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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 128TH INFANTRY  
(32D INFANTRY DIVISION) AT LIMON, LEYTE, PHILIPPINE  
ISLANDS, 16-23 NOVEMBER 1944  
(LEYTE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Assault Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION ATTACKING  
MOUNTAIN FORTIFICATIONS PROTECTING THE STRONGHOLD OF  
LIMON

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	3
ORIENTATION.....	4
Introduction.....	4
The General Situation.....	5
General Dispositions of Enemy Units on Leyte.....	8
Previous History of the 3d Battalion.....	9
Geography, Weather and Terrain.....	11
The Situation on Leyte on 14 November 1944.....	13
General Dispositions of the 24th Infantry Division.....	13
The Plan of the 32d Infantry Division.....	14
The Battalion Situation.....	15
Dispositions and Plans of the Regiment and the Battalion.....	17
Movement to the Line of Departure.....	19
NARRATION.....	20
The Attack to Secure the Line of Departure.....	20
The Attack Towards Limon.....	21
The Second Day's Attack Towards Limon.....	28
The Battalion Goes into the Defense.....	34
The Attack of Limon.....	38
The Japanese Counterattack.....	42
The 3d Battalion Returns to Ridge 19.....	44
Summation.....	45
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	46
LESSONS.....	52

MAP A Sixth Army and Battalion Enroute to the Philippines  
MAP B The Sixth Army Plan  
MAP C Sixth Army Operations  
MAP D Dispositions of Enemy Troops when Operation Began  
MAP E Sixth Army Operations 2 November - 14 November 1944  
MAP F General Dispositions of the 32d Infantry Division  
MAP G Breakneck Ridge and Limon Area

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry, 32d US Infantry Division, in the Battle of LIMON, LEYTE, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, 16-23 November 1944, during the forcing of a passage south through the mountains from PINAMPOAN to the ORMOC VALLEY.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events leading up to this action.

By early summer of 1942, Japan had conquered a vast area in the western PACIFIC and southeast of ASIA and commenced its consolidation of positions on the eastern coast of NEW GUINEA and on the island of GUADALCANAL in the southern SOLOMONS. On 7 August 1942 the United States counteroffensive in the PACIFIC was begun with the landing in the TULAGI - GUADALCANAL area of the SOLOMON ISLANDS. The SOLOMONS campaign came to an end with the landings upon NEW BRITAIN, and by October 1944, Sixth Army had control of WESTERN NEW BRITAIN, the ADMIRALTIES, and had completed operations on the north coast of NEW GUINEA, to include securing the southeast portion of MOROTAI in the HALMAHERAS, and was enroute to the PHILIPPINES to begin the liberation of the PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. (See Map A) (1)

LEYTE ISLAND, in the eastern VISAYAS, was selected for the initial landing in the PHILIPPINES. In making LEYTE the target

(1) A-1, p. 457-459

and plunging into the center of the PHILIPPINES, the landing would isolate the Japs in the northern islands from their forces in the south and place our air and naval forces in position to complete the severance of their lines of communication to the valuable resources of the NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES. (See Map A) (2)

The LEYTE OPERATION was divided into four phases. Phase I was to consist of the preliminary amphibious operations to secure the entrance to LEYTE GULF. Phase II -- the crucial period -- was to comprise a major amphibious assault to destroy hostile forces in the coastal strip from TACLOBAN to DULAG, and to seize and secure airdromes and base sites in this area. A rapid advance through the LEYTE VALLEY to seize and occupy the CAPOOCAN - CARIGARA - BARUGO area was to follow. (See Map B) (3)

Phase III was to include the overland and shore-to-shore operations necessary to destroy hostile forces remaining in LEYTE, to seize and occupy the western portion of southern SAMAR, and to open SURIGAO STRAIT. Phase IV was to consist of such operations as might later be directed to occupy northern SAMAR and to destroy or contain hostile garrisons in the VISAYAS. Construction missions were to be completed during this period.

The target date for A-Day was 20 October 1944. (See Map B) (4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION (See Map B)

The first phase of the LEYTE OPERATION was completed on D minus three. Combat troops, from the Ranger Infantry Battalion, occupied the northern tip of DINAGAT ISLAND and made landings on the southeastern coast of HOMONHON ISLAND the following day.

(2) A-2, p. 63-64

(3) A-3, p. 20

(4) A-3, p. 20

Securing of the vital points on these islands, which guarded the eastern entrance to LEYTE GULF, paved the way for the entrance of the US Navy. Following the landings, minesweepers ranged back and forth across the gulf, clearing it for the armada already on its way. Early in the morning of A-Day, our amphibious forces entered LEYTE GULF and at 1000 hours commenced landing operations.

(5)

The Xth Corps, commanded by Major General Franklin G. Sibert, was composed of the 1st Cavalry Division and the 24th Infantry Division (minus the 21st Infantry Regiment), and after landing on A-Day in the MARASBARAS and in the PALO - PAWING areas of LEYTE, was to capture TACLOBAN AIRDROME, and PALO. Upon completion of these missions, Xth Corps was to establish control over the SAN JUANICO STRAIT and advance northwest from PALO to seize and occupy the CAPOOCAN - CARIGARA - BARGUO areas, and destroy hostile forces in the LEYTE VALLEY. (6)

The XXIVth Corps, commanded by Major General John R. Hodge, and comprised the 7th and 96th Infantry Division, was to land on A-Day in the DULAG area of LEYTE, seizing thereafter the DULAG - BURAUEN - DAGAMI - TANAUAN area and destroying the hostile forces in that locality. When directed, the XXIVth Corps was to seize ABUYOG, and then, after advancing westward to BAYBAY, destroy the enemy forces along the west coast of LEYTE. In addition the XXIVth Corps, when directed, was to relieve the 21st Infantry Regiment and the 6th Ranger Infantry Battalion in their respective areas. (7)

(5) A-2, p. 64

(6) A-3, p. 20

(7) A-3, p. 20

The 21st Infantry Regiment, reinforced (minus the Cannon Company), was to land on A-Day in the vicinity of PANAON STRAIT to secure control of that entrance to SOGOD BAY. (8)

The 381st Infantry Regiment of the 96th Infantry Division, as the Sixth Army Floating Reserve, was to be prepared to reinforce elements of the Sixth Army in the objective area. The 32d Infantry Division in NEW GUINEA, and the 77th Infantry Division in GUAM, were designated as the Sixth Army Reserve, to be prepared to load from their present areas after A / 3 on a 24-hour notice to reinforce elements of the Sixth Army in the objective area as directed. (9)

The Sixth Army Service Command (ASCOM) was to establish air facilities in accordance with the objectives outlined by General Headquarters, and to initiate the establishment of naval, air, and logistic facilities as directed by the Commanding General, Sixth Army, for the support of subsequent operations to re-occupy the PHILIPPINES. In addition, ASCOM, when directed, was to assume responsibility for the unloading of all units, supplies, and materials arriving in the objective area. (10)

The second phase of the LEYTE OPERATION was completed by the Sixth Army on 2 November. In the Xth Corps zone the 24th Infantry Division (minus the 21st Infantry Regiment) driving up LEYTE VALLEY, joined with the 1st Cavalry to take CARIGARA, thus securing the LEYTE VALLEY. Elements of the 1st Cavalry Division had secured the southwest portion of SAMAR ISLAND, thus controlling SAN JUANICO STRAIT. (See Map C) (11)

(8) A-3, p. 20

(9) A-3, p. 20

(10) A-3, p. 20

(11) A-4, p. 24



In the XXIVth Corps zone to the south, the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions had advanced rapidly and secured the southern portion of LEYTE VALLEY to include DULAG - BARAUEN - DAGAMI - TANAUAN, the air strip at DULAG, and three airfields in the BURAUEN area. (See Map C) (12)

GENERAL DISPOSITIONS OF ENEMY UNITS ON LEYTE (See Map D)

The Japanese on LEYTE, when the operation began, were estimated at 21,000 troops, including the bulk of the 16th Japanese Infantry Division with headquarters at TACLOBAN, elements of the 102d Japanese Infantry Division, and base defense and service troops. Principal dispositions on LEYTE were 7,300 in the CARIGARA - TACLOBAN sector, 5,500 in the DULAG - BURAUEN area, 5,100 in the ORMOC area, and 3,800 south of the line BAYBAY - ABUYOG. (13)

By A-Day it was possible that a total of two Japanese divisions would be disposed in the LEYTE area, possibly by shifting the remainder of the 102d Japanese Infantry Division from CENTRAL VISAYAS. (14)

