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THE OPERATIONS OF CANNON COMPANY, 17TH INFANTRY
(7TH INFANTRY DIVISION) DURING THE ADVANCE ON
DAGAMI, LEYTE ISLAND, 23 - 29 OCTOBER 1944.
(LEYTE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: CANNON COMPANY SUP-
PORTING THE ATTACK OF AN INFANTRY REGIMENT IN
SWAMPY, HEAVILY WOODED TERRAIN.

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THE OPERATIONS OF CANNON COMPANY, 17TH INFANTRY
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INTRODUCTION

Sixth Army, composed of the X and XXIV Corps, invaded Leyte Island on 20 October 1944. (See Map A) The objective was to seize and occupy the island. (1)

The importance of this landing may be seen when one considers that Leyte Island was to be used as an immediate stepping stone for American armies and supplies used to recapture the other Philippine Islands. From Leyte, the war could be carried to Japan's home waters. Leyte was to be the American air and land base for the December attack on Luzon. (2)

When the Leyte landings were made on 20 October, the nearest land-based planes had to come nearly 1000 miles from bases in the South Pacific. It was extremely important that existing airstrips on Leyte be captured immediately and converted to American use. (3)

X Corps (1st Cavalry and 24th Infantry Divisions) landed south of Tacloban with the mission of securing important tactical installations in that area. The XXIV Corps, composed of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions, landed on beaches 10 miles to the south of X Corps landing --- in the Dulag-Tanauan area. All divisions landed abreast. (4)

(1) A-1, p. 1; A-6, p. 4; (2) A-4, p. 31; (3) A-4, p. 28; A-5, Annex 7 to F.O. #9, p. 1; (4) A-4, p. 7.

The 7th Division landed in the left half of the Corps zone with the mission of protecting the Corps left flank and making the main effort for the Corps along the Dulag-Burauen Road. This road ran directly inland 17,000 yards from the coastal town of Dulag where it turned north in Burauen, a town situated at the base of the mountains.

As the assault regiments of the 7th Division pushed inland the 3d Battalion of the 17th Infantry landed and secured a bridge which crossed the Daguitan River near Dulag. (5) This battalion had the mission of protecting the Corps left flank. The 3d Platoon of Cannon Company accompanied this battalion on its mission. The remainder of Cannon Company, 17th Infantry landed close behind the assault, located a suitable assembly area in the vicinity of Dulag and awaited the landings of the remainder of the 17th Infantry Regimental Combat Team. (6) This RCT, minus, was the division reserve -- to be committed only on Corps order. It completed landings by noon on 21 October. When RCT 17 was ashore, it moved inland about 600 yards and bivouaced behind RCT 32, which was attacking in the right half of the division zone. (7) (See Map C)

^{TERRAIN}
Leyte Island is 115 miles long and averages about 20 miles in width. The island has no dry season. Rainfall increases during the month of October and continues through March in what is called "The Rainy Season". During the October to March period rain may be expected nearly every

(5) A-5, p. 2, 3; (6) Personal knowledge; (7) A-5, p. 3; A-6, p. 6; A-1, p. 5.

night. Days are usually sunny with the air moisture-laden. Sunny days and rainy nights during ~~the~~ late October and early November combine to cause heat exhaustion.

The fertile black soil of the eastern plain of Leyte is covered with cocoanut plantations interspersed with rice paddies. The vegetation which grows in the cocoanut plantations is dense making them into a veritable jungle broken only by the rice paddies, native roads and other man-made clearings. (See Map B)

Transportation, except for tanks which could push over the jungle growth in the cocoanut plantations, was confined to the few narrow roads which traversed the island. The rice paddies were unferdable by any type of military vehicle. (8)

COMPANY ORGANIZATION AND ARMAMENT

Cannon Company consisted of a company headquarters and three howitzer platoons. (See Chart I) The headquarters was organized into a company CP and liaison party, forward party, ammunition team, communication team, and maintenance team. Kitchen personnel assisted the supply sergeant during battle.

The company had gained considerable experience in the employment of their primary weapon (the M8 self-propelled howitzer) during the battle for Kwajalein. The effective use of the M8, as a shock weapon with the infantry on Kwajalein, so impressed commanders that additional M8's

(8) A-6, p. 1.

were obtained and issued to other cannon companies of the division. The Commanding Officer, RCT 17, requested that six M4A3 medium tanks, with 105-mm howitzer mounted, be added to the Cannon Company armament. However, these tanks did not arrive in time for the Leyte operation although the company trained skeleton crews for their employment. These trained men stayed with company headquarters during the battle and were used to replace casualties within M8 crews. The M8 howitzer carriage was full-tracked and extremely mobile, with 360° of traverse. It was equipped with hydro-matic transmission which facilitated handling the carriage at speeds up to 40 miles per hour. (9) The M8 carried a crew of five men; a driver, radio operator, loader, gunner, and "tank" commander. The radio operator was also the assistant driver. Each self-propelled howitzer mounted an SCR 300 radio for inter-company control. Each crew member was trained to perform the duties of at least one other member of the crew. (10)

THE SITUATION

The two assault RCT's of the 7th Division had advanced about 4,500 yards inland when they closed for the night of 22 October. RCT 17 moved from its position, near the beach, to the west end of the captured Dulag airstrip during the afternoon of 22 October. (See Map C) Division obtained permission from Corps to commit its reserve on the following morning. (11)

(9) A-7, p. 173; Personal knowledge; (10) Personal knowledge; (11) A-1, p. 6.

