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# AMERICAN GUERRILLA

The Forgotten Heroics of  
**Russell W. Volckmann**

The Man Who Escaped from Bataan,  
Raised a Filipino Army  
Against the Japanese,  
and Became the True "Father"  
of Army Special Forces

MIKE GUARDIA



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and Became the True “Father” of Army Special Forces**

**Mike Guardia**



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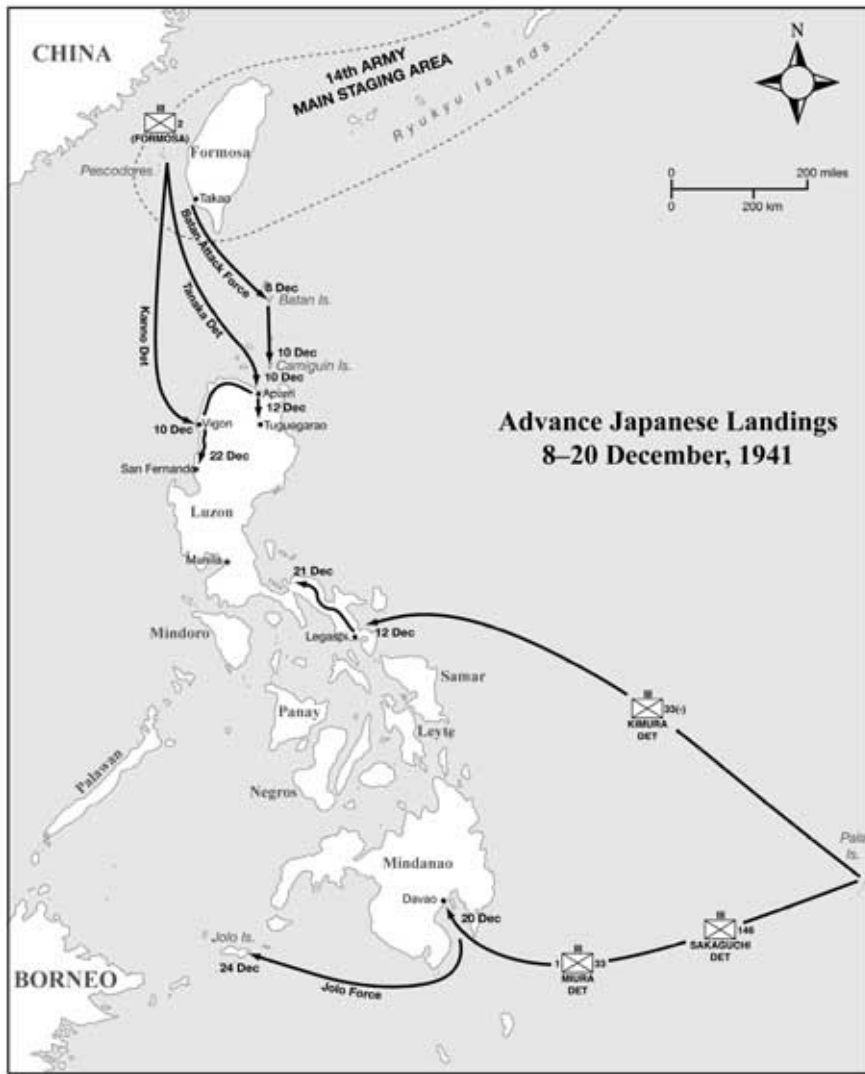
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*Map of Lingayen Gulf and the immediate vicinity on the western coast of Luzon. The Lingayen beach— from Dagupan City in the east, to the Agno River delta in the west—marks the site of the 11th Infantry’s first defensive position.*

With his parting words “I shall return,” General Douglas MacArthur sealed the fate of the last American forces on Bataan. Yet amongst those who capitulated to the Japanese, a young Army Captain named Russell William Volckmann refused to surrender. At the outset of World War II, Volckmann served as the Executive Officer of the 11th Infantry Regiment (11th Division). Rather than surrender, Volckmann disappeared into the jungles of North Luzon and raised a guerrilla army of over 22,000 men. For the next three years, he led a guerrilla war against the Japanese, killing over 50,000 enemy soldiers. During the interim, he established radio contact with MacArthur’s Headquarters in Australia and directed the Allied forces to key enemy positions. Officially designated the *United States Armed Forces in the Philippines—North Luzon* (USAFIP-NL), Volckmann’s guerrilla unit decimated the Japanese Fourteenth Army. When General Tomiyuki Yamashita—the commander of the Japanese occupation force—finally surrendered, he made the initial surrender overtures not to MacArthur, but to Volckmann.

Volckmann was also the first to develop the Army’s official doctrine of counterinsurgency and to articulate the need for a permanent force capable of unconventional warfare. His diligence in this regard led to the creation of the Army Special Forces. Surprisingly, Volckmann has not received credit for either of these accomplishments. Despite this man’s contributions, he remains virtually forgotten by history.

This book seeks to establish two premises. First, it explores how Volckmann’s leadership was critical to the outcome of the Philippines Campaign. His ability to synthesize the realities and necessities of guerrilla warfare led to a campaign that rendered Yamashita’s forces incapable of repelling the Allied invasion. Had it not been for Russell W. Volckmann, the Allies would not have received the intelligence necessary to launch an effective counterstrike. Had he not funneled his intelligence reports to MacArthur and coordinated an Allied assault on the Japanese enclaves, the Americans would have gone in “blind”—reducing their efforts to a trial-and-error campaign that would have undoubtedly cost more lives, materiel, and potentially stalled the pace of the entire Pacific War.

Second, this book establishes Volckmann as the progenitor of modern counterinsurgency doctrine and the true “Father of Army Special Forces”—a title that history has erroneously awarded Colonel Aaron Bank.\* In 1950, Volckmann authored two Army field manuals: FM 31–20, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces* and FM 31–21, *Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare*. Together these manuals became the Army’s first complimentary reference set outlining the precepts for special warfare and counterinsurgency operations. Taking his argument directly to General J. Lawton Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, Volckmann outlined the operational concepts for Army Special Forces. At a time when U.S. military doctrine was conventional in its outlook, Volckmann marketed the idea of guerrilla warfare as a critical and strategic force multiplier for any future conflict. In doing so, he ultimately won the blessings of the Army Chief of Staff and secured the establishment of the Army’s first special operations unit: the 10th Special Forces Group.

The story of Russell W. Volckmann commands a unique place within the military historiography of World War II. Military histories of the Philippine Campaign are told predominately within the context of conventional warfare. Several books have been written about MacArthur’s triumphant return to the Philippines, the Army Rangers at Cabanatuan, U.S. Sixth Army operations on Luzon, and the Battle of Leyte Gulf. However, the guerrilla war remains largely forgotten. Aside from a few published memoirs, such as *Lapham’s Raiders*, and official Army publications such as General Charles A. Willoughby’s, *Guerrilla Resistance*



*Movement in the Philippines*, the historiography of the guerrilla war in the Philippines comparatively narrow. Survey texts on American military history often relegate the guerrilla conflict to only a paragraph or two.

Volckmann himself remains a shadowy figure throughout modern military history. The *Oxford Companion to American Military History* and *Oxford Companion to World War II* have no entries for either Volckmann or the USAFIP-NL. His name is absent from every major biography on MacArthur and what little history there is on Volckmann is often incorrect or misleading.\* Many books cite *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces* and *Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare*, but do not recognize Volckmann as the author. Because field manuals are considered “intellectual property” of the Army, their authors are not credited upon the manuals’ release—although the Army does maintain a record of who writes them. For this reason, few know that Volckmann was the man behind FMs 31-20 and 31-21. My contribution to the broader historical literature, therefore, is an account that not only chronicles the military career of Russell Volckmann, but analyzes how his leadership contributed to the Japanese defeat in the Philippines and paved the way for counterinsurgency and special warfare doctrine.

Research for this project began in February 2007. When I made the decision to write a biography on Russell Volckmann, I understood that there would be a narrow selection of adequate secondary sources. As such, my book is composed almost entirely of primary source material.

