

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF TROOP "C", 7TH CAVALRY
(1ST CAVALRY DIVISION) NEAR ROSSUM, MANUS ISLAND,
THE ADMIRALTY ISLANDS, BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO
22-24 MARCH 1944
(BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Troop Commander)

Type of operation described: TROOP IN THE ATTACK

Major Houck Spencer, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction - General.....	3
History, Organization & Training of Participating Units.....	3
Terrain Sketch of The Admiralty Islands.....	5
The Situation - Strategic.....	7
Division.....	8
Regiment & Squadron.....	11
The Attack on Rossum.....	14
Preparation & Planning.....	14
Attack - 22 March 1944.....	16
Attack - 23 March 1944.....	20
Attack - 24 March 1944.....	21
Relief and Summary.....	24
Analysis and Criticism.....	24
Preparation & Planning.....	25
Conduct of the Attack.....	25
Lessons Learned	29
Map A - The Situation in the Pacific, February 1944	
Map B - Eastern Manus Island and Los Negros Island	
Map C - Battle Area on Manus Island	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 The Admiralties
Operations of the 1st Cavalry Division (29 February to 18 May 1944)
Historical Division, War Dept., 1 Dec 1945 (TIS Library)
- A-2 Jungle Operations
The Cavalry Journal, March-April 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-3 1st Cavalry Division in the Admiralty Islands
The Cavalry Journal, November-December 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-4 1st Cavalry Division in the Admiralty Islands
The Cavalry Journal, January-February 1945 (TIS Library)
- A-5 1st Cavalry Division in the Admiralty Islands
The Cavalry Journal, March-April (TIS Library)
- A-6 1st Cavalry Division in the Admiralty Islands
By Hal Stewart
Armored Cavalry Journal, November-December 1946 (TIS Library)
- A-7 In the Admiralties: Fanatic Jap Rushes Withheld by Steady U.S. Defense
Intelligence Bulletin #3-3, November 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-8 Attack on Enemy Fortified Position
By Col Marion Carson, AGF Board, SWPA
Report #67, 7 June 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-9 Artillery Support of Foot Cavalry
By Col W. Bradley
Field Artillery Journal, August 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-10 Eye-Witness or Personal Knowledge
- A-11 Use of Tanks in the Admiralties
By Col Marion Carson, AGF Board, SWPA
Report #62 (TIS Library)
- A-12 The Admiralty Islands - Terrain Study #67, 30 Nov. 1943
Allied Geographical Section, SWPA
(Personal possession of the author)
- A-13 Brochure - The Seventh Cavalry, issued by the regiment June 1943
(Personal possession of the author)

THE OPERATIONS OF TROOP "C", 7TH CAVALRY
(1ST CAVALRY DIVISION) NEAR ROSSUM, MANUS ISLAND
THE ADMIRALTY ISLANDS, BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO
22-24 MARCH 1944
(BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Troop Commander)

INTRODUCTION

General

This monograph is devoted to a description and analysis of a small-unit attack in the rain forest of the tropics. The medium of our study is the operations of Troop "C" - 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division on Manus Island during the Admiralty Islands Campaign, Bismarck Archipelago, 22-24 March 1944.

The peculiar conditions of terrain and climate wherein this engagement occurred operated to produce a type combat action notable for the reduced influence of infantry supporting weapons, particularly air, artillery and armor; accompanied by an inverse rise in the importance of man and his leaders as the decisive factors in combat.

It is believed worthwhile to examine this action briefly but in detail, for in many instances during the late war, the engagements of our arms in the Pacific Theater were typified by the circumstances and techniques described in the narrative. Wherever men may fight in local conditions characterized by extremely rugged terrain, dense vegetation and an inimical climate, the whole situated in an undeveloped region, the problems herein discussed will appear. These problems become of pointed interest when one considers that these particular geographic conditions occur in entire areas of the North and South American continents and Asia; all most apt to be primary theaters of war in event of another conflict.

History, Organization and Training of Participating Units

The 7th United States Cavalry Regiment was organized in 1867 at Fort Riley, Kansas by its colorful lieutenant-colonel, George Armstrong Custer, for the purpose of aiding in the security of the nation's western expansion. During the following half-century the regiment participated in

many bitter fights of the Indian Wars, served on the Mexican Border with General Pershing and finally campaigned in Cuba. The 7th Cavalry is best known for its unfortunate, but heroic action against the Dakota Indians at the Little Big Horn River, Montana, in the spring of 1876; wherein Custer perished with the majority of the regiment. (1)

In 1921 the 1st Cavalry Division was formed at Fort Bliss, Texas and the 7th Cavalry was assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Brigade with the 8th Cavalry. Except for frequent maneuvers in Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico, the Division remained at Fort Bliss and adjoining border posts until March 1943, when it was dismounted and committed to an intensified infantry training program. This measure was taken in anticipation of early employment in the Pacific Theater, where, at the time, only two United States Army divisions were engaged. (2)

