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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY K, 162ND INFANTRY
(41ST INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE SALAMAUA
OPERATION 20 JULY - 12 SEPTEMBER 1943
(NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: AN INFANTRY COMPANY
ATTACKING IN MOUNTAINOUS JUNGLE TERRAIN

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this monograph is the operations of Company K, in conjunction with other units of the 162nd Infantry Regiment, in the Salamaua, New Guinea, campaign. A brief review of the early progression of the Japanese aggression in the Pacific will enable the reader to analyze the factors contributing to this operation.

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, disabling the United States Pacific Fleet for months to come and dealing the Allies a blow for which they were entirely unprepared. (1) Immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor and for the next 100 days the Japanese moved southward in a mighty surge of military strength; sweeping through China, Thailand, into Malaya and Burma; capturing the great eastern ports of Singapore and Hongkong with only a minimum expenditure of men and materiel. Another arm of their attack moving to the southeast subjugated the Philippines, Sumatra, Java, Borneo and the Celebes. Each new possession, irrespective of size, provided them with another air strip from which the attacks could progress forward. At this point the attacks swung "down under", or below the Equator, to capture the islands of New Britain, New Ireland and smaller islands of the Dutch East Indies. (See Map A) From their newly acquired possessions the Japanese Military Power was in a position and poised to strike New Guinea and thence to Australia. (2)

The following primary factors made it imperative to Japan that she control the island of New Guinea:

(1) A-8, p. 8; (2) A-4, p. 5; A-2, p. 6.

1. It offered a base from which to protect her flanks in New Britain, New Ireland, and the Solomon Islands.

2. It was a base from which they could launch attacks on the long, slender, and vital supply lines from the United States to Australia, denying the Australians desperately needed supplies.

3. It provided them with a land mass on which they could build up a base of supply and from which they could launch ground, air, and naval attacks on the poorly-defended continent of Australia, their ultimate goal and which, if conquered, would give them absolute domination of the Pacific. (3)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 8 March 1942 the Japanese landed several thousand troops ashore at Lae, capitol of British New Guinea and at Salamaua, 15 miles across Huon Bay. This operation afforded them a foothold on the mainland of New Guinea and penetrated Australia's outer line of defense which placed them within striking distance of Australia. (4) (See Map B)

The almost absolute supremacy of the Japanese in the Pacific Islands presented an ominous picture to the Allies early in the year 1942. It was at this time that General MacArthur, ordered by his Commander in Chief to leave his bastion at Corregidor and proceed to Australia, was put in Supreme Command of the Allied Forces Southwest Pacific. (5) Here he was met with a dismal plight of unpreparedness and chaos. However, the following statement, which he was to repeat time and time again, showed his indomitable will and became his slogan: "I will go out and meet the enemy on battlefields of my own, and not the enemy's, choosing. We will make the fight for Australia in New Guinea." (6)

The repossession of New Guinea was to be the first major operation of the Allies for the following strategical reasons:

(3) A-4, p. 4; A-2, p. 8; (4) A-2, p. 21,145-147; (5) A-1, p. 63-65;
(6) A-1, p. 82-83.

1. It offered a base from which they could protect their supply lines from the United States.

2. It could be utilized as a jumping-off place for future attacks northward.

3. It provided an area sufficient in size to permit construction of air fields for long-range, land-based planes, with which attacks could be made to the north against the enemy, as it was General MacArthur's policy never to commit the ground forces without support of the air force. (7)

Between the 8 March 1942 and 23 July 1942 the Allies instigated no major ground offensives. During this lapse of time there was a noticeable pause in the Japanese aggression to the south, as a result of over-extended supply lines, the Coral Sea Battle and increasing Allied air activity against the Japanese shipping in the southern waters. This lull in the Japanese advance gave the Allies time to gird themselves for their counteroffensive to the north. (8)

On 23 July 1942 an Australian Battalion met and engaged the Japanese land army at Buna, New Guinea, and were forced to withdraw into the Owen-Stanley Mountains. Only a march of one day lay between the Japanese and Port Moresby, the gateway to Australia, when Allied reinforcements dispatched from Australia pushed the Japanese back over the Owen-Stanley Mountains and into the swamps of Buna, Gona, and Sanananda. (9) (See Map B) Here the Japanese fought fanatically and to the death against General Herring's Australian forces and Lieutenant General Eichelberger's American Forces, the famed 32nd Division and the 163rd Infantry of the 41st Division. (10) The Japanese, in most cases, were annihilated at every perimeter. "Hardly five hundred survived out of a force of 16,000 who had fought in Papua since July 22, 1942." (11)

(7) A-1, p. 122; (8) A-2, p. 63-64; (9) A-1, p. 97; (10) A-2, p. 210-212; (11) A-2, p. 213.

THE 41ST DIVISION SITUATION

The 41st Infantry Division, a National Guard Division from the Pacific Northwest, was ordered to Federal active duty 16 September 1940. An extended training period at Fort Lewis, Washington, ended abruptly for the division 7 December 1941. On this day the division was alerted and ordered to construct and occupy coastal defensive positions from California to the Canadian border.

March of 1942 witnessed the embarkation of the division for overseas to destination "X". This destination designation proved, after many days at sea, to be Australia. (12)

The three infantry regiments, the 162nd Infantry, 163rd Infantry, and the 186th Infantry with other division troops, established a camp in southern Australia and immediately began intensive, but belated, training in amphibious operations and jungle warfare. (13)

In December 1942, having completed their amphibious and jungle training, the 163rd Regimental Combat Team, hereafter referred to as RCT, moved into New Guinea and relieved the 7th Australian Division in the Buna-Sanananda area. (See Map B) After 27 days of physical hardships and fierce fighting in jungle swamps where the width of a unit's front was determined by the breadth of a vine-entangled trail, the Japanese were practically obliterated and fighting in this area was reduced to small unit patrols and mopping-up maneuvers. Soon thereafter, units of the Australian Brigades, and the American 32nd Division and 163rd RCT were relieved in the Buna-Gona-Sanananda area by the 186th and 162nd RCTs (American) who were given the mission of extensive patrolling and the mopping-up of all enemy resistance north to the Kumusi River. No future mission was known to them at this time. (14) (See Map B)

(12) Personal knowledge; (13) A-1, p. 90; A-2, p. 34; (14) A-5, p. 43-44.

