



Irbe Edward Hanson

**U.S. Army—World War II
Pacific
Americal Division
Staff Sergeant**

Irbe Edward Hanson

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
May 28, 2008**

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Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Irbe E. Hanson**

Rank: **Staff Sergeant**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Army**

Theater: **World War II - Pacific**

Unit: Americal Division

Interview Date: 5/26/2008, 2-3:30 p.m.

Place: Oakton Pavilion, Des Plaines

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday, May, the 28th, of the year 2008 here at the Oakton Pavilion in Des Plaines, Illinois. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I'm speaking with Mr. Irbe Hanson. Mr. Hanson was born on September the 4th, 1918. Mr. Hanson learned about this Veterans History Project through the offices of his daughter Peg who saw an article in the Niles Journal. And Mr. Hanson has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Also present with me in the room is Mr. Hanson's son-in-law, Gig Brzezinski, who joins in the conversation as the interview concludes.

So, Mr. Hanson, do you recall when you entered the Service? (Interviewer's words in italics)

Well, I was in the National Guard. That was in early 1941.

You enlisted in the National Guard.

And not too long after I got involved, we, it was the Illinois National Guard Group 122nd Field Artillery. And later we moved on to a new group.

Did you have to go for more basic training?

A new group, a whole unit there.

And had you finished high school before you went into the Army?

No, the last few months, we didn't. We left down south and we didn't graduate.

Was that down somewhere near Waterman, Illinois?

Waterman. That was where I was born.

And were you living in Waterman when you enlisted?

No, in Chicago, Northwest.

Northwest side of Chicago.

Normally, I was living there all my life.

Yes, I live on the northwest side of Chicago around Lawrence and Elston.

And mine was just Northwest of that.

Did you have a favorite branch of the Service that you wanted to go into?

I was in the Artillery.

And did you like the Army better than the Navy?

Oh, definitely. I was not a water man.

Not a water man.

And we set up the whole shooting, there was no infantry. We were all artillery that I was with. You had a whole division, the 33rd Division. And we practiced that way before. We were several months down there getting things going, and, then, as we were coming back from our drives and so forth, I learned that they were taking in volunteers to build up the group to leave to war strength. And I went, catching them while they were still up in the east before they left. I transferred up there and got into (Task Force) 6814. And I was on a train going to the east, and we were moving down, living in the east, in New York, and I was in the group that moved out. Nobody knew where we were going. And instead of going east-- we went east a little bit and then we shot south and went through the Panama Canal and we wound up, eventually, down in Australia.

Wow. Down under.

Thirty some days on a boat and wound up in Australia. We were called (Task Force) 6814. We had-- there were too many people down in Melbourne down there. So we were spread around. I moved into a town from Melbourne, about thirty miles inside of Australia. We stayed in private homes. There was no place to put us. So, eventually, we wound up, getting ready to, and we were sent down to, from there, from Australia, we went to, we started to the southeast Pacific.

And there was a spot called New Caledonia, was down in, and we stopped there. We just landed there. There were supposed to be Japanese there. But they took off before we got there. So then we got thinking about it, and we got orders, we found out there were initial artillery. And we followed up the Marines. The Marines took the position landing on Guadalcanal. They made that, and we supported them. Now, our division, now, we were the 33rd Division. We followed the infantry. They made the run. And I was in an artillery battery, so we followed up the island along with the, following the infantry. And we finally took Guadalcanal, knocked the Japanese off there. And then we stayed there for a while.

cleaned up, got all of them. And then from there, we, trying to remember this stuff, the second one we landed on was-- it was bigger than Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was important, and it was big. But it was a smaller island of the group. It was called the Solomon Islands.

And we made a second run. And I can't recall what it was named. In our second run, in and knocking the island off, and then from there we rested for a while. And then the-- we were on, we got an invasion which, sure enough, we left for there, and went from there all the way by ship to New Guinea right at the top. And we spent there, only a day or so. Trucks, and cars, and boats, and everything were already getting ready. And we had a big invasion in the Philippines from there. And my group was in the big-- my group stayed on, they were over on Leyte, L-e-y-t-e.

Yes.

