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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY F, 51ST. INFANTRY REGIMENT
(51ST. DIVISION) (PHILIPPINE ARMY) IN VICINITY OF
MT. SAMAT, BATAAN, 1 MARCH 1942
(PHILIPPINE DEFENSE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

Many people, even those with a reasonable knowledge of geography, know little of the location or topography of Bataan. Since the operation to be discussed occurred in Bataan it would be well to know both these things.

Bataan is a Peninsula on the Island of Luzon in the Philippine Archipelago. Bataan lies almost North and South with the North end connected to the Island of Luzon, the China Sea on the West shore, Manila Bay on the East shore and the Island of Corregidor just off the tip of the South shore. (1) Bataan is about 32 miles long and 20 miles wide. Mt. Natib dominates the Northern half while Mt. Samat dominates the South half. (2)

The 51st. Infantry Regiment of the Philippine Army inducted its personnel into service in its organization from the Bicol (South Luzon) Region. Its concentration was in Lipa, Batangas. (3) The unit was in process of training when war with the Imperial Japanese Government began on 8 December 1941.

There were four schools of thought or four plans for consideration. These are listed as follows:

1. Evacuate all troops at first signs of coming hostility.
2. Defend the Philippine Islands by repulsing the invader on the beach.
3. In the event that successful defense on the beach was not realized, withdraw to the hills and pursue guerilla warfare

(1) See Map No. 1; (2) A-9, p.76-79; (3) See Map No. 1

until relieved or captured.

4. Withdraw to Bataan to hold a beach-head for reinforcements to be sent from the Continental United States of America.

Needless to say, the sudden attack at Pearl Harbor precluded the first plan. The low training level caused the second plan to fail and the last plan was adopted after some thought had been given the matter by the high command. "Outnumbered and incompletely equipped, lacking air support, and utilizing troops but recently mobilized and organized for the first time into regimental groups, General MacArthur was left no alternative but that of delaying action." (4)

When the invader could not be thrown back from the beach it became increasingly apparent that the training level was not high enough to use guerilla warfare. The withdrawal to Bataan began. Toward the last stages it almost became a race. "His action was further complicated by another Japanese landing, in force, on the eastern coast of Luzon. Under great difficulties an orderly withdrawal was effected into the Bataan Peninsula." (5)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 51st. Division, under Brigadier General Albert M. Jones, covered the withdrawal of the South Luzon Force commanded by Major General George M. Parker, Jr. (6) The first delaying position was across the Manila-Batangas Road on the Tagaytay Ridge. (7) The second position was the foot of the Malabang Trail on the shores of Luguna De Bay. (8) The third position was the East side of the village of Plaridel and then into Bataan. (9) Each position was to be a days march by motor.

Mention of the vehicles reminds me that these were not of T/O & E number or size, just anything we could get as long as everyone was carried.

(4) A-11, p. 10; (5) A-11, p. 10-11; (6) A-9, p. 74; (7) Where National Highway No. 1 marker is on the map South of Manila. See Map No. 1; (8) Due West of Luguna De Bay, just off the Highway. See Map No. 1; (9) See Map No. 1

one of mine and what I learned by my Battle Examination.

My unit was the 51st. Infantry Regiment of the 51st. Infantry Division, Philippine Army. This 51st. Infantry Regiment, as inducted into USAFFE, was comprised of a total of 1752 men and officers. There were three rifle battalions and a headquarters battalion. A rifle company had a total of 110 officers and men. This broke down into three rifle platoons and a company headquarters. The headquarters battalion had service and administrative personnel and a heavy weapons company. The heavy weapons company was armed with 50 caliber machine guns. One rifle platoon had four squads with Enfield, bolt action, 30 caliber rifles. Each battalion had a weapons company armed with four 30 caliber water cooled machine guns and two three inch trench mortars.

The training level of the 51st. was a cadre of key personnel with six weeks training. The units had an average of four weeks training when they reached Bataan. The American leaders/instructors had the normal Reserve Officer experience comparable to 1st. Lieutenants. The Philippine officers had an insufficient amount of training to equip them for anything above the rank of Corporal. Some were purely political appointees. The Regiment, the Division in fact, had been shot up so badly that it had been reorganized into the 51st. Combat Team. The 51st. Infantry, 52nd. and 53rd. became Battalions. The new Combat Team was comprised of three rifle battalions (the old rifle regiments, 51st., 52nd., and 53rd.) and a provisional battalion that closely resembled a heavy weapons battalion of our pre-war regiments but on a smaller scale. There was also a headquarters battalion, mostly service troops. The headquarters battalion retained the heavy weapons company armed with the 50 caliber water cooled machine guns. One battery of the 51st. Field Artillery was also retained. It had four World War I 75 MM guns, two being British and two being French.

(14)

BATTALION SITUATION

The action, or operation, to be discussed occurred about 1 March 1942 at the North Eastern foot of Mt. Samat in Bataan. The terrain involved in this instance was cleared, flat, hard, dry rice fields that extended for about seven to eight miles East to West and about five miles North of the Main Line of Resistance of the 51st. Infantry. (15)

Attention given to Map No. 2 will give one a better idea of where the 51st. Infantry was on 28 February 1942. Mt. Samat was in the II Corps sector but the Western foot of Mt. Samat was in the I Corps sector.

