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THE LANDING ON OKINAWA AND THE SECURING OF THE BEACHHEAD  
BY THE 2D BATTALION, 383D INFANTRY (96TH DIVISION)  
1 APRIL TO 8 APRIL 1945 (RYUKYUS CAMPAIGN)  
*(Personal Experience of a B.N.S.-3)*

Type of operation described: AMPHIBIOUS LANDING AND  
SECURING THE BEACHHEAD

Captain Leo A. Smith, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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are based on personal knowledge of the author.

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1945 was destined to sound the death knell for the Japanese Empire. General Douglas MacArthur began his "return" from Australia in 1942, and from the time that the first Pacific Island was wrested from Japanese control, and each succeeding island taken or retaken, it could be likened to the slow deliberate tread of the executioner. The Japanese Imperial High Command, basking in the successes of expanding their control over the Greater East Asia sphere, were not initially cognizant of these portentous sounds. Month passed month and Japan suffered overwhelming defeat after overwhelming defeat. General Douglas MacArthur returned to the Philippine Islands on 20 October 1944. (1) The Japanese, being scholars of proverbs, had cause to reflect and remember by this time the old proverb, "Coming events cast their shadows before them."

The Philippine Islands became the last Japanese outpost where an affinity existed between the inhabitants of the islands taken and the advancing American military might. From now on, the people living on the island or islands on the way to the Japanese homeland, of necessity, must be regarded as being definitely hostile.

The Allied High Command decided the next strategic move would be to invade the Ryukyu Islands. (2) Final plans called for the US 10th Army to make the thrust and on Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945, the Island of Okinawa was invaded by this force. This island, being only about 340 miles southwest of Japan proper, would, without a doubt, be the last stand before the Japanese warlords would be fighting the war in their homeland. (See Map A)

Okinawa is the largest island of the Ryukyu Group. It is approximately 67 miles long and from 3 to 18 miles wide with a population of 435,000. The

(1) Personal knowledge; (2) A-2, p. 3-0-1.

topography of the island may be best described by saying it is mountainous. Almost all the slopes were terraced, thereby permitting utilization of all land possible for agricultural purposes. This practice was necessary due to the fact that most of the terrain was rock. A ridge, running generally north and south, occupied the central portion of the island. This high ground sloped down to narrow coastal plains along the east and west coasts. As a result, the high ground drained either to the east or the west. The drainage system had eroded many deep ravines making a series of ridges perpendicular to the main high ground. This type of terrain was ideal for construction of defensive positions. As the operation progressed, it was found that these ridges or escarpments were, more often than not, of rock formation. The enemy had enlarged and constructed a maze of cave positions with connecting tunnels. Each succeeding ridge or escarpment was organized in like manner with exits on the reverse slopes which could be used for organizing counter-attacks or routes of withdrawal to the next line of defense. (3) This manner of organizing the ground caused each escarpment to support the escarpment to its front.

The caves were in many cases very large. Complete hospitals were found in a few. Artillery pieces were in others, perfectly located, where the pieces could be rolled out, fired, and rolled back into the position again. Huge amounts of ammunition were stored with the artillery pieces. Tunnels connected the gun positions as well as underground rooms which housed the gun crews. In similar manner, other caves were constructed for other weapons. All weapons with their ammunition and crews were underground. Huge quantities of food, medical supplies, explosives, and other material necessary for waging war were stored in other cave positions. The Japanese being masters of camouflage had constructed their positions in such a manner that detection was virtually impossible until within a few feet of the site. The thorough

(3) Personal knowledge.

organization of positions and installations below the ground made bombing, artillery fire, and mortar fire completely ineffective except in cases of direct hits. In most cases it became necessary for the infantryman to physically dig the enemy out of his position without the aid of the supporting arms. This type of action, coupled with the inherent fanaticism of the enemy, made the cost <sup>of men and material</sup> run high before the operation was completed.

