



DECLASSIFIED

COMMAND HISTORY
**SEVENTH AMPHIBIOUS
FORCE**

10 JANUARY 1943 -- 23 DECEMBER 1945

AUSTRALIA

MOROTAI

NEW GUINEA

PHILIPPINES

BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO

BORNEO

KOREA

NORTH CHINA

DECLASSIFIED

SEVENTH AMPHIBIOUS FORCE

COMMAND HISTORY

10 January 1943 - 23 December 1945

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VICE ADMIRAL DANIEL E. BARBEY, U.S. Navy, Commander Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific and Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force from 10 January 1943 to 23 December 1945 which included the entire period of existence of these Commands.





COMMAND HISTORY
SEVENTH AMPHIBIOUS FORCE

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PART I

NARRATIVE HISTORY

SEVENTH AMPHIBIOUS FORCE

10 January 1943 - 23 December 1945

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

1900-1901 - 1st Year

FOREWORD

For almost three years, the SEVENTH Amphibious Force trained its personnel, fought a determined enemy, and carried Allied troops forward with accelerating pace and swelling power. Its strength and its success derived from the qualities of the individuals who composed it--foresight, courage, indefatigable energy, resourceful "know-how", the will to endure danger and suffering and hardship.

I am tremendously proud of the performance of the officers and men of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force, and, that others may more fully share my pride in their accomplishments, I hope that a more complete history some day will be written.

We have collected here the material from which the future historian may frame an outline for a more finished and detailed work. Our purpose has been to record significant incidents and conditions, dates and statistics, methods and opinions of participants, while they are fresh in the minds of those who were a part of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force.

Supplements to this Command History will deal separately with the amphibious phases of the various campaigns in which the SEVENTH Amphibious Force took part.



DANIEL E. BARBEY,
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy,
Commander Seventh Amphibious Force.

U.S.S. ESTES
SHANGHAI, CHINA
23 December 1945


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DANIEL E. BARBETT
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander, Seventh Amphibious Force

U.S.S. ESTES
SHANGHAI, CHINA
23 December 1945

COMMAND HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH AMPHIBIOUS FORCE

PART I

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The SEVENTH Amphibious Force was in existence for less than three years. In that time it participated in every assault landing in the Southwest Pacific Area and took part in the occupation landings following the successful completion of the war. Allied troops were transported and landed in assault on NEW GUINEA, BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO and the HALMAHERAS, in the major campaigns which regained the PHILIPPINE ISLANDS and the operations which secured control of the SULU ARCHIPELAGO and parts of BORNEO. Preparations were being made for participation in the amphibious assault on JAPAN when the abrupt capitulation of the Japanese changed all plans. The Force thereafter was employed in transporting Army troops to KOREA, Marines to NORTH CHINA, Chinese forces from SOUTH CHINA to ports in NORTH CHINA and in repatriation of the Japanese from KOREA and the CHINA COAST.

Initially the SEVENTH Amphibious Force was known as the Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific. On 15 December 1942 Rear Admiral Daniel E. Barbey received orders from Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, to establish this force and he assumed command on 10 January 1943.

From January 1943 until September 1943, when assault operations commenced, Admiral Barbey was employed:

- (1) In the organization of the Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific.
- (2) In the training of amphibious ships arriving from the United States.
- (3) In the training of Army Units in amphibious operations.
- (4) In the movement of Army, Marine, and Australian units to forward areas in anticipation of future operations.

Subsequent operations of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force to the time of the Japanese surrender can be divided into three general phases:

- (1) September 1943 - September 1944 - Amphibious landings on the Eastern and Northern Coast of New Guinea, in New Britain, Admiralty Islands, and at Morotai in the Halmaheras.
- (2) October 1944 - February 1945 - Amphibious landings at Leyte, Mindoro, Lingayen and supporting operations in Luzon culminating in the Bataan-Corregidor landings on 15-16 February 1945.
- (3) February 1945 - July 1945 - Amphibious landings together with extensive minesweeping operations in the Central and Southern Philippines, Sulu Archipelago, and Borneo.

ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING

The entire strategic concept of the military campaign to drive the Japanese from their positions in the Southwest Pacific Area was predicated on amphibious operations. When he assumed command of the Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific - a force in name only - in January 1943, Admiral Barbey had three immediate problems:

- (1) Creation of an amphibious force
- (2) Training of amphibious ships
- (3) Training of army units

CREATION OF AN AMPHIBIOUS FORCE

LCTs and smaller craft began to arrive in the Southwest Pacific Area in December 1942 as part of a program to establish a large pool of LCTs, LCMs, and LCVs or LCPs primarily for use in training Army troops. The LCTs were shipped in three sections and assembled at Sydney, after which they were assigned with other landing craft to the amphibious training establishments at Port Sydney, New South Wales (about sixty miles below Sydney), and Toorbul, Queensland (about fifty miles north of Brisbane). Three flotillas of LCTs and landing craft for the units established at the various training centers were eventually obtained under the program.

The Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet assigned LST Flotilla Seven to the Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific and the ships, many carrying LCTs, arrived at intervals between April and July 1943. The flotilla consisted of two groups of LSTs built on the west coast, and one group, manned by Coast Guard personnel, which had participated in the North African campaign.

The ships of LCI Flotilla Seven, also assigned to the Southwest Pacific Force, commenced to arrive in April 1943.

No APAs or AKAs were originally assigned to the Amphibious Force, Southwest Pacific, because of the pressing need for transports in other war theatres. Because of the need for at least one ship of each type for troop training, the HENRY T. ALLEN (APA 15) and the ALGORAB (AKA 8) were assigned to the force in 1943, and reported at Sydney, the former in March and the latter in September. The TITANIA (AKA 13) replaced the ALGORAB in June 1944. Two other ships, the BLUE RIDGE (AGC 2) and CARTER HALL (LSD 3) reported for duty in December 1943.

To supplement the Amphibious Force, the Australian Government provided three passenger ships which had previously been used as merchant cruisers, to be converted into Landing Ships, Infantry (LSI), the British counterpart of APAs. The conversion of the MANOORA was completed in February 1943, the WESTRALIA in June and the KANIMBLA in September, and each immediately joined the force. These three LSIs plus the HENRY T. ALLEN and the TITANIA served with the SEVENTH Amphibious Force until the end of the war.

The RIGEL (AR 11) was assigned to the Seventh Amphibious Force, to provide repair and maintenance facilities for the ships of the force. Subsequently two LSTs, each with a Landing Craft Maintenance Unit embarked, augmented the maintenance facilities for a force that was constantly expanding and dispersed over a wide area. The facilities in these LSTs were increased until eventually they were reclassified as ARLs, and in December 1943 a third ARL joined the force. All these repair facilities remained under the operational control of Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force until 30 June 1944 when Commander SEVENTH Fleet directed their transfer to Service Force, SEVENTH Fleet.

Except for a very short use of the HENRY T. ALLEN in March 1943, Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force was without a flagship until June 1943 when he and part of his staff moved aboard the RIGEL. During the early assault operations, Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force, with a small operational staff, used the CONYNGHAM (DD 371) as his flagship, while the rest of the staff remained in the RIGEL. When the BLUE RIDGE (AGC 2) arrived in the Southwest Pacific in December 1943, she became the force flagship and continued in that capacity until June 1945 when she returned to Pearl Harbor for overhaul and major alterations.

TRAINING OF AMPHIBIOUS SHIPS

In the early period of activity in the Southwest Pacific Area, no organized training program for ships and landing craft similar to those of the Atlantic and Pacific Training Commands could be adopted. Ships had to be constantly engaged in troop training or in moving Army units to forward areas in preparation for imminent amphibious operations. However, the operations for occupation of Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands in June 1943 revealed the definite need for ship training, and as a result, an intensive ship training program was carried out in the Townsville-Cairns area of Australia prior to the first assault landing at Lae in September 1943.