The first step I took in obtaining primary source material was to contact the surviving members of the Volckmann family. At first, I had no indication of how much or what kind of material they possessed—or even how many family members were still living. My first reference to this end was the United States Military Academy’s *Registry of Graduates and Former Cadets*. This is a directory of every West Point graduate from 1802 until the present day. Included with each graduate’s entry is a paragraph that gives: (a) date of birth, (b) date of death (if applicable), (c) all active duty assignments, (d) time of separation or retirement, and (e) the graduate’s last confirmed address. If a graduate has deceased, the *Registry* gives the names of any known next of kin.

From this, I discovered that Volckmann’s eldest son, Russell Jr., also attended West Point. With his name and contact information in hand, I began the research process by conducting a series of interviews with Russell Volckmann, Jr. Aside from the wealth of information he gave me concerning his father’s life and career, he informed me that the family had, in fact, retained many of Volckmann’s personal effects. Directing me to his son, Christopher, and half-brother, William, he indicated that the family had kept Volckmann’s personal papers, letters, and several newspaper clippings. The most important resource, however, was Volckmann’s *war diary*. This well-written and thoroughly documented journal is a day-by-day account of his adventures in the Philippines from 8 December 1941 until 16 June 1944.

When I received the diary from the Volckmann family, they informed me that they had never found any entries beyond 16 June 1944. However, after conducting extensive archival research, I concluded that Volckmann simply stopped writing after this date. By June 1944, his guerrilla force, USAFIP-NL, had an effective record keeping system that contained more details than Volckmann could feasibly fit into a journal.

My next priority was to visit the National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. Arriving at the Archives in August 2007, I located Record Groups 319, 389, 407, and 496. In doing so, I was pleased to find that there were over twenty boxes of information on Volckmann—including his leadership of USAFIP-NL, his work in creating the Special Forces, and his time as the Director of Special Operations in the U.S. European Command. Record Group 496 included several maps of North Luzon. However, these were drawn from the U.S. Sixth Army Records and, aside from listing Volckmann’s guerrilla positions, did not offer anything in the way of battle plans or situation maps.

Continuing my research, I decided to reference the U.S. Army Military History Institute (MHI) at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. There, I found a wealth of information that, surprisingly, was not present at the National Archives. Under the heading of “The Russell W. Volckmann Papers,” MHI has seven boxes of material relating strictly to his operations in the Philippines. These were Volckmann’s possession until his death in 1982. Shortly thereafter, the collection was donated by his widow, Helen. Included in this collection are official reports and situation maps of Volckmann’s guerrilla units.

Possibly the most salient items in this collection were the *USAFIPNL G-3 Operations Reports*, *USAFIP-NL G-2 Intelligence Reports*, *USAFIP-NL G-3 After-Battle Report*, and the USAFIP-NL radio logs. *USAFIP-NL G-3 Operations Reports* are a collection of all combat reports and records pertaining to actions against the enemy. The *AfterBattle Report*—prepared by General Headquarters, USAFIP-NL—reconstructs the different phases of Volckmann’s guerrilla war by synthesizing the combat and intelligence reports. The radio logs contain some 385 radiograms sent to and from MacArthur in Australia. Collectively, these documents provide a valuable look into the thought process Volckmann undertook while contemplating the course of his guerrilla campaign.

Attempting to balance the perspectives of my primary source material, I referenced a handful of Japanese resources. At MHI, I recovered transcripts of interviews and sworn statements from the Japanese generals and colonels whom Volckmann confronted in the Philippines. Aside from General Yamashita, these officers included the likes of Colonel Sotomu Terau, Chief of Staff—19th Torpedo Division, Lieutenant General Fukutaro Nishiyama, Commander—23rd Division, and Lieutenant General Yutaka Marauka, Commander—103rd Division. Describing Volckmann as a constant thorn in their sides, these flag officers admittedly stumbled over their own frustrations in a vain attempt to shut down USAFIP-NL. Not only did these men confirm the validity of the USAFIP-NL combat reports, they acknowledged that Yamashita had placed a sizeable bounty on Volckmann’s head.

Another valuable source came from the files of the Rand Corporation. In 1963, six years after his retirement from the U.S. Army, Volckmann participated in the Rand study panel to discuss the viability of close air support for contingency operations. From the Rand Corporation, I secured a transcript of the panel’s proceedings. Volckmann used this opportunity to explain how ground-air operations were indispensable to unconventional warfare. The concepts he articulated on this panel soon found their way into the U.S. Army’s air cavalry doctrine during Vietnam.

Finally, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I conducted research at the Special Operations Archives at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center. While their archives are comparatively smaller than the ones I had visited previously, there was no lack of relevant material. The Special Operations Archives have one file on Volckmann that contains letters he wrote to the Archives—then known as the “History Office”—over a period of time spanning from 1969–1975 explaining his roles in the Philippines and creating the Special Forces. This file also includes some information about Volckmann’s role in developing special operations units for the Eighth Army during the Korean War.

Other primary sources that I encountered included a handful of personal memoirs and Army publications available from the Army Museum System. These included: *We Remained* and *Guerrilla Days in North Luzon: A Brief Historical Narrative of a Brilliant Segment of the Resistance Movement during Enemy Occupation in the Philippines 1941–1945*. *Guerrilla Days* is an 80-page booklet published by USAFIP-NL Headquarters in 1946, and is the official Army document chronicling the rise of Volckmann’s resistance movement. Less than 100 copies of this monograph are known to exist, and the master copy rests at the First Division Museum in Fort Riley, Kansas. Memoirs include Robert Lapham’s, *Lapham’s Raiders*, Ray Hunt’s, *Behind Japanese Lines*, and other guerrillas who survived the war and have much to say about Volckmann.

After finishing the first round of archival research, I set out to find any of Volckmann’s



colleagues that were still living. Simply taking into account Volckmann's age—95 years old if he was still living in 2007—this part of my research did not promise to yield any significant information. At first, it appeared as though my apprehensions were correct: Volckmann's sister, Ruth Volckmann Stansbury, tragically passed away the same month that I began researching for this project. Volckmann's brother-in-law, John Stansbury, declined to be interviewed. Cross-referencing other names that Volckmann mentioned in his diary returned only a handful of obituaries. However, a significant lead developed during my research at MHI.

In the Philippines, Volckmann developed a close relationship with Captain (later Brigadier General) Donald D. "Don" Blackburn. Escaping from Bataan together, Blackburn became Volckmann's executive officer in USAFIP-NL and later commanded one of its regiments. I had never found anything significant concerning Blackburn until I came across a 400-page transcript of an interview conducted with him in 1983. As part of an oral history project, MHI commissioned Lieutenant Colonel Robert B. Smith, USAF, to conduct a series of interviews with Blackburn concerning his life and career. Not only did this interview corroborate the information I had previously gathered on Volckmann, it gave the names of Blackburn's immediate family members: his son, Donald Jr., and daughter, Susan. I decided to locate Blackburn's children through a public records search and, in the course of doing so, was shocked to learn that Blackburn himself was still alive and living in Sarasota, Florida.

Contacting the Blackburn family, I secured a visitation in March 2008. Unfortunately, Blackburn had been suffering from Alzheimer's, which diluted much of his memory. However, his daughter granted me access to all of his records. Comprising nearly two whole filing cabinets, Blackburn's collection included a wealth of photographs, letters, war trophies, USAFIP-NL reports, and official duplicates of government documents. I also learned that Blackburn himself kept a diary while in the Philippines. Although his diary started much earlier, it ended at approximately the same time that Volckmann's did. This, I believe, is a reasonable affirmation of my theory that Volckmann discontinued his diary because adequate records were being maintained by USAFIP-NL. Blackburn tragically passed away on 24 May 2008, nearly two months to the day after completing my visit with him.

Shortly thereafter, Blackburn's son provided me with the contact information for Edwin J. Ramsey. Ramsey was another American guerrilla who led a small band of raiders in the northern Zambales Mountains. Ramsey was indeed a competent leader, but spent most of his time battling the *Hukbalahap*, or Philippine Communists. As of 2008, Ramsey is 91 years old. Despite his age, however, he remains mentally sharp and recalls his meetings with Volckmann in excruciating detail.