The terrain and its organization were not the only obstacles on the Island of Okinawa. During the planning phase of the operation, excellent aerial photographs were made available. Study of these photos showed that the enemy had constructed large numbers of fortified positions along the beaches where the landings were to be made. Photo interpreters also pointed out that a coral reef extended out from the beaches for a distance of several hundred yards. Detailed study showed that this reef rose above the water in many places at low tide. This obstacle made it mandatory that LVT's (Landing Vehicles, tracked), commonly known as "Alligators", be used in the ship-to-shore movement. Had this type of amphibious vehicle not been available, this reef could not have been traversed. No difficulty was experienced, however, when the landing was made. (4)

Intelligence reports indicated that approximately 80,000 Japanese troops were located in the Ryukyus with the preponderance located on Okinawa. It was felt that in addition to the Japanese troops, the civilian population had to be regarded as being hostile.

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The purposes of the Okinawa operation were as follows:

1. To establish bases from which to:
  - a. Attack the main islands of Japan and their sea approaches with naval and air forces.
  - b. Support further operations in regions bordering on the east China Sea.

(4) A-1, Appendix D to Annex 3 to FO #17, 5 Mar 1945.

c. Sever Japanese sea and air communications between the empire and the mainland of Asia, Formosa, Malaya, and the Netherlands East Indies.

2. To establish secure sea and air communications through the East China Sea to the coast of China and the Yangtze Valley.

3. To maintain unremitting military pressure against Japan. (5)

The 10th Army <sup>went to land</sup> landed on the west central coast of Okinawa with the III Amphibious Corps (Marines) on the left and the XXIV Corps (Army) on the right. (See Map B) In general, the 10th Army plan called for both corps to drive across the island. Simultaneous with the drives across the island, the III Amphibious Corps was to turn and attack toward the north and the XXIV Corps was to turn and attack toward the south. The XXIV Corps <sup>went to land</sup> landed with the 96th Infantry Division on the right (south) and the 7th Infantry Division on the left (north). (6) In the zone of the 96th Infantry Division, the 383d Regimental Combat Team <sup>went to</sup> landed on the left. The 382d Regimental Combat Team was in corps reserve. (7) In the zone of the 383d RCT, 3d Battalion Landing Team landed on the right and the 1st Battalion Landing Team landed on the left. The 2d Battalion Landing Team was in regimental reserve.

#### THE LANDING

"General Quarters" rang out at 0400 on 1 April 1945 aboard the USS Edgecomb (APA 164). This was Easter Sunday - L-Day - the day that US Forces were to invade Okinawa. The majority of the personnel aboard ship were awake and up on deck trying to peer through the darkness. The huge convoy ploughed on. Every man was afflicted with a feeling of extreme tenseness. It was commonly felt that "something big" was ahead. No one knew just how big it was to be. For a great many, this was destined to be the last "boatride". Others were to be maimed and crippled. Fate <sup>?</sup> knew that nobody would leave completely unscathed.

(5) A-2, p. 1-0-1; (6) A-2, Chap 7, Sec III, p. 2; (7) A-4, Chap 7, p. 5.

Breakfast was served, beginning at 0430. Steak and eggs were most popular. Many expressed regret, knowing that they would not be eating so well again for some time to come. Most of the men ate their food very rapidly. They were very anxious to return "topside" to see what was happening. Gradually it began breaking day and the outline of land could be faintly seen. The Naval Bombardment began at dawn. The dull rumble of exploding shells on the beaches increased gradually until the crack of shells passing overhead and the blast of the detonations on shore made one think that the island would fall apart. In addition to the shells thrown by the battleships, cruisers, and destroyers, navy carrier-based airplanes strafed and dive-bombed the beaches, and the rocket boats unleashed their missiles with terrific shrieks. This was the climax of a week of softening up by air bombardment. (8) At 0800 the first long white wakes made by lines of Alligators began moving slowly eastward toward the beaches. The assault waves of the Assault BLT's were on the way - H-hour for the Okinawa Campaign was 30 minutes away.

