

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

REGULAR COURSE
1938-1939

Plan and Conduct of Attack

A Special Operation--Mountain Warfare.

Action of 1st Abbottabad Infantry Brigade (British) near
Dandil, India, 29th of March, 1937.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbrevi-
ations

Text

Journal

The Action of the 1st (Abbottabad) Infantry Brigade Near Damdil on the 29th March, 1937.

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Reliable articles only accepted by this journal. Contents of this article may be considered authentic.

S.T. 15

Army Extension Courses. Special Text No. 15. Par. 15.

S.T. 13

Army Extension Courses. Special Text No. 13. Pars. 4, 28.

Mimeo 1-18a

"Forms of Attack" Extract: Conference. Tactics. The Infantry School, 1938-1939, Par. 3.

F.S.R.

Field Service Regulations. U. S. Army, 1923. Par. 435.

I. A SPECIAL OPERATION: MOUNTAIN WARFARE

1. INTRODUCTION.--The general features of the brief attack I propose to analyze, constitute generally a study of a special type of operation, specifically, that of mountain warfare.

The uprising of Wazir tribesmen dates back to 1919 and came about as a natural result of the World War and anti-British propaganda by the Bolshevik Government at Moscow. (1) Since 1919 intermittent revolts have continued, fostered largely by tribal jealousies, envy of party chieftains, and the arrogant attitude of the tribesmen as individuals.

During February and March 1937, the situation in Waziristan had deteriorated as the result of propaganda by the Faqir of Ipi, a tribal chief. As a result additional troops of the 1st Division had been sent to North Waziristan. Part of this division, the 1st (Abbottabad) Infantry Brigade, was located at Damdil (Map No. 2).

During this period tribesmen had on several occasions indulged in acts of hostility, such as sniping of camps or determined attacks on pickets. Several hundred tribesmen were known to be gathered in the Lower Khaisora Valley, a few miles southeast of Damdil, ready to seize any opportunity for hostile enterprise.

At this time, the action of troops was confined to the problem of camp protection and the protection of the main lines of communication. Airplanes were used to a limited extent in reconnaissance.

The 1st (Abbottabad) Infantry Brigade (reinforced) was commanded by Brig. General R.D. Inskip and consisted

(1) S.T. 13, Par. 28. Ch. 3.

of the following troops: (2)

	Strength
1st South Wales Borderers (a regiment of infantry)	1600
2nd Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles	500
1st Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles	500
2nd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles	500
13th (Dardoni) Mountain Battery, R.A. (estim)	100
15th (Jhelum) Mountain Battery, R.S. (estim)	100
Total	3300

2. TERRAIN.--The country in the area is extremely rugged and difficult. The features at Ring Contour, Point 4641, and Point 4792 (See Map No. 2) are higher than any ground to the immediate south. However, the country lying between these points and the main road consists of a series of low ridges covered with heavy scrub, and intersected by numerous small ravines with steep and scrub-covered sides affording abundant cover for an enemy. Air reconnaissance on March 28, 1937, of this area, revealed no indication of any concealed tribesmen. (3)

II. PLAN OF ATTACK--BRITISH

3. BRITISH PLAN OF MARCH 29, 1937.--The troops at Damdil were responsible for opening the Razmak Road two or three times a week. The section of this road with which we are concerned is shown on Map No. 2.

On March 29, 1937, the sector of the road north of Damdil (not shown on map) was opened by the 1st South Wales Borderers supported by the 13th Mountain Battery (less one section).

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 6th Gurkha Rifles with the 15th Mountain Battery were given the task of

(2) Journal p. 33

(3) Journal p. 34

opening the road for the six miles of the southern sector (about half of which is shown on Map No. 2).

The task of protecting the Damdil camp was assigned the 2nd Battalion of the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles.

One section of the 13th Mountain Battery was in action near Damdil where it was able to afford support in either the north or south sectors.

No opposition was met by the 1st South Wales Borderers, and the fighting which occurred was confined to the south of Damdil.

The procedure adopted for the protection of this sector was varied on each occasion. The plan on March 29th (4) was as follows:

(a) The 2nd Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles (less one company in brigade reserve) with the 15th Mountain Battery (less one section) was to occupy the features from Ring Contour westward to Point 4641 (See overlay No. 1 to Map No. 2).

(b) The 1st Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles (less "A" Company and one Machine Gun Section) was to pass through, moving between Ring Contour and Asad Khel, and secure the road up to milestone 52 (See Overlay No. 1, to Map No. 2).

(c) "A" Company and one section of machine guns were to be brought up from Damdil as soon as the first objectives had been secured.

(d) No troops were to move south of the Khaisora River on March 29.

(4) Journal p. 34

4. INITIAL CONDUCT OF BRITISH UNITS.--The 2nd

Battalion of the 6th Ghurkha Rifles (less one company), left camp at 6:00 AM on March 29, and by 7:25 AM had occupied without opposition Ring Contour and Point 4641 and a forward locality at "W" (See Overlay No. 1, to Map No. 2). The 15th Mountain Battery (less one section) was in position at this time, on the nose of the hill between Ring Contour and Point 4641 (See Overlay No. 1, to Map No. 2).

