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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 17TH INFANTRY
(7TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK OF A RIDGE
NOSE, ATTU ISLAND, 21-22 MAY 1943.
(ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion S-2)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
ATTACKING A CRITICAL FEATURE IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This is an account of the operations of the 3d Battalion, 17th Infantry, 7th United States Division, during the Battle of ATTU in 1943, and describes the action of 21 - 22 May.

Let us review the major events which led up to the action on these two days.

Following their attack on DUTCH HARBOR, 3 June 1942, the Japanese began the occupation of ATTU and KISKA ISLANDS, located at the western tip of the ALEUTIAN chain. The islands were occupied in considerable force and provided the enemy with potential stepping stones to the NORTH AMERICAN continent, or, defensively speaking, a northern anchor for their defensive perimeter. (See Map A) Strong defensive works and construction of airfields were ordered by a Japanese Imperial Headquarters Directive; to be completed by February 1943. (1)

General De Witt, Commanding General of the Western Defense Command, on 21 June 1942, forwarded a request to the War Department for authority to conduct offensive action in the northwest PACIFIC. Early in July 1942, General Marshall, Chief of Staff, forwarded a memorandum to General De Witt advising that the proposals were being carefully considered and that planning should be continued. (2)

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- (1) A-1, p. 81
(2) A-2, p. 3

The original plan was to capture KISKA ISLAND first, however this was dropped and it was decided in late March 1943 to attack and capture ATTU. (3) The size and composition of the American Force necessary to carry out this task had received long consideration and study by the American High Command. Late in December 1942, it was decided that the ground forces for the job would be composed of units of The 7th Infantry Division, which had been training in the CALIFORNIA desert. (4)

On 24 April 1943, the landing force supported by three battleships, six destroyers, one escort aircraft carrier, two destroyer mine sweepers, and a mine sweeper group, sailed from SAN FRANCISCO. The composite assault force was commanded by Rear Admiral W. F. Rockwell, and the landing force by Major General A. E. Brown (7th Division Commander). (5)

D-Day had been fixed as 7 May. The Japanese intelligence system was functioning well, however, and the garrison on ATTU was warned that the Americans were coming. (6)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 7th Division troops chosen to assault and capture ATTU consisted of the 17th and 32d Infantry Regiments, the 48th and 49th Field Artillery Battalions (105mm), the 50th Engineer Battalion, to which were added medical units and other supporting and service troops. A reserve was organized on the island of ADAK, several hundred miles to the east of ATTU. This reserve consisted of a battalion of the 4th In-

(3) A-2, p. 5
(4) A-3, p. 4
(5) A-2, p. 103
(6) A-3, p. 5

fantry and other troops from the Alaskan Defense Command.

(See Map A) (7)

Several plans were drafted for the landing operation, each having several variations. The final approved plan called for four landings. Two were to be main landings and two would be subsidiary landings. (8)

Let us examine the terrain and enemy disposition on ATTU ISLAND. ATTU is located some 1,000 miles from the ALASKAN mainland and is the property of the United States. Prior to World War II and its seizure by the Japanese, many Americans had never heard of the place.

The weather on ATTU cannot be described aptly. Most of the time the island is covered by thick, cold fog, generally supplemented by snow, sleet, rain -- or all three in varying degrees. High winds are almost continuous, sometimes reaching a velocity of over 100 miles per hour. Even such winds as these do not dispel the clinging fog.

The terrain is composed chiefly of volcanic-type mountains and peaks and narrow, sharp ridges. These peaks and mountains rise sharply from the seas. Some few beaches suitable for landing craft exist. The lower slopes of the mountains and ridges and the valleys are of tundra composition. Tundra is a spongy, muskeg-type moss and grass. The higher portions of the ridges and peaks are normally snow covered. (9)

Since the enemy had held this island for nearly a year, his defenses were strong and they were well planned, well constructed, and well concealed. The landing field under construction in the HOLTZ BAY area, the Headquarters there,

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- (7) A-3, p. 4
 - (8) A-3, p. 6
 - (9) A-3, p. 1

and the installations in CHICHAGOF HARBOR were well protected by weapons sited for control of all approaches. Advance intelligence estimates placed the enemy strength at about 2300. (10)

During the voyage of the American forces, D-Day was postponed until 8 May, due to bad weather. When the convoy arrived off ATTU, strong, unfavorable winds made the landing out of the question for the time scheduled. Consequently the convoy killed time, circling around in the BERING SEA, waiting for more favorable weather. Finally, it appeared that a landing could be made on the 11th. (11)

The main force was to land on the MASSACRE BAY BEACHES. This body, called the Southern Force, was organized for combat as follows: the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 17th Infantry, the 2d Battalion of the 32d Infantry, supported by three batteries of 105mm howitzers and auxiliary troops. The Commanding Officer of the 17th Infantry, Colonel Edward P. Earle was designated Commander of the Southern Force.

The other main landing was to be made in the HOLTZ BAY area. This force consisting of the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry, plus a battery of 105mm howitzers and auxiliary troops was called the Northern Force.

A floating reserve composed of the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 32d Infantry plus two batteries of artillery was commanded by Colonel Frank Culin.

A provisional unit made up of the 7th Scout Company (Special) and the 7th Reconnaissance Troop less one platoon was to make a subsidiary landing in the HOLTZ BAY area, while

(10) A-3, p. 3

(11) A-3, p. 6

the remaining platoon of the Reconnaissance Company had the mission of providing cover for the rear of the Southern Force and would land on ALEXEI POINT, to the east of MASSACRE BAY.

These forces were to effect a junction, thus encircling the Japs completely, and then proceed with his capture or destruction. (12)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE SOUTHERN FORCE

On the afternoon of 11 May the 2d and 3d Battalions successfully landed on their respective beaches in MASSACRE BAY and moved inland. (See Map B)

The 3d Battalion was ordered to advance up MASSACRE VALLEY, seize and secure the MASSACRE-HOLTZ PASS and effect a union with the Northern Forces in the HOLTZ BAY area. The plan for the 2d Battalion was to advance up the hogback in MASSACRE VALLEY to seize and secure the MASSACRE-SARANA PASS. Then in conjunction with the Northern Force both battalions would compress the enemy into the CHICHAGOF area for his final destruction or capture. (13)

The right flank of the attacking battalions was to be protected by a reinforced platoon from Company F of the 17th. The left flank protection was to be provided by a platoon from Company I. (14)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 3d Battalion began hitting the beach at 111620 May and moved rapidly inland toward its objective -- the pass

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- (12) A-3, p. 6
 - (13) A-3, p. 6
 - (14) A-3, p. 8

leading from MASSACRE VALLEY to HOLTZ BAY. The valley floor ranged in width from some 1,000 yards near the beach to 500 yards as it approached the pass. (See Map B)

The first resistance was encountered some 2,000 yards inland. The enemy fire increased and became very heavy as the battalion pushed forward. Meanwhile, the reinforced platoons assigned the missions of protecting the flanks had been completely stopped and were unable to continue. Consequently, the battalion came under fire from the front and both flanks. Obviously, this was a critical situation. Failure to secure the high ridges on either side of the valley placed the battalion in an extremely unfavorable position tactically. It's chances for successful assault of the pass were practically eliminated. However, the battalion pushed forward to within about 600 yards of the entrance to the pass. Here it was halted by devastating fire from machine guns, rifles, mortars (grenade launchers) and artillery coming from the mouth of the pass and the flanks.

Meanwhile, the 2d Battalion, attacking towards the MASSACRE-SARANA PASS was stopped and it became apparent that the two battalions had hit the main Japanese defenses.

This is borne out by examining the enemy's general plan of defense which was simply to deny the Americans the use of the HOLTZ BAY and CHICHAGOF areas until reinforcements could arrive from Japan. (15)

The 3d Battalion despite its extremely poor tactical position continued its attacks towards the objective. For four days the battalion, from its water filled slit trenches fought desperately to take the PASS. All efforts were re-

(15) A-5, p. 87

pulsed and the wet, cold nights and days plus the dominating enemy fire were taking their toll. On the night of 14 May the battalion was relieved by the 2d Battalion, 32d Infantry, and withdrew to draws on the right side of the valley. The relieving battalion made two unsuccessful attacks on the pass. (16)

Finally the enemy, after absorbing five distinct attacks, on his position in the pass, combined with our heavy artillery and naval gun fire on his positions, plus the threat to his rear by the Northern Force, withdrew to shorten his lines and reinforce the defenses in and around MASSACRE-SARANA PASS. This action was completed on the night of 16-17 May and paved the way for the junction of the Northern and Southern U. S. Forces through MASSACRE-HOLTZ PASS.

