

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
Fort Knox, Kentucky

ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS #1

25 FEBRUARY 1947

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: Operation of Armored in the Pacific Area

SCOPE: Allied: Particular Emphasis on the Fourth Tank Group

Location: Operations out of Hawaiian Islands Group

Assignment and Duties of writer: Captain, Company Commander in the
763d Tank Battalion.

42-37

Prepared by:

(Name)

Herbert Henderson, Jr.

HERBERT HENDERSON, JR.

(Rank)

Captain, Cavalry

OPERATIONS OF FOURTH TANK GROUP IN THE POA

1. GENERAL.-- The Fourth Tank Group was activated in the latter part of 1942 at Schofield Barracks, Ahae, Hawaiian Islands. The Group consisted of five (5) battalions, including 193d, 762d, 763d, 766th and 767th. These battalions operated under Group for administrative purposes only. Each battalion commander was responsible for the tactical training of his unit.

Around the middle of 1943, the 27th Infantry Division was alerted for the Gilberts Operation. They requested tank support from Group Headquarters. Upon receiving this request, Group took certain elements from the 193d Tank Battalion and 766th Tank Battalion and assigned them to the 27th Division for tank support. From the time this order was issued to the time of the actual operation, these units had approximately four to five weeks training on tank-infantry tactics.

After the operation, all units returned to Schofield Barracks and several critiques were given by various regimental and battalion commanders. In each critique, it was brought out very clearly that tanks did not support infantry in the way they should. In further investigations, it was revealed that the infantry commanders did not know the capabilities and limitations of the tanks and the tank commanders did not know what the infantry wanted. Since tanks and infantry only had four to five weeks training prior to an operation, it was very logical that neither side knew what the other could do. This type of training and operation was carried on throughout the POA, up to and including the Saipan Operation.

2. OPERATION CONSISTING OF TANK AND INFANTRY TEAMS.-- In August of 1944, the 763d Tank Battalion was alerted with the 96th Infantry Division. Upon receiving alert orders, the whole battalion was ordered to jungle training school for dismounted jungle training with the infantry. Upon completion of this course, we reported back to our battalion area and proceeded in waterproofing all vehicles. During this phase of waterproofing, all company commanders were called into battalion CP and assigned to regiments of the Division. Upon receiving their assignments, the various company commanders reported to the infantry regimental commanders for further instructions. These instructions were as follows: "Captain, you will act as my tank representative. Your platoons will be assigned one to each battalion". This was carried out throughout the division, including the 381st, 382d and 383d Regiments.

From then on it was a matter of meetings between platoon leaders and battalion commanders, and company commanders and regimental commanders. During these meetings, the main topic of conversation between unit tank commanders and unit infantry commanders was, "What can you do and what can you not do?" Up to this period, we still did not know our target. Since we did not know our target, about the only thing we could possibly tell them was the capabilities and limitations of tanks given in various field manuals. While all these meetings were going on, the enlisted personnel and the remaining company officers worked in waterproofing all vehicles and did not get a chance to know or work with any of the infantrymen. In other words, throughout Pacific operation we did not use the "buddy" system.

On 8 September 1944, we were given our target. On 13 September 1944, we left Schofield Barracks for Pearl Harbor to board our ships. Three medium companies were loaded on LSD's; the light tank company was loaded on APA's. We sailed from Pearl Harbor on 15 September 1944 for Yap. Our rendezvous area was designated as Eniwetok in the Marshall Group.

Upon arrival at Eniwetok, a radio message came in for all company commanders to report to the control ship. At this time, we were told our target had been changed and that we were going to Leyte in the Philippines. This changed all our tank tactics and meant considerable terrain study of photo maps with all infantry commanders, since Yap was an atoll with a reef all around it and Leyte consisted of sand beaches and rice paddies. We had approximately five days to make this study and submit a tank plan to the infantry commanders.

On 28 September 1944, we left Eniwetok for a new rendezvous area which was the Admiralty Islands Group. We had a period of ten days in the Admiralties for further study and briefing on the Philippine Operation.

On 14 October 1944, we left the Admiralties for our target. We arrived in Leyte Gulf on the morning of 20 October 1944. On the assault landing, very little opposition was met, but, from lack of training, the tanks were either separated from the infantry or the infantry was separated from the tanks and it was not until the second day that things really got organized and started to operate as tank-infantry teams. Although the tankers and infantry started operating as a team, the tremendous number of rice paddies throughout Leyte was a big hindrance to all tank units, which made tank operations practically nil. On this particular operation, we acted more as artillery support than tank support.

