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OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY D,  
127TH INFANTRY (32D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN  
THE DEFENSE OF THE DRINIUMOR RIVER, EAST OF  
AITAPE, NEW GUINEA, 28 JULY-3 AUGUST 1944  
(NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Machine-Gun Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: MACHINE-GUN  
PLATOON IN DEFENSE IN JUNGLE TERRAIN

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OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY D, 127TH  
INFANTRY (32D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE DEFENSE  
OF THE DRINIUMOR RIVER, EAST OF AITAPE, NEW GUINEA,  
28 JULY - 3 AUGUST 1944 (NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN)  
(PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A MACHINE-GUN PLATOON LEADER)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 1st Platoon, Company D, 127th Infantry, 32d Infantry Division in the final phases of the AITAPE Operation along the DRINIUMOR RIVER in NEW GUINEA from 28 July to 3 August 1944.

The events leading up to the commitment of this platoon in the defense of an isolated section of dense, insect-infested jungle began with the ejection of the Japanese Forces from advanced bases at GUADACANAL, in the SOLOMONS and BUNA, NEW GUINEA, by Allied Forces early in 1943.

By January 1944 the momentum generated by successful thrusts at the Japs in the SOLOMONS, NEW BRITIAN, and the ADMIRALTIES, coupled with Allied victories at BUNA, SOLOMONS, LAE, FINSCHHAVEN and SAIDOR in NEW GUINEA had succeeded in forcing the enemy into defensive operations throughout the South Pacific. (1) These leapfrogging operations had secured for the Allies the necessary airfields, harbor facilities and staging areas from which successive operations could be launched in the drive for the Philippines.

The next crushing Allied blow fell at HOLLANDIA and AITAPE in a daringly conceived, brilliantly executed two-pronged assault by three reinforced American infantry divisions. (See Map A)

(1) A-7, p. 82-85

This operation, conceived by General Douglas MacArthur, and executed by Lieutenant General Walter Kreuger, caught the enemy completely by surprise. A system of clever ruses had deceived him into anticipating an attack in the WEWAK-HANSA BAY-MADANG area far to the east. Therefore, the bulk of his strength had been concentrated in this area. (2)

(See Map A)

Both landings met with light resistance and succeeded in isolating an enemy force of 40,000 - 60,000 from all hopes of supply, reinforcement or evacuation. (3)

The landing at AITAPE on 22 April 1944 was accomplished by the Persecution Task Force under the command of Brigadier General Jens A. Doe of the 41st Infantry Division. This task force was composed of the 127th and 163d Infantry Regimental Combat Teams, supported by five Australian aviation engineer battalions, four battalions of antiaircraft artillery and two additional field artillery battalions. (4)

The mission of the Persecution Task Force was to: establish a beachhead at AITAPE, capture the TADJI airdromes and develop and protect these installations.

This mission was accomplished and on 4 May 1944 Persecution Task Force was inactivated. The 127th Infantry then reverted to its organic place in the 32d Infantry Division. (5)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The landings at HOLLANDIA and AITAPE had placed the Japanese Imperial 18th Army in a very precarious position.

- (2) A-6, p. 256; A-5, p. 151
- (3) A-1, p. 179, 180
- (4) A-6, p. 256; A-11, p. 1
- (5) A-11, Part I, p. 1, 2

From his location in the WEWAK-HANSA BAY region, Lieutenant General Adachi, Commanding General of the 18th Army, was confronted with a situation which required immediate action. With several alternatives available, General Adachi elected to attempt a break-through of American positions at AITAPE rather than a by-pass of these positions or withdrawal across the mountains to the south.

(6)

This decision was extremely hazardous as the Japanese in this area were virtually without support of any type. No aircraft or naval vessels were available and only a few landing barges were on hand for over-water operations. Resupply was almost impossible and supplies on hand in the WEWAK area were under constant bombardment by Allied Air Forces. (7)

Movement and actions of the enemy during the period 4 May - 27 June indicated an all-out attack against the AITAPE positions. Enemy patrols were growing increasingly strong and movement of enemy foot and motor columns were observed by our aircraft and naval PT boats moving west from WEWAK towards AITAPE. (8)

In the weeks following the landing at AITAPE the 32d Division had constructed a strongly fortified MLR around the TADJI airdrome. Outposts had been established at NYAPARAKE, AFUA and CHINNIPIILLI with the mission of patrolling vigorously to the south and east. (9)

- (6) A-11, Part III, p. 3
- (7) A-11, Part III, p. 2, 3
- (8) A-11, Part III, p. 3
- (9) A-11, Part I, p. 1

By 1 June elements of the advancing Japanese 41st Division had forced our outpost at NYAPARAKE to fall back and by 9 June the outpost line had been reestablished along the west bank of the DRINIUMOR RIVER. (10) The OPLR extended generally from the headwaters of the DRINIUMOR RIVER in the foothills of the TORRICELLI MOUNTAINS near AFUA to the village of ANAMO on the PACIFIC OCEAN, a distance of approximately 8 miles. (See Map B) As elements of the Japanese 41st and 20th Divisions increased pressure along this line, the 112th Cavalry Regiment was committed on the OPLR as well as additional units from the 32d Division.

On 10 July a determined enemy attack, after heavy losses, succeeded in effecting a penetration in the position held by the 128th Infantry of the 32d Division on the DRINIUMOR RIVER. This regiment in a vicious counterattack ejected the enemy and no serious attack was again attempted in this sector. (11)

The weight of the Japanese offensive was then shifted inland along the AFUA track in an attempt to turn the right flank of the defensive forces anchored near AFUA. This maneuver was partially successful and a strong counterattack was required to restore the flank. (12) Positions were strengthened in this area by assigning the 127th Infantry the mission of defending this flank against renewed enemy attack.

#### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COVERING FORCE

By 28 July 1944 the defensive forces along the DRINIUMOR consisted of the 127th and 128th Infantry Regiments of the

- (10) A-2, p. 15
- (11) A-2, p. 15
- (12) A-2, p. 15, 17

32d Division, the 112th Cavalry Regiment, the 124th Infantry of the 31st Division and the 1st Battalion, 169th Infantry of the 43d Division. The 32d Division artillery was in direct support of this force. (See Map B)

Field Order No. 7, Headquarters US Forces, APO 705, dated 12 July 1944, designated this force as "The Covering Force" and placed the operation under the capable hand of Major General William Gill of the 32d Division. (13)

Opposing The Covering Force were jungle-trained combat veterans of the Japanese 20th and 41st Infantry Divisions, the 66th Infantry of the 51st Division and the 6th South Sea Japanese Marine Detachment. (14)

Enemy-supporting artillery (75-mm) had been, for the most part, hand-carried from WEWAK, a distance of over 80 miles, as had most of his ammunition. Crew-served and individual weapons were in excellent condition, ammunition was adequate and rations, while low, were sufficient generally for Japanese-type operations. (15)

The 32d Division was a combat-experienced, battle-tested organization. Victories at BUNA and SAIDAR had established its reputation as one of the outstanding divisions in the PACIFIC. With morale generally lower than desirable, caused by sustained defensive action, this unit was still a very effective fighting force. All echelons were convinced that with superior artillery support, complete air domination and strong defensive positions, the liquidation of the enemy was virtually certain. (16)

(13) A-12, Part II, p. 8; personal knowledge

(14) A-12, Part II, p.2; A-1, p. 181

(15) Personal knowledge

(16) Personal knowledge



The terrain along the DRINIUMOR RIVER was typical NEW GUINEA jungle. Dense rain forest crowded the banks of the ever-changing river. A system of ridges up to 150 feet in height extended generally parallel to the river for a distance of some five miles from the TORRICILLI MOUNTAINS north toward the beach. The remaining three miles to the beach was relatively level terrain. (See Map B)

Supplies were carried in to these units near the beach by native carriers. Farther inland along the AFUA-ANAMO TRAIL two battalions of the 127th Infantry were supplied entirely by Air Drop. There were no roads in this area.

The Air Drop operated very effectively and with the exception of a very few days, supplies and ammunition were dropped by daily schedule. Extremely inclement weather was the only obstacle to complete efficiency.

Little difficulty was experienced in the resupply of rations and small-arms ammunition. Ordnance items and mortar ammunition, however, were frequently damaged and, due to its bulk, mortar ammunition was a critical problem.  
(17)

The terrain favored the defender generally along the river line. Time had been adequate to prepare an elaborate system of covered defensive positions. Artillery and mortars had registered throughout the defensive positions and communications were completely installed.

The combat efficiency of the opposing forces was heavily in favor of the defender, although the enemy was

(17) Personal knowledge

extremely aggressive and capable of massing numerical superior forces at any given point. (18)

Both forces were understrength with the defender generally at 80% effective strength and the enemy at approximately 40% - 50% effective strength. (19)

On 28 July 1944 the defensive forces were well dug in and prepared to carry out their assigned mission of defending the DRINIUMOR RIVER and preventing the escape of the trapped enemy forces.

#### THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION

On 28 July 1944 the 127th Infantry under the command of Colonel Merle H. Howe occupied the southern sector of the covering force as the right flank regiment. Deployed on the left of this regiment was the 112th Cavalry Regiment. The battalions of the 127th Infantry were deployed with the 1st Battalion on the right, the 3d Battalion on the left and the 2d Battalion in reserve. The regimental front extended approximately 1,500 yards. (See Map B)

The mission of the regiment was to defend the west bank of the DRINIUMOR in its sector at all costs and prevent the enemy from enveloping the right flank of the covering force. The 126th Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support of the regiment. (20)

#### THE DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 1ST BATTALION (21)

The 1st Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles (Monk) Meyers occupied the right battalion

- (18) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Kenneth Virch, S-2, 127th Infantry, 25 July 1944
- (19) Statement of Captain Kenneth Virch, S-2, 127th Infantry
- (20) Statement of Colonel Merle H. Howe, Commanding 127th Infantry, 25 July 1944
- (21) Personal knowledge; statement of Captain Gilbert Sawyer, commanding Company B, 2 December 1949

sector of the regiment. This battalion was assigned the mission of defending the right flank of the regiment which was also the right flank of the covering force. (See Map C)

The battalion occupied a heavily fortified line of approximately 600 yards, extending in a semi-circle from 200 yards west of the DRINIUMOR, up a ridgeline approximately 100 feet high and curving north in rear of an open banana grove. This banana grove served as the battalion dropping ground for air-transported supplies. (See Map C)

The companies of the battalion were deployed three on the line. On the left was B Company with the 1st Platoon, Company D, in direct support. This company was assigned the mission of defending the most dangerous approach into the battalion perimeter, the ANAMO-AFUA TRAIL located on relatively level terrain and bisecting the company position. C Company occupied the high ground in the center of the battalion sector and A Company with 2d Platoon, Company D, in direct support was on the right protecting the rear of the battalion.

