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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 165TH INFANTRY  
(27TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ASSAULT OF THE  
EASTERN SLOPES OF THE MT. TAPOTCHAU HILL MASS,  
SAIPAN, MARIANAS ISLANDS, 24-28 JUNE 1944.  
(CENTRAL PACIFIC THEATRE)  
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: RESERVE BATTALION IN THE  
ATTACK OF A DOMINANT TERRAIN FEATURE.

Major Martin E. Nolan, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

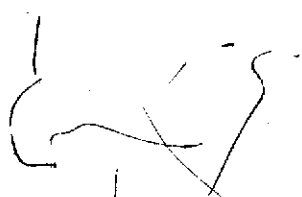


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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

In June 1944 the United States launched its great amphibious invasion of the NORMANDY coastline in EUROPE. At the same time, halfway around the globe, the greatest fleet force ever mounted in the PACIFIC was at sea moving against the JAPANESE held MARIANAS ISLANDS.

A glance at Map A will indicate the problems and risks involved in this venture. The outer line of JAPANESE held islands had been neutralized and then bypassed by the Marine and Army landings on the GILBERTS in November 1943, and in the MARSHALL ISLANDS in February 1944. Planning for the next step, penetration to the inner ring of enemy island outposts, centered around the great JAPANESE base at TRUK, in the CAROLINES. However, the seizure of ENIWETOK in the MARSHALLS, and smashing carrier plane attacks against TRUK effectively eliminated that base as a serious threat to AMERICAN operations in the WESTERN PACIFIC area. (1)

At the same time, landings at BIAK on 27 May 1944, the consolidation of NEW GUINEA holdings, and continuing AMERICAN pressure from the ALEUTIANS, secured the strategic flanks of any attack against the center of the JAPANESE perimeter. (2) Consequently, in the summer of 1944, the MARIANAS invasion was undertaken.

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(1) A-2, p. 195  
(2) A-2, p. 210

## THE GENERAL SITUATION

The announced objective of the MARIANAS campaign was the securing of forward bases which would support operations against the JAPANESE line of sea communications and also permit long range air attacks (B-29) on the enemy homeland. In addition, the islands would provide ideal bases for mounting later amphibious assaults against other important JAPANESE held islands, notably the BONINS, FORMOSA, and the RYUKUS. (See Map A)

The plan of invasion called for landings on SAIPAN by the V Marine Amphibious Corps, consisting of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, on the 15th of June. This would be followed on 18 June by landings on GUAM by one Marine Division plus a Marine Provisional Brigade. TINIAN, just south of SAIPAN, would be captured during or after the seizure of SAIPAN, depending on progress of operations on that island. The 27th Infantry Division, afloat, was reserve for the SAIPAN operation, with plans for employment at either GUAM or TINIAN if not required in the north. Alerted as area reserve in HAWAII, was the 77th (Army) Division.

SAIPAN, the D Day target of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, was a relatively large JAPANESE possession, at least in the eyes of CENTRAL PACIFIC combatants. Approximately 75 square miles in extent,  $13\frac{1}{2}$  miles long by 5 miles wide, it was rough and mountainous for most of its length. The southern third of the island was comparatively flat, but even here a series of low hills and escarpments provided ideal cover and holding positions for the JAPANESE defend-

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ers. The northern two-thirds was marked by a high backbone of coral, which dominated the terrain to either side. MT. TAPOTCHAU, at the southern end of this chain, was the highest point on the island, 1554 feet. Defending this JAPANESE bastion were the 43d Infantry Division, the 47th Independent Mixed Brigade, and elements of Naval and Air Base Units. In addition, the JAPANESE 31st Army, in over-all command of the MARIANAS ISLANDS, had its Headquarters at SAIPAN. In all, possibly 30,000 JAPANESE troops were available for defense. Although a large percentage of these were not first line troops, the ideal defensive terrain on the island more than compensated for this weakness.

By contrast, the assaulting troops were at the peak of training and combat efficiency. Moreover, the United States Forces possessed complete air and naval superiority, with ideal operational weather at hand. The planning and logistical support for this operation was the most complete of any in the PACIFIC war to date.

Supported by a terrific naval bombardment, the D Day assault was begun on 15 June 1944. However, after initial successes, the two Marine Divisions were held at the beach-head line, taking exceedingly heavy casualties. (3) It was therefore necessary to commit the Corps reserve into the fighting, and on D plus 1 elements of the 27th Division took over the right of the beachhead.

