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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 167TH INFANTRY  
(31ST INFANTRY DIVISION) ON THE KIBAWE-TALOMA TRAIL  
MINDANAO ISLAND, 14-28 MAY 1945  
(SOUTHERN PHILIPPINE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN ATTACK

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 History of the 31st Infantry Division in Training and in Combat, 1940-1945 (TIS Library)
- A-2 Report of The Commanding General, Eight U.S. Army on the Mindanao Operation (TIS Library)

There are no further documents of any value, relating to this operation, available in the Academic Library and, as a result, the bulk of the material in this document is based on the personal knowledge of the Battalion Executive Officer.

The distances and hours of the day are given from memory only, therefore are approximate.



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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 167th Infantry, 31st Division on the Kibawe-Taloma Trail, Mindanao Island, 14-28 May 1945, during the Victor-V Operation.

For an orientation of the reader it will be necessary to go back to the planning and beginning of the Victor-V Operation of which the operation described, herein, is a part. *Map H*

Mindanao, the southern most island of the major islands of the Philippines, is surpassed in size only by the island of Luzon. It is a tropical island. Its terrain is ideally suited for defensive tactics. To destroy the enemy here, the American forces were required to overcome the many natural obstacles that beset offensive operations in mountains, jungle, and swamps. There are few routes of approach, and in most cases those are commanded by towering ranges from which small units can make an advance a slow and costly one. (1)

Mindanao has very few roads of which only two are of any major or tactical importance. One of the main inland routes is Highway No. 3, also known as the Sayre Highway. This one-lane surfaced road runs from Bugo in the north, south to join Highway No. 1 at Kabakan. (Map B). Highway No. 1 runs from Bugo in the north, west through the Lake Lanao region to Cotabato town, then swerves east across the island to Davao. (Map B). Because of the lack of roads and the many undeveloped

(1) A-2, p. 6



areas within the interior, travel for the most part has always been dependent on crude modes of transportation. Water transportation on the many streams, most of which are short and fast flowing, augment the limited transportation facilities. The two main rivers are the Mindanao in Cotabato Province and the Augusan in the Augusan Province, Both of which are navigable for many miles. (2)

Mindanao has the hot, moist climate of the tropics, with an average temperature of 80° and humidity that seldom falls below 80 percent. The mean annual rainfall is 91.8 inches <sup>with</sup> and the heaviest rains occurring during the months of April and May. (3)

The strength of the Japanese troops on the island was estimated to be 30,000. They were under the command of the XXXV Army (Corps). The principal combat units in central Mindanao were the 100th Division and some elements of the 30th Division which was estimated to have an effective strength of only 8,000. (4)

Although the enemy force was of considerable size, it was spread over a large area. The largest of the enemy concentration was known to be in the Davao Area where the principal elements of the 100th Division were located. There he had a force of 15,000 composed of combat and naval troops. His strength in all other areas was limited. In the Parang and Malabang areas and inland as far as Kabacan his strength was estimated at 3,000. In the Del Monte-Bukindnon area in

(2) A-2, p. 10-11; (3) A-2, p. 13; (4) A-2, p. 14-15



the north was an estimated strength of 8,500. In various other points of Mindanao there were small numbers of enemy troops seldom totaling over 500. (5)

The guerrilla forces on Mindanao which totaled more than 25,000 troops, controlled 95% of the island prior to the landings of the American forces. They were continually harassing the enemy on all interior roads and waterways. Thus limiting the Japanese activities to the coastal cities, roads and waterways. (6)

#### GENERAL SITUATION

R-day (target day) for the invasion of Mindanao was 17 April 1945. The initial landings were made by the 24th Division with one Battalion Combat Team landing at Malabang and a Regimental Combat Team at Parang. (Map B) By the evening of R-plus one, the 24th Division had accomplished its initial mission, the seizure of the Malabang-Parang-Cotabato area. (7)

On R plus one the 2nd Battalion 21st Infantry, reinforced by elements of the 533rd Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment and supported by a small naval task force and two flights of B-25's, began an advance up the Mindanao River with the mission of seizing the Fort Pikit-Kabakan area. This would split the enemy into isolated pockets, secure a supply route, reduce the load on the highway and cut the enemy's most critical line of communication at the junction of Highway No. 1 and Sayre Highway. (8)

(5) A-2, p. 14-15; (6) A-2, p. 17; (7) A-2, p. 24-25;  
(8) A-2, p. 26



The initial objective of the 2nd Battalion Combat Team, reinforced, 21st Infantry was the Cotabata-Tamuntaca area at the mouth of the Mindanao River. (Map B) The landings here were unopposed. The river force then pushed rapidly on toward its final objective, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy with a minimum of losses to itself. (9)

While the river forces were advancing, other elements of the division were pushing rapidly to the east on Highway No. 1. Because of the bad road conditions, these units were having to be supplied by air. They were meeting scattered enemy resistance which was being disposed of with minimum losses.

On the 21st April the river force attacked and secured the fort and town of Fort Pikit after disposing of light resistance. (10)

Early on the morning of 23rd April the Infantry of the river force occupied the town of Kabakan and action on the river was over. During that day the balance of the division closed into an area east of the highway junction at Kabakan. The division command post was established there. (11)

The morning of 22 April 1945 the 31st Infantry Division landed at Parang. The division, less the 167th Infantry in Army Reserve, was released by 8th Army to X Corps control on the following day. The 124th Infantry followed by the 155th Infantry was directed to proceed to an area in the vicinity of Kabakan. Elements of the 167th Infantry relieved the 24th Division units guarding the lines of communication from

(9) A-2, p. 27; (10) A-2, p. 29; (11) A-2, p. 31



Parang to Kabakan. The 31st Division Command Post was opened at Kabakan on the 28th April 1945. (Map B) (12)

On the morning of 24 April, after having advanced 60 miles in 7 days, the 24th Division launched its overland drive to the east. Meeting scattered resistance and ~~after~~ being slowed by mined roads and burned bridges, leading elements of the division reached Digos on the east coast on the 29th April (Map B). Thus bringing to a close an amazingly rapid advance during which the 24th Division literally raced across the island and put the operation far ahead of schedule, preparing the way for an early assault against the main Japanese forces in the Davao sector. (13)

On the 27th April the 31st Division started its drive north on the Sayre Highway (Map B). The 124th Infantry, with its 2nd Battalion leading, was stopped one mile south of Armon ~~x?~~ by strong enemy resistance estimated to be a company. The fire fight continued during the night until early morning when the enemy broke contact. The regiment then continued its drive northward, being delayed considerably by burned and destroyed bridges and scattered resistance. Up to this time the 124th Infantry had been functioning as a Combat Team with its artillery being of great assistance in overcoming enemy resistance and obstacles. But the many burned bridges and deep gorges proved too much for the artillery and about mid-morning of 30th April the regiment moved beyond its artillery support. (14)

(12) A-2, p. 38; (13) A-2, p. 36; (14) A-1, p. 54



On the 3rd May the 124th Infantry captured and secured the road junction at Kibawe and the airstrip just south of the town. The 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry moved southeast from Kibawe to set up a trail block on the Kibawe-Taloma Trail. Here it met and dispersed an enemy force estimated at between forty to fifty. (15)

With the capture of Kibawe and the blocking of the Kibawe-Taloma Trail, the 31st Division had accomplished its first mission, the isolation of the enemy forces in the Davao sector (Map B). During this action the 155th Infantry had been following the 124th Infantry. The 167th Infantry continued to carry out security missions along the division's main line of communication. (16)

The afternoon of the 5th May the 167th Infantry was relieved of its mission by elements of the 41st Infantry Division. It then began to assemble ~~within~~ the vicinity of Kabakan, the Regimental Command Post opening there at approximately 1600 hours. On the 6th May the 2nd Battalion moved to the vicinity of Omonay, 10 miles distance from Kabakan and on the Sayre Highway (Map B), with the mission of guarding the lines of communications from there to Kabakan. (17)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 3rd Battalion, 167th Infantry, moved from Kabakan on the morning of 9 May 1945, with the mission of relieving elements of the 155th Infantry, by the morning of 11 May, who were blocking the Kibawe-Taloma Trail southeast of Kibawe.

