

The Bastards of Bataan:
General Douglas MacArthur's Role in the
Fall of the Philippines during World War II

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Senior Seminar: History 499
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Western Oregon University
June 8, 2007

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On December 8, 1941, just hours after having attacked the United States' fleet on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese army turned their attention toward another American stronghold, the forces stationed on the Philippines. Here the Japanese attacked Clark Field, an American airbase on the island of Luzon.¹ The subsequent battle and surrender that ensued has become known as "...the worst defeat yet suffered by the United States, a source of national humiliation."² With all of the confusion and horror that happened to the men in the Philippines it is hard to understand where blame should be placed. Was it General Douglas MacArthur, the Commanding General in the Philippines at the time? Or were there other factors such as war in Europe and conflicting beliefs on how best to defend the Philippines that led to the defeat? Historians have debated MacArthur's role in the Philippines for some time. There are those who believe that MacArthur should be held accountable for the fall of the Philippines and those who see him as a commanding general who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. In this paper it will be argued that MacArthur's actions in the Philippines prior to his escape to Australia hastened the fall of the Philippines, which led to more death and brutality at the hands of the Japanese.

Discovering what MacArthur's role was can be assessed by comparing his defense plan and the War Department's defense plan as well as analyzing MacArthur's ability or inability to adapt to the increasing hostilities between the United States and Japan. Historians have interpreted how MacArthur could have altered the outcome of the fall. They believe that he could have worked with the Navy to develop a war plan as well as executed War Plan Orange-3 sooner to preserve the soldiers on Bataan. As a result of

¹Duncan Anderson, "Douglas MacArthur and the Fall of the Philippines, 1941-1942," in *MacArthur and the American Century*, ed. William M. Leary (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 92.

² Anderson, 84.

MacArthur's miscalculations the soldiers suffered enormously due to the brutal actions of the Japanese.

There have been many interpretations of MacArthur's role in the Philippines during World War II. Some historians praise him for his ability to achieve as much as he did with his limited resources. Others call him a cocky, arrogant man, who abandoned his men in their time of need. Some put the blame on Washington for not communicating clearly its intentions, and for promising reinforcements of men and supplies which never arrived.

Historian Richard Connaughton in *MacArthur and Defeat of the Philippines*, asserts that MacArthur was promoted without merit during his time in the Philippines, which resulted in failures and mishaps. In fact, Connaughton argues that MacArthur was promoted due to the influence of his mother.³ MacArthur's mother was able to use her influence to move him up on the promotion list, which made him "...the youngest of the army's twenty-one Major-Generals." Connaughton argues that MacArthur's defense of the Philippines included more mistakes and blunders than positive achievements.⁴ One specific blunder was just prior to the Japanese attack at Clark Air base; MacArthur prevented Lewis Brereton, Major-General of the Air Force on the Philippines, from launching an attack on the Japanese at Formosa. Allowing this attack to happen would have ensured the protection of the planes.⁵ Connaughton speculates this was due to MacArthur's overly relaxed habits while in the Philippines, and characterizes MacArthur

³ Richard Connaughton, *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2001) 28.

⁴ Connaughton, 29.

⁵ Connaughton, 168.

as "...remote, aloof and rarely present."⁶ Connaughton believes that "ultimately the Philippines were lost because the U.S. had insufficient trained and equipped forces there to save it."⁷

Geoffrey Perret on the other hand praises MacArthur for his command of the Philippines at the onslaught of the United States' entrance into the war. He points out in his book *Old Soldiers Never Die*, that MacArthur was faced with inconceivable and unattainable odds. Not only was the army unprepared for the fighting, but MacArthur had to deal with other leaders, especially Roosevelt and Churchill. They had made an alliance to focus on Germany and Europe first and then move to the war raging in the Pacific.⁸ MacArthur had been preparing the Filipino army for some time before the Japanese attacked. In 1935 General Douglas MacArthur became the Military Advisor to the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines.⁹ This position was created by the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1935, which provided for the independence of the Philippines effective July 4, 1946.¹⁰ At the request of the newly elected president of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon, MacArthur agreed to help prepare the Philippines for independence.¹¹ He was given time money and conscription.¹²

MacArthur was assigned to train the Filipinos as a precursor to their independence.¹³ Prior to the military advances made by the Japanese, MacArthur had

⁶ Connaughton, 168.

