

STUDY PROJECT

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EIGHTH ARMY OPERATIONS IN MINDANAO, 1945: A MODEL FOR JOINT OPERATIONS

BY

COLONEL JOSEPH G. TERRY, JR.

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While amphibious operations have historically straddled single service prerogatives and had been conspicuously avoided prior to World War II, in the Pacific area of operations during World War II such operations were abundant, decisive and generally regarded as models of joint service cooperation. Under the legendary General Douglas MacArthur, the Phillippine Campaign in 1944-45 was especially noteworthy as a model of a single flexible strategy, unity of command, and join service cooperations. Yet forty-five years later, our national military experience in joint planning and operations has appeared to regress. The recent Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, however, has elevated service interest in joint planning and operations. This study briefly discusses the Mindanao Operation (March-July 1945), one of several operations within the Phillippine Campaign. The study focuses on the impact of existing joint doctrine on the planning, coordination and execution of operations and evidence of joint action to solve some specific and unique challenges encountered within the operation. A summary of the Mindanao operation and appropriate comments on its applicability as a model for today's joint operations complete this study.

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EIGHTH ARMY OPERATIONS IN MINDANAO, 1945:
A MODEL FOR JOINT OPERATIONS

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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While amphibious operations have historically straddled single service prerogatives and had been conspicuously avoided prior to World War II, in the Pacific area of operations during World War II such operations were abundant, decisive and generally regarded as models of joint service cooperation. Under the legendary General Douglas MacArthur, the Phillippine Campaign in 1944-45 was especially noteworthy as a model of a single flexible strategy, unity of command, and joint service cooperation. Yet forty-five years later, our national military experience in joint planning and operations has appeared to regress. The recent Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, however, has elevated service interest in joint planning and operations. This study briefly discusses the Mindanao Operation (March-July 1945), one of several operations within the Phillippine Campaign. The study focuses on the impact of existing joint doctrine on the planning, coordination and execution of operations and evidence of joint action to solve some specific and unique challenges encountered within the operation. A summary of the Mindanao operation and appropriate comments on its applicability as a model for today's joint operations complete this study.

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EIGHTH ARMY OPERATIONS IN MINDANAO, 1945:
A MODEL FOR JOINT OPERATIONS?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

And he had in his hand a little book open:
and he set his right foot upon the sea and
his left foot on the earth. Revelation 10:2

Amphibious operations have historically straddled single service prerogatives and had been conspicuously avoided prior to World War II. Dr. Alfred Vagts, in a detailed study of landing operations from antiquity to 1945 noted:

Professional militarists of the past two and a half centuries avoided landings that were potentially decisive largely because they shunned cooperation and the inevitable subordination of one service to another.¹

While lack of adequate technology and absolute necessity were also cited as reasons for the lack of successful amphibious operations prior to World War II, joint doctrine failed to provide adequate answers to the overall question of "who's in charge" and who would provide what to whom, where, when, and how. Yet, in the Pacific theater of operations during World War II, successful amphibious

operations were abundant and decisive and generally regarded as models of joint service cooperation. Under the legendary General Douglas MacArthur, amphibious operations were synonymous with success and interservice cooperation.

General MacArthur's campaigns in the Philippines in 1944-45 were especially noteworthy as models of a single, flexible strategy, unity of command, and joint service cooperation. In commenting on General MacArthur's Philippine campaigns, Lieutenant General Shichi Miyazaki, Chief of Operations Bureau, Imperial General Headquarters, stated:

Strategic plans, strategic preparations, operational decisions--these were splendid. I came to the decision in Tokyo that the combined use of air, ground and naval forces and in general all war plans involving the cooperation of these three together were especially notable for their success.²

General MacArthur himself underscored the effect of joint operations on the particular success of the Leyte Gulf operations. On 31 October 1944, he said:

The magnificent coordination displayed by the services was as marked as the special tactical efficiency of the various branches.³

And later, placing the Philippine campaigns in perspective and setting a standard for future joint operations, he released the following statement to the press:

The entire Phillippine Islands are now liberated and the Phillippine Campaign can be regarded as virtually closed....

The enemy during the operations employed twenty-three divisions, all of

which were practically annihilated. Our forces comprised seventeen divisions. This was one of those rare instances when in a long campaign a ground force superior in numbers was entirely destroyed by a numerically inferior force.

Naval and air forces shared equally with the ground troops in accomplishing the success of the campaign. Naval battles reduced the Japanese Navy to practical impotence and the air losses running into the thousands have seriously crippled his air potential. Working in complete unison the three services inflicted the greatest disaster ever sustained by Japanese arms.⁴

In 1943, the British Imperial Staff had profoundly declared:

Even in their respective spheres, the fighting services have always been incomplete and now they are often individually impotent. Today, all operations are combined operations.⁵

General MacArthur's experience in the Phillippines underscored their wisdom and provided a strong foundation for joint operations in the post war years.

Yet, curiously, forty-five years later, our national military experience in joint planning and operations has appeared to regress. In fact, regression was so noticeable that the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 forced "jointness" on the services. This act elevated the importance of the regional Commanders in Chief (CINCS), Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS),

and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS). It also bought a host of critics and criticisms; most of whom and which continue to question the wisdom of jointness and expanded Congressional oversight of joint planning and operations. Had we forgotten the lessons of General MacArthur and the Phillipines?

Recently, former Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, stated in his book, In Command of the Seas : Building the 600-Ship Navy:

We have taken this idea of jointness to an extreme- it now hobbles everything we do. It will cost us the next war, too, should there be a major war with the Soviets.⁶

He was also disdainful of Pentagon rhetoric that joint duty would reduce interservice rivalry.

