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OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 20TH INFANTRY
(6TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT MAFFIN BAY, NEW GUINEA
21-25 JUNE 1944
(Papuan Campaign)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion S-3)

Type of operation described: ATTACK AGAINST A STRONGLY
DEFENDED BEACH POSITION OVERLOOKING MAFFIN BAY

Major William D. McDowell, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE NO 2

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OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 20TH INFANTRY
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The transition from veteran troops to combat veterans occurs in a matter of seconds. When the first shot is fired in anger the troops find out whether the confidence placed in their leaders is justified; only then do the leaders know how effective their training has been.

For the 3d Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment (6th Infantry Division) this transition occurred on 20 June 1944. The officers and men of this battalion had maneuvered together in LOUISIANA, TENNESSEE, and the DESERT CENTER. They had undergone rigorous jungle training in Hawaii and amphibious training at MILNE BAY, NEW GUINEA. They were well trained when they received their first combat mission.

(1)

The 6th Infantry Division departed from MILNE BAY on 7 June administratively loaded. This meant another unopposed landing. The Marine instructor at the amphibious training school had made it very clear that a ship had to be combat loaded before the troops could successfully attack an enemy beach. Speculation ran high. Most men figured HOLLANDIA as the next stop, then more training. (2)

When the ships dropped anchor four days later it was in MAFFIN BAY, NEW GUINEA, a spot you can find on your Atlas only if you happen to know that it encompasses TOEM and SARMI. A few hundred yards off shore was WAKDE ISLAND,

(1) A-2, pp 14-40
(2) A-4

only recently taken from the Japs. (See Map A)

The first men on shore learned that the beachhead was still hot. Only 300 yards inland the Japs still occupied the ground and made nightly foraging parties. The 158th Regimental Combat Team was the only combat unit in the area. To the east, the 158th RCT had been forced to draw back to close its over-extended supply lines. They still held a long stretch of the beachline but little else.
(3)

More important they learned that the 158th RCT had another combat mission in the near future and were going to pull out as soon as the 6th Division relieved them. Resistance had been much heavier than expected; securing the beachhead to make WAKDE ISLAND usable as an airstrip and MAFFIN BAY usable as a supply base would require more troops.
(4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 6th Infantry Division was operating under direct control of Sixth Army. At the time this action took place MAFFIN BAY was the newest and consequently the most advanced NEW GUINEA base. The 6th Division mission was to find the Japs in the beachhead area and destroy them.

The intelligence situation on 12 June when the commanding general of the 6th Division (Maj Gen Franklin C. Sibert) assumed command of the beachhead was not too bad. There were 2500 to 3000 Japs concentrated in the SARMI - TOEM area. They were believed to be remnants of the Japanese 36th Infantry Division who had been driven out of HOLLANDIA. Until they were eliminated, WAKDE ISLAND and MAFFIN BAY could not be used. (5)

(3) A-3, p. 27

(4) A-5, p. 2

(5) Personal knowledge; statement of C/S 6th Infantry Division.

DISPOSITIONS AND PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS

During the period 13-20 June the three regiments of the division were disposed along the beach: the 63d Infantry west of TOEM, the 1st Infantry in the TOEM area, and the 20th Infantry to the east in the area occupied by the 158th RCT. All regiments sent out patrols to locate the enemy positions, but the Japs habitually evaded small patrols.

The first actual concentration of Japs was sighted on 16 June. From concealed positions a 20th Infantry patrol watched 128 Japs move along a native trail south of LONE TREE HILL. Patrolling was intensified in this area but our patrols were unable to contact the enemy in force. Throughout the LONE TREE HILL area, however, patrols found signs of Japanese bivouacs.

On 19 June a combat patrol from L Company made the first positive contact with the enemy. Advancing on LONE TREE HILL from the west they ran into a Jap ambush. The platoon leader and three other men were killed while trying to break contact. (6)

On the same day another patrol surprised a Jap taking a bath and captured him. The prisoner painted an encouraging word picture for the interrogators; morale was low in his regiment; there was not enough to eat and very little ammunition for the machine guns. The Japs were avoiding contact because they didn't have weapons to fight with. There were only about 300 Japs concentrated in the LONE TREE HILL area the prisoner confided, and many of them were ill with malaria. He wouldn't consider going to his unit to ask them to surrender, however, because the commandant "would kill me."

Reconnaissance reports and the PW's statement tied in. Except for the L Company patrol, the Japs had offered little

(6) Personal knowledge

resistance choosing to run whenever possible. The division commander ordered the 20th Infantry to attack LONE TREE HILL and destroy or capture the Japs.