The 1st Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles (less detachments) with one section of the 15th Mountain Battery left camp at 6:30 AM. The battalion moved south of Ring Contour and after passing through the positions held by the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles, prepared to secure their first objective, a ridge running to the north of Milestone 50 $\frac{1}{2}$ (See overlay No. 1, to Map No. 2).

The advance guard of the battalion, commanded by Lieutenant R. A. L. Marks, consisted of one company (less two platoons) and one section of machine guns.

At 8:05 AM the advance guard was moving along the low hills immediately north of the road near X. (See Overlay No. 1, to Map No. 2).

At this time heavy fire was opened, from south of the Khaisora River, on the main body of the 1st Battalion, who were also on the hills north of the road, moving towards the first objective. The main body was immediately and effectively pinned to the ground. (See Overlay No. 1, to Map No. 2).

5. FAILURE TO MAKE RECONNAISSANCE.--It appears from the route taken, that the British plan was to make sure that the territory along the immediate north of the Razmak Road was clear by choosing that territory as a route through which to advance. It also appears that the British contemplated no offensive action being taken by tribesmen south of the Khaisora River for the reason that reconnaissance of that area was specifically forbidden in the original plan of action.

Q. Was a tactical error committed?

A. The principles of reconnaissance and security as expressed in Par. 4, Chapter 4, Special Text No. 13, are as follows:

"Reconnaissance and security become of the utmost importance in mountain warfare. Because of the excellent observation available to an enemy it is seldom possible to conceal the movement of any force of appreciable size. Therefore, it is necessary to give it every protection. All around security should be provided both on the march and at halts. Security groups should be strong enough to protect themselves. Surprise must be guarded against at all times. Units should not be allowed to become isolated, unless they are strong enough to defend themselves against any probable enemy in the vicinity."

Two methods for providing security for lines of communication in mountains are:

1. Escort for supply column.
2. Series of posts or combat groups along the high ground adjacent to the line.

Both systems uneconomical in use of men.

The second method has proved most successful in operations by the British in northern India.

Let us note that all around security should be provided. The decision to forbid reconnaissance south of the Khaisora River is therefore, considered an error from a tactical viewpoint in that it prevented all around

security being established for this main body.

We also note that a unit should not be allowed to become isolated, unless strong enough to defend itself against any probable enemy in the vicinity.

In considering the application of this principle to the advance guard let us see what took place and then pass judgment.

6. ADVANCE GUARD ACTION--FAULTY FORMATION.--We must recall that at this time the main body was under fire from points south of the Khaisora River.

A few moments later the advance guard also came under heavy fire from south of the Khaisora and almost simultaneously tribesmen emerged in considerable numbers from the deep wooded ravine, north of and parallel to the road, and attacked the advance guard. It is evident from results that the enemy attacked with fanatical fury and actually closed with the advance guard in hand to hand fighting. The advance guard suffered heavy casualties, including Lieutenant Marks, the advance guard commander. The remnants of the advance guard were pinned by heavy fire to whatever positions they happened to be in, and there defended themselves against further repeated attacks.

7. COMMENT ON PLAN AND CONDUCT OF ATTACK (ADVANCE GUARD).--It now appears that the advance guard was allowed to become isolated, and that it was not strong enough to defend itself against any probable enemy in the vicinity, a serious violation of the tactical principle previously expressed, which resulted in disaster for the advance guard. (5)

(5) Journal, p. 35

III. PLAN OF ATTACK--TRIBESMEN

8. PRINCIPLE OF SURPRISE--ILLUSTRATION.--We shall now look at this situation from the viewpoint of the attackers.

Q. What type of attack was this on the British advance guard?

A. A surprise attack.

We learn from paragraph 15, Special Text No. 15, the elements of a surprise attack, quoting:

"Surprise attacks consist of ambushes, or other sudden blows, made against a hostile force caught unawares in route column or in some other unsuitable formation. Success in ambushes and local attacks is secured by the suddenness and rapidity of the blow. The moral effect on the force surprised is overwhelming and effectively prevents organized counter-measures. Conditions which permit attacks of this nature result from insufficient reconnaissance and observation, and from faulty security dispositions on the part of the force attacked."

It appears that the arrogant uncivilized tribesmen were well aware of what constituted a surprise attack. The tribesmen were, in this instance, the peer of the civilized Britisher, from a tactical viewpoint.

9. THREE AIMS OF EVERY ATTACK--ILLUSTRATION--COMMENT.--

Let us further investigate this advance guard action.

Q. What are the three aims of every attack?

- A. (1) To contain or fix the enemy.
(2) To direct a decisive blow at a vital area.
(3) To exert continuous pressure against that vital area.

We must again recall that the main body was fired on and pinned to the ground a few minutes before the advance guard was fired on. In this action, the tribesmen carried out the first aim of the attack by fixing the enemy. (6)

The British were immediately afterward struck in a vital area--the advance guard. Score two for the tribesmen.

And further, we find our primitive Waziristan tribesman scoring the third and conclusive point by continuing to exert pressure against that vital area.

IV. CONDUCT OF ATTACK

10. OPERATIONS OF 1st BATTALION, 6th GURKHA RIFLES.--

The sound of the firing from this advance guard action reached Dosalli, several miles down the road, where a Light Tank Company was located. Armored cars of this Light Tank Company were sent from Dosalli and succeeded in evacuating survivors of that part of the advance guard near the road.

