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OPERATIONS OF TROOP "A", 124TH CAVALRY (MARS TASK FORCE)
IN THE BATTLE OF NAM-PAK-KHA, 28 JANUARY-2 FEBRUARY 1945
(CENTRAL BURMA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Troop Commander)

Type of operation described: CAVALRY TROOP ATTACKING
IN JUNGLE AS INFANTRY UNIT.

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OPERATIONS OF TROOP "A", 124TH CAVALRY (MARS TASK FORCE)
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INTRODUCTION

Late in February, 1944 the first phase of the Allied Operation for the reconquest of Burma began. (1)

The purpose of this Allied offensive was to regain control of the land routes across Burma so that supplies could be transported to China. (MARS A)

The enormous tonnage of supplies which were required of the American and British Allies in order to keep China in the war had to be transported vast distances over sea, land and air. (2) With the Japanese controlling all of the sea ports of China, as well as the whole of French Indo-China, Thailand, and Burma, our Chinese Allies were sealed off by land and sea. This threw a tremendous strain on the air force which attempted to sustain the supply flow until a sea and land route could be reestablished. At the beginning of the campaign related in this monograph, supplies were being flown from India, across Burma, and into the interior of China. The objective of this campaign was to drive the enemy out of Burma so that the land and sea routes to China could be opened.

This operation was planned in late 1943. (3) At the time there was known to be a total of five Japanese Divisions in Burma which were disposed as shown on Map B. (4) The first phase, which was to be carried out by American

(1) A-1, p. 1; (2) A-1, p. 3; (3) A-1, p. 5; (4) A-1, p. 7.

and Chinese forces operating from bases in the vicinity of Ledo on the northwest border of Burma, had as its objective the capture of Myitkyina, the northern terminus of the Myitkyina - Mandalay railroad. (See Map B) Accomplishment of this first phase would permit the building of a road from Ledo to the Burma Road, and thus facilitate the overland transportation of supplies to China while succeeding phases of the campaign were being accomplished. At the conclusion of the campaign, supplies could again be brought in by sea to the port of Rangoon, carried by rail to Lashio and thence over the Burma Road to China as had been the case previous to the occupation of Burma by the Japanese. (See Map B) (5)

The first phase of this campaign was accomplished by the 3d of August, 1944, with the fall of Myitkyina.

The American and Chinese forces with which this operation was conducted consisted of one American RCT, the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), popularly known as Merrill's Marauders, and the Chinese 22d and 38th Divisions.

(6) The Marauders spear-headed the advance of this force all the way through northern Burma, and during the assault of the strongly held objective. This was the last offensive action of the Marauders, for with the end of this phase of the Burma Campaign, disease, fatigue, malnutrition and the normal attrition of jungle fighting had decimated their ranks. With a small cadre of the original Marauders, and many replacements, the unit was reorganized and redesignated

(5) A-1, p. 113; (6) A-1, p. 1.

as the 475th Infantry. (7)

ORGANIZATION AND MISSION

The second phase of the Central Burma Campaign was started from Myitkyina on the 15th of November, 1944, and was assigned to a specially organized American Force known as The Mars Task Force. (8) This task force was composed of a headquarters, the 475th Infantry (formerly the Marauders), and the 124th Cavalry which was to fight as infantry. (9) The organization of the two regiments differed as one was standard infantry and the other standard cavalry, but their equipment was the same. Organic transportation was by pack mules only, and the force was to be resupplied by air drop.

It was necessary to reorganize the 124th Cavalry Regiment, as they arrived in the theater understrength, and the equipment which was issued to them for the operation could not be properly employed under a standard horse cavalry organization. The result was a regiment consisting of three squadrons which were in effect three small but complete combat teams, each with a battery of 75-mm pack howitzer field artillery attached. The heavy weapons were contained in the headquarters troop of the squadron, and in the headquarters platoon of each line troop. The service and heavy weapons troops of the regiment were disbanded and the personnel used to strengthen the squadrons. (10)

Each rifle platoon had one 60-mm mortar squad armed

(7) A-3, p. 28; (8) A-3, p. 49; A-3, p. 28; (9) A-3, p. 33; (10) Personal knowledge.

with one 60-mm mortar. This mortar was the modified type equipped with a small base plate and a lanyard trigger. This permitted the weapon to be fired on a horizontal plane to give the shell a flat trajectory. It proved to be extremely effective against enemy bunkers which were too close to be reached by high angle fire. (11)

Training of the force was characteristic of that for the jungle, and emphasized small unit leadership and teamwork within small units. Discipline was emphasized to insure efficient and aggressive action on the part of small units and individuals when acting independently. Live ammunition was used in all combat problems to familiarize individuals with the effectiveness of their own and supporting fires.

