



THE STEADFAST LINE

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In November 1941, the 27th Bombardment Group left the West Coast aboard the USS Coolidge, bound for the Philippines to deter Imperial Japanese military aggression in the Far East. These pilots, aircraft maintenance and support personnel arrived at Manila Bay on Thanksgiving Day. As they began settling into their new Pacific home, they eagerly awaited the arrival of their remaining A-24 Dive Bomber fleet. None of them expected that only 18 days later, Pearl Harbor would

be attacked, plunging the United States into war. In the days following Pearl Harbor, Imperial Japanese Forces assaulted U.S. positions across the Pacific, including the Philippines.



With the few U.S. aircraft on-island mostly destroyed, and the remaining A-24 Dive Bombers diverted to Australia, the airmen of the 27th Bomb Group found themselves stranded in the Philippines without aircraft to support.

What do Airmen do when they have no aircraft to fly, fight, and win? They hold the line.

For the first time in Army Air Corps history, Airmen were converted to infantry, transforming the 27th Bomb Group into the 1st Provisional Air Corps Regiment (Infantry), or PACR.

This new ground infantry formation comprised of Airmen whose jobs were no longer germane to the military situation. These men became legacy pathfinders -- the first generation of multi-capable Airmen, improvising and overcoming unprecedented battlefield challenges. They salvaged machine guns and cannons from crippled aircraft to fortify American fighting positions and vehicles with heavy weaponry.





Although they lacked formal infantry training, they quickly adapted, training alongside advisors to learn field craft in real time. They became a staunch fighting force while under fire. Some men in the PACR used previous infantry or other specialty experience to help train and fight alongside their comrades. Two battalions of maintenance, ordnance, intelligence, ground staff, and aircrew Airmen were all required to become infantrymen in the five-month defense of the Bataan Peninsula. They bravely held the left flank of the US Army's III Corps, even escaping encirclement in the final battles, earning them the moniker "The Steadfast Line."

Their contributions to the greater war effort are described by Adrian Martin and Larry Stephenson in "Operations Plum":

"Despite their shortcomings, the tenacious defenders of Bataan and Corregidor were able to significantly disrupt the timetable the Japanese had set for their conquest of the island nations for the Western Pacific. The Philippines campaign, originally scheduled to be completed in 50 days, took 5 months. Approximately 192,000 Japanese army and navy personnel had to be deployed, a number far in excess of the original strength allotment. We know now, with hindsight, that these early defensive actions fought so fiercely by the United States and its Allies in the Philippines bought valuable time for America to "gear up" for war, thereby contributing to the Allied victory. If these early Japanese campaigns had gone unchecked, the Allied offensive phase likely would have begun in Hawaii or California instead of New Guinea and Guadalcanal."



The 27th Bombardment Group is the gold standard. They set the example. While their service members faced disease, starvation, and constant attack from the air, land, and sea, they continued fighting until they were surrendered. In April 1942, the PACR conducted a three-day fighting retreat, breaking through an impending enemy infantry, armor, and air force encirclement. After surrender, enemy forces put the men on a forced death march through the Bataan Peninsula, torturing, starving, beating, humiliating, and executing them along the way to concentration camps. A reported 40-50 Americans and 100 Filipinos died a day in the concentration camps.



Holding the Line

The 27th Special Operations Wing honors the pathfinding legacy of the 27th Bombardment Group and promises to hold the line in the future of unprecedented challenges. Cannon's Air Commandos stand ready to deploy globally to hotspots in support of combat, humanitarian, evacuation, and steady-state peacekeeping operations.

The MH-53s of Cannon's 20th SOS were some of the first aircraft to support rescue and relief efforts following 9/11, arriving to Ground Zero on September 12. Air Commandos were at the tip of the spear in Afghanistan, enabling precision strike, specialized air mobility, ISR, and other critical functions.



During Operation NEW DAWN in 2011, Senior Airman Justin Woolie, an Electrical and Environmental Systems Journeyman with the 27th Special Operations Maintenance Squadron, led maintenance actions that enabled the first MC-130W Dragon Spear to successfully fire munitions in combat and record the first enemy killed in action from that aircraft – he held the line.



