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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION (REINFORCED),
25TH INFANTRY (93RD DIVISION) AS A PART OF A
PURSUING FORCE ON BOUGAINVILLE, 2-4 APRIL 1944
(NORTHERN SOLOMONS CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental S-2)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION ON A SEMI-
INDEPENDENT MISSION IN JUNGLE TERRAIN

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry, 93rd US Division in the limited pursuit of enemy forces following the March 1943 attacks on the BOUGAINVILLE Perimeter.

In order to orient the reader it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events leading up to this action.

By the summer of 1942 the Japanese offensive had been carried through the rich East Indies to the south and to a point through and including the SOLOMON ISLANDS in the Southeast. (See Map A)

(1) RABAUl was the hub and nerve center of all Japanese forces in the Southeastern Sector. It was the principal air, naval and submarine base, and one of the staging areas for ground force troops in this area. (2)

On 2 July 1942, the Joint Chiefs of Staff specified RABAUl as an objective to commanders in the PACIFIC Area. (3)

Allied Ground Force offensive action in the Pacific began with the landings at GUADALCANAL on 7 August 1942. After severe fighting on land, sea and air effective Japanese ground resistance ended on 8 February 1943. (4)

- (1) A-2, Maps 4 and 21
- (2) A-5, p. 105, 150
- (3) A-4, p. 1
- (4) A-5, p. 105, 142

A series of amphibious assaults were made in the SOLOMONS throughout the rest of 1943 culminating in the I Marine Amphibious Corps landing on BOUGAINVILLE on 1 November 1943. (See Map B) (5) This landing had for its purpose the establishment and protection of air fields from which RABAUL could be neutralized. It is noteworthy that the directive for the operation did not call for the clearance of Japanese resistance from the island. (6)

On 15 December I Marine Amphibious Corps was replaced by XIV Corps (Army) consisting of the 37th Division (transferred from the I Marine Amphibious Corps), the Americal Division (which replaced the 3rd Marine Division, withdrawn at this time) and additional artillery and service units. (7)

The Japanese Commander on BOUGAINVILLE, when he finally realized that the American forces were not going to continue the attack beyond the original perimeter, ordered a concentration of his forces for an attack on the American position. (See Maps C and D) (8)

The initial Japanese attack was launched on 8 March 1944 and succeeded in driving in the outposts and making a shallow penetration in the zone of the 37th Division. (9) This penetration was reduced by counterattacks. The enemy continued to attack until 24 March with no better results. On or about this date, the Japanese commander, with better than half of his infantry strength destroyed, decided to withdraw. The withdrawal was conducted over virtually the same routes as the concentration, only in reverse. (10)

(5) A-3, Map 10

(6) A-14, p. 8

(7) A-10, p. 1, 2

(8) A-14, p. 8; A-12, p. 5

(9) A-10, p. 14

(10) A-12, p. 12, 13, 15

On 17 February 1944 the 25th Infantry, part of the 93d Division, closed in its assembly area on GUADALCANAL, having shipped directly from the United States where for the past eight months it had been engaged in desert training. (11) About the middle of March, the 25th Combat Team was ordered to BOUGANVILLE, closed in at BOUGANVILLE on 28 March 1944 and was attached to the Americal Division. (12) Selected personnel from all battalions accompanied Americal Division patrols for training.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The enemy withdrawal was conducted under cover of a delaying force. While this move was hasty to the extent of leaving sick and wounded along the trails, (13) the delaying force would fight stubbornly when contacted during daylight hours and withdraw under cover of darkness.