The secondary sources that I referenced for this project were largely for the sake of understanding the historical context in which Volckmann operated. Highlights include *The Fall of the Philippines* and *Triumph in the Philippines*, both published by the Army Center for Military History in 1953 and 1963, respectively. *The Fall of the Philippines* provides the background for the American defeat by tracing it to Washington's political neglect and the subsequent impact it had on the Philippines' combat readiness. It also provides a detailed look at the Japanese and American military operations from 8 December 1941 until the Fall of Corregidor. *Triumph in the Philippines* begins with the decision to retake the archipelago and recounts the American conquests of Luzon, Mindanao, and Cebu. Both books are told from a conventional warfare perspective.

Also included is *A Study in Command and Control: Special Operations in Korea, 1951–1953*. Written by Colonel Rod Paschall, it is another publication from the Army Center for Military History. The book does not mention Volckmann, although it makes several references to FM 31-21 as the nexus between the Army's disastrous *ad hoc* approach to special operations in Korea and the establishment of a permanent Special Forces command. Likewise, *Dark Moon: Eighth Army Special*

*Operations in the Korean War* has no references to Volckmann, but tells of the *United Nations Partisan Forces in Korea* (UNPFK) and the Eighth Army's *Special Activities Group*, two organizations in which Volckmann played an integral part.

Other books include *Notes on Guerrilla Warfare: Principles and Practices* by Virgil Ney. Books in this genre do not normally mention Volckmann—if they do, it is only in passing—but provide analyses into the tactics, philosophies, and mentalities of guerrilla warfare.

In all, I have been mindful not to resort to hagiography. Although I believe Volckmann to be a forgotten hero and a tactical innovator, I do not pretend that he was infallible. An innovator of any kind is bound to make mistakes along the way. Many of my primary sources do not portray Volckmann in the most flattering light. Furthermore, despite the breadth and accuracy that I believe my sources possess, none of them are completely without their potential liabilities.

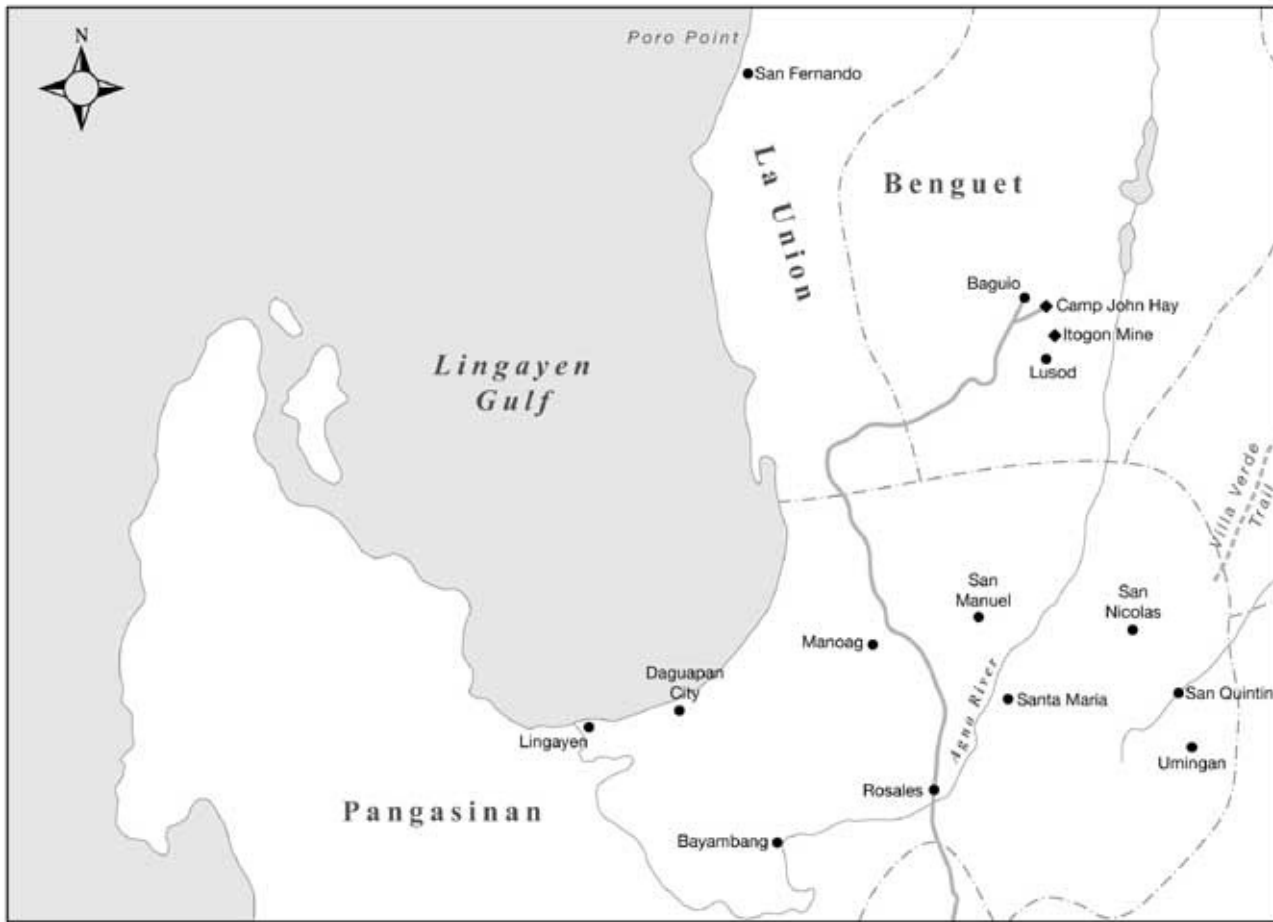
Volckmann's diary gives a unique first-person perspective and provides a glimpse into the mind of the man himself. Although Blackburn and Volckmann achieve remarkable consistency with the diaries, there are a few discrepancies. For instance, Blackburn recalls meeting certain individuals that Volckmann never mentions. In some instances, both men recall a particular incident but do not agree on the date that it occurred—for example Blackburn recalls an event happening on a Friday while Volckmann records the same event happening on a Wednesday. During their trek to North Luzon, both men constantly battled malaria, dysentery, and other tropical diseases. As a result, they may not have always been fully cognizant of their surroundings. Towards the end of Volckmann's diary, his entries become progressively shorter and farther apart. This may be because there was little action to record but the reader will never know for certain.

Interviews, however, present a much different challenge. As with any subject that occurred long ago, one's memory can—and often does—distort and rearrange the facts surrounding what happened. With the exception of Don Blackburn—who was tragically losing his fight against Alzheimer's—most of the subjects whom I interviewed were of sound mind and recalled their facts about Russell Volckmann in amazing detail. Furthermore, the recollections of these individuals did not greatly contradict one another.

I believe that the official documents, reports, sworn statements, and other items gleaned from the various archives are relatively safe from refutation. Collectively, these documents tend to corroborate one another—even on Volckmann's missteps and shortcomings as a leader. As mentioned previously, Japanese captives (including several Japanese flag officers) confirm the accuracy of USAFIP-NL operations reports. Radio logs of Volckmann's communication with MacArthur are not one-sided. By this, the log-books do not solely contain outgoing messages—all incoming messages from MacArthur are documented as well. Duplicates of these messages are on file at the MacArthur Memorial Archives in Norfolk, Virginia. Furthermore, General Willoughby's aforementioned *Guerrilla Resistance Movement in the Philippines*, a nine-volume report published by MacArthur Headquarters—Southwest Pacific Area, confirms the dates and times of Volckmann's contact with General MacArthur. Conclusively, I believe that my research and selection of source materials warrants the credibility to support this book's overall thesis.

\* - Aaron Bank was an Army officer and a former operative in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

\* - For example, there are two books that claim Volckmann was in the OSS. This is not true, however, as neither he nor any of his guerrillas ever fell under OSS jurisdiction.