Thus reinforced, the attack was continued, securing the southern portion of the island and then pivoting to the north. The Corps plan of action now called for a straight push to

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(3) A-1, p. 127

the northern end of the island, with three divisions abreast, as shown on Map C.

#### SITUATION OF THE 165TH INFANTRY REGIMENT ON 24 JUNE 1944

In conformance with Corps and Division orders, (4) the 165th Infantry on the right of the 27th Division zone, planned its attack with the 1st and 2d Battalions in assault. 1st on the right, with the 3d Battalion in reserve. The attack objective was the O-5 line (5) in the regimental zone of action, as indicated on Map C.

The regimental attack began on schedule, at 1000 hours 23 June 1944.

By 1100 it had developed determined enemy resistance and had been stopped all along the line.

A day of local maneuvering by the front line companies followed, but by 1000 of the 24th of June, it was apparent that the attack was stalled. At that time, with the Regimental situation as shown on Map D, the decision was made to commit the 3d Battalion, with the following mission:

(a) Move by covered route in rear of the 1st Battalion; pass through Company C (on the right of the regimental line); assault generally north, seizing HILL XRAY-YOKE.

(b) There meet the 2d Battalion, tie-in, and continue the attack along PURPLE HEART RIDGE, forming the right flank of the regiment. (6)

#### DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 3D BATTALION

This order was issued to the Commanding Officer of the

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(4) A-5, Entry 23 June, 27th Div. F.O. #47

(5) O-5 line: one of several progressive objective lines established by Corps Headquarters.

(6) A-1, p. 249



3d Battalion, Major Dennis Claire, at the 1st Battalion C.P., in person by the Regimental Commander. At the time, the Battalion was in an assembly area southwest of HILL QUEEN, with one company, L, providing security and running anti-sniper patrols for the Regimental C.P.

The Battalion had been alerted since early morning for employment on either the extreme right or extreme left of the Regiment, and was ready to move within five minutes of the receipt of the attack order. Movement was begun in the formation K, I, Headquarters and M Companies. C Company of the 1st Battalion was attached temporarily as Battalion Reserve. The troops halted in rear of HILL QUEEN, to prepare for the assault, while the Battalion attack order was issued to Company Commanders from a vantage point on the crest of the hill. (7)

The terrain facing the Battalion would not in retrospect, present unsolvable problems, but on 24 June 1944, it looked "rugged". On the extreme left, out of the Regimental zone, the towering heights of MT. TAPOTCHAU overlooked the entire area. Directly in front of the 165th zone of action there arose a typical SAIPAN ridge formation, then in the process of earning its later title, "PURPLE HEART RIDGE". This ridge line was a rambling low coral outcropping from the eastern SAIPAN plain, covered with dense shrubbery and small trees. Running generally north and south, it presented to the 3d Battalion a series of small hilltops roughly in line, separated by deep ravines and precipitous slopes, and covered with coral caves, holes, and

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(7) A-6, Entries, 24 June 44

crevices. These the JAPANESE had improved to nearly perfect squad and individual defensive positions. Stretching away from the wooded hilltops were steeply sloping open fields, some of knee high grass, others of burned over sugar cane stubble. Cover here was measured in foot-high folds of ground. Immediately in front of the Battalion, HILL QUEEN dropped sharply into a deep, wooded valley from which a 500 yard open slope led to the attack objective.

The enemy forces facing the 27th were considered by Corps Headquarters to consist chiefly of Artillery and Engineer troops. (8) These would be rear echelons of the combat units supposedly smashed by the Marines in their drive over the western beaches. However, until the end of the SAIPAN operation, it was impossible to determine exactly what enemy strength opposed the 165th Infantry at PURPLE HEART RIDGE. Day to day S-2 and G-2 estimates indicated that less than a company opposed the advance. (9) However, after-action reports and POW interrogations showed that about 4000 men, consisting of one full regiment of Infantry, the 135th, reinforced by two companies of the 9th Tank Regiment, manned the JAPANESE defenses facing the 27th Division. (10)

In any case, there was no reason to expect other than the usual fanatical JAPANESE resistance. Enemy troops were firmly entrenched, on ground of their own choosing, (11) and were plentifully supplied with food, water, and equipment.

