Happy New Year and Welcome to the February session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Roundtable. Tonight’s speaker is Dr. George Eaton, Command History for the US Army’s Sustainment Command at Rock Island Arsenal. We have two veterans and a civilian internee joining us.

The Japanese attacked the Philippine Islands on 8 December 1941. Landing at Lingayen Bay on 22 December, they advanced on Manila from the north. MacArthur’s forces retreated onto the Bataan peninsula and to Fortress Corregidor.

After surrender, American and Filipino soldiers endured the Death March, and PW camps (notably O’Donnell, and Cabantuan), with some in internment camps at Santo Tomas University and Bilid prison. A number of soldiers did not surrender, and most joined the Filipino Guerrillas which controlled up to sixty percent of the islands, and were the core of USFIP, to MacArthur’s initial dismay.

Filipinos endured forced labor, theft, exploitation, and sexual debasement under Japanese occupation. Their loyalty to the United States and their support of the prisoners and guerrilla warfare testify to the ties of trust forged between the two peoples.

MacArthur had promised he would return, but Adm. Ernest King wanted to take Mindanao, then Formosa, and land on the Chinese coast, continuing the island-hopping campaign. MacArthur insisted that both strategic and moral reasons dictated retaking the archipelago, and managed to win this debate.

In the Battle of the Philippine Sea, 19-20 June 1944, the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot,” the Imperial Japanese Navy lost the bulk of its aircrews and aircraft and 3 of its precious fleet carriers. Effectively only ground based aircraft defended the Philippines from American invasion.

On 20 October 1944, the Sixth Army began the landings on Leyte instead of Mindanao. The IJN attempted the destruction of Adm. Halsey’s 3rd and 7th fleets in the “Battle of Leyte Gulf” on 23-26 October. Technically, this was a collection of four battles: of the Sibuyan Sea, of the Surigao Strait, off Cape Engaño, and off Samar. The first kamikaze attacks were launched in this battle, which was the first in which Japan fielded fewer aircraft than the US. After this battle, the IJN was finished as a major fighting force.

By Christmas, 1944, Luzon was taken, and the island of Mindanao fell rapidly since the Japanese did not heavily fortify it. The landings on Lingayen Bay followed on 9 January 1945. The invasion fleet was the largest assembly of combat vessels to that time. This landing was much larger that the fabled Normandy landings, and had few casualties because the Japanese did not seriously contest the beaches.

General Yamashita Tomoyuki was forced to leave substantial areas undefended by the speed and weight of the American advance down the center of the Luzon plain towards Clark Field and Manila. He put significant forces in the mountains above Clark Field to try and deny use for as long as possible.

Despite orders to the contrary, much of the Manila Naval Defense Force remained in the city. As the American forces drove the Japanese forces into the mountains and back on Manila, the MNDF regrouped to defend the city. Its mission was to “defend its already established positions and..."
Despite vicious fighting in the city, the MNDF was forced building by building to retreat, leaving Manila one of the most heavily damaged cities of the war. Yamashita’s main forces moved north into the mountains and dug in, holding out until after Japan’s surrender.

Further Reading:

Kevin Holzimmer, General Walter Krueger: Unsung Hero of the Pacific War (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2007)

Edward Drea, Japan’s Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall: 1853-1945 (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1992)


Robert Ross Smith, Triumph in the Philippines (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2005)

See Reports of General MacArthur including Japanese reports of their operations, at the US Army Center for Military History Online Bookshelves, http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/MacArthur%20Reports/MacArthurR.htm

Announcements:

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Feb 28, 2011 “Key West & Florida in the Civil War” Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268

Rochester WWII History Round Table Feb 14, 2011 "Destroyers in the Pacific" www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org - 507-280-9970

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org or Bill at 952-201-8400


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