



February 2022

Vol. 35, No. 1

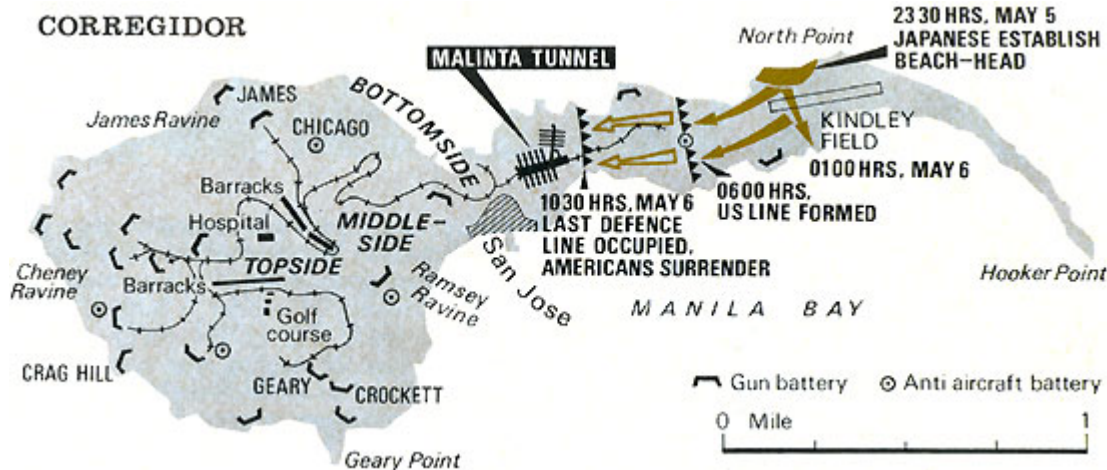
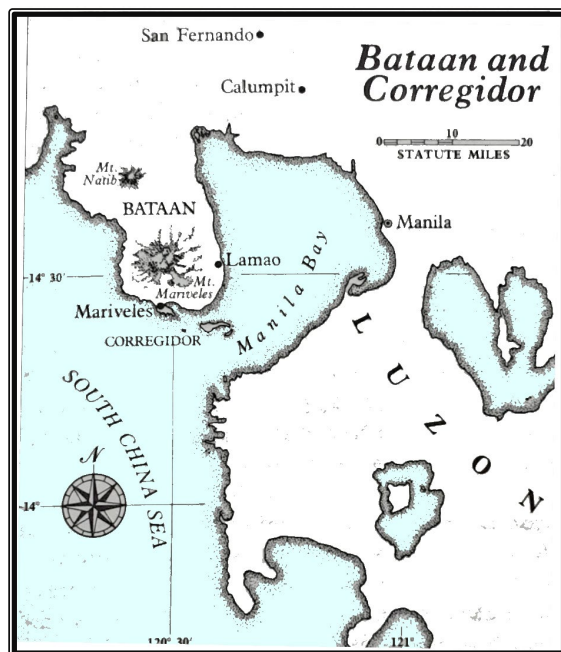
THE JUMP ON THE ROCK

By LTC (USA Ret) Donald A. Simpson

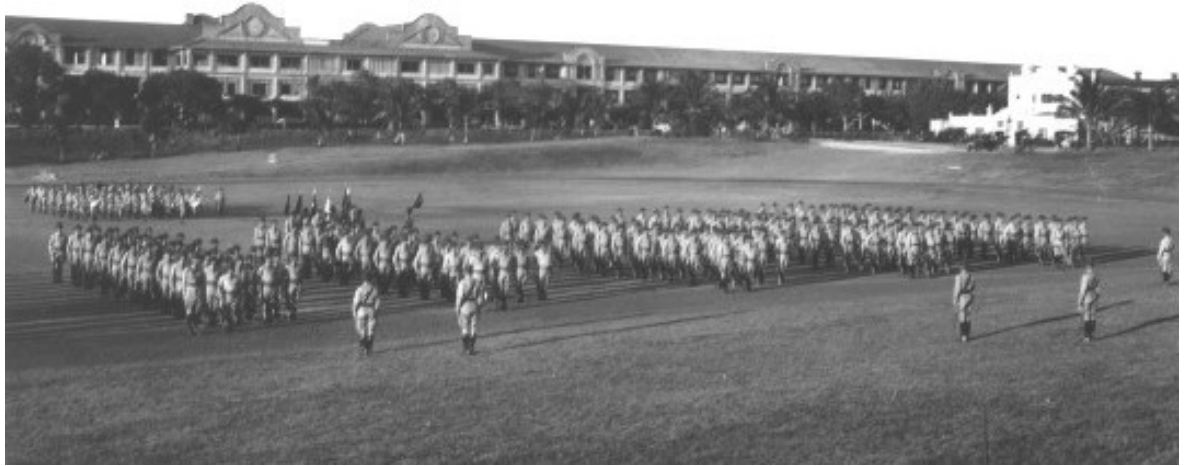
Seventy-seven years ago, on 16 February 1945, the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) conducted one of the most treacherous and unique parachute operations in our Army's history. They jumped to seize the island of Corregidor in the Philippines from the Japanese.