(15) A-2, p. 39; (16,17) Personal knowledge



It made this move by truck, for 20 miles and foot marching for 35 miles, marching well into the night of 9-10 May to accomplish this move by the time allowed. The movement was necessarily slow due to the mountainous terrain, heat and security measures taken to guard itself against surprise attacks by the small forces of enemy bypassed by the leading units in their rapid advance north. The battalion closed into its bivouac area at Kibawe at 2000 hours the night of 10-11 May. (18)

On the morning of 11 May the Battalion Commander, Major James E. Barbar, accompanied by his Executive Officer, reported to the Commanding Officer, 155th Infantry, at his Command Post in the vicinity of Kibawe. There he was oriented on the enemy situation within this area as they knew it, and issued orders and instructions regarding the relief of the 3rd Battalion, 155th Infantry, on the Kibawe-Taloma Trail which were in part as follows:

1. The relief of the 3rd Battalion, 155th Infantry, on the Kibawe-Taloma Trail must be effected prior to 1200 hours today.
2. You will, upon effecting this relief, assume his mission of blocking that trail. The Battalion Commander of the 3rd Battalion will give you all the details concerning this mission.
3. You will patrol daily to the south as far as possible, but no further than the Pulangi River. (Map C) You will not become too heavily engaged with the enemy as there is nothing here to support or assist you.

(18) Personal knowledge



It would be well to mention at this time some of the topographical characteristics of the Kibawe-Taloma Trail and the enemy situation existing thereon.

From the vicinity of Kibawe the trail ran generally southeast through the mountains and terminated at Taloma, a small barrio 10 miles south of Davao (Map B). For a distance of three miles from Kibawe the trail ran through fairly open terrain with much grassland and small patches of woods. It was passable in this area for two and one-half ton trucks. It then became narrow and traveled a winding course along narrow ledges with dense vegetation obstructing ground observation. Five miles from Kibawe the trail ran parallel to the Pulangi River. Here it was very narrow, traveling across a series of small ridges and streams. On the left of the trail the ground dropped sharply away to the river and on the right rose almost vertically, continuing in this manner to the river crossing at Sanipon (Map B). (19)

The strength of the Japanese forces, defending the trail west of Sanipon, was estimated to be between 600 to 800. They were identified as elements of the 30th Division, 58 Road Construction Unit and the 37th Road Construction Company. These units were under the direct command of the XXXV Army (Corps). It was known by contact with the natives in this area, that the enemy had used the trail as a supply and evacuation line and had made strong efforts to improve it. (20)

The trail was considered important to the X Corps (U.S.A.) as it offered a communication link between forces opposing us

(19) A-1, p. 104 and Personal knowledge; (20) A-2, p. 67 and Personal knowledge



in central Mindanao and those engaged with the 24th Division near Davao. (21)

The battalion moved out of its bivouac in the vicinity of Kibawe at 0900 hours on the morning of the 11th May. The relief of the 3rd Battalion 155th Infantry was effected at approximately 1200 hours. The battalion was then disposed as follows:

The battalion, minus "I" Company, and elements of Company "M" in a perimeter defense position near the Kibawe-Taloma Trail, 3000 yards southeast of Kibawe. Company "I" plus 1 Platoon of Heavy Machine Guns, in a perimeter defense position on high ground astride the trail, 700 yards southeast of the battalion. Their mission was one of security for the battalion.

The Battalion Commander's plans for carrying out the mission assigned the battalion, were to send reconnaissance and security patrols out from out present positions. A company commanders and staff officers meeting was held at 1400 hours in which he discussed his plans and assigned patrols for the following day. Hereafter, all patrols were to be assigned by noon the day prior to date of patrol. The patrol leaders were to report to the S-2 at 1600 hours on the day of assignments and also upon return from the patrol. During the meeting the S-4 discussed the supply and evacuation plans. The battalion was to be supplied by air drops on the Kibawe air strip and evacuation was to be by Liaison plane until the air strip could be lengthened to accommodate heavier planes. The companies' kitchen and supply trucks were not expected to close in to this area for several days. However, a one-quarter

(21) Personal knowledge



ton truck and trailer for each company with some items of kitchen equipment was expected to arrive tomorrow. This detail was equipped for making coffee and preparing a few hot meals. (22)

The next day, 12th May, the patrols were sent out. No contact with the enemy was reported, although the patrols reported finding fresh tracks and used Japanese ration sacks. That afternoon the Regimental Commander, Lieutenant Colonel L. L. Mathews, visited the battalion. The Regimental Command Post had opened at Kibawe that morning. He discussed with the battalion commander, the battalion's mission and the plans for carrying it out. The plans were approved, considering the fact that we were the only battalion that the regiment was free to use at this time. The other battalions were strung out on the Sayre Highway guarding the division's line of communication from Kabakan to the north of Kibawe. (23)

Late that afternoon about 1730 hours the one-quarter ton kitchen trucks arrived from Kabakan. The 10 in 1 rations the units were using were pooled within each company for the cooks to prepare.

On the 13th May we made our first contact with the enemy. A patrol on the trail reported the location of an enemy motor pool, approximately 1500 yards from "I" Company, with several dugin positions within its vicinity. Upon moving forward to investigate, the patrol received some small arms and automatic weapons fire. After a short fire fight the patrol withdrew. Major Barbar reported this contact to regiment and asked for permission to send a stronger force, consisting of 18 men and the Battalion S-2, down the trail tomorrow with the mission

(22,23) Personal knowledge



of making the enemy expose his positions and strength. Regiment approved this plan but stated that the patrol must not become too heavily engaged with the enemy. (24)

The S-2 patrol left the battalion area at 0700 hours the next morning, passing through "I" Company's positions at 0800 hours. At 1000 hours firing was heard to the southeast. Soon after the S-2, Lieutenant George W. Maddox, reported by radio that the patrol had killed a sniper and was continuing on their mission.

Soon after this report the Assistant Division Commander of the 31st Division, Brigadier General Joseph C. Hutchinson, came into the Battalion Command Post. He was informed of the situation by the Battalion Executive Officer who had an S.C.R. 300 on the same frequency as the Battalion Observation Post and Lieutenant Maddox for the purpose of making entries on the Unit Journal. General Hutchinson left soon afterward for the Battalion Observation Post.

At about 1100 hours Lieutenant Maddox reported contact with a strong enemy force near the Jap motor pool. The fire fight lasted for about 30 minutes after which the patrol reported an enemy force was observed moving in on its rear. Lieutenant Maddox was then ordered to break contact and withdraw. This was accomplished by 1330 hours at which time the patrol arrived in "I" Company's position.

We now had a good idea of what it was going to take to push on to the Pulangi River (Map C) which was the mission assigned to the battalion as soon as it was relieved of its present one. We would need more force than we had at this time. With this in mind the Regimental Commander ordered the

(24) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major Barbar on 13 May 1945



battalion to do only local security patrolling until more force was available. (25)

During that night at 2200 hours small arms firing was heard in the direction of Company "I". The company commander, Captain Harold L. Hanson, reported that the enemy, trying to move into his positions, had tripped a booby trap causing some of his men to open fire. The next morning there were no dead Japs located, however, one very dead carabao was found. (26)

The next day was comparatively quiet, with only local security patrolling to front and flanks. During the afternoon Major Barbar was called to Regimental Command Post. He was given orders to prepare plans for the drive to the Pulangi River, to begin on the 17th or 18th May. The day dependent on the arrival of "C" Battery 117 Field Artillery Battalion. (27)

On the morning of 16th May Battery "C" 117 Field Artillery arrived and went into position near the battalion defense perimeter. Due to our having patrols out they could not start their registration until mid-afternoon. This was accomplished by use of their air observer. The Liaison Officer and one Forward Observer Party from the 117th Field Artillery reported to the battalion early that afternoon. He was given the enemy dugin positions near the Motor Pool as one of his first targets. The air observer had some difficulty in locating them from the air and based upon information we received later, his fires were not too effective.

The Battalion Commander and his staff, at this time, were busy planning the operation coming up two days hence. Lieutenant Colonel Mathews had now given orders for the battalion to move

(25) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major Barbar on 14 May 1945; (26) Personal knowledge; (27) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major Barbar on 15 May 1945



on the 18th May. Elements of the 1st Battalion were to relieve us of our present mission. A warning order had been issued to the companies early that day.

The weather during this time had been very bad. As you will recall this was the middle of the rainy season and it was surely doing just that. There was seldom a day passed without some rain. This added to the discomforts of the men and our supply problem. Most of the trails and roads were fast becoming quagmires. The fox holes and slit trenches were often like bath tubs. All of the blankets and extra clothing were damp continuously. These conditions added little to the morale of the men. However, <sup>SINCE</sup> most of the men were in good physical condition ~~with the results~~ we had only a slight increase in our sick list.

On the morning after its arrival, the artillery fired almost continuously on enemy positions located by their air observer. The Army Air Force was also active in our area, making two strikes, called for by regiment, on enemy positions located by the Field Artillery Air Observer on the west bank of the Palangi River at Sanipon (Map C). (28)

That afternoon Major Barbar held a meeting with his staff and company commanders and issued his order for the attack down the Kibawe-Taloma Trail tomorrow. His orders were, in part, as follows:

1. Our mission was to advance to the Pulangi River, destroying or capturing all the enemy force within that area. The battalion's objective was the high,

(28) Personal knowledge



fairly flat ground south of the point where the trail first joins the Pulangi River (Map C). (This area's importance was that it was the only possible drop area for resupply of the battalion in case the trail to its rear became impassable to vehicles.)

2. The Battalion, minus Company "I", and the 81 mm Mortar Platoon to cross its Initial Point at 0700 hours 18 May 1945.
3. The formation; a column of companies with the companies in column of two's. Company "L", plus a section of Heavy Machine Guns, as the Advance Guard: The Battalion Command Group consisting of the Battalion Commander, S-2 and 3 to follow in rear of Company "L". Battalion Headquarters Company minus Command Post personnel: Company "M" minus 81 mm Mortar Platoon; Company "K" as rear guard.
4. Company "I" to remain in its present position with the mission of protecting the battalion's rear and its lines of communication. The 81 mm Mortar Platoon to go into position this afternoon within "I" Company's perimeter and be prepared to support the attack tomorrow.

Battery C, 117th Field Artillery was to displace tomorrow morning to positions already selected near Company "I".

The Battalion Aid Station to move initially to Company "I"'s perimeter. The Battalion Command Post was to follow the battalion on orders. The one-quarter ton kitchen trucks and trailers were to follow with the organic transportation.



### THE BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

At 0700 hours 18 May the battalion moved out as was ordered, passing through "I" Company at 0800 hours. The Regimental Commander was at the Battalion Command Post prior to the time the movement began. He informed Major Barbar that he would relieve Company "I" on the 20th or 21st with a unit of the 1st Battalion.

At 0900 hours "L" Company made contact with a small enemy force, consisting mostly of snipers, a few hundred yards west of the enemy Motor Pool. The battalion pushed rapidly through this force to a point where it could observe the enemy Motor Pool. Here again the Advance Guard received small arms fire. The column was halted and men dispersed to the sides of the trail. The enemy force was forced to withdraw when a platoon from "L" Company started a maneuver to its rear. This action lasted for about one hour. The motor pool area was searched out by the advance guard prior to the battalion's renewal of its attack. It contained several U.S. Army and Japanese civilian trucks of which a few were loaded with equipment including, among other items, Japanese Army Officers' and Nurses' clothing. Several cases of enemy explosives and small arms ammunition were found under some of the vehicles. Company "K" was ordered to place a guard over the vehicles until they could be searched for booby traps. "I" Company was later ordered to relieve this guard from "K" Company and to establish an outpost within the vicinity of the motor pool. (29)

At 1030 hours the battalion resumed its advance with "L" Company still in the lead. Soon after the movement began a

(29) Personal knowledge



series of three loud explosions was heard and was estimated to be between 400 to 500 yards in front of and southeast of the battalion. After a hurried check by the Field Artillery Liaison Officer to see if the artillery was firing, it was assumed that the enemy was destroying some of his ammunition and supply dumps. This assumption was later found to be true.

The column had advanced a distance of 400 to 500 yards southeast of the motor pool when it once more made contact with the enemy. The Advance Guard was fired on by snipers, causing several casualties. When Company "L" started maneuvering a force to knock these snipers out, the enemy opened up with automatic weapons and mortars. The mortar section of "L" Company then went into action. If the meantime, the Company Commander of Company "L", Captain J. W. Kuykendall, had been ordered to hold his attack until 81 mm mortar fire could be placed on the enemy's positions. This was accomplished in a minimum amount of time and the enemy's guns were soon silenced. Upon completion of the mortar fire "L" Company moved forward. It had not gone over 50 yards when it again ran into the enemy's fire which was much closer than before. The company's mortars opened fire at very short range causing the enemy to halt some of his fires. While this action was going on, Captain Kuykendall started a platoon around his left flank to some high ground 100 yards north of the trail. The platoon had moved only half that distance when an enemy force estimated at 20 to 30 in strength moved into some heavy undergrowth to its rear, thereby cutting it off from the rest of the company. The maneuvering platoon then began receiving fire from two directions. It halted and went into a hasty



defensive position.

Meanwhile Major Barbar had ordered some artillery fire on the rear of the enemy in dugin positions. "L" Company now had all three of its platoons engaged, two astride the trail, and one with an enemy force between it and the company. "K" Company, minus one platoon held in Battalion reserve, was ordered to move around the enemy's right flank to relieve the platoon that was cut off. Soon after "K" Company gained the high ground to the left of the trail, the enemy started withdrawing. "K" Company was ordered not to pursue him and by 1400 hours contact was broken.

During this action the Battalion Executive Officer had moved to "I" Company's perimeter. At 1500 hours the battalion was ordered to go into a perimeter defense position on high ground near the positions the enemy had so recently vacated. The rear echelon closed into this area at 1530 hours. Major Barbar briefed the Battalion Executive Officer on the day's action. The perimeter was in the process of being organized at this time. "K" Company, plus a section of Heavy Machine Guns on the left and left front. Company "L", plus a section of Heavy Machine Guns on the right and right front. Company "M" and Battalion Headquarters Company closed in the rear gap. During the registration of the artillery the air observer observed an enemy force apparently going into bivouac some six to eight hundred yards to the southeast. He brought a battery six rounds in on them and reported it very effective.

At 0800 hours the next morning the battalion moved out. Company "K" was the Advance Guard, "L" Company was bringing up the rear. The Battalion Aid Station was being hand carried



and was moving with the Battalion Headquarters Company. The 81 mm Mortar Platoon, minus 1 section, was left in position in the bivouac area to support the attack. A platoon from "I" Company had been sent forward to establish an outpost within that area. Soon after moving out a loud explosion was heard to our front. "K" Company reported that the enemy was cratering the trail 200 yards to his front.

About 30 minutes later "K" Company reported that a security force to his left flank had found an enemy area that looked as if it had been recently shelled. There were several dead Japs and approximately forty packs scattered over the area. Several U.S. Army packs were found, one of them belonging to a man in "K" Company who had lost it in the action the day before. The S-2 went forward to assist his Intelligence Sergeant, who was with the advance guard, to examine the enemy equipment and collect documents. As in most cases, the patrol, having poor intelligence discipline, had gone through the majority of the equipment looking for souvenirs. This was, without a doubt, the area shelled by the artillery the previous afternoon.