The 475th RCT left Myitkyina on the 15th of November, 1944, moving south. During this time the 124th RCT continued training. (12)

It was not until the 16th of December, 1944, the the 124th RCT started on its mission. It moved in three squadron serials, each a day apart. (13)

The enemy situation was very vague at this time, as the Japanese had moved south after the fall of Myitkyina, and contact with them had been lost. Consequently the first objective of the task force was to develop the situation. A specific mission would be assigned later when the enemy situation was better known. For the present it was to move south on a prescribed route of march. (14)

(11) Personal knowledge; (12) A-3, p. 49; (13) A-3, p. 50; (14) Personal knowledge.

Two weeks after leaving its base at Myitkyina, the 124th RCT received its definite mission. It was to cut the Burma Road in the vicinity of Namphakka. (See Map C) In doing this it was to go by way of Bahmo and Mong Wi, rendezvousing with the 475th RCT in Mong Wi. (See Map C) By the 11th of January 1945, the two regimental combat teams and the forward command post of the Mars Task Force were assembled in Mong Wi. (See Map C) (15)

GENERAL SITUATION

At Mong Wi, the two regiments were given their specific missions. The Burma Road in the task force objective area was dominated by two hill masses about three miles apart. The 475th RCT was assigned the southern hill mass, and the 124th RCT was given the northern hill mass. (16) Both of these regimental objectives were known to be occupied by the enemy, but the strength was not known. The terrain would not permit the combat teams to move towards their objectives on a broad front, so they resorted to their routine method of advance; that of squadrons or battalions moving a day apart on the same trail. The 3d Squadron of the 124th moved out of Mong Wi on or about the 18th of January, a day after the last battalion of the 475th. It was followed on the 19th by the 1st Squadron. (17) The 2d Squadron remained in Mong Wi as task force reserve. (18)

The approach to the two objectives took the regiments over the most difficult terrain they had encountered. It

(15) (16) (17) Personal knowledge; (18) A-3, p. 135.

*Map?
Regimental -
more detail
needed.*

required four days to march twenty-one miles -- the point at which contact was made with the enemy. (19)

About mid-morning of the fourth day out of Mong Wi, the 1st Squadron of the 124th heard heavy firing from the southeast. This was in the direction of the 475th Regiment. After a short time the firing of small arms decreased, but artillery continued. It was learned later that the 1st Battalion of the 475th had struck a trail block, and that the artillery, which had gone in position to support the battalion, continued firing to interdict traffic on the Burma Road.

At noon it was learned that the 3d Squadron, a days march ahead of the 1st, had been stopped the day before by heavy enemy resistance. ^{where?} During the night the 3d Squadron had been subject to a strong attack on their perimeter, and had taken many casualties. The 3d Squadron Commander considered his position untenable for the coming night unless he could be given reinforcements. The sound of the 3d Squadron fight had not been heard by the 1st Squadron because of the peculiar acoustics caused by the cross compartment arrangement of the hills.

The enemy situation was developing in front of both regiments.

REINFORCEMENT OF THE 3D SQUADRON

Troop A and Troop B, which were leading the 1st Squadron column, were ordered to make a forced march to reinforce

(19) Personal knowledge.

the 3d Squadron which was in contact with the enemy. The commanding officer of Troop A was given command of both troops for this march. No information as to the strength or exact location of the enemy was available to the Troop A Commander as they started out. The location of the 3d Squadron was definitely known, but there was no knowledge as to how their battle positions were drawn up. It was not even known whether the 3d Squadron was fighting in a perimeter or a line position.

Only enough time to water the animals was allowed, and then the two troops moved out.

A map study of the route to the 3d Squadron showed that about midway a deep canyon would have to be crossed. To prevent loss of time in crossing this obstacle, the commander of Troop A went ahead of the main body with a reconnaissance party. When this reconnaissance party arrived at the edge of the canyon, they found a similar party there under the executive officer of the 3d Squadron. It was sent there for the same purpose.

The crossing site suggested by the 3d Squadron executive officer was five miles off the route of march. This was discouraging, for time was important if the reinforcement troops were to reach the 3d Squadron by night.