For this assault, the 3d Battalion mustered about 80% of T/O and E strength in its units, numbering about 150 men

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(8) A-5, Entry, 22 June

(9) A-6, Entry, 25 June

(10) A-1, p. 231; A-3, p. 8; A-13, p. 3; A-14, p. 256

(11) A-1, p. 231

per rifle company. However, combat efficiency of the unit was excellent.

The Battalion attack order called for the advance in column of Companies K and I, K leading, through Company C, which would remain in reserve in rear on HILL QUEEN. Battalion heavy weapons were to support the attack from positions on HILL QUEEN, neutralizing enemy positions on HILLS VICTOR and XRAY-YOKE. The one tank platoon, working with the regiment, was operating with the 1st Battalion; the one available 4.2 Chemical Mortar observer was with the 2d Battalion; Artillery support was denied due to the proximity of friendly troops on the southwest and on the east of the objective area. No attempt was made to effect a coordinated assault with the 2d Battalion. One company of the 1st Battalion, B, was engaged in an assault against an enemy pocket which could take the 3d Battalion attack in flank.

(12) (See Map D)

No special arrangements for supply were necessary. All troops carried one-third K ration in light assault packs, and a full belt of ammunition.

The movement through C Company was begun at 1335 hours and completed without opposition. K Company, in the lead, deployed upon reaching the line of departure at the bottom of HILL QUEEN, and the attack was launched at 1400 hours. (13)

#### NARRATION

##### THE ATTACK ON HILL XRAY-YOKE

At 1400, Captain Betts of K Company started his men up

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(12) Personal experience

(13) A-1, p. 261

the slope, in short rushes, under cover of supporting fires. As the assault platoons neared the summit, and supporting fires lifted, the entire network of JAPANESE positions covering the eastern slopes erupted with machine gun and rifle fire. (14) K Company took to earth seeking cover in whatever folds of ground offered protection. At about this time, a medium tank operating with the 23d Marines west of CHACHA VILLAGE, saw the movement on the hillside and evidently took it for enemy action. Three to four rounds of 75 mm HE were fired at the advance elements of Company K, with a liberal sprinkling of machine gun fire. However, whether because of ammunition shortage or in response to frantic calls, (thru channels!) from the 1st and 3d Battalion OP's, the tank quickly ceased firing and lumbered off. (15)

At this point, it appeared that much of the fire hitting Company K was originating in the area supposedly in the hands of the 1st and 2d Battalions. To verify this, the 2d Battalion was requested to mark its front lines by colored smoke, which was done. It was immediately apparent that the 2d Battalion line was well below and in rear of the crest of HILL XRAY-YOKE, and did not in fact have the enemy on this hill under fire or observation.

Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion reinforced its attack by swinging Company I, under Captain John Potter, into the right of the line. Lacking complete coordination and without heavy supporting fires, this attack met with no more success than that of Company K. (16)

The committment of Company C, the battalion reserve,

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- (14) A-1, p. 261; Personal experience  
(15) A-6, Entry 24 June; Personal experience  
(16) A-1, p. 261

appeared to offer no possibility of furthering the completely stalled attack, and as the hour was late, the Battalion Commander directed both I and K Companies to pull back and establish a line of defense for the night. This was done, tying in on the left with Company C. A gap on the right would be filled by L Company, which had been returned to Battalion control. (17) (See Map E)

There still remained the task of bringing in the wounded of Company K who had been left on the open hillside in the wake of the attack, and with the withdrawal of the Company, volunteers were called for to bring in these casualties. The JAPANESE continued to place small arms fire over the area, and the wounded had to be evacuated under fire, being dragged along the ground by men on their hands and knees.

During the progress of the 3d Battalion attack, and its subsequent withdrawal, the battalion operations officer was located at the 1st Battalion O.P. In the early morning hours of 24 June, he had been ordered there to study the progress of the 1st Battalion attack, and upon commitment of the 3d Battalion, was directed to remain at the O.P. to facilitate coordination between the two battalions.

Now, with the failure of the battalion attack, the S-3 was ordered to report to the foot of LOVE HILL to join the Battalion Command Post Group. Coming down from the hill in the gathering darkness, he was handed a map, and directed to lead the Battalion Headquarters, together with Company L and the mortars of M Company in rear of HILL QUEEN, along the line of a sunken railroad, and thence back to the eastern limit of HILL QUEEN.

