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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY C, 63D INFANTRY
(6TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK OF THE SHIMBU LINE
(MOUNT MATABA) EAST OF MANILA, LUZON, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS
10-17 APRIL 1945
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY ATTACKING AN
ORGANIZED DEFENSIVE POSITION IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
ORIENTATION.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	4
Disposition and Plans of the 63d Infantry....	6
Disposition and Plans of 1st Battalion, 63d Infantry.....	6
The Company Situation.....	7
The Company Plan of Attack.....	8
Final Preparations for the Attack and Movement to the Area of Departure.....	9
NARRATION.....	10
The Attack on the Shimbu Line(Mount Mataba)..	10
The Second Day on Mount Mataba.....	17
The Third Day on Mount Mataba.....	19
The Fourth and Fifth Days on Mount Mataba....	21
The Sixth Day on Mount Mataba.....	24
The Capture of Knob 2.....	25
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	29
LESSONS.....	35
MAP A Luzon Landing	
MAP B Plan of Attack 6th Division	
MAP C Plan of Attack 63d Infantry	
MAP D Plan of Attack 1st Battalion, 63d Infantry	
MAP E Attack on Shimbu Line	

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of Sixth Army. The 63d Infantry, 6th Division, was initially in Corps reserve. (5) The Division destroyed enemy resistance encountered in the Cabaruan Hills; defeated elements of the Japanese 2d Armored Division at Manoz; seized and secured the high ground south of San Jose; cut the island of Luzon in half by seizure of Baler Bay and Dingalan Bay on the east coast. (See Map A) (6) During the period 24 February to 9 April, the 6th Division was engaged in operations against the Shimbu Line, east of Manila. (7)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 15 March, XI Corps relieved the XIV Corps in operations against the Shimbu Line. At this time the VI Corps was composed of the 6th Infantry Division, the 43d Infantry Division, and the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team. The 6th Division, in the center of the Corps zone, was ordered to attack against the Montalban sector of the Shimbu Line. (8)

The 6th Division's plan of attack was simple. The 1st Infantry Regiment and the 20th Infantry Regiment were used to spearhead the advance and attack Mount Mataba and Mount Baytangan from the southeast, while the 63d Infantry Regiment protected the left flank of the Division. (See Map B) (9)

The Shimbu Line, located east of Manila in the Sierra Mountains, extended from Ipo Dam in the north to Antipalo in the south. The enemy had his forces generally concentrated in five sectors: Antipolo, ^{? enemy} Marikina, Central (Mount Baytangan), Montalban and Ipo Dam. An estimated 17,000 troops occupied the Shimbu Line. (10) The Montalban sector, located generally

(5) A-1, p. 19

(6) A-4, p. 103

(7) Personal knowledge

(8) A-1, p. 62

(9) A-6, p. 68

(10) A-3, p. 142-143

in the center, consisted of Mount Oro (1,000 feet), Mount Pacawagan (1500 feet), and Mount Mataba (1,400 feet). Mount Mataba dominated the Mariquina River Valley. Its main ridge ran generally north and south with three prominent peaks, Knob I on the southern tip, Red Top in the center and Knob 2 on the northern tip. (See Map C) (11) The western approaches to Mount Mataba consisted of steep hog back ridges with deep ravines covered by a dense growth of vegetation and trees.

Elements of the Japanese 8th and 105th Divisions, 26th Independent Mixed Brigade and miscellaneous service units were located in this area. (12) They had spent months in preparing positions in this sector, consisting of an elaborate network of mutually supporting caves with connecting underground tunnels covering all avenues of approach leading to Mount Mataba. (13)

The men of the 6th Division were considered in the category of seasoned troops. In addition to their operations on Luzon, they had experienced considerable combat in New Guinea. Replacements were quick to acquire the fighting spirit of the unit because of its high esprit de corps. Morale was excellent. At this time logistical support was adequate. On the other hand, the enemy had suffered reverses and was occupying defensive positions. Nevertheless, his morale was assumed to be excellent. Captured documents indicated that his supplies were sufficient, in that he had placed a six months stockpile of supplies in this area. (14) Taking everything into consideration the combat efficiency of the opposing forces was considered equal.

(11) Personal knowledge
(12) A-1, p. 57

(13) A-4, p. 107
(14) A-5, p. 43

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF THE 63D INFANTRY REGIMENT

From 15 March to 5 April the 63d Infantry had protected the left flank of the Division extending from the vicinity of Ipo Dam in the north to San Mateo in the south. (See Map B) During the period 6-9 April, the 63d Infantry attacked Mount Mataba with two battalions, the 2d and 3d, to seize Objectives A, B and X from the southwest but was repulsed with heavy losses. (15)

On 10 April, the regiment planned to attack with all three battalions to seize Objectives A, B, X and C. The 1st Battalion was to make a surprise attack from the west, under concealment of darkness, to seize and hold Objective C (Mount Mataba). The 2d Battalion was to seize Objective X from the south while the 3d Battalion was directed to capture Objectives A and B. (See Map C) (16)

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF 1ST BATTALION 63D INFANTRY

The battalion planned to attack Mount Mataba from the west at 0400 hours, 10 April, with two companies abreast, Company A and Company C. Company C, on the right, would attack up Ridge R while Company A would attack up Ridge S. Company B, in reserve, would protect the routes of supply and evacuation. Each assault company was reinforced with one section of machine guns from Company D. The 81 mm mortars were to be placed in general support from positions west of San Mateo. (See Map D) (17) For this operation one platoon of tanks and one platoon of 4.2 mortars were attached to the battalion.

