

Battle of the Philippines (1941-42)

Battle of the Philippines

Part of [World War II](#), [Pacific War](#)



Allied prisoners of war use improvised litters to carry comrades who are sick, exhausted and/or wounded. This event, shortly before the end of the battle, would become known as the [Bataan Death March](#).

Date: [December 8, 1941](#)-[May 8, 1942](#)

Location: the [Philippines](#)

Result: Japanese victory

Combatants

the [Philippines](#), [United States](#) | [Japan](#)

Commanders

[Douglas MacArthur](#)

[Masaharu Homma](#)

Strength

About 150,000

120,000

Casualties

2,500 killed in action;
10,000 POWs
killed/died during
[Bataan Death March](#)

1,200 killed; 500
missing in action
1,100 wounded

5,000 wounded 100,000 POWs total	
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Pacific Campaign 1941-42

[Pearl Harbor](#) – [Malaya](#) – [Singapore](#) –
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Philippines – [Borneo](#) – [Rabaul](#) – [Balikpapan](#)
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The **Battle of the Philippines** was the invasion of the [Philippines](#) by [Japan](#) in 1941-42, and the defense of the islands by Filipino and [United States](#) forces. Although the result was a Japanese victory, the perseverance of the defenders delayed Japanese attacks on other areas, and assisting in Allied counterattacks in the [South West Pacific Area](#), from late 1942 onwards.

The defenses

From mid-1941, following increasing tension between Japan and several other powers, including the [United States](#), [Britain](#) and the [Netherlands](#), many countries in [South East Asia](#) and the [Pacific](#) began to prepare for the possibility of war.

By December 1941, the combined defense forces in the Philippines included the 10 [divisions](#) of the [Philippine Army](#) (PA), under General [Douglas MacArthur](#), who had retired as US Chief of Staff in 1937, and had accepted control of the PA. MacArthur had been tasked by the Government of the Philippines with reforming an army made up mostly of reservists, and poor in equipment, training and organisation. (See: [Military history of the Philippines](#), for more details.)

The [US Army](#)'s 22,532 strong [garrison](#), known as the [Philippine Department](#), was under Maj. Gen. [George Grunert](#). The main part of Grunert's force was the US Army's [Philippine Division](#), which included a substantial number of Filipinos, in [Philippine Scouts](#) (PS) units. The garrison had been augmented by 8,500 personnel from [National Guard](#) units on the US mainland, including the only armoured forces present, two tank [battalions](#).

The [US Army Air Corps Far East Air Force](#) (FEAF), under Maj. Gen. [Lewis H. Brereton](#), was the largest US air formation outside the United States, and included 107 [P-40](#) fighters and 35 [B-17](#) bombers.

MacArthur organized the defenders into four separate commands. The North [Luzon](#) Force, under Maj. Gen. [Jonathan M. Wainwright](#), defended the most likely sites for amphibious attacks and the central plains area. This included [Bataan Peninsula](#), the designated fallback position, which adjoined [Manila Bay](#). Wainwright's forces included the PA 11th, 21st, and 31st Infantry Divisions, the US 26th Cavalry Regiment (a PS unit), a battalion of the 45th Infantry (PS), two batteries of 144mm guns and one of 2.95 inch mountain gun. The Philippine 71st Infantry Division served as a reserve and could be committed only on the authority of MacArthur.

The South Luzon Force, under Brig. Gen. [George M. Parker](#) Jr., controlled a zone east and south of [Manila](#). Parker had the PA 41st and 51st Infantry Divisions and two batteries from the US 86th Field Artillery (PS).

The [Visayan-Mindanao](#) Force under Brig. Gen. [William F. Sharp](#) comprised the PA 61st, 81st, and 101st Infantry Divisions.

A reserve force, under MacArthur's direct command, was composed of the Philippine Division, the Far East Air Force, and headquarters units from the PA and Philippine Department, stationed just north of Manila. Four US artillery regiments guarded the entrance to Manila Bay, including [Corregidor](#) Island.

The Far East Air Force controversy

After the outbreak of war on [December 7](#), Brereton urged his superiors to launch bombing missions against [Formosa](#), which was then a Japanese territory, and from which an attack was likely to come, but the request was denied. This proved to be a fatal error, as there were few anti-aircraft guns in the Philippines, and FEAF was all but destroyed on the ground, in air raids over the next few days.

