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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 20TH INFANTRY
(6TH INFANTRY DIVISION) NEAR MT. BAYTANGAN,
RIZAL, LUZON, 23-24 MARCH 1945
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of the Company Commander)

Type of operation described: RIFLE COMPANY ATTACKING
THROUGH WOODS, OCCUPYING DEFENSIVE PERIMETER,
AND DESTROYING FORTIFIED POSITION

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS' CLASS NO II

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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 20TH INFANTRY
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company A, 20th Infantry, 6th U. S. Infantry Division, near MT. BAYTANGAN in RIZAL PROVINCE, LUZON, 23-24 March 1945, during the offensive against the Shimbu Line in the SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS East of MANILA.

The third and most important of the operations to re-occupy the PHILIPPINE ISLANDS commenced on 9 January 1945. At 0930I on that date, troops of the Sixth U. S. Army began landing on the beaches of LINGAYEN GULF. The I Corps and the XIV Corps landed abreast, the I Corps on the East. (See Map A) The landings effected on S-Day met no organized enemy resistance, and thus began the Luzon Campaign during which a major part of the Japanese forces in the PHILIPPINES was crushed.

(1)

The 6th Infantry Division (less the 63d Regimental Combat Team in I Corps reserve) landed on BLUE BEACH in the West half of the I Corps zone of action between SAN FABIAN and DAGUPAN. (See Map A) The 1st and 20th Regimental Combat Teams landed abreast, the 20th on the West. (2) The 63d Regimental Combat Team landed on 10 January and was subsequently attached to the 43d Infantry Division. It was heavily engaged in bitter fighting until its return to 6th Infantry Division control on 1 February. (3)

(1) A-1, p. 17; A-12, pp. 10-11; personal knowledge
(2) A-8, pp. 3-5; personal knowledge
(3) A-1, p. 19; A-8, pp. 5-6, 27

While operating under the I Corps, the 6th Infantry Division fought two major engagements with the Japanese defenders. The first of these was the Battle of the CABA-RUAN HILLS during the period 14-28 January. (See Map A) This action proved to be an accurate indication of what the Red Star troops were to face throughout the Luzon Campaign. Enemy troops, weapons, and installations were elaborately dug in and skillfully camouflaged. Underground installations included command posts, aid stations, ammunition and food storage dumps, a blacksmith shop, and a stable capable of accommodating 50 horses. Some of these installations were 20 to 30 feet underground. (4)

The second major engagement was the annihilation of the enemy garrison at MUNOZ. (See Map A) This force was eventually identified as the Japanese 6th Tank Regiment, strongly reinforced, consisting of approximately 1900 well-equipped troops who had been ordered by their commander to resist "to the last man". The siege of MUNOZ lasted from 1 to 7 February and cost the enemy 1527 dead and 116 vehicles destroyed, including 57 tanks and other armored vehicles. (5)

During the following week, extensive patrolling was conducted in the RIZAL-BONGABON-CABANATUAN (exclusive) area. Heavily reinforced rifle companies raced to BALER BAY and to DINGALAN BAY and returned without having contacted the enemy. These thrusts completely severed the island of LUZON. (See Map A) (6)

On 16-17 February, the division (less the 1st Regimental

(4) A-8, pp. 8-9; A-11, p. 7; personal knowledge
(5) A-8, p. 31; A-11, pp. 17-24
(6) A-1, p. 45; A-8, pp. 33-34; A-11, pp. 27-28

Combat Team on BATAAN) concentrated in the SAN MIGUEL area. (See Map A) At 0800I on 17 February, the 6th Infantry Division (-) came under operational control of the XIV Corps. On 18 February, the division (-) arrived in the NOVALICHES area and was placed in line between the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team on the North and the 1st Cavalry Division on the South, thus setting the stage for the subsequent drive into the Shimbu Line. (See Maps A and B) (7)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The part of the original Yamashita Line extending North from ANTIPOLLO to MT. ORO was known as the Shimbu Line. (See Map B) It consisted of a series of coordinated strongpoints organized in depth on the dominating terrain features in the SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS. Many months had been spent in the preparation of the countless caves and pillboxes throughout the enemy defensive structure. The terrain can best be described as a series of steep ridges, extending generally North and South, and cut up by many thickly-wooded draws. Only scattered trees, brush, and tall tropical grass covered the ridges. The enemy made maximum use of natural concealment in camouflaging his positions. (8)

The enemy force in the Shimbu Line was commanded by Lieutenant General Shizuo Yokoyama. It consisted of an estimated 17,000 troops from assorted service, air, and naval units, and elements of two combat divisions. (9) The Japanese defense was to be a suicidal defense of each cave and fortification, coupled with local night attacks and raids

(7) A-7, pp. 136-137; A-8, pp. 35, 40

(8) A-7, p. 142; A-13, pp. 28-29; personal knowledge

(9) A-7, p. 143; A-13, p. 29

against American positions. (10) Although capable of fanatical defense of caves, this force was considered to be incapable of any large-scale offensive action. (11)

Confronting the Shimbu Line was the XIV Corps with the 1st Cavalry Division on the South, the 6th Infantry Division in the center, and the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team on the North. The protection of the vital MANILA water supply system in the NOVALICHES area was of immediate concern to the XIV Corps. Since the enemy outposts were a scant 10,000 yards from the heart of MANILA, there was also a strong possibility of the enemy shelling the city. Accordingly, the initial mission assigned to the 6th Infantry Division was to seize and outpost a line along the high ground extending from East of NOVALICHES Northward to SAN JOSE (DEL MONTE). (See Map B) The division (-) was reinforced by the attachment of the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team which screened the North flank of the Corps and conducted long range patrolling in the IPO area. Simultaneous offensive drives were launched by the 6th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division in accordance with the Corps plan. Although local gains were made in the 6th Infantry Division's zone of action during the latter part of February and early March, progress was noticeably slow. (12)

Information obtained from aerial reconnaissance and other sources indicated that numerous trails leading generally North crossed the Corps' zone of action. These trails were believed to serve as the main route of enemy withdrawal from the BICOL

(10) A-13, p. 33

(11) A-13, p. 29

(12) A-1, p. 41; A-7, pp. 137-138; A-8, pp. 40, 44;
A-13, pp. 34-35

and BATANGAS areas in Southern Luzon. (13) On 5 March, XIV Corps ordered a change in plans calling for the 6th Infantry Division to drive East toward the BOSO BOSO RIVER, thus isolating the WAWA area and permitting the envelopment of MT. MATABA and MT. PACAWAGAN from the South. The division would make its main effort in the South half of its zone of action, while the 1st Cavalry Division on the Corps' South flank would move Eastward along its entire front. The 112th Cavalry was to maintain its positions screening the Corps' North flank from SAN JOSE (DEL MONTE) to CABANATUAN. (See Map B) (14)

Troops of the 6th Infantry Division attacking the enemy strongholds on MT. MATABA and MT. PACAWAGAN were withdrawn to make two full regiments available for the new drive. The second phase of the XIV Corps' offensive against the Shimbu Line began on 8 March with the 6th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division launching simultaneous attacks. (15) The 1st Infantry, which had returned to division control on 23 February, spearheaded the advance in the 6th Infantry Division's zone of action. The 20th Infantry was assigned the mission of protecting the main supply road being built by the division's engineer battalion as the attacking troops advanced. This road was named the "Sightseer's Highway" by the division engineers. It was a vitally important factor in the success of the division's operations against the Shimbu Line. All supplies for the elements of the division engaged in the drive to the East moved over this road. It was carved out of the hills with bulldozers under trying conditions,