After the RCT had moved to the Dulag airstrip, the S-4 contacted the Cannon Company Commander and asked that the company ammunition sergeant and four ammunition bearers be left with the rear echelon to handle 75-mm ammunition. The Company Commander objected to such a use of the ammunition sergeant on the grounds that such a key man would be needed to perform his assigned combat mission on the following day. The company commander did offer to leave five men to help move ammunition on the beach. A conference was held with the RCT commander and Cannon Company was ordered to leave the ammunition sergeant with the rear echelon. (12)

The enemy, fighting to limit the American beachhead, had used three battalions of infantry supported by two battalions of Field Artillery in front of the 7th Division. These battalions were from the Japanese 16th Division, famous for the 1942 Death March on Bataan. All of the enemy units in the division zone had suffered heavy casualties during the first three days of fighting and by the 23d were withdrawing their shattered remnants to a secondary defense line near Bureauen. (13)

THE ORDER

At 1800 hours the RCT Commander received the division commander's order. The order stated that "RCT 17 (-3d Bn) and reinforced by 2d Bn, 184th Infantry; 91st Cml Co* (-1st and 3d plat); platoon, 13th Engr Bn **; and Co A, 7th Med Bn will proceed West along the Provincial Road,

(12) Personal knowledge; (13) A-16, p. 95; A-1, p. 6;
* This company was employing four 4.2 mortars with the RCT for the first time; ** 1st Platoon, Co. A, accompanied RCT.

capture BURAUEN, then turn North and secure the town of DAGAMI, making junction with the 96th Division at that point. RCT 17 will drive on a narrow front with its primary mission to secure DAGAMI in the shortest possible time. 48th FA Bn will support RCT 17 directly, with other elements of Division Artillery on call. 767th Tank Bn, operating as the terrain dictates will precede RCT 17." (14) Time of the attack was set as 230830 October. The front line positions were designated as the line of departure.

ATTACK TO BURAUEN

The leading battalions crossed the line of departure at 0830 hours. (See Map C) The 1st Battalion front extended from the road 200 yards left and the 2d Battalion covered a similar frontage to the right of the road. One Cannon Company platoon accompanied each of the leading battalions. (15)

Cannon Company, 17th Infantry was trained to give close support to attacking troops from positions on or near the front lines. Consequently, as the attack moved out through the jungle, which hugged the road on either side, the assault guns were with the troops. The two guns of each platoon had been trained to maneuver in such a way as to mutually support each other. This maneuvering had to be abandoned in the jungle as the growth was so dense as to limit visibility to a few feet and the gun crews were

(14) (15) A-2, p. 1.

wholly dependent upon the infantry for protection.

As the attack moved forward swampy terrain and jungle growth were encountered on either side of the road. The maps being used indicated relatively open terrain with good standing. A check of distances on the ground against scaled distances shown on the map pointed up the fact that the map contained many inaccuracies. To correct for this lack of information the company commander and the platoon leaders were required to reconnoiter well forward to avoid having the M8's lost in swamps or dense jungle.

The regiment patrolled vigorously throughout the advance in order to gain accurate information on the sector through which it was to move. Artillery spotters in liaison planes gave valuable terrain information to the commanders on the ground. (16)

As the attack progressed the company headquarters moved forward with the regimental command post. The CP moved along the Provincial Road immediately behind the assault battalions. The 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry followed 300 yards in rear with the necessary supply vehicles in their column. (17)

Forward movement was slow due to the marshy ground and the heavy foliage of the jungle. (18) The sun beat down mercilessly on the men whenever they broke into the open. The air was still and humid to the point of making perspiration drip from the men's clothing. Men from company headquarters had to be continually reminded to keep

(16) (17) Personal knowledge; (18) A-1, p. 6.

their helmets on. The company executive officer stayed with the regimental CP as it advanced along the road. He had an SCR 300 radio with him for the purpose of relaying any information received at the regimental CP to the company commander for action. The first sergeant, supply sergeant, communication team, and kitchen personnel were with the executive officer. Four ammunition bearers were with the two ammunition trucks which followed further to the rear. A spare radio was with the ammunition trucks for their use in the event it was needed.

Besides the normal company headquarters personnel with the CP, there were the crewmen for manning two additional M8's. These men had trained on M8's before the operation but the company had two of its weapons taken away just before the operation and the men were taken into Leyte to be used to replace casualties in the other six gun crews.

The company commander, reconnaissance sergeant, radio operator, and a driver were free to move around with the attack to see that the platoons were properly supplied and performing their missions.

Cannon Company's M8's advanced by pushing down the smaller coconut palms in the jungle. An external telephone had been mounted on the rear of each howitzer carriage prior to the operation. Each telephone was connected to the vehicle's inter-phone system in such a way that an infantryman on the ground could lift the hand set, flash a red light mounted in the driver's compartment (by pressing

not covered in original report

a switch) and then talk to the M8 commander. The conversation was heard by all members of the crew. As the guns moved through the jungle, they were helped considerably by doughboys who literally talked them through the jungle to where they could destroy the isolated pockets of enemy who were trying to delay the advance.

Two enemy tanks were seen during the day -- one had been destroyed by friendly tank action and the other appeared to have stalled and been abandoned. Cannon Company targets consisted of scattered enemy positions which were always well concealed amid the undergrowth. (19)

The RCT closed into a perimeter defense for the night 12,000 yards west of their starting line. (20) (See Map C) The self-propelled 75-mm howitzers were positioned in the approximate center of the perimeter and registered indirect fire to cover the most likely avenues of enemy approach into the RCT position. This fire was coordinated with that of the accompanying field artillery liaison officers. (See Map D) The ammunition sergeants moved the ammunition trucks up to gun positions and resupplied them with ammunition.

Cannon Company headquarters and Anti-Tank Company were combined and given the mission of occupying a small sector of the perimeter between positions occupied by the 2d Battalion, 17th Infantry and 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry. The four .50 caliber machine guns, which are normally mounted on top of the M8 turrets, were set on their ground mounts and used along the perimeter.

(19) Personal knowledge; (20) A-2, p. 1.