At the time of this attack on the advance guard, the situation which developed between 8:20 AM and 8:35 AM was as indicated on Overlay No. 2, to Map No. 2:

A. 1st Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles:

(1) "A" Company (with one section machine guns attached) arrived at milestone 49 and in attempting to drive the tribesmen from the ravines north of the road and establish a picket on the spur of Point 4792 were pinned down by hostile fire, and suffered several casualties, including the Company Commander.

(2) "C" Company was broken up to provide pickets as follows:

a. Picket with Machine Gun Section attached at milestone 49.

b. Picket sent to occupy spur running southeast from Point 4792 (under cover of fire of a machine gun section).

This picket was stopped by hostile fire at positions indicated.

c. Small section from "C" Company joined Battalion Headquarters at Point Z.

(3) "B" Company was broken up into small detachments during process of deployment in face of enemy fire.

a. A small section of "B" Company joined the "C" Company picket which was moving towards the spur running southeast of Point 4792. It was pinned down here by hostile fire.

B. 2nd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles, was still occupying position as indicated on Overlay No. 1.

C. 15th Mountain Battery, same.

D. 13th Mountain Battery, at Damdil

E. 2nd Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, at Damdil.

F. 1st South Wales Borderers, north of Damdil.

As for the opposing forces, it was now apparent that large numbers of tribesmen were concealed in the ravines north of the road, in addition to an indeterminate group south of the Khaisora.

11. OPERATION OF TRIBESMEN.--At about this time tribesmen began to present good targets to the 2nd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles and the 15th Mountain Battery. Fire from these units secured "A" and "C" Companies from any further attack, but any movement continued to draw instant fire at close range from concealed tribesmen, and the troops were virtually pinned to the ground. (7)

(7) Journal, p. 37.

Attempts were made by parties of tribesmen to attack the 2nd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifle and to out-flank their positions north of Point 4641. These attempts were frustrated by rifle and light automatic fire and by the fire of the section of the 13th Mountain Battery from camp.

12. USE OF BRITISH RESERVE--ENVELOPMENT.--Q. What use would you make of the British reserve at this time?

A. I would use the reserve, 2nd Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, to make an envelopment from direction of the high ground in vicinity of Point 4792, in order to relieve pressure on the British units now engaged.

Q. What tactical principle does this type of movement illustrate?

A. The division of troops into a main or decisive attack and a holding or secondary attack.

That is actually what was done. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, left Damdil, and at 1:00 PM attacked Point 4792 from the northeast. (See Overlay No. 3, to Map No. 2). This attack was successful in relieving the pressure on 1st Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles, which as we have seen, was deployed over a considerable area. (8)

Q. What paragraph of our F.S.R. applies in this case?

A. Paragraph 435.

"An envelopment is effected by directing a portion of the forces against the hostile flank while other forces contain the enemy along the front."

(8) Journal, p. 37.

13. COMMENT ON ENVELOPING ACTION.--This enveloping action included the necessary elements for success: viz:

- (1) Element of surprise.
- (2) Superiority of force.
- (3) Advantageous terrain features.

The success of the movement was warranted by these conditions.

14. WITHDRAWAL FROM ACTION--BRITISH.--The 2nd Battalion, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, with the assistance of artillery fire, continued to work southward driving tribesmen out of cover so that they came under small arms fire. The approach of dusk prevented full advantage being taken of the favorable position.

During the course of this action, the survivors and casualties of the advance guard were evacuated by the composite group under Battalion Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles, commanded by Captain O. C. T. Dykes.

While the above action was taking place, the 1st South Wales Borderers, who had returned to camp at about 2:00 PM from the northern section, moved out and took up a position to the northeast of Point 4792 to support the withdrawal of the 2nd Battalion of the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles. This battalion was able to withdraw successfully, covered by fire from the 1st South Wales Borderers, the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles and by artillery fire of the 15th Mountain Battery. The 2nd Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles then withdrew and were followed by the 1st South Wales Borderers.

The tribesmen had suffered heavy losses late in the day and although the last stages of the withdrawal were carried out in failing light, it was not followed up. The last troops reached Dandil Camp by 7:45 PM.

The strength of the tribesmen is reliably estimated to have numbered between 700 and 1000. Their casualties were subsequently confirmed at 94 killed and 64 wounded. (9) The high percentage killed is an indication of the severe nature of the fighting.

The British casualties numbered 34 killed and 45 wounded.

15. CONCLUSIONS.--This action indicates that principles of combat are applicable in situations other than those generally considered, particularly situations arising in stabilized warfare. Here we have a so-called group of uncivilized mountain tribesmen opposing in battle an array of civilized, modern, professional soldiers on a battlefield abnormal in aspect; yet every phase of this action provides a multiple illustration of principles enunciated in our Field Service Regulations, featuring such principles by their violation or observance, with corresponding results. We are able to deduce from this attack certain lessons, primarily concerned with elementary principles of combat, as follows:

V. RECAPITULATION OF LESSONS

Reconnaissance	Proper and more complete reconnaissance would have been of inestimable value to the British.
Security	There is evidence that the initial formation provided little security for the advance guard and that the advance guard was also unable to provide proper security for the main body.

Suprise

The element of suprise gave the tribesmen, although outnumbered, a terrific momentum and consequent advantage, initially.

