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OPERATIONS OF THE 3D BATTALION, 5307 COMPOSITE UNIT
(PROVISIONAL) IN THE BATTLE OF MYITKYINA, BURMA
27 JULY - 3 AUGUST 1944
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

Major John J. Dunn, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Battalion, 5307 Composite Unit in the Battle of Myitkyina 27 July - 3 August 1944, during the North Burma Campaign.

For the conquest of Burma, the Japanese concentrated two divisions in Southern Thailand. (1) (Map A) In mid January 1942, they struck across the border toward Moulmein (see Map A) which fell on the 30th. Rangoon, the capital and principal port was taken on 8 March. The Japanese then turned north in two columns of division strength. One pushed up the Sittang Valley, the other division moved up the Irrawaddy Valley. (See Map A) Toungoo on the Sittang fell on 1 April and on 2 April, they took Prome on the Irrawaddy. (See Map A) They pushed north to Yenangyuang and then swung westward and on 4 May took the port of Akyab on the Bay of Bengal. (See Map A)

A third Japanese force of two divisions landed at Rangoon on 12 April 1942, drove rapidly northward into the upper Salween Valley, and took Lashio, junction of the rail and highway sections of the Burma Road.* (2) (See Map A)

Mandalay, now completely outflanked, was evacuated and was occupied by the Japanese on 1 May. From Lashio, the Japanese pushed up the Salween Valley into the Chinese province of Yunnan. In North Central Burma they sent patrols as far as Fort Hertz and to the west they took Kalewa on the Chindwin. (See Map A)

(1, 2) A-2, p. 3; *The "Burma Road" extends from Rangoon to Chungking, approximately 1445 miles. It consists of a railroad from Rangoon to Lashio, a new motor road from Lashio to Kunming, and an old highway from Kunming to Chungking. The new section, constructed in 2 years, from 1937 to 1939, was the first link between Burma and China for heavy traffic. Before the Japanese conquest of Burma, the road carried vital supplies to the Chinese armies.

The remnants of the Chinese forces retired from North Burma to India by way of Shingbuiyang, while British, Burmese and Indian survivors withdrew up the valley of the Chindwin and across the Chin Hills. The Allied withdrawal was made on foot, for no motor road or railroad connected India with Burma. (3) (See Map A)

When the monsoon rains came in June, the Japanese held all of Burma except for fringes of mountain, jungle and swamp on the north and west.

The conquest of Burma menaced India and cut the last land route for supply to China. (4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

At the Quebec Conference in August 1943, Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed commander in chief of the Southeast Asia Command. During a talk with General Marshall, the General asked him if there was anything he could do for him, and Mountbatten requested an American regiment to participate in the forthcoming offensive in Burma.¹

Five months later, in January 1944, the 5307 Composite Unit (Provisional) was organized, equipped, trained, and ready to participate in the Allied offensive. (5)

Operations in Burma in 1944 reached large scale proportions for the first time in two years. The action took place on four separate, though strategically related, fronts. One front was west of the Akakan Range, in the Maungdaw - Akyab area (see Map B); another was in the Chin Hills, in the Kohema - Imphal region; a third was in the Hukawng Valley, southeast of Ledo; the fourth along the Salween River in southeastern China. There Chinese troops attacked westward astride the Burma Road. (6) (See Map B)

At the beginning of the year, the American trained Chinese 22d and 38th Divisions under General Stilwell began to push down the Hukawng Valley

(3-4) A-2, p. 5; ¹ Talk by Mountbatten to the 475th Infantry, Camp Landis, Burma, August 1944; Personal knowledge; (5) A-2, p. 8; (6) A-1, p. 62.

toward Marngkwan in order to clear the way for the construction of the Ledo Road, which was to link the Indian railhead at Ledo with the old Burma Road to China. (See Map B) By early February, the offensive had made good progress and the highway had been extended 100 miles from Ledo. However, the main defenses of the opposing Japanese 18th Division had not yet been reached.

The 5307 Composite Unit, known as "Merrill's Marauders", had by now arrived at Ledo, and General Stilwell decided to send it on a wide envelopment across the mountains in order to get in rear of the enemy opposing the Chinese and to facilitate the advance by disorganizing supply lines and communications. (7) (See Map B)

By late April, Myitkyina, with the only hard-surfaced airdrome in northern Burma, was at last within striking distance. General Stilwell's 22d and 38th Chinese Divisions were fighting just north of Inkangahtawng. (See Map B) British-led Kachin and Gukha troops were fighting south toward a large supply base at Nsozup. The Marauders were at Nhpum Ga. (8) (See Map B)

Myitkyina was the principal Japanese base for the defense of Burma from the north. Situated 170 air miles southeast of Ledo, it was the northernmost point of a railroad from Rangoon and also the head of navigation on the Irrawaddy River. It lay in the proposed path of the Ledo Road, being 170 air miles north of the Burma Road junction with the railway at Lashio. Its capture would dispose of the principal air base from which Japanese aircraft had menaced American transport planes flying supplies to China over the famous "Hump". (9) (See Map B)

Since 9 February, the Marauders had marched and fought through several hundred miles of exceedingly difficult country. The troops were physically worn out. During most of the 80-day period they had lived on K-rations and nearly all of the men had suffered to some extent from dysentery and fevers.

