

MENTS By L. MORTON

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Authority: 48 CFR 1.101

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES WESTERN PACIFIC
G-3, GUERRILLA AFFAIRS BRANCH

APO 707

REPORT ON GUERRILLA AFFAIRS
BICOL PENINSULA

Lieutenant Robert L. Morton, Contact Team "G", proceeded to the Bicol Peninsula to contact all known guerrilla units in that region. The following report is a summary of the investigation, and a few facts of interest.

Geographical Data

The Bicol Peninsula is located on the southernmost tip of Luzon, 120 degrees, 30 minutes longitude and 140 degrees latitude, and is comprised of six provinces, namely: Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Albay, Sorsogon, Catanduanes, and Masbate. The latter two provinces are not an integral part of the peninsula, for they are islands near the coast of southern Luzon but they are included geographically as a portion of the Bicol Region. The population of the Bicol Region is approximately 1,500,000 inhabitants whose occupations consists of farming, fishing, mining and lumbering. The most important cities of the Bicol are: Legaspi, Albay, the capital of Albay and the most important port; Sorsogon, Sorsogon, the capital of Sorsogon; Naga, Camarines Sur, the capital of Camarines Sur; and Daet, Camarines Norte, the capital of Camarines Norte.

Transportation

The best mode of transportation to Bicol from Central Luzon is by air. There is a landing field at Legaspi, Albay, large enough to land planes as large as B-24's. By air it takes approximately one hour fifteen minutes from Manila to Legaspi. It is impossible to travel by vehicle, for many of the bridges are out between Manila and Legaspi. Rail is possible, but a very poor means of transportation, for part of the trip must be made by truck, rivers crossed by boat, and the train itself is very slow and overcrowded.

While in the region, transportation is available from the 341st Infantry, 86th Division, which has its Legaspi Base Command at Legaspi, Albay. Transportation may also be obtained from the Military Police Command at Legaspi. Civilian transportation is available through the Alatco Bus lines, but again this too is a very poor mode of transportation. Roads in the area are passable but they are in very poor condition, and on two occasions ferries

must be made to cross rivers between Naga, Camarines Sur and Daet, Camarines Norte.

Communications

Communication by radio is available through the Legaspi Base Command, 31st Infantry, 86th Division, and also at the Military Police Commands at Legaspi, Albay, Naga, Camarines Sur, and Daet, Camarines Norte. Messages may be sent and received from these stations. Communication by telephone exists only within the 86th Area Command, and the Military Police Commands, but it is impossible to communicate from one city to another.

Air courier service is available through the 86th Division Area Command, but unreliable for no strict schedule is followed.

History and Activities

On 12 December 1941, the Japanese landed at Legaspi as the starting point for their southern prong which was to push northward and join forces with those which landed along Lamon Bay. Most of the loyal inhabitants of the cities, towns, and barrios took to the hills. Wandering remnants of escaped and unsundered USAFFE soldiers and loyal civilians began to organize guerrilla units, each dominating certain areas within the provinces. For a time active guerrilla resistance caused the Japanese considerable trouble; but gradually lack of funds and supplies hampered their activities. The primary activities of the units were to preserve law and order, encourage food production, intelligence, sabotage, and harass the enemy. Engagements with the enemy were negligible in that there were but few weapons in the region. Several small units donned the guise of loyal guerrillas for the purpose of banditry and to force tribute from civilians.

The first, and best known guerrilla unit to be formed in the Bicol region was organized on 18 December 1941 in Camarines Norte by Lt Wenceslao Q. Vinsons, former governor of the province. This force of about 100 armed men raided Japanese garrisons throughout January to July 1942, their most notable exploit being a three-day assault on the provincial capital of Daet, 30 April 1942, which resulted in the temporary capture of the town with severe losses to the Japanese defenders. Increased pressure from the Japanese forced the unit to withdraw to Camp Abas where it was practically disbanded. Supposedly trusted men of the group betrayed the position of the camp and on 8 July 1942, Lt Vinsons was captured and executed by the Japanese. Francisco Boayes (alias Turko), who was Vinsons' assistant, took over the command, and although Boayes appears to have been a fearless gang leader and was one of the best known anti-Japanese fighters he was also undisciplined and unruly. His unit became bandits and caused as much trouble for the inhabitants of Bicol as they did for the Japanese.

Next to Vinsons, the most noted guerrilla leader was Faustino Flor, commanding officer of the Camp Isarog Guerrillas. The outstanding activity of Flor was the attack on the Japanese occupied town of Naga, Camarines Sur on 2 May 1942, in which some thirty Americans and other prisoners who were about to be executed by the Japanese were freed.

