought them out, while "P-61 Blackwidow" night fighters fired on them. No ships ever fired, because the planes

were too high. The ground forces fired^{ed} with 90 millimeters. Also, the night fighters fought them. This was strictly a show to be watched - not joined in.

Exactly on the dot at New Year's Eve, the Japs came over again. This turned out to be an interesting show.

On January 2, 1945, we weighed anchor and moved North.

When Mac Arthur took Mindoro, it became obvious to the Japs that the General had his eye on Manila. He was going to get it by way of Northern Luzon.

800 ships, the biggest invasion fleet in the war except the North African invasion, went through

17

Surigao Strait into the Mindanao
Sea. Then around the Southern tip
of Negros into the Sulu Sea. Up
past Panay and into Mindoro
Strait (South of Mindoro). From
Mindoro Strait - out to the South
China Sea. Then Northward along
Luzon to -

Lingayen Gulf !!

We'll get ruined! we thought.
Bohol, Cebu, Panay, Palawan,
Mindanao, Luzon - all were held
by the Japs. They were good bases
for submarines and torpedo boats.

My only a little over two months
previously, the Jap fleet was fighting
us right at Surigao Strait.

12

all of the waters of the Sulu Sea, Mindanao Sea, South China Sea, Surigao Strait, and Mindoro Strait were still known as Japs infested.

And how many air bases did they have on all of these Islands? Only the island of Mindoro was controlled by us.

This invasion would require a big air umbrella. It was provided. Planes droned over head constantly.

The Japs have a habit of attacking at dusk and dawn, and that is when our air force was at it's best. From air fields at Leyte and Mindoro, our planes took off and landed, to give us constant support and protection.

19

For weeks, Lingayen Gulf had been shelled by warships and planes. There was not very much opposition to the landing. We had engineers of the 6th Army aboard our ship.

(I just recalled the group)

Lingayen Gulf was where the Japs landed when they invaded the Philippines three years before. Now we had come back and went ashore at the same place.

The toughest part of that landing was the surf. The surf was very rough and it was hard to make a landing. Only after most difficult landings were troops put ashore.

The Japs attacked in the early evening and early morning.

And it was here that the Japs ¹¹⁰
ruined plenty of ships by the use of
suicide boats and suicide swimm-
ers.

The boats were loaded with depth
charges. In the pitch dark, the
boats moved along side a ship
and unloaded the depth charges,
causing certain death to the boat-
man, and many casualties to the
personnel aboard ship.

I saw a Jap swimmer get
caught in the search lights of a
ship. The ship fired at the Jap. Be-
fore the Jap got hit, he threw a
hand-grenade on the ship and
caused painful casualties. There
was a lot of hand-grenades thrown

that night.

111

We stayed at Lingayen only a few days, and then went back to Leyte Gulf.

It was here that we loaded with more elements of the 6th Army and took them through the same waters.

Instead of going all the way to Lingayen, this group was put off about 100 miles Northwest of Manila.

They were put off just North of Subic Bay at San Antonio. This was a smart move to cut the japs off

at Batasan Peninsula. Also,

Subic Bay was headquarters for the Philippine guerrillas. The landing was unopposed. Only a few ships were torpedoed by submarines.

We left in two days and re-
turned to Leyte. 112

The campaign to clean up Luzon was going along full blast. The Japs would eventually be wiped out or driven into mountain hideouts. They would even have to give up Manila, though not 'til they wrecked it completely.

As we steamed into the now very familiar Surigao Strait, we knew that our part in winning the Philippines had been well carried out. As we moved into Leyte Gulf to pick up mail, we heard on the radio that Sulu Jima had been invaded. A new Stanley was there. From now on it would be me and Tony.
Benny.