Enemy aircraft in the PHILIPPINES were estimated at approximately 500 planes of all types, exclusive of an unknown number of combat planes and depot aircraft unassigned to operational units, a portion of which could be pressed into combat. With these accretions and by means of withdrawing aircraft from forward areas and reinforcements from Japan and other rear areas, the enemy could have 1,000 - 1,500 planes available for combat in the PHILIPPINES by A-Day. Enemy naval strength in the PHILIPPINES

(12) A-4, p. 24

(13) A-3, p. 93

(14) A-3, p. 93

area was estimated to consist of 3 battleships, 1 escort carrier, 3 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, 11 - 13 destroyers, 2 submarines and 200 - 300 motor torpedo boats. In addition, there was some indications of the possible movement of the main strength of the Mobile Striking Force Fleet from home waters to the PHILIPPINES. (15)

The Japanese 14th Area Army had been alerted to our landing on LEYTE, and under cover of a major naval engagement conducted off the eastern and southern coast of LEYTE and inclement weather, from 24-27 October 1944, moved in large bodies of reinforcing troops. Elements of the 30th Japanese Division from MINDANAO; elements of the 102d Japanese Infantry Division from CEBU, elements of the 26th Japanese Infantry Division from LUZON, and the Japanese 1st Infantry Division from MANCHURIA all moved in during the period 25 October - 11 November 1944. General Yamashita, the Japanese Commander in the PHILIPPINES, intended to hold LEYTE at all costs. (16)

#### PREVIOUS HISTORY OF THE 3D BATTALION (See Map A)

A brief discussion of the history of the 3d Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32d US Infantry Division, from its training in the United States to its initial baptism in WORLD WAR II at BUNA; then its contested steps on through SAIDOR, AITAPE, and its staging and embarkation from HOLLANDIA (all in NEW GUINEA) is given for the benefit of the reader so that in the following narration the reader will be acquainted with the background of the Battalion up to the LEYTE OPERATION.

(15) A-3, p. 93

(16) A-5, p. 71

The 32d Infantry Division was trained and toughened by three months of maneuvers in LOUISIANA and two months in the CAROLINAS after it was called into Federal Service on 15 October 1940. During the early months of 1942 the Division received further training in AUSTRALIA while the high command watched anxiously the clutching fingers of Japan's advance, clawing over the OWEN STANLEY MOUNTAINS towards PORT MORESEY on the southern coast of NEW GUINEA. (17)

Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Alexander J. McNab, the Battalion with elements of its own Regiment and those of the 127th Infantry Regiment, were moved by air to bases east of BUNA, in the malarial jungle on the other side of the OWEN STANLEY MOUNTAINS the latter part of September 1942. With the defeat of the Japs at BUNA, the Battalion with the other elements of its Division was relieved of the mopping-up phase by the 41st US Infantry Division. (18)

The Battalion was returned to AUSTRALIA with its Division and immediately went into an intensive period of basic, combat and amphibious training. Within eight months after its return to AUSTRALIA the Battalion was rebuilt and ready to fight again. In September 1943 the NEW GUINEA OFFENSIVE mounted in tempo and the entire Division was moved to GOODENOUGH ISLAND to stage for its next operation. (19)

The Japanese tried to by-pass the Allied beachhead made on SAIDOR. The Japs straggled in unorganized columns through the high peaks of the FINISTEERE MOUNTAINS trying to reach their

(17) A-6, p. 8

(18) A-7, p. 43

(19) Personal knowledge

bases at MADANG. The Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Milton F. Ziebell, took to the mountains after their landing at SAIDOR the early part of January 1944, and by extensive patrolling cut the Jap's route from PARAMUS to GABUMI. (20)

The DRINIUMOR RIVER 17 miles to the east of AITAFE, became the main line of resistance for the US Forces. The Battalion took part in the defense of this line after its landing at AITAFE in April 1944. After being placed under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William A. Duncan the Battalion was relieved of its defensive role and was given the mission of repulsing the Japs at AFUA. The Japs were attempting an envelopment on the right of the DRINIUMOR RIVER, the right flank of the US Forces. These Japs were repulsed by the Battalion after several attempts by day and night attacks. As the Japs started to withdraw they were caught by an encircling force and were defeated in detail. (21)

The 32d Infantry Division was relieved at AITAFE and moved up to HOLLANDIA, where it staged and departed on 9 November 1944 for LEYTE by water as ordered by the Sixth Army. At 0700 hours the morning of 14 November 1944 this Division that the Japanese named "The Bloody Butchers of New Guinea" arrived in SAN PEDRO BAY, LEYTE, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. (22)

GEOGRAPHY, WEATHER AND TERRAIN (See Map B)

LEYTE is the eighth largest PHILIPPINE ISLAND, some 125 miles long and from 20 to 40 miles wide, centrally located in the PHILIPPINE group. The island is divided by exceedingly

(20) A-6, p. 12

(21) A-6, p. 18

(22) Personal knowledge

rough mountainous terrain, heavily wooded by tropical rain forest and is broken only by two major lowland areas. The LEYTE VALLEY extends from CARIGARA BAY on the north to TACLOBAN and ABUYOG on the east coast. The ORMOC VALLEY runs from ORMOC BAY north toward LIMON. (23)

The island of LEYTE receives considerable rainfall normally and especially during the monsoon season, or when the inter-tropical front passes the PHILIPPINES which practically coincided with the LEYTE OPERATION. In addition, the typhoons make up an entirely separate climatic factor and are formed in this same front of winds which pass directly through LEYTE ISLAND during the months of October, November and December. This weather condition was a risk, known and considered during the planning of the operation. (24)

The road from the vicinity of CARIGARA to PINAMOPOAN follows the bay and was built over very marshy ground. This road gave way due to rains and heavy traffic and became an absolute bog. It had to be abandoned to all but emergency traffic while the engineers worked frantically to reconstruct it; however, this took over two months. In the meantime the only means of supply was landing craft carrying supplies from the east coast of LEYTE through the SAN JUANICO STRAIT to the PINAMOPOAN area. The supplies from this point were all practically hand carried (using some Filipino carriers) to the forward troops. (25)

The terrain west of PINAMOPOAN rose abruptly into the mountains with a winding road (Highway 2) from PINAMOPOAN to

(23) A-1, p. 459

(24) A-1, p. 460

(25) A-1, p. 518

LIMON; then from LIMON the terrain again rose abruptly into mountains with a winding road (Highway 2) into the ORMOC VALLEY.

(26)

THE SITUATION ON LEYTE ON 14 NOVEMBER 1944 (See Map E)

Following the landing of the Sixth Army on LEYTE between TACLOBAN and DULAG on 20 October 1944, elements of the Sixth Army advanced to the south, southeast, and north against ineffective enemy opposition and by 14 November, held a beachhead extending generally from ABUYOG on the east coast to PINAMOPOAN on the north coast. The XXIVth Corps, consisting of the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions, was operating to the south of BINABAAN RIVER with the Xth Corps, consisting of the 1st Cavalry Division and the 24th Infantry Division, operating to the north and northwest of this river. (27)

The Xth Corps troop dispositions were as follows: The 1st Cavalry Division, minus the 8th Cavalry, was operating in the MT. PINA - SINAYAWAN area with patrols operating as far west as MT. CABUNGAAN. The 24th Infantry Division since their landing on A-Day had advanced westward from its positions at CARIGARA, captured PINAMOPOAN on 4 November, then turned southward on HIGHWAY 2, in the direction of ORMOC. Shortly thereafter it encountered strong and stubborn resistance on BREAKNECK RIDGE. (28)

GENERAL DISPOSITIONS OF THE 24TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
(See Map E) (29)

The 24th Infantry Division was disposed as follows: The 21st Infantry Regiment was 1,000 yards south of PINAMOPOAN,

(26) Personal knowledge

(27) A-8, p. 5

(28) A-5, p. 180

(29) A-8, p. 5, 6

astride HIGHWAY 2 and in contact with the Japanese 1st Infantry Division that had moved to the north from ORMOC after its landing on 2 November 1944, into the upper ORMOC VALLEY. One Regiment of this Division was in contact with the 21st Infantry, the exact location of the remainder of the 1st Japanese Division was not known at this time. This Japanese Division was reported as being one of Japan's finest; well equipped, adequately supplied and all echelons displayed evidence of having been thoroughly trained. It lacked none of the determination for which the Jap soldier was so highly lauded.

The 34th Infantry, 1st Battalion, was in the vicinity of TOLIBAW, and was in contact with enemy patrols. 2d and 3d Battalions of the 34th Infantry were operating a patrol screen in the mountains south of CAPOOCAN - CULASIAN and were not in contact with the Japs in strength. The 19th Infantry, 2d Battalion was 1,000 yards southeast of LIMON and was in contact with strong Japanese forces. 1st and 3d Battalions of the 19th Infantry were in the vicinity of CULASIAN as the 24th Infantry Division reserve.

