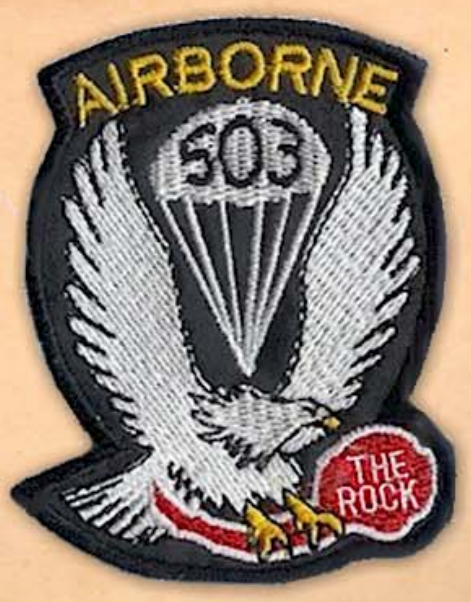
503d PRCT HERITAGE REGIMENT
REFERENCE COLLECTION



WITH THE 503D PRCT ON CORREGIDOR

FEBRUARY 1945

DONALD E. ABBOTT

ROCK FORCE

503PRCT.0RG DOCUMENT DISPOSITION SHEET

1. SHORT USE TITLE

WITH THE 503D PRCT ON CORREGIDOR FEBRUARY 1945

2. TITLE/SUBTITLE

N/A

3. AUTHOR OR OFFICE OF ORIGIN ATTRIBUTION	4.ORIGINAL CLASSIFICATION	5. SECURITY CLASS.
Donald Abbott	Not classified	Open

6. DATE OF ORIGIN PERIOD	7.PROGRAM ELEMENT OR PROJECT, TASK AREA
	503 PRCT Heritage Bn., Rock Force
8. STORED AS: docx, pdf	9. STORAGE (1) VIA
10. REFDOC Y	11. EXTERNAL STORAGE (2) Scribd
12. DISTRIBUTION Open	13. WEB ADDRESS 503prct.org / rockforce.org
14. NOTES Author was	15. RELEVANCE Personal Recollection Corregidor

16. PROVENANCE, SOURCE & INFO KNOWN OR SURMISED

Author's Collection

17. KEY WORDS

Nadzab, Papua New Guinea, Noemfoor, Dutch New Guinea, Corregidor, Topside, Middleside, Bottomside, Malinta Hill, Mile Long Barracks, 59th Coast Artillery, Mindoro, Black Beach, Camp Pt., Engineer Pt., Monkey Pt.,

18. REFERENCES TO MILITARY UNITS OR FACILITIES

503d PRCT, 11th Airborne Division, 317th Troop Carrier Group, 462nd Parachute Artillery Battalion, Company "C" 161st Parachute Engineer Battalion, 3d Bn 34th Infantry, Kindley Field, Navy Radio Intercept Tunnel

19. REFERENCES TO PERSONS

General Douglas MacArthur, Colonel George M. Jones, Capt. Akira

Itagaki I.J.N., Colonel John Lackey, Lieutenant Colonel John L. Erickson, Major Arlis E. Kline, Major Lawson B. Caskey, Major Robert H. Woods, Lieutenant Colonel Edward M. Postlethwait, T-5 Arthur O. Smithback, PFC Stanley J. Grochala, S/Sgt Harry D. Clearwater, S/Sgt. Robert V. Holt, Lt. Joe M. Whitson, Jr., Lt. Roscoe Corder 2d Lt. Lewis B. Crawford, 2d Lt. Emery N. Ball, Lt. Hudson C. Hill, Lt. Dick E. Atchison, Pfc. Andrew J. Rabinko, Pvt. Pace, S/Sgt. Leonard R. Ledoux, S/Sgt, Edward Guksvick, Pfc. Emory N. High, Pfc. Matthew D. Musolino, Pfc. Jimmie T. Rovolis, Capt. John Rucker, Maj. John M. Davis, Capt. William Bossert, Pfc. Carl Bratle, 2d Lt. Fred A. Goetz, Lt. William J. Sullens

20. ABSTRACT

First person personal reminiscence 1945; Corregidor Operation summary; reflective

21 AUTHOR DETAILS

Donald E. ABBOTT was drafted into the army in June 1941 from his native State of Oregon. After completion of Basic Training in Camp Roberts, California in October 1941 he volunteered for Parachute troops and was assigned to "A" Company 503rd Parachute Infantry Battalion in Fort Benning, Georgia. While serving with the 503rd Battalion he applied for and was accepted by Infantry Officers Candidate School, at Fort Benning. He shipped overseas in "D" Company 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment in October 1942. Later he was transferred to "E" Company where he spent approximately two years. While in "E" Company he participated in the historic jump at Nadzab, New Guinea. After Nadzab the 462nd Parachute Artillery Battalion and "C" Company 161st Parachute Engineers joined the outfit to form the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team. He also served in "E" Company during the fighting on Noemfoor, Dutch New Guinea where he was unfortunate to get in front of a Japanese Machine Gun, receiving a Purple Heart. Fortunately, the wound was not particularly serious. At the time he was a platoon leader. He also participated in the amphibious landing on the island of Mindoro, Philippines in December 1944. From Mindoro, he and 2000 other members of the 503rd Parachute RCT made the jump on Corregidor as XO of "E" Co. He left Corregidor as a hepatitis case. Following recuperation he became Company Commander of "A" Company in time for the 503rd RCT to be assigned to the island of Negros, where it continued to battle Japanese forces until the surrender. As soon as possible after the war ended, he left the service and returned to studies at Oregon State University where he graduated in 1948. He went to work for Crown Zellerbach Corporation, a large Pulp, Paper and Forest Products Company and worked for them until his retirement in 1982. He and his wife Elizabeth ("Libby") were married almost 56 years, and lived in Santa Rosa, California. He pre-deceased her 2 September 2005. She died June 2006.