"The plan of RCT-383 was exploitation to the fullest extent possible of the area of the coastal flats which were in the zone assigned the 3d BLT. The 1st BLT on the left was to move inland, take the hill mass south of Momobaru, and establish contact with RCT-381 in order to secure the beachhead. The 2d BLT centrally located in reserve was to be prepared to take the high ground east of Kne so as to protect the left flank of the 3d Battalion and to assist the advance to the south." (9) (Map e)

The first wave of the Assault Battalion hit the beach at 0830 as scheduled. In 26 minutes, all assault waves had landed. The beaches had been found undefended. (10)

At 0919, the 2d Battalion was ordered ashore. All personnel were ready to go over the side as soon as the order was given. Officers and men climbed down chain ladders into predesignated boats alongside the ship. As soon as (8) Personal knowledge; (9) A-1, Sec 3, Chap 7; (10) A-1, Sec 3, Chap 7, p. 15.



all personnel had loaded into each boat, the designated weapons and equipment were lowered into the boat. When the boats were completely loaded, they pulled away from the ship into the assembly area and circled until all of the boats comprising each wave had assembled. The boats then went into formation and proceeded to the transfer area where the transfer from the boats to the Alligators was made. When the transfer of the entire wave was completed and the Wave Commander received the signal from the control vessel, each Alligator went into its proper place on the line of departure. Upon signal from the control vessel the wave proceeded toward the shore. The landing of the 2d Battalion was completed at 1030. With the exception of a few scattered mortar rounds which fell on the beach, no fire was received during the landing. (11) Upon reaching the shore, the battalion immediately moved without opposition to its assigned area east of Kus where reorganization was made with the minimum amount of delay. (See Map C) During the process of reorganization, the Regimental Commander appeared upon the scene. He ordered the 2d Battalion to proceed to Chatan along the coastal road and then turn inland and proceed to Futema and come abreast of the 3d Battalion. The battalion moved out in a column of companies. As the unit was passing through Chatan, orders were issued to collect all gas masks and place them in a battalion pile. These were picked up by the Battalion S-4 later. (12) All members of the battalion were happy to be relieved of this cumbersome item of equipment.

Advancing southeast along the road to Futema, the battalion encountered increasing resistance from entrenched enemy along the high ground. Company E deployed on the left side of the road and Company F deployed on the right side of the road. By 0430 the resistance had been reduced and the battalion began digging in for the night. Resupply of ammunition was made and the troops ate the K-rations they had carried ashore. Enemy dead and casualties for the (11, 12) Personal knowledge.

first day were: Enemy killed - 18; own wounded - 21.

*This not shown*

Let us now take a look at the situation as it existed within the Regimental Combat Team at the end of the first day. The three battalions had landed on undefended beaches, and with the exception of the 1st Battalion had reorganized rapidly and continued on their designated missions. Through the confusion of landing and non-receipt of last minute orders by Company A, the 1st Battalion did not complete reorganization until the latter part of the afternoon. (13) By 1400 the entire Regimental Combat Team was ashore and established. To break it down, Company B, 88th Chemical Mortar Battalion (4.2 mortars) had gone into position and was firing in support of the 1st Battalion at 1100. By the same time, Company C, 763d Tank Battalion had landed and sent tanks to the 1st and 3d Battalions. By 1400, the 921st Field Artillery Battalion had gone into position and was firing. (14)

It was generally felt that all the work in connection with the detailed planning of this operation had paid huge dividends. The planning continued at a feverish pace from the time the regiment first received the Division Order early in February while on the Island of Leyte in the Philippine Islands. Schools had been set up for key personnel, plans made for loading, and finally the loading of personnel and equipment. Two rehearsals for the operation were held, wherein landings were made on the beaches of east central Leyte. (15)

#### SECURING THE BEACHHEAD

*This not shown*

Let us now return to the 2d Battalion. The night of 1-2 April was relatively quiet. The battalion was in the center of the regimental zone and widely separated from the other two battalions. The 1st Battalion was at Monobaru and the 3d Battalion was approximately 1000 yards south of Chatan. (See Map C)

The 2d Battalion resumed moving toward Futema on the morning of 2 April 1945. Moderate machine-gun and rifle fire was received from the high ground (13) Statement of Col E. T. May (deceased), Regtl Comdr, 383d Inf; (14) A-1, Sec 3, Chap 7, p. 16; (15) Personal knowledge.

