

Staff Department  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 322ND INFANTRY (81ST IN-  
FANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CLEAN UP PHASE OF THE CAP-  
TURE OF THE ISLAND OF ANGAUR, 11 - 22 OCTOBER 1944  
(WESTERN PACIFIC CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE  
COMPANY IN THE ATTACK OF A HIGHLY FORTIFIED  
SYSTEM OF RIDGES AND CAVES

Captain Jerry V. Keaveny, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this monograph described the operations of A Company, 322nd Infantry, the middle regiment of the 81st Division, in the clean up phase of the battle for the small Island of Angaur. The assault on Angaur was a part of a joint operation in which the main effort was pitted against the heavily fortified island of Peleliu. These two islands and ten more formed the Japanese Mandated Islands of the Palaus. (1) (2)

The geographical location of the Palau Islands made the capture of these small objectives an important phase in the overall progress of our assault against the Japanese Army. The southern most tip of Angaur was only five hundred miles from the Philippines. From air bases in the Palaus, land based planes would be able to support the landings that were soon to take place in Leyte and to bomb other strategic locations in the Philippines. (3)

The 81st Division departed from the states for this Operation in July of 1944. A month's delay occurred in Hawaii for the purpose of additional Jungle training and to combat load the ships for the assault. A three day practice landing was made on the coast of Maui before leaving on the 10th of August for the first operation of this organization. The only time in which the troops were off the ships during the remaining

- (1) A-4, p. 46
- (2) A-8, p. 43
- (3) A-7, p. 786

thirty eight days was for a practice landing and a short conditioning hike in Guadalcanal. (4)

The Western Landing Force of the 111th Amphibious Corp, commanded by the Marine Corps' Major General R. C. Geiger, was composed of the 81st Division and the 1st Marine Division. On the 15th of September 1944, the 1st Marine Division made the assault landings on the Island of Peleliu. This battle was the hardest fought and the costliest campaign in which the Marines had thus far been involved. The Marine Corps can well be proud of it's 1st Division in this difficult operation. (5) (5a)

The Japanese forces that defended Angaur Island was the 1st Battalion, 59th Infantry Regiment, reinforced. The 59th Infantry was a <sup>REGIMENT</sup> request of the 14th Infantry Division. The Angaur garrison of the Japanese Army consisted of approximately 1500 men. (5b)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Island of Angaur runs three miles north and south while it is only two miles east and west. Almost a fourth of the island constitutes a phosphate mine and it's diggings. On the west side of the Island was located Sipan Town. This was the only community on Angaur, and it was but a few short streets. Near the town was located a rather large phosphate plant that supplied the reason for the Japanese interests in Angaur. The use of this phosphate, to produce much needed fertilizer, marked this community as contributor to the economy of Japan. The area south of the Southern Railroad was typical of the pictures seen of the beautiful Pacific Islands. Along the coast

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(4) A-4, p. 43, 45, 62

(5) A-3, p. 299

(5a) A-10, p. 266

(5b) A-9

had been located coconut groves and the inland area was light in vegetation. The weather was extremely hot during the day and the usual tropical rains fell during the night. The northwest section of the island was that area in which the enemy chose for a last stand. It was in this sector that the 322nd Infantry spent the succeeding month in an all out effort to destroy the Jap force of Angaur. (6) (7) (8)

Romauldo Hill was the key terrain feature of the north section of the island. Positions in the phosphate peaks on this Hill could be found to offer wonderful cover and fields of fire that could prevent entry into any area in the section of the bowl to its immediate front. (9) These peaks were so located that a system of all around security was almost perfect. The area south of Romauldo Hill near Lake Salome can be compared to a large bowl with the only entry a small railroad cut in the southwest section. Under these phosphate peaks were located large caves with connecting entrances. These caves were large enough to hold at least five hundred people and offered sufficient security that, in spite of all the large attack concentrations, the enemy casualties were not excessive. Every type of weapon was used on this area. Among those included air strikes, naval gun fire strikes, artillery, 4.2 chemical mortars, napom bombs, as well as all the weapons of the infantry regiment. At one time a battery of 155 howitzers laid direct fire on the cave area at a range of less than seven hundred yards. Although this firing had an extremely demoralizing effect on the enemy, the destruction and the casualty effect was not great. (10)

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- (6) A-4, p. 53  
(7) A-4, p. 54  
(8) A-4, p. 103  
(9) A-4, p. 127  
(10) A-4, p. 123