TRAINING OF ARMY UNITS

Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force organized and established an Amphibious Training Command for troop training at Port Stephens on 1 March 1943. This command absorbed the existing facilities of the Joint Overseas Operation Training School (U.S. Army) and the amphibious training facilities of HMAS ASSAULT (Royal Australian Navy). In June 1943 the Amphibious Training Command was shifted to Toorbul and in an endeavor to maintain troop training in the vicinity of the staging areas, the Command was again moved forward to Milne Bay. However, the advance of our forces along the New Guinea coast was so rapid that three mobile training units had to be organized in order to train troops in forward areas. In March 1945, the Amphibious Training Command was transferred to Subic Bay, Luzon, to prepare for training troops for the prospective landings in the Japanese home islands.

The amphibious training curriculum was divided into two phases: intensive instruction of officers at the Training Center, followed by practice landings by Regimental Combat Teams under the direction of their own officers with mobile groups of instructors from the Amphibious Training Command serving as supervisors. A detailed account of the participation of Army, Marine and Australian Divisions in this training program is contained in a separate section of Part II.

ASSAULT OPERATIONS

NEW GUINEA: BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO: MOROTAI SEPTEMBER 1943 - SEPTEMBER 1944

The amphibious landing at LAE by the 9th Australian Division on 4 September 1943 was the first of a series of assault landings along the New Guinea coast, in the Bismarck Archipelago and in the

Halmaheras designed to provide staging areas, minor naval bases, and airfields to support the major assault on the Philippine Islands. From September 1943 to September 1944, the SEVENTH Amphibious Force made 14 major landings in these areas involving the movement of approximately 300,000 men and 350,000 tons of supplies and equipment.

The amphibious landing at LAE, in the Huon Gulf, on the north-east coast of New Guinea, was made by Australian troops of the Ninth Division, A.I.F., in conjunction with a parachute and airborne landing in the Markham Valley. The operation at LAE progressed so swiftly that it was evident that the same troops could begin amphibious landings at FINSCHHAFEN earlier than originally planned. FINSCHHAFEN landings were made on 22 September 1943 and the whole operation progressed smoothly. There was relatively little initial resistance by shore based forces at either LAE or FINSCHHAFEN but enemy air attacks in strength commenced in both areas about noon on D Day, followed by night attacks of small groups of enemy planes. Ships leaving the landing areas and re-supply echelons were under persistent and determined air attacks until airfields were developed and aircraft brought forward to neutralize nearby Japanese air bases. This same general pattern of air resistance first adopted by the Japs at LAE and FINSCHHAFEN continued throughout the New Guinea campaign.

The 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team was landed at ARAWE, New Britain, on 15 December 1943 against strong enemy opposition. The plan called for two landings; an advance echelon of 300 men to land in rubber boats from APDs one hour before dawn, and the main force to land after sunrise in LVTs and landing craft from the CARTER HALL (LSD 3) and WESTRALIA (LSI). In the expectation of preserving the element of surprise, planners recommended that no naval gunfire be used to support the advance echelon. Surprise was largely unsuccessful, however, for two reasons: (a) the enemy had been forewarned by the landing of amphibious scouts on the same beach several days earlier, and (b) bright moonlight enabled the Japs to spot the movement. The advance echelon was repulsed with 50 % casualties. The main landing, supported by excellent naval gunfire, was successful. As a result of this experience, the SEVENTH Amphibious Force never again omitted naval gunfire support in order to achieve surprise.

The splendid execution of the amphibious landing at CAPE GLOUCESTER, New Britain, on 26 December 1943 was a tribute to the

professional skill of the 1st Marine Division. The navigational problems involved in the long overwater movement of a large number of landing craft and the skillful handling of these craft in the landing areas were particularly gratifying features of this operation. It was in this operation that Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force inaugurated the employment of Landing Craft Control Officers who were responsible for guiding the landing craft through the reefs to the designated beaches. The direction of landing craft by a senior officer has since become standard practice in all assault operations.