*Map of Lingayen Gulf and the immediate vicinity on the western coast of Luzon. The Lingayen beach from Daguapan City in the east, to the Agno River delta in the west-marks the site of the 11th Infantry first defensive position*

## The Road to Luzon

The military career of Russell William Volckmann began on 12 June 1934, the day he graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. Prior to his matriculation at the Academy, however, surprisingly little is known about Volckmann's early life. Born on 23 October 1911 in Clinton, Iowa, he was the eldest of three children born to William Volckmann and Hattie Mae Dodd. As the only son in the family, "Russ" enjoyed a childhood that was typical of most boys growing up in a small-town Iowa. Boy Scout jamborees, competitive sports, and other vigorous activities punctuated the young Volckmann's life.<sup>1</sup>

From an early age, Russell Volckmann possessed a remarkable fascination with all things military. At the tender age of six, during World War I, he volunteered his services as the unofficial "mascot" for C Company, 133rd Infantry of the Iowa National Guard. C Company's wartime responsibility was to guard the town's bridges over the Mississippi River. Clad in a child-sized khaki uniform and brandishing a toy rifle, Volckmann was a regular sight around the Company Headquarters. With his imagination firing on all cylinders, the young lad would engage in epic battles against pretend foes and cheer wildly as he vanquished one enemy after another.<sup>2</sup>

Developing an appetite for military history, Volckmann spent considerable time reading about the United States Army and its heroic leaders throughout the years. Indeed, by the end of his grammar school career, the young Volckmann knew that he had found his calling. In the spring of 1926, he entered the Shattuck Military Academy—now Shattuck-St. Mary's—in Faribault, Minnesota, an all-boys military school well-steeped in the traditions of the Episcopal Church. Graduating from Shattuck in 1930, Volckmann wrote to Congressman Charles E. Swanson requesting a nomination to the United States Military Academy and entered West Point with the Class of 1934.<sup>3</sup>

Although he was an outstanding cadet at Shattuck, Volckmann did not repeat that same performance at West Point. Graduating 189th in a class of 250, he was a below average student—known more for his golfing and swimming prowess than his academic skills.<sup>4</sup> Despite his class standing, however, he was an excellent soldier. Physically strong and mentally tough, he was drawn to the "rough-and-tumble" world of the Infantry.

On graduation day, as a newly minted Infantry officer, Volckmann requested a duty assignment in the Philippine Islands.<sup>5</sup> A United States Commonwealth at the time, the Philippines offered the best of Army glamour. The tropical climate, expansive beaches, and Manila—the "Pearl of the Orient"—made it one of the most sought after assignments in the U.S. military. However, his class standing made him less competitive for such a popular assignment and he instead received orders to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, then home to the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division. After completing his tour of duty as a rifle platoon leader and company executive officer at Fort Snelling, Volckmann attended the Infantry Officer Advanced Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, in the fall of 1937. Shortly thereafter, he received orders to Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Although his "dream assignment" still eluded him, "Fort Sam" proved to be just the stepping stone Volckmann needed.<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 1940, after returning from field maneuvers with the 2nd Infantry Division—Fort Sam's tenant unit—Volckmann discovered that many of the junior officers in his regiment had

received orders to Panama—another exotic outpost. Sensing an opportunity, Volckmann wrote a letter to the chief Adjutant General in Washington, D.C., asking for a reassignment to the Pacific. In doing so, he called attention to the fact that his name had been on the Philippine volunteer roster for the past six years.<sup>7</sup> One week later, Volckmann received his orders.

By the time of Volckmann's arrival, the Philippines Islands were in the midst of their transition to full sovereignty. With the ratification of the *Tydings-McDuffie Act* in 1935, the United States had authorized a ten-year timeline for Philippine independence. By the time of its ratification, however, the *Tydings-McDuffie Act* was little more than a formality. For the past thirty years, the Philippines had enjoyed virtually limitless autonomy: Filipinos elected their own leaders, made their own laws in the Philippine Assembly, conducted free trade with other nations, and enjoyed the full protection of the United States military. Central to the *Tydings-McDuffie Act*, however, was a plan calling for the reorganization of the Philippine Islands' defense scheme.<sup>8</sup> Since becoming an American territory in 1898, defense of the archipelago had been the exclusive province of the U.S. War Department. Now the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines had to confront the challenge of creating its own defense structure.<sup>9</sup>

The first legislative action taken by the Philippine Assembly in this regard was ratification of the *National Defense Act* (1935). It called for a standing army of 10,000 men and a reserve component of nearly 400,000—anticipated to reach full strength by the summer of 1946. The attendant problem, however, was finding and training adequate personnel. Aside from the Philippine Scouts and the Philippine Constabulary, the Commonwealth had no military tradition upon which to build a standing army. The Philippine Scouts were an American Army unit in which most of the enlisted men and junior officers were Filipino. This well-trained force of only 10,000 men was the closest thing the Philippines had to an indigenous fighting force. The Philippine Constabulary, established in 1901, was the national police force, but their training and organization had always been military in nature.<sup>10</sup>

Calling on Washington for assistance, Philippine President Manuel Quezon enlisted the help of General Douglas MacArthur, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff. Assuming the title "Military Advisor to the Commonwealth," MacArthur set about the task of creating a Philippine Army. To fill the immediate need for officers, MacArthur and President Quezon drew personnel from the Philippine Scouts and the Constabulary. By the end of 1939, despite the enormity of the task and massive budgetary constraints from the U.S. Congress, the Philippine Army had swollen its ranks to 4,800 officers, 104,000 reservists, and developed a standardized curriculum for infantry, field artillery, and coastal defense artillery.<sup>11</sup> However, until Quezon's army could fulfill its projected end-strengths, the U.S. military would continue to shoulder the burden of the Philippines' defense.

American forces in the Philippines fell under the jurisdiction of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). Commanded by an Army General, USAFFE encompassed all U.S. military assets in the Philippine archipelago.<sup>12</sup> This included American ground forces, the Far East Air Force, the Asiatic Fleet, and the semi-autonomous Philippine Army. USAFFE's mission was simply to continue providing combat-capable units for the Commonwealth's defense and assume responsibility for training the Philippine Army.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these mission parameters, however, USAFFE remained in a deplorable state of combat readiness. In the midst of their isolationist fervor, Congress reallocated defense dollars away from an area that was not considered to be an imminent theater of war. As a result, USAFFE perennially subsisted on less than half of the money and equipment it needed for an adequate defense of the Philippines.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, twenty-nine-year-old Captain Russell Volckmann loaded his family—wife Nancy and their young son, Russell Jr.—aboard the *USS Grant* en route to the Philippine Islands. It was the summer of 1940, and it had been nearly seven years since he put his name on the volunteer roster for



the Philippines. Fresh from his tour of duty at Fort Sam Houston, Volckmann welcomed his new assignment to the Pacific. Orders initially assigned him as the commander of H Company, 31st Infantry Regiment. The 31st Infantry was an American Army unit suffering under the same budgetary constraints that had plagued the U.S. military for years. Still, the men of H Company were comparatively better equipped than their counterparts in the Philippine Army. <sup>15</sup>

Volckmann commanded H Company for nearly a year. During this time, he and his men drilled under the Emergency War Plan, which called for H Company to perform extensive maneuvers throughout Southern Luzon. The exercises gave him an intimate knowledge of the southern landscape. Unfortunately, it was knowledge Volckmann would never use, for in July 1941, he was reassigned to a new position in the Philippine Army.

The opportunity that lay before him was one seldom given to a young captain. The Philippine Army desperately needed senior-level staff officers for its newly activated divisions. Normally, the Army gave these billets to Majors and Lieutenant Colonels, but there were simply not enough of the high-ranking officers available to meet the demands for the Philippine defense project.

At first, Volckmann had only a cursory understanding of what his new assignment entailed. He knew that the Philippine Army needed American officers for its higher echelons, and that this would likely be the norm until the Filipinos had sufficient training to take over the command structure. He also understood that Americans like himself would be the minority—all of the enlisted personnel and most of the company-grade officers would be Filipino. Finally, he had no indication where he would be assigned or what his new position might be.

