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THE OPERATION OF COMPANY M, 105TH INFANTRY (27TH INF. DIV.)
BATTLE OF MAKIN ISLAND, 30 OCT-25 NOV 1943
(Personal experience of a Company Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: COVERING FORCE IN AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of Company M, 105th Infantry, 27th Infantry Division, in the capture of Makin Island, (The Advance in the Central Pacific (Tarawa to Iwo Jima) 21 November 1943-March 1945) from the beginning of preparations for the operation, about 30 October 1943, to the reembarking of the company 25 November 1943.

To understand the importance of this operation, it is necessary to know the location of the Gilbert Islands, one of which is Makin, in relation to our supply lines from the Hawaiian Islands to the South Pacific. The Gilbert Islands are nothing more than a group of small atolls, none of which is large enough in itself to be of great importance. It was their strategic location which was of great importance to both the Japanese and us. The islands lie along the equator about two thousand miles southeast of Hawaii, and between the islands of Hawaii and Bougainville, the latter being the scene of the latest thrusts by the U.S. Forces. Of the Gilberts, only two were large enough to support military installation, one being Makin Island and the other Tarawa. The Japanese, sensing the importance of these islands, seized Makin on 10 December 1941, and established a seaplane base. Late in 1942 the Japanese occupied Tarawa and built an air strip. From these two islands the Japanese could and did harass such islands as Canton and Funafuti. They could also watch any ship movements in this area either by air or by submarine. In addition to the above, the enemy, by occupying these islands, forced all allied ships to detour several hundred miles in moving badly needed supplies and men to our advanced bases and battle fields.

After the Japanese had been defeated at Midway, our forces gradually increased in strength to a point where we could strike at several points at the same time. By July 1943, it had been decided by the Joint Chiefs

of Staff that we were now strong enough to attempt to penetrate the outer defense of the Japanese, which was composed of these outlying islands. (1)

Our purpose in seizing these islands was twofold. First, by occupying these islands we could remove part of the threat of Japanese air observation and thereby shorten our ship distances to Bougainville and Australia. Secondly, we could use these islands as bases from which to support and launch new attacks on areas closer to Japan proper.

It should be mentioned here that the original plan called for the occupation of the Island of Nauru, which lies several hundred miles south and west of Makin. The location of Nauru and its size, however, necessitated the use of a greater naval protecting force and a larger number of troops than there was available shipping space. (2) The final plan called for a simultaneous attack on Tarawa by the Second Marine Division, and Makin by elements of the 27th Infantry Division Army.

After the final plans were made known to the Commanding General of the 27th Division, he changed his objective and completed his plans.

The 27th Division Task Force (52.6) was comprised of elements of the 27th Division and attached units listed here: (3)

Det., Hq & Hq Co, 27th Division

165th RCT (Co's I, K, and L, 105th Inf attached)

193rd Tk Bn (Less Dets. and Co B)

IST Landing Groups Nos. 31, 78, 179 (consisting of Det., 193rd Tank Bn, and Dets. X, Y, Z, 3rd Bn, 105th Inf)

152nd Engr Bn (C)

1st Bn, 98th CA (AA), 90-mm (Btrys A(S/L), B, C, and D)

Atchd: Btrys K and L, 93rd CA (AA) (AW)

(1) A-1, p. 4; (2) A-1, p. 7; (3) A-1, p. 24.

4th Plat, V Amphib Corps Rcn Co
Det., 27th Sig Co
Det., 75th Sig Co
Det., 727th Ord Co
Det., 27th QM Co
Det., AAF
Co C and Det., Hq & Hq Co, 102nd Engr Bn (C)
Det., 232nd Bomb Disposal Unit
Signal Photo Section
Naval Shore Fire Control Parties

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

To completely understand the tactical plan it is well to know the geographical features of Makin Atoll and the problems likely to be encountered.

Makin Atoll is comprised of a number of reefs and islands surrounding a large lagoon. There are several channels leading into the lagoon, but only two are deep enough to handle large ships. Of these one is almost completely blocked by small reefs, making navigation difficult. The other, entering from the west, is free and suitable for free passage. The lagoon itself is not too free to shipping because of the many reefs scattered throughout all but a small area in the southwestern corner.

