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OPERATIONS OF THE 158th RCT
IN CLEARING THE BICOL PENINSULA
1 APRIL - 30 JUNE 1945 (LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental S-3)

TYPE OF OPERATION DESCRIBED:

AMPHIBIOUS LANDING AND OFFENSIVE ACTION OF AN INFANTRY
REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (REINFORCED)

Major LeRoy C. Brown, Infantry

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INTRODUCTION

The 158th Regimental Combat Team varied from the conventional RCT in that it contained both an RCT Headquarters and an Infantry Headquarters. There were a number of factors which made such an organization both desirable and necessary. The principal factor which dictated this unorthodox organization was the fact that the 158th Infantry Regiment operated as a separate regiment throughout the entire war. For most of the regiment's operations, the 147th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm) was the supporting artillery. It was upon the framework of this Infantry-Artillery team that the 158th Regimental Combat Team was built. The 158th RCT was a flexible unit which varied in strength and composition according to the type of mission which it was assigned. Since it was normal for the combat team to operate in areas which were far removed from higher headquarters, many of the services normally performed by division or corps, were necessarily performed by the combat team.

Having an RCT and a Regimental Headquarters permitted the regimental staff to concentrate principally on the tactical situation as the RCT Headquarters furnished the services which are normally obtained from division.

It is interesting to note that the RCT numbered well over 5,000 troops for the Bicol Operation. (1)

(1) A-1, p. 64.

From 5 March 1945 through 24 March 1945, the 158th RCT, operating under XIV Corps, had cleared the area south and west of Lake Taal of the enemy and had opened Balayan and Batangas Bays. (2)

Field Order 57, Headquarters, Sixth Army, 11 March 1945, as amended, directed XIV Corps to concentrate the 158th RCT in the vicinity of Lemery by 24 March 1945, for a shore-to-shore operation to secure the northern exits of San Bernardino Straits. The 158th RCT was to revert to the direct control of 6th Army as soon as the concentration was completed. (3)

The landing at Legaspi, on the Bicol Peninsula of Luzon was ordered by CG, 6th Army, as a result of a letter written by the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, on 5 February 1945, to CG, 6th Army, CG, 8th Army, Commander, Allied Naval Forces, and the Commander, Allied Air Forces. General MacArthur had, in this letter, outlined the strategy to be employed throughout the Luzon Campaign following the capture of Manila. The 1 April 1945 landing at Legaspi by the 158th Regimental Combat Team (Reinforced) was essential in order to comply with a portion of this letter: ie; "Clear....the BICOL PENINSULA with the objective of...securing of the northern exits to SAN BERNARDINO STRAITS..." (4) CG, 8th Army, in the same letter was directed to secure the southern exits to the San Bernardino Straits at the earliest practicable date. It was realized that when these straits were open to allied shipping, the supply route from the United States would be appreciably shortened.

(2) A-1, p. 62; A-5, pp. 17-23. (3) A-14. (4) A-13; A-1, p. 64.

Five days after being relieved by the 11th Airborne Division in the Lemery-Batangas area, the 158th RCT loaded aboard three (3) APD's, five (5) LST's, eight (8) LCT's, four (4) LSM's and set sail at high tide on 30 March 1945 for the Bicol Peninsula, Port of Legaspi. (5)

THE LANDING AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE BEACHHEAD

The convoy moved through the Verde Island passage, cleared the northern exits of San Bernardino Straits and rounded Bignay Point, entering Albay Gulf prior to 0800, 1 April 1945. Naval escort, consisting of two destroyers, two destroyer escorts, two LCS's and one LCI (Rocket), maneuvered into position as we neared the landing area and began to blast known and suspected enemy installations. At the same time, the final phase of the pre-invasion air attacks began. This force was composed of 31 B-24s, 4 B-25s, 60 P-38s, and 16 P-47s dropping 200x1000 lb. bombs, and 16x250 lb. bombs, a total of 175 tons of bombs being dropped by 111 planes. Our planes gave particular attention to the landing area and obtained excellent coverage. During the bombardment, mine sweepers moved in closer to the shore to complete the clearance of the vital passages to the landing area. Enemy reaction to the landing was first apparent when enemy artillery and coast defense guns opened fire on the convoy at 0930. A destroyer, the USS Bailey, was bracketed but none of our ships were hit. This may be attributed largely to the speed with which the naval vessels delivered a heavy concentration of accurate counter-battery fire and the alertness of the air cover to targets of

(5) A-6; A-5, p. 23.

opportunity and the speed with which they made bombing runs covering the enemy battery areas. Some additional long range anti-aircraft weapons fire was employed by the enemy but it was inaccurate and ceased completely as the flak and rocket boats moved in to blast the shore, paving the way for the initial assault wave. (6)