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(17) Personal experience

This movement was executed without incident, although the very circuitous route and the absence of guides until the outskirts of CHACHA were reached, delayed the march until after 2000 hours. The march group moved up onto the nose of HILL QUEEN and halted. Without sound they improved the plowed furrows of the farm land in which they were situated into some manner of cover, and fell asleep. (18)

The Battalion Commander oriented his staff, and disclosed the contents of a regimental order for continuing the attack, this time pushing in rear of the HILL VICTOR positions, in a move designed to outflank the JAPANESE main line of resistance, which was believed to have been almost completely developed in the attacks by the 106th and 165th during the day. (19)

The plan of attack approximated that followed on 24 June. At 0630, Companies K and I, K on the left, would attack the ridgeline 500 yards to their front, driving up just to the north of HILL VICTOR, with the immediate objective HILL OBOE. (See Map E) Battalion weapons would support from HILL QUEEN. A platoon of light tanks, attached by the Regiment, was further attached to Company I. (20) Night defensive plans were also reviewed at this time. All three companies of the Battalion were in line, stretching along the northeastern base of HILL QUEEN, and bending around sharply to the east to make contact with the Marines. Within the rifle companies, all platoons were in line, with the troops placed in shallow, two or three man foxholes seldom over ten yards apart. The heavy machine gun platoons of M Company were attached to I and K, and were also in the front lines. No security was out

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(18) Personal experience

(19) Personal experience

(20) Personal experience; A-1, p. 268

to the front. The Battalion Command Post group on the nose of HILL QUEEN provided the only "depth" to the defense.

However, during this and succeeding nights on SAIPAN, the JAPANESE made no organized attempts to infiltrate, attack, or even harass the 3d Battalion's lines. A straggler or two were the only enemy encountered.

#### THE ATTACK ON HILL OBOE

The night was passed uneventfully, and in darkness the men of the 3d Battalion gathered their equipment, ate a cold and hasty meal, and prepared to move. The scheduled advance began at 0630, but was not general along the battalion front, pending investigation of enemy resistance on HILL VICTOR, which had delivered such heavy flanking fire against the right flank of the battalion on the day before. Consequently, K Company sent out a patrol at 0630 to work up the south side of HILL VICTOR and take under fire any enemy in that vicinity, thus eliminating any threat to K Company's open left flank. (21)

The only result of the patrol was to bring forth a terrific volume of enemy fire from the caves along the face of HILL VICTOR and the undergrowth along its crest. In an effort to avoid this very strong position, the battalion attack was side-slipped to the north, and the assault on HILL OBOE begun from a point almost due west of that feature. It was now only 0730. (22)

In the meantime, the attached tank platoon had failed to put in its appearance, and it was necessary to contact Regiment to speed up its arrival. As it was, the vehicles arrived too late to be of any great assistance in the attack, as will

(21) A-1, p. 268

(22) A-1, p. 269

be shown shortly.

Company K took the lead, having located a heavy belt of trees which knifed straight towards the objective. However, the hope that the battalion assault would strike the rear and weak elements of the JAPANESE defenses was soon dissipated. Again the knobs and caves of the ridge line erupted with fire, as Company K began its ascent. However, the slight cover and concealment of the tree line permitted the advance in column of K Company's platoons to within 100 yards of the crest of HILL OBOE. Here however, the tree line ended, and initial attempts to cross the open ground to the crest were unsuccessful.

Company I in the meantime had made an advance of only 200 yards. The open area to its front was swept by flanking fire from HILLS KING and ABLE, which developed even greater strength than any of the previously encountered positions. It was later revealed that, in rear of HILL ABLE, was established the Command Post of the Japanese Commander, Lt. General Saito, which was defended by a battery of artillery, several 37 mm AT guns, over a score of machine guns, and a battalion of Infantry, supported by three tanks. (23)

Although not realizing the exact nature and strength of this position, its firepower was terrific over the I Company area. (24) At the same time the steady advance of Company K offered possibilities of infiltrating Company I over the same route onto the objective. L Company in reserve maintained contact with the left elements of the 4th Marine Division near CHACHA.

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(23) A-1, p. 275

(24) Statement of Capt J. Potter, CO, Co I, to the author.



The Battalion Heavy Weapons in the meantime, were in general support on HILL QUEEN. There the gunners of the machine guns and the observers of the 81 millimeter mortar platoon had perfect observation over the entire battalion front, looking down from their commanding height over the slopes leading up to the objective.

