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TITLE

THE LOSS OF LEADERS IN COMBAT MUST BE ANTICIPATED

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

- (1) The Operation of E Company, 151st Infantry (38th Division) at Caballo Island, P.I., 27 March-10 April, 1945.
- (2) The Operations of K Company, 242nd Infantry (42nd Division) in an Attack in the Handt Mountains, Alsace, France, 14-15 March, 1945.
- (3) The Operations of A Company, 184th Infantry (7th Infantry Division) on Bamboo Ridge, Leyte, P.I. 27 Nov.-1 Dec., 1944.
- (4) The Operations of a Task Force of Combat Command "B" (4th Armored Division) at Baerendorf, France, 23-24 Nov., 1944.

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THE LOSS OF LEADERS IN COMBAT
MUST BE ANTICIPATED

Far back in the annals of history; battles, campaigns and wars have been won and lost as a direct result of the quality of leadership. Many nations of the past have enjoyed great successes under an outstanding leader or general, until his untimely death, when they would lose power and sink into oblivion as far as a great military nation was concerned.

The nations that did keep this so-called world power for a longer period were those whose leaders had the foresight to train a successor or their country just happened to have another untried leader who, in spite of all handicaps, was successful.

We can readily see that the problem of replacing leaders has grown steadily since early history due to the constant change in military tactics which places more responsibility on the small unit leader. Because of new innovations such as amphibious assaults, air drops and armored infantry coordination; and new inventions such as A bombs and proximity fuzes, modern armies of today stress the importance of leadership and training of officers and non-commissioned officers so that replacement in battle would be a routine matter.

While this is a step in the right direction, the overall training for replacement of leaders is a basic orientation and is not adequate to assure success. It will be seldom if ever that a junior leader will assume command in a stereotyped classroom situation. This brings us down to the im-

portance of constant training of junior leaders in the field while in combat; and more important, keeping them informed of the situation so that they are cognizant of the fact that they might take command.

Knowing this, a junior leader is prepared to replace a fallen leader on a minutes notice and can continue his particular phase of the operation without undue loss of time, which in many cases would be costly.

The four following examples will show both successful and unsuccessful operations whose success or failure was due to a great extent to the ability to replace the loss of leaders in battle.

EXAMPLE I

At 1900, 27 March, 1945, the 2nd Battalion, 151st Infantry, 38th Infantry Division, jumped off from Corregidor in the Philippine Islands with E Company in assault, followed by G Company and H Company. F Company was left on Corregidor as reserve.

Prior to the attack, the Company Commander took his Platoon Leaders, Platoon Sergeants and Squad Leaders to a vantage point where they could see Caballo Island and coordinated their map study with the terrain. The Company Commander let each man ask questions until all were familiar with their jobs and that of their immediate superiors.

By late afternoon of 3 April, after a vicious struggle, E Company had control of Caballo Island and was relieved by G Company. They returned to Corregidor for a much needed rest.

It was known that there were many Japs left on the island who had submerged into many caves and tunnels, and the E Company Commander was notified that they were expected to come out after dark. If this happened, E Company would return immediately. In taking Caballo Island casualties were heavy, but what was left of the company was to return by LCM for the approximately two-mile trip.

As predicted the Japs came out from their caves, tunnels and subterranean passages and attacked, at 0505, 4 April, 1945. E Company shoved off for Caballo from San Jose Beach on Corregidor.

The plan was to land one squad and one officer on the south beach at the base of Hill 2 to reinforce G Company. The remainder of the company was to continue on the LCM to the east beach and destroy all enemy between east beach and Hill 2 (See Map A).

The 2nd Platoon Leader was a casualty from the previous encounter and was replaced by the Platoon Sergeant, who was thoroughly oriented before taking off.

The shores of the south beach were exceedingly rocky and the coxswain feared that if he pulled the LCM in too close to the shore he would beach the boat. Thus, he stopped the LCM and lowered the ramp before the boat reached the shore. The one officer and one squad debarked from the LCM into water nearly neck deep. The last man to leave the LCM was the BAR man. As he stepped off the ramp, a wave pushed the LCM forward and pinned his leg under the ramp. The Company Executive Officer and the Platoon Sergeant of the 2nd Platoon ran out on the ramp and pulled him back into the boat. At the same time the coxswain raised

raised the ramp and started backing the LCM out. As the LCM turned, an enemy machine gun located on the plateau of Hill 2 fired into the LCM hitting the Platoon Sergeant of 2nd Platoon and one other man. The LCM continued on to the east beach. En route, aid was given to the two wounded men and they were left on the LCM. Inasmuch as the 2nd Platoon was again without a leader, the Company Commander told the Executive Officer to take charge of the platoon.

The 2nd Platoon, one officer and seven men, moved to the left as they debarked. Their mission was to destroy any enemy on the southeast end of the island. The 1st and 3rd Platoons moved directly inland to relieve the situation on Hill 1 around the Battalion CP.

The 2nd Platoon met no resistance and rejoined the company on Hill 1. The 1st and 3rd Platoons killed several of the enemy as they moved up and around Hill 1, where they killed most of the enemy around the Battalion CP. G Company, from the plateau, observed twelve of the enemy going into a cave on the south side of Hill 1. They radioed this information to E Company.

The Company Commander ordered the Company Executive Officer, then acting 2nd Platoon Leader, to take a detail and "blow" the cave. The Company Executive Officer ordered three men to go with him to seal the cave. After the cave was demolished, at about 1000, 4 April, 1945, the E Company Commander was called to Battalion Headquarters to take over the job of Battalion Executive Officer. This made the Company Executive Officer, then acting as 2nd Platoon Leader, the Company Commander.

The company continued to patrol the beaches. The 3rd Platoon patrolled the beach on the south side of the island and found no enemy. The 1st Platoon patrolled the beach on the north side and killed seven. The company returned to Hill 1 and set up a perimeter around the Battalion CP for the night. For the next six days, the company remained at this location, patrolling the island every day to destroy any enemy that had slipped out of the pits during the night.

On 10 April, 1945, E Company received orders to withdraw from Caballo Island and were moved back to reorganize for their next mission.

(This historical example taken from the personal experience monograph of Captain Clarence K Sells, Infantry, on file in the Infantry School Library, Ft. Benning, Ga.)

DISCUSSION

While this was a small operation in the vast Pacific theatre, the lessons brought out were of major significance. First, the Company Commander, realizing the importance of the fact that his key personnel must know the situation and understand their job, oriented them individually prior to jumping off. It is true that this is not always possible to the extent accomplished here but it must be done somewhat, the more detailed the better.

Also, it is noted that the Company Commander stressed the importance of each man knowing the job of his immediate superior. This point is extremely important in the fact

that a man can know his own job thoroughly but if he is unaware that he might be called upon to assume command of his unit, and does not know the duties of his superior; the continuity of the operation is delayed or lost.

This operation, particularly with regards to assumption of command, was successful in the fact that when the 2nd Platoon Leader was wounded, the Platoon Sergeant took over with a prior orientation and a knowledge of what to do. When the Platoon Sergeant became a casualty, the Squad Leader could have very well taken over, but the Company Commander wanted an officer with the party. The Executive Officer, having an overall knowledge of the mission, took the platoon on a minutes notice without taking time for instruction. In many cases like this, time taken for orientation could be costly.

Then, when the Company Commander was called to Battalion CP to take over as Battalion Executive--and from this historical example it is rather obvious why he was the Company Commander chosen--the Executive Officer was again able to assume a different task without any orientation or delay.

Thus, the Company Commander's realization that leaders will be lost in battle and must be replaced without delay, added materially to the success of this operation.

EXAMPLE LI

In the Handt Mountains, Alsace, France, at 0645, 15 March, 1945, K Company moved across the line of departure as one of the assault companies of the 3rd Battalion, 242nd

Infantry, 42nd Division. The Battalion was attacking northeast from a line held by the 117th Cavalry Squadron. K Company was attacking on the right of the Battalion Zone with L Company on the left and I Company in reserve. K Company, after a short reconnaissance by the Company Commander and his platoon leaders, decided to attack with two platoons abreast, the 1st on the right and the 2nd on the left, with the 3rd in reserve.

The mission of the Battalion was to cut the Bitcher-Haguenau road, approximately 6000 yards to the northeast. The mission of K Company was the same with the added clause "to clear all enemy to your immediate front".

The company moved approximately 150 yards forward when the 2nd Platoon received heavy rifle and machine pistol fire from the woods in E Company Zone on the left, (See Point A, Map B). The platoon returned this fire as they deployed.

When the 2nd Platoon Leader had deployed initially, the left squad moved too far to the left. As they started to close on Point A, by fire and maneuver, they were caught in a mine field. The casualties of this squad were nearly one hundred per cent. The Platoon Leader committed his support squad on the right flank and in leading them into position was seriously wounded. The Platoon Sergeant took charge and attempted to move the Platoon forward. As the two remaining squads started forward, they also ran into the mines. The Platoon Sergeant then discovered that the mine field did not end at the trail as previously reported, but extended diagonally to the rear. The enemy was covering this area with sporadic fire and a tree burst from a mortar round

wounded the Platoon Sergeant.