Reserve

The British were able to evade a costly defeat through the use of reserves, which made a flank envelopment possible.

APPENDIX TO:

PLAN AND CONDUCT OF ATTACK.

A SPECIAL OPERATION....MOUNTAIN WARFARE.

ACTION OF 1st ABBOTTABAD INFANTRY BRIGADE (BRITISH)
NEAR DAMDIL, INDIA, 29th OF MARCH, 1937.

SUBJECT: Comparison AEF Infantry Regiment of 1918
and a British Regiment of 1937.

1. Two previous monographs have been submitted by my colleagues under Topic No. 17-A. In these monographs has been indicated the formation of attack generally adopted by a typical AEF Regiment of 1918. In them is emphasized particularly the fact that depth and control were sacrificed for fire power, due to the influence of French instructors who were assigned to AEF Regiments for the purpose of familiarizing the American troops with French tactics. Reconnaissance and other security measures seemed to have been subordinated to the exigency of pouring this new source of man power into the beaten zone of German fire.

2. In my monograph on "Plan and Conduct of Attack", which concerns the actions of a composite regiment of the 1st Abbottabad Infantry Brigade near Damdil, India on March 29, 1937, I have deduced certain lessons which illustrate principles of the attack. In order to make a comparison of an AEF Infantry Regiment of 1918 and this British Regiment of 1937, I have drawn the two sketches, attached, marked 1-a, and 1-b. I have taken a zone of action as indicated on the maps attached to basic papers on this subject submitted by my two colleagues, Lt. Batcheller, and Lt. Andrea, as being a typical zone for

an AEF Regiment of 1918. This zone is shown on Sketch 1-a. On sketch 1-b, I have indicated schematically the attack which took place in the action of this British Regiment on March 29, 1937.

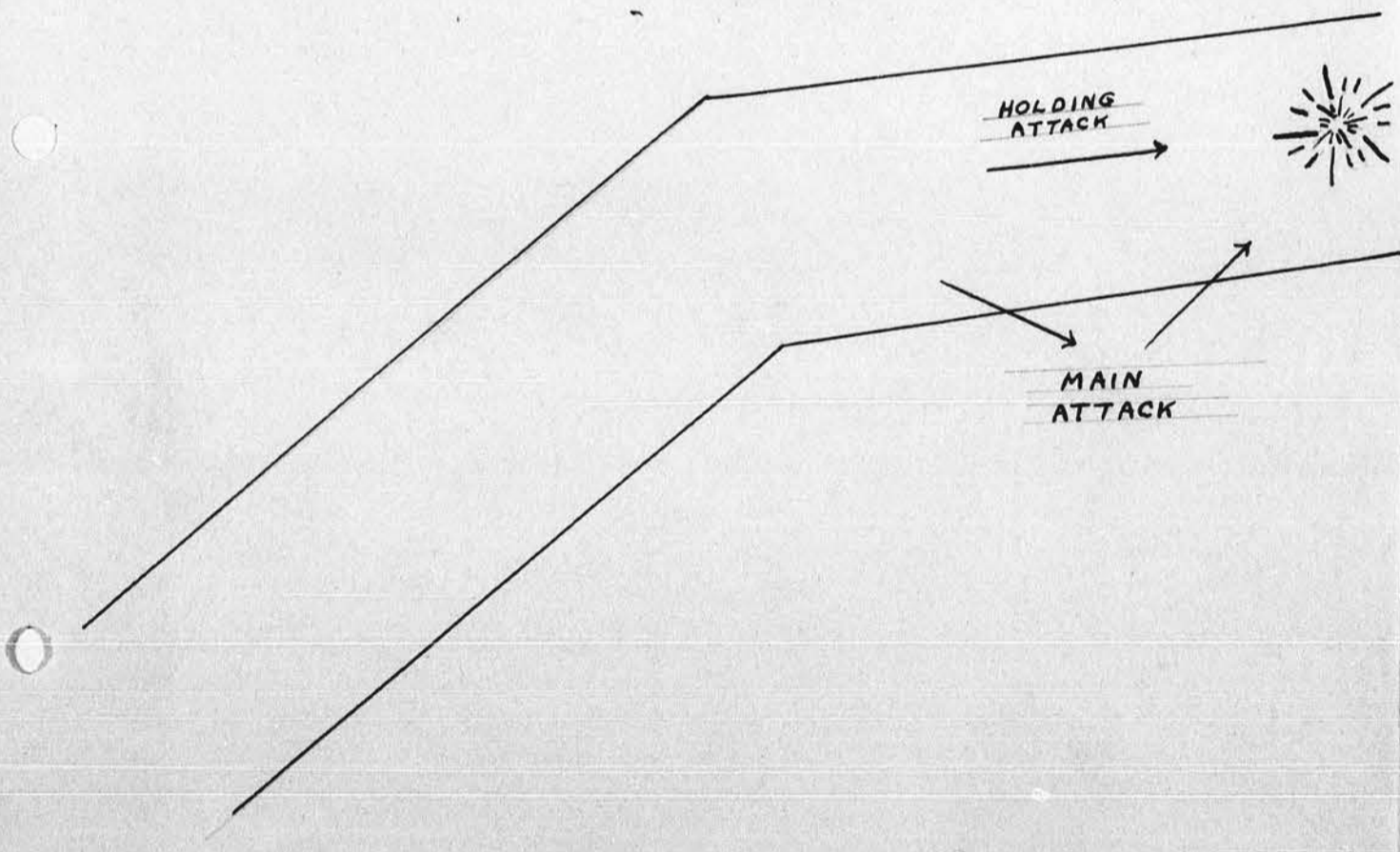
3. In order to make this comparison clear, I have selected the feature of the attack of each Regiment which is outstanding and because of which the attack resulted in eventual success.

