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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST AND 2ND BATTALIONS 128
INFANTRY REGIMENT (32ND INFANTRY DIVISION) AND THEIR
SUPPORTING ARTILLERY BATTALION AT AITAPE, NEW GUINEA,
VICINITY DRINIUMOR RIVER, 10 - 15 JULY 1944
(NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Field Artillery Liaison Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY AND ARTILLERY UNITS
ON THE DEFENSE IN JUNGLE TERRAIN

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the action of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 128th Infantry Regiment and the 129th Field Artillery Battalion, 32nd Infantry Division, during the period 10 - 15 July 1944, at Aitape, New Guinea.

The writer was an artillery liaison officer with both the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 128th Infantry Regiment, but to present the action as it really happened, the infantry picture must be given first and the artillery treated as it was--a supporting arm.

By January 1944, the Allied offensive in the Pacific was gaining momentum. The Army and Marine troops had leapfrogged from Guadalcanal in the Solomons to New Britain and the Admiralty Islands. (1) On New Guinea, American and Australian forces had halted the Japanese advance just short of Port Moresby. The enemy was pursued and defeated at Buna, Salamaua, Lae, Finschhafen, and Saidor. (2) (See Map A) By these actions, the Allied troops under General MacArthur secured air fields, ports and bases from which future operations could be successfully conducted against the Japanese.

The next Allied move was characteristic of General MacArthur's brilliant strategy throughout the Pacific War. With the bulk of the Japanese troops concentrated in the

(1) A-1, Map 13; A-8, p. 147; (2) A-1, p. 42-48, 83; A-6, p. 173-177

Madang - Wewak area (3) (See Map A) in anticipation of the next Allied landing, (4) General MacArthur sent American troops ashore at Hollandia and Aitape. As a result, an estimated 40,000 - 60,000 Japs were bypassed, their supply lines cut, and their chance for reinforcements, escape or supply hopeless.

Both landings were unopposed. (5) (See Map A) The landing at Aitape on 22 April 1944 was made by the 127th Regimental Combat Team of the 32nd Infantry Division, and the 163rd Regimental Combat Team of the 41st Infantry Division, supported by five Australian aviation engineer battalions, four battalions of antiaircraft, and two additional field artillery battalions, all under the command of Brigadier General Jens A. Doe. (6) The mission of this task force was to establish a beachhead at Aitape, capture the Tadji Airdromes, and develop and protect these installations.

The climate and terrain surrounding Aitape was typical of New Guinea. The village, itself, was located on the beach and dotted with coconut trees. The only relief from the blazing sun was a daily shower of rain or an occasional tropical storm, which kept the air heavy and humid. However, the nights were cool and more comfortable. Inland was the dense swampy jungle infested with malaria mosquitoes that had, already, impaired the health of the 32nd Division troops. Native foot trails were the only routes of travel through the jungle and mountains, and these were frequently made impassable by the torrential rains.

(3) A-7, p. 256; A-8, p. 151; (4) A-8, p. 150; (5) A-8, p. 157
(6) A-7, p. 256; A-1, p. 86-87; A-10, p. 3

THE ENEMY SITUATION

The isolated enemy force in the Madang - Wewak area was the Japanese 18th Army under the command of Lieutenant General Adachi. (7) Of these 40,000 - 60,000 Japs, 25,000 of them were combat troops of the 20th, 41st, and 51st Infantry Divisions with their supporting artillery. (8)

After the landings had been made at Hollandia and Aitape, the Japs were faced with three alternatives.

1. They could remain in the Madang - Wewak area and eventually surrender or starve. This course of action was not characteristic of the Japanese. Furthermore, the Australian 8th Brigade captured Madang on 23 April, and was rapidly moving up the coast toward Wewak. (9)

2. They could bypass Aitape by going through the Torricelli Mountains, and attempt to recapture Hollandia. This choice was illogical because the Torricelli Mountains were exceptionally rugged, and native food would be too scarce for such a large force. (10) In addition, the Allied force at Aitape would still be a threatening factor from the South.

3. They could attack the Aitape beachhead and capture necessary supplies, equipment and ammunition. If successful, this would reopen their supply lanes and, again, they would be a threatening force in New Guinea.