THE TERRAIN

New Guinea is the 2nd largest island in the world. The island is rich in resources, the most lucrative of which are gold, rubber and copra. Head Hunters and Cannibals inhabit the mountain jungles and also man-eating crocodiles and the malaria mosquitos are to be found in profusion, lurking in the humid swamps. (15)

The difficulties of supply, evacuation, communications and general fighting were enhanced by the character of the land to be found in New Guinea. The terrain in the Buna-Gona-Sanananda area, in which the 163rd fought, was a steaming, heavily-foliaged, almost impassable swamp. The rain, which only New Guinea could offer, came in sweeping down-pours which kept the men irritatingly soaked almost constantly. (16)

Almost as many casualties resulted from the malaria mosquito and the typhus chigger, with which the swamps were infested, as resulted from enemy action.

The area to the north, on the other hand, was in no way comparable to this swamp land of Buna and Gona. By the use of inadequate aerial photographs and through native interrogation, the coast line and land mass to the north of Sanananda was determined to be extremely mountainous. This fact was later verified. The Owen-Stanley range or the "backbone of New Guinea" became wider and in many areas extended clear out to the coast line. (See Map B) This mountainous territory, wherein was found a series of deep ravines and wide gorges, seemingly appeared to be impassable. In addition to the handicap resulting from the contour of the land, the mountains were covered with a dense forest, properly called "rain forests" and a mass of under-growths of vines and grasses. (17)

Travel, maneuver, communication and supply were confined to one of two means: (1) by use of native tracks (2) or by rivers and the sea.

(15) A-4, p. 4; (16) Personal knowledge; (17) Personal knowledge.

There were two principal types of native tracks; one track was the mountain track used for years by natives travelling inland and was narrow and followed the top of the ridges where jungle growth was less dense. The other type track was found paralleling rivers or the ocean and skirting small swampy areas adjacent to the sea.

Supplying forces in this region could be inefficaciously accomplished only by use of the natives acting as carriers, who were limited to a maximum load weight of 40 pounds per man per day. No motor roads existed on the north side of the island.

THE 162ND RCT SITUATION

In March of 1943 the 162nd RCT received orders to move from their position at Sanananda and Gona, to a staging area at the small native village of Morobe, on the coast 100 miles to the north. Travel by water presented the only available method of transportation and two ancient inter-island trawlers, with rafts, which had miraculously escaped destruction by the Japanese, were employed for this move. (18) (See Map B)

Upon arrival at Morobe the 162nd RCT was placed under the operational control of the Australian 3rd and 5th Divisions, under the command of GOC (General Officer Commanding), New Guinea Forces. Misunderstandings between the Americans and Australians frequently resulted from the differences in tactical methods and customs as well as from several changes in command. The natural problems of terrain and climate were heightened by frequent questioning of command authority. (19)

At Morobe the 162nd RCT was divided into two Combat Forces. The first force was made up of the 1st Battalion plus attached artillery and medical personnel, commanded by the regimental commander, Colonel MacKechnie. The MacKechnie Force was assigned the mission of moving by boat to make an

(18) A-5, p. 51; (19) A-5, p. 51.

amphibious landing at Nassau Bay and then to advance to Mubo which is inland from Nassau Bay approximately 8 miles. (See Map C) The second Force, commanded by the 41st Division Artillery Commander, Brigadier General Coane, was made up of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, and elements of the 205th and 218th Field Artillery Battalions. (20) The general operations of the Coane Force would be to follow the MacKechnie Force into Nassau Bay to develop the beachhead and to patrol north to Salus Lake, located approximately 6 miles up the beach.

The general plan for the two forces was to assist the Australian 3rd Division who was stopped by the enemy at Mubo. (21) (See Map C)

It later developed that these Allied and Australian forces were so successful at Mubo, that the GOC, New Guinea Forces, thought it probable that the Japanese could be pushed back through Salamaua without a struggle. The mission of these forces was then changed and operations were to converge upon Salamaua, a key enemy base in that area of New Guinea. (22)

Prior to the arrival of the 162nd RCT at Morobe, an extensive air and ground reconnaissance had been made in and around Salamaua by Lieutenant Rod Orange and a couple of native trackers. Lieutenant Orange remained out on this reconnaissance for one month and brought back detailed and thorough information of the enemy in this sector. He reported that Salamaua was seething with the "Sons of Heaven". (23) It must be noted here that little if any information exists regarding the identity of the enemy units occupying Lae and Salamaua, though it is definitely known that certain elements of the 18th Japanese Army and the Imperial Marines participated in that campaign. (24)

The date for the MacKechnie Force to execute its landing at Nassau Bay was set for the night 29-30 June. Final coordination was achieved with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions who were to follow the 1st Battalion, at a later date due to the shortage of landing craft, in their movement to

(20) A-5, p. 205; (21) A-7, p. 9; (22) A-7, p. 9; (23) A-5, p. 51; (24) A-5, p. 65; Personal knowledge.