On 24 May 1942, Flor with several of his officers was persuaded by General Francisco, then commander of the puppet Bureau of Constabulary, to surrender. Twofilo B. Padua took over the command of the unit, but the unit does not appear to have been very active against the Japanese under his control. Flor escaped prison and organized another guerrilla unit in Albay, but the activities of this unit were slight and with very little resistance.

One of the largest disputes in Bicol was the question as to who should command the 5th Military District. Lt Col Zabat of Albay, Major Lopus and Governor Escudero of Sorsogon, all claimed to be the Military Commander, but Zabat was more successful than the others. Zabat tried to unify the guerrilla units in Bicol and, on paper, he was successful, for he had the 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 59th, and 60th Infantry Regiment under his command. But as far as activities are concerned the greater portion of these units operated separately. These units accepted Zabat as Military Commander only because of the threats from Zabat but no authority was ever granted.

There were a few disputes among the guerrilla leaders, the most outstanding being that between Lopus and Escudero. The exact reason is unknown, but it is believed that the dispute was chiefly caused by both leaders wanting to claim control of guerrilla units in Sorsogon. Due to animosity encouraged by the two leaders these two units continuously fought one another during the Japanese regime. Other units having conflicts were the units of Juan Q. Miranda and Francisco D. Boyaes (Turko), but the reason for their conflict is questionable.

A great number of women are considered as guerrillas by the unit commanders for Zabat had issued orders on 24 December 1943 in effect that "all able bodied female residents of the town between the ages of 18 and 45 are hereby drafted into the service of the Women Auxiliary Service." The purpose of the Women Auxiliary Service was for administration and supervision of the Medical Corps, but their activities were practically nil. (See Inclosure #1)

THE ARRIVAL OF UNITED STATES FORCES

At the time of the landing of the 158th Regimental Combat Team at Legaspi, Albay, 1 April 1945, the leaders of the various guerrilla organizations operating on the Bicol Peninsula claimed that varying numbers of personnel were members of their groups and each supported his claim with rosters. There were conflicting boasts of dominance and there were many petty jealousies among them. Each guerrilla

commander was asking for the recognition of as many men as he could muster, thus hoping to gain for himself a higher rank.

In accordance with previous reports, Lt Col F. B. Thompson and Major Blieden, S-2, 158th RCT, devoted their entire time to solving the guerrilla problem. After investigation of the several units, each was allotted the strength that it would submit for recognition. Each commander then screened his organization to conform with that number and reorganized it under Philippine Army TO/E 5, which was the latest TO/E available to them. The units were recognized by the Sixth Army on the recommendation of the aforementioned officers, and these units have hence been processed in the "Bicol Brigade."

The leaders were then told that no more recognition of any unit would be made. Upon hearing this, much of the clamoring for further recognition diminished. However, the leaders were not completely satisfied but they accepted as fact the statements of Col Thompson and Maj Blieden that there would be no more recognition. The units activated in the Bicol Brigade as of 20 June 1945 may be found in inclosure #2.

It is believed that from May 1945 to October 1945 the Bicol Peninsula was more or less considered closed for recognition of additional units, and no action was taken during this period. In October 1945 the request for recognition of the Blue Eagle Brigade was reconsidered, and the undersigned officer was sent to the Bicol Region to contact and investigate this unit. Thus the Bicol Region was again opened for recognition, and as a result approximately thirty-seven (37) units have submitted their request for recognition.

The undersigned officer has investigated the majority of these units, and in his investigation it was found that the Sixth Army made a wise choice as the number of personnel recognized from the various units. The undersigned states "number of personnel" worthy of recognition have been recognized rather than the "members worthy of recognition," in that it was revealed in the investigation that numbers rather than names of personnel attached to the United States Forces were taken and, when recognition was given, the commanding officer of the unit concerned was asked to give the names of a certain number of the members of his unit. Thus, in many cases relatives and close friends were included on the rosters, whereas some members actually worthy of recognition were left off of the rosters. There is no means to prove that worthy members were omitted from the rosters, for unit commendations were given rather than individual commendations.

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Recommendations

In that the majority of the units in Bicol have been contacted it is recommended that, to give justice to the remaining units, they be contacted either by units or by personal contact and an investigation made. It is not, however, recommended that additional units be favorably considered for recognition since it is believed that each unit, deemed worthy of recognition, was given its proportionate quota by Major Blieden.

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