Corregidor is the largest of four volcanic islands at the entrance to Manila Bay. It was seized from Spain in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. Over the next forty-four years, the US Army used it as an artillery bastion to protect Manila Bay.

In the early months of World War II, General Douglas MacArthur used Corregidor as his headquarters during the ill-fated defense of the Philippines. On 12 March 1942, under orders from President Roosevelt, he departed from South Dock by PT boat for Australia to organize defenses there and prepare for future operations. On 6 May 1942, Lieutenant General Jonathon Wainwright surrendered the island and its defenders to the Japanese.



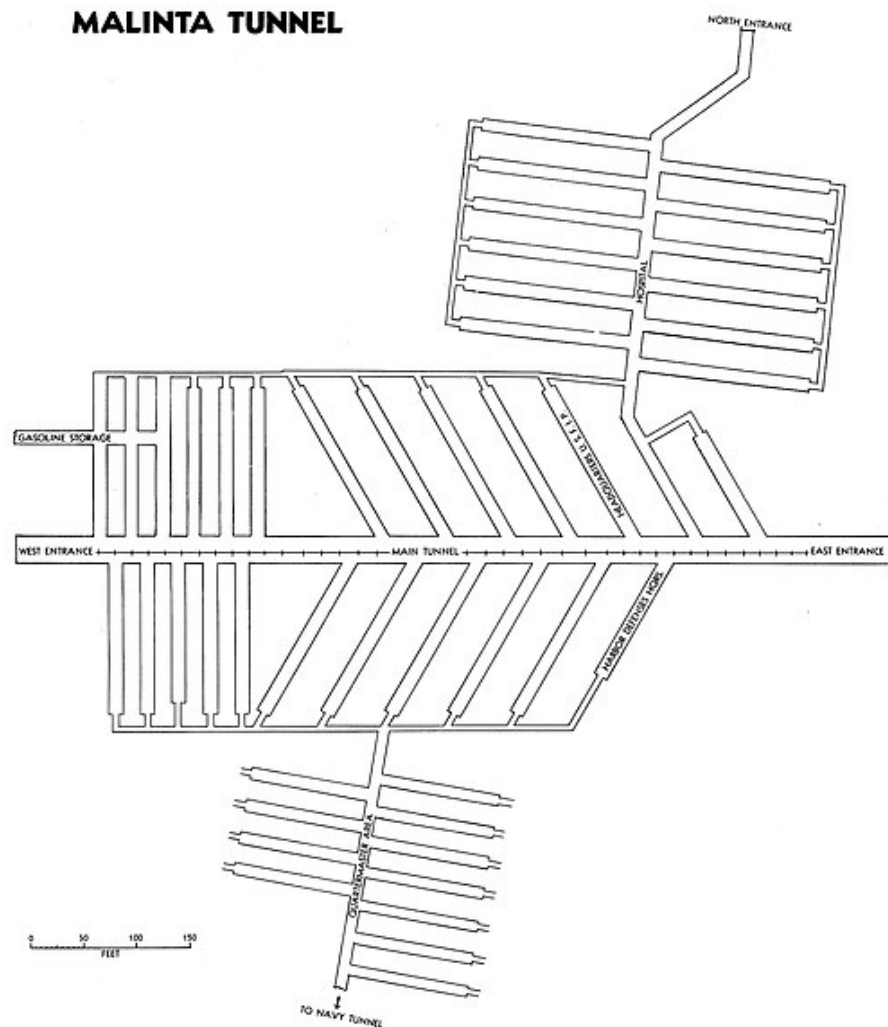
Corregidor is a tadpole shaped island, 3.5 miles long and 1.5 miles wide at the widest point. The island runs generally west to east. The western most portion - the head of the tadpole, known as Topside - is a 550-foot circular plateau. The main troop living and support facilities were located here. A large parade ground was flanked on its north side by a 1500-foot-long barracks, known by soldiers as “Mile-Long” Barracks. On the south side were officers’ quarters. Further south was a nine-hole golf course. Topside was ringed by coast artillery positions. There are three ravines that provide access to Topside from the beaches below: James Ravine on the north side, Ramsey Ravine on the east side and Cheney Ravine on the west side.