Leading elements of the 1st and 2nd Battalions hit the beach at 1000 as scheduled, with the 1st Battalion on the right. Very light and ineffective mortar fire constituted the only enemy reaction to the landing. One hundred to two hundred and fifty yards inland from the landing beaches a strip of swampland paralleling the beach canalized our advance to two narrow areas. One of these was a fill which supported the railroad track from the port area inland and divided the landing area at the approximate center. The other was a highway leading from the landing area inland to the town of Legaspi with the swamp area being bridged at one of its narrowest points. (7)

The advance inland was rapid and carried out according to plan, with the 2nd Battalion advancing toward Legaspi and using one platoon of E Company to occupy Capuntucan Point (Hill 222), a critical terrain feature on the left flank of the landing area. The 1st Battalion, with B Company in the lead, moved inland, advanced on the airstrip and seized Mt. Linguion (Hill 555) against token resistance. One platoon of the Anti-tank Company established a roadblock in the vicinity of the Yawa River bridge. Company L of the reserve battalion patrolled north along the coast to Libog without

(6) A-5, p. 25; A-1, p. 65, p. 106. (7) A-5, p. 25.

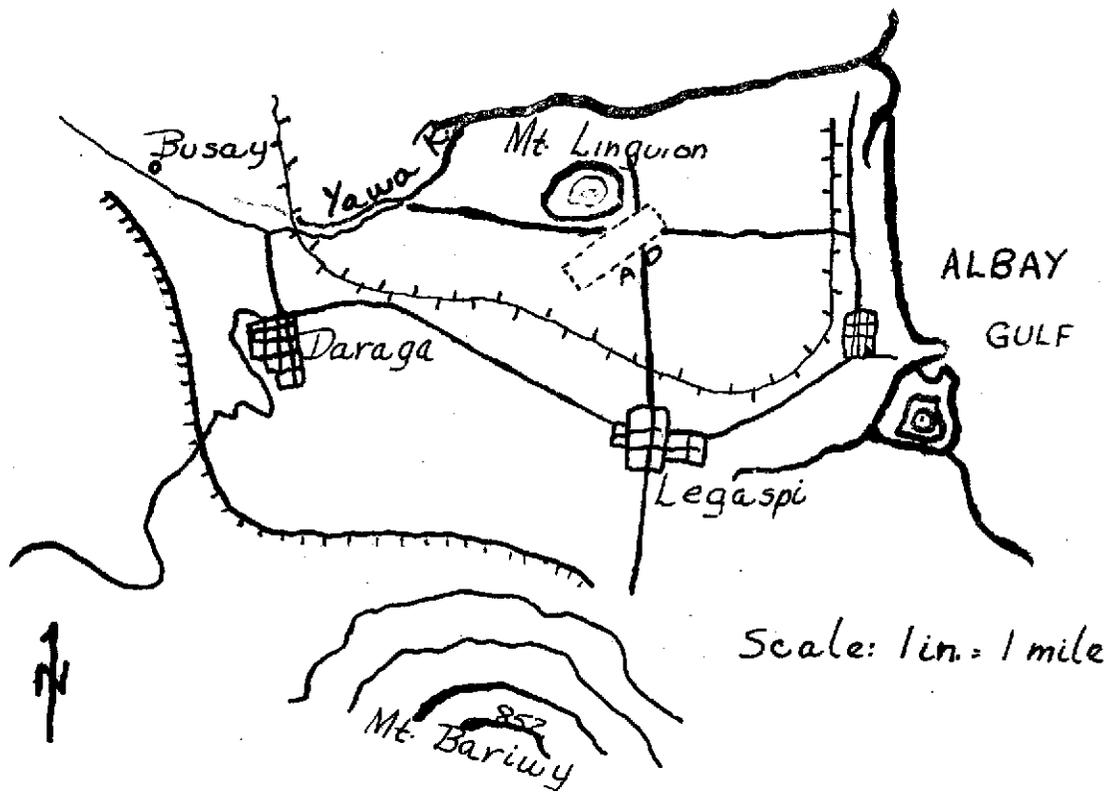
making contact with the enemy. By dusk of D-Day our forces held a beachhead approximately one mile wide and two miles deep. (8)

THE BATTLE FOR HIGHWAY 1

At dusk on D-Day the lead company of the 2nd Battalion, Company E, less one rifle platoon, encountered the first organized Japanese resistance when they were fired on from three sides by an estimated enemy company as they reached a point 800 yards southwest of Daraga on Highway 160. The company was unable to advance or withdraw; they dug hasty foxholes in such a manner as to obtain a tight perimeter and spent the night repelling repeated attacks by which the enemy attempted to penetrate their position. (9) Patrols of the 1st Battalion, probing west of Highway 160 and north of Daraga, made scattered contacts with the enemy along the high ground shortly before dark. During the night of D-Day enemy artillery and rocket fire fell throughout the beachhead area. (10)