The supply sergeant drew a "C" ration for each man of the company and saw that it was broken down and issued to the platoons, ammunition section and company headquarters. It was discovered that the maintenance section of company headquarters was not with the company. A radio message was sent to the RCT rear echelon in Dulag to determine if the men could be found there. The gun mechanic and three motor mechanics of Cannon Company were reported to be with the Service Company train near the beach. A request that the men be sent to their company on the first transportation to come forward was radioed to the RCT S-4 at Dulag.

One enemy patrol approached the company position during the night along the trail leading from San Pablo Airfield # 1, but retired to the north when taken under .50 caliber machine gun fire. (21) Five enemy were killed along the perimeter.

The RCT continued the attack to the west at 240800 October. The 1st and 2d Battalions, with cannon platoons in support, led as they had on the 23d. (22) The platoons of cannon company were forward with the assault troops. Scattered enemy were encountered along the way. A few positions along the Bayug Airstrip had to be reduced by the joint action of troops and M8's. The tanks had gone as far as the outskirts of Burauen, on the 23d, without encountering anti-tank opposition. Now they pressed aggressively forward over the same ground. This day was even warmer than the one before and the men had to be repeatedly

(21) Personal knowledge; (22) A-2, p. 2; Personal knowledge.

cautioned to wear helmets and shirts. ✓ Some of the exhausted enemy fell behind their retreating comrades and were taken prisoners. (23)

How many to be

As the tanks approached the outlying buildings of Burauen they were met by enemy rifle fire which caused them to "button up". They struck mines as they came abreast of the first buildings and three tanks were disabled on the road. A fourth tank attempted to bypass the mine field by swinging to the right of the road but struck a mine. Enemy troops were seen to move out of foxholes near the road and hurl themselves at the tanks. Explosions enveloped the tanks on the road.* Tankers who tried to escape the destruction were shot down as they ran. (24) (See Map E)

The leading infantry troops and the M8's came out of the jungle just in time to witness this action by the enemy 800 yards to their front. Hurrying forward, the riflemen opened fire on the enemy. The M8's fired into the buildings occupied by the Japanese causing them to flee to the rear. Many were killed in their holes or as they were running. The attack pressed quickly forward with the M8's shifting their fire into the streets of Burauen. The infantry had little trouble in mopping up the stunned enemy who cowered in their holes. The tank company weapons joined in the action with vengeance, pushing down native homes where Japanese were hidden. The M8's fired white phosphorous into some of the coconut log pillboxes located

(23) A-2, p. 2; Personal knowledge; (24) A-2, p. 2; A-10, p. 3; Personal knowledge; *Later inspection showed that individual Japanese had carried satchel charges which were held against the tanks until exploded.

at street intersections. This fire was very effective as it drove the Japanese from the pillboxes into the streets where they could be liquidated. (25) The attacking troops used two methods to point out enemy targets to the M8's during this action. Some targets were identified by voice conversation over the outside telephone while others were pointed out by the use of .30 caliber tracer ammunition. This action progressed so rapidly that scarcely an hour was needed to secure Burauen.

The M8's had expended their loads of ammunition during the fight through Burauen. The company ammunition trucks had carried loads of 75-mm ammunition along with the other essential supplies. The M8's returned to the eastern edge of town and replenished their loads from these trucks. Because the company had fired some during the previous night, both truck loads were gone and the company commander found it necessary to dispatch the trucks back to the beach to replenish their loads. A note was sent by the Cannon Company Commander to the regimental ammunition officer requesting that the trucks be fully loaded and returned immediately, and that the maintenance section men be put on the trucks when they returned. The note also requested that the ratio of time-fuzed ammunition be increased because of the effectiveness of close-range time fire over enemy positions. This request may have influenced the supply section on the beach to delay the return of the loaded trucks while the S-4 attempted to get more time-fuzed

(25) A-2, p. 2; Personal knowledge.

ammunition.

The M8's were beginning to need minor mechanical adjustments. On one mount the gun's recoil mechanism was not returning it to battery, indicating the need for additional fluid in the recoil cylinder. The gun commander corrected this deficiency with fluid and tools carried in the M8, but all of the guns needed to be adjusted by the trained gun mechanics. However, the guns continued to support the attack as it turned north. (26)

Stubborn enemy resistance was met just north of Bursuen at about 1400 hours. A rocky ridge rose out of the ground east of the road and ran parallel to it. A meandering swampy stream crossed under the road between the advancing troops and the rocky ridge. Enemy mines were discovered on the road above the bridge. The attached engineer platoon crawled forward under fire and removed this mine field. (27)

As soon as the road was open, tanks crossed the bridge and started north firing flank fire into the enemy on the ridge. A jeep patrol accompanied the tanks until another enemy mine field was encountered about 500 yards north of the bridge. The jeeps successfully bypassed the mines and continued up the road but the tanks tried to go through the adjoining rice paddy. The leading tank bogged down in the mud and had to be abandoned. The remaining tanks returned to the vicinity of Bursuen.

Meanwhile the M8's had followed the tanks across the bridge and had swung off the road to the right where they

(26) Personal knowledge; (27) A-2, p. 2; Personal knowledge.

began to fire on enemy positions along the ridge. Accompanied by men from Company F, they advanced along the ridge until the length paralleling the road was in our hands. The RCT consolidated its position and bivouaced for the night. (28)

By 1900 hours the company commander was very concerned about his ammunition trucks. They had more than sufficient time to return with their loads. He also needed the company mechanics to perform maintenance on the howitzers and the motor carriages. He informed the regimental S-3 that his ammunition was almost gone and asked that the S-4, in Dulag, be requested to investigate and see that the ammunition was put on the road as soon as possible. At about 2030 hours, word came back that the trucks had left Dulag at 2000 hours fully loaded with 75-mm ammunition. The mechanics were still with the rear echelon at Dulag, according to the message. (29)

Enemy activity in front of the perimeter was easily heard as darkness began to fall and by 2030 hours, enemy fire was falling within the bivouac area in increasing volume. Cannon Company's guns, in battery position near the RCT CP, fired short barrages across the road to our front in an effort to keep back the enemy "Banzai" attack and still conserve their limited supply of ammunition.