The main islands of the atoll are Butaritari and Kuma. Butaritari was the only one containing military installations. Therefore, we shall be concerned with it almost entirely. The island, which is 7 miles long and averages about 500 yards in width, is shaped somewhat like a crutch, the armrest of which opens to the west. The crutch staff itself is bent, curving in an arc from north east to a little south of east. (See Map #1, page 27)

The islands are very flat, as is the case in most atolls, and provides no terrain feature from which to gain observation. It was also known that there were many swampy areas on the island, which would prove obstacles to wheeled or track vehicles.

The seaward or southern shore of Butaritari was pounded by a heavy surf and not too well suited for landings. The west shore or the armrest of the crutch was open to swells, but thought suitable for landing small boats at most points. The northern or lagoon shore had a narrow sand beach and a reef which extended out into the lagoon up to 1500 yards in places. It was thought that small boats and IST could easily reach shore even at low tide.

From the lagoon side extending out into the lagoon were three piers. The western most pier was built to be used at high tide and extended out about 400 feet. This pier was known as On Chong's Wharf. About 1000 yards to the east was King's Wharf which was about 1000 feet long. Further to the east was the Government pier. This pier had been damaged and was not in use.

The tactical plan called for the initial landings to be made on the western beaches and on the beach on the lagoon side between On Chong's and King's Wharves. Therefore, future discussion will be confined mainly to these areas.

The purpose of the discussion up to this point has been to stress the importance of the Gilbert Islands in the general plan for the conduct of an offensive in the Central Pacific and to outline the geographical and tactical features which are to play an important role in formulating the tactical plan for the occupation of the Makin Island.

THE PLAN

The final plan for the attack on Makin Island called for the initial landings to be made on the western beaches which were designated Red Beach One and Red Beach Two. Red Beach One was on the left and Red

Beach Two on the right. Later another landing was to be made on Yellow Beach by another force whose purpose was to envelope the Japanese defenses.

The attack was to be preceded by aerial and naval bombardments. Heavy bombers of the 7th Air Force were to strike the island for several days prior to the landings. On the day of the landings navy planes were to take up the attack by dive bombing and strafing enemy positions. During the air strikes heavy units of the fleet were to bombard known or suspected defense areas along the beaches and inland.

At H-hour two battalions of the 165th Infantry were to land abreast, the first battalion on Red One, the third on Red Two. Tanks and artillery were to follow. The battalions of the 165th Infantry were to be preceded by two special landing teams from the 105th Infantry. The mission of the special landing teams was to overcome positions on the beaches and then pivot, one to each flank and protect the following waves from flank attacks. If the initial landing was successful, the Second Battalion of the 165th Infantry preceded by another special landing group, was to move into the lagoon and land on Yellow Beach. One half of the special group was to cover the right flank of the beach and seize On Chong's Wharf. The other half was to seize King's Wharf and cover the left flank of the beach.

The plan mentioned above was not disclosed to all men until the task force had left Pearl Harbor but a great deal had been done prior to that time.

After much consideration, the Commanding General of the 27th Division, Major General Ralph C. Smith, had selected the 105th Infantry Regiment to supply the men to constitute the ships parties. The Third Battalion, 105th Infantry, in turn, was ordered to provide the necessary men, and so Companies I, K, and L, each less approximately sixty men, were attached to the 165th Infantry. The remaining

part of the battalion was not to have participated in the action. At a later date, however, LVT's were made available and General Smith decided to use the entire Third Battalion, 105th Infantry.

This unusual decision accomplished two purposes which were sound tactically. First, it allowed the battalions of the 165th Infantry Regiment to land as complete BLT's and secondly, by removing the ships parties from their ships and combining them with the landing detachments, General Smith had a complete battalion including a staff which could be quickly assembled and employed should the situation demand.

The order for the rest of the 3d Battalion to prepare for the operation was, to say the least, a surprise. To the individual officer and man, who did not know the plan, the whole idea was impossible. When Major Bradt received his orders, he assembled his staff and heavy weapons commander and, with the aid of members of the division staff, started to draw a plan. Available for the operation were about four hundred men of whom only 180 were from rifle companies. This meant that the greater part of the force was to be made up of specialists and a heavy weapons company. With the tactical plan in mind Major Bradt and his staff had a difficult time in distributing the rifle strength. Since the initial landings were to be made on Red 1 and 2, the hardest fighting would be in that area. Because riflemen are better suited to combat on the beach, Major Bradt decided he would use two-thirds of the rifle strength on Red 1 and 2. Major Bradt himself was to command Detachment Y; his executive officer, Major De Graff Detachment X; and Captain Ferns Detachment Z. To complete the organization of the three detachments, the troops were disposed as follows:

Detachment X, 130 men

60 riflemen from Company I

1 section HMG, Company M

1 section 81-mm mortar, Company M

30 men, 3d Battalion, Hq & Hq Company

Aid men, 3d Battalion Medical Detachment

Detachment Y, 132 men

60 riflemen from Company K
1 section HMG, Company M
1 section 81-mm mortar, Company M
30 men, 3d Battalion, Hq & Hq Company
Aid men, 3d Battalion Medical Detachment

Detachment Z, 133 men

50 riflemen from Company L
1 platoon HMG, Company M
2 section 81-mm mortars, Company M
12 drivers, Company M
12 men, 3d Battalion, Hq & Hq Company
Aid men, 3d Battalion Medical Detachment

Each detachment commander was to organize his detachment to fit his mission, yet retain some degree of unity. This was bound to be somewhat of a problem when we consider that there were at least three different companies and an unknown number of platoons represented in each detachment. This problem was somewhat alleviated when LVT's were allotted to the detachments. Each detachment was to land in sixteen LVT's, so the detachment was divided into four platoons of four squads each, and the men assigned to squads. With the organization complete the detachments moved from Schofield Barracks to Fort Armstrong and began their training.

The purpose of the training was to instruct the men in the methods of embarking and debarking from LVT's and to acquaint each man with his part in the landing. Naturally, the destination of the task force was not disclosed, but the methods of reaching the beach and the plans of maneuver were made known.

At this time the men were also given instruction in the use of the bazooka. This was the first time the bazooka had been seen in the organization and very little was known about its use or maintenance.

The greater part of the time available for training was spent in embarking and debarking from a mock up and running through the ground plan. Since this action was to be the first for any unit of the division, no one had actual first hand knowledge of the type and amount of equipment necessary. Some difficulty was experienced in obtaining certain articles of equipment and certain types of ammunition. Before sailing time, however, all men were equipped. Each man had had his choice of weapon as far as practical, and as the result most carbines were left behind. The men had little confidence in, not the gun itself, but the sight. Few men had been able to fire a satisfactory score on the range and they felt that they wanted no part of the gun in combat.

The latter phase of the training consisted of a trial run on the island of Maui in the Hawaiian Islands. Each detachment was loaded aboard an LST along with the sixteen Alligators and the little convoy set out. The initial landing was made without incident, but inexperienced crews aboard the LST's and LVT's made reembarking the LVT's a problem.

A second landing which was to have been made the next day was postponed because of a storm which arose during the night, and the convoy returned to Pearl Harbor. The next two days were spent in repairing the damage caused by the storm. During this time the army made the final changes and modifications of the original plan.

The plan that would be disclosed to all personnel of Detachment Z after leaving Pearl Harbor would be as follows. The squads would land abreast: Squad 1 on King's Wharf, Squad 16 on On Chong's Wharf, while Squads 2 through 15 would land on Yellow Beach proper.

Squads 1 through 8 after landing would proceed, as quickly as possible, to the left flank of the beach and establish a line from the cross roads to the base of King's Wharf. Their zone of action would

be on the lagoon or north side of the main road which paralleled the beach. Squad 1 was to land on King's Wharf and clean out the machine guns reported to be on the wharf. These guns could cause a great deal of damage to the rest of the LVT's. Squads 2 through 5 were to land at the base of King's Wharf and clean out the gun positions known to be in that area. Squad 6 was to land on the sand spit, clean out two suspected machine gun positions then move to their position in the line. Squads 7 and 8 were to land west of the sand spit, move to the road, then with their right flank on the road, move to their position in the line. Squads 9 through 16 would land on the right half of the beach. Squad 16 would land on On Chong's Wharf and wipe out enemy positions reported to be on the wharf. Here again guns in position on the wharf could cause a great deal of damage to the rest of the LVT's as they landed. Squad 15 was to land at the base of On Chong's Wharf and clean out a suspected pillbox. The rest of the squads were to land at intervals along the beach, proceed in to the main road, then swing to the right and move to their position in line, which was between the base of On Chong's Wharf and the road junction just south of On Chong's Wharf. (For landings and disposition, see Map #3, page 28.)

By accomplishing these missions the succeeding waves of the 2d Battalion, 165th Infantry would not be subjected to cross fires from the wharves or counted attacks on exposed flanks.

Squads 3 and 4 on the left and squads 13 and 14 on the right were to be machine gun squads. After they had accomplished their primary mission they were to put their guns in position. Squads 7 and 8 on the left, and squads 11 and 12 on the right were to be 81-mm mortar squads. They too, after accomplishing their primary mission were to be prepared to set up their guns. In the case of the 81's, there was some question as to how they would carry their weapons, so

it was decided that they would leave their mortars on the beach and pick them up after the 165th Infantry had landed. This was feasible because the action of Detachment Z was to be limited to that explained above.

THE ATTACK

On 5 November all repairs were completed and the convoy sailed for Makin. Due to the difference of speed of the LST and the larger troop transports the three ships carrying Detachments X, Y, and Z, departed about ten days prior to the rest of the task force, escorted by one destroyer. The route followed by the LST's was from Pearl Harbor south to Canton Island then west to the Gilberts. Most of the voyage was uneventful. Then on 17 November, contact was made with the enemy. A plane was observed approaching the convoy, but no attempt was made to bomb the ships. About sundown, the plane which had been paralleling the course of the convoy started what may have been a torpedo run, but was driven off by fire from the escorting destroyer. The next morning, just after daybreak the same plane or one of similar type was observed shadowing the convoy. The plane continued to follow the convoy until middle of the morning when three planes from U.S. carriers appeared and after a short battle, shot it down. There was a great deal of cheering aboard the ships when the Jap fell flaming into the sea and morale went up as the troops realized that there was help nearby. Previous to this time the general feeling was that the three LST and one destroyer were like ducks in a shooting gallery. Later that day, just at dusk, two Jap bombers flew over the convoy. No bombs were dropped and contact was soon lost. A short time later, radar reports indicated that the planes were flying a course leading away from the convoy, but the report was erroneous, for without warning one LST opened fire and hits were scored setting a plane afire. As soon as flame showed all ships opened up and the

plane was soon a mass of flame. It appeared that the pilot made an attempt to crash dive the plane into one of the LST. He failed to make it and the plane fell into the sea about three hundred yards off the port bow. Immediately after this incident a submarine contact was made and caused a great deal of worry to all hands aboard. At this time the convoy was cruising just off Tarawa and all army personnel felt that we would be attacked by surface units. Nothing came of the alarm and the next morning just after dawn, the convoy arrived in the transport area. Soon the flashes of the big guns could be seen and then the heavy rumblings could be heard. This was it: maneuvers were over now.

During the voyage from Pearl Harbor to Makin the men had studied again and again their missions and the terrain over which they would operate. At 0830, 20 November, when LST 179 carrying Detachment Z moved into the lagoon, each man was able to identify the point on which he was to land.

About 0900, the LVT's were put into the water and prepared for the run into the beach. The men showed no great fear in facing their first action. One man, upon seeing the hundreds of fish that had been killed by the explosion of shells in the water, remarked that after the fight he would pick up enough fish to feed the detachment. About 1000 the Alligators started for the beach. During the run in, artillery fire was expected from the medium AA guns in position at the base of King's Wharf, but none was seen and the detachment moved in to about 1500 yards where the command vehicle fired ranging shots for the rockets. When the wave reached a point about 1100 yards from the beach each vehicle fired its rockets. The effects could not be observed, but naval fire was falling in the main defense areas of the island. When the LVT's came within 1000 yards, the naval fire ceased

and planes began bombing and strafing. The plan called for the planes to continue their mission until the LVT's were only 100 yards off the beach. (4)

As the Alligators neared the beach they came under machine gun fire from both flanks. From the center of the wave it was impossible to detect the location of the guns firing and later, reports from men in the flank vehicles indicated that they also could not locate the guns. As the Alligators closed in on the beach, the enemy fire increased. Supporting planes were still strafing the beaches and the Alligators slowed down, fearing that they would run in under the planes. This delay caused the waves to close up a bit, but the following waves slowed up also thus preventing a pile up on the beach. (5)

At 1045 the Alligators touched down. Squad 1 landing on the end of King's Wharf found the sea plane ramp there demolished and were forced to dismount. As they worked up on the wharf they came under machine gun fire that swept the bare top of the wharf. The squad then worked its way in along the side of the wharf. The suspected guns were never found but the firing from the left flank ceased soon after the squad landed.