#### THE PLAN OF THE 32D INFANTRY DIVISION (See Map F)

The troops of the 32d Infantry Division started their disembarking at 0800 hours on 14 November, SAN PEDRO BAY, LEYTE, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, and were completely disembarked by 1800 hours; the vehicles and bulk cargo were completely unloaded 15 November by 1200 hours. The Division was immediately attached to Xth Corps and a verbal warning order was delivered by the Deputy Chief of the Xth Corps, to the effect that the 32d Infantry Division would immediately relieve elements of the 24th Infantry Division in the PINAMOPOAN area. (30)

This order directed that at least one regiment be committed by 16 November, and that the Division would participate in the attack south along the PINAMOPOAN - ORMOC HIGHWAY (HIGHWAY 2) passing through elements of the 24th Infantry Division, and occupy the high ground extending east from a point one mile southwest of TOLIBAW to the east of HIGHWAY 2. Thus the 32d Infantry Division (part of the Sixth Army Reserve) entered the struggle for western LEYTE with the rainy season at its height. (31)

The 128th Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel John A. Hettinger, was the first Regiment of the Division selected by the Commanding General to be committed, in order to comply with the Xth Corps order. The Regiment was to move by motor from the landing beach near PALO to the vicinity of CAPOOCAN immediately; then by motor and foot to assembly positions in rear of the 21st Infantry to launch its attack against the enemy on 16 November. (32)

The 127th Infantry was to go into an assembly area in CAPOOCAN. The 126th Infantry was designated as the Division reserve, to be moved into JARO - TUNGA area and be prepared to move to assembly areas in the vicinity of PINAMOPOAN on Division order. The 32d Division Artillery was to go into firing position in the vicinity of CAPOOCAN and CULASIAN. (33)

THE BATTALION SITUATION  
(See Map F) (34)

The 3d Battalion landed carrying one unit of fire and each man had in his pack, besides his allotted clothing equipment,

- (31) A-8, p. 4
- (32) Personal knowledge
- (33) A-8, p. 7
- (34) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge



three heavy and three light cans of C rations. All of the troops were unloaded at 0800 hours 14 November. I and K Companies were assigned to the beach party for unloading details. The Battalion went into an assembly area a few hundred yards from the beach in PALO. At 1300 hours the Battalion minus I and K Companies loaded into trucks and were moved to JARO, a distance of 23 miles. Upon arrival in this new area the Battalion was given the mission of outposting the area which was to be used as the 128th Infantry bivouac area. The remainder of the Battalion arrived and closed into the area at 1900 hours. The troops messed on the rations they carried in their packs.

On 15 November, the Battalion Commander held a meeting with his Staff Officers and Company Commanders at 0945 hours, and told them the Battalion was to move by motor and foot to an assembly area south of PINAMOPOAN. The Battalion was to stay in the PINAMOPOAN assembly area overnight and be prepared to attack LIMON the morning of 16 November, and no prior reconnaissance was to be made because of secrecy. All of the organizational equipment which had caught up with the Battalion from the ships so far, was to remain in the present bivouac area which had been designated as the rear area. Each company was to leave three guards with their equipment. The Battalion movement would be L, Headquarters, M and K with I Company bringing up the rear of the Battalion.

The movement started at 1230 hours. Troops of the Battalion detrucked at CAPOOCAN at 1400 hours, dropped their water-proof clothing packs at the detrucking point and proceeded by foot a distance of approximately 7 miles over roads that were ankle-to knee-deep in mud.

The Battalion closed into its assembly positions 1,000 yards south of PINAMOPOAN, in rear of the 21st Infantry at 2130 hours. The organic vehicles of the Battalion and supplies other than what were carried by the troops, had not closed in the assembly area at this time. The troops messed on K rations that were given to them at the detrucking point at CAPOOCAN.

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE REGIMENT AND BATTALION  
(See Map F) (35)

At 2200 hours, 15 November, the Battalion Commander was ordered to report to the Regimental CP located about 2,500 yards to the rear of the Battalion assembly area.

The Regimental Commander issued his order at 0015 hours, 16 November. He briefed the Battalion Commanders and his Staff Officers from his notes secured when he visited the 24th Infantry Division command post earlier in the day. He quoted an extract from the Periodic Report No. 26, Headquarters 24th Infantry Division, dated 1800 hours, 14 November. "Japanese resistance in the area of BREAKNECK RIDGE is believed broken. With complete occupation of the ridge area to include minor ground to the south, superior observation and fields of fire allowed the 21st Infantry to obtain the maximum results with machine gun, mortar and artillery during the day. Particularly good results were gained from improved fields of fire for the automatic weapons. Enemy resistance consisted primarily of pockets astride the PINAMOPOAN - ORMOC HIGHWAY (HIGHWAY 2) approximately 1,200 yards north of LIMON." (36)

The Regimental Commander told his Battalion Commanders and Staff Officers that BREAKNECK RIDGE was not one ridge but a series

(35) Statements by Lieutenant Colonel William A. Duncan, then 3d Battalion Commander, 128th Infantry, 32d Infantry Division, 23 March 1950

(36) A-4, p. 85

of ridges in the area where the HIGHWAY crosses the highest ground. The series of ridges were broken into knobs, separated by deep rocky ravines and the entire area was heavily wooded or covered with kunia grass two to five feet high. Visibility was frequently limited from fifteen to twenty yards because of the dense vegetation.

The Regimental Commander planned to execute his mission of relief of the elements of the 21st Infantry, and the attack towards LIMON and its capture, using two battalions astride HIGHWAY 2, the 1st Battalion on the left (east), the 3d Battalion on the right (west). The 2d Battalion was to follow the attack of the 1st Battalion as Regimental reserve.

The hour of relief and attack was set at 0800 hours, 16 November, and no prior reconnaissance was desired in the interest of secrecy. The Regimental Commander stated that units of the 21st Infantry were alerted for the relief, that the sector had been recently very quiet, that additional information regarding the terrain and the enemy could be secured from the respective commanders being relieved at the time of relief.

To effect the relief at that hour, the Regimental Commander said it would necessitate the battalions leaving their assembly areas at dawn, in order to be in position at the rear of the elements to be relieved before 0800 hours.

Supply would be effected by motor, native carriers, and by air drop if necessary.

During the period 16 November to 1800 hours 19 November, the artillery missions would be under the control of the 24th Division Artillery. The 24th Division Artillery was to be used

because some of the 32d Division Artillery was still unloading or held up by road restrictions, and the 24th Division Artillery was in firing position.

From the preliminary reconnaissance earlier in the day, and the information received from the Regimental Commander, the Battalion Commander issued his order to his Battalion Staff Officers and Company Commanders at 0630 hours, 16 November in the Battalion assembly area. He said that the Battalion was to move out at 0700 hours. The formation from the assembly area would be a column of companies I, K, Headquarters, M and along HIGHWAY 2 up to the position of the 21st Infantry, which was a distance of about two miles. After the Battalion reached the positions of the 21st Infantry, further orders would be issued.

MOVEMENT TO THE LINE OF DEPARTURE  
(See Map G) (37)

The 3d Battalion column started from its assembly area at 0700 hours on 16 November. Each man carried 3 days of K rations plus additional ammunition issued prior to the movement.

As the head of the column cleared the assembly area onto HIGHWAY 2, it was met by men of the 21st Infantry who were moving towards the rear. These troops cheered the oncoming 3d Battalion and told them they were relieved by troops of the 128th Infantry. This word was passed on to the Battalion Commander who stopped some of the troops moving to the rear, questioning them where their positions were on the line. Upon learning they were from the right (west) side of the HIGHWAY, he overtook the head of his Battalion and told Captain Lutz, the I Company Commander, that he was going ahead and would meet the column on the HIGHWAY near the rear of the positions of the 21st Infantry.

(37) Personal knowledge

When the Battalion Commander arrived at the positions that were astride the HIGHWAY, he was met by an officer of the 2d Battalion, 21st Infantry who told him they had taken all of their men off the line except the positions astride the HIGHWAY, and that these positions were being manned until elements of the 128th Infantry arrived. Shortly thereafter the head of the 3d Battalion arrived. Immediately the Battalion Commander directed the Commander of I Company to start placing his men in the positions that were vacated by the 21st Infantry right (west) of the HIGHWAY to restore the line, and when the line was reoccupied to inform him so that the Battalion could go into the attack.