All mortars were grouped in battery under battalion control in the banana grove, and commanded by the D Company mortar platoon leader. Company C, 169th Infantry, was attached to 1st Battalion at this time and was in battalion reserve, occupying perimeter positions in the drop zone area. The battalion command post and battalion aid station were also located in the banana grove behind the reserve company. (See Map C)

THE SITUATION OF COMPANY B AND 1ST PLATOON COMPANY D (22)  
(See Map D)

Company B occupied the left sector of the battalion with a zone of action including approximately 75 yards of ridgeline, sloping down to relatively level terrain approximately 125 yards in width. On the left the company joined with the 3d Battalion and on the right with Company C. The terrain was densely wooded with extremely thick underbrush. From the left boundary the terrain was level for about 75 yards. At this point a small plateau some 10 feet high intersected the line. This plateau was about 50 yards wide and 60 yards in depth. The main trail from AFUA north to ANAMO on the beach crossed this small plateau. The defensive line extended in width across this terrain feature and up the sloping ridge for about 75 yards. It joined with C Company on the right some 20 yards short of the crest.

This company had been engaged in combat for two months at this time without replacements. Its three officers and 90 men gave it approximately 50% of effective strength. The 1st Platoon, Company D, had been engaged in combat for almost three months at this time. With one officer and 28 men it was about 65% effective strength.

Small-arms ammunition for these units was adequate and strictly controlled. K rations were issued daily to each man.

The combat effectiveness of both Company B and the 1st Platoon, Company D, was high considering the length of combat time for these units. The increased burden caused by low strength was a definite handicap to the officers and men

(22) Personal knowledge, A-3, statement of Captain Gilbert Sawyer, commanding Company B, 2 December 1949

especially in Company B where extensive and continuous patrolling was required.

Patrols dispatched daily by Captain Gilbert Sawyer, commanding Company B, had indicated a strong force estimated at 600 Japs to be building up in the vicinity of AFUA. The enemy had been crossing the DRINIUMOR in the foothills of the TORRICELLI MOUNTAINS and also crossing at night near AFUA. It was evident from enemy patrol activity that an attack was to be launched in an effort to capture the 1st Battalion dropping grounds, thus forcing a withdrawal to the beach and leaving the southwestern approach to the MLR unprotected.

This report was further confirmed by battalion and regimental S-2s. The intelligence gathered by these sections was so detailed and complete it was usually possible to inform a captured Jap of the name and designation of his squad, platoon, company and regiment and also the name of the leader of each unit.

Enemy casualties had been extremely heavy in the previous attempts to break through the trap along the DRINIUMOR. This had required reorganization to the extent that in many cases regiments were only a battalion in strength and at least one regiment of the 41st Japanese Division had been completely destroyed in the attack of 10 July. The main body of the enemy opposing Company B and the 1st Battalion was made up of combined elements of the Japanese 20th Division.

The weather during this period was variable with frequent thunderstorms and rain of varying intensity almost a daily occurrence.

The mission of Company B was to defend the left (east) sector of the battalion perimeter from enemy attack from the south and to hold at all costs its position astride the AFUA-ANAMO TRAIL.

THE COMPANY PLAN OF DEFENSE (23)  
(See Map D)

Following a detailed reconnaissance by the machine-gun platoon leader and Captain Sawyer, the decision was made to place the entire machine-gun platoon on the level ground in the left sector of the company.

The section of B Company's light machine guns would be placed in position on the plateau firing up the ANAMO TRAIL towards AFUA. This was considered the most effective employment as it placed all the machine guns in the area most vulnerable to enemy attack, giving the heavy machine guns grazing fire for approximately 100 yards after fields of fire and fire lanes were cleared. The light machine guns on the plateau could not deliver grazing fire because of the elevation, however fire could be delivered up the trail for about 100 yards. Captain Sawyer, with the approval of Lieutenant Colonel Meyers, placed his light machine guns under the tactical control of the machine-gun platoon leader, thereby centralizing responsibility and adding flexibility to the defense.

The operation of machine guns in jungle terrain at all times poses special and varied problems. The 1st Platoon, Company D, had employed their weapons in a variety of assorted positions. The training days with sectors of fire

(23) A-3, personal knowledge

extending to 2,000 yards and final protective lines of 700 yards had yielded to jungle measurements. Here FPLs were seldom more than 50 yards in length and sectors of fire were fired more from sound than vision.

These weapons had proved to be priority targets for the enemy and no effort was spared in an attempt to locate and destroy these positions as expeditiously as possible once they opened fire. For this reason the clearing of fields of fire and cutting of fire lanes were placed as a priority once positions were selected. As many men as possible were placed on this mission with a minimum remaining on the gun to prepare the position.

The clearing of underbrush and cutting of fire lanes afforded the enemy the general location of the battle position. This was anticipated but because of the tremendous morale factor involved, experience had shown this disadvantage was more than compensated for by the confidence of the men and the increased aggressiveness displayed in the defense of their position. During the hours of darkness with illuminating flares available, a sense of security was established and troop fatigue was far less evident.

The positions selected by Captain Sawyer and the machine-gun platoon leader would employ these weapons at their maximum capacity in this type terrain under these conditions.

The three platoons of B Company would be employed on the line extending from the plateau to C Company on the right. This would require the machine-gun platoon to provide its own local security. This was considered necessary as the terrain from the plateau up the ridge was very close and the

maximum area that could be covered by the understrength rifle platoons.

The supply of food and small-arms ammunition posed no special problem as the battalion drop zone was only 200 yards in rear of B Company's position. Night resupply was hazardous but was considered possible. These units did not fire at anything that moved at night. The greatest danger in night resupply was the difficulty encountered in following trails and locating units.

Ammunition for battalion mortars was critical and harrassing fires were not normally delivered. In the event of attack, however, B Company could call down the fires of all battalion mortars. Prior registrations had been made at critical points throughout the defensive position and each platoon had a forward observer attached. Artillery support was available through the liaison officer with B Company. The artillery support had previously provided a special problem and to a large extent the defensive positions now occupied were selected because of the artillery situation.