At about 1000 hours Company "K" reported finding mines and booby trap trip wires on and across the trail. The Battalion Commander ordered them to be marked. The Antitank Platoon was ordered forward to remove the mines and booby traps. All Company Commanders were then warned to look for such along the trail. These mines and booby traps later proved to be 100 pound Air Force General Purpose Bombs.

Meanwhile the battalion had continued its advance. At about 1100 hours several shots were heard from the front of the column. Company "K" had surprised six Japs who were



getting water from a small stream. Four of them were killed and two escaped through the underbrush. Soon after this "K" Company received several long bursts from enemy automatic weapons and some small arms fire from both sides of the Pulangi River. (Map C) The company's mortars were immediately brought to bear on the enemy positions across the river. Artillery fire was brought in on those positions to the south and on our side of the river. The company in the meantime had deployed one platoon astride the trail. The Light Machine Guns were brought up, but no sooner had they begun operations, than the enemy opened up with his mortars. "K" Company then started a platoon around on the high ground to its right with the mission of flanking the enemy positions. This force had gone only a short way up the side of the mountain when most of the men came screaming, on the run, back to the rear of the company. All were waving their hands about their faces and bodies. The Battalion Executive Officer, who was with the "K" Company Commander, came back with him to see what the trouble was. Both found out very fast. Everyone of the men in the platoon had several large, black wasps swarming about his face and body. These jungle wasps caused more casualties within that platoon than the Japs had been able to cause the battalion as a whole in the past two days. Three-fourths of the men were medical cases, some of them having to be evacuated.

The Battalion Commander ordered "L" Company, after a heavy artillery concentration, to pass through Company "K".



This was accomplished with little results as "L" Company was stopped by the same fire that had held up Company "K".

In the meantime the 81 mm mortars had been ordered up and into positions about 400 yards in rear of "L" Company. They were firing on the positions across the river. The Battalion Commander ordered "K" Company to send a platoon to the high ground on our right to protect that flank. This was the area selected as the possible drop area prior to the beginning of the attack on the 18th. (Map C)

At 1500 hours "L" Company had advanced only 300 to 400 yards from where it passed through Company "K". It was then ordered to go into a company defense perimeter for the night. "K" Company was ordered to occupy a position on the small stream approximately 400 yards to our rear. The battalion, minus "I", "K" and "L" Companies was ordered to the high ground south of the trail. The Battalion Command Post opened in that position at 1530 hours. (Map C)

The Battalion Commander made his report of the days action to the Regimental Commander at approximately 1600 hours. A plan for continuing the attack tomorrow was discussed. The battalion was ordered to hold where it was, due to the resistance being met and the lengthening of our lines of communication, until more force could be brought to bear. A staff conference was held soon afterward. Major Barbar briefed the staff on his plan for defending the area. Several recommendations were made by the staff for betterment of the plan, none were approved.



The balance of the day was spent in digging in, evacuating casualties and planning artillery and mortar fires for the defense of our positions. At 1700 hours the ration detail arrived with three days "K" rations. The battalion organic transportation, one-quarter ton trucks and trailers, were in a motor park within the Company "K" perimeter.

Early the next morning, 20th May, the Regimental Commander visited the Command Post at which time he discussed the regiments plans with the Battalion Commander. The regiment, as soon as sufficient forces were available to it, was to continue its attack to the southeast on the trail and secure the river crossing at Sanipon. (Map C) The regiment now had attached to it a Battery of 4.2 chemical mortars which was being sent forward to the 3rd Battalion with the mission of direct support. The Regimental Kitchen and Supply Train was due in Kibawe tomorrow. Kitchens were to be released to battalions upon arrival. Company supply tents were to be set up and kept in Kibawe. "A" Company was to relieve Company "I" tomorrow. Company "I" was immediately informed of this plan and ordered to close in this area not later than 1300 hours the same day. It was to occupy the area now held by "K" Company. The battalion was to remain in its present position and was ordered to send out patrols daily to determine the enemy's positions and strength. It was not to resume the attack until ordered. (30)

The companies were busy during that day improving their positions and local security patrolling. A company commander and staff meeting was held by the Battalion Commander at

(30) Personal knowledge



about 1100 hours. Everyone was brought up to date on the situation and the plans as outlined by the Regimental Commander. "K" Company was ordered to move into the battalion perimeter when relieved by "I" Company. "I" Company was also to place a platoon in the area now held by "L" Company and as soon as this was accomplished, "L" Company was to move into the battalion perimeter. Company "M" was to bring its Mortar Platoon within the battalion perimeter today, dig in and be prepared to fire on targets tonight. "K" Company was ordered to furnish a twelve man patrol for tomorrow morning, the leader to report to the Battalion Commander at 1400 hours this afternoon. "M" Company was to furnish two men from Mortar Platoon to accompany this patrol. They were to act both as forward observers in case the patrol ran into trouble and a reconnaissance party for selection of gun positions to be used to support the attack when resumed by the battalion. The Company Commanders were informed of the movement of their kitchen and supply trucks. The kitchen trucks were to remain under battalion control in the Battalion Motor Pool. Feeding would be by carrying parties.

After the meeting, the Battalion Commander accompanied by company commanders, made an inspection of the company defensive positions. "L" and "K" Company Commanders were shown their areas to be occupied tomorrow. Most of the areas were found to be in a very bad state of police which was ordered corrected immediately. In general, the balance of the day was spent in making our perimeter more comfortable and sanitary.



The leader for tomorrow's patrol from "K" Company reported as was ordered. He was oriented on the ground and aerial photograph. His mission was one of reconnaissance and he was not to engage the enemy if possible to avoid it. His objective was the nearer of Twin Bridges, located about 800 yards from our present position. (Map C). An SCR 300 was to be carried for communication. Report on the hour and contact was to be reported immediately. Upon reaching his objective he was to assist the men from Company "M" in selecting mortar positions and to await orders prior to any further action. Men would carry one day's "K" rations and light packs plus entrenching tools.

The Battalion Chaplain held a short meeting and song fest just before sundown. This was his first chance for one since the attack began.

The next morning "K" Company's patrol moved out as per order. At 0900 hours he reported no contact, located about 500 yards southeast of his starting point. Soon after this, several shots were heard in the direction of Company "K's" defensive area. The company reported a security patrol, to his right flank, had surprised two Japs moving near the stream carrying ammunition. Both were killed. At 1000 hours the patrol, moving southeast to the Twin Bridges reported on their objective, no contact, proceeding on mission. This report led the Battalion Commander to believe that the Japs had withdrawn further into the mountains, to the south of the trail. (Map C). The Regimental Commander was informed of this report and belief. He suggested that a company be sent the next morning



to confirm the belief. With this in mind, the patrol from "K" Company was ordered to dig in on its objective and prepare positions for a section of mortars.

At about noon "I" Company moved into "K" Company's position and soon after relieved both "K" and "L" Company as had been ordered. Both companies completed their move into the battalion perimeter about two hours later. "L" Company was then alerted for the patrol tomorrow that had been suggested by the Regimental Commander. The plan called for the company to move down the trail and occupy that first high ground to the right of the trail. (Map C). This high ground could be seen from the Battalion Observation Post and was pointed out to Captain Kuykendall. Major Barbar planned to support Company "L" by sending a section of 81 mm mortars forward with them to go into positions now being prepared by the patrol from "K" Company near the Twin Bridges. (Map C)

That afternoon at 1300 hours the Battery of Chemical Mortars from regiment went into positions in rear of "I" Company. The Liaison Officer reported to the Battalion Commander at 1330 hours. He was ordered to be prepared to fire prior to nightfall. The Field Artillery Observer with the rifle company was to be used to adjust and observe the 4.2 fires, using their radio to the Mortar Liaison Officer at the Battalion Command Post. The reason for this system was that there were only two officers, the Battery Commander and one other, with the battery.