WITH THE 503RD PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM ON CORREGIDOR - FEBRUARY 1945

Donald E. Abbott

Two long columns of C-47 transport aircraft approached the Island of Corregidor from the Southwest. Jumpmasters peered anxiously out the open doors of the 47 planes trying to catch a first glimpse of the drop zone assigned to their stick of jumpers.

It was moments before 8:30 on the morning of February 16, 1945 and the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team was primed to begin what was to turn out to be a classic model for the effective use of parachute troops.

When the jumpers in the left-hand column could, finally, see their field they saw the pre-World War II Parade Ground on Topside. The field, itself, was about 200 yards long by about 175 yards wide. When the bombed-out area to the South was taken into consideration there was a total of about 500 yards long by 200 yards wide. The plane, at 100 miles per hour, would have roughly ten seconds over the drop zone.

Jumpmasters in the right-hand column had, perhaps, and even grimmer view. They were to jump on the pre-war nine hole golf course south of the Officers Quarters and the Officer's Club. This was roughly the same size as the extended Parade Ground drop zone except there the cliff was right at one end of the field. This drop zone was constricted to about 275 yards long and 175 yards wide. There were buildings to look out for on the left side of the field and a dry swimming pool near the old Officers Club ruins.

The biggest natural hazard, however was the cliffs at the southern edge of each field. These, generally, dropped off about 500 feet to the South China Sea. Nothing at all was known about the human hazards--Japanese troops waiting to make landing a fatal endeavor. Eighth Army Intelligence had a very hazy idea of what to expect from defenders. The Japanese were known to have been beefing up their defense facilities when it became evident to them American forces were on their way back as General Mac Arthur had promised nearly three years before. The best intelligence could come up with was an estimate of something in the order of 850 Japanese on the island. It was not long before it became evident that was a gross understatement.

The 503rd was a veteran outfit which had been in the Southwest Pacific since late in 1943. They had made two combat jumps

previously--one at Nadzab in Papua New Guinea and another at Noemfoor in Dutch New Guinea. Most of the men knew, very well, the role Corregidor had played in the early days of World War II after Pearl Harbor. They knew, too, about the defenders of Bataan who had been pushed back to the tip of the peninsula and forced to surrender by overwhelming forces. To the bitter end on May 6, 1942 Corregidor had held out against many weeks of bombing and shelling by the Japanese who needed Manila harbor open to their shipping. Now it was the Americans who needed Manila harbor to service the forces closing in on the "Pearl of the Orient", the city of Manila. A few days before Navy ships attempting to clear mines in the main channel between Corregidor and Bataan had been fired upon and had several ships sunk while others were badly damaged.

Every trooper was bursting with pride that the 503rd had been chosen for this historic mission. There was only one other Airborne unit in the whole Southwest Pacific Area. The 11th Airborne Division had arrived in the area much later than the 503rd and had missed much of the jungle training and fighting. When the 11th was chosen to participate in the liberation of the City of Manila, the 503rd was greatly disappointed. General MacArthur, however, assured us he had something even better in store for us. When he informed Colonel George M. Jones, the 503rd Commanding Officer, his Regimental Combat Team was to liberate Corregidor the news was received with great enthusiasm.

While the number of Japanese infesting Corregidor was unknown, it was optimistically suspected they would be planning for an amphibious landing as they, themselves, had done in 1942. This was a big gamble because a few well-placed machine guns at Topside, as the area of the drop zones was known, and the parachute landing could have been a disaster of a gigantic order. It turned out that Japanese Navy Captain Akira Itagaki had surveyed the Island, after he had received a warning from his superiors of the possibility of such a landing. His study of the terrain convinced him it there was no area suitable for an airborne landing. Consequently, he concentrated his efforts on setting up defenses against amphibious invaders.

Japanese defenders were the potential peril uppermost in the jumpers minds. This was the unknown factor. But there were other serious hazards of which they were more certain. The miniscule size of the two drops zones has already been mentioned.

Wind is a constant threat to parachute jumpers because is one of the factors which cannot be known ahead of time with any degree of certainty. Information about wind velocity and direction was sketchy but it was known the normal direction for that time of year

was from the Northeast to Southwest. The velocity, however, could vary from a slight breeze to a zephyr of thirty miles an hour. In non-combat training jumps it was the practice to curtail drops when the wind exceeded fifteen miles an hour. Jumping in any higher winds always brought unnecessary injuries.

Aerial photographs of the drop zones had, vividly, shown some of the more serious obstacles. That was the terrain itself. There were many bomb and shell craters spread throughout the area left from the heavy bombing done by the U.S. Army Air Corp during the month prior to the jump. These, of course, were added to any craters left over from the Japanese siege in 1942. Between the siege and the jump trees and other vegetation had been allowed to grow without control all over the Island. The Air Corps bombs, landing among the trees, neatly slice off the tops, leaving sharpened trunks ready to impale an unlucky jumper. Aside from those hazards, there was rubble such as chunks of concrete and corrugated iron roofing spread all over the area.

But it was the cliff at the south end of each field which was the most dangerous element to consider. Topside was an irregular rolling area which averaged about 550 feet above sea level. The lighthouse, which stood between the two drop zones was the highest point on the island, at about 600 feet. The cliff to the South of the right hand field, known as Landing Zone B, was abrupt, but the one to the south of the left hand field, known as Landing Zone A, was almost sheer. Any jumper drifting over the edge would be in real trouble.

Parachute jumping is not a precise business at best, but several fairly reliable factors are known. Firstly, an average person will drop at the rate of about 20 feet per second after his parachute has opened. Therefore if the parachutist jumps at one thousand feet above the ground it should take him 50 seconds to land. Of course a jumper in combat gear, which could easily exceed a hundred pounds, comes down faster. If the wind is blowing at ten miles an hour, he will drift over 700 feet! The only way of reducing the distance he will drift is to reduce the altitude of the jump. Initial planning for the Corregidor jump specified the jump altitude to be at 1150 feet, or 500 feet above the average ground level. That would reduce the drift to 350 feet at a wind velocity of 10 miles per hour. IP's (Initial Points) were designated for each field for the jump masters to use as guide points.