Nassau Bay. (25) (See Map C)

On the night 29-30 June the MacKechnie Force left Morobe for Nassau Bay aboard landing craft, in waves which were to follow each other at twenty-minute intervals. In addition to torrents of rain on an extremely black night, a heavy surf was pounding on the beach of Nassau Bay. The resulting poor visibility made it impossible to see the wake of the preceding wave moving into the landing area. Confusion immediately ensued. Of the original 32 landing craft that departed from Morobe that night, only 22 arrived at Nassau; the others becoming lost enroute and some delaying their landing as much as several days. Of the 22 that did get ashore, 18 were beached high and dry and in most cases destroyed by the sea. This destruction constituted a severe shortage in the already scanty supply of these boats which prevented the prompt arrival of the 3rd Battalion. (26) The few boats remaining intact reformed and with two PT boats as escorts, returned to Morobe to transport the 3rd Battalion to the landing beach. During the following day the 1st Battalion reorganized, set up a perimeter defense from which they repulsed minor counterattacks, and made preparations for movement inland toward Mubo. (27)

THE 3RD BATTALION SITUATION

The 3rd Battalion, commanded by Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Archibald Roosevelt, son of the late President Theodore Roosevelt, followed the 1st Battalion's landing at Nassau Bay - arriving there 6 July 1943. (28) This battalion was actually a battalion in name only as malaria, typhus, dermatitis, and other diseases, contracted during the previous five months spent in New Guinea, had taken their toll and had reduced the battalion to two-thirds of its original strength. The personnel remaining in this battalion had, almost without exception, at one time or another, had cases

(25) A-7, p. 5; (26) A-7, p. 5; (27) A-5, p. 53; (28) A-5, p. 61.

of malaria which produced a continually weakening effect. It was a somewhat physically unfit and understrengthened battalion which made preparation for further military operations toward Salamaus. (29)

After the battalion had landed, the force commander briefed the battalion commander on the local situation and issued orders to establish a perimeter defense at Nassau Bay and to send patrols inland and as far north as Salus Lake.

THE COMPANY MISSION

Company K was given the mission of patrolling to the north in search of Japanese delaying positions, bivouac areas which had been reported by the natives as existing, possible Japanese supply routes inland, as well as to flush out stray enemy from the Buna fight who were wandering in the Jungles stealing what food they could get. The remainder of the battalion remained at Nassau Bay to develop the beachhead. (30)

Attached to Company K was a platoon of the Papuan Infantry Battalion (hereafter referred to as PIB) who would assist the company on their patrol mission. This PIB unit was composed of natives, chiefly from the territory of Papua, New Guinea. Their selection was determined by their physical endurance and their willingness to serve. The unit was trained as a military organization by the Australian government and were commanded, down to the platoon, by Australian officers and non-commissioned officers. Their familiarity with the peculiarities of the jungle and their knowledge of this area made them of inestimable value to the Allied conduct of jungle warfare. (31)

The minimum equipment required for sustained combat in jungle warfare was carried on the backs of each man. This equipment, stowed in a special jungle pack, larger than the regular field pack, consisted of the following (29) (30) (31) Personal knowledge.

items: Mess equipment, rations and cigarettes, 1 to 2 rounds of mortar ammunition for the 60mm mortars, or machine gun ammunition, pauncho which doubled as a blanket, a shelter tent, rain coat, litter, or foxhole cover, and shaving kits (the use of which was ordered daily to check the ever-threatening skin diseases). The uniform was a pair of coveralls, always wet from rain and perspiration, a fatigue cap and foot gear. Additional clothes supply was not available. In addition to the machete and entrenching tool, a helmet, used primarily for washing and cooking, was carried on the outside of the pack. Two canteens were usually carried on the cartridge belt in addition to a jungle first aid kit. This packet contained a tube of halizone tablets for water purification, quinine tablets taken daily for malaria, aspirin and soda tablets for indigestion, wound dressings, and one-fourth grain morphine syrettes. In addition, certain selected men of each platoon carried a blood plasma unit. The average weight carried by each man would range from 50 to 60 pounds. This equipment was always with the soldier in attack or defense. (32)

Equipped in this manner and moving in single file along the beach track and preceded by a small patrol of Americans and PIB men, the company began its patrol mission to the north. (33) (See Map C)

The leading platoon located a deserted enemy bivouac which had been used just prior to the battalion's occupation of the area, but nothing remained to disclose the identity of the unit. The company moved still farther to the north, crossed the Bitoi River and Salus Lake was approached with still no large Japanese force encountered, except for an occasional sniper. At Salus Lake the company commander halted the company and dispatched patrols consisting of six to ten men forward to determine enemy activity to the front and flanks. The patrols reported that the enemy had recently been in the area to our immediate front as evidence of fresh

(32) Personal experience; (33) Personal experience as the patrol leader.

human excreta, indicating diarrhea in the unit, was to be found along the track over which the company was to advance. With these indications of enemy in the area, a plan was conceived to send two PIB men forward, disguised as natives - a simple matter of merely changing their regulation khaki shorts and their rifle for the native attire of a girdle and fish spear - to attempt to locate the bivouac of this Japanese force. (34)

This patrol succeeded in moving as far as Boisi village, located on Tambu Bay approximately 10 miles south of Salamaua, and upon their return they reported, by use of pidgin english and sign language, the presence of approximately 250 of the enemy encamped in that village. Patrols such as this, performed by native PIB men, were made not without a great deal of trepidation by them, as detection of their guise meant harsh or sudden death. (35)

At dusk of the same evening three bedraggled natives approached along the beach track and into the company perimeter. They were immediately stopped and interrogated by the Australian Sergeant who commanded the PIB platoon attached to the company. In an attempt to gain their favor they were supplied with a feast of "C" rations, the only food available at that time and donated by the men of the company. They imparted the information that the Japanese at Tambu Bay had "big, black tubes on wheels"; to our force that meant artillery. They were unable or unwilling to give us any definite strength. After this slight information they let it be known that they preferred the enemy food to ours and wished to return to the Japanese lines. It was, of course, obvious that they would be equally willing to give information to the Japanese regarding the attacking forces, but with no authority to detain them, they must be permitted free movement as they desired. However, as soon as the natives cleared the company perimeter, three PIB men departed in the same direction and the eventual arrival of the natives back to the Japanese lines at Tambu Bay remains doubtful. (36)

(34) Personal experience; (35) Personal knowledge; (36) Personal knowledge.