The XIV Corps plan was to harass, delay, and cut the line of communications of the forces remaining in front of the position by means of patrolling and limited pursuits, and to secure and outpost the dominating terrain surrounding the perimeter. (14)

The 37th Division, on 31 March, formed the Special NUMA NUMA Trail Force consisting of the 3d Battalion, Fiji Infantry, and the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry under command of Colonel White, the Commanding Officer of the 148th Infantry. The mission given to the Special Force was the cutting of the NUMA NUMA Trail at the trail junction north of the LARUMA RIVER and JAVA CREEK stream junction to harass, delay and cut off the retreat of enemy forces remaining in front of the division. (See Map E) (15)

(11) A-11, p. 1

(12) A-12, p. 4, 5

(13) Personal knowledge

(14) A-11, p. 4

(15) A-8, p. 50

The island of BOUGAINVILLE, like most of the other South Pacific islands is geologically speaking, new, which accounts for the fact that the hills and mountains rise very abruptly. Slopes on the hillsides frequently vary from 45 degrees to vertical. Ridges often are barely wide enough for a foot path, with very steep slopes falling off on either side. Rivers and streams are short and usually not deep but are very rapid until the coastal plain is reached. River bottoms are rocky and strewn with boulders. The entire area, including the steepest hillsides, is covered with a rain forest type jungle. The floor of the jungle is continually damp and in shadow from the overhead canopy. Brush and small trees growing to a height of ten or twelve feet and vines hanging from the branches of the taller trees prohibit observation for more than a few feet in any direction except where vegetation does not exist, such as across a river. The jungle floor, while apparently flat, is cut by numerous deep, narrow, eroded washes. (16)

Weather during the operation was normal for this climate; clear except for thunder showers during the early morning and late afternoon; usually two hours of rain began at about 1600 hours every day. The temperature, except during the rains, was hot and humid but dropped rapidly to cool (50 - 60 degrees) at night.

During the period 31 March - 1 April, the Special Force advanced from the main perimeter to the south bank of the LARUMA RIVER at hill 205. (17) Hill 205 was taken on 1 April, but

(16) Personal knowledge
(17) A-7, 1 April

strong resistance was encountered on the ridge northeast of Hill 205. On 1 April the Commanding Officer of the Special Force requested that a Battalion of the 25th Infantry be attached to him and was informed that the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry would be at the point where the NUMA NUMA Trail enters the main perimeter at daylight 2 April.

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE SPECIAL FORCE

On the morning of 2 April, the situation of the Special Force was as follows: (18) 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry and one company, 3d Battalion, Fiji Infantry making slow progress along the ridge northeast of Hill 205; the rest of the 3d Battalion, Fiji Infantry was protecting the east side of the trail between Hill 205 and the main perimeter; the 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry (attached 1 April) was protecting the west side of the trail; the 2d Battalion, 25th Infantry was moving by foot on the NUMA NUMA Trail toward the Command Post at the base of Hill 205.

(See Map F) (19)

The plan of the Special Force Commander was for the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, less one company, to continue the attack across the ridge toward the JAVA CREEK while the 2d Battalion, 25th Infantry encircled the enemy's right and established themselves on the NUMA NUMA - JAVA CREEK trail junctions, thus cutting the enemy's line of communication and retreat. (See Map F)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

At daylight on the morning of 2 April the 2d Battalion, 25th Infantry was at the junction of NUMA NUMA Trail and the main

(18) A-7, 1 April

(19) A-7, 2 April; A-8, p. 50 and personal knowledge

perimeter. The battalion was at approximately T/O strength but due to the anticipated hand carry certain deliberate reductions of equipment existed. Only one 60 mm mortar per rifle company was carried. Only two 81 mm mortars and four machine guns of the heavy weapons company were carried and these were light machine guns rather than heavys. The Antitank Platoon, the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoons of Headquarters Company and the weapons unit personnel not carrying weapons were used to carry extra ammunition and rations and to assist in carrying the crew served weapons listed above. (20)

A staff officer of the Special Force met the commander of the 2d Battalion, 25th Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel A. K. Amos, at the junction of the NUMA NUMA Trail and the Perimeter Road and instructed him to move his battalion by foot to the vicinity of Hill 205 where further orders would be issued. The battalion moved out in column of companies, a file on either side of the trail, order of march: E, F, Headquarters, H, and G. (21)