The third amphibious landing by the SEVENTH Amphibious Force within 18 days was made at SAIDOR on 2 January 1944 as soon as landing craft could be released from the Cape Gloucester operation. The assault forces were the 126th Regimental Combat Team of the 32nd Division which were landed in order to establish advance bases from which aircraft and light naval forces could operate to secure control of the Vitiaz Straits Area.

The Amphibious landing in the ADMIRALTY ISLANDS on 29 February 1944 was intended as a reconnaissance-in-force to prepare for the main landing scheduled for 1 April 1944, to be executed in conjunction with simultaneous landings by the Central Pacific Forces in the vicinity of Kavieng, New Ireland. Negros Island was selected for the advance landing after air reconnaissance had revealed only a small enemy force there, but doubts arose as to the actual condition existing when amphibious scouts insisted there were large enemy troop concentrations on this island. To definitely determine the enemy strength, a squadron of the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division (dismounted) landed at NEGROS on 29 February 1944. Possibly because of the excellence of the supporting naval gunfire directed against defensive installations near the beach, the landing force met little resistance on the first day, and the situation was deemed sufficiently secure that the 40th Construction Battalion landed at once to develop the airfield at Mamote. However, the third day brought confirmation of the advance reports of the amphibious scouts, as Japanese resistance developed in great strength. The success of the entire operation was in danger until the arrival of reinforcements, especially artillery, which were rushed forward from New Guinea. During the engagement the "Sea Bees" assumed the role of combat troops, and served with such credit that the battalion was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

The AITAPE-HUMBOLDT BAY-TANAMERAH landings on 22 April 1944 represented the most ambitious amphibious undertaking to date in the Southwest Pacific. It was the largest overseas movement undertaken in that area and it effectively by-passed and cut off the strong enemy garrisons in the vicinity of Wewak. Excellent strategic surprise was effected. The Japanese had moved forward heavy reinforcements to the Wewak area in anticipation of attack, and as a result there was only nominal resistance where the landings were actually made. Carrier based planes were used for the first time for landing support, and APAs and AKAs assisted in transporting 25,000 troops for the three simultaneous landings. Fast carriers from the Pacific Fleet furnished support.

Experience in amphibious warfare has taught that: (a) assault echelons should carry a minimum of supplies, sufficient only for immediate needs, and (b) preliminary reconnaissance and photo-interpretation can be very misleading unless skillfully evaluated and analyzed. These lessons were learned again during this operation. At Hollandia, a large amount of supplies were brought in to beach dumps and insufficiently dispersed. On the evening of D Day, a lone enemy plane dropped a single bomb in the concentrated supply area and the resulting fire destroyed all the supplies landed that day, the equivalent of 11 LST loads. In the Tanamerah Bay area, photo intelligence had reported a road behind the beach. During the landing it was discovered that the "road" was an unfordable swamp which made it necessary to unload supplies at Humboldt Bay, forty miles distant. The results could have been disastrous for the Tanamerah Attack Force had the enemy opposition been stronger. Fortunately, these mishaps did not seriously affect the success of the landings.

The next amphibious operation was at WAKDE ISLAND on 17 May 1944 followed on 27 May 1944 by the landing on BIAK ISLAND. The Biak operation was not originally contemplated but was quickly conceived and planned when it became evident that the air strips at Hollandia would not be ready to support heavy bombers for some months. Several calculated risks were accepted in the execution of the Biak landing in order to meet the early date set. However, the landing and unloading were conducted with unanticipated success although the troops met considerable resistance. A minor reversal was successfully recouped two days after the initial landings when LCTs evacuated an Army battalion which had been cut off at one point by a large enemy force. Naval gunfire was effectively employed for several days to support the troops in their advance against the strong enemy positions.

On 2 July 1944 an assault landing was made at NOEMFOOR ISLAND and on 30 July 1944, the final landing of the New Guinea campaign was made at SANSAPOR.