(7) A-1, p. 62; (8) A-2, p. 93; (9) A-2, p. 94.

The unit had lost about 700 men killed, wounded, and sick from their original strength of about 3000. There were no American replacements in the theater to refill the Marauder ranks. To provide strength enough for the mission, General Stilwell decided to reinforce the three battalions of Marauders with the 150th and 88th Chinese Regiments and about 300 Kachins*, giving them a strength of about 7000 for the Myitkyina operation. (10) They were organized into three groups, designated as H-Force, M-Force, and K-Force. (11) (See Map B)

Moving out on 27 April, they established several road blocks behind enemy lines and directed a strong column toward Myitkyina. (12) (See Map C) This column (H-Force), consisting of the 1st Marauder Battalion and the 150th Chinese Regiment, reached the Myitkyina area on 16 May. Colonel Hunter, in command, set the time for the attack on the airfield at 171000 May. The 1st Battalion led the 150th Regiment to the southwest end of the airfield, left the regiment to attack the strip at that point, and then proceeded southwest and took the ferry terminal at Pamati. (13) (See Map C)

The attack on the airfield came as a complete surprise and the Chinese took the strip against very light opposition. (14)

The Commander of the 1st Marauder Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Osborne, was ordered to leave part of his force to hold Pamati, to proceed southeast, and seize Zigyun, the main ferry point for Myitkyina. (15)

Immediately upon capturing the airstrip, Colonel Hunter radioed General Merrill asking for more troops and supplies. The strip was ready to receive transport planes. The Chinese 89th Regiment was ordered to leave for Myitkyina and one battalion arrived by air from Ledo late in the afternoon (17 May). Colonel Hunter also sent an urgent request to M- and K-Forces for their assistance. Both of these were about two days trip from Myitkyina. Both started for Myitkyina by forced marches. (16)

*A north Burma tribe; (10) A-2, p. 94; (11) A-2, p. 97; (12) A-1, p. 62; (13) A-2, p. 106; (14, 15) A-2, p. 107; (16) A-2, p. 108.

When enemy reinforcements did not appear at the airstrip on 17 May, Colonel Hunter concluded that the Japanese did not hold Myitkyina in strength, so he decided to attempt to take the city before they could reinforce their garrison. (17)

One battalion of the 89th Chinese Regiment which had arrived by air from Ledo would defend the airstrip (18) while two battalions of the 150th Regiment attacked Myitkyina. The remaining battalion of the 150th Regiment would be in reserve at the strip. Part of the 1st Marauder Battalion would hold the ferry terminal at Pamati, while the remainder of the battalion would continue toward Zigyun to secure the ferry crossing south of the city. (19)

By 181000 May, Lieutenant Colonel Osborne's group took Zigyun.

During the 18th the two battalions of Chinese attacked Myitkyina from the north. (20) Good progress was made and after taking the railroad station in the center of the town, the attacking force got out of control, due, primarily, to the looting of a jewelry store and the discovery of a supply of native liquor. (21)

During the night 18-19 May, approximately 1000 Japanese reinforcements arrived, and on the morning of the 19th counterattacked, and the Chinese withdrew to a line about 800 yards west of the town. There they dug in. (22) (See Map C)

On the 19th, K-Force, consisting of the 3d Marauder Battalion and the Chinese 88th Regiment, arrived and took Charpate. The 3d Battalion dug in around the village while the Chinese 88th Regiment moved to the southwest on a line extending roughly from Charpate to the railroad. (23) (See Map C)

On the same day, the elements of the 1st Battalion who were holding Pamati were relieved by a company of Chinese and they took up positions along the Namkwi River, south of the town of Namkwi. (See Map C)

(17) A-2, p. 108; (18, 19, 20) A-2, p. 109; (21) Personal knowledge; (22, 23) A-2, p. 109.

During the evening of the 19th, M-Force reached Namkwi, ill and weak from hunger, for the supplies of food which they had anticipated during the trip had not been dropped.** After getting food from H-Force, they outposted Namkwi. (24) (See Map C)

The Allied troops were now disposed in a semicircle covering all approaches from the northwest, west, southwest, and south. Japanese reinforcements could reach Myitkyina only from across the Irrawaddy River*** or along the Myitkyina - Mankