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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 306TH INFANTRY  
(77TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON CAMP  
DOWNS, LEYTE, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS ON 8 DECEMBER 1944

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION MAKING A CO-  
ORDINATED ATTACK ON ITS ASSIGNED OBJECTIVES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
ORIENTATION.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	4
Disposition and Plans of the 307th Infantry.....	6
The Battalion Situation.....	7
The Battalion Plan of Attack.....	8
Final Preparations for the Attack and Movement to the Line of Departure.....	9
NARRATION.....	10
Attack on the Initial Objective.....	10
Orders and Continuation of the Attack.....	13
Preparations for the Night.....	17
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	18
LESSONS.....	20
MAP A Sixth Army Situation and Landing by the 77th Infantry Division at Ormoc. P. I.	
MAP B The Beachhead and Division Plan of Attack.	
MAP C The Attack on Camp Downs, LEYTE, Philippine Island.	

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 306TH INFANTRY  
(77TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON CAMP DOWNS  
LEYTE, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS ON 8 DECEMBER 1944

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Battalion, 306th Infantry, (77th Infantry Division) in the Attack on Camp Downs LEYTE, Philippine Islands on 8 December 1944.

Prior to a discussion of this action the reader will be oriented on the major events leading up to the attack by the Battalion.

General Kueger's Sixth Army made the initial landings in the Philippines on 20th October 1944. The Island of LEYTE was chosen as a target for the opening stages of General McArthur's return to the Philippines. The Sixth Army with the X and XXIV Corps landing abreast, the X Corps on the north, made successful landings and moved in rapidly to their initial objectives. (See Map A) (1)

The 77th Infantry Division Sixth Army Reserve for LEYTE operation, had just completed their operations in the Battle of Guam. The initial operations on LEYTE being very successful, 77th Infantry Division was ordered to move from Guam to a rest area on the Island of New Caledonia. (2) Meanwhile the Japanese were reinforcing the Island of LEYTE with several more Divisions. They were determined to make an all out effort to eject the Sixth Army from LEYTE. This required the Sixth

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(1) A-1, p. 93

(2) A-5, p. 1

Army to commit all U.S. Divisions present on LEYTE. General Krueger then ordered the 77th U.S. Division to proceed to LEYTE without delay. (3) This message was received by the 77th Division aboard ship just off the coast of New Caledonia. The Division arrived at LEYTE on the 23rd of November 1944. Various elements of the 77th Division were immediately committed "piece-meal". On the 1st of December the Division received a warning order requiring it to assemble and prepare for a shore to shore landing on the west coast of LEYTE in the vicinity of Ormoc. (4)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 6th December 1944 the Sixth Army had secured the eastern half of LEYTE. (See Map B) All U.S. Army Divisions except the 77th Division were heavily engaged with the Japanese forces. The Japanese soldier's morale was high at this point. This was due to the large number of reinforcements they were receiving through Ormoc. The Japanese had succeeded in making progress of the U.S. Army Divisions slow and costly.

General Krueger ordered the 77th Division to attack the Japanese main base and nerve center <sup>Ormoc</sup>. The Sixth Army plan included an all-out attack by the 7th Division in the South and the 32nd Division in the North, in conjunction with the landing by the 77th Division. (5)

On the third anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the 77th Division surprised the Japanese Forces by landing on a lightly defended beach a few miles south of Ormoc.

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(3) A-1, p. 105, 106

(4) A-2, p. 148, 149, 153

(5) A-1, p. 107

The initial wave landed at 0707 and moved inland against negligible opposition. The Division less two Infantry Battalions, Hq 306th Infantry and part of Division Artillery made the landing. This Force had landed and secured a beach-head in 2½ hours. (6) The balance of the Division was due to arrive on D-day plus 2. The 2nd Battalion 306th Infantry was attached to the 307th Infantry. Disposition of Troops along the beach-head line were as follows: 307th Infantry on the left (north) portion of the beach-head perimeter, 2nd Battalion 306th in the center and 305th Infantry on the right (south). (See Map B)