⁷ Connaughton, 306.

⁸ Geoffrey Perret, *Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corp, 1996).

⁹ Catherine Porter, "New Light on the Fall of the Philippines," *The Journal of Pacific Affairs* 27:4 (1954), 372.

¹⁰ John Beck, *MacArthur and Wainwright: Sacrifice of the Philippines* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974) 2.

¹¹ Beck, 3.

¹² Connaughton, 53.

¹³ Perret, 133.

envisioned organizing a Filipino army of 76,000 that he planned on training for ten years before they would be required to use their skills in war.¹⁴ Another critical aspect of preparation, according to Perret, was MacArthur's buildup of air power on the Philippines.¹⁵ MacArthur strongly believed that with a large air force he would be able to out fight any enemy.

In *Macarthur and Wainwright: Sacrifice of the Philippines*, John Beck analyzes General MacArthur's decisions and strategic plans during the attack of the Philippines as well as the surrender on Bataan. Beck uses actual correspondence from MacArthur to other military leaders; he believes doing so "...will give the reader a greater understanding of what actually took place in the Philippines."¹⁶ Beck argues that MacArthur made several errors which hastened the fall of the Philippines. These included ill-trained men, poor equipment and his underestimation of the power of the Japanese.¹⁷ Unlike Perret, Beck believes that MacArthur had sufficient time prior to the Japanese attack to protect the aircraft on the Philippines.¹⁸ This is significant because while there was much MacArthur didn't have control over, this was something that he had completely controlled. Soon after becoming the Military Advisor to the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines, MacArthur devised his own war plan that relied heavily on his air force, which he believed was superior and larger than that of any enemy.¹⁹ MacArthur's plan also included the use of a well trained Filipino army and the defense of the beaches at all cost. However, MacArthur failed to enact portions of his own War Plan

¹⁴ Perret, 234.

¹⁵ Perret, 235

¹⁶ Beck, xiv.

¹⁷ Beck.

¹⁸ Beck, 15.

¹⁹ Louis Morton. *Command Decisions: The Decision to Withdraw to Bataan*. (Washington DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1990) 155.

which included air raids against the Japanese at first sign of hostility towards the Philippines.²⁰ Doing so, it is widely believed, he would have saved the air force on the Philippines and prevented its fall, especially since much of MacArthur's defense plan for the Philippines relied heavily on air power.²¹

Beck is quick to point out that MacArthur had several years to prepare the Filipino army and nation to protect itself. In 1935 the US government passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act, which provided for the Philippines independence effective July 4, 1946.²² This preparation was obviously cut short by the attack and limited the number of men ready and able to fight the Japanese. The American-Filipino army was not prepared for such an attack, their preparation being cut back by five years.²³

Unfortunately, MacArthur overestimated the ability of the army even though they lacked proper training, organization and crucial equipment.²⁴ Another mistake, which Beck points out, was MacArthur's lack of quick response due to changing circumstances. Realizing that his army was no match against the Japanese, MacArthur should have immediately ordered the withdrawal to Bataan and by doing so enacting War Plan Orange-3, the United States War Department's defense plan for the Philippines. "The Orange plan... directed MacArthur's forces to retreat to the Bataan peninsula and conduct a prolonged defense while guarding Manila Bay and awaited rescue."²⁵ This presupposed the Japanese attack and was a defensive rather than offensive plan. The key to the success was a quick and early retreat, and an appropriate amount of food and

²⁰ Beck, 15.

²¹ Beck, 10.

²² Beck, 2.

²³ Beck, 3.

²⁴ Beck, 235.

²⁵ Allan Millett and Williamson Murray, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 183.

medical supplies necessary for survival, which would have been collected and held on Bataan prior to the retreat. The lack of these two key elements would result in failure of the War Plan Orange-3.²⁶

Historian Duncan Anderson in “Douglas MacArthur and the Fall of the Philippines 1941-1942” points out that MacArthur was seen as a brilliant commander. Anderson argues that the American public believed that MacArthur’s brilliancy was the only reason the forces in the Philippines were able to hold out and fight as long as they did.²⁷ Blame was often placed on the White House and the United States Army for not sending men earlier to rescue those on Bataan.