4. Note that the part of the AEF Regiment which was concerned in the attack succeeded because of the enveloping movement of a platoon from "B" Company, 103d Infantry which took the enemy in flank, destroyed the hostile resistance and took the objective. This movement took place within a definite zone of action, with clearly defined boundary lines on a stabilized front.

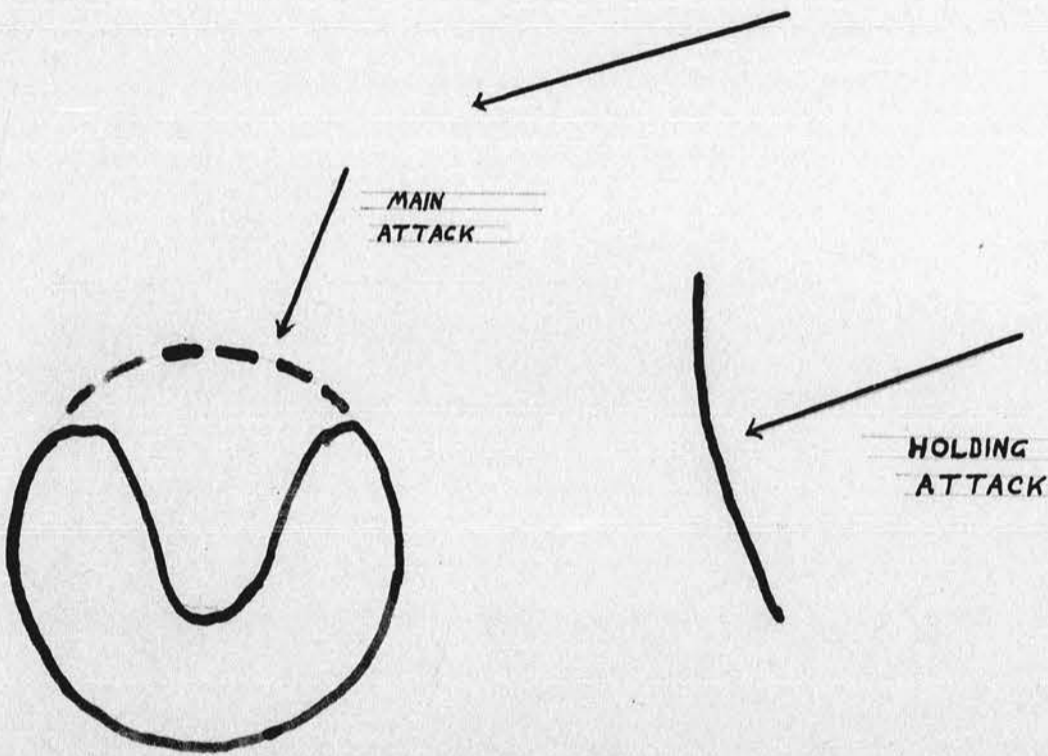
5. Nineteen years later we find a British Regiment operating in open warfare without a definite zone of action and without boundary lines in a mountainous country, against so called uncivilized people. Yet we find again an application of the enveloping action in order to take the enemy by surprise from the flank, and again with success. This action is indicated schematically on Sketch 1-b.

6. It should be recalled that the doctrines of the Infantry School include this statement in effect: that all attacks properly include two efforts; the main or decisive attack and the secondary or holding attack. We find both of these two efforts included in the successful enveloping actions already described, and both are represented schematically on Sketches 1-a and 1-b.

~~7. In conclusion then, we may state that reflection~~
on the lessons to be deduced from a comparison of these
two entirely separate actions, lends indorsement in
proof of the statement that principles of combat are
immutable and of universal application.