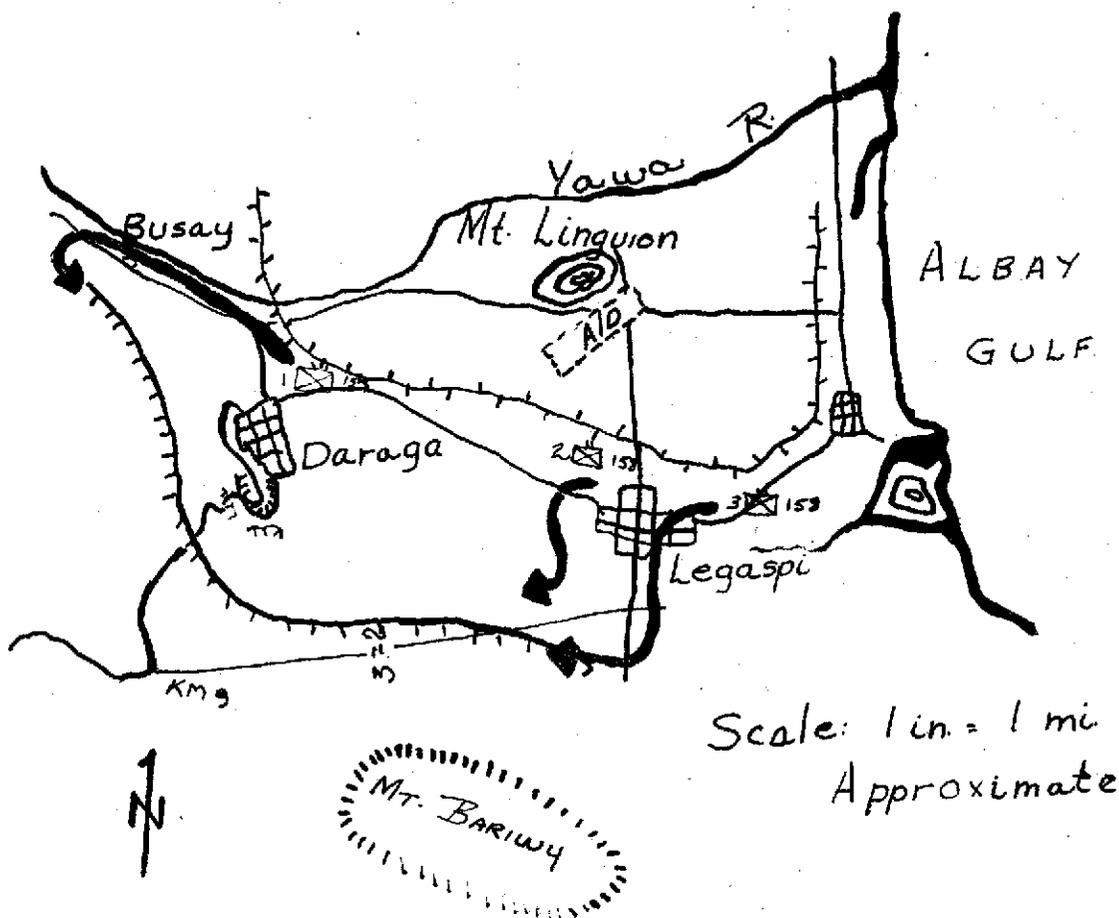
On the basis of the location of enemy contacts during the day, it became evident that their first organized defensive position in this area resembled somewhat an inverted "U". The left flank of the enemy position appeared to be anchored to Highway 160 in the vicinity of Busay approximately one mile north of Daraga, thence south along high ground slightly west of Daraga, straddling Highway 160 at the point where contact had been made by Company E, and swinging east along high ground with the right flank anchored near the northern base of Mt. Bariwy. (11)

(8) A-6; A-5, p. 26; A-1, p. 66. (9, 10) A-5, p. 26; Personal knowledge, self. (11) A-6 ; A-5, p. 26.



On the night of D-Day the decision was made to reduce the position by attacking the enemy flanks in an effort to roll the position up toward the center. In accordance with this plan, the 1st Battalion was to be concentrated near the suspected enemy left flank and by strong patrol activity, was to develop the extent and the strength of the Jap position. The 3rd Battalion was to move west from its position east of Legaspi, south of the town and develop the enemy's right flank positions, attacking generally west on a given azimuth. After extricating Company E from its untenable position, the 2nd Battalion was to side-slip to the south from positions slightly west of Legaspi and attack abreast of the 3rd Battalion as the following indicates: (12)

(12) Personal knowledge, self; A-5, p. 27.