#### NARRATION

##### THE ATTACK TO SECURE THE LINE OF DEPARTURE (See Map G) (38)

Company I started to move into the positions at 0745 hours, as the positions were being filled from astride the HIGHWAY then extending west to the exposed flank. Small arms fire hit a few of I Company men that were part of a platoon moving into the positions about seventy five yards west of the HIGHWAY. It was soon learned that the fire was coming from the positions along the flank on the ridge line. This firing could only mean the Japs had moved into positions vacated by the 21st Infantry.

The Battalion Commander contacted the Commander of I Company in reference to the firing and was told by the Company Commander that some Japs must have moved into some of the positions on the flank inflicting several casualties in his company. He also told the Battalion Commander his company was just about set to attack those positions in order to occupy them.

(38) Personal knowledge

While I Company was trying to retake the positions, the balance of the Battalion was instructed to remain in their march order formation. The Battalion Commander tried to locate some officers or men of the 21st Infantry to find out if there were any supporting weapons still in position to fire. His search was in vain, for there were no men or weapons of the 21st Infantry in sight.

I Company after slow, hard position to position fighting, secured at 1100 hours the Line of Departure.

THE ATTACK TOWARDS LIMON  
(See Map G) (39)

As soon as I Company reported that the Line of Departure was secured, the Company Commanders reported to the Battalion Commander at his OP to receive the balance of the attack order. From this point which was left (east) of HIGHWAY 2, the terrain to the front started to slope downward. The highest ground was the ridge they were on (BREAKNECK RIDGE), the irregular ground formed mass obstructions and it appeared that all of the high ground sloped down from the east, west, north and south. The HIGHWAY was seen from this point only in sections, and was a winding road with a high bank on its left and a sloping bank on its right. From a map study, a conclusion was drawn that LIMON was the lowest ground and the high ground around it placed LIMON within the center of a bowl, with the LEYTE RIVER south of LIMON running northwest.

After the Battalion Commander oriented the Company Commanders on the ground to their front, he referred to their maps which were radically inaccurate with a 1/250,000 scale. He then gave the

(39) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge

following attack order: The Battalion will attack towards LIMON at 1230 hours, L Company will be in the lead, K Company was to follow L Company echeloned to the right, along the HIGHWAY. The HIGHWAY was inclusive to L Company and it was to make physical contact with the 2d Battalion on the left flank. K Company was to guide itself on L Company and maintain contact with it. Each company would have approximately a 200 yard front. I Company was to remain in its present position along the Line of Departure and be prepared to move forward upon order, and maintain security patrols to its immediate front and the right flank of the Battalion. M Company was to attach one machine gun platoon to L Company and one to K Company. The mortars of M Company were to be in general support of the Battalion in firing position in rear of BREAKNECK RIDGE. The assault Platoon and the balance of the Battalion was to remain in the rear of BREAKNECK RIDGE under the command of Major Millard G. Gray, the Battalion Executive Officer. This rear group was to be prepared to move forward on order. All requests for artillery fire were to go through Battalion then it would be relayed to Regiment, because there were no artillery liaison officer or forward observers with Battalion.

Communication was to be by SCR 300 radios between companies and Battalion. The route of evacuation was to be along HIGHWAY 2 to the rear, the Battalion casualties were to be turned over to the Collecting Platoon of the 107th Medical Company. If the situation permitted, kitchen and supply trucks were to follow on HIGHWAY 2 when they came up from the rear.

L Company jumped off at 1230 hours in a column of platoons. As soon as the 1st Platoon made its first turn on the HIGHWAY.

25 yards in front of BREAKNECK RIDGE, enemy artillery started to fall on the ridge, then shifted onto the HIGHWAY. The lead platoon of L Company kept moving forward under the enemy artillery fire, and shortly ran into small arms fire that came from their front on the HIGHWAY. The positions from which the small arms fire came were spotted and within a few minutes the battalion received credit for its first enemy killed in the LEYTE OPERATION. Company L was not able to investigate the positions they silenced because an intense stream of machine gun fire forced them off the HIGHWAY, and they received several casualties. After the wounded were removed from the HIGHWAY, which was accomplished with the aid of smoke hand grenades, the company received several more casualties from Japanese artillery fire that fell in the vicinity of the white smoke.

The Commander of L Company contacted the Battalion Commander by radio requesting artillery fire on the enemy artillery pieces that were firing on his company. The Battalion Commander told the Company Commander that he had requested counterbattery fire from Regiment, and that Regiment was sending him an artillery map showing the concentrations fired by the 24th Division Artillery. He also told him that Regiment was trying to get an artillery observation plane up to spot the Japanese artillery positions. There was now no means to call for artillery fire, until he received the artillery map showing the plotted concentrations.

The Japanese artillery fire falling on L Company lifted and L Company tried several times to continue the attack as was planned, but was forced off the HIGHWAY each time because of the effective enemy artillery and machine gun coverage. The Japanese



artillery fire would fall in the general vicinity of the HIGHWAY that the troops of L Company would come up on as if the artillery fire were on call.

At 1330 hours a heavy rain started. Captain Elfers, L Company CO, contacted the Battalion Commander by radio and told him the company was receiving too many casualties by trying to keep on the HIGHWAY or trying to get on the high bank of the road. He told the Battalion Commander he would like to keep off the HIGHWAY as much as possible and instead of moving on the HIGHWAY move along the lower bank and come up on the HIGHWAY about every fifty yards. In this way it might be possible to clean up the HIGHWAY in a piece meal fashion, and cut down the number of casualties. The Battalion Commander approved the plan, and also informed the L Company CO that according to an artillery map just received from Regiment, concentration number 13, was on a ridge above the HIGHWAY, with a definite bend towards the west. This ridge would be the objective for his company, and after taking it he would report and be prepared to move on order. The distance to this objective was about 300 yards from the Line of Departure along the HIGHWAY. The Battalion Commander also informed him Battalion could now call for artillery fire, and a copy of the artillery map received from Regiment showing the concentrations, was now on the way to the Company Commanders. He told the Commander of L Company that from now on if he wanted any artillery fire, to call Battalion and give the nearest concentration number and make the necessary adjustments himself.

Company L went into action by placing 60mm mortar fire on the HIGHWAY in the vicinity of the area the last machine gun fire

came from. At the same time, a platoon worked itself forward along the lower bank of the HIGHWAY and came up on the road about seventy-five yards from its last starting point. This distance brought the head of the company just in the rear of the enemy positions on the HIGHWAY from which the machine gun fire came. The Japs were taken by surprise and were killed. As soon as the Company Commander observed the success this platoon had, he ordered another platoon from the lower bank of the HIGHWAY up on the road. They were to move forward, and clean up any positions as they moved to join up with the lead platoon. The platoon coming up from the rear eliminated the Japs still taking cover from the 60mm mortar fire that was lifting as the platoon advanced.

The Company Commander noticed his troops were able to move on this section of the HIGHWAY freely, and upon investigation, found the HIGHWAY bent towards the west. From further investigation the Company Commander judged he had reached the company objective, and immediately started to secure it. At 1600 hours he contacted the Battalion Commander by radio and gave the description of the terrain feature the company was on. The Battalion Commander told him to carry on with his plans to secure the ridge, for it appeared to be where artillery concentration 13 had been plotted. He also told the Company Commander, for reference purposes, that the ridges the concentrations were on from now on would be used for terrain identification. The Battalion Commander contacted K Company by radio and instructed the Commander to continue his patrols towards the west, and out as far as possible.

The Battalion Commander contacted the Regimental Commander by radio and informed him of the location of the head of his

Battalion. The Regimental Commander told him to consolidate his gains for the day and be prepared to continue the attack in the morning. The Battalion Commander then contacted his Executive Officer and Company Commanders by radio and informed them that the Battalion was to set up its perimeter on RIDGE (CONCENTRATION) 13 for the night, L Company would take the high ground which it was on, K Company to tie in with L Company on its left, I Company to move forward at once and tie in with L Company on its left and K Company on its right. I Company was also to get a patrol out at once and contact the 2d Battalion on the left (east). The Executive Officer was to move up to RIDGE 13 with the balance of the battalion and take up positions within the perimeter.

At 1930 hours the Battalion was closed into its perimeter. At the end of the first day's attack, the 3d Battalion veterans accounted for 30 known killed Japs and knew the enemy they were in contact with, were elements of the 1st Japanese Division. During the day's action the Japanese displayed excellent fire discipline and control of their supporting weapons. Its delivery, in great volume well timed, showed great effect. The enemy's cover and concealment was superior, and once again the veterans realized that in order to take the enemy positions it was necessary to destroy each one, by gun fire, grenades, suffocation or application of flame throwers. Flame throwers, most effective for this type of fighting, were not available to the Battalion Assault Platoon at this time as they still were enroute from the beach.