On the right flank, Squad 16 had attempted to land on On Chong's Wharf. The structure of the wharf prevented the vehicle from moving up on it, so the squad moved around to the base of the wharf and after landing climbed up and attacked it from the rear. The rest of the squads had, in the meantime, come to the edge of the reef and started clambering in over the rough sharp coral like giant bullet-spitting bugs. To the surprise of the men in the vehicles, most of the enemy fire ceased as the LVT's climbed up on the reef. Squads 2, 3, and 5 landed on their objectives in the cove between King's Wharf and the sand spit and immediately seized the AA guns in their area. They then

(4) A-1, p. 56; (5) A-1, p. 56.

set up their guns on the prescribed line. Squad 4 had trouble with the steering mechanism of the LVT and couldn't maintain its position and landed in the vicinity of On Chong's Wharf. (6) From there, they worked their way east along the beach after the right half of Detachment Z had landed. Squad 6 landed on the edge of the sand spit, continued inland, until the LVT hung up on the stump of a palm tree. The men had just dismounted when a shell of unknown size and origin struck the right front end of the troop compartment. (7) All crew members were painfully wounded and had to be given aid. Since there were no aid men present nor any to call, the squad had to delay while the wounds were dressed. The squad then worked up to the road where it ran into a large bomb proof tunnel.

This tunnel later was to be the scene of the first serious action on the left of Yellow Beach. The squad surrounded the opening of the tunnel and fired several rounds from a bazooka into the opening. Several Japanese soldiers attempted to run from the tunnel to another and were cut down by fire from an automatic rifle. By this time, troops of the 165th Infantry had landed and were engaged in reducing the tunnel. Squad 7 landed about 50 yards to the right of the sand spit and after cleaning up their area, moved along the beach toward their position. When they reached the sand spit, they were held up by the fight at the tunnel.

Squad 8 had run into serious trouble. After reaching the shore the alligator went out of control and continued straight on across the road and into the middle of the island where it stalled in a bomb crater. Here it came under rifle and machine gun fire. The driver and another man were killed and several wounded. The rest of the squad dismounted and succeeded in enveloping the machine gun and wiped it out. No more casualties were suffered and the squad secured its 81 mortar

(6) Eye witness, Lt. McGuire; (7) Eye witness, self.

and moved to join the rest of the detachment. Just why the Alligator continued on beyond the beach will never be known. The squad finally worked its way back and joined the rest of the detachment engaged at the tunnel. (8)

On the right half of the beach the action was moving along at a much faster rate. Squads 16 and 15 had moved in on the base of On Chong's Wharf and had cleaned it out. The remaining squads, with the exceptions of Squad 9, pivoted when they reached the road and moved to take up their position on the flank. Several casualties were suffered by squad 9 and an unknown squad on the beach. Just as LVT 9 reached the narrow sand beach, a shell struck the rear of the vehicle, continued on and exploded in the troop compartment. Several men were killed and more wounded. Captain Ferns, the detachment commander, was in this LVT, but escaped injury. The other squad was shaken up when a violent explosion took place almost in their midst. One officer was killed and several men were wounded. It was thought that the explosion was a large caliber naval shell which had landed in an area that was later set afire. The squads, however, reorganized and continued on to their position. Another officer, Lt. M. H. Marlowe, was wounded by a grenade after he had surprised three Japs setting up a machine gun. Lt. Marlowe doesn't know where the grenade came from as he saw no other enemy. (9) An unknown number of Japs were killed as the squads threw grenades into dugouts. Squad 12 at this time flushed two enemy soldiers and killed one as he attempted to escape. The other Jap held his hands over his head, apparently surrendering, and walked toward the squad. Lt. John J. Campbell, platoon leader, 2d Platoon, Company M, was with the squad and was trying to indicate to the Jap that he was to remove his clothes before being taken back to the beach, when

(8) Eye witness, Lt. Huff, 105th Inf.; (9) Eye witness, Lt. M. H. Marlowe.

the Jap suddenly lunged forward bringing up a saber that he had had concealed behind his back. The Jap had determined that Lt. Campbell was an officer, (officers wore no rank) and so directed his attack. Before the rest of the squad could bring fire on the Jap, he had slashed Lt. Campbell across the wrist and ankle. The Jap had no chance for a second stroke, but Lt. Campbell was put out of action. (10) The squad proceeded to the flank and carried out its secondary mission. During the initial action, about thirty prisoners were taken. Most of them were Koreans.