Interservice rivalry is a phenomena that exists primarily in Washington. When you go out into the fleet, you don't find sailors not working with soldiers from other services. The Air Force and the Navy exercise and work side by side all the time. If you just keep Washington the h... out of the picture, there's no problem.⁷

Since Congress will always be in the picture because of the budgeting process (particularly so when resources are dwindling) and the 1943 British Imperial Staff assessment is patently true, it appears prudent to take a few moments to reassess the brilliance of the Phillipine campaigns to gain insight into the planning, coordination, and execution of

Joint operations for today. Questions of service autonomy and cooperation, personality and urgency versus the impact of joint doctrine and organization are particularly relevant.

To focus on these questions and also reduce its scope, I have limited my detailed research to the Mindanao Operation (March-July 1945) and narrowed my attention to two areas:

1. The impact of existing joint doctrine, precedent, or organization on the planning, coordination, and execution of the Mindanao campaign.

2. And, evidence of joint action taken to solve some specific and unique challenges of the Mindanao campaign.

To accomplish this research, I surveyed a broad range of campaign summaries, unit histories and related studies, and biographies of key leaders. However, I concentrated on actual unit plans (from the initial Southwestern Pacific Area directives through the assaulting regimental combat team of the 24th Infantry Division), the Eighth Army Campaign After Action Report and Lessons Learned, and an Operational Monograph on the Mindanao Operation published by the 10th Information and Historical Group in 1945 for most of my insights on joint operations. All original documents were available through the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, the Center for Military History in

Washington, D.C. and the Washington National Records Center
in Suitland, Maryland.

ENDNOTES

1. Dr. Alfred Vagts, Landing Operations, Strategy, Psychology, Tactics, Politics, From Antiquity to 1945, p. i (Introduction).

2. General Staff, Reports of General MacArthur: The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific, Volume I, p. 360.

3. Vagts, p. 791.

4. General Staff, Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific, p. 357.

5. Vagts, p. 819.

6. Jay Blucher, "Who's in Command of the Seas," Army Times (Washington, D.C.), 30 January 1989, p. 45.

7. Ibid.

CHAPTER II

MINDANAO CAMPAIGN

OVERVIEW

The Mindanao campaign was both a routine and a capstone operation in the overall Phillipine campaign and worthy of study on both accounts.

As a routine operation, the Mindanao campaign was the fifth of a series of Victor Operations under the Montclair III omnibus for the retaking of the Phillipines. The map (Figure 1) describes the flow of the operations under the Eighth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger. The map also shows the Sixth Army, the second of General MacArthur's armies, commanded by General Walter Krueger consolidated to the north and preparing for future operations against Japan. The overall objective of the Victor Operations was to secure the southern islands of the Phillipines and use bases there to prepare for future operations. To this end, the Victor Operations and the Mindanao campaign were extremely successful. Of the Eighth Army's performance, General MacArthur exclaimed:

No Army in this war has achieved greater glory and distinction than the Eighth.¹

And Samuel Eliot Morison, in the official naval history of World War II, declared the Mindanao campaign "brief and brilliant, deserving more detailed study than we can afford as an example of flexibility, improvisation, and perfect cooperation between Army, Navy, and Air Force."² The Mindanao operation completed the cycle of success of the Victor Operations. Although success was achieved more quickly under somewhat harsher conditions than earlier operations, success was expected--the pattern was routine.

However, the Mindanao campaign was also a capstone operation, for it completed General MacArthur's overall Phillippine campaign. The campaign was motivated by a sense of urgency to declare the Phillippines free and move on to Japan and dominated by the pervasive personality of General MacArthur. As the capstone operation, the campaign benefited from months of successful joint operations in other island campaigns and a seasoned, veteran team tested by a determined enemy and molded by a single, brilliant unyielding commander.

THE PLAN

On 11 March 1945, the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) headquarters, General MacArthur's headquarters, issued

General Headquarters Operations Instruction #97. This document provided the foundation of the Mindanao campaign. The instructions directed the Eighth Army to

...seize Malabang-Parang-Cotabato area by an overwater operation and from there to continue the offensive and destroy hostile forces on the island east of the Zamboanga Peninsula.³

The Mindanao operation map (Figure 2) shows the breadth and generality of the mission statement. While the Eighth Army had conducted studies of the area in February, 1945, the Operations Instruction issued 11 March set R-day (assault) on 12 April and designated the objectives as the Malabang-Cotabato area.⁴ Although R-day was later slipped to 17 April due to the unavailability of shipping, there was hardly time for joint operations planning as we would hope to see it occur today. In fact, the Eighth Army had no Navy, Air Force, Marine, or special operations component. General MacArthur retained central control of all service components as well as special operations forces (in this case all guerilla forces operating in the Philippines; about 25,000 under the able leadership of Colonel Wendell W. Fertig) and allied forces. An organization chart for this operation (Figure 3) highlights this phenomena and Operations Instruction #97 clearly indicated service efforts.