Evening formation in front of the “Mile Long” Barracks, Topside, Corregidor, 1939.
 Courtesy MacArthur Memorial, Colonel William Alfonte Collection.

To the east of Topside is an intermediate level known as Middleside, which contained additional family quarters, troop barracks, recreation and support facilities. Below Middleside was a beach area 600 yards long by 300 yards wide known as Bottomside. On the south side was Black Beach. Boat docks were located on both the north and south sides.

East of Bottomside is the 396-foot Malinta Hill. A thirty-foot-wide tunnel ran for 1,400 feet through the base. There were twenty-five lateral tunnels that connected to the main tunnel. The complex included a hospital, living quarters, and storage facilities. General MacArthur and later, General Wainwright, used the tunnel complex as their headquarters.





General MacArthur and Lieutenant General Richard K. Sutherland in Malinta Tunnel, Corregidor, March 1942. U.S. Army Photo - Courtesy National Archives.

East of Malinta Hill is the tail of the tadpole, a long 200-foot ridgeline. Key facilities were a 2,400-foot airstrip known as Kindley Field and a radio intercept station under Monkey Point. It was from this facility that coded Japanese messages were intercepted and forwarded to Pearl Harbor early in the war.

General MacArthur's forces returned to the Philippines at Leyte Gulf on 20 October 1944, and to the island of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf north of Manila in January 1945. By February, the 11th Airborne Division, 37th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division were on the outskirts of Manila. The next phase was the opening of Manila Harbor and that required seizing Corregidor to eliminate the threat to Allied shipping.

The 503rd PIR was located on Mindoro Island south of Luzon, having participated in ground combat on Leyte and Mindoro. Previously, the regiment made two combat jumps at Nadzab Airdrome and Noemfoor Island during the New Guinea campaign. The commander was Colonel George M. Jones, a 1935 graduate of West Point.

On 6 February 1945, Colonel Jones was alerted by Sixth US Army to prepare for a parachute assault on Corregidor. He was to command Rock Force that was to consist of his regiment and the 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. The plan called for the 503rd to parachute on to Topside and for the 3/34th Infantry to land at Black Beach on Bottomside. Airlift support was to be provided by the 317th Troop Carrier Group. D-Day was set for 16 February 1945.

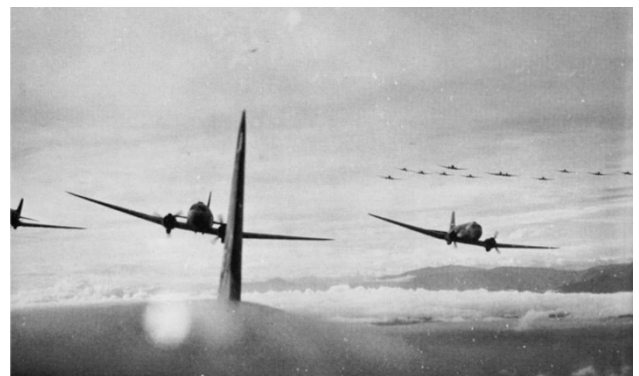
A Douglas C-47 Skytrain 79-ship formation, led by the 317th Troop Carrier Group. Courtesy <https://www.dyess.af.mil>.

Japanese strength on Corregidor was estimated at 850. This number was grossly underestimated and was based on information from four American POWs who had escaped from an adjacent island in August 1944. However, after the American landings on Leyte, the Japanese commander in Manila, Rear Admiral Sanji Iwabuchi, reinforced the island with additional coast and anti-aircraft artillery batteries and three Imperial Marine Construction units, approximately 5,000 additional men.