Previous positions at AFUA had forced the artillery to operate at maximum range. This was caused by the inability of artillery to move inland due to impassable terrain and difficult mask clearance.

With artillery limited to the beaches the defenses had been shifted some 600 yards north of AFUA. This allowed more flexibility and depth to artillery fires. By 28 July artillery registration had been completed and barrages planned throughout the defensive area.



The evacuation of wounded from the battalion aid station was by litter conducted by native carriers and required a trip of approximately six miles up the beach.

The preparation of defensive positions and clearing of fields of fire had progressed satisfactorily although Jap patrols had intermittently harrassed the defenders by eluding outposts and sniping at clearing parties.

Depth to the battle position was provided by a perimeter defense around the outer rim of the banana grove occupied by the reserve company. Communication within the position was entirely by wire. Radios would not function consistently and their use was not planned in the defense.

#### FINAL PREPARATION FOR THE DEFENSE (24)

By 28 July all positions were prepared, fields of fire cleared and communications installed and tested. All automatic weapon positions had been constructed exactly the same, each would accommodate a heavy machine gun if necessary, and all were covered. Many rifle positions had also been covered not only for protection but also to deceive the enemy as to the true location of automatic weapons. This forethought was to prove a great advantage in the ensuing action.

A unit of fire of 88 rounds of M1 ammunition was issued to each rifleman. Each machine gun had a unit of fire of 5,000 rounds of belted ammunition in 20 boxes. An additional two units of fire were maintained at the battalion supply point in the drop zone area.

(24) Personal knowledge

All officers and men had been thoroughly informed of the enemy situation. Final protective lines and sectors of fire had been checked and coordinated including the fire of a section of 3d Battalion's light machine guns firing across the front of the 1st Platoon, Company D.

As darkness fell on the evening of 28 July 1944 these men were alert and prepared to meet the all-out attacks they knew would soon be launched against their positions.

#### NARRATION

##### THE ACTION OF ENEMY PATROLS

On the evening of 28 July the outposts in front of the 1st Platoon were withdrawn at dusk as was the SOP in effect at this time. They reported no unusual enemy activity, which was a normal situation. In the several days of defensive preparation only a few small enemy harrassing patrols were operating in this area during the day.

From his command post a few yards in rear of his right section of machine guns the platoon leader had completed checking the wire communication to all squad positions and receiving from squad leaders the rotation of men to be on guard during the night. By proper rotation it was possible to have the best men manning the guns during the hours of greatest danger - just after dusk and just before daylight.

(25)

This routine inspection had scarcely been completed when the platoon leader was alerted by a low whistle on his T-EE-11 phone. From his position overlooking the AFUA-ANAMO TRAIL the

(25) Personal knowledge

light machine gun section leader had detected enemy movement to his front and was requesting a 60-mm mortar flare. This request was approved by the platoon leader after directing the section leader to alert the riflemen around his position in the event they had not detected the movement. Relaying the request for flares to the battalion mortar platoon leader through the forward observer the platoon leader was informed that his mission could not be fired. Captain C. R. Coulter, commanding Company D, had issued orders that day that no flares were to be fired. Additional information was not available and attempts to contact Captain Coulter were unsuccessful.

This information was relayed to the section leader and all other squad leaders with instructions to be especially alert. The absence of flares would allow the enemy much more freedom of movement. As a result, his reconnaissance would become bolder. In addition, the light machine-gun section leader was directed to keep the platoon leader fully informed of all developments in his area.

At this point it might be well to mention that these machine gunners, both heavy and light, were a group of experienced men. Jungle noises could be quickly interpreted and their ears could easily detect the difference between the movement of small animals from that caused by an enemy creeping up in an attempt to destroy the position or infiltrating through to the rear. Therefore, when activity of this nature was reported, the platoon leader knew this activity was enemy-incurred. This platoon had learned through experience

as had the light machine-gun section, to what extent the enemy would go in order to locate and destroy machine-gun positions. The sacrifice of enemy patrols was not unusual. For this reason the guns were not fired unless it was known beyond reasonable doubt that a target worthy of their fire would be engaged. (26)

A sudden blaze of rifle fire from the vicinity of the light machine guns brought the platoon leader to his phone. After several minutes contact was established and it was learned that the fire had come from rifle positions of B Company next to the light machine-gun section. The section leader did not know what had caused the firing but believed a small party of Japs were trying to work through between our positions.

Action of this nature continued from 1930 hours until 0630 hours the following morning, all in the vicinity of the ANAMO-AFUA TRAIL on the plateau. Repeated attempts by both the machine-gun platoon leader and the mortar platoon leader to contact D Company commander were unsuccessful. There were no flares fired that night.

The morning of 29 July indicated the enemy activity of the night before. Six Jap bodies lay where they had fallen, two within six feet of the right gun of the light machine-gun section, the remainder in the general vicinity of this section.

The intense strain these men had been under was indicated when it became necessary to send one B Company rifleman to

(26) Personal knowledge

the rear. He had killed a Jap within three feet of his fox hole and the center of all enemy activity had been around the fox hole he shared. Prolonged combat and tension caused by nights such as this were responsible for a number of such combat fatigue cases. (27)

It was found necessary on subsequent nights to rotate the men in this fox hole as it was under continued harrassment by the enemy. This fox hole was the position nearest the trail.

The 29th of July was a day of increased harrassment by the enemy. They had either located our outposts and were eluding them or else good fortune was theirs at this time. A small amount of barbed wire had been dropped to the battalion and was allocated to B Company. The enemy soon detected the installation of this obstacle in the 1st Platoon sector and increased the pressure of harrassing fire.

No casualties had been received at this time although several men displayed articles of clothing which had been ripped by enemy machine guns and rifle fire.