(13) A-7, p. 144; A-13, pp. 31-32

(14) A-7, p. 144; A-8, p. 49; A-13, p. 38

(15) A-13, p. 38

often coming under enemy artillery fire. At such times, construction operations were screened by smoke, sometimes for several hours at a time. (16)

On 10 March, the 20th Infantry was ordered to attack on 12 March in its newly-assigned zone of action North of the 1st Infantry. Its mission was to seize the corps objective in its zone of action, to seize the high ground Northeast of the Corps objective, to block the trail in its zone of action, and to continue protecting the main supply road with a battalion less one company in division reserve. On 11 March, the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry moved forward about 6000 yards to an assembly area West of the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry. It launched an attack on 12 March and seized positions in the Corps objective area after an advance of 2000 yards. The battalion occupied these positions when the XI Corps assumed control of the Shimbu Line operations on 15 March. (See Map B) (17)

The XI Corps did not alter the scheme of maneuver materially when it took over. Continuation of the offensive was ordered for 17 March. Field Order 24, issued by the 6th Infantry Division on 15 March, ordered the 20th Infantry to continue its attack on 17 March and seize Objectives "A" and "B" successively in its zone of action. In a swift advance of approximately 3500 yards on 17 March, the 1st Battalion seized and organized the commanding terrain on Objective "A" that overlooked Objective "B" about 1000 yards farther to the East. (See Map B) (18)

On 17-18 March, the 2d Battalion, 20th Infantry moved

(16) A-8, p. 51; A-11, p. 36, A-13, p. 38; personal knowledge
(17) A-8, p. 53; A-11, p. 36; A-13, p. 42
(18) A-8, p. 56; A-11, p. 37; personal knowledge

forward and occupied positions just West of the 1st Battalion. In a pre-dawn attack on 19 March, the 2d Battalion passed through 1st Battalion positions and moved Northeast about 1250 yards where it seized and organized positions on the North half of Objective "B". (See Map B) (19)

During the two weeks that had elapsed since the initiation of the drive Eastward to the BOSO BOSO RIVER, 6th Infantry Division troops had fought through 12,000-15,000 yards of the SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS. They had been subjected to everything the enemy could muster to halt their advance--artillery up to 155-mm, antiaircraft guns up to 120-mm, mortars up to 150-mm, and the terrifying 20-cm rockets the Japanese had improvised from naval shells with rocket motors attached. The advance had been characterized by seizing and organizing key terrain features and fighting off enemy Banzai charges and infiltration attempts almost nightly. The mopping up that took place following an advance was slow and difficult. Every enemy soldier who had not been killed by artillery and mortar fire or bombing had to be dug out of each cave or blasted while still in it. The veteran troops of the 6th Infantry Division went about this process in a routine manner, particularly since the enemy seemed to be fighting for survival rather than offering any well-organized resistance to the attacking forces. The enemy had suffered heavy losses in men, materiel, and supplies. Conversely, the 6th Infantry Division troops were well-equipped. Supplies and hot meals were brought forward to them daily. Very few replacements had been received, and, as a result, all units

(19) A-8, p. 57; A-11, p. 38

were greatly under strength after 73 continuous days in action.

(20)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 20TH INFANTRY

On 22 March, the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry occupied defensive perimeters on prominent hills approximately one mile Southwest of MT. BAYTANGAN. (See Map C) (21)

Having received orders from regiment to seize and occupy the South half of Objective "B" in the regiment's zone of action, the 1st Battalion formulated a plan for a coordinated attack on 23 March. Using the old Jap road at the edge of the woods as a line of departure, Companies A and C would attack abreast, A Company on the South, and seize the high ground on Objective "B" in their zones of action. The edge of the woods parallel to the direction of the attack would be the boundary between companies. Company A would clear the woods as it advanced. Final coordination would be effected just prior to the attack. Company B would remain in its present position as battalion reserve, but would furnish one platoon to occupy positions vacated by Company A. The mortar platoon of Company D and an attached platoon of 4.2-inch mortars from Company B, 82d Chemical Mortar Battalion would support the attack from their present positions in the vicinity of the battalion command post. Both platoons would fire preparations in the battalion's zone of action prior to the attack. (See Map C) (22)

THE COMPANY SITUATION

Shortly after dark on the night of 22 March, the battalion executive officer, Captain Charles A. Figley, called

(20) Personal knowledge

(21) A-11, p. 38; personal knowledge

(22) Personal knowledge

the A Company Commander, Captain Robert E. Phelps, and informed him of the attack scheduled for the following morning at 0900. He instructed Captain Phelps to move his company South to an assembly area near the main supply road prior to the attack and that the battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Wilbur D. Vincent, would issue final instructions at that time. (See Map C)

When these instructions were received, Company A occupied three hills generally in rear of the right flank of the 2d Battalion. (See Map C) The company was considerably understrength, having approximately 80 men in the operational area plus the administrative, mess, and supply personnel located in the regimental field train bivouac area. With the exception of five replacements received a few days earlier, all personnel were combat veterans, most of whom had lived and worked together since their training days in the United States. They had landed in assault on 9 January and had been actively engaged for 73 continuous days at that time. They were a tired lot but still capable of offensive effort.

Captain Phelps had assumed command on 19 March after two months of hospitalization from earlier wounds. At this time he was still getting acquainted with the members of his new command. The company executive officer, 1st Lieutenant Lynn G. Balbach, and the weapons platoon leader, 1st Lieutenant Ralph L. Porter, had both been with the company a long time. The rifle platoons were led by Technical Sergeant Clifford E. Christianson and 2d Lieutenants Frank M. Mesojedec and Harold W. Bieraugel, all of whom had served in Company A

since their induction in 1941. The two lieutenants had been platoon sergeants of their respective platoons until about two weeks before when they had received battlefield commissions. Sergeant Christianson had been recommended for a battlefield commission which he received early the following month. These were the men who would lead Company A in its attack the following morning. (23)

Since the warning order for the attack was received after dark, there was no opportunity for a reconnaissance of the area except for a hasty visual reconnaissance just prior to the attack. The company commander was reasonably familiar with the zone of action, however, having observed it from the position Company A occupied when he assumed command. A defiladed route was available for the movement of the company to its assembly area. The line of departure and the boundary between the attacking companies were easily recognized by the comparatively square-shaped wooded area. Although the terrain in Company C's zone of action was visible from a distance, little could be determined from looking at the woods in Company A's zone other than the fact that the woods were heavy with a moderately heavy growth of low underbrush and that the terrain in the woods apparently sloped off toward the regimental boundary on the right rather gradually.

Little was known of the enemy dispositions in this area. While attempting to occupy the objective area on 22 March, Company C had encountered strong enemy resistance. Artillery fire had been placed on enemy troops and positions. Company F had also received sporadic machine gun fire from the vicinity

(23) Personal knowledge

of the 1st Battalion's objective.

After continuous reverses during the preceding month, the enemy's aggressiveness had dropped noticeably. American troops now moved about in the open with an almost careless abandon.