The sergeant in charge of reconnaissance for the commander of Troop A asked that he be allowed to search for a shorter route while waiting for the arrival of the main body. Permission was granted. This capable sergeant plunged into the thick brush of the downward slope of the canyon. The

problem was to find a crossing which the pack mules could negotiate.

Before the first troops arrived, he had found a route which was hazardous, and which would require about an hour's work for the leading platoon in clearing the brush and cutting down the most precipitous slopes. Even so, it was better than a ten mile march to take advantage of a better crossing.

The leading platoon was immediately put to work on this project, and while this work was in progress, the remainder of the main body fed men and animals. It was now early afternoon. The work was rotated so that all of the men had a chance to eat and get a short rest. The delay caused by this crossing only amounted to about forty-five minutes.

With the canyon crossing safely behind them, the reinforcing troops knew that they would reach the 3d Squadron far ahead of the planned schedule. The commander of Troop A went ahead with the executive officer of the 3d Squadron to contact the commander of the squadron needing the reinforcements.

Upon arrival at the 3d Squadron, (See Map D) it was found that the situation had eased considerably for the squadron. The enemy did not seem to be showing any strength against the positions at this time. The reinforcement was timely, however, for the squadron was overextended in order to completely hold the objective. With the arrival of A and

B Troops, it was possible to strengthen the perimeter, and to place I Troop, which had been hardest hit the night before, within the perimeter as a reserve. (20)

This perimeter was under good enemy observation. Seeming to realize^a that they had been out maneuvered, the Japs made no attack that night.

With the arrival of the remainder of the 1st Squadron on the 22d of January, the entire position was reorganized, and A Troop was given the mission of establishing trail blocks on the trails leading into the position from the north. By nightfall the regiments of the task force were disposed as shown on Map D.

The 475th RCT on the right had encountered strong organized enemy resistance, and had committed two of its battalions in an effort to attain its objective. (See Map D) Considerable enemy traffic could be observed on the Burma Road, but it could not be determined as to whether or not this indicated an attempt on the part of the Japs to reinforce their troops in contact with the task force.

SPECIAL SITUATION

At about 1600 hours on the 22d of January the positions for the trail blocks had been selected. While these were being established at top speed to have them ready by darkness, the troop commander dispatched two patrols of one squad each to reconnoiter to the north. Nothing was known of the enemy situation in this area, and it was desirable

(20) Personal knowledge.

to know the strength which the enemy could throw against these blocking positions.

One patrol was to advance as far as the village of Mong Noi. The other was to go as far as the village of Namogun, and there split; half returning by the trail leading directly south from this village, and the other half returning by a trail which ran south from a point five hundred yards to the west of Namogun. (See Map D)

where The enemy situation did not remain a mystery for long. Twenty minutes after starting out, the Mong Noi patrol was engaged in a fire fight. The commander of Troop A could tell by the sounds of the weapons that the Japanese were delivering a preponderance of the fire. The exchange of fire lasted for about five minutes, and then died out. In due time a runner came back from this patrol to give the story: (21)

The patrol was fired upon as it came adjacent to a hill to the east of the trail. (See Map D) As the patrol returned the fire, they could observe several Japanese, estimated to be about a platoon, rush over the crest of the hill from which the fire was coming, and occupy prepared bunkers on the forward slope of the hill.

As fighting was not his mission just then, the resourceful NCO in charge of the patrol had broken off the fire fight after causing the enemy to show his strength, then by-passed the exposed portion of the trail by detouring through the jungle to the west of the trail. His report

(21) Personal knowledge.

ended by stating that he was continuing on his mission to Mong Noi. For this and other similar evidences of his leadership ability in this campaign, this resourceful NCO was given a battlefield promotion.

Hurrying to take advantage of the short remaining time of daylight, the Troop A Commander took his artillery observer and 81-mm mortar observer, along with a few riflemen for security, and hurried to a position on the trail where he could see the enemy strongpoint. Upon arrival he found two men of the Mong Noi Patrol whom the NCO had left to keep the strong point under observation. (See Map D) A good observation post was found on a hill line which formed a semi-circular ring around the high point occupied by the enemy. This brought the American party within two hundred and fifty yards from the leading positions of the Japanese. A deep and heavily wooded draw separated the two forces.