Rear Admiral W. M. Fechteler, US N, Deputy Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force, directed the amphibious operations at WAKDE, BIAK, NOEMFOOR and SANSAPOR while Rear Admiral D. E. Barbey, USN, was on temporary duty in the United States. Ships that participated in these four landings and in the resupply echelons that followed were under constant threat of attack by a strong Japanese surface force concentrated in the Philippine-Borneo-Netherlands East Indies Area. During this period, the Pacific Fleet was concentrated far to the north in the Marshalls-Marianas Area, and the combatant units of the SEVENTH Fleet would have been entirely inadequate at the time to withstand an attack of enemy heavy units. The failure of the Japanese Navy to attempt to capitalize on this opportunity to retard the advance and prevent the consolidation of our ground force positions is an unexplained aspect of the enemy's strategy.

The amphibious landings at MOROTAI in the Halmahera Islands took place on 15 September 1944, when over 50,000 troops disembarked in record time without opposition but under very difficult landing conditions. There was one other operation, relatively small, in the same area in November 1944. Under the direction of Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force and under the immediate command of Captain Lord Ashbourne, RN, in the British minelayer ARIADNE, United States troops transported in LSMs and LCIs landed unopposed to establish radar and loran stations on ASIA and MAPIA ISLANDS as aids to future naval operations.

CAPTURE OF THE PHILIPPINES

October 1944 - February 1945

The projected increase of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force began to be realized in August 1944. Between then and November the Force was increased threefold by the addition of three LST Flotillas, four LCI Flotillas, three LCT Flotillas, and one LCS(L) Flotilla. Also many transports from the Pacific Fleet joined the force under the temporary operation control of Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force.

Original plans for the capture of the Philippines provided for an amphibious landing at Sarangani Bay, Mindanao, but on 15 September

1944, Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force was advised that the initial assault would be made at Leyte, and plans were revised accordingly. The changes were the result of the new strategic concepts, arrived at in early September, which stepped up the tempo of the whole program of war against Japan.

The amphibious landings at LEYTE, Philippine Islands, were made on A day, 20 October 1944, preceded by minor landings on Dinagat and Homonhon Islands at the entrance to Leyte Gulf on A-3 and A-2 days respectively. Commander SEVENTH Fleet was in overall command of the ships engaged in the Leyte Operation; Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force was responsible for landing the XXIV Army Corps on the Southern Beaches in the vicinity of Dulag; and Lieutenant General Walter Kreuger, Commanding General SIXTH Army was responsible for securing LEYTE and the adjacent island of SAMAR.

In this operation the fire support ships did not operate directly under the amphibious force commanders, but under Commander Battleships (Rear Admiral Oldendorf) temporarily operating with part of his force under the SEVENTH Fleet, who served as Commander Support Force during the Leyte Operation. He conducted the preliminary bombardments prior to the landings and thereafter covered the amphibious forces during the Battles of Surigao Straits and Samar.

The amphibious landings were eminently successful, but the supporting ships suffered from suicide air attacks, effectively employed against our naval forces for the first time. Fortunately ships of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force in the assault echelon were lightly loaded and were able to unload and depart on the first day, with the result that the large transports were out of the landing area before the suicide attacks commenced.

When Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force left Leyte for Hollandia to begin preparations for the Lingayen Operation (which was originally scheduled for 20 December 1944), Commander Amphibious Group 8 (Rear Admiral Fechteler) was designated to remain at Leyte. He was relieved as SOPA, LEYTE on 16 November 1944 by Commander Amphibious Group Nine (Rear Admiral Struble) who directed subsequent amphibious operations in the area.

The advance of the ground forces on Leyte was seriously threatened by the arrival of substantial Japanese reinforcements

landing at Ormoc on the west coast. On short notice, Commander Amphibious Group 9 skillfully planned and directed an amphibious landing at ORMOC on 7 December 1944. One week later, on 15 December 1944, he made another successful landing on MINDORO and conducted the resupply echelons in support of this landing as long as the Japanese air threat existed. His flagship was hit by a suicide plane while enroute to Mindoro, and his Chief of Staff, several other members of his staff, and several members of the staff of the Landing Force Commander were killed. Ships of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force suffered high personnel casualties and heavy material losses from suicide air attacks during the ORMOC and MINDORO operations. However, these two landings contributed materially to the final capture of Leyte and to the success of the impending operations on Luzon.