My group was on Leyte, and then we knocked that off. But my particular group that I was with, at Leyte, we took Leyte then. My group landed in Cebu, C-e-b- u. It was a cigar shaped island. So I landed there, and stayed there, and we knocked off Leyte and Cebu. We were taking up; in the meanwhile, our whole group was knocking the Japs off. And, well, they couldn't go anywhere. There were hundreds of them. We were knocking them off. So taking Cebu and Leyte, the big islands there, helped us take the Philippines. And from then on, it was just a matter of knocking off the Japanese who were starving, and so they kept coming in, because they were hungry.

They were surrendering, the Japanese?

Yes. And, so, there wasn't much more they could do, but come in.

Oh, when we were out there, anyway, I was in the spot where and this was the first time that MacArthur landed on the island (Leyte), and the only time anybody ever saw him. And, so, we said okay, and off and away we went.

So from there, I left the Philippines. And checking out of the Army. And from the Philippines there, from there, is when I went back, the whole trip from there, all the way down to Frisco. It was a big trip. And we wound up in Fort Sheridan. Whenever you were near somewhere, that's where you got your department discharge papers.

Yes.

That's where I went, because I lived right near Chicago. So that was it! That's all I can remember.

Well, that's a lot. Sergeant Hanson, were you injured in the war? Were you injured in the war?

I got, well, first of all, we all had malaria. We all had malaria. But, somewhere, I got some shrapnel. I can't recall where I got it, but I wound up in the hospital. And I got in that

hospital but, anyway, I can remember, at the hospital, they took the crapper all the way down to the latrine about a half a block away. So any time you had to go take a leak, you had to go all the way back down a block away and then come back, sick or what.

Sick or what, you still had to make a walk.

It was all right. And that's the only time I was really hurt.

Was that in the Philippines when you had the malaria?

Yes, you're right, yes. Can't think of what island that was.

We have a custodian at the library. His name, he's Filipino, and his name is Arthur. And he's named Arthur because of MacArthur, because his family was glad that the Americans came and liberated the island from the Japanese.

I can't remember where I got hurt.

Mr. Hanson's son-in-law: Luzon?

Luzon, was it in the Philippines that you were injured, do you think, with the shrapnel?

To tell you the truth, I can't remember.

You must have been glad to get back home, were you?

Oh, yes. It didn't bother me. I'm a senior guy, and we had a lot of fun and different things. And it never bothered me. But you come and go, and that's it. Oh, I think it was I was bad with, too much red fever, that you didn't care what the hell you were doing. It was just a hot thing whether you got kicked in the ass or anything like that. It made your fever hot.

Yes.

Eventually, I came home. I just can't think much more about it.

Did they give you-- did the Army give you any medals, decorations, and ribbons?

A Good Conduct pin. My stuff, it's in the drawer somewhere.

Do you remember where you went for basic training?

Well, you were supposed to have that. Everybody had to get it ; all had a basic kind of thing. So, I was a truck driver and one of the pictures I have is going down Michigan Avenue in Chicago and looking at the old Dodges and smiling. We drove all the way down to Tullahoma, Tennessee.

Oh.

From Chicago.

I think there is still an Air Force base or something down there now, yes.

So it's-- there's probably a lot of things missing that I haven't talked about, but that's all I can think of now.

Well, thank you very much for going back in time over sixty years ago. That's amazing. That's amazing. Staff sergeant, you came out a staff sergeant.

A staff sergeant. That's right. I was a T P, which means a driver, a truck driver. And you get a little more money for being a truck driver PFC with a T underneath. You get more money.

So you were promoted in the Philippines or--

Here.

Oh. Here before you went?

Yes.

Yes.

Well, they got everything they wanted and anybody that they needed. They had to let all the people in, sergeants, staff sergeants and all that had to be done before we went down there, because we had to do too many things without worrying about promotions or anything like that, setting up the camp at Tullahoma. I liked Tullahoma Camp.

When you came back to Chicago--

Staff sergeant.

Staff sergeant. When you came back after the war, was it hard to get used to civilian life? Did you miss being in the Army?

Not much.

As long as you were in the States for a while. You came in, you got to re-up , "You want to re-up again?" "No, give me the money and away I go." I'm done.

And eventually there, I met my girl. I was working then. I was in a bar near where I lived. And I was there with a couple of my buddies, sitting at the bar, with my hat, a baseball cap laying on the side on a bar stool, and this one gal, she poured her beer in my hat!

Wow.