The Division plan was to hold this beach-head until balance of the Division and additional supplies arrived on D-plus 2. However, Major General A.D. Bruce, commanding General 77th Infantry Division, after observing the complete success of the landing decided to order the 307th Infantry to make an immediate attack to the north and capture Ipil. This attack was to be followed the next morning by an all-out attack against Ormoc. (7)

Major General A.D. Bruce sent the following message to XXIV Corps and Sixth Army Headquarters: "COME SEVEN, COME ELEVEN, DOUBLE SEVEN HAS LANDED" (indicating that the 7th Division from the south and 11th Airborne Division from the east could now move as a result of the 77th Division offensive action.) The contents of this message was disseminated to all troops of the Division. The significant message bolstered morale and contributed greatly to release of ten-

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(6) A-2, p. 157

(7) A-2, p. 149

sion caused by the D-day landing. (8)

The Island of LEYTE is divided by a very high mountain range running north and south. These mountains are covered with dense jungles and rough terrain. The east and west coast consisted of two valleys. The east valley was held by U.S. Forces and the west valley by Japanese Forces. (9) The valley near the west coast now became the area of operations for the U.S. 77th Infantry Division. It had the usual small streams, rice fields, and numerous finger ridges extending generally east and west. The terrain was rather open with patches of woods through the area. Further inland from the valley the terrain became very rough and difficult to traverse. Operations would have to be conducted along the coast line if the attacker was to have any advantage. The weather was fair and mild during this operation.

On D-day, 7th December 1944, sufficient supplies were carried with troops for three days of operations. Division supply Agencies carried an additional amount. It was expected that the D plus 2 Convoy would resupply the Division; thereafter Sixth Army would supply the Division. No difficulties were encountered in resupply of the Division. (10)

#### DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 307TH INFANTRY

The 2nd Battalion, 306th Infantry was attached to the 307th Infantry. Headquarters 306th Infantry was not due into the beach-head until D plus 2.

Major General BRUCE, Division Commander, decided to attack. The 307th Infantry in the assault echelon was to

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(8) Personal knowledge

(9) A-3, p. 5

(10) Personal knowledge

attack the next day to the north. The plan of maneuver required the 305th Infantry to protect the Division beach-head. Each night the beach-head was to move to the area captured by the assault Regiment. (11)

Late in the afternoon of 7th December, Colonel Stephen S. Hamilton, Commanding Officer of the 307th Infantry, issued his attack order for 0800 hours on 8th December 1944. The Division Objective was ORMOC, the Regimental Objective was Camp Downs, and Battalion Objectives were two intermediate ridge lines between beach-head line and Camp Downs. The line of Departure was the beach-head line. The 3rd Battalion of the 307th Infantry and the 2nd Battalion of the 306th Infantry were to assault with the 2nd Battalion on the exposed right flank. Each Battalion to attack in a zone about 500 yards wide.

(See Map C) (12)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION (13)

The Battalion on 7th December 1944 had landed twenty minutes after the first wave hit the shore. It had immediately organized and was disposed on a front of approximately 1700 yards in the center of the beach-head perimeter. Patrols were sent out to the front. No action of major importance had taken place between the Battalion and Japanese Forces, but the Battalion was prepared to meet a counter attack against the beach-head.

The Battalion was in good condition to launch an attack the next day. It had just completed a very successful operation on Guam. Although the fighting had been severe at times,

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(11) A-4, p. 3

(12) Personal knowledge

(13) Personal knowledge



the casualties had been very light. Everyone was anxious to go after the Japs again and finish the war.

The Battalion had collected and placed its supplies in the Battalion supply point. Due to the shortage of landing craft, only one-third of its vehicles were present. Vehicles were placed under Battalion control. The terrain was so difficult, that all heavy weapons had to be hand-carried as well as the ammunition. Many Philipinos volunteered their service to the Battalion Supply Officer thus relieving a great deal of need for additional vehicles.

Terrain in the immediate zone of operation was fairly open, except where patches of woods covered ridge lines and stream beds. Two prominent hills dominated the approaches to Camp Downs and were considered the critical terrain features in the Battalion zone. There was one dangerous avenue of approach into the Battalion zone of action. This approach was covered with trees and entered the Battalion zone of action from the east and along the right of the first hill.

Upon receipt of the attack order, the Battalion Command Group made its reconnaissance. No Japs were encountered. Unless the Japs moved up at night it appeared that the Battalion would be able to "jump off" into its attack without difficulties. The Battalion Commander then issued his attack order about two and a half hours prior to darkness.

#### THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK (See Map C) (14)

The Battalion plan was to move out of the beach-head in a column of companies, Just before arriving at the first hill

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(14) Personal knowledge

it was to deploy with two Companies abreast, Company E on the left, Company F on the right and Company G in Reserve. An artillery preparation had been requested by the Battalion. The 307th Infantry had not sent an Artillery Liaison Officer nor any forward observers. They were expected the following morning. The Battalion machine gun platoons were to be in direct support, one with each assault company. The 81 mm Mortars were in general support. The Battalion anti-tank platoon, due to the ineffectiveness of its 37mm gun, was armed with Browning Automatic Rifles and used for special patrols and security groups. During the attack a detachment protected the Command group at the OP and the balance was used for security in Battalion rear area.

The time of attack was 0800 on 8 December 1944. The boundary with the 3rd Battalion, 307th Infantry was the highway leading to Ormoc. The Reserve Company was given the mission of right flank security. It was to move by bounds on order of the Battalion Commander. Flank patrols from Reserve Company were not to exceed one Squad. The Battalion aid station was located initially in a draw just south of first objective. The Battalion Supply point was located near the road leading to Ormoc, approximately 1200 yards south of Line of Departure.

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK AND MOVEMENT TO THE LINE OF DEPARTURE (15)

Upon receipt of the Battalion attack order the Company and platoon Commanders made their reconnaissance and the troops prepared for the attack. Battalion patrols continued to operate in a radius of 1000 yards to the front.

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(15) Personal knowledge

The individual <sup>equipment</sup> weapon of the soldier in this operation included his herringbone twill uniform, combat boots, web belt, steel helmet, trench knife, individual weapon, two bandoliers of ammunition, poncho which he carried in his belt, three handgrenades, a spoon and one-third ration. Very few men carried their pack. Extra socks and drawers were carried in their pockets. The men stripped down to essentials. All gas-masks were carried by the Battalion S-4 and were available for issue on short notice. The Battalion Communications SOP was checked. Radios were to be used with companies. The Battalion Command Group included a communication team which provided a wire line from the Battalion OP to the CP.

#### NARRATION

##### ATTACK ON THE INITIAL OBJECTIVE (16)

At 0800 on 8 December 1944 the 2nd Battalion, 306th Infantry "jumped off" in the attack from the beach-head line. No Artillery observer or Liaison Officer had reported, so the Battalion crossed the line of departure without an artillery preparation. Assault Companies E and F moved slowly but steadily. Just as the assault was started on the initial objectives the Japs opened up. Japs employed machine guns, mortars and Infantry riflemen. This position was evidently the Japs combat Outpost Line. They soon withdrew to the north. Casualties for both sides were very few.

The Battalion command group, consisting of the Battalion Commander, S-3, S-2, Communication Teams and Security group, maintained an OP that moved along with the rear elements of

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(16) Personal knowledge

the two assault Companies. The Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. William D. Cavness, was very aggressive in his actions. He always appeared at the point that did the Battalion the most good and was readily available to make decisions on the spot. Communications during this period had been exceptionally good. The wire from OP to Battalion CP was functioning well and all radio nets were working in good order. All during the attack the Battalion Commander had wire communication with his CP and Regimental CP

Company G, in reserve, was moved into an assembly area that covered the main avenue of approach. They were in a good position to meet enemy counter attacks into the Battalion's exposed right flank.

