

Newsweek

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Corregidor Finale

Last Stand of the Defenders
Writes an Epic of U. S. Valor

Every time a shell crashed down it lighted up the low beach and the still waters of Manila Bay. From their foxholes and shallow gun pits the soldiers saw the barbed-wire defenses torn up, and as the barrage advanced they were forced slowly back up the shore. Then, as the fire slackened for a moment, another sound came out of the darkness—the grate of a steel bottom on sand. In a few minutes the quick rattle of machine-gun fire was intermixed with the boom of heavy shells. The Japanese had finally succeeded in landing on Corregidor.

Thus, shortly before midnight on May 4, began the last phase of the Battle of the Philippines. All through the next day and the following dawn the two sides fought fiercely over the rugged 2-square mile island fortress. The combat lasted 33 hours before the overwhelmingly larger Japanese forces overpowered the weakened and half-starved defenders, whose great guns had been battered by prolonged bombardment, and whose ammunition was running out. The Japanese also captured the bay's lesser forts, Drum, Frank, and Hughes. During the fight, five small American naval vessels were sunk, either by enemy gunfire or by American action to prevent their capture.

The last communication to the War Department from Corregidor came on May 6 from Lt. Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright (see Gen. Fuqua's War Tides), commander of the American forces in the Philippines, who, along with Maj. Gen. George F. Moore, commander of the island garrison, and some 11,574 others,* was taken prisoner.

The message said that fighting had ceased and terms of surrender were under discussion. Next day, the War Department quoted a Japanese broadcast from Manila to the effect that General Wainwright had "reluctantly acceded" to im-

*Including 3,845 Navy and Marine personnel, 3,734 American and 2,726 Filipino soldiers, and 1,269 civilians, according to War Department records up to April 15.

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mediate surrender not only of the bay forts but of all the scattered American and Filipino forces operating in various parts of the Philippines. But it warned that it had no actual knowledge of the reported terms or whether or not they had been met.

The capitulation of the Manila Bay forts came on the 151st day of the Pacific war and 27 days after the fall of Bataan. It wiped out the last large-scale United Nations resistance behind the long Japanese invasion line running from Burma through the Netherlands East Indies to New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. It freed large numbers of enemy troops and much equipment for campaigns elsewhere, and permitted the Japanese full use of Manila Bay as a naval and air base.

The Japanese thus wound up the Philippine campaign with a major victory. But the fall of Corregidor had been inevitable ever since Bataan was overrun on April 9 and the Japanese were able to mount huge 9.5-inch guns on the lofty slopes of Mount Mariveles, at the southern end of the peninsula, and attack the fort with devastating plunging fire.

Even before that, Corregidor had been badly damaged by some 300 aerial bombings. In a cable from Australia on May 8, Frank Hewlett, United Press correspondent recently evacuated from the Philippines, revealed that late in March and early in April the bombers scored three costly direct hits—on a big ammunition dump, the cold-storage plant, and the main power house.

The fall of Corregidor marked the end of an epic fight that won acclaim from Allied leaders the world over. The most heartfelt tribute came from Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Australia: "It has sounded its own story at the mouth of its guns. It has scrolled its own epitaph on enemy tablets. But through the bloody haze of the last reverberating shot I shall always seem to see the vision of its grim, gaunt, and ghostly men still unafraid."