During the afternoon the Field Artillery Liaison Officer reported his Battalion Headquarters and "B" Battery had moved into positions with "C" Battery. (Map C). He discussed the



use of the artillery and mortars in supporting "L" Company tomorrow. Major Barbar did not want any preparatory fires on the objective prior to "L" Company's patrol for fear of losing the element of surprise. (31)

At 0730 hours 22 May, "L" Company moved out. At 0800 hours "L" Company reported it was passing through "K" Company's patrol position, which Captain Kuykendall estimated to be about 400 to 500 yards from the battalion area. It was not at the Twin Bridges as reported. The section of 81 mm mortars were left there, Company "L" continuing its advance. Upon reaching the Twin Bridges the point of the Advance Guard was fired on by a sniper. Soon after silencing this fire the company started its climb, on the trail, to the high ground. The Twin Bridges were found to be mined and had to be bypassed. This was reported to Major Barbar who sent the Anti-tank Platoon forward to remove the mines.

Soon after passing the Twin Bridges, "L" Company was again fired on by snipers, causing some casualties within the leading element. Major Barbar, now realizing the enemy had been warned of "L" Company's approach, ordered the company to hold where it was until artillery fire could be placed on the objective. This was accomplished by the Artillery Liaison Officer with the Battalion Commander on his Observation Post. The company continued its advance soon after these fires ceased. Up to this time "L" Company had had flank security on the left near the river and on the right in some fairly open, flat terrain. These forces were slowed, once the company started its climb, by the dense undergrowth on the right and left of the trail.

(31) Personal knowledge



Here at this point they were ordered into the column for the company was practically standing still while trying to remain abreast of them. (32)

At 1230 hours "L" Company reported receiving heavy mortar and machine guns fire from the high ground to its right front and flank. It could not deploy due to the high, almost vertical ground on its right and steep drop to its left. The objective could be observed from this point and the enemy was thought to be on the high ground to ~~its~~ <sup>the</sup> rear. <sup>of obj.</sup> Artillery and mortar fire was placed on these enemy positions. Soon afterwards the company gained the forward slopes of its objective. Two platoons were partially deployed when the enemy again opened with all his fires. His positions were now thought to be definitely located and were estimated to be from 300 to 400 yards to the right front and on much higher ground than that of "L" Company. His observed fires were causing some casualties.

During this time regiment, who was in contact with Major Barbar at his observation post, notified him that two Marine Corp planes, loaded with napalm, were in the air near our area and could be used if they were needed. He stated he could use them immediately. The Air Liaison Officer at regiment stated he would have to go through the air strip at Malabang to make the arrangements for the air strike for he could not contact the planes on his radio as it was a different set from that as used by the Marine Corps. Arrangements were then made for the "strike". As soon as the planes were overhead the target was to be marked by two rounds of smoke.

(32) Personal knowledge: Statement of Captain J. W. Kuykendall on 21 May 1945



Captain Kuykendall was told of these arrangements and to hold the positions he now occupied. In the meanwhile the artillery had continued to fire on the enemy positions near the objective. It had now been planned, by the Battalion Commander, for "L" Company to hold this position if they were successful in pushing the enemy off of them. (33)

The planes came over at about 1300 hours. Two rounds of smoke were fired by the artillery. The planes then made a dry run, from northwest to southeast, over the targets. The Artillery Liaison Officer, at this time, suggested that he fire two more rounds of smoke to be positive that the planes had definitely located the target. The wind blowing from an easterly direction had blown some of the smoke over "L" Company's positions. The Battalion Commander stated he thought the planes had located the right targets and the extra smoke was not needed. He saw his mistake after it was too late. The first plane had already started strafing "L" Company in his dive on the target, soon after dropping his bomb. The second plane followed the same path as the first and did likewise. Both napalm bombs landed, so it seemed, as seen from the Battalion Observation Post, in the middle of our own troops. Just as soon as the Battalion Commander saw his mistake, he asked the Air Liaison Officer, who was on a direct telephone line to our observation post, to stop the strike. This however was too late. During the first few seconds of the strike and after the first bomb had been dropped the telephone line to Company "L" went out. The Battalion Executive Officer, after several attempts, made contact by SCR 300 with Captain

(33) Personal knowledge: Statement of Major Barbar on 21 May 1945



Kuykendall who informed him that they were being hit hard and were suffering high casualties. The men were almost in a panic and the company was fast becoming disorganized. The enemy was taking advantage of our mistake and disorganization and was firing all they had. This information was given to the Battalion Commander who then ordered the artillery and all mortars to give the enemy positions all they could.

Meanwhile the Battalion Executive Officer, the Surgeon with all the litters and blood plasma on hand, the Chaplain and two platoons of riflemen from "K" Company had moved out on the double to "L" Company's positions. When this party, after a 30 minute run, reached "L" Company, it was a sore sight to behold, though not as bad as we had imagined. The Surgeon set up his Aid Station on the trail approximately 10 yards and in defilade from the Company Command Post. The Chaplain remained with him to assist those the Surgeon could not help. The Battalion Executive Officer, after placing one platoon of "K" Company on the trail as security, went forward to "L" Company's Command Post. Captain Kuykendall was ordered to withdraw with his company to the trail to reorganize. During this time it had begun to rain very hard. The enemy was firing his mortars and automatic weapons on the trail and the company's positions.

Soon after "L" Company had moved to the trail, the Battalion Executive Officer contacted the Battalion Commander by telephone, which had been repaired, told him of the situation and in his opinion <sup>that</sup> "L" Company was not capable of occupying their positions as had been planned. All of the forces were then ordered to withdraw to the Battalion perimeter.



The Surgeon, by this time, had depleted his supplies and litters thereby creating a very difficult evacuation problem. This was solved by building litters with rain coats and poles cut from the side of the trail. After a very hard fight, during the withdrawal, this force closed into the Battalion area at about 1700 hours. The Regimental Aid Station had been set up here to assist in evacuation. After reaching the perimeter, "L" Company's losses were determined to be 60 casualties with about one third of these being KIA's. This had been, by far, the greatest loss suffered by any of our companies up to this date.

The next day, 23 May 1945, the battalion was kept busy with local patrolling and counting its losses of equipment and men. Company "L" had lost most of its communication and the men's personal equipment. The Surgeon had lost his surgical equipment and the Battalion Executive Officer, several years off of his natural life. Requisitions covering all items were sent in by telephone to regiment who promised delivery of some items that afternoon.

Earlier that morning Colonel Leroy S. Graham, the Regimental Commander, and his S-2, with two native guides, visited the Command Post. The Battalion Commander was given the following information:

1. The 1st Battalion was now on the trail to rear in our initial location. (Map C)
2. Company "A" would relieve "I" Company by 1300 hours today.
3. Replacements for the battalion would arrive at the Regimental Command Post in Kibawe this morning.



The Battalion S-1 would be there to receive them.

4. The native guides were to be left with the battalion for its use in a possible flanking move to Sanipon. (Map C).

The plans for this move was discussed at this time. It called for the use of a reinforced company to move on a wide flanking maneuver over a trail just barely distinguishable from the aerial photograph. The reasons for this move, as given to the Regimental Commander by Major Barbar, <sup>was</sup> were to seize the river crossing, establish a force across the enemy lines of communication and drive northwest on the trail to join with the force now pushing southeast. Colonel Graham approved this plan and ordered the Battalion Commander to put it in operation as soon as possible. "I" Company, since it had seen less action than the other companies, was selected for this mission. Captain Hanson was sent for immediately.