A strong reconnaissance patrol advanced up the northern slope of LONE TREE HILL the following day, 20 June. About half way up the hill the patrol split into two parties and forked out to either flank. Both elements of the patrol ran into Jap rifle fire but the Japs withdrew after exchanging a few rounds. (7)

Since it was late in the afternoon and the troops could not move forward and dig in before dark, the patrol withdrew.

THE TERRAIN

LONE TREE HILL is one of the worst possible misnomers. It is covered with thousands of trees and all types of jungle vegetation. Actually it is a large coral hill mass about 1200 yards long by 1000 yards wide. To the west it slopes to the crest. On the other sides it is faced with steep jagged cliffs rising almost to the top. ROCKY POINT is a small outcropping of the larger hill that juts 100 feet out into the ocean. (See Map B)

The Japs took the utmost advantage of the defensive capabilities of the coral hill. Natural tunnels were improved until they were of cavern dimensions. Caves and short tunnels housed machine guns and 75-mm howitzers. Camouflaged burlap coverings for these positions made it almost impossible to see them from a distance. Rails made it possible to roll a gun into firing position and rapidly withdraw it. The Japs on top of the hill widened shallow crevices for machine gun positions. In some cases cave openings on top of the hill led to cliff-side tunnels 20 feet below. In the final stage of this action a 250-pound demolition

(7) A-1, p. 5

charge was set-off in the main tunnel and smoke poured out of at least 20 openings. (See Exhibit 1) (8)

THE REGIMENTAL PLAN

The regimental commander assembled his commanders and staff in the vicinity of the SNAKEY RIVER ^{PERIMETER} perimeter on the afternoon of 20 June to announce his plan. In general, the plan was for the 1st and 3d Battalions to attack simultaneously -- the 1st Battalion to capture the southern knoll and the 3d Battalion the northern knoll. The 2d Battalion, in reserve, was to be prepared to reinforce either assault battalion.

The mission assigned to the Regimental Antitank Company and Cannon Company were not those recommended in the field manuals, but normal missions are for normal terrain. Antitank Company was to fire into the cave openings on ROCKY POINT and the visible portion of LONE TREE HILL. Cannon Company, from positions in rear of SNAKEY RIVER, was to reinforce artillery fires. Cannon Company FO's were furnished each battalion.

The 51st Field Artillery had already registered on the attack area but because of poor visibility in the jungle, FO's were to check concentrations at intervals. The 4.2-inch mortar company in support of the regiment did not have regularly assigned forward observers but they were to furnish qualified noncommissioned officers to each battalion.

Company B, 6th Engineer Battalion was to construct a bulldozer road parallel to the beach as soon as the 3d Battalion took their objective (9)

(8) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 4
(9) Personal knowledge



AFTER-ACTION PHOTOGRAPHS

This hole led to a cave 20 feet below. A ladder was used to move a machine gun to the top. Shells and flame throwers have destroyed the jungle vegetation that concealed the position for three days.

A Jap aid station and field kitchen were operating in this cavern. Only flame throwers drove them out.



A track-mounted 75-mm howitzer was well concealed in this cave. It had only 200 yards field of fire at land targets but an unlimited field of fire toward the sea.

A Jap machine gun was set up along this fire lane. Until the vegetation was burned away it was almost impossible to find the cave in the mound to the left.



NARRATION

THE FIRST ATTACK: 21 JUNE

On 21 June at 0800 the 3d Battalion attacked LONE TREE HILL. With companies in column and L Company leading, the battalion crossed the SNAKEY RIVER and followed an azimuth toward the objective. Visibility in the jungle was less than 20 yards. The battalion was strung out in single file with flank guards maintaining visual contact. (See Map C)

After advancing about 800 yards L Company reported that they had seen a few Japs to the front. While the L Company commander was making this report a fire fight broke out. From the front and the left flank the Japs fired on the extended column. Every one hit the ground just as they had been trained to do. Unfortunately, however, it was impossible to see the enemy from the prone position. (10)

The battalion commander ordered K Company, the second unit in column, to swing wide to the left and outflank the Jap machine guns on the left, but both K and I Companies were also under fire. The battalion commander ordered all three company commanders to get troops out of their flanks to knock out the Jap machine guns. Small groups of men from the main column began to work toward the sound of the Jap guns, but now the wily Japs began to pepper the area with grenades and knee mortars.

As the security units worked close to the Japs on the flank, the Japs withdrew. In about an hour the security units flushed out the area on the left flank.

In the meantime the rifle companies in the column had almost instinctively formed small perimeters with only a

(10) Personal knowledge

few feet between men. The battalion now had an adequate defensive formation but they were hardly prepared to continue the attack.

The battalion commander reorganized the column, this time with stronger forces on the flanks. In addition each company dispatched its own flank guards. L Company began to move but before they advanced a hundred yards the head of the column ran into an almost vertical 20-foot cliff.

By alternately climbing, boosting, and pulling, the leading platoon scaled the cliff to find a fairly open plateau to their front. While the leading platoon was scaling the cliff the L Company commander and the battalion commander reconnoitered to find a way to by-pass the obstacle. To the left they ran into Jap machine gun fire; to the right they found a deep narrow ravine with vertical 50-foot sides. Up and over the cliff seemed to be the only way to the crest of LONE TREE HILL. (See Map C) (11)

The remainder of L Company and the battalion command group scaled the cliff while being protected by the leading L Company platoon. Then the Japs resumed their sport. This time it was grenades and knee mortars. A concentration of heavy mortars landed about 100 yards ahead of the troops on the plateau but the Japs made no effort to shift the fire. The troops on top of the plateau took the brunt of the attack but the companies below the cliff were also under fire.

By this time it was obvious that we had foolishly fought our way into a trap. Under fire from both flanks and facing an area well covered by a mortar barrage, discretion seemed the better part of valor. The battalion commander told the artillery liaison officer to smoke the area to the front and

(11) Personal knowledge

the Cannon Company forward observer to smoke the left flank. Under cover of these fires the battalion withdrew to the SNAKEY RIVER perimeter. (12)

The 1st Battalion attack also had been stopped early in the afternoon. One company was isolated on the slope of the hill and pinned down as dusk fell. The 2d Battalion had not been committed since neither assault battalion had been successful. (13)

As soon as the 3d Battalion formed a defensive perimeter on the SNAKEY RIVER the battalion commander called the commanders and staff of his foxhole to issue an attack order for the next day. His only reference to the day's succession of errors was couched in a terse opening statement: "We learned a hell of a lot more today than the Japs did. Tomorrow it's going to be different!" (14)

His plan of attack was simple: K Company was to advance boldly down the beach and hit LONE TREE HILL from the ocean side; L Company was to attack through the jungle, get on the crestline and join K Company on the northern knob of the hill. I Company, in reserve, was to follow whichever company got on the objective first. Both K and L Company were to have a platoon of heavy machine guns. The 81-mm mortars were to be in general support.

Before giving his plan for the use of supporting fires the battalion commander interjected a brief comment on the days attack. "Today," he said, "We waited until we were in trouble to call for fire support. Tomorrow we'll use all the artillery and mortars available to help knock those Japs off the objective. In addition we're getting an air strike."

(12) Personal knowledge

(13) A-1, P. 5

(14) Personal knowledge

The supporting fire plan called for an air strike on the objective at 0800. As soon as the air strike was completed, two battalions of artillery were to fire a 20 minute preparation. Artillery fires were to shift to the rear slope of LONE TREE HILL when K and L Companies were in position to assault. The 4.2-inch mortar platoon was to fire on call. Cannon Company was to reinforce the artillery fires on call; two SPM's were to engage any enemy guns located in the coral caves on top of the HILL or ROCKY POINT. (15)

THE SECOND ATTACK: 22 JUNE

The leading platoon of K Company moved from its covered position to the beach road at 0830. After the previous days experience the men advanced warily, momentarily expecting to hear the now familiar sound of the Jap 25-caliber rifles. Two platoons trailed out in column along the beach and still the concealed enemy failed to fire. It began to look like a repetition of the previous days attack. The second platoon of K Company, accompanied by the company command group, laid wire as it advanced. The scouts working only 15 yards inland in the dense jungle frequently dropped behind the beach column and had to be replaced. (16) (See Map D)

All of K Company cleared the jungle perimeter and the battalion command group fell into position in the drawn out column. The battalion commander was talking to the K Company commander over his SCR-300 radio when it happened. A jeep towing a 57-mm antitank gun along the concealed portion of the beach road advanced too far. A Jap 75-mm gun from a cave position fired down the beach. The driver swerved into the jungle vegetation to hide from the Jap gun and the front

(15) Personal knowledge

(16) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James Emanuel.

fender of the jeep knocked the battalion commander sprawling.

Slightly dazed and with his leg temporarily paralyzed, the battalion commander directed his command group to fall out of the column until he could walk. (17)

Then the battalion SCR-300 radio failed to contact K Company. (It was later determined that the radios had not been properly dewaterproofed and some of them had abnormally short ranges.) Until another SCR-300 was brought forward, communication was established by tapping the K Company assault wire. At 0915 the K Company commander reported that his leading ^{platoon} ~~position~~ was crouched under a 5-foot cliff at the base of LONE TREE HILL and that the artillery was landing directly on his objective. The rounds were not more than 100 yards from his front but the troops were defiladed by the cliff. (18)

The battalion commander contacted L Company who had made a parallel advance about 400 yards inland and was told that L Company could not advance further until the artillery was shifted to the rear of the objective. (19)

The artillery liaison officer moved the artillery fire about 200 yards west of LONE TREE HILL, and the battalion commander ordered the K and L Company commanders to get on the objective as soon as possible. (20)

Still in column formation, K Company scaled the small cliff that had been protecting them and infiltrated across a narrow open plateau to a second protecting cliff. The company commander was with his lead scouts at this point and on the ^dhasty reconnaissance found a narrow opening in the coral cliff. The distance from the opening to the steep bank that

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- (17) Personal knowledge
(18) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James Emanuel.
(19) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James P. Jolivette.
(20) Personal knowledge

led to the top of LONE TREE HILL was only 60 yards, but it was a level open channel entirely clear of vegetation. Midway along the channel was a single large boulder that appeared to offer cover. (21)

The M Company commander had come up to the head of the column by this time and was surveying the open channel with the K Company commander. Knowing that delay was dangerous the K Company commander ordered his leading platoon to dash across the open ground and get on the objective. At the same time the M Company commander adjusted the 81-mm mortar platoon on the tree tops to the east of the open lane. (22)

The leading squad of K Company and the company command group crossed the lane and scrambled half-way up the steep slope on the far side before a Jap machine gun opened fire. Three men of the second squad fell to the first long burst. Two others dove for the cover of the large boulder in the lane. From the opposite flank a Jap sniper methodically picked them off. (23)

The M Company commander immediately sensed that this was another trap. He called for more mortar fire on the area to the left of the trail but the Jap machine gun continued to fire. He then ordered the mortars to shift 50-yards and fire WP. As soon as the phosphorous rounds began to burst and pillar into smoke the Jap guns stopped firing. During the lull, the M Company commander got the K Company column in motion again. For the next hour the pattern continued. Two rounds of smoke and a squad dashed across, another two rounds and another squad. (24)

(21) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James Emanuel.

(22) Personal knowledge; statement of Lt Col (then Capt) Frank Linnell.

(23) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James Emanuel.

(24) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Frank Linnell.

The men quickly learned that the large boulder that looked like sanctuary in the middle of the 60-yard lane was actually a death trap. A single Jap sniper had his rifle accurately trained on the boulder. To pause long enough to take a breath was too long.

While the M Company commander was engineering the dash across the open lane the K Company commander on top of the hill was organizing a hasty jungle perimeter as fast as troops arrived on the objective. During this phase the fight reads like a comic opera. Two Japs, evidently surprised at breakfast, rushed out of a cave carrying steaming bowls of rice; another one emerged from a tunnel carrying a fully packed suitcase and dashed 15 yards to another cave entrance. He made it but the suitcase didn't. A few minutes later his worldly goods were divided among the troops: two battle flags, breeches, shirts, a silk robe, and two dozen lead medallions that looked like Sunday School pins. (25)

L Company in the meanwhile was running into a different kind of resistance. Advancing up the sloping hillside in a column of platoons, the column was continually subject to small arms fire and grenades. No one could see the enemy but his fire was an effective morale deterrent. From well camouflaged foxholes, cave openings, and tree roots, the concealed Japs played a deadly and harassing game of tag. Fortunately, the dense foliage greatly reduced the effect of the .25 caliber bullets and fragmentation grenades but this was small solace to the man who happened to get a fragment in the leg. (See Map D)

Hoping to flush out the defenders, the L Company commander brought his second platoon abreast of the first.

(25) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James Emanuel.

This formation only led to more difficulties as the platoons now had to refrain from firing toward each other. While the columns were slowly advancing through the Jap snipers, the leading elements of the 2d Battalion closed on the tail of L Company.

To speed up the advance the L Company commander took a position at the head of his right flank platoon and the weapons platoon leader moved to the head of the left platoon. With limited visual contact and with SCR-536 radio contact only at sporadic intervals, they aggressively led the company forward. As soon as they came to the crestline they swung to the right toward the K Company position.

When they attempted to advance north along the crestline to join K Company, enemy resistance stiffened. A system of mutually supporting pillboxes and sniper posts pinned down the leading elements. The company commander decided to outflank the position organized astride the crestline and led his troops down the hill to a narrow plateau. By maneuvering aggressively they overcame the sporadic resistance from their left flank and approached the K Company perimeter from the west. (26)

A catastrophe was narrowly averted when L Company approached the now-established K Company perimeter. In the dense jungle foliage a K Company machine gunner thought the advancing troops were the ever-expected Jap Banzai attack. He opened fire but the K Company commander, having been warned that L Company was closing in, rushed to the position and stopped the gunner.