## INVASION ON ANGAUR

On the 17th of September, the first troops of the 81st Division went ashore on Angaur. (10 a) The 322nd Infantry, which was commanded by Colonel Benjamin W. Venable, landed on Red Beach, and the 321st landed on Blue Beach. (See Map B) The plan of the 1st Battalion found A Company in the initial wave and securing the right flank of the regiment. From that period until the 10th of October found ABLE Company, with exception of two one-day periods, in constant action on the front lines. Of the 168 men who initially landed on Red Beach on the 17th of September, there now remained on the 10th of October only 70 men. The writer who had been the company executive officer was now in command of the company. Of the six officers there remained only three and in this respect the company was in better shape than most of the other companies of the regiment. (11) (12)

On the 21st of September the Island was sufficiently secured to allow construction of the airport. The 321st Infantry was sent to Peleliu to assist the 1st Marines Division. All that remained of the 1500 Japs were now inclosed in the cave area on Romoldo Hill. Information was gathered that, in addition to the Jap troops in the north section of the island, a few hundred island natives were being held by the enemy as prisoners. (13) These natives were later released by the Japs and were found to be in poor physical condition due to lack of proper food and water. They did not suffer greatly from the bombings that their inclosures were given.

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(10 a) A-10, p. 268  
(11) A-4, p. 72  
(12) Personal knowledge  
(13) A-4, p. 127

## PREPARATION FOR ATTACK INTO THE CAVE AREA

On October 10, the troops of the 322nd Infantry made plans relative to the first entry into the Jap-held system of caves. Disposition of the companies (all rifle companies were at a strength of less than two platoons at this time) on the 10th showed the 2nd and 3rd Battalions in contact with the enemy in positions as shown on Map "C". The position of the 3rd Battalion was that held by the 1st Battalion on the 9th of October. The battalion commander, Major Harthrong, assembled the company commanders in the area of Black Beach and with armed protection went forward into the enemy area to show the avenues of attack which were planned. Since the units were small, his plan projected three companies abreast with A Company on the right which was the exposed flank of the battalion. The mission was to kill or capture any Japs between the line of departure and the bowl in the companies zone of action. On the ground, coordination was made between company commanders for control, contact and mutual support. This initial meeting in the forward area proved extremely helpful after the movement once got under way. (14)

As all plans were made in the enemy area, it was considered wise that company orders to platoon leaders be made in the rear areas in order to prevent further exposure to the enemy of our troops and plans. There was no prearranged fire plan and it was the company commander's decision not to use the weapons platoon of the company as such in this operation. Instead of the machine guns and mortars, the weapons platoon was organized as a rifle platoon having as many BARs and Rocket Launchers as could be handled securely. The company now had two platoons.

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(14) Personal knowledge



Platoons were then organized in small elements the size of half squads. The company was given a general orientation by the company commander and the situation in detail was given by platoon leaders. The plan called for an attack by platoons in column with the 1st Platoon, now commanded by Lt. Byron McKinstry, moving his elements forward in a column of half squads as they had been organized.

### NARRATION

#### OPERATION ON 11 OCTOBER 1944

Movement to the line of departure through the outpost line that had been set by the 3rd Battalion found the three rifle units in a column of companies. The movement was slow and cautious. As the leading company reached an area about one hundred yards in front of the outpost line, a right turn was made. At the same time the other two companies reached their respective points and also turned to the south. The direction of the attack was toward the bowl area to meet other elements of the 3rd Battalion, who held a front line position on the edge of cave sector. (15)

At this time, the 2nd Battalion was moving from the west to clear the section on the 1st Battalion's left flank. (See Map C)

The 1st Platoon was slow and perhaps overly cautious in this initial movement, but the reasons were quite obvious. Any previous action in this area had met with difficult resistance and there was no observation into the enemy positions. However the enemy was able to detect the movement of the attack-

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(15) A-4, p. 127

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- (1) A-4, p. 46
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(4) A-4, p. 43, 45, 62

(5) A-3, p. 299

(5a) A-10, p. 266

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(10 a) A-10, p. 268  
(11) A-4, p. 72  
(12) Personal knowledge  
(13) A-4, p. 127



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#### NARRATION

##### OPERATION ON 11 OCTOBER 1944

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The 1st Platoon was slow and perhaps overly cautious in this initial movement, but the reasons were quite obvious. Any previous action in this area had met with difficult resistance and there was no observation into the enemy positions. However the enemy was able to detect the movement of the attack-

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(15) A-4, p. 127

ing forces. The ground did offer cover at first, but as progress was made into the cave area, the deep draws supplied only death traps of which the Japs made the most. (16) It was decided that the best progress could be made by using these half squads. They were to be given specific objectives to secure and only one unit was to move at a time. The type of objective would be one which was located on high ground where observation would be available. Likewise the objective should offer firing positions that could be used to support the forward progress of the other elements. The first day ended with an advancement of only fifty yards, but it was an important foothold in the Jap defenses. (17)

Radio communication was extremely poor and the use of the SCR 536 was curtailed completely. In order that contact could be maintained with the forward element the half squad, which Lt. McKinstry accompanied, laid wire as they advanced. This formed the axis of signal communication for the company. As the unit was able to secure sufficient sound power phones, these were made available to tap into the line in order to talk with both forward and rear elements. This also assisted in the routing of walking wounded and the forward movement of supplies. It was the first time during this operation that good company communication was in effect. Contact was maintained with battalion and the unit on the left by use of the SCR 300. Just prior to darkness the area was extended to make physical contact with Charley Company.

Defending this ground during the night was as difficult as the daily movement into the enemy territory. All around

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(16) Personal knowledge  
(17) Personal knowledge

security was maintained by the proper selection of positions for squads. As there was no soil in which to dig, it was necessary to locate low spots in the rock bed and build the sides of a fortress with the largest stones that could be located. It was normal to have at least three and no more than five men to each hole. In each hole one man remained awake and a system of rotation developed. Everyone was sufficiently security conscious that checking on protective measures were never necessary. A contact system was maintained between holes by use of sound power phones and wire tied to the wrist of the man on watch. Prearranged signals were used. Once darkness had set in there was no movement from the hole for any reason. In some units where this system was not enforced, men were killed by their own buddies. (18)

#### OBJECTIVE REACHED

On the morning of the 12th the 2nd Platoon, commanded by Lt. Raymond Trowbridge, started again to move toward the bowl area. It was thought that if the bowl was once reached the battle would be over. If all of the units were able to succeed in covering their zones in this phase of the operation the battle would have been over. The over all progress was such that this was not so. As the 2nd Platoon advanced both Baker and Charlie Companies were unable to develop their sectors. By noon the 2nd Platoon was in the center of the Jap area and had good positions to cover the movement of the 1st Platoon which completed the progress into the bowl. (19)

The difficulty encountered in front of B and C Companies

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(18) Personal knowledge  
(19) Personal knowledge

was not from the enemy but from the terrain. They secured a ridge that fell off into a huge draw almost one hundred feet deep. It was too wide to cross and too steep to scale. By the end of the day both B and C Companies had moved into A Company's sector and had followed the company wire into the bowl area. (20) As it proved later the most critical area was that which was by-passed by the battalion. At the same time the 2nd Battalion was making only limited progress in their drive from the east. On the night of the 12th the rifle companies of the 1st Battalion were together in a draw just inside the Jap stronghold. At this point the supply and evacuation was an extremely difficult problem. All supplies were hand carried into the company positions by the company supply sergeant and his carrying party. This carrying party consisted of the cooks and others who were unable to take part in the front line operations. Often these men showed outstanding bravery in the completion of their tasks which frequently required carrying their load over areas covered by enemy fire. Due to the extreme heat the greatest requirement was water and these men made sure that the front line troops were never short. The transportation of the wounded over the rugged terrain was a great problem and was met only by the hard work of the litter bearers and the many volunteers who assisted them. A great satisfaction to the men of A Company was that the problems of both supply and evacuation were always such that they would be cared for at all times, by the supply sergeant or the aid men. (21)

#### STRIKE TO THE EAST

The following morning the battalion turned east and start-

(20) Personal knowledge

(21) Personal knowledge

ed its movement toward the 2nd Battalion. "A" Company maintained its former position on the right flank of the battalion with B and C Companies also in line. Lt. Trowbridge moved his platoon forward, again using the system of small elements securing one small terrain feature after another. (22) Resistance was light for the first time and progress of perhaps a hundred yards was made. By the end of the day the Jap defenses began to weaken. In two instances single Japs ran out into the open with hand grenades clutched to their chest in order to commit suicide in front of their enemy. (23) During that day the battalion commander brought Dog Company Commander into A Company sector. It was planned to convert the heavy weapons company into a rifle company and to place them in the line with the rest of the battalion. While observing the area to the front, a well concealed Jap from a ridge not more than twenty yards opened fire with a machine gun. It was fortunate that no one was hurt but it was just such a target for which this Jap had been waiting. There was no retreat from his position once he opened fire. "A" Company had been in this area for perhaps two hours. It meant that this man had been sitting in this cramped position many hours waiting the opportunity of taking as many of our men with him as possible. (24) Later that day Dog Company was placed in line on the left flank of the battalion which now had four companies on the line. The distance that separated the two attacking battalions was not more than two hundred yards. (25)