In 2021, Air Commandos from the 27th Special Operations Communications Squadron were the first to conduct near real-time cyber-integrated threat analysis and deterrence onboard an MC-130J, greatly increasing our aircraft's communication capabilities in contested operating environments. They held the line.

The PACR's demonstration during WWII is a representation of Agile Combat Employment, and the parallels with our Mission Sustainment Team is undeniable. MST enables Cannon to deploy power-projection teams of cross-functional Airmen independent of main operating bases– just as the 27th BG deployed forward with minimal footprint and equipment.



We will continue to pathfind for Air Force Special Operations Command – just as the 27th did for the Army Air Corps. We remain steadfast, focused on efforts like the Adaptive Airborne Enterprise (A2E) concept, the future of the MQ-9 enterprise. We will ensure its successful transformation from being solely an ISR platform to a node in distributed command and control, furthering AFSOC's power projection capabilities.

We always find a way – just as our Air Commandos from the 17th SOS found ways to gain access and placement for the AC-130J Ghost Rider in the Indo-Pacific in 2023.

Holding the line isn't only in combat – it's every day life. It's integrity. It's service. It's doing the best we can with what we have. It's knowing and remembering why you are here. It's doing a job that you weren't assigned, but a job that is required for our Nation.



Your Part

Like the men of the 27th Bombardment Group, the service members who hold the line for the 27th Special Operations Wing are not only aircrew and maintainers...they are engineers, defenders, personnelists, logisticians, medical technicians, and financiers. They are range control, vehicle operations, intelligence, chaplains, linguists, communications, and munitions specialists. They are you.



The Airmen of the 27th Bombardment Group were not specially trained, assessed, or selected; they were simply service members who wanted to serve their country – and who were committed to their service and their Nation. When the time came to take the fight to the enemy, they did not back down. Each Airmen in the PACR was accountable to themselves and the teammate next to them, just as you are.



The 27th SOW is evolving to better prepare and equip our Air Commandos for future fights. Institutional change is not only necessary but inevitable. Transformation is a process not an event. Missions, aircraft, and locations evolve with the needs of the nation, but our Air Commandos' steadfast commitment will always remain – we stand ready. Ready to honor the legacy of the 27th Bombardment Group, pathfinding and adapting, and promising to hold the line in the future of unprecedented challenges. Ready to HOLD THE LINE, STEADFAST.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The Steadfast Line \(.af.mil\)](#)

What do Airmen do when they have no aircraft to fly, fight, and win? They hold the line. Watch the 27 SOW Mission Video and [The Steadfast Line](#) video here.



[AFSOC Heritage](#)

AFSOC has been a part of every major operation since its inception. Read about the history of the command here.



[The Provisional Air Corps Regiment at Bataan, 1942: Lessons for Today's Joint Force](#)

During desperate times throughout World War II, troops were compelled to perform actions and duties beyond their training and intended purpose.



[Witness to War: Preserving The Oral Histories of Combat Veterans](#)

At first they were confident a relief convoy would appear around the corner at any moment. That convoy never came. As MacArthur left for Australia and Bataan was written off by the men at the top, Bert Schwarz and the rest of the *Battling Bastards of Bataan* faced an overwhelming enemy force and were captured. Rocky Gause was one man who wasn't going to take it.



[Audiobook](#)

Listen to the audio recording of *The Steadfast Line: The Story of the 27th Bombardment Group (Light) in World War II* by Mary Cathrin May



[Jim Bollich, Bataan Death March Survivor Part 1](#)

Like many of his peers, James Bollich, barely out of his teenage years, joined the U.S. military amid another world conflict brewing overseas just four months after graduating technical school 20-year-old Corporal Bollich would become a prisoner of war.



[Jim Bollich, Bataan Death March Survivor Part 2](#)

"I couldn't imagine people going to my mother and saying that [I'd] died. I think that's what kept most young people alive, the fact that they had families to go to," James Bollich answered when asked how he managed to survive the Bataan Death March and then life in a prison camp.

