

*UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II*

The War in the Pacific

THE APPROACH TO  
THE PHILIPPINES

*by*

*Robert Ross Smith*



*OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY*

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This volume, one of the series UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II, is the third to be published in the subseries THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC. All the volumes will be closely related, and the series will present a comprehensive account of the activities of the Military Establishment during World War II. A tentative list of subseries is appended at the end of this volume.

. . . to Those Who Served

## Foreword

*The Approach to the Philippines* deals principally with lesser known but highly interesting amphibious and ground operations along the New Guinea coast during 1944 and also relates the Army's part in the conquest of the southern Palau Islands. Opening the way for the Allied invasion of the Philippine Islands in the fall of 1944, the operations described in this volume involved all the mechanics of modern warfare—the complexities of amphibious landings, carrier-based and land-based air support, infantry maneuver and small unit action, artillery support, logistics, tank and flame thrower action, troop leadership, medical problems, civil affairs, intelligence, and all the rest. While primarily a story of ground combat action, the volume describes the activities of the Army's supporting services in sufficient detail to complete the history of the ground operations. Navy, Army Air Forces, and Marine Corps activities are covered as necessary to provide a well-balanced picture, and enough strategic background material is included to fit the tactical narrative into its proper perspective in the global war.

Mr. Robert Ross Smith, the author, has a B. A. and M. A. in history from Duke University, and he holds a Reserve commission as a Major of Infantry. A graduate of the Infantry Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga., Mr. Smith served for two years during World War II as a member of the G-3 Historical Division at General Douglas MacArthur's Allied Headquarters in the Southwest Pacific Area. Mr. Smith has been with the Office of the Chief of Military History, either as an officer on active duty or as a civilian, since January 1947.

ORLANDO WARD  
*Maj. Gen., U. S. A.*  
*Chief of Military History.*

Washington, D. C.  
1 May 1952

## Preface

This volume describes the operations of Allied forces in the Pacific theaters during the approach to the Philippines, April through October 1944. While this is essentially the story of U. S. Army ground combat operations during the approach, the activities of all ground, air, and naval forces are covered where necessary for the understanding of the Army ground narrative. Eight major and separate operations, all susceptible of subdivision into distinct phases, are described. Seven of these operations took place in the Southwest Pacific Area, while one—the Palau Islands operation—occurred in the Central Pacific Area. This series of actions is exceptional in that the operations were executed in such rapid succession that while one was being planned the height of combat was being reached in another and still others had entered the mopping-up stage.

Because of the nature of the combat, the level of treatment in this volume is generally that of the regimental combat team—the infantry regiment with its supporting artillery, engineer, tank, medical, and other units. The majority of the actions described involved a series of separate operations by infantry regiments or regimental combat teams, since divisions seldom fought as integral units during the approach to the Philippines. Division headquarters, often assuming the role of a ground task force headquarters, co-ordinated and administered the oftentimes widely separated actions of the division's component parts.

In accomplishing the research and writing for this volume, which was begun in the spring of 1947, the author had access to the records of the U. S. Army units involved in the approach to the Philippines. Records of the Combined and Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U. S. Army General Staff, the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps, the U. S. Air Force, and the Australian services were also made available to the author upon request. Principal Japanese sources employed were monographs of Japanese operations prepared by former Japanese Army and Navy officers, beginning in late 1946, under the direction of the United States high command in Tokyo.

Unlike most operations in the Central Pacific and in Europe, those of U. S. Army ground combat forces in the Southwest Pacific Area had no contemporary historical coverage during World War II. In the last-named theater, no teams of historians accompanied combat units to observe, collect materials, conduct interviews, and prepare preliminary historical manuscripts. Thus, the sections of this volume concerning operations in the Southwest Pacific Area are based principally upon the official unit records maintained during combat and, to a lesser extent, the unit After Action Reports required by Army regulations. For opera-

tions in the Palaus, there was available an incomplete manuscript covering part of the 81st Infantry Division's actions. This was prepared partly in the field and partly during a short tour of duty with the Historical Division, War Department General Staff, by Maj. Nelson L. Drummond, Jr. For operations of the 1st Marine Division in the Palaus, the author depended for the most part on Maj. Frank O. Hough's *The Assault on Peleliu*, an official publication of the Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps.

It is manifestly impossible for the author to list all those who have aided or guided him during the preparation of this volume, but he must express his gratitude to those who have made especially notable contributions.