All G-2 reports and estimates agreed that this last alternative was the most logical course of action open to the Japs at this time. G-2 estimates, also, revealed the improbability of any strong coordinated Jap attacks against the Aitape beach-

(7) A-5, p. 15; A-9, p. 45; A-10, p. 2; (8) A-10, p. 2; A-9, p. 45; A-5, p. 15; (9) A-7, p. 257; (10) A-1, p. 87

head prior to latter June or early July because of the great distance involved. (11)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The commanding general of the 32nd Infantry Division, Major General William Gill, assumed command of U.S. forces at Aitape, pursuant to General Order #5, dated 4 May 1944. (12)

The 32nd Division continued the organization and preparation of defensive positions. An MLR was prepared along the Nigia River on the East, then through the jungles and swamps south of the airfield to the Raihu River on the West. (See Map B) Pillboxes were built, fields of fire cleared through the jungle and swamps, and double apron barbed wire fences constructed. (13) The artillery prepared primary and alternate positions from which they could support the division MLR. Registrations were allowed on likely avenues of approach, complete communication systems were installed, and some ammunition was stored at the primary positions. (14)

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 128th Infantry and the 129th Field Artillery Battalion at this time were included in the division defensive plan. (15)

There was very little enemy action or activity for the next few weeks. The division started the usual training program. Extra time was allotted for care and cleaning of equipment, while special emphasis was placed on local security and

(11) Statement of Brigadier General Martin, later Major General, then Assistant Division Commander, 32nd Infantry Division; Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Zinzer, Executive Officer, 128th Infantry Regiment; (12) A-9, p. 1; (13), (14), (15) Personal knowledge

all around perimeter defense. This was routine procedure by now, having trained for jungle operations in Australia and on Goodenough Island, and having participated in the Buna and Saidor campaigns and staging out of Finschhafen. (16) Yet, this training was to pay dividends in the not too distant future.

MARTIN'S TASK FORCE

Field Order #3, issued 19 May, set up the East Sector Command, which was to be commanded by Brigadier General C. A. Martin (17) and later became known as "Martin's Task Force." (18) The mission assigned to this force was to delay the Japs as long as possible along the Driniumor River. The outposts of the 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment were initially established at Nyaparake, but by 1 June were forced to withdraw to Yakamul because of continuous, strong, active, enemy patrols. (See Map C) These enemy patrols increased to such strength and ferocity that the battalion was ordered to withdraw to the Driniumor River. (19) The outpost line of resistance on the Driniumor River was strengthened on 9 June (20) by the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry and the 129th Field Artillery Battalion. Defensive positions were established on the west bank of the river, with the left flank anchored to the Pacific Ocean. (21) The 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry was to block the inland trail at Afua, which was about 8,000 yards inland. (See Map C) There was, however, a big gap of about 4,000 yards between the two positions that was covered only by visiting patrols. The mission assigned these two units was to effect "Maximum Delay" (22)

(16) A-5, p. 8-13; (17) A-9, p. 12; (18) A-12; (19) A-9, p. 22; (20) A-9, p. 25; (21) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Scott, then Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry; (22) A-12; Statement of General Martin

*Detailed inventory
is in other
area*

along the Driniumor River. When the battalion commanders asked for a definition of "maximum delay," they were told to hold the line for several days, but if a penetration were made, they were to counterattack and reestablish the line. If this were impossible, they were to fall back to delaying positions along "X Creek." (23) (See Map C)

The 129th Field Artillery Battalion occupied positions at Tiver, a small native village about 15 miles east of Aitape. (24) (See Map C) The village consisted of 8 or 10 native huts which were destroyed to make room for the battalion gun positions. It was impossible to locate artillery positions more than 100 yards in from the beach because of the dense jungle growth. Clearing away the jungle was impossible. Bulldozers and tractors became mired once they left the protection of the beach sand. The entire battalion went into a position no larger than a football field. Since the Japs had no air force in this sector, and very little artillery, this minute battalion area was the ideal position from which the artillery could defend themselves from small Jap raiding parties that were to infiltrate the jungle and attempt to blow up the artillery guns.

The difficult supply problem, especially ammunition, was not solved until the Navy supplied the division with several LCMs. (25) Unloading artillery ammunition in the dark, and often knee deep in water, is really a rough job.

As soon as the battalion occupied this position, a liaison officer, plus three forward observers and their parties, went

(23) A-12; Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Scott; (24) Personal knowledge; (25) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Beyer, then Battalion Commander, 129th Field Artillery Battalion

forward to the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry. These parties were comprised of one officer and three enlisted men. (26) Two soldiers were radio men, and the third was a noncommissioned officer who was capable of replacing the officer if the need arose. Wire was laid from the fire direction center directly to the liaison officer. From this position, the forward observers were required to lay lines to their respective companies. Radios, carried by each party, were fairly reliable when operated along the coast.