At about 0930, just as the assault echelon was about to gain the first objective, an artillery forward observer reported to the Battalion Commander. He was immediately dispatched to Company F on the right. Company F was on the exposed flank and its portion of the objective was on higher ground. Thirty minutes after this forward observer reported to Company F, he and his radio operator were killed by enemy machine gun fire. This was ironical, because the first thing the forward observer did when he opened his radio was to report to Regiment that enemy opposition was very weak. The Battalion supporting weapons continued to take over as much of the role of artillery as was possible. Another artillery observer was requested. (17)

The Jap forces opposing the Battalion were identified as elements of the 12th and 13th Regiments. One Unit was

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(17) Personal knowledge

identified as the 1st Machine Gun Company. (18) They appeared to be well trained and well disciplined troops. It was very difficult to spot their individual positions until after they had opened fire and inflicted several casualties. Their camouflage was superior. Some small calibre Jap artillery shelling was received in the Battalion area, apparently from 77mm and 40mm anti-aircraft guns. Most of the Jap artillery shelling was directed at the Division or beach-head supply installation during this initial phase. (19)

The Battalion aid station had moved up to within supporting distance of the advancing troops. Litter bearers were boldly roaming the area for wounded. The Battalion ammunition point had not moved from its original location.

The Battalion captured its first objective at 1030. The momentum of its attack carried the leading elements beyond the objective to a small fordable stream. Companies E and F began to re-organize and prepare for the continuation of the attack. The Battalion supply officer, Lt. Robert J. De Grand, had anticipated the need for ammunition and carrying parties from the Battalion pioneer and ammunition platoon had delivered the resupply of ammunition to companies E and F. Machine gun and BAR ammunition were the chief requirements at this time.

During this reorganization the Battalion Commander and staff made an estimate of the situation. It was determined that the Japanese outpost had been driven in; the main battle position was the next objective. The Battalion objective was the last high ground in the approaches to Ormoc. It was also

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(18) A-4, p. 3

(19) Personal knowledge

surmised that the likely avenue of counter-attack for the Japs would be the draw that led up to the objective and ran deep into the Division beach-head area. The Battalion Commander decided to make a coordinated attack against the Battalion's next objective with two Companies in assault echelon and to give the Reserve company the same flank security mission. It was also felt that a counter-attack would not be made by the Japs until after our troops had "jumped off" this ridge into the attack against the next objective. The captured objective dominated the Battalion's right flank. Troops holding that ground could easily stop a counter-attack directed into the right flank. (20)

#### ORDERS AND CONTINUATION OF THE ATTACK (21)

Based on this estimate the Battalion Commander ordered Company E to continue the attack at 1130. Company F, the right assault company, was to revert to Battalion Reserve and hold this first objective. It was to be prepared to meet a counter-attack coming down the draw towards the Battalion's right flank. In addition to flank security they were to move by bounds and be prepared for employment in the Battalion zone of attack. Company G was ordered to move to the right of Company F and attack the next objective in conjunction with Company E. Company G was to envelope the Japs left flank and capture the right half of the Battalion objective. The bulk of the Battalion machine guns were to fire from the ridge overlooking the Jap position, and when their fires were masked, were to go into direct support of the front line companies.

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(20) Personal knowledge

(21) Personal knowledge

Everything possible was done to secure artillery support but to no avail. The terrain to the front now appeared to favor the defender considerably. The area leading to the next objective was an open rice field. There was no cover or concealment. However, it was felt that the Battalion supporting weapons, especially the two machine gun platoons, could effectively neutralize the Jap position. Thus the order to continue the attack was issued.

Just as the assault companies launched their attack the platoon leader of a chemical mortar platoon (4.2) reported to the Battalion Commander and indicated that he was in direct support of the 2nd Battalion. It was too late for this mortar platoon to support the assault echelon. It was therefore given the mission to support Company F on the right flank. The mortar platoon immediately planned fire to cover the counter-attack approaches into the area.

Progress of the assault Companies over the open rice field was much better than was expected. There were some casualties but no more than normal for a coordinated attack. At 1826 hours Companies E and G were about to launch their assault. Company F at this time reported Jap troops, approximately one company, concentrating at the head of the draw where the counter-attack was expected. Company F and the Chemical mortar platoon were ready. As the leading elements of the Jap counter-attack approached the Company F position all planned mortar and machine gun fires were directed on them. The well planned fires broke up the counter-attack and the Jap forces were fleeing

to the north. The effective fire of the 4.2 mortars was the deciding factor.