The information received from the native informant of enemy artillery in the area was relayed to the battalion commander, who was at Nassau Bay, via messenger. The messenger returned with orders to "hold up" 3 miles south of Boisi village pending arrival of the remainder of the battalion. (37)

It was known that Tambu Bay was bounded on three sides by very steep and precipitous ridges which formed a natural bowl. The ridge to the north and extending east and west formed the most southern defenses of Salamaua. This ridge was later named Roosevelt Ridge, in honor of the battalion commander. (38) On the left flank, extending to the north and appearing to join Roosevelt Ridge, was an even higher ridge which was known as Scout Ridge. To the south of Tambu Bay was one of the few exceptions to this mountainous and heavily-forested terrain - a bald ridge covered with short Kuni grass - which prevented unobserved movement into the Tambu Bay area. (See Map D and E)

The other units of the battalion arrived on 18 July. The battalion commander assembled his staff and company commanders and presented his plan of attack; an advance to the top of the high ridges around Tambu Bay where the enemy was suspected to be dug in, in strength, and thereby completing the occupation of Tambu Bay.

Using the palm of his left hand as a map and the first three fingers of his right hand to represent the rifle companies, the battalion commander issued his order: (39) On 19 July, Company I, guided by a patrol of PIB men, would precede the battalion by one day and circle, by means of a secret trail to the west, to the top of Scout Ridge. (The report of the existence of this secret trail later proved to be erroneous, and as a result of the rugged terrain encountered, two days were required for the march. The end of the first day of this forced march found the company without rations and many of the men's shoes were made unserviceable.) Upon reaching the top of

(37) Personal knowledge; (38) A-5, p. 61; Personal experience; (39) Personal knowledge.

training and somewhat inactive for many months. They also knew that they were preparing to meet an adversary that would fight to the death with ruthless determination. With this thought in mind they set about making their last minute preparations for the attack. (41)

*Company I
preparations
of CO K
not accompanied
covered*

On 19 July Company I, with one heavy machine gun platoon attached, left the perimeter. An EE-8 telephone and W110 wire afforded the only means of communication with battalion. As Company I disappeared into the jungle, the company commander of Company K dispatched a patrol toward Boisi village with the mission of locating any prepared defenses in and around the village. This patrol, returning several hours later, reported that an enemy outpost had been observed astride the beach track, about 200 yards south of Boisi village. This enemy outpost consisted of a machine gun and four men. It was apparent to the company commander that the destruction of this outpost must be accomplished before the final assault on the village could be launched. It could, at the same time, be presumed that the village would be well-fortified. The platoon leader of the PIB platoon was advised of the situation and asked to furnish the necessary men to accompany a patrol to eliminate the existing obstacle on the route of attack.

On the morning of 20 July Company K moved into the attack. The patrol, designated to knock out the enemy outpost, moved out ahead of the company and soon disappeared around a bend in the track. A short time later a few rifle shots were heard and then the silence of the jungle again encompassed the company as they moved along the track in single file. Having knocked out the enemy outpost, the patrol fell into the company column as it passed by. (42)

Near the village the vegetation became less dense. As the leading platoon entered the village they deployed and moved more cautiously. Men (41) Personal knowledge; (42) Personal experience.

quickly entered the huts and, surprisingly, finding them to be vacant, rejoined their platoon. The leading platoon had just passed through the village when a heavy barrage of mortar and artillery fire, from the ridges, fell into the village and along the file of the company which was still coming up the track. The Command Group of Company Headquarters, who had been following the leading platoon, was caught in the village when the enemy fire fell. The first rounds caught the men in a standing position, inflicting many casualties before cover could be found. Some men began to dig in; others, temporarily frightened, started to withdraw back down the track over which they had advanced. The instantaneous action of the non-commissioned officers promptly restored order within the company. (43)

Artillery fire was called for but prior to this call, an artillery observer stationed on the high ground to the rear, had seen the flashes of enemy artillery and had already called for counter-battery fire. In a very few minutes the enemy artillery was silenced; later it was found that these artillery pieces had been destroyed. Mortar rounds still fell intermittently in and around the area but resulted in no casualties. (44)

Word was relayed from mouth to mouth to the platoon leader of the support platoon to come forward to the village. The platoon leader, upon arriving at the village, found that the company commander, Captain Lovell, and the executive officer, Lieutenant Dorrigan, who had been with the Company Headquarters, had both been seriously wounded and required immediate evacuation, as well as several others on whom the aid men were working. (45)

The platoon leader, hereafter referred to as the company commander, immediately reorganized the company, moved them through the village and established a perimeter. A survey of the company revealed that several non-commissioned officers had been either killed or wounded, thereby requiring a reassignment of non-commissioned officers also. (46)

(43) Eye-witness account; (44) Eye-witness account; (45) Eye-witness account;
(46) Eye-witness account.