The enemy positions were constructed differently from those in NEW GUINEA. The Japs' positions were dug into the high and low

banks of the road. When dug into the high banks they were completely protected from artillery and mortar fire. They also were dug with connecting tunnels so each position connected with another, and in many cases with a series of connecting tunnels. The positions dug on the lower banks were into the shoulders of the road, with an entrance from the lower bank. All the positions dug along the HIGHWAY supported each other and the Japanese took advantage of all the draws along the banks and made them strong points.

The Japanese artillery was fired differently from the way they had fired it in NEW GUINEA. The day's action showed the artillery firing by the Japs was point firing with several guns, and it appeared that the fire never came from the same area more than once. In NEW GUINEA the Japs were known to fire one piece at a time and into general areas, whereas now they were getting mass fire and on point targets.

The night passed with only Japanese harassing, trying to draw fire in order that their artillery fix our positions. A few rounds of Japanese artillery shells fell close to the positions of L and K Companies without any damage.

The evacuation of the dead and wounded was accomplished prior to securing RIDGE 13, over the tough terrain along the lower bank of the road by men of the Battalion Assault Platoon and Battalion Headquarters. Resupply was done by the same personnel, ammunition was carried forward to RIDGE 13 by the Pioneer and Ammunition Platoon before movement within the perimeter ceased for the night. The troops messed on K rations they had carried in their packs. Up to this time no motor supply or evacuation was possible beyond the morning's Line of Departure.

THE SECOND DAY'S ATTACK TOWARDS LIMON (See Map G) (40)

At dawn, 17 November, the Battalion Commander gave his attack order to his Company Commanders. L Company was to continue the attack to the south along the left side of the HIGHWAY and proceed as far as RIDGE 17, be prepared to continue the attack from there upon order. K Company was to attack to the south along the LEYTE RIVER and protect their right flank by extensive patrolling. The 3rd Platoon of K Company was to remain in its present positions and would support the advance by overhead fire. I Company was to follow L Company and be prepared to assist L Company on order. One section of machine guns from M Company was to be attached to L Company, and one section to K Company. The balance of M Company was to go into firing positions on and to the rear of RIDGE 13 to support the attack as needed. The Battalion Assault Platoon was to take over the positions of L Company when it moved out and would be in general support of the Battalion. The support the Assault Platoon would provide was demolitions that either assault company requested. The Battalion Executive Officer was to organize the balance of the Battalion, and with the Battalion Assault Platoon, form a perimeter on RIDGE 13. A fifteen minute artillery preparation was to be fired on and along RIDGE 17 starting at 0730, and at 0745 L and K Companies were to jump off.

At 0745 L and K Companies jumped off, but L Company no sooner got a few men around the bend of RIDGE 13 when they were hit by machine gun fire from their front. Several attempts were made to get to the wounded but the attempts failed because the

(40) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge

Japs kept the wounded covered with machine gun fire. The Commander of L Company started to move another platoon down the west slope of the HIGHWAY and use the same maneuver that the company used the day before. The platoon moved about fifty yards along the lower bank of the road and was able to come up on the HIGHWAY and once again hit the Japs along this section of the road from the rear and with surprise. The Japs were killed before they could respond to this direction of attack. The wounded and killed were cleared off the road and L Company continued their attack along the HIGHWAY.

K Company on the right of L Company did not meet any resistance, and reached a ridge line the Company Commander judged to be RIDGE 19 according to his copy of the artillery concentration map. He contacted the Battalion Commander and gave him his location, and the Battalion Commander concurred on the location as being RIDGE 19. The Commander of K Company was told to keep his patrols active, secure the ridge, and assist L Company as it kept moving down the HIGHWAY.

At 1330 hours the Battalion Executive Officer contacted the Battalion Commander by radio. The Battalion Commander at this time was moving forward to join K Company on RIDGE 19. The Executive Officer told the Battalion Commander some tanks were on the way up to RIDGE 13 for the Battalion's use. The Battalion Commander instructed his Executive Officer to inform him upon their arrival.

L Company, after mopping up their last opposition, moved along the HIGHWAY about seventy-five yards, then this free movement ended. A machine gun fired into the rear of the men on the

HIGHWAY and at the same time several machine guns started to fire into the men on the road from a draw on the high bank of the HIGHWAY, about 100 yards to the front, in the vicinity of RIDGE 17. The two platoons left the HIGHWAY, leaving behind their wounded and killed that were covered with enemy fire. Those recovered, were removed at once to the lower bank of the road. The Battalion Commander reached L Company just as the enemy fire opened up on the platoons on the road. He at once called Regiment by radio and asked for artillery concentration. 17, Company L 60mm mortars and M Company mortars were layed on and began firing in the vicinity of RIDGE 17 from where the enemy fire was coming. The artillery also came in and it appeared it was right in on the enemy positions, but with all the indirect weapons firing, the enemy fire from the draw still kept the fallen men on the road covered. The Battalion Commander contacted I Company by radio and told the Commander to send out a patrol at once to knock out the enemy machine gun that was firing into the rear of L Company.

The Battalion Commander told the Commander of L Company he was going to join K Company on RIDGE 19 and would see if he could do anything from there to assist in removing the men that were hit on the HIGHWAY. As soon as the Battalion Commander reached the command post of K Company, the I Company Commander reached him by radio and told him his patrol had killed the crew of the enemy machine gun firing into the rear of L Company and had captured the weapon. As soon as the I Company radio transmission was ended the Battalion Executive Officer informed the Battalion Commander a platoon of tanks had just arrived at

RIDGE 13 and wanted to know what their disposition would be.

The Battalion Commander directed him to give the situation pertaining to L Company to the tank commander, then have the tanks proceed down the HIGHWAY and they would be met by the Commander of L Company. The Battalion Commander then contacted the Commander of L Company and told him to meet the tanks and use them to assist in the recovery of the wounded men on the road.

When the tanks arrived at the rear of L Company, they were met by the Commanding Officer and he and the Tank Commander worked out a plan. The plan was for one tank to go forward and engage the enemy weapons that were firing from the draw on the HIGHWAY. Another tank would advance far enough in front of the men lying wounded on the road so the medics and litter bearers could remove them to the lower bank of the road. The second tank was to place itself in a position on the road which would provide a shield against the enemy fire covering our wounded.

The tanks moved out on a prearranged signal and the wounded were removed. This was accomplished none too soon for within a few minutes, enemy artillery fire started to fall in the vicinity of the tanks, getting a few direct hits. The tanks started to withdraw and reached the rear of RIDGE 13 intact, then kept withdrawing towards the rear.

L Company reorganized, removed its wounded and dead towards the rear, and continued the attack. The Company Commander's plan was to move along the low bank of the HIGHWAY then come up just at the rear of the draw from which the enemy fire came. This would be a distance of about 100 yards. The company moved out and received no resistance. When the Company Commander thought



that the head of the company was just in the rear of the draw, he started to move his first platoon up to the HIGHWAY. When the platoon was just about three quarters of the way up the bank of the road, it came under intense small arms and machine gun fire. This indicated the Japs had learned their lesson on the way we had taken their previous positions, and were offsetting their mistake in the protecting positions they had prepared and were now using.

L Company tried several times to come up on the HIGHWAY at this point from several different directions but was unable to get any further than their first attempt. At this time the Company Commander sent out a patrol to contact K Company on RIDGE 19. Upon the patrol's return, he was told by the patrol leader that RIDGE 19 was about 300 yards to the left front beyond the nose of RIDGE 17, that the Battalion Commander wanted him to move the company towards RIDGE 19, using the same route the patrol took, and he would meet it in the rear of RIDGE 19 at a point shown to the patrol leader. Company L was to go into position on RIDGE 19 as soon as it was met by the Battalion Commander after receiving the necessary instructions.

After the wounded and killed were removed to the rear, Company L moved forward along the lower bank of the HIGHWAY, guided by its patrol that returned from RIDGE 19 where the Battalion Commander met it. The Battalion Commander told the Company Commander RIDGE 19 was cut in two by the HIGHWAY, and that K Company had secured the right of the RIDGE, and was setting up its perimeter there for the night. Company L was to do the same on the left portion of the RIDGE. There was one

platoon of K Company outposting the RIDGE that would return to its Company as soon as L Company moved onto the RIDGE. Company L moved onto the RIDGE at 1700 hours and started to prepare its perimeter for the night. Company L soon found out that the RIDGE was under enemy observation, and enemy fire. The Company Commander was wounded, as were several other men during the preparation of the positions, thus making movement limited.