The hill occupied by the observation party of Troop A and the hill fortified by the enemy were both important terrain features, as both gave almost perfect observation on the area occupied by the 1st and 3d Squadrons on an adjacent ridge in the distance. It will never be understood why the Japs did not occupy both of these terrain features. (See Map D)

*Full details
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Full details of this situation were sent back to the 1st Squadron, and the commander of Troop A began making plans to seize the enemy positions as he felt that an order to attack would be forthcoming. On his own initiative he had the artillery and the mortars register on the enemy

position. The Japanese gave no reaction to this registration. The observation post was manned for the night, and wire was laid to the position after dark.

The Commander of Troop A now made his way to the 1st Squadron CP to give a detailed report and to offer a plan for taking the enemy positions. The squadron commander appreciated the aggressive action and plans of Troop A, but was forced to hold everything in obedience as the 1st Squadron was now in regimental reserve, and as such was not allowed to commit even a part of its force. Instead of returning to his troop with approval for his attack plans, the Commander of Troop A returned with orders to maintain observation on the enemy position, and to initiate no further patrol action without specific orders from squadron.

Thus the situation remained "frozen" for seven days until on the 29th of January the 2d Squadron arrived upon the scene from Mong Wi and relieved the 1st Squadron as regimental reserve. (22)

Squadron ordered the attack to be launched at 1000 hours on that day.

THE PLAN OF ATTACK

(THE ATTACK)

The 613th Field Artillery Battalion was placed in direct support of the troop, and a section of heavy machine guns was attached from squadron headquarters troop.

The plan of attack was as follows: The assault was to be made from the west by the 1st and 2d Platoons abreast;

(22) A-3, p. 168.

the 1st Platoon on the left. The 3d Platoon and the section of heavy machine guns were to establish a base of fire from a point on the crescent ridge directly north of the Japanese positions. (See Map E) The artillery was to open the attack with fire upon the positions. At the same time the 81-mm mortars were to open fire on the reverse slope of the enemy held hill to prevent reinforcement of the position and to neutralize possible mortar positions. The base of fire was to remain silent and hold their fire until the leading elements of the assault platoons approached the leading enemy positions, then they were to open fire ahead of the assaulting platoons and keep the enemy pinned down. At the time 3d Platoon commenced firing, the artillery was to shift their fires up towards the crest of the hill, and make succeeding fifty yard shifts to the east as the assaulting platoons advanced. As soon as the fire of the 3d Platoon was masked by advancing troops on the enemy positions, they were to displace and join the assaulting elements on the objective. Each of the assaulting platoons would have a squad in support, and with this squad would be a light machine gun crew.

Briefing for this attack had gone on for a week. The most thorough reconnaissance had been made down to and including the squad leaders. Troop A could find their positions in the dark, and this they actually did on the morning of the attack, remaining in concealment until jump off time. (See Map E) All of this reconnaissance and maneuver took place within three hundred yards of the enemy positions.

The troop commander feared that because of this the intention to attack might be discovered, but when daylight came on the morning of the attack, no unusual activity or fire was noticeable on the part of the enemy.

~~THE ATTACK~~

The artillery commenced firing promptly at 1000 hours.

As soon as the enemy held positions became obscured in dust, the two platoons started their descent into the draw separating the two positions. Going down into the draw was accomplished with no difficulty. The enemy had no security outposts. Climbing the steep grade to the enemy positions, however, was more difficult. Seeing that the men were panting and out of breath, the troop commander signaled for a brief halt just before the leading elements reached the summit. This was accomplished by simply raising the arm in the signal for a halt. The platoon leaders were well trained and kept the troop commander in view so that his orders could be communicated in this manner.

During this halt it was noticed that the radio operator, carrying the SCR 300, was too fatigued to be efficient. All members of the troop had been trained in radio procedure, so the radio was transferred to the troop commander's runner. Then the signal to advance was given, and the two platoons resumed their climb.

The troop commander and his command group, including the artillery and 81-mm mortar observers, were in front of the left platoon. As they stepped onto the plateau, the artillery fire was promptly shifted fifty yards forward. The two platoons followed closely in good formation and in

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breath.*

good order. Control by the NCO's was good. The center of impact of the artillery was about fifty to seventy-five yards in front of the troops. The artillery observer objected to bringing fire in this close to the troops, but acquiesced to the troop commanders wishes.

Concurrently with the shift of artillery fire, the 3d Platoon let loose with a tremendous volume of fire which was laid a few feet in front of the attacking troops. So far there had been no evidence of enemy reaction, but at this time a Jap soldier raised out of a bunker, and took off at a dead run into the artillery impact area. Before he could be killed by artillery fire, though, the troops dispatched him with their small arms.

At the same time a small amount of rifle fire was received from the leading bunkers. The troop commander shouted to his platoon leaders to reduce each bunker before moving on. The squads then began a systematic destruction of the enemy within the bunkers. The system was simple. While one or two men would keep the occupants of a bunker down by firing into the aperture, another would walk up and drop hand grenades into the slit. This had been practiced many times in training, and proved to be an effective method. Most of the bunkers were found to be occupied by two or three Japs.

Evidently the Jap plan of resistance was to allow troops to pass occupied bunkers, and then fire upon them from the rear. When the enemy in succeeding bunkers saw that the leading positions were being neutralized and that none were being passed, they began to bring a volume of

small arms fire upon the attackers. They used some light machine gun fire at this time. This fire was wild and ineffective. It is believed that this was because of the heavy artillery pounding and the heavy volume of small arms fire from the 3d Platoon.

As the troop continued the work of neutralizing bunkers, some of the enemy tried to run out of their positions, only to be shot down by the troops. Others destroyed themselves within the bunkers. One resourceful Jap Nambu Light Machine-gunner ran to the rear with his weapon slung over his left shoulder and the muzzle pointing in the direction of the attackers -- firing as he ran. He was covering his own withdrawal. He was last seen as he disappeared into the smoke and dust of the artillery impact area. There his rear guard protection was of little use.

The troop continued to work up the gentle forward slope of the enemy held hill. During this time some enemy light mortar fire began to fall upon them, but it was not serious enough to hamper them at their work. When the crest of the hill was reached, however, the assaulting elements were met with heavy small arms fire from the ridge to their front -- another ridge running north and south and about a hundred yards from the one now occupied by the troop. (See Map E) The first casualties were taken at this point. One man was wounded and one killed.

Our 81-mm mortar fire was still falling in the draw between the two ridges, and it was felt that it was serving a useful purpose there. So the artillery fire was shifted

to the next ridge. This caused the enemy fire to be reduced.

At the same time, through a natural break in the foliage, several Japs were seen to be running towards the left flank of the troop. (See Map E) The support squad and light machine gun of the left platoon was immediately ordered to engage this target. The 60-mm mortars with each platoon supported this action with low angle fire made possible by the modifications on the weapon. The effect was good, but it was not known as to whether or not the developing counter-attack had been stopped.

There was a possibility that this counterattack might catch the 3d Platoon in the process of displacing forward to the newly won position. This fear was soon dispelled as the 3d Platoon arrived upon the scene under the command of ^{an} NCO. The officer platoon leader had become a casualty.

The 3d Platoon was immediately deployed to meet the counterattack, and advanced to take up positions on a slight rise of the ridge line. (See Map E) As they crossed the low ground in front of the rise, they were fired upon. But the resistance was not in strength or well organized. The platoon opened fire, assaulted the rise, and took it. They dug in hastily to protect the left flank of the troop.

At this point the troop commander made a complete report to the squadron commander. The troops were on their objective; the opposition on the opposite ridge was estimated to be a reinforced company; a counterattack was developing, but it was not known in what strength the counter-

attack would be made. The squadron commander replied that he had watched the entire action from a good observation post, and that he considered the position too large for one troop to hold. Consequently he had already ordered Troop B to march to the position to reinforce Troop A. By taking over the left half of the objective -- the part now held by the 3d Platoon of Troop A. (See Map E) Neither troop commander was given command of the newly won position as a whole. Orders to the troop commanders were merely to coordinate.

The SCR 300 radios worked perfectly in this exchange of messages.

THE DEFENSE

The 1st and 2d Platoons were ordered to dig in and organize their positions as quickly as possible. They were arranged so that when the 3d Platoon was released by the arrival of Troop B, it could dig in on the rear of the two forward platoons and thus establish a tight perimeter for Troop A. The heavy machine gun section was assigned a position in the 2d Platoon area so that they could be centrally located, and support both the perimeter of A Troop and B Troop. But the non commissioned officer and the men of this machine gun section lacked aggressiveness. Some fire was being received from the enemy ridge, but it was mostly ineffective. It caused the machine gun section to remain in defilade when they could have been carrying out their orders and digging in with the rest of the troop. When the troop

commander learned of this situation, he placed the machine gun section under the command of the officer platoon leader of the 2d Platoon. With this leadership the section got into position with no more trouble.

