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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 129TH INFANTRY REGIMENT
(37TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE BATTLE FOR
CLARK FIELD AND FORT STOTSENBERG, LUZON, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS
27 JANUARY - 3 FEBRUARY 1945 (LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

Lt. Col. Morris J. Naudts, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. 1

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 129th Infantry, 37th Infantry Division, in the Battle for Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg, Luzon, Philippine Islands, 27 January through 3 February 1945, during the Luzon Campaign. To orient the reader, it will be necessary to go back to the fall of Corregidor, Philippine Islands on 6 May 1942. At that time there began a period of ground, naval, and air warfare in the Pacific, which during a period of three years progressed from the defensive to the offensive. This three year period was divided into four tactical phases. (1)

The first, (7 December 1941 to 8 March 1942) primarily covered many desperate naval engagements and included Tulagi Island, located adjacent to Guadalcanal Island. This was followed by a phase which began with the Battle of Midway (3-6 June 1942), which in its final analysis, gave our forces the opportunity to seize the initiative from the Japanese, by the defeat of their invasion forces. The third phase (7 August 1942 to 6 August 1943) was highly important since it was at this time that our forces began a period of offensive-defensive warfare, which was highlighted by landings on Guadalcanal, and in the New Georgia Islands. This started the return of the American forces down the long road to the Philippines. Finally, in November 1943, there were landings on Bougainville, in the Solomon Islands and Tarawa and the Makin Islands were captured. We had attained the offensive. It was now indicated that from here on we could attack the enemy when and where we elected to do so. (2)

In order to progress beyond the fourth phase a considerable degree of planning was evolved from a series of conferences

held by the joint Chiefs of Staff. These conferences began in May 1943 with the Trident Conference held at Washington D. C. The initial results of this conference were the development of Global Strategy, and the adding of impetus to the offensive against Japan. Specific routes of attack to continue the offensive were mapped out during another conference, the Quadrant Conference, held at Quebec, Canada, August 1943. Another result of this conference was a directive that General MacArthur's forces continue the offensive along the New Guinea Coast, with the ultimate objective of assaulting the Philippine Islands in the Fall of 1944. In order to carry on this offensive, additional Army Troops were allocated to the Pacific Area. (3)

The final goal of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs agreed on at the Octagon Conference at Quebec, Canada, August 1944, was to make flanking maneuvers, from the south and east, on the Philippines. These long range plans laid at this time, stepped up the offensive in the Pacific. These conclusions were the direct results of Admiral Halsey's successful Naval strikes against the central Philippine Islands on 12 September 1944, and his recommendations that our forces attack Leyte, Philippine Islands as soon as possible. General MacArthur was requested to present his views on this recommendation. "Within two days a reply was received stating that he was prepared to make a shift in plans which would land troops on Leyte Island, 20 October 1944, instead of 20 December 1944. The accomplishment of this change in plans was one of the outstanding administrative achievements during the Pacific war." (4)

(3) A-6, p. 219-221; (4) A-6, p. 220-229

GENERAL SITUATION AND PREINVASION PLANNING

According to the decisions of the Octagon conference, elements of the Sixth United States Army, made a successful amphibious assault landing on Leyte, Philippine Islands, 20 October 1944. (5)

It was during Sixth Army's preparation for movement to Leyte, on 12 October 1944, that Operations Instructions Number 73, were received. These instructions directed that the Sixth Army make the initial amphibious assault landing at Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippine Islands. (6)

The primary results of the invasion of Luzon, Philippine Islands were to have been:

1. To penetrate and pierce the enemy's "center of conquests", in the Pacific Area, so as to divide him in half; his home islands to the north, his captured possessions to the south.
2. Seizure of the Central Luzon Plain and the Manila Bay area.
3. The establishment of Air and Sea blockades between the Japanese Home Islands, and ^{JAPANESE} ~~their~~ conquests to the south, so as to prevent raw materials from being shipped to the north, out of the South China Sea.
4. The total destruction of all Japanese defending forces, to include his command, communications, and logistical installations. (7)

The final result of this operation would provide for, in a large measure, sufficient and adequate bases of operation for ground, air, and naval forces. Their use would be for further

(5) A-6, p. 220-229; (6,7) A-3, p. 5-6

attacks which could be launched for the ultimate defeat of the Japanese Home Islands. "The return of the Sixth Army to Luzon would be the culmination of a long cherished dream of General Douglas MacArthur and the troops therein." (8)

One of the most gratifying factors of the Luzon operation would be the release and rescue of the many American and Filipino prisoners of war, who were interned at Cabanatuan Prison Camp near Cabu~~g~~ (30 January 1945); Santo Tomas University, Manila (7 February 1945); Bilibid prison, Manila (5 February 1945); ~~and~~ Los Banos, 35 miles south of Manila (23 February 1945); and Baguio (18 April 1945). (9)

While the Leyte Campaign was in progress, a planning group of the Sixth Army completed the necessary details for the Luzon operation, which was to be known as the Musketeer (M-1) operation. (10)

The following combat units were assigned to the Sixth Army for the Musketeer (M-1) operation:

Headquarters I Corps	40th Infantry Division
Headquarters XIV Corps	43rd Infantry Division
6th Infantry Division	11th Airborne Division
25th Infantry Division	158th Infantry RCT
37th Infantry Division	13th Armored Group (11)

"The 6th and 43rd Infantry Divisions were assigned to I Corps, the 37th and 40th Infantry Divisions were assigned to XIV Corps. The remainder being directly under Army command." (12)

The target date for the Luzon M-1 operation was 20 December 1944. However, as the Leyte operation progressed it became

(8) A-3, p. 5, A-10, p. 356; (9) A-10, p. 367; (10, 11, 12) A-3, p. 5-6

evident that this date would have to be altered due to the slow development of airfields. This resulted in some additional delay in the neutralization of enemy air bases on Luzon by our Air Forces. The target date was postponed from 20 December 1944 to 9 January 1945. (13)