Before complete darkness came, it was discovered that the southwest portion of RIDGE 19 was a key terrain feature on the north of LIMON. This ridge overlooked LIMON, the ridges sloping down into LIMON, the LEYTE RIVER and the LIMON BRIDGE. Beyond LIMON BRIDGE, HIGHWAY 2 ran east for a short distance then it disappeared into the high ground towards the south. The high ground on the other side of the LEYTE RIVER, running due south, was the critical terrain feature in the LIMON area other than BREAKNECK RIDGE. The Battalion Commander, after making his terrain study, contacted the Regimental Commander and gave him the situation, also stating he felt his Battalion could take LIMON. The Regimental Commander told him to remain in the present positions and await further orders.

At the end of the second days fighting, the Battalion was overlooking LIMON, and had captured the important terrain feature RIDGE 19. Between its forward troops and its rear troops on RIDGE 13, there still remained a pocket of Japs that denied the Battalion full use of the HIGHWAY. As time went on this pocket appeared to be a side interest of the Japs who were applying pressure on the 1st Battalion. The pocket always became inactive and free movement was allowed the 3d Battalion,

whenever the 1st Battalion was applying pressure on the Japs to their front. When they were not applying pressure, the Japs would start harassing the 3d Battalion from this pocket.

The battalion had established a route of evacuation and resupply by by-passing the pocket along the low bank of the HIGHWAY.

THE BATTALION GOES INTO THE DEFENSE (See Map F) (41)

The Regimental Commander contacted the Battalion Commander on 18 November, at 0940 hours and informed him the 3d Battalion had advanced much faster than the 1st Battalion and it would be necessary for the 3d Battalion to hold up on RIDGE 19 until the 1st Battalion, pushed forward of BREAKNECK RIDGE, came abreast of the 3d Battalion. The Regimental Commander ordered the Battalion to maintain patrols vigorously to the front and left flank.

At 1120 hours three 81mm mortar rounds fell near the forward command post of the Battalion, and three more rounds fell into the area of I Company, causing a total of sixteen casualties. The firing was denied by any of our rear troops, so it was assumed that the enemy was using some of our weapons and ammunition.

The battalion experienced a difficult task evacuating the wounded result of the mortar fire. They had to be evacuated by the by-pass route between RIDGE 19 and 13. The Battalion Commander planned to evacuate the wounded along the HIGHWAY, but before this was done, he had the Battalion Assault Platoon move

(41) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge

into the pocket between RIDGE 19 and 13. The Assault Platoon moved in without any resistance and found the draw free of enemy. This was reported to the Battalion Commander by radio, but he decided to still use the by-pass route for the evacuation of the wounded. The Assault Platoon tried going deeper into the pocket but came under small arms fire. Before the Platoon could get into action against this fire, it was forced to pull out of the draw due to heavy knee mortar and artillery fire the enemy brought down within the draw. The Assault Platoon Leader contacted the Battalion Commander by radio, giving him the situation, and was told to contain the enemy within the draw in order that they would not interfere with the evacuation of the wounded along the by-pass route. The evacuation was completed without any enemy interference, but the litter bearers had a severe task with the muddy route and thick vegetation.

The Battalion took advantage of this defensive role by having a complete reorganization and equipment check. The Battalion had no major resupply problem, other than the fact its Flame Throwers were still unaccounted for. Its communications were good, radio throughout was intact, and wire was laid to the Battalion from Regiment during the afternoon.

Patrols were kept out to the immediate front and flanks. Reconnaissance was continuous to the front, with the idea of the Battalion being moved forward directly towards LIMON, or to take the zone of the 1st Battalion, or a possible envelopment by going across the LEYTE RIVER and hit LIMON from the rear in the vicinity of the LIMON BRIDGE. Artillery and 81mm mortar fires were placed on targets of opportunity as they appeared in and around LIMON.

On 19 November at 0825, the Regimental Commander contacted the Battalion Commander by phone and directed him to withdraw his Battalion from RIDGE 19 back to RIDGE 13. The reason being the 3d Battalion was interfering with the fire of the 1st Battalion which was to the rear and on the left flank. The 3d Battalion was to consolidate positions on RIDGE 13 and be prepared to attack again to the south as soon as the elements of the left flank had come up even with the 3d Battalion. The Battalion Commander gave the order for the move with I Company leading, then K Company. The forward command post group was to follow K Company, and L Company was to be the rear guard. At 0955 hours I Company started to move out. The withdrawal was stopped at 1000 hours, after the Battalion Commander received a message from the Regimental Commander, that the withdrawal order for his Battalion was cancelled.

At noon a column of Japs, estimated a company, came down from the high ground south of LIMON, and crossed the LIMON BRIDGE, continuing up the HIGHWAY moving in a column of twos. This action of the enemy was strange. They were wearing rain coats and carrying their rifles at sling arms. The strange part about their marching was that we had been placing all types of fire on LIMON and its vicinity since we had gained the high ground on RIDGE 19, and now before the troops on RIDGE 19 along HIGHWAY 2 was a company of Japs marching in an approach march formation. The Battalion Commander was allowing the enemy column free movement so they would be strung out along the HIGHWAY and it would be possible to catch the entire column in the artillery concentrations numbered, 27, 43, 44, 45, 33, 34 and 35. The artillery was alerted for the fire mission, but the

element of surprise was lost after one of the sections of M Company machine guns opened fire on the column. The machine gun fire was inaccurate and allowed the column to disperse and take cover off the HIGHWAY. The artillery fire brought down thereafter was not as effective as it might have been if the machine guns had not fired.

The Japanese picked up the general area on RIDGE 19 where the machine gun fire had come and placed artillery fire on that area for half an hour. A few casualties were received by the Battalion from the enemy fire.

The tanks that assisted the Battalion to recover some of their wounded men from the HIGHWAY on 17 November, returned to RIDGE 13 from the rear. The tank commander wanted permission to fire on the artillery pieces and tanks that were being reported in LIMON and its near vicinity. The tank commander received permission from the Regimental Commander and at 1530 moved forward of RIDGE 13. Just about this time the Battalion forward OP spotted a tank in the vicinity of artillery concentration number 35, and reported the same to the rear Battalion command post. The tank commander also picked up the same tank and placed fire on it, when just about this time another Jap tank appeared in the same vicinity. Both of the Japanese tanks returned the fire and scored direct hits on our tanks. The hits did not cause any damage, but the tanks withdrew towards RIDGE 13, then to the rear.

At 2000 hours the Battalion Commander was notified by the Regimental Commander by phone that the 1st Battalion was to attack on the morning of 21 November at 0930 hours. The 1st Battalion was to drive forward from its present positions on

BREAKNECK RIDGE and tie in with the 3d Battalion on its left flank. The 3d Battalion should be prepared to give all possible assistance to the 1st Battalion, also be prepared to attack if ordered to do so.

When the Battalion went into its positions for the night, it was the first day there had been a steady rain throughout the day. Resupplies during the day from the rear of RIDGE 13 was very rough due to mud and steep climbing which was necessary to bring the supplies forward using the by-pass route. The troops messed on K rations.

THE ATTACK OF LIMON (See Map G) (42)

At 0630 hours the Regimental Commander called the Battalion Commander by phone and told him to prepare his Battalion to attack at 1100 hours, and that the Battalion was not to move out except on his order. The 1st or the 2d Battalion was to attack instead of only the 1st Battalion, as stated the night before. The 1st Battalion was to start its attack at 0930 hours from the vicinity of the 1st Battalion positions just beyond BREAKNECK RIDGE, and should reach the left flank of the 3rd Battalion on RIDGE 19 by 1100 hours. If the 1st Battalion broke through, the 3d Battalion was to coordinate the attack of LIMON with the 1st Battalion. If the 1st Battalion did not break through the enemy pocket, the 2d Battalion would make the attack by moving up and joining the 3d Battalion, then tying into its left flank, the attack of LIMON was to be made with two battalions abreast, the 1st or 2d Battalion on the left, the 3d Battalion on the right.

(42) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge

The Battalion Commander called a meeting of his Company Commanders at 0730 hours and gave them the attack order. The Battalion was to make the attack of LIMON with the 1st or the 2d Battalion on its left flank. K Company would move out first and establish positions along RIDGES 20 and 21, which were in front of L Company positions, and would maintain contact with the left flank battalion at all times. It was to attack in a south-westerly direction, be responsible for the HIGHWAY, and also for a 200 yard front to the right of the HIGHWAY. I Company with the 1st section of machine guns attached from the 1st Platoon of M Company, would move out following K Company echeloned to the right rear, and would cross the LEYTE RIVER at a point due west of RIDGE 20.