A delay of three seconds beyond the IP was the preliminary instruction for the jumpmasters to follow.

Each C-47 carried equipment bundles and an average of about 20 men. Although trained jumpers, such as the 503rd men, can go out the door in less than a second, manhandling equipment bundles takes time which must be allowed for. Since the C-47's flying at roughly 100 miles an hour would have only about ten seconds over the field, it was determined each plane would have to make three passes, dropping about seven men each time.

Colonel Jones, knowing the variables which could not be foreseen, opted to fly in a command plane over the island to keep watch over the operation and to be able to radio needed changes to the planes dropping the jumpers. The command plane was flown by Colonel John Lackey, Commanding Officer of the 317th Troop Carrier Group. This outfit was nicknamed the JUNGLE SKIPPERS. This was a veteran group which had dropped the 503rd a number of times and could be relied upon to fly the mission according to plan, something which could not be said for many pilots untrained in dropping parachute troops.

The 51 C-47' s of the 317th were all the Troop Carrier planes which could be spared to drop the invaders of Corregidor. While there were other units in the Southwest Pacific, they were badly needed for supply missions to other fighting units as well as general transportation needs. Unfortunately, the Southwest Pacific never had the number of transports such as were available for dropping many thousands of troops as was the case in the European Theater of operations. The 317th could drop only about a third of the 503rd Parachute RCT at a time.

The 503rd Parachute RCT was made up of the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, the 462nd Parachute Artillery Battalion and Company "C" of the 161st Parachute Engineer Battalion. The RCT total manpower consisted of roughly 3000 men.

This meant there would have to be three separate drops of parachutists. Chosen as the first jumpers was the Third Battalion of the 503rd Parachute Infantry, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John L. Erickson, Battery "A" plus a platoon from Battery "D" from Major Arlis E. Kline's 462nd Parachute Field Artillery and Company "C", 161st Airborne Engineer Battalion.

Over-all plans for the liberation of Corregidor called for three jumps by elements of the 503rd Parachute RCT. The first would be the drop to begin at 8:30 AM on the February 16, 1945 followed by a second at 12:50 PM on the same day. At that time the Second Battalion of the 503rd Parachute Infantry, commanded by Major Lawson B. Caskey, and Battery "B" plus a platoon from Battery "D", 462nd Parachute FA Bn. would jump. The final jump, consisting of

the First Battalion of the 503rd Parachute Infantry, under Major Robert H. Woods, with Battery "C" and one platoon from Battery "D" 462nd FA Bn. would drop the following morning.

Rounding out the ROCK FORCE, as the liberating troops were designated, was the 3rd Battalion of the 34th infantry Regiment which was detailed to make an amphibious landing at Bottomside at 10:30 AM on 16th February. This regular line Infantry Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Edward M. Postlethwait. Attached to the ROCK FORCE were various other units such as a Tank Platoon, Antitank Platoon and Air and Sea support groups.

One of the out-of-the-ordinary features of the first wave to drop on Corregidor affected the writer who served at the Executive Officer of Company "E", 503rd Parachute infantry. It was decided to send the XO's from the 1st and 2nd Battalion in with the 3rd Battalion. We were to attach ourselves to 3rd Battalion units in the area that our own companies were to operate in after they had made their jump. Thus, I was to be among the first one-third to land on the island rather than with the second wave.

Promptly at 8:30 the Third Battalion began its jump. Leading the first stick out was the John Erickson, the Battalion Commander followed by T-5 Arthur O. Smithback and PFC Stanley J. Grochala who had won a lottery for the honor of being the first to jump.

As the first jumpers from the first wave of jumpers crashed down on the miniscule landing zones it became very evident the wind had exceeded initial estimates and was blowing at least 20 knots. Colonel Jones passed the word for the jump altitude to be lowered to 1050, to 500 feet above ground level, thus reducing the time in the air and the amount of drift. The count beyond the Initial Point was increased to six seconds.

Jumpmasters in succeeding passes had the benefit of the experiences of the first pass. I watched the first pass of the plane I was in drifting dangerously close to the cliff at the southern end of Landing Zone "A". In fact, a number of men from the first pass from other planes had gone over the cliff because their jumpmaster had gone too early. Even though the count had been increased from three seconds to six seconds, I extended the count to ten seconds. I landed within the Landing Zone but well to the southern end, within a few seconds drift of the cliff. The remainder of the stick, which followed out the door, landed closer to the designated area than many earlier or later jumpers.

While the time in the air could not have been more than a few seconds, I vividly recall several observations. The first thing a jumper does is to look up and check his canopy. The canopy was fully open so the chute would be doing the job it was designed to do. Then I looked in the direction we had come, the south, to see where the cliff was. Battery Wheeler stood out very clearly 200 or 300 yards away but, being so large, it seemed closer. Beyond the Battery the drop-off of the cliff was very evident because PT boats in Manila Bay were coming into view. My immediate conclusion was that while the Battery and the cliff were close they should not be any real problem as far as the landing was concerned.

Looking to the east, toward Malinta Hill, the hill was just barely visible over the top of a layer of smoke which was being laid down by, what appeared to be A-20's. If we had been told of smoke being provided, it had slipped my mind. Flashing through my mind was the recollection that smoke had been laid when we jumped at Nadzab. As I watched, a flight of A-20's crossed Bottomside dropping bombs and strafing. That was a good idea because the Japanese in that direction certainly would be down in their holes.

I landed amid rubble of a burned and blasted building floor, and bounced and was dragged another 20 or 30 yards. The parachute was still full and dragging me further. Fortunately, a couple of men who had been on the ground from the first pass lent a hand in collapsing the chute. Unhooking myself from the harness I began to work my way to the Third Battalion Headquarters assembly area around the Lighthouse. Although I wore glasses, I had always made it a practice of carrying my eyeglasses in an empty grenade case. I had reached for the case from where I had stored it for the jump and found it was gone. Thinking I'd be without them for the duration of the mission, I was very relieved to spot the case near where I'd first landed.