Upon arrival, these parties found the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry well dug in along the west bank of the river, with a frontage of 4,000 yards. (27) The battalion commander, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Scott decided that the artillery would have to be registered on the east bank of the river. The Driniumor River averaged from 30 to 50 yards in width and 3 to 5 feet in depth. Between tropical rains, small islands covered with Kunai grass would appear in the river. These tropical rains could change the mild, even flowing Driniumor River into a raging power, churning and twisting its way to the sea. Dense jungle ran directly to the river's edge. (28) The west bank was lined with numerous 100 foot trees, and with our troops dug in on the west side, this left a lot to be desired from the artillery point of view. It was decided that before any firing could be done that close to friendly troops, the high trees would have to come down to prevent tree bursts. The infantry was glad to do this, not only for the artillery fire, but for the overhead protection they could get from the logs.

(26) Personal knowledge; (27) A-9, p. 24; Personal knowledge;
(28) Personal knowledge

The initial registration was placed at the mouth of the river, and from there, south along the east bank of the river as far as the 1st Battalion had troops. At points along the river where concentrations were registered, the number of that concentration was given to the infantry unit which occupied a defensive position from which it could see the exact location of that concentration. Thus, the infantry was able to call for artillery fire by a concentration number. (29) Almost every noncommissioned officer in the 128th Infantry was able to adjust artillery and mortar fire. The registration of each concentration was necessary, because it was impossible to carry any type of accurate survey inland from the coast. Survey was conducted from the gun positions to the mouth of the Driniumor River. (30)

For the next few weeks, the infantry continued to strengthen their positions. Daily patrols were sent out, accompanied by a forward observer and party. Patrolling along the coast was a simple duty, and usually the party reached the village of Yakamul without a sign of the Japs. (31) If a Jap patrol was encountered, it was very small. Patrolling inland was a different story. A patrol was lucky to reach Niumen Creek, a distance of about 2,500 yards, between daylight and dark. (32) The jungle was so thick in certain places, that it was actually necessary for the patrol to cut its way through. The biggest problem, that of location, was finally solved by the use of artillery liaison planes. The night before an inland patrol was to leave, the infantry S-3 would give the artillery liaison officer an overlay of the route the patrol was going to use. The usual

(29) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Beyer;
(30) Personal knowledge; (31) A-9, p. 25-37; (32) A-12

procedure was to have the artillery plane fly the correct route at a specified time, and when the pilot was directly overhead, the patrol's radio operator would tell him so. Then the pilot would radio back the patrol's map coordinates. Another method was to have the pilot give the patrol's location with reference to the Driniumor River and the Pacific Ocean. For example, out 2,000 - in 800 meant the patrol was out 2,000 yards from the Driniumor River and 800 yards in from the Pacific Ocean. These two methods were often conducted merely by the sound of the plane overhead, because the jungle was so dense that the patrol was unable to see the plane. This arrangement, although not too accurate, was better than nothing. When artillery was needed, the plane could act as a relay, and also, aid in adjusting artillery fire. (33) This patrolling and defensive buildup continued.

On 27 June, a patrol from the 127th Infantry captured a Japanese Field Order that indicated the Japs would attack our outpost line, in force, on the night of 28 or 29 June, penetrating between the 1st Battalion 128 and 3rd Battalion 127. (34) On 28 June, the 2nd Battalion 128 Infantry was brought up to the Driniumor River to reenforce the rather, thinly held line. (35) (See Map C) The following is quoted from a letter written by Lieutenant Colonel Smith, Battalion Commander, 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry.

"We moved out at dawn on the 28th and wasted no time in moving to our new positions, but muddy trails, swamps and heavy jungle slowed our movements, and by dark we had barely

(33) Personal knowledge; (34) Statement of Brigadier General Martin and Lieutenant Colonel Zinzer; (35) A-12; A-9, p. 37

gotten into position along the river with our flanks in contact with the other two battalions. Our mortars were not ready to meet the strong attack that we feared would come that night.

"Morning finally arrived without the Nips. At least we had another day to get ready. Feverishly we worked at improving our positions, re-sighting our weapons, registering artillery and mortars, putting in communications and trying to get more ammunition. Nightfall found us better prepared but it was still far from a rosy picture. Our ammunition was very limited consisting only of that which we had carried in with us the day before. Our only evacuation and supply route was the trail leading northwest to the village of Anamo, which would certainly be cut as soon as the Japanese succeeded in crossing the river. We still knew nothing about the country to our rear except that it was dense rain forest and jungle swamps.

"That night it rained and it was so black that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. 'If the Japs come tonight,' I thought, 'we'll be fighting our own men in the dark.' But evidently something had changed the Jap's timetable because, as you know, twelve days were to pass from the day we arrived until the attack came."

Also at this time, 1 July, the 112th Cavalry CT (dismounted), commanded by Brigadier General Cunningham, was attached to Martin's Task Force and was sent along the inland trail to strengthen the right flank in the vicinity of Afua. (36) Thus, on 1 July, the Driniumor River was held by the following units from the Pacific Ocean inland: 1st Battalion 128, 2nd Battalion 128, 3rd Battalion 127, and two squadrons from the 112th Cavalry, (36) A-9, p. 39

all supported by the 129th and 120th Field Artillery Battalions, the latter battalion having arrived 2 July. (37) (See Map D)

The XI Corp, commanded by Major General Hall, arrived about this time and assumed overall command of the Aitape area.

(38) ^{one Regt of the 31st - one Bn of the 43rd} The 31st and 43rd Infantry Divisions had, also, arrived, although none of these units were deployed along the Driniumor River prior to 12 July.

From 28 June until 9 July, enemy patrols became more numerous, and some of them were beyond the classification of nuisance and reconnaissance patrols, especially those in front of the 3rd Battalion 127 and 2nd Battalion 128. Several attempts were made to blow up the artillery positions.

After 28 June, maintaining wire communications was almost impossible. Although the wire lines were repaired every day, the Japs would cut them every night, splitting the wire in numerous places, and pull small pieces into the jungle. Two new methods for laying wire were tried. One method employed an amphibious truck (commonly called a Duck) to lay double strands of 110 wire in the ocean. This worked fine until a good strong wind, producing 10 foot waves, washed the wire onto the beach, breaking it into hundreds of little pieces. This method of laying wire, although tried several more times, did not prove satisfactory. The battalions next attempted to lay wire over the top of the jungle with a C-47 plane. This, also, worked fine until the line broke, and no one was able to locate the break. Most of the time, wire was kept into the 1st Battalion 128 during the day, but keeping wire communications inland proved to be almost an impossibility. Radio, as previously stated, (37) A-9, p. 37; (38) A-9, p. 35

worked fine along the coast, but not very well inland. However, with a relay station, which was built in a high tree to the rear of the 1st Battalion 128, radio communication could be maintained. To supplement this system, artillery liaison planes were in the air constantly. (39)

Initially, only one unit of fire was to be kept at the defensive positions. (40) A unit of fire at that time consisted of 1250 rounds per machine gun, 80 rounds per rifle, and 50 hand grenades per company. General Martin and the two battalion commanders, Scott and Smith, asked for an additional 4,000 rounds per machine gun and 10 hand grenades per man in the front line. However, they were authorized to increase their ammunition supply to only a unit and a half. (41) In accordance with the Infantry School Doctrine, this request was not justifiable. But, in the jungle, with resupply so difficult, an exception existed.

On 9 July, Brigadier General Cunningham and the three battalion commanders were ordered to report to Martin's Task Force Headquarters at Tiver for new orders. General Martin revealed that he had been ordered to conduct a Reconnaissance in Force, with two battalions or a battalion and one squadron, to the Harech River to ascertain the Japanese strength, dispositions and intentions. (42) (See Map D) General Martin decided to send the 1st Battalion 128 along the coastal trail, and a squadron of the 112th Cavalry on the inland trail. Near Afua, it was a simple matter to move the reserve squadron up on the defensive line to replace the squadron that was to go on

(39) Personal knowledge; (40) Statement of Major General Martin; (41) A-12; (42) Statement of Major General Martin

the Reconnaissance in Force. (43) Along the coast, it was an entirely different matter. There were no reserves available to General Martin to block the sector now occupied by the 1st Battalion. Therefore, it became necessary for the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry to take over the sector now occupied by the 1st Battalion in addition to their own--a frontage of approximately 4,000 yards. (44) (See Map D) This meant the 2nd Battalion had to move its reserve company, and even the support platoons of the rifle companies, into the front lines. Even this arrangement left only 3 or 4 men every 25 to 30 yards. It was, indeed, a thin green line.