The amphibious landing at LINGAYEN on 9 January 1945 followed the same general organization plan used at Leyte. Commander SEVENTH Fleet was in overall command of the landing; Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force landed the I Corps on the northern beaches; and Commander THIRD Amphibious Force landed the XIV Corps on the southern beaches. Initial opposition to the landing was not strong but it stiffened as the troops moved from the beachhead to the hills just beyond, and naval gunfire support was used for several weeks. Fire support ships and minesweepers suffered substantial losses during the preliminary minesweeping and preassault bombardment. If the enemy had concentrated air attacks on transports with the same effectiveness achieved against supporting ships, the Lingayen operation might not have succeeded.

After the Lingayen Landings, matters of first importance were the immediate reinforcement of the Philippines, and the exploitation of the rapid advance of the SIXTH Army down the Luzon plain. The SEVENTH Amphibious Force assumed the task of transporting troops to accomplish these ends. A major portion of those amphibious ships from the Pacific Fleet which had participated in the Leyte and Lingayen operations were made available to Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area until 15 February 1945, and under the operational control of Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force, they were immediately employed in a rapid turnaround which brought six divisions from Leyte and New Guinea to Luzon within a month.

After LINGAYEN, the amphibious operations of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force assumed a new pattern to meet the need for

simultaneous operations for the earliest control of the entire Philippine Archipelago. Vice Admiral Barbey during this phase acted as the Attack Force Commander and assumed overall control of operations assisted by three Rear Admirals as Group Commanders. These were Commanders Amphibious Groups 8 and 9, regularly assigned to the Southwest Pacific Area, and Commander Amphibious Group 6 (Rear Admiral Royal), assigned temporarily from the Pacific Fleet. Individual operations were under the command of these group commanders or, in some cases, under command of subordinate officers of the Force.

The first of the consolidating operations took place on 29 January 1945, when one division and regimental combat team were landed near Subic, Zambales Province, followed on 31 January 1945 by the 11th Airborne Division landing at NASUGBU, South of Manila Bay, which assisted materially in the capture of the Capital. During the same period, three more divisions were landed at Lingayen, and a fourth at Mindoro.

The BATAAN-CORREGIDOR operation on 15 February 1945, was a combined air bombardment-naval bombardment-airborne-amphibious attack. The intensity of the air bombardment, the excellent timing of airborne and amphibious operations, and the accuracy of the naval gunfire support by cruisers and destroyers reduced what might have been a long and costly campaign to one successfully concluded in a few days. The amphibious phase of the operation was commanded by Commander Amphibious Group 9, Rear Admiral Struble.

CONSOLIDATING AND MINESWEEPING OPERATIONS THROUGHOUT THE PHILIPPINES AND BORNEO

February 1945 - July 1945

In February 1945, Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force was charged with the clearance of minefields and reopening of ports and sea routes in the Philippine Area. The opening of Manila Bay to shipping was given first priority. Though a relatively small number of minesweepers were available for this difficult task, Manila was open as a port before 1 March 1945, not quite two months after the first troops had landed in Luzon. The clearance of Philippine waters was by far the largest minesweeping operation of the war up to that time. Including the Borneo operations, over 1300 mines (both Allied and Japanese) were destroyed in more than 8,000 square miles swept

during continuous operations which lasted five months. Six AMs and approximately 25 YMS did the job.

While fighting on Luzon was still in progress, the campaign for the recapture of the remaining islands in the Philippines and for the control of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies was begun. Between February and May 1945 more than sixteen landing operations were conducted in the central and Southern Philippines, and three major operations on the east and west coast of Borneo.

