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TITLE  
COMMIT THE RESERVE  
TO SUCCESS

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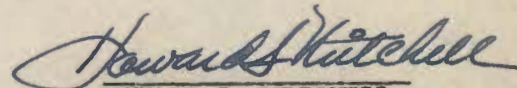
PREFACE

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The attention of the reader is directed to the Annexes attached hereto in which sketch maps of each action described in the context of this monograph may be found as an aid in following the initial and subsequent tactical situations used as examples.

Footnotes for historical examples are noted only at the completion of the narrative and the inclusive page numbers indicate a summation of the reference material cited.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author—not necessarily that of The Infantry School or the Department of the Army.

  
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## INTRODUCTION

"Once the attack is launched the reserve is one of the commander's principal means for influencing the action to obtain a favorable decision. It is used to exploit the success of the attack . . . ." (2:88) This paper will be concerned with showing the validity of the above principle and the associated success that has followed its diligent application in battle. Additionally, the opposing course of action which commits the reserve to redeem a failure, will be evolved as often the principal reason for the failure of otherwise tactically sound operations.

In the not too distant past warfare was often envisaged as the drawing up of two armies in cordon like formations, massed on one great open battlefield, to meet in a head on clash. One need only to go back to World War I, where on a general scale this picture was not far from actuality. Centuries ago it was the essence of warfare; or was it?

If we go back to the Italian Campaign, not in 1943 with the Fifth Army, but to the year 218 B.C. with the Carthaginians under the command of Hannibal, we will find two armies facing each other on the south bank of the Po River where it joins with the Trebia. The enemy forces were known - 40,000 infantry and cavalry of the Roman Army. It was also known that the Roman Cavalry forces were inferior in numbers and training; these were disposed on the Roman flanks. The fronts of both armies were covered by the light infantry and drawn up in the conventional massed lines. (See Annex I, sketch map.)

Hannibal also disposed his cavalry to his flanks, and being superior in this force, he here looked for success. While his center joined in a holding attack, he opened his battle with the main attack, his

cavalry. Hannibal's estimate of the situation proved sound -- his cavalry forces began to overcome the resistance to its attack and thereby threaten the Roman flanks. The decisive moment was approaching and the Carthagian general had planned well, for he had held out a reserve force of cavalry and infantry under the command of his brother Mago. This reserve was positioned under cover, behind and off to the left flank of the Carthaginian army, in a position from whence it could exploit any success of the superior cavalry forces already engaged in the battle.

Hannibal now saw that his main attack was beginning to roll up the flank of the Romans; signs of enemy demoralization were beginning to show. The time was ripe; the reserve was committed to the flank and rear of the Roman army, exploiting the success already gained. This surprise move proved to be decisive as the Roman army, of equal strength, was surrounded and virtually annihilated. (3:25) (1:2)

Hannibal had recognized the sound principle of maintaining an adequate reserve, well disposed to exploit success. He had further made a sound decision in committing his reserve at the decisive moment, in the proper place, under ideal circumstances.

Here, some 22 centuries ago occurred a near perfect example of the use of the reserve. That this same use of the reserve force is still applicable will be shown in the analysis of current combat examples. The prime factors to be developed will be the time and the place to commit the reserve force. Specifically, it is to be proven a logical principle that with all other circumstances equal, "the time and the place" will point toward success and not toward what has been attempted and has already failed.

The scope of success itself must be here qualified for it may seem

that total success must already have been attained, (the assumption being made that success is the attainment of the objective or its corollary the accomplishment of the mission) before the reserve can be committed for further exploitation. In some cases this may well be the circumstances for further exploiting the attack, attaining as much an advance as possible while the enemy is off balance and still recovering from the initial assault. However; it is here envisioned that success or various degrees of success are maintained and may tactically encompass, among others, situations as noted hereafter:

An attack that has not lost its momentum or the initiative - as long as the enemy has not forced the attack to halt, we still maintain the initiative of the battle fixing the enemy force in his defenses and allowing the attacking force the choice of the location to strike.

An opportunity that presents itself as a result of the action of our attack echelons - any advantage for the attacker, forced upon the enemy, leads to success if recognized and decisive action taken. This may take the form of the enemy splitting his forces, prematurely committing his reserve, or weakening his defenses at some critical point.

The recognition by the commander of the decisive point in the battle or on the battlefield that has been developed by his forces - this in itself is one of the most important functions of the commander. When the attack develops a situation that can be decisive (locally) a degree of success is again attained; the final result pending the recognition of the situation.

If the commander properly analyzes the combat that his unit is

engaged in and chooses the decisive moment in his attack, committing his reserve under the above or related circumstances, the basic principle heretofore stated is then served.

Many are the commanders who, through unsound decisions or ignorance of the basic principle: commit the reserve to success; have led their units to defeat, stalemate or gradual decimation by attempting to overcome strong resistance by the piece-meal employment of mass. On the small unit level the added element of mass was the reserve force. The temptation to throw the reserve into the battle, to aid an attack element when in questionable stages of distress and the call for help has come from the subordinate leader, has swerved as many of these commanders from the path of decisive victory when the success of another attack element could more beneficially have been exploited.

## DISCUSSION

The decision that leads to the successful use of the reserve force is not one easily arrived at; it is one of the commander's most difficult and as it will be shown, most important decisions. The proper time, place and circumstances of committing the reserve must be determined by the commander. This demands all of his experience, patience and professional knowledge as well as a "close tab" on the progress of the battle. (2:88)

In the "Summary of the Art of War," General Antoine Jomini, the first author to gather from the campaigns of the greatest generals the true principles of war, noted, "It is almost always easy to determine the decisive point of a field of battle, but not so with the decisive moment; and it is precisely here that genius and experience are everything, and mere theory of little value." (4:20)

Jomini again wrote that, "It is essential to provide a sufficient reserve, disposed to permit falling upon the enemy at the decisive moment, with force and rapidity." (4:16) Our current doctrine states that the reserve must be large enough to exploit to the final objective and that it is generally positioned to favor the main attack where success is most likely expected. (2:88) The similarity cannot be overlooked between our current teaching and the principle laid down by Jomini over a century ago; the principle with which this paper is involved is not something new in the annals of tactical doctrine.

In Hannibal's Italian Campaign in 218 B.C. during the Battle of Trebia, the application of the basic principle of exploiting success with the reserve proved decisive in the success of his army. Then the objective of all armies was the opposing force and its destruction. In modern warfare this is still the final military objective but the mass



armies of today numbering in the 100,000's and even millions, fighting at opposite ends of the earth, can not below the national level envisage such an objective. Today, units must fight for terrain, which on ever increasing levels of command is a part toward attaining the final objective. We are concerned with battalions, companies and platoons; their objectives in the attack may be fundamentally reduced to the seizure of terrain, though the mission is to close with and destroy the enemy.