During the night of 9 July, a request to furnish a guide for an officer courier from the 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry was received by the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry. This officer was carrying an "important document" back to Corp Headquarters. The guide was furnished. Later it was revealed that this "important document" was a captured copy of a Japanese Field Order for the all out attack against our defenses on the Driniumor River. This order specified the exact time, place and number of troops who were to attack. The "important document" reached Corp Headquarters on the night of 9 July, yet the front line units of Martin's Task Force had no warning of the attack that was to come on the following night. This exemplifies the failure of pertinent information to reach those people for whom it is of immediate concern.

On the morning of 10 July, the 1st Battalion 128 and the 2nd Squadron, 112th Cavalry moved out on their Reconnaissance Missions. (45) In single file formation, B Company led the

(43) A-9, p. 46; (44) A-9, p. 46; Personal knowledge; (45) A-9, p. 46

not to be changed

1st Battalion which followed at a 500 yard interval. One platoon of B Company proceeded directly down the coast with a parallel platoon 150 to 200 yards inland. Forward observer parties were sent with both platoons. An artillery liaison plane, also, kept constant vigilance from the air. Due to the slow progress of the platoon which was acting as flank security, the battalion had moved only about 3,000 yards by noon. Shortly after noon, the lead platoon of B Company encountered a fairly heavy Jap force, well entrenched and supported by several heavy and light machine guns. After a heavy artillery concentration, a frontal attack was attempted, but no progress resulted. It was not until the inland platoon was able to attack from the flank, and the support platoon was committed, that the position was overrun. Judging from the Jap fox holes and the amount of work they had undertaken, it was estimated that a reinforced platoon had held up the 1st Battalion's advance. It was now about 1500 hours, and the battalion pushed on another 2,000 yards where they dug in for the night, although 1,500 yards short of their objective. Artillery was registered around the entire perimeter. (46)

(See Map D)

The 2nd Squadron, 112th Cavalry moved inland to Niumen Creek, meeting only a few Jap patrols. (47) The daily patrols of the 2nd Battalion 128 and 3rd Battalion 127 reported no signs of Japs in their zone of responsibility. (See Map D)

On the night of 10 July, the battalion commander of the 2nd Battalion 128, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Smith, was

(46) A-9, p. 46; Personal knowledge; (47) Statement of Major General Martin

unhappy about the situation on the Driniumor River. Before dark, accompanied by his artillery liaison officer, the commander traversed his entire extended front, mainly to check positions, ammunition supply, and to see that the troops were familiar with all artillery concentrations and knew how to call for the artillery when it was needed. The liaison officer of the 1st Battalion had turned over all numbered concentrations and overlays to the 2nd Battalion. (48) Lieutenant Colonel Smith, also, wanted to make sure that all units were familiar with the plan of withdrawal, if a withdrawal were necessary. The plan was a simple one. An unnamed creek, about 2,000 yards west of the Driniumor River and running approximately parallel to it, was picked as a rallying point and called the "X Creek." (49) (See Map D) Trails had been cut through the thick jungle from the defensive position to "X Creek," and all officers and key noncommissioned officers were well orientated with the positions they were to occupy if and when the time came. No ammunition was placed on the "X Creek."

THE BREAKTHROUGH

About 2330 hours it happened. Ten artillery rounds from a Jap mountain gun sailed over the C.P. of the 2nd Battalion and landed about 200 yards beyond. Simultaneously, flares were fired directly over the C.P. and the mortar positions. (50) Several small Jap parties had evidently crossed the river and were marking the battalion's key installations for their artillery which was using direct fire. The small arms firing started. An intense preparation on the front line positions was fired for ten minutes, concentrating heavily on the machine (48) Personal knowledge; (49), (50) A-12

gun and B.A.R. positions, which the Japs had located with pin point accuracy. Then a bugle sounded. All firing stopped and the Japs started one of their renowned fanatic banzai attacks. This was not just another raid, but the full scale attack that had been anticipated. (See Map E) The Japs weren't dumb. They had timed their attack well. They had waited until the units which were on their Reconnaissance in Force ^{did they know this?} were beyond supporting range and could not influence the course of action. The attack was concentrated on a front of 100 yards. In a platoon front, the enemy emerged from the jungle, and proceeded to charge through the hip deep river, screaming like the madmen they were. As the front man fell, another would step forward in his place. The strength of this first mad charge was estimated at 150 men, with approximately a dozen Japs succeeding in crossing the river. This attack was broken up by machine gun and B.A.R. fire.

