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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST SQUADRON, 5TH CAVALRY,
(1ST CAVALRY DIVISION, DISMOUNTED), IN THE VICINITY OF
HILL 260, LOS NEGROS ISLAND, THE ADMIRALTY
ISLANDS, 14-24 MARCH 1944
(Personal Experience of a Squadron S-2-3)

Type of operation described: A DISMOUNTED
CAVALRY SQUADRON ATTACKING IN JUNGLE

Major Fred B. Irby, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry, (1st Cavalry Division, Dismounted), in the vicinity of Hill 260, Los Negros Island, The Admiralty Islands, 14-24 March 1944.

The following brief resume of events leading up to this operation will serve to orient the reader properly: After the Japanese drive into the Southwest Pacific area shuddered to a halt with their decisive defeat in the battle of the Coral Sea on 8 May 1942, the Allies launched their counterattack early the following year. (1) The general plan of attack was outlined by March of 1943. Operating under this plan, Admiral William F. Halsey, commanding the South Pacific Area, drove northward from the newly won base at Guadalcanal through the Solomon Islands, toward objectives set by General MacArthur and on a time schedule outlined by him. (2) On a parallel but widely separated route, General MacArthur with American and Australian troops advanced north along the west coast of New Guinea. The strategy of this island-hopping campaign was to seize terrain for airstrips which would bring the Japanese bases within our own bomber and fighter range. (3) (See Map A) Since it was impossible for the Japanese, or any other nation for that matter, to hold the extensive island coastlines in force, the Allied High Command could select objective areas in which their landing forces would meet with the minimum resistance. (4) In this manner bases were secured at Munda, Vella Lavella, and Empress Augusta Bay in the Solomon Islands; at Oro Bay, Salamaua, Lae, Finchhafen and Saidor on the west coast of New Guinea. (5) (See Map A) By-passed enemy garrisons were cut off from all supplies and reinforcements. (6) Although these enemy forces could mount a ground assault against an allied beachhead,

(1) A-1, p. 27; (2) A-2, p. 4; (3) A-3, p. 1; (4) A-3, p. 3; (5) A-3, p. 3 and 4; (6) A-3, p. 3.

their lack of resupply and the toll of battle gradually lessened their capability of offensive action. (7) The planning of each landing took into consideration the important role of sea and air power as supporting arms; the Navy's function being to transport the assault forces, neutralize beach defenses, protect and keep open the sea supply lanes; the Air Force to insure air superiority over the landing beach and provide close support for the ground operations. (8) The objective of the Allied drive northward through the Southwest Pacific was the great Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain. (9) Its seizure or neutralization had been planned as early as July 1942. (10) All previous operations in the South and Southwest Pacific had been directed toward accomplishing this mission. Located on the northeast tip of New Britain and protected by its own airfields, the harbor at Rabaul offered excellent security for Japanese supply ships and a staging area for reinforcements for outlying garrisons. (11) The enemy supply routes to Rabaul were from the Wewak-Madang area on New Guinea; or through the Ninigo, Hermit and Admiralty Islands; or from Truk, 800 miles northward in the Carolines. (12) Conquest of the Admiralty Islands was one of the Allied operations planned to outflank the Japanese on New Britain. (13)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

In October 1943, General MacArthur's forces occupied Finchhafen and thereby controlled the south entrance to the Bismark Sea area. (14) He further extended Allied control with landings at Arawe and Cape Gloucester, New Britain, in December 1943 and at Saidor, farther up the New Guinea coast in January 1944, thus placing our aircraft within 300 miles of Rabaul. (15)

In the Solomon Islands the South Pacific Command under Admiral Halsey had moved even closer, with the occupation of Empress Augusta Bay, on Bougainville, in November 1943 and Nissan in the Green Islands in February 1944. These bases were less than 220 miles from Rabaul. (16) (See Map A)

(7) A-3, p. 3; (8) A-3, p. 3; (9) A-3, p. 3; (10) A-2, p. 1; (11) A-3, p. 3; A-2, p. 3 and 4; (12) A-3, p. 3; (13) A-3, p. 4; (14) A-3, p. 4; (15) A-3, p. 4; (16) A-3, p. 4.