The company commander was called to the regimental CP at 2045 to give his reason for not shooting a greater volume of fire into the attacking enemy. Enemy small arms fire

(28) A-2, p. 3; Personal knowledge; (29) Personal knowledge.

was perforating the CP tent with regularity and 37-mm rounds (from the abandoned light tank) swished through the air within a few feet to strike the ground with a thump. Enemy mortar fire and the shout of "Banzai" promised that the enemy would give no rest to the tired men. (30)

Upon being informed by the company commander that Cannon Company ammunition was nearly expended and that a resupply had not yet arrived although it was past due, the regimental commander called the S-4 at Dulag and ordered that additional ammunition and the company mechanics be sent forward immediately. The S-4, with three truck loads of 75-mm ammunition and four Cannon Company mechanics arrived in the bivouac at about 2300 hours and from then until morning the M8's fired enough of the ammunition to silence most of the enemy activity to our front. The company commander spent the night at the regimental CP, as he was ordered to do, and relayed fire commands to the guns whenever he was told to do so. The enemy fire coupled with the usual nightly downpour made this a most uncomfortable night to remember.

After daybreak on 25 October, the two ammunition trucks of the company were found in Burauen, less than 400 yards from the battery position. The trucks, accompanied by the regimental ammunition officer, had spent the night in this position. They had arrived in Burauen at the time when the enemy attack had been making a great deal of noise and had decided to bed down for the night. (31)

(30) A-2, p. 3; Personal knowledge; (31) Personal knowledge.

THE ENEMY SITUATION

*Enemy not engaged
step prior to this*

The elements of the enemy 20th and 33d Infantry Regiments, with which the RCT had been in contact, had suffered such heavy casualties that they had withdrawn as rapidly as possible to occupy a new defensive line hinging to the Daguitan River through Bureauen and onto the Buri Airstrip. The rapid pursuit of RCT 17 had caught the enemy right flank at Bureauen with such force that it was broken through in less than two hours of fighting. The capture of the rocky ridge along the road leading north toward Dagami, placed friendly troops in position to strike at the enemy rear. During the night of 24 October the enemy reinforced his positions on the rocky knolls behind the ridge and dug new positions in his rear. This action was covered by his attacks of the forward perimeter. On the morning of 25 October his position was as shown on Map E. (32)

BURAUEN TO DAGAMI

not on map

2d Battalion, 184th Infantry swung around to the right of 2d Battalion, 17th Infantry and began an attack on the rocky knoll to the east of present friendly positions. 2d Battalion, 17th Infantry supported this attack by firing into the enemy flank. Some progress was made during the day but the enemy fought tenaciously to hold his positions on the knoll. (33)

During the morning of the 25th, Cannon Company mechanics

(32) A-2, p. 3; (33) A-2, p. 4.

performed maintenance on two guns at a time while the other two guns gave indirect fire support to the attack of the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry. This maintenance was performed on one platoon at a time and the 1st Platoon was the first to receive it. M8's or tanks were unable to support the 2d Battalion, 184th Infantry by other than indirect fire because of the extremely irregular contour of the ground and the heavy growth of coconut palms near the base of the knoll.

About 1200 hours a reinforced patrol from Company C was sent north along the road to determine the condition of the road. 1st Platoon, Cannon Company was sent with the patrol as were three light tanks. Proceeding north the patrol encountered scattered enemy in foxholes. C Company men rode on the carriages of the M8's and tanks until enemy rifle or machine gun fire was encountered. Then they would dismount and fire into the enemy positions until the M8's could overrun and destroy them. The patrol would remount their transportation and continue forward. This continued until the patrol was halted by a blown bridge in front of Buri. Forty nine enemy were accounted for by the patrol without the loss of a single American. The road was reported free of mines or other obstacles as far as the blown bridge. (34) *not on map*

The 3d Battalion, 17th Infantry was relieved of their mission south of the Daguitan River near Dalag on 25 October and moved by shuttling to join the remainder of RCT 17 north of Burauen. (35) The two guns of 3d Platoon, Cannon Company moved with the 3d Battalion and rejoined the company.

(34) A-2, p. 4; Personal knowledge; (35) A-2, p. 4.

*positions not
as in map*

The howitzers occupied a battery position at approximately the same location as used the night before, the difference being that now there were six guns in battery instead of four. (36) (See Chart A)

The night of 25 October was much quieter than the preceding one with a few enemy trying to penetrate the perimeter. None succeeded although a few Japanese did crawl into front line foxholes where they were given sharp receptions with trench knives.

RCT 17 was ordered to continue the advance toward Dagami on the following day, 26 October, along the Provincial Road. Supplies of ammunition and rations were issued to the men. Cannon Company had 2 truck loads of ammunition on hand. The men carried a "C" ration and 2/3ds of a "D" ration on their person.

Because of the marshy nature of the ground on both sides of the road north of Buraen, it was decided to narrow the front of attack to 100 yards on either side of the road and attack in a column of battalions with Cannon Company minus following the lead battalion. 1st Battalion was chosen to lead the attack on 26 October, with the 1st Platoon of Cannon Company accompanying the forward troops. (37)

Before the attack jumped off the company 1st sergeant informed the company executive officer that the maintenance team was again missing from the area. The executive officer searched the area until he found the gun mechanic. When

(36) Personal knowledge; (37) A-2, p. 4, 5; Personal knowledge.

questioned, the gun mechanic stated that one of the motor mechanics (a man who had been especially trained for M8 maintenance and transferred into the company just prior to the operation) had complained that he was not supposed to expose himself near the front lines to do repair work on the vehicles. He had gone back to the beach and had taken the other motor mechanics with him. The attack jumped off before a message could be sent to have them returned to the company.