SKETCH 1-a



SKETCH 1-b

SYMBOLS

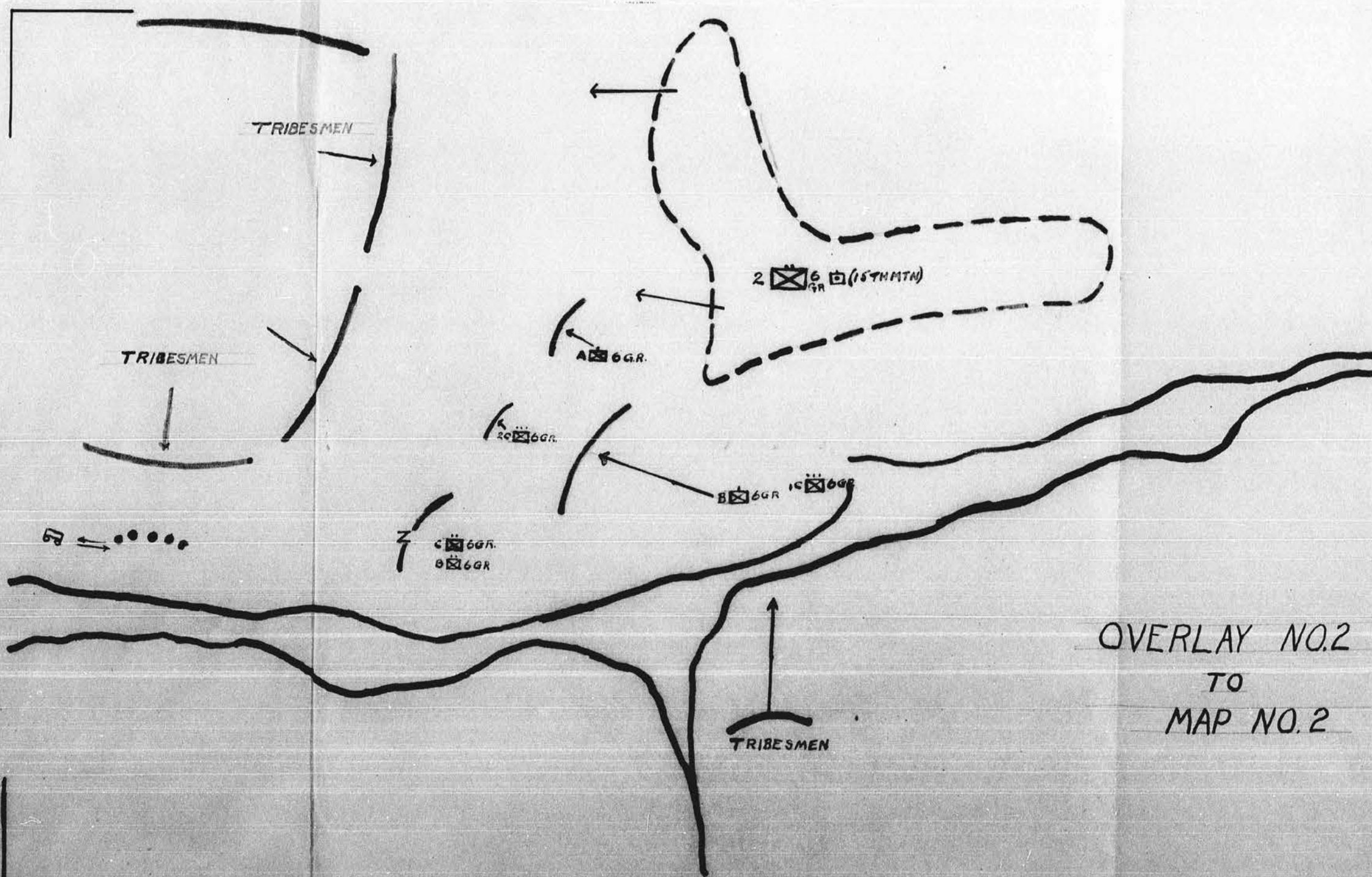
----- AREA OCCUPIED
BY 2D BN, 6GR.

POINT Z GENERAL LOCATION
HDQTRS 1ST BN, 6GR.

..... SURVIVORS
ADVANCE GD.

☐ (13TH MTN
BATTERY)