The company commander contacted the battalion commander by telephone and reported the company situation and that the company was formed in a perimeter defense at the base of the ridge. The battalion commander ordered the company to remain in its present position as the remainder of the battalion would assemble in that area. (47) As afternoon was ending, the men made preparation for the night. Between 1630 and 1800 hours a peculiar custom was executed by both the enemy and Allied forces in this type warfare; all fighting ceased as if by previous agreement. Upon cessation of combat, the men dug foxholes, put out booby traps and individually prepared their own meals which consisted merely of cold "C" rations. Fires were not utilized at this time due to the shortage of matches, the difficulty of starting them in this damp climate, and, as well, the early belief that they would attract enemy patrols who were not prone to attack a position after dark. (48)

Several hours later Company I, who had been unable to locate the non-existent secret trail or to fulfill their mission, moved into the perimeter. Company L, who had likewise been unable to fulfill their mission as a result of the heavy vegetation encountered, arrived at the perimeter by use of an old trail which they had accidentally discovered. Thus the battalion was reformed for the night. (49) (See Map E)

On the morning of 21 July the battalion commander issued orders for the attack on Roosevelt Ridge north of Tambu Bay.

This ridge presented a formidable objective, rising abruptly from the sea to a height of approximately 1500 feet, only 2500 yards inland from the sea. The ridge was covered with a heavy carpet of twining jungle growth and consisted of steep ravines and spur ridges leading to the top. With the purpose of organizing the top of the ridge for the defense of Tambu Bay, Company K would assault and secure the eastern extremity of the ridge and (47) Personal knowledge; (48) Personal knowledge; (49) Personal knowledge.

Company L would secure the western extremity; Company I would remain in the perimeter as battalion reserve. (50)

Company K moved out of the battalion perimeter via the beach track which paralleled the base of the ridge. The company had moved several hundred yards down the beach track when the company commander saw what appeared to be two spur ridges separated by a deep ravine extending down from the main ridge. A hasty reconnaissance of this area revealed that these spur ridges presented the most likely avenue of approach to the top. The company commander deployed the company. As the second platoon was commanded by a Lieutenant, this platoon, reinforced with a light machine gun squad, was given orders to move up the right spur and at the same time make an attempt to keep abreast of the remainder of the company. Moving forward in single file, the company tediously threaded their way up the left spur. In many places enroute the men of the company were compelled to move inch by inch, hand over hand, from vine to vine - advancing over what at times seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. Many yards were covered without making actual contact with the ground. The determination and persistence of the men was commendable. (51) (See Map E)

Shortly after noon, two PIB men preceding the company, signalled the company commander forward and indicated that the top of the ridge was 30 yards ahead and that a Japanese outpost was entrenched astride the spur ridge on which the company was moving. The company commander deployed the company by ordering the platoon sergeant of the leading platoon to move one squad to the right and one squad to the left. As the leading elements rushed the top, the enemy occupying this position on the ridge were taken completely by surprise, which was indicated by their fleeing in all directions as the first Allied fire fell. This state of enemy confusion was, however, of short duration as the enemy support elements immediately

(50) Personal knowledge; (51) Eye-witness account.

retaliated with machine gun fire which became increasingly intense, forcing the platoon to take cover. As the remainder of the company reached the top they moved into a semi-circular position and began return fire at the enemy who were then dispersed to our right on still higher ground. The enemy, from well-entrenched positions, executed a relentless defense with steadily increasing rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire. The extremely heavy volume of enemy fire prevented the men from digging in positions. (52)

Somewhere behind the Japanese lines a bugle sounded clear and loud. The typically American wit, no matter what the seriousness of the situation, prompted several of the men of the company to make remarks such as "pay call" and "mess call" etc. The bugle call, as soon became apparent, was the signal for a counterattack and the little yellow men could be observed moving into position. (53) It was at this time that the company commander called for his forward artillery observer but was informed by the 1st Sergeant, Joseph Briskey, that he had not arrived at the top and his whereabouts was unknown. The artillery liaison officer at battalion was contacted by telephone, the only means of communication, and was informed that the company commander would direct artillery fire in the absence of the forward artillery observer. This plan was immediately approved and the company commander was given direct communication with the firing battery. A smattering of artillery ROTC in College served the company commander well. The artillery fire placed into the known enemy positions halted the counterattack. (54)

A messenger was sent to contact the platoon, supposedly advancing on the right spur, with a message to attack the enemy's flank. Upon his return he reported that the platoon could not be located. (55)

A phone call from the battalion S-3 informed the company commander that Company I had been unable to gain the top of the ridge in their sector and, having suffered numerous casualties, were forced to abandon their mission. The company commander asked if Company I could be sent to the top using the

(52) Eye-witness account; (53) Personal experience; (54) Personal experience; (55) Personal experience.

trail that had been carved by Company K, as there appeared to be a possibility of holding the ground with reinforcements. This request was refused by battalion and the S-3 advised against sacrificing the company to hold the ridge as night was approaching and Company I would be unable to reach them.

The company commander realized that it would be impossible to hold this position with his meager force as the enemy had been observed on the flanks and to the rear. As the position was becoming untenable the company was ordered to return to the bottom of the ridge, necessitating the carrying of the wounded back down the treacherous trail. (56)

As the company arrived at the bottom of the ridge they were met by the 2nd Platoon. The platoon leader, upon being questioned regarding his failure to attain the top of the ridge, stated that they had lost contact with the company due to the dense foliage and when they heard the firing, their position was not such that they could offer assistance. Therefore, they returned to the bottom of the ridge. (57)

The night of 21 July found the company back in its previous position at Tambu Bay. The Japanese were heard singing on the hill and giving the American equivalent of "cat calls"; apparently a serenade to the departed company. (58)

Personal experience
Actual

During the period from 22 July to 1 August Company K, from positions at Tambu Bay, made numerous unsuccessful attempts to seize positions on Roosevelt Ridge. Due to the low strength of the company, caused by subsequent combat, it became necessary to utilize every member, including cooks and supply personnel, on perimeter defense and combat patrols. During one such combat patrol activity a patrol, consisting entirely of cooks, were pinned down by heavy enemy machine gun fire. The patrol leader, a 1st Cook, worked his way forward toward the Japanese position and, when (56) Personal experience; (57) Personal experience; (58) Actual experience.

within grenade distance, assaulted the position single-handed and eliminated it; thereby enabling his patrol to complete their mission. He was later awarded the silver star for his heroic action. (59)

It became imperative, when the present committed strength was unsuccessful in occupying Roosevelt Ridge, to employ additional force. Consequently, the 2nd Battalion was committed to the campaign and arrived at Tembu Bay by landing craft 29 July. Because the men of the 2nd Battalion were in better physical condition and the battalion was higher in strength, this battalion was, in turn, ordered to the mission of attacking Roosevelt Ridge. (60)

During this same period from 22 July to 1 August, Companies I and L had been patrolling to the west on various trails in an attempt to acquire positions on Roosevelt Ridge. On one such mission a trail was found, unoccupied by enemy, which wound to the top of Scout Ridge and there made junction with the long north-south trail on the dome of the ridge. Through use of this trail they advanced to the top of the ridge to the junction of the two trails. It was not uncommon to fight for several weeks for the possession of a trail junction, since these trails generally provided the only avenue of communication, supply and evacuation in the Jungle. (61)

Advancing in both directions on this north-south trail, the companies encountered stubborn enemy resistance along each route. To the north, but short of the supposed junction of Scout Ridge and Roosevelt Ridge, Company I encountered a very firm enemy position employing mountain artillery. Company L moved to the assistance of Company I and took up a defensive position at this point of contact. (62)

After several days of unsuccessful attempts to overrun this enemy position, Company I was relieved by Company K who had previously been relieved from the Roosevelt Ridge mission by the 2nd Battalion. (63)

(59) Personal experience; (60) A-5, p. 62; (61) Personal knowledge; (62) A-5, p. 61; (63) Personal experience.

Heading needed

More details needed

During this same two-week period, on 16 August, the 2nd Battalion made a coordinated attack on Roosevelt Ridge which was preceded by the fires of scores of guns - 75mm Howitzers, Australian 25-pounders, light and heavy machine guns, and 81mm mortars and, in addition, allied bombers strafed and bombed the dome of the ridge. The 2nd Battalion's coordinated attack on Roosevelt Ridge completely battered and stunned the enemy and gave the Allies control of the eastern portion of the ridge. (64)

Concurrently, Company I who had been in the battalion area, had gained a position on the western portion of Roosevelt Ridge at the supposed junction of the ridges and was also encountering fierce enemy opposition; they were forced to dig in and hold the position they had attained. From the Company I perimeter, Company L on Scout Ridge could be observed several hundred yards west but, ironically, the two companies were separated by a deep ravine which disproved the belief that Roosevelt Ridge and Scout Ridge were joined. This fact eliminated the possibility of the joining of either company or the battalion for the assault down Scout Ridge and into Salamaua. (65)

More details needed

Company K, from their position adjacent to Company L position on Scout Ridge, was also engaged in combat with the enemy. Many unsuccessful attempts were made to penetrate the enemy defenses which were estimated to be a battalion in strength. Due to the narrowness of the ridge, which barely exceeded 35 feet at its widest portion, it was impossible to make an attack with sufficient strength to overcome this enemy position. Attacks on the flank of the enemy proved equally ineffective as the approach to the enemy positions was up a very steep and heavily-vegetated piece of ground - again limiting the frontage of the attacking unit. Due to these unsuccessful attempts by Company K, it was deemed advisable, by the battalion commander, to release Company K from the Company L position and attach this unit to Company I whose position presented a terrain feature upon (64) A-5, p. 63; (65) Personal knowledge.

which, possibly, a successful attack could be launched. (66)

Company K, upon joining Company I, was a company in name only. The company strength was less than 30 men and officers. (67) The casualties resulting from enemy action were much less than those inflicted by nature, such as malaria, ringworm, hookworm, typhus, skin diseases and the continually deteriorating physical condition of the men. The possibility of absorbing Company K into Company I was considered but it was decided that, rather than lose the identity of the company - a factor severely effecting morale - Company K would operate as a patrol company. (68)

Company K, acting in this capacity, was ordered to: (a) probe the flanks and rear of this enemy force, which was retarding the progress of Company I, in an effort to determine any changes in his battle positions and (b) assist Company I in the defense of their perimeter.

A normal day's activities for this patrol company would begin at day-break with the dispatching of patrols, preceded by two PIB men, to the enemy's flanks. On one such patrol the lead scout, a PIB man, signaled that an ambush was just ahead of the patrol. This report was dispelled by the patrol leader as he was familiar with this terrain and felt that the presence of this ambush was a definite impossibility. He ordered the patrol forward again. The result was disastrous; when the patrol moved into the ambush, they were met with a hail of fire from grenades, machine guns, and rifle fire. The patrol escaped the ambush, preceded by the PIB man who, upon reporting to the company area, had 103 wounds over his entire body. An amusing incident developed, however, during the evacuation of this man. The daily supply train, made up of natives, had ascended the ridge, a four-hour march, with supplies and water. On their return trip they usually carried the wounded of that day. However, due to tribal feuding, the PIB man refused to be carried by the supply train natives;

(66) Personal experience; (67) A-5, p. 66; Personal experience; (68) Personal experience.

they, in turn, refused to carry him. After much quibbling and bickering back and forth it was decided to form a carrying team consisting of other PIB men and American soldiers to evacuate this litter case. (69)

On another such maneuver the patrol located a water hole which was a scarce and much-prized item; a peculiar phenomenon in a land of constant rain. A pack train of natives made daily trips to supply the unit with a minimum amount for drinking and cooking. Therefore, it was decided to improve the water hole and with American ingenuity born of necessity, a nice, clear, clean pool was developed. After the first few trips to the water point, the two-toed shoeprints of several Japanese were discovered on a trail leading to this point from the other direction but never a glimpse of the Japanese himself. For two or more weeks this water point was utilized by both the enemy and ourselves without a casualty resulting. (70)