The invasion

The [Japanese 14th Army](#), under General [Masaharu Homma](#), began its invasion with a landing on [Batan Island](#) (not to be confused with Bataan), off the north coast of Luzon, on [8 December 1941](#). Landings on the mainland followed two days later.

From 11 to 23 December, most of Luzon gradually fell to the Japanese, following landings on the southern tip of Luzon at [Legazpi](#), as well as in [Lingayen Gulf](#) and on on Mindanao. Most of the Allied forces gradually surrendered, or were overrun. The US Philippine Division moved into the field to cover the withdrawal of troops to Bataan and to resist Japanese advances in the [Subic Bay](#) area. On 23 December, MacArthur notified his field commanders that he was reactivating an old prewar plan to defend only Bataan and Corregidor; both the military headquarters and the Philippines government were moved to Corregidor. Nevertheless substantial forces remained in other areas for several months.

On 30 December, the [Philippine 31st Infantry Division](#) moved to the vicinity of [Zigzag Pass](#) to cover the flanks of troops withdrawing from central and southern [Luzon](#), while the US Philippine Division organized positions at Bataan. The 31st Division then moved to a defensive position on the west side of the [Olongapo](#)-Manila road, near [Layac Junction](#) — at the neck of Bataan Peninsula — on 5 January 1942. The junction was lost on the 6th, but the withdrawal to Bataan was a relative success. The 31st Division assumed a reserve position on the peninsula to recover from its losses in the rearguard action.

The Battle of Bataan

Main article: [Battle of Bataan](#)

From 7 to 14 January 1942, the Japanese concentrated on reconnaissance and preparations for an attack on the main battle position on the [Abucay](#) line. US and Filipino forces repelled night attacks near Abucay, 10-12 January, and elements of the US Philippine Division counterattacked on 16 January. However this failed and the division withdrew to a reserve position in the [Casa Pilar](#)-[Bagac](#) area, on 26 January.



Generals Wainwright (left) and MacArthur

For several weeks the Japanese, made cautious by heavy losses, engaged in patrols and limited local attacks. Because of the worsening Allied position in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, US President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) ordered MacArthur to [re-locate from Corregidor](#) to [Australia](#), as Supreme Allied Commander [South West Pacific Area](#). (MacArthur's famous speech regarding the Philippines, in which he said "I came out of Bataan and I shall return", was made at [Terowie](#), [South Australia](#) on [March 20](#).) Wainwright assumed control of Allied forces in the Philippines on 12 March. During this period elements of the US Philippine Division were shifted to assist in the defense of other sectors.

A new wave of Japanese attacks, from 28 March, hit Allied forces now severely weakened by malnutrition, sickness, and prolonged exposure to combat. On 3 April, the

Japanese began to break through gaps in the Allied lines alongside [Mount Samat](#). The US Philippine Division, no longer operating as a coordinated unit, was unable to counterattack against heavy enemy assaults. On 8 April, the US 57th Infantry Regiment (PS) and the Philippine 31st Division were overrun near the [Alangan River](#). The US 45th Infantry Regiment (PS) finally surrendered on [10 April 1942](#).

The Battle of Corregidor

Main article: [Battle of Corregidor](#)

Corregidor was now defended by 11,000 personnel, comprising the US 4th Marine Regiment, other miscellaneous infantry, US Army artillery units and [US Navy](#) personnel, deployed as infantry. The Japanese began their assault on Corregidor with an artillery barrage on 1 May. On the night of 5-6 May, two battalions of the Japanese 61st Infantry Regiment landed at the northeast end of the island. Despite strong resistance, the Japanese established a beachhead that was soon reinforced by tanks and artillery. The defenders were quickly pushed back toward the stronghold of Malinta Hill.

Late on 6 May, Wainwright asked Homma for terms of surrender. Homma insisted that surrender include all Allied forces in the Philippines. Believing that the lives of all those on Corregidor would be endangered, Wainwright accepted. On 8 May he sent a message to Sharp, ordering him to surrender the Visayan-Mindanao Force. Sharp complied but many individuals carried on the fight as guerrillas.

The defeat was the beginning of three and a half years of harsh treatment for the Allied survivors, including atrocities like the [Bataan Death March](#) and the misery of Japanese prison camps.

Allied forces began the [campaign to recapture the Philippines](#) in [1944](#), with [landings on the island of Leyte](#).

External links

- [US Army, 2003, "Philippine Islands: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II"](#)
- [WW2DB: Invasion of the Philippines"](#)

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