In accordance with the above plan, the 3rd Battalion moved out astride the south Legaspi road on D/1, leaving the road and swinging west about 1000 yards south of the town. They moved west 1500 yards before encountering any organized resistance. This was later found to be the right flank of the enemy's main defensive position. These positions were well organized with mutually supporting, well-concealed pill boxes which housed machine guns and were afforded additional protection by riflemen skillfully placed so as to prevent our troops from approaching the emplacements from a direction the enemy could not cover by fire from his automatic weapons. (13)

The 2nd Battalion, at daybreak on D/1, employed Company G in an effort to relieve the pressure on Company E. From the

(13) A-8; A-9; A-5, p. 27; Personal knowledge, self.

time Company G arrived at Daraga until they reached the perimeter of Company E 800 yards to the south, they had to fight for every foot of ground they gained. Under cover of smoke, the two companies withdrew through the gap which Company G had made during its morning attack. From positions slightly west of Legaspi, the battalion moved to the southwest until they gained contact with the 3rd Battalion and the Japs at approximately the same time. In the meantime, the 1st Battalion, from a position near the Daraga-Airstrip road junction, moved in a northwesterly direction, using the banks of the Yawa River for cover to the vicinity of Busay where they wheeled south and attacked with two companies abreast against the high ground which marked the enemy's left flank. The battalion made limited progress initially but was successful in securing a piece of high ground which facilitated their advance against the stubborn resistance of the defending Japs. By 6 April (D/5) enemy resistance in front of the battalion collapsed as they attacked south along the high ground as far as Daraga, thence west through Lacag, reaching Highway 1 on 10 April. (14)

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, with the 2nd on the right, continued their attacks to the west against increasing enemy resistance. In his defense, the enemy occupied successive terrain features which were favorable for his purpose and employed every weapon at his disposal to retard our advance. Particularly effective was his employment of the 75 millimeter AA and 25 millimeter AA guns in dug-in positions as a ground weapon. On 5 April, the 2nd Battalion reached Highway 160 and

(14) A-5, p. 28.

secured a foothold on the high ground immediately to the west. The advance of the 3rd Battalion was bogged down due to the presence of a stream with cliff-like banks which extended across their entire front. A small force of approximately one platoon worked its way across with the mission of occupying the high ground on the west bank and covering the crossing of the main force only to be driven back by a numerically superior force occupying well dug-in defensive positions. No greater success was obtained in subsequent attempts. Due to the peculiarities of the terrain, the 2nd Battalion occupied ground where fire could be brought to bear on the reverse slope of the position from which the Japs were holding up the advance of the 3rd. Taking a lead from the enemy, two 40 millimeter AA guns from Battery D, 210th AAA AW Battalion were moved into position within the 2nd Battalion area where they could bring direct fire on Japanese positions in front of the 3rd Battalion at ranges of 800 to 1000 yards. Close coordination was made between the guns and the 3rd Battalion. Both guns simultaneously opened with automatic fire securing tree bursts over the enemy positions. Troops of the 3rd Battalion had a field day picking off the surprised Japs as they left their holes in an effort to obtain protection from this unexpected fire coming from an unexpected direction. By 9 April both battalions had reached the highway and the dominant terrain to its west and the remaining enemy was forced to abandon the position. After a week of hard fighting, this vital roadnet was in our possession. (15)

During the battle for this vital road, the regimental

(15) A-5, p. 28; Personal knowledge, self.

I & R Platoon had engaged in intensive patrolling. By motor, they had traveled north to Tiwi Point on Highway 27, around the northern edge of Mt. Mayon to Guinobatan without contact with the enemy. By foot, elements of the platoon had patrolled southwest of Legaspi to the top of Mt. Bariwy, which was also clear of enemy. (16)

OPERATIONS ON THE SOUTHERN HALF OF THE PENINSULA

Information from natives, which was verified by an officer of the 6th Army Alamo Scouts who had been operating in the area for several weeks, indicated that the area to the south was not heavily defended by the enemy. From this same source, information was received that the major portion of enemy troops in this southern area was occupying defensive positions in the San Francisco Hills approximately three miles north of Bulan. (17)

The Regimental Anti-tank Company, reinforced, was loaded aboard five LCM's at 0830 6 April, and escorted by a rocket ship, moved along the coast making an unopposed landing at Bacon, 25 miles to the south. The mission of this force was to move across the peninsula, establish a base in the vicinity of Sorsogon, and by the use of foot and motor patrols to both the north and south, determine the location and strength of the enemy in that part of the peninsula which lay south of the Legaspi area, and to report by radio the suitability of Highway 1 for truck traffic. On the basis of reports received from this force, a squad of engineers and two D-7 Bulldozers

(16) Personal knowledge, self; A-5, p. 27. (17) A-1, p. 67; A-5, p. 28; A-6.