As the troops were leaving their foxholes in the attack at 0700, an enemy plane came over the front lines, turned sharply and dove in a strafing run across the front lines. All six of the M8's were on the road moving forward. The gunners opened fire with the .50 caliber machine guns and succeeded in driving the plane off before his fire had any effect on the troops other than to paralyze them in their tracks. Swinging south, the plane failed to gain altitude and crashed into the ground, spewing fire into the air. It is presumed, by the author, that the effective .50 caliber machine gun fire of the M8 gunners not only drove off the plane before it caused casualties among American troops, but that it was also the reason for the crash. (38)

The fire from supporting artillery pounded the rocky knoll where Japanese were stubbornly holding on as the troops advanced. The enemy, in foxholes along the sides of the road, had to be destroyed. The two howitzers of the 1st

(38) Personal knowledge.

was down was this?

Platoon greatly assisted the rapid advance of the 1st Battalion by firing time-fuzed ammunition which exploded above areas from which enemy rifle and machine gun fire was coming. This time-fuzed fire was so effective that very few casualties were received in the 1st Battalion during the day. Some enemy, entrenched under native shacks, were crushed under the tracks as the M8's pushed forward through the flimsy huts. Japanese anti-tank measures consisted of small arms fire which kept the M8 crews down inside the armor plate. (39)

The attack advanced north until the four M8's of the 2d and 3d Platoons approached the road junction where a side road led into the Buri Airstrip. A platoon of F Company had been ambushed while trying to establish a road block across this side road about 300 yards east of the road junction. 2d Platoon, Cannon Company was sent to reduce the enemy position. (See Map E) (40)

As the two M8's approached the ambush, the platoon leader found that he could not accomplish his assigned mission without advancing up the road in front of friendly troop positions. Heavy jungle growth was on both sides of the road obscuring all enemy targets. One M8 advanced along the jungle road as the second M8 followed 75 yards in rear, to provide protective fire for the leader. The leading M8 passed a gentle turn in the road and vanished from view of the second gun's crew. The leader halted as he came into

(39) A-1, p. 8; Personal knowledge; (40) A-2, p. 5.

view of the Japanese earthworks and opened fire to destroy machine guns emplaced on either side of the road. Enemy troops left their cover and tried to grenade the men inside the turrets. The platoon leader, manning the .50 caliber machine gun mounted above the turret of the lead M8, cut down the charging Japanese. Two enemy bullets killed Lieutenant Moses, the platoon leader. The enemy strong point had been reduced by the effective fire of Lieutenant Moses and his gun crew. F Company men established their road block without further incident. (41)

The Cannon Company executive officer was called forward from the CP, which was on the road, and put in command of the 2d Platoon. The 1st sergeant was placed in charge of the company CP with the mission of keeping close to the regimental CP. He was the liaison between regiment and the company during the next two days. This left the company commander free to check on each platoon's problems of supply, maintenance, and liaison.

It was about 1030 hours when the company commander was able to go to the regimental CP and request that a message be sent to the rear echelon instructing them to send forward the three Cannon Company mechanics on the next truck to be dispatched. A guard was to be placed over the runaways if necessary.

The three mechanics were returned to the company during the afternoon and two of them performed their duties without

(41) A-2, p. 5, 6; Personal knowledge.

further incident. The third one, the man who had decided his neck was too valuable to risk, was evacuated as a mental case on 28 October. (42)

By late afternoon of the 26th, Companies A and C (in the attack) were approaching ^{Northward} Guinarona, 6,000 yards north of Buraen. A large meandering stream ran across the approach to the town and the bridge, as were nearly all bridges on the road to Dagami, was blown away. RCT 17 bivouaced south of the stream for the night. (See Map C)

The attack was resumed at 270700 October with the 3d Battalion in the lead. (43) Numerous blown bridges were encountered and replaced during the day. The tropical heat was having its effect on the troops. M8 crews had to be reminded to wear their helmets as they were want to hang them on the sides of the vehicle turret and go bareheaded. As the attack progressed in much the same manner as on the preceding day, Cannon Company's 3d Platoon accompanied the forward troops. The ~~platoon~~ leader of this platoon, who preferred to control his guns by radio from a position on the ground, fell unconscious from the heat and was revived by the company commander. The platoon leader was given a rest in the company commander's jeep while the company commander provided liaison between the 3d Platoon and the 3d Battalion. The RCT formed its night perimeter defense on a thickly wooded field about 2,500 yards south of Dagami. This field was above the level of the rice paddies which

(42) Personal knowledge; (43) A-2, p. 5; Personal knowledge.

surrounded it. (See Map F)

Cannon Company MB's were placed in battery position 500 yards behind the north perimeter. The company commander went forward from the battery position in his jeep to register the night fires of the battery. The company reconnaissance sergeant was seated in the back seat of the jeep behind the company commander when an enemy bullet struck the side of the sergeant's helmet. Although a gaping hole was torn in the helmet, the bullet was deflected without injury to the wearer. Thereafter, Cannon Company men did not need to be told to wear helmets. As the jeep approached the front line, it ran over an enemy mine which exploded, injuring the driver and the reconnaissance sergeant. The radio operator and company commander, shaken up by the blast, were able to continue forward and register indirect fires for the night.

(44)

The enemy did not probe the perimeter during the night so little firing was done by Cannon Company. (45) Ammunition for the guns was being sent forward by the regimental S-4 and was sufficient for our needs. This ammunition was transferred to the company trucks as it arrived. (46) However, a Japanese bomb had struck an ammunition dump near Dulag destroying a large amount of 75-mm ammunition. Our reserve was limited for that reason. (47) Gasoline, oil and rations were transported forward on Service Company trucks and issued to the company during the night.