directly to the front. Three tanks from Company C, 763d Tank Battalion were placed in support of the battalion and the resistance was eliminated. After crossing the stream and deep gorge directly north of the town, the battalion occupied the high ground on the northern outskirts of Futema that night. Two hundred and thirteen Japanese had been killed by the 2d Battalion during the day. The 1st Battalion was located approximately 300 yards to the right front of the 2d Battalion. The 1st Battalion had advanced to the high ground approximately 300 yards southwest of Momobaru. A strong regimental front had been achieved. The 382d Infantry, minus the 3d Battalion, had been released from corps reserve and moved in on our left. In the evening, 383d Infantry issued Field Order No. 19. The 2d Battalion mission was stated as follows: "2d Battalion, left assault battalion, will move out from present position at 0800 to capture portion of Urasoe Mura in zone of action. Maintain contact with 382d Infantry on left." (16) (See Map C) 1st Battalion was placed in regimental reserve. The night was relatively quiet.

The battalion jumped off at 0800 on 3 April as ordered and moved against light opposition to a point about 600 yards south of Futema. Troops dug in for the night. Twenty Japanese had been killed during the day. The battalion had 8 men wounded. The 3d Battalion was on the immediate right and held the towns of Isa and Chiyunna. (See Map C) The 1st Battalion was located about 300 yards to the rear of the 2d Battalion. A strong perimeter was formed. The gap between the 382d Infantry abreast of the 383d Infantry was covered by fire. In order to coordinate covering this gap by fire, it was necessary to change frequencies on the SCR 300 radio so communication could be made with the 382d Infantry.

During the night of 3-4 April, a small force of Japanese hit the 2d Battalion perimeter and destroyed one 37 mm gun. One Japanese was killed. The remainder of the night was quiet.

(16) A-1, Sec 5.

*Enemy over  
head in night*

0800 on 4 April was jump-off time and the battalion swung over to the right portion of the battalion sector, keeping control of the high ground there. The battalion advanced against moderate machine-gun fire from emplaced positions along the left flank. The high ground northwest of Kamiyama was captured and the battalion dug in for the night. The 3d Battalion had moved down on the coastal plain and had advanced approximately 600 yards farther than the 2d Battalion. The 1st Battalion was located approximately 300 yards to the rear of the 2d Battalion. The night of 4-5 April was very quiet; only one Japanese was killed.

*not a map*

The battalion jumped off again at 0800 on 5 April against increasing enemy resistance. An advance of approximately 800 yards was made when heavy fire from the left front was encountered. From this point, progress was very slow. Numerous pillboxes were cleaned out. Two enemy antitank guns and two artillery pieces were knocked out. These weapons were emplaced in caves in the forward slope of what was later to be known as Cactus Ridge. (See Maps C and D) Medium tanks working with the infantry accounted for the artillery pieces and the antitank guns. In the action, two of our tanks were put out of operation at the antitank ditch which extended across the front. (See Map D) At approximately 1530, the battalion had moved about 1200 yards and began preparing positions for the night. The 3d Battalion had occupied the high ground to the right and fires were tied in with that unit. As G Company moved into position on the left flank of the battalion, one artillery shell, estimated 150 mm, fell in its midst. Sixteen casualties were suffered. It was impossible to determine if this artillery shell was a Japanese shell or one of our own that had fallen short. Our artillery was in the process of registering their night fires at that time.

Due to the amount of resistance encountered, it was felt that the enemy outpost line was directly to the front. It was decided that an air strike on Cactus Ridge would be requested. This request was granted. Detailed plans

for the air strike included that the I & R Platoon Leader of the regiment would ride in the lead plane in that he was thoroughly familiar with the ground. In addition, the limits of the ridge would be marked by smoke, the smoke to be fired by the 4.2 mortars. The plan for the infantry called for Company E and Company F to swing to the high ground on the right flank and attack toward the southeast.

Extra ammunition was distributed to the troops, flame throwers were re-filled, and tanks were sent up to replace the two which had been knocked out. The troops were briefed on the forthcoming action. Everything was in readiness. The night was very quiet. A few scattered artillery rounds fell in the area, but no damage was sustained. All through the night, through previous arrangement, the navy fired illuminating shells at varying intervals, thereby lighting the area to the front.

