



IN less than nine months United States Forces of General MacArthur's Command regained the Philippines from Japan. Their task was not easy. From the fall of the island fortress of Corregidor in Manila Bay, and with the end of organized American and Filipino resistance on May 7, 1942, until the American landing in October of 1944, the islands were in Japanese hands. The enemy had therefore almost two and a half years in which to dig in. Still, the Americans made good progress. The campaign on Leyte Island, begun in October, ended in December, and in February of this year, Manila, capital of the islands, was recaptured. On July 4 General MacArthur was able to report: "The Philippines are now liberated and the campaign can be regarded as virtually closed."

This is an important gain. The Philippines are the geographical centre of the Far East. From them more conven-

iently than from any other one place the Allies may thrust towards the Japanese-held China coast, the Netherlands East Indies, or Japan. The most northerly island is 65 miles from the most southern island in the Japanese group; northern Luzon is only 225 miles from Formosa; and the Philippines contain nearly two hundred airfields, two naval bases, and several natural harbours. The islands have, in fact, often been described as a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan. It is easy to understand why the Japanese kept in them an army of about 250,000 men.

The 7,000 islands of the Philippines lie sprawling between Japan and the Netherlands East Indies for 1,150 miles from north to south, as far as from Auckland to Invercargill. From east to west they stretch over 682 miles. But the fact that the group contains 7,091 islands is more important to navigators than to the 16,000,000 Filipinos who live on them,