MacArthur was a highly recognized and praised general, and therefore blame for the disasters in the Philippines can not be completely put on him nor taken from him. The fact is that MacArthur was in charge of the Philippines’ defense plan, his “failure to respond with sufficient flexibility to changing circumstances” was by far his biggest failure as commander in the Philippines. However, that being said, Anderson strongly believes that historians are much too severe in their critique of MacArthur. They tend to blame him for circumstances outside of his control. MacArthur cannot be blamed for the early attack by the Japanese, nor can he be blamed for the Japanese destroying the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and MacArthur’s chance for rescue from the Navy if and when the Japanese attacked the Philippines. Anderson also argues that MacArthur cannot be blamed for rejecting War Plan Orange -3 which was in essence sacrificing the Philippines, for a time, to the Japanese.²⁸ MacArthur rejected the plan because he held radically different views from the Navy on how the war should progress in the Pacific.

²⁶ Beck, 236.

²⁷ Anderson, 84.

²⁸ Anderson, 85.

He felt that the Navy should play a very small part, and that the build up of the Air Force and the Army would be more effective; however, the Navy disagreed.²⁹ MacArthur had been building up a Filipino army that he felt could be prepared for war. It would have seemed cowardly and defeatist to MacArthur to retreat to Bataan without first fighting for the protection of the Philippines. However, Anderson, argues, as many other historians have, that by 1940 MacArthur knew of the impending war with Japan and the vast risk to the Philippines. Knowing this MacArthur should have realized that his army was unprepared both in training, weaponry, and essential supplies to withstand the Japanese in battle. In conclusion, Anderson along with Beck argues that MacArthur should have enacted War Plan Orange-3, and in not doing so MacArthur was negligent.³⁰

Stanley Falk addresses the effectiveness of War Plan Orange-3 in “The Army in the Southwest Pacific.” Since the acquisition of the Philippines the United States government had struggled with how best to defend them.³¹ Here then began War Plan Orange-3 which was the final plan for the Philippines defense. In this plan the major portion of the Islands would be lost to the Japanese, but the American and Filipino forces would hold Manila Bay until the Navy could acquire the needed men and supplies to retake the Philippines.³² Falk, however, is very critical of this plan, pointing out that as early as 1941 many believed this plan to be impossible, due to the unexpected strength of the Japanese Army. Thus, because of previous arrangements made by Roosevelt and Churchill of focusing their efforts on Europe first, the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese would have to wait until Nazi Germany was defeated. Perhaps worse than

²⁹ Anderson, 86.

³⁰ Anderson, 85.

³¹ Stanley Falk, “The Army in the Southwest Pacific” in *MacArthur and the American Century*, ed. William M. Leary (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 144.

³² Falk, 144.

War Plan Orange-3, Falk believes that MacArthur's plan for the defense of the Philippines was unrealistic and overly optimistic.³³ He even went as far as to argue "...that the emphasis on the operations in the Southwest Pacific, in large part due to the 'forceful presence' of MacArthur, was a waste of resources."³⁴ Falk argues that MacArthur's continual push for the defense of the Philippines was misguided and unwarranted. He believed that the Philippines were of no strategic significance to the United States, and that instigating War Plan Orange-3, although flawed, at the beginning of the war would have saved many lives. He argues that the Japanese would have surrendered the Philippines when they lost the war, and that building up of logistical supplies on Bataan would have kept many of the men alive until help arrived.³⁵ Falk sees the defense of the Philippines as MacArthur's "project" and not as any lasting significance in retrospect to the rest of the war, but as an unnecessary loss of life.³⁶

Perhaps the most quoted and widely acknowledged MacArthur historian, Louis Morton, is often the most critical of the General. In such writings as *The Decision to Withdraw to Bataan*, *The Battling Bastards of Bataan*, *Egotist in Uniform* and *The Fall of the Philippines*, Morton divulges the controversy surrounding MacArthur. He even goes as far as to say that "...with everything involving MacArthur we are faced with contradiction[s]."³⁷ One of these contradictions centered on War Plan Orange-3. Morton points out that War Plan Orange-3 was a joint Army and Navy plan, and much like

³³ Falk, 145.