from the 1279th Engineer Battalion (Combat) was sent by water to join the force and begin working north, repairing Highway 1 and reinforcing bridges where necessary. (18)

The Anti-tank Company, functioning as a reconnaissance unit, divided itself into small groups, and by continuous patrolling via both foot and motor, had covered the major portion of the lower Bicol and had sent back to regiment much valuable information relative to geographic features and enemy dispositions within their patrolling sector. The enemy's main position in this area was fixed, as had been previously reported by natives, in the San Francisco Mountains area north of Bulan. Their strength was estimated as 300 to 500. (19)

The 2nd Battalion, less Company G, with one firing battery of artillery attached, prepared to move south by motor to the Bulan area on 11 April after the collapse of the enemy position in the Daraga-Legaspi area. Their movement was slowed somewhat by numerous improvised enemy mines imbedded in the road. However, the mines were not covered by fire, could be spotted easily, and were quickly removed by elements of the 1279th Engineer Battalion. With the mission of destroying the remaining pocket of enemy troops in the Sorsogon Province, the 2nd Battalion reached Bulan on 12 April, and prepared to attack the San Francisco Mountain defensive area the following day. (20)

On 13 April, during their advance over the relatively open ground immediately north of Bulan, the battalion came under long range heavy mortar, machine gun, 25mm anti-aircraft gun,

(18, 19) A-1, p. 66; A-5, p. 28; Personal knowledge, self.

(20) A-1, p. 67; A-5, p. 28.

and rocket fire from the enemy's prepared position. The battalion commander attempted a double envelopment, but the enemy withdrew to new positions to prevent encirclement.

Company G, having completed in two days its mission of destroying a small enemy force on Rapu Rapu Island in the Albay Gulf, rejoined the battalion on 14 April. By 1800 the following day our forces, separated by a distance of approximately 400 yards, were attacking the enemy position both from the east and the west. At 0030 on the 16th the Japanese launched a counterattack which was repelled after five hours of furious fighting. The extent of the enemy losses during his unsuccessful counterattack was sufficient to cause his complete collapse. The enemy position was overrun and 154 Formosans availed themselves of an opportunity to surrender. After mopping up, the battalion rejoined the regiment in the Camilig area on 18 April, and the few disorganized enemy remaining in the Sorsogon Province became the responsibility of the organized guerilla forces. (21)

THE REDUCTION OF THE CITUINAN HILL DEFENSES

During the period that the 2nd Battalion was engaged in clearing Sorsogon Province of the enemy, elements of the 1st and 3rd Battalions were actively patrolling to the west and north of the collapsed Daraga-Legaspi defensive position. It soon became apparent that the next major defensive position which would require our attention during our advance to the north was located at a hill mass slightly south of Camalig.

(21) A-5, p. 28.

The highest point within this maze of hills, ridges, and saddles is Cituinan Hill, which is of volcanic origin and slightly over 800 feet above sea level at its point of greatest elevation. To quote from Historical Report of the Luzon Campaign: "The entire mass is characterized by a complete absence of pattern. Noses and ridges leading to the peaks wind a torturous path through deep valleys, and several come to an abrupt halt just before reaching their goal. The ridges are narrow, frequently only a few feet in width, and the sides of them are too steep to permit climbing. The vegetation, mostly abaca plants, is lush and dense, with normal visibility some thirty feet. A maze of trails interlace the area, difficult to detect and more difficult to follow. The absence of visibility and the mystifying gyrations of the minor terrain features made accurate map location of troops on a 1:50,000 map impossible and added greatly to the difficulty of providing close artillery support." (22)

On the morning of 12 April, the 1st Battalion moved north along Highway 1 to attack the hill mass from the southwest while the 3rd Battalion advanced north on Highway 160 with the mission of attacking to the west. From the 13th through the 15th of April, the 1st Battalion during its advance to the north destroyed several small delaying parties of the hostile forces. Their first contact with a stabilized position was made on the 16th on the lower approaches to Cituinan Hill. (23)

During this same period, the 3rd Battalion attacked to the west with three companies abreast and overran a number of

(22) A-5, pp. 29-30; A-8; A-9; Eye witness, self. (23) A-5, p. 30.

the enemy's trench positions. The attack was slowed due to the presence of mine fields and booby traps which covered all possible avenues of approach into the enemy position. During the night of the 13th, the enemy made a determined attack on the perimeter enclosing the battalion command post, but was repulsed after suffering several casualties. (24)

After systematically isolating and destroying successive enemy positions, including numerous pill boxes and AA guns converted to ground use, the 1st Battalion was within 600 yards of the main peak by 20 April. The situation was similar in the sector of the 3rd Battalion both as to terrain and enemy, but enemy positions were more strongly defended and routes of advances were more heavily mined. (25)