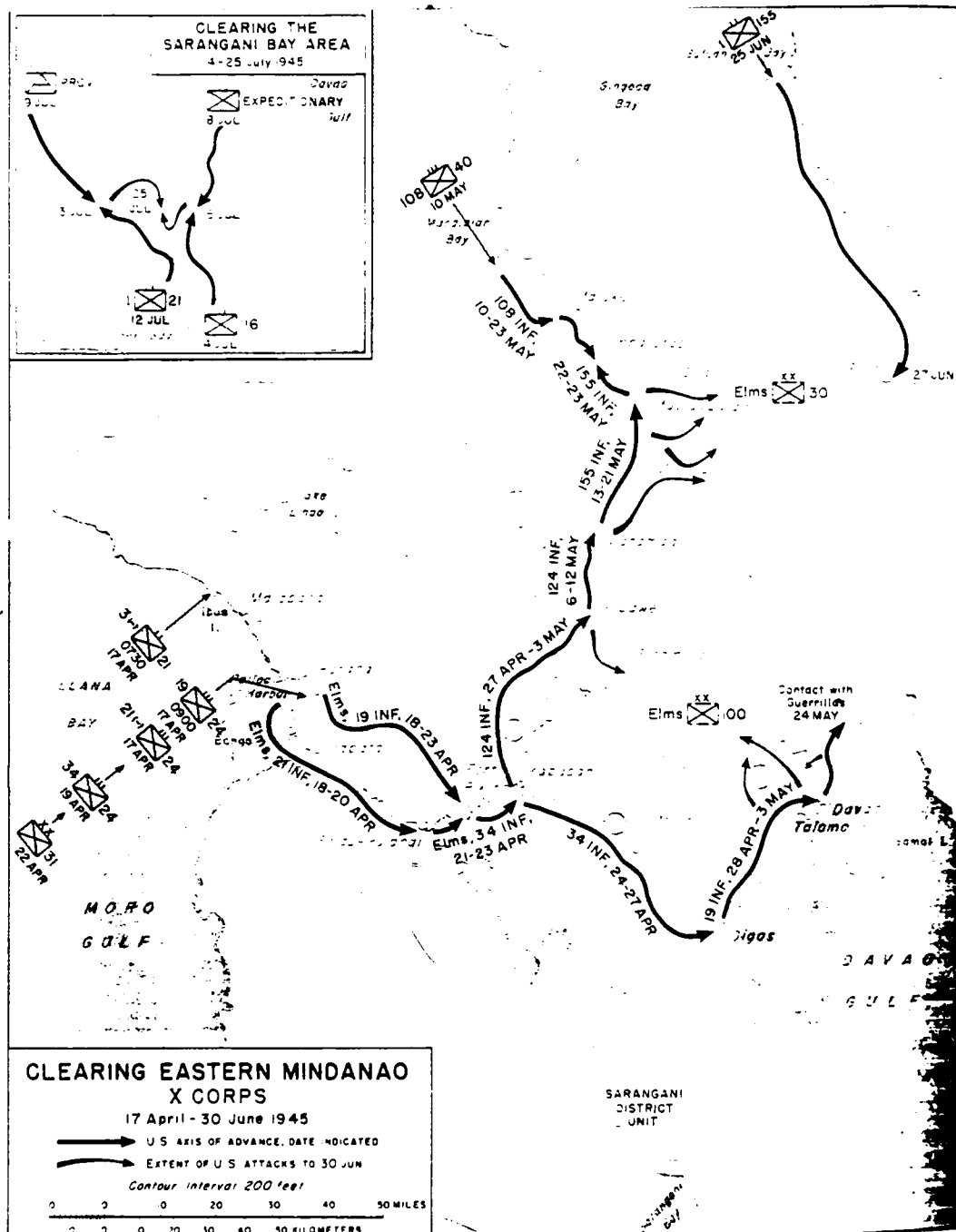


Figure 2
Mindanao Operations Map

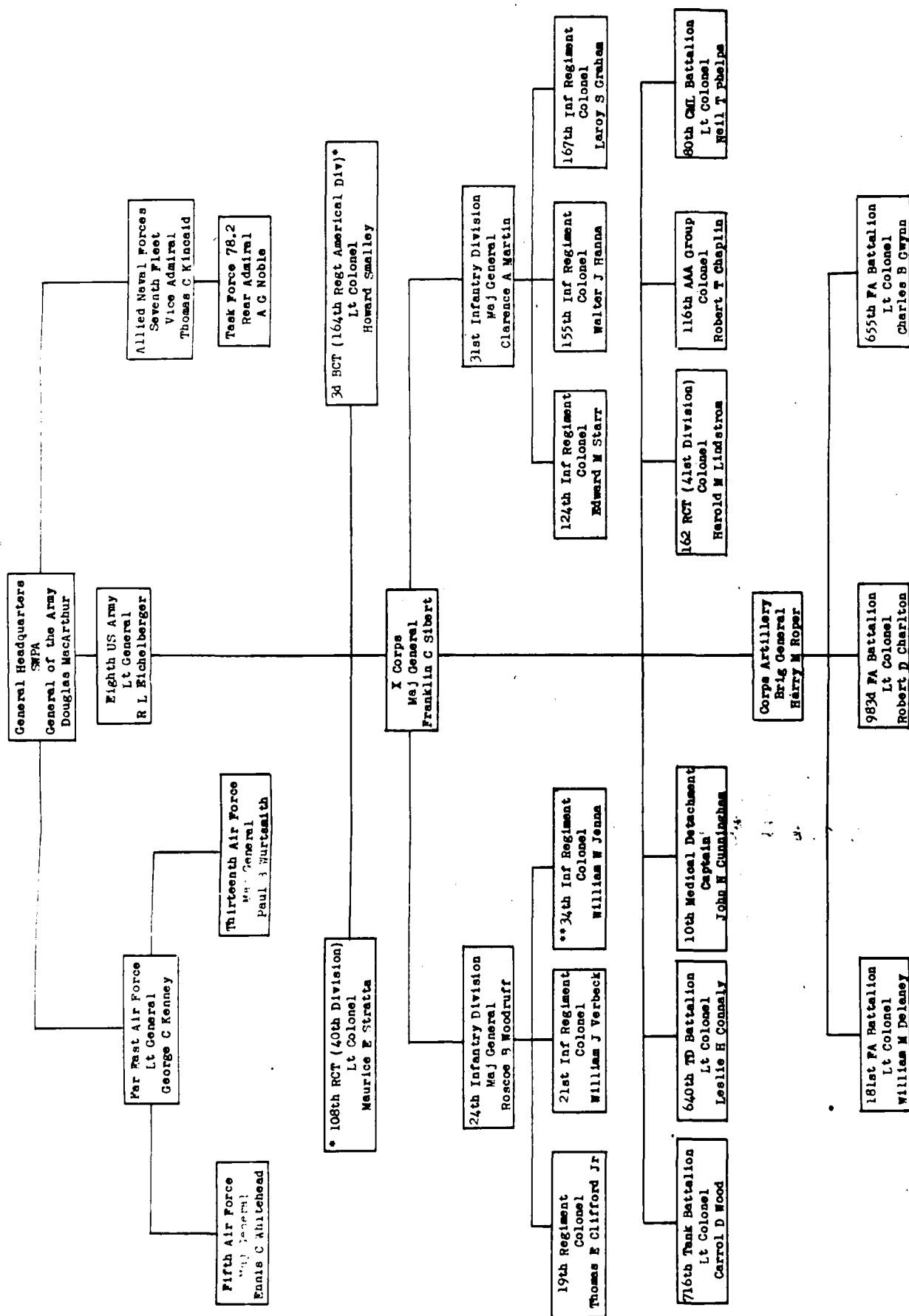


Figure 3
SWPA Headquarters

The instruction directed the Commander, Allied Naval Forces, to "transport and land the assault forces and supporting troops, protect shipping, and conduct minor overwater operations as required as the operation progressed."⁵ The Commander, Allied Air Forces, was instructed to "support the operation by providing aerial reconnaissance and photography, furnishing air cover for our forces, and continuing the neutralization of enemy forces within supporting distance."⁶

Joint planning was accomplished at General Headquarters in those areas which transcended service autonomy, e.g. command, control and communications, transportation and fire support, but there appeared to be no abiding joint doctrine or precedence that directed command and staff efforts. Issues at the "borders", where service authority and responsibility naturally stopped (e.g. transfer of command on the beach from the Navy to the Army), were also discussed but not apparently as a matter of joint doctrine. The staff placed greater emphasis on precedent, experience and personality. More will be said about these problems later in the paper. However, at this point it becomes necessary to discuss the evidence of operative joint doctrine available to General MacArthur during World War II, which will establish a useful foundation for later insights on the joint lessons of the Mindanao campaign and also dispell any

notion that General MacArthur's forces blatantly disregarded accepted joint doctrine.

The United States government had long recognized the need to conduct joint operations. Moved to action at the end of the Spanish-American War (1888-1889) by poor joint capabilities, an Army-Navy board was formed in 1903. This board was generally inactive, met only twice during World War I, and produced no written documentation.⁷ Similar boards came together in 1927 and 1935. In 1927, the board produced a broad document calling for unified command and joint forces. The board stated that unity of command "embraces the responsibility for, and the power to direct operations of the forces of the Army and Navy having a common mission."⁸ The board further called for separate and distinct headquarters from the other two services, assignment of missions, designation of objectives; and provision of logistic support and appointment by the President.⁹ The board convened again in 1935 and produced a more detailed document, but service interests and functions were protected. Interestingly, a significant discussion point was the function of aviation which, of course, transcended the traditional boundaries of the Army and Navy.¹⁰ However, at the start of World War II, no joint doctrine existed. During the war, Congress twice intervened establishing the Joint War Staff in 1941 to prepare joint