MOUNT ROTONDO & CANNAVINELLE

30th INF, 3d INF DIV, USA

Many years after Hannibal smote the Romans in the Battle of Trebia, American forces found themselves fighting the German over the same rugged Italian terrain. The 30th Infantry, part of the U. S. 3d Division, had landed in the Salerno beachhead in southern Italy on D plus 8, September, 1943. For two months it fought north, straight up the mountains of western Italy. The 30th Infantry was located on 5 November 1943, at Presenzano, south of the Barbara line established by the Germans in the vicinity of Cassino. 3d Division was on the VI Corps left flank, making the main effort. The Mignano Gap stood before the American forces, a highly dangerous approach. The decision was made for the division to attack through the mountains. The 30th Infantry was to attack the Cannavinelle hill mass that looked down on the Mignano Gap from the east.

At 2215 during the night of 5 November the 30th Infantry entrucked to move through an adjacent regiment (180th Infantry) to their LD in the vicinity of Rocca-Pipirozzi. Time of attack was 060530 November. The LD was crossed in the dark, column of battalions: 1st, 2d, 3d in order, attacking due west. The 1st Battalion after overcoming resistance

and a hard struggle with the difficult and precipitous rocky terrain, attained the northern nose of the Cannavinelle Hill at 1315. The 2d Battalion, from the reserve continued the attack with companies E and G abreast, down the western slopes of the Cannavinelle hill mass at 1530, with its objective Mount Rotondo, a 357 meter hill densely covered with brush that dominated the Mignano Gap itself. 3d Battalion maintained its reserve status. (See Annex II, sketch map.)

Mount Rotondo was critical to control of the main passage through the Mignano Gap. The Germans recognized this factor in that they strongly set their defenses here when previously they had fought a definite delaying action. The attack of E and G companies was slowed perceptively as they waged a fierce battle among the pillboxes, wire and crossfire that met them on the southeast slopes of their objective. With the approach of darkness the fighting ebbed but the enemy was kept off balance with strong patrols. On 7 November the 2d Battalion with companies E and G, continued the attack again with relatively the same results. However; the attacks of 6 and 7 November had developed the German defenses found to be strong on the east and south slopes of Mount Rotondo. The 1st Battalion had secured the north approach in the zone in their successful attack. An opening in the defenses appeared to present itself.

On the morning of 8 November the 2d Battalion again attacked with elements of companies E and G against the southeast slopes of the objective, at 0930. The 3d Battalion in reserve was then committed to attack west and swing south into the north approach to Mount Rotondo, between the 1st and 2d Battalions. By 1100 companies I and K, the assault echelon, had reached their objectives; company L (-) had secured the LD. The attack had taken the enemy completely by surprise. The objective was

consolidated and for the next 48 hours companies I, K and L and the 1st Battalion withstood fierce enemy counterattacks. (6:93 - 97)

With the securing of Mount Rotondo, a critical point in the Cassino line had been breached; the entire enemy line was forced to pull back out of its fortified positions in the area. For its attack and subsequent defense of Mount Rotondo the 3d Battalion, 30th Infantry, received the Presidential Unit Citation. (6:98 - 102)

#### ANALYSIS

During the critical phases of this action the commander utilized his battalions in a logical and tactically sound manner. His plans were excellent and the control demonstrated was certainly present at the critical time. In initially adopting the column formation with the bulk of his forces in reserve, he allowed maximum flexibility. The rather obscure enemy situation prevailing to the unit's immediate front, the long approach to the objectives over rough terrain and the terrain of the initial objective, Cannavinelle Hill; bore out the soundness of this action. (7:11 - 12)

Within the 30th Infantry zone the critical terrain was certainly Cannavinelle Hill and Mount Rotondo (Mound Cesima the highest point, to the south, (see sketch Annex II) was taken by the 2d Battalion, 15th Infantry). That these two hills were made the objectives proved sound; the subsequent results of their seizure furthered the correctness of this analysis. Initially the 1st Battalion met with success in attaining the Cannavinelle Hill in a one battalion attack. The breadth of this objective certainly offered a temptation to commit part of the two company, battalion reserve in order to secure it - this subsequently proved unnecessary and the commander was free to commit his 2d Battalion from

his reserve to pass through the initial successful attack to exploit the advances gained. Meanwhile the 3d Battalion could be still maintained in reserve. Through this phase of the attack the commander maintained maximum flexibility and did not embroil part of his reserve force in the action where they were not needed or where they could have contributed nothing save added confusion.

One of the few questionable parts of the maneuvering in this battle might be raised here. It was known that the Germans had strongly fortified Mount Rotondo with a maze of pillboxes, mines, barbed wire and tank obstacles, in depth. Plausibly, this objective was worthy of a two battalion attack which subsequently it developed into. The 1st Battalion at this time was holding its position on the right (north) flank of the zone, receiving heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire but in a situation that did not preclude it becoming or at least supplying an element for the reserve. However; three separate attacks were made by the 2d battalion with companies E and G, each being strongly pushed and just as strongly repulsed. (6:92)

During the desperate struggle of E and G companies to dent the strong defenses on the south and east slopes of Mount Rotondo this action does not indicate any move by the 2d Battalion commander to commit his reserve, company F, into the battle (though self-admittedly the objective could not be taken by frontal assault alone). (6:92) Without unnecessarily repeating the previous futile assaults on the objective, F company could have been properly used to influence the action by attacking in a new direction or adding impetus to the assault when it had made some progress through the defenses in the initial assault, before companies E and G became completely bogged down. The commander must insure that every unit and all of his combat power is engaged at the decisive moment.

(4:88). After the initial assault by E and G companies the battalion was merely butting its head against a stone wall in its subsequent repeated attacks with depleted forces.

The regimental commander arrived at his new CP on Cannavinelle Hill at 080530 November from Rocca-Pipirozzi where his initial CP had been located (it had remained behind at the direction of the Assistant Division Commander). (6:97) At this time the 2d Battalion had already made two unsuccessful attacks to attain the complete objective. The commander arrived in time for the critical action and properly analyzed the situation with the recommendation of the 2d Battalion commander. The opening developed in the enemy defense could probably have been foreseen earlier had the commander been present at a forward OP, when the action opened, to obtain a close picture of the battle.

This action highlighted two excellent uses of the reserve. First; with a large reserve giving maximum flexibility and allowing greater freedom of maneuver, the attack on Cannavinelle Hill and the continued exploitation of the 1st battalion's successful attack maintained the attack's momentum. Secondly; the thrust of companies I and K through the advantage developed by the attacks of the 1st and 2d Battalions, exploiting a weakness in the defenses and attaining the desired factor of surprise. This final action proved decisive to the accomplishment of the mission.

Detracting from the excellent work of the 3d Battalion and the sound planning in the initial and decisive phases of the battle was the failure of the commander to be at the scene of the combat, when a close look at the development of the action was needed as well as his on-the-spot direction of the major units. His absence limited his ability to influence the battle, one of his most important tasks and capabilities, where the means were at hand. The decisive moment actually developed

early in the action. Fortunately the "moment" remained and was eventually recognized on the third day of the fighting. In a like vein, the 2d battalion commander showed little ingenuity or flexibility in his attacks and his failure to employ his reserve.

Opportunity knocked twice for the 30th Infantry on Mount Rotondo and with the help of excellent small unit leadership, the sound employment of units at the critical time and place proved wholly successful.

The triangular organization of American infantry forces is predicated on lending flexibility and maneuver to all units greater than squad size. Not the least of these is the capability inherent to this type of organization to form a reserve force. This thereby enables the commander to influence the action when necessary by adding the weight of his reserve to the attack. U. S. Marine units though dissimilar in organization in some aspects, to the army, basically maintain this triangular concept.

#### OBONG-NI RIDGE

#### 1st PROVISIONAL MARINEBRIGADE

In the summer of 1950, in Korea, the United Nations forces had been steadily pushed back toward the Pusan Perimeter when the first Marine unit was committed into the battle. After a counter-offensive action on the southern flank of the perimeter near Sachon, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade with the 5th Marines the primary component, were committed in a counterattack against the Naktong Bulge, the bridgehead the North Koreans had established over the Naktong River into the U. N. lines in August 1950.

The 5th Marines was, when committed, at peace time strength having only two rifle companies in each battalion. These consisted of A and B in the 1st Battalion or 1/5; D and E in the 2d Battalion or 2/5; G and H in the 3d Battalion or 3/5. The companies themselves were about 50 men under the T/O strengths. The artillery had only four guns per battery rather than the full six. However; the brigade did have its own air support in the form of the 33d Marine Air group which gave the unit strong and closely coordinated support.

The enemy that had overrun the Naktong Bulge was the 4th NKPA Division, an experienced and highly distinguished Communist unit which had met only success in its battles from the 38th parallel south. The 5th Marines were opposed in the zone of their initial objectives by the 18th Regiment of this division strongly supported by artillery and armored units.

The zone of the 5th Marines extended south of the 24th Division MSR; on the north flank was the 9th RCT of the army. The 9th RCT had left flank elements on HILL 125 north of the MSR which commanded a sharp bend in this road. To the south across the MSR was Observation Hill, the line of departure for the Marine counter-thrust. Further to the rear and east of Observation Hill was Cloverleaf Hill which commanded the MSR and approaches to the 24th Division CP as well as the town of Miryang. This hill was ordered to be occupied to protect the vital installations to the rear; the 3d Battalion of the 5th Marines was committed to this mission.

The 5th Marines were to attack 170800 August to seize a series of hills within the enemy penetration and generally along the MSR, beginning with Obong-ni Ridge (Objective 1) and continuing to HILL 207 and HILL 311. The plan of attack was to have 2/5 to take Objective 1 and

pass the succeeding battalions through to take the following objectives in order. Initially the 9th RCT was to support by fire the assault on Objective 1 and subsequently attack west to seize Finger Ridge. (See sketch map, Annex III.) Obong-ni Ridge was known to be heavily defended but major opposition was expected on HILLS 207 and 311.

The CO of 2/5 observed from Observation Hill that to his front there was a 300 yard deep rice paddy before the lower slopes of Obong-ni Ridge were reached. From there a procession of steep spurs separated by gullies ran down from the peaks along the ridge. The ridge itself was high and narrow marked by a series of peaks: HILLS, 102, 109, 117, 143, 147 and 153 from north to south. From there the ridge trailed off into a low marsh some 2000 yards south of the MSR.

It was decided to frontally assault the objective with two companies. The left approach would go through the marsh area impeding the tanks and other supporting weapons in addition to leaving a gap in the line in so vital an area. The right approach would necessitate going into the zone of the 9th RCT and through the defended and densely populated town of Tugok on the right flank.

Preparatory fires commenced at 0725, and with air strikes were to last to H - hour, 0800. Due to hasty registration by the 1/11 artillery, the preparation on Objective 1 was ineffective. The 2d Battalion with company D on the right and E on the left jumped off at 0800 in the attack on Obong-ni Ridge (later called "No-Name-Ridge" by some correspondents). Mortar and artillery fire harassed the assault platoons of the two companies as they advanced across the rice paddies and up the slopes of Objective 1. When they had reached about the half way point up the ridge, a hail of machine gun and small arms fire raked the attackers from HILLS 117, 147 and 153. The 3d platoon of company D got



a loose foothold on HILL 109 in the face of strong enemy resistance and at the cost of many casualties. The 1st platoon of company D was pinned down on the right on the northwest slope of HILL 102. The reserve platoon of D company, the second, was caught in much of the same fires as immobilized the 1st platoon and they could advance no further. Much of this fire was coming from enemy positions in Tugok to the right flank, in the zone of the 9th RCT. The 9th RCT, thrown off balance by enemy attacks, had not been able to launch its attack thus exposing the flank of 2/5 as it attacked Obong-ni.

Easy company on the left of the battalion was also sustaining heavy casualties. The 2d platoon had been driven back from the gully leading to HILL 117. The 1st platoon on the left had made better progress toward HILL 143 west of the small village of Obong-ni. The reserve (3d) platoon was committed to the left flank of the 1st platoon to relieve the pressure and the deadly enfilade fire falling on the 1st and 2d platoons from machine gun positions on 143, 147 and 153. The 3d platoon made better progress and reached the high slopes before HILL 147. At this time an air strike was called in which caused some casualties among the 3d platoon and drove them back from their hard won ground. Again the 1st and 2d platoons were opened to the enfilading fire.

Repeated attempts to assault the strong enemy positions by the six depleted platoons of 2/5 were of no avail; all reserve strength was already engaged. The attack of 2/5 wobbled to a halt by noon of 17 August.

At 171300 August, 1/5 was ordered to pass through the 2d battalion and take Objective 1. Further preparations were made on the ridge by air, 1/11 artillery and supporting tanks. Company B passed through

company D, attacking with the 1st and 2d platoons. The 3d platoon in reserve was positioned on Observation Hill with the attached machine guns, to fire in support of the attack. When the assault platoons had gotten just past the former advances of Dog company, they both were halted by strong small arms fire. The 1st platoon on the right receiving particularly strong fire from Tugok called for a fire mission on the village. The 81mm mortar FO called in a volume of fire that virtually plastered the position. Now the 1st platoon assaulted again and carried through to take HILL 102 at 1710. (see Annex IV, sketch map.) Fifteen minutes later, the 2d platoon on the left, had taken HILL 109 and the first breach of the defenses on Obong-ni Ridge had been made.

Company A meanwhile, on the left of the zone, had crossed the rice paddies in front of Obong-ni village with the 1st and 2d platoons, each with a machine gun section attached, and passed through Easy company at 1500. They advanced up the hillside slanting off farther to the right of where Easy company had advanced. At the critical halfway point, as company E had before them, both platoons came under a hail of flanking automatic fire. The 1st platoon advanced up the draw between the spurs from HILLS 109 and 117 in the face of heavy fire and managed to reach the saddle between the two hills as Baker company was taking HILL 109. Their attempts to turn south were pinned down with fire from 117.

The 2d platoon on the left was cut in half by the enemy fire. Casualties sustained from fire from 117 and 113 brought the skirmish line to a halt. Despite air and artillery support called in to pound the two hills, Able company CO saw the attack bog down. He requested permission to commit his 3d platoon which was the battalion reserve located on Observation Hill. His request granted, the CO started the 3d

platoon across the rice paddies to Obong-ni Ridge, toward the 2d platoon. As the platoon got into the rice paddy they were hit by an enemy mortar barrage and took some casualties. They got up to the position of the 2d platoon and picking up remnants of that unit attempted to launch two separate assaults. Both attempts were practically stopped in their tracks by a curtain of fire. The company commander moved to the base of Obong-ni meanwhile and lost contact with the 1st platoon.

Company B consolidated its positions on HILLS 102 and 109 and company A slipped its platoons to the right to tie in with Baker company, to hold the ground gained, during the night. Able company commander regained contact with his 1st platoon at 2030 after the attack of 1/5 was discontinued. That evening the NKPA forces hit the positions of 1/5 with strong counterattacks and managed to overrun the 2d platoon of company A. The attacks did not develop above company strength however, although an enemy battalion had held Obong-ni originally. A terrific volume of supporting fire was called down on the penetration and the enemy positions during the night by the battalion commander. Company B on the right, held fast against several attacks. By dawn the enemy attack had expended itself and at 180700 August the 3d platoon of company A jumped off in the assault and seized HILL 117. Wheeling south, this platoon overran HILLS 143, 147 and 153 in succession, against crumbling enemy resistance. Two companies of North Koreans were seen moving down the reverse slopes of Obong-ni Ridge. By mid afternoon of 18 August Obong-ni Ridge, Objective 1, had been secured by 1/5. Meanwhile the 9th RCT across the MSR had taken Finger Ridge after a delayed attack. (5:175-201)

## ANALYSIS

The attack of the 5th Marines went on to prove successful and with the attacks of other army units eliminated the dangerous penetration in the Pusan Perimeter at a cost to the enemy of many lives and much materiel. The attack on Obong-ni Ridge demonstrated above all else the results that can befall units that lack that needed degree of flexibility and additional punch derived from an adequate reserve force. The 5th Marines lost their reserve battalion before the battle started when it was immobilized in a static protective mission on Cloverleaf Hill. Left with only two battalions, 1/5 and 2/5, for the attack on Objective 1, the commander had to limit his zone of maneuver and attack Obong-ni frontally, though the terrain, at a battalion level, also was a definite limiting factor.

Perhaps even more decisively, within the attacking battalions, did the lack of a flexible triangular organization cause initial failures. When 2/5 opened the assault on Obong-ni Ridge with Dog and Easy companies it had thrown its full weight into the attack. The limited success gained by company D on the right when it gained a short lived foothold on HILL 109 could not be exploited and the attack could only falter after the assault platoons had spent themselves. The Marine command recognized that the decisive moment in the battle had been reached and could only curse their misfortune in not having a third company in their battalions. (5:85) The battalion commander had come into the battle without his principal means of influencing the action and as such, once the momentum of the attack was lost, only additional casualties could be gained by pressing the assault. This was certainly borne out by the decimated forces of company D and E when they pulled back

from the slopes of Obong-ni Ridge after being relieved by 1/5. True, the friendly air strike that came so close to the leading elements of Dog company and actually drove the 3d platoon of Easy company back, did not help their advance and was probably the "straw that broke the camel's back". However; had it not been for the closely coordinated air and artillery support received throughout the attacks of 2/5 and 1/5, these units would not have made the limited gains they did accomplish.

The fire support received by the 1st and 2d Battalions and their own determined assaults did not go for nought. Enemy casualties had been high and small holes were being opened in his strong defense. Baker company of 1/5 was able to grab two hills on the flank of the enemy defenses on Obong-ni Ridge without committing its reserve platoon and the first penetration of the position had been made. Here indeed was success, achieved at no little cost, waiting to be exploited. But again, the lack of depth in the battalion's attack did not allow the availability of a reserve company. What reserve the battalion had maintained, the 3d platoon of company A, had somewhat unwisely been released to that company's faltering attack. Baker company was sitting on the enemy's flank in a prime position to roll it up. Yet, no action was taken by the company commander (his reserve platoon was uncommitted and relatively untouched); by the battalion commander (he could follow the success of Baker company and see the halting of Able company's attack, yet he released his reserve toward the failing attack); or the brigade commander (the 1st Battalion, though battered, was available on Observation Hill or an element of it, if necessary) to push the success of company B.

When the 3d platoon of company A rolled down the flank of Obong-ni Ridge on the morning of 18 August they executed the same

maneuver that could have been accomplished decisively the day before, at each of the command echelons. That the units failed to exploit their success and in at least two instances tried to redeem a failure (attacks of Co's A and D), resulted in the 1/5 having to maintain a very shaky defensive position that night. The subsequent attacks of the NKPA forces were costly to the Marines; had they been pushed they could have been decisive in eliminating the entire battalion in its untenable and isolated position.

At company level the maneuver of reserve platoons was most important since they comprised the only depth that the battalions' attacks could muster. With the aid of hindsight it appears that this is one instance where the battalion commander might have more justifiably kept a closer rein on these company elements. The company commanders in the most decisive instances, failed to employ their reserves or tried to redeem a failure of one of their assault platoons.

Company D attacking on the right of 2/5 committed its reserve to bolster the attack of its right platoon (the 1st) which had been halted east of HILL 102. The third platoon of company D had meanwhile gained a foothold on HILL 109. When the 2d (reserve) platoon advanced toward the 1st, it too was immediately pinned down by the same fire that had brought the 1st platoon to a halt. Had the reserve been committed to the limited success achieved by the 3d platoon, HILL 109 and the right flank of Obong-ni might have been carried in this initial assault (later Baker company did gain this same position with two platoons). But, the 3d platoon (D Co) was unable to advance further or hold its gains and all three platoons "withered on the vine".

Company E did have its reserve attack in a new direction to relieve

the pressure on its two assault platoons which had been halted; the 1st platoon having advanced further than the second. The 3d platoon did help these two units, advancing to the left flank of the 1st platoon, but was subsequently pushed back by the closeness of a friendly air strike.