The first pre-war buildings I reached were the old officers' quarters which stretched from the parade ground off to the east. These buildings were without roofs. It was evident they had been blown away because a few sheets of corrugated iron were still in place but most of the corrugated sheets were laying around the area where they had been shed as a result of concussion from the bombs and shells which had landed nearby. All of the outer walls were pocked where bullets had impacted. It was surprising to see paved streets and curbs. During the advance of the 503rd through the Southwest Pacific from Port Moresby, through Nadzab, Oro Bay, Hollandia, Noemfoor, Leyte and Mindoro we had never seen paved streets. The 503rd had, finally, reached civilization.

A short distance beyond the first Officers Quarters, to the left, was the remains of the flag pole, laying off at a 45 degree angle because some of its guy wires had been cut by shrapnel. Across the street was the Fort Mills Headquarters building.

As the troops from the Third Battalion landed they spread out towards the perimeter of the Landing Zones. Of course there were already many who had landed outside that area.

At first there appeared to be no opposition and it looked as if this might be a very peaceful mission. It was not long, however, before firing began, to the east and west of the two fields. By the time the last of the first wave had landed, there was a good deal of fire.

About this time two fortunate incidents took place which, undoubtedly, were the most significant factors in the success of the liberation.

Captain Itagaki had observed the 34th Infantry loading on landing craft which would take them to a Corregidor invasion. Assuming they would land on the most logical beach, the south side of Bottomside, he and his staff made their way to the vicinity of Breakwater Point to observe the event. One stick from an early pass at Landing Zone "B" had landed far below the field and landed near Itagaki and his staff. The paratroopers proceeded to wipe out the whole group except the Captains orderly, who was taken prisoner and was able to tell the story of the Captain's death. The Japanese Commanding Officer had been eliminated.

The second important event took place when a small unit of paratroopers spotted the telephone exchange near the Mile Long Barracks. This key facility was only lightly defended and the exchange was rapidly wiped out.

With the Commanding Officer dead and telephone communications disrupted, the Japanese were, with a few exceptions, unable to mount large, coordinated attacks on the invaders.

Eventually, I made my way to the Lighthouse and Erickson's Command Post. Information was coming in from his units reporting on fighting taking place and on the status of the units as they reached their assembly points. Since Company "E" would eventually have responsibility for a pie-shaped area of the Western end of Corregidor stretching from James Ravine to Grubbs Ravine, I cut through the center of the Mile Long Barracks where that area could be seen.

A crew from the 462nd FA had manhandled one of their 75 mm Mountain Howitzers through the barracks and had it set ready to fire. Although this was probably not much over an hour after the first troopers landed, the crew had already found a cache of Japanese liquor and were working on a bottle of brandy. Being very friendly by this time they offered me a swig. Figuring they would all be dead by that time if the brandy had been poisoned I tried some. It was not bad but there were more important things to come.

From this position the Main Post Hospital stood out very prominently below me to the north. It was to be one of Company "E"'s first objectives once it arrived and had assembled. A little closer to the Barracks was the old Commissary building. This stood on a bench which would be a good place for the Company to set up its perimeter defense the first night on the Island. The elevated terrain would provide a commanding view of the area in front of it.

Looking to the northeast, far enough away they were too small to identify, some men were running across an open area on Morrison Hill. All of a sudden there was the sound of rifles and a light machine gun opening up. The men I had seen began to stumble and fall, laying still. At first I was shocked we would be losing men so fast to enemy fire. Suddenly, it became evident the men I was seeing were not ours but were Japanese troops running away from third battalion men who were firing on them. There must have been ten or twelve Japanese who had died for their emperor right before my eyes.

Near a part of the Barracks, which had been demolished by an explosion, I found a location where we would set up our Command Post when the people in Company Headquarters arrived. This was well to the west of the center of the building. It would place us close, but not too close, to the Battalion and Regimental Command Posts, which were both located in Mile Long Barracks.-

As the time approached 10:30 the sound of shelling could be heard in the direction of Black Beach at Bottomside. There were too many buildings in the way to be able to observe the landing but from the amount of small arms fire, in addition to the shelling, it was evident the 3rd Battalion of the 34th Infantry were landing according to the schedule.

The overall plan for the Rock Force was for the 34th Infantry to immediately attack up the slope of Malinta Hill, secure the top and to move on beyond to cut the island so that Japanese reinforcements from the east end of the island could not reach the west end. This could be a difficult assignment for these men because Malinta Hill was a steep, treacherous looking place. From

the end of the Mile Long Barracks the entrance to Malinta Tunnel could just be made out. There was a lot of fire being poured into it. Shells were exploding nearly constantly.

Having no official duty which needed attention, I had a little time to look at the buildings and the layout of Topside and reflect on how they must have looked in the days when Fort Mills was one of the regular duty posts of the Army. The buildings were badly pocked from bullets. Some of the buildings had been hit by shells or bombs and had big parts missing or collapsed. Practically all roofs had been blown off by concussion. Regardless, the place had a majesty about it which held a person in awe. The Mile Long Barracks, in particular, was a wonder. One felt it must have, certainly, been the largest single barracks building anywhere. The whole building was three stories high. Although little remained it was evident the first floor held the various headquarters for the 59th Coast Artillery Batteries, along with the kitchens and mess halls, the showers, storerooms, etc. The second and third floors, reached by concrete staircases, had large squad rooms. It appeared the Non Commissioned Officers must have been quartered elsewhere because there were no smaller rooms, such as the temporary wooden barracks had at the end of each squad room.

Across the road from the Mile Long Barracks were the remains of a tram stop and the ties of the rail system. The rails apparently had been taken up by the Japanese invaders. There was a large building near the tram station which was the movie theatre. It had a very substantial looking ticket window, much different than the flimsy glass and light metal affairs of the theatres back in the states. Somehow the rumor made the rounds the last movie to play at the Topside theater was Gone With The Wind. I doubted this since I remembered having seen the movie in 1940, well before the last film would have been shown on Corregidor.

The last C-47 which had dropped the first wave had not left the area until 0940 for its return flight to Mindoro to pick up the second wave. Mindoro was 150 miles south, or a bit over an hour's flying time, point to point. Of course there would, likely, be time in the pattern over the two airfields used by the 317th. To make the scheduled 1250 second drop would take some doing. Each plane would have to be refueled, time could be spent rigging the artillery packs where they needed to be mounted.

There would be no need to worry about the Second Battalion being ready and anxious to board when given the go-ahead by the Air Corps crews. They were at Hill and Elmore strips waiting when the planes returned from dropping the first wave. The heavily loaded men would take a bit of shoving and hauling, however, because they

carried so much weight it was about all they could do to waddle to the ladder leading to the door. Then it was a case of men behind them on the ground giving a shove at the same the men in the plane offered a hand and pulled them aboard. Each man, in his eagerness to get under way, had forgotten how hot it would be in the plane as it sat in the scorching hot tropical sun. The minute the men got in the plane the sweat would pour from them and not just because of their nervousness. As soon as the plane would get in the air and up to the eight or ten thousand feet altitude they would fly at it would be so cold each man would be near freezing. There seemed to be no happy medium.

The planes, after take-off formed into an echelon formation to make fighter coverage more effective. The flights continued in that order until a few miles south of Corregidor when they again formed into two, evenly spaced columns and steered toward the two landing zones. The lift began to drop its troopers at 1250 and completed their mission at 1342.

During the time the first wave of jumpers had been on the ground, the wind had picked up. As the time for the second jump approached the velocity had passed 25 knots in gusts. Since it looked as if the gusts were going to get stronger as the day went on, the people on the ground wished for the second wave to get there as soon as possible.

Jumpmasters of the second wave had been instructed to count 10 seconds past their Initial Points because of the increased wind velocity. Even with this correction, a number of men were blown over the cliff, landing on the steep slopes below the rim. Staff Sergeant Harry D. Clearwater was one who landed well down the slope, breaking both legs. Staff Sergeant Robert V. Holt, Jr. landed somewhat below Clearwater and somehow lost his weapon. Climbing toward the rim, Holt found Clearwater and borrowed his Thompson Sub Machine Gun, promising to send help. The help came, but not until 36 hours later.

The wind seemed to have shifted to a little more from the east than for the first wave. Some of the aircraft did not compensate fully for this change and flew a course too far to the west over the jump fields. As a consequence a number of men were blown off the western edge of Landing Zone "A", landing around three large, two story buildings which housed senior Non Commissioned Officers' families prior to the war. Others landed near a large building which been a radio station. Even from my vantage point two or three hundred yards away, I could tell these buildings were effective anti-airborne hazards with ragged concrete and exposed reinforcing-rods ready to impale or mangle a man.

Standing on the edge of Landing Zone "A", next to the Mile Long Barracks and watching what was happenig I knew what should have been done but, of course, was powerless to do anything because I did not have contact with people in the planes. If someone could have told them to fly about three hundred feet to the east, these misses would not have happened. It is a very helpless feeling to watch disasters happen and not be able to do anything to help.

While I watched, one man with almost a complete a streamer (his chute pulled from his pack but not opened) crashed into the Mile Long Barracks with an impact no man would be able to survive. But there were medical people in that area to do what they could for him.

The first men hitting the silk seemed to be the sign for Japanese troops to commence firing, particularly down in the Battery Wheeler area and in the upper Cheney Ravine -area. Rifle and Machine Gun fire had been heavy east of Landing Zone "B" ever since the first wave had landed and, particularly, since the 34th Infantry had landed at Black Beach. Now that fire seemed closer and heavier than ever.

I would be watching a man over the drop zone, with his chute full and doing its job, swinging his arms and legs around trying to control his descent so as to land where he wanted to. More than once I would see the man, suddenly, slump in his harness as he had been hit by fire from the ground.

Several of the airplanes were struck by the light anti-aircraft fire from the Japanese. I heard about that a bit later. It was not immediately evident while watching from the ground.

When we landed with the first wave the Japanese were, mostly, in their shelters to avoid our Air Corps bombing and strafing and were not out in the open ready to shoot at us in the air. I was very lucky to be in the first wave. Because men from the first wave were spread out over a large area of Topside, the Air Corps fighters and bombers couldn't cover the second wave. By that time the Japanese were ready for them and the jumpers were met with constant rifle and machine gun fire.

Shortly, men from Company "E" began to work their way to where I was waiting for them. First Lieutenants Joe M. Whitson, Jr., Roscoe Corder and Second Lieutenants Lewis B. Crawford and Emery N. Ball arrived. I told them to head down to the Western end of the Mile Long Barracks which was the Company's assembly point and try to keep the men spread out as they came in.

Having been on the island for around five hours I felt like a Corregidor veteran as the Company began to arrive. Although it had been an exciting period, the nervousness of the first few minutes, not knowing what to expect, had worn off and I was as cool and collected as could be expected under the circumstances.

The 503rd had been in the tropics for a long time and the men had become as well acclimated to the heat and humidity as anyone from temperate climates could expect to be. Everyone had worked up a good sweat and pulled out their canteens for a swig of water to freshen their mouths. On other operations we had gone in with only one issue canteen. This time the planners had smartened up. Every man was issued a second canteen and landed with each of them full. For some unknown reason I had always been able to survive with less water than most. I had begun using water out of my right hand canteen. Now I shook it and found it was at least three quarters full. Some of the men coming in from the Landing Zone had started on their second. I reminded them they had better slow up because we didn't know when we would get any more. We had been warned that we could not expect to find water on the island and that it could be as much as several days before we could receive our first resupply. First priority for resupply during the first day or so would be given to ammunition and weapons to replace those which might have been lost or damaged.