While Detachment Z was carrying on the above described action, waves of tanks and infantry were coming ashore. The LCV's and LCM's ran into an unexpected obstacle in the form of the reef. Calculation of tide conditions had been correct, but even at high tide, the boats hit bottom before reaching the beach. Jap rifle and machine gun fire was heavy, in spite of the action of Detachment Z, and the men had to wade several hundred yards through this fire. The depth of the water varied and a great deal of equipment was lost when men went in over their heads. Two of the tanks were drowned out when they fell into deep holes. One tank was that of the commander and his radio was drowned out, thus cutting off communication. The commander tried to get out of the tank, but machine gun fire forced him to stay inside. (11) With communication gone and no leader, the tanks on shore were reluctant to move. Some of the tanks did fire on targets as they reached shore, Closely following the tanks were the riflemen. Elements of the 165th Infantry soon relieved the right half of Detachment Z which moved back to the beach.

(10) Statement, Lt. J. J. Campbell; (11) A-1, p. 61.

After being relieved Capt. Ferns, who was with the right half of Detachment Z, started out to contact the rest of the detachment supposedly at the base of King's Wharf. When he got to the sand spit, Capt. Ferns contacted the part of the detachment engaged around the tunnel. The situation at the tunnel at the time was as follows: four squads of Detachment Z were deployed between the road and the beach; E Company, 165th Infantry was deployed south of the road; four squads of the detachment were in position at the base of King's Wharf. E Company had been trying to reduce the enemy position south of the main road and around the tunnel, but no advances had been made. At this time, about 1500 on D-day, liaison was established with the artillery which had gone into position near Ukiangong Village and the company commander of E Company was about to fire concentrations into the area south of King's Wharf. It was fortunate that Capt. Ferns arrived at this time for after contacting his troops deployed around the tunnel, he sought the commander of E Company to see what the position of that company was at the time. When Capt. Ferns heard of the proposed artillery fire he informed all concerned that there were American soldiers in position at the base of King's Wharf. Members of Detachment Z present were very much surprised to find out that some members of the 165th Infantry did not know the entire plan. After causing the artillery to be postponed, it was necessary to send a messenger forward to the portion of the detachment in position because there were no radios of any kind in the detachment. Pfc Bert Decker, who had come from King's Wharf for information was sent back with orders for Squads 1 through 4 to withdraw to the sand spit. Pfc Decker was able to reach the squads and they withdrew without difficulty and were deployed between the road and the lagoon.

With the withdrawal of the squads, the artillery forward observer started to adjust the fire of the 105th Field Artillery Battalion.

The terrain was such that no observation could be gained and in order to establish the gun-target line, the observer was forced to direct his first rounds out into the lagoon where they could be seen. One of the first rounds fired was short and fell among the men of Detachment, killing an officer and two men, and wounding several others. After adjusting the fire, the observer fired a concentration into the Japanese position. At this time, it was decided that the present position would be more easily organized for the night perimeter, so the troops were ordered to dig in. (See Map #3.) Detachment Z dug in where it was deployed and spent a relatively quiet night. Casualties were one man killed and one man wounded. Some infiltration took place and several enemies were killed. (12)

The attack on D+1 was to jump off at 1100 preceded by an air strike and artillery fire. The tanks, which were to accompany the infantry, caused the late attack hour as they needed fuel which had not come in the previous day. Still further delay was caused by machine gun fire harassing the supply boats as they neared the beach. It was thought that the fire came from two hulks lying off On Chong's Wharf. Naval fire was directed at the hulks, but some rounds fell among troops ashore and so was suspended. Later an air strike was delivered on the hulks. While nothing conclusive was accomplished, the firing did cease and landing resumed. (13)

Prior to the launching of the attack, machine gun fire was received from King's Wharf and from the hulk of a Jap flying boat which lay in the cove at the base of King's Wharf. (See Map #3.) Tank fire which was directed at these positions silenced the guns. These guns had been put into position during the night after Detachment Z had withdrawn.

(12) Eye witness, self; (13) A-1, p. 98.