The 3d Battalion rested and observed during the day of the 17th and that night moved into the pass with very little opposition. (17)

Although the enemy had now been surrounded he was by no means defeated. Plans now called for the Southern Force to push out of MASSACRE VALLEY and advance on CHICHAGOF through the MASSACRE-SARANA VALLEY. The 3d Battalion, badly battered was to leave one reinforced company (K Company) guarding the MASSACRE-HOLTZ PASS, while the remainder of the outfit was placed in Force reserve and withdrew to an assembly area on the MASSACRE VALLEY hogback, 18 May. (See Map B)(18)

Meanwhile, other elements of the Southern Force began the slow laborious task of capturing MASSACRE-SARANA PASS.

This pass was the gateway to CHICHAGOF, where the enemy was

(16) Personal knowledge

(17) A-3, p. 11

(18) A-3, p. 12

later to be defeated in detail.

The Southern Force was now commanded by Colonel Wayne Zimmerman, Colonel Earle having been killed during the initial advances. Major Jack Siddens had assumed command of the 3d Battalion, the former commander having been relieved on the 17th. Major Lee Wallace was assigned as the battalion executive officer on the same date.

After the battalion was placed in Force reserve Major Siddens maintained close liaison with Colonel Zimmerman. An important mission for the 3d Battalion would be coming up shortly -- that of seizing SARANA NOSE. (See Map C)

Meanwhile, other elements of the Southern Force were doggedly pushing the Japs out of the MASSACRE-SARANA PASS and adjacent heights. This would provide a spring-board for the 3d Battalion's attack on SARANA NOSE.

On 20 May, the battalion was ordered to move to an advanced assembly area at the outer entrance of the pass as fighting continued around the inner entrance. Later, at about 2300 hours, Company L was moved to positions facing SARANA NOSE on the slopes below POINT ABLE. These positions would protect the battalion's move to the final assembly area the next morning. (19)

Overhead, Companies C and E of the 32d were attacking an enemy strong point on POINT ABLE. It was reduced during the early morning hours of the 21st. (20) Following this the 3d Battalion, minus Company L, began its move to the final assembly area near the positions of Company L. This entailed a slow tortuous climb and descent, during the course

(19) Personal knowledge

(20) A-3, p. 13

of which the battalion came under roving machine gun fire from the high ground west of SARANA NOSE. The assembly area was reached successfully, however, closing at 1500 hours. Reconnaissance and planning for the attack of next morning was begun. Casualties sustained by the battalion during the fighting in MASSACRE VALLEY had reduced its strength to a total of about 550. The three rifle company commanders and the heavy weapons company commander had been among the casualties. Clothing and footwear was inadequate and wet. Morale was considered as good, despite this. (21)

Across the valley the enemy was busily engaged in preparing for the expected attack. A diary, found later on an enemy dead soldier, stated under the dateline 21 May -- "We strengthened our position on SARANA NOSE". (22)

Lieutenant Goto's 4th Company, 303d Japanese Infantry Battalion, with remnants of the 2d Company, defended SARANA NOSE. Their positions dominated both CHICHAGOF and SARANA VALLEYS. Directly across SARANA VALLEY the Americans had moved into positions for what to Lieutenant Goto and his men must have appeared an impossible task -- an attack across some 700 yards of flat, bare, tundra. (23)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK (See Map C) (24)

The line of departure selected was the edge of SARANA VALLEY below POINT ABLE and facing SARANA NOSE. H-Hour was set for 0650 hours. The plan was to attack with Companies I and K abreast (K on the right), with Company L in reserve.

(21) Personal knowledge

(22) A-4

(23) A-5, p. 88

(24) Personal knowledge; Statements of Lt. Colonel Lee Wallace, 10 March 1950 and Lt. George M. Schwant, 1 March 1950.

The assault companies were to push rapidly across the valley floor, seize the nose, reorganize, and send out patrols forward and to the flanks.

Company L was to attack by fire, initially, rejoining the battalion on the objective for mopping up operations. Company M, reinforced by the fires of three heavy weapons companies, was to support the attack with overhead fires from positions on and in the vicinity of ENGINEER HILL. The regiment's 37's were to add their fires. Four batteries of artillery (105mm) and a section of 75mm pack howitzers were in direct support. A ten minute preparation was to be fired. After H-Hour supporting fires would continue until fires were masked on the objective. Due to the steepness of the nose it was believed that supporting fires of machine guns could assist during the assault.