2 ☐ 6GR




OVERLAY NO.2
TO
MAP NO.2

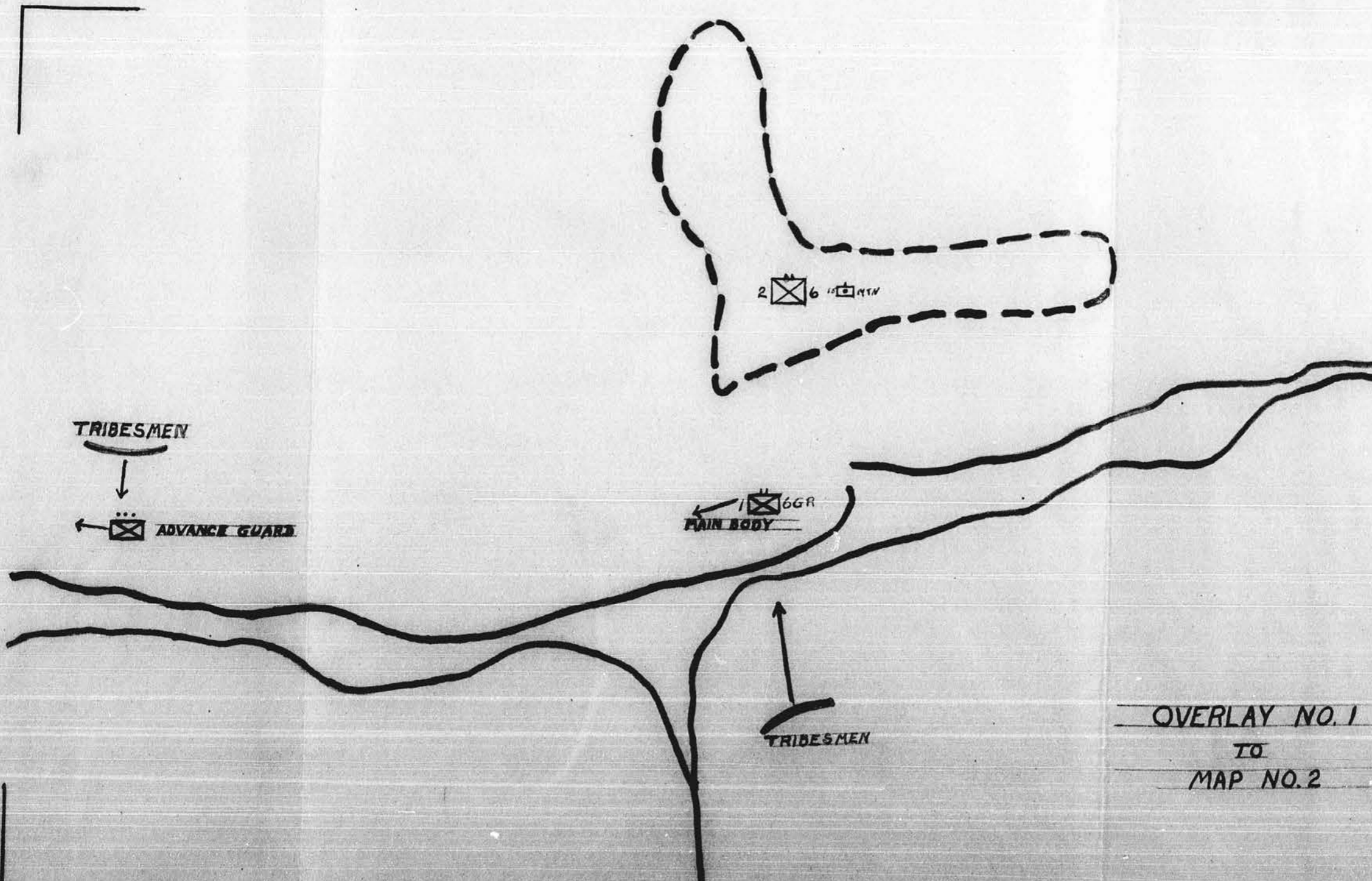
SYMBOL

AREA OCCUPIED BY

2D BN, 6TH G.R.