One defect in this picture existed, and it turned out to be critical. The "perfect" observation of the JAPANESE position amounted to just that; we could see the ridge line and its crown of trees, and that was all. No sign of the JAPANESE could be detected, and without observers with the front line companies, exact targets could not be engaged.

Consequently, the weapons fired area missions, 81 mm WP on the ridge above Company I, mixed HE and WP for Company K, machine gun fire along the entire ridge line, but without knowing what targets, if any, they struck.

At the same time the position of the battalion front lines in relation to the axis of PURPLE HEART RIDGE, meant that artillery fire could not be used on the battalion objective from the Division Artillery position without excessive danger of overs landing on the men of Companies K and I.

In spite of these difficulties, the attack so far had met with some success, and there was considerable reason to believe that an aggressive attack in the K Company sector would place troops on the battalion objective. However the extremely heavy volume of fire from cave positions on HILL VICTOR posed the most serious threat to the advance, and some means of accurate, high explosive fire was needed to neutralize these positions. Consequently, tank support was called for,

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and after a long delay while one vehicle clawed its way up the steep hillside, K Company prepared to continue its attack. Just at this moment, however, a change in orders from Battalion was received, directing the assembly of the company for movement to the north. (25)

#### THE DIRECTION OF ATTACK IS CHANGED

It is necessary now to return to the larger picture of the SAIPAN BATTLE to understand the abrupt change of orders in the 3d Battalion, 165th, and its actions for the next few days. While the 27th Division was butting head on into the main JAPANESE defensive positions, and the 2d Marine Division had little more success, (26) the 4th Marine Division on the right of the Corps line suddenly began moving sharply against very light enemy resistance, and by noon of the 25th of June, had reached the O-5 line in its zone. (Map C)

Up to this point the Marines had kept one company resting in the vicinity of CR 189 outside CHACHA; with which L Company had maintained contact. Suddenly, and without warning, this unit formed up and moved rapidly to the north. This was at 1030. L Company reported the movement immediately, and the information was relayed to the Regimental C.P. There, the Regimental Commander, Colonel Gerard Kelley, ordered the 3d Battalion to move from the vicinity of HILL VICTOR and maintain contact with the Marines. (27) The exact order can be reproduced with little space or effort. It was "Get on the left flank of the Marines and stay there!" (28)

With these instructions, it was necessary to disengage

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(25) A-1, p. 269-271; Personal experience

(26) A-8, p. 192-193; A-15, p. 14-15

(27) A-1, p. 287

(28) Personal experience: Words of Lt Col Joseph Hart, Regt'l Exec. O, to 3d Bn. Comdr.

Company K from its advanced position on the ridgeline, which was done under cover of tank fire. Company's I and L were already well grouped and were moved into position without difficulty. At 1445, the battalion attacked to the north over relatively open, rolling terrain, without opposition, other than long range rifle fires from PURPLE HEART RIDGE. The advance proceeded at a rapid walk, with the battalion forward command group, for one, practically running to close with the front line units.

In this manner over one thousand yards was covered in about three hours, tying in with the Marines on the right, north of CHACHA VILLAGE. To cover the wide vertical gap which had developed as a result of this move, the 1st Battalion of the 105th Infantry, which had been attached to the 165th, was inserted on the left. (29)

Night positions were taken up facing the north, with the left flank sharply refused to cover the face of the ridgeline to the west. The 1st Battalion of the 105th occupied a perimeter area approximately 400 yards to the rear and covering this exposed left flank. Coordination of fires between the battalions was arranged prior to darkness and communication established. (30)

#### CONTINUING THE ATTACK TO THE NORTH

In view of the lack of enemy resistance in the right of the 27th Division zone, a long range night reconnaissance was executed by the Division Reconnaissance Troop, on the night of 25 June, passing through the lines of the 3d Battalion,

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(29) A-1, p. 287, 340

(30) Personal experience

165th. This reconnaissance, which was carried to a depth of about three thousand yards, indicated no organized resistance by the enemy need be feared. Consequently, the plans of the 165th Regiment envisioned a rapid forward movement on the right, with the need for additional flank protection on the left to be filled by the 1st Battalion, 165th, under Major Mahoney. (31)