The weather during this season was hot and dry. The present phase of the moon furnished very little illumination at night. The herringbone twill uniform was adequate clothing for day and night. Ponchos were used to provide some warmth and protection at night. The supply situation was as good as could be expected under the circumstances. Hot meals, water, ammunition, required items of supply, and mail were brought forward twice daily by company mess personnel in a $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton truck and trailer. The long trip over the Sight-seer's Highway was always made in daylight, thus affording some measure of protection from enemy ambushes. Each man carried two canteens of water. Individual combat rations were issued for the noon meal each day. (24)

THE COMPANY PLAN OF ATTACK

Based on the limited information given to the A Company Commander the night prior to the attack, little planning could be done at that time. The company commander informed the executive officer, the first sergeant, and all platoon leaders of the attack scheduled for the following morning. Instructions were given to close out all three positions and prepare for the move prior to the arrival of the mess personnel with breakfast. Feeding was to be completed quickly so the company could move out by 0815. In view of the present

(24) A-11, p. 39; personal knowledge

dispositions of the company, the order of march was announced as 2d platoon, 1st platoon, company headquarters, mortar section, and 3d platoon. The machine gun squads would remain attached to the 2d and 3d platoons until arrival in the assembly area at which time the section would revert to company control. The weapons platoon leader was instructed to select a suitable firing position for the 60-mm mortars in the vicinity of the assembly area and register them prior to the attack. The route of movement to the assembly area would be South along the main supply road to the vicinity of its junction with the old Jap road. The executive officer was designated to move the company to its assembly area. (See Map C) (25)

MOVEMENT TO THE ASSEMBLY AREA AND FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK

Following a hot breakfast on the morning of 23 March, Company A moved out toward the assembly area approximately 500 yards South of the 2d platoon's present position. The company commander, his radio operator, and several messengers preceded the column and reported to the battalion commander in the vicinity of the line of departure. The actual order for the attack was issued at that time in fragmentary form. It was not until then that the commanders of the attacking companies learned the exact location of the line of departure and the boundary between the companies. Coordination of supporting fires was practically neglected. The battalion commander's plan called for the 81-mm mortar platoon to fire preparatory concentrations in Company A's zone of action

(25) Personal knowledge

prior to the attack. Thereafter, it would lift its fires and shoot what amounted to a rolling barrage in the woods in Company A's zone of action. A forward observer from the 81-mm mortar platoon would go with Company A to control these fires. Nothing was said about supporting fires from the 4.2-inch mortar platoon during the attack.

The battalion commander's final orders were limited to essential information that had not been given to the two company commanders previously. Preparatory fires were falling beyond the line of departure before the attack order was completed. After receipt of these orders, the A Company commander ran back to the assembly area about 150 yards away. The executive officer, first sergeant, and platoon leaders were assembled and the company order was issued. This took place approximately five minutes prior to the time the company was scheduled to cross the line of departure about 200 yards away. The company order consisted only of announcing the line of departure, boundary between companies, and the company formation which was 2d platoon on the left, 1st platoon on the right, 3d platoon, company headquarters, and machine gun section to follow the 1st platoon by 100 yards. There wasn't time for anything more. The company, dispersed nearby, was alerted and the two leading platoons moved out quickly, deploying as they approached the line of departure. The company commander, with the 1st platoon, was still yelling instructions to his assault platoon leaders as they reached the line of departure. (26)

(26) Personal knowledge

NARRATION

THE ATTACK ON OBJECTIVE "B" (See Map D)

At 0900 on 23 March 1945, the leading platoons of Company A crossed the line of departure and entered the woods. (27) Each platoon deployed into a skirmish line with scouts preceding the formation by approximately 50 yards. Since the company's zone of action was relatively narrow, this formation permitted a thorough search for concealed enemy as the leading elements advanced.

Shortly after entering the woods, the 2d platoon overran an enemy 47-mm gun position. The gun was loaded and pointed directly at the high hill occupied by elements of Company B. The position was not manned nor were any enemy troops found in the holes nearby. The enemy had apparently abandoned the position to escape the artillery and mortar fire that had been placed on the area during the past 24 hours.

After moving about 75 yards into the woods, the company commander noticed that the terrain began sloping rather abruptly into a draw on the company's South flank. Accordingly, he ordered the support platoon leader to send one squad down to the draw to search it and to protect the company's flank. The squad leader given this mission was told to maintain contact with the 1st platoon on his left. (28)

By this time the scouts had reached an eroded, open strip that extended laterally almost across the company's zone of action. (See Map D) The leading platoons closed on the scouts, and the advance was halted at this point while

(27) A-8, p. 59; personal knowledge

(28) Personal knowledge

the 81-mm mortar fire was shifted farther ahead.

Seeing the C Company commander along the boundary at the edge of the woods, the A Company commander shouted at him and the two exchanged information relative to the progress of the attack. The commander of C Company reported that his men were advancing rapidly across the open ground and had encountered nothing but vacated foxholes and a few enemy dead, apparently killed by artillery fire the preceding day.

As soon as the mortar fire had been shifted, Company A's scouts moved across the open strip and started down the steep slope into the wooded area ahead. As they did so, they opened fire on several enemy troops seen running into a deep wash a short distance to the front. It was impossible to see where these troops went after they jumped into the wash.

The mortar platoon was now keeping up a steady volume of fire in the woods approximately 100 yards ahead. This fire was falling just short of the high ground on the objective. The leading platoons of Company A were ready to continue the advance. Suddenly, there was a terrific explosion about 15 feet behind the company commander. A mortar round had fallen short, landing in the midst of the 1st platoon. When the dust had cleared away, Staff Sergeant Sidney E. Ambrosen, one of the ablest squad leaders in the company, lay dead about 20 feet from the point where the round had landed. Four others closer to the blast had been wounded. These included an assistant squad leader, one of the new replacements, and the platoon aid man who suffered severe chest and abdominal

wounds. The loss of these men was a serious blow to the platoon which had started the attack with 16 men. The executive officer and First Sergeant Whitten Patterson came forward at once and took charge of evacuating the wounded and the dead squad leader. The battalion surgeon, Captain Lorin D. Dawson, was near the line of departure with several litter bearers, so the wounded received excellent attention almost immediately and were promptly evacuated. Captain Dawson always seemed to be nearby when he was needed most. Everyone in the battalion had the greatest respect for his courage and untiring efforts to provide "on-the-spot" treatment for the wounded.

(29)

After the wounded had been cared for and their evacuation arranged, the 1st platoon crossed the open strip and started moving down into the woods. The 2d platoon had advanced into the woods about ten minutes earlier. The scouts of the 1st platoon were halted and trying to locate the enemy troops upon whom they had fired. One of the scouts said he had heard jabbering nearby. A very large tree was located at the edge of the wash, and it was felt there might be a cave underneath it. The company commander and the remaining men in the 1st platoon lined up along the bank of the wash which was about 6 feet deep and 6-10 feet wide. When everyone was in position, a white phosphorous grenade was dropped in the wash under the tree. Its burst was followed by a surprising turn of events. From beneath the tree came the muffled sound of a hand grenade as one enemy soldier killed himself. Eight

(29) Personal knowledge

others, their uniforms smouldering from particles of white phosphorous, dashed out of the cave and started running down the wash. None of them got over 20 feet from the cave as they were riddled by a hail of fire at ranges varying from 5 to 15 feet. After insuring that all these enemy were dead, both of the leading platoons began a diligent search of the remainder of the wash. Numerous small caves were found, but none were occupied. This action took about a half hour. (30)

The advance through the woods was resumed shortly after 1100, and progress was very slow. Several other dry washes were encountered, and each was systematically searched for enemy hiding in caves. Although no further enemy troops were encountered, numerous dead were found throughout the area, apparently having been killed by artillery and mortar fire placed on the woods periodically during the preceding 24 hours. Several rifles and light machine guns had been found in the woods.