The division and its regiments were now based on a mounted table of organization, less animals, due to the possibility of mounted employment in Northern Australia should the Japanese land on that sub-continent. The combat elements consisted of the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades composed of the 5th and 12th Cavalry Regiments and 7th and 8th Regiments respectively. The 61st, 82nd and 271st Field Artillery Battalions, 105mm Howitzer, until recently horse-drawn, constituted the artillery elements. The 99th Field Artillery Battalion, 75mm Howitzer, pack, was attached to the division in June of 1943. The 1st Signal Troop, 8th Engineer Squadron and 1st Medical Squadron formed the service support. The rifle regiments were divided into two squadrons (battalions) of three rifle troops (companies) each. Regimental troops were Headquarters, Service and Special Weapons, all being organized similarly to their infantry counterparts. The rifle troops, however, differed from the equivalent infantry organization of the time, in that they had eight-man squads and were equipped

(1) A-13; (2) A-10, A-13

with four light machine guns each. In other respects the infantry company organization was applicable. (3)

The Division arrived at Brisbane, Australia in June of 1943 and continued with field training in Queensland for the following five months. During this period squadron weapons troops were organized, as well as communications platoons; and the 99th Field Artillery, now truck-drawn, was designated as the 7th Cavalry support battalion. (4)

In December of 1943 the Division debarked over the beach at Oro Bay, New Guinea and completed jungle training terminated abruptly by the first combat commitment - the attack on the Admiralty Islands. (5)

Summarizing, the status of the regiment, just prior to combat was this:-

On the credit side the training had been superior and complete. The troops possessed a large cadre percentage of excellent regular army non-commissioned officers. The replacement drafts had undergone a minimum of ten months training in the jungle and desert. The personnel were thoroughly acclimated, finely conditioned and had a high morale and esprit.

On the other hand the light table of organization did not provide for a third battalion per regiment which resulted in a certain lack of weight and flexibility of employment. (6)

Terrain Sketch of the Admiralty Islands

The Admiralties, constituting an extension of the Bismarck Archipelago, are located 200 miles northeast of New Guinea and 260 miles west of the tip of New Ireland. (7)

The island group, so named by Carteret in honor of the British Admiralty, was discovered by the Dutch mariner, Schouten, in 1615. The Germans established the first sovereignty in 1884 and made the initial serious effort at

(3,4,5,6) A-10; (7) A-1, p.4

low hills covered by dense jungle. Extensive uncharted and reef-blocked sections of the coast magnify the difficulties of sea-borne assault on either island. (11)

Located only 2 degrees south of the equator the climate is equatorial with an average temperature of 94° and average humidity of 84 per cent. The mean rainfall is 150 inches annually. (12)

THE SITUATION

Strategic

By February 1944, the Japanese outer Pacific perimeter was reduced to a line extending east and south from the home islands, including Wake Island and the Carolines and thence southwest encompassing New Britain (less Cape Gloucester), New Ireland and roughly bisecting New Guinea. The westernmost bastion of the island chain was the Admiralty Islands. The Admiralties constituted a lucrative strategic target for several reasons. Under Japanese control, they effectively blocked the southern entrance to the Bismarck Sea, the most direct water route to the Philippines. In addition, the Islands menaced our right flank, should operations be continued northwest on the New Guinea Coast. Once neutralized, the Admiralties would cease to be one of the major supply links in the enemy logistics system supporting the entire Solomons area and over 100,000 Imperial troops would be left to "wither on the vine". With these considerations in mind, augmented by the extreme desirability of the harbor and its surrounding islands as a naval and air base, planning for the invasion of the Admiralties was initiated by Headquarters, SWPA, as early as November 1943. By February 1944, Admiral Halsey's air and sea power, operating from Bougainville, had almost neutralized the enemy's once mighty base at Rabaul, the only other southern key to the perimeter. Our seizure of the New Guinea coast as far north as Saidor and the capture

(11) A-1, p.6; A-10; (12) A-12, p. 33, 36

of Cape Gloucester on New Britain left the Admiralties as the sole remaining block to the final assault on the Philippines. (13) (See Map A)

Division

Accordingly, plans for a reconnaissance in force to be executed by elements of the 1st Cavalry Division were vastly accelerated and on 29 February 1944, at 0817, the 2nd Squadron, reinforced, of the 5th Cavalry stormed ashore on Momote air-strip, Los Negros Island. The initial landing was so successful that the reconnaissance force was ordered by General MacArthur to hold the beachhead until reinforced. On 2nd March, the remainder of the 5th Cavalry, the 99th Field Artillery Battalion and the 40th Naval Construction Battalion arrived and the beachhead was enlarged. (14) (See Map B)

On the nights of 3 and 4 March, the enemy reacted violently with a series of banzai attacks. This action netted him approximately 700 casualties and from that time on the issue was never in doubt, although much hard fighting lay ahead. (15)

By the 8th of March, the 1st Brigade with the 2nd Squadron of the 7th Cavalry attached, had entirely cleared Mokerang Peninsula and had established minor beachheads on Lombrum Plantation, Papitalai Mission and Papitalai. The security of the eastern harbor area was so thorough that the 2nd Brigade was enabled to land administratively on Red Beach, Los Negros, commencing 1300, 9 March. (16)

The remaining operations were divided into two area phases. The final mopping-up on Los Negros was assigned to the 1st Brigade. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade Combat Team was charged with the mission of landing on Manus, clearing the island, where the enemy was, as yet, untouched. (17)

(13) A-1, p. 123, 47; (14) A-1, p. 11, 12, 23, 38, 39; A-10;

(15) A-1, p. 43-50; A-7; (16) A-1, p. 60-75; A-10; (17) A-1, p. 76

The primary targets on Manus; the township of Lorengau and the air-strip, are well situated for defense from sea-borne attack. Rising in rear of the strip to a height of approximately 200 feet, a low, densely wooded ridge provides excellent fields of fire commanding the water approaches and the strip itself. The small settlement of Lorengau, at the mouth of the river of the same name, is ensconced within a complete semi-circle of hills, about 400 feet high. As these areas are the key localities of the island, it could reasonably be assumed that the enemy would make considerable preparation to defend them. (18)

Accordingly, Major General V. D. Mudge, the 2nd Brigade Commander, resolved upon a flanking landing by the entire brigade combat team in the vicinity of Iagos Mission. (Map B). Such a landing would avoid the anticipated main resistance and enable our forces to get ashore with minimum cost. A coastwise effort east would then be mounted with the purpose of rolling up the defense along the coast at the air-strip and about the township of Lorengau. (19)

In order to situate artillery with required minimum range to support this operation, it was necessary to seize Hauwei and Butjo Iao Islands for battalion positions. This was accomplished by sea-borne assault of the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry with Troop "C" attached, against Hauwei Island. This attack met with sharp resistance but by nightfall on 13 March, the neutralization was complete. In the meantime, Troop "F" of the 7th Cavalry occupied Butjo Iao without difficulty and on 13 March, the 61st and 271st Field Artilleries were emplaced on Hauwei while the 99th readied itself on Butjo Iao. (20)

The action on Hauwei Island was the first of the war for Troop "C". Morale and esprit were enhanced, the sufficiency and suitability

(18) A-1, p. 76, 77; A-4, p. 50; A-12, p. 4, 24; (19) A-1, p. 76, 79; A-10; (20) A-1, p. 80, 81, 82; A-4, p. 48; A-10

of prior training were confirmed and very light casualties were sustained. (21)

On 15 March, the 8th Cavalry landed against negligible opposition at Lugos Mission (Map B), closely followed by the remainder of the brigade combat team. Within three days, following a vigorous drive east along the coast, our forces were disposed as shown on Map "C". Sharp engagements were fought by both regiments along the coastal track and about the air-strip. The vigor of the defense and complexity of fortifications in these areas bore testimony to the sagacity of the brigade commander's plan. (22)

The character of the surviving Japanese resistance on Manus commenced to crystallize. As yet, only a portion of the estimated 500 troops on the island had been contacted and eliminated. However, during the engagement at Lorengau air-strip, a Japanese officer was killed on whose body was found a situation map indicating all remaining enemy defenses on the island. A position of considerable strength and depth was depicted astride the Rossum Track (No. 2 Road) extending from Old Rossum to Rossum. (23) (See Map C)

In order to corroborate this information and regain contact, two patrols were dispatched by the 8th Cavalry on the morning of 19 March. One proceeding eastward to McElrey Plantation elicited only scattered opposition; the other moving south on No. 2 Road agitated a hornet's nest. (24)

Before continuing with the development of the situation toward Rossum, let us review the terrain over which the action was to be

(21) A-10; (22) A-1, p. 82-103; A-4, p. 48-50; A-10; (23) A-1, p. 97, 102; A-8; A-10; Old Rossum and Rossum are native place names. Old Rossum consisted merely of a clearing in the forest located on a small rise. A locality rather than a point is meant. Rossum was a native village of about twenty dwellings located on a considerably higher knob. The terms Rossum Track and No. 2 Road are used interchangeably in this narrative. (24) A-1, p. 103, 104; A-10

fought. Southeastward from the 8th Cavalry perimeter the rapidly rising ground was cleared for about 300 yards in rear of the Lorengau settlement. Traversing the center of the clearing and winding upward was a narrow clay trail capable of being turned into a sticky mass by a small quantity of rain. At the edge of the clearing the rain forest closed in, entirely solid and impervious to observation. This was the limit of visual reconnaissance. Inspection of the available maps clarified the terrain situation but slightly. Rising ground was indicated as far south, at least, as Rossum. Apparently the dominating feature was a ridge rising steadily to the southeast where it eventually united with the main hill mass which traverses the center of the island eastwest. No. 2 Road followed the crest of this ridge as is characteristic of all native routes in the jungles. Rain forest was represented as covering the entire area. Contours were approximate and relative elevations could not be determined nor could the actual alignment of the drainage system. The scale bore no apparent constant relation to ground distances. The above information is included in such detail in order to illustrate the difficulties of unit leaders in planning and conducting military operations in the area.