To put the final touch to the picture one must remember the lack of replacements so that the duties of sick and wounded were taken over by or assigned to others who remained. This was the reason I found myself at one and the same time, Regimental S-4, Heavy Weapons Company Commander and Commanding Officer, Company F.

About one week prior to 1 March 1942, Lieutenant Dobson, 51st. Field Artillery officer, out on reconnaissance, stopped by our Command Post, (51st. Infantry) for liason and a friendly "session" While he was present, the usual afternoon mortar and heavy machine gun harassing, by the Japanese, to the immediate front of the 51st. Infantry broke out. (The Japanese positions are shown on Sketch 1) As we lay on our faces, someone made the joking remark that Lieutenant Dobson and I should get our heads together and see if we couldn't stop this harassing fire. Each of us had tried on our own but had never combined. In fact, we had never thought of it. We were still too inexperienced in many ways to do independent

(14) This reorganization took place in late February 1942. Each battalion retained some heavy weapons (four 30 caliber heavy machine guns and two 3 inch trench mortars) in their own weapons company. (15) The 51st. Infantry will be referred to as such through out this monograph inasmuch as it retained this title during the Philippine Defense Campaign. It is to be remembered, however, that after February this unit was actually a Battalion.

thinking, but relied on books and neither of us had read of this combined effort.

The remark, however, was made at a time when our minds were very receptive to such an idea - any method that promised an end to this harassment would probably have been tried. The result was that as soon as we could, Lieutenant Dobson and I left the Command Post and went to the Observation Post of his Battery (B) which was near by and made joint use of the "BC" scope to study the possible tie-in of three inch trench mortar, 30 caliber machine gun, and 75 MM gun battery fires. Likely positions were chosen by me for the machine guns and mortars. I checked these positions later that day and found some suitable. The mortars were to be in defilade behind a rice paddy dike and the observer was in view of the mortar on mortar target line, behind another dike forward of the mortars. The machine guns had oblique fire and could cover all open ground between the Pilar-Bagac Road and the Talisay River. This was the area the Japanese would have to cross to reach their dugouts. The Artillery could observe the entire area from Battery B Observation Post and had phone connections with the Battery.

The following day Lieutenant Dobson and I made our final joint plan. February 28 at 1200 was decided as date and time. The mortars were to concentrate on the ditch, the machine guns on the intervening ground to the Talisay River and the artillery on the South bank of the Talisay River.

SPECIAL SITUATION

Now we jump the picture back a little to give a better over all understanding of what happened on 1 March 1942. Unknown to the lower units, the II Corps was planning to obtain more favorable ground for its position in defense. This involved a slight ground advance for) various units (among which was the 51st. Infantry. The date for the move-up was to be 1 March 1942. For security reasons the lower units

were to be left "in the dark" until 1800 28 February 1942- time enough to plan and move at 0700 1 March 1942. Patrolling for two days in advance was reduced to the minimum. Only security patrolling between the OPLR and corresponding units continued. Inasmuch as the situation was stalemate this caused no comment other than pleasant thoughts of more rest and sleep.

The day of 28 February found the necessary ammunition accumulated and our units ready. At exactly 1200 my mortars opened fire. The first adjustment, or second round, found them on target and firing for effect. The Japanese immediately returned counter mortar fire but the increased tempo of our mortars with the vast difference in burst effect proved too much and in less than four minutes the Japanese went out of action and broke for cover.

The machine guns opened when the Japanese hit cleared ground and continued firing until the enemy had reached cover on the South bank of the Talisay River. Lieutenant Dobson's guns arrived on target at about the same time the Japanese did. By this time the area of the 51st. Infantry took on the life of a movie-set battle. The whole front began to blaze from both sides and amid all this confusion the Japanese continued to move from Ditch to River, River to Ditch and back again. I do not recall how many trips they made or how long it lasted - I would judge about ten minutes. The end of this time found my mortars out of ammunition but also out of target material. That evening there was no harassing fire so we were well pleased; I might even say fat, dumb and happy in view of what followed.

That evening about 1800 we were informed that we were to move up to the Talisay and occupy the North bank as an OPLR.) The jump-off was to be 0700 on 1 March 1942. I was to lead F Company, the right flank of the 51st. Infantry Combat Team, on the move-up.

THE ATTACK

Everything went "according to plan." We jumped-off and found no resistance at all. The strong point to our front had pulled out under cover of darkness and had broken contact completely. We just walked up and occupied our new position, about 900 yards in advance of our old OPLR South of Pilar-Bagac Road.

As soon as we reached our objective I had the Lieutenant's place their men in good positions and left the senior Philippine officer in charge with instructions to carry on digging in. I told him I was going back to report in and check on any further instructions.

When I reached the Pilar-Bagac Road the first senior officer in line of command I saw was Brigadier General Clifford Blumel, sector commander. I walked up to him, saluted and reported, "Captain Martin, Company F, right flank 51st. Infantry, reporting Sir. My company is now on the North bank of the Talisay. Any further instructions?"