I kept expecting First Lieutenant Hudson C. Hill, the Company Commander, but he did not come in. I kept trying to raise him on the Walkie-talkie SCR 536 Company network but to no avail. The SCR 536 had been notoriously fickle since they had first been issued. They were of absolutely no use unless there was a perfect line-of-sight between the two instruments. Apparently Hill was in a building or behind a knoll where we could not see each other.

Finally, we made contact. Apparently Hill had moved so he was within range and had a line-of-sight. He was asking me to get some artillery fire down in the area of the NCO Quarters to take the pressure off him so he could get up to the CP. Upon his insistence I went looking for an artillery officer but couldn't find any. As near as I could tell the only completely assembled artillery piece, at that time, was the one I had seen on the other side of the Mile Long Barracks. There had been no officer with them. After quite a lot of scurrying around looking for someone with authority in the Artillery, with no success, I gave up. Shortly afterward Hill made his way to the CP very upset that he had not received the artillery fire he wanted.

Having the Company Executive Officers of the Second Battalion jump with the first wave in the morning worked out well. The

Companies were able to get themselves organized much faster than they would have otherwise.

The writer served in Company "E" of the Second Battalion. He knew more about the activities of its Companies (Headquarters, "D", "E" and "F") than what went on in the First and Third Battalion. With that in mind, the following will deal with some of the actions of those Companies.

By 1400 hours Company "E"'s platoons were organized and in their positions down at the base of the hill below the Mile Long Barracks. The Company CP had been set up two thirds of the way to the west of the middle of the Mile Long Barracks. Twenty one men had been injured in the jump or wounded in action. First Lieutenant Dick E. Atchison had broken a leg on the jump. His third platoon was taken over by Second Lieutenant Lewis B. Crawford who had been the Assistant Platoon Leader of the first platoon under First Lieutenant Joe M. Whitson, Jr..

The third platoon, under Lt. Crawford, moved out with the mission of seizing and securing the old Hospital Building, the most conspicuous feature in the Company area of responsibility. The other platoons formed a base around the old Commissary Building, a short distance from the Hospital.

A patrol from the First Platoon was sent down to the area of the Senior Non Commissioned Officers Quarters to extricate PFC Andrew J. Rabinko and Pvt. Pace who had been pinned down by a Japanese Machine Gun.

At the end of the first day on Corregidor we had five men missing in action. They were Staff Sergeants Leonard R. Ledoux and Edward Gulsvick and PFC's Emory N. High, Matthew D. Musolino and Jimmie T. Rovolis.

Early in the morning of 23 February Company "E" relieved Company "B" of the First Battalion down near the base of Crocket Ravine on the South Shore Road.

All First and Third Battalion companies were withdrawn to Bottomside on the morning of 23 February. The men who had been on the go from the time they had landed on the island had an opportunity to get cleaned up a bit, shave and get something to eat which was a little better than the "K" rations they had been stuck with. There, also, was plenty of fresh water for drinking and coffee making.

At about 0300 of 24 February three strong explosions shook Malinta Hill, with flames coming from all entrances. Somewhat later two more explosions shook the hill with flames again pouring out of the entrances. Since neither the 503rd or the 34th Infantry were initiating any actions at that time, the explosions were assumed to have been set off by the Japanese occupying the tunnel.

The interlude of rest and recovery by the First and Third Battalions was not to last long because Colonel Jones, his staff, Major Robert Woods and Lt. Colonel John Erickson were cooking up a new mission for the two battalions. The plan was for the First Battalion to pass through the 3rd Battalion of the 34th Infantry and push an attack toward the eastern end of the Island. The Third Battalion of the 503rd was to bring up the rear and mop any islands of Japanese defenders which the First Battalion had left. The 3rd Battalion of the 34th Infantry continued to occupy a line across the middle of the Island, astride Malinta Hill.

The Second Battalion was to maintain its base at Topside and continue its aggressive patrol activities and wipe out any remaining Japanese troop pockets. While the Western end of the island, including Topside, was considered "under control" there were a good many Japanese left. None of these were ready to surrender voluntarily. Some were forced out of their hiding places and mowed down by small arms fire. Others had their caves or tunnels closed by demolition men. While not participating in the big push toward the tail of the island with the First and Third Battalions, the Second Battalion would continue to be well occupied.

Elements of the First Battalion began the attack toward the East end of the Island at 0830 sharp on 25 February. The movement, while fast enough for the men who were in the lead, seemed like a snail's pace to the main body of the First and Third Battalions. The route of the attack was so narrow, and astride a ridge known to us as Water Tank Hill.

For the 503rd, which had been used to fighting a self-sufficient war with little help from any other source, having Naval and Air Corps assistance was a welcome oddity. With the further assistance of the 75 mm guns of the 462nd Parachute Artillery Battalion the advancing Battalions were getting more support than our infantry had ever seen.

Malinta Hill sat astride the middle of Corregidor. At that point the Island is about 900 yards wide. Little room was left on either the North or South side for roads. To the south the South Shore Road edged its way along a narrow shelf. On one side of the

road was a near-sheer cliff of about 100 feet leading down to the water. On the other was the cliff leading up to the south end of the ridge, which Malinta Hill really is. The road on the north side begins at sea level and climbs to about a hundred foot elevation over a distance of about three hundred yards.

That is a slope of over 10 percent, hardly a level surface. At that point the road really begins to get steep. It climbs another hundred feet in about 150 yards. Such pitches even put a strain on the two tanks which were to accompany the attacking forces.

Tanks were an entirely new phenomena to the 503rd. In the jungles the outfit had been operating in they would have been of little value so, in the most part, they were held back until MacArthur's troops landed in the Philippines where some of the land lent itself to tank operations. Now, however, the 503rd found it strange having this potential tool at their disposal. Few, if any, of the Officers and men had any experience in tank warfare and, as a consequence, failed to take full advantage of the support they could have provided.