As darkness approached the outposts were withdrawn and reported no enemy activity near their positions though fire had been heard from the vicinity of the covering force positions.

During the day it had been learned that the use of flares had been restricted by regimental order, as the supply was not considered adequate for illumination on call. The decision was to use flares only in the event of attack.

(27) Personal knowledge

No reasons were given for not forwarding this information on the day received.

The night of 29 July was almost a repetition of the previous night with the enemy probing further to the right and left of the ANAMO TRAIL, evidently seeking to draw automatic weapons fire and searching for weak spots in the defense.

The vision of flares exploding continuously in the 112th Cavalry regimental area on the banks of the DRINIUMOR added nothing to the state of mind of the machine gunners staring into the jungle to their immediate front. (28)

#### THE FIRST ENEMY ATTACK

Shortly before dawn on the 30th of July an enemy force estimated to be a company of 100 men attacked the perimeter from the southeast. The attack was aimed at the junction of B and C Companies with the objective of capturing the topographic crest of the ridge. (29) (See Map E)

No preparations were fired and at daybreak the men of B and C Companies could detect the enemy swarming up the steep southeast slope of the ridge.

The section of B Company's light machine guns was hastily moved from its position on the plateau and immediately placed in action near the topographic crest of the ridge. The 1st (right) Section of heavy machine guns was moved up on the plateau and occupied the positions vacated by the section of light machine guns.

- (28) Personal knowledge
- (29) A-3

The enemy attack continued until 0900 hours and succeeded in reaching within 20 feet of the crest of the ridge before superior fire power annihilated the attacking force. It was believed that not more than a dozen Japs survived this attack. B and C Companies on the other hand suffered very few casualties. (30)

The fires of the 60-mm mortars had been very effective. Jap wounded captured at this time believed they would have succeeded in this attack had not the mortar fire been so effectively delivered. It was further learned from a wounded prisoner (2 others had died enroute to the rear) that this attack was more a reconnaissance in force than a main attack. It had met with such initial success that the captain commanding the company had decided to launch an all-out attack with the objective of capturing this key terrain feature. (31)

It should be noted that the information received from Jap prisoners was usually reliable; frequently low-ranking enlisted men had a very good picture of the situation in their unit. It was customary for wounded Japs to attempt suicide if possible; when this could not be done they would beg their captors to kill them. It was therefore extremely difficult to obtain a prisoner, but once this was accomplished they were generally a fruitful source of information. It is common knowledge that the Japs were given no instructions as to their conduct if captured, as capture was considered even more serious than death. Our interrogator at regiment

(30) Personal knowledge  
(31) A-3

consequently had little difficulty extracting useful information from those enemy falling into our hands. (32)

#### THE INTRODUCTION OF SCREENING PATROLS, AND REORGANIZATION

Patrols sent out from B Company following this action could move only a few hundred yards before encountering enemy fire. The patrols were increased and directed to move laterally across the company front at a distance of from one to two hundred yards from the perimeter. They, in a great measure, replaced the company outposts as these had proven inadequate. The dense jungle, coupled with enemy stealth of movement, had limited their effectiveness to such an extent that they engaged not a single enemy in front of the machine-gun platoon during this entire period. (33)

The enemy attack on the ridge caused a change of plans in the employment of the machine guns in B Company's area. It was decided to leave the 1st Section of heavy machine guns in the light machine-gun positions on the plateau with the section of light machine guns in positions approximately 35 yards up the ridge to the right. To cover the gap left by the move of the 1st Section's heavy machine guns, the section of light machine guns from A Company was attached to the 1st Platoon, Company D, by Lieutenant Colonel Meyers, and moved into positions vacated by the 1st Section. This placed a total of four heavy and four light machine guns on a front of approximately 150 yards.

In addition to these weapons there were three BARs in position, one on the plateau and two immediately to the left

- (32) Personal knowledge
- (33) Personal knowledge



of the platoon and on the right of A Company's light machine-gun section. (See Map E) These changes were made on 30 July.

Throughout the day of 30 July a few enemy reconnaissance patrols succeeded in eluding B Company's patrol screen but the harrassment normally encountered during the day was not experienced; this was believed to be caused by the more effective system of screening patrols. Weight was given to this belief with the withdrawal of these screening patrols at dusk. Enemy activity increased almost immediately and the night of 30 July was a night of constant activity throughout the 1st Platoon's area. Several men received minor wounds from enemy grenades but no serious casualties were suffered and the enemy inflicted little damage.

The enemy patrols from their actions did not appear to be combat patrols as they only fired when fired upon. They were evidently attempting to infiltrate, or draw automatic weapons fire by close-in reconnaissance. The latter appeared the more likely in view of the over-all situation.

The use of hand grenades, particularly against this type of action, was found to be advantageous, especially at night, as this weapon did not reveal the location of the gun positions. Unfortunately, the supply of grenades was limited and frequently rifles and carbines had to be used to defend against harrassing action.

The 31st of July was very quiet; the screening patrols operated by B Company apparently discouraged the enemy from attempting close-in observation and harrassment. This type of patrolling was a strain on B Company as regular patrols were also dispatched daily in attempts to learn more of the

enemy's activities and intentions. This constant action and the enemy's night activities combined to drain B Company's energies. This fatigue was becoming very evident and patrols were beginning to lose a great deal of their efficiency and effectiveness. (34)

Immediately after the withdrawal of the screening patrols at dusk the enemy became more active. Their ability to judge the time of withdrawal was made simple by withdrawing at the same time daily. The night of 31 July was marked by no unusual incident other than sporadic rifle fire along the line outside the platoon area. Enemy activity in the 1st Platoon area was uneventful in comparison with the past few nights.