The plans of the Sixth Army called for the landing of two corps abreast. This was due to the width of the Sixth Army front, which extended from Port Saul to Damortis, in the Lingayen Gulf. Each corps was to land with two divisions abreast and in turn each division would land with two regimental combat teams. The Army Beachhead Line was decided upon after careful consideration. Depth was provided to insure that the beaches were out of long range artillery fire. Ample space was provided for the establishment of supply installations and initial air facilities on the Lingayen airfield. (See Map B) (14)

Prior to the assault landing in Lingayen Gulf, Sixth Army plans provided for a preinvasion bombardment by surface, and naval air craft within the landing area. Preliminary bombardment to begin on S day-3, continuing through S-1, and on S day, 9 January 1945, to render direct support during the assault landings. (15)

PREINVASION TRAINING OF THE 129TH INFANTRY

The preinvasion phase for Sixth Army, XIV Corps and the 37th Infantry Division meant completing the final operations plans. However, for the 129th Infantry of the 37th Division it meant actively engaging in a training program, which logically, began with amphibious training. All personnel were thoroughly oriented on how to combat load a ship with both troops and cargo.

(13, 14) A-3, p. 8-10; (15) A-3, p. 14

Debarkation exercises were followed by practice amphibious landings. Training also involved platoons attacking fortified positions, in which they were organized and trained as assault units. All personnel were thoroughly trained in the use of flame throwers, bangalore torpedos, satchel charges, and other forms of demolitions, which normally were used in the reduction of fortified positions.

The platoon problems were followed by that of a battalion attacking critical terrain features. Tanks, artillery, and air, were used to support the infantry in coordinated assault. Every effort was made to add realism to the training, live ammunition and explosives were used in quantity to simulate combat conditions.

Upon completion of the assault training phase all units participated in river crossings, loading, and landing exercises from mock-ups of amphibious tractors, and other types of landing craft. In conjunction with all the specialized training, conditioning marches were conducted to bring every man up to a peak of physical endurance. In addition, all personnel went through a period of range firing, which permitted the zeroing of all weapons. A thorough check of mechanical functioning by ordnance repair teams, stationed on the range, made sure that every weapon was in excellent operating condition. (16)

OVER-WATER MOVEMENT TO LINGAYEN GULF PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

The 129th Infantry was to embark for the M-1 operation from Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, Solomon Islands. The 37th Infantry Division allocated to the 129th Infantry, five APA's

(16) Personal knowledge

(Auxiliary Personnel Attack) and six LST's (Landing Ship Tank) for the over-water movement. Combat loading of all water transportation was scheduled to commence 11 December 1944, and to be completed by 14 December 1944. On 14 December troops of the regiment took part in a practice amphibious landing exercise. This exercise proved invaluable in that it gave all commanders an opportunity to check the tactical organization and communications of each boat team assigned to landing craft in the assault waves. (17)

The convoy departed from Bougainville in two echelons, the first consisted of LST's which departed at 150530 December 1944. This was done to achieve a one day's start on the faster transports (APA's) which in turn left at 160845 December 1944. (18)

After leaving Bougainville the convoy, escorted by destroyers and cruisers, proceeded to Lae, New Guinea. At that time all units of the XIV Corps spent two days rehearsing assault landings in the Huon Gulf area. The convoy sailed 19 December 1944, for Seeadler Harbor, Manus Island, in the Admiralty Group. (19)

All personnel were given an opportunity to utilize the extensive recreational facilities of the Naval Base at Manus Island, by invitation of the Base Commander. The LST-LSM convoy departed from Manus Island on 27 December 1944, and preceded the faster moving elements by 4 days. (20)

The overall plan of the Sixth Army provided for the rendezvousing of all elements of the invasion force in Leyte Gulf. Movement of the Lingayen invasion force from Leyte Gulf commenced on 4 January 1945. The route of approach was through

(17,18) A-5, p. 15, Personal knowledge; (19,20) A-4, p. 24-28, Personal knowledge

Suraigao Strait, Mindanao Sea, Sulu Sea, Mindaro Straits, and the South China Sea. (See Map A) Throughout the movement the convoy was constantly in danger from attack by enemy surface craft, submarines, and air craft. Friendly air cover did not preclude that the journey was uneventful. Several ships of the convoy were damaged by Japanese suicide planes which, in some way, were able to penetrate the protective screen of our planes, and anti-air craft gun fire from surface craft. One of these suicide planes caused slight damage to an assault transport assigned to the 129th Infantry, causing no casualties of personnel. All elements of the convoy arrived in Lingayen Gulf, the morning of 9 January 1945, the 9th being S-Day. As the first rays of sunlight came across Lingayen Gulf, the assault troops were able to see the greatest ^{CONVOY} ~~fle~~etilla ever assembled in the Pacific up to that time. They moved into position for the assault at (J Hour, 0930). (See Map B) (21)

ASSAULT LANDING

Assault troops of the 129th Infantry began disembarking at 090730 January 1945. They were formed in 14 waves, the first of which consisted of LVT (A4's) amphibious tractors mounting 75mm guns. The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th waves consisted of LVT's contained personnel of the 1st and 3rd Battalions. The balance of the RCT went ashore in LCVP's (Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel). All tractors attached to the regiment were from the 672nd Amphibious Tractor Battalion. The mission of the 129th regiment was to land on Crimson Beaches "one" and "two", to move inland as rapidly as possible, and to secure its sector of the

(21) A-4, p. 24-28, Personal knowledge

Army Beachhead Line. The first assault waves landed on Crimson Beach at 0931 as scheduled. Upon landing it was found that little damage had been done to the beach area, for the preinvasion bombardment had been reduced 80% because of the light opposition expected. The area to be traversed by the assaulting troops after once leaving the beach, was a maze of deep fish ponds, rice paddies, and extensive marshy areas. Also there were numerous small streams which branched off from the Basina, Calmay, and Dagupan rivers. All this terrain had to be traversed before reaching the Army Beachhead Line. (See Map B) (22)

Intensive study of air photos and maps prior to the landing made all commanders well aware of the terrain difficulties that would be encountered upon landing. The attachment of amphibious tractors therefore, solved many of the problems of crossing these inundated areas and rivers. (23)