war plans, command joint training exercises, and command Army and Navy forces in war and in 1942 to create a Central Defense Command and zone defense commands who had charge of all forces in their zone.¹¹

General MacArthur followed acknowledged joint doctrine quite well. He, in fact, was in command and service components were subordinate to him. Through his staff, he centralized joint issues and did not, without careful consideration of each issue, delegate joint operations to subordinate commands. The organization of his headquarters and that of the Eighth Army (Figure 3) attested to General MacArthur's intent in joint operations.

With this brief but necessary digression, let us return to the planning of the Mindanao campaign and discussion of command, control, and communications; transportation; and fire support.

In the area of command, control and communications, General Headquarters held conferences on 5 and 14 March at the office of the Chief Signal Officer. The 14 March conference was attended by all the major joint players: Eighth Army, Far Eastern Air Force, Thirteenth Air Force, X Corps, 99th Signal Battalion, Seventh Fleet, and Task Force 78 (the Navy force which transported the Eighth Army to Mindanao).¹² At the conference, decisions were made

regarding call signs and radio frequencies. Special Operating Instructions (SOI) 30-8, 31-8, and 33-8 dated 22 March 1945 respectively designated radio circuits between Army and corps; allocated radio frequencies; and established fixed call signs for all units concerned.¹³

While conferences ensured, to a great degree, the feasibility of joint communications, Field Orders at each level of command (from Eighth Army through 19th Regimental Combat Team) directed overall command and control. For example, Eighth Army Field Order #26, 20 March 1945 highlighted missions assigned to supporting forces in Annex II- Missions Assigned Supporting Forces by General Headquarters Southwest Area (SWPA) and underscored General Eichelberger's limited authority to direct efforts of Naval and Air Task Forces. With the authority of SWPA, Eighth Army directed command of the operation to pass from Commander, Naval Task Force to Commanding General, X Corps "after his arrival and upon notification to the Commander, Naval Task Force that he is ready to assume command of his forces ashore."¹⁴ Eighth Army also directed X Corps to notify headquarters "promptly" when this occurred.¹⁵ Each unit Field Order issued similar instructions and Air and Naval Task Forces also reiterated these instructions in their equivalent orders. No one, at least on paper,

misunderstood who was in charge during each phase of the operation.

Transportation and supply planning was also set in motion by Operations Instruction 97 which provided a troop list (with current locations of the units) and the following supply guidance:

Supply point capable of supporting 52,000 troops be established in the Cota-bato-Malabang area. The port of Parang was to be rehabilitated for one liberty ship and one small vessel but construction in the Malabang area was to be limited to jetties for landing ships (tank).¹⁶

Transportation requirements were further refined by Administrative Order #9 (Eighth Army) which "directed all units carry 30-day supply of Classes I, II, III, and IV (less Engineer) and three units of fire (basic load) for combat troops and one for service troops."¹⁷ The order also limited units to shipment of 75% of authorized vehicles (due to limited shipping).¹⁸ And finally, the Eighth Army requisitioned and scheduled an automatic 30-day resupply for the force.¹⁹ Also all loads were "paper loaded" at various planning conferences to ensure feasibility.²⁰ Navy amphibious shipping, Army-Air Force planes, fast supply vessels, and Army Forces Western Pacific heavy shipping were all available and as the operation progressed were brought together with great effect at the Eighth Army Headquarters as the operation progressed.²¹

Fire support was initially planned and segregated, i.e. air units of all services had bombed Mindanao for several months preceding assault operations, naval units provided assault bombardments, and army units were responsible for all fires as soon as command was established and transferred. Naval and Air Support plans (authored by each service) specified the type and timing of the support and provided Eighth Army the details needed for their plan. Once ashore and control had passed from the naval assault force to the X Corps, Eighth Army coordinated all fires. Eighth Army was also authorized direct contact with the Thirteenth Air Force for photographic support.²² Three Air Support Parties were provided initially to the 24th Infantry Division for coordination of fires. While the Eighth Army coordinated all fires, some coordination was accomplished by liaison outside Eighth Army headquarters because of General Headquarters policy to keep services as pure as possible during operations. However, cooperation was always reported as excellent and fire support accomplished in minimum time.²³ And, as we shall see execution of the plan basically bears out this statement.

Before going into discussion of the execution of the plan, let us spend several minutes summarizing the impact of existing joint doctrine, precedent, and organization on the planning of the campaign.

First, as we have seen, no written joint doctrine existed at the beginning of World War II. While joint (Army-Navy) boards did meet between World War I and II and Congress established the Joint War Staff and Central Defense Commands in 1941 and 1942, the only real guidance from Washington was a consensus for unity of command in joint operations and the requirement for unique command zones and headquarters (separate from service centers). General MacArthur followed this guidance well. His headquarters issued joint operations instructions and individual service missions. Further, only his headquarters was jointly organized and reserved the prerogative to solve all joint problems. Joint planning, coordination, and execution was designed to keep service missions distinct and separate; coordinating only those functions which naturally crossed boundaries (e.g. command, control and communications) and where "borders" needed to be resolved (e.g. handing off command responsibility at the beach). In special cases, e.g. fire support, General Headquarters issued special instructions or authority while maintaining the principle of keeping the services pure. Finally, at least in the case of the Philippines and Mindanao, the system appeared to work well. Where plans did not provide necessary detail, conferences supplemented. And last, the entire process was bonded by personality, experience, precedent, urgency, and a

consistent record of success that seemed to guarantee victory.

Let us now turn to the execution of the plan and evidence of joint action and cooperation taken to solve specific challenges in the campaign.

EXECUTION

Eighth Army and X Corps planners envisioned a three phase operation (Figure 2):

1. Assault, seize, and occupy a beachhead at Malabang.
2. Seize the Malabang-Parang-Catabato area and Malabang airstrip.
3. Develop essential airfields, naval and logistical facilities for subsequent operations to destroy Japanese forces in eastern Mindanao.²⁴

Relying on adequate roads, a predictable enemy, and a conservative time schedule, logisticians expressed veiled optimism at supporting the plan having divided efforts in the west, north, and south and anticipating seizure of Davao and use of its facilities for follow-on forces. What logisticians did not anticipate was the early success of the assault forces, the extremely poor condition of all roads, and a determined, fatalistic enemy who did not concentrate his forces but took to the high ground and defended to the

death. Action taken to counter each of these occurrences provides additional insights into the presence and extent of joint action and cooperation.

While the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) process was not a familiar term in World War II, assessments of terrain, weather, and enemy on Mindanao provided unique challenges to the assaulting forces. The island was a dense jungle with no significant connecting roads. As the map (Figure 2) shows, there was one predominant east-west road paralleling the Mindanao River and one north-south road. Control of the junction of the two roads was critical to the overall seizure of Davao. Weather also played a significant factor as the rainy season began in April and was a sure bet to wash out roads, bridges, and retard the flow of supplies by land or air. Lastly, the enemy (numbering about 70,000) was dispersed but concentrated on potential landing sites (notably Davao). The enemy was expected to defend to the death and they did.

Assault landings were initially planned at Davao, on the east side, because Davao offered the best beaches, facilities, and greatest concentration of enemy forces. However, General Headquarters decided that landings at Cotabato, on the west coast, and a subsequent push east provided greater opportunity for success. Subsequent

landings in the north and south were also planned to assist the overall push to the east and seizure of Davao.

The assault plan (directed by the Eighth Army) called for the 24th Infantry Division to assault on 17 April 1945 with two regimental combat teams to seize Malabang and move south toward Parang and Cotabato. The 31st Infantry Division was to follow five days later to assist and continue the attack.

In the execution of the assault, several joint actions were significant. First, the assault force was not located in one location. The 24th Infantry Division was at Mindoro; the 31st Infantry Division at Morotai; and X Corps and most support at Leyte. While conferences at General Headquarters provided Admiral Noble with specific resources and requirements,

- one auxilliary group command ship
- six attack personnel destroyers
- 63 landing ships (tank)
- 16 landing ships (mechanized)
- 35 landing craft (infantry)
- 4 auxilliary cargo vessels

- and a total requirement of
- 76,925 dead weight tons,
- 8,635 vehicles
- 59,250 personnel 25

the plan left Noble and Army and Air Force commanders the responsibility of bringing all assets together in sufficient time to properly load, assemble, and convoy to make the

assault date-time group. This was all accomplished without flaw.