THE ENEMY "SURRENDER ATTEMPT" (See Map E)

At approximately 0730 hours on the morning of 1 August the platoon leader of D Company was alerted by a low whistle on his phone. The 1st Squad from its position near the AFUA-ANAMO TRAIL had detected movement on the trail. As Sergeant Brandt, 1st Squad leader, was relaying this information he saw a Jap walking toward the gun position holding a dirty white flag high over his head.

The platoon leader immediately directed that all fire be withheld and the Jap be allowed to continue into the perimeter, but under no circumstances were any men to expose themselves in order to accept the surrender. It had not been uncommon for the enemy to employ a ruse such as this to either divert attention or attempt to destroy his would-be captors at the sacrifice of his own life. (35) It was therefore necessary to exercise all caution in a situation of this type.

- (34) Personal knowledge
- (35) Personal knowledge

The platoon leader was formulating his plan of capture when a shot rang out from the vicinity of the 1st Squad position. Making his way to the squad position as rapidly as possible the platoon leader was just in rear of the position when a hail of enemy machine and rifle fire swept the area. This was followed immediately by an onrush of enemy toward the 1st Squad position. The attack was over almost as soon as begun. Withering fire from two heavy machine guns and a BAR stopped the attack 50 yards from the perimeter. The action could not have lasted over 10 minutes. It was not possible to move out and verify the enemy dead as the enemy maintained constant fire on the gun positions while removing as many dead and wounded as possible.

A hastily dispatched patrol from B Company was pinned down by enemy small-arms fire soon after leaving the perimeter.

From the amount of fire delivered by the enemy and his shouts in the attack, it was estimated a force of 50 Japs had attempted the abortive attack. (36)

A recapitulation of the action revealed that an ammunition bearer of the 1st Squad had shot the Jap with the flag from his fox hole on the right of the gun position.

On close questioning he steadfastly maintained he had not seen the white flag. This ammunition bearer was a former Staff Sergeant recently reduced in another company and transferred to Company D shortly before this action. The platoon leader seriously doubted this man's version of the shooting. Visibility from his fox hole had been exceptionally good and

(36) Personal knowledge

sniper action. It was virtually impossible to detect a sniper from the muzzle blast or smoke from his rifle. This was almost equally true of enemy machine guns. (37)

The day of 3 August was spent by the 1st Platoon in cleaning its weapons in rotation and sending men, in rotation, to a small stream in rear of the platoon to wash their clothes, fill canteens, and shave. Personal hygiene was practiced to its fullest in the 32d Division. All men were required to shave daily if the situation permitted. Clothing, especially socks, were washed as often as possible under the supervision of noncommissioned officers. (38)

A company barber was also operating and on 3 August was near the 1st Platoon command post cutting the hair of the platoon. Atabrine was administered by roster by the platoon leader; this roster was in the possession of the platoon leader at all times. As a result of this supervision, not one man in the platoon was evacuated with malaria during the entire operation. (39)

As the evening of 3 August approached, this was the situation: all guns were clean and ammunition replenished up to the full unit of fire authorized. On the plateau in the right platoon sector the 1st Section occupied positions astride the ANAMO-AFUA TRAIL. To their right and up the ridge the section of B Company's light machine guns were employed. In the center of the sector and immediately to the left of the plateau the section of A Company's light machine

- (37) Personal knowledge
- (38) Personal knowledge
- (39) Personal knowledge

guns were in position. On the left platoon sector the 2d Section of the heavy machine guns were prepared for action.

Final protective lines could only be fired by the 2d Section on the left and A Company's LMGs. These sections crossed FPLs. Grazing fire of the 2d Section could be laid in front of the nose of the plateau intersecting the ANAMO TRAIL. This was the FPL of this section. The 1st Section on the plateau and the section of B Company's LMGs could not deliver grazing fire because of their elevation. The 1st Section could, however, cover the ANAMO TRAIL for approximately 100 yards. B Company's LMGs could assist in their fire though visibility was poor and fire was plunging. (See Map E) On the left flank of the platoon a section of LMGs from 3d Battalion fired an FPL across the front of the 2d Section.

The platoon leader had been disturbed about the situation of his 1st Section. They had disclosed their positions during the attack of 1 August and it was virtually certain the enemy knew their exact location. Movement to alternate positions was not possible because of the limited space on the plateau and time would not permit the clearing of new fire lanes. These squads had therefore been instructed to exercise extreme vigilance and to be especially alert at night as it was believed the enemy would soon attempt to destroy these positions.

The coordinated fire plan of the 1st Platoon with attached weapons had been completed with the planned artillery and mortar barrages. It was now anticipated that an enemy attack in this area would experience tremendous

difficulty in effecting a penetration. (See Map E)

As darkness approached on the night of 3 August, all machine guns were laid on FPLs and primary targets and ammunition bearers were on guard in flanking fox holes.

These ammunition bearers had been given a large morale transfusion. On 3 August they were allowed to exchange their carbines for M1 rifles if they so desired at the battalion supply point. As a result, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant were the only members of the platoon now armed with carbines.

The confidence the men felt in their new weapons was extremely noticeable. The tension as darkness approached was far less evident than in the past.

#### THE MAIN ENEMY ATTACK

At 1830 hours the close in local security in front of the machine-gun platoon withdrew to the perimeter reporting no enemy activity. An 81-mm mortar observer with the platoon had completed checking his wire communications to the mortar positions. A replacement, 2d Lieutenant artillery observer, had reported to the platoon leader. Captain Sawyer had sent him with the message that he believed the observer would be of more value in this position in the event of an enemy attack.