As the advance elements of the Regiment threaded their way across this area, the only opposition encountered was that of very difficult terrain. Some of the amphibious tractors bogged down in the deep mud of the rice paddies, but this loss of transportation was overcome by overloading and shuttling of personnel, equipment, and some supplies. By 101145 January 1945 the regiment had reached the Corps Beachhead Line at Calasio, after having successfully negotiated a crossing of the Calmay and Dagupan rivers without meeting enemy resistance. The amphibious tractors proved their value time and time again by the ferrying of troops and $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks and trailers across the rivers. Extensive patrolling by both motorized and foot patrols did not reveal the location of any enemy. Based on

(22) Personal knowledge; (23) A-5, 19-21

this negative information, the regiment was ordered to proceed to the Army Beachhead Line, which was reached and secured by 11 January 1945. (24)

Upon reaching the Army Beachhead Line, vigorous patrolling was engaged in to provide security for the Army Beachhead for the Regiment, and the Corps left flank. The Regiment's first contact with the enemy was made by a patrol of the 1st Battalion, in the vicinity of Caoayanbogtong, two miles northwest of Malasiqui, in rear of the Army Beachhead Line. The enemy contacted was a patrol of eight, six of whom were killed, at a cost of three wounded, the first for the Regiment on Luzon. (See Map C) (25)

A patrol from the 2nd Battalion on 13 January 1945 encountered an unknown number of enemy at Bautista across the Agno River. Based on that information, that evening F Company reinforced by the attachment of one platoon of 4.2mm mortars from D Company, 82nd Chemical Mortar Battalion, one platoon of 81mm mortars, one platoon of heavy machine guns from H Company, and the Cannon Company in direct support, moved into positions directly across the Agno River from Bautista, in preparation for an attack the following day. The attack initiated at 1001 hours was preceded by a ten minute preparation of HE and WP mortar fire. The main effort was directed across a partially destroyed railroad bridge which had been secured the previous day. By midday the attack was successfully accomplished without casualties. This was the second enemy action engaged in by the Regiment on Luzon. That date, 14 January 1945, marked the beginning of numerous small unit actions and

(24) A-5, p. 19-21; (25) A-11; Personal knowledge

patrol clashes. (See Map C) (26)

On 15 January, the 1st Battalion arrived in Camiling without encountering opposition. Upon arrival the 37th Division Reconnaissance Troop was attached. C Company was immediately ordered to outpost the town. C Company at 1530 hours observed a column of Japanese estimated at a strength of 60-70 approaching the town. This column with battle flags waving, was permitted to continue down the road to within 200 yards of C Company's outposts, where they were fired upon. Some were killed and the remainder forced to seek cover in water filled ditches and rice paddies on either side of the road. Mortar fire was placed on the area cutting off the avenues of retreat. One platoon of A Company was ordered to attack. The platoon had to wade through the knee deep mud of the rice paddies in order to ferret out the Japanese who were hiding in paddies camouflaged by clumps of rice stalks. This forced the platoon to virtually dig the Japanese out from under their concealment. The mopping up action was completed by 1800 hours and casualties resulting from this action were two men killed and seven wounded, all having been shot at a range of only a few feet. The enemy suffered a total of 31 killed and an additional eight dead were found in this area 16 January. (See Map C) (27)

The Regiment was ordered to move forward on 19 January and occupy positions in the Paniqui-Nampicuan-Moncoda area. That area had been outposted prior to the time of its occupation. The 3rd platoon of K Company outposted the road 1000 yards north-east of Moncoda. It made contact with an estimated 230 Japanese, which it engaged with rifle and machine gun fire. This fire

(26) A-11; Personal knowledge; (27) A-5, p. 23; Personal knowledge

continued intermittently throughout the night 18-19 January. At 0800 the next morning the balance of K company attacked. The results of this action were 51 enemy killed and 175 taken prisoner. The majority of the prisoners were Formosans, Chinese, and Korean. These prisoners were believed to be labor troops, in that the majority were found to be armed with sharpened bamboo sticks and poles, and no doubt, were forced to attack, by the Japanese who were armed with rifles and machine guns. (See Map C) (28)

The Regiment, on 21 January, was placed in XIV Corps reserve at Victoria, less its 1st Battalion which was located at Ramos. It was given the missions of securing the Corps and 37th Division flanks from Victoria to Carmen and maintaining contact with the 6th Division of I Corps at Nampicuan in addition to its reserve mission. The missions were accomplished by means of motorized and foot patrols, and the establishment of road and trail blocks. A mobile reserve was held at Victoria. (29)

The 1st Battalion on 24 January was moved from Ramos to Tarlac with the mission of securing Tarlac and patrolling the area. The remainder of the regiment established battalion outposts at Victoria and LaPaz, and continued to be in reserve until 27 January. (30)

THE BATTLE FOR CLARK FIELD AND FORT STOTSENBERG

The Division Boundary was altered on 27 January to include the Clark Field, Fort Stotsenburg area. In accordance with XIV Corps Operations Order Number 11. The mission of capturing

(28) A-5, p. 25-26; Personal knowledge; (29) A-5, p. 28; Personal knowledge; (30) A-5, p. 29; Personal knowledge

Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg area proper was assigned to the Regiment, while the 145th Infantry was coordinated to attack on the left. (31)

The Regiment less the 1st Battalion, which remained in division reserve near Santo Rosario, moved by motor to comply with that order. (See Map C) The 2nd Battalion began its motor movement from positions at LaPaz, 0900 hours 27 January 1945, closing into its assembly area north of Santo Rosario at 1140 hours. (See Map D) The 3rd Battalion began its motor movement from Capas at 1400 hours 27 January and closed into its assembly area at Santo Maria at 1500 hours. These assembly areas were approximately three miles east of Mabalacat. While the Regiment (-) was preparing for its attack against Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg, a news commentator was heard, reporting the capture of Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg by the 40th Infantry Division, XIV Corps. Yet that same day the 129th Infantry was given that mission and they knew it was still to be achieved. This erroneous news release had considerable detrimental effect on the morale of the regiment at that time. (See Map C) (32)