Several additional events added to the significance of the assault. First, forces were assembled in sufficient time for a full scale assault rehearsal (for the 24th Infantry Division) on 11 April 1945. Second, assault plans were changed on 15 April (when all forces were afloat) shifting the primary effort south to Parang-Cotabato and landing only one battalion at Malabang. Colonel Fertig, leader of guerilla forces on Mindanao, reported airfields secure at Malabang and General Headquarters directed the change without apparent fanfare or concern. 26 Third, insufficient shipping existed for one lift of all forces and elements of Task Force 78.2 under the command of Admiral Noble had to return to Mindoro to pick up the remainder of the 24th Infantry Division after the initial assault. Yet, on 17 April 1945, landings were accomplished without difficulty and at 181010 April the Commanding General 24th Infantry Division assumed command ashore followed by the X Corps commander at 181800 April. 27

In summary, the initial assault landings were excellent examples of joint cooperative efforts to bring the force together on short notice and over significant distances. Further, changing plans enroute underscored the accolade of joint cooperation and success given the Mindanao campaign.

Having landed, however, problems in transportation and supply surfaced. As the enemy withdrew to defensible terrain, the combined effects of terrain, weather, and unexpected success of the X Corps forces required continuous joint cooperation to maintain the momentum of the operation.

Problems in supply and transportation were immediate but not unexpected. Much preliminary work had been accomplished in establishing various capacities of beaches, ports, and other shore facilities. However, the usual unsettling initial problems of shore operations were primarily left to the 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. This organization was an amalgam of Army units and naval ships. Annex 8, 24th Infantry Division, Field Order #5, 5 April 1945, highlighted the organization, mission, and responsibilities of this regiment.

533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment

Attached:

- 80th CML Mortar Battalion
- 1461st Engineer Maintenance Company
- Detachment, 163rd Ordnance Maintenance Company
- 297th Port Company
- 313th Port Company
- Detachment, 578th Ordnance and Ammunition Company
- Detachment, 24th Infantry Division
- Military Police Platoon

and the following naval ships:

- 5 LCM (G)
- 1 LCM (R)
- 3 LCS (S)
- 24 LCM
- 14 LCVP 28

The mission of the regiment was long and its lists of responsibilities longer still. Its mission was to "organize, develop, and control the beach areas, facilitate the unloading, and direct movement of troops and equipment thru the beach areas and disposal of supplies in dumps". 29 Responsibilities included clearing beaches, maintaining records of all tonnage discharged, constructing beach and dump installations and roads, collecting and receiving casualties and evacuating them to hospital ships, receiving and guarding POWs, and much, much more. Annex 8 underscored the true "jointness" of this organization and its impact on perhaps the most critical of boundary operations: those on the shore.

The 533d was spectacularly successful in coordinating shore operations and pushing supplies forward along the west-east road and up the Mindanao River. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Amory, New York lawyer and former dean of Harvard freshmen, pushed his assembled forces up the Mindanao River with courage and abandon. Admiral Nobles stated that "were it not for successful completion of this river campaign, our forces would be at least a month behind their present schedule."30 The only real joint force in the Mindanao campaign, the 533d and others like it, operated with the same success in the European theater and are worthy

of a separate study on their organization, function and application in today's joint operations.

While the efforts of the 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment highlighted joint action to solve early transportation and supply problems, significant joint action occurred as land forces continued to move to Davao. Most significant was the off-line coordination which occurred between Naval, Air and Army forces at Eighth Army Headquarters to concurrently develop three ports or supply fronts to support converging land forces. Ports were opened on the west coast at Malabang, the north at Macajalar Bay, and the east coast at Davao. 31 Questions of present and future supply availability were balanced well and land forces experienced minimum delay of critical supplies. The G-4, Eighth Army, continuously balanced daily supply efforts by air, internal waterways, and road to converging forces while successfully playing a "shell" game in deciding where to position ships with the requested 30-day resupplies (i.e., east, west, or north). The effectiveness of joint execution in sustainment directly supported the early seizure of Davao and significantly reduced casualties as X Corps converged on a defeated enemy.

While not as significant a joint action as the assault landings or sustainment of supply and transportation, joint efforts in fire support deserve a short discussion and are

the last discussed in the execution of the Mindanao campaign.

Joint cooperation in fire support was evident throughout the Mindanao campaign as air forces, followed by naval bombardment, and then land force artillery all executed the plan well. Largely because of early air force bombing and guerilla action (sometimes coordinated), enemy air fields, bridges, and supply dumps were rendered ineffective before the assault. Naval bombardment, although scheduled and executed, was largely unrequired as assault landings received minimum opposition. However, as land forces moved into Phase III of the campaign, i.e., subsequent operations to destroy Japanese forces in eastern Mindanao, joint action to coordinate and sustain effective fires was particularly evident in three areas.

First, in the area of aerial reconnaissance, Eighth Army was authorized to make direct contact with the Thirteenth Air Force for photographic support.³² As forces progressed along severely restricted roads during the monsoon rains against an enemy entrenched in the highground, requirements for timely photographic support increased. The problem was solved by daily Eighth Army liaison with Thirteenth Air Force and direct coordination and delivery to ground units. Despite Eighth Army inconvenience,

cooperation was reported as excellent with effective photographs in minimum time. 33

Second, corps artillery units reported "splendid cooperation" between Marine support aviation from the 12th, 24th, and 32d Marine Air Groups.³⁴ Marine spotter pilots often visited corps artillery units exchanging effective information. Daily liaison was commonplace.