At about 0900 hours the battalion reached the command post of the Special Force without incident and halted in column. The Battalion Commander here received orders to move west along the south bank of the LARUMA RIVER for about 400 yards to insure that the crossing could not be seen by forces opposing the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, and there cross the river to the north bank and proceed east (upstream) to the trail junction near the JAVA CREEK -

(20) Personal knowledge

(21) A-11, p. 6

LARUMA RIVER stream junction. Upon reaching this objective, the battalion was to set up a trail block cutting the lines of communication and the withdrawal of the forces then opposing the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry. (22) Company I, 148th Infantry, an experienced unit familiar with the terrain, was attached to the battalion at this point, with orders that it (Company I) would spearhead the attack. (23)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The mission given to the battalion was that of an enveloping force; to encircle the enemy right flank, move to and occupy the objective, the trail junction near the LARUMA RIVER-JAVA CREEK stream junction, thus cutting the enemy's line of communication and his primary route of withdrawal.

Information of the enemy was vague, but it was estimated that the total force was not over a company at reduced strength heavily supported by light automatic weapons and that this force was concentrated on the ridge facing the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry. Only flank protection was anticipated north of the LARUMA RIVER.

Due to this almost complete lack of information concerning his route of advance, the Battalion Commander could only plan his route, movement and security. His plan of attack against a hostile force must wait until one was encountered.

(22) Personal knowledge, verbal order, Lt. Col. Amos

(23) Personal knowledge; A-13, p. 32

The plan of movement was to move west to the appointed crossing site, have E Company secure the crossing, then cross the battalion to the north side of the LARUMA RIVER and proceed east to the objective in column, with I Company, 148th Infantry leading and furnishing front and flank security for the battalion. During the movement east toward the objective, the Commander planned to have only flank patrols along the river, keeping the main body in column parallel to and about 50 yards north of the river to prevent discovery by the enemy south of the river. Since the battalion must now cut its own way through the jungle, it was decided to change the formation to single file. For the movement from the Special Force command post to the river, the order of march was the same as that on the NUMA NUMA Trail except that I Company, 148th Infantry was placed between E and F Company. (24)

NARRATION

CROSSING THE LARUMA RIVER

The battalion moved out in the formation mentioned above at 1045 hours and cut a trail to a point about 400 yards west of the Special Force command post. The south bank of the river was found to have near vertical embankments of from 20 to 40 feet, however, sufficient vines and tree roots were available to permit the men to scramble down. The greatest difficulty was encountered in lowering the weapons. This was finally accomplished by a chain of men holding themselves to the roots and vines with one hand or tying themselves to the roots with their belts and lowering the weapons and ammunition from one man to another.

(24) Personal knowledge

E Company started across the river at about 1100 hours employing a squad at a time. The river at this point was rapid but at its deepest point only about three to four feet deep, the bottom was rocky and would frequently slip from under foot. Several men were swept downstream until they could regain their footing. Again the heavy loads were the greatest difficulty. As the squads of E Company gained the far (north) bank, they formed a perimeter which widened and deepened with each additional squad. Once E Company had established itself on the far bank, the rest of the battalion, less G Company, began the crossing and passed through E Company. During this period, a security patrol from E Company killed two enemy soldiers about 100 yards west of the crossing. Whether these men constituted an enemy flank security force or just two stragglers from the general withdrawal could not be determined. (25)

G Company was dropped off from the column at this point and given the primary mission of securing the crossing site and line of communications in the vicinity. It was also given the secondary mission of constructing a path down the south bank of the river and placing a safety rope across the river to facilitate future movement, particularly of supplies. G Company accomplished all of these tasks in an excellent manner although no enemy action took place and its security mission was therefore not tested. (26)

THE ADVANCE TOWARD THE OBJECTIVE

As the last elements of H Company passed through the E Company security at about 1200 hours, E Company joined the end of the

(25) Personal knowledge; A-11, p. 6

(26) Personal knowledge

column. The column was now organized as follows: I Company, 148th Infantry, F Company, Headquarters, H Company and E Company, 25th Infantry. The Battalion Commander marched near the head of the column. Advance and flank security were put out by I Company, 148th Infantry.