The battle for the Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg area was the first major stand by the Japanese during the Luzon Campaign and the Battle for Manila. The main purposes of the enemy in defending this area were twofold; first to effect maximum attrition of our fighting power by taking advantage of the natural and man made defenses, the superior observation, and fields of fire; second, to delay the occupation and utilization of Clark Field as long as possible. The early recapture of this area would provide our air forces with one of the most

(31) A-5, p. 31; (32) A-5, p. 31

important air bases in the Philippines. The capture of Clark Field would necessarily drive the Japanese far into the foothills of the Zambales Mountains to the west. This would lessen the possibility of a counter attack against the corps flank, and reduce the danger of cutting its supply line supporting the advance to Manila. (See Photo Album) (33)

Leaving assembly areas during hours of darkness on the morning of 28 January the Regiment (-), with its attached and supporting units, moved into forward assembly areas in the vicinity of Dau. The 2nd Battalion closed at 0530 hours, followed by the 3rd Battalion at 0630 hours each into its respective area. The 3rd Battalion, 145th Infantry, was attached and in regimental reserve. It closed into forward assembly areas in the vicinity of Mabigo. The Regimental Cannon and Anti-tank Companies closed at 0600 hours. The Anti-tank company was initially to provide anti-tank defense, from positions in the vicinity of the Line of Departure. Other attached and supporting units of the Regiment consisted of C and D Companies, 754th Tank Battalion; and A Company, 637th Tank Destroyer Battalion all of which, were to be in regimental reserve. A Company, 82nd Chemical Mortar Battalion attached one platoon each to the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. A Company, 117th Engineer Battalion in regimental reserve, attached one platoon each to the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The 140th (105mm How.) Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support. Company B, 112th Collecting Battalion, (31st Portable Surgical Hospital Attached) in position in vicinity of Bundagal

(33) Personal knowledge

provided medical support for the operation. (See Map D) (34)

The Regiment (-) which had a three thousand yard frontage, crossed the line of departure (a north-south railroad track which ran parallel to highway 3) at 0712 hours. The 2nd Battalion was on the right, and the 3rd Battalion on the left. Each Battalion had two company's forward and one in reserve. (See Map D)

By 0815 the 129th had moved forward 2000 yards meeting light resistance from scattered sniper fire. The terrain over which they advanced was level and open, upon which several airstrips, taxiways, and dispersal areas had been constructed. The attack gained 3800 yards in two hours, at which time the Regiment encountered heavy resistance, consisting of interlocking and supporting fire from 20-mm, 25-mm, and 40-mm guns, mortar and small arms. All this fire power was delivered from well camouflaged positions which had long fields of grazing fire across the open ground. At 1000 hours G Company was on the right and F Company on the left, of runway number 1, which lay parallel to the route of advance. E Company, in reserve, followed at 500 yards. I Company was on the right and L Company on the left of runway number 4, which also ran parallel to the route of advance. K Company in reserve, also followed at 500 yards.

The 3rd Battalion CP had from 20 to 30 rounds of enemy artillery or mortar fire of unknown caliber fall into its area between 1000 and 1020 hours, simultaneously, I and F Companies in the center of the regimental sector were halted by an intense

(34) Personal knowledge

barrage of heavy artillery fire. That was the first artillery fire which the Regiment had encountered on the Luzon Plain. The moment the enemy artillery fire lifted, the advance continued. Its leading elements were strafed and bombed by our own aircraft because of their failure to properly mark the target area and their forward elements. (35)

At 1230 hours, the 2nd Battalion on the regimental right flank approached what remained of the hangars. The hangar area reached, the battalion became engaged in a heavy fire fight. The enemy was well dug in and hidden in the rubble within the hangars. In addition to being fired upon from these positions, the battalion was receiving 20-mm fire from guns emplaced on the high ground to the rear of the hangars. An attempt to dislodge the Japanese from their positions within the hangar made use of a tank-infantry team, which consisted of a rifle platoon, from E Company, reinforced by an attached platoon of tanks of the 754th Tank Battalion. This attack was ineffective, in that two of the tanks were knocked out by enemy mines, and the supporting infantry came under a heavy volume of machine gun and 20-mm gun cross fire. Meanwhile, elements of the 3rd Battalion were held up on the left flank, and similarly a tank infantry team was organized, around a platoon of I Company. This attack was launched at 1530 hours and forty-five minutes later two more tanks were knocked out by mines, however, the infantry continued on to capture the objective. The 2nd Battalion by 1640 had received numerous casualties from the enemy fire from the hangar area. In order to recover these wounded

(35) Personal knowledge

from the open, fire swept, areas around the hangars it was necessary for the medical aid personnel to use half track vehicles, whose light armor provided a small measure of protection from this fire. (See Map D) (36)

The 3rd Battalion was ordered at 1720 hours to hold, and dig defensive positions for the night, with particular attention paid to anti-tank defense. Elements of the Regimental Anti-tank Company were placed in direct support of the Battalion in anticipation of the enemies' use of armor. The situation at 2000 hours, 28 January was that the Regiment's left flank was located 700 yards east of Tacondo, and the main line of resistance extended 3000 yards to the northeast through the hangar area. This represented an advance of 5000 yards for the first day of the attack. (37)

Throughout the night of 28-29 January the enemy continued to place heavy fire in the regimental sector. The Japanese launched a counter-attack at 0315 which lasted for a half hour, but failed to penetrate the 2nd Battalion lines. The point of the counter-attacking force came in contact with a section of heavy machine guns from H Company. This section held their fire until the enemy was within 100 yards. Daylight revealed a total of 19 dead Japanese, the 2nd Battalion suffered no casualties.