(44) Personal knowledge; (45) A-2, p. 6; (46) Personal knowledge; (47) A-1, p. 7.

The 3d Platoon leader recovered from his heat exhaustion during the night and stayed to command his men through the remainder of the battle. The company commander decided that it was time to appoint another platoon leader for the 2d Platoon and to return the company executive officer to his job at the CP. Therefore, T/Sgt. Irwin, an extremely competent platoon sergeant (1st Platoon) was appointed platoon leader of the 2d Platoon. The regimental commander approved of a battlefield commission which was later confirmed by the division commander. * (48)

THE BATTLE OF THE STONE BRIDGE

2d Battalion led off on the morning of the 28th, with F Company on the left, and G Company on the right. The men had hardly entered the rice paddy in front of the bivouac area before they received heavy machine gun and mortar fire. Company F continued through the rice paddy and reached the raised ground just beyond, but the enemy fire was so intense that they could advance no further. Company G did not get across the rice paddy before the enemy fire stopped them. Casualties were heavy in both companies. A platoon of five tanks started across the rice paddy on the road. As the fourth tank crossed a small stone bridge connecting the paddy under the road, the bridge (previously dynamited by retreating Japanese) gave way, denying use of the crossing

(48) Personal knowledge; *When killed a short time later, Lt. Irwin had been awarded the Silver Star, and the Bronze Star with cluster.

to the fifth tank and the Cannon Company M8's, which were moving out on the road. (See Map F)

Once past the paddy, the 2d and 3d tanks in column struck enemy mines and were disabled. Japanese with Molotov cocktails, immediately set fire to the last tank, (labelled #4 on Map No. F) to cross the paddy. A moment later, yelling Japanese set fire to one of the disabled tanks (#3). The crew of the other disabled tank (#2) dropped through the escape hatch and started running back along the road toward friendly positions. Two badly wounded tankers reached the rice paddy while three were killed as they ran. The leading tank (#1) had passed safely through the first minefield and passed out of view from the rest of American forces around a bend in the road. Its crew soon radioed back that the tank had struck a mine and could not move. Japanese tried to burn the tank but the crew used their guns with such effect that the enemy were content to await darkness before destroying them.

The Cannon Company Commander was instructed, by the Regimental Commander to give the full support of his company to the 2d Battalion in reducing the Japanese strong points.

The company commander contacted the 2d Battalion Commander near the road at the south edge of the rice paddy. It was decided that the Cannon Company Commander should examine the bridge site and determine what was needed before M8's could be taken across. The company commander went forward along the shoulder of the road and examined the stone works of the blown bridge. He decided that the near wall

of the blown bridge could be pushed into the bottom by an engineer bulldozer and that the M8 would climb the far wall after the gap was partly filled. An armor-plated bulldozer was driven forward to accomplish the proposed mission. He might have succeeded except that the heat of the dozer motor combined with the sun's heat forced the operator to open his armor-plates doors. The driver, and then the assistant driver, were shot from the cab as they operated the dozer. The dozer ran out of control over the road shoulder and rolled into the rice paddy. Another dozer was brought forward, but the operator of this machine was also wounded and evacuated. The plan to fill the gap with a bulldozer was abandoned. (49)

1st Battalion was committed on the left of the 2d Battalion. G Company moved up to the left of F Company but were stopped in the rice paddy by enemy fire. B Company, committed to the left of C Company, encountered heavy enemy fire to their front and were forced to try an envelopment of the enemy right flank. The enemy had his right flank well defended and B Company made little progress.

Meanwhile, Cannon Company had reconnoitered right and left of the road in an attempt to find a suitable sight for taking M8's across the marshy rice fields. The ground was covered with water for hundreds of yards in both directions and the heavy jungle adjoining the paddies made an end run impracticable if not impossible. Nevertheless, two light

(49) A-2, p. 7; Personal knowledge.

tanks attempted to go through the woods 500 yards to the right of the road and were bogged down.

Casualties from the enemy machine gun and mortar fire continued to mount. Cannon Company's howitzers hesitated to fire direct fire into the woods across the paddy because of the uncertainty of just where friendly troops were.

Several cocconut palms had been cut down in the edge of the woods near the rice paddy. On the insistance of the 2d Battalion Executive Officer and the Battalion S-3, the Cannon Company Commander and his Executive Officer began to assist them in dragging these cut logs, behind an M8, to the edge of the blown bridge. At the edge of the blown bridge, the logs were unfastened from the towing cable and the M8 was backed past the logs it had been towing. Next the logs were rolled into the bridge gap. The Battalion S-3, Cannon Company Commander and the Cannon Company Executive Officer made several trips along the road behind the M8 until sufficient logs to partially fill the gap had been snaked along the road and rolled into the cavity. The Battalion Executive Officer was killed by enemy fire while he supervised this work.

As soon as the gap was sufficiently filled, the 1st Platoon of Cannon Company was ordered to cross the paddy, turn sharply to the right at the far edge and, staying within view of friendly troops and supporting M8 fire, to direct fire upon the enemy pillboxes in the area. The two M8's crossed the filled gap successfully and continued to the edge of the woods. Here they turned off the road and opened

fire on the enemy pillboxes to their front. Their fire, delivered at extremely close range, tore away the heavy jungle growth disclosing mutually supporting coconut-log pillboxes. A maze of trenches connected the pillboxes to each other. The 1st Platoon advanced through the pillboxes, destroying all of them as they advanced. Once through the pillboxes the platoon leader turned his M8's north and rescued the marooned tank's crew.

After this daring feat, the platoon leader decided to return along the left side of the road. The M8, which was in the lead, reached a position opposite the burned tanks where it struck an enemy mine. A boggy was blown off and the M8 could not move. Its crew joined the other two crews in the remaining M8 and the "personnel carrier" returned to the woods south of the paddy.