The platoon leader was talking to the two observers concerning planned concentrations and barrages when the sound of machettes chopping in the jungle was heard in front of the 1st Section's position on the plateau. This chopping could not have lasted longer than 30 seconds when a tremendous explosion occurred. The sound of clanging metal was heard and another explosion. From his position between the gun

As the enemy continued to pour men into this sector the 1st Squad reported its gun overheating and that one of B Company's light machine guns was out of action. This was at approximately 1930 hours. In view of this development, the platoon leader decided to move the 2d Section up on the plateau to reinforce this weakened position, leaving the section of A Company's LMGs to cover the area vacated by the 2d Section. This plan was heartily endorsed by Captain Sawyer. Captain Coulter of D Company also approved this action and immediately dispatched a section of guns from the 2d Platoon to reinforce the threatened sector. The platoon leader then led the 2d Section up on the plateau.

By this time the 1st Squad's machine gun had ceased functioning from overheating and the squad was busily hurling grenades into the enemy, answering the enemy shouts with threats and shouts of their own. The 2d Squad's gun was still in action and holding down the progress of the enemy, at least temporarily. The 1st Squad, less the ammunition bearers, was withdrawn to the immediate rear and directed to do everything possible to get their weapon in action again.

The 2d Section was placed in position with the 3d Squad entering the 1st Squad's position and the 4th Squad moving into the position of the out-of-action B Company's machine gun. With these three machine guns in operation, and aided by accurate mortar fire, this attack was finally stopped at 2100 hours. (See Map F)

Our casualties at this time for the machine-gun platoon were five wounded including the platoon leader. Enemy fire had been sporadic and highly inaccurate. (40)

(40) Personal knowledge

Reorganization was undertaken immediately. The section of the 2d Platoon arrived and was placed in positions vacated by the 2d Section. The 1st Squad had succeeded in placing its gun in action again and was placed in a BAR position which had been constructed to accommodate a heavy machine gun. This position was between the LMGs of A Company and the section of the 2d Platoon. (See Map G)

A light machine gun replacement had been issued to B Company by battalion and was in action on the right flank of the platoon.

At 2200 hours along the 125-yard front of the 1st Platoon a total of six heavy machine guns, four light machine guns and four BARs were in position. Carrying parties from the battalion supply point had replenished expended ammunition and one platoon of the reserve company had been committed to reinforce the ridge in B Company's sector. (See Map G)

A great deal of difficulty had been encountered with the artillery observer as he had refused to call down artillery fire within 200 yards of the perimeter. The main force in the enemy attack had been within that distance during the assault. (41)

At about 2230 hours the enemy launched another strong attack immediately to the left of the plateau. This attack was on a front of approximately 50 yards. This area was covered by three heavy machine guns, two light machine guns and three BARs. With mortar flares constantly illuminating the area the effective placing of fires was simplified.

(41) Personal knowledge



To sum up the results of this action:

The 1st Platoon of Company D, in direct support of Company B, assisted this company in the execution of its assigned mission - to hold at all costs the ground in this sector and deny to the enemy the ANAMO-AFUA TRAIL in this area.

By understanding the Japanese doctrine of mass attack in depth on a narrow front and knowledge of defensive principles applicable to jungle terrain, this platoon succeeded in inflicting the maximum casualties to the enemy with minimum loss to itself.

The enemy losses in this sector totaled more than 600 killed. A large number of these were killed by artillery and mortar fire while preparing for attacks on the perimeter.

The losses of the 1st Platoon in the action described were exceptionally light in comparison with the enemy. One man was killed and 12 wounded. The conduct of the platoon in defense of the battle position won commendations from Lieutenant Colonel Meyers, commanding the 1st Battalion, and a verbal commendation from Brigadier General Julius Cunningham, commanding the 112th Cavalry Regiment.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. ACTION OF ENEMY PATROLS

The aggressive use of reconnaissance and combat patrols by the enemy indicated the high state of training and excellent utilization of these units.

The ability of the enemy to use the terrain to his advantage was demonstrated by the manner in which these patrols could move undetected even in daylight up to within a few yards of the battalion perimeter.

The stealth and patience exercised by these patrols in reaching their objective and the aggressiveness of action once this was located continually reminded the defender of the presence of the enemy and contributed in a large measure to the difficulty of selecting and occupying defensive positions.

During the hours of darkness, these patrols operated with apparently undiminished efficiency and vigor. This facility for moving at night with a minimum of noise frequently enabled enemy snipers to be in concealed positions at daylight prepared to harrass the defender preparing positions. The smokeless powder used in enemy small arms contributed greatly to the success of such sniper action.

## 2. ACTION OF B COMPANY OUTPOSTS

The practice of employing stationary outposts with limited visibility in the same position each day and withdrawing them at the same time each evening presented the enemy with an opportunity he was quick to realize. The ease with which the enemy eluded these outposts over a period of several days demonstrated the inadequacy of this system.

The introduction of the patrol screen solved this problem to an appreciable degree. Operated on a schedule and staggered from hour-to-hour and day-to-day, the patrol screen proved effective in preventing all but a few enemy patrols from penetrating to the perimeter during daylight hours.

The resulting drain on the energies of B Company posed a difficult problem for Captain Sawyer. This was partially solved by equitable rotation of patrols and the practice of allowing a portion of each platoon a full night's rest each night without guard duty.

### 3. BATTALION AND REGIMENTAL INTELLIGENCE

The value of Battalion and Regimental Intelligence Sections in this action cannot be over-emphasized. The accuracy with which enemy units from regiments down to squads were identified, and particularly the accurate estimate of enemy strength opposing the 1st Battalion, was an important factor in defensive plans and dispositions.

The success of these intelligence sections could be attributed directly to the training each man in the regiment had received in the importance of intelligence to him. Extensive training had been given in this subject. Errors and omissions in past operations had been vividly outlined with estimate of time consumed and lives lost as a result of failure to receive enemy material in possession of our troops.