After I Company crossed the LEYTE RIVER, it would guide on the LEYTE RIVER and be responsible for securing the right flank of the Battalion. Also be prepared to assist K Company if at all possible. L and M Companies, minus the one section of heavy machine guns, would support the attack initially from their present positions on RIDGE 19, and be prepared to move immediately upon order. Headquarters Company and the balance of the battalion would be prepared to displace forward from RIDGE 13 to RIDGE 19, upon order. The ammunition and supply dump would move forward with the balance of the Battalion.

At 0900 hours the Battalion Commander informed the Regimental Commander by phone and received approval of his tentative plan. The Regimental Commander told him to pass on the same information, plus his knowledge of the general situation, to the 1st or 2d Battalion Commanders, and that they should make plans for the



coordination of the attack. The initial objective of the attack was to secure RIDGES 22 and 23. The Regimental Commander also told him an artillery observer would join the 3rd Battalion before the attack to assist in the coordination of the artillery fire. After the initial objectives were taken, the battalion would have to be prepared to continue the attack, in order to secure the LIMON BRIDGE by the end of the day. The Regimental Commander stressed the point that the attacking battalions were to keep an even line throughout the attack, and under no circumstances was either battalion to push out in front of the other.

At 1030 hours the Regimental Commander told the Battalion Commander by phone that the 2d Battalion was to make the attack, and the Commander of the 2d Battalion was on his way to the 3d Battalion command post. The 2d Battalion Commander arrived at the forward command post of the 3d Battalion at 1130 hours and the Regimental Commander's orders were passed on by the 3d Battalion Commander.

At 1428 hours the Regimental Commander was informed by the 3d Battalion Commander by phone that both battalions were tied in, ready to go into the attack. The Regimental Commander told him a ten minute artillery preparation had been laid on, starting at 1445 hours, and the battalions were to jump off at 1455 hours.

Upon lifting of the artillery fire, the two battalions jumped off. As K Company started to move down along the RIDGES 20 and 21, three Japs came out from the cut in the HIGHWAY where the road started to straighten itself into LIMON. The three Japs stood out in the open unarmed on the HIGHWAY bank, waving their hands over their heads. K Company held their fire and Captain

Walters, the K Company Commander, shouted to them in English that if they wanted to surrender, they should come forward and up the ridge. The three Japs ran back into the HIGHWAY cut, and within a few seconds returned to the same spot waving one of their battle flags. This caused a few men of K Company to expose themselves, and once again the three Japs returned to their cut in the HIGHWAY. At the same time Japanese artillery started to fall on the RIDGES 20 and 21, and a few casualties were suffered by K Company by this trickery.

While the Japs were pulling this stunt on K Company, G Company of the 2d Battalion was able to come from the rear of this HIGHWAY cut and caught the Japs plus other Japs within the cut by surprise, thus relieving them of the battle flag they had just waved at K Company.

The elimination of these positions opened the balance of the HIGHWAY into LIMON. K Company and G Company tied in their flanks just beyond the cut in the HIGHWAY at a small bridge. Then both companies started to move forward. At 1655 hours K Company was again tied in with G Company on RIDGE 26. At this time, I Company had advanced across the LEYTE RIVER without any resistance. A heavy rain started and visibility became poor. Both K and I Companies informed the Battalion Commander of their situations. The Battalion Commander ordered L Company to move to RIDGE 20. He also informed the Battalion Executive Officer to move to RIDGE 19 the rear elements of the Battalion, and that he would join I Company on the other side of the LEYTE RIVER. The Battalion Commander reached I Company just as they reached a low ridge even with the LIMON BRIDGE. The Battalion Commander, by

radio, ordered L Company to cross the LEYTE RIVER and move into a coconut grove on the west side of the LEYTE RIVER, just behind I Company.

THE JAPANESE COUNTERATTACK (See Map G) (43)

At 1700 hours the 2d Battalion had secured the high ground in LIMON and the 3d Battalion had secured all of the low ground of LIMON plus ground along the west bank of the LEYTE RIVER. Both battalions were continuing the attack beyond LIMON to secure the LIMON BRIDGE. At this time, K Company was moving along the HIGHWAY straight towards the LIMON BRIDGE with G Company on its left flank. Across the LEYTE RIVER, on its right flank, I Company was in position to assist K Company.

As was stated before, a heavy rain was falling and visibility was poor. This was one reason K and G Companies were able to move freely on the flat ground of LIMON and towards the LIMON BRIDGE. Just as K Company started to cross the bridge, the rain stopped and visibility became better. K Company got two platoons across the bridge. G Company was to the left of L Company ready to assist by fire. Just as the third platoon of K Company started across the bridge it was stopped by machine gun fire coming from the highground south of the LEYTE RIVER. Then the Japs opened up at point blank range with tanks and artillery from the south and down the HIGHWAY towards the LIMON BRIDGE. Also at this time the Japanese artillery started to fall down on K and G Companies. The balance of K Company tried to get across the bridge to assist the men who were cut off, but were unable to because the Japanese kept an intense stream of machine gun fire on the bridge. The Commander of K Company got word to his men

(43) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge

who were across the bridge to return to either the 2d Battalion or I Company because darkness was setting in.

During the Japanese tank firing, the 3d Battalion Antitank Platoon which had just joined the battalion on RIDGE 19 was put into action and went down into LIMON to join the Battalion. It was able to get a few rounds of 37mm into the vicinity of the tanks, but had to withdraw because of intense counterfire the Japs placed on the guns. I Company also went to the assistance of K Company immediately upon seeing their situation, and was able to get two platoons across the river before they were noticed by the Japanese. As soon as they were noticed, the Japs hit them in the same fashion that they hit K Company. The enemy action disorganized the platoons of I Company and they were ordered to return to the other side of the river, back to their company positions.

The Japanese counterattack hit the 3d Battalion and the 2d Battalion troops with the elements in their favor. It was growing darker when the counterattack started and the LEYTE RIVER was getting higher and swifter from the rains. I Company was able to get two platoons across the river only after a slow foot crossing, and the men had to fight the swiftness all the way across. These conditions hampered attempts to get reinforcements to the troops on the other side of the river who were badly disorganized. There was no question as to the disorder that prevailed, and fortunately for the troops on the other side of the river, the Japs failed to follow up their counterattack which up to this point was very successful.

I Company was ordered by the Battalion Commander to dig in for the night on its present ridge, and collect as many men from

the other side of the river as possible. The Battalion Commander contacted the Regimental Commander by radio and gave him the Battalion situation. The Regimental Commander ordered him to return the 3d Battalion back to RIDGE 19 at once because LIMON was now occupied by the 2d Battalion and the present location of the 3d Battalion had no tactical value. The Battalion Commander replied that it was impossible to get back to RIDGE 19 that night because of the high waters of the river and its swiftness. The Regimental Commander told him to keep the Battalion's present location and return the battalion to RIDGE 19 in the morning.

Throughout the night, men from K Company were coming into I Company's perimeter, while I and K Company men were turning up in the 2d Battalion perimeter.

THE 3D BATTALION RETURNS TO RIDGE 19 (See Map G) (44)

The Battalion Commander contacted his Company Commanders by radio at 0740 hours on 23 November, and ordered them to return their companies to RIDGE 19 in the following order: the men of I Company that had joined the 2d Battalion would move with K Company. The 1st Platoon of I Company, with one section of heavy machine guns from M Company, would move out first then followed by the men of K Company that joined I Company during the night. The forward command post group would follow next, then the balance of I Company. L Company was to send two security patrols out to the flanks, and the balance of the Company was to bring up the rear. He also instructed the Company Commanders upon their arrival on RIDGE 19, that I Company was to take over

(44) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge

the positions that K Company held. L Company was to return to its old positions and K Company to move into the positions that I Company held. The time for the withdrawal was set at 0800 hours.

The Battalion was back on RIDGE 19 at 1245 hours, its perimeter was organized and occupied at 1600 hours.

#### SUMMATION

To sum up the battle for LIMON the 128th Infantry Regiment encountered enemy in strength immediately when it moved into the Line of Departure. The 1st Battalion, on the east of HIGHWAY 2, operated over a sharp ridge. The Japs strongly defended this position but were gradually driven to the south and east into what was later known as the "CORRIDOR."

Operations on the west of the HIGHWAY were carried out by the 3d Battalion. Its initial advance encountered strong resistance, but this resistance was rapidly reduced and the 3d Battalion was able to advance as far south as the LEYTE RIVER by 21 November. The 3d Battalion's advance was then delayed in an effort to keep the two attacking battalions abreast.

The 2d Battalion followed the 1st Battalion as the regimental reserve but after a few days of determined resistance on the east flank of the 1st Battalion zone, the 2d Battalion bypassed the 1st Battalion and proceeded on 21 November to the south in a coordinated attack with the 3d Battalion. It secured the high ground east of LIMON and the HIGHWAY running into LIMON.