As B Troop moved into position, (See Map F) it was fired upon by remnants of the repulsed counterattacking force which had remained in position to the rear or east of the 3d Platoon position. One platoon of B Troop was committed to attack this opposition. This was done promptly and with success, but the platoon suffered three casualties, including the officer platoon leader.

The 3d Platoon was released, and it began organizing its assigned position in the troop perimeter.

As the two troops worked on their defensive positions, enemy opposition ceased almost entirely. Our artillery and mortar fire was discontinued.

By dark A Troop had its defenses completed. (See Map F) The area was still very large even with the assignment of part of it to B Troop. The Commander of Troop A had all of the men available with him including the cooks and most of the mule handlers. Artillery and mortar concentrations were planned. The men were entrenched in two and three men bunkers, each bunker with heavy overhead protection. Bunkers had all around fields of fire so that any penetration by the enemy would be constantly under fire. Because of the nature of the terrain and the close proximity of the enemy, no outposts were used. However, the perimeter was ringed with warning devices and booby traps. There was an ample supply

of food and ammunition within the perimeter.

Just before dark, the Commander of Troop A visited the Commander of Troop B for the purpose of coordinating artillery and mortar concentrations. B Troop was far from being ready for the night. Many of the positions were shallow and without overhead cover. Some pack mules were still in the area, and the B Troop Commander stated that these animals would have to make a round trip yet that night to replenish their supply of ammunition, as they were almost out.

There was just time remaining before complete darkness for the Commander of Troop A to give his own positions a final check, so with this on his mind he left Troop B. With everything in readiness in the area of Troop A, the commander waited in his CP for the enemy activity which he felt sure would develop.

The enemy did not keep the troop waiting long, but within a half hour after complete darkness, they began to probe the perimeter. Several booby traps were exploded, but the men held their fire. They were told not to open fire until an attack was evident. The exploded booby traps were all in front of the 1st and 3d Platoons. (See Map F) No attack developed. When it was evident that the enemy had finished probing the position, selected men of the platoons performed the daring feat of creeping out forward in the darkness to reset the traps. This was accomplished without loss or incident.

At 2330 hours, a sudden and intense volume of enemy

heavy mortar and artillery fire was delivered on Troop A's position. This lasted for approximately fifteen minutes and then was lifted as suddenly as it had been delivered. It was immediately followed by heavy small arms and machine gun fire in front of the 2d Platoon and against the boundary separating the 1st and 3d Platoons. The attack was delivered simultaneously from two directions. (See Map F) The screaming and yelling Japs charged the perimeter, setting off the warning devices and booby traps as they came. The troop commenced firing with all of its weapons, artillery and mortar fire was called for and delivered. With the exception of a few fanatical individual enemy soldiers, the attack was repulsed. These few penetrated the perimeter, but were killed by riflemen who did not have to leave their foxholes to fire on them. The all around fields of fire which had been carefully arranged in daylight paid dividends.

B Troop had been attacked simultaneously with A Troop. When the attack subsided on A Troop, a terrific battle could be heard in progress in the B Troop area. Apparently their positions had been completely overrun. One of the troop officers of B Troop radioed the commander of Troop A saying that they were overrun; they had taken heavy casualties; the Troop Commander was missing; and that they were out of ammunition. The Commander of Troop A warned this officer not to give such information in the clear, and advised him that Troop A would give what assistance it could.

At this stage of the fight a flare was sent up from the Jap lines on the hill to the east, (See Map F) and with that the enemy left the overrun position of Troop B. It

was never understood why the enemy gave up this newly re-taken position.

The commander of Troop A sent his executive officer to Troop B to find out what condition existed there, while he himself inspected his own perimeter to see how the men had fared during the attack. In the Troop A area it was found that the troops were all in position and in good order. The 2d Platoon had suffered two men killed and three wounded. One of these was a squad leader. The 1st Platoon had taken three wounded; the 3d Platoon had no casualties. The men were busy repairing the damage done to their bunkers, and details were in front of the perimeter reinstalling the warning system of booby traps and sound devices. There was an ample supply of ammunition remaining on all positions, and the aid men were taking care of the wounded. No automatic weapons had been damaged. ^P Nothing more could be done in his own perimeter, so the Troop A Commander turned his attention to the conditions in Troop B. Here the situation was not so encouraging. The Troop A executive officer stated that heavy casualties had been sustained; the 60-mm mortars, which had been set up in battery, had been completely demolished. Whether or not the weapons could be reconditioned and new crews assigned to operate them was not known. ^{T mortars?} They were out of ammunition. A gap existed in the north part of their perimeter -- a critical point. The troop commander and 1st sergeant were missing, and the morale of the men was badly shaken. Because of its heavy casualties, Troop B would no longer be able to hold its original perimeter.