As Company A approached its objective on the high, open ground beyond the woods, heavy rifle and automatic weapons fire could be heard to the left front. Company C had advanced across the open ground in its zone of action more rapidly than Company A and had reached the escarpment overlooking the BOSO BOSO RIVER valley about 2500 yards to the East. (See Map D) In going down over the escarpment, C Company troops had discovered two large caves and a tunnel that passed under the old Jap road and led into the woods in Company A's zone of action. White phosphorous grenades were

(30) Personal knowledge

thrown into the caves and the enemy troops came streaming out of them, usually one or two at a time. Troops lining the edge of the escarpment cut them down with rifle, light machine gun, and automatic rifle fire as they ran down the hill trying to escape. None escaped. When these positions had finally been reduced, 37 enemy dead littered the open area below the escarpment, and an undetermined number died within the caves as the battalion assault team blew them up with satchel charges. A total of 120 pounds of TNT was used to destroy the larger cave. When the C Company troops threw white phosphorous grenades into the tunnel, several enemy attempted to escape from the other end into the woods. A Company's 2d platoon killed three as they emerged from the tunnel.

After completely clearing the woods, Company A moved onto its objective, leaving a squad of the 2d platoon to cover the tunnel entrance until it was destroyed. Meanwhile, the company commander went up to the escarpment in C Company's area where the battalion commander and his staff were watching the excitement below. Objective "B" had been taken. (31)

THE OCCUPATION OF OBJECTIVE "B"

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Vincent, decided to hold the ground that had been seized with only one company. This mission was assigned to Company A. Company C would be withdrawn to occupy a small knoll on the South side of the woods near the regimental boundary.

After receipt of the orders to occupy the objective with Company A, the company commander made a reconnaissance to

(31) Personal knowledge

select a suitable position for the perimeter. The high ground on the part of the objective that Company A had taken was found to be a narrow, bald nose extending South about 150 yards from the Jap tunnel. Although suitable fields of fire existed to the East, the woods to the West constituted a dangerous approach to the position for infiltrating enemy. This position was rejected in favor of the open ground in rear of the escarpment over which Company C had attacked. This terrain sloped up to the escarpment gradually. The escarpment offered reasonable protection to the East because it was a sheer drop of 15 to 20 feet to the ground level below. To the North, the ground was open and relatively flat. Company F occupied a perimeter near the escarpment about 300 yards away. The principal threat was from enemy approaching the position from the woods to the South or along the nose that Company A had taken. (See Map D) (32)

The company moved to the selected location at about 1430 and organization of the position began at once. The company commander assigned sectors of the perimeter, which was about 50 yards in diameter, to all three rifle platoons. Company headquarters, the 60-mm mortar section, and the forward observer from the 81-mm mortar platoon were located inside the perimeter. A section of heavy machine guns from Company D was attached for the defense. These guns were placed on the perimeter covering the most dangerous approaches to the position. The company's light machine guns were also placed on the perimeter to cover these approaches. Automatic

(32) Personal knowledge

weapons coverage for the remainder of the perimeter was provided by automatic rifles. Preparation of individual slit trenches and positions for crew-served weapons was begun as soon as dispositions had been made. (See Map D) Organization of the position was interrupted about 1645 when the company mess personnel arrived with a hot meal, water, and ammunition. This was a welcome sight to the men as few of them had taken time to eat anything during the day.

Preparation of positions was completed prior to dark. The 60-mm mortars registered on the bald nose and the area on the Eastern slope of it. Arrangements were made for the 81-mm mortars to fire a barrage in the woods just South of the perimeter. Booby traps and trip flares were placed on all approaches to the perimeter. Wire communication had been established with battalion earlier in the afternoon. (33)

At dusk, an enemy gun welcomed Company A to its new position with five rounds of high-velocity artillery that exploded harmlessly against the escarpment about 20 yards from the front of the position. By dark, everyone had settled down for the night, and the first relief was on the alert around the perimeter. Many rounds of artillery passed over the position during the night, but none of it landed on Company A. The enemy made no attempt to attack the position during the night. Two enemy soldiers, apparently unaware of the presence of the new position, were killed as they walked along the trail near the escarpment. (34)

ACTIVE RESISTANCE ENCOUNTERED

At about 0800 on 24 March, Lieutenant Colonel Vincent

(33) Personal knowledge
(34) Personal knowledge

and Captain George O. Burt, the battalion S-3, arrived at Company A's position. The battalion commander told the A Company commander to send patrols Eastward to the BOSO BOSC RIVER during the day. He said that two platoons of C Company were coming up to work with Company A. No specific mission or objective was assigned to either unit.

The BOSO BOSO RIVER was approximately 2500 yards East of A Company's present position. The intervening terrain was very rough and sloped down to the river far below. The enemy situation was obscure--nothing was known of the enemy strength, location, or disposition. Being aware of these conditions, the A Company commander interpreted the battalion commander's order to mean routine mopping up East of the present line and assumed that the patrols were to return to the perimeter that night.

The two C Company platoons arrived about 0830, led by 2d Lieutenant Carroll L. Gregory, a recent recipient of a battlefield commission. After discussing the terrain and the situation, it was decided that the C Company platoons would work together under Lieutenant Gregory and patrol the area toward the river that lay directly East of Company A's perimeter. The A Company commander decided to use two platoons of A Company farther to the South. The areas in which the two companies would patrol were separated by a continuation of the escarpment which curved toward the Southeast at the Jap tunnel. (See Map E) (35)

Prior to the arrival of the C Company platoons, the A Company commander had alerted his 2d and 3d platoons to be

(35) Personal knowledge

ready to move out at 0900. The 1st platoon, which was much smaller than the other two, would be left at the perimeter with company headquarters and the weapons platoon. No supporting weapons would accompany the platoons on patrol, however, Lieutenant Porter was instructed to standby on the SCR-536 and be prepared to support the platoons with the 60-mm mortars if required. If 81-mm mortar fire were needed, it would be called for and directed by relay through Lieutenant Porter's SCR-536.

The company commander oriented the platoon leaders on the plan. Lieutenant Mesojedec would take the 2d platoon forward on the left, guiding on the edge of the escarpment. Lieutenant Bieraugel would move the 3d platoon South along the nose and turn Eastward, maintaining visual contact with the 2d platoon. Both platoons would knock out any enemy resistance encountered. The company commander would be with the 2d platoon on the left so he could keep track of the C Company platoons operating below the escarpment as well as his own platoons.

At 0900, all platoons moved out as planned. (36) The battalion commander and the S-3 were present to see them leave. A Company's 2d platoon moved down the hill along the edge of the escarpment in a widely-dispersed platoon column. The 3d platoon moved South along the nose in column. Upon turning Eastward, it changed into an echelon formation to the right.