It was 1500 hours when the tail of L Company closed into ^{the} K Company perimeter with a number of walking wounded

(26) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James P. Jolivette.

trailing the column. Two platoons of F Company and a heavy machine gun platoon from H Company closely followed L Company and the men on the perimeter were warned that the remainder of the 2d Battalion was close behind.

While L Company was maneuvering to link up with K Company, I Company rapidly moved along the same route used by K Company. They met no resistance until they reached the second cliff at the base of the hill. The Jap machine gun opened fire as the men dashed across the 60-yard lane, *but* mortars were again able to neutralize the unseen weapon.

The M Company commander assumed command of all the troops on the perimeter since the battalion commander was still unable to walk. As I and L Companies moved onto the hill he extended to the west. As was customary in jungle operations, a complete perimeter was established around the hill top. Unfortunately however, it was impossible to dig in. Riflemen and machine guns were placed in shallow crevices in the rough coral formation and instructed to bulwark their positions with anything they could find. Most foxholes and emplacements were nothing more than a crack in the coral or an opening between the roots of a giant tree. The entire perimeter, now containing four rifle companies (less one platoon) and three machine gun platoons, covered an area about 30 yards wide and 90 yards long. Men and weapons were emplaced about five feet apart. (27)

While the perimeter was being organized the Japs sniped at the defenders. Occasionally a mortar round landed in the area. Our own artillery observers were busy registering fires all around the position. (28)

(27) Personal knowledge

(28) Personal knowledge

Meanwhile the 2d Battalion (less parts of F and H Company) was heavily engaged on the crestline but they were unable to push through the enemy position. At 1600 they organized a perimeter about 400 yards south of the 3d Battalion. (See Map D) (29)

During the day the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry made several unsuccessful attempts to advance along the coral road that ran around the southern slope of the hill. As dusk approached they were forced to reoccupy the same perimeter that they had set up the previous day. (30)

At dusk (about 1700) the meaning of the sporadic mortar and artillery fire on the 3d Battalion perimeter became very clear to the defenders. Shells from Japanese 90-mm mortars, 75-mm guns and machine guns covered the entire area like a blanket. Obviously the previous fire had merely been registrations; now the Japs were firing for effect.

The M Company commander called for mortar fire around the perimeter. Our artillery fired throughout the depth of the known Japanese position but the Japanese mortar shells continued to land on our position.

It was an anticlimax when the first Japanese Banzai developed along the ridge line to the north. For the first time many riflemen and gunners saw a Jap although many of their comrades had already earned their Purple Heart -- some the hard way. (See Map D) (31)

As the Japanese aggressively advanced on the shell-shocked troops laying in their shallow emplacements, the accumulated dividends of several years of training paid off in a lump sum. Without hesitation our men opened fire.

(29) A-3, Sec. II p. 2
(30) A-3, Sec. II p. 2
(31) Personal knowledge

The L Company weapons platoon leader crawled to the edge of the perimeter to adjust his 60's. Since he couldn't see from a kneeling position he stood erect by a large tree and telephoned commands to his mortars. The 81-mortar platoon leader took a post on the opposite side of the same tree and adjusted his mortars to within 50-yards of the perimeter. Machine gunners at first fired final protective lines, but as one gunner later explained it, "I couldn't see any sense firing where I couldn't see them, so I just squirted it at the bunch behind that big log laying on the ground." (Three days later the S-2 counted 30 bodies piled up like cordwood behind the fallen tree.) (32)

The Japanese attack was not stopped -- it just disintegrated. As long as a Jap was alive he continued to advance. When he was cut down the man behind him became the spearhead.

The attack only lasted 20 minutes. Three Japs managed to penetrate the perimeter. Two were killed by bayonets and one was strangled after he slashed a machine gun sergeant with his saber. (33)

But there was little glory in victory. The artillery and mortar preparation had taken a heavy toll of casualties because of the shallow emplacements. Aid men worked heroically to take care of the many wounded around the narrow perimeter but they had only a few bottles of plasma. By this time it was pitch dark and the only way to find the more seriously wounded was to listen for their sobbing.