**United States Armed Forces—Far East (USAFFE)**

Sector	Troop Assignment	
	U.S. Army	Philippine Army
North Luzon Force	Force HQ and HQ Co (US) 26th Cavalry (PS) One battalion, 45th Infantry (PS) Battery A, 23d FA (PS) Batteries B and C, 86th Field Artillery (PS) 66th Quartermaster Troop (PS)	11th Division 21st Division 31st Division 71st Division (used as directed by USAFFE)
South Luzon Force	Force HQ and HQ Co (US) HQ Battery, Battery A, 86th Field Artillery (PS)	41st Division 51st Division
Visayan-Mindanao Force	Force HQ and HQ Co (PS)	61st Division 81st Division 101st Division
Reserve Force	HQ Philippine Dept Philippine Division (less one battalion) 86th Field Artillery (PS) Far East Air Force	91st Division HQ, Philippine Army
Harbor Defenses	Headquarters 59th Coastal Artillery (US) 60th Coastal Artillery (AA) (US) 91st Coastal Artillery (PS) 92d Coastal Artillery (PS) 200th Coastal Artillery (US)	

*Chart depicting all USAFFE land and air assets as well as the Philippine Army, 8 December 1941.*

*U.S. Army Center for Military History.*

It is unclear to what extent Volckmann knew of the Philippine Army's readiness issues prior to his reassignment—or if he was even aware of them at all. Reporting for duty, however, he discovered these inconvenient realities firsthand. At USAFFE Headquarters in Manila, Volckmann's new orders designated him the Executive Officer of the 11th Infantry Regiment, 11th Division (Philippine Army).<sup>\*</sup> Traditionally, it was *unthinkable* for a captain with only seven years of service to become the Executive Officer for an entire regiment. However, the Army's newfound exigencies had broken down the traditional rank and meritocracy barrier.

Arriving at Regimental Headquarters at Camp Holmes, near Baguio, Volckmann discovered just how problematic it would be to mold the 11th Infantry into a cohesive unit. Many of the soldiers spoke little to no English, and their native dialects would often differ from company to company. The language barrier, however, was the least of the regiment's problems. Filipino officers and enlisted soldiers had virtually no knowledge of basic military skills. What little they did know was either wrong, obsolete, or had no practical use in battle. To make matters worse, they carried outdated weapons to which they had no spare parts or ammunition.<sup>\*</sup> The Filipino soldier knew little beyond the basics of close order drill and a few marching commands. And most of the officers were political appointees who, in many cases, had less training than the men they were expected to lead. <sup>16</sup>

The 11th Infantry's Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) called for a headquarters (HQ) battalion and three combat battalions. The HQ battalion consisted of an administrative company, a medical company, and a heavy-weapons company. The three combat battalions each contained four companies: three 100-man rifle companies and one 96-man machine-gun company. The total strength of the Regiment came to 1,850 officers and men. Aside from his rifle, the Filipino soldier had little to carry. He was issued only one uniform, one pair of shoes, a cotton blanket, and a pith helmet. Other items, such as bayonets and entrenching tools—necessities by American standards—were unheard-of luxuries in the 11th Infantry. Even the officers had no access to these items. <sup>17</sup>

Volckmann, undaunted by the challenges that lay before him, scoured the countryside for interpreters and began teaching basic infantry tactics to his men. Indeed, by the end of the summer, the soldiers of the 11th Infantry had mastered some basic commands in English and their tactical skills continued to grow. As the Filipinos celebrated their military benchmarks, however, the Japanese continued the march of conquest. In August 1941, as Japan tightened its grip over the Pacific, USAFFE evacuated all military dependents in the Philippines, including Volckmann's wife and son.<sup>\*</sup> As per the Philippine Army Mobilization Plan, the 11th Infantry Regiment began building its primary defensive line along a five-mile stretch of coast on Lingayen Gulf. <sup>18</sup>

On 15 November 1941, Volckmann received a visit from General Douglas MacArthur, the newly appointed USAFFE commander.<sup>\*</sup> MacArthur arrived at Lingayen early that morning to receive the Regiment's progress report. Volckmann politely voiced his concern over the unit's critical needs. The lack of adequate weapons, clothing, fire support, and transportation were among his chief complaints. The General appeared to appreciate the unit's handicap, but told Volckmann not to worry. Volckmann asked him, "Sir, how do you assess the situation? What are your plans?" MacArthur's response did not inspire him:

"Well, I'll tell you Russ, I haven't got anything really on paper, yet. I've got it all in my mind, but we really don't have to worry about things at this point. The Japanese have a second-rate navy and about a fourth-rate army, and we don't have to worry about them until around July [1942], or in the summer months, during the dry period." <sup>19</sup>

On the merits, MacArthur's assessment made virtually no sense. The Japanese and their "fourth-rate army" had conquered Manchuria in less than six months. Furthermore, this "second-rate" navy that MacArthur spoke of had taken on—and defeated—the best of Czar Nicholas's fleet in the Russo-

Japanese War of 1905. Whatever the basis for MacArthur's assessment, the Japanese were about to prove him wrong.

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Before the General departed later that afternoon, he confirmed that the 11th's mission was to defend the five-mile stretch of coast along the Lingayen Gulf. For the final weeks of November, units of the 11th Infantry Regiment continued to drill and maneuver in the sweltering heat. Although it was no easy task, the indigenous soldiers of the 11th Infantry were coming together as a cohesive military unit. Finally, after three months of continuous training, Volckmann earned a three-day pass for Thanksgiving weekend. <sup>20</sup>

Relaxing at the officer's club in Baguio, however, Volckmann's weekend was cut short by an urgent phone call from General William Brougher, the 11th Division's commander. According to Brougher, every unit in the Philippines had been put on high alert and all weekend passes had been cancelled. Volckmann was ordered to return to his regiment that same day. With his weekend spoiled and not knowing why the alert had been called, Volckmann hastened himself back to Lingayen Gulf. Upon his arrival, he found no further news from either the Regimental or Division Headquarters. Could this have been just another drill?

The Army was quite fond of conducting these "drills," and Murphy's Law stipulated that an officer's weekend pass always coincided with one. However, the following morning, on Monday, December 1, Volckmann learned that USAFFE Intelligence had detected a large Japanese naval convoy entering the South China Sea. <sup>22</sup> Volckmann hoped that the alert would pass without incident. Perhaps the Imperial Japanese Navy was on its way to Borneo...or Indochina.

\* An "Executive Officer" is the second in command of an Army unit. Volckmann's regiment was one of many that had been recently activated as part of the Philippine defense plan. A regiment normally consisted of two or three battalions, each containing four companies (a total strength of approximately 1,000 men).

\* The line companies were equipped with the M1917 Enfield rifle—a mechanically complex and troublesome rifle absent from U.S. inventories since World War I.

\* Sending Nancy to her parent's home with Russell Jr. in tow, Volckmann promised to write to her as often as he could. The last letter that she received from him was dated March 1942, shortly before the surrender. It would be the last time Volckmann's family would hear from him until January 1945.

\* MacArthur had retired in 1937 while serving as the military advisor to President Manuel Quezon. However, in July 1941, President Roosevelt recalled him to active duty and appointed him commander of all U.S. forces in the Philippines.

## Rising Su

Arriving at Regimental Headquarters on the morning of 8 December, Volckmann received word that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. By now, it was no surprise that war had finally come, but no one had anticipated a first strike on Hawaii. Volckmann himself could hardly believe it. Why would the Japanese attack Hawaii—over 4,000 nautical miles from Tokyo—when the Philippines were closer and presented a much easier target? Suddenly, it dawned on him: *the entire Pacific Fleet was anchored at Pearl*. Fearing the worst, he knew that the Japanese would terrorize the Pacific unchecked by the U.S. Navy. <sup>23</sup>

At 8:20 a.m., a mechanical murmur descended over the Regimental Staff Office. Barely audible at first, it grew steadily into a roar that rattled books from their shelves and sent wall clocks crashing to the floor. There was no mistaking that sound: the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service had arrived. Running outside, Volckmann stood agape as he counted 60 Japanese bombers thundering overhead. Bypassing Regimental Headquarters, the warplanes continued their flight pattern southward over the horizon. Ten minutes later, the first of their bombs fell on the airfield at Camp John Hay. <sup>24</sup>

*The war had begun.*

Minutes after the final bomber disappeared from view, the 11th Infantry received orders to occupy their five-mile stretch of coast along Lingayen Gulf. Five miles long and 150 yards wide, the area was larger than what a regiment could feasibly defend. All along the beach, enormous gaps dotted the defensive line. Although ammunition was no longer a problem, the regiment still lacked engineering tools. Thus, to build their defensive enclaves, Volckmann dispatched several parties into Dagupan and the surrounding communities to borrow any civilian equipment available. Items including saws, shovels, garden hoes, and pick axes were used to construct their redoubts. For lack of better building materials, the 11th Infantry made their shelters and pillboxes from wet sand and palm trees. <sup>25</sup>

Volckmann was surprised by the men's newfound sense of urgency. In fact, he had never before seen them work so efficiently. No longer did they have to be encouraged to dig their foxholes and trenches to the appropriate depths—the impending invasion was enough to motivate them. For the next three days, every man on the line worked beyond exhaustion. Occupying the beach with nothing larger than a .50 caliber machine gun, however, Volckmann knew that the odds were not in their favor.