That's how we got together!

Sounds like she'd got spirit!

Gig: Yes, she did. He married here. God rest her soul.

So, we dated for a while. And had four kids.

One of the questions we usually ask towards the end of the interview do you think your military service affected your life in any way?

Made it better. Sure. It taught me different things. And, also, just I didn't have to, well, eventually out of that, I got a job, and it wound up as my life work.

Was that the driving, your life work, was that driving?

No. I wound up as a manager of a department in a big company. And I eventually had twenty-thirty people and was a manager, also, of a warehouse. And I had the maintenance of that. And some of the fellows where I had to work at night to do my work and keep the-- I had to get the place good and clean during the day. So, I did during the night. And eventually I hired and fired, setting up inventory control and different things like that.

Gig, Mr. Hanson's son-in-law: You travelled around the country opening up the warehouses.

Yes. I forget how many really. The inventory I controlled was all the way from the east, New York, and all the way to Indianapolis here in the middle of the country. And at one time, we had eight or ten plants.

Wow.

But we tried to bring it down. It got so that, one plant, we could do things with inventory and so forth. We could-- one plant could take-- two or three, eventually, at that time we just could cut out that many.

So you just got better as the years went by. You didn't tell us that would. You did your job or you knew you'd get fired.

As a military man, did you find that employees with the military training were good employees, generally speaking?

Not always.

Not always?

Not always. It made no difference. The fellow that wants the job and wanted to do a good job - stuck around.

After the war, did you stay in touch with some of your buddies from the war, or were there reunions that you were able to go to?

If they were in area, okay.

And you hired or didn't hire. And there aren't too many that I got chummy with.

As we come to the end of the interview, is there any experience that comes to mind that was particularly memorable, or made a deep impression, or was very humorous, or tragic?

I'm sure there are, but, right at the present, I can't think of any. I would like to think of some, but I can't think of any.

Oh, I generally was very happy when I could make myself and somebody happy by giving him a better job. You're the guy for the job, and you go up. And that's what I liked, not only pay, pay was never in my mind, the guy does the job.

Yes.

You do the job, okay, eventually, well, he gets money. The women are-- not too much. They generally were doing a standard job. The fellows just fell in the way of doing things. The better they make it, well, they not only have a better part of their job, but they make more money. If they didn't make it, they're fired.

Simple as that. Yes.

I was pretty and, well, what the hell, I was, most of my life, I was a manager, for twenty-five years, most of the time, so there we have it, at least twenty-five years, part of Irbe's life.

Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Hanson.

And then I just decided that one day this is enough. Twenty-five years, and that was it. Irbe was through with it.

Yes.

No more. Right?

Gig, Mr. Hanson's son-in-law: That's right, pa. 1974.

1974, Mr. Hanson retired.

Mr. Hanson's son-in-law: Yes.

Yes.

Gig: He donated a lot of his time to, as he called them, the old people. And to retarded kids and to Lamb's Farm. He always gave all the time.

Wow. Yes.

Never took a dime for anything. That was his job for all of those years after he retired.

I don't think there are too many people that would ever say that they don't think they got a good shake from me. If they didn't think they got a good shake, I wish they would come to see me about it instead of opening their mouths to somebody else.

It's wonderful to be able to say that, to look back and say, you know.

Gig: The company he worked for twenty-five years he hired a stock handler so then he could go to school. He ended up being a CEO for the company he worked for, eventually.

You could pick them! You could pick them!

Gig: He helped a lot of people move up the company. Merrill was one of them. He ended up being a CEO.

Yes. And the military background was valuable.

Gig: Organized to the max.

Organizer to the max, yes.

Well, if you think of any more incidents or any more--anything you want to add, we can do that, you know, we can.

Okay.

We can take a statement and just put it at the end of the interview. Yes.

Yes. There's nothing much.

Gig: I'll think of something else.

Oh, I'm sure. That's happened with other interviews.

Yes, that's quite a nice calendar, if I do say so. Niles gift of Loc v

I would say I had better times here than not. I only can think of several times where our lookout men fell asleep or something like that. But other than that, never had anything to worry about at night. Whoever was on guard did their job. Most everybody figured when they do it, they'd better do it right, otherwise you're dead!