³⁴ Falk, 143.

³⁵ Falk, 152.

³⁶ Falk, 152.

³⁷ Louis Morton, "Egoist in Uniform," in *MacArthur and the American Century*, ed. William M. Leary (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 489.

Anderson, Morton argues that MacArthur did not see eye to eye with the Navy and disagreed drastically with the Navy's Pacific War plans.³⁸

Morton asserts that MacArthur had developed his own plan, one, which given time, would include trained men both American and Filipino working together with the Army Air Force to defend the Philippines.³⁹ One aspect of MacArthur's plan which differed drastically from War Plan Orange-3 was the idea of withdrawal. War Plan Orange-3 relied on withdrawal to Bataan for the plan to be successful, while MacArthur's plan implicitly stated that the beaches were to "be held at all cost", withdrawal was not a possibility.⁴⁰

Morton is very critical of MacArthur's sudden enactment of War Plan Orange-3. Morton asserts that MacArthur waited too long to withdraw to Bataan and as a result did not leave himself sufficient time to gather the necessary supplies.⁴¹ Like Anderson and Beck, Morton sees this as MacArthur's biggest failure; arguing that there were more than enough signs to clue MacArthur into the fact that his men were unprepared and no match for the Japanese.⁴² However, Morton is also very critical of MacArthur when he does decide to retreat to Bataan after loosing drastically to the Japanese, he argues that without acquiring the much needed food, water, medical and other military supplies the soldiers were being led to their doom.⁴³ It then became the effects of disease and starvation which forced the men to surrender.⁴⁴

³⁸ Morton, *Command*, 151.

³⁹ Morton, *Command*, 155-157.

⁴⁰ Morton, *Command*, 158.

⁴¹ Morton, *Command*, 166.

⁴² Morton, *Command*, 161.

⁴³ Louis Morton. "The Battling Bastard of Bataan." *The Journal of Military Affairs* 15 (1951): 107.

⁴⁴ Morton, *Battling*, 108.

David Kennedy in *Freedom from Fear* argues that MacArthur had enough time and resources to mount a counterattack on the Japanese at Formosa following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Kennedy calls MacArthur's failure to do so incredible and unforgivable.⁴⁵ The result was the elimination of the United States Air Force in the Far East and the sacrifice of the men, both American and Filipino on the Philippines. This Air Force was MacArthur's "...claim to be able to defend the Philippines indefinitely."⁴⁶ With this much needed source destroyed MacArthur was forced to withdraw to Bataan. Here, on Bataan, Kennedy argues, MacArthur made another mistake by doing nothing to help rally his men. In fact he saw them only once during the months they were on Bataan and he was on the small island fortress Corregidor. Feeling very much abandoned and desolate the soldiers on Bataan soon nicknamed MacArthur, "Dugout Doug", and started referring to themselves as the "Battling Bastards of Bataan."⁴⁷ This is significant because it shows the state of the soldiers at the time of the attacks by the Japanese. They were no match for the Japanese and unprepared to hold out against them on Bataan.

MacArthur was immersed in the military long before he came to the Philippines, in fact it could be said that it was in his blood. As far back as he could remember he was influenced by the United States Army. In 1880 MacArthur was born at the army barracks in Little Rock Arkansas.⁴⁸ He was perhaps influenced more by his father than any other person.⁴⁹ His father, Arthur MacArthur, fought in the Civil War and the Spanish

⁴⁵ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 527.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, 529.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, 529.

⁴⁸ William M. Leary, *MacArthur and the American Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001)

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⁴⁹ Connaughton, 17.

American War. Ironically Arthur was vital in liberating the Philippines from the Spanish and ended the 300 reign they held.⁵⁰

MacArthur, much like his father, relished his time serving in the military. MacArthur graduated from West Point at the top of his class in 1903.⁵¹ Following his successes in World War I, MacArthur was appointed superintendent of West Point. This promotion earned him praise from secretary of War Newton D. Baker who “called MacArthur ‘the greatest frontline general.’” MacArthur became a Major General in the army in 1925 and this made him the youngest active general at that time.⁵² Historians Richard Connaughton and Geoffrey Perret, however, point out that this was achieved not on MacArthur’s merit alone, but that the promotion had more to do with MacArthur’s mother and her influence as the wife of Commanding General Arthur MacArthur.⁵³ MacArthur lacked the necessary qualifications of his peers and had to rely on the influence of others. However, despite this he was praised and admired by both those in the military and out of it. This perhaps explains why he was asked, in 1935, to oversee the training an army in the Philippines.