Although the Japs had been repulsed their mortar rounds still dropped on the position. From a few yards to the north the Japs fired machine guns and lobbed grenades to harass the defending troops. Several men were wounded

(32) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain James Emanuel.
(33) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Frank Linnell.

while trying to help a casualty back to a shallow depression on the rear side of the perimeter. (34)

There was another serious consequence to the Jap attack. In repelling the mass advance, the machine gunners and 60-mm mortars had used almost all of their ammunition. Riflemen passed clips of ammunition to the nearest machine gun and crews hand-loaded the belts, but the gunners reported that they needed still more. The mortar sections were told not to fire except in case of attack.

The M Company commander reported the situation to the battalion commander and asked that every effort be made to evacuate the wounded and bring up more ammunition. At this time, however, the entire regiment was committed. To make matters worse, it was pitch dark and all personnel were ingrained with the "stay in your hole after dark" doctrine. (35)

Volunteers in the SNAKEY RIVER perimeter formed an evacuation party but they were stopped by the Japs along the beach. All efforts to assist the 3d Battalion met with failure. (36)

Throughout the night the men in the 3d Battalion perimeter heard the Japs talking a short distance away. The enemy harassing fire continued through the night. Several bayonet clashes developed as groups of two or three Japs attempted to sneak through the perimeter. From a few yards away the Japs peppered the area with fragmentation grenades, but the machine gunners carefully hoarded their ammunition.

Casualties continued to mount during the night. Flesh wounds received scant attention. Men simply stopped the

(34) Personal knowledge

(35) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Frank Linnell.

(36) Personal knowledge; statement of Lt Col C. J. Van Sickle

bleeding and wrapped them with gauze. Head and stomach wounds received the only medical treatment we could give -- a shot of morphine. Many times that night the men on the perimeter blessed the medical officer who had had the foresight to issue five morphine ampules to every officer. (37)

From the perimeter on SNAKEY RIVER the battalion commander coordinated mortar and artillery support throughout the night. Plans were made for elements of 3d Battalion Headquarters Company, Regimental Antitank Company, and Service Company to resupply the beleaguered battalion at daylight. (38)

The Japs were active in all areas during the night. A banzai attack by 20 Japs was repulsed by the SNAKEY RIVER perimeter; the 1st Battalion fought off several small attacks; the 2d Battalion was attacked by small groups. Jap artillery and mortars fired on all occupied areas but casualties were relatively light except in the 3d Battalion perimeter. (39)

Just before daylight the second Jap Banzai attack developed. This time it appeared to be better organized -- still aggressive but not quite so brash. Following their mortar preparation, they crept to within a few yards of our perimeter before assaulting.

When it was all over about 20 minutes later it was another hollow victory. There were many dead Japs outside the perimeter and some inside the perimeter. Only one radio was still in operation as the others had been damaged by fragments or small arms. The 60-mm mortars had fired all of their ammunition; the machine gunners had only empty belts. There were no more fragmentation grenades. There were many casualties but no medical equipment -- not even morphine. (40)

(37) Personal knowledge

(38) Personal knowledge; statement of Lt Col C. J. Van Sickle

(39) A-1, p. 8

(40) Personal knowledge

THE DEFENSE: 23 JUNE

At daylight all available men from the 3d Battalion Headquarters Company, Regimental Antitank Company, and Service Company were organized into a supply and evacuation party. Following the route initially opened by K Company they fought their way to the 3d Battalion perimeter with much needed ammunition. Some of the wounded were evacuated by the same route. After the supply party completed one trip, however, the Japs attacked the supply troops from the west flank. The troops on top of the hill and the supply troops attempted to reopen the supply line, but without success. (41)

The division commander attached L Company, 1st Infantry to the 20th Infantry and they were committed to reestablish the supply line. After an hour of fighting on the plateau between the beach cliff and the hill top they flushed out the Japs. More ammunition was carried up and more casualties evacuated. About 1400, however, the Japs again severed the supply line and L Company, 1st Infantry joined the 3d Battalion on the LONE TREE HILL perimeter. (42) (See Map E)

The 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry joined the 3d Battalion on top of LONE TREE HILL about an hour later. As they came up they cleared the area to the west of the hill gaining undisputed possession of the supply line. They formed a perimeter west of the 3d Battalion since the Japs along the ridge line to the north were still contesting every foot of ground. (See Map E)

With the supply line fully opened reserve supplies were carried up to the position and all casualties evacuated to the beach.

(41) Personal knowledge; statement of Lt James Young, Jr.