The 2nd Battalion, after completing the destruction of all organized resistance on the southern tip of the Bicol, rejoined the regiment at the Cituinan Hill position 18 April and was committed west of Malabog with two companies abreast, thereby exerting pressure on the enemy from a third side. Their advance was soon held up by a series of mutually supporting positions and entrenchments similar to those which confronted the other two battalions. If a fire fight at extremely short range and the use of grenades was not sufficient to dislodge the enemy, he was pinned down by machine gun fire while mortar fire was placed on his position. M-7s from the Regimental Cannon Company were employed at extremely short ranges to bring direct fire on enemy emplacements which could not be reduced by organic battalion weapons. (26)

(24) A-5, p. 30; Personal knowledge, self; (25) A-5, p. 31. (26) A-1, p. 67; A-5, p. 31; Personal knowledge, self.

Excellent assistance in the reduction of this difficult position was given the infantry by the air force. Daily close support missions by A-20s carrying para-demolition and napalm bombs permitted treetop level accurate bombing, which assisted materially in the final disintegration of the enemy defenses. Strafing was not considered safe due to the presence of friendly troops on three sides of the target area. (27)

Japanese resistance was noticeably weaker on 27 April as our troops continued to exert determined pressure from the north, east, and southwest. The following day, 1st and 3rd Battalions affected a juncture at the highest peak in the area. The enemy position collapsed, and mopping up placed the area completely under our control. (28)

THE CAPTURE OF THE FINAL OBJECTIVE

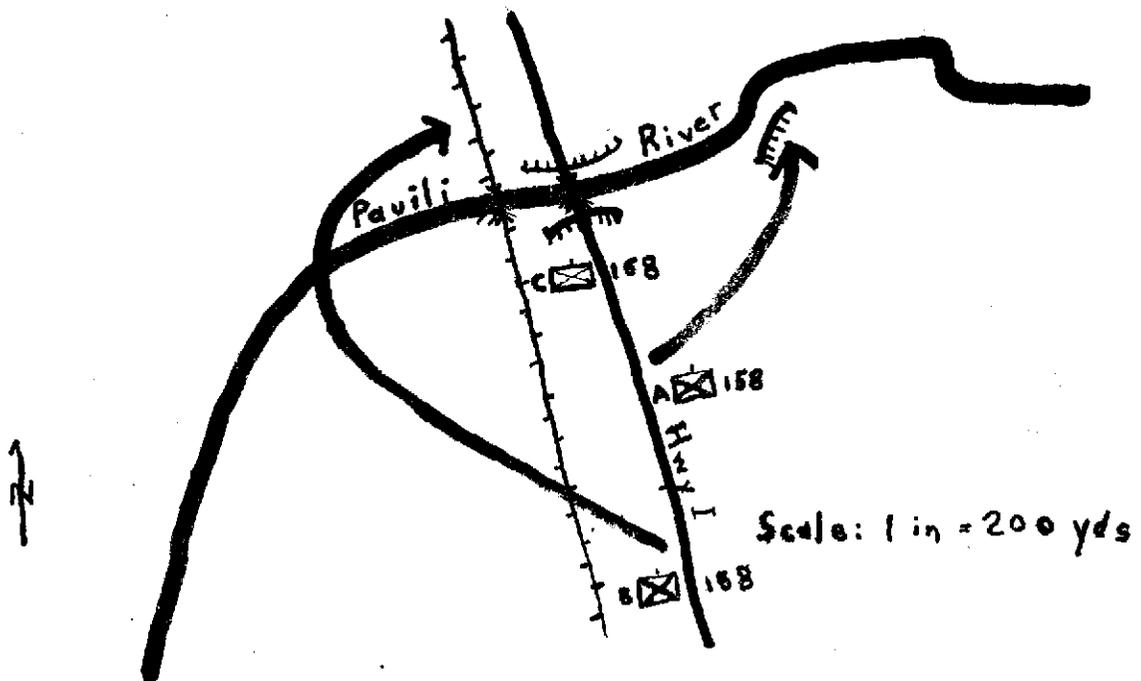
On 14 April, during the early phases of the attack on Cituinan Hill, strong patrols from Company I and Headquarters Company of the 3rd Battalion began probing to the north along Highway 1 as far as Nabua, established a base from which to operate at Iriga. From this base, the road and trail net was systematically patrolled by foot and motor. The only contact with the enemy was made when an estimated company of Japs was observed digging positions astride Highway 1 on the north bank of the Pauili River on 23 April. (29)

As a result of information obtained from these patrols, intelligence from higher headquarters, and carefully evaluated information received from local inhabitants, it was strongly

(27) A-1, p. 106; Eye witness, self. (28) A-5, p. 32; A-1, p. 70. (29) A-1, p. 67; A-5, p. 30.