*2nd platoon to
blown up*

Cannon Company's 2d Platoon was ordered to cross the paddy along the road, turn sharply left, and assist F Company. This was done and F Company moved forward, F Company men used the M8's telephones to point out to the gun crews the many pillboxes which had stopped their attack.

(50)

Darkness fell before the 1st Battalion could complete the destruction of the enemy positions and the RCT dug in as shown on Map F.

Cannon Company's five M8's went into battery position 200 yards south of the rice paddy and fired indirect fire

(50) A-2, p. 8; Personal knowledge.

into the enemy held fortifications extending south from F Company. The Cannon Company Executive Officer was sent to spend the night with F Company. His mission was to adjust Cannon Company fire into any enemy movement he heard. This adjustment would be by sound only. He called for, and received, two fire missions during the night.

Before the cannon platoons left the battery position on the morning of 29 October, the company commander reorganized the 1st and 2d Platoons into a single platoon of three guns under the command of the 1st Platoon leader. (51)

On the morning of 29 October, B Company was given the job of mopping up the pillboxes which extended southwest along the paddy. The 3d Platoon of Cannon Company was sent to assist in this mopping up activity. The Japanese resisted bitterly. Individual Japanese would fire their rifles at the M8's and then, in desperation, throw themselves against the sides and fronts on the howitzer carriages. B Company men tried to cut down the enemy before they reached the M8's, but the action became so violent that the M8 gunners were forced to man the exposed .50 caliber machine guns. (52)

In one M8, the gunner was wounded, and, as he fell inside the turret, the loader replaced him on the .50 caliber machine gun. The loader was hit in the shoulder but refused to leave the gun. A second bullet struck him in the side of the head but he continued to fire the machine gun until the Japanese had been driven off or killed. In the other M8,

(51) Personal knowledge; (52) A-2, p. 9; Personal knowledge.

the gunner was slightly wounded while manning the exposed machine gun. During the action, ammunition chests mounted on the machine guns, were riddled by enemy bullets. The mopping up team was not to be denied and soon all enemy along the line of prepared positions had been killed. A total of 42 mutually supporting coconut-log pillboxes were counted in the area. All of these pillboxes had been connected by communication trenches. The entire ground works had been prepared months before and jungle growth had completely concealed them from air or ground observation. (53)

ON TO DAGAMI

While B Company mopped up on the left flank, 1st (less B Company) and 3d Battalions took over the lead along the road to Dagami. 2d Battalion followed in reserve. Scattered enemy foxholes were mopped up along the road without slowing the advance of the RCT. 1st Battalion, minus, was on the left of the road; 3d Battalion's front covered the ground from the road right. As the troops reached the outskirts of Dagami the lead battalions committed one more company each on their respective flanks. To the immediate front of the 3d Battalion was the cemetery and beyond that could be seen the smashed ruins of the objective. Dagami had been smashed by long-tom artillery and carrier-based airstrikes.

The two guns that had assisted B Company in mopping up at the Stone Bridge, rejoined the company and were sent to

(53) Personal knowledge.

support the 1st Battalion. L Company entered the town through the cemetery. After the leading troops had passed the stone crypts, fire from the cemetery struck them from behind.

Enemy, hidden inside of the old stone crypts, waited until American troops passed and then pushed back the lids and opened fire. K Company, following behind L Company, drove the Japanese back into their tombs with rifle fire and mopped them up with flame throwers. (54)

On the left of the road, the M8's advancing through Dagami came under fire from an enemy 75-mm anti-tank gun. (See Map C) The first round of enemy fire was armor piercing. It struck on the sheath of the M8 howitzer and did little damage other than to groove the sheath. The M8 tried to back out of the line of fire but its transmission failed to function and it sat there, like a duck on a pond, until a high explosive round exploded over the drivers compartment. Another round of high explosive hit the armor plate and set the M8 on fire. All members of the crew were wounded by pieces of flying metal, which the explosions had ripped from inside the carriage. The other M8 maneuvered to where it could fire on the anti-tank gun and destroyed its crew with ^{its} ~~their~~ first round.

The remaining four M8's reached the northern limit of the town without further incident. The RCT had accomplished its mission. (55)

(54) A-2, p. 9; Personal knowledge; (55) Personal knowledge.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation it is my opinion that the mission of the Regimental Combat Team to capture Dagami in the shortest possible time was accomplished.

2nd Lt. Cannon
— The primary mission of Cannon Company was to give close-in direct fire support to the infantry. The company's secondary mission was to support the infantry by indirect fire during hours of darkness or when the nature of the attack was such as to preclude the use of armor in the assault. These missions were accomplished.

The employment of the M8s and accompanying infantry as a coordinated team assisted the attack and averted many casualties. The installation of an outside telephone for better communications between infantry and M8 crews paid high dividends in the close jungle fighting. In the dense undergrowth, the M8s had to rely entirely upon the accompanying troops for direction. Tanks advancing relatively long distances in front of friendly infantry suffered heavy losses from individual enemy action. The infantrymen who were deprived of close armored support at the Stone Bridge, suffered heavy casualties and were unable to continue the attack until M8s could add their fire and maneuver to the battle.

The coordination between Cannon Company and supporting artillery, to gain full advantage of their combined indirect fire power during darkness, was important. The accuracy of the Cannon Company indirect fire (which was always fired at short range) permitted adjustment close to friendly

positions to cover critical points along the perimeter.

The Leyte Valley terrain favored the defense. Rice paddies and dense cocconut forests served to canalize motor movement along the Provincial Road. Enemy mines and anti-tank explosives used on or near the road were effective.