At 1100 the attack was well underway. Detachment Z was not relieved as had been anticipated; instead it was ordered to advance in the zone between the main road and the lagoon. Prior to the attack, Detachment Z reorganized into three platoons. At H-hour they moved out in a column of platoons with the 1st Platoon in advance deployed in line; the 2d Platoon followed at fifty yards mopping up suspected positions bypassed by the 1st Platoon; the 3d Platoon followed the second at fifty yards with one squad along the beach, one squad in the center, and one squad on the detachment's right flank to contact the 165th Infantry. In its advance, Detachment Z had to retake the three AA gun positions at the base of King's Wharf and also King's Wharf. Before the attack jumped off, some concern was expressed at retaking the AA gun positions, but no fire was received from that direction, leading to the conclusion that the enemy had withdrawn during the artillery concentration or air strike. No serious opposition was encountered by Detachment Z, but the advance was held up to maintain contact with the 165th Infantry. As the line advanced beyond the road running from the base of King's Wharf, sniper fire grew heavier. In one instance, a BAR man was fired at by a sniper and when he attempted to return the fire, he found his gun jammed. Each time he moved to clear the stoppage, the sniper would fire at him. After lying still for some time the BAR man looked about and saw another soldier riding a bicycle down the road ten yards away without drawing fire. Seeing this the BAR man picked up his gun and nonchalantly walked away. (14) This was the first experience of the idiosyncrasies of Japanese snipers.

About the middle of the afternoon Detachment Z had advanced about 1000 yards and had encountered several dugouts. During the ensuing fight one officer and one man were wounded. Tanks were used first to fire on the apertures then to run up on the dugouts to crush them. One

(14) Statement, Pfc Frank Knapik, Co M, 105th Inf.

tank opened fire on a suspected position and in doing so, pinned down a squad of Company G, 165th Infantry. The men from the squad waved flags in an attempt to stop the fire, but the tankers could not see them. Without regard for his own life, Lt. Arthur Hansen who was with the right flank of Detachment Z, jumped to his feet directly in front of the tank and caused the fire to be lifted. (15)

Before the attack was halted for the day, elements of Detachment Z had advanced beyond Stone Pier. It was here that S/Sgt. Wright and his squad discovered six Jap officers who had sat down in a circle and committed hara-kiri. (16)

At 1730 orders were received to dig in for the night. Detachment Z dug in along the beach on the lagoon. Company A, 165th Infantry, occupied the center of the line; Company E, on the right, pulled back even with Company A, and dug in. (See Map #3) The men were told again and again not to fire unless it was unavoidable, but still a great deal of firing took place during the night. Detachment Z was under mortar fire and grenade attack throughout most of the night, but suffered only light casualties. One man was killed by friendly fire and one wounded by grenade fragments.

Morning found the men pretty badly shaken, but in good spirits. Their spirits were given an additional boost when orders were received for Detachment Z to withdraw to a bivouac area west of the west tank trap. (See Map #3) After being relieved Detachment Z pulled back to its assigned area and occupied a section of the perimeter established by the 165th Infantry where it remained until it left for Yellow Beach to reembark for Oahu.

After arriving in the bivouac area, Detachment Z dug in and then retired to the beach for a swim. As dark drew near, the men were again

(15) Eye witness, Capt. W. M. Ferns, Co. M, 105th Inf; (16) Statement, S/Sgt. Wright, Co. M, 105th Inf.

ordered to hold their fire, but during the night fire coming from the flanks excited the men and some did fire. At one time Capt. Ferns called to the 1st Sgt. and asked him to pass the word down the line to cease fire. His answer was a burst of fire that tore the bark from a palm tree at the head of his fox hole. No casualties were experienced during the night and Detachment Z was somewhat rested when morning arrived.

During the day some rumors were heard about the Third Battalion, 105th Infantry, being assembled and sent to Tarawa, but nothing came of it and Detachment Z was ordered to move to Yellow Beach to embark.

After arriving at Yellow Beach, Detachment Z was joined by Detachment X which had landed on Red Beach 1. Transfer of men from the beach to the transport area was slowed down by lack of LCV's and LCM's, and dark found some men still on the beach. The night was uneventful except for sporadic firing about the beach area. As soon as day dwaned, LVT's were employed to take men from the beach out into the lagoon where they were transferred to an LCT to be taken out to the transport.

During the embarking of the troops an air alarm was sounded, and it was feared that some of Detachment Y would be left behind, but all were finally brought aboard and the convoy pulled out for Pearl Harbor 24 November 1943. And the next day was Thanksgiving.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation as compared to normal operations, it will be noted that Company M, 105th Infantry, was given an unusual mission which might have been very costly in men and material.

The mission called for individual squad action which included lateral movements along the beach in the face of what was reported to have been the most heavily defended portion of the island. Undoubtedly the presence of the LVT's made the operation possible. The Japs were confused and alarmed by these monsters which were equally at home in the water or on land.