(25)

Regiment and Squadron

The 8th Cavalry patrol which was to penetrate the Rossum area consisted of one officer-led platoon from Troop "A". This platoon had barely cleared the perimeter and approached the fringe of the rain forest when it received fire from automatic weapons situated in two bunkers flanking the trail. The platoon leader and one man

(25) A-10; The accompanying Map C of the battle area is drawn from personal recollection and examination of the Admiralty Islands Terrain Folder. Rough sketches of the Rossum Track appear in other documents listed in the Bibliography, but these are still less complete. The Army Map Service does not provide a tactical map of Manus Island.

were wounded, whereupon the platoon sergeant assumed command and attempted to flank the position, but without success. As the mission was reconnaissance, the patrol returned to the perimeter and reported. Col. Bradley, the commanding officer of the 8th Cavalry, then dispatched Troop "A", reinforced with a section of heavy machine guns and a section of 37mm towed AF guns to destroy the enemy emplacements. This mission was accomplished after a brief fight in which the troop lost two men killed and ten wounded. The position consisted of two log bunkers excellently concealed and covered by riflemen on the ground and in the trees. The 8th Cavalry then established a trailblock at the limit of advance. (26) (See Map C)

Intelligence information now indicated that the remnants of the Los Negros garrison were fleeing eastward across Loniu Passage and could possibly reinforce the Rossum defenses. ^(See Map C) The 7th Cavalry was therefore ordered to penetrate the position immediately. (27)

On the morning of 20 March, Troop "F" of the 7th Cavalry moved south along the track with the purpose of reconnoitering in force. The troop was reinforced with one light tank, one bulldozer and a TD-9 tractor pulling a one-ton supply trailer. The advance moved steadily and slowly as the entire area was scouted. A number of shacks, recently occupied, and supply dumps were discovered.

At noon the troop encountered major resistance judged to be located north of Old Rossum. A thorough reconnaissance, executed under machine gun, rifle and light mortar fire, disclosed a line of log pill-boxes ^X athwart the ridge and extending at least 150 yards from flank to flank. The locality was infested with tree snipers and riflemen in spider-holes. Captain Frey, the troop commander, upon regimental order, attempted to punch through the line and in

(26) A-1, p. 104, 105; A-10; (27) A-1, p. 105; A-5, p. 1

doing so lost five men killed and eleven wounded. The troop was then withdrawn to the perimeter. During withdrawal, the tank and TD-9 were forced to back, due to the narrowness of the trail. While backing, both vehicles were disabled by mines. The dozer crew succeeded in retrieving the tank under fire but the TD-9 had to be abandoned. (28)
(See Map C)

A full-scale effort by at least a reinforced squadron was obviously necessary to clear No. 2 Road. As in any other type of warfare attack on a fortified position in jungle may be executed either frontally or in flank. However, both methods, when employed in the jungle, present special difficulties. Movement is usually dependent upon trails. Maneuver may be made cross-country, but the problems imposed by restricted visibility and sketchy maps reduce control and coordination to a low degree. For the same reasons mutually supporting fires cannot be employed and gaps between maneuvering elements are apt to be exploited by an alert enemy, resulting in possible encirclement and danger to command posts and routes of communications. In addition, the dense vegetation, rugged terrain and depressing climate cause very slow movement and quickly exhaust the troops. The problems of supply are greatly complicated and may be dependent upon human carriers. A frontal attack minimizes the problems of time, space, coordination and control. Battle security and supply are greatly facilitated. The attack, however, is usually limited to a narrow front and must traverse the enemy's main defensive fires. These factors impose a high cost on the frontal operation. (29)

Before deciding upon the plan of attack, Col. Glenn S. Finley, the regimental commander, caused Troop "E" to thoroughly reconnoiter the
(28) A-1, p. 106, 107, 108; A-10; Personal statement of Capt. Wm C. Frey, 7th Cavalry, to author about May 1946; A-11; (29) The opinion of the author based upon personal combat experiences in the jungle in the Admiralties, Leyte, Samar and Luzon.

area for lateral approaches throughout 21 March. (See Map C) The patrols reported that all the enemy were located on the Rossum Ridge and no feasible routes leading in from the flank could be discovered. The decision was thereupon made that on the following morning the 1st Squadron of the 7th Cavalry, reinforced, would penetrate the position and attempt to reach Kelaua Harbor. (See Map C) (30)

THE ATTACK ON ROSSUM

Preparation and Planning

At 2200 hours on 21 March, the troop commanders were appraised of the squadron mission commencing the following morning. The force would consist of Troops "B", "C" and "D" with "G" attached from the 2nd Squadron in place of Troop "A", which was then securing the hospital area. The heavy machine gun platoons of "D" were to accompany the rifle troops; one platoon attached to "C" troop which was designated as the advance guard and the other in squadron reserve. The 81mm mortar platoon was emplaced with the mortar platoon from regimental weapons troop on the Lorengau Ridge. (See Map C) Both platoons were in general support of the squadron. One M-4 medium tank and one D-7 bull-dozer comprised the armored elements to move initially with Squadron headquarters. An air preparation was delivered by several RAAF P-40's at 1800, 21 March, but the accuracy of the strike could not be determined. The 61st and 99th Field Artillery Battalions were placed in direct support for the operation. Communications would be provided by the regimental communications platoon wire-crews by laying 110 wire to the Squadron CP. The intra-squadron communications would be by the SCR 511's while in movement and the sound-power telephones when stationary. The SCR 300 was not, at that time, an item of issue. (31)

(30) A-1, p. 108; A-10; (31) A-10

The advance would roughly parallel the trail, remaining on the high ground. The jungle march SOP would prevail: i.e., column of troops, troops in column of platoons, troopers either in single column or staggered by twos. The advance guard would set the rate of march and all platoons were responsible for local security, both at the halt and in march. Supply of water and ammunition was deemed feasible by jeep about as far south as Rossum, provided obstacles or mines did not block the track. In the event that obstructions could not be demolished, hand carry would have to be substituted. Ration resupply would not be required until 24 March at which time K-rations would be sent forward by the best available means. The aid station was to be located at Lorengau as was the ammunition supply point. Evacuation would be by litter and quarter-ton truck. (32)

