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The Battle of Leyte

An NCO's Analysis

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Sergeants Major Course, Class 75

NCOs' Strategic Role in Battle

The Battle of Leyte marked a pivotal moment in World War II for operational art and the integration of multi-domain forces in the Allied mission to liberate the Philippines. The battle reveals NCOs' indispensable and strategic role in managing warfare's complexities.

Former Secretary of State and retired Gen. Colin Powell once wrote, "Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them" (Powell, 1995, p. 109).

During the Battle of Leyte, NCOs exemplified Powell's words by adapting to unfamiliar terrain,

managing logistics, and maintaining operational continuity in real time through their active involvement in planning and decision-making.

They were the problem-solvers.

Their actions in battle align directly with the Goldwater-Nichols Act's objectives (introduced more than 40 years later), which aim to enhance joint operations and inter-service cohesion.

NCOs as Problem Solvers on the Front Line

Powell's observation that "great leaders are almost always great simplifiers" (Powell, 1995, p. 120) highlights the clarity and decisiveness needed in high-stakes situations.

At Leyte, NCOs embodied these principles by addressing complex challenges, from navigating the treacherous terrains of Kilay Ridge to coordinating critical resupply efforts under fire.

With limited infrastructure and rugged terrain, NCOs implemented creative logistics solutions to sustain operations and maintain combat effectiveness (such as using Navy landing craft and airdrops). Their adaptability in the face of adversity is a testament to their resilience and resourcefulness.

Today, NCOs are indispensable in operational problem-solving, particularly in the face of emerging threats. They demonstrate remarkable adaptability, adjusting strategies to effectively counter these

threats and serve as the crucial link between tactical execution and strategic objectives.

As Gen. Omar Bradley, 17th Chief of Staff of the Army, aptly put it, "Amateurs talk strategy. Professionals talk logistics" (Bradley, 1983, p. 201). NCOs often resolve unforeseen issues on the ground and ensure the right equipment for every operation's success.

Real-World Application

The Battle of Leyte offers enduring lessons for modern warfare, particularly in applying operational art, multi-domain integration, and NCO strategic influence in joint operations. I suggest that any NCO looking to become more relevant in planning study this battle thoroughly.

The coordination across land, air, and sea during Leyte aligns with today's Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) doctrines, which emphasize synchronized operations efforts — bridging tactical execution and strategic objectives with adaptability and foresight. Powell noted, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure" (Powell, 1995, p. 56).

In an era where threats extend beyond physical terrain to encompass cyber and space, NCOs are increasingly essential in adapting operational tactics to encompass emerging domains.

Modern conflict scenarios require a holistic approach to warfare that leverages NCOs' unique



Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, hone their skills in counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) training at McGregor Range, New Mexico, March 1, 2025. Today, NCOs are indispensable in operational problem-solving, particularly in the face of emerging threats. They are adaptable, adjust strategies to counter threats, and serve as the link between tactical execution and strategic objectives. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Maximilian Weaver)

expertise. The principles of joint force coordination and adaptability that guided Allied forces at Leyte continue to inform current military doctrine and highlight the importance of empowering NCOs in leadership and decision-making roles.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the lessons of Leyte, where NCOs were integral at every level, from logistical planning to frontline combat, reinforces Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's belief that "leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it" (Eisenhower, 1967, p. 34). Let us not forget the past. Instead, let us continue to study and learn from it.

The Battle of Leyte exemplifies the critical principles of operational art and design, including operational reach, centers of gravity, and joint force integration. These principles enabled Allied forces to overcome immense obstacles and achieve strategic objectives, setting a historical precedent that holds practical relevance for modern military operations.

Leyte's successful coordination across domains,



With limited infrastructure and rugged terrain at Leyte, NCOs implemented creative logistics solutions, such as using Navy landing craft and airdrops, to sustain operations and maintain combat effectiveness. Their adaptability in the face of adversity is a testament to their resilience and resourcefulness. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Archie Stone/National Archives)

led by strong and adaptable NCOs, emphasizes their indispensable role in the decision-making process and in battlefield execution. ■

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