On 25 December 1944, the Leyte campaign came to an end. On 26 December 1944, Division called the tank battalion commander to inform him that we had been alerted again. Upon receipt of this alert order, we were given an area on the beach to reorganize and come back up to strength. From Leyte experience, the infantry understood and knew the tanks' capabilities and limitations and the teams knew each other, which resulted in a considerably better tank-infantry team.

On 25 March 1945, we left Leyte for the Ryukun Operation. This operation consisted of two medium tank companies on the assault and one in reserve. The two assault tank companies loaded on LSD's; the one in reserve loaded on LST.

On 1 April 1945, we landed on Okinawa. The two assault tank companies went in without any resistance. After meeting no resistance on the beach, the division commander decided to beach the LST and land the reserve tank company and his reserve infantry battalion. Our mission was coordinated with the 7th Infantry Division. We were to go in as a two-division front, with the 7th Division going completely across the island and then turning south, and the 96th Division going half-way across and turning south. This first phase was accomplished within the first six hours of the operation. When both divisions turned south, the formation for each division was two regiments abreast and one in reserve.

We moved in the direction of Naha for three days without any opposition. On the morning of the fourth day on the island, the Japs cut loose with everything they had, including 320 mm mortars. This resulted

in our forces losing approximately 1,000 yards. For a comparison of yardage, a day's gain of 250 yards was considered as exceptionally good. Consequently, our loss meant that everything we had gained the first three days was practically a total loss to us.

From then on, tanks and infantry were practically held at a standstill. Although the Japs had heavy artillery, most of their shells were of the **M2** type and did very little damage to our tanks. Our greatest worry was the Japanese 47 anti-tank gun which they kept in caves and could roll them out, take a couple of shots and roll them back in before they could be observed. This gun was a very high velocity weapon and would penetrate any part of our medium tanks. Okinawa consisted throughout of a mass of caves which all joined each other in some shape or form. The Japanese used these caves for artillery positions, which resulted in their having artillery superiority over our forces, since these guns were so positioned that they could be moved in and out of these caves at random. Air bombardment and direct Naval fire seemed to have little effect on these caves. Immediately after a bombardment, the Japs were still capable of moving their artillery pieces out of the caves, fire and withdraw their weapons into the cave.

As an example of some caves, the Japanese Army Headquarters was stationed in the vicinity of Shuri and consisted of twenty stories below ground. This cave also consisted of a hospital with 200 beds in it. Another type cave would go through a complete mountain, which afforded the Japanese fire power on the near or far side of the mountain. In other words, if we would close up the near side, thinking we had shut the Japs off, we would cross the mountain to find we had artillery firing in our rear.

On 30 April 1945, the division was released for rest and rehabilitation for a period of ten days. In the meantime, the 77th Infantry Division and the 27th Infantry Division had been landed and put into the front lines. The 27th Division replaced the 96th Division with a mission of capturing and securing Naha. This division suffered very heavy losses, including their tank elements, and had to be withdrawn on their fourth day in the front lines. This action caused the 96th and the 763d Tank Battalion to go back into action understrength. On being committed the second time, we had two companies of tank flame throwers attached to us. These flame throwers worked as a section with the tank platoon. The tanks would take a cave under fire while the flame thrower section would maneuver to a place where they would be able to blast the entrance with their flame thrower. This proved very effective and flame throwers are highly recommended. In fact, it was even more effective than bombardment either by air or Naval.

In reference to Naval gunfire, the Navy tactical task force set up teams of battleships on both sides of the island. When Army Ground Force needed support, they would call on Naval gunfire. These forces, on delivering gunfire, would practically rake the island from one side to the other with cross fire. All through this operation, tank and infantry were practically a team welded to each other. The only time the infantry did not want tanks around was at night. The Japanese had set up a priority list with tanks as number one, artillery number two and airfields number three. Since the Japs did considerable artillery firing at night, this meant the doughboy would be constantly under artillery fire; whereas, if

the tanks, just prior to darkness, would move back approximately 500 to 800 yards, this would eliminate enemy artillery firing around the infantry locations. By the end of the Okinawa Operation, a team consisting of one battalion of infantry, one section of flame throwers and one platoon of tanks was very effective.

3. CONCLUSION.-- In conclusion, I would like to bring out the fact that the American soldier, when he has to, can really "put out". As brought out in this monograph, the tankers and infantry had very little training together as a team, but on the pay run, they really welded into one solid team.

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