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- (15) Personal statement Major Dwight Dickson, then S-3, 63d Infantry.
(16) Personal knowledge and statement of Major Dwight Dickson, then S-3, 63d Infantry.
(17) Personal knowledge

THE COMPANY SITUATION

Company C had occupied a portion of the battalion defensive position, southwest from Novaliches Water Shed, along the pipe line which supplied the water for Manila. Daily patrols had been dispatched to the east to reconnoiter the area around No Name Gorge and other ravines in the vicinity of Mount Mataba in an effort to determine routes of advance, enemy strength and dispositions. These patrols reported that all ravines were thickly wooded and covered with a dense growth of underbrush providing excellent concealment for enemy installations. They further reported that the area was void of any trails except for a few narrow foot paths. It was known that the enemy had constructed an elaborate system of mutually supporting caves and fox holes, connected by underground tunnels. These positions were located on the commanding ground covering all approaches to Mount Mataba. These approaches crossed flat rice paddies in the Mariquina River Valley and were subject to constant hostile observation. (18)

The strength of Company C just prior to the jump off was 90 enlisted men and 2 officers, (the company commander and the 1st platoon leader); of this strength approximately one fifth were replacements who had been received in the past month. They had been given as complete an orientation and indoctrination into combat as possible by being utilized to the fullest on combat and reconnaissance patrols and in setting up ambushes. The composition of all patrols was carefully supervised to ensure that each patrol had a proportionate share of combat veterans

(18) A-4, p. 107

and was commanded by a reliable non-commissioned officer. (19)
While the company had been guarding the pipe line they received a well earned rest, which, in conjunction with three hot meals daily, had raised morale to a new high. The combat efficiency of the company was considered to be excellent.

Captured documents indicated that the enemy was determined to make the seizure of Mount Mataba a costly as well as a timely operation. The Japs were prepared to defend each position at all costs, which might easily tend to dissipate the strength of the main attack to several separate individual operations in the reduction of these defensive positions. (20)

Throughout this period the weather was hot and humid with excellent visibility during the day. With the exception of a shower on 14 April the weather was clear.

THE COMPANY PLAN OF ATTACK

The company planned to attack in a column of platoons, the men in single file. The 1st Platoon, with Company D's machine gun section attached, would lead the attack up the razor back ridge to seize and hold Mount Mataba. The forward command group was to follow behind this platoon. The 2d Platoon, with the company's light machine guns attached, would be in support. This platoon would furnish flank protection by fire and would follow behind the forward command group. The remainder of the command group followed the 2d Platoon. The 3d Platoon, also in support, following the rear command group, was to protect the rear of the company and assist in the evacuation of casualties. The artillery forward observer and his party was placed with the

(19) Personal knowledge

(20) Personal knowledge

forward command group, while the 81 mm mortar observer accompanied the 1st Platoon. No 60 mm mortar observers were to be used from the mortar section, but would be employed to carry extra ammunition as a resupply problem was anticipated. Platoon leaders and key non commissioned officers were to adjust their own 60 mm mortar fire. Communication would consist of SCR 536 radios within the company command net and one SCR 300 radio in the battalion command net. The company was instructed that the battalion communication officer would lay wire from battalion to the company area of departure. At this point the company would be responsible for continuing this line as the unit advanced.

No line of departure was to be used but rather an area of departure. The platoon leaders were informed that trucks would be spotted in the vicinity of the rear assembly area at 2330 hours, 9 April, to move the company to the area of departure. The company would remain in the latter area only long enough to detruck, assume the designated formation and move out. (See Map D) The attack was scheduled for 0400 hours 10 April, approximately one hour before daylight. The element of surprise was stressed; supporting fires were planned, but would not be delivered except on call of the company. (21)

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK AND MOVEMENT TO THE AREA OF DEPARTURE

Since a minimum amount of time would be spent in the area of departure, platoon leaders were instructed that blankets and extra equipment would be stacked in platoon piles in the rear assembly area. One bandoleer of ammunition and two combat type "K" rations were issued to each man. Squad leaders were ordered

(21) Personal knowledge

to make last minute checks to ensure that each man had his poncho, extra pair of socks and two full canteens of water. All men were briefed on the necessity of maintaining strict light discipline and in keeping noise to the minimum. Coffee and hot sandwiches were served at 2300 hours.