The invasion of the Admiralty Islands had been assigned in November 1943 to Lieutenant General Walter Kreuger's Alamo Force, Sixth Army. The original target date had been set as 1 April 1944. (17) On 24 February, ¹⁹⁴⁴ GEQ Southwest Pacific Area instructed the Commanding General of the Alamo Forces, "to prepare plans for an immediate reconnaissance in force of Los Negros Island in the vicinity of Momote airstrip with the objective of remaining in occupancy in case the area was found to be inadequately defended by the enemy, or in case of heavy resistance to withdraw after all possible reconnaissance had been accomplished." (18) It was recommended that the reconnaissance force be composed of one cavalry squadron, reinforced. D day was set for not later than 29 February 1944. This advance in schedule was made when an intelligence estimate of the situation indicated that the Japanese offensive capabilities were considerably lessened by the success of continuous Allied sea and air strikes. (19)

The Admiralty Islands lie about 200 miles north and east of New Guinea and 260 miles west of New Ireland. Manus, some 49 miles long by 16 miles at its widest point, is by far the largest of these islands and is separated from Los Negros by narrow Loniu passage. Los Negros Island, lying east of Manus, forms a rough horseshoe with one arm extending north and elbowing west to form the northern lagoon of Seeadler Harbor. The lagoon is afforded further protection by a broken chain of islands that extend in prolongation of the northwestern tip of Los Negros. (20) The surveyed portion of Seeadler Harbor is 6 miles wide by 20 miles long and permits anchorage for a large fleet of capital ships with depths up to 20 fathoms. (21) (See Map B)

The Admiralty Islands, an Australian mandate since World War I, lie at about 2° south latitude and 147° east longitude, with a hot, humid climate and an annual rainfall of 154 inches. (22)

The Los Negros coastline is indented by several harbors, one of which is Hyane on the east or Bismark Sea side. On the west coast and directly

(17) A-3, p. 10; (18) A-4, p. 15; (19) A-4, p. 15; (20) A-3, p. 4;
(21) A-3, p. 6; (22) A-5, p. 1 and 5.

opposite Hyane is Papitalai Harbor, connecting with Seeadler Harbor. Actually, because of the indentation of the west coastline, the only land strip separating Papitalai and Hyane is a low 50-yard wide sandspit. Across this sandspit natives constructed a skidway over which they transported their canoes from one harbor to the other. North of the skidway extends Mokerang Peninsula which bends to the west and forms the main breakwater for Seeadler Harbor. Coconut groves and swamp land cover the greater part of this northern prong of Los Negros Island. Immediately south of the skidway is Momote Plantation where the Japanese had built a large airdrome. Extending west from the native village of Papitalai and across Lemondrol Creek is a range of hills covered by dense rainforest and jungle growth. The dominating terrain feature of this range is Hill 260. The entire island is ringed by a shelving coral reef which makes landing by assault craft extremely hazardous. (23) (See Map B)

A successful invasion of the Admiralties would completely outflank the enemy at Rabaul and in the Wewak-Madang area. The islands could then become a springboard for an advance toward the Philippines. Naval and aircraft operating from this base could give excellent protection to any force advancing into the open waters of the Central Pacific. (24)

THE BATTLE SITUATION

Organization of Invasion Forces:

A planning staff from 1st Cavalry Division Headquarters had been making a study of terrain, logistics and other data, since January 1944. On 26 February the Admiralty Island invasion was designated the Brewer Operation and the 1st Cavalry Division a part of the Brewer Task Force. (25) The division was engaged in jungle and amphibious training in the vicinity of Oro Bay, New Guinea, when the warning order from Alamo Force Headquarters was received. The 5th Cavalry Regiment was alerted to furnish one squadron for the Reconnaissance Force. The regiment, less one squadron, was designated the Support Force. (26)

(23) A-3, p. 6; A-5, p. 2 and Personal knowledge; (24) A-3, p. 7;

(25) (26) A-3, p. 12.

The Brewer Reconnaissance Force was composed of:

2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment

Battery B, 99th FA Bn (Less 2 Gun Sections)
673d Antiaircraft Machine Gun Battery (Airborne)

Reconnaissance Platoon, Hq Troop, 1st Cav Brigade

Communications Platoon, Hq Troop, 1st Cav Brigade

1st Platoon, B Troop (Clearing), 1st Medical Squadron

30th Portable Surgical Hospital

Detachment, Australian New Guinea Administration Unit (ANGAU)

Air Force Detachment (Supervisors)

Naval Gun Fire Support Party

Air Liaison Party

A total of 1026 enlisted men and officers.