In about ten minutes, the leading men of the 2d platoon were walking in single file along the narrow top of a peculiar

(36) A-8, p. 60; A-11, p. 39; personal knowledge

formation where the escarpment changed direction abruptly. For convenience, this will be referred to hereafter as "the spur". (See Map E) It was merely a continuation of the escarpment, but it appeared to be built up on the South end. The old Jap road ran along the top of "the spur" but came to an abrupt halt at its end. There was an almost vertical drop of 6 to 8 feet at the end of "the spur".

An enemy 37-mm gun was in position near the South end of "the spur" and was pointed directly at the advancing troops. Everyone was conscious of its presence and wanted to make certain the enemy didn't have a chance to use it. Sergeant Joseph J. Fidrich, Jr., a squad leader in the 2d platoon, was leading his squad along the top of "the spur". Suddenly, a shot rang out, and Sergeant Fidrich fell with a bullet hole between his eyes. He had been killed by an enemy rifleman in a spider hole under a clump of brush not more than 10 feet away. As soon as Sergeant Fidrich had been killed, the enemy loosed a hail of rifle fire at the 2d platoon on the almost-barren hillside. Everyone scrambled for cover. Some slid over the escarpment on the North--others ran back up the hill. Several men, including Lieutenant Mesojedec, took cover behind the few sizeable trees on the slope and opened fire on the enemy.

When this action started, the company commander and his radio operator were immediately in front of "the spur" at a distance of about 25 yards from the enemy. The company commander grabbed the SCR-536 from his radio operator and jumped into an enemy foxhole nearby. The radio operator was creased along

the side of his head as he turned to run up the hill. The company commander called Lieutenant Porter on the radio and asked for 60-mm mortar fire on the enemy position, saying he would adjust. One mortar was used, and fire was brought on "the spur" almost immediately. Some rounds fell behind "the spur" and many burst in the trees directly above the position. After the 2d platoon had been safely withdrawn to the nose, the company commander called for 20 rounds to be placed on the position while he withdrew. (See Map E) (37)

Shortly after the enemy had opened fire on the 2d platoon, a heavy machine gun began firing from "the spur" across the hillside at the 3d platoon which had advanced into its lane of fire. Fortunately, no casualties were caused by this fire, but it was impossible for the 3d platoon to advance without passing through what amounted to a final protective line across the hillside. Lieutenant Bieraugel reported his situation to the company commander by radio. He was ordered to withdraw the 3d platoon to the nose. Both platoons were dispersed in the edge of the woods behind the nose when the company commander rejoined them. (See Map E) (38)

The battalion commander and several of the staff were on the nose when the A Company commander returned. After discussing the situation, it was decided to place 81-mm and 4.2-inch mortar fire on the enemy position to soften it up. Observers from both platoons were brought forward to the nose, and registration began. The 81-mm mortars started shooting HE Heavy ammunition with delay fuse to tear up the enemy fortification.

(37) Personal knowledge
(38) Personal knowledge

The A Company commander planned to go back down to clean up the position with the same two platoons after an adequate preparation. These plans were delayed considerably when a 4.2-inch mortar round burst in a tree directly above the 2d platoon. Private First Class Andrew R. Kinsey, an automatic rifleman, was killed instantly and seven other members of the platoon were wounded. The round had burst about 35 yards to the right rear of the observation post where the battalion commander, his staff, the A Company commander, and both forward observers were located. Evacuation of the wounded was accomplished readily after first aid had been given. The firing continued without letting up.

This tragedy was a severe blow to the morale of the company and particularly to the 2d platoon. The company commander, realizing the 2d platoon would not be an effective unit the rest of the day, ordered Lieutenant Mesojedec and his platoon back to the perimeter. At the same time, he told Sergeant Christianson to alert the 1st platoon for the mopping up to follow the mortar preparation.

The mortar firing continued for about two hours. The 81-mm mortars, firing delay-fused ammunition, were ripping sizeable holes in "the spur". The dispersion using this type ammunition was far greater than when using HE Light, and some of the rounds fell dangerously close to the observation post.

(39)

THE ATTACK ON "THE SPUR"

Shortly after noon, the A Company commander decided to attack the enemy position. His plan called for the 1st and

(39) Personal knowledge

3d platoons to approach "the spur" from the North, protected by the escarpment. When the platoons were in position, the signal would be given by radio to cease firing the mortars. When the firing stopped, the 3d platoon would go up over the escarpment and along the top of "the spur". Meanwhile, the 1st platoon would circle below "the spur" and move in on it from the East. (See Map E) (40)

When the mortar fire ceased, the company commander gave the order to attack. One of the 3d platoon scouts moved up the bank, followed by the company commander. There was no sign of enemy activity. After having gone beyond the point where Sergeant Fidirich's body lay, the company commander looked back and saw that the 3d platoon had not followed but were peering up over the bank to see what was happening. In a burst of anger, he shouted to the platoon leader to get his platoon up and get busy--there was still work to be done.

In the meantime, the 1st platoon had circled below "the spur" and approached the entrance to the enemy position. Five dead and seriously wounded enemy were found outside. White phosphorous grenades were thrown into the entrance. No enemy emerged. After the smoke had cleared, members of the platoon and the battalion S-2, 1st Lieutenant George A. Carlson, went inside to check the enemy stronghold. They found it to be a large dugout, shored up with timbers and well-stocked with ammunition and other supplies. Two heavy machine guns were sited to fire through embrasures at the South end of the dugout. One of these guns had stopped the 3d platoon's advance earlier in the day. Another heavy

(40) Personal knowledge

machine gun and a knee mortar were found inside the dugout.

Twelve enemy troops were found in the position. Some were dead and the rest were either suffering from concussion or otherwise seriously wounded. One made a vain attempt to discharge a grenade but was promptly shot by Lieutenant Carlson. Troops inside the dugout took adequate measures to insure that none of the other Japs tried the same thing. The battalion assault team blew the dugout apart with satchel charges later in the afternoon. (41)

As soon as he saw that the 1st platoon could mop up the dugout alone, the A Company commander ordered the 3d platoon to resume patrolling Eastward beyond "the spur". He joined the platoon as it moved out along the old Jap road. About 25 yards beyond "the spur", the platoon found a 20-mm anti-aircraft gun partially concealed in a clump of brush beside the trail. The gun had been destroyed by the mortar fire directed at "the spur".

After passing the gun, the platoon moved across a flat, open field to its Eastern edge--a distance of about 200 yards. No further enemy positions were found but an enemy 105-mm howitzer was found destroyed. The Eastern edge of the field was found to be a continuation of the escarpment. It dropped abruptly into a thicket of brush. The platoon moved along the edge looking for a suitable place to descend and continue Eastward. While standing at the edge, Private First Class Carlyle R. Fleming was killed by a single shot from someplace in the brush below. His body toppled over the bank and lodged against the trunk of a small tree. The platoon

(41) Personal knowledge

threw several fragmentation and smoke grenades in the direction from which the shot was thought to have come. There was no further enemy activity. This brought the platoon's patrolling to an abrupt halt. After some enemy telephone wire had been secured, one of the members of the platoon descended the bank and tied the wire around Fleming's body. The body was then hoisted up the bank. The entire process of retrieving the body was concealed by use of smoke grenades.