The advance east was made by the leading elements cutting a path through the jungle about 50 yards in from the river. Direction was maintained by a flank patrol that kept the river in sight. Progress was slow because of the terrain. Frequent small streams draining from the north into the LARUMA RIVER and the excessive heat and humidity made movement difficult and exhausting. Loads, especially weapons, were frequently exchanged, the packboard and ammunition bags were invaluable during this movement.

THE ACTION OF 2 APRIL

At about 1430 hours, after having moved about 1400 yards from the point of crossing, the flank patrol on the river reported sighting several Japanese on the south bank of the river. Reconnaissance revealed about twenty to thirty enemy soldiers walking up and down or sleeping on improvised shelters, obviously unaware of the presence of the battalion. Behind them were five or six log and earth bunkers built against the shelter of a vertical rock cliff about twelve feet high. (27) Above the cliff, the hillside sloped up very steeply and was heavily covered with jungle. The river ran about fifteen feet from the base of the cliff, and no vegetation grew here, being periodically swept by the river during floods. The river bed was about one

(27) Personal knowledge

hundred yards wide at this point; the north bank was low and flat and vegetation grew out over the river but afforded numerous places from which the south bank could be seen. (See Map G) The flank patrol, less the reporting messenger, had remained to observe. The battalion commander decided to exploit the surprise he had achieved and ordered I Company, less the leading platoon and the left flank security patrol, to deploy secretly along the river bank. Fire was to be opened only on signal or when discovered. The leading platoon was deployed to protect the column from the east and moved out slowly. As they moved, they uncovered the NUMA NUMA trail on the north side of the river. Two machine guns were emplaced to fire on the yet unsuspecting enemy. Just as the battalion commander was about to give the signal to open fire, a small group of enemy appeared moving down the trail toward the leading platoon. The lead platoon promptly opened fire killing all but one, and wounding and capturing the other. As the first shot fired was to be the signal for the two platoons and the machine guns along the river to commence firing, they opened fire. A virtual hail of bullets swept the enemy on the far bank. None of those caught in the open escaped, most being found later riddled with from five to twenty bullets. (28) Retaliatory fire was meager and ill aimed, indicating that a large majority of the enemy in the immediate vicinity had been killed or wounded in the initial volley. No mortar or artillery fire was received.

The 60 mm mortar had been given a position area and had picked its exact location, but due to the secrecy required,

(28) Personal knowledge

could not begin clearing the overhead branches and leaves until firing had begun. As soon as the first shots were fired clearing began, and in a few minutes the 60 mm mortar was ready to fire. By this time the enemy had brought up a machine gun which began firing from a position on the hillside and to the west of the bunker area. Scattered rifle fire was coming from the jungle covered hillside above the bunkers directly across the river from I Company's position. The enemy machine gun could not be definitely located but its general area was known and the 60 mm mortar fired about twenty five rounds into this area. The machine gun ceased firing. The mortar ammunition thus expended was about one fourth of the total carried by that company for the mortar and was consumed in about two minutes, not including registration. (29)

Fire gradually died down, until by 1530 hours only an occasional round was fired by the enemy when some one was careless enough to expose himself too prominently, or when some rifleman thought he saw a target or a suspicious movement on the far side of the river.

While all this was going on, let us see what was happening in the rest of the battalion. From the beginning of the march, frequent halts of two to five minutes duration had occurred while leading elements cut their way through a particularly difficult spot, or reconnoitered a suspicious area. Thus the men initially welcomed the halt as an opportunity to rest and catch their breath. But as the halt lengthened to fifteen, then twenty minutes, and no word was received as to why, the men

(29) Personal knowledge

became nervous. Ability to see only a few feet off the trail and only five or six men in each direction, increased that nervousness. Rumors of ambush, enemy using silent weapons, a break in the column just ahead, and even desertion by their leaders and the white company they knew to be leading began to fly up and down the column. When firing suddenly burst out in heavy volume up ahead, a near panic resulted. (30) Only strenuous efforts on the part of company commanders, platoon leaders, and non-commissioned officers prevented many men from running or firing into their own comrades. In one case, violent action on the part of two enlisted men of the 148th Infantry and an officer was necessary to prevent a squad from firing into the left flank guard put out by I Company of the 148th Infantry.