The Brewer Support Force:

5th Cavalry Regiment (Less 2d Squadron)

99th FA Bn (Less 2 Gun Sections)

1st Platoon, A Troop, 8th Engr Squadron

Signal Detachment, 1st Signal Troop

40th Construction Bn, US Navy

Battery C, 168th Antiaircraft Bn (Gun)

Battery A, 211th Antiaircraft Bn (AW)

Company E, Shore Bn, 592d Engr Boat and Shore Regt (27)

The 1st Cavalry Division, the only square division to participate in World War II, was composed of 2 brigades of 2 regiments each, plus supporting arms and services. A regiment consisted of 2 rifle squadrons, a headquarters and headquarters troop, service troop, weapons troop, and a medical detachment; a squadron was comprised of a headquarters and headquarters detachment, 3 rifle troops and a weapons troop. Division artillery was made up as follows: Two 75-mm pack Howitzer battalions, the 82d and 99th; two 105-mm Howitzer battalions, the 61st and the 271st. (28)

Estimate of Enemy Strength:

Intelligence estimates, based on reports of 40 natives who had left the islands prior to 27 February 1944, placed the enemy garrison strength (27) A-4, p. 15 and 16; (28) A-4, p. 199 and Personal knowledge.

on the Admiralties at approximately 4300 men, disposed as follows:
2450 in the Momote-Mokerang area, 750 in the Papitalai-Lombrum area,
1100 on Manus in the vicinity of Lorengau. Dual purpose 25-mm pom-pom
guns were reported to be organized in depth around the Momote airstrip.
(29)

The Capture and Defense of Momote Airstrip:

At 0815 hours, 29 February 1944, the Brewer Reconnaissance Force,
preceded by naval and air bombardment of the target area, landed under
fire at White Beach in Hyane Harbor. The entrance to the harbor is pro-
tected by two arms of land 1700 yards apart, projecting one from the north
and one from the south. The landing craft maneuvered through a fifty-
yard break in the coral reef which extends across the harbor entrance,
and then turned south and southwest to the only suitable landing beach
near the jetties. (30) The landing met with light enemy resistance, and
the invading forces pushed inland to Momote Plantation. By about 0950
hours the entire airstrip and revetment area had been occupied. (31)
Patrols were sent out to the north, south and the west. The patrols op-
erating toward the south and west met no resistance, but found ample evi-
dence that the area had been recently occupied. To the north, the patrol
encountered stiff enemy resistance from the skidway area. Reports from
these patrols indicated that the landing force could not hold the entire
area of the airdrome; consequently, a much smaller perimeter was estab-
lished on the eastern edge of the airstrip. At 1400 hours General Mac-
Arthur, who had accompanied the Brewer Reconnaissance Force, came ashore
and ordered the beachhead held at all cost. For the next 44 hours the
invaders repulsed repeated sporadic attacks from the enemy. Despite a
tight perimeter it was impossible to prevent some night infiltration,
with the result that many wire communication lines were cut, command posts,
artillery and mortar positions were forced to beat off repeated attacks.
(32) (See Map C)

At 1000 hours on D + 2 the Brewer Support Force landed from LST's
on White Beach. (33) With this increased strength the entire airstrip
(29) A-3, p. 17; (30) A-3, p. 16 and 23; (31) A-3, p. 27; (32) A-4,
p. 18; A-3, p. 31; (33) Personal knowledge.

and revetment area was occupied by 1600 hours against negligible resistance. Squadron commanders were ordered to dig in and hold what they had gained. The extent of the perimeter was such that the troop commanders placed all three platoons on line. Automatic weapons were sighted for grazing and flanking fire and were protected on both flank and rear by dug-in riflemen with two men per fox hole. The night of 2-3 March was relatively quiet. The following day positions were improved and patrols probed into the jungle to the north, south and west. They again met heavy resistance in the skidway area. (34)

The night of 3-4 March was to be the acid test for the 5th Cavalry Regiment. At about 2100 hours the enemy launched their first determined attack to drive the invaders into the sea. In the 1st Squadron sector two reinforced platoons of Japanese probed at the thinly held perimeter. To the north in the 2d Squadron sector a battalion plus, moving in from the direction of the native skidway and Porlaka, made repeated attacks against G Troop and the right flank of F Troop. Friendly artillery and mortars supported the fire of automatic weapons and riflemen throughout the night. The Japanese made no attempt to side slip the murderous fire of the defenders or attack another sector of the perimeter, but chose to walk over the bodies of their fallen comrades to their own death. The next morning when a new outpost line was established, over 750 enemy dead were counted in this sector. Thus the 5th US Cavalry celebrated its 89th birthday on 3 March 1944. Remnants of the enemy force withdrew into the hills west of Papitalai. (35) (See Map C)