Finally, in Phase III, close air support coordination was particularly effective. Using the three Support Aircraft Parties (SAP) allocated one each to X Corps, 24th Infantry Division, and 31st Infantry Division, aviators flew 3280 sorties in the Davao sector dropping 1450 tons of bombs and 183 tons of napalm. ³⁵ Although coordinated at division level, many of the missions must have looked very similar to those later flown in Vietnam as front line battalions tried to dislodge or kill enemy units dug in and well camouflaged by jungle terrain. Interestingly, one of the lessons learned in CAS was the requirement for colored smoke (as the Japanese quickly learned to mimic exclusively white smoke) and a reinforcing requirement for a forward air control party with each infantry battalion. ³⁶

SUMMARY

On 23 May 1945, the X Corps campaign on Mindanao operationally ended. On that day, the north-south (Sayre) road was opened, the east-west road cleared, and Davao liberated. 37 Later, on 30 June 1945, Lieutenant General Eichelberger declared the operation officially closed and reported success to General MacArthur. 38 Through 30 June, United States forces and guerillas had killed over 10,000 Japanese soldiers with corresponding losses of 820 killed and 2,880 wounded. 39 While infantry units were still "mopping up" enemy units in August, 1945, General MacArthur was moved to eloquence on the Eighth Army's swift and complete success. Speaking to the Eighth Army, he stated: "I stand ready with a veteran Army to march on to Tokyo." 40

Of course, the atomic bombs ended the war before the march on Tokyo. In some ways too, the bombs ended the progress in joint doctrine and coordination as the United States moved into a great period of peace dominated by the pre-eminence of atomic weapons. But let us go back now, for a moment, and review the evidence and effectiveness of joint action in the Mindanao campaign and possible application for today.

In joint planning, experience, urgency, and cooperation were dominant. Written joint doctrine did not exist and guidance from Washington between the wars was limited to need for unity of command and separate and distinct

headquarters. During the war, Washington directed and formed a joint staff and divided theaters into zones, but did not constrain either the Pacific or European theaters to any standards of joint operations. General MacArthur abided, at least to the letter of the law, by Washington's guidance and established a long series of successful joint operations in the Southwest Pacific Area. Although the Mindanao campaign was only a small operation in the Phillippine Campaign, it was a model of General MacArthur's approach to joint planning and execution in large amphibious operations.

In Mindanao, joint guidance from General Headquarters was short and thorough. Operations Instruction #97 provided the mission and resources to the Eighth Army to do the job. Specific missions to the Air and Naval Task Forces provided Eighth Army with the guidance needed for their plans and orders and assurance that the Air and Naval Task Forces were responsible to the General Headquarters for the planning and execution for their respective portions of the operation. General Headquarters further provided Eighth Army the latitude to discuss some issues directly with other service components and admonitions to bring other problems back to General Headquarters for resolution. General Headquarters was clearly in charge.

This combination of precedent, experience, and personality also set into motion a continuing series of conferences that resolved pressing issues of command, control, and communication; transportation and supply; and fire support. These conferences ensured, to a great extent, that later published Field Orders and Administrative Instructions were feasible documents. Under General MacArthur, services were "free" to concentrate on optimizing their particular service capabilities. General Headquarters resolved, either a priori or at conferences, issues at the "borders", such as command transfer on the shore, or that functionally crossed service boundaries in matters of communication or transportation.

A model for today? Hard to argue with success. In many ways, a senior, committed, experienced joint staff under a dynamic, centralized commander made life easier or at least simpler for component commanders like Lieutenant General Eichelberger. Assured of service support, General Eichelberger was free to focus on his land forces and their operations on Mindanao. Likewise, but to a lesser extent, Admiral Noble and Major General Whieteside were similarly free. But, the model is flawed a bit in several ways.

First, General MacArthur's staff had no doctrine. They learned to work together by doing; sometimes the hard way at the expense of time, efficiency, and soldiers' lives. The

General Headquarters developed doctrine by precedent, urgency, personality and experience; a luxury most likely not available in today's contingencies. The General Headquarters also left no written doctrine at the end of the war.

Second, with the advantages of centralization are attendant disadvantages. How many joint operations can a single headquarters control? The Mindanao operation was the last of the Phillippine Campaign; the last of a string of successes. In many ways, Mindanao was routine and General Headquarters did not need to be very involved. Concurrently, however, the General Headquarters was also planning the invasion of Japan with both the Sixth and Eighth Army. The plan did not call for a change in organization or procedures; General MacArthur would control the effort at his joint headquarters. Would centralization work as well? Also, while service component commanders were "free" to optimize their particular service strengths, because their staffs were not integrated, many joint problems were not anticipated or developed until experienced in the execution of the plan. Wargaming and rehearsing were limited and "what if" drills that are characteristic of today's joint planning were again limited since joint staff existed only at General Headquarters.

Despite these limitations, however, execution too went well in the Mindanao campaign. Joint action was evident and effective in solving significant problems of transportation and supply and fire support. The Navy and the Eighth Army skillfully adjusted assault landings, follow-on supplies, and prepositioning of resupply ships. The 533d Engineer Regiment (augmented with additional naval elements) solved shore problems of organization and supply and pushed far up the Mindanao River to establish forward support. Joint air assets supplemented supply efforts with almost continuous air drops; joint air reconnaissance provided significant timely photographic support to maneuver commanders and corps artillery; and joint action in close air support had a significant impact on destroying dug-in enemy and saving lives of friendly soldiers.