It soon became apparent why the Japs had held their fire and permitted the Battalion to cross the rice field. The Battalion objective was a hill about 600 by 400 yards and covered with woods. The Japs had the entire area organized with many automatic weapons and cleverly concealed individual riflemen. The area was organized into a number of mutually supporting enplacements and "sniper" positions. The Japs planned to allow the Battalion to enter the woods and then destroy it. The Battalion did suffer considerable casualties, but small units and individuals stuck to the job of hunting down and killing the Japs as they were "flushed" out of their positions. There were several well-concealed Jap machine guns in the area. Only one or two would fire at any one time. It was very difficult for the men of the Battalion to locate these weapons. Many Jap emplacements were camouflaged so well, that it was often too late when they were discovered. The Battalion received casualties much greater in number than those inflicted on the Japs.

It was now 1645 hours. Normally the Battalion would cease all action at 1600 hours and prepare perimeter defense for the night. It usually took about two hours to complete a wellorganized perimeter defense, and tie it in with the adjacent units.

During this critical period the Battalion Commander was moving back and forth between the two front line Companies. His presence during this critical phase paid dividends. He was able to see the situation confronting the Battalion and to



make proper coordination with units on the flank.

Just prior to dark, the Battalion had eliminated the greatest part of the Jap resistance, but many Japs escaped to the north. Many enemy machine guns were captured or destroyed.

The Battalion Commander received word that the 305th Infantry had been ordered to move up to the Battalion's right flank and then extend back around the new beach-head. Lt. Col. Cavness coordinated this flank and gave the Battalion Commander of the 305th Infantry the situation in that area. Company E, commanded by Capt. Bringham, fought hard and aggressively throughout the entire day. They overran the objective and were within 300 yards of Camp Down at nightfall. Company E had gone beyond the line held by 3rd Battalion, 307th Infantry on the left. The Battalion Commander committed one platoon of the reserve company to close this gap. As night fell the Battalion had just "tied in" its flanks.

The Battalion situation was presented to the Regimental Commander. A request was made to delay the continuation of the attack on the next day to allow re-organization and resupply. The Regimental Commander accordingly decided to attack with a fresh Battalion due to the heavy casualties.

During the late afternoon and all through the night Capt. Summer Davis, the Battalion Surgeon, evacuated about 165 of the wounded. There were about 30 dead. Most of these casualties fell during the bitter fighting for the Battalion objective which was named "bloody hill" by the men. During the heavy fighting late in the afternoon Capt. Davis moved his aid station close to the assault Companies. This location was in range of small arms fire, but, due to the nature of the fighting, it was felt that the aid station could receive the

casualties and evacuate them much quicker. Additional medical aid was requested from higher headquarters which promptly furnished a Mobile surgical Hospital. This Hospital consisted of three surgeons and the necessary facilities for battlefield surgery.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR THE NIGHT

The Division SOP did not permit activity at night. Perimeter type defense was to be organized and anyone moving in the front lines would be shot. The night watch was organized by making two and three men groups. Members of the groups would each observe for Japs in turn. This action was necessary due to the Japs infiltrating tactics. The Jap was well trained in this role.

As night fell the Battalion Commander knew the flank situation, but very little about the actual situation and combat efficiency of the two front-line Companies. There was no radio communication with them. Either their radio operators had become casualties or they had closed their stations fearing ambush by the Japs. It was quite important that the front line companies render a report, but none arrived. The Battalion could not continue the attack without a reorganization the next morning. A staff officer was dispatched to each of the front line Companies. They could not return that night. The next morning they reported that, although the objective was completely taken, the platoons were not under control of the Company Commanders. The next morning the Battalion was assembled and it reverted to Division Reserve.

Chaplain Malloy, Battalion Chaplain, as was his custom, supervised the collecting of the Battalion's dead and escorted

them to the Division cemetery. Here he conducted their burial ceremony. The manner in which Chaplain Mallory handled the dead contributed greatly to the morale of the troops.

To summarize the 2nd Battalion, 306th Infantry, being attached to the 307th Infantry and without Artillery support reduced two well-organized objectives utilizing its own supporting weapons to the maximum extent. Although it was a well-coordinated and aggressively conducted attack the final stand by the well-camouflaged Japs made the ground gained very costly. The swift action of the Battalion, in penetrating the Japs main line did contribute greatly to the final capture of the Division objective.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. COORDINATION BY HIGHER HEADQUARTERS

At no time during the action did higher headquarters coordinate its supporting Artillery effectively for the Battalion. Since the Battalion was attached for the operation, the Commanding Officer, 307th Infantry should have provided adequate Artillery support equal to that received by his organic Battalions. The Battalion with its critically exposed right flank should even have been able to call for and receive priority of fire from Division Artillery.

##### 2. COMMAND

The aggressive action of the Battalion Commander, the teamwork displayed by the staff, and the presence of the Commander at critical points permitted the Battalion to successfully ward off a serious counter-attack, coordinate flanks for the night, and inspire the troops in their attack on both objectives.

*Commander  
Weak  
in  
Part*

### 3. REPORT FROM SUBORDINATE COMMANDERS

Even though the two front line Companies were engaged in the type of decentralized fighting that existed on the second objective, company and platoon Commanders should have insured control and reorganization and reported the situation to the Battalion Commander. Due to this lack of information it was necessary for the Battalion Commander to request an extension on time for the continuation of the attack for the next day.

### 4. USE OF BATTALION RESERVE

The Battalion Reserve was used very effectively. Company G was committed at a point where the momentum of the attack could have bogged down. It was ordered to make a coordinated attack on the flanks of the enemy in conjunction with the left attacking Company. This maneuver gave the Battalion the proper impetus to carry it on through the objective even though the fighting was very severe. By ordering Co. F into Battalion Reserve, it was able to organize the critical ridge which dominated the most likely avenue of counter-attack.

### 5. SUPPLY EVACUATION AND TRANSPORTATION

The Battalion supply officer showed a great deal of initiative when he sent ammunition carrying parties forward just as the first objective fell.

Captain Summer, Davis, the Battalion Surgeon, displayed a great deal of courage and initiative in locating his aid station close to line of contact, thus shortening the litter haul and assuring rapid evacuation of wounded.

Due to the shortage of shipping space the Battalion had to operate on one-third of its authorized transportation. The vehicles were kept under Battalion control, thereby insuring

maximum use of available transportation.

#### 6. THE SOLDIERS INDIVIDUAL LOAD

The Battalion Commander, in permitting the soldier to carry minimum load, accomplished two things: One-the soldier was made comfortable and capable of fighting with his maximum ability. Two - extra equipment was saved by placing it under the control of the Battalion S-4.

#### 7. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

The Division in its Standard Operating Procedure set the policy that there would be no activity at night. The Battalion had been engaged in a stiff fight on its main objective and continued to fight until dark, thus making it extremely hard for Commanders to render necessary reports and prepare for the continuation of the attack the next day. This SOP had been established for jungle combat where all Battalions formed their own isolated perimeters. The Division had failed to properly analyze the terrain and conditions under which the troops would be fighting in this particular operations.

#### LESSONS

1. A Commander must assure that attached combat units are furnished the necessary share of the available Artillery support.
2. The Commander and his staff by making a continuous estimate, by taking decisive action, and by placing themselves at the most critical points on the battle field will contribute greatly in victory over the enemy.
3. Regardless of the confusion of battle, subordinate commanders must make adequate and timely reports to higher headquarters in order for the commander to make plans and render decisions that will effect the victory.

4. The Commander should not hesitate to commit his reserve if he can exploit his success by maintaining the forward momentum of the attack and assuring proper and effective use of the reconstituted reserve.

5. Supply and evacuation personnel must be resourceful and flexible when inadequate transportation and the situation demands it.

6. The Commander must insure an efficient combat soldier by carefully selecting his type load for each operation.

7. Standard Operating Procedures must not be followed blindly for all operations. Each operation must be analyzed and proper changes made.