Meanwhile, upon hearing the fire fight to their left the 1st Platoon changed its direction of attack, cutting in front of the 2nd Platoon and engaging the enemy also at Point A.

The Company Commander immediately went to the 1st Platoon and started them out on their proper route of advance and returned to his CP. As soon as they started out, they were tied down by fire from Point B. The Company Commander called for artillery on Point B and while the Forward Observer was getting it, he received a message from the 2nd Platoon, that the Platoon Leader was wounded. He left for the Platoon Area immediately and by the time he arrived he found that the Platoon Sergeant was also a casualty. The Platoon was disorganized and in utter confusion. The Platoon Guide either didn't know he was in charge or, at least, had done nothing about it. The action at the time consisted of men running into mines or trying to find cover from the mortar fire. The Company Commander ordered the Platoon Guide to reorganize the Platoon and resume firing. The Company Commander left the area and was subsequently wounded himself.

At 0945, the Company Executive Officer, who was now in command, sent for the three Platoon Leaders to see if he could get the company out of the state of chaos and get them moving again. This was necessary as he himself had not been oriented before the attack and his only information regarding the situation was what the Company Commander gave him between the time he was wounded until he was evacuated.

When the Platoon Guide reported as in charge of the

2nd Platoon, he stated that the platoon consisted of himself and one other man. The balance of the platoon were casualties. The Executive Officer, or now Company Commander, told the 1st Sergeant to form litter bearer teams with available men around the CP and with the Platoon Sergeant as a guide, to go and evacuate the casualties of the 2nd Platoon.

Then after gaining an understanding of the situation, the Executive Officer (now Company Commander) committed the 3rd Platoon and using them in the assault, proceeded to capture the Company objectives shortly after 1130 hours.

(From the personal experience monograph of Captain John D Hoile, Infantry, on file in the Library, The Infantry School, Ft. Benning, Ga.)

DISCUSSION

In the first place, it is not extraordinary that the subordinate leaders of K Company were not oriented and briefed as to the duties of their next higher leader when they were seemingly confused as to their own duties.

If the Squad Leader of the left squad of the 2nd Platoon had had more knowledge of the Platoon Picture, he would have known he was heading into L Company's sector and a mine field. If the 1st Platoon had known more of the Company operation, it is not likely that they would have changed direction of attack. The fact that the Platoon Guide was not anticipating taking charge of his platoon is obvious. There was more time lost when the Company Commander, realizing that the executive Officer knew nothing of the sit-

uation, had to try to orient him under adverse conditions.

It is evident that the losses among the key personnel of the company were not anticipated. They were not oriented as to the situation confronting the next higher leader and were not kept abreast of the situation as the operation went along.

If these factors had been covered prior to and during the attack, there would have been a great saving in time and personnel.

EXAMPLE III

The 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry, 7th Division, was ordered to seal a penetration in our lines northeast of Kamulaan, on Leyte, P.I. It was decided that A Company would attack Bamboo Ridge as a part of the operation. The ridge was only 100 yards wide by 400 yards long, so the Company Commander decided to attack with a column of platoons, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd in that order.

Prior to the attack, the Company Commander took his Platoon Leaders and Platoon Sergeants to a spot about 75 yards from a dense thicket on the ridge. Due to this density, it was impossible to see all of the Jap locations, but a few groups could be seen digging in. After this orientation they returned to prepare for the attack.

At 0855, Company A crossed the line of departure, (see Map C) moving rapidly across the open ground under the protecting cover of the supporting artillery, machine gun and mortar fire. After advancing about one hundred and fifty

yards, and just as the leading elements of the 1st Platoon reached the edge of the thicket, the enemy opened up with intense automatic weapons fire, killing four men, two of whom were Squad Leaders, and wounding seven, including the Platoon Leader. The attack immediately bogged down and the company was pulled back to the line of departure to effect a reorganization, and to permit the artillery and mortars to plaster the area again.

The Platoon Sergeant took command the instant the Platoon Leader fell and brought the platoon back in an orderly manner. The two assistant Squad Leaders went to work immediately and in a short time the platoon was reorganized.

Orders were issued passing the 2nd and 3rd Platoons through the 1st Platoon, which was reconstituted as the company support.

The 2nd Platoon led off the second attack and this time managed to penetrate about fifty yards into the thicket before frontal and enfilade fire from numerous automatic weapons again forced withdrawal to the line of departure. Casualties from this attempt amounted to five wounded. Of these five wounded, one was a Squad Leader and one was his assistant. Without orders the BAR man took command and reorganized his squad.