The second attack came on the left of the initial charge (See Map E) in about the same strength. This time the Japs were halted by artillery fire, but a few scattered Japs managed to cross the Driniumor. By the time the third attack was launched, the ammunition was dangerously low. This attack, two companies strong, was made to the right of the first attack. (See Map E) The doughboys had a field day until their ammunition supply was exhausted, and they were forced to withdraw to "X Creek." (51)

Throughout this course of action, the artillery was being shifted en masse from one attack area to another. The infantry noncommissioned officers did an excellent job of calling for

(51) A-2, p. 41-43

and adjusting the artillery fire. The last and successful Jap attack came near the position of the artillery liaison officer who was working with the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry. He was able to concentrate the bulk of all artillery at this point as the infantry was withdrawing. During this period of little more than one hour, the 129th Field Artillery Battalion expended some 1,300 rounds of ammunition. (52) Communication between companies and battalions and between battalions and Martin's Task Force Headquarters was maintained solely through artillery liaison radio channels during this entire series of attacks. This was an immeasurable aid to all units. (53)

As the companies of the 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry and the 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry were forced to withdraw to their previously selected positions along "X Creek," confusion reigned supreme. G Company of the 2nd Battalion 128 was unable to reach the "X Creek" until 12 July, and then in the 3rd Battalion 127 area. The 2nd Battalion 128, minus G Company, reached "X Creek" and set up a small perimeter (54) at the same time that approximately 2 regiments (55) of Jap soldiers crossed into the 2nd Battalion area. One enemy regiment set up their headquarters and bivouacked within 400 yards of the 2nd Battalion's perimeter. Due to the darkness and dense jungle, neither group was aware of the other's position.

When the extent of the breakthrough was reported, General Martin ordered Lieutenant Colonel Scott's 1st Battalion 128 to return from its Reconnaissance in Force. (56) This with-

(52) A-11; (53) Statement of Major General Martin; (54) A-12; (55) A-9, p. 46, 51; (56) A-9, p. 46; Statement of Major General Martin; Personal knowledge

drawal started about 0030 hours on 11 July, and was made directly down the beach at practically double time. Lieutenant Colonel Scott possessed scant information on the situation, but was determined to recross the Driniumor River before the Japs could cut off his route of withdrawal. The 1st Battalion succeeded in recrossing the Driniumor and reached Anamo before daylight. Here they were ordered to begin the counterattack to reestablish the defense line on the river. (57) The 2nd Squadron, 112th Cavalry was, also, withdrawn.

During the night, the artillery was displaced to prepared positions about 3,000 yards to the rear. This displacement was effected for safety reasons, and to enable the artillery to better support the forthcoming counterattack. (58)

The Japs had paid a heavy price for this godforsaken river. It was estimated that 400 Japs were killed in front of the 2nd Battalion 128 alone, while our total casualties amounted to 28 killed and 80 wounded. (59) However, they failed to exploit their success. During the night and day of 11 July, it was estimated that 2 regiments (60) pushed across the river. Had this force followed up their attack, especially toward the coast, their success might have continued, but they stopped. The reasons for stopping may have been the loss of leaders, the absence of orders to continue the attack once the river was crossed, our continuous artillery bombardment, or maybe a poor estimate of the situation. Whatever the reason, it was fortunate they stopped, (See Map E) because it gave Martin's Task Force time to reorganize, regroup, and start a counterattack.

(57) A-9, p. 47; (58) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Beyer;
(59) A-9, p. 48; A-12; (60) A-9, p. 51

THE COUNTERATTACK

At daylight, the 1st Battalion 128 directed a counteraction southeast along the Anamo Trail. (See Map E) This attack progressed about 1,500 yards where it encountered a strong Jap force which had crossed the river the previous night. It became increasingly apparent that this battalion could not penetrate the Jap position, nor could it remain where it was because the battalion was in grave danger of being surrounded and annihilated. (61) Failure of this attack was due, mainly, to the exhausted condition of the troops, lack of planning and coordination, and the fact that no prior reconnaissance had been made. (62)

Having no other reserves available, General Martin had no alternative but to order a general withdrawal to "X Creek" to establish a defensive line until a coordinated attack could be made to restore the defensive line on the Driniumor River. (63)

Both the 31st ^{one Regt.} and 43rd ^{in excess} Infantry Divisions were now at Aitape, and XI Corp decided to employ additional troops to counterattack and reestablish the Driniumor River line. The 124th Regiment of the 31st Infantry Division was selected as the reenforcing unit. (64)

The general counteroffensive began at daylight on 13 July. The troops employed from right to left along the line were as follows: 112th Cavalry C.T., 3rd Battalion, 127th Infantry with G Company, 128th Infantry attached, 124th Infantry Regiment less the 2nd Battalion, and 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry. ^{units} The Task Force Reserve was comprised of the following units: 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry and 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry

(61) A-9, p. 47; (62) Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Scott; (63) A-9, p. 47; Statement of Major General Martin; (64) A-9, p. 49

minus G Company. The artillery units employed were the 129th Field Artillery Battalion, the 120th Field Artillery Battalion, the 121st Field Artillery Battalion, and the 149th Field Artillery Battalion from the 31st Division. (65) This Task Force was commanded by Brigadier General Stark, Assistant Division Commander of the 43rd Infantry Division. (66) (See Map E)

The author can best describe the action of the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry in this coordinated counterattack, because at this time he was the artillery liaison officer with this unit. Due to the terrain, the majority of the artillery fire was directed in front of this battalion.

The mission of the 1st Battalion 128 was to clear an area approximately 300 yards wide up the coast to the Driniumor River. Proceeding on schedule, the forward elements of the battalion moved about 800 yards when they encountered the first Jap resistance. The enemy was fairly well dug in, and, as usual, made excellent use of the jungle to conceal themselves. This Jap force, a reenforced company, delayed the 1st Battalion's advance for a considerable time, and inflicted a great many casualties. (67) The damage would have been more extensive had it not been for the artillery. This situation was an artilleryman's dream as far as jungle firing was concerned. With the whole Pacific Ocean in which to adjust the fire for range, and by shifting a few mils in deflection, the artillery fire could be placed exactly where called for with a minimum danger to the infantry. This effective firing enabled the infantry to move forward again.

After moving a short distance, the troops were showered (65), (66) A-9, p. 49; (67) A-9, p. 50

with Jap artillery and mortar fire. The battalion commander screamed for artillery, but the vision of the artillery forward observers was nil because of the dense jungle. The only position from which the liaison officer could get observation was on the open beach. (68) Considering the possible danger of tree burst from Jap fire, the open beach was as safe as the jungle. As soon as the liaison officer reached the beach, two Jap mountain guns opened up with direct fire at him. By shouting commands to the radio operator, the liaison officer probably gave the 1st Battalion 128 the most rapid artillery fire of the war. In a matter of minutes, three battalions of artillery were firing at the two Jap guns, and with the odds 36 to 2, the Jap guns were soon silenced. From this point to the Driniumor River, it was strictly an artillery show. Each artillery battery was adjusted about 100 yards apart along the beach. As the infantry moved forward, each battery's range would increase 50 yards on command from the liaison officer. The 1st Battalion 128 moved back to the Driniumor River without firing another shot. (69) So much artillery fire had been concentrated in front of the 1st Battalion 128 that it was necessary to recut trails, fields of fire, and in many instances, actually cut limbs and trees out of old fox holes before reoccupying the defensive positions. The 1st Battalion captured 3 Jap mountain guns, 6 heavy machine guns, 4 mortars, and 1 Jap aid station. Sixty seven enemy dead were counted.

The other units attacking inland did not fare as well. The Jap resistance was heavier, the jungle thicker, contact harder to maintain, and artillery and mortar fire more difficult (68), (69) Personal knowledge

to direct. It wasn't until the night of 15 July that the entire old defensive line was reestablished on the Driniumor River.

(70) (See Map F)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The failure to maintain the integrity of command and units was very noticeable throughout this entire operation. The mission of outposting the Driniumor River should have been assigned to one regiment. The original units on the Driniumor defense line were comprised of two battalions from different regiments, with neither their commander nor staff represented. During the counterattack, the troops employed were from two regiments of the 32nd Infantry Division, one regiment from the 31st Infantry Division, and elements of the 112th Cavalry, all under the command of the assistant division commander of the 43rd Infantry Division. It is remarkable that the counterattack was successful under these circumstances; therefore, credit must be given to the caliber and experience of the troops, and to the individual leadership of the small unit commanders.