While the preparation of the unit for the operation was as complete as time would permit, and the original plans were specific for each squad from the time of the initial landing until the unit was to be relieved, there are a number of points which are subject to criticism. These points are enumerated and explained below:

1st: Insufficient time for preparation. Men from four different units had to be molded into a close cooperating organization. Of these four units three were undertaking tasks for which they had not been trained. Company M and Headquarters Company, Third Battalion, 105th Infantry, were to enter combat, for the first time, as riflemen. Men from Headquarters and Service Company, 193d Tank Battalion, were operating LVT's with which they had no experience.

2nd: The plan violated two essential rules of combat by:

(1) Landing on a hostile beach with insufficient strength. With the exception of the four squads which were to have landed at the base of King's Wharf, each squad was a separate unit which could easily have been isolated and destroyed. (2) Majority of squads were required to make lateral movements across the front of a strong enemy position without cover or concealment.

3rd: The supporting and supported units did not participate in trial operations together. The failure of commanders to order trial runs in which all units would be included greatly increased the chances for serious confusion on the beach. This was forcefully brought to light when tanks following Detachment Z opened fire while still off shore and caused a number of casualties among the troops already ashore.

4th: Liaison between 2nd Battalion, 165th Infantry and Detachment Z was not established as soon as it should have been. This lack of liaison almost resulted in bringing a portion of Detachment Z under friendly artillery fire by a company commander of the 165th Infantry who apparently did not thoroughly understand the plan.

5th: Detachment Z had no communications whatsoever until the third night when they were in a bivouac area several miles from the scene of action. Company M did not have organic radios at this time and none were provided by higher headquarters. This lack of communications prevented units from knowing the situation or calling for aid as could very possibly have been necessary. There was no way for riflemen to contact tank crews if tanks were buttoned up. Riflemen were required to strike the turret with rifle butts to attract attention and in many cases, tankers failed to hear or acknowledge. If they did, the rifleman had difficulty in making himself understood. It was this lack of communication that caused the death of Colonel Conroy, Commanding Officer, 165th Infantry. While attempting to direct tank fire Colonel Conroy was killed by enemy machine gunfire. (17)

6th: The initial success of Detachment Z undoubtedly was due to the characteristics of the alligator. First of all, the vehicle, when in the water, has a very low silhouette and is hard to bring under fire. Secondly, the enemy must have been shocked when the LVT's climbed up over the reef and moved in on the shore. This was evident by the lack of fire directed at the vehicles. Had Detachment Z been forced to wade ashore from the edge of the reef, it would have suffered so many casualties as to render it unable to accomplish its mission, and possibly have prevented it from reaching shore altogether.

LESSONS

1. Troops must be given missions for which they are trained.
2. Greater care must be given weapons enroute to the objective and the bazooka must be covered to keep water from its electrical circuit.
3. Bazooka fire is ineffective against palm log dugouts unless rounds enter gun ports.

(17) A-1, p. 79.

4. Liaison between units must be constant.
5. Perimeter defense is made effective against infiltration, if contact between units is not broken.
6. Artillery fire, unless it can be observed, is of little value except as a harassing agent.
7. Troops must be thoroughly familiar with night tactics and rouses of the enemy. As the result of the experiences gained at Makin, Company M was able to eliminate, to a great degree, firing at shadows and noises.
8. All leaders must prevent "bunching" during combat. The absence of artillery fire on the beach caused men in Detachment Z to become careless and a short round from our own artillery caused a large number of casualties when it fell near a group of men.
9. Men must be prepared physically and mentally for combat. In spite of the fact that they were entering combat in jobs for which they were not trained, the men were almost eager to get ashore. Realization that they were being depended on to assist the battalion ashore made the men anxious to accomplish their mission. There was also some unit pride displayed.
10. Once the attack has been launched, the commander must depend on his subordinate leaders to carry the plan through to the objective. In the case of an amphibious operation the commander must depend on every man, not just his leaders, for in the confusion of the landing a leader is totally helpless if he has no men to lead.

CONCLUSION

After criticizing and analyzing, the credit for successful completion of the mission must be given to the leaders of the individual squads and men under them. In most cases, these leaders were commissioned officers originally, as several officers of the other battalions of the 105th Infantry were attached to Detachment Z to observe and gain combat experience. This situation did not last long for two officers were

killed on the beach, two more were casualties a few minutes later, and one more was wounded early on D+1. As the commissioned officers became casualties, non-commissioned officers took command and carried out their mission in a manner that brought only commendation from their commander, Major General Ralph C. Smith.

Thus a most unusual, if not most difficult, mission was accomplished and earned for the men of Detachments X, Y, and Z the title "Springboard Troops".