At 0914, 29 January, following a twenty minute artillery and 4.2 mortar preparation, the Regiment continued the attack with tank infantry teams. They were preceded by elements of the Antitank Company's mine platoon, who were able to clear

(36) A-5, p. 31; Personal knowledge; (37) Personal knowledge

paths through the extensive mine fields, which had caused slow progress. The majority of the mines were primed aircraft bombs buried in the ground and were easily detected. Throughout the advance the enemy maintained a heavy volume of rifle and automatic weapons fire from well camouflaged earth pillboxes, the automatic weapons were primarily machine guns from destroyed aircraft on improvised mounts and later were abandoned as he withdrew. (38)

A large volume of mortar, artillery, and large and small caliber antiaircraft gun fire, was received from positions in the Zambales foothills to the west of Fort Stotsenburg. The skillful employment of artillery and mortar fire enabled the 3rd Battalion to advance to the eastern edge of the village of Tacondo. The 2nd Battalion with three company's on line advanced through the heavily defended hangar area to a point in front of Fort Stotsenburg proper. The advance was slow and difficult due to the high grass which concealed numerous enemy suicide snipers and machine gunners. Hangars and storage warehouses contained well concealed emplacements amidst the rubble and hampered the advance in the 2nd Battalion zone of action. Bypassed snipers concealed in destroyed aircraft made resupply and evacuation difficult. Tank destroyers of A Company, 637th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were employed to completely destroy those enemy sniper positions. (See Map D) (39)

The objective of the 3rd Battalion during the afternoon of 29 January was a hill, 200 yards long and 100 yards wide, on the outskirts of the village of Tacondo. The continued occupation

(38, 39) A-5, p. 33; Personal knowledge

of this hill by the enemy hampered the advance of the regiment. The enemy observation there controlled the area over which the regiment had to advance. The position occupied by the enemy consisted of pillboxes and caves, which provided them with cover from our artillery and bombs, as well as small arms fire. I Company supported by elements of M Company was given the mission of securing this objective. The use of supporting tank fire on known positions in the sparsely covered area assisted I Company's assault on the hill and was successful in driving the enemy off the crest. The remaining enemy positions were reduced by the use of flame thrower and demolition teams. Two of the caves with entrances six feet square ran completely through the base of the hill. These caves or tunnels were found to contain large stocks of supplies. To prevent the enemy from infiltrating and reoccupying these positions during darkness the entrances were sealed by demolitions. The enemy observation posts located on this hill were equipped with high powered naval telescopes. These observation posts had complete observation of the regimental advance. During the reorganization of the assaulting forces on the objective, the enemy counter-attacked from the northwest with a force of six tanks, mounting 47-mm guns, supported by infantry. The tanks maneuvered into a position from which they were able to take I Company and the supporting machine guns of M Company under effective fire, initially inflicting heavy casualties and knocking out all but one machine gun. I Company placed sufficient fire on the tanks to keep them buttoned up, thus preventing a possible coordinated infantry and armored attack. I Company was without armor support

in the counter-attack because their supporting tanks had withdrawn from the immediate area to refuel and resupply with ammunition. I Company was able to maintain fire superiority, so that by 1740 hours the Japanese tanks began to withdraw. (See Map D)
(40)

From positions in rear of the 2nd Battalion five tank destroyers from A Company, 637th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were ordered forward to intercept the withdrawing enemy tanks. As the tank destroyers approached the 2nd Battalions' front line, four enemy tanks came into their view, and within ten minutes all four were destroyed, at a cost of two tank destroyers. The remaining two enemy tanks remained hidden in the 3rd Battalion sector, withdrawing under cover of darkness. The presence of these two enemy tanks and the unknown number of enemy infantry, precluded the possibility of evacuating the numerous casualties sustained by I Company and elements of M Company until the following day. (41)

L Company, less one platoon, to hold the position gained, was ordered to reinforce I Company and bring up additional medical, ammunition, and water supplies. This movement began at 2000 hours. To reach I Company without becoming engaged with the enemy it was necessary to make a wide swing around the left flank of the battalion zone. This reinforcement was made in darkness and only through close control and coordination with I Company was this vital night mission successfully accomplished without incident. (42)

(40, 41) A-5, p. 33; Personal knowledge; (42) Personal knowledge

Although the Regiment's advance forward was not great in yardage gained, important terrain features had been secured. Throughout the days action the regiment was under heavy artillery and mortar fire which inflicted large numbers of casualties. It was now necessary to reinforce the regiment by committing the attached 3rd Battalion of the 145th Infantry on the Regiment's right flank. (See Map D) (43)

"A coordinated attack preceded by heavy artillery and mortar fire at 300900 January began to the west. The formation of the attacking force from north to south was three battalions abreast, 3rd Battalion 145th Infantry on the north, 2nd Battalion 129th Infantry in the center and the 3rd Battalion on the south."

The 1st Battalion (less C Company) 129th Infantry, was released from Corps reserve, and given the mission of securing the village of Dolores, 4000 yards to the northeast of the regimental right flank, which it succeeded in accomplishing by 1200 hours. The 2nd Battalion was to capture Fort Stotsenburg proper, and the 3rd Battalion was to secure high ground to its left flank and front. The 3rd Battalion, 145th Infantry was to secure the regiments right flank.

The 3rd Battalion had moved forward 1000 yards by 1000 hours and secured the town of Sapangbato, beyond which it encountered a hill mass well organized with pillboxes and caves. The assault of these positions employed tank-infantry teams. The tanks provided direct fire support for the flame thrower and demolition teams as they moved up the sides of the hill in

(43) A-5, p. 33; Personal knowledge

their mission to destroy the enemy caves and pillboxes. The Regiment at 1700 hours had advanced 3000 yards. The 1st Battalion having secured Dolores was ordered to leave one platoon to outpost the area. The balance of the battalion moved into an assembly area, to the rear of the 2nd Battalion, reverting to regimental reserve. The 2nd Battalion had secured its objective Fort Stotsenburg proper. The 3rd Battalion, 145th Infantry, was abreast of and to the right of the 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry. (See Map D) (44)

That evening all units on ^{The} main line of resistance were occupying commanding terrain. The enemy had now been pushed back to positions on the high ground to the west of Fort Stotsenburg. The most prominent terrain feature over-looking Fort Stotsenburg, was commonly known as the "Top of the World". This was a large hill mass studded with pillboxes, caves, and trenches, all of which were supported by mortars, 20-mm, 25-mm, 40-mm, and 120-mm anti-aircraft gun fire. These weapons were emplaced so as to have the dual mission of air and ground defense. (See Map E) (45)

THE ATTACK ON THE "TOP OF THE WORLD"

"Top of the World" was the final objective for the 129th Infantry. The mission of securing this objective was assigned to the 1st Battalion, supported by fires of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, the Regimental Anti-tank Company, Cannon Company, Company A, 637th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and A Company, 82nd Chemical Mortar Battalion (less one platoon).