(31) Authentic information of the situation was not received by the companies until they were closed up about an hour later.

At about 1530 hours, the battalion commander ordered the battalion to move up and form a perimeter based on I Company. F Company tied to the left platoon of I Company and extended around to the northwest, E Company joined the ends of F Company and I Company facing west and northwest to complete the perimeter. (32) At 1600 hours the decision was made to spend the night here although no effective resistance to the continued movement of the battalion had been encountered as yet and the accomplishment of the assigned mission, already delayed an hour and a half, was thus to be delayed an additional twelve to fourteen hours at least. The troops were ordered to dig in on present positions.

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) Personal knowledge

(32) Personal knowledge

THE FIRST NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE

The organization for defense was generally as stated above, with the addition of the machine gun platoons of H Company to the perimeter. They were sited to cover the back trail, and to give grazing fire on the river. I Company's machine gun was sited up the uncovered NUMA NUMA Trail, and that of the other companies where they could get the best grazing fire. An inner perimeter was formed from the remainder of H Company and Battalion Headquarters Company, less the Antitank platoon. (See Map H) This platoon was ordered to drop its loads of ammunition and rations and return to the headquarters of the Special Force, remain there, or return to the main perimeter during the night. They were to bring forward additional machine gun and mortar ammunition and rations the following morning, the prisoner captured by I Company was sent back with this supply party.

All personnel of the 25th Infantry were ordered to dig three or four man fox holes and to keep one man alert in each fox hole at all times. Fox holes were dug not over five yards apart. These holes were actually sitting type slit trenches, joined in the form of a cross or a "T". (See Sketch I) The use of multiple fox holes gave the men a sense of companionship and teamwork and were employed primarily for morale. It was noted that many men still had not completely shaken off the case of "jitters" they had had earlier in the afternoon, and the Battalion Commander decided that the risk of a panic in case of an attack was greater than that of an enemy mortar or artillery barrage.

All personnel were ordered to remain in their holes from dark to dawn and to employ only hand grenades unless a major attack developed.

From darkness until daylight, no further incidents occurred. There was no indiscriminate firing or throwing of hand grenades by the battalion or its attached company.

At early dawn, the personnel along the river dimly saw two or three Japanese who had returned and were apparently getting water from the river. Since the dead from the previous day's fighting were still lying where they had fallen, it can only be presumed that they believed the battalion had departed. They were quickly killed and nothing further occurred so far as the enemy was concerned.

The battalion ate breakfast from the last of the K ration carried from the main perimeter on the morning of 2 April on the individual. The rations brought in by the Antitank platoon and dropped when the platoon returned to the Trail Force Headquarters the previous afternoon were distributed, as was the ammunition. The battalion, less F Company, G Company and the supply group, prepared to continue the movement to the objective.

THE F COMPANY ACTION ON 3 APRIL (33)

At about 0800 hours, 3 April, the battalion, less G Company, F Company and the supply group, moved out in column up the NUMA NUMA Trail toward the objective.

F Company was left in place across from the enemy position to guard the line of communication and to keep the enemy position under observation. The Battalion Commander also directed that the Executive Officer remain there. Shortly after the battalion had moved out, the supply group entered the F Company area. In answer to queries as to how they had arrived so quickly, they stated that during the 2d of April engineers had improved the trail

(33) Personal knowledge

from the main perimeter to the Special Force command post and that trucks were now bringing supplies to that point. This saved a slow and laborious hand carry and return of about four miles, insuring more rapid delivery of supplies and fewer personnel required to maintain the necessary flow of supply. After dropping off rations for F Company and taking a short rest, the supply group moved on, following the battalion.