The 3d platoon returned to the company perimeter about 1600. The 1st platoon had returned a few minutes earlier after the battalion assault team had destroyed the enemy dugout in "the spur" with demolitions. (42)

Much had happened to Company A on 23-24 March 1945. It had seized its assigned part of Objective "B" after a routine attack through a heavily wooded area the first day. It had occupied the newly-taken ground and organized a perimeter to hold it. The junction of the old Jap road and one of the main North-South trails had been blocked, thus denying the enemy the use of these well-traveled routes of communication. During the action on the second day, the company destroyed a strong enemy fortification encountered soon after starting its patrol activity. Although company patrols did not reach the BOSO BOSO RIVER as ordered by the battalion commander, this had no adverse effect on the outcome of the over-all operation. For all practical purposes, the 6th Infantry Division's drive to the East had been completed as planned. In accordance with orders from XI Corps to shift the attack to the North, the division began regrouping for this new phase

(42) Personal knowledge

of operations on 25 March.

During these two days, Company A had accounted for over 100 enemy dead, including those killed by artillery and mortar fire. It had overrun five enemy guns ranging from 20-mm to 105-mm in caliber. The company had suffered two men killed and one wounded as a result of enemy action. A far greater loss had been the two killed and 11 wounded as a result of friendly mortar rounds falling short of their targets. The effective fighting strength of the company was now below 65. The men in Company A felt they had fought long enough. They were hot and tired and had not had a bath in two weeks. (43)

During the next two days, the company continued to hold its perimeter. At 1000 on 27 March, Company A was relieved by elements of the 1st Infantry. Following its relief, it moved back to BALARA FILTERS for its first actual rest in the 78 days since landing at LINGAYEN GULF. (44)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. PLANS AND ORDERS FOR THE ATTACK ON OBJECTIVE "B"

A well-conceived plan is of little value unless it is communicated to those responsible for its execution in sufficient time to permit adequate preparation. The battalion plan for the attack on Objective "B" is considered adequate under the circumstances. However, the attack order was not received by the commander of Company A in time to permit prior reconnaissance and the formulation of a sound plan for the employment of the company. This necessitated issuing the company attack order hastily and in fragmentary form.

(43) A-8, pp. 59-60; A-11, p. 39; personal knowledge

(44) A-11, p. 39; personal knowledge

The company commander was still issuing orders to the leading platoons as they crossed the line of departure. In the rush to jump off on time, arrangements for the use of the 60-mm mortar section were completely neglected. Although the section was in position and registered on the company's zone of action, it did not fire a round in support of the attack. Fortunately, the fire support received from the 81-mm mortar platoon was adequate.

The failure to issue the battalion attack order in sufficient time to permit adequate reconnaissance and planning by lower units cannot be attributed entirely to the battalion. This occurred frequently, even at higher levels, and resulted largely from the fact that plans for the subsequent day's operations were formulated after studying the situation and the results achieved during the current day's operations. An unnecessary delay would have been caused frequently if this system had not been used to a great extent.

2. SUPPORTING FIRES DURING THE ATTACK ON OBJECTIVE "B"

During an attempt to occupy Objective "B" on 22 March, Company C encountered strong enemy resistance from the woods through which Company A attacked the following day. Since the strength and dispositions of the enemy were not known, artillery and mortar fire was placed on the woods periodically up until the time of the attack on 23 March. A heavy preparation of mortar fire was placed on the woods prior to the attack, after which the 81-mm mortars fired a rolling barrage about 100 yards in front of Company A as it advanced. No enemy resistance was encountered although several enemy

were killed and numerous others found dead as a result of artillery and mortar fire poured into the area during the preceding 24 hours. It is felt that the task of clearing the woods was made much easier due to the use of the rolling barrage. The few enemy remaining in the woods elected to take cover from the mortar fire rather than offer active resistance to the advance. Company A did not suffer a single casualty as a result of enemy action during this attack.

3. USE OF WHITE PHOSPHOROUS HAND GRENADES IN CAVE WARFARE

The task of mopping up cave positions was much easier when white phosphorous hand grenades were used to drive the enemy out of the caves. Past experience had taught the infantrymen the value of this weapon. It had been found that white phosphorous hand grenades were more effective than flame throwers against large caves. Their value in cave warfare cannot be overemphasized.

4. MISSION ASSIGNED TO COMPANY A ON 24 MARCH 1945

It is felt that the order directing Company A to send patrols to the BOSO BOSO RIVER was not based upon a sound estimate of the situation and sound planning. No further amplification of this order was given by the battalion commander. Looking at this order in retrospect, it is considered to have been beyond the capabilities of the company under the circumstances in which it found itself. The commander of Company A was aware of the fact that the XI Corps wanted to drive all the way to the river. Doing so would have severed the enemy's final North-South line of communications and prevented further evacuation of troops from Southern Luzon. He would then be forced to bypass the area

through the trackless mountains East of the river. However, the river was approximately 2500 yards East of the company's present position. The intervening terrain sloped into the valley below, but it was extremely rough and most of it was heavily wooded. The enemy's strength and dispositions in this particular area were completely unknown. It was known that the enemy had reinforced his central sector in the Shimbu Line, and it was felt that he would fight desperately to retain his last remaining line of communications.

Although the division engineers had pushed the main supply road up to the front lines, no vehicular traffic could go forward of Company A's present position without extensive construction. For this reason, it would have been necessary to hand carry food, water, ammunition, and other supplies to any unit located forward of that point. No provisions had been made for this support. It is not believed that sufficient troops were available within the regiment for the protection of the long line of communications that would have resulted from such a move. All three battalions were actively engaged at that time.

5. COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP

Operations conducted under circumstances such as those described herein require aggressive leadership by all officers and noncommissioned officers. In the attack on Objective "B", observation was limited and the situation pertaining to the enemy and the terrain was obscure. For this reason, the company commander accompanied the assault platoons. From his location, he was able to modify his plan as required to insure successful accomplishment of the company's mission.

Platoon leaders and squad leaders were habitually near the head of their respective units. Although this practice may vary somewhat from accepted tactical doctrine, it was considered necessary at the time. The presence of the leader among his leading troops not only bolstered their morale but also expedited operations. Each new development in the situation could be met with appropriate action quickly. At times, the company commander became so involved in the operations of one of the platoons that he lost sight of the fact that it was his responsibility to direct the actions of the entire company--not just a single platoon. This did not have any adverse effect in these operations, however. A suitable balance must be maintained between effective control and personal leadership with sufficient flexibility to permit placing greater emphasis on one or the other temporarily.

6. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

Hot meals, water, ammunition, and other supplies continued to reach the company twice daily. There was never a shortage that could affect the outcome of these operations. The morale and combat efficiency of the troops would have been seriously impaired if the supply system had failed. Particular credit is due the company mess personnel who made this achievement possible.

Casualties received first aid promptly. The battalion surgeon gave excellent "on-the-spot" treatment to the wounded in both cases when he was needed. Although this practice did not conform to accepted medical doctrine, it did not interfere with the accomplishment of the medical mission in support of these operations. Furthermore, it undoubtedly

saved the lives of several men who could not have survived evacuation to the battalion aid station before receiving surgical attention.