During the briefing no mention was made of the captured map nor were the details of Capt. Frey's reconnaissance described. As a result, the rifle troop commanders in no way anticipated the violence of the resistance they were to meet. (33)

The troops were organized and briefed by flashlight. The usual tropic equipment of poncho, spoon, canteen, individual weapons and ammunition were to be carried with 2 days "K" rations. "C" troop was clean and well-rested, having been in reserve since the attack on Lorengau 18 March and the successful actions of the campaign had produced a high morale. The strength was approximately 90 men and 4 officers. (34)

The troop organization for the approach march was, in order, as follows:-

(1) 2nd Platoon, under Lt. Roger Fiske, to furnish the advance guard.

(32) A-10; The 27th Portable Surgical Hospital was located in Lorengau. The proximity and efficiency of this unit was instrumental in saving many lives; (33,34) A-10

- (2) Troop Commander's Group.
- (3) 1st Platoon in command of Lt. Donald Ross, accompanied by one section of heavy machine guns.
- (4) 3rd Platoon and 60mm Mortar Section in command of S/Sgt Waggoner.
- (5) The light machine guns and rocket launchers 2.36" were attached to rifle platoons.
- (6) The rear was closed by Lt. Jerome Shenker, the troop executive officer.

The distance between platoons would be the usual average 100 to 150 yards. Forward elements were responsible for dropping connecting groups to the rear as necessary.

The briefing was not completed until 0200 hours on "D" Day, at which time the personnel completed their private arrangements. (35)

THE ATTACK TOWARD ROSSUM

1st Day, 22 March

The brief rest of the troops was terminated all too soon at 0500 hours. The kitchens had not yet been ferried from Red Beach, so all hands breakfasted on "K" rations and by 0700 the troops had filed onto the Lorengau Road. The advance was suspended when the point squad reached the 8th Cavalry Perimeter, while the artillery and regimental mortars fired an unobserved preparation. Several salvos of 4.5" naval rockets were launched from improvised racks mounted on a 3/4 ton weapons carrier. The rocket fire was very inaccurate, but sounded quite impressive. (36)

The approach was resumed at approximately 0800 and proceeded silently and cautiously for about an hour. During this period there

(35,36) A-10; The activities of the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry are described in some detail on pages 104 to 112 in the War Dept. Historical Study, The Admiralties. Where discrepancies occur between this text and the historical study, the narrator has chosen to recount or add his personal recollections.

was no sign of the enemy. At 0905 a long burst of machine-gun fire, at very close range, fatally wounded Cpl. Quatse, the leader of the point squad, killed two of his men and wounded three others. The column halted and the troop commander's group moved forward to the 2nd Platoon. Lt. Fiske could not determine the origin of fire, but apparently a well-concealed bunker lay immediately ahead, commanding the trail. The 1st Platoon was deployed to the right of the trail, the 3rd Platoon to the left and the heavy machine guns were emplaced beside the trail to cover the removal of the casualties. The 2nd Platoon, less one squad, drew back into reserve and the troop command post was established just off the track about 100 yards in rear of the line. The commander's group remained with the 2nd Platoon advanced squad. The 60mm mortars commenced registering from their column positions, but after a few rounds the inability of the light projectiles to penetrate the upper trees was apparent and the effort was ceased. The same results were attained with the 81mm mortars. No medium ammunition nor delay fuze was available and the indeterminate height of the tree mask made overhead fire hazardous. There was still no penetration of the forest cover so the fire was discontinued. (37)

By 1000 the deployment had been completed in good order. Contact and communications were functioning smoothly despite the extremely dense forest, which limited visibility to about fifteen yards. The wounded having been evacuated by litter teams, the command was given to push forward and develop the resistance. The troop had not covered twenty yards when heavy rifle, machine-gun and knee mortar fire broke out from flank to flank. The concussion of mortar rounds and grenades was continuous and the resulting smoke soon reduced visibility even further. Although the fire was originating about thirty yards forward, (37) A-10

the only positions spotted were two bunkers confronting the third platoon. Cpl. Conyers and Cpl. Ortiz immediately engaged these bunkers at point-blank range with their light machine guns. Cpl. Conyers manned his gun until he was killed and two of his crew members seriously wounded, whereupon Sgt. Martinez, the weapons platoon file-closer, worked forward and scored four direct hits on one of the pill-boxes with a rocket launcher. Unfortunately, the rockets would not detonate on the soft earth covering the emplacements. (38)

It now became apparent that the most serious danger consisted of snipers located overhead in the dense trees, perfectly concealed and the sound of their firing obscured by the general racket. Within the first hour the 1st platoon sergeant, the 1st platoon guide, the weapons platoon-sergeant, two squad leaders and three others had been wounded by this fire. Shortly, 1st Sgt. Haines was shot from directly above, suffering a severe shoulder wound while talking to the troop commander. The company messenger also received a rifle bullet through the top of the helmet, which luckily was deflected, resulting in another shoulder wound. The morale effect of this fire was severe. A man never knew when a sniper was literally breathing down his neck. (39)