Still, one must again realize the impact of experience, urgency, and precedent on the response in these situations. Headquarters were still separated by hundreds of miles and in most cases (e.g. Eighth Army liaison with the Thirteenth Air Force) the supported unit took the initiative in solving the problem. Would General Headquarters have been as responsive with competing demands? For example, the Sixth and Eighth Army had constantly competed for resources and often the Eighth (the more "junior" of the two) felt slighted. Joint action worked in Mindanao but the process

did not point to similar assured success in a larger, more complex campaign.

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9. Ibid.
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18. Ibid.
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21. General Staff, Eighth Army Report, pp. 194-208.
22. Ibid., p. 108.
23. Ibid.
24. Special Staff U.S. Army Historical Division, Operational Monograph on the Mindanao Operation (Victor V), p. 33.
25. Ibid., p. 34.
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27. Ibid.
28. Division Staff, 24th Infantry Division Field Order No. 5 and Administrative Order No. 2, Mindanao (Victor V), 5 April 1945, Annex 8.
29. Ibid.
30. Morison, p. 246.
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32. Ibid., p. 108.
33. Ibid.
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CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

What then does the Mindanao campaign offer as a model for the planning and execution of joint operations? In general, the campaign certainly underscored the positive impacts of unity of command, joint centralized planning, and effective joint reaction during execution. Further, the synergism of a joint, seasoned command and staff was evident throughout the campaign. Joint planning and execution appeared more routine than exceptional and, at least at the higher command and staff levels, problems were approached logically and effectively. The success of Mindanao also argues strongly for experience at every level. In Mindanao, staffs at every level had planned and executed numerous successful assault operations. Further, both assault divisions, the 24th and 31st Infantry Divisions, were veterans of other larger operations. In short, a survey of the Mindanao campaign supported General MacArthur's accolades and many of his techniques are transferable today. But, was Mindanao a blueprint for the future? Probably not.

First, we must remember that even the Mindanao campaign was accomplished without written doctrine. Forged by necessity and urgency and molded by perhaps the strongest central leader in United States history, joint operations in the Phillippines emerged but were not recorded as doctrine. Consider the following. In 1946, the Sixth Army (the first army formed in the SWPA under General MacArthur) conducted a joint training amphibious exercise in California.. The "Mid-Pacific Doctrine" was used. In an after action report, the following was said:

The "Mid-Pacific Doctrine" is the technique of landing forces on a hostile shore as worked out by six Marine Divisions and six Army Divisions in the central and South Pacific Theaters of Operation. It was not used in the North African, the Mediterranean, the European, or the Southwest Pacific theaters where 80 army divisions engaged in amphibious operations. It is an adaptation of Marine technique to Army use. To understand it, it is necessary to understand the Marine organization and modus operandi. 1

Conducted in April, 1945, Mindanao and the Phillippines were apparently forgotten in 1946. In a year, parochialism, i.e. Marine organization and modus operandi, returned jointness to pre-World War II status.

Second, Brigadier General Trudeau, as Deputy Director of Military Training, Army Service Forces, wrote a report on 4 October 1944 that said in part:

Present thinking and techniques as regards such operations (amphibious) is colored by the general conclusion that past operations have been successful. When the results and costs of such operations are carefully studied, we may be thankful for the good luck that permitted victory despite poor techniques and execution rather than satisfied as to the brilliance with which it was achieved. 2

While his report was very technical and specific, he underscored unsolved problems of "who was in charge on the shore" as the initial assault moved inland and supplies began to flow to the shore from the sea and casualties, supply requests, and changes to the plan came from the land to the shore. In Mindanao, these problems were solved or masked by the 533d Engineer Regiment, a defensive enemy, and experience at every level that made things happen. General Trudeau also discussed the lack of command and control at all levels. In Mindanao, the separation of headquarters and centralization of joint staff was not a major factor for the Eighth Army, X Corps, or 24th Infantry Division. In a more modern scenario with even greater distances, joint staffs are needed at lower levels to anticipate problems and spearhead solutions.

And finally, the Mindanao campaign provides a thought on former Secretary of the Navy Lehman's foreboding on the overemphasis of "jointness" and plea for the return of service autonomy and concept of joint operational

necessity. General George C. Marshall, with great foresight, anticipated Mr. Lehman's lament over forty years ago. In recounting the effectiveness of the new Joint Chiefs of Staff, he stated:

Even under stress of war, agreement has been reached in the Joint Chiefs of Staff at times only by numerous compromises and after long delays; and coordination in material and administrative matters has largely been forced by circumstances arising out of war, and then only incompletely ...Current events have reinforced my view that the Joint Chiefs of Staff could not be genuinely effective in peacetime as a coordinating agency. 3

Forty years of peace, a continuing absence of joint doctrine, Congressional consensus on the increased importance of joint plans and operations in the execution of United States national security objectives, and dwindling resources further explain Mr. Lehman's lament. However, the lasting lesson of Mindanao is not one of lament but action.

Mindanao does provide an example of a joint operation where success was dependent on both centralized and decentralized action. Mr. Lehman is right and Goldwater-Nichols is right. We must optimize service capabilities but joint action must be the watchword as well as the law. In Mindanao, combat urgency, experience, and hardened staffs and leaders overcame the lack of written joint doctrine and peacetime experience in joint planning and operations. Today, we will not have the luxury of the

SWPA and trial by fire. We must write doctrine, exercise it, and know our business well enough to tell Congress what we need and why.

After World War II, people mostly forgot the Philippines and Mindanao. If they remembered, they recalled General MacArthur, brilliant victories, and splendid interservice cooperation to win the war. As we have seen, there was much more. Mindanao: a model for the planning and execution of joint operations? No, but the Mindanao campaign does reinforce the need for a vision and provides a clear reminder that if we do not put aside parochialisms and biases and "get on with it", we will have no assurance of future success.

ENDNOTES

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