The company departed from the rear assembly area at 0100 hours, 10 April, and arrived at the area of departure at 0200 hours. (See Map D) The men detrucked, formed quickly, and moved out promptly at 0215 hours. (22)

NARRATION

THE ATTACK ON THE SHIMBU LINE (MOUNT MATABA)

Company C left the area of departure in single file at 0215 hours, 10 April, in a column of platoons, according to plan. A four man patrol preceded the company by one hundred yards with the mission of furnishing early warning of any enemy activity to the front. This patrol had communications with the company by means of an SCR 536 radio. The men selected for this patrol had previously been over this ground on reconnaissance missions looking for the best route of approach to Mataba. The movement from the area of departure to the base of Mount Mataba was made over a well defined trail and presented no particular problem of control. At 0330 hours the company reached the base of Mataba, and continued in a northerly direction toward Ridge R, the company route of approach to the top of Mataba. Without warning, and sending chills down the spine of every man in the company, the silence of the night was broken by the ferocious barking of several dogs, terminating in a sharp whine and a brief order in a foreign

(22) Personal knowledge

tongue. The column halted but no further sound was heard. (23) Several thoughts passed through the mind of the company commander at this time. Had the element of surprise, so essential to the successful accomplishment of the mission, been lost? Was this an outpost of the enemy, a series of listening posts, employing dogs? If it was an outpost, would it call for mortar and artillery fire? Did the enemy know the true size of the unit or possibly think that it was only a patrol? After several minutes had elapsed without further incident, the column continued in the direction of Ridge R. (24)

At 0345 hours, the security patrol reported that enemy movement could be heard approaching from the north. The 1st Platoon was deployed to the left and right, while the security group was ordered to remain in their present position and to keep the company commander informed of the situation. From the excited reports that poured in from this group a force of considerable size was approaching. Meanwhile, the company commander had moved forward to join the 1st Platoon, where machine guns on each flank had been set up, ready to commence firing on order of the platoon leader. At 0355 hours the security group reported that the suspected enemy force was Company A.

The two company commanders held a conference and decided that they had overshot their respective ridges. They felt they were located somewhere between Ridges R and S. (See Map E) It was decided that the companies would reverse their respective routes and use the first ridges they came to as their routes to

(23) Personal knowledge
(24) Personal knowledge

Mataba. (25)

While Company A was withdrawing, excited voices, jabbering in Japanese, could be heard a short distance away. The 1st Platoon Sergeant and four men were sent to investigate the noise. They encountered a large cave from which the noises were plainly audible. White phosphorous hand grenades thrown into this cave resulted in cries of pain. One Jap, who ran out of the entrance, was quickly killed by a rifleman. No further sounds could be heard. A squad was left in the vicinity of the cave to furnish security as the company passed this location. (26)

At 0420 hours the 1st Platoon Leader reported that he was at the base of Ridge R and he was ordered to advance up the ridge. Due to the narrowness of this ridge, the column remained in single file. By daylight, all elements of the company, with the exception of the 60 mm Mortar Section, were advancing.

At 0830 hours, the company received sniper fire from Ridge Q, approximately four hundred yards to the south. The men were forced to hug the ground, taking advantage of any cover and concealment they could find. The fire was finally located coming from a cave on the forward slope of Ridge Q. (See Map E) Small arms and machine gun fire was directed into this cave, resulting in one Jap being flushed out. He ran over the ridge and disappeared from sight. A check of the company revealed that three men had been wounded, including the company commander's messenger and radio operator. One of the casualties could not walk and four men from the 3d Platoon were used to evacuate this man on

(25) Personal knowledge
(26) Personal knowledge

a litter. (27)

Meanwhile, smoke was placed along Ridge Q and denied the enemy further observation from this direction. At 0945 hours the company had advanced approximately two hundred yards forward when the company commander noticed for the first time that the remaining elements of the company were not following. The company commander turned to retrace his route, but in so doing, twisted his ankle, lost his balance, and went head over heels down the north side of the ridge. Approximately three quarters of the way down he stopped his descent in the midst of dense vegetation and amid the excited babbling of enemy voices. Without a lost motion he unhooked his cartridge belt and began scrambling up the side of the ridge with tiny puffs of dust kicking up all about him. He succeeded in reaching the top only to look into the muzzle of an M-1 rifle held by one of his men. In fact, this was the same man who had failed to see the column move out and consequently held up the balance of the command. (28)

A radio message was received at this time from the 1st Platoon Leader reporting their location at Point W, approximately one hundred and fifty yards from the top of the main ridge running north and south. From there he had observed thirty six Japs moving south along the ridge line.

The company commander moved forward without delay and joined the platoon leader. At 1045 hours they observed small groups of Japs moving to the south. This area, approximately

(27) Personal knowledge
(28) Personal knowledge

one hundred fifty yards northeast from Point W, appeared to be covered with fox holes. A ten minute artillery preparation of high explosive was placed on these positions. Since the wind was blowing from the north it was decided to end the concentration with smoke, which, drifting south, would obscure any enemy visibility from that direction. At 1100 hours, just as the artillery preparation finished, the 1st Platoon jumped off and succeeded in reaching this area without opposition. (29)

The 1st Platoon was ordered to hold this position and to protect the right (south) flank of the company as it turned left (north) and advanced to the north along the main ridge. The 1st Platoon was instructed that it would protect the rear of the company after all elements of the company had passed. The 2d Platoon was directed to pass around the left flank of the 1st Platoon, turn north and advance along the main ridge. The command group followed the 3d Platoon and the remainder of the formation remained unchanged. The 60 mm Mortar Section had joined the column and had gone into position to support the advance of the company.