(44) A-5, p. 33; Personal knowledge; (45) Personal knowledge

The 1st Battalion crossed the line of departure at 0800 hours, 31 January under supporting fires of 2nd and 3rd Battalions, attached units, and supporting artillery. The attack of the 1st Battalion initially was directed toward an intermediate objective, which was a small ridge dominated by three sharp peaks, which guarded the eastern approach to the main objective. The Battalion advanced, and fires of supporting units and weapons assisted in neutralizing all known enemy positions. This ridge and its peaks were heavily fortified with mutually supporting weapons emplaced within pillboxes constructed of earth and timbers. A greater threat to the Battalion, however, was those enemy weapons emplaced on surrounding hills which were capable of delivering both flanking and frontal fires. (See Map E and Overlay)

The terrain over which the Battalion attacked afforded practically no cover, and the short grass that once covered the hills had been burned off leaving little concealment. Coping with the exposed nature of the terrain and intense enemy fire, A Company secured the first peak within 20 minutes after crossing the line of departure, at a cost of 5 men killed and 15 wounded. B Company attacked the center peak and had to cross open terrain which was covered from the left flank by machine gun fire, and from the left front by fire from a 20-mm anti-aircraft gun. (46)

These guns were silenced by two platoons of G Company, which had been in regimental reserve, that had attacked around B Company's left flank. Thus B Company was permitted to continue its attack to secure the center and left peaks. The

(46) Personal knowledge

area surrounding this intermediate objective was mopped up and the Battalion was ^{re}organized, and the attack continued.

G Company remained attached to the 1st Battalion and was committed around B Company's left flank to lead the attack up a small narrow spur which led to the "Top of the World". This attack was halted after a short advance by heavy anti-aircraft and machine gun fire from both flanks and the front. In order to continue the assault, B Company continued the attack around the right flank of G Company, advanced several hundred yards to a heavily wooded draw which was one third the distance from the "Top of the World".

The leading elements emerged from this draw and the company was subjected to a friendly artillery barrage, and forced to withdraw from the impact area. When the artillery fires were lifted, B Company continued to advance until halted by 25-mm gun fire delivered from outside the Battalion zone of advance. Companys' B and G could not advance further without taking an unreasonable amount of casualties, therefore, A Company was committed at 1845 hours to attack around the right flank of B Company. The route of advance was up a bare narrow ridge line which ran perpendicular to the Japanese positions, exposing A Company frontally as well as both flanks to heavy fire. A Company continued to advance until after darkness and a small promontory half way up to the "Top of the World" had been secured. Here A Company was halted by 25-mm gun fire. The Battalion was halted for the night and ordered to hold the position gained. (47)

(47) Personal knowledge

During the advance of the 1st Battalion, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions from their supporting positions continued to destroy all known and observed enemy gun positions which obstructed and hindered the advance. The effective accomplishment of this mission required the Regimental Cannon Company's self-propelled M7's (105-mm cannon) to move well forward into covered positions on the 2nd and 3rd Battalions main line of resistance, where direct fire could be observed and controlled. A similar plan was used in the employment of the battalion's 37-mm Anti-tank gun platoons. The regimental Anti-tank Company's 57-mm anti-tank guns were manhandled into positions from which they were able to perform similar missions. A Company, 637th Tank Destroyer Battalion was employed to destroy those enemy positions on either flank which were firing from positions at long ranges. The high velocity 76-mm guns of the tank destroyers effectively destroyed many of these positions, by direct observed fire. Artillery and mortar fire was employed to destroy those enemy positions located on the reverse slopes of the many ridges and hills in this area, also to destroy any probable concentration areas of enemy troops from which counter-attacks could be launched. (48)

While the regiment was engaged in the attack of its objective, the 40th Infantry Division on the right, advanced and in so doing pinched out the attached 3rd Battalion, 145th Infantry, due to converged lines of attack. The battalion reverted to its parent organization. (49)

Late in the afternoon of 31 January, the 37th Division received XIV Corps Field Order No. 4, dated the same day which

(48) Personal knowledge; (49) A-5, p. 35

attached the regiment and all its attached units to the 40th Infantry Division. (50)

The 3rd Battalion on 1 February continued to patrol to the front and left flank and further reduce enemy gun positions by use of tank infantry teams. Elements of the 1st Battalion continued to advance against heavy resistance. A Company on the right flank of B Company, continued to advance along the narrow ridge where it had been halted the previous day. B Company continued its advance from its positions attacking up a wooded draw. Emerging from the concealment of this wooded draw to make its final advance to the objective, it was subjected to fire of a heavy machine gun at close range, from a pillbox on top of the objective. Before the lead platoon could withdraw to a covered position, the platoon leader and four men were killed. (51)

A Company successfully reached the crest of the objective and knocked out the machine gun in front of B Company thereby allowing B Company to continue on to the objective. In order to secure the remaining small peak, G Company was ordered to attack through B Company's position, and by 1300 hours, all elements of the Battalion occupied the objective. Although the ground was occupied the battalion continued to be subjected to intense fire from anti-aircraft guns emplaced on the high ground to the front of the 3rd Battalion position. (52)

Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion had attacked at 0830 hours with the mission of securing a hill on the regimental right flank, and the ridge that extended from the 1st Battalion's

(50) A-4, p. 75; (51, 52) Personal knowledge

objective. The ridge and hill were successfully secured by 1100 hours having met but light resistance afforded by a few enemy riflemen.