Prior to the war a series of plans for the protection of the Philippines in the event of an attack were developed by the United States War Department. Here, in 1935, War Plan Orange -3 has developed. The primary mission of the army in the Philippines was the protection of Bataan, and the small island fortress of Corregidor, which were essential to the protection of Manila Bay; this bay was seen as vital to the Pacific War campaign.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Perret, 40.

⁵¹ Connaughton, 16.

⁵² Beck, 3.

⁵³ Connaughton, 29. Perret, 134.

⁵⁴ Anderson.

This plan assumed that the Navy would do most of the fighting while the army on Bataan would hold the Japanese off until help arrived.

Understandably MacArthur was not in agreement with the War Department's defense plan. As early as 1936 he rejected the Orange Plan as cowardly and unnecessary. In an address given in 1936 MacArthur defended his war plan which he called "The Defense of the Philippines"⁵⁵ Here he argued that the Philippines have "...an enormous defense advantage."⁵⁶ This advantage, MacArthur pointed out, was a natural one with three elements. First, the island chain of the Philippines is protected by the surrounding water. Next, the mountainous terrain makes it nearly impossible for aircraft to land. The protection of a few ideal landing areas was considerably easier than protecting the whole of the island. Lastly, the natural defense of "great forests" he saw as "impenetrable by powerful military units." MacArthur believed that all of these "combine to create a theater of operations in which a defensive force of only moderate efficiency and strength could test the capabilities of the most powerful and splendidly equipped army that could be assembled here."⁵⁷

In July of 1941 MacArthur convinced Roosevelt that his war plan would save the Philippines from an attack. MacArthur was granted some 8,000 new men as well as "thousands of tons of supplies" and more aircraft.⁵⁸ "All that these last-minute efforts achieved, assert MacArthur's critics, was to increase the toll of the Bataan Death March."⁵⁹ By the fall of 1941 MacArthur knew anticipated war with Japan was certain.

⁵⁵ Douglas MacArthur, "The Defense of the Philippines" in *MacArthur and the American Century*, ed. William M. Leary (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 43.

⁵⁶ MacArthur, 43.

⁵⁷ MacArthur, 45.

⁵⁸ Anderson, 94.

⁵⁹ Anderson, 87.

His inability to adapt to the developing situation with Japan is one of MacArthur's biggest failures.⁶⁰ The major "charge filed at MacArthur was his failure to respond with sufficient flexibility to the changing circumstances."⁶¹ "By this stage MacArthur's sense of personal identity was intimately bound up with the future of the Philippines."⁶² Thus MacArthur would have surely seen a retreat to Bataan as a failure in his own character, and in his ability to perform his commanding duties. MacArthur also disagreed drastically with the Navy, as argued by Duncan Anderson, and further rejected any war plans which included the Navy as saviors of the army in the Philippines.⁶³ Unfortunately MacArthur's disagreements with the War Department and the Navy had far more reaching consequences than his pride being hurt; they also included the loss of the Philippines as well as the death and capture of his soldiers.

The Japanese attack on Clark Field Base put a halt to MacArthur's war preparations and put MacArthur and his men into the middle of the war in the Pacific. December 8, 1941, has become known as "MacArthur's Pearl Harbor."⁶⁴ MacArthur learned early that morning that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and he expected the same would occur in the Philippines, yet he failed to prepare for a counterattack, or to begin the retreat to Bataan. Perhaps he felt unprepared for an attack so early in the war, and stalled while trying to discern what to do.⁶⁵ Whatever the reason, when the Japanese attacked Clark Field Base they found a large portion of MacArthur's aircraft sitting like ducks waiting their arrival. In one hour it is estimated that the Japanese destroyed over half of

⁶⁰ Anderson, 84. Beck, 236.

⁶¹ Anderson, 84.

⁶² Anderson, 83.

⁶³ Anderson, 88.

⁶⁴ William Bartsch, *December 8, 1941: MacArthur's Pearl Harbor* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press).

⁶⁵ Kennedy, 527.

MacArthur's precious aircraft, and as a result destroying his plan of protecting the Philippines.⁶⁶ A member of MacArthur's staff Lieutenant Colonel Warren J. Clear recalls, "That raid and the simultaneous attack on other airfields near Mania sealed the fate of Luzon and Corregidor."⁶⁷ By the end of the attacks all of MacArthur's aircraft had been wiped out.

Still today there is much controversy surrounding MacArthur's role in the fall of the Philippines. It is widely argued that he should have adapted more quickly and begun the retreat to Bataan when he lost his airpower, which he held as such an essential part of his war plan.⁶⁸ However, having already rejected the War Plan Orange-3 MacArthur still naively believed his men could out fight the Japanese.⁶⁹ MacArthur's American-Filipino Army was then put to the test and as anticipated by the shortness of their training they were no match for the Japanese. The Filipinos panicked when they saw the Japanese, they had good reason to do so. They had "never trained together with the tank and cavalry" as a result they "were unable to coordinate their activities."⁷⁰ MacArthur perhaps ignoring the disastrous situation before him still believed that defending the Philippines was possible. He was so sure of this that he sent precious supplies, eighteen thousand tons, and men to Lingayen where his intelligence had learned that "...the Japanese would make a large scale landing."⁷¹ Many historians argue that MacArthur drastically underestimated the strength of his enemy and overestimated the strength of his men.⁷²

⁶⁶ Earle Rice, *World War Two: Strategic Battles in the Pacific* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000), 19.

⁶⁷ Rice, 20.

⁶⁸ Perret, 235.

⁶⁹ Beck, 325.

⁷⁰ Anderson, 95.

⁷¹ Anderson, 94.

⁷² Beck, 325.

As the situation deteriorated and seemed endless, on December 22 MacArthur suddenly ordered the execution of War Plan Orange-3, the withdrawal to Bataan. Eighty thousand soldiers, both Filipino and American, and some twenty six thousand civilians “would have to survive in a malaria-ridden, mountainous jungle without adequate food, medical supplies, and ammunition”⁷³ MacArthur’s biggest mistake was not changing his plan to include the possibility of a retreat to Bataan and as a result he waited too long to make the much needed preparations. War Plan Orange-3 required the acquisition of logistical supplies including food, medicine and ammunition. These supplies were required to sustain an anticipated forty three thousand men for six months.⁷⁴ Unfortunately when War Plan Orange-3 was actually instigated the needed supplies were spread throughout the island and the men on Bataan were almost double the anticipated amount.⁷⁵ This aspect alone doomed MacArthur’s men to failure. Historian Louis Morton points out that “strategic decisions in war are normally based upon military and political considerations. Rarely do food, medical, and morale enter into the large decisions of war. But when on April 9, 1942, the American and Filipino troops on Bataan surrendered, they did so with the bitter realization that starvation, disease, and despair – not the enemy--had brought them to defeat.”⁷⁶ MacArthur had assumed that although he had convinced Roosevelt of his new, more active war plan when in trouble the United States would still have the means to provide men, supplies, and arms to conduct a rescue of the soldiers. The War Department sent MacArthur numerous men, supplies and aircraft

⁷³ Millett & Murray, 183

⁷⁴ Morton, *Command*, 166.

⁷⁵ Morton, *Command* 167.

⁷⁶ Morton, *Command* 170.

prior to the outbreak of war with Japan. The attack on December 7th crippled the Navy's fleet and made a quick rescue suddenly impossible.

MacArthur did much to deserve blame in the fall of the Philippines. He knew of the attack on Pearl Harbor yet did not protect himself and the Philippines from the same fate. He naively believed he could protect the Philippines from the slaughter of the Japanese, as well as defeat the Japanese. He grossly underestimated the ability of the Japanese while overestimating the ability of the soldiers under his command.⁷⁷ With little supplies and outdated weapons they didn't stand a chance. When the retreat to Bataan became absolutely necessary inadequate supplies had been procured, leaving the soldiers and civilians who had retreated suffering from hunger and disease as opposed to suffering at the hands of their enemy.