Meanwhile, the 1st Platoon had sent six men down the ridge to the south to secure the company's right flank and rear. One of these men observed a patch of grass almost at his feet which seemed to rise out of the ground. He fired into it and was rewarded with a cry of pain. He discovered a very cleverly constructed fox hole. It appeared to be a normal fox hole, four feet deep and two feet in circumference, with a cover constructed for the top. This cover consisted of a network of interwoven branches covered with a topping of sod which blended in perfect

(29) Personal knowledge

harmony with the terrain, affording excellent concealment for the hole as well as the occupant. Apparently the enemy planned on hitting the rear of the column as it moved north along the main ridge. The mere fact that this particular Jap had become over anxious and was lifting his cover to observe the column led to his timely death. Two other similar holes, occupied by the enemy, were found and their occupants liquidated. (30)

At 1200 hours the 2d Platoon Leader reported that he was maneuvering around a cave, east of the main ridge, where he had observed a Jap disappear. The company commander ordered him to send a security party forward along the ridge. By 1215 hours the resistance in the cave had been eliminated primarily by use of white phosphorous grenades which had killed an undetermined number of Japs. At 1245 hours the 2d Platoon reported that they had reached a small knoll approximately two hundred yards south of Knob 1. The company commander joined the platoon leader at this point. (See Map E)

A number of the enemy was observed moving westward in small groups. Artillery fire dispersed these groups and inflicted an unknown number of casualties. Part of Company A, on the left of Company C, was observed in a grenade battle with four enemy on Knob 1, which terminated when a white phosphorous grenade landed in the crater hole occupied by the Japs. Two of the enemy were killed by small arms fire when they left the crater hole in an effort to escape the effects of the grenade.

Meanwhile, Company C's machine guns had gone into position and began firing on small groups of enemy attempting to infiltrate

(30) Personal knowledge

across open ground to Knob 1. These groups dispersed and retreated toward the north. No further resistance was encountered and, at 1315 hours, the battalion commander was informed by radio that Knob 1 was secured. He ordered Company C and Company A to form a perimeter defense around Knob 1 and to dispatch reconnaissance patrols towards the north. (31) Company C organized the north portion of the perimeter.

Meanwhile, a patrol of seven men from the 3d Platoon had approached Red Top from the south. Several Japs were seen by the patrol moving toward the north along the main ridge. No resistance was offered, with the exception of harassing sniper fire from the front and flanks, and the patrol succeeded in reaching Red Top at 1600 hours. The remainder of the platoon was ordered to join the patrol immediately and instructed to form a perimeter for the night. Artillery and mortar fire was adjusted around Knob 1 and Red Top Hill for the inevitable counterattack was expected.

At 1730 hours the company, minus, occupied the northern portion of the perimeter on Knob 1, while the 3d Platoon dug in on Red Top Hill. (See Map E) (32)

At 1800 hours the company was notified by phone that an attempt to resupply the company by carrying party had failed due to enemy artillery and mortar fire, but a liaison plane would drop supplies the following morning at 0900 hours. The company should be prepared, on call, to mark the drop area with a smoke grenade. Fortunately, the men still carried two combat type K rations and sufficient rifle and machine gun ammunition. Shortages existed in hand grenades, especially white phosphorous, and

(31) A-5, 10 April 1945

(32) Personal knowledge

water.

At this time Company C had approximately fifty men on Mount Mataba. In addition to the men who were wounded and who had acted as litter bearers, a number of men suffered from heat exhaustion because of the strenuous climb up the slopes of Ridge R, and were forced to fall to the rear. Among these men were the 1st Sergeant and Communication Sergeant. A radio message informed the company commander that these stragglers had been collected at the base of Ridge R by the 1st Sergeant. They would occupy positions in Company B's perimeter for the night and would lead the carrying party forward the following day. (33)

Shortly after dark the wire line to battalion went out and arrangements were made to make reports, on the even hours, by SCR 300 radio. Company C's radio would be off the air between reports to conserve batteries while the battalion set would remain open in case of an emergency message. Although artillery and mortar fire was received on the position, the expected enemy counterattack failed to materialize.

THE SECOND DAY ON MOUNT MATABA

The second day on Mount Mataba was spent improving the company's defensive positions on the northern portion of the perimeter. Reconnaissance patrols were sent north along the main ridge toward Knob 2, but withdrew after receiving small arms and mortar fire from this vicinity.

At 0915 hours the liaison plane dropped supplies, including water, rations, ammunition and blood plasma. Late in the morning, the battalion commander directed the company to

(33) Personal knowledge

endeavor to locate the enemy mortars that were firing on the 4.2 mortar positions. At 1125 hours artillery and mortar fire was received on the company's positions. All attempts to locate these positions met with negative results. (34) Meanwhile, information was received that the battalion supply train was hit by 90 mm mortar fire and that one Filipino carrier was killed and five wounded. It was reported that the enemy mortars were firing from Mango Gorge. (See Map E) This supply train was carrying food, water, ammunition and blood plasma. It became quite evident that the Japs were endeavoring to stop carrying parties by artillery and mortar fire in an effort to reduce the efficiency of the troops on Mataba. (35)

At 1800 hours three men were wounded on Knob 1 by enemy mortar fire from the vicinity of Mango Gorge. It became increasingly apparent that observation must be obtained on the Gorge in an effort to locate the source of this mortar fire. (36)

As darkness descended the company withdrew all security elements and all men occupied positions on the perimeter. This perimeter consisted of a number of mutually supporting positions around the entire Knob. Each position was manned by three men in individual fox holes. In this way one man would be on the alert, while the remaining two were able to rest.