On the 14th little progress was made as the area was becoming confined. During this day the unit casualties greatly  
(22) Personal knowledge  
(23) Personal knowledge  
(24) Personal knowledge  
(25) A-4, p. 128

increased by the desperate last minute action of the enemy. The Japs intended to die to the last man. There was absolutely no attempt on the part of the Japs to surrender; even though it was so apparent to them that there was no chance to continue to hold their position. (26)

Although there was no advancement made during this day, the time was utilized in organization of the battalion line. On the following day close visual contact was made with Easy Company and the thought that the battle could not continue much longer in spite of the extended period of pressure heightened the morale of the men. During this day a greater use was made of the 2.35 rocket launcher and the flame thrower than had been used since the early days in the beach area. Prior to each exploitation into a new area a few rounds of rocket fire were placed in the suspected firing positions. If a new draw was to be entered, the half squad would upon the signal of the leader throw a few vollies of hand grenades over the top. They would then assault as rapidly as possible to attain the position. If there was a suspected Jap cave in the area, a flame thrower was brought forward to be fired into the opening. During this entire period, the most respected weapon, besides the M-1, was the old faithful Browning Automatic Rifle. (27)

The conditions that existed on the morning of the sixteenth lasted for several days with limited progress. During this period every yard gained was costly for the Japs were lurking at every turn in the cavern defenses. On the 17th of October, the Battalion Commander, Major Harthrong was killed. (28)

A distinct advantage that the enemy had over our troops

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- (26) A-4, p. 128  
(27) Personal knowledge  
(28) A-4, p. 130

was in the use of smokeless powder. (29) It was almost impossible to detect the firing position of the Jap sniper. Even from close range, detection of the fire was seldom made except in the use of automatic weapons. The Jap sniper in addition was extremely accurate in his rifle firing. It was a common practice on hearing the stinging sound of the Jap bullet to start looking for the soldier who had been hit. A great many of the dead and wounded resulted from head injuries.

### BONZAI

On the night of the 18-19 there was a great increase in the enemy activity for which it was difficult to account. It was thought that the Japs were going to make one last effort to fight their way out of the cave area. An all out Banzai attack struck through the 1st Platoon but the strength of the force was so weakened that it did not meet with much success. Again the following night the Japs made another charge and the commander of the Japanese, Major Goto, was killed. (30) It was felt that now with their leader gone, the enemy garrison would be quickly defeated. During the night of 20-21, an almost fanatical escape was tried, during which time the Japs lost 28 men killed and 10 captured. (31) During the morning of the 21st, loud speakers broadcast for the remainder of the enemy to come out, but this met without success. During that day an additional 19 Japs were killed and the entire defenses of the Japanese were overrun. Our troops were pulled out of this area for the first time in 28 days. On the following day, they were sent back into the cave area, where a systematic coverage of

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(29) A-4, p. 105  
(30) A-4, p. 121  
(31) A-4, p. 131



the whole section was made to clear out any remaining Japanese and to bury the dead. (32) This was as distasteful as any previous assignment during the entire campaigns. Almost all the men in the front line units were in poor physical condition due to prevalence of dysentery. After a few days of rest and well prepared food the first that A Company kitchen had served since leaving Hawaii, the spirits of the men greatly increased. (33)

### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

#### 1. THE ENEMY

The enemy troops that defended the Island of Angaur were well trained and well disciplined soldiers. They lived up to the creed which taught that it was honorable to die for their country. Even in the face of certain death the fear of disgracing themselves before their ancestors was greater than the desire to live. If this is to be considered bravery the Japanese soldier was extremely brave. There were lessons that could be learned from this fighting man. He understood the necessity of continuous care for his equipment. He was an excellent shot and a master at the use of concealment. His ability to wait until the best target presented itself and then to take full advantage of it was a method which cost many American lives. Even with limited supplies and no high angle fire support, he was a difficult enemy to defeat.

#### 2. OUR TROOPS

As this was the initial battle for the troops of the 81st Division many mistakes were made. The one that was most pro-

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(32) A-4, p. 132

(33) Personal knowledge

nounced was the lack of aggressive action. Every effort was made to defeat the enemy by fire and to avoid close combat. Frequently one well concealed sniper would hold up the progress of an entire battalion for as much as a half a day. It is now believed that, if during the early phases of the battle the units were forced into more rapid movement, the immediate casualties would have been greater, but the overall losses would not have been nearly as heavy. The use of supporting rifle fire to assist the forward movement of elements of the company was not utilized to the fullest extent. Toward the end of the battle this situation was almost corrected. (More training, the type of which is contrary to the normal situation should be given to small units in order that they might more rapidly learn to adjust themselves to problems, that will be confronted in combat.) Training involving a rifle company of half strength with few supporting weapons and limited supplies would be an example.