In the attack of 1/5 when committed through the 2d Battalion (in precisely the same direction and same strength) the reserve platoons were presented two opportunities to carry the objective - both were lost. Company B solved the puzzle of the right flank of Obong-ni by eliminating the flanking fire from Tugok. With a fresh reserve within easy supporting distance they were content to sit on HILLS 102 and 109 consolidating for defense while the key to the entire ridge was in their grasp. Company A on the left of 1/5 tread the same fire swept path with their 2d platoon as the units of company E before them had attempted and failed, with a resultant constant flow of casualties. The 2d platoon of Able company tried to force their way up the same gully that Easy company's 2d platoon had been stopped cold in and met with even less success as enfilading fire cut them down. The 1st platoon had veered to the right and reached the saddle between HILLS 109 and 117 almost on top of the ridge. Here at the decisive time, while B company was taking HILLS 102 and 109 and the 1st platoon was getting into the enemy defenses on the right, the battalion commander released his reserve, the 3d platoon of company A. The platoon was committed not to exploit the crumbling left flank of the enemy defenses, but directly into the 2d platoon area where two units had already been chopped up.

In the attack of 17 August, the attempted assaults of the 3d platoon, company A, were totally useless in gaining the ridge. Had

the company commander exploited the success of the 1st platoon, or the battalion commander the success of company B, with the 3d platoon which was in ready reserve; the entire enemy position might well have been rolled up in the first day's attack. "A" company commander violated the principle of exploiting success with the reserve most flagrantly, by attempting to redeem the failure of the 2d platoon. By omission, the success gained by other units was not exploited and on 17 August the attacks of 1/5 and 2/5 could attribute their failures to the violation of this principle.

That the unit eventually carried Obong-ni Ridge despite constant misuse of reserves and repeated violation of the noted principle may be attributed to several factors, upon closer examination of the action. Most notable causes attributing to the ultimate success of the attack on 18 August, were:

1. The tremendous volumes of fire support expertly utilized by the battalions and supplied by 1/11 and organic mortars.
2. The facility of the organic air support group that lent immediate and superior close support at all times.
3. The tenacious and fighting quality of the individual marine and small unit leaders in the face of withering fire.
4. The failure of NKPA forces to exploit their penetration of the defense of 1/5 in their night attacks.
5. The advances made by 9th RCT flanking Obong-ni Ridge.

With the proper application of their reserves in conjunction with some of the above noted factors, Obong-ni should have been taken on 17 August. The failures to follow the principle led, not to total failure because of the above factors, but delayed success and the cost of innumerable casualties; besides presenting the enemy an unwarranted



opportunity for total defeat of 1/5. Repeatedly throughout the action the momentum of the attack was allowed to be lost while units already stopped were reinforced or while those units gaining success, were allowed to be brought to a halt.

Ultimate success does not in itself disprove a principle despite the resort by units in this action to the opposing course of repeated attempts to redeem failure at all levels. Rather, although negatively, this action has shown the fallacy of following the opposing course and the value that could be derived from exploiting success at all levels with the often decisive element, the reserve.

It is difficult to find the successful application of principles clearly illustrated in any battle action. However; the attack by the 2d Infantry Division on HILL 192 on 11 July 1944 demonstrated two striking examples of the proper use of the reserve.

HILL 192, ST-LO

2d INF DIV, USA

After the Normandy landings in June of 1944, the First Army had established a salient toward Caumont. HILL 192 remained a dominating height giving observation to the enemy as far as the beaches and including all approaches to St-Lo. In the attacks to 16 June, well over a thousand casualties had been spent by 2d Division in assaults on 192. From 16 June to 11 July the 2d Division intensively trained in infantry-tank team tactics to deal with the hedgerow country and the strongpoint defenses of the Germans. Careful coordination was worked out with the artillery to support the field by field fighting expected. The enemy

defenses on HILL 192 were manned by elements of the 3d Parachute Division. They too had carefully mapped their fires and defenses. (8:58-62)

The attack on HILL 192 itself (the main crest) was to be in the zone of the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry on the left part of the 38th Infantry zone. To the left of the 1st Battalion, the 23d Infantry was to attack the eastern slopes of HILL 192 in column of battalions, 1st Battalion leading. These two battalions, attacking in adjacent zones, would hit the strength of the enemy defenses on 192.

At 110620 July the 1st Battalion jumped off with company C on the right, company A on the left, company B in reserve. The time of attack for the 38th was 0630 but the 1st Battalion had to fight for its LD since the Germans had crept up several hedgerows during the artillery preparation on HILL 192. The enemy hit the attack with artillery and mortar and the tanks accompanying the 1st Battalion were withdrawn or disabled. All tanks were then committed elsewhere as they could not negotiate the high ground to the front. (See sketch map, Annex V.)

Without tank support companies A and C advanced methodically, hedgerow by hedgerow, until company A on the left was halted by a three-sided strong-point covering four fields. With all its platoons committed, A company was still unable to gain ground. Company C on the other hand was able to steadily push ahead and by 1100 was a couple of hundred yards ahead of Able company. The 1st Battalion commander, after A company had again been repulsed, committed his reserve just left of company C and through the gap between the two companies (C and A). The attack of companies C and B on the right of the zone caused the opposition in front of company A to withdraw and by early afternoon the 1st Battalion with companies B and C in the van, had cleared the crest of HILL 192. (8:64-65)

To the immediate left of 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry, companies A and C of 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry; were attacking the eastern slopes of 192. Across the 1st Battalion zone there ran a draw for 750 yards east-west about 200 to 400 yards from the LD, constituting a serious initial obstacle. Previous losses received in the draw had dubbed it "Purple Heart Draw". With company A on the left and C on the right, the 1st Battalion moved out at 0600, 300 yards to the rear of the LD.

Company A on the battalion left faced the draw to its direct front. Until it reached the draw not too much opposition was met. At the north edge, four tanks with the 1st platoon lined up to support the assault across the draw. The enemy held its fire until most of the 1st platoon had reached the bottom of "Purple Heart Draw". Then, they plastered the draw with pre-planned artillery and mortar fires while automatic weapons fired from the south bank and the houses along the east and of the draw. The platoon desperately held on but could not move an inch forward. (See sketch map, Annex VI.)

The 2d platoon on the right of the company zone had meanwhile advanced, making some progress to flank the draw from the west. Added tank support came up to aid the 1st platoon but the enemy still held on to his strongpoint. The reserve 3d platoon was then committed to aid the still advancing 2d platoon as they flanked the draw from the west. The added momentum to the 2d platoon's attack turned the enemy out of his position and extricated the remnants of the 1st platoon from the draw. The 3d platoon then moved on to secure the left flank of the 1st Battalion. (8:66-67)

Meanwhile, company C on the right of the 1st Battalion zone, moved on without too much difficulty to draw abreast of the 1st Battalion,

38th Infantry, units on its right. By the close of 11 July every enemy position on HILL 192 had been reduced and the defenses of St-Georges-d'Elle turned and eventually smashed. (See sketch map, Annex VI.) (8:67)

#### ANALYSIS

With this action one of the major obstacles in the path of First Army to the seizure of the vital center of St-Lo was reduced. The attacks of 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry and 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry; were directly instrumental in achieving this success. The auspicious use of reserve forces by the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry, commander and Able company commander of the 23d Infantry proved decisive in the action to take HILL 192. The two strongest points of resistance were both turned in similar maneuvers; one with a company, the other executed by a platoon.