Prior to the arrival of Captain Hanson the native guides were questioned regarding this trail. They knew the trail well and stated that as far as they knew the enemy did not know if its existence. Captain Hanson arrived during this discussion and was oriented on the situation and plans for the flanking move which were as follows:

1. "I" Company was to move from its present positions, guided by the native guides, over the trail as shown on the aerial photograph to Sanipon (Map C), seize the river crossing, establish itself across the enemy line of communication and drive northwest, on the trail,



- destroying the enemy, joining up with the force now pushing southeast. (This mission was later changed so as to hold the river crossing at Sanipon).
2. A section of Heavy Machine Guns, one 81 mm mortar and a part of the Battalion Aid Station was attached to "I" Company as of 0700 hours tomorrow. A Forward Observer Party from 117th Field Artillery would join the company today. A group of 40 native carriers would join the company this afternoon. (This had been arranged with the Regimental Commander during his conference).
  3. All men would carry 2 days "K" Rations. The native carriers 3 days "K" Rations and extra small arms and mortar ammunition. (Captain Hanson stated at this time that each man in the company would carry one round of 60 mm mortar ammunition in addition to all the extra small arms ammunition and grenades he wanted). Spare batteries for all radios would also be carried. Any resupply of the company to be by Artillery Liaison plane on call.

That afternoon at about 1500 hours, 40 native carriers reported to the Command Post and were sent on to Company "I". Soon afterward "I" Company reported receiving its extra rations and ammunition. At 1700 hours the Battalion S-1 returned from regiment with replacements for the battalion, the majority of which were assigned to "L" Company.

On the morning of the 24th May, "I" Company moved out. Once it was strung out, going up the mountain to the south, it resembled a battalion more than it did a company. Patrols were sent out to the flanks and front. One Jap was killed by



a patrol from "K" Company near the small stream 400 yards to the rear of the battalion and 500 yards to its right flank. Several shallow, freshly dug graves were found to contain enemy dead which had been dead, according to the Aid Man, not over two days.

At 1200 hours "I" Company reported no contact and going was slow due to their having to cut a path through the heavy jungle. At 1400 hours Captain Hanson reported his company had found the trail and was starting to move southeast. He estimated his distance from the battalion to be between 2,000 and 3,000 yards. At 1600 hours he reported the company was going into bivouac for the night.

An enemy patrol attacked "K" Company's outpost on the trail that night. A platoon now held this area in place of the twelve man patrol. This fire fight lasted for about fifteen minutes before the Japs withdrew. One casualty was reported. The aid man, with the platoon, stated it would not be necessary to evacuate him that night.

The next day one dead Jap was found near "K" Company's outpost. The battalion continued to send out patrols for its security. "I" Company reported in at 0800 hours that it was continuing its advance. There had been no action during the night.

Early that morning the Battalion Commander was called to the Regimental Command Post. He returned around noon with new plans for the advance to be executed as soon as "I" Company was in position at Sanipon. Soon after his return he held a conference with the staff and Company Commanders. The plan for the battalions attack was discussed:



1. The battalion (-), with Company "A" attached, will move, when ordered, from its present position, down the trail to seize and secure the river crossing at Sanipon. (Map C)
2. Formation: Company "K", Battalion Command Group, Headquarters Company, Company "M"(-), Company "L". Company "A" to remain in its present area and will take over "K" Company outpost by 1200 hours tomorrow. The Battalion Executive Officer will remain in this area until all units of the battalion have cleared. Mortar Platoon, Company "M", will leave one section here to support the attack.
3. The battalion aid station will move with the battalion. Two days "K" ration will be carried by men. All mortar ammunition will be moved forward.

The artillery and 4.2 mortars fired most of the afternoon on the enemy positions on the high ground to our front. The Air Observer reported seeing "I" Company, however, he made no attempt to contact them for fear of giving their location away. He estimated that they were one days march from Sanipon.

At 1600 hours "I" Company, using the Field Artillery Forward Observer radio, reported their position which agreed with the Air Observer's estimate, no contact or any signs of the enemy. They were forming a perimeter for the night. This information was reported to the Regimental S-2. Soon afterward the Regimental Commander called the Battalion Commander and ordered the battalion to renew its attack down the Kibawe-Taloma Trail on the twenty-seventh, the day after tomorrow.



The next day, 26th May, was spent preparing for the attack. The Artillery was pounding away at the enemy position just south of where "L" Company had its fight. The Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel James N. Brown, visited the Command Post. The use of "A" Company in tomorrows attack was discussed with the Battalion Commander. Lieutenant Colonel Brown and the Battalion Executive Officer of the 3rd Battalion went to the Battalion Observation Post for a look at tomorrows route of advance. They could see, from there, the Kiwabe-Taloma Trail for several hundred yards to the southeast.

At about 1300 hours Company "I" reported that it had reached its objective and was digging in on high ground just south and west of Sanipon. No enemy had been contacted or seen. The men were in good condition. It could observe the east bank of the Pulangi River but had not seen any Japs there as yet, though it observed what appeared to be freshly dug positions, approximately 50 yards from the river. (34)

The next morning, about 0600 hours, Company "I" reported, by Field Artillery radio, that they were receiving heavy machine gun, small arms and mortar fire from the west. The enemy, trying to infiltrate in their positions, had been stopped. The enemy withdrew soon after 0630 hours. The casualties for Company "I" was one killed in action. At this point it may be interesting to view the events through the eyes of the enemy. Quote:

"Lieutenant Colonel Hirayama, 58 years old and a professional soldier of more than thirty years active service,

(34) Personal knowledge: Statement of Captain Hanson on 26 May 1945



commanded all Japanese forces then engaged in defense of the trail to our front. After the surrender he talked freely of this situation. Most of all he feared a movement around his left flank. His staff, however, persuaded him to take the attitude that American troops were not capable of such a movement over the very difficult terrain and to regard his left and rear as secure. He regarded the failure to protect his left flank as the most serious omission of his long military career. Then he made the most serious error in his commission. Using his strongest and best company, he launched a frontal attack on our force at his rear and lost 100 of the 120 men employed. That company was rendered completely ineffective and its survivors were sent to the rear." Unquote. (35)

At 0800 hours on 27 May the battalion renewed its attack to the southeast. The formation of the battalion had been changed by the Battalion Commander prior to moving out. Company "L", minus one platoon, was now following the Battalion Command Group. One platoon of Company "L" was placed in Battalion Reserve and, was left with the rear echelon. The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon was left in the rear to assist in moving the mortar ammunition forward. Soon after the battalion cleared the bivouac area, the Regimental Commander, with the forward echelon of the Regimental Command Post, moved into the area.

"K" Company's leading platoon made contact with the enemy at 1000 hours on the trail about 400 yards south of the area where Company "L" was stopped on the 22nd. (Map C) The company deployed two platoons astride the trail and sent the other platoon to the right in the dense undergrowth and on

(35) A-1, p. 105



higher ground than the trail, to place flanking fire on the enemy. However, it did not swing wide enough in its maneuver and it, too, was stopped by the same heavy fire as the two platoons on the trail.

It would be well to mention now that, due to the dense undergrowth on both sides of the trail, a rifle platoon, when deployed, covered a very narrow front. Men were seldom more than three to four feet apart and then only when they could see the man on their right and left. When a man could observe his fire fifty feet to his front in this type terrain, he was considered to have an excellent field of fire and this, too, was seldom.

The Battalion Commander then ordered Company "K" to pull back 100 yards to allow the artillery to fire on those enemy positions to its front and flank. When the company pulled back it left its packs along the trail where it had first deployed. After the artillery fire, which lasted about thirty minutes, the company returned to its position to continue the attack. It then discovered that most all of its packs were gone. This was reported to the Battalion Commander, who surmised that the enemy knew when an American unit withdrew a short distance, it usually meant it was doing so to place artillery on his position. To avoid this he was following our troops and after the artillery fire, was getting back in his dugin position before our troops could attack him. Thereafter the companies were ordered to hold their positions during close in artillery fire, even though it might cause some casualties, and to push forward immediately afterward. (36)

(36) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major Barbar on 26 May 1945



Company "K" was stopped again by heavy enemy fire a few yards past the lines it had previously held. Company "L" (minus one Platoon) was ordered to leave the Kibawe-Taloma Trail 400 yards to the rear and the right of "K" Company to attack the enemy's flank or rear. This action failed because Company "L", after taking more than an hour to reach the high ground above the trail, attacked too quickly toward the trail and found themselves abreast of "K" Company and were unable to maneuver further.

During this action the battalion's rear echelon had closed in to the Battalion Command Post area. Shortly after their arrival, sniper fire was received from the high ground to right front of the Command Post, wounding two men. A squad from the Antitank Platoon moved out in the direction of the sniper and the firing soon ceased.

The Regimental Commander, with some of his staff, arrived at the Command Post at about 1500 hours and went into a conference with the Battalion Commander. Soon afterward orders were issued for "K" Company to form a company defense perimeter in their present position. The Commanding Officer of Company "L" was ordered to report to the Command Post.

When Captain Kuykendall arrived he was oriented on the situation by the S-2 and was issued orders:

1. Company "L", minus one platoon, will move at 1900 hours tonight to Sanipon, (Map C) arriving there not later than 2400 hours, to reinforce Company "I" now in that area. Any contact with the enemy will be avoided, if possible, however should the opportunity arise to destroy any of the enemy without



undue risk to his force, he will do so.

2. One platoon of Company "L" will remain in its present position near the Battalion Command Post and will be held in Battalion Reserve.
3. Captain Hanson will be in command of all forces at Sanipon. Radio will be used to report contact only.

The Battalion Commander, after issuing the order to Captain Kuykendall, discussed with his staff the reasons for this move tonight, which were as follows:

1. The enemy probably now knew the strength of our forces to his rear, since he had made one attack, which was unsuccessful, on this force. Therefore, he could reasonably be expected to make a second attack with a stronger force to destroy our force which was a dangerous threat to the success of his mission.
2. If "I" Company was not reinforced, the enemy's second attack with a stronger force had a good chance of success, therefore they must, if possible, be reinforced prior to the next morning when the enemy would probably launch his second attack.
3. It was believed that the enemy did not man his defensive positions during the night but withdrew a short distance down the trail to assembly areas. Since we could not reinforce our forces at Sanipon during the daylight hours, we had a good chance of success of doing so under the cover of darkness.

"I" Company was told by radio, in code, of these plans and a sign and countersign was given.



At 1900 hours Company "L", minus one platoon, moved out in a column of two's. At 2000 hours small arms firing and hand grenades exploding was heard to the southeast. "Pete", Captain Kuykendall's code name, reported they had surprised and killed a small group of the enemy who were gathered around a small fire just off the trail and were continuing on mission. He reported contact similar to the first once more prior to his closing-in with "I" Company at 2330 hours.

The battalion was now disposed as follows:

1. Force at Sanipon, (Map C) "I" and "L" Company, minus, plus parts Company "M" and Battalion aid Station.
2. Force on the Kibawe Taloma Trail four miles north of Sanipon, Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company plus one platoon "L" Company, "K" and "A" Companies.

At 0800 hours the next morning "K" Company reported it had advanced 200 yards from its perimeter positions and was now receiving heavy small arms fire. The Battalion Commander, wanting to push on to Sanipon that day, sent his Executive Officer and Lieutenant Maddox, the S-2, forward to assist "K" Company. When they arrived at the company's command post it was found that the company was in approximately the same positions as they had occupied during the night. The company commander had lost control of his company and was making no effort to push on as had been ordered. He was sitting in a fox hole with a bewildered expression on his face. His men were lounging on the ground in the near vicinity. This situation was reported to Major Barbar who ordered the company commander relieved and sent back to him, Lieutenant Maddox



was placed in command of "K" Company. He ordered his Platoon Leaders to meet him at the company command post for a conference. When they arrived he oriented them as to the present situation within the company and found out exactly what he had in the company.

Soon after his meeting Lieutenant Maddox, with his platoon leaders, moved forward to the leading platoon. While there, he issued his orders for the attack. The company moved out at approximately 0900 hours. One platoon was sent, as a flank security force, to the high ground running parallel to the trail. Contact was maintained by SCR 536. The company, minus, moving on the trail was to govern its pace by the pace of the security force. Soon after the move began, the flank security force reported they had found a cave with a number of the company's packs, lost the day before. All had been stripped of their equipment. About one hour later the security force was ordered onto the trail, being replaced by another platoon.

The company made slow progress that morning, being continually harassed by enemy snipers. Soon after 1200 hours heavy enemy small arms and machine gun fire was received by the leading platoon, causing a number of casualties. The enemy was located on high ground around a bend in the trail. His fields of fire were excellent. He could observe his fire for approximately 100 yards to his front. Lieutenant Maddox ordered his machine guns into a position with his lead platoon. The 60 mm mortars were in position in a draw about 200 yards to his rear.

We could no longer use our artillery, 4.2 or 81 mm mortars because of the danger of firing into the force at Sanipon,



which was 600 to 800 yards to the southeast. Too, "I" Company had been ordered, earlier that morning, to send a reinforced platoon two hundred yards up the trail to form a trail block with the mission of denying, to the enemy, some high ground in that area and to destroy him as he withdrew. The recognition signal between these two forces was a green parachute flare.

Soon after opening fire with his machine guns and mortars, Lieutenant Maddox ordered one platoon on a flanking movement to the right of the trail. The other platoon was brought up on the left and echelon to the rear of his lead platoon to protect his left flank which was receiving enemy fire. This fight consumed more than one hour.

"A" Company, who was attached to the 3rd Battalion and following close in rear of "K" Company, was ordered by the Battalion Executive Officer to pass through "K" Company. This was done while "K" Company reorganized so as to follow the enemy closely and not allow time for him to dig in and organize his position. "A" Company had moved about 100 yards when it, too, made contact. By using the same type maneuver as "K" Company had previously used, it soon overran the enemy positions which were not as well organized and defended as those "K" Company had destroyed. They, too, suffered several casualties from the Jap machine guns and mortars. During this action the Regimental Executive Officer, who was acting Battalion Commander of the 3rd Battalion, called the Battalion Executive Officer and wanted to know if he had not better select a bivouac area for the night. The answer received was, "The Battalion will bivouac tonight in "I" Company's perimeter." Soon after "A" Company had overrun this enemy position, the battalion once more continued its



advance. At 1700 hours it closed into "I" Company's Area at Sanipon (Map C) without further action, thus, accomplishing its mission of seizing and securing the river crossing at Sanipon.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation it is necessary to remember:

1. It occurred during the rainy season in Mindanao, raining almost continuously throughout all phases of the operation.
2. The nature of the terrain, on which it took place, was ideally suited for a delaying action.
3. The enemy was well equipped and had plenty of time, well in advance of the attack, to prepare positions on successive key terrain features.

#### A. INFORMATION

Initially, there was very little enemy information available. The S-2 and Regimental Commander of the 155th Infantry gave all they had to the Battalion Commander but even this was sketchy and, in some respects, erroneous. The map of the Kibawe-Taloma Trail, given to the battalion prior to its departure from Kabakan, was little more than a sketch, showing only the higher mountains and principal streams and rivers. It was definitely not suited for use by a unit as small as a battalion. The battalion was issued aerial photographs several days after the operation began and they, too, were lacking in detail needed by a unit of our size and strength. X Corps Headquarters had known, since the early part of May, that some units of or all of the 31st Infantry Division would push southeast on this trail but up to the 18th May no maps or aerial photographs of usable scale for



these units had been made available to them. (37)

The only reliable information of the terrain and enemy received by the battalion was from its patrols prior to and during the operation. The practice of sending officers on patrols and reconnaissance missions was most valuable as a source of information on the terrain. Regiment had, at its disposal, an L-4 Liaison Plane that could have been used initially to an advantage by the Battalion Commander for an aerial reconnaissance. This however was not done, though the plane was used extensively by the Regimental Commander and his staff for such work.