I never-- I don't know of anybody that did anything on purpose. See, every situation is-- Guadalcanal was the first. Guadalcanal was the first bad (situation) killing people and so forth that any of us had ever experienced. And, so, from after Guadalcanal from then, all you did know how to take care of yourself, what you want to do, or you saw some fellow doing his job, but from then on nobody--

We had fellows, when we got to one river for the first time; the fellows were hungry enough that they jumped in the river. They were trying to catch fish with their shirts, things like that.

So, everything went along well, as far as my life went.

There were times I got tested. One of the tests made me sweat! I was checking underneath my truck and the gear box was inside under below. I got under the truck to check it over, and I turned over my head, and there's a damn snake! Looked up, "Oh, oh, boy,!" Did I make a torn shirt that quick, just wheeling out of there, just tensed myself to take off! I hoped, and I did! The snake went one way and I went the other way! But there's the closest I've ever come to a snake.

You don't forget that.

The photographs, probably all this stuff, photos are by your place. (Gig's) And when I was taking my groups learning how to use their six gear on the trucks, getting on high, using all of the wheels, learning how to use it before you get in trouble--

So, that's Irbe in a nutshell!

Thank you very much, Sergeant Hanson. Thank you.

Gig: Good job, Pa!

Yes.

You got machines; you'd better know how to use them!

You said it!

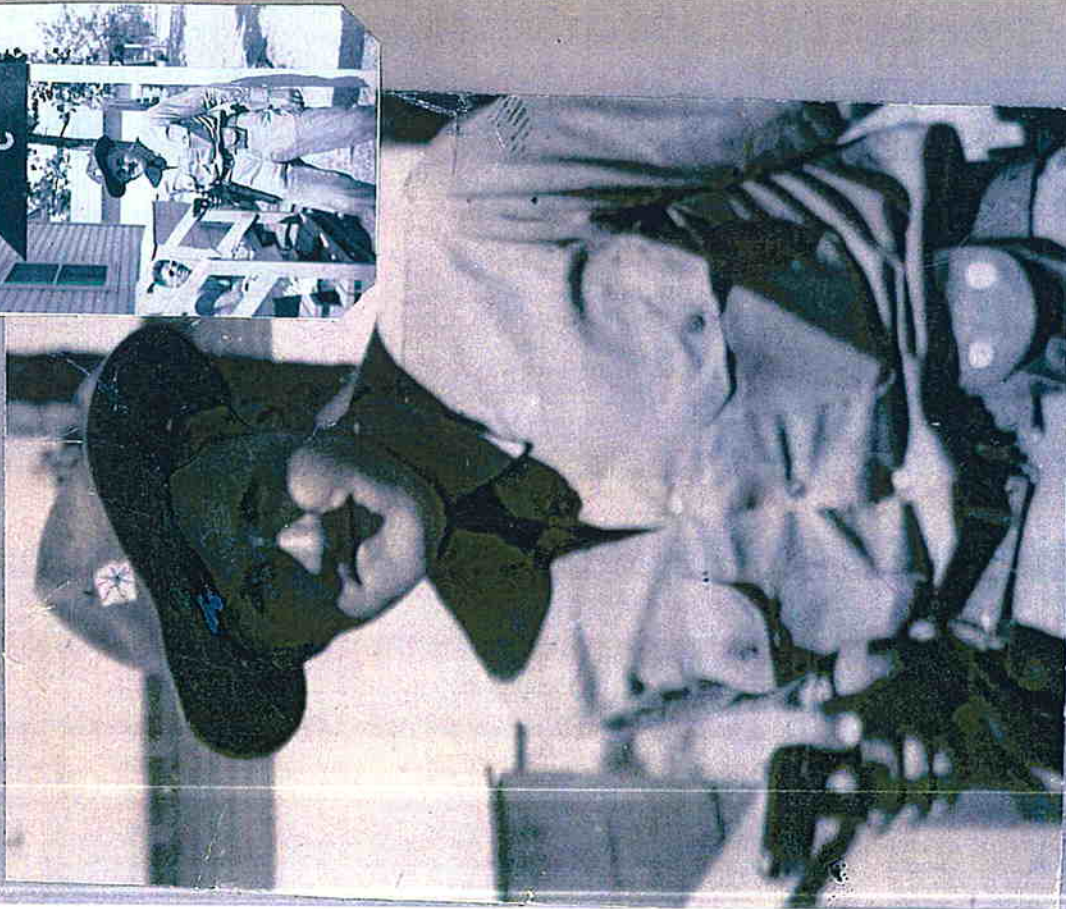
Reader's Note:

Mr. Hanson passed away in late June, 2008. The Chicago Sun-Times carried his obituary at <http://www.legacy.com/chicagosuntimes/DeathNotices.asp?Page=LifeStory&PersonID=1123303>
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The Americal Division History, published in 1971, can be read at the Americal Division Veterans Association web page at <http://www.americal.org/ambook.shtml>.