Baker company of the 38th Infantry was committed after it was determined that company A could not make any progress against the strong point to their front. The attack of company C at this time was still moving forward though at a slow pace. Keeping the primary objective in mind, the battalion commander had maintained the momentum of his attack by committing his reserve toward the success achieved by company C and did not throw additional forces into the stalemated company A zone when they had already been halted in their attack. Had the reserve been committed through Able company it might well have met the same fate and at the same time left company C dangerously exposed with an open left flank. This action too would have only pushed the enemy back to other defensive positions prepared in depth on HILL 192. As it was, company B was able to exploit the opening in the enemy defense and met little

resistance from positions lightly held at the crest of the hill.

Company A, 23d Infantry, knew beforehand that "Purple Heart Draw" would pose a serious obstacle to its advance. The 3d platoon in reserve was wisely disposed to facilitate movement to the zone of the right (2d) platoon of the company's attack, which had enough maneuver room to skirt the draw to the west. With some difficulty, the 2d platoon had been moving to flank the strongpoint at the draw when the added impetus of the reserve platoon was given to this drive. Though this move did not in itself attain the battalion objective (which was not taken until the day following), it was locally decisive in eliminating the strongest point of enemy resistance within the zone. Again with one element of the attack echelon halted, the reserve was used to insure the momentum of the other element's attack; achieving complete local success.

Essentially, in both of these attacks the commanders derived the decisive time to make their moves with their respective reserve forces. The units were adequate to carry out the mission assigned and were both committed in the critical place - toward the success of units that had not yet lost the momentum of their attacks. It could only be a matter here of conjecture as to the results that would have been attained had these reserves been thrown into the battle to reinforce the stymied attacks of the elements that had run into the strong enemy points of resistance. The attacks of the 5th Marines previously cited on Obong-ni Ridge might, however, provide an example of the fallacy of such action. On the other hand these attacks provided decisive success, at the cost of relatively few casualties for an objective of such import, for the 1st Battalions of the 23d and 38th Infantry Regiments.

The decisive success achieved on Mount Rotondo and on HILL 192 and the cost of repeated failures on Obong-ni Ridge can not in themselves dogmatically prove the truth of the principle initially stated in this work. The logic of this principle and the conclusions listed hereafter, are believed to be clearly derived from these examples and may be backed up by the analysis of innumerable actions in World War II and Korea, too broad in scope for inclusion within the limits of this monograph.

## CONCLUSION

1. The flexibility of a unit in the attack is largely dependent on the maintenance of an adequate reserve force.

2. One of the commander's primary means of influencing the action is the proper utilization of his reserve in the attack.

3. The reserve should be used whenever possible, to exploit success.

4. Reserves should not be used to redeem failure except where there is no other course of attack open to the unit.

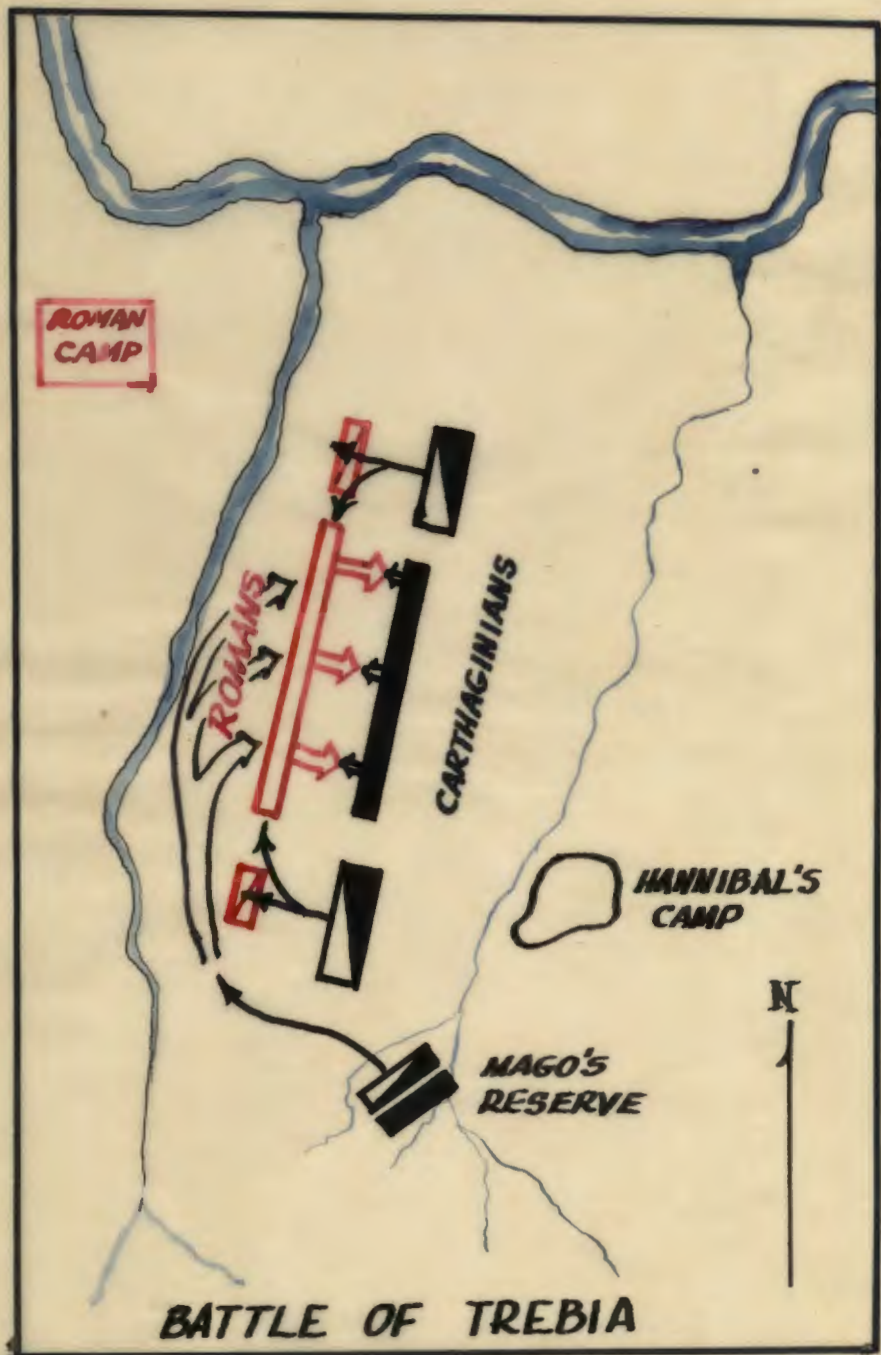
5. The reserve must be committed before the momentum of the attack is lost to achieve maximum success.

6. The use of the reserve to exploit success is often decisive in attaining a favorable decision for the attacking unit of which the reserve is an element.

7. The commander should not hesitate to commit his reserve at the decisive moment in the attack.

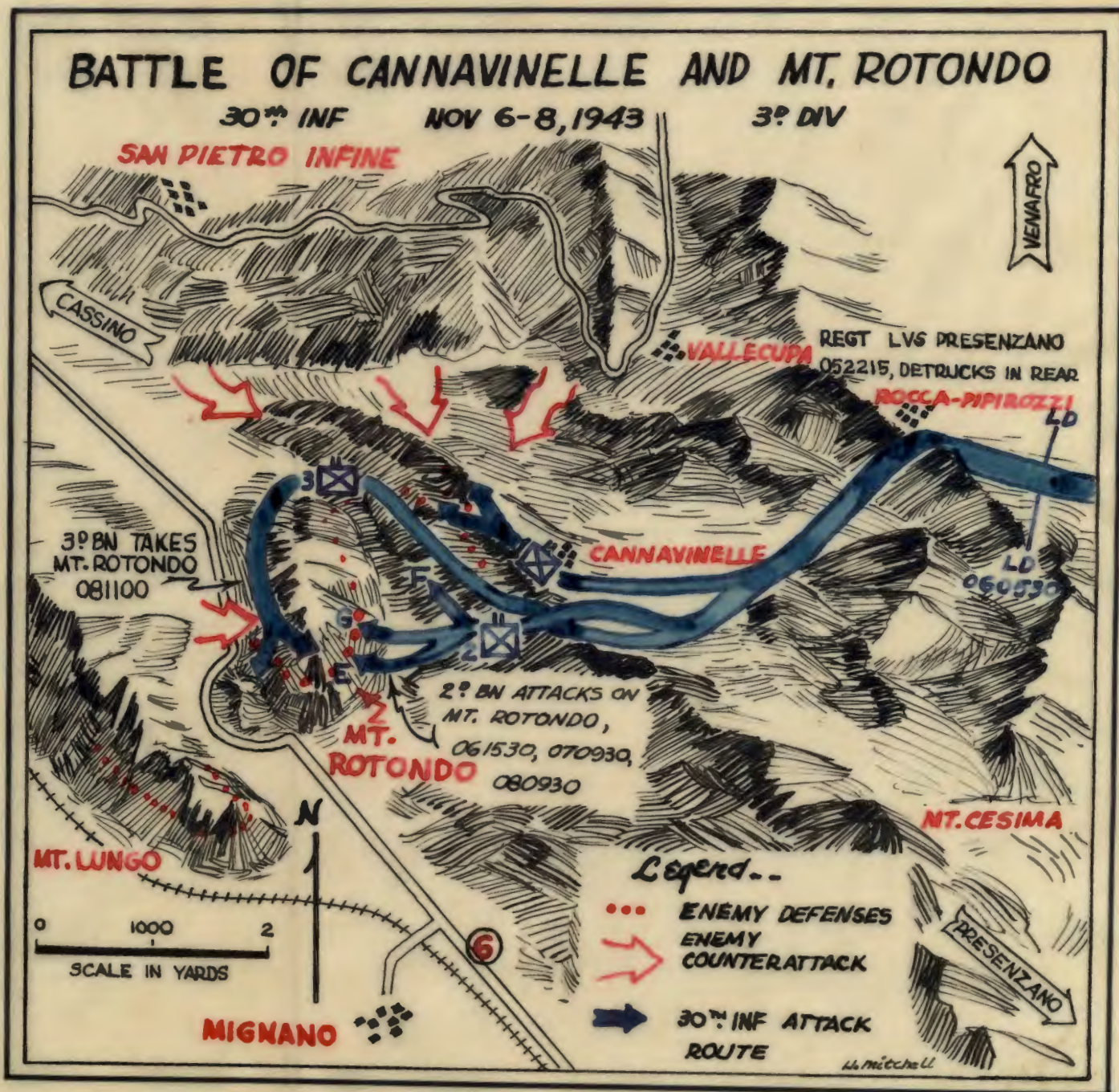
8. In the attack, the decisive time and place in the battle most often will be developed within the zone of a successful attack element.

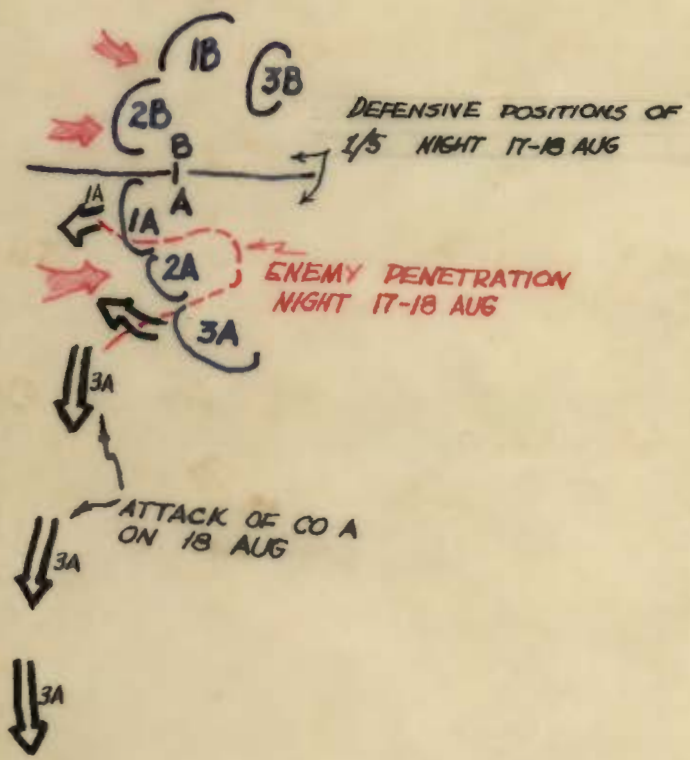
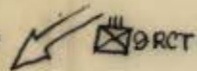
*Annex I - sketch (2:25)*