On 7 February, Colonel Jones conducted an aerial reconnaissance. He was concerned that the two tentative drop zones (DZs) - the parade ground and the golf course - were heavily cratered and littered with jagged chunks of concrete, broken trees and other debris. Another concern was the prevailing winds were normally in the fifteen to twenty knot range. Use of both drop zones would undoubtedly result in a large percentage of jump casualties. After the flight, he recommended that the jump be conducted at Kindley Field on the spiny tail rather than on Topside. This recommendation was disapproved by Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, the Sixth Army commander, who felt Topside had to be taken by surprise and secured at the outset to prevent the Japanese from placing fire on the landing at Black Beach.

Based on this decision, the parade ground was designated as "Drop Zone A" and the golf course as "Drop Zone B". Both were extremely small, the parade ground being 325 yards long by 250 yards wide and the golf course being 350 yards long and 185 yards wide. Adjacent to each drop zone were deep ravines and cliffs, rubble and destroyed buildings. There would be very little margin for error in getting the paratroopers on to the DZs.

Colonel Jones' plan was to have the C-47 transports fly from southwest to northeast at twenty-five second intervals into the prevailing wind. Only eight paratroopers from each plane would be dropped in each pass. Planes would circle around for additional passes until all jumpers were dropped.



3rd Battalion/503rd, A Battery and one platoon of D Battery, 462nd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and 3rd Platoon, 161st Airborne Engineer Company would drop at 0830 on D-Day. 2nd Bn/503rd, B Battery and one platoon of D Battery, 462nd Parachute FA Battalion would drop at 1215 on D-Day. 1st Battalion, 503rd, C Battery and one platoon from D Battery, 462nd would drop at 0830, D+1. Regimental headquarters and support personnel were to be divided between the first two lifts.

Aerial bombardment began on 23 January by B-24 Liberators and A-20 Attack Bombers. Naval bombardment from four cruisers and seven destroyers began on 13 February. Over 3,128 tons of bombs were dropped, the most on any target in the Pacific Theater during the war. The result was much of the wire communications were cut, affecting the ability of the Japanese to coordinate their defense.

At 0700 on 16 February, fifty-one C-47s carrying the 3rd Battalion Combat Team began taking off from San Jose and Hill airstrips on Mindoro. The first aircraft was flown by the 317th Group commander, LTC John H. Lackey, with Colonel Jones also in the cockpit. They would observe the initial jump and make the necessary adjustments. The green lights were to go on when each aircraft hit land fall. Each jumpmaster was to wait four counts before exiting. This was determined to be the best way to get the jumpers onto the drop zone.



The effects of the 5th Air Force's bombing campaign in preparation for the retaking of Corregidor.
United States Air Force Photo - Courtesy Major Frederick German Collection.

At 0835, just five minutes behind schedule, LTC John Erickson, commander of 3/503rd, jumped at 600 feet from the lead aircraft with seven other jumpers. The last man in the stick barely reached the parade ground DZ. LTC Erickson landed to the southwest near Battery Wheeler and the others were spread out between him and the parade ground. Colonel Jones immediately determined that the northwest wind was blowing harder than expected and adjusted by ordering the remaining aircraft to drop to 400 feet and for the jumpmasters to count to eight before exiting. This adjustment resulted in more jumpers hitting the drop zones.

3/503rd troopers went into action to clear the drop zone for the follow-on jump of the 2/503rd. One of the facilities captured and destroyed was the communications center located in the old telephone exchange. Wire lines from all the defensive positions fed into this center and its capture and destruction further disrupted the ability of the Japanese to coordinate their defense.

The initial Japanese reaction was light. The commander, Imperial Navy Captain Akari Itagaki, did not expect a parachute assault, although he had been warned by his superiors to be prepared for one. He and members of his staff were in an observation post near Breakwater Point on the southeast side of Topside observing the landing craft carrying the 3/34th from Mariveles on the south end of the Bataan Peninsula to Corregidor. Thirty paratroopers from I Company, 3/503rd were dropped near there and engaged and killed Captain Itagaki and seven others. Now the enemy was leaderless and without communications. Their subsequent response was piecemeal and disjointed, although very fierce at times.



Paratroopers of the 503rd PRCT descend on Corregidor, 16 February 1945. Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

At 1030, the first wave of landing craft carrying the 3/34th Infantry hit Black Beach. Japanese resistance was light. K and L Companies immediately moved to the top of Malinta Hill and secured it. Subsequently, K Company on the north side came under vigorous attack throughout the night of 16-17 February. On D+1, I Company & the attached A Company secured the entrances to the Malinta Tunnel and the remainder of Bottomside.