Between 4-6 March the following reinforcements were landed: 2d Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 12th Cavalry Regiment, the 82d and the 271st Field Artillery Battalions. The 2d Squadron, 7th Cavalry and the 12th Cavalry Regiment were given the mission of clearing Mokerang Peninsula of all enemy resistance. The 99th Field Artillery Battalion was placed in direct support of this force. The 82d Field Artillery Battalion went into position in the vicinity of the airdrome and was in direct support of the 5th Cavalry Regiment. (36)

(34) Personal knowledge; (35) A-4, p. 20, 22 and 23 and Personal knowledge; A-3, p. 46; (36) A-7, p. 10-12.

During the period 6-13 March the 5th Cavalry extended its control of the Momote Plantation area with the occupation of Porlaka and Papitalai village by the 2d Squadron, which met its only resistance at Papitalai when 50 Japanese were driven into the hills. (37) The 1st Squadron moved south to Southeast Point encountering very little enemy resistance. From this point daily patrols were sent west along the coastline and into the swamps south of Lemondrol Creek seeking the scattered enemy and destroying supply caches whenever found. (See Map C)

OPERATIONS OF 1ST SQUADRON, 5TH CAVALRY, IN THE VICINITY OF HILL 260

The beachhead at Papitalai village, which had been occupied by F Troop on 6 March, had a radius of about 50 yards. Behind this cleared space rose the range of hills that extended west to Loniu Passage. A dim, very steep trail lead south and southwest from the perimeter along a narrow ridge, then west toward Hill 260. This dominant terrain feature was protected by two knobs, 1100 and 1700 yards west of the village. Since 8 March all F Troop patrols, numbering from the size of a squad to a reinforced platoon, had been driven back by cleverly concealed enemy with machine gun, knee mortar, and sniper fire. It was evident that the Japanese intended to delay in successive positions and inflict as many casualties as possible on the attacking troops. The dense jungle and rainforest was ideal for ambush, defense from concealed positions and for lurking snipers. (38) (See Map D) Enemy resistance was estimated to be at least a reinforced company. (39)

In Field Order No 4, Colonel Hugh T. Hoffman, Regimental Commander, 5th Cavalry, gave the 1st Squadron the mission of clearing the Japanese from this portion of the island and designated four phase lines which included the objectives to be secured. On 13 March C Troop, commanded by Captain Henry Greer, relieved F Troop at Papitalai village. The main attack was to be delivered the next morning. (40) Under this plan the 2d Squadron moved from the vicinity of Porlaka and Papitalai to Southeast

(37) A-7, p. 13 and Personal knowledge; (38) Personal knowledge;
(39) A-7, p. 17; (40) A-7, p. 19.

Point and took up positions there. To create a diversion the Regimental Commander, 12th Cavalry, agreed to send to the west and southwest a patrol from his 2d Squadron, which had occupied Papitalai Mission on 8 March. G Troop of the 5th Cavalry was to send a patrol south of Lemondrol Creek. (41)

On the morning of 14 March Lt Colonel Charles E. Brady moved A, B, and Weapons Troops from Southeast Point to Porlaka. The crossing of Lemondrol Creek was made in two engineer boats and two captured barges. (42)

The 82d Field Artillery Battalion fired a fifteen-minute preparation and the regimental mortars a five-minute preparation on the first and second objectives, which were two points 600 yards and 1100 yards west from Papitalai village. When the preparatory fires lifted at 1030 hours, B Troop, commanded by Capt Robert Singleton, with one platoon of heavy machine guns attached, moved up the trail followed by A Troop. Either the enemy forces were not in position or they withdrew in the face of the effective artillery and mortar preparation, as the two troops were able to occupy the first objective with negligible resistance. (43)
(See Map E)