Since the short action at daylight, no enemy had been seen or heard from on the far bank. Deliberate exposure brought no fire. The Executive Officer and the Regimental S-2, who had also remained, studied the position across the river with field glasses and, noting several telephone lines running from one of the bunkers, concluded that the position was probably a command post. This was later proven to be correct. By 1100 hours, the complete lack of any indications of active enemy on the far bank prompted the Regimental S-2 to take two men and cross to the south side of the river for the purpose of making a search of the bunkers for documents or other forms of information of an intelligence nature.

During the crossing, no fire was received, but after investigating several bunkers containing either dead men or nothing, a machine gun and two riflemen opened fire on the party. Under cover of fire from F Company from the north bank the party returned to the north bank.

At about 1300 hours, a 4.2 chemical mortar platoon that had been attached to the Special Force entered the F Company area. This platoon was carrying one mortar, and personnel not carrying the weapon carried one round of ammunition each. Permission was

obtained to employ this unit against the machine gun uncovered by the search party. At about 1500 hours, under cover of a short but violent shelling from the 4.2 and the company's 60 mm mortar, a platoon of F Company crossed the river. This time the enemy fired as the crossing was made and five men of F Company were wounded. (34) Thirty eight Japanese dead were counted in and around the bunkers. This count includes all action to and including that of the platoon. After cleaning out this pocket of resistance, the platoon returned to the north bank of the river. No further action occurred in the F Company area.

MOVEMENT TO AND OPERATIONS AT THE OBJECTIVE

While the above action was taking place in the F Company area the battalion advanced without making further contact and by 1300 hours was on the objective. In a short while they were joined there by the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, and the Special Force Headquarters who, finding no resistance on the ridge at daylight, had pulled back and taken the route of the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry, leaving one company of the Fiji Infantry to push across the ridge. (35)

During the afternoon of the 3d of April, patrols were sent to the west along the JAVA CREEK and to the northeast along the LARUMA RIVER but no contact was made by any of these patrols. (36) By night fall it was apparent that the main body of the enemy delaying force had withdrawn during the night of 2-3 April and that the halting of the battalion short of its objective had permitted the escape of that force.

(34) A-11, p. 7; A-8, p. 53

(35) A-7, 2 April and 3 April

(36) A-7, 3 April and personal knowledge

The following morning, 4 April, additional patrols combed the areas of the upper JAVA CREEK and the LARUMA RIVER. These patrols reported many abandoned bivouac areas and considerable equipment but no enemy troops. (37) At about 0915 hours, contact with a patrol from the Fiji Infantry coming down the JAVA CREEK Trail was made, thus completing the circuit. (38)

At 1255 hours, 4 April, the Commanding General, 37th Division ordered the withdrawal of the Special Force. (39) At 1655 hours, the 2d Battalion, 25th Infantry, returned to the main perimeter and reverted to control of the 25th Infantry Regiment. (40)

To sum up the results of this operation: A green battalion in its first contact with enemy forces and with exceedingly difficult terrain had successfully defeated all enemy forces employed against it. True, the battalion was spearheaded by a company of experienced troops from another division, but this was in accordance with the policy of the Corps Commander and achieved the results desired. (41) On returning from a visit to the 2nd Battalion shortly after it returned from this operation, the Regimental Commander, Colonel E. M. Yon, stated that he had never seen such high morale in any unit of the 25th Infantry since he took command. (42)

Counted enemy casualties were forty-four dead and one captured. Total losses to the battalion and attachments were five wounded in F Company.