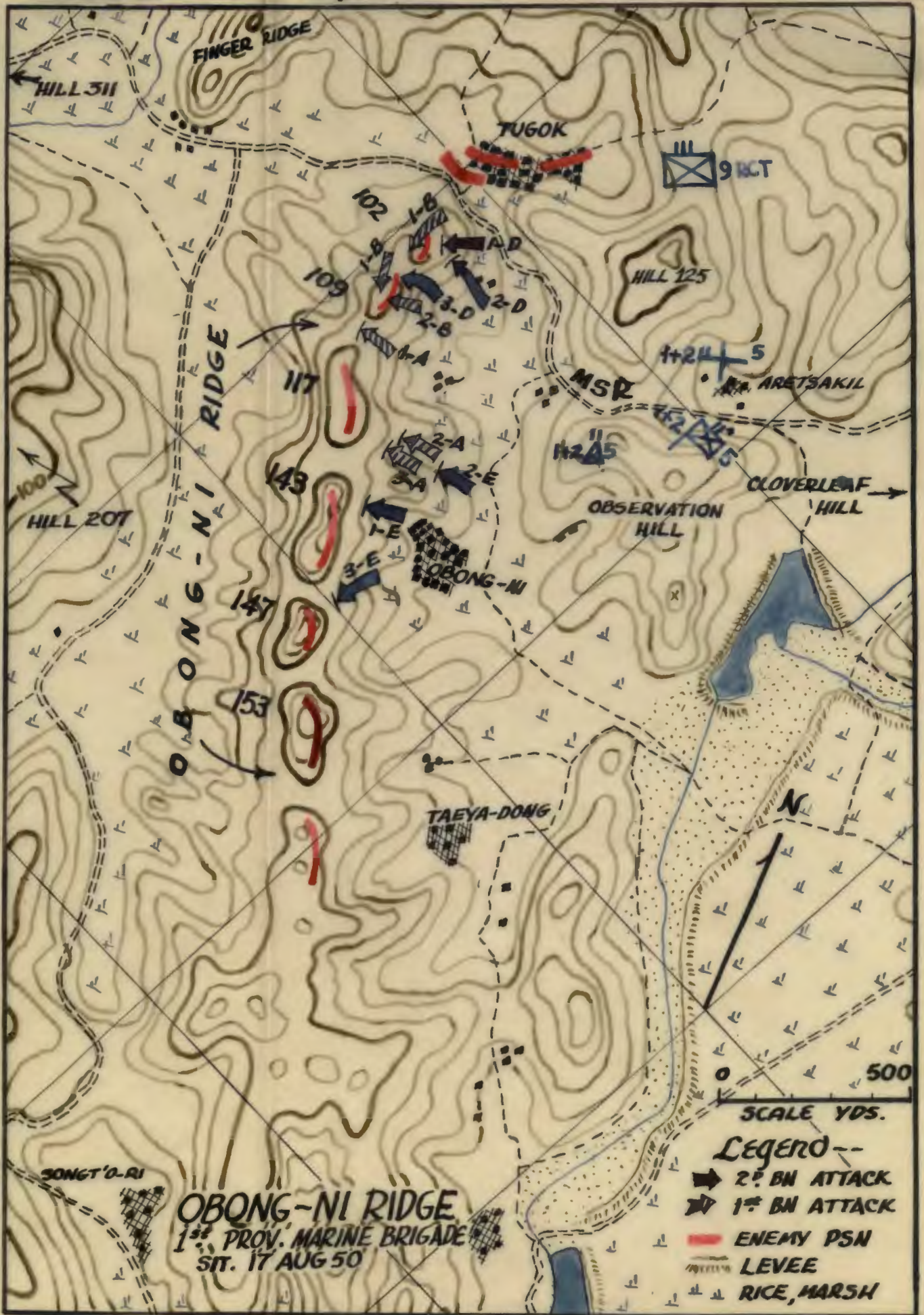
Annex II - sketch map (6:94)





OBONG-NI RIDGE  
SIT. 18 AUG 50

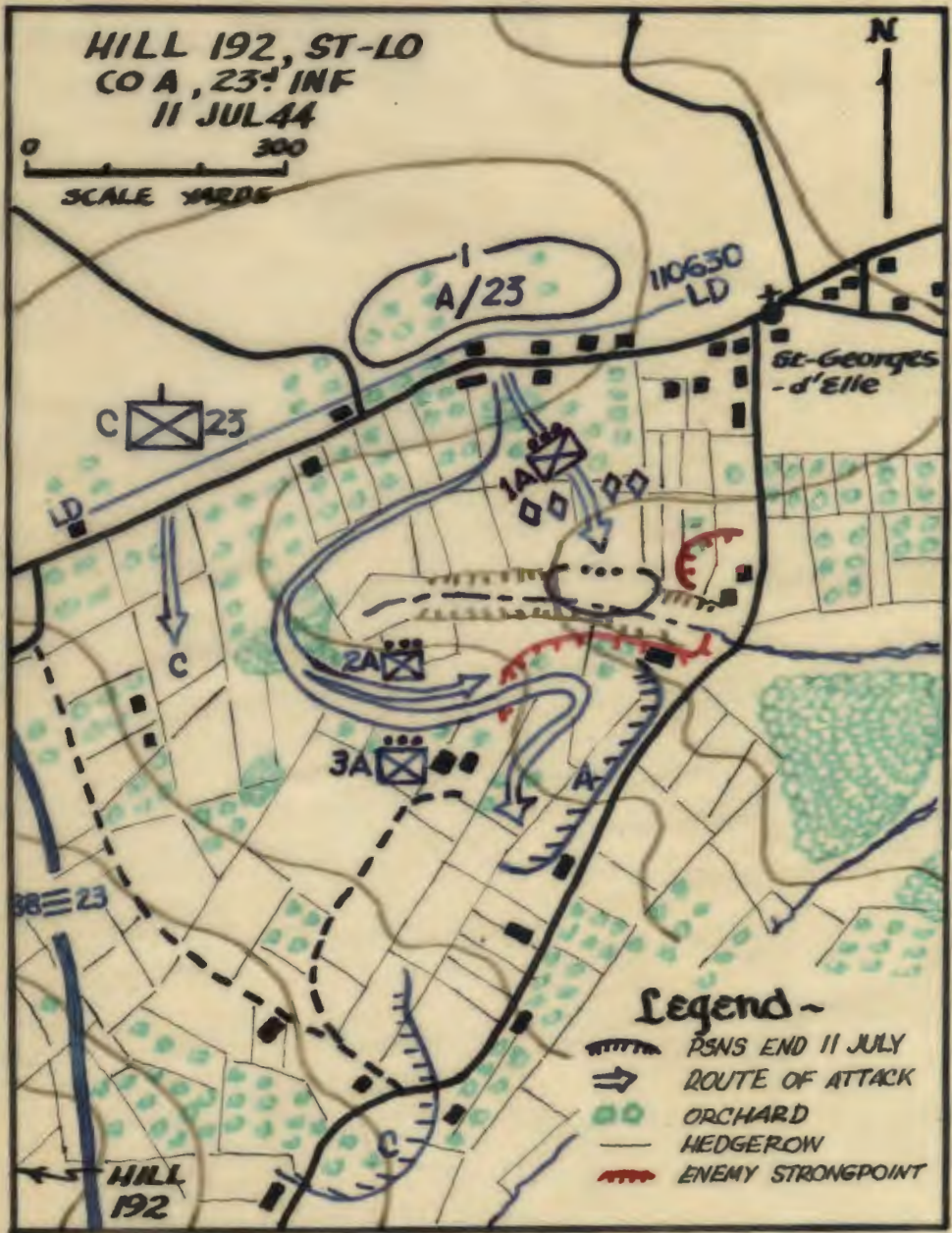
Annex III - sketch map (5:185)



Annex V ~ sketch map (8:59)



# Annex VI - sketch map (8:60)



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