Where the initial slope really became steep, the troops encountered the Northern entrance to Malinta Tunnel. This entrance, in reality the outside entrance to the Hospital Lateral, was suspicious since it was not known if there were any Japanese troops in the tunnel who were still in condition to provide a threat. The 34th Infantry had been in the area but the 503rd was experienced enough in fighting the Japanese to know they could not take neutralization of the entrance for granted.

As one of the tanks was abreast of the Hospital entrance about 50 Japanese swarmed out of the entrance in a Banzai attack. Fire from the tank wiped them out.

Lithe did either the 503rd or the 34th Infantry know that there were two significant air shafts which surfaced above and to the side of this entrance. While the shaft led up at a steep forty five degree angle from the Hospital area they allowed Japanese, in limited numbers, to come and go to harass the troops as they crept past. These entrances held the advancing column for some time while a good deal of firepower and explosives was spent on it. The experiences with tunnels and caves on the western part of the island had not been lost on the troops.

Once the leading elements reached the top of the second, and steeper of the two slopes, the road leveled. While Water Tank Hill

loomed ahead, it was possible to see a good deal of the Eastern part of the island reaching out to the extreme end at Hooker Point.

Concurrent with the main column heading up the North Shore Road, a patrol had followed the rugged shore line, keeping even with the main body higher on the Malinta Hill. This patrol passed Malinta Point and encountered the old Enlisted Men's bathing beach. Remains of the shark net installed to protect swimmers from the marauders could still be made out just below the surface of the water. Then the patrol rounded Engineer Point and made its way around Artillery Point. The Officers Swimming Beach opened up before them. But, much to their surprise, a whole fleet of small boats was beached along the shore line. Upon investigation, it became evident this was the base of the "Q" Boats we had heard about. Unknown to us boats had been very active on the day and night before the 503rd had jumped. A fleet of them had attacked our naval ships and landing craft in the Mariveles Harbor. Now a number of the craft were up on rails ready for launching into the North Channel to attack any of our ships which tried to enter Manila Bay. Other of the boats were under cover back in tunnels which had been bored back into the cliff. There originally, had been well over a hundred of these "Q" Boats, which the Japanese called Shin-Yo-Tai, when the unit left Japan. The boats were about twenty feet long with a freeboard of about a foot--not designed for long trips in the open seas. Consequently, many of the boats had been lost on the move from Japan. The United States military forces, with its huge war machine, would have moved boats like this utilizing large, sea-going vessels. The Japanese military machine was then stretched to its limits. Given the resources they had to work with, the Japanese did not have adequate shipping facilities to move the boats.

By 5 o'clock in the afternoon advance elements of "A" Company had reached Camp Point, beyond the 92nd Garage area. "C" Company was nearing Infantry Point but were meeting stiff resistance. Because night comes on fast in the Philippines in February, the Battalions began to settle while it was still light enough to see what was going on. The First Battalion set up its Command Post in a large bomb crater.

Major Woods called a meeting of his Company Commanders at 2000 and laid out the plan of attack for the following day. Following the meeting the Company Commanders, with the exception of Captain John Rucker returned to their units to prepare for the next day.

At about 2130 a mortar shell landed in the Command Post crater killing Major Woods, instantly. Several others from "B" Company were killed and most of the remaining staff were wounded. The Battalion was left without its Commanding Officer, its S-1, S-2 and

S-3. Major John N. Davis, the Battalion Executive Officer, assumed command.

During the night "B" Company on the North side of the Island was hit by a Banzai attack by a large force which was repulsed with 135 enemy killed. Later a prisoner of war reported that originally a force of 600 had been planning attack but had been caught by an artillery barrage just as they were preparing to move and that about 300 had been killed. Our artillery reported the fire had been a searching, harassing exercise which turned out to be highly effective.

Because of the disruption caused by the loss of Major Woods, the Battalion attack did not begin until 1045 on the morning of 25 February. Heavy resistance was experienced almost immediately as the forces approached Water Tank Hill.

By the evening of 25 February the companies had secured the high ground to the north of Monkey Point and the western end of Kindley Field. The Third Battalion, closely following the First Battalion, continued to mop up installations bypassed earlier.

Early in the morning of 26 February the attack continued toward the east with "A" Company on the right, or south side of the road to Kindley Field and "B" Company on the left. "C" Company followed "A" Company in reserve. Captain William Bossert remembers being nervous because he was unable to have any troops down along the waterline on the south side but, since there was a cliff on that side, he did not see how he could put anybody down there and yet have them under his control.

"A" Company came under fire from a machine gun on the southern slopes of the high ground above Monkey Point. One of the tanks was brought up to assist. It, too, came under fire from an entrance to what the 503rd men knew as a radio tunnel. It was not difficult to believe the tunnel had something to do with radios because there was a whole forest of tall antenna poles located throughout the whole area. The antenna wires were, mostly, missing but the original layout was very evident.

The tank took up a position on a small mound in front of the tunnel and began firing into the entrance with its cannon.

Suddenly, there was a catastrophic explosion, greater than any of the many which had taken place since the 503rd had landed on 16 February. The whole hill seemed to be lifted hundreds of feet into the air. Large boulders could be seen flying through the air.

Chunks of concrete were everywhere. The sun was blotted out by the cloud of dirt which was in the air. Men who were on top of the mound were flung far into the air. Then all of the many cubic yards debris which had been flung up began to come down. Later reports were that Naval vessels laying a mile away were hit by falling boulders.

The tank was lifted into the air and blown on its back about 50 feet from where it had been located. Only one of the crew survived and was rescued after being trapped for a number of hours. In order to get him out a cutting torch had to be obtained from the Navy.

PFC Carl Bratle was near the site of the explosion. The explosion itself had caused him to bleed from his mouth and ears. But when he looked up and saw all the debris ready to fall on him, he dropped his M-1 rifle and leaped over to embrace one of the big radio antenna poles. Fortunately, this worked as a shelter even if he was hit by rocks and dirt. When the worst of the debris had fallen he looked down at his rifle. A rock two feet in diameter had hit the stock and completely smashed it. Not to worry, there were plenty of rifles laying around men who had not been as lucky as Carl.