At 2100 hours the battalion commander notified Company C to continue the attack to the north to seize and hold Knob 2. The following day it was believed that this knob was being used by the Japs to place observed fire on the battalion supply train

(34) A-5, 11 April 1945
(35) A-5, 11 April 1945

(36) A-5, 11 April 1945

and the 4.2 mortar positions, as well as other battalion installations in the Mariquina River Valley. (37)

Because of the narrow hog back ridge the approach to Knob 2 was canalized and limited the formation to a column in single file. The strength of the enemy on this knob was unknown but patrol reports indicated that he had automatic weapons positions on the dominating ground covering the only approach to his position. The dense vegetation afforded the enemy excellent concealment which, in conjunction with his ability to camouflage his positions, made it extremely difficult to locate them.

The company planned to attack in single file with the 2d Platoon in the assault closely followed by the command group and the 1st Platoon. As the distance from Red Top to Knob 2 was approximately four hundred yards the 3d Platoon in support was ordered to remain in position and to take under fire any targets of opportunity that might arise. They were ordered specifically to observe for automatic weapons fire from Ridge T. (See Map E)

The company's machine gun section was attached to the 2d Platoon, while the 60 mm Mortar Section would support the attack from their primary position on Knob 1. They were to be prepared to displace forward to Knob 2 on order. A ten minute artillery and 4.2 mortar preparation was to be placed on the objective from H-10 to H hour. H hour was designated as 0800 hours, 12 April. (38)

THE THIRD DAY ON MOUNT MATABA

The attack jumped off at 0800 hours as scheduled and the company advanced against relatively light sniper fire to point

(37) Personal knowledge

(38) Personal knowledge

V, approximately two hundred yards north of Red Top. Point V consisted of a small rise along the ridge and as soon as the men crossed over it they immediately were exposed to enemy observation from Knob 2. The scouts were immediately hit and the attack was stopped. Heavy mortar fire began to fall on the column and two men were seriously wounded as a result of a tree burst. Meanwhile, the 3d Platoon leader reported that a light machine gun was firing from the vicinity of Ridge T, but due to the heavy vegetation he was unable to locate it. He further stated that he was searching this area with machine gun fire. At 1000 hours, following another artillery preparation, the company attacked but was stopped again at Point V by enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire. (See Map E) As a result the attack was called off and the company withdrew to its positions on the perimeter.

Meanwhile, it was discovered that the 3d Platoon on Red Top had received some casualties as a result of the heavy mortar fire. One shell had scored a direct hit on a box of white phosphorous grenades, killing one man, and seriously burning two others. The former had been burned to a crisp when several of the grenades had fallen into his fox hole.

The company was informed at this time that a supply road had been built from the southeast by the engineers and was approximately three hundred yards east of Knob 1. The casualties were to be evacuated by litter directly to the road and from there would be further evacuated by jeep ambulance. The company reorganized and the wounded were evacuated. (39)

(39) Personal knowledge

At 1535 hours the company commander of Company C was informed that Company A would make the attack the following morning to capture Knob 2. Company C would be prepared to assist Company A on the objective if needed. Meanwhile, four rounds of 150 mm mortar fell on the supply trail just in rear of the carrying party bringing rations, water and ammunition.

(40) The carrying party arrived on the position at 1600 hours and doughnuts and hot sandwiches were relished by the men. Because of the acute shortage, water was rationed to the platoons according to their strength.

At 1845 hours enemy artillery fell on Company C positions on Red Top without effect.

With the arrival of darkness the men went into their holes for the night. No patrolling was done. Instead, everyone remained in his position on the perimeter. At 2315 hours the phone line to battalion went out and shortly thereafter the company line to the platoon on Red Top failed. The company commander was unable to contact this platoon on the SCR 536 radio.

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH DAYS ON MOUNT MATABA

On 13 April, Company A attacked to the north following an artillery preparation, but was stopped at Point V and withdrew to the perimeter. Company B relieved Company A on the perimeter that afternoon and attacked Knob 2 the following morning, but was also repulsed at Point V and withdrew to the perimeter. During this period Company C continued patrol activities to the east and remained in position on the perimeter. During the night 13-14 April the wire lines to the battalion were again

(40) A-5, 12 April 1945

cut by the enemy. Supplies were sent forward each day by vehicles over the road that had been completed to Knob 1 from the southeast. (41)

Company C was ordered to attack Knob 2 at 1020 hours, 15 April. The artillery and 4.2 mortars would fire a preparation on the objective from H-15 to H hour and increase their range to fire smoke on Mount Pacawagan. (See Map E) A self propelled mount from Cannon Company would be attached to the company. The company plan was as follows: The 3d Platoon with the self propelled mount and light machine gun section attached would lead the assault followed by the command group and 1st Platoon in that order. The 2d Platoon would relieve the 3d Platoon on Red Top at 0800 hours, giving the latter sufficient time to assemble and prepare for the attack. The company would again advance in single file. Company D's machine gun section remained in position on Red Top. The mortars would support the attack from their position on Knob 1. (42)

The attack jumped off as scheduled, but was again stopped at Point V. The self propelled mount drew fire as soon as it appeared and immediately withdrew when it was subjected to 150 mm mortar fire. The officer commanding the mount refused to go forward, stating that the mortar bursts were liable to wound his men since the top of his mount was open and afforded no protection to the occupants. He made no comment when informed that all the infantrymen of Company C had for protection was their skin. (43)