There are stories told by soldiers on Bataan that MacArthur, prior to leaving for Australia, did not even see his men to give them commands or encouragement.⁷⁸ While there was little MacArthur in all honesty could have done to ensure the complete safety of the islands, his pride and over-optimism caused considerably more hardships than necessary.⁷⁹ Historian Richard Connaughton argues that had the "campaign been fought with more imagination, flair, foresight, and planning then a whole new raft of possibilities might have arisen."⁸⁰ Roosevelt, who was often critical of MacArthur, in hindsight, believed that his defense of the Philippines had "been 'criminal' rather than heroic, 'more a rout than military achievement.'"⁸¹

⁷⁷ Beck, 325.

⁷⁸ Anderson, 103.

⁷⁹ Anderson, 104.

⁸⁰ Connaughton, 306.

⁸¹ Connaughton, 305.

There is other evidence that cannot be ignored when discussing the fall of the Philippines in World War II. This aspect of the fall MacArthur had no control over and cannot be held accountable for. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had agreed to focus the American forces on defeating Germany first. The plan that ensued “... represented the revision and distillation of many previous plans; it was ‘world-wide in its provisions,’ calling for a defense strategy in the Pacific and Far East,’ ‘and accepting implicitly the loss of the Philippines, Guam, and Wake.’”⁸² Thus some blame must be put upon Roosevelt’s shoulders. Had Japan been made a priority much like Germany had been, perhaps the Philippines would have been save from the fate of a forgotten land where men were left to die. That being said there is strong evidence to show that Roosevelt and Churchill’s prewar alliance saved thousands from the hand of Nazi Germany. It is argued then that perhaps like Secretary of Defense Henry Stimson who claimed that ‘there are times when men have to die,’”⁸³ these men on Bataan had to be sacrificed for a greater good.

One significant result of the fall of the Philippines was the abandonment felt by the men on Bataan. Of all parties that took part in the fall, the men fighting on Bataan were innocent of any wrongdoing. They followed orders, retreated when commanded to, waited for promised supplies when told to, and in an unimaginable moment surrendered when demanded. This abandonment led the soldiers on Bataan to refer to themselves as “the Battling Bastards of Bataan”.⁸⁴ They still hoped for a rescue; however, “the repeated promises from Washington that help was on the way rang hollow by the second

⁸² Baldwin Hanson, *Great Mistakes of the War* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 66.

⁸³ John Castello *The Pacific War 1941-1945* (New York: Quill, 1982) 186.

⁸⁴ Kennedy, 529.

week of January, when no ships or planes had arrived. The belief spread among the hungry troops in Bataan foxholes that Washington had decided to abandon them to their fate. Neither the United States, nor its allies had the ships, men or aircraft to make good that plan.”⁸⁵

One of the prominent consequences of the fall of the Philippines was the extreme difficulties the soldiers experienced while prisoners of war. The horrific experiences faced by the POWs are inconceivable; their Japanese captors were beyond any brutality yet known. Kenneth Hourigan, a member of Company D, the 192nd Tank Battalion’ sat down to an interview with author Studs Terkel and gave an account of conditions following the army’s surrender. His experiences mirror those of countless other soldiers. “They came an’ picked out eighteen big broad-shouldered guys, looked like football players... [The Japanese soldiers] got out to drinkin’ one night an’ they got their guns and just shot ‘em all down.”⁸⁶ “They loaded us up on boxcars, eighty and ninety men to a boxcar. They didn’t have room to squat down. It was hot in those metal things, an’ boy, when that sun was comin’ down on us....it was pitiful.”⁸⁷ Another soldier remembers “the guards placed the head of a soldier who tried to escape on a 20-foot pole, which they marched down the center of the camp as a warning.”⁸⁸

Perhaps the most horrific example of the unforgivable cruelty that these men went through came during the Bataan Death March. The Death march lasted eight days and 65 miles with little to no food and water available to the prisoners. “Before the end of the Bataan Death March...600 Americans had died of disease and exhaustion or had been

⁸⁵ Castello, 186.