The troop commanders were ordered not to move forward until 1300 hours as an air strike on the remaining three objectives was scheduled for 1245 hours. The strike was called off for an undetermined reason after four bombs had been dropped. At 1300 hours A Troop, led by Captain Langham, passed through B Troop and pressed on toward the second objective. Artillery and mortar fire, closely supervised by Major Harry Lambert, Commanding Officer 82d Field Artillery Battalion, who acted as air observer, supported the attack. So dense was the jungle that the advance of the troops was completely obscured from the air observer, and it was necessary to mark the forward positions by firing red flares. Artillery and mortar forward observers, assisted by Major Lambert in a cub plane, adjusted fire within 50 to 150 yards in front of the column. The trail (41) A-3, p. 120; (42) Personal knowledge; (43) A-7, p. 19.

followed a narrow ridge that permitted movement of only two men abreast; the ground fell off sharply on either side into deep ravines. Two platoons of A Troop and one of B Troop were able to advance slowly. Congestion on the trail prevented Captain Langham's A Troop from moving forward as a whole. (44) The enemy opened fire from bunkers as the advancing troops approached within 15 to 25 yards of the second objective. These bunkers blended so well with the surrounding vegetation that they could not be detected until the defenders chose to reveal the positions with a burst of machine gun fire. Assault teams were organized, and as the positions were pinpointed they were attacked by riflemen, supported by machine guns and bazookas. Lt Ralph E. Hill, a platoon leader from B Troop, was killed in this action. Lt Swan, in command of the heavy machine gun platoon, although wounded in the arm, moved forward, reorganized the platoon and directed its attack. A total of eight bunkers were knocked out along this section of the trail. As the troops pressed forward, they were again stopped by fire from enemy knee mortars. (45) The D Troop forward observer, who had maintained constant contact with the gun positions at Papitalai village by means of CE-11 equipment, called for mortar fire and silenced the opposition. By 1400 hours the two platoons of A Troop and one platoon of B Troop arrived on the second objective. The immediate area was mopped up, and the troops began digging in for the night to hold the ground they had gained. The perimeter was organized for all-round defense. At 1555 hours the Japanese launched a counterattack which was repulsed by rifle and machine gun fire supported by artillery and mortars. Fire lanes were cut for automatic weapons; they were tied in before darkness.

B Troop, less one platoon, and one platoon of A Troop dug in on the first objective.

Two cavalrymen were killed and twenty wounded during the attack on the first and second objectives.

(44) A-7, p. 19; (45) A-4, p. 27 and Personal knowledge.

The squadron commander scheduled harassing fire by artillery and mortars on the third objective during the night. The fires were to be delivered alternately every half hour. (46) The artillery had no counterbattery mission. The little supporting artillery of the Japanese, one 70-mm Howitzer and two 75-mm mountain guns, had been knocked out in the initial stages of the invasion. (47)

Throughout the advance the assault elements had maintained communication with the squadron CP by laying W-130 wire and using sound-powered telephones. It was found that in dense jungle the SCR-536 radio would not function even at short ranges. The SCR-300 was not an item of issue to troop level at this time. Squadron wire teams replaced the W-130 wire circuits with W-110 wire as the advance progressed.

Previous intelligence training, which had stressed the importance of recovering and submitting for translation all enemy documents, was now put into effective practice. The men searched the Japanese dead, thoroughly cleaned out all positions overrun, and sent collected material to the CP. (48)

During the night of 14-15 March both A and B Troops repulsed counterattacks. The next morning at 0730 A Troop moved toward the third objective established in the Regimental Field Order. The resistance was sporadic and weak, and the troops were on the position by 1035 hours.

Whenever necessary, the advance was supported by artillery and mortar fire, adjusted in the same manner as on the previous day. The artillery fired delay fuze so that the projectiles would penetrate heavy overhead foliage and burst closer to the ground. This reduced the hazard of tree bursts near the advancing troops. (49)

B Troop moved from the first objective and joined A Troop in its new position. Patrols reconnoitered 200 yards west in the direction of Hill 260 and to both flanks without making contact. C Troop, the squadron reserve, operating from the CP area, was assigned the mission of carrying supplies from the beachhead to the forward elements and evacuating the

(46) Personal knowledge; (47) A-3, p. 148; (48) Personal knowledge; (49) A-4, p. 5 and 7.

sick and wounded. Major Harry Lambert visited the squadron CP to arrange the supporting fire missions for his battalion and to talk with the forward observer. At his suggestion he assigned a section of artillerymen to the 1st Squadron to assist in carrying the supplies forward to the assault troops. This gesture, in addition to the splendid support his battalion was giving the squadron, more firmly cemented the friendly relationship between the artillery and cavalry. (50)

The next day, 16 March, was devoted to building up the supply of ammunition, rations and water for the attack on Hill 260 the following day. Patrols sent to the west to reconnoiter the trail and outline the enemy defensive positions drew intense sniper and machine gun fire after advancing 300-400 yards.

On the morning of 17 March C Troop moved from Papitalai village to the third objective and prepared to lead the attack on Hill 260. B Troop was to support the advance while A Troop reverted to squadron reserve and CP protection. The command post group had followed C Troop up to the line of departure. It was estimated that 100 Japanese were dug in on Hill 260. Preceded by a rolling artillery and mortar barrage, Captain Greer led his troop up the trail and advanced to within 200 yards of Hill 260 when they were stopped by a heavy cross fire from machine guns and rifles which killed four men, among whom was the squadron executive officer who had accompanied the assaulting troops. Seven were wounded, one of whom was the artillery forward observer who refused to be evacuated until the position had been occupied. At this point on the trail the ground dropped off less steeply than heretofore. Using C Troop as a blocking force, the squadron commander sent B Troop on an enveloping movement to the left (north) flank around the objective. Progress was painfully slow as each foot of the way had to be hacked through tangled vines and jungle undergrowth with machetes. Visibility was limited from five to ten yards. The noise made by the enveloping troops evidently unnerved the Japanese who abandoned their strong position, leaving approximately fifty of their dead behind (50) A-7, p. 21.

them. B and C Troops were now able to move onto Hill 260 without further resistance at 1310 hours. Captain Singleton reported that during the envelopment, the bodies of many dead Japanese were found in the bush. The remainder of the day was spent digging in, carrying supplies forward, and in local patrolling. (51) (See Map E)

With the taking of Hill 260, the supply line was extended to 2600 yards, over steep jungle trail, narrow and slippery, and rutted by the footprints of the advancing troops. Rations, water and ammunition had to be carried forward by hand. The sick and wounded were evacuated on return, the round trip taking five hours. Division headquarters sent thirty-eight native carriers, bossed by an Australian who spoke Pidgin English, to assist in supply and evacuation. Two bulldozers with engineer operators were ferried from Porlaka to Papitalai village to attempt improvement of the trail leading up into the hills; however, the steep and slippery terrain prevented their successful operation and the project was abandoned.

A patrol from A Troop reconnoitered south from the command post in an attempt to find a suitable route to Lemondrol Creek which might be improved and utilized as a supply trail. The area, which consisted of either steep terrain choked with undergrowth or deep swamps near the water's edge, was impassable, and the patrol was unable to reach the creek. To add to the squadron commander's worries, carrying parties from the beach at Papitalai reported sniper activity along the trail. It was believed that the operations of the 12th Cavalry in the vicinity of Papitalai Mission were driving straggler bands of the enemy south into the 5th Cavalry sector. Colonel Brady requested the regimental commander to provide protection along the supply trail. This request was granted, and G Troop of the 2d Squadron was alerted and assigned this mission. (52)

On the night of 17-18 March some enemy hand grenades were thrown into the B and C Troops' perimeter; otherwise, the night was relatively quiet. The next morning G Troop moved from Southeast Point to Papitalai village (51) Personal knowledge; (52) Personal knowledge.

and took up position along the supply line to protect carrying parties, while a forward supply dump was built up at the squadron CP. A Troop, the squadron reserve, was utilized to carry the rations, ammunition and water forward to the troops occupying Hill 260.

Combat patrols were sent to the west and southwest to reconnoiter the next high ground and to feel out the enemy defenses. The Japanese set up a machine gun and several knee mortars about seventy-five yards north of the command post and opened fire; 81-mm fire silenced this harassing action.

The night of 18-19 March was very quiet with no enemy activity. The next morning patrols from all three troops combed the jungle north and northeast of their positions in an attempt to locate the snipers harassing the supply line. Only two or three were seen; however, the bodies of many dead Japanese were found. Apparently wounded by artillery and mortar fire, they had crawled off the trail to die. C Troop also sent a patrol south from Hill 260 in another attempt to find a suitable route to Lemondrol Creek, so that the overland carry of supplies might be shortened. This effort, like the previous ones, was unsuccessful.