Upon several occasions empty brass fell upon various individuals but no tree snipers were definitely located during the action. Several methods, none successful, were attempted in order to cope with this situation. A complete cessation of fire and careful observation were employed. A deliberate spraying of the trees was an error, for the snipers intensified their efforts under cover of the general firing and casualties continued to occur. A formation was adopted with one squad of each platoon covering the platoon front and moving about twenty yards in the rear of the line with the sole mission of observing for tree snipers. This likewise produced no appreciable results. (40)

(38,39,40) A-10

The troop now disengaged by withdrawing about 50 yards to the rear and the 99th Field Artillery Battalion registered a heavy concentration of time fire and fuze delay. The assault was then recommenced in the original formation, the fire from the trees was considerably reduced and the two bunkers on the 3rd Platoon front were over-run and grenaded. Almost immediately, however, the same violent reaction was produced and progress again ground to a halt. (41)

The squadron commander now committed "B" troop on the right of the trail and "C" slipped to the left while "G" remained in reserve. The tank moved forward cautiously preceded by RAAF sapper details sweeping for mines, and reported to the C.O. of "C" troop. The tank had no provisions for communication so arrangements were made to bang on the hull and to designate targets by pointing. Both artillery battalions now registered a heavy preparation directed by air observation and at 1400 the attack jumped off. The troops received fire again but it was somewhat reduced in volume. The amount of knee mortar fire seemed to increase, however, and Cpl. White, a mortar squad leader, fired his 60mm mortar from the front line without a mount in an attempt to repay the enemy in kind. His effort was unsuccessful and he and the assistant gunner lost their lives. The tank was now employed to fire to the right and left immediately across the front of the advancing troops. The enemy fire seemed to decrease, but the personnel contacting the tank by pounding on the turret and shouting to the commander, who was well buttoned up, incurred intense danger. The RAAF sapper crew swept the trail ahead of the tank, displaying the utmost in cool courage. It was questionable as to whether the tank was worth the extra risk to all these people. (42)

The squadron succeeded in advancing one hundred yards and attained the clearing at Old Rossan. A total of about 12 bunkers were over-run (41) A-10; (42) A-1, p. 108, 109; A-10; A-11

and demolished by details from the 8th Engineer Squadron. No count of enemy dead was attempted and few were seen. Troops "B" and "C" and the machine-gun crews from "D" troop had suffered the brunt of the action. Casualties were 11 killed and 29 wounded. A total of about 800 yards was gained and as the hour was about 1850, the squadron perimeter was established for the night. (43) (See Map C)

2nd Day, 23 March

During the night of 22 March the enemy remained inactive except for an officer who blundered into the perimeter and struck a match in order to examine his map. Nothing of importance was found on his body. The next morning the attack was renewed at 0730. Troop "B", under command of Captain R. C. Hubbell, who had joined the previous day, was committed again on the right. Troop "G" passed through "C" on the left and assumed the lead. Troop "C" was designated as the reserve to follow in echelon on the left of the trail, to clear snipers and to protect the left rear flank. Lt. Ross, the first platoon leader, was evacuated, with a fever of 105°, which caused him to lose consciousness and the platoon was left in charge of the sole remaining corporal. Before clearing the position, the dozer struck a mine and was disabled. (44) The trail was further blocked by the TD-9 tractor, abandoned on the 20th by Troop "F" and subsequently burned by the enemy. Consequently, the tank could not proceed until the engineers cleared the trail. (45)

The squadron worked slowly forward for several hours while the artillery continued a steady shelling throughout the area. No resistance was encountered until early afternoon when the lead troops commenced descending^g reverse slope south of Old Rossua. At that point, the Japanese

(43) A-1, p. 108, 109; A-10; A-11; (44) Reference A-1 states that the enemy had probably placed this mine during the night. Such was not the case for the mine was discovered the preceding evening, but not removed due to someone's omission; (45) A-1, p. 109; A-10

opened effective rifle, machine-gun and knee mortar fire from the forward slope of the next rise. The forest was less dense in this locality, and visibility was increased to about 100 yards. (46)

(See Map C)

Aided by artillery fire, the attack continued with "G" troop in the lead and by about 1800 hours the line was established approximately 1000 yards south of Old Rossum on the intermediate ridge. Twenty-one bunkers were neutralized during the 2nd day's attack by Troops "B" and "G". "C" Troop and 8th Engineer demolition squads destroyed these positions as the line advanced. The enemy did not defend this ridge quite so vigorously as that north of Old Rossum. It is the narrator's belief that a covering force was employed here and that the bulk of the surviving Japanese congregated at Rossum for the final stand. No evidence of destruction of bunkers by either air, mortar, or artillery fire was observed. Apparently the greatest value of supporting fires lay in the destruction of riflemen in the trees and on the ground, thus expediting the effort of the troops in flanking the pill-boxes. Troop "C"'s participation in the day's activity was limited to demolishing fortifications and scouting the area for snipers, several of whom were killed in the trees. They were excellently camouflaged and roped into place. The squadron had suffered 1 killed and 27 wounded, and as the day was well advanced, the coil was established on the enemy position. Some harrassing mortar fire was received while the troops were digging-in. Apparently the fire was originating in the vicinity of Rossum. (47)

3rd Day, 24 March

Acting in the belief that the strongest resistance had not yet been encountered, Col. Finley attached Troop "E" to the 1st Squadron.