⁸⁶ Studs Terkel, *The Good War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 74.

⁸⁷ Terkel, 75.

⁸⁸ John Cervone, “Remembering the Bataan Death March”, *The Journal of Military History* 16 (1999): 35.

murdered by their guards; the numbers of Filipino deaths reached 6,000-7,000.”⁸⁹ It is shocking to learn that prior the surrendering at Bataan, the American leaders on the peninsula preserved enough trucks and gasoline to transport all the men; this of course made the gruesome march unnecessary, it was instead just an act of inhumane cruelty.⁹⁰ “Stragglers would be mercilessly clubbed, those dying from disease and malnutrition were left by the wayside, and men who appeared to be succumbing were buried alive by their comrades at gunpoint.”⁹¹ What made this march worse was that even before the Japanese captured the troops the men were suffering lack of food and nutrition.⁹² One soldier remembers that “walking soon became much easier, but depression soon set in when we discovered there was no food or water to be had. Soldiers were shot or bayoneted and left to die on the side of the road. In some ways they were the lucky ones. Their miseries were over. For the rest of us our agonies had just begun.”⁹³ Another soldier remembers; “we were marched backward and stopped alongside a road in daylight, in plain sight if Corregidor and the American guns. The guns of Corregidor opened on the Japanese artillery positions alongside the road. We were being used as human shields. A number of prisoners were hit by the American gunfire, including me.”⁹⁴

General Douglas MacArthur was loved and hated. He was often accused of being a “legend in his own mind,”⁹⁵ by some and at the same time regarded as brilliant by

⁸⁹ Millett & Murray, 186.

⁹⁰ Morton, *Battling*, 146.

⁹¹ Castello, 228.

⁹² Morton, *Battling*, 133.

⁹³ Cervone, 34.

⁹⁴ Cervone, 34.

⁹⁵ Kennedy, 529.

others.⁹⁶ It is argued that MacArthur's actions in the Philippines prior to his escape to Australia hastened the fall of the Philippines, which led to more death and brutality at the hands of the Japanese. His inability to adjust to changing circumstance with the Japanese was his downfall, as it has been argued by numerous historians.⁹⁷ And with this the debate over MacArthur's role in the Philippines is one which is continuing still to this day. Some have argued "...that the emphasis on the operations in the Southwest Pacific, in large part due to the 'forceful presence' of MacArthur, was a waste of resources."⁹⁸ While others believe that historians are much too severe in their critique of MacArthur that they tend to blame him for circumstances outside of his control.

The responsibility of the fall cannot lie solely on MacArthur; there were many other circumstances over which he had no control. These included Roosevelt's and Churchill's decision to focus on Germany first as well as the early attacks by the Japanese. With all of MacArthur's shortcomings regarding the Philippines, there is one significant basis of praise: without a doubt MacArthur was the backbone behind the early liberation of the Philippines. He fought against Navy commanders who pushed for a direct attack on Japan avoiding the Philippines. The only reason that the Philippines were liberated before the surge to Japan was because of MacArthur's continued pressure on the White House.⁹⁹

The fall of the Philippines will forever be remembered as "...the worse defeat yet suffered by the United States, a source of national humiliation."¹⁰⁰ Thousands of soldiers

⁹⁶ Anderson, 83.

⁹⁷ Anderson, 84.

⁹⁸ Falk, 143.

⁹⁹ Alfred Castle, "President Roosevelt and General MacArthur at the Honolulu Conference of 1944", *Hawaiian Journal of History* 38 (2004): 168.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, 84.

lost their lives at the hands of the Japanese as well as to the fatal affects of diseases. Their sacrifice goes beyond anything that they can be comprehended and understood by those who didn't experience it. It is their sacrifice and experiences which were the real consequences of the fall.

“We’re the battling Bastards of Bataan
No mama, no papa, and no Uncle Sam,
No aunts, no uncles, no nephews, no nieces,
No rifles, no planes or artillery pieces,
And nobody gives a damn!”¹⁰¹

“We are MacArthur’s bastards
A fighting in Bataan
With neither father nor mother
Nor their old Uncle Sam.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Castello, 193.

¹⁰² Morton, *Battling*, 148.

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