During the day of 20 March there was continued patrolling to clean out the snipers operating north of the trail from Papitalai village up to the CP. (53) On the evening of 20 March Brigadier General William C. Chase, Commanding General 1st Cavalry Brigade, issued oral orders that called for a coordinated drive to clear the remaining Japanese from Los Negros Island. In compliance with the orders of the brigade commander the 2d Squadron, 12th Cavalry, operating from Papitalai Mission was to drive southwest from its beachhead and move into position on line with, and to the north of, the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry. The movement of the 12th Cavalry into position was to be the first phase of the drive. The two squadrons would then attack and seize the brigade second objective, the high ground approximately 900 yards west of Hill 260. (54)

As the carrying parties were no longer being molested, G Troop was returned to the 2d Squadron at Southeast Point.

(53) Personal knowledge; (54) A-7, p. 27.

The next morning, 21 March, while waiting for the 12th Cavalry Squadron to move into position, a patrol from C Troop, 5th Cavalry, reconnoitering in the direction of the brigade's second objective, encountered an enemy strongpoint in a cane patch 700 yards west of Hill 260. The patrol pulled back and called for an artillery concentration on the position. When the concentration lifted, they moved in and were again halted by machine gun and rifle fire. The thick cane served as excellent overhead protection for the Japanese fox holes. The cunning enemy had cut fire lanes about twelve inches from the ground through the cane. The guns were sighted down these lanes to cover the trail from several angles. Another concentration was fired, but again the advance of the patrol was stopped. Without a direct hit on the strongpoint, the light caliber 75-mm Howitzers had no effect on the well-protected enemy. It was estimated that a reinforced platoon of Japs had holed up in the cane patch. The reconnaissance patrol withdrew. (55) (See Map E)

At 0900 hours on 22 March, B and C Troops moved toward the Japanese position located the previous day. As expected, the Japanese opened up with machine guns, rifles and knee mortars. Captain Singleton, in command of B Troop, used one platoon as a blocking force and sent his other two platoons on a double envelopment to the north and south of the position. Captain Greer led C Troop on a wide and deep envelopment in an attempt to gain the enemy rear. The Artillery concentration which had preceded the advance apparently had little, if any, effect upon the well-protected Japanese. Heavy undergrowth and the thick cane limited the progress of the maneuvering troops to 200 yards per hour. The attack was called off, and Captain Greer and Captain Singleton withdrew their troops to the perimeter on Hill 260. (56)

Radio communication was established with the 2d Squadron, 12th Cavalry, moving southwest from Papitalai Mission. Lt Colonel Goodrich reported his position as approximately 250 to 300 yards north and east of the 5th Cavalry forward position, and estimated that his squadron would (55) A-7, p. 28; (56) A-7. p. 29.

make contact with the 5th the following day. Physical contact with Colonel Goodrich's squadron was accomplished at 1130 hours, 23 March, when a patrol was guided to their position by a series of prearranged rifle shots. The patrol then led the 12th Cavalry Squadron into its position on the north flank of Hill 260. The first phase of the brigade drive had been accomplished. Earlier that morning, a platoon from the 12th Cavalry Regiment had arrived at the CP via Papitalai village and the long supply trail through the hills. They carried rations, water and ammunition for Lt Colonel Goodrich's force. The sick and injured were treated and evacuated by the carrying party. The remainder of the day was devoted to building up supplies behind the two squadrons. The march from Papitalai Mission, having been long and debilitating, the 12th Cavalry was given a much-needed rest the remaining hours of the day. (57) (See Map F)

Lt Colonel Brady, the senior commander, made final plans for an attack to be launched on the brigade second objective the following morning. In accordance with his outlined plan, a fifteen-minute preparation was fired by the 82d and 271st Field Artillery Battalions. The attack jumped off at 0830, 24 March, with A and C Troops, 5th Cavalry, and E and F Troops, 12th Cavalry, abreast. The right and left flank troops were echeloned to the rear. The strongpoint in the cane patch had evidently been abandoned following the unsuccessful attacks on the 22d; the advancing troops were not fired upon while by-passing this position. The first heavy resistance came from a small village a hundred yards from the objective. The enemy was located on a small ridge parallel to the line of advance. On the initial contact the troops halted in indecision. Captain Henry Greer, commanding C Troop, 5th Cavalry, and ranking officer present, called in the other three commanders and outlined the plan of attack. Quietly and confidently, he ordered all heavy machine guns brought to the center of the line and set up under cover on a small knoll overlooking the village; from this point the gunners had perfect overhead (57) A-7, p. 30 and Personal knowledge.