Four wartime photographs provided by Mr. Hanson's family as well as a map of Cebu and a page showing Mr. Hanson's military badges can be found in the following pages.

1941



THE MAN
WITH A GUN.

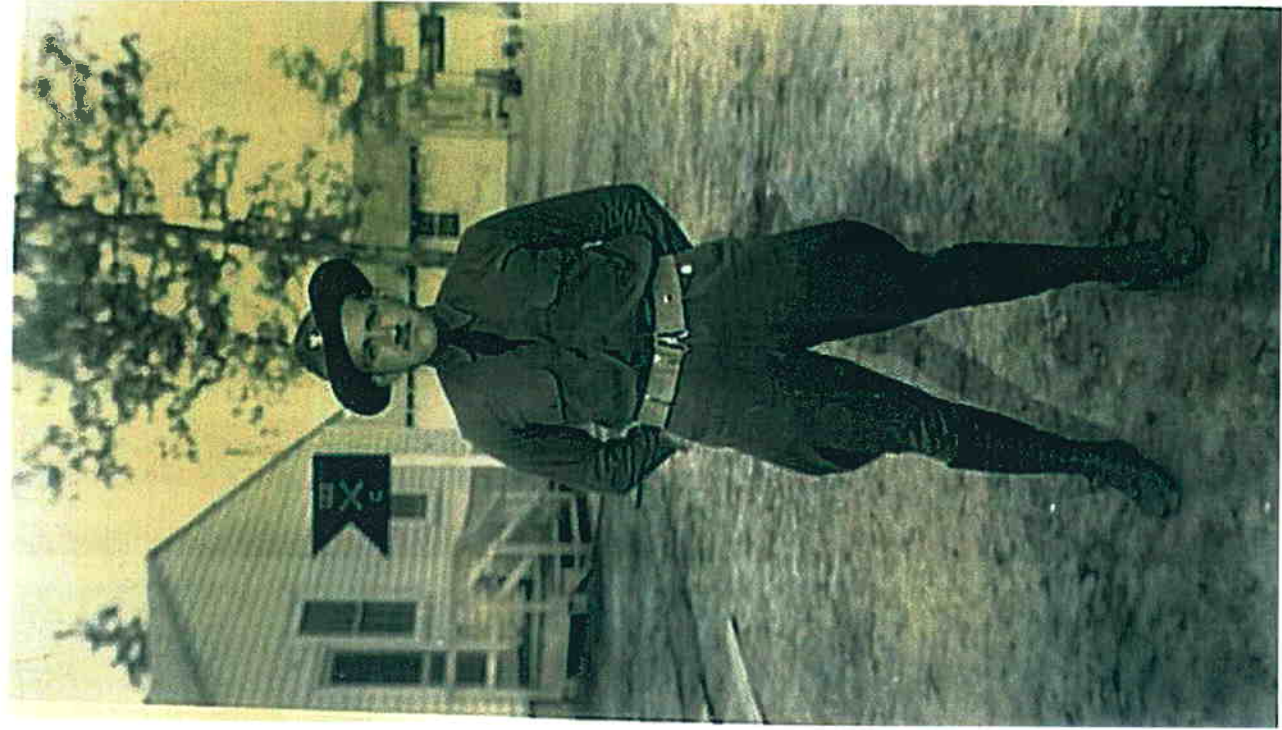
1941

“The Man with a Gun”



Sergeant Hanson in the Philippines.

The Sergeant



“a Man of Many Faces”

**Badges of military units mentioned by
Sergeant Hanson during interview**



**Illinois National Guard
122nd Field Artillery Unit**

Badge of Sgt. Hanson's original National
Guard unit.



33rd Division Patch

"the Golden Cross"

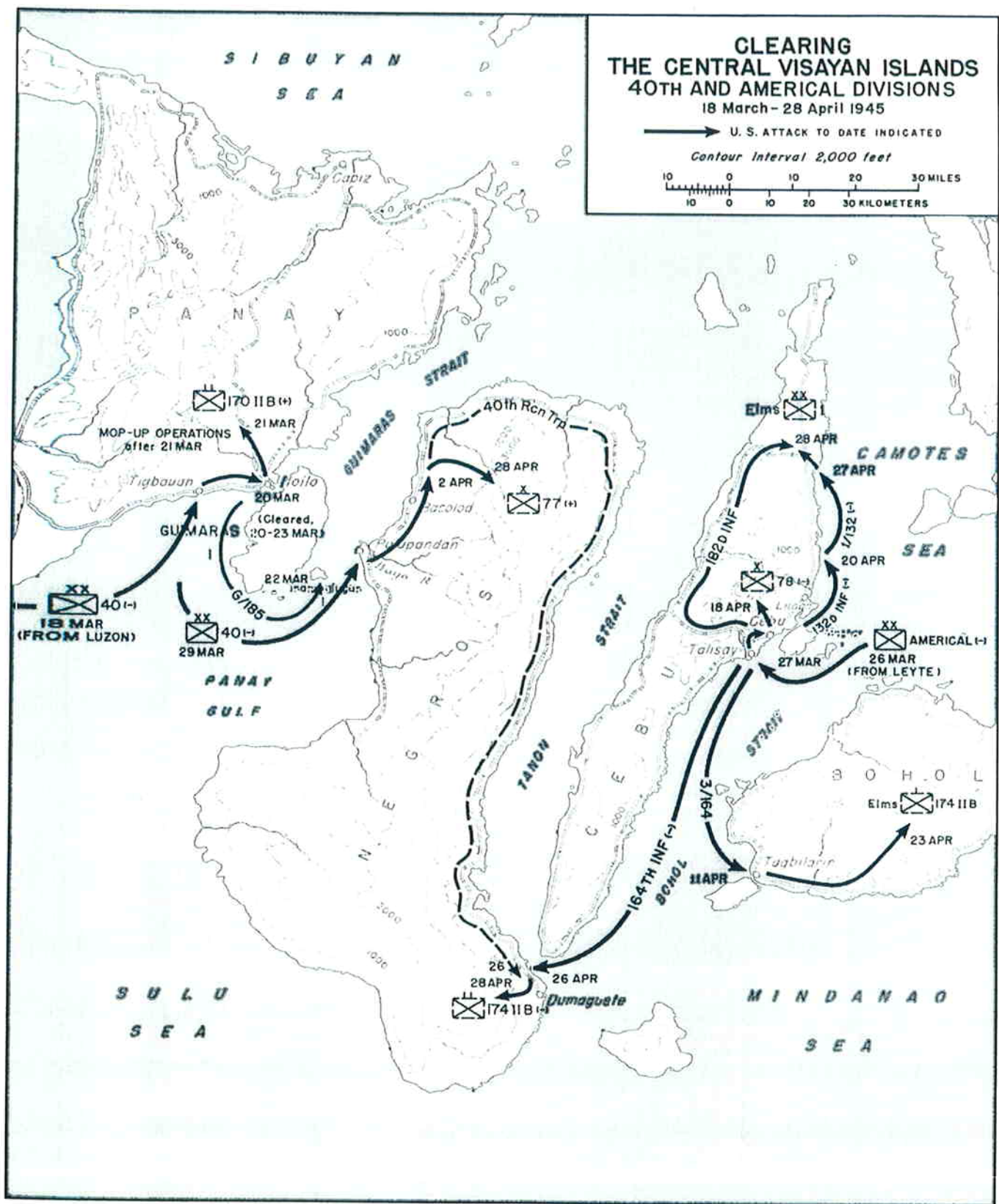


**Americal Division,
stood for "Americans in Caledonia"
formed from Task Force 6814**

"Under the Southern Cross"

Sergeant Hanson served in the Americal Division and spoke of the Cebu military operation in the Philippines.

Map below appears on Army history site at ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-P-Triumph/index.html where Robert Ross Smith's *Triumph in the Philippines* can be read.



Monument at Leyete commemorating General MacArthur's return to the Philippines