The impatience of the higher command, which resulted in the Reconnaissance in Force, certainly weakened the defensive line at a very inopportune time. It was fairly evident that the Japs were going to attack our lines in force; all captured documents and prisoners indicated an attack early in July. Other factors indicated that the attack would soon come in a particular area. Patrols in front of the 1st Battalion 128 and the 112th Cavalry could move with ease across the river, yet, the patrols of the 3rd Battalion 127 and 2nd Battalion 128 were constantly encountering Jap resistance. With the Jap

(70) A-9, p. 51

force known to be 20,000 combat troops moving up from Wewak, two battalions attacking in dense jungle certainly had little chance for success.

If the captured Japanese Document, which gave the time, place, and size of the attacking force, had reached Martin's Task Force, this vital information could have changed the tactical employment of all units and very possibly have prevented the penetration of the defensive line.

That the Japanese were able to move such a large force, undetected, to within 200 yards of the front lines, doesn't speak too highly of the thoroughness of the daily patrols whose primary missions were to contact the enemy, and determine his strength and location. This faulty reconnaissance probably can be traced to the density of the jungle, and the failure of the S-2s to supervise and coordinate all reconnaissance. Specific missions and routes should have been assigned to each patrols. Again, had the integrity of units and command been maintained, the Jap force may have been detected.

It is of vital importance not to store ammunition where it might fall into enemy hands, but at the same time it is important to have sufficient ammunition available to front line troops to enable them to accomplish their assigned mission. This is especially true in the jungle, where ammunition resupply is so difficult. It was possible that the greatly over-extended line could not have stopped the Japanese attack, but, had sufficient ammunition been available, the price the Japs paid for crossing the Driniumor could have been greatly increased.

The speed with which the first counterattack was launched, even though unsuccessful, put the Japs on the defensive, thus

giving higher commanders a chance to employ more troops and plan the coordinated counterattack. Although the fighting continued for more than a month, and the Japs employed more than two divisions, the only coordinated, large scale attack made by them was the original breakthrough. They wasted their strength in small scale suicidal attacks. Had the Japs, on 10 July, pushed all their troops through the gap in our lines and then attacked the open flanks of the units on the right and left, the rear installations at Aitape may have been in danger of annihilation.

The value of a definite terrain feature upon which to reorganize, such as "X Creek," and the complete dissemination of this information down to the last man, cannot be over emphasized.

MAB
The artillery and rear area units can be expected to furnish their own local security in the jungle. The lack of training of the artillery patrols was very apparent, as Jap raiding parties were allowed close enough to throw hand grenades and demolitions into the gun positions.

Liaison officers and forward observers should be well acquainted with the infantry units and officers with whom they are working. An understanding of the capabilities and limitations of each branch of the service certainly would pay dividends. This was well brought out on the Driniumor River when battalion commanders insisted upon artillery fire being delivered within 50 yards of the front lines. ^{N180} This was certainly sound judgment under the circumstances, but the infantry must expect some short rounds when fire is brought in this close. Also, forward observers must be with the front line platoons

in the jungle if they are to deliver close and continuous artillery support. Infantry officers and noncommissioned officers must be trained to adjust artillery fire. When a unit was assigned a wide sector to defend, there never were enough forward observers to cover the entire front.

The use of artillery liaison planes was invaluable. Their presence in the air often silenced enemy artillery and mortar fire. Their aid in adjusting artillery and maintaining communications proved worthwhile.

If a counterattack is to be successful, good reconnaissance and proper planning is essential. The 1st Battalion 128 in their first counterattack up the Anamo Trail had neither. The attack was a failure.

LESSONS

1. The integrity of units and commands should be maintained at all times.
2. Intelligence must flow both ways. *P.W.*
3. Adequate ammunition must be available *on* the defense as well as for the attack, even if it has to be stacked on a position.
4. Infantry officers should know artillery capabilities and limitations.
5. Artillery officers should know infantry tactics.
6. A determined enemy can breach any defense if they wish to pay the price.
7. Artillery can deliver close support in the jungle.
8. If close artillery defensive fire in support of an MLR is to be effective, it must be registered.
9. Good communication is essential to successful combat.

10. PATIENCE ✓

11. A few extra artillery shells can save many lives.

12. A definite terrain feature, such as a creek, for a rallying point and reorganization is important.

13. Artillery liaison planes can be used for varied purposes.

14. If a counterattack is to be successful, good reconnaissance and proper planning is essential.