(46) A-10; (47) A-1, p. 110; A-10

The entire regiment would now be committed less Troops "A" and "F". The formation adopted placed "B" on the right as before, Troop "G" in the center, and Troop "C" on the extreme left. Troop "E" was to follow the right rear, in reserve, patrolling meanwhile, west to the Lorengau River and thence south and east again, in the possibility of locating a flank approach to Rossum. In the event such an entrance were found, Troop "E" was to exploit it immediately while the other Troops continued the frontal pressure. (48)

Preceding the attack, a prolonged artillery and mortar concentration was delivered, but an anticipated air-strike was cancelled. (49)

Due to the difficulties of adjusting the preparatory fires, the advance did not commence until 1142 hours. The assault echelons moved across the low swale between the intermediate ridge and the northern slope of the Rossum rise. The forest continued to be fairly open with visibility at about 100 yards. Upon ascending the first rise, the troops encountered a transverse clearing approximately 30 yards in width and resembling a utilities right-of-way in the United States. At all events, this opening provided excellent fields of fire and observation for the defenders and the first scouts attempting to cross precipitated the most concentrated fire yet experienced. The opposition was particularly violent on the right before "B" Troop, although "C" and "G" received ample rifle and machine-gun fire also. The squadron commander extended the right by committing "E" Troop, which promptly elicited the same reception as "B" had previously. The entire enemy position was completely invisible. (50)

The four rifle troops pushed the attack vigorously. Maj. William B. Shelley, the squadron executive officer, personally directed the tank (48,49) A-1, p. 111; A-10; (50) A-1, p. 111, 112; A-10; A-11

which was overtly cautious. The tank and its attendant sappers, directors and security soon drew heavy small-arms and knee-mortar fire which wounded the tank platoon leader, who was dismounted; and several cavalrymen of the security squad. Captain Hubbell of "B" Troop was killed at the beginning of the engagement, leaving only one officer in the Troop - Lt. Ferguson, a very young, but capable soldier. Within the first hour of contact, the squadron suffered 24 casualties and had not been able to get anyone across the fire lane. This fire lane was not so well defined on the left of the trail and "C" Troop made some progress. However, upon arriving abreast of the lane, a heavy flanking fire from the right was received and due to the troop formation, no means of returning it could be employed. (51)

No signs of a decrease in the enemy fire were apparent, all our units were completely committed and no reserve was left. To force the frontal attack would obviously exact very heavy casualties and might be unsuccessful. All troops except "E" were exhausted from the exertions of three day's attack in a temperature of 100°. The toll in leaders had been very high as a result of the discrimination of the tree snipers. The average rifle troop mustered no more than two officers and fifty men on the line. The squadron commander therefore requested permission of the Brigade Commanding General to disengage for the purpose of coordinating heavier supporting fires, obtaining an air-strike and preparing a different plan of attack. This request was granted and the squadron disengaged at 1600 after marking the lines for the air-strikes. Just prior to the withdrawal, 12 P-40's of the RAAF commenced the air preparation and the 61st Field Artillery initiated harrassing fires on the position. As the terrain over which

(51) A-1, p. 111, 112; A-10; A-11

the day's attack had been made was low and poorly suited for defense, the troops returned to the previous night's position on the intermediate ridge. (52)

RELIEF AND SUMMARY

This concludes the action of the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry on the Rossum Track. The following morning the 1st Squadron of the 8th Cavalry, now somewhat rested, passed through our positions and continued the attack, supported by a heavy air-strike and artillery preparation. As was expected, the stiff resistance was met on the high ground at Rossum and the 8th Cavalry participated in a heavy fight before neutralization was obtained. (53)

During three days of continuous attack, the 1st Squadron had captured two fortified positions, destroyed approximately 33 bunkers, gained about 2000 yards and, in so doing, lost 16 men killed and 76 wounded. (54)

The approximate enemy loss was never determined. Few of the defenders were killed above ground and those who died in their emplacements were entombed therein without any count, for the assaulting troops had neither time nor inclination for investigation. The actual Japanese strength committed at Rossum likewise will remain indeterminate. Undoubtedly all bunkers were not occupied, although it is very probable that they were employed as alternate positions. At all events the efforts of the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry paved the way for the final knock-out on Manus Island. (55)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The analysis and criticism of this operation is organized similarly to the narrative so as to facilitate examination.

(52) A-1, p. 112; A-10; (53) A-1, p. 112-116; A-10; (54, 55) A-10

Preparation and Planning

Planning for this operation, on the squadron level, was untimely and incomplete. In view of the fact that the efforts of the 7th Cavalry were directed by Brigade order, against the Rossum Track commencing 19 March, some effort should have been initiated to prepare for possible commitment. Hence, two extremely valuable sources of enemy and terrain intelligence; liaison aircraft and patrolling, were not utilized. Further, the information recorded on the captured Japanese map was neither considered in advance on the squadron level, nor was it even made available to the troop commanders. As a result, small-unit leaders were plunged into the attack with only the most fragmentary knowledge of the situation. No plan whatsoever was formulated in advance for squadron employment in event of enemy contact. The late hour and date at which troops were alerted resulted in a hurried briefing of personnel after dark.