In the execution however, no substantial advances were registered by the 3d Battalion on 26 June. It was necessary to conform to the movements of the 4th Marines on the right, as well as the attempts of the 1st Battalion, 105th, to keep pace in the much heavier terrain on the left. Thus, although no enemy opposition was encountered, the 3d Battalion had advanced no more than six hundred yards by nightfall. There, astride the main east coast highway leading towards DONNAY, night positions were prepared. (Map E)

The day had produced, however, one rather unusual "combined operation", within the battalion. At the beginning of the attack, at 0610 in the morning, the forbidding wall of PURPLE HEART RIDGE still stretched perpendicular to the axis of the projected advance, and at a range of only four to six hundred yards. To provide some degree of cover on this wide open flank, the Naval Gunfire Control Party with the battalion obtained the services of a destroyer, and proceeded to plaster the cliffs just ahead of the line of troops. No where was the accuracy and effectiveness of this type of fire more clearly indicated to the men of the 3d Battalion. As the fire moved along the cliff wall, here and there scattered groups of JAPANESE would break from the vicinity of the explosions and

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(31) A-1, p. 288

race for cover, apparently panic stricken. L Company on the left, had a field day, employing machine guns, BAR's, and rifles up to extreme range, and even the sniper rifle, (at that time the 1903 Springfield.) No fire was received in return. (32)

For the next day, a continuation of the advance was scheduled, but the extreme vertical distance between the 165th Infantry Regiment and the remainder of the Division still occupied with the major JAPANESE resistance in the area east of MT. TAPOTCHAU caused a change in task organization and command. The 165th was attached to the 4th Marine Division, and remained so attached for the next six days. (33)

The plan of attack ordered by General Schmidt of the Marines directed simultaneous advance of the three front line battalions under control of the 165th, in order from right to left: 3-165; 1-105, and 1-165. (2d Battalion 165th was still engaged in mopping up operations along PURPLE HEART RIDGE in the vicinity of HILL ABLE. (34))

As the attack progressed, the two left battalions were to "peel off" and face left, taking the ridge line to the west. The 3d Battalion, continuing to the north, would seize the O-6 line in its zone.

The formation assumed by the 3d Battalion placed K and I leading, K on the left, with L in reserve. No major opposition was expected, and none materialized. Jumping off at 0900, the lead elements pushed over two thousand yards before the Battalion halted for the night. The terrain was open and gently rolling, and only scattered enemy stragglers were encountered,

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(32) Personal experience

(33) A-1, p. 343, 363

(34) A-1, p. 299

26 of whom were killed during the day. (35) Because of the speed of the advance, the naval gunfire used so effectively the day before, was not employed. The battalion heavy weapons were not even taken from their weapons carriers. (36)

The advance on 27 June had halted on a minor ridge about 200 yards short of the O-6 line in the 3d Battalion zone, and reflected possibly the easiest and most rewarding day of combat on SAIPAN for the battalion.

This day also saw a change in commanders for the unit, with Major Claire assigned to command of the 2d Battalion of the Regiment, which had successively lost Lt. Colonel Mc Donough wounded and Major Brousseau killed during the past four days. Major Foery assumed command of the 3d.

#### SEIZURE OF HILL 700 AND CHARAN-DANSHII

For the 28th, Marine orders directed no further advance, to prevent over-extension of lines already dangerously thinned by the rapid advance on the right. However, the 3d Battalion found itself to be in a particularly dangerous position from possible enemy counterattack. Directly to the front, separated from the battalion position by a shallow draw, was a prominent parallel ridge, marking the O-6 line. From here, patrols reported visibility up to a thousand yards and unlimited fields of fire. Just to the left front, the northern end of PURPLE HEART RIDGE crossed with the O-6 line, swelling up to two very prominent hills, CHARAN-DANSHII, and HILL 700.

These two hill masses dominated the entire battalion position.

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(35) A-1, p. 344

(36) Personal experience

Consequently, Major Foery requested permission to advance his lines to secure these dominant terrain features, on 28 June. Permission was granted, and K and L Companies moved onto the O-6 line at 0800 hours. Company K then swung sharply left along the ridge and up onto HILL 700. L Company on the right continued on to CHARAN-DANSHII, (See Map E) and the two hills were gained with the loss of one man killed. (37)