(41) Personal knowledge
(42) Personal knowledge

(43) Personal knowledge

At 1130 hours no progress had been made; however, only three casualties had been suffered by the company. The company commander ordered one squad to move around the left to attempt to flank the position and the balance of the platoon to build up a base of fire from the vicinity of Point V. The 3d Squad of the 1st Platoon disappeared on the west side of the ridge. After proceeding approximately fifty yards by rushes from one crater to another, the squad came under heavy machine gun fire. One man, endeavoring to continue to advance, was critically wounded. The squad was pinned down; not a man could expose himself without being subjected to accurate small arms and machine gun fire. Meanwhile, the balance of the platoon had been unable to build up a base of fire as the least movement forward resulted in a preponderance of enemy missiles being brought to bear on Point V. The inevitable heavy mortar fire began to fall in the area. At this time the squad leader of the 3d Squad, on the left side of the ridge, contacted the company commander by 536 radio reporting two men wounded, his position untenable, and that he could neither advance nor withdraw. A 4.2 smoke concentration was requested and delivered on Knob 2. The 81 mm Mortar Platoon of Company D fired smoke adjusted by the forward observer from that company on Ridge T. The 60 mm Mortar delivered high explosive that was adjusted by the squad leader of the 3d Squad to his immediate front. This fire support enabled the 1st Squad to withdraw back to the main ridge. The squad leader informed the company commander that Knob 2 appeared to be alive with Japs. True, he had only seen a few but the entire

knob appeared to be erupting with rifle fire. Further, he had observed one machine gun on Ridge T firing flanking fire on Point V and another machine gun appeared to be located in the center of Knob 2. The latter position caused him the most trouble. Although it was less than one hundred fifty yards away he had not been able to locate it definitely. This information was forwarded to the battalion commander, who directed that Company C withdraw to their positions on Knob 1. The company commander was informed that Company B would seize the objective the following morning. (44)

At 2300 hours enemy could be heard digging to the front and artillery fire was placed on Knob 2 with unobserved results. The digging continued during the night and speculation arose whether the enemy had received reinforcements, was improving his positions, or burying his dead resulting from the mortar and artillery fire.

THE SIXTH DAY ON MOUNT MATABA

On 16 April, Company B, supported by mortar and artillery fire attempted to capture Knob 2 and was once again repulsed at Point V and withdrew to its position on the southern portion of the perimeter.

Meanwhile, the regiment directed the engineers to extend the road around Red Top to Point V to enable a tank to get to the position. Company C was notified by the battalion commander that they would take Knob 2 the following day. One Sherman tank would be in support of the operation and would arrive at Company

(44) Personal knowledge

C's position at 0800 hours the following morning. Information was also received at this time that a captured enemy document, dated 14 April, had ordered the enemy to "Intensify infiltration on Americans for next three days preceeding general counter-attack". (45)

At 1330 hours the battalion commander notified Company C of the supporting fires to be furnished. Two medium artillery battalions and one 8" battery would fire a fifteen minute preparation from H-15 to H hour. When the artillery fires lifted the 4.2 and 81 mm mortars would fire on the objective, to lift on call of Company C.

Company C's attack order was given to the platoon leaders at 1500 hours. The 1st platoon, with the tank attached, would lead the assault, followed by the command group and the 3d Platoon, in that order. The 2d Platoon would remain in position on Red Top Hill, prepared to displace on order to Knob 2 to assist in the reorganization of that position. The 2d Platoon was ordered to secure the attack position, just behind Point V, at daylight. The line of departure would be Point V. (46)

At this time the company commander sensed, for the first time, a feeling among the men that the objective would be taken. The mere fact that a tank would support the attack had a tremendous psychological effect on the men. The men were also carrying extra grenades, especially white phosphorous, which was indicative of a new determination.

THE CAPTURE OF KNOB 2

At 0630 hours, 17 April the 2d Platoon reported that the

(45) A-5, 16 April 1945

(46) Personal knowledge

attack position was secured. No enemy resistance had been encountered. At 0815 hours the tank joined the company behind Red Top and at 0845 hours the artillery and mortar preparation commenced. Under cover of this noise the company moved out with the tank to a position one hundred yards in rear of the attack position. Upon completion of the artillery and mortar fires, the company moved quickly to the attack position and called for the mortar fires to lift.

The tank moved out over Point V with its 75 firing and machine guns spraying the area to its front. For the first time the men could see the enemy. The preparatory fires had left the hill practically void of any vegetation. Enemy riflemen, apparently demoralized by the sight of the tank, fired excitedly as well as wildly. As the main ridge widened the second squad was deployed around the left side of the tank. The light machine guns were set up on the flanks of Point V and began to spray Ridge T with bullets. Japs, their torsos torn practically in half, continued to resist. One Jap, his leg blown off at the knee, manned a heavy machine gun until struck by a .30 caliber bullet. It was a suicidal defense, but once the attack gained momentum it bowled over the opposition. No words can express the magnificent job accomplished by the tank. The enemy was completely surprised and stunned by its appearance. (47)

At 1030 hours battalion was notified that the objective had been taken. Meanwhile, the men who had been mopping up on Knob 2 received sniper fire from Mount Pacawagan. This fire ceased when the 4.2 mortars blinded the enemy with smoke. A

(47) Personal knowledge

large cave was discovered on the north side of the Knob. This cave had apparently been used by the Japs to escape the devastating effects of the artillery and mortar fires. The entire knob was found to consist of a series of mutually supporting fox holes connected by underground tunnels. Tunnels in several of the holes appeared to lead toward the large cave on the reverse slope of the knob. White phosphorous grenades were thrown into all such tunnels. It soon became quite apparent why the Japs had made a last ditch stand to hold this knob. It afforded an excellent view of the Mango River Gorge and disclosed a number of trails leading up to Mount Pacawagan from this direction. A few Japs were seen occasionally moving to the east in the gorge and artillery was fired in these areas with unobserved results.