The final attack to secure the regimental objective was launched by I Company on 2 February. The mission was to destroy a small pocket of enemy troops who were well dug in on a large knoll to the left of the 1st Battalion's positions. Initially it was necessary to clear paths through a mine field near the line of departure. The cover of artillery and mortar fire assisted the Anti-tank Company Mine Platoon to move forward leading three tanks to the field's edge. A gap was cleared under the close supporting fires of the tanks. Through this gap I Company and supporting tanks moved forward to assault the objective. This mission was accomplished by 1300 hours. (See Map E)

The complete capture of the regimental objective necessitated the elimination of the long range fires from the remaining enemy resistance which continued from carefully selected caves and pillboxes on the forward slopes of surrounding hill masses. This display of the fire power remaining was presumed to be a last ditch stand, however it was effective in that it prevented complete occupation and freedom of movement on the regimental objective. The elimination of this resistance was accomplished by direct observed fire from tank destroyers, tank, and self-propelled M7's, (105-mm cannon) from the Cannon Company. When this was accomplished, the regiment held and controlled all high ground in the vicinity of the Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg area. The regiment reverted to control of the 37th Division at midnight 1 February. (53)

(53) A-4, p. 75; Personal knowledge

RELIEF OF THE 129TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

Commencing at 1200 hours 2 February, the regiment and attached units were relieved on position by the 108th Infantry, 40th Division and this relief was complete by night fall of the following day, 3 February 1945. (54)

The regiment and attached units went into an assembly area at Culyao, where all personnel were fed a hot meal and given opportunity to bathe and change into clean clothing. Casualty reports at this time revealed that the regiment had three officers, 66 enlisted men killed and 268 wounded in the six day battle for Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg.

CONCLUSION

In order for the reader to more easily understand the Japanese defense of Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg the following must be kept in mind.

The battle for Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg was the first major stand made by the Japanese during the Luzon campaign. The main purpose of the enemy in defending Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg was twofold, first, to effect maximum attrition of our fighting power by utilizing the advantages of natural and man made defenses and superior observation within the area, secondly, to delay the occupation and utilization of Clark Field as long as possible.

As the regiment advanced across Clark Field and destroyed the enemy position it was noted that the defenses of the area were prepared in depth so as to meet an attack from the north. However the majority of emplacements were so constructed that

(54) A-4, p. 76; Personal knowledge

by slight alterations the enemy was able to have all around fields of fire, which covered our advance from the east.

The enemy forces at Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg were predominately naval and anti-aircraft personnel with a small number of army troops cooperating. Their overall strength was estimated at 7000 troops. Enemy morale was high and physical conditions of the troops excellent. The familar fanatical mental attitude dominated, and a determined all out defense was encountered.

Japanese defenses within the area were characterized by improvisation. Mines, barrⁱacades, and the use of weapons of all types. These and the tactics employed were well adapted to this situation. No reliance seemed to have been placed on any particular doctrine or training, except the usual Japanese tendency to accept death rather than a withdrawal. (55)

It was not until the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Imperial armed forces that the defense of the Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg area was thoroughly understood. This was brought out after the surrender of General Yamashita and other responsible commanders and staff officers on Luzon.

The following excerpt of their interrogation is quoted:
*
"The basic plan for the defense of the island of Luzon had been conceived in September 1944, and called, originally, for a defense in strength of the entire island, including all landing beaches, the Bicol Peninsula, Batangas, Manila Bay and Corregidor, Subic Bay, Lingayen Gulf and the Central Plain, Aparri, and parts of the east coast. Since the only two units on the island at that time were the 105th and 103d Brigade

(55) Personal knowledge:

* QUOTES NOT CLOSED

Divisions, it was found necessary to bring in a large number of troops from China and Manchuria, and by October the Japanese were quite well organized for a strong defense of the island. Then we landed on Leyte; the 26th Infantry Division (less an infantry regiment and the transport unit), one regiment of the 8th Division, the 1st Infantry Division, which had not even landed on Luzon but transhipped in Manila Bay, were all sent south to reinforce the troops on Leyte, leaving the defenses on Luzon slightly out of joint. (56)

Lieutenant General Muto, Yamashita's Chief of Staff, explained the conditions governing the Japanese conduct of the Luzon campaign as being dependent on three basic assumptions:

1. That the US would have complete air superiority by the time operations on Luzon would commence, and that our artillery, armor and other mechanized equipment was far superior to anything the Japanese forces could command;
2. That the Japanese would suffer from serious shortages of fuel and lubricating oil for what armor and motor equipment they did have available and
3. That the native population was entirely hostile to the Japanese, could be depended on to carry arms against them if given the opportunity, and would certainly provide the US with abundant intelligence.

Though neither Yamashita or Muto included it as one of the basic reasons for his aversion to open country, it was stated by both of them in a rather hopeless voice that, "No matter what we do, if you decide you are going to get in somewhere, you get there."

During the early stages of the Leyte operation, it was not clear to Yamashita where the landings on Luzon might occur, and

(56) A-14

moreover, there were not sufficient troops on the island to hold all beaches at which we might land. It was also felt that it would be foolhardy to make any attempt to meet us on flat, level country which would provide us the opportunity for full exploitation of our material superiority. Yamashita did not believe that it was possible for him to prevent a US occupation of Luzon and therefore regarded his mission as one to contain the maximum number of US divisions for a maximum length of time; to cause the allies the greatest number of casualties and to prevent the exploitation of the airfields already on the island. He assumed from the outset that he would eventually meet with defeat.