At 1240, 2/503rd jumped on Topside under increased enemy anti-aircraft fire. The Japanese had recovered from the initial surprise of the 3/503rd jump and were better prepared. With two battalions on the ground, Colonel Jones directed that 3/503rd clear the northern half of Topside, 2/503rd to clear the southern half and link up with 3/34th as they expanded their beachhead.

By the end of D-Day, Colonel Jones had 2,050 paratroopers on the ground, 280 were casualties, 210 of these from the jump. The two battalions formed a perimeter defense for the night. The only serious supply problem was lack of water. Most troopers had drunk their two canteens and would have to wait until the next day for resupply.



Above: LSM-52 and LSM-38 put men and supplies ashore on Corregidor's south coast.

U.S. Army Signal Corps Photo - Courtesy Major Frederick German collection.

Right: Topside, Corregidor Island, is seen with the parachutes of the 503rd Parachute Infantry strewn all over, February 1945.

U.S. Army Photo - Courtesy National Archives.



Colonel Jones did not want to risk more jump casualties. Instead of having 1/503rd jump on D+1 he directed that they come into Black Beach by landing craft. The following morning, 1st Battalion flew over Topside and dropped their supply bundles, then landed at Subic Bay on the Bataan Peninsula where they loaded on to landing craft. They attempted their first landing on Black Beach at 1500; however, the coxswains of the landing craft backed away after five soldiers and one sailor were killed by enemy fire. Not until 1900 were they finally able to land. The battalion formed a perimeter for the night on Bottomside and moved up to Topside the next morning.

On the 17th, both 2/503rd and 3/503rd continued to clear out enemy resistance on Topside and expand their perimeter. 3/503rd attacked north to seize Morrison Hill. Much of the enemy were located in underground bunkers, tunnels, and caves and had to be dug out with grenades, demolitions and direct fire from the 75mm Pack Howitzers of the 462nd Parachute Field Artillery Bn and by naval gunfire. 3/34th Infantry linked up with the forces on Topside, thus opening the road from Bottomside and allowing supplies to be brought in by landing craft.

The next morning, 18 February, 1/503rd moved to Topside. With three battalions available, Colonel Jones adjusted areas of responsibility. Emphasis was on clearing the enemy from the ravines and digging them out of caves and bunker positions. 3/34th Infantry continued to clear the areas around Malinta Hill.

At 0600 on the morning of 19 February, 600 Japanese under Lieutenant Endo, now the senior enemy officer, conducted a determined banzai attack from Cheney Ravine against elements of 2nd Battalion. For two and a half hours, the fighting was fierce. By 0830, the attack was spent and over 400 Japanese were either killed or wounded. The survivors disappeared into caves and bunkers. Fifty-five paratroopers died and seventy-five were wounded. The Pack-75s fired at maximum rates of fire and naval vessels offshore fired illumination flares over the battle area.

At 2330, the night of 23 February, a huge explosion occurred inside the Malinta Tunnel complex. 2,000 Japanese were attempting to blast open the entrance that had been closed by a landslide caused by the pre-invasion bombardment. The blast was to be followed by a banzai charge against the 3/34th infantry, however, the blast set off ammunition stores and killed all but 600 of the enemy. These 600 were cut down as they staggered from the tunnel.

On 24 February, the 1/503rd launched an attack to clear the eastern tail of the island. Japanese tactics were to execute banzai charges or use demolitions as a form of suicide in tunnel and underground complexes. The most horrendous act occurred in the Radio Intercept Tunnel under Monkey Point. At 1105, 26 February, an explosion lifted the top off the ridge above the tunnel and created a crater 170 feet long, 70 feet wide and 30 feet deep. Fifty-four paratroopers were killed, 145 were wounded. 150 Japanese died. Because of these excessive casualties the 1/503rd was withdrawn and replaced by 3/503rd.



Monkey Point after the explosion in the Radio Intercept Tunnel. Courtesy thedropzone.org.



Men of the 34th Infantry Regiment during the battle to retake the “Rock.”
U.S. Army Signal Corps Photo - Courtesy MacArthur Estate.



Recapture of Corregidor, 16-28 February 1945. Courtesy U.S. Army.