On the final assault of Knob 2 by Company C, two light machine guns, one heavy machine gun and a number of enemy rifles were captured. Approximately thirty-five dead Japs were counted on the knob and an undetermined number were already buried. Several times the men, digging new fox holes, would dig into enemy graves.

No time was lost in organizing a perimeter defense. Concertina wire and sand bags were used to strengthen the position. Booby traps were constructed and placed in critical areas to give early warning of any hostile approach. While the perimeter defense was being organized observation posts were established. At dark all security elements withdrew to the perimeter and prepared for an expected counterattack that failed to materialize. The enemy was content to harass the position with mortar and artillery fire.

Company C's casualties for the final assault on Knob 2 were much less than expected, in that, only one man was killed and three men were wounded. On the other side of the ledger, thirty-five enemy dead were counted. An undetermined number had been killed and sealed in the spider like net work of tunnels and in the large cave. (48)

In summary, Company C, 63d Infantry, did accomplish its mission by assisting in the capture of Knob 1, by seizure and subsequent holding of Red Top and, in the final phase, the capture of Knob 2 in an all out assault.

The seizure of this dominant and critical terrain feature in the heart of the Shimbu Line paved the way for the later capture of Mount Pacawagan and the ultimate destruction of the Shimbu Line. It denied to the enemy his most advantageous point of observation on the Mariquina River Valley and the city of Manila, farther to the west. In turn it provided observation for the American forces down the Mango River Gorge, one of the main communication routes of the Japs and suspected location of many of his artillery and heavy mortar pieces.

Company C's losses during this operation amounted to three men killed and sixteen men wounded. Although the actual enemy casualties are not known it far exceeded those of Company C. On Knob 2 alone, thirty-five enemy dead were counted while an undetermined number were destroyed in the numerous tunnels and caves. No prisoners of war were taken.

Company C, by their participation in this action, shared in a unit citation awarded to the 1st Battalion, 63d Infantry,

(48) Personal knowledge

for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy in the Shimbu Line, Mount Mataba area.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. SUPPLY

On the morning of 11 April, thirty-six hours after the start of the operation, Company C had not been resupplied. Water and grenades, especially white phosphorous, were critically low. These items were dropped by liaison plane on 11 April.

In the writer's opinion necessary measures were not taken to ensure adequate logistical support. Where enemy artillery and mortar fires disorganized the carrying party on the first day, no alternate method of getting supplies to the company had been planned. It is believed that the liaison plane could have been included in the initial planning as an alternate method. As soon as it became apparant that the carrying party was unable to accomplish their mission, the liaison plane could have been utilized and could have dropped supplies shortly thereafter. It is imperative that problems of resupply be anticipated in advance of an operation and alternate methods be provided for in the pre-planning phase to ensure adequate supplies reaching the unit in sufficient time. The use of a liaison craft to drop small quantities of critically supplies is both feasible and practicable.

2. EVACUATION

During this operation, litter bearers had to be provided from the support platoon, which rapidly depleted its strength and rendered it practically ineffective as a fighting force. The nature of the terrain, coupled with the heat and high humidity, drained the energy from these men, and prohibited their return

to the company the same day. This problem could have been eliminated by assigning additional men to the company to act as litter bearers. In this way the situation would have been alleviated and the company would have been able to operate at its available combat strength.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

During the period 11-14 April the wire lines to battalion and the 3d Platoon were cut by hostile patrols. Radio had to be relied upon exclusively for communications. When this medium failed on 12 April, this platoon had no contact with the company. In the event of a hostile counterattack it would have been unable to call for supporting artillery and mortar fires. Pyrotechnics were available but no provision had been made for their use as a means of communication.

In the opinion of the author, provisions should have been made to utilize all means of signal communication. When the wire and radio communication with the 3d Platoon failed, this platoon should have had a means of requesting assistance when needed. The planning phase of this operation should have incorporated the use of pyrotechnics so that alternate means would be available.

4. EMPLOYMENT OF TANK-INFANTRY TEAM

During the period of this operation repeated attacks made against Knob 2 were repulsed by the Japs. A coordinated tank-infantry attack, made on 17 April, succeeded in capturing this objective. It is believed by the writer that only the additional fire power and shock action furnished by the armor enabled the infantry to maneuver and seize this position.

Had the initial attack been supported by armor it is felt that it would have been successful and many lives and much time would have been saved. The employment of tanks with infantry is an effective combination in the seizure of enemy strong points.

5. NIGHT MOVEMENT OVER OPEN TERRAIN

The movement from the rear assembly area to Ridge R on the night of 9-10 April, enabled the company to cross a wide, open area, subjected to enemy observation and artillery fire, without casualties. This movement during daylight hours would not have been feasible since the enemy had excellent observation and registered concentrations throughout the area. By utilizing the concealment of darkness, observation on the movement of the company was denied the enemy. Night movement over open terrain is both feasible and practicable in avoiding devastating artillery and mortar fires.