Certainly, they could inflict *some* damage on the Japanese, but Volckmann knew that his men would eventually be overrun. In the best-case scenario, the regiment would have to face only a handful of landing craft and a few Japanese marines. At worst, however, they could be facing an entire naval detachment. A naval task force could take on any composition, but was sure to have at least two gunships, multiple landing craft, and close air support. Whatever the odds may have been, Volckmann worried more for his troops than for himself.

On 10 December, the first elements of the Japanese Fourteenth Army landed near Aparri on the northern coast of Luzon. Simultaneously, another contingent landed at Vigan on the western coast, only 50 miles north of Volckmann's sector. As the Japanese drew nearer to the Lingayen beach, Colonel Townsend, the Regimental Commander, was suddenly relieved of duty and reassigned to

“special mission” in Cagayan Valley. Volckmann never knew the details of this reassignment, but to relieve Townsend now made almost no sense; Townsend was a competent commander and he had certainly done nothing to warrant a punitive reassignment. Upon his departure, he announced that instead of receiving a new commander, he was relinquishing command to Volckmann. As a captain with only seven years experience, Volckmann was now in command of an entire regiment. He felt prepared for the job but wondered why USAFFE had reassigned Townsend so quickly. Ultimately, he feared that the 11th Infantry had been designated a “sacrifice outfit” and that USAFFE would not risk the life of a colonel in such a unit. <sup>26</sup>

As the enemy closed in on Central Luzon, Division Headquarters (HQ) sounded retreat for all regiments in the Lingayen Gulf area. Meanwhile, General MacArthur defaulted on the infamous “Orange Plan,” and called for all ground units to make their way towards Bataan.\* On Christmas Eve 1941, the 11th Infantry withdrew from the Lingayen beach. Around midnight on Christmas Day, the regiment crossed the Agno River at Bayambang. In his diary, Volckmann recounts an incident that he describes as the bane of every military commander. Before crossing the river, heavy machine gun fire ripped through the silence of the night:

Seconds after the machine gun firing, which came from the direction of the river, a wave of terrified officers and men (my regiment) were running away from the river. I drew my 45 cal. revolver and yelled to every American officer within hearing to drive every officer and man back to the riverbank. After a hectic time of what seemed to be hours, we managed to get the entire regiment back into positions along the river. I then found a bugler and ordered “Officers Call” sounded. When all the officers were assembled, I told them that was the first and last time that officers and men of the regiment would retreat without orders. I further made it clear that if ever again I saw an officer running to the rear or failing to do his utmost to stop his men from retreating without orders, I would shoot him on the spot. <sup>27</sup>

Volckmann later found out that the machine gun fire belonged to a trigger-happy American tank crewman.

On 26 December, the Japanese hit the Agno River to the east and west of the regiment assembly area. With the Japanese now only one day behind him, he knew that time was running out. Although his natural instinct was to turn and fight the Japanese head-on, common sense told him otherwise: he had no idea what sized unit was behind him. At any rate, the Japanese were bound to have artillery support—a luxury he no longer had.

The following day, Division HQ sent word that the regiment was to abandon all heavy weapons and continue southward to a rendezvous point at Paniqui. <sup>28</sup> *Volckmann was livid*. His men had been suffering from supply issues since the day the unit was activated—there was *no way* he was giving up any of their equipment now. They hadn’t even traded fire with the Japanese yet. True, his regiment may have been outgunned, but Volckmann knew better than to continue his retreat while combat was ineffective.

Fuming over the Division’s latest order, he spied a railroad track running north and south through his position. Suddenly, Volckmann had an idea: if the regiment could not carry out the heavy equipment, then a locomotive certainly could. Pleading with HQ, he secured a steam engine with seven boxcars to come in under the cover of night. Arriving shortly before midnight, every square inch of railcar was loaded to capacity. What could not fit on the train was loaded onto the regiment’s trucks. <sup>29</sup>

At daybreak, the entire regiment arrived at Paniqui where they rejoined the rest of the 11th Division. Ironically, it was here that Volckmann discovered just how lucky his regiment had been. Of the four regiments that comprised the 11th Division, his was the only one still intact. <sup>30</sup> The remaining three, while still functional, had already taken a tremendous beating.



On 28 December, the Division settled into a defensive line astride Highway 13. Extending from the town of La Paz in the west to Zaragoza in the east, Volckmann's sector lay over a three-mile stretch of road. Volckmann received orders from Division HQ to "hold a line north of the La Paz—Carmen—Zaragoza road *until you are licked*" (emphasis added).<sup>31</sup> The adjacent units operating with Volckmann on the line were the 21st Division, which was situated west on Highway 3, and the 91st Division (Philippine Army), that was to the east covering Highway 5 and the Carmen-Cabanatuan sector of Highway 13.

The terrain on which the 11th Infantry found itself was far from ideal. Almost the entire area surrounding La Paz and Zaragoza consisted of rice paddies that had been drained from the previous harvest. Aside from the intermittent bamboo groves, the regiment had no other means of concealment. The main approaches to Volckmann's area came from the north: one road from Victoria to La Paz and another from Carmen to Cabanatuan. The regiment's second battalion covered the Victoria-La Paz route while the third battalion was detached to the 91st Division to cover the area around Carmen and Zaragoza. The first battalion was held in reserve at Barrio Caut, just south of La Paz. This configuration seemed ideal for the time being: the regiment occupied an area that would not overstretch its manpower and there were two whole divisions on either side of it. The other regiments of the 11th Division took up defenses elsewhere in the area.

Volckmann was convinced that the Japanese's most likely avenue of approach would be the road from Carmen. General Brougher, the 11th Division commander, met with Volckmann on the evening of the 30th. After inspecting the regimental defenses, Brougher confirmed that the 91st Division was responsible for the Carmen-Cabanatuan road. Before leaving, the General made it clear that the regiment was to "hold the line at all costs."<sup>32</sup> After a brief meeting with his battalion commander, Volckmann determined that everything was in good order and turned in for some rest. But what he awakened to the next morning infuriated him.

At daybreak, Volckmann was startled awake by the sound of heavy machine gun fire. What startled him even more was that it sounded so close. Jumping to his feet, it sounded as though his 3rd battalion had made enemy contact around Carmen-Zaragoza. Because 3rd battalion had no wire or radio communications, Volckmann hopped in his command car and drove to their sector. En route, Volckmann wondered why 3rd battalion would be engaged in such heavy fighting. His prediction that the enemy would arrive on the Carmen-Cabanatuan road proved correct, but the 91st Division was to assume the brunt of the assault. From what he could deduce, it sounded as though 3rd battalion was fighting alone. Upon arriving at the battalion command post, he found that the battalion was indeed alone. The 91st Division had withdrawn earlier in the night *without informing anyone!* Volckmann learned that 3rd battalion had been attached to the 91st Division and yet no one, not even a runner, had been sent to inform them of the move. By the looks of the situation, Volckmann determined that the 91st Division's absence had allowed the Japanese to move further south, bypass Cabanatuan, and head around to catch 3rd battalion in the rear.<sup>33</sup>

Volckmann scrambled to get reinforcements to the beleaguered 3rd battalion, but Companies K and L were completely cut off and all attempts to make contact with them had failed. The 1st battalion, still in reserve at Barrio Caut, was ordered to launch a counterattack but was decimated by heavy Japanese fire before it could make any progress. To make matters worse, the Carmen-Zaragoza Bridge had been blown up amidst the confusion, thus denying the battalion its primary escape route. To stem the tide of confusion, Volckmann ordered what remained of 3rd battalion to form a defensive firing line on the bank of the La Paz River. This would provide at least some protection for the regiment's only remaining withdrawal route.<sup>34</sup>

Volckmann's entry for 31 December records the battle in exquisite detail:

A tank platoon in my area, but not under my command, withdrew and . . . ordered the engineers to destroy the [Carmen-Zaragoza] Bridge. This prevented me from moving my reserve by motor [trucks] to counterattack the Japs in an effort to save Companies A and L. I ordered a platoon of the reserve to move by motors to the bridge east of Zaragoza with instructions to repair the bridge.