(37) A-8, p. 53

(38) A-7, 4 April

(39) A-7, 4 April; A-8, p. 53

(40) A-7, 4 April

(41) Personal knowledge; A-13, p. 32

(42) Personal knowledge

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. TACTICAL DECISIONS

The attainment of the Division Commander's desire to harass, delay and cut off the retreat of the Japanese force, and the instructions to the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry, to encircle the enemy right flank and establish themselves at the critical trail junction implied a need for speed and, if possible, stealth. That this was admirably carried out up to the point of contact with the enemy command post is seen by the complete surprise achieved by the battalion in its engagement at this point. However, the commander's decision to engage this force at all may be questionable. The principal factors involved in this decision were: (a) The commander's inexperience in combat, (b) the mission to seize the JAVA CREEK JUNCTION and (c) the very real danger of an enemy force of undetermined strength so close to his own supply line with the probability of eminent discovery of the new trail cut by the battalion. A very few minutes after firing had begun, the enemy strength was revealed as being little more than the initial force destroyed in the first burst of fire. At this point we must criticize the commander for not pushing on toward his objective, leaving, as he did some eighteen hours later, a company to engage any enemy that presented themselves. This delay, coupled with the forceful notification to the enemy of the battalion's presence on their right rear, caused the enemy commander to insure that the bulk of his delaying force was withdrawn from the obvious trap prior to dawn. Thus, when the battalion did arrive on its objective and the trap was sprung, the enemy had fled.

2. SUPPORT IN JUNGLE TERRAIN

The reduction of supporting weapons within the battalion heavy weapons company to two machine guns per platoon and two 81mm mortars was proven to be a wise decision. The difficult marching conditions of muddy, slippery trails, steep slopes and the heat and humidity gave these troops great difficulty in keeping up with the riflemen on the march, even though loads were rotated frequently and ammunition bearers did not carry full bags.

During the engagement on the afternoon of 2 April, it was found that the one mortar in action could very rapidly use up a large percentage of the ammunition that could be carried with it, even using the rest of the platoon as ammunition bearers.

In jungle terrain, with its greatly reduced ranges, it was found that adequate support could be given by the reduced number of guns due to their greater accuracy and effectiveness at these ranges provided sufficient ammunition could be made available to the guns. When the attached 4.2 mortar platoon joined the battalion, on 3 April it was found that only one mortar was carried and all other men of the platoon carried one round of ammunition each. Only by this expedient and the strictest control of ammunition expenditure could the weapon be kept in action.

3. THE USE OF MULTIPLE FOXHOLES

The requirement that all men of the 2d Battalion, 25th Infantry, dig three or four man foxholes for the defense on the night of 2-3 April was proven sound. By employing this type of entrenchment the battalion was compressed into a very small

area and was highly vulnerable to mortar and artillery fire, however, the system had the advantage of giving each man the maximum amount of rest or sleep since no one would have to be awake more than one third of the night and each man could sleep secure in the knowledge that there was someone within arms reach who was awake. This grouping of personnel also had the effect of reducing the nervousness, hysteria, and the illusion of enemy forms and movement common to men new to action at night.

The battalion commander weighed the advantages and disadvantages and, since the enemy had employed no mortars or artillery during the fire fight, decided to take the risk of a close formation. Inasmuch as no enemy action of any kind took place during the night, his estimate was proven correct. His decision was also shown to be sound when morning came and there had been no indiscriminate firing or grenade throwing during the night. The company commander of I Company, 148th Infantry, commented to the author on this fact as being most unusual for green troops in jungle terrain.

4. THE USE OF SURPRISE

In analyzing the action of 2 April by itself, the outstanding characteristics that present themselves are: the employment of surprise fire by the battalion commander, the recognition of that capability of the battalion by the flank patrol that discovered the enemy force and the concealment afforded by terrain that permitted so large a force to work its way into firing positions undetected.

Had the flank patrol opened fire, a maximum of three or four enemy casualties could have been expected. The rest would

have taken cover in their bunkers and the battalion would have had a much more difficult time with them. The movement of the bulk of a company into a firing position within 125 yards of the enemy without detection and the devastating results of its fire testify to the effectiveness of surprise fire, the training and ability of Company I, 148th Infantry, and the unexcelled concealment afforded by jungle terrain.