6. CONTROL OF A UNIT AT NIGHT

The unexpected meeting of Companies A and C during the night of 9-10 April indicated a lack of an effective method of maintaining control and direction by the officers concerned. Had adequate steps been taken to ensure a more efficient system of locating Ridge R in the darkness this confusion would not have resulted. The company commander of Company C relied upon a magnetic azimuth and guides who were unable to pin point the location of minor land marks in the dark. In the opinion of the writer, by marching on a magnetic azimuth to the base of Mount Mataba and knowing the exact distance from this point to Ridge R, a more accurate method would have been utilized eliminating guesswork and chance.

7. THE USE OF SMOKE

On 10 April the company advancing up Ridge R received sniper fire from Ridge Q. Smoke was placed on this ridge and the sniper fire stopped. Again at the junction of Ridge R and the main ridge smoke was used on likely observation posts and on the flanks to deny enemy observation on the column. Throughout the entire operation smoke fired by 4.2 mm mortars was found to be especially useful in stopping sniper fire as well as enemy high angle weapon fires.

The use of smoke reduced considerably the number of casualties that would otherwise have been received by Company C from hostile sniper and artillery fire.

8. EXPLOITATION OF INITIAL SUCCESSES

On 10 April when Knob 1 was seized a patrol was sent to investigate Red Top. Upon discovery that the Japs were not occupying their prepared positions the remainder of the platoon was ordered to join the patrol immediately and to organize a defense on knob. However, no effort was made at this time to take Knob 2.

In the opinion of the writer the commander of Company C should have taken full advantage of the situation by pushing the attack to Knob 2. Failure to do so gave the enemy an opportunity to reinforce this position which resulted in a long drawn out battle, the loss of life, and unnecessary delay in capturing the objective.

Commanders should make an accurate estimate of the situation and when warranted should maintain the initiative and exploit initial success in the absence of orders.

9. REPEATED ATTACKS FROM THE SAME DIRECTION

During the period 12-16 April several attacks were made in an effort to capture Knob 2. These attacks were made from the same direction and in the same formation, single file. Only the time of the attack was changed. This is a violation of the basic principles of offensive operations in that once an attack is repulsed a different scheme of maneuvers from a different direction should be employed.

The writer feels that the enemy was given a decided advantage in that he was reasonably sure of the direction of the attack and was able to place all his fires in that direction to include artillery and mortar barrages. However, it is difficult to visualize how this attack could have been conducted otherwise. The very nature of the terrain dictated a single file formation and offered no opportunity to maneuver. The defense of the position was strengthened immeasurably by the absence of approaches into it. However, if another approach had been available it should and would have been utilized. Repeated attacks from the same direction are costly in personnel and have little chance of success.

10. INDOCTRINATION OF REPLACEMENTS

On 10 April approximately one fifth of the strength of Company C, was composed of replacements without previous combat experience. These men had been assigned to the company during the middle of March while the company was in a relatively quiet area. They had been sent on patrols and used in setting up ambushes under the supervision of capable veteran non commissioned officers.

The writer feels that this method gave the replacements an opportunity for complete orientation and indoctrination into combat without being involved in a major engagement. They were made to feel like a member of the command and gained confidence not only in themselves but in their officers and non commissioned officers as well.

When possible replacements should be assigned to their organization when the latter is in a relatively quiet sector which permits a thorough orientation and indoctrination into combat.

11. NIGHT PATROLS

Prior to the attack no night patrolling was done by the company, but rather the men remained in their fox holes on the perimeter after sundown. During the period 10-17 April the company following this same practice of remaining in their holes at night. This permitted the enemy to conduct patrols and subversive activities without opposition as illustrated by his nightly cutting of the wire lines to battalion.

In the opinion of the writer the company should not have gone underground at night but should have conducted night patrolling and set up ambushes. This practice of going underground with the coming of darkness was a carry over from the operations conducted in dense jungles where night operations were not feasible. This indicated a definite lack of flexibility on the commander of this unit. Had ambushes been established along the wire line the activities of the enemy would have been curtailed resulting in better communications.

LESSONS

1. Problem of resupply should be anticipated and alternate means should be provided to ensure the continuous logistical support of an operation.
 2. Additional men should be attached to an assault company, operating in mountaineous terrain, to assist in the evacuation of litter cases.
 3. Communications must be flexible: plans must be made to include the use of all available means within the unit.
 4. Infantry, supported by tanks, forms a power combination, capable of destroying enemy strong points in a short time, that otherwise would be costly in lives as well as time consuming.
 5. The movement of troops at night, over open areas under enemy observation, is effective and practical.
 6. Detailed plans must be made to ensure control and maintenance of direction during a night move.
 7. The employment of smoke to deny enemy observation is effective in reducing casualties resulting from enemy small arms fire.
 8. Unit commanders must be able to estimate the situation quickly and be prepared to exploit initial successes.
 9. Successive attacks from the same direction, in the same formation, and with the same fire support should be avoided.
 10. Great care must be taken to ensure proper orientation, indoctrination and assignment of replacements to units, operating under combat conditions.
 11. Flexibility, in the plan of operation of a unit, is essential, in order that the unit may fully utilize advantages offered by different terrain.
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