As my men began repairing the bridge from one end, the Japs began repairing it from the other end. Giving this idea up, I returned to the west side of Zaragoza where I met Capt. Robinson with one company of the 1st battalion. After giving him the situation, I directed him to counterattack in the direction of Carmen [east]. A lieutenant, with his platoon of tanks, was parked along the road. I asked him if he was interested in joining the 1st battalion in a counterattack. He agreed to join.

I was standing up on the front seat of a Bren Carrier [small utility vehicle similar to a tank] looking down the narrow road toward Zaragoza, watching the progress of the 1st battalion counterattack when I noticed some men dash across the road about 150 yards up. I assumed they were our men but, a few seconds later, my Bren Carrier was plastered with machine gun fire. Automatically, I dropped down into the seat of the Carrier and, at the same instant, my rear gunner opened up with his machine gun. The muzzle of the gun was only inches from my ear and I thought my eardrum had been broken. As soon as the Jap machine gun opened up on us, the tank lieutenant scrambled into his tank. He had no more than shut the turret when a Jap anti-tank gun put a round into the tank...the turret flew open and the lieutenant jumped to ground. The next Jap anti-tank round took the lieutenant's leg off.

Seeing there was no time to organize the counterattack from this point, I ordered K Company [third battalion] to withdraw to the west bank of the Zaragoza River and take up a defensive position astride the road facing east. I then drove the Bren Carrier down the narrow causeway, zigzagging as much as possible in hopes that the Jap antitank gun would miss. The Japs tried hard, but luck was with me—I made [it to the] La Paz [River]... <sup>35</sup>

While organizing the new defensive line, Volckmann's position was suddenly hit by artillery fire. Terrified, he found himself diving for cover into the nearest ditch. As he lay in the muddy wallow, he witnessed the shell bursts flying overhead. Fiery shrapnel landed only inches away from his body—truly a horrific sight. Hugging the ground, his bones rattled with every thunderous explosion as shells after shell pounded the banks of the La Paz River. <sup>36</sup> With every fire adjustment, the rounds inched closer and closer. When it appeared as though the next barrage would blast him from his hole, he poised himself to make a run for it. But just then, the firing stopped. Volckmann could not figure out why but he had no time to sit and wonder; he had to get his men out of there.

In addition to the artillery nuisance, the 11th Infantry had to contend with an increasing number of enemy dive-bombers. While taking cover from another artillery salvo, he received orders to withdraw to Concepcion. Volckmann acknowledged the order, but knew better than to withdraw right now, for it was still daylight. Any movements now would expose what remained of his regiment to the Japanese aerial patrols. He was certain that if General Brougher were aware of the circumstances, he would agree on a nighttime withdrawal.

Despite uneven odds, the regiment held the lines and inflicted heavy losses on the Japanese trying to cross the La Paz River. At nightfall, the 11th Infantry broke contact and moved out of La Paz toward Concepcion. In the last 24 hours, Volckmann had lost over 300 of his men. Yet, in spite of his tragic losses, he was proud that his regiment had fought valiantly under so many handicaps. By that time, most of the men were without shoes. The uniforms they had been issued the previous summer were tattered and torn, some to the point where they were no longer wearable. Their rifles were only marginally better. Over 500 had broken extractors, and those riflemen who had to contend with them used bamboo rods to push out the expended cartridges. The process was time-consuming but necessary considering that the regiment had no spare parts. <sup>37</sup>

Over the following week, the 11th Infantry continued its withdrawal towards Bataan. On New Year's Day 1942, Volckmann ushered in the New Year by ambushing two Japanese columns. While occupying their next defensive position on Mt. Arayat, the first column of Japanese troops came through the adjacent road at about 4:30 in the afternoon. Because they had no forward security elements ahead of their column, the Japanese obviously did not expect to find any resistance around

Mt. Arayat. The machine gun teams Volckmann had placed at choke points in the road took care of the Japanese column in short order. A few minutes later, another column came into the regiment's sector this time along a railroad track. These troops, too, had no security elements. Just as they had done with the previous column minutes before, the 11th Infantry cut them down in a blaze of gunfire.

By 2 January 1942, the 11th had moved into the town of Guagua. Volckmann was ordered to make this his next defensive enclave. After conducting a reconnaissance of the area and issuing orders to battalion commanders, he began planning for the next withdrawal. It was to be his routine for the rest of the campaign: withdraw, defend a predetermined area, trade fire with the enemy, break contact, and withdraw again—at least until he reached Bataan.

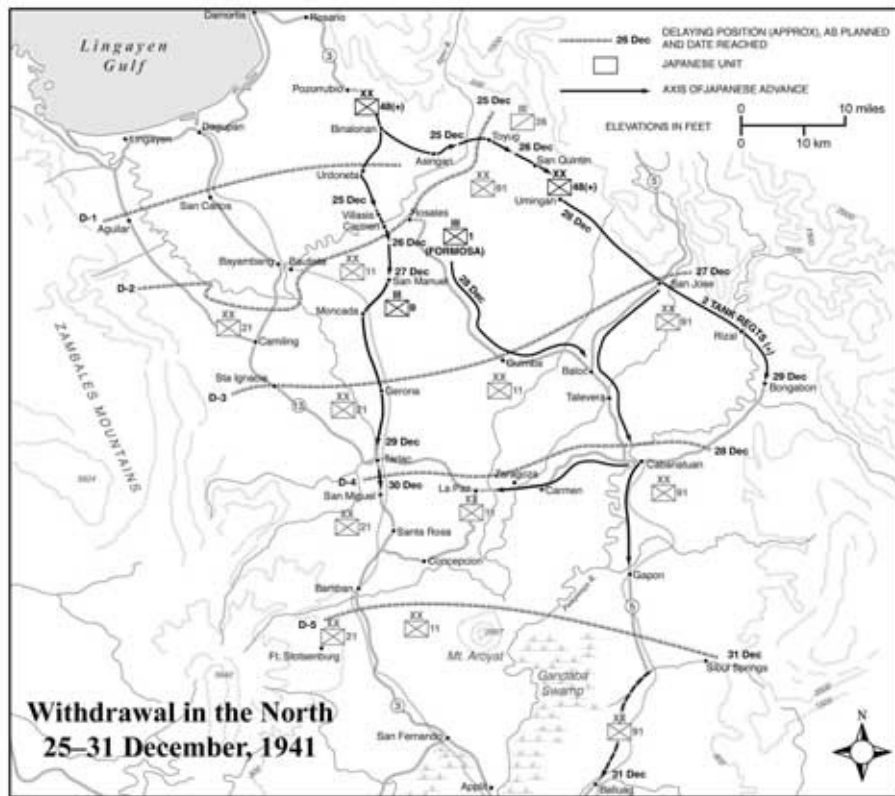
While planning for his next withdrawal, Volckmann was greeted by yet another artillery barrage. Like before, these were 75mm guns but now the shelling continued for over half an hour. As he dove into the nearest ditch, he could not fathom how the Japanese had found him so quickly. After the firing stopped, he discovered that his command post lay right in the middle of three Japanese howitzer batteries conducting coordinated counterbattery fire with one another. Without a moment's delay, he relocated the entire regiment.<sup>38</sup>

The following day, Colonel Townsend rejoined the 11th once again as their commander. His reunion with the regiment was crowned by a heavy Japanese assault—this time with tanks. The armored thrust broke through the 13th Infantry on Volckmann's right flank, and in the process managed to cut off the 11th's main escape route. The regiment had been cut off before, but now they were running from Japanese armor. With Townsend back in command, he ordered Volckmann to find a secondary route under the cover of darkness. Volckmann found a suitable route, but it took the regiment into another position that would not be tenable for long.<sup>39</sup>

At daybreak on 4 January, the regiment hastily dug-in along Highway 7 at Kilometer Post 19, just south of Guagua.<sup>40</sup> For the moment, they had outrun the Japanese ground forces. What they could not outrun, however, were the Zeroes. Throughout the day, dive-bombers pounded the 11th Infantry. Increasingly frustrated with the three-dimensional beatings he and his men were taking, Volckmann ordered them to break contact and withdraw under the cover of darkness. This time however, the withdrawal was a welcome change. Instead of being ordered into another defensive position, the 11th was taken off the line and assembled into a rest area.

By now, the men—Filipino and American—looked visibly different. Those who were still alive had been emaciated by only one month of war. Volckmann described them as having drawn almost ghastly faces. The long periods of sleeplessness, intense combat, and minimal food rations had further diminished their collective health. Several others began showing symptoms of malaria and scarlet fever. For what it was worth, Volckmann still had his health, but his appearance was no better than that of his men. The challenges placed on this young, 30-year-old captain were taking their toll. He had no signs of tropical disease but had already lost several pounds, and had been badly bruised by the tactical environment. Whatever the condition of his body, it was hardly of any importance to him now—the 11th Infantry had arrived in Bataan. This was pleasing, as the defensive lines were now on terrain favorable to the Americans. By the same token, however, Volckmann knew that they had nowhere else to go. Bataan and Corregidor were the end of the line.

\* The Orange Plan was the “doomsday scenario” for an invasion of the Philippines. It called for a last stand on the Bataan Peninsula.



USAFFE's retreat in North Luzon. The 11th Infantry's withdrawal from Lingayen Beach can be traced roughly along Highway 13. La Paz, Carmen, and Zaragoza are visible from the map. This area marks the site of one of the 11th Infantry's deadliest battles.

## The Great Escape

Four days in the rest area saw the men beginning to look like their old selves. Smiles and laughter made their way through the ranks, but it would soon be over. The following day, the regiment received orders to occupy a defensive sector along Manila Bay. Though uneventful on the ground, their sector received plenty of bombardment from the air. With the Far East Air Force (USAFFE's only air asset) all but destroyed, Japanese dive and high-altitude bombers had become a regular nuisance. <sup>41</sup>

During this time, Volckmann recounted a visit he made to the 31st Infantry, where he had been company commander upon his arrival in the Philippines. It was here that he realized just how miserable his current troops in the 11th Infantry looked by comparison. The men of H Company—whom he had commanded only a few months earlier—looked clean and crisp. The 31st Infantry had not been idle—they were covering the American retreat—but seeing the comparative state of the troops, there was no mistaking that the 11th had received the harsher beating. <sup>42</sup>

On 12 January, General MacArthur convened a meeting of the Division commanders and senior staff, the purpose of which was to assure the impending arrival of reinforcements. <sup>43</sup> MacArthur promised that hundreds and even thousands of troops were on their way. It sounded like great news, but Volckmann recalled his meeting with the General from two months earlier: MacArthur assured him that the Japanese could not possibly strike *until summer 1942*. Then again, he asked himself, “Who was I to question the General?” <sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, Volckmann tried to remain optimistic. Now that the bulk of American forces were consolidated around Bataan, he was confident that tight communication and common sense would prevail.

Sadly, it was not to be.

On 25 January, he learned that the entire 11th Division would be reassigned further west to the vicinity of Pilar-Bagac. This gave him no worries until he discovered the area where Division wanted to place his regiment. Traveling with a Division staff officer to a point on Trail 7, 2.5 kilometers off the main Pilar-Bagac road, Volckmann learned that his defensive line was to cover over 2,500 yards or about 1.5 miles. While the distance was not unmanageable for a regiment to defend, the foliage was so thick that Volckmann could barely see ten yards in either direction. Any attempts to cut through the jungle were useless—the foliage was too dense. <sup>45</sup>

How, he wondered, was he supposed to build a defensive line through *this*?

Although it is not certain, he may have navigated his way around the thicket by using a series of firebreaks or the other numbered trails. In any event, he was able to find clearings suitable for his battalions. In his diary, Volckmann documents his frustration with the terrain: although the three battalions now had defensive positions, they were separated by thick patches of jungle. This made them highly susceptible to being cut off and surrounded. What concerned him the most, however, was the 3rd battalion.

As per Division orders, he sent them to the Outpost Line of Resistance—over two kilometers away from the main line. Volckmann knew that the order was unwise, and he hated it. The jungle had already separated the elements of his main line. Now, he was expected to send an entire battalion over



two kilometers away where—separated by distance *and* heavy foliage—their chances of being cut off suddenly multiplied.

Three days after establishing his new position, Volckmann was on his way to Regimental Headquarters when he ran into elements of the 45th Infantry Regiment (Philippine Scouts) moving off the line. Because they had been assigned to guard the 11th Infantry's left flank, Volckmann wanted to know where they were going. He stopped one of the officers and learned that the 45th had been reassigned to the I Corps reserve further south. Normally, Volckmann would have had no qualms about something such as this, but there was no unit assigned to take the 45th Infantry's place. <sup>46</sup> *This meant that a large sector of the main line was wide open.* Aghast, Volckmann reported the vulnerable flank to Division Headquarters. USAFFE sent the 1st Division, Philippine Army, to replace the departed 45th, but it did not arrive for another two days. <sup>47</sup>

On 30 and 31 January, the Japanese began attacking the Outpost Line of Resistance. Throughout the assault, the outpost units—including Volckmann's 3rd battalion—were driven back into the main line. Meanwhile, Headquarters rejected every appeal Volckmann made to authorize relocation for 3rd battalion. This made Volckmann cringe, as he knew there was nothing more he could do for his overstretched defenders. Even more disheartening was that one of the platoons in 3rd battalion had been captured. Volckmann described the Japanese interrogation techniques with horror and disgust:

The men were tied to trees and subjected to a session of questioning in a manner in which the Japs were most proficient. Their questions centered on the main battle position, about which our third battalion men had no knowledge, for they had never been on the main battle position. Each question that brought an unsatisfactory reply was followed by a bayonet jab. The Japs finally left all of our men for dead, but some hours later one of our men came to and managed to crawl through the jungle to our lines. He had eleven bayonet wounds to confirm his story. <sup>48</sup>

Finally, on 1 February, the Japanese broke through the main line. For the next 21 days, the 11th and 45th Infantry Regiments, as well as elements from the 91st Division, battled a single Japanese regiment. Although the American-Philippine units had numerical superiority—two of their regiments versus only one of the Japanese—their firepower was inferior. At one point during the battle, the Japanese overran another one of Volckmann's platoons, this time in 2nd battalion. The break created a small pocket in the main line that stood until heavy fighting finally forced the enemy to withdraw. Although they had taken a tremendous beating, the soldiers of the 11th Division could now breathe easier knowing that the Bataan Line had been restored.

By the first of March, the Japanese assault had died down. March was relatively quiet, but the combat of the previous month had taken a heavy toll on the 11th Infantry. Continuous fighting had made their peacetime supply shortages even worse, especially in regard to food rations. By now, they were feeding off plants and animals. Aside from their nourishment, the lack of adequate food affected their performance. Everyone on the line suffered, including Volckmann. Now, only a few hours' work in the tropical heat could turn an otherwise capable soldier into a casualty. Plus, disease within the ranks—a persistent problem even before Bataan—created more gaps in the defensive line.

In recognition of his leadership with the 11th Infantry, Volckmann received a promotion to major. The promotion, however, brought with it another reassignment, this time as the 11th Division Intelligence Officer. Though unhappy to leave his regiment, the job brought with it more news about the current state of USAFFE ground forces. Unfortunately, none of the reports were encouraging.

Within a week of his new assignment, Volckmann received word that the Japanese had overrun II Corps' main line units. The worst news, however, arrived on the evening of 8 April: the II Corps commander, General Edward King, had surrendered. This meant that the Japanese would be at the 11th Division Command Post *in a matter of hours*. Shortly thereafter, General Brougher ordered the fire

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sample content of American Guerrilla: The Forgotten Heroics of Russell W. Volckman the Man Who Escaped from Bataan, Raised a Filipino Army against the Japanese, and became the True "Father" of Army Special Forces

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