As the RCT moved forward it was found that the maps being used did not show the swamps or heavy jungle encountered on either side of the road. Further study of the terrain pointed ^{indicated} out that distances on the map did not agree with actual ground distances. The rocky ridge north of Burauen did not appear on the map. These inaccuracies caused the artillery to use liaison planes to adjust fire and point out critical terrain features along the road.

The Japanese' passive measures of laying mines across roadways, blowing bridges, and defending behind swampy areas hampered the forward progress of American armor. The enemy's use of rifle fire to make M8s and tanks button up, their employment of Molotov cocktails to set tanks on fire, and their practice of holding explosives against tanks to destroy them coupled with the natural difficulty of the terrain reduced effectiveness of American armor. However, these measures should have been supplimented by anti-tank guns. These weapons can be easily concealed in the jungle and are very effective. It is believed that two anti-tank guns properly employed at the Stone Bridge would have destroyed many of the M8's and tanks supporting RCT 17.

The tank company which approached Burauen on 24 October allowed three of its tanks to travel so close to each other

that three of them were lost simultaneously to enemy explosives. Had the tanks approached this enemy strongpoint cautiously with good dispersion, it is felt that no more than one tank would have been lost in the initial action and that following tanks would have been able to cover the disabled tanks with machine gun fire.

The enemy prepared his successive defensive positions months before the invasion of Leyte. This permitted him to carefully organize his positions and then to allow nature to conceal them. He cut the logs, used in constructing pillboxes, at a distance from where they were to be used thus preserving the natural cover around his defensive position. The rapid growth of jungle vegetation completed the act of hiding his fortified positions from both aerial and ground observation.

The use of Cannon Company personnel in the perimeter during the night of 23-24 October was unwise since the men were trained for specialized missions vital to the efficient functioning of Cannon Company and enough infantrymen were present to form the outer perimeter. However, it is believed by the author, that all personnel of an infantry regiment must be trained to perform as infantry riflemen when they are directed to do so.

The use of the ammunition sergeant on the beach to supervise the movement of 75-mm ammunition for the rear echelon was an improper use of this non-commissioned officer at a time when he should have been helping the combat company to perform its primary mission. Had he been forward with

the company it is believed that the difficulty of ammunition resupply would have been greatly reduced.

The maintenance sergeant, who returned to the beach and influenced other maintenance men to go with him, was guilty of a crime as serious as desertion in the face of the enemy. This sergeant had not been properly trained to perform his mission in combat. The consequent lack of maintenance of company vehicles might have resulted in the failure of the company to accomplish its mission.

The M8 was a very effective weapon during the advance to Dagami. Direct fire into enemy positions always succeeded in routing or destroying the enemy although more than one round of high explosive was needed to penetrate the sides of coconut log pillboxes. When not employed in the attack, the M8 gave accurate indirect fire support to the defense of a position. Its speed and ease of handling afforded some protection for the crew. Some of its limitations in close combat were:

a. An open-topped turret which, sometimes, forced crewmen to expose themselves to guard against being grenaded by the enemy.

b. A narrow track which limited the vehicle's ability to cross marshy terrain.

c. Extremely light armor plate on the front which, in one case, permitted enemy high-explosive anti-tank fire, which burst on the outside plate, to destroy the M8 and injure its entire crew.

Time-fuzed high explosive ammunition was extremely ef-

fective against enemy in foxholes. One round of time-fuzed ammunition would often destroy a group of the enemy who was concealed in a good defensive position. A round could be set to burst as close as 150 yards in front of the gun muzzle and about ten feet over the enemy entrenchments. The fragmentation effect would penetrate all open entrenchments for several yards to either side of the burst and about 15 yards in depth. The bursting range of the round could be more accurately determined when the projectile was fired at a low muzzle velocity.*

LESSONS

Some of the lessons that were emphasized during this operation are:

1. Mutual support of armor and infantry is vital to the rapid accomplishment of assigned missions. [Good understanding of what may be expected of each other improves understanding and effectiveness of the team.

2. When Cannon Company and artillery are both used to fire indirect missions, the Cannon Company weapons should be employed against enemy targets which are so close to friendly positions as to be unsafe for artillery to fire and to supplement artillery fire density on critical avenues of approach.

3. Armor should utilize all possible avenues of approach to enemy defenses. Approaching along a single route increases the enemy's ability to concentrate on defending

* The 75-mm howitzer round is semi-fixed with charges one to four in the casing. The muzzle velocity of a round fired with charge four is 1,250 feet per second while with charge one it is 700 feet per second. (A-8, p. 22)

the approach.

4. Ground reconnaissance is essential to an appreciation of the terrain. Maps are not a substitute for this ground reconnaissance but an aid to it.

5. The utilization of natural terrain barriers and passive anti-tank measures should be supported by aggressive anti-tank action to include the use of anti-tank weapons.

6. Proper dispersion of armored vehicles permits mutual support and avoids excessive losses.

7. The preparation of defensive installations well beforehand is desirable since it permits natural growth to assist in the concealment.

8. All members of the infantry combat team must be trained to perform front line infantry missions.

9. Men given specialized training should be utilized on jobs for which they have been trained whenever possible.

10. Men needed for handling rear area ammunition or supplies should be assigned to Service Company and not taken from a combat company when it is entering battle.

11. Men trained to perform missions of maintenance and supply of combat equipment must be impressed that they will have to work on or near the front lines as conditions require.

12. Continuous maintenance and servicing is required to keep equipment performing at a high degree of efficiency.

13. Airburst is extremely effective against enemy in foxholes.

14. The self-propelled weapon used in support of assault infantry should have a combination of the following characteristics:

- a. Mobility.
- b. A closed turret for protection against individual grenading.
- c. Sufficient armor to protect against light anti-tank weapons.
- d. Good flotation over soft or marshy ground.
- e. A howitzer, or gun, with enough punch to penetrate anticipated enemy emplacements and armor.
- f. Direct and indirect fire capabilities.