#### B. PLANNING AND ORDERS

The initial plans for the operations were not as clear and complete as they should have been. It was not known by the Battalion Commander, when his unit left the area just south of Kibawe, that the regiment wanted the battalion to go to Sanipon. In light of the orders from both the Regimental Commanders of the 155th Infantry and 167th Infantry, it was thought that the battalion would only push as far as the Pulangi River and not to Sanipon as was later learned when the battalion reached the river. The Regimental Executive Officer, who was the Regimental Commander in the initial phases of the operation, criticized the battalion severely for its slow progress during that phase of the operation. Had he been more specific in his orders, the Battalion Commander's impression as to what was expected of the battalion, would have resulted in better plans and a more aggressive spirit in the execution of his orders.

(37) A-2, p. 66



The orders issued by the Battalion Commander were as clear as possible under the circumstances. Though at times by the manner and method of their execution they may not have been as much in detail as they should have been. "K" Company's patrol on 20 May did not show a lack of clarity in the order but did show a lack of good judgment and force in enforcing this order. When it was discovered that the patrol had not accomplished its mission, some action should have been taken to guard against such a lack of dependability reoccurring in the future. However, this was not the case and this lack of force often resulted in similar instances thereby lessening battalion's chances of success in accomplishing its mission.

The Staff and Special Staff as a whole, functioned in an excellent manner throughout the operation. The work of the S-2 was of the highest order. The S-3 work was good but could have been improved upon had he taken a different attitude. He was almost continuously at cross roads with other members of the staff which did little in promoting cooperation between them. The Staff could have functioned much better than it did had the Battalion Commander used it properly. Often times plans and decisions were made by him without the aid of his staff.

#### C. OPERATIONS

##### 1. Enemy Operations:

The enemy commander apparently had, at his disposal, about five hundred combat and service troops armed with small arms, automatic weapons and mortars. His service troops had apparently received the same type training as his combat troops as all of them defended their positions in a stubborn manner, withdrawing only



under the heaviest of fires. His use of the terrain in organizing his positions was good in many ways. Principally, it was almost impossible to approach any of his positions from any direction without first receiving sniper fire. The camouflage of these positions was superior. An American soldier would practically be standing on one before he saw it. He evidently kept a small force several hundred yards to the rear, preparing these positions, so when his units withdrew, these positions on key terrain were organized and prepared for their immediate use.

His acceptance of the attitude that his left flank was secure was his greatest mistake and undoing. If he had had a doubt in his mind as to its being secure, he should have sent a security force out to protect it. His lack of security at night was very faulty as was determined by "L" Company movement, with little difficulty, through the middle of his positions.

## 2. Friendly Operations:

In the initial movement of the battalion from the vicinity of Kibawe the decision to leave a rear echelon in that area was prompted by the belief that the enemy would be contacted soon after passing through "I" Company's perimeter. The decision to leave the 81 mm mortars within "I" Company's perimeter was also prompted by the belief that contact could be expected early. Both decisions proved to be correct.



The use of the Antitank Platoon in the searching out and removal of mines from the Japanese Motor Pool was justified in that several were found that could very easily have destroyed the whole Motor Pool.

In the use of "K" Company on the left flank of "L" Company on the 18th May to flank the enemy position without the knowledge as to the enemy's disposition was a faulty decision. This flanking force could have easily run into the same trap as had the platoon of Company "L". It was likewise poor judgment to break contact with the enemy once he was on the run. Had "K" Company pursued and destroyed the enemy, the next day's action would probably have been of no consequence.

The use of "L" Company on the 18th to push through Company "K", who was already stopped and couldn't move, was very poor judgment. "L" Company should never have been used unless they were sent around a flank to hit the enemy from above with flanking fire.

The decision, not to place more smoke on the enemy for the air strike on the 22nd May, showed a lack of command judgment in that two members of the staff stated they thought the planes did not have the right target. The Battalion Commander should have had a doubt in his own mind by then and if he was in doubt, the smoke most certainly should have



been fired. This was a costly mistake and was the greatest one of the whole operation. The air strike should not have been attempted so close in to our own troops and in such dense woods. Also, since the Air Liaison Officer was not there to observe for and talk directly to the planes, this strike should have been called off before it started. Actually the planes could do little more to support "L" Company than had already been accomplished by the artillery and mortars.

The decision to send "I" Company wide around the right flank was the turning point in the operation. Had this been done earlier it would have lessened the time spent in this attack by several days. The use of native guides and carriers showed good judgment and made this operation possible. This trail could not and would not have been used without their help. In having all men carry one round of 60 mm mortar ammunition was a wise decision on the Company Commanders part. This extra ammunition was of great value to the company the morning of the enemy's attack. "I" Company, in blocking the enemy's line of communication, caused him untold worry and caused him to make the decision to abandon the trail northwest of Sanipon.

In sending "L" Company down the trail at night to join "I" Company was a wise decision with sound reasoning behind it. However the planning of this



movement was not as much in detail as it should have been. Had the company run into real trouble its losses would have been severe, for there were no plans made to support it.

D. Communications:

All methods of communications available to the battalion were employed, at one time or another, throughout the operation, and were excellent. The use of wire was found to be the most dependable. In one instance, on the 28th May, the Battalion Executive Officer in following closely behind the attacking echelon and using wire which was shorted by enemy action, used ground return very successfully.

The Battalion Commander's use of radio to remain in contact with "I" Company on its wide flanking move was successful only because of the stronger radio of the Field Artillery Forward Observer. The SCR 300 is an excellent radio but is not suited for use in rough, mountainous terrain.

The Battalion Communication Platoon did an excellent job in keeping wire and radio communication with all elements of the battalion. Some members of the platoon were always with the leading units while in contact with the enemy, either repairing breaks or laying wire.

E. Evacuation and Supply:

The medical plan for the support of the operation was excellent. The Battalion Aid Station, normally, was set up very near the Battalion Command



Post. Its personnel was often attached to units on special missions. The medical support of "I" Company on its flanking maneuver was excellent in that when the company was attacked on the 27th May, all casualties were well taken care of even though there were no means for evacuation.

Evacuation of wounded was a major problem throughout the operation. The decision to attach elements of the Collecting Company to the battalion, as a solution to this problem, was an excellent one. This unit was used well forward with the leading elements to evacuate both wounded and dead.

The supply plan as used by the battalion was an excellent one and worked without any serious difficulties. The use of 1/4 ton trucks to supplement the normal 2½ ton truck proved very successful. The use of the Artillery Liaison Plane in resupply of Company "I" at Sanipon proved to be highly successful for if it had not been available for this work, the company would not have had any communication with the battalion on the 27th, as it had exhausted all of its spare radio batteries. A drop of hand grenades from this plane was tried but proved unsuccessful as only 2 or 3 grenades in the box of twelve failed to explode when they struck the ground.

F. Summary:

To sum up the results of this operation the following points are:



1. The mission of the battalion was accomplished, though it took more time and force than should have been necessary.
2. All elements of the battalion, to a certain degree, functioned well but had a more aggressive spirit been taken by the unit commanders and individuals concerned, the time length of the operation could and would have been shortened.

#### LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Careful planning, good staff work and sound tactics will produce victory at a cost far smaller than is usually realized.
2. Staff members should be employed to the maximum by their commanders in formulating their plans and assisting them in reaching a decision.
3. Every effort should be made by all commanders to learn all that is possible of the terrain over which he is to give battle and the enemy which he is to fight.
4. Violation of the principle of security invites disaster.
5. To receive the maximum effect of close supporting artillery fire, it must be closely followed by assaulting infantry.
6. Orders in time of battle must be executed by subordinate leaders with the maximum force and effort.



7. For effective close support of the ground troops by air units, an air liaison officer should be present with the unit to be supported and to control air strikes properly he must be able to talk directly to both.
8. Troop movements, which are rendered impractical by enemy observation in daylight, can often be accomplished under cover of darkness.
9. Troops are influenced strongly by the example and conduct of their leaders.
10. Commanders should be so located in battle where they can best control and influence the actions of their subordinates and units.