By the occupation of the high ground east of LIMON, the capture of LIMON was completed. As previously stated, the 3d Battalion had advanced to the LEYTE RIVER and occupied the ground that commanded the river immediately to the north of it. During

this phase of the attack, in which the 128th Infantry gained approximately 2,000 yards, a total of 850 Japs had been killed and the offensive potentialities of the Jap 57th Infantry was broken. However, elements of this Japanese regiment, along with many other units of the 1st Japanese Division, maintained the corridor towards the north coast. The southern end of this was the island in the LEYTE RIVER 1,000 yards south of LIMON, maintained until 10 December. The enemy held hope until the very last that the attack to the north would be successful and the "CORRIDOR" would be maintained without regard to losses. (46)

The 1st Japanese Division finally broke under the 32d Infantry Division's relentless pressure on 19 December 1944. The Japs yielded the ridge above LIMON and fell back rapidly. The 32d Infantry Division raced ahead on 20 and 21 December, and on 22 December reached LONOY and a junction where it met the 77th Infantry Division. They had fought their way up the road from ORMOC, thus the road to ORMOC was opened and organized Japanese resistance on LEYTE had been cut to bits. (47)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. COMMITMENT

In my opinion, the way the 32d Infantry Division was committed in this operation, although the battle for LIMON was a success, initially caused confusion and disorganization.

The troops of the 32d Infantry Division were unloaded at 0800 hours on 14 November, the vehicles, bulk equipment and the Division Artillery were expected to be completely unloaded by 1200 hours, 15 November. The division was ordered by Xth Corps

(46) A-8, p. 7

(47) A-6, p. 20

to relieve the 24th Infantry Division with at least one regiment on 16 November.

There was no dire reason for the early commitment of at least a regiment of the 32d Infantry Division. At this time the 24th Infantry Division had secured BREAKNECK RIDGE and had fixed the enemy beyond it. There were no indications that the Japanese were going to wage a counterattack against the 24th Infantry Division or that the 24th Infantry Division was in such a depleted condition its relief had to be accomplished at once.

This rush commitment forced the 32d Infantry Division to go into action minus its Division Artillery and other fighting equipment. There was no question as to the 24th Division Artillery being capable of giving proper support, but because of the lack of proper artillery liaison and forward observers, part of the 32d Infantry Division's fighting punch was lost.

## 2. RECONNAISSANCE

The secrecy that was desired for the movement of the 128th Infantry troops, to relieve the 21st Infantry that was on line in contact with the enemy, resulted in complete disorganization, not only on the Line of Departure, but within the command as a whole when considering that the Line of Departure turned out to be the attacking point.

It was very fortunate that the desired secrecy and no reconnaissance stipulations were tried with a relieving unit being one that was seasoned and well tried.

No matter how the higher command appraises a situation, full consideration must be given to the commander on the ground who actually is the one moving or fighting troops.



In this operation, if the unit commanders were allowed to go forward on their reconnaissance prior to moving their troops forward, part of the question of the unknown would have been eliminated. Assurance would have been given to the commanders up to a certain point about the ground also the friendly and enemy situation in more detail.

### 3. RELIEF

The relief the 128th Infantry was to perform in this operation in the sense of relieving did not exist inasmuch as the 21st Infantry had vacated their positions and the enemy had moved into them.

In my opinion, this situation would not have materialized if the proper instructions were received by the proper commanders who were with the troops of the 24th Infantry Division on the line. It is my belief that the proper dissemination of orders was not carried down to the commanders concerned.

From the fact that only the positions astride the Highway were manned until troops from the 128th Infantry came up to the line, this misconception of relief by army personnel is unbelievable. For there is no relief other than physical, yet in this case men were taken out of positions that were under constant observation of the enemy, which was proved by the enemy's occupation of the positions as soon as the troops left them.

This situation would have been a costly one if a unit, such as the 32d Infantry Division with its background of combat, was not the relieving unit.

4. COORDINATION

From the incidents that occurred, it appears to me there existed a complete lack of coordination between the Staffs of the 24th and 32d Infantry Divisions.

It is the responsibility of the Staffs to not only dig out all details pertaining to their own unit, but to be capable of exchanging with staffs of other units pertinent information concerning each other, then to effect complete dissemination to those who actually do the work.

At no time must a matter be taken for granted as a Standing Operation Procedure other than within one unit. For the same procedures do not apply to all units. In this operation if the staff members of both divisions had received information and properly discussed the matter of relief, the conception may have differed and confusion might not have resulted.

5. STOPPING A UNIT IN ORDER TO KEEP IT ABREAST OF ANOTHER UNIT

When the 3d Battalion overcame the enemy resistance in its zone of action and was making rapid advances, in my opinion the Regimental Commander failed to take advantage of the success of the 3d Battalion.

When the 1st Battalion was unable to break through its opposition in its zone, the Regimental Commander should have committed his 2d Battalion in the same manner that he did, but at once instead of after a few days. Or he might have allowed the 3d Battalion to move in on LIMON, and moved the 2d Battalion to take up the right flank positions that the 3d Battalion held.

Whenever an enemy has been broken and is on the move, pressure applied continuously does not allow the enemy to strike back in a detailed manner.

6. THE COMMANDER'S POSITION

The Regimental Commander exercised control over his battalions from his CP which was located to the rear of BREAKNECK RIDGE. He failed to make himself available on the ground to his Battalion Commanders.

In an operation like this where maps are inaccurate and incomplete, it is impossible to make detailed plans or to accept terrain features as they are shown on maps. In this situation the unit commanders of the battalions were confronted with new problems and new concepts with every yard gained.

In my opinion, the Regimental Commander failed to take advantage of the 3d Battalion's advances and the possibility that the battalion might have been able to take LIMON after it reached RIDGE 19. Before the Regimental Commander refused the recommendation of the Battalion Commander, he should have gone to RIDGE 19 and made his own estimate while looking over the terrain and its possibilities, so that he could exercise sound judgment.

When the 3d and 2d Battalions were going into the attack from RIDGE 19, in my opinion there is no question the Regimental Commander should have been at this point. Instead, he had the coordination done by the 3d Battalion Commander, and all during the attack should have been on RIDGE 19, which was the most forward point and the most advantageous point, to exercise control over his units that were at this time making the main effort.

7. THE CONDUCT OF THE ATTACK IN GENERAL

The successful attack towards the objective was made possible because of the seasoned unit and the driving leadership of the squads, platoons and companies.

The mission that was given to the 3d Battalion was not an unusual one, but the enemy was of more determined nature, and better equipped, that the Battalion had encountered in NEW GUINEA.

The outstanding factor was the circumstances which confronted the Battalion as it was committed into action. The Battalion was kept in the dark about the entire movement from the beach, including going into the Line of Departure. The only facts made known to the commanders of the companies were that they were to relieve elements of the 24th Infantry Division and then make an attack towards LIMON.

The most unusual fact was the Battalion had to fight to secure the Line of Departure. This Line of Departure was unique in that it was secure until the friendly troops moved out too soon, not turning the line over to the relieving unit as should have been done.

As the Battalion started forward from the Line of Departure, it soon became confined to applying its main effort along the HIGHWAY. The enemy set up a stubborn defense to deny us the use of it. By striking at the HIGHWAY in segments, it soon crumbled and the Japanese lost the valuable terrain feature.

The movement forward that had gained momentum was brought to a halt in order to keep units abreast. This was uncalled for when one considers the background of the 3d Battalion. The Battalion had been through battles with the same enemy at BUNA, SAIDOR, and AITAPE, and in each case defeated them. In all of the three engagements, the Battalion was on missions which were accomplished by the Battalion itself with sometimes supporting units attached, thus they were not dependent on other

units' flanks or their support in depth. And by holding the Battalion up in order to bring another battalion abreast of it only gave the enemy that much more time to reorganize and prepare a new defense.

### LESSONS

- Cover  
the  
flanks*
1. Success in combat depends not only on seasoned troops but <sup>and</sup> also on the way units are committed.
  2. Reconnaissance by all commanders must be made, and has to be continuous.
  3. Relief always has to be a physical one, positions should never be vacated until they are occupied by the relieving units.
  4. Coordination has to be performed well in advance in order to avoid any misunderstandings or unforeseen possibilities.
  5. Attacking units which have advanced in their zone, and are able to continue their advance, should not be stopped in order that another unit may keep abreast of them.
  6. The unit commander has to make himself available at *the* places where his presence will do the most good for the accomplishment of his units mission.
  7. Seasoned troops can overcome unusual circumstances providing their immediate commanders make the best of the situation with the means on hand, and <sup>have</sup> the determination to accomplish the mission.