

The Alamo Scouts

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
22 SEPT 93

History of special intelligence operations with the Sixth Army in New Guinea and the Philippines.

Eustace E. Nabbie

Colonel Allison Ind's recent book, *Allied Intelligence Bureau*,¹ which described a number of the unorthodox reconnaissance and raider activities carried out in the World War II South West Pacific Area, failed to mention a small intrepid group of men called "Alamo Scouts" who performed for the U.S. Sixth Army services similar to those rendered by OSS detachments in other overseas commands. It is the purpose of this article to bridge a gap thus left in the intelligence history of that Area and time.

Origin and Training

General Walter Krueger, whose Sixth Army was then called simply the "Alamo Force" in deference to Australian General Blamey's seniority under MacArthur, was personally the originator of this group of Scouts bearing the name of the famous Texas shrine. It is my belief that his main aim in creating them was to insure that in his area of responsibility there would be no fiasco like that of Kiska island in the Aleutians, which, it will be recalled, U.S. Navy and Army air forces bombarded for more

than 20 days in ignorance of the fact that the Japanese troops had already been withdrawn, and which was then taken by an assault landing with self-inflicted casualties. The Scouts' principal mission was therefore reconnaissance behind enemy lines, an activity which in this Area meant torture and death for any of them that were captured. They were volunteers, hand-picked for their intelligence, spirit, and physical stamina.

The first volunteers "for an unusual mission" did not know exactly what they would be called upon to do; it was only as the exploits of the Scouts became more generally known that secrecy was lifted from the nature of the work. It was specified, however, in General Krueger's order of 28 November 1943 setting forth a charter for the Scouts:

1. The Alamo Scouts Training Center (ASTC) is hereby established under the supervision of Headquarters Alamo Force at the earliest practicable date prior to 1 January 1944, and at a location in the vicinity of the present Headquarters [Goodenough Island, off the southeastern tip of New Guinea].

2. The training center will train selected volunteers in reconnaissance and raider work. The course will cover a six-week period. Specially selected graduates will be grouped into teams at the disposal of the Commanding General, Alamo Force, and will be designated "Alamo Scouts"; the remainder will be returned to their respective commands for similar use by their commanders.

3. Commanders of combat units will be called upon from

time to time to furnish personnel for the above training. Personnel so selected must possess the highest qualifications as to courage, stamina, intelligence and adaptability.

The instructors for this Training Center were to be drawn from the Army members of an all-service organization known as the Amphibious Scouts, to which I happened to have been assigned. This group, originally formed in the Solomons by the Navy, had moved to Fergusson Island, south and east of Goodenough, on a beautiful bay well protected from the seasonal wind. There it had a training site which served also as a base for PT boats making the run to New Britain Island.

Early in December, Lt. Col. Frederick Bradshaw, Deputy G-2 of the Sixth Army, who was to become the first commanding officer of the ASTC, and I learned through grapevine channels that the Navy unit was being disbanded. We immediately made arrangements to move into the established camp and take over its rather crude facilities in being. With native work teams and assistance from the U.S. Army Engineers we then pushed back the jungle and built better facilities. By about 1 January 1944 we were ready to receive the first class of potential Scouts.

Members of the first class came from the 158th Regiment (the Bushmasters), formerly stationed in Panama and adept at jungle fighting, and from the 32nd Infantry Division, veterans of Buna and Gona in New Guinea. Succeeding classes were drawn from the dismounted 1st Cavalry Division, the 33rd Division, and the 41st Division. The instructor force was augmented by graduates from the first class, and several Australian army officers were attached to the Center at one time or another to train the Scouts in jungle fighting and survival. U.S. Marine or Army Air Corps officers were sometimes added to a team if its mission called for specialized personnel not available in the Training Center.

Eyes for Island-Hopping

The Scouts' first reconnaissance mission was carried out by Lt. John R.

C. McGowan and five men on 27 February 1944. The team was put ashore by Catalina and rubber boat on the southeast tip of Los Negros island in the Admiralty group. Air reconnaissance during the previous two weeks had detected no activity on the island, and the Army Air Corps had concluded that the Japanese had been evacuated. McGowan's team nevertheless found Japanese troops there and were able, unobserved, to ascertain that they were healthy and apparently well fed. The Scouts returned safely to the point where their rubber landing boat had been cached and were picked up by the "Cat" at daybreak the following morning. McGowan was taken by PT boat from the Catalina base to the task force commander, who, on the strength of his report, ordered reinforcements for the "reconnaissance in force" of the island being conducted by the dismounted 1st Cavalry Division. On the morning of 29 February a successful troop landing was made on the northeast coast of Los Negros.

This operation established a pattern that came to be almost routine. Before each landing of U.S. and allied troops, sometimes as early as D-day minus 14, an Alamo Scout team would be put ashore by PT, Catalina, Mariner, or submarine. After Los Negros came Madang and Wewak on the coast of New Guinea. Then when Hollandia (where an Australian team sent in by Theater Headquarters was betrayed by unfriendly natives and killed by the Japanese) had been taken, Sarmi, Biak, Noemfoor, Sansapor, and Japan Island followed in quick succession. In advance of each of these actions an Alamo Scout team made a pre-landing reconnaissance or conducted line-crossing operations to establish the strength and disposition of the enemy forces, and its reports enabled the Army G-3 to complete his plans for the assault. In one case, at Sansapor on the north coast of New Guinea, the planned pre-landing bombardment and aerial strikes were called off because so few Japanese were found in the area.

As the Sixth Army moved northward the ASTC moved with it, setting up nearby headquarters and keeping in close personal touch with the Army G-2. For the later New Guinea operations the Center was located at Mange Point, south of Finschafen. In the Philippines, while the Sixth Army was near the beach on Leyte the Center was in Abuyog. On Luzon it followed the Sixth Army down the Lingayan Plain toward Manila, arriving finally at Subic Bay about 1 March 1945, where it set up shop on the east side of the bay four or five miles south of Olongopau. It was here that teams were trained and held until time for their operational briefing by Sixth Army G-2 officers at San Fernando, Pampanga.

The Philippine Guerrillas

During the Luzon campaign the work of the Alamo Scouts was broadened and diversified into two general types, first, the collection of information from guerrilla and civilian sources and by personal reconnaissance, and second, the organization of guerrilla activities. The Philippine guerrillas, nurtured and developed since 1942, had already for some time been in radio contact with General MacArthur's Philippine Regional Section. Now those in areas assigned to the Sixth Army were turned over to General Krueger, and the Sixth Army G-2 controlled all contact with them and the direction of their activities. For this purpose a Special Intelligence subsection of G-2 manned by Alamo Scout officers was established.

Alamo Scout teams thus made the initial personal contact with guerrilla units and remained the instrument for organizing their actions in support of the regular forces. The guerrilla effort had been inadequately coordinated, various political frictions hampered teamwork, and some units had no recognized leader. The Scout teams became coordinating agencies, mediating quarrels, appealing for unity of effort, expelling chronic agitators. Where leadership was lacking or disputed, Scout officers assumed command.

From the outset, a troublesome obstacle to the organization of efficient guerrilla operations was the undefined status of the many autonomous guerrilla units with respect to central authority. Since little was known concerning the composition and activities of many of these units, there being no overall command as in Mindanao or the Visayas, several months passed during which scores of Filipino fighting groups were neither fish nor fowl, neither bandits nor allies. The confusion and resultant dissatisfaction among cooperating groups were resolved by a decision to recognize bona fide units as components of the Philippine Army and give their officers and men formal status and proper pay.

This decision gave to us in the Special Intelligence subsection the lever we needed to extend control, through Scout teams in the field, to those guerrilla leaders who had not acknowledged our authority. Some of them, as might be expected, attempted to play off General MacArthur's

Theater Headquarters against the Sixth Army, but with little success. Effective liaison was established between the two echelons, and guerrilla leaders attempting this gambit were soon put in their place.

The policy of official recognition also brought us problems. No sooner had it been announced than a flood of claims for pay and status threatened to inundate the Special Intelligence section. Many of these were clearly spurious, and procedures had to be set up to determine the legitimacy of each claim. American units employing guerrillas submitted rosters to the Sixth Army G-1, who referred them to the Special Intelligence section for verification. Upon verification and after formal approval by United States Army Force, Far East, lists of recognized units were published.

For radio communication with the guerrillas on Leyte and Luzon, a Filipino Message Center was set up adjacent to the U.S. Army Message Center, staffed with members of the U.S. Filipino Regiment and with former local employees of the Philippine Government's Bureau of Posts and Roads. These latter, given a minimum of training, made ideal communicators: every Philippine postmaster of pre-war days had to be able to operate a telegraph key. Many of the guerrillas with whom they were in contact were also former postal employees trained in radio communications. The more than 70 guerrilla radios with which General MacArthur's Headquarters was in contact at the time of the Luzon landings were put gradually under the control of this Filipino Message Center and their messages fed into Army channels via Sixth Army G-2.

As the situation on Luzon became more stable the guerrilla network came to be a sort of general-utility coded telegraph service. The newly established Philippine Government was in dire need of some of its experienced officials still hiding out in the hills and jungle. It would telephone the Headquarters at San Fernando, and we would send its messages to the outlying provinces directing such-and-such persons to report to Manila. Finally, as the war ended, I arranged with the Director of Posts and Roads for the transfer of the whole network to the Philippine Government.

A Tidy Record

General Krueger's experiment with the Alamo Scouts was designed to give Army Headquarters what every division and lower command already had--an organized reconnaissance agency. Its purpose was to obtain strategic and tactical information primarily for the Army G-2, but at the same time for units being employed or about to be employed in combat. It accomplished this and more.

That the idea was sound and that this new application of standard principles was practical and valuable is attested by the results of more than 60 missions. The commanders who were beneficiary of these missions recognized that information provided by the Alamo Scouts saved lives, changed plans of attack, and led to the destruction of enemy positions and enemy shipping. Scouts made two successful prisoner-rescue raids, and they brought in 60 Japanese prisoners for questioning.

The experiment was a success; and remarkably, thanks to thorough planning, careful selection of personnel, conscientious training, and luck, its cost in lives was zero. On all these missions not a single Alamo Scout was killed.

1 New York: David Mackay, 1958. Reviewed in Studies, Vol. III, No. 1.

Posted: May 08, 2007 07:23 AM