The first in the series was the landing of a regimental combat team of the 40th Infantry Division at PUERTA PRINCESSA, PALAWAN ISLAND by Commander Amphibious Group 8, Rear Admiral Fechteler, on 28 February 1945. In this operation there were no losses by either Army or Navy. When PUERTA PRINCESSA was secured, air bases were established which enabled the air force to gain control over the China Sea.

On 10 March 1945 in another amphibious operation under Rear Admiral Royal, Commander Amphibious Group 6, two regimental combat teams also of the 40th Infantry Division, were landed at ZAMBOANGA. In April, landings at JOLO, TAWI-TAWI, and on SANGA-SANGA ISLAND conducted by the same troops achieved control of the Sulu Archipelago.

The next series started on 18 March 1945 when two regimental combat teams landed in the vicinity of ILOILO, PANAY under Commander Amphibious Group 9. This was followed on 26 March 1945 by landing two regimental combat teams on CEBU with Acting Commander Amphibious Group 8 (Captain A. T. Sprague) in command. Over a two months period Commander Amphibious Group 9 conducted landings on NEGROS ISLAND: BOHOL ISLAND, and additional landings on CEBU and PANAY.

During March and April, amphibious landings were also made on LUBANG ISLAND, TICAQ-BURIAS ISLANDS, MASBATE ISLAND, CABALLO ISLAND, CARABAO ISLAND, EL FRAILLE ISLAND, and at LEGASPI, LUZON. These operations were all commanded by subordinate officers of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force, usually flotilla or group commanders. In one of these operations, the landing of one Regimental combat team at LEGASPI on 1 April 1945, low-level bombardment prior to D Day supplanted naval gunfire with very effective results.

On 17 April 1945, Rear Admiral Noble who had succeeded Rear Admiral Fechteler as Commander Amphibious Group 8 directed a two division landing by the X Corps at PARANG and MALABANG in the Cotabato area of Mindanao. The landing areas had previously been secured by guerrillas, and troops moved quickly overland and captured DAVAO. Meanwhile, naval support forces moved into DAVAO GULF and destroyed suicide boats, midget submarines, and their bases. Elements of the X Corps moved northward from Davao and met increasing Japanese resistance in the mountainous part of Central Mindanao. To assist in enveloping the remaining Japanese, Commander Amphibious Group 9 landed a regimental combat team at MACAJALAR BAY and on 1 June 1945 he assumed responsibility for support of the entire Mindanao Operation while Commander Amphibious Group 8 withdrew to prepare for the Balikpapan operation.

Owing to the importance of preparation for the invasion of Japan, plans for control of the Netherlands East Indies were restricted to the capture of strategic areas in Dutch and British Borneo. The first operation took place on 1 May 1945 when a brigade group of the 9th Australian Division, equivalent in size to a regimental combat team, landed at TARAkan, Dutch Borneo. Commander Amphibious Group 6 conducted this landing which was unopposed, following effective air strikes, naval bombardment, and minesweeping operations. An unusual feature of the TARAkan operation was the extreme tidal range encountered and the fact that LSTs beached in mud instead of sand. Seven LSTs were stranded in mud for 11 days. Another was the iron rails set upright in the mud to form beach obstacles. Such obstacles had not been encountered previously and no Underwater Demolition Team had been assigned to remove them. However, the Royal Australian Engineer Unit undertook and successfully accomplished the job on D-1 Day.

Commander Amphibious Group 6 conducted the second landing in Borneo on 10 June 1945 at BRUNEI BAY; (The original date of 22 May was extended to permit the arrival of support units and supplies from Australia). This was an extensive operation involving the simultaneous landings of one brigade group of the 9th Australian Division on LABUAN ISLAND and another on the mainland adjacent to BRUNEI BAY. Subsequent operations resulted in the capture of the rich oil area of MIRI-LUTONG.

The untimely death of Rear Admiral Royal occurred at sea while his flagship was enroute to Leyte following the Brunei Bay operation.