Along the same lines, 2nd Lt. Fred A. Goetz, Mortar Platoon Leader in "B" Company who was, perhaps two or three hundred yards from the explosion with his mortarmen, looked up and saw the cloud of corruption. He quickly called for his men to stand up. He reasoned a standing man would make a smaller target for the heavy stuff which was coming down. It worked because he had no serious casualties in his platoon.

Captain Bill Bossert was on the walkie-talkie radio, talking with First Lieutenant William J. Sullens, platoon leader of the platoon Bossert had detailed to support the tank which was firing into the tunnel. The radio went dead as the tank landed on top of Sullens and he was killed instantly. Bossert was smashed into the ground by the falling debris and nearly buried alive. As it was, a rock landing on his back crushed his chest as several ribs were broken. His men dug him out of the dirt and Bill could breathe again--barely.

The 503rd had known nothing about the radio tunnel. It was not until afterward it was learned this tunnel had been used by Navy personnel as an intelligence gathering facility.

On the day prior to the big explosion I had been sent over to the east side of Malinta Hill to look over the situation as it stood at that time. It was not clear whether companies from the Second Battalion might be called upon to assist in the move toward the east. That was on 25 January before the big explosion.

After climbing to the ridge to the east of Malinta Hill I was able to get a very good idea of the orientation of the units and where the major resistance was coming from. Some of the people I talked with suggested I take a side trip down to Officer's Beach to see the "Q" Boats which had been turned up. I dropped down to the beach and, after looking the boats over, continued toward the west past Bottomside and on up to the Company location.

The First and Third Battalions continued with the clearing of the east end of Corregidor while the Second Battalion continued its search and destroy mission, digging Japanese out of their hiding places. It always seemed "Higher Headquarters" knew more about the local operation than we did. They had declared the Island to be under control early in the mission. While, from a strategic standpoint, they were undoubtedly right--shipping could and did begin to use the South Channel to enter Manila Bay and harbor, the troops remaining on the island, however, would have questioned how strong that control was.

A couple of days prior to his coming, word was received General Douglas MacArthur was going to visit on 2 March, very near three years since he had been taken off by PT Boat on 12 March 1942. Preparations began to be made for a ceremony to greet him as he stepped of a much newer PT Boat.

Each Company was given a part to play in the ceremony. There would be a representa tion from each company to attend the formal rededication to take place at the old flag pole across the road from the old Headquarters of Fort Mills. "E" Company was also required to furnish a detail to guard the route from Bottomside to Topside. On 1 March I, and representatives of other companies were taken along the route to have our area of responsibility pointed out to us. Later, I took our detail down to a stretch of the road near the Middleside Barracks. The men were spaced at an interval of about ten yards and instructed to remain at ease but alert for any evidence of Japanese attempts to get to the General. I am certain the men did their duty as they were directed but would be very surprised if they did not sneak a look at MacArthur and the group with him as they went by.

For about a week prior to 1 March I had been feeling progressively sicker as each day went past. I continued to go on

every patrol and perform full duty, such as the posting of the guard for General MacArthur but it was not easy. Everything I ate came back up as soon as it him my stomach. The best thing I was able to find was canned green peas. Those went down and stayed there for a few minutes before coming back.

Finally, I went in to see our Battalion Surgeon and told him I didn't feel well. I was wearing sunglasses to protect against the tropic sun glare. The Doctor took a look at me and reached for an evacuation slip. He said, "You have hepatitis, I can see the yellow of your eyes even through the glasses". I said "Oh, you mean yellow jaundice?" He blew a fuse and informed me that "jaundice" means yellow, so when someone says "yellow jaundice" all he is saying is "yellow, yellow." That bit of information stuck with me ever since and I find myself correcting others when they talk of "yellow jaundice." At any rate I was taken by barge from Bottomside to an airstrip at Mariveles, on the tip of the Bataan Peninsula. There the pilot of an L-5 flew me to San Fernando in Pampanga Province, at the north end of Manila Bay. I spent about a week in a makeshift hospital there recovering before making my way back to duty.

By the time I was released from the hospital the 503rd had returned to Mindoro where replacements were waiting to fill in the many slots which had been vacated by casualties on Corregidor.

From Mindoro the Combat Team was sent to Negros where they remained, fighting the Japanese there who had been bypassed by the advance from Leyte to Luzon and Corregidor. This fight continued until the Japanese Empire collapsed in August. After the end of the war it took several days for the local Japanese to believe it was all over. When they surrendered a total of 7,500 came in and laid down their arms. At its peak strength, the 503rd had about 2,700 Officers and men.

I was given orders for rotation back to the States in October and was sent to Leyte to await a ship. With many people being released, shipping was at a great premium and it took six weeks before the *Admiral Hugh Rodman* came into Tacloban harbor. This troop ship looked like a modern cruise ship. It was only its second cruise.

Unlike many of my friends, I opted to get out of the service immediately and was separated at Fort Lewis, returning to my home in Portland, Oregon.

The 503rd was disbanded in November 1945 so there was no continuing organization to fall back on. As the years went by I had

no contact with anyone I had known in the service. Over the years I often thought of the people I had served with and the fantastic battle which had been fought on Corregidor. In 1967 I read the book *Corregidor, the Saga of a Fortress,* written by the Belote brothers, William and James. The Belotes had done an outstanding research job and told the story of Corregidor from its earlier days, during the siege by the Japanese and its liberation by the Rock Force in 1945.

Regardless of my interests in Corregidor, I did nothing about it until after I retired from business. In 1984 my wife and I traveled to Australia and visited our old campsite outside Cairns, North Queensland. There the people told me of the 503rd Parachute RCT, WW II Association and gave me the addresses and phone numbers of people to contact. Upon return to the States I contacted the Association and have been active in it ever since.

Donald Abbott

This page is deliberately blank