The successful accomplishment of the supply and evacuation missions during these operations can be attributed largely to the untiring efforts of the 6th Engineer (Combat) Battalion which constructed and maintained the Sightseer's Highway (division main supply road). Without this road, large-scale operations in the SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS could not have been sustained.

7. SIGNAL COMMUNICATION

Signal communication played a relatively insignificant role in the operations described herein. This was primarily due to the limited distances involved which permitted the maximum degree of personal coordination between commanders and leaders. No situation reports were made to battalion on either day since the battalion commander and one or more of his staff were present observing the action closely at all times. Wire communication was not used within the company. It was established between battalion and Company A's perimeter at the end of the first day of action and provided uninterrupted service. Radio sets SCR-536 were utilized exclusively for communication within the company and provided excellent control at all times. No other means of communication would have been practical under the circumstances. The radios functioned perfectly throughout these operations and were invaluable in securing 60-mm mortar fire to cover the 2d platoon's withdrawal from "the spur" on the morning of 24 March. Both wire and radio were used by

observers from the mortar platoons. There was never any delay in securing fire support that was caused by a communication failure.

8. THE ENEMY'S DEFENSE

One of the most important factors contributing to the success of these operations was the enemy's failure to offer active, organized, and continuous resistance to the advance. It must be remembered that the enemy had suffered tremendous losses in men, materiel, and supplies during the preceding month. His main defense line had been systematically destroyed, except for isolated mountain strongholds. His troops had been subjected to constant pounding by artillery and mortars, as well as bombers and fighter-bombers. The enemy encountered in these operations could have delayed the successful accomplishment of the company's missions by offering continuous resistance. However, he lacked leadership and tactical unity. He seemed to accept death as inevitable but attempted to prolong life as long as possible by hiding in caves and tunnels. In this way, he escaped much of the devastating fire that was placed upon him when he exposed himself. None of the positions encountered were mutually supporting. Therefore, each one could be attacked individually and destroyed. Fewer troops were required in the reduction of such positions.

LESSONS

1. Orders should be issued sufficiently in advance of an operation to permit necessary reconnaissance, planning, coordination, and issuance of orders by subordinate units.

2. By forcing the enemy to take cover, a rolling

barrage facilitates the uninterrupted approach of attacking troops to the enemy position.

3. White phosphorous hand grenades are invaluable as a means of driving enemy troops out of caves.

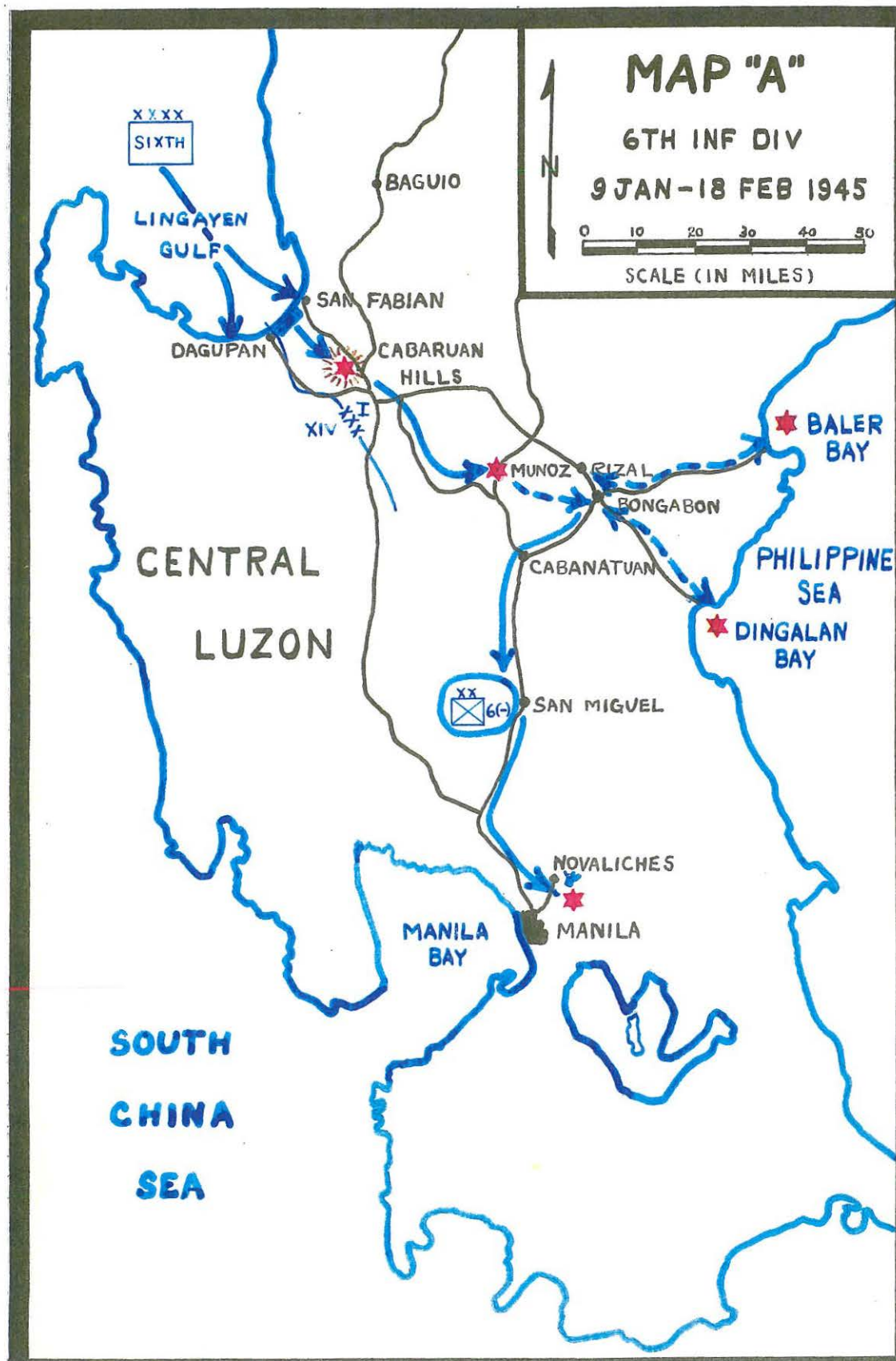
4. A mission assigned to a unit should be specific, understood, and within the capabilities of the unit.