indicated that the only organized enemy resistance of any great consequence remaining in the Bicol would be met in the Mt. Isarog area which was located between San Miguel Bay and Lagonoy Gulf on the Camaroan Peninsula. This enemy force was estimated to number 2500. (30)

On 22 April the RCT passed to control of XIV Corps in accordance with provisions of FO 61, 6th Army, dated 18 April 1945, and XIV Corps received the mission of completing the destruction of enemy forces on the Bicol Peninsula. However, this order did not appreciably alter the operational plan of the 158th RCT. (31)



The 1st Battalion, having moved up from the Camalig area by truck after the collapse of the Cituinan Hill position, began to develop the Pauli River position on 29 April. Company C, the lead company, deployed astride the highway on the south side of the river and engaged the enemy in a fire fight.

(30) A-1, p. 67; A-5, p. 34; A-6. (31) A-15; A-5, p. 32; A-6.

Company A, immediately to the rear of C, moved to the right of the road where they feinted a river crossing. Company B made a wide envelopment on the left and completed an unopposed river crossing. The enemy hurriedly withdrew when he discovered the crossing and realized the threat to his right flank.

(32)

On 18 April, following its return from the Sorsogon area, the Anti-tank Company received the mission of moving north toward Sabang along Highway 27 from the Legaspi port area and destroying all enemy along their route of advance. This movement began on 18 April and on the following day the company overran a 155mm gun position (American Model 1918). This was the first gun of a four gun battery which they were to recover in the Tiwi Point-Timi Timi area between 19 April and 27 April. None of these positions were strongly defended even though the enemy troops were numerically superior to our own. The axis of advance of the 2nd Battalion to the north following the collapse of the Cituinan Hill position was Highway 27. When the battalion reached the area in which the Anti-tank Company had been operating, the company was attached to the 2nd Battalion on 29 April. The battalion, reinforced, moved west from Tigaon along Highway 27, passed through Salvacion, Consocep and made contact with the eastward moving 3rd Battalion at Mabatobato at 1600 on 2 May without making a single enemy contact. (33)

The 5th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division, a part of XIV Corps, moving south via Highway 1 and by a shore-

(32) A-5, p. 33; A-1, p. 70. (33) A-5, p. 34; A-6.

to-shore amphibious landing at Pasacao on the west coast of the Bicol Peninsula, made contact with our 1st Battalion in the vicinity of Anayan on 1 May. By direction of XIV Corps, the 5th Cavalry Regiment passed to control of the 158th RCT. The combat team, reinforced, was further directed to assume the responsibility for the final mopping up of the Bicol Provinces. (34)

In preparation for an all-out drive to destroy the enemy's Mt. Isarog positions, road and trail blocks were placed around the mountain at all likely escape routes. Boundary between regiments was placed along the line Payatan-Mt. Isarog Peak-Pili, all to the 158th Infantry inclusive. On 3 May aggressive patrolling up the slopes of the mountain began in the sectors of both regiments. During this patrolling, scattered contacts were made with small enemy groups which never exceeded 25 in number. On 9 May, a patrol from the 2nd Battalion reached the peak of the mountain. By 13 May other patrols had reached the crest. Many unoccupied defensive positions and supply installations were found but the enemy was not found in strength in either regimental sector. During the remainder of May, small groups of poorly equipped and unaggressive enemy were being systematically run down and destroyed in widely scattered areas. (35)

On 6 June after destroying numerous small enemy groups by patrol action throughout the Camarines Norte Province, the 5th Cavalry reverted to control of the 1st Cavalry Division and evacuated the Bicol Peninsula to rejoin its parent unit. (36)

(34) A-1, p. 70; A-5, p. 34. (35) A-5, pp. 34-35; A-1, p. 70; A-9. (36) A-1, p. 70; A-5, p. 34.

On the 25th of May the boundary between regiments had been moved north to the Bicol River. While the cavalry was clearing out the area west of the Bicol River, patrols from the infantry completed the coverage of the Caramoan Peninsula by a series of combination foot and amphibious patrols. Contacts made by these patrols indicated the state of disorganization of the enemy. Practically all weapons were rusted beyond use and the physical condition of many of the Japs made them easy prey to alert American gunners. (37)

On 14 June, the security of the peninsula was assumed by the Bicol Brigade, a Philippine Army unit. The 158th Infantry took no further part in the Bicol operation with the exception of an occasional platoon patrol which was sent out to secure some patrol experience in conjunction with the program of training newly arrived replacements to function as a part of a closely knit and experienced fighting team. (38)

On 30 June 1945 at 2400 the Luzon Campaign, and with it the Bicol Peninsula Operation, was officially terminated. (39)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

"The Bicol Operation is replete with situations where it was necessary for the invading force to change quickly from one role to another. When it landed at Legaspi on 1 April, it was organized and formed up strictly as a landing force. After the landing was made, resistance in the hills surrounding Legaspi was encountered. Then it became necessary to throw the major part of the landing force in three directions.

(37) A-5, p. 36. (38) A-5, p. 37. (39) A-16.

When the enemy resistance was overcome, it became necessary to concentrate the bulk of the strength against Camalig while the 2nd Battalion went to the southeast and cleaned out the southern part of the peninsula. That operation was accomplished very quickly, and immediately upon the return of the 2nd Battalion to the regiment, it was thrown into the Camalig fight which proved much more difficult than anyone anticipated. After the Camalig position was overrun it became necessary to again change quickly to an advance on a broad front with reconnaissance parties and groups of varying sizes sweeping to the north and west. Again when the force which was believed to be properly organized and equipped was struck at Mount Isarog, it was necessary to change again to an attacking force which had a very broad front across an area where the covered avenues of approach were very narrow and difficult."

(40)

In making a study of the Bicol Operation, the following points appear to be deserving of special comment:

1st: The selection of the landing beaches at Legaspi Port might be criticized when only a hasty consideration is made of the factors involved in its final selection. The swampland inland from the beach which canalized the routes of advance inland was a factor which made the beach far from ideal. These undesirable characteristics of the landing area were readily apparent in the excellent vertical aerial photographs which were available during the planning phases of the operation. The alternate landing beach which was more suitable for the landing in some respects was located approximately

(40) A-9.

1000 yards to the north beginning just north of the mouth of the Yawa River. The disadvantages to this latter beach as a landing site were also apparent after a careful study of the aerial photos. The bridge across the Yawa River was obviously unserviceable, and no accurate information was available as to the depth of the river or the probable amount of engineer work which would be required before a ford could be constructed which would be usable both to foot troops and vehicular traffic. After a careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of each, and the observed tendency of the enemy in past operations to occupy defensive positions on high ground some distance inland in order to avoid most of our preliminary aerial and naval bombardment, the landing at the Legaspi Port area was selected.

2nd: The unorthodox employment of the Regimental Anti-tank Company as a supplementary reconnaissance unit permitted an appreciable decrease in the length of time required to accomplish an integral part of the mission of the combat team: ie: "clear the northern exits of San Bernardino Straits."

3rd: Flank protection was not always adequate as exemplified by the case of Company E, when, on D-Day, they were fired on from three sides at a position 800 yards south of Daraga.

4th: Enemy anti-aircraft guns were effectively employed as a ground weapon against our troops. The principal disadvantage to this weapon as employed by the enemy was the limited field of fire which it possessed after being dug in.

5th: The map coverage of the Bicol Peninsula was inadequate and highly inaccurate. The 1:50,000 maps which were furnished, had they been accurate, were not of an ideal scale

for use by small unit commanders. It would seem reasonable to expect that more accurate maps should be available of an area which had been a possession of the United States for so many years.

6th: The M-7s of the Regimental Cannon Company were employed almost exclusively as close support weapons. Even though little protection from small arms fire was afforded the gun crew by this open type self-propelled gun, the calculated risk which preceded its use paid handsome dividends when used in the reduction of enemy gun emplacements which were capable of withstanding the force of the battalions' organic weapons. It is believed that the 57mm or the 75mm recoilless rifle would have been ideal for this purpose.

7th: There was a noticeable failure on the part of the troops to fire on the enemy except at extremely close ranges. Marksmanship at ranges in excess of 150 to 200 yards was usually poor. This shortcoming, in the opinion of the writer, was due principally to earlier operations of the troops in jungle terrain where the use of rifles was limited to ranges of less than 150 yards.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are as follows:

1. At best, information as to enemy strength and disposition is incomplete prior to an amphibious landing.
2. Once the landing is made, every possible source of obtaining information of the enemy must be exploited to the maximum in order that the accomplishment of the mission will

not be unduly delayed and in order that effort will not be needlessly wasted.

3. Patrolling by small units requires the highest type of small unit leadership and increases in effectiveness as the unit develops teamwork. Maximum effectiveness is obtained when each individual within this small unit comes to appreciate the capabilities and limitations of every other member of this team.

4. Aircraft, properly employed and carrying the proper bomb load, may be used with safety and effectiveness in giving close support to troops in reducing enemy defensive positions.

5. When troops become accustomed to firing at short ranges exclusively due to the visibility restrictions of the terrain, a period of marksmanship training at medium and long ranges should be undertaken when it is anticipated the terrain present in future operational areas will permit the effective employment of the weapon at such ranges.

6. The unorthodox employment of both weapons and units is desirable and effective when conditions warrant such deviations from the normal.