(42) A-1, p. 8

As darkness came the men on the two-battalion perimeter were waiting for the Jap attack. They weren't disappointed. First came the Jap mortar and artillery preparation; then the Japs launched their attack from the eastern slope of the hill. But we were better prepared for it this time. During the day the troops bulwarked their shallow holes with coral rocks, tree limbs, and brush. Instead of catching our troops napping as they hoped it would, the attack from a new direction worked to our advantage. G Company, 20th Infantry and L Company, 1st Infantry had not been depleted by casualties and they had plenty of ammunition. The Jap attack was stopped short. Not a man broke through the tight perimeter. (See Map E)

During the night the Japs continued to lob grenades into the position but there were no more mass attacks. There were several bayonet clashes on the perimeter as Jap patrols attempted to break through.

During the night the regimental commander radioed a brief message: "Hold your position at all costs. There will be two lights in the Old North Church tomorrow." It didn't take long to decipher this cryptic message. Obviously he was referring to Paul Revere's ride. Two lights in the church tower meant an attack from the sea. (43)

THE DEFENSE: 24 JUNE

At 0800 on 24 June the 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry hit the beach east of ROCKY POINT in LVT'S (Landing Vehicle, Tracked). Division artillery rained shells on the enemy held area and the 6th Reconnaissance Troop, standing offshore in LVT Al's (Armored Landing Vehicles), fired into the eastern base of the coral hill. (See Map F)

(43) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Frank Linnell.

The men on the perimeter had a grandstand seat for the amphibious landing, but they were unable to give much fire support. From cave positions and tunnels in the vertical side of the coral hill, the hidden Japs stopped the landing before the troops advanced 50 yards.

The amphibious assault was very precarious for the next 24 hours, but it contributed immeasurably to the fall of the Jap position. During the day, patrols from the 20th Infantry Battalions on the perimeter forced their way along the crest-line against greatly reduced resistance. Caves and tunnels occupied by the Japs a few hours before were closed with demolitions. Assault troops with flame throwers broke into the main tunnel of the Jap underground labyrinth and sealed off the secondary tunnels. Many Japs committed honorable Hari Kari rather than surrender. The two battalion perimeter was extended to the north and east as the Japs were eliminated. L Company, 1st Infantry attempted to relieve the pressure on the remainder of the 3d Battalion but were themselves caught in a murderous cross fire between two Jap cave positions. (See Map F)

As darkness came the situation on LONE TREE HILL was much more secure than it had been for the past three days. The amphibious beachhead, however, was still less than 75 yards deep. (44)

THE FINALE: 25 JUNE

The finale of this operation was typical of the Japs. Driven from their cave shelters, pounded relentlessly with four artillery battalions and numerous mortars, and out-flanked by the amphibious forces to the west, they made a last desperate gesture. Worked into a Saki frenzy and shouting

(44) A-3, Sec. II p. 3

at the top of their voices, the remnants of the Jap force attacked just before daybreak. Accurately registered mortars and artillery stopped many of the Japs. Those that advanced to within grenade throwing range of the perimeter were systematically cut down. None broke through. (See Map G)

With the coming of daylight on 25 June resistance was broken on LONE TREE HILL. For the first time the stench of corpses exposed to the tropical sun overpowered the acrid smell of gun powder.

That uncolorful phase of combat aptly described as mopping up began. Patrols roamed through the shell torn jungle. More cave openings were sealed. The souvenir hunters came streaming up the steep incline that had been called "the gauntlet." (45)

During this brief engagement more than one-third of the men on the hill were casualties. The 3d Battalion earned 282 Purple Hearts; 58 men were killed. Total division casualties for this action and the mopping up phase which continued for another 8 days were over 800. But the Japs did not get off lightly; 942 dead were counted around the LONE TREE HILL perimeter. Many others were sealed in caves or buried. For their part in this action the 3d Battalion, 20th Infantry received the Distinguished Unit Citation. (46)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

INTELLIGENCE

Information obtained from prisoners of war is only of limited value unless corroborated by other intelligence sources. In this operation the information obtained from

(45) Personal knowledge

(46) A-2, A-3

the lone Japanese prisoner was given undue credibility. Contrary to his testimony, the Jap defenders had very high morale, plenty of food and ammunition, and no intention of giving up without a fight. After the attack on 22 June the division commander quickly recognized that the Japanese resistance was much more determined than expected and planned the amphibious landing to outflank the resistance. Had he not taken immediate steps to assist the initial attack force the objective might have been lost.

AGGRESSIVENESS

The patrol on 19 June advanced about two-thirds of the way up LONE TREE HILL against only slight resistance. Had they been more aggressive they might have advanced to the crestline and held it until the remainder of the 3d Battalion could join them. True, this would have necessitated a hastily organized movement at a late hour but it might have saved casualties in the long run. Only the fact that the final K Company attack was made from an unexpected direction allowed the battalion to get on the objective without heavy casualties.