5. SECURITY

In analyzing the action of 2 April from the enemy viewpoint, the lack of security on the north side of the river can only be explained on the basis of beaten, weary troops, inadequate forces, and the unexpected direction of the attack. These forces had been and were then fighting toward the south and retreating northward. All previous attacks had come from a generally southerly direction and the enemy apparently expected all future attacks to follow this same pattern. His lack of imagination or under-estimation of American forces and the concealment afforded by the terrain led to surprise and complete destruction of the command post and its personnel.

6. INFORMATION TO SUBORDINATE UNITS

In the initial stages of the action of 2 April, the failure to send back information to the units halted in the column on the trail led to serious problems of control when firing was opened. It must be remembered that the men of this unit had never been in combat and their natural nervousness was enhanced by the unfamiliar terrain and inability to observe more than a few feet in any direction. During this period of waiting rumors and speculation increased this nervousness. When firing was

suddenly opened at the head of the column, only exceptional leadership on the part of officers and non-commissioned officers, who themselves had no knowledge of what was taking place, prevented a panic. At one point, violent intercession on the part of an officer and two enlisted men from I Company, 148th Infantry, was necessary to prevent the slaughter of a left flank patrol coming in. Much, if not all, of this could have been prevented had the commander sent word of the situation and his plan to all units while the assault force was moving into position. This type of information, desirable in all units, is especially necessary when dealing with green troops.

7. SUPPLY AND RESUPPLY

Supply in this operation, as in most operations in this type of terrain, was reduced to the simplest common denominator: how much can a man carry and still keep up with the column. Initially, the supplies were carried from the main perimeter to the limit of advance. During the day of 2 April, engineers attached to the Special Force pushed a road capable of taking two and a half ton trucks to the command post. This saved the returning supply group a round trip distance of about four miles, and several hours of fatiguing hand carry. The closer to the using units that mechanical means of transportation can be brought, the less will be the drain on combat personnel to provide adequate supply.

8. GUARDING OF SUPPLY LINES

The guarding of supply lines is another form of security. In totalling up the number of troops finally in use on this operation we find the 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry, guarding the

west side of the NUMA NUMA trail, the 3d Battalion, Fiji Infantry, less one company, guarding the east side of the same trail, and Companies F and G, 25th Infantry, guarding the trail beyond the command post, making a total of nine companies employed as trail guards. The elements actually operating to accomplish the assigned mission were one company from the 3d Battalion, Fiji Infantry, the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, and two companies of the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry, or a total of seven companies. More than half the entire force was employed as guards for the line of supply. Such a force insured that supply personnel and vehicles could operate without fear of a major threat and reduced the possibility of even individual enemy action to a minimum. This method could only be used where the commander has more than sufficient forces to accomplish the mission. The greater the distance from base to point of consumption, the greater will be the drain on combat troops to furnish guards for the supply routes.

Another method, less expensive of combat strength, is to put guards with each supply element moving over the route. This system gives the enemy the opportunity to set up ambushes on the routes and, although the ambush may be driven off, some casualties can certainly be anticipated.

Regardless of the type used, some security for the elements moving over the supply route must be maintained.

LESSONS

1. Regardless of how tempting a side issue may be, a commander must never forget his primary mission, nor even temporarily cease his efforts to fulfil that mission.

2. In very close or difficult terrain where long hand carries are essential, commanders must expect and plan on a reduction in the number of supporting weapons available.

3. When troops new to combat are employed in front line positions during darkness, the physiological and psychological advantages of multiple foxholes should be weighed heavily when considered against the tactical disadvantages.

4. Jungle type terrain affords the most frequent opportunities to employ complete and overwhelming surprise on the small unit level due to the complete concealment it affords.

5. In jungle terrain, regardless of where a unit or installation may be with respect to the "front lines", complete and all-around security should be the first and most vital command consideration.

6. The dissemination of information concerning the situation is always important, but is essential to a unit which is engaging in its first combat operation.

7. In terrain where difficult hand carry of supplies and weapons is necessary, every effort must be made to push roads as close to the using units as possible to prevent or cut down long hand carries with their attendant reduction in combat strength.

8. In jungle terrain, security of the line of communications may become a serious drain on the combat strength of the command.