Continuous assaults by the 2nd Battalion from the area of Dot Inlet and constant harassing by companies of the 3rd Battalion from positions on Scout Ridge and Roosevelt Ridge, forced the enemy to withdraw from its positions in front of Company L on Scout Ridge and Company I on Roosevelt Ridge, bringing to a conclusion a static defense which had existed for 30 days. (71) The following morning Companies I and K moved into the Japanese position and, finding it to be deserted, followed closely on the heels of the enemy and again made contact with him several hundred yards down the ridge. This proved to be merely a delaying position. (72) (See Map E)

It must be noted that artillery and mortars played a major roll in the successful conclusion of this campaign. Frontal attacks were avoided and the nature of the terrain precluded attacks by units larger than a platoon. Throughout the action, several principles of attack were maintained by the Allies; "maintain constant pressure in front of the enemy position; pound the enemy with mortars and artillery; patrol constantly

(69) Personal knowledge; (70) Personal knowledge; (71) A-5, p. 65; Personal knowledge; (72) Personal experience.

where the enemy lines are weak; seize a position in the enemy's weak spot with sufficient force to repel the inevitable counterattacks; follow up vigorously the resultant weakening or withdrawal." (73) The success of these principles is clearly exemplified by the figures of 2,045 Japanese killed against a loss of 102 men by the 162nd Infantry. The Japanese paid at a rate of better than 20 to 1 in this fight. (74)

In direct contrast to the Allied principles of attack, the Australians, who had been fighting inland, were fighting an entirely different type campaign; overcoming stubborn resistance by sheer force of man power. In one instance, Australian Infantrymen, who lacked immediate artillery support, rushed an enemy pillbox containing 20 Japanese, which resulted in a loss of 250 "Aussies" before the position was overrun. (75)

Company K was ordered, by the battalion commander, to move from this position to the battalion rest area at Tambu Bay. ^{do + e?} On 8-9 September while in the rest area, the company received a few replacements, consisting of men who had previously been evacuated as casualties from the company and then returned upon approval from the hospital. One such replacement came in with a wound on his leg that was far from being healed. During the entire campaign this was the only method of replacement utilized. (76) With the arrival of the replacements came the rumor that had persisted throughout the entire campaign. "The 186th Infantry was moving to Tambu Bay to relieve or assist the 162nd RCT in the final capture of Salamaua." This was strictly rumor as the 186th Infantry remained at Buna and Milne Bay as Division reserve throughout the entire operation. (77)

(73) A-5, p. 67; A-7, p. 10; (74) A-7, p. 10; (75) A-5, p. 67; (76) A-5, p. 66; (77) Personal knowledge.

THE FINAL ASSAULT ON SALAMAUA

MAK 12
On 10 September Company K, from Boisi Village, followed by Company I, from their positions on Scout Ridge, moved via the beach track to the Francisco River which formed the southern boundary of Salamaua. Company K moved with great speed through several abandoned Japanese perimeters, meeting and overcoming only slight enemy resistance, and arrived on the banks of the Francisco River 11 September 1943. (78)

On the following day, 12 September, the three infantry battalions of the 162nd RCT were poised at the mouth of the Francisco River and prepared for the final assault on Salamaua. Intense enemy artillery fire, the previous day, gave indication that a furious fight was to ensue. To the 3rd Battalion fell the mission of leading the assault across the river and into the built-up area, to be followed by the 2nd Battalion; the 1st Battalion remaining in their present position as regimental reserve.

The Australian 3rd Division was in like position, to the west and a few miles up the Francisco River. As day dawned, the 3rd Battalion forded the river but the attack was short lived as no enemy resistance was encountered, a fact which has remained somewhat of a mystery. To the west and north, the Australians could be seen coming in from the vicinity of the air field. Allied troops poured into Salamaua - a peaceful, serene village in days prior to the war, now a filthy, rat-infested pile of rubble. (79)

(See Map D)

In selecting a position for a CP, as enemy aircraft was still active over the area, the company commander of Company K located a well-covered pillbox. On entering the pillbox, he found it to be harboring one of its former occupants, a member of the Japanese Imperial Marines, who was immediately taken prisoner - one of only six taken during the entire campaign. (80)

(78) A-5, p. 65; Personal experience; (79) Eye-witness account; (80) A-5, p. 66; Personally captured.

This concluded a campaign that had started 76 days previously when the 1st Battalion landed at Nassau Bay - one of the longest sieges of sustained combat in the Pacific area.

General MacArthur highly praised the gallant 162nd Infantry, and in special orders of the day, directed to both American and Australian forces, Lieutenant General Sir Edmund Herring, in command of the New Guinea Force which directed the campaign said: "The capture of Salamaua marks the end of a campaign of seven months duration. It has been a campaign of very great importance to the Allied cause in the Southwest Pacific. You have all done a magnificent job, have out-fought the Japs and have triumphed in spite of the difficult terrain and trying conditions." (81)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

An analysis or criticism of the campaign of the 3rd Battalion must take cognizance of the fact that this operation was General MacArthur's first direct opposition to the Japanese. This offensive was conducted in the year 1943 and prior to this time there had been too little emphasis placed on the strategy of jungle warfare. Supplies, equipment, and man power were at a premium and no airforce was ready to operate, in strength, in this area.

✓ The low strength and poor physical condition under which the men of the 3rd Battalion undertook this mission left a margin of doubt as to its successful conclusion. It is felt that, previous to the regiment's commitment at Nassau Bay, the strength of the entire command should have been increased through replacements from the 186th Regiment, who remained at Buna as division reserve, throughout the entire campaign. Replacements which the company did receive were men released from the hospitals and at times, before they were in a fit condition to return to combat, thus making (81) A-5, p. 68.

it necessary to place them in the least strenuous positions.