Here, at the northern terminus of PURPLE HEART RIDGE, the 3d Battalion ended its four day attempt to gain the commanding ground afforded by this terrain feature. Starting with the abortive attack to the north on 24 June, the battalion had gradually felt its way along the sharply refused flank of the JAPANESE defenses. Finally, three thousand yards further north, it had been able to work up onto the ridgeline, securing observation and long range fires over the rear of the NIPPONESE. Although the last two or three days had been marked by comparatively light casualties and weak enemy resistance, the battalion's accomplishment was considerable. It may most effectively be stated ( and thereby close this narrative) by quoting the Regimental message of 28 June 1944 to the Battalion:

"Lt. General Smith of the Marine Corps sent his congratulations on doing a splendid job." (38)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. COMBAT INTELLIGENCE

Without dealing at length with the U.S. intelligence system on SAIPAN, it can be said that front line battalions

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(37) A-1, p. 345; Personal experience

(38) A-6, Entry, 28 June.

profited little from formal collection and evaluation practices. Even more important, these front line units didn't evaluate properly the evidence of their own eyes, ears, and casualty rates! Faced by what amounted to the JAPANESE Main Line of Resistance, operating in close terrain ideally suited to the defender, there was a general failure to realize the nature and extent of JAPANESE resistance. Here there was no fault in combat intelligence as such. The fault lay in that commanders and staffs did not rationalize enemy actions and capabilities, and failed to include in their estimate of the situation, any realistic analysis of enemy dispositions and capabilities. As an example, the attack of the 3d Battalion on 24 June against HILL XRAY-YOKE was conceived and executed as almost a maneuver movement to seize a key terrain feature. This despite the fact that five of six front line companies had bumped their head against this position for almost two days.

In this example, the Regimental Commander and the Commander of the 3d Battalion either glossed over the enemy situation in a desire for speed, or failed entirely to estimate the capability of the JAPANESE for resistance.

## 2. SUPPORTING FIRES

The attacks of the 3d Battalion, 165th on the afternoon of 23 June and the morning following were made against a strongly entrenched enemy in excellent cover. Nevertheless, both attacks were made with only the support of battalion heavy weapons. Artillery fires were denied due to the nearness of friendly troops. Forward observers of the heavy mortars were with another battalion, and could not be contacted for fire



support. Naval gunfire could not be brought to bear, because of the advanced Marine lines in the KAGMAN POINT area. Consequently, the front line infantrymen attacked with entirely inadequate supporting fires.

The responsibility for this situation rests almost entirely with planning personnel and commanders from battalion all the way to Corps. Faced by what amounted to a natural fortified position, a series of limited objective attacks under massed supporting fires were called for. They would have been uniformly successful with minor losses, in the opinion of the writer.

It may be noted here that Major Claire, in assuming command of the 2d Battalion as noted on page 21 of this narrative, took this lesson with him. When faced with a similar problem at HILL ABLE, on PURPLE HEART RIDGE, the Major massed every available mortar, and pounded the JAPANESE position all night long. At daylight, the hill was taken with the loss of one man killed. (39)

In any case, the 3d Battalion should not have been denied these fires. Gun positions of artillery could have been changed, advanced units withdrawn or shifted momentarily, more accurate short range weapons provided, and mortars of reserve units made available.

### 3. COMMITMENT OF RESERVES

The commitment of the 3d Battalion on the 24th of June on the right of the Regimental line appears in afterthought to be premature and not carefully thought out. There is a

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(39) A-1, p. 339

tendency on the part of commanders to press for a chance to use their reserves, without having reached an understanding of the true nature of the action, and the really critical point which must be gained by such employment. It is undoubtedly the outgrowth of a very human desire to do something, anything, to assist the progress of their unit.

In this case, the two assault battalions were stopped, but it can be shown that they had not made an all-out coordinated assault based on the intelligence gained in earlier thrusts. Indeed, the 2d Battalion had not even employed its reserve company.

The decision to commit the 3d Battalion was made in effect on the promise that, where two battalions had failed, the regimental reserve, by a slight shift in direction, could push the assault to a successful conclusion.

#### 4. THE PRINCIPLE OF MASS

There are several paragraph titles which may more fully convey the general idea of the criticism to follow. However, when reduced to its essentials, no better terminology than the Principles of War come to mind.

Definitely, the attacks of the 165th against the southern end of PURPLE HEART RIDGE lacked power. For example, during the advance of the 3d Battalion against HILL XRAY-YOKE, only K Company of that Battalion and B Company of the 1st, were actively engaged. Counting Company I, committed later and ineffectively around the right of Company K, less than 1/3 of the regiment's rifle strength was thrown into the attack at this critical time.