At 0723 on the morning of 6 April, the navy carrier-based aircraft were above their target. The ridge was marked by smoke and the air strike began at 0725 and continued until 0800. The air strike was extremely successful. The position was bombed, strafed, and subjected to rockets. At 0800, E Company and F Company moved out to the right flank, E Company on the left and F Company on the right. G Company remained in place. Companies E and F received intense rifle, machine-gun, and mortar fire when they reached the high ground to the northwest of the ridge. The attack slowed down and stopped. At this time the machine guns from the Heavy Weapons were brought up and placed in position to more effectively support the attack. During this time the Battalion Commander and the S-3 were with the forward elements of the attacking companies and the position was subjected to devastating mortar and machine-gun fire continually.

Artillery fire was placed on the objective from 1045 to 1100 and at that time the attack was resumed. The attack moved very slowly. It would have stopped completely if it had not been for the heroism of the platoon leaders of both E and F Companies.

The 81 mm mortars, the tanks, and the artillery were firing continually. Fires were shifted slowly to stay ahead of the slowly advancing infantry. More often than not, the artillery shells were detonating less than 100 yards in front of the troops. They had complete confidence in the men serving and firing those guns.

At 1300, G Company was ordered to attack over the open ground toward the foot of Cactus Ridge. They moved forward approximately 300 yards when they were subjected to intense machine-gun crossfire. One section of enemy heavy machine guns was in a pillbox in the finger extending out from the base of the forward slope of Cactus Ridge and another section of heavy machine guns was firing from their left front. The company was pinned down behind a small terrace and, to make matters worse, all their communications went out.

By this time, Company E and Company F were moving up the northwest slope of Cactus Ridge and the Japanese were on the run. At 1630 the crest of the ridge had been taken.

While the assaulting companies were moving up the ridge, the Regimental Commander, the Battalion Commander, and the Battalion S-3 were moving with them. At approximately 1600 the Regimental Commander ordered the Battalion S-3 to go to the position where Company G was located and have the company continue its attack. The S-3 moved back across open ground to G Company. The area traversed was receiving heavy artillery fire and small arms fire from the southeast slope of Cactus Ridge, which was still in Japanese hands. The antitank ditch offered a path in defilade, however. When he arrived at a point about 150 yards to the right rear of Company G, the small arms fire ceased, so he decided to make a dash across the flat open ground. For some unknown reason, the Japanese allowed the S-3 to join the company.

Upon arrival, it was evident that Company G was seriously disorganized. The Company Commander was very nervous. He had tried to resume the attack several times, but each time the men tried going around the ends of the terrace

or over the top of the terrace, they were subjected to the murderous cross-fire. The S-3 decided to move the company back to the positions occupied the night before. Due to the fact that a gap of about 600 yards existed between the company and the 382d Infantry, the unit on the left, it was decided to move out before dark. The position was not favorable for organizing a night defense.

A demolished farm yard, surrounded by a stone wall about 6 feet high, was located to the rear of the terrace. An open space, 50 to 60 yards wide, separated the terrace from the stone wall. One man at a time made a dash across this space amid a fusillade of machine-gun fire. Varying intervals of time were used between each man. At dusk, the entire company had traversed this open ground at a cost of six men wounded. After reaching the sanctuary of the stone wall, the company was moved along a defiladed route to positions occupied the night before. This was a precarious position to be in, but the night passed without any activity. The company rejoined the battalion the following morning at 0845.

A column of Japanese reinforcements was noticed moving toward Cactus Ridge at 0630, 7 April. A concentration of 4.2 mortar fire was placed on the group, killing the greater number. The remainder joined the force still holding the southeast portion of the ridge and launched the counterattack. The counterattack was repulsed and all resistance on Cactus Ridge was eliminated. (17)

At 1220, the 1st Battalion moved through the 2d Battalion and continued the attack in the zone of the 383d Infantry. The 2d Battalion was placed in regimental reserve.

During the remainder of the day, the 2d Battalion was busily engaged in sealing caves, reorganizing, and getting some much needed rest. Intermittent artillery fire was received throughout the day.