On 25 February, 3/34 Infantry was replaced by 2nd Battalion, 151st Infantry, 38th Infantry Division. 3/34th was returned to its parent unit to participate in operations on the island of Mindanao. While part of Rock Force, they lost forty-three killed and 163 wounded. They accounted for 800 enemy dead.

On the 27th, 3/503rd reached Hooker Point, the eastern tip of the island. At this point, Rock Force went into the mop-up phase. Japanese continued to resist in small groups, but many were now attempting to swim to the Bataan Peninsula. Colonel Jones ordered his units to retrace their steps and continue to check for isolated enemy in caves and bunkers.

On 2 March, General MacArthur visited Corregidor. He returned as he had left three years before, by PT Boat, landing at North Dock. He toured the island by jeep and entered the Malinta Tunnel complex that had been his headquarters in early 1942. At a formation on Topside, he addressed the assembled troopers. As he completed his remarks, he turned to Colonel Jones and commented, "I see the old flagpole still stands. Have your troops hoist the colors to her peak and let no enemy ever haul them down."

On 8 March, the 503rd returned to Mindoro. The 2/151st remained as a garrison force on Corregidor. During the operation, the 503rd lost 165 troopers killed and 615 wounded or injured. Attached units lost forty-five killed, 175 wounded and five missing. Documents captured from the Japanese after the war indicated that 6,700 Japanese died on Corregidor.

SOURCES

Belote, James H. & William M. Corregidor: Saga of a Fortress. New York: Harpers & Row, 1967.

Devlin, Gerard M. Back to Corregidor. New York: St. Martin Press, 1992.

Flanagan, Edward M. Corregidor: The Rock Force, 1945. Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988.



503rd Paratrooper fires a "bazooka" during the battle to retake the "Rock," Corregidor, February 1945.
U.S. Army Photo - Courtesy National Archives.



General MacArthur walks with Colonel George M. Jones, 503rd Parachute Infantry, Corregidor, March 2, 1945.
U.S. Army Signal Corps Photo - Courtesy Major Frederick German Collection.



General MacArthur and his commanders, and assault force members salute as the colors are again raised over Corregidor, 2 March 1945.
U.S. Army Signal Corps Photo - Courtesy Major Frederick German Collection.

**The Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum
Board of Directors**

COL (Ret.) Marisa Peloquin, USAR.....President
 LTC (USA Ret.) Thomas D. Morgan.....Vice President
 COL Edward Wood, USARSecretary
 LTC (USA Ret.) Donald A. Simpson.....Treasurer
 COL (USA Ret.) Rodney G. Thomas.....Member
 Joseph Koczur, Jr.....Member
 COL (USA Ret.) Ian W. Larson.....Member
 COL (USA Ret.) Paul KnoopMember
 Dawn Dailey.....Member
 Karolyn A. Bredberg.....Member

The *Banner* is printed four times a year and is mailed to all members of The Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum. Articles may be submitted to the Editor or left with the Director of the Lewis Army Museum. The Friends assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or other materials submitted for publication. Contents copyrighted by The Friends, contact the Editor for permission to reproduce any portion.

Editor.....Karolyn A. Bredberg
 Assistant Editors.....Heidi Pierson
 LTC (Ret.) Donald A. Simpson
 COL (Ret.) Paul Knoop



Crews inspect anti-aircraft artillery damage to the left wing of a Douglas C-47 Skytrain "Jungle Skipper" after returning from an airdrop in Corregidor Island, Philippines. Despite the heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire, the disciplined Airmen of the 317th Troop Carrier Group recorded a 95 percent effectiveness rate getting paratroopers and their bundles onto their assigned drop zone. Courtesy <https://www.dyess.af.mil>.

Visit the Friends web site for more
information and purchases from the
Cannon Shop.

<http://fortlewismuseum.com>

Why be a Friend of Lewis Army Museum

If you value our military heritage and think it is important to preserve the history of Fort Lewis and the units that served here, then you should be a ***Friend*** of Lewis Army Museum. If you have been a ***Friend*** of the Fort Lewis Military Museum in the past, please consider renewing that association. If you are a current ***Friend***, please consider referring a friend or neighbor for a membership.

**Friends of the Fort Lewis
Military Museum
PO Box 331001
JBLM, WA 98433-1001**

2022 Friends—Membership Fees

Annual:

Single	\$ 10
Family	\$ 15
Sustaining	\$ 25

Life:

Life	\$100
Gold Life	\$500

**Download form at www.fortlewismuseum.com
at Membership link.**