fire. Under this protective fire the four troops crossed the ravine and ascended the far side of the ridge. When the advance masked the machine guns, the fire lifted, and the troops took up marching fire with their own weapons. The enemy was completely blanketed and pinned down. The assault swept through the village and on to the high ground beyond, achieving the brigade second objective. Huddled in holes and under houses, fifty dead Japanese were counted against three Americans killed and twelve wounded. (58) (See Map F)

This successful attack cleaned out the last effective enemy resistance on Los Negros Island. The attack continued on the 25th and 26th of March. Six hundred yards west of the brigade second objective a north-south trail led to the head of Lemondrol Creek -- and adequate supplies. (59)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

General MacArthur's decision to leave the Brewer Reconnaissance Force in occupation of Momote airstrip was a calculated risk that paid huge dividends. By the time the Japanese organized and launched a coordinated counterattack, the Support Force had landed with sorely needed reinforcements. Captured enemy documents revealed the following information: The 1st Battalion, 229th Infantry Regiment, with a strength of 1429 men, was charged with the defense of the Hyane Harbor area. This battalion was called the "Baba Force" after its commanding officer, Captain Baba. The 2d (Iwakami) Battalion, 1st Independent Regiment, with a strength of approximately 800, was located north of the native skidway on Mokerang Peninsula. This force was not committed to the attack until the night of 3-4 March. A letter written by a Japanese officer stated that "Baba and Iwakami Battalions could not work together in close cooperation." Had these two numerically superior forces launched a coordinated attack before the night of 3-4 March, the reconnaissance in force of the Admiralty Islands might have ended disastrously.

(58) A-7, p. 31; (59) Personal knowledge.

The inadequate artillery supporting the Japanese defenders of Los Negros Island contributed materially to the success of the initial landing and conquest of the island. Their two 75-mm mountain guns and one 70-mm Howitzer were knocked out early in the campaign, thus limiting enemy fire power to machine guns, knee mortars and rifles.

The operations of the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry, west of Papitalai village were directed with sound judgment on the part of leaders at all levels of command. The speed of any advance is limited by the intensity of enemy resistance and timely resupply of attacking troops. This is particularly true of jungle operations where the absence of roads necessitates resupply and evacuation of sick and wounded by hand-carrying methods. Prior planning should give this fact serious consideration and provide adequate carrying parties to support the assault troops. In this operation the squadron commander was forced to utilize the reserve troop on the supply and evacuation mission, although the regimental commander provided as much assistance as it was possible to obtain. Lt Colonel Brady's insistence that assault elements have adequate provisions in their possession or available at forward supply points may have delayed the advance somewhat, but at no time were the attacking troops placed in a precarious position for the lack of provisions.

Artillery fire in support of ground forces engaged in jungle combat must be closely supervised by both forward and air observers so as to avoid the possibility of friendly troops receiving casualties from their own supporting artillery. The leading elements marked their position by firing prearranged pyrotechnic signals; the air observer then directed the adjusting battery to fire a marking round well forward of this position. Subsequent reductions in range brought the fire back towards the ground forces until the forward observer could determine the point of burst and then make corrections as necessary.

Although the support of 75-mm Howitzers was effective, it is believed that the heavier 105-mm will produce much better results in the

jungle and with fewer rounds. This was quite evident when the 271st Field Artillery Battalion reinforced the fires of the 82d on 24 March, and the resultant damage was noted.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons brought out in this operation were:

1. The present SCR-536 radio is useless in jungle operations.
2. In a slow moving situation of this type adequate communications can be maintained with CE-11 equipment. However, assault wire should be replaced with W-110 as soon as possible.
3. The advance must be halted by mid-afternoon so that troops will have ample time to dig in and prepare defenses before nightfall.
4. Automatic weapons must be protected on both flanks and rear by dug-in riflemen.
5. In the jungle the machete is a necessary item of equipment.
6. In jungle operations the artillery should fire the delay fuze so as to reduce the hazard of tree bursts near friendly ground troops.
7. The planning phase of a jungle operation must take into consideration the lack of roads and the resultant problem of hand carrying all supplies to combat troops.
8. In the jungle a perimeter defense that affords all-round protection must be established.
9. Fox holes should be large enough to accommodate two men -- one can sleep while the other remains awake and alert.
10. The 75-mm Howitzer is too light for jungle operations.
11. In jungle operations mortar and artillery forward observers must be well forward.