The executive officer estimated that with a squad from A Troop, the gap in the north part of the B Troop perimeter could be restored, and that the survivors could reorganize the remainder of the perimeter. He further stated that B Troop should have to have a portion of A Troop's reserve ammunition in order to be effective.

The Commander of A Troop was willing to part with some of his reserve ammunition, but hesitated to weaken his own troop to reinforce B Troop -- especially if they were to be sacrificed to a hopeless situation. The 3d Platoon Leader was ordered to prepare to send one of his squads to the B Troop position, and to send the squad leader of that squad to meet the Troop A Commander at the B Troop Command Post. Then the Troop A Commander immediately left for the Troop B Command Post to get a first hand estimate of the situation.

The remaining officer of B Troop gave the impression of being capable and efficient. The Commander of Troop A decided to reinforce the position with one squad, and at the same time began to help the Troop B officer reorganize the position. One of the glaring deficiencies was found in the fire plan for support fires. These were too far out in front of the perimeter, thus they had allowed the enemy to attack undisturbed by mortars and artillery once they had gotten in close to the perimeter. Luckily, the artillery observer with B Troop was still living, so that condition was corrected at once.

Next, the remaining men of B Troop were placed in advantageous positions and reorganized. When the Commander

of Troop A was satisfied that all preparation that was possible had been started, he left for his own perimeter.

At 0400 hours the enemy attacked both perimeters again. This attack followed the same pattern with a fifteen minute concentration of mortar and artillery fire. The second attack, however, was not as aggressive as the first, and it was repulsed from both perimeters. The close in mortar and artillery fires played an important part in breaking up this attempt.

A Troop lost one man killed in this action, and one heavy machine gun was put out of action with a bullet through the water jacket.

The remainder of the night passed without incident.

In the morning a thorough search was made for any enemy that might have entered the perimeter and remained there. But the only enemy found were dead ones.

The squadron commander came on the position early in the morning, and stated that A and B Troops would have to remain in position for two or three days before an attack could be launched to take the Burma Road. This was because the entire task force had been heavily engaged in combat, and the casualties had piled up at the clearing station. The only means of evacuation was by liaison type plane, and it would take that much time for the medical services to catch up with the situation under this handicap. (23)

Until the 2d of February, A and B Troops held their positions. No further large scale attacks were launched

(23) Personal knowledge.

against these positions, but several minor harassing attacks were made. Artillery and mortar fire frequently fell on the troops, and sniper fire was consistent throughout the period.

— HEADLINE needed —

On the 2d of February, Troops A and B were ordered to engage in a fire fight to contain the enemy while the 2d Squadron made an attack around the north flank. They were to keep the enemy occupied all through this attack, but were not required to take any ground. (24)

This was done. By early afternoon the 2d Squadron had secured its objective. This placed the squadron in advance of and slightly to the left of Troops A and B. The enemy troops opposing Troops A and B were now in a precarious position. Long range artillery fires began to fall in the perimeters occupied by Troops A and B. Enemy patrol activity was increased, and continued active throughout the night until about 0500 hours in the morning. At that time an unusually heavy concentration of artillery fire was placed on the positions. This heavy fire continued for about an hour. Then suddenly the situation became quiet.

A patrol was sent out with daylight on the 3d of February, only to find that the enemy had accomplished a good withdrawal.

Resistance had also ceased in front of the 2d Squadron. The meaning of this was not clearly understood at the time, but the fact was established later on that the entire

(24) Personal knowledge.

Japanese force had executed an excellent withdrawal to the south, moving their troops on the Burma Road in front of the entire task force, and disengaging those in front of the 475th Regiment at the last. (25)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

It was proven throughout this action that the training which had been given the troop was sound. With the emphasis on small unit leadership during training, it was found in fighting that small units would take aggressive action, and that they could be depended upon to carry out their missions and orders even when away from superior officers. On every occasion when the troop commander checked his platoons, he found them doing exactly what was expected of them.