The rapid transmission of captured enemy maps, diaries, documents, etc., to intelligence sections was stressed. In addition to this, the intelligence sections had established and maintained the policy of returning all souvenirs as quickly as possible with a full translation accompanying the material, if possible. Added to this, a note accompanying the material explained the relative intelligence value of this particular item. This policy had contributed greatly to the satisfaction of the men concerned and had given them a feeling of participation and achievement.

The prompt dissemination of information from the S-2s of regiment and battalion was a decided morale factor to the men of the platoon. The day-to-day situation of the enemy including his strength, disposition and capabilities gave the men a definite basis for comparing and evaluating the enemy in front of our machine guns.

The accurate knowledge of enemy plans by the S-2s on several occasions enabled our artillery and mortars to dissipate planned enemy attacks before reaching the line of departure. Such results obtained amply demonstrated the service an efficient intelligence system can render to front-line troops.

#### 4. PREPARATION OF DEFENSIVE POSITIONS

The designing and constructing of all automatic weapon positions to hold a heavy machine gun, if necessary, was dictated primarily because the limited front afforded no plan for construction of alternate positions for machine guns.

Time had permitted the covering and camouflaging of all these positions and a number of rifle positions had been similarly covered, more for deception than protection.

The flexibility afforded the employment of machine guns because of this construction was demonstrated in the main enemy attack when weapons were used in several types of positions. The greatest advantage, however, was in the successful deception of the enemy. Prisoners captured following this action revealed that the enemy had pin-pointed our covered positions and, because our fire did not disclose otherwise, believed them all to contain machine guns. A total of 21 positions had been constructed in the 200-yard front held by B Company. This information explained the reluctance of the enemy to press the attack after advancing undetected to within 25 yards of our positions. The initial machine-gun fire had demoralized them to the extent that, while their leaders were exhorting them to attack, the confusion enabled our supporting fires to be massed before the attack could regain momentum.

## 5. CONDUCT OF DEFENSE

The success of the defense hinged on the fire control of supporting weapons. The failure of enemy patrols to draw machine-gun fire contributed directly to the defeat of enemy attack. The exercise of such fire discipline and fire control was found to be extremely difficult and only through constant supervision and training, coupled with experience by the men in the platoon, did the practice of such control attain a satisfactory level.

The 1st Squad, with the brunt of enemy pressure directly on their position, initially fired too rapidly for too long a period, thus forcing their gun out of action. In view of the situation existing at this time, however, the conduct of fire of this gun was believed to be in accordance with the urgency of the situation.

The effectiveness of the fire of this weapon was established when the bodies of 19 Japs were counted within 20 feet of their gun the day following the main attack.

It is interesting to note that at no time during the main enemy attack did the platoon run low on ammunition. Fire control and discipline exercised by the squad and section leaders was considered superior. This was indicated by the total expenditure of 48 boxes or 12,000 rounds of ammunition by the 1st Platoon. This ammunition could have been expended in 12 minutes by the platoon employing maximum rate of fire.

## 6. SUPPORTING FIRES

The employment of mortars and artillery was generally excellent in defense of the battle position. There are,

however, three points in this action which are deserving of comment.

1. The siting of battalion mortars to bring fire to bear on threatened sectors could be accomplished on very short notice. The control exercised in permitting every mortar to fire in one sector was a great advantage in this action. This flexibility of the mortar fire plan was indicated in the rapidity with which enemy artillery was brought under fire and subsequently destroyed as additional mortar fire was brought to bear.

2. The aggressive employment of enemy artillery as a direct fire weapon, even though fields of fire had to be chopped, was in decided contrast to the attitude of the artillery forward observer who refused to bring our artillery fire in beyond prescribed limits even though the main enemy force was within this limit.

Once the platoon leader succeeded in securing this fire by personally calling it in on his positions, the enemy situation was hopeless.

3. The adjusting of the perimeter to the capabilities of the artillery was a successful move.

The artillery fires in front of the perimeter harrassed the enemy continually and, as mentioned previously, broke up several of his formations in the rear area.

#### 7. PERSONAL HYGIENE

The rigid policies followed in the practice of personal hygiene paid dividends to the platoon.

In defensive positions in combat men frequently lack initiative to perform necessary functions. This is a mental

condition which, if allowed to continue, will result in decreased combat efficiency and morale.

By emphasizing the importance of personal hygiene and definite supervision, it was possible to have the men shave almost daily under all conditions. The washing of clothes and care of equipment, while performed under vigorous protest at the time, was a source of pride to the men when adjacent units were observed in a slovenly condition. The administration of atabrine was another practice which yielded dividends in manpower. The personal daily administration of atabrine by roster enabled the platoon leader to be assured that each man in the platoon was receiving proper dosage. In this action, not one man was lost due to malaria. In prior operations, before atabrine was available in quantity, the platoon had suffered as high as 85% malarial casualties.

#### LESSONS

1. Patrols must be highly trained and taught to use the terrain, whatever its condition, as an ally and not an obstacle.
2. Outposts must be flexible and must conform to the situation and terrain.
3. If each man is trained in his place in the intelligence cycle, the information he can forward to intelligence sections will enable efficient S-2s to save time and lives.
4. The construction of all automatic weapon placements to hold a machine gun adds flexibility to fires and adds deception to defense.
5. Fire control and fire discipline are essential in concealing the battle position and delivering the maximum volume of fire when ordered with the minimum expenditure of ammunition.

6. Supporting fires must be flexible and must conform  
to the situation without regard for safety limits, especially  
when the defensive line has been selected in order to utilize  
these fires.

7. The practice of personal hygiene will add to the  
health and combat efficiency of a unit and will reflect  
itself in increased pride and morale.