A squad from Company L, reinforced by a section of light machine guns was to protect the right flank from positions near the southwest tip of LAKE NICHOLAS.

The S-4 and the A & P Platoon Leader were to dump ammunition on position after establishing a supply point on ENGINEER HILL. This would be done the night before the attack and was a back breaking job for the tired men of the A & P Platoon. A K ration would be issued prior to the attack. No plans were made for a hot meal or even hot coffee at this time, as ammunition and "K's" had to be hand carried forward, and facilities were not available in this position.

The battalion command post was to be located in a draw at the base of POINT ABLE near the line of departure. The aid station was to be set up in a nearby draw. Both locations

were selected to provide access from the valley floor for casualties and messengers. An observation post was selected on the high ground to the right of ENGINEER HILL.

MOVEMENT TO THE LINE OF DEPARTURE AND FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ATTACK (25)

The battalion operations order was issued by Major Siddens at 212300 May. At 0430 hours the following morning Companies K and I began moving from their assembly areas to attack positions in draws just to the rear of the line of departure. Although the distance was short, the footing was treacherous in the foggy darkness and movement was extremely difficult.

At about the same time Major Wallace, the executive officer, began displacing the command post and aid station forward. The battalion commander and the S-2 moved up to the OP, which afforded excellent observation of the area except that of the attack positions. Wire was laid to the command post and OP. Apparently everything was set for the jump-off.

NARRATION

THE ATTACK (See Map C)

Company K, commanded by Captain Charles T. Frazee, crossed the line of departure at 220650 and began moving out into the valley. Strangely, nothing could be seen of Company I from the Battalion OP. The battalion commander, Major Siddens, was greatly concerned over this and immedi-

(25) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lt. Col. Lee Wallace, 10 March 1950.

ately left the OP at a run towards the line of departure, with the S-2 trailing behind.

For the moment let us leave the mystery of Company I's failure to jump-off and see how Company K was faring. As the men of K deployed into SARANA VALLEY, over their heads streamed a beautiful ceiling of fire. For 10 minutes before the jump-off, the well-coordinated preparation had been plastering SARANA NOSE with what appeared to be sheets of fire. At exactly 0640, 32 heavy machine guns, 8 light machine guns, 14 A/T guns (37mm), 23 mortars (81mm) 16-105's, and 2-75mm pack howitzers, had opened fire on the objective. Following the preparation, fire from these weapons continued at a rapid rate as K Company advanced over the valley floor. (26)

Since the supporting fires played such an important part in the attack, it is fitting that a detailed description be given. SARANA NOSE could be expected to be strongly defended, however location of specific targets had been extremely difficult. The Japanese had done a masterful job of camouflage. (27) Some 10 days earlier, Lt. Paulson who with his reinforced platoon had been assigned the mission of protecting the right flank of the Southern Force, had climbed to the top of GILBERT RIDGE. Here he and his men had observed an estimated 300 Japs improving the defenses and moving supplies on SARANA NOSE. (28)

The Japs having cleverly constructed and hidden his defenses on the nose created the necessity of large area coverage by our supporting fires. Accordingly, the nose itself and the rising slopes of the ridge to the rear were divided into sectors and assigned to the supporting units. Tracers were used

(26) Personal knowledge

(27) Personal knowledge

(28) A-3, p. 28

to allow gunners to shift higher on the nose as the troops advanced. This sensible and militarily correct coordination paid off as we shall later see.

Shifting now to the action in the valley, we find K Company continuing it's rapid advance toward the objective under the overhead streams of fire. Meanwhile somewhat higher on SARANA NOSE the mortars and artillery were pounding the Japanese support positions with great intensity.

There was practically no resistance to Company K's deployed (squad columns) movement on the valley floor. The saturation of fire had the enemy's head well down. Neither were the battalion's installations being bothered at this stage by enemy fire. No fire to speak of was directed at the spouting machine guns on the forward edge of ENGINEER HILL. Smoke from these guns could easily have been observed by the enemy if he had been inclined to look. The American's fire was just too overwhelming. The lone casualty, so far, to our forces was an artillery radio operator who was killed as he moved down ENGINEER HILL by long range sniping from high ground to the left of CHICHAGOF VALLEY.

By now Major Siddens had reached I Company's attack position and found it still there. Investigation as to why the Company had not jumped off on time revealed these circumstances. The company commander, Lt. Ward Redmond, had been leading his company from the assembly area to the attack position at the base of the mountain. He frequently halted the company while he reconnoitered the ground ahead. While doing this he fell, injuring a leg, and it was necessary to evacuate him. As a result the company failed to reach the line of departure on time.

As soon as Major Siddens reached I Company, he got it started off across the valley. By this time K Company had reached SARANA NOSE and had begun the climb up the initially almost vertical slopes. In effect the attack was being made by one company just now; I Company was still across the valley to the rear. (29)

K Company's first resistance materialized as it reached the base of the nose. It came in the form of sporadic mortar and artillery fire. As it developed later there was a mountain howitzer high up on the ridge ^{Reverse slope - use of OP's & surv.} behind the nose. Two of K's sergeants were wounded by this fire, and sergeants were at a premium, considering the small numbers left in the company after the Massacre fight. Two more soldiers were wounded by another burst.

As the leading elements of the company crossed the first string of enemy foxholes they appeared to be deserted. While the company climbed, the machine gunners back on ENGINEER HILL raised the fire a little higher and a little higher, coordinating beautifully with the assaulting troops. It would have been perfect except for two men wounded by rounds dropping into the troops. This was probably caused by hot barrels. (30)

Suddenly, Lt. Thayer, a platoon leader, noticed that Japs were huddled deep in some of the apparently vacant foxholes ^{hoping we would by-pass them from exp. fire} his platoon was overrunning. He and Staff Sergeant Chester H. Brown started mopping them up. Lt. Thayer killed 15 enemy and Sergeant Brown killed ten, in their holes.

While this was going on the scouts were probing trenches a short distance ahead and were engaging the enemy at close

(29) Personal knowledge

(30) A-3, p. 70

hurried to report this information to Lt. Thayer. The light machine guns were brought forward, one sited to fire forward, and the other to cover the left flank. As the flank gunner was setting up his gun, he observed an enemy light machine gun to his left about 50 yards away, and 25 yards further, a heavy machine gun, both firing on I and L Companies in the valley. Our light machine gun crews knocked out these two guns. (34) The machine gunners were justly proud of this feat and later pointed out the heavy machine gun to the S-2. It was perfectly sited to cover both CHICHAGOF and SARANA VALLEYS with plunging fire. Apparently, the reason it did not retard K Company's advance across the valley was that the gunners had been pinned down by the terrific volume of supporting fire. It could have caused much trouble. (35)

The next occurrence was a small counterattack of about 15 enemy led by an officer waving his saber. It came from the left flank -- from around the CHICHAGOF VALLEY side, and hit the machine guns. Thereafter, followed a small sized battle at close quarters -- with pistols, grenades, and bayonets. The Japanese were killed while K Company sustained one casualty from the action.

Over on the company's right flank the fight was continuing, with 4 casualties to the Americans in another short, bitter skirmish. (36)

I & L Companies reached the nose and began climbing the slopes of the left portion, while K Company took time out to have a K ration and reorganize. (37)

(34) A-3, p. 71

(35) Personal knowledge

(36) A-3, p. 71

(37) A-3, p. 72

The battalion commander and the command group arrived on the nose. High up, on a small shelf, an enemy 37mm gun began firing. It attempted to place fire on the bottom slopes of the nose, but it could not depress sufficiently and the shells were landing about 50 yards out in the valley. K Company's mortars laid on the gun, silencing it. (38)

While the fight was going on Lt. Murphy, the Battalion S-4, and Lt. Schwant, the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon Leader, were busily engaged with supply. They were moving supplies and ammunition from the supply point to the forward edge of ENGINEER HILL. Everything had to be hand carried, vehicles were useless. From there to the valley floor was a steep drop of about 250 feet. So the tired men of the A & P Platoon just slid the cases down to the valley. They planned to set up a forward supply point in a draw at the base of SARANA NOSE. Since the valley was still under long range fires the battalion commander ordered the move to be made under cover of darkness. When consideration is given to the amounts of ammunition, rations, etc., required to maintain even a depleted battalion, the enormity of the job of moving every item on the backs of man can be readily seen. (39)