The use of live ammunition for combat problems acquainted the men with the effectiveness of their own fires, and with the capabilities of supporting fires. As a result, the men had confidence in their own ability to repulse attacks and to assault strong enemy positions. Their experience while training in working close to artillery fire saved many casualties through their ability to do just that when making an assault. When supporting fires were brought in close to their perimeter, they were able to continue to deliver well directed small arms fire on an attacking enemy.

Confidence in themselves, each other, and in their supporting fires had been well developed in training, thus

(25) Personal knowledge.

making a smooth functioning team in combat. It was definitely demonstrated in this action that realism in training saves casualties and confusion in combat.

The enemy did not exercise good judgement in the selection of the terrain on which he organized his defense. If he had chosen the ridge from which Troop A launched its attack, he would have placed the attacker at a great disadvantage, since the attack would have had to advance more than one thousand yards across flat open ground and under direct observation and fire.

The organization of the enemy defense was poor. He failed to cover his front with outposts, and thus relinquished all the advantages of the terrain to the attacker. His positions were under observation continuously for one week prior to the attack. Troop A was able to remain unobserved on the line of departure for several hours before launching the attack. The Japanese bunkers were designed so that each bunker had only one field of fire. Some of these were to the front to meet an attacking enemy, and others were to the rear to fire into an enemy that had penetrated. No bunkers were observed which could fire to both front and rear.

The enemy failed to exploit his successes when he voluntarily gave up the positions which he had retaken from Troop B. By consolidating his gains on the night of the night of the 29th of January, it is possible that he could have successfully overrun A Troop by attacking from the B Troop area.

It is freely admitted that the Japanese had an almost perfect plan for the withdrawal of their entire force. Their use of long range artillery and aggressive patrol action on the night of their withdrawal kept the American forces from instigating any aggressive action of their own, and, it must be admitted, from even suspecting that a withdrawal was being made. It was the concensus of opinion in the 124th Regiment that the enemy would follow his usual tactics of launching a desperate attack that night in an attempt to regain the ground which had been lost during the day. The American force was guilty of estimating enemy intentions instead of enemy capabilities.

The reorganization of B Troop after it had been overrun on the night of the 29th of January demonstrated the great value of leadership in sustaining the morale of troops. The one remaining officer with B Troop, with the help of A Troop Commander, took positive action at once to reorganize the troops positions. The men were kept busy in reforming their perimeter; they had faith in their officer and in the plan of defense which he was putting into effect. They got reinforcements and ammunition. The will to fight was built up in their attitude instead of allowing despair to develop into panic. When put to the test by a second attack that night, B Troop held their perimeter even though their fighting strength was only a fraction of what it had been earlier in the night. If such leadership could have been shown by the original troop commander, it is quite certain that Troop B would never have been overrun by this first attack.

For various reasons, the 124th Regiment failed to promptly exploit its successes. A week's delay was forced upon Troop A before it could launch its attack. When Troop A had accomplished its mission, the advantage was not followed up by throwing the other two troops of the Squadron against the succeeding ridge held by the enemy. Several days after Troop A's successful attack, another Squadron made an envelopment on the left flank, but they too halted on their objective and allowed the enemy to withdraw his forces intact.

LESSONS

- ✓ 1. Training for jungle warfare must emphasize independent action on the part of individuals and small units.
2. The detailed planning and conduct of training for jungle combat must be decentralized down to company level for best results, as this is the level at which most of the decisions are made during combat.
- ✓ 3. A high degree of discipline is essential to the success of small units and individuals when acting independently.
4. Commanders must realize that they cannot observe and supervise completely the action of subordinate units during jungle combat. Training must be conducted so that he can be certain his orders will be carried out even when he is not actually present to enforce them.
5. Ground selected for defense must deny all possible approaches to the attacker.

✓ 6. Adequate security measures must be taken to insure a command at all times against surprise and these measures must be increased when contact is imminent.

✓ 7. Strong points within a defensive position should provide for all around observation and fields of fire.

✓ 8. In order to be successful, an attack must be carried through to its final objective -- that of complete destruction of the enemy and the occupation of the ground.

✓ 9. Protective barrages should not be located beyond the effective range of small arms fire from the defended position.

✓ 10. Proper leadership can restore the confidence of a demoralized and beaten unit.