Understanding the above, it is relatively easy to see the pattern behind the final shape which Japanese dispositions on Luzon took. Two islands of defense were set up, one west of Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg, and the other east of Manila in the Mountainous area around Ipo Dam, Montalban, Marikina, and Antipolo. The third and final defensive area was the mountain area of Northern Luzon including Baguio and Balete Pass together with the rich Cagayan Valley to the north. Each of their three defensive areas was chosen to enable the defender to take maximum advantage of terrain as an effort against our superior artillery and armor. (57)

The northern defense area was placed directly under the command of the 14th Area Army, designated by the code word SHOBU, the Clark Field area was given the designation KEMBU and the Ipo Dam district was called SHIMBU. The composition and strength of the three areas was as follows at the beginning of January 1945:

(57) A-14

Northern Sector - SHOBU	10th Division	6,500
	19th Division	8,000
	23rd Division	12,000
	103rd Division	15,000
	105th Division	6,000
	2d Armd Div	6,000
	Army Hq Troops	14,000
	4th Air Army	18,000
	L and C Troops	12,000
	Sig Troops	2,500
	Other	40,000
	Total	140,000
Central Sector - KEMBU	1st Airborne Gp	13,000
	Naval Air Corps	15,000
	Other	2,000
	Total	30,000
Southern Sector - SHIMBU	8th Division	8,000
	105th Division	2,000(elements)
	Manila Defense Tps	15,000(Army)
	Naval Personnel	15,000
	Others	40,000
	Total	80,000
TOTAL FOR ENTIRE LUZON AREA:		250,000

It must be noted that the above figures were obtained from staff officers and are estimates rather than exact figures so that there might be some slight variance from fact. (57)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

An analysis of this operation reveals that the mission of taking the Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg area was well within the capabilities of the 129th Infantry and its attached units. The fighting spirit of the men and Esprit de Corps of the units were well demonstrated by the aggressive manner in which they pressed the attack and in particular, having initially been depressed by an erroneous and premature announcement that this area had been captured by another unit.

(57) A-14

It is worthwhile to mention the elaborate training, practice, and rehearsals engaged in prior to the beach landing. This phase of the operation paid dividends in the actual landing which operated smoothly, on schedule, and free from confusion. The amphibious tractors proved to be an indispensable means of transportation onto the beaches, through the rice paddies, and across the many rivers.

Aerial strafing and bombing by friendly aircraft demonstrated a lack of sufficient training in the proper marking of front lines by panels. It also illustrated the necessity of a forward air-ground Liaison Officer with communications ground to air available.

The importance of Tank-Infantry teams cannot be over-emphasized. Their repeated use and success in this operation against a stubborn well dug-in enemy marks the dependence of each arm on the other. The successful cooperation of these arms is dependent on each commander understanding the capabilities and limitations of the other. The direct fire of the tank gun on enemy armor and pillboxes was vital and the enemy infantry had to be ferreted out by friendly infantry.

Another team that was very successful against this pillbox and cave type defense was that of the flame thrower and demolition team. Flame throwers in addition to their casualty producing effect had a very definite psychological effect. Demolitions assisted in opening and destroying some pillboxes as well as sealing others. Infantry were used as a part of these teams for security.

The enemy made profitable use of damage that had already been incurred in that they made elaborate pillboxes and

defensive works in the rubble of previously damaged areas. These were particularly hard to destroy because of the inability to locate the exact part of the rubble from which the fire was coming. In these pillboxes as well as all others the enemy made very effective use of camouflage.

The necessity of locating mine fields and the clearance and proper marking of paths therein, was forcefully brought out by two instances in which friendly tanks were knocked out by mines. While these fields are being cleared protection must be given by infantry and armor, as well as a protective screen by artillery and mortars.

Poor planning resulted in a temporarily critical situation when the 3rd Battalion tanks left the objective area for resupply immediately after taking the objective. The enemy counter-attack which followed resulted in unnecessary casualties and a sharp action that should have easily been driven off by emplaced armor. Reorganization is a critical phase of an attack and requires coordination of all available weapons.

It is believed that more frequent use of screening agents would have eliminated much of the long range fires that harassed the attacking troops. There were many instances when the approach to an objective was made untenable due to long range observed fires. Screening agents would have at least diminished their accuracy.

A night move was made in this area and while not outstanding in itself, was very outstanding in a theatre where the nature of the enemy had made any night movement a veritable impossibility. Through prior detailed planning and coordination, this move was without incident and saved considerable time in effecting the attack.

The enemy, although stubborn, fanatical, and aggressive, did not coordinate his counter-attacks so they were relatively ineffective. He made poor use of patrols and above all he did not make use of the rivers as natural defense lines. The enemy appeared united only in small groups and the unity of higher command appeared to be lacking.

In summary, the 129th Infantry Regiment, successfully accomplished its mission in a minimum time. It faced a fanatical determined enemy whose covered and concealed positions housed many automatic weapons with long grazing fields of fire. A comparison of losses showed 3 officers, 66 enlisted men killed, 268 wounded for the Regiment against a known 728 enemy killed.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons brought out particularly by this operation are as follows:

1. Realism injected in training greatly enhances its value. Rehearsals of combat amphibious assaults assures close coordination between units as well as make for a more efficient landing.
2. The complete orientation and thorough study of landing beaches from air photographs and maps is vital in order to maintain direction beyond the beach after reorganization.
3. The utilization of amphibious tractors, in the crossing of rivers and inundated areas, are efficient and effective in assisting assaulting troops to advance rapidly.
4. Flame throwers and demolition teams are very effective in combating a stubborn enemy in caves and pillboxes. Each

squad must be expertly trained to act in this capacity.

5. Tank-Infantry teams are powerful weapons and demand close cooperation and coordination to utilize their maximum effectiveness.

6. An attack of a fortified position necessitates close coordination between the assaulting infantry teams and their supporting weapons. The enemy must be neutralized by supporting fire until the assault troops are ready to overrun the position.

7. Reorganization is a very critical phase of the attack and must be supported by all weapons and troops at hand.

8. Reorganization on an objective must be rapid and away from its center to avoid casualties from prearranged enemy fires on that objective.

9. Effective tactical air support requires front line troops to properly mark their front line positions.

10. Close and continuous artillery support, while highly destructive to the enemy, makes for high morale and aggressiveness in friendly troops.

11. Close coordination between the forward observers of all supporting weapons provides maximum ground observation.

12. Screening agents are very effective to deny observation for enemy fires coming from outside the zone of advance of a particular unit. This must be coordinated with adjacent units.

13. Armored vehicles are useful to evacuate wounded under small arms fire which cannot be reached by medical personnel.