When the bulk of the battalion had reached the objective, the battalion commander, Major Siddens, ordered the three companies to move higher up the nose for the purpose of mopping up and organizing for defense. The companies were to advance abreast, I on the right, K in the center, and L on the left. Patrols were sent out along the high ground towards SARANA BAY, to SARANA PEAK and along the ridge beyond the peak. The patrol

(38) Personal knowledge

(39) Statement of Lt. Schwant, 1 March 1950

to the right flank returned with a negative report, but the patrol to the ridge above reported enemy in the vicinity of MIDDLE PEAK. (40)

As L Company moved up the slopes on the left, it was fired on by a heavy machine gun. Corporal Manges, a squad leader, crawled to close range while covered by members of his squad and knocked out the gun. (41) This ended all resistance on the objective.

Things quieted down and the battalion settled down to organizing the defense. All elements had closed on the objective by 1500 except the A & P Platoon. The battalion commander made an inspection of the battalion area for the purpose of sizing up the situation and checking weapon dispositions. Morale was high after the very successful attack and Major Siddens was well pleased with the job well done. Incidentally the Major received a promotion a few days later.

While there has been little mention of the S-3, much credit must be given to Captain Earl Nelson for his assistance in planning the attack and coordination of fires. The attack went off in fine style even with the failure of I Company to attack on time.

All about lay the evidence of success. There were approximately 75 enemy dead counted. Our casualties amounted to some 12 men. K Company with a strength of slightly under 100 had borne the brunt of the attack.

No prisoners were taken so there was no problem here. The enemy dead were left where they fell. The cold took care of this sanitary problem. An interesting sidelight was the fact

(40) Personal knowledge

(41) A-3, p. 73

that many of the enemy dead were wearing gas masks or had them partially on. The Japs evidently had mistaken white phosphorus for gas. (42)

A recapitulation of ammunition expenditures shows that during the short preparation and supporting fires the heavy machine guns fired an average of 3000 rounds per gun; the lights, 1500 rounds per gun; mortars, 100 rounds per gun, and the same for the 37's. (43)

An interesting point about shellfire was the difference in the effects of ours as compared to the Japanese. The Japanese shellfire (what little there was) fell into SARANA VALLEY which has a tundra top. Here the shells would bury themselves before exploding, consequently doing little damage. Compared to this, our artillery and mortar fire was landing among the rocks of the nose and ridge, where a highly desirable bursting radius was obtained.

Evacuation of the wounded posed quite a problem during the attack just as it had in previous actions. The medics overcame tough obstacles in getting the relatively small number of casualties back to the aid station, but the job was done. The less serious cases were evacuated to Division installations on MASSACRE BEACH, while the more serious cases were placed aboard ship for hospitalization in the States. (44)

That night as the battalion settled down to digging in and a few hours rest there were few physical comforts to cheer the men. They had no rolls or sleeping bags. Water supply consisted of snow. Clothing was worn and torn. The logger boots were still wet. Digging in the rocky mountain side was most

(42) Personal knowledge
(43) Personal knowledge
(44) Personal knowledge

difficult.

Even with these adversities, morale was high. They had given the enemy a licking -- and they knew the battle's end could not be far off. (45)

SUMMARY

In summary of the operation it may be stated that the attack was highly successful. A great measure of it's success can be attributed to the actions of the battalion commander in following the principles of war and his energetic troop leading. Every company commander except the Battalion Headquarters Company Commander had been lost in the MASSACRE VALLEY fighting, but the junior leaders who took over had every confidence in their battalion commander.

The enemy doubtless considered SARANA NOSE a serious loss. Since the day of the landings they had been busy improving its defenses. They knew the ridges on the flanks of CHICHAGOF VALLEY must be held to deny the Americans use of the valley. They suffered a crushing defeat on SARANA NOSE. For the Americans it was another big step towards their final victory which came eight days later on the beaches of CHICHAGOF HARBOR.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. THE OBJECTIVE

The objective assigned the 3d Battalion was a most important one. From the enemy viewpoint it was one which commanded all approaches except one. That would have been an amphibious

(45) Personal knowledge

LOC
approach from the rear. This would have entailed an attack without suitable routes for supply since it would have been an approach entirely over mountains, after landing.

Neither CHICHAGOF VALLEY nor SARANA VALLEY could have been used by our forces until the objective was taken. By this time the Americans had learned (the hard way) that valleys cannot be used as routes for attack, supply, or other purposes, without first securing the high ground on either side. The objective, SARANA NOSE, was the first step in clearing the mountain ridge on the east of CHICHAGOF VALLEY. Attacks had also begun on the ridge to the west of the valley. Once the attacks on the ridges had progressed sufficiently, the valley could be used for supply and evacuation, in support of further attacks.

2. SUPPORTING FIRES

The principle of mass refers to combat power, not mere numbers of men. It means having superior combat power at the decisive point at the decisive time.

TOPIC SENTENCE
These teachings were well borne out in the 3d Battalion's attack. The objective was taken not by the weight of numbers but rather by the concentrated combat power. In effect, K Company alone took SARANA NOSE, insofar as the actual assault was concerned, but the mass of supporting fires made this possible. It is extremely doubtful that the valley could have been crossed at all without the neutralizing effect of the fires. As a result the company not only maneuvered across the valley with little trouble, but actually arrived on the objective before receiving any effective resistance.

3. SURPRISE

The battalion moved into its final assembly area during daylight hours the day prior to the attack. While moving into this assembly area the battalion came under fire and observation. Consequently the enemy was well aware that an attack was coming. Possibly if the movement to the final assembly area had been made at night a high degree of surprise could have been attained. Although the Japanese expected an attack, a measure of surprise was achieved through K Company's speed in crossing the valley and the devastating fires which kept the enemy's head down until the company was on top of him. Even this degree of surprise contributed to the success of the attack and the low number of casualties.

4. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

The Americans on ATTU are considered to have been poorly clothed for operations in cold mountainous terrain. The men were constantly cold, wet, and uncomfortable. The logger type boots were inadequate. Shoe-pacs would have served better, at least feet could have been kept dry. The ALASKA type field jacket failed to keep out the biting winds. It is believed that parkas would have been much better.

The standard infantry weapons performed well, but vehicles, particularly trucks, were practically useless as they could not negotiate the tundra. This posed a severe problem for supply. For combat in this terrain, a vehicle which could move in snow and over tundra would have solved many problems.

5. TRAINING

Difficulties encountered by the battalion in moving into the assembly areas and the subsequent move to attack positions probably would have been reduced had the outfit received mountain training prior to entry into combat. It will be remembered that I Company failed to jump off on time, partly attributable to difficulty of movement to the line of departure. Current Army Field Forces' policy is to have all infantry divisions receive a degree of training for mountain operations. The 3d Battalion had trained in the CALIFORNIA desert as part of the then motorized 7th Division. Amphibious training was conducted before entry into combat and was greatly helpful in the landing operations. But the lack of mountain training was a definite shortcoming in the efficiency of the unit, particularly in movement and supply techniques.

6. LEADERSHIP

It has been stated that the leadership exercised by the Battalion Commander, Major Siddens, was instrumental in the successful attack. When I Company failed to cross the line of departure on time, Major Siddens personally cleared the apparent confusion of the company and got it on its way to the objective. This should not have been necessary. The officers of the company knew the time of jump off. They should have provided the leadership required after Lieutenant Redmond was injured. The senior officer should have taken immediate steps to correct the situation.

7. SIMPLICITY OF PLANS AND OPERATIONS

*more
assaultment*

Combat entails confusion. In combat the simple way is the best way. Simple plans, orders, and formations smooth the way for subordinate units. The attack of the 3d Battalion was a simple one. The plans and orders were simple. There were no complicated maneuvers to perform. The men assaulting the objective knew what to do; the men firing in support knew what to do -- they did it, and accomplished the battalion's mission.

LESSONS

the people will know, but must always be true.

1. Adjacent heights must be secured before advances in valleys can be made.
2. Massed supporting fires with area coverage should be employed when assaulting troops must advance over open terrain.
3. Surprise is possible over open ground and during daylight hours if supporting fires and assault echelons are closely coordinated. *use of smoke*
4. Adequate clothing and equipment of proper types should be provided for special operations.
5. At least a degree of mountain training should be conducted for contemplated mountain operations.
6. Subordinate leaders must be trained to exercise initiative in the absence of superiors.
7. Simplicity of operations in combat by small units helps pave the way to success.