Although many Japs could be seen and heard within the thicket, the bamboo was too dense for our small arms fire to be rendered effectively. The Japs, of course, had carefully cleared fire lanes that were almost impossible to detect but seemed to cover the entire area.

After a brief discussion with the battalion commander,

the Company Commander requested the 81mm mortars fire HE heavy into the thicket while the artillery fire air bursts at tree-top level in an attempt to reduce and eliminate the cover and concealment afforded by the bamboo. This request was approved and at 1430 hours everything opened up and a terrific concentration fell on the hapless Japs.

The company moved in swiftly; the bamboo was burned and ripped to shreds but many Japs still remained and were able to fight. However, things were now on a more equal basis as most of the cover and concealment had been destroyed. The ridge was too narrow to permit any maneuvering element; it was merely a case of employing assault fire, moving rapidly and aggressively, and mopping up as the advance progresses.

By this time the supporting fires of all weapons had been masked, and the fight developed into one between infantrymen, with no quarter asked or given.

The attack was moving forward swiftly and smoothly; the 2nd and 3rd Platoons had cleared the thicket and were continuing their advance along the ridge; the 1st Platoon was moving more slowly and making a final mop-up for any Japs that may have been by-passed or overlooked. As the light machine gun section, which was following the 3rd Platoon, began emerging from the thicket on the far side, the Japs fired four artillery volleys of approximately ten rounds per volley in this area. This fire practically decimated the light machine gun section, killing one man and wounding six. The 1st and 3rd Platoons suffered a total of nine casualties from this action, of which only three were evacuated. Notwithstanding, all elements of the company

continued their advance and by 1600 hours the area was combed clean.

Altogether one hundred and nine dead Japs were counted in the thicket and twelve machine guns were removed. A later check recovered an additional seventeen machine guns from this area. It was estimated that a hundred more Japs had pulled off the ridge to escape the artillery fire.

Orders had previously been issued for a defense sector to be occupied when the ridge was cleared. This was immediately effected and the company began to consolidate positions for the night.

(This example taken from the personal experience monograph of Captain Norvan E. Smith, Infantry, on file in The Infantry School Library, Ft. Benning, Ga.)

DISCUSSION

The first item brought out in this example is the fact that the Company Commander oriented his subordinates as best he could so that they could pass the information and plan to their units.

It is obvious that they had been trained to anticipate the loss of their leaders as brought out by the fact that in the midst of terrific automatic fire, the Platoon Sergeant took charge and effected an orderly withdrawal when the Platoon Leader was wounded. Also on another occasion when two Squad Leaders were wounded, their assistants assumed command on a moments notice. The lesson that the loss of

leaders was anticipated was brought out to a marked degree when the BAR man assumed command of his squad when his Squad Leader and assistant were killed. An act like this seldom just happens. This man was trained to anticipate just such an emergency. While it is impossible to bring this point out in this example, in an interview with the Company Commander, he stated "We had a Division CG who was very definite on the subject of subordinate leaders anticipating the next higher command. He demanded it of the officers and non-commissioned officers at all times." *

This example has brought out the fact that we were outnumbered by the enemy, fighting on terrain of their choosing, with all the adversities the dense jungle holds, and yet the company had control of the situation in spite of the rapid turnover of subordinate leaders. The loss of leaders in battle was definitely anticipated.

*From an interview with Capt. Norvan E. Smith, Infantry, USA.

EXAMPLE IV

Company B, 53rd Armored Infantry, a part of the advance guard of Combat Command "B", 4th Armored Division, was moving north on the road between Gasselming and Baerendorf, in the Saar Valley, France, on 24 November, 1944. At 1000 hours, approximately 700 yards east of the town, the column was halted by enemy fire and the attack plan was formulated. (See Map D)

B Company, 53rd Armored Infantry, was to dismount,

seize the bridge for the tanks and deploy in the valley preparatory to the assault on the town of Baerendorf, the enemy strong point blocking the path of the task force. C Company, 8th Tank Battalion, was to cross the bridge after Company B and attack the town in conjunction with the infantry.

B Company and the tanks moved out to seize the bridge. Company B crossed the bridge and deployed and was lying in the ditches on either side of the road. The tanks moved across the bridge with the loss of one tank from a mine. As the tanks spread out on the plain before the town, the infantry moved into position to their rear, a platoon of infantry teamed up with a platoon of tanks.