(17) Statement of Lt Col P. E. Clark, Bn Comdr, 2d Bn, 383d Inf.

In summary of the action on Cactus Ridge, a total of 15 pillboxes was found and reduced, and 36 caves were sealed or destroyed. One hundred and sixty-four enemy dead were counted in addition to 65 being killed during the counterattack. The battalion suffered 10 killed and 66 wounded.

The night of 7-8 April was very quiet. The morning of 8 April arrived with more artillery fire. During the morning, several of the division staff visited the position. They remained until another artillery barrage and mortar barrage fell. They then made a hasty exit. At approximately 1245 very heavy artillery fire began falling on Cactus Ridge. The Battalion Commander, the Battalion S-3, and the Heavy Weapons Company Commander were wounded. One Platoon Leader from the Heavy Weapons Company was killed. Many others were wounded.

With the capture of Cactus Ridge, a consolidated front had been established and the beachhead had been secured.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing and criticizing this operation, it is the opinion of the author that it was well planned and well executed.

The detailed planning engaged in by all levels of command was very thorough and made with a definite objective in mind. The attainment of this objective was achieved when the landings were made. Troops, vehicles, ammunition, and supplies were unloaded in the proper sequence with the minimum amount of delay. All material reached the using units in sufficient time to be handled and utilized in an efficient manner. It is the opinion of the author that the execution of a well coordinated plan is the secret of success in the initial phases of an amphibious operation.

When a nation is invading another and no maps are available, it is extremely necessary that an abundance of aerial photographs <sup>be</sup> made available, and maps reproduced from that source. The maps used on this operation were made from aerial photos and were reasonably accurate.



It is the opinion of the author that the 1st Battalion, 383d Infantry, took too much time in completing reorganization. Had the 1st Battalion been as well coordinated as the other two battalions of the regiment, reorganization would have been facilitated.

A great deal of credit is due the US Navy for the naval gun fire which supported the infantry during the initial phase of the operation. A large number of missions were fired and adjusted by the naval gun fire liaison officers. The results obtained were extremely valuable. During the first days of the operation, the only aircraft available was navy carrier-based. The coordination between army and navy was made very rapidly and as a result many missions were completed with the minimum amount of delay. This was clearly brought out by the effectiveness of the air strike on Cactus Ridge on 6 April.

The night illumination missions fired by the navy were very effective and much appreciated by the ground troops. The duration of the light offered by the navy shells was much longer than anything the army had at that time. It is very necessary that sufficient illumination be available at night on special operations.

The Japanese soldier was not to be underestimated in the least. The organization of the island of Okinawa was extremely well planned. All positions were expertly camouflaged. Many lessons were learned through observation of their handiwork.

During the first days of the operation, units were widely scattered and made mutual support difficult, especially in organizing night protection fires. Most frequently, patrols from a unit would contact the adjacent units with the purpose of coordinating the fires, thereby avoiding duplication of effort. It is the opinion of the author that provisions should have been made for greater ease of communications, either by wire or radio, with adjacent units.

The plan of attack on Cactus Ridge embodied all the principles included in the present day doctrine of offensive tactics. The maximum use of available supporting fires was utilized. Thorough evaluation of the terrain was made and the enemy was forced to defend over ground which was least advantageous to the defender. As a result, a certain element of surprise was attained and the objective was taken with a minimum number of casualties.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

Many lessons were learned during this operation and many lessons which had been learned previously were reemphasized. Some of them might be listed as follows:

1. Specialized training for a special operation is vital.
2. Night illumination of the battlefield greatly increases the effectiveness of individual weapons. p. 16
3. Decisive results can be achieved by attacking a position at its weakest point.
4. There is no substitute for firepower.
5. An enemy established in positions deep underground is immune to artillery fire, mortar fire, and aerial bombardment.
6. Never underestimate the enemy and his capabilities.
7. Assault teams should be trained on company level for use in attacking fortified positions.
8. By employing infantry and tanks as a team, the greatest effectiveness is achieved.
9. Detailed planning is the secret of success in the initial phase of an amphibious operation.
10. No defense can withstand the attack of an aggressive, well trained, well equipped, and well led attacking force for an indefinite period of time.