General Blumel looked at me for a minute, blinked and said, "Yes. Push on to the Abo Abo River."

I told him I had no map and asked where the Abo Abo was - how would I know when I reached it?

"Oh," he answered, "You'll know it Martin. It is about six or eight kilometers to your front; it isn't as wide as Manila Bay but you can't step over it either."

Well, I didn't see any point in further questions and when he asked when I could continue, I replied, "In about 15 minutes," and asked if the units on my right and left were also moving up. He said, "Yes." I saluted and returned to my company.

Thus began the deepest penetration of No Man's Land by a unit in the II Corps. We jumped-off in the good old approved solution manner of scouts out, flank patrols out and main body in squad column echeloned - all 110.

We continued at about one and one half miles per hour across country for four hours. My flanks remained dangling in the breeze (11)

By this time, pictures of Custer's Last Stand were going through my mind and it began to occur to me that something had gone wrong. My orders were clear yet there I was, all alone with my company and the Imperial Japanese Army, somewhere! Where? Where were our friendly troops? Why hadn't they come on with us?

This, it seemed to me, deserved serious thought. I ordered a halt and had the men lie down in place - facing out. I called my officers in for a conference. No, no troops friendly or otherwise had been seen. Signs were plentiful of a force having passed in haste shortly before us; i.e., canteens with water still cool, the odd piece of equipment which may have fallen from a cart, etc., but no troops.

It was about at this stage that my runner noticed a lone soldier in our rear running as fast as he could towards us. When he arrived he was so out of breath that all he could do was hand me the field message he was carrying. It was from Major Cory, my roommate and also my Commanding Officer. It read, "Come on back, Junior," signed, Cory. (16)

I started my company back toward the Talisay at once. We got back and went into the exact positions we had left so hurriedly that morning. What remained of the day was spent digging in.

This isn't a story of brilliant action but it is full of lessons.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. First of all, why had the enemy conducted himself in such a manner? I believe now, in view of what occurred, that he was at that time, fighting a "containing" action - one designed to hold us in Bataan until he could reinforce and continue the attack. Our conduct on the 28th. of February probably had all the appearance of the beginning of

(16) Literal Quotation

a large scale effort to break out of Bataan and strike for the Hills to begin guerilla warfare. This was not what the enemy wanted. It occurred at the time when his ground troops may not have been able to hold back such an effort unless they possessed excellent ground. He retired to the Abucay Ridge to attain that ground.

2. The combined effort of the various arms on 28 February 1942 was very effective. We found over 600 Japanese dead in one common grave and two other graves of around 40 bodies each. The area was covered with material - we sent three 2½ ton trucks full to G-2 for such information as he might be able to glean.

3. In breaking command channels by reporting to Brigadier General Blumel, even though he had command of the Sector, I laid myself open to serious consequences inasmuch as a clear understanding of what unit I commanded depended entirely on the ability of General Blumel to hear me correctly above the din of battle. Study of Map No. 2 will show that the Abo Abo River was to the front of the 41st. Infantry. I am convinced now that General Blumel understood me to say 41st. Infantry because he gave me the mission of advancing to the Abo Abo River. That river ran in front of the 41st. but ran into the Talisay River long before the Talisay passed in front of my unit. In other words, by breaking command channels, I was given a mission which amounted to a wild goose chase.

4. I had no map and no access to one at the time so of course did not question the order - that also impressed on me the importance of a map or in lieu of one, an accurate knowledge of the terrain to the flanks as well as to the front.

5. Where was the enemy? I did not know and did not find out. Contact should have been maintained. I should have sent a scouting party on at the time I turned around to go back to the Talisay River position. I lost valuable time and information for myself as well as for my Regiment. If

contact is lost it should be regained as soon as possible.

6. The field message quoted may not be one that is taught in school but I think that under the circumstances it was superior. It was brief, to the point and even gave a clear intimation that a childish mistake had been made on my part. i.e., "Junior."

7. Last of all, but in my opinion by far the most important, was the fact that my own training level as a Captain left much to be desired. My lack of knowledge and experience was no fault of General Blumel, nor was it mine. The fault lay in the reserve training program and the penny pinching short-sightedness of Congress and the general public, in years passed, in forcing the Army to create thousands of officers JUST LIKE ME. The reserve should have been made to do longer periods of active duty and attend more schools. Training should have been made more realistic and more intense over a more extended period of time.

LESSONS

1. Learn everything possible of the enemy. Nothing is trifling be it ever so little.
2. The value of the combined effort of all arms available is never to be forgotten in any situation where their employ can be profitable.
3. Stick to command channels.
4. Accurate knowledge of the terrain is essential.
5. Maintain contact at all cost, at all times.
6. If contact is lost, regain it at the first opportunity.
7. Field messages should be brief but adequate.
8. Good sound combat training cannot be over-emphasized. The reason for the existence of an army is to fight. Any fighter must train and the more realistic it is, the more often repeated, the better.