### 3. TERRAIN

The feature that most effected the entire operation was the difficulty of the land formation. Every few yards involved a new problem that had to be met and there was no standard procedure that would work in every case. Ridges were narrow and hard to scale while the crevices formed by the ridges were death traps. The many caves and tunnels constituted fortified positions that had to be cleaned out or closed. High angle weapons were not effective in this area and the only successful method was individual action of the front line rifleman, with weapons that he was able to handle.

#### 4. ATTACK PLAN

The formation of units into the size of a half squad was used for several reasons. The ridges were so shallow that frequently only four or five men would be able to secure firing positions. Control of any larger force by one man in the movement from one terrain feature to another would have been difficult. The men were more aggressive in the smaller units than they had been in squad and platoon formations. Each man was able to see his part in the coordinated problem.

Converting the weapons platoon into a rifle platoon had not been done by any other unit in the regiment. By doing this an additional number of men could be used in the assault phase of the battle. As high angle fire was not effective and the fields of fire for machine guns were so limited these weapons could not be properly utilized. Later in the operation the weapons platoons of both the first and second battalions were used as rifle elements. Another feature that dictated this action was the fact that the combat zone had become so narrow that calling for supporting fire would endanger our own troops.

#### 5. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective was reached with much more success than had been expected. The fact that the other companies of the first battalion were not able to cover their zone hampered the morale of "A" Company. After the men were given a reason for the action of supporting companies, they regained confidence in these units. As the Japanese-held area became smaller each succeeding objective became more costly and the cautious attitude was more apparent. On turning to the east no specific

objective was given. The only instructions provided for an advance order consisted of strike in the direction of the 2nd Battalion and to clean up the remainder of the enemy. There were no terrain features that could identify the company zones and there were no definite instructions given to assure that companies would completely cover the area held by the Japanese. The results were that "B" Company angled toward the bowl into Company "A"'s area, not only forcing "A" Company out of its zone of action but resulted in opening a gap between C and D Companies. This gap was filled during the last two days of action by "A" Company.

#### 6. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

During the entire battle all necessary supplies were available. The planning made prior to the arrival on Angaur was so complete that the troops were provided with everything that could be of any value both from the standpoint of fighting and of personal needs. Getting supplies into the front lines presented a definite problem but this was solved by the outstanding performance of the company supply sergeant, Staff Sergeant Earl Livesey. His ability to anticipate the needs of the men and the leadership he displayed in bringing his supply train into the battle area marked him as an excellent soldier. Since all supplies had to be hand carried across difficult terrain, the carrying parties with their heavy loads had to work exceedingly hard. As the personnel who made up the carrying party were members of "A" Company (cooks and others who were unable to take part in the front line action,) they had a personal interest in making certain that the fighting elements were given all the sup-

port that was possible. Carrying wounded from the cave area was an additional problem. It generally required four to six men to evacuate one wounded. As the Japanese did not respect the arm band of an aid man there were many casualties among litter teams and company medics.

## 7. COMMUNICATION

In jungle terrain it is even more important to maintain good communication. The SCR 536 did not supply needed contact within the rifle company. The use of sound power wire and phones worked extremely well. Wire should be laid even when the radio is operating as an alternate means of communication. The wire line can also route the walking wounded back to the rear area and can be used to route the supply trains into forward areas. The SCR 300 offered contact with battalion and the other companies part of the time. A system for control and warning between fox holes at night can be secured by prearranged signals.

## LESSONS

1. Training should be such that unusual situations are presented to require adjustment to meet the problem with the least confusion and the best use of the forces.
2. Slow cautious movement is often times more costly.
3. Where supporting elements are not effective, do not be burdened with their presence, but convert them to the best possible use.
4. Use the smallest element that is possible to accomplish the mission.

5. Hold the commanding ground and avoid possible death traps.
6. Supply problems can only be met by the continuous effort of all supply echelons.
7. Keep the troops confident that their welfare is secure from both the stand point of supply and evacuation.
8. Assure the men that the other elements of their organization are doing their share of the work and make every effort to maintain confidence in supporting units.
9. Good compact communication can be maintained by wire and should be used with, as well as instead of, radios.