✓ The battalion commander's method of presentation and facts of the orders for the attack on Tambu Bay were inadequate and somewhat inaccurate. No prior reconnaissance had been made in the area of the "secret trail", the existence of which was never determined. As this monograph relates, Company I merely beat the brush for two days and the search resulted only in increased fatigue of the men. In addition, Company I also was ordered to make use of a supposedly existing trail, however, their search did prove more fruitful than that of Company I. On the other hand, the route of the attack on Roosevelt Ridge, taken by Company K, was selected only after prior and thorough reconnaissance had been made of every other possible route of attack.

✓ The attack on Roosevelt Ridge, with two squads abreast from a column formation, did not provide sufficient fire power and shock action to overcome the enemy or to drive a wedge into his positions. Had more time been expended in building up a strong base of fire for a maneuvering element, the initial attack of Company K on Roosevelt Ridge might have been successful.

Much credit is due the men of the battalion for their determined efforts and their stamina, when faced with nearly insufferable living and fighting conditions, and their mastery of the nearly impassable terrain over which they fought.

✓ The platoon leader who failed to accomplish his mission of ascending the right spur, cancelled any possible chance of holding a perimeter on the dome of the ridge. The completion of that mission would have placed the platoon in a position to fire into the flank of the enemy; thereby greatly enhancing the company's chance to dig in.

✓ The advice given by the battalion S-3, that of not sacrificing the company to hold the ridge, was very sound. However, at the time, considering

the hardships endured to reach the dome of the ridge, it was received somewhat questioningly. Careful analysis of the order made it apparent that the battalion S-3 had displayed commendable forethought, in that reinforcements could not reach the company until the following day, at which time the position would have been made untenable by enemy action.

✓ The bugle call, evidently a signal of some sort (probably attack) and used quite frequently by the Japanese, though somewhat of a deviation from general battle procedures, was a peculiarly effective sound to be heard above the common din of battle. It not only had the consequence of letting the opposing force know that he was meeting a well-organized enemy but also produced a demoralizing influence on this same opposing force.

✓ As has already been stated, a larger percentage of casualties resulted from disease and illness than resulted from enemy action. It was perceptible, from time to time, that some few of the "hospital casualties" could have been prevented had the men practiced some of the advised precautions to be taken against diseases peculiar to the jungle. Few men took seriously the fact that some of the jungle contracted diseases remained with them and affected their health many years after the jungle had been left behind.

✓ The complexity of supply, communication, and evacuation, which will always remain one of the most difficult problems of jungle warfare, greatly encumbered the activities of the battalion. Many of the "niceties" of combat, such as clean clothing, shoes, and food, were excluded in order that indispensable supplies, such as ammunition and water, could be pushed forward.

✓ In considering the final success of this operation, much credit must be given to the attached PIB units. Their knowledge of the jungle trails, the natives, and other peculiarities of New Guinea, imparted to a unit with no previous experience in the jungle, lent invaluable assistance and guidance to the battalion.

✓ The failure of the artillery forward observer to stay with the company might have resulted in disaster. This fact is indicative that an artillery

forward observer should be carefully selected and imbued with the importance of his mission.

The battalion would have profited through the capture of a larger number of prisoners and from the probable information gained from them. In the course of this campaign many opportunities arose in which prisoners could have been taken, however, due to the understrength of the battalion and the difficulties involved in sending them back over the rugged terrain and thick undergrowth, they were simply eliminated. It is felt that, through the use of more detailed enemy information, the campaign could have been shortened.

Finally, the campaign deserves all the praise given to it by General MacArthur, for, by sheer tenacity of purpose, this sickly, half-starved, RCT accomplished their mission over some of the most rugged terrain American men have ever fought over.

LESSONS

1. A direct frontal attack on a well-entrenched, organized position, is a costly operation, as exemplified in the Australian conduct of battle, and should not be employed unless it has first been definitely determined that there is no other method of subjugating the position.
2. Patrols are particularly valuable and should be employed extensively in jungle warfare to determine loop-holes in enemy defenses and in ferreting out supply lines.
3. Cooks and Headquarters personnel should be amply trained as infantrymen, to enable them to skillfully replace a squad member.
4. To permit battle to be effectually sustained, every infantry officer should receive artillery training sufficient to enable him to substitute for an artillery forward observer in the artillery forward

Lesson 4
observer's absence. Also, since leaders are expendable, each infantryman should have knowledge of leadership.

5. The regulation bugle could perhaps be both adroitly used as a method of control of attacks, as well as a medium influencing morale.

6. Men should be proficient in preparing their food individually, for, in many instances, in jungle fighting, the mess personnel and kitchens are not operative.

7. Much assistance can be obtained from the natives of a country and every effort should be made to secure their good will, and then rely upon and make use of the information procured from them. Generally their information is accurate, though sometimes misunderstood.

8. It is somewhat profitless, no matter what the need, to make replacements in a company from previous casualties until they are, again, in completely good physical condition. Rather, it is better to make replacements from the division reserve or with an entirely new unit.

Lesson 5
9. In preference to losing the identity of a company, which has a tendency to lower morale, units in battle, though greatly understrength, can continue as an effective fighting unit through their use as a patrol company or in other small-scale activities.

10. An effort should be made to take prisoners and there should be, in execution, a well-defined plan for their disposal.

11. A reconnaissance patrol, regardless of size, should precede the advance of a unit when operating in new territory.

12. One of the greatest single factors in control of an operation is infallible information where possible, and the concise issuance of orders designed to prevent confusion. (As in the case of the lost platoon on Roosevelt Ridge, the platoon leader should have been told what procedure to follow in the event contact with the remainder of the company was lost.)

13. Additional lives could be saved through the policy of allowing infantrymen, other than the medics, to carry blood plasma and certain medical