The final amphibious assault landing in Borneo was made on 1 July 1945 at BALIKPAPAN. Vice Admiral Barbey was in overall command of this operation with Commander Amphibious Group 8 directly responsible for landing the 7th Australian Division. Many elements of this division had been transported the entire distance from Australia in LSTs of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force. The following factors made BALIKPAPAN an extremely difficult amphibious operation:

- (a) A very shallow beach gradient which did not permit fire support ships nearer than five miles out from the beach.
- (b) Shallow waters thickly sown with magnetic mines.
- (c) Landbased air support operating from bases more than 400 miles away.

These difficulties were overcome by the excellent work of the minesweepers, intensive naval bombardment, and three Escort Carriers of the Pacific Fleet which contributed air support.

The Borneo operations were unique in the respect that serious difficulty was encountered with previously sown allied magnetic mines. The Fifth Air Force and RAAF had planted numerous magnetic mines, many incapable of self-sterilization, in the shallow waters of TARAKAN, BRUNEI BAY, and BALIKPAPAN, and pre-assault sweeping was conducted for several days in each of these three areas. At BALIKPAPAN where the threat of magnetic mines was especially great, minesweeping continued for two weeks before the landing. No serious difficulty was encountered in clearing Japanese mines. However, off LUTONG, the sweeping groups swept one enemy field of 600 mines all more than 80 feet deep. The field had obviously been designed as a defensive measure against Allied submarines. Because of the slight gradient of the ocean bottom near LUTONG, Japanese tankers were obliged to anchor three miles from the beach and load oil through long pipe lines, thus being particularly exposed to submarine attack.

Throughout the BORNEO operations, the small minesweeping group attached to the SEVENTH Amphibious Force did an outstanding job in spite of heavy losses--about one ship damaged or lost for every two magnetic mines destroyed.

POST WAR OPERATIONS

Although it was not realized at the time, the BALIKPAPAN operation was the last for the SEVENTH Amphibious Force which completed a two-year combat record of 56 amphibious assault landings involving overwater movement of a total of more than a million men.

During July and August 1945, ships of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force were engaged in the roll-up of men and material from New Guinea, the Solomons, and Admiralty Islands. Many of the same ships had carried the same troops to those ports in assault landings a year or two before. During this period, the SEVENTH Amphibious Force also was engaged in redistributing Army Units, and preparing plans for the final assault on the Japanese homeland.

15 August 1945 had been set for the transfer of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force from the SEVENTH Fleet to the Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet, where it was to have a status comparable to the THIRD and FIFTH Amphibious Forces. Administrative and training functions of the force were to be transferred to the Administrative Command, Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet, and the ships to various commands, primarily the Philippine Sea Frontier.

When the Japanese surrendered on the very day the transfer was to take place, plans were quickly revised, and the SEVENTH Amphibious Force continued under the operational control of the SEVENTH Fleet. The movement of the XXIV Corps for occupation in KOREA and movement of the III Marine Amphibious Corps for similar duties in NORTH CHINA were begun immediately. Upon completion of these lifts, the SEVENTH Amphibious Force transported the 8th, 13th and 52nd Chinese Armies from South to North China ports and simultaneously began the repatriation of Japanese from Korea and North China. Commanders Amphibious Groups 7, 8 and 13 were in immediate command of these various phases.

On 19 November 1945, Vice Admiral Barbey assumed command of the SEVENTH Fleet, and simultaneously delegated the responsibility for continuation of the repatriation program to Commander Amphibious Group 8. The same date marks the end of the operations of the SEVENTH Amphibious Force, for while it

continued as a command, and Vice Admiral Barbey retained his title as Commander, the flagship with the staff embarked, proceeded to the Atlantic. On 23 December 1945, the SEVENTH Amphibious Force was finally disestablished. The organization, which Vice Admiral D. E. Barbey created, trained, and led, had completed its task.

Rear Admiral WILLIAM M. FECHTELER, U.S. Navy,
Deputy Commander, Seventh Amphibious Force and first
Commander Amphibious Group EIGHT.