Again, in the 3d Battalion assault against HILL OBOE the following day, K Company was the only unit in active contact with the JAPANESE, and that contact limited to the point of a company column of platoons.

Decisions cannot be gained against determined defense by such tactics.

## 5. COMMUNICATIONS

During the course of this action, considerable difficulty in radio communication was experienced, which may be summarized briefly as follows:

a. Direct radio communication between tanks and infantry is a must. On two occasions during the period covered by the narrative, it was necessary to go through lengthy command channels to contact tanks. In one case, fire from a friendly tank held up the battalion advance for almost half an hour. In another, the failure of a tank platoon to report, and the inability of the battalion to contact that unit, adversely affected the battalion attack. The SCR 300 -- AN/VRC 3 net should answer this problem.

b. Liaison agents or forward observers of supporting heavy weapons must have adequate communication with their parent units. The 536 used in the 81 mm platoon did not prove reliable, and has been replaced by the SCR 300. However, liaison agents of the machine gun platoon are still without radio equipment.

The 3d Battalion attack against HILL OBOE on 25 June may be cited as an example of how weapons support will fail, no matter how fine the observation and fields of fire, unless

direct contact with front line units is maintained.

#### 6. BATTLEFIELD CONTROL

The disengagement of the 3d Battalion from its attack positions against HILL OBOE, and the lateral shift and subsequent advance of over 1000 yards to the north provides an excellent example of battlefield control. This control can be traced to a high state of troop training, together with the close personal supervision of the Battalion Commander, who was seldom more than four hundred yards behind his front line elements. Although in the course of a day's action it is believed that the Battalion Commander should normally be somewhat removed from the narrow field of vision of the front line units, at the critical time he must be forward. Only in this way can he quickly gauge the enemy situation, estimate the actions required of his own troops and weapons, and act decisively and promptly to shift his forces.

It is noteworthy that, in spite of enemy fire and a very sketchy Regimental Order, the entire 3d Battalion movement was executed without casualties or undue confusion, and with extreme rapidity.

#### 7. RECONNAISSANCE AND PLANNING FOR ATTACKS

For the attack of 24 June in the right of the regimental sector, reconnaissance by the Reserve Battalion may be considered as satisfactory, considering the time available. The Battalion Commander and Executive Officer had made an initial reconnaissance on 23 June, and members of the battalion staff were ordered out on this mission on 24 June. But this recon-

naissance had not been translated into workable plans. No provisions had been made with the artillery or heavy mortars for support if and when committed. Further, the officer most responsible for staff planning of this nature, the S-3, was ordered to remain at a neighboring Battalion O.P., when the attack was not due to jump off until almost four hours later.

No better evidence of lack of planning is needed than consideration of the following facts: although the 3d Battalion was moving from its reserve area at 1015, it did not pass through Company C, only fifteen hundred yards to the east, until 1335, and the attack was not launched until 1400.

With proper prior planning this four hour time lag between issuance of the Regimental Order and the 3d Battalion's crossing of the Line of Departure, should have been cut in half, at least.

#### 8. NEW WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

The operations of the battalion against the JAPANESE entrenched in the covered coral hillsides of SAIPAN indicated the necessity for certain special purpose weapons in infantry assaults. Some of these were made available for later battles of World War II. Others are only recently in production. These are:

- a. A light, accurate, direct fire, high-explosive weapon to accompany front line troops, and otherwise support attacks in the absence of, or to supplement, friendly tanks. (57 mm and 75 mm recoilless)
- b. Organic tank support in the Infantry Regiment.

c. Organic heavy mortar support in the Infantry Regiment.

### LESSONS

1. The commander's plan should give first consideration to a critical analysis of available information concerning enemy dispositions and capabilities.

2. Except in the interests of surprise, no infantry attack should be launched without the cover of all available supporting fires.

3. Reserves should be committed at the critical point in an action, not dissipated in attempts to rectify front line dispositions.

4. The commitment of a reserve to secure an attack objective should be marked by a concentrated, coordinated thrust utilizing all available personnel and fire power of the larger unit.

5. Effective command and control is dependent upon efficient communications.

6. Careful pre-battle training and close supervision by all leaders will insure efficient execution of battle-field maneuvers.

7. Reconnaissance and planning for employment of units must be continuous and as detailed as time will permit.

8. Continuing analysis of combat experiences will lead to development of improved weapons and combat techniques.