Thanks are due the personnel of the Historical Records Section, Departmental Records Branch, Office of The Adjutant General, U. S. Army, especially Mr. Wilbur Nigh and Miss Thelma K. Yarborough, for their co-operation and patience in helping the author locate source material. For similar reasons thanks are due the members of the Organization Records Branch, Records Administration Center, Office of The Adjutant General. The author is also greatly indebted to Maj. Frank O. Hough (USMCR) of the Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps; to Lt. Roger Pineau (USNR) of the Naval History Branch, Naval Records and History Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, U. S. Navy; to the personnel of the Naval Records and Library Branch of the same Division; to Capt. Bernhardt L. Mortensen (USAF) of the USAF History, Research, and Library Division, Air University Library, Air University, U. S. Air Force; to Flight Lt. Arthur L. Davies (RAAF) of the History Section, Headquarters Royal Australian Air Force; and to the author's personal friend Capt. John Balfour (AIF) of the Office of the Official War Historian, Australia. The list would not be complete without mention of the time and patience of fifty-odd participating commanders who provided comments on all or parts of the manuscript and, finally, official reviews undertaken by members of the Historical Sections of the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U. S. Marine Corps, the U. S. Navy, the U. S. Air Force, and the Australian Army.

Especial thanks are due Dr. John Miller, jr., during whose tenure as Chief of the Pacific Section, Office of the Chief of Military History, much of this volume was written, for his sound counsel and his careful reviewing of the final manuscript. For his excellent guidance and valuable advice, a great debt of gratitude is likewise owed Dr. Louis Morton, under whose direction as Chief of the Pacific Section preparation of this volume was begun and (upon his return to the section after a period of service as Deputy Chief Historian, Department of the Army) completed. The help and encouragement of Dr. Kent Roberts Greenfield, Chief Historian, Department of the Army, is also keenly appreciated. The author is greatly indebted to the late Mr. W. Brooks Phillips of the Editorial Branch, Office of the Chief of Military History, who did the final editing, ably assisted by Mrs. Loretto Stevens and other members of the same branch. Mr. Leonard B. Lincoln prepared the index, and the painstaking task of final typing for the

printer was in charge of Mrs. Lois Riley. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to the many other members of the Office of the Chief of Military History (especially Mr. Wsevolod Aglaimoff, the Chief Cartographer, and his colleagues of the Cartographic Branch, as well as the members of the Photographic Branch), for the time and effort they expended during the preparation of the volume.

Finally, the completion of the work would not have been possible without the support of Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward, Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, and the military members of his staff who, understanding the problems of the historian, made the path smoother.

ROBERT ROSS SMITH

Washington, D. C.

1 May 1952

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The illustration on p. 146 is an Australian War Memorial photograph. All other illustrations in this volume are from the files of the Department of Defense.

## CHAPTER I

# The Strategic Background

In March 1944 the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Allied forces in the Pacific to begin an offensive toward the Philippine Islands. Recapture of the Philippines would be a profoundly important step toward the defeat of Japan, for from those islands the Allies could cut Japanese lines of communication to the rich, conquered territory of the Netherlands East Indies, Indochina, Thailand, Burma, and Malaya. In the Philippines the Allies could also establish bases from which to support subsequent advances against Formosa, the China coast, or Japan itself. (*Map I*)

Before March 1944 the objectives of operations in the Pacific had been limited to securing the lines of communication from the United States to Australia, beginning an attack across the Central Pacific, and occupying bases from which to launch future operations. During these operations Allied forces of General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area had secured eastern New Guinea, western New Britain, and the Admiralty Islands, joining with the drive of Admiral William F. Halsey's South Pacific Area forces up the Solomon Islands in a campaign to neutralize the great Japanese base at Rabaul. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz had begun an offensive in his Central Pacific Area late in 1943; by March 1944 his forces had driven through the Gilbert Islands into the Marshalls. Now the war in the Pacific was ready to enter a more decisive stage, as

the various land, sea, and air forces under General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz attacked toward the Philippines from the bases already in Allied hands.

The offensive toward the Philippines would have to be undertaken with relatively limited means. The U.S.-British Combined Chiefs of Staff, subject to whose approval the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the war in the Pacific, had from the first assigned priority in the global war to the defeat of Germany.

### *Determining the Strategy of the Approach*

In May 1943 the Joint Chiefs of Staff secured approval from the Combined Chiefs for a course of action providing that the main offensive against Japan would be conducted across the Pacific, as opposed to advances from the Aleutians, Southeast Asia, or China. The Joint Chiefs decided that the seizure of a foothold in the Philippines would be necessary before any subsequent operations against Japan or her holdings could be launched. To the Joint Chiefs, there were two practicable routes of approach to the Philippines. One was across the Central Pacific via the Marshalls, Carolines, and Palau; the other in the Southwest Pacific along the north coast of New Guinea and into the islands between northwestern New Guinea and Mindanao, southernmost large island of the Philippine Archipelago. The choice of