MANEUVER

The fact that the 2d Battalion was not able to link up with the 3d Battalion for almost 72-hours indicates that the maneuver was too complicated. Maps of jungle areas are not generally accurate and hill masses, streams, trails, and other key terrain features frequently are not accurately plotted. An enveloping movement is practicable only when the two forces can maintain communication and can accurately locate themselves on the ground.

SURPRISE

The Japanese defenders on LONE TREE HILL were surprised. The last minute decision to attack the Jap position from the beach paid tremendous dividends. Had K Company been confronted by an alert defending force rather than an enemy outpost, they could not have spanned the open fire lane and scrambled up the steep embankment in single file. Had the K Company commander failed to organize rapidly or the M Company commander failed to use his supporting fires, this attack would have failed. More important, the initial advantage of surprise would have been forever lost.

ACTION UNDER FIRE

Most of the 3d Battalions casualties resulted from mortar and artillery fire. Tree bursts made the fire particularly deadly. Had overhead cover or even simple slit trenches been available many casualties would have been prevented. In this case there was no alternative. The men could not dig through the coral and no material was available for overhead cover. To move forward was impossible; to move in any other direction was to give up the objective.

SUPPORTING FIRES

In this operation, as in many other small unit actions, the intelligent use of supporting fires spelled the difference between success and failure. To a large degree this can be traced back to the regimental commander. While the regiment was training at MILNE BAY, Colonel W. M. Ives required every officer to learn to adjust mortar and artillery fire. Consequently when forward observers were not available, any officer who could establish communication with a

supporting unit could adjust fire. Artillery and mortars were brought to within 100 yards of our own front lines; when troops had good cover, the supporting fires were brought within 50 yards. White phosphorous was used both as an incendiary and casualty agent. The Japs feared it more than high explosive ammunition.

DECEPTION

There is one aspect of fire support that must be entered on the debit side of the ledger. On several occasions the wily Japs waited until our mortar rounds were in the air and then dropped a few of their own rounds on our troops. Our men thought they were being hit by their own mortars. All firing ceased for a few minutes while observers and fire direction personnel checked and double checked. To restore the confidence of the front-line soldiers each commander had to personally explain the Jap ruse to his men.

ENEMY ATTACKS

The Banzai attack is worthy of consideration only from a negative point of view. Ill-conceived and ill-executed, they were never successful. In fact after the first reaction to the shock of being attacked in mass, our troops eagerly awaited the Jap Banzai. The rash attackers habitually took 100 per cent casualties while our own were negligible. But we constructed two false premises based on the fool-hardy night Banzai: (1) Night attacks are not feasible in close terrain (2) Since the enemy attacks at night, we must remain motionless in our foxholes and shoot anything that moves above the ground. It took us many days of combat to recognize the now-obvious flaws in these two propositions.

COURAGE

There are two kinds of courage on the battlefield --

physical courage and moral courage. One is as important as the other. Far too many platoon leaders and company commanders became casualties while doing the work of a scout. It is necessary that all leaders display physical courage at times to bolster the morale of their unit. A platoon leader must occasionally lead his scouts; a company commander advance with his front lines. But the leader's position is where he can best influence the action of his entire team -- not just a few individuals. In this action platoon leaders and company commanders felt morally obligated to share the most dangerous assignments with their men. Company and battalion command posts were less than 30 yards from the front lines. Lieutenants and captains led 12-man patrols. Officers sometimes manned bazookas and machine guns.

One comment that repeatedly appears in after action reports aptly describes the relationship between these two types of courage: many battalion commanders remark that it would have been easier for them to lead a patrol on a very dangerous mission, knowing that some of the men would not return, than to order the patrol to go out.

LESSONS

1. Information gained from prisoners of war must be carefully evaluated.

2. When a patrol is able to make substantial gains or occupy key terrain, it should hold the key feature until it can be reinforced.

3. In jungle operations the plan of maneuver must be simple. Under adverse conditions of visibility and communication a simple plan is difficult; a difficult plan

is impossible.

4. Surprise is obtained by resort to the bold and audacious. Attacking from an unexpected direction or in unexpected strength may catch the defender off balance.

5. The value of foxholes, slit trenches, and overhead cover for protection from mortar and artillery fire cannot be over emphasized. But there are times when the assault troops will simply have to lay flat and take it.

6. All combat leaders should know how to adjust the fire of supporting weapons.

7. Leaders and men must be alert to recognize trickery.

8. Combat lessons based on enemy tactics must be closely scrutinized. It is easy to construct a faulty premise based on the success or failure of tactics which vary from our own.

9. Leaders must recognize that both physical and moral courage are equally essential.