Conduct of the Attack

Tactical and Technical Aspects

1. No variety of tactics was attempted. Daily, the enemy could accurately predict the strength, direction, time, location and formation of our attacks. The element of surprise was completely ignored.

2. All attacks were delivered against the enemy's greatest strength. No concentration of effort nor attempts at flanking attack were made. Attack in the jungle lends itself well to penetration due to limited fields for delivering flanking fire on the attacker.

The ground to the east logically presented the best avenue for approach to the enemy's flank, as this terrain was

high and away from water. However, all patrolling, with a view to flank attack, was conducted west to the Lorengau River bottom where the jungle was most dense.

3. The commitment of "B" Troop on the first day and "E" Troop on the third are examples of piecemeal attack against the strongest resistance.

4. The above factors indicate that the squadron employment resulted from considering the terrain and vegetation solely as obstacles.

5. Company and platoon tactics were generally sound, as evidenced by subsequent operations under similar conditions.

The following tactics were emphasized:

- a. Employment of maximum fire power to the front, with automatic crew-served weapons close to the line.
- b. Continual close battle-security on the flanks.
- c. Close contact between elements, in depth and laterally at all times.

6. It is believed that the tactical principle dictating against the employment of single tanks was violated with proper substantiation. Not more than one tank could possibly fire at any one time due to the nature of the terrain. The addition of another tank would have doubled the difficulties of control, coordination and tank security by infantry without adding to the squadron fire power in any respect. In the event that the first tank were disabled the second could not have gotten into action, and the location of the second tank would have prevented the retrieving of the disabled tank.

7. Employment of squadron heavy weapons was sound. In order to obtain any field of fire with the heavy machine guns, it was necessary to emplace them on the line with the rifle troops. The

81mm mortars were well emplaced initially and could have displaced along the trail when necessary. The use of medium or heavy ammunition with a delay fuse might have done some damage to ground targets. The light ammunition with super-quick fuse was useful to clear the trees of snipers by tree burst.

8. Air support rendered by RAAF P-40's delivering 500 lb. bombs was ineffective due to lack of mass. Three aircraft of this type cannot deliver a sufficient amount of demolition bombs. The use of white phosphorous shells was effective for designation of targets for air-strikes.

9. Field Artillery tactics were sound and the amount of support excellent. The artillery spared no effort to lend maximum assistance to the attacking elements. Upon one occasion, Lt. Col. Kenneth L. Johnson, the commanding officer of the 99th Field Artillery, adjusted fire at great personal risk. Unfortunately, the effect of the 75mm shells upon the bunkers was negligible, although the tree bursts did discourage tree snipers considerably. Adjustment of fire was accomplished by sound, which produced reasonably accurate results.

10. The application of the principles of scouting and patrolling by individuals was excellent. In particular, we should note the effective use of cover and concealment, skillful individual movement, stealth, patience and aggressive assault use of individual weapons. |

11. Communications provided by the SCR 511's within the squadron in movement were adequate, mainly due to the lack of distance between units. Sound power telephones were particularly useful at the halt and for fire control at all times.

12. The validity and thoroughness of prior training was of incalculable value. Despite enemy fire and limited visibility, control, coordination and security were excellent throughout the action.

The conduct of junior leaders, throughout, was superior in their display of courage, aggressiveness and self-sacrifice, and to them the success attained must be mainly credited.

LESSONS LEARNED

No new principles of war were developed through this action but many of the old axioms were painfully reiterated and their applicability to jungle warfare clearly demonstrated.

1. The attacker, even when operating against an enemy inferior in men and equipment, cannot afford to violate the axioms of surprise, economy of force and concentration of effort. To do so, is at the least, wasteful; at the most, disastrous.

2. Reconnaissance must be thorough and continuous preceding and during the attack. All reconnaissance agencies must be utilized to the greatest possible extent. Air observation and patrolling are the most reliable means of gaining terrain and enemy information in jungle warfare.

3. The necessity of planning a military operation is obvious. Existing information must be made available to all commanders concerned. Failure to do this is a serious omission and needlessly jeopardizes lives.

4. Dense vegetation and rugged terrain must be made to work for the attacker. These factors must be considered as allies providing cover, concealment and great opportunity for surprise. To do otherwise is to become stereotyped in method and canalized in movement.

5. Armor can be used in the jungle wherever the ground affords sufficient support; but excellent tank-infantry communication is an absolute essential. Tanks must be aggressively manned.

6. Air support must be delivered in sufficient mass to be effective. Precision dive-bombing is impossible against targets in the jungle, but area strikes will produce appreciable results.

7. Artillery and mortar fire must be of sufficiently heavy caliber and so fused as to penetrate heavy forest if much destruction or neutralization of ground targets is to be obtained.

8. Above all the training of the individual soldier must prepare him to advance and attack on his own initiative, without the physical and visible proximity of his comrades or leaders.

9. The most vigorous small-unit training on suitable terrain will produce squad and platoon SOP's capable of producing effective control, cohesion and teamwork under the extremely trying circumstances of jungle combat.

Summary

The technical and tactical requirements of jungle combat are neither extremely difficult nor complex but the mental preparation of the individual soldier and the training and example of junior leaders constitute the key to victorious action. The will to offensive action must be inculcated by exact and thorough training.