2  S.R.G.R.

1  G.R.



OVERLAY NO. 1

TO

MAP NO. 2

AFGHANISTAN

CHINA

WAZIRISTAN

INDIA

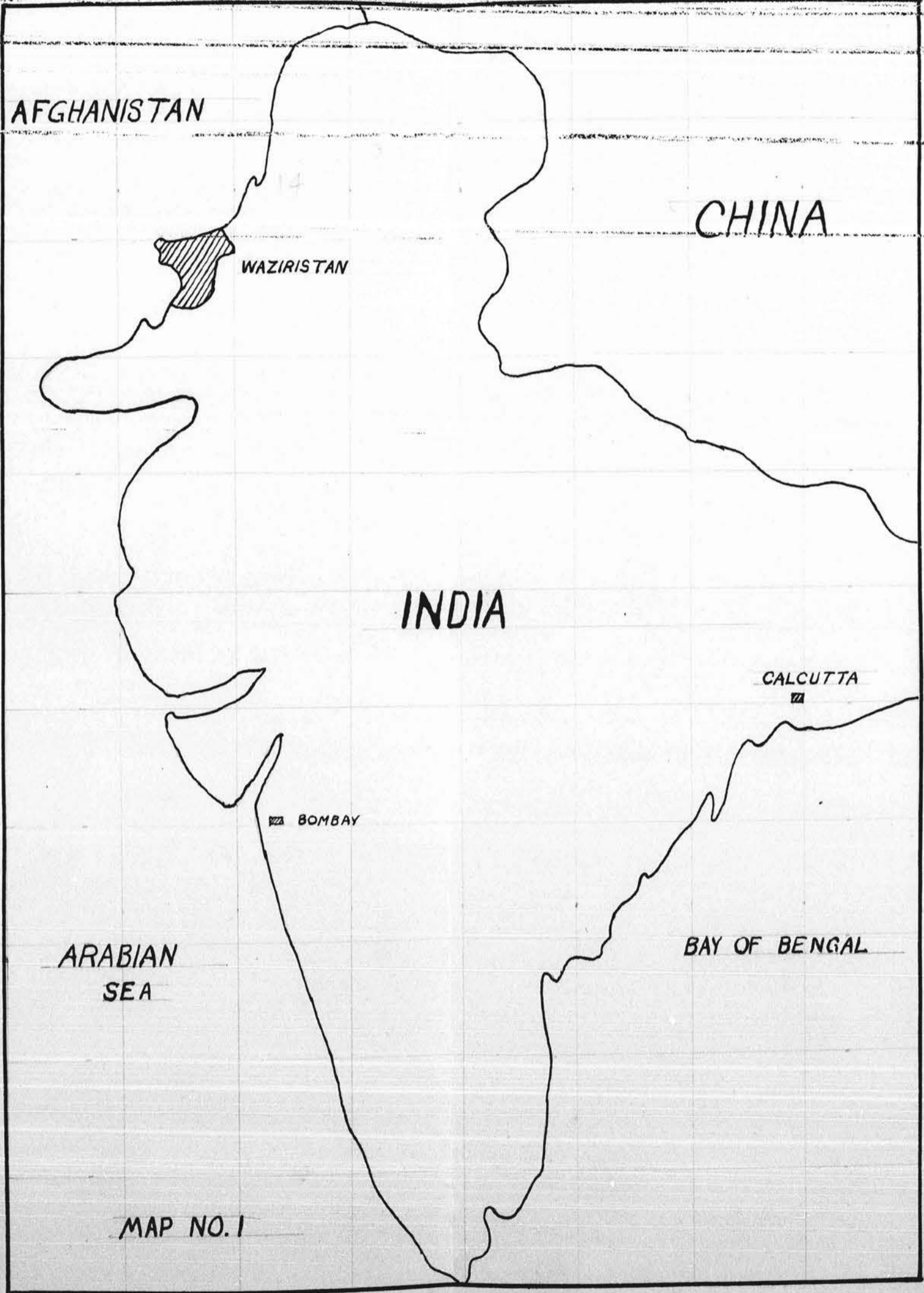
CALCUTTA

BOMBAY

ARABIAN
SEA

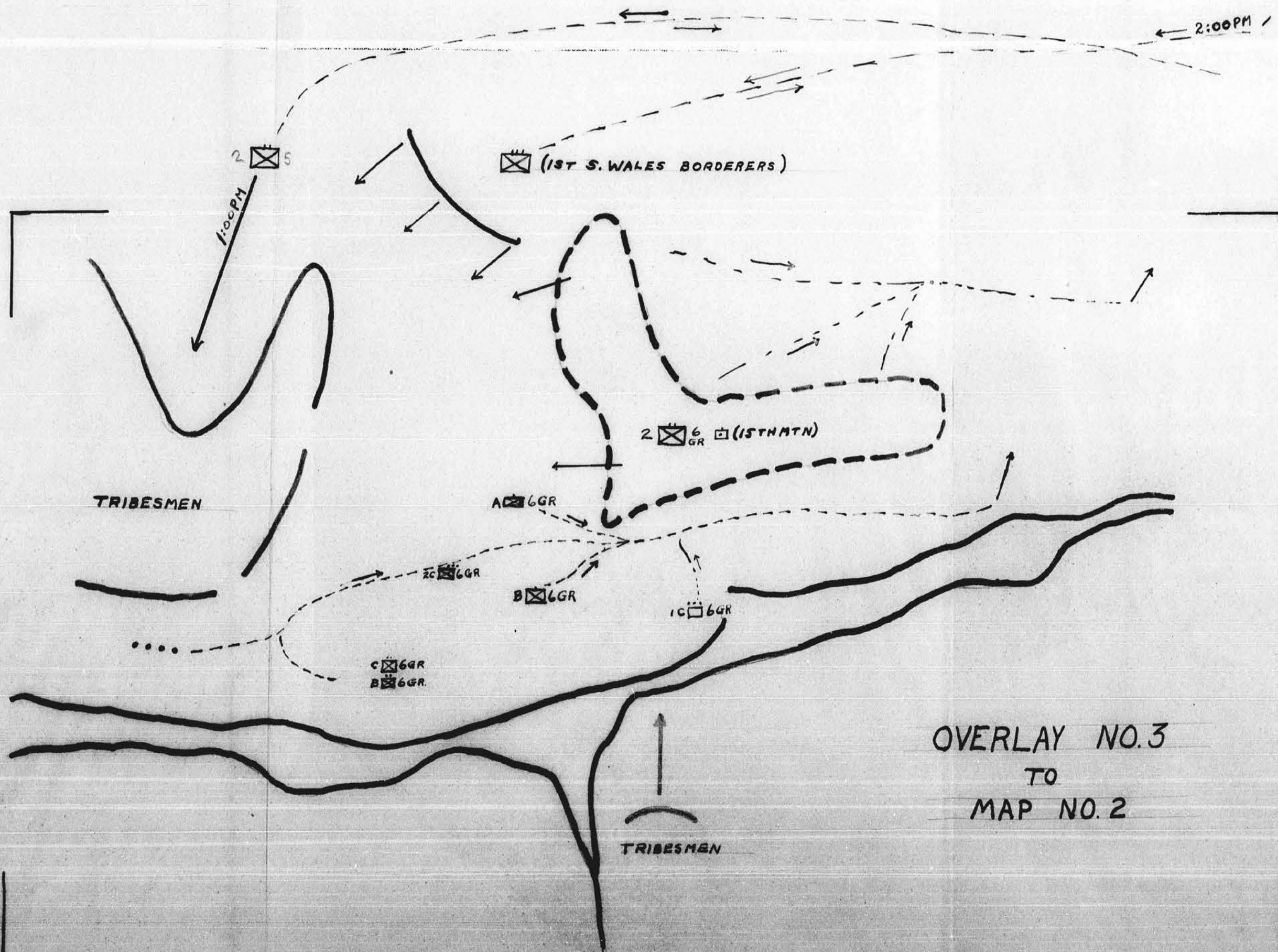
BAY OF BENGAL

MAP NO. 1



SYMBOLS

- AREA OCCUPIED BY
20 BN, 6TH G.R.
- OTHER SURVIVORS,
ADVANCE GUARD



OVERLAY NO.3
TO
MAP NO.2

SKETCH MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE
ACTION OF THE 1ST (ABBOTTABAD) INFANTRY BRIGADE
S.W. OF DAMDIL 29TH MARCH 1937



SCALE

MAP NO. 2