5. A commander must place himself where he can exert the greatest influence on the outcome of the operation.

6. Ground operations can be sustained in remote areas only when adequate logistical support is provided.

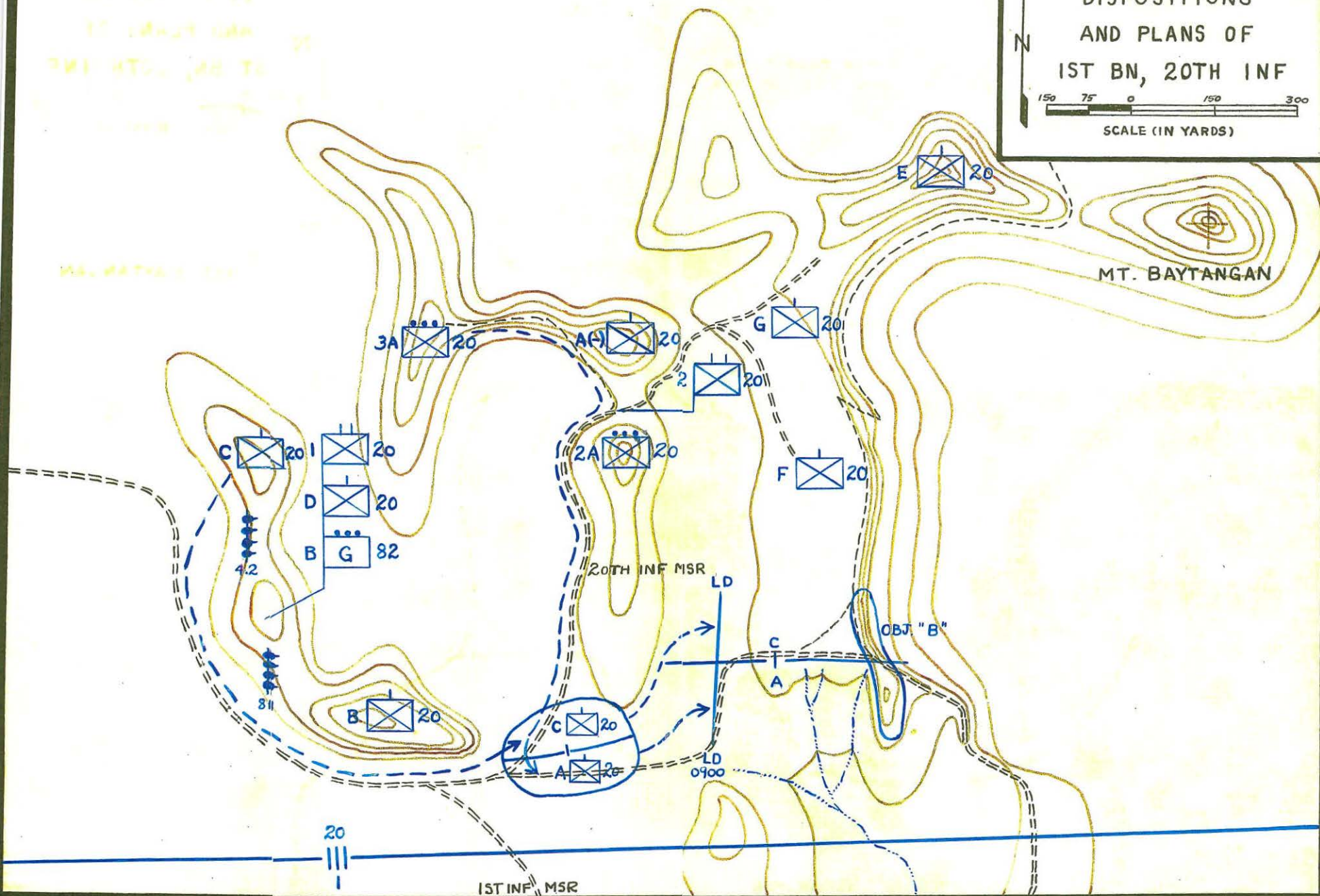
7. Lightweight voice radios, when properly employed, are the most practical means of controlling a rifle company in offensive operations.

8. Cave positions that are not actively defended and supported by fire from adjacent positions can be attacked and destroyed by small units.



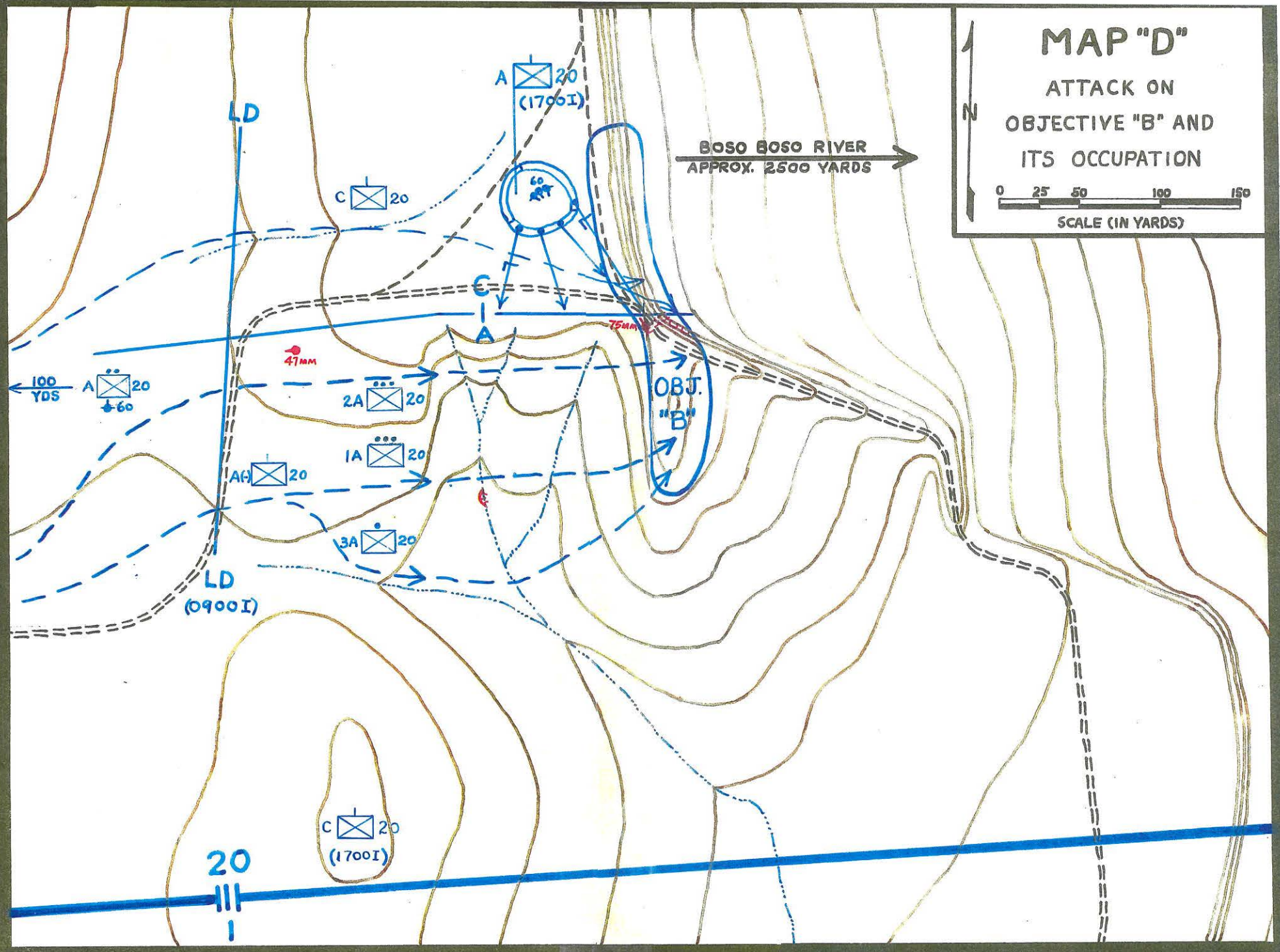
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SCALE (IN YARDS)



MAP "D"

ATTACK ON OBJECTIVE "B" AND ITS OCCUPATION



SCALE (IN YARDS)



BOSO BOSO RIVER
APPROX. 2500 YARDS