The advance continued and the infantry disappeared into the town, enveloping it left, right and center. The center platoon, only, having a platoon of tanks actually following it into the town proper. The right and left tank platoons dispersed in the surrounding orchards and fields and proceeded to fire at point blank range into the town.

It was now about 1700 hours and repeated attempts to raise B Company on the radio had been fruitless, so the Task Force Commander moved into the town to find out for himself what the situation was.

Inquiry as to the whereabouts of officers or NCOs elicited no coherent information. He called to C Company Commander, 8th Tank Battalion, and found that he was reassembling his tanks on the south side of the town in an orchard. He had not seen the B Company Commander since the start of the action in the town. The Task Force Commander immediately ordered C Company Commander to push on over

the north bridge and to take up reverse slope defensive positions on the hill due north of town and to block any penetration into the town from that direction.

The Task Force Commander continued to look for an officer or NCO of B Company. He saw a familiar figure walking dazedly down the street. It was B Company Commander who was crying and incapable of making coherent conversation. However he did manage to lead the Task Force Commander to his CP in a deep cellar of a battered house and there, huddled together, were the Company Executive Officer and a few enlisted men.

A query as to why the Executive Officer was holed up at the Company CP when no one was making any attempt at reorganization, why the company was scattered without control, and why no defense had been set up, brought the response that both Platoon Leaders, the Forward Observer and all the sergeants had been killed, so what could be done? A few choice words from the Task Force Commander told him what could be done and in a few seconds, the Executive Officer left to reorganize the company.

It was now 1830 hours, The B Company Commander was evacuated. After leaving word for the Executive Officer of B Company to report his strength and dispositions, the Task Force Commander and his driver left.

After an hour's wait for a report from the Executive Officer of B Company, the Task Force Commander went back to the CP and found that the officer had not returned. The Task Force Commander realized that B Company was through as a force until it could be pulled out and reorganized.

He found a NCO of B Company and ordered him to round up as many men as he could and report back in ten minutes.

The Sergeant returned with approximately twenty men and a light machine gun, and was then led up the road to east bridge personally by the Task Force Commander so they could protect the tanks and hold the bridge. It was later found the Executive Officer was also a casualty. Who was left in command or who assumed command is still unknown. B Company ceased to exist as a rifle company.

(This historical example taken from the personal experience monograph of Major Henry A. Crosby, Infantry, on file in the Infantry School Library, Ft. Benning, Ga.)

DISCUSSION

In this example, it is brought out very plainly that there was no anticipation of replacing leaders in action. First, when the Company Commander was a casualty, the Executive Officer should have known the plans of reorganization. He should also have been anticipating taking command by having plans of his own formulated.

When the Executive Officer was ordered to reorganize the unit, it was evident that he made no arrangements for a subordinate leader or something would have been done when he did not return. The same situation evidently continued through all levels of the command or the Task Force Commander could have found some degree of coordination among the troops in the town.

This operation is a glaring example of where a Company Commander did not anticipate the loss of his subordinate leaders and the junior leaders were not trained or oriented to take command when needed.

The failure in this respect on the part of the Company Commander is a contributing factor in the loss of a rifle company.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we have seen where the anticipation of the loss of leadership has influenced the success of an operation. This lesson is the same as it was in early military history, only today it is of much more importance.

In analyzing the precautions a commander must take prior to battle, we see the following steps are necessary for successful leadership:

1. Junior Officers and non-commissioned officers must be trained in the duties of their next higher in command.
2. They must be oriented as to the overall plan of their unit and the next higher level previous to the operation.
3. They must know their commander's plans and kept abreast of changes so that they can anticipate his next move.

As to training, a leader himself can be well trained in the principles of leadership but if he is not training his subordinates constantly, his training is wasted. The

leader can have his plan for a subordinate to take over, but if his subordinate is not trained to anticipate the change, he is wasting his time.

With regard to orientation of subordinates, it is not always possible to be complete due to lack of time, but all time possible should be given to this phase of troop leading. In many cases this phase is neglected and in the event of casualties among leaders this neglect is obvious.

Taking into consideration the swift way a situation can change in battle, even if a subordinate is well oriented before battle and then is not kept abreast of the situation his success is also hampered. Any change in plans must be known to the subordinate.

Heavy casualties and loss of small units in the face of a greater number of enemy and against overwhelming odds can be condoned but the waste of all important time and human lives because of the failure of a subordinate leader to assume command definitely cannot. The failure to provide subordinate leaders is a dereliction of duty on the part of the commander.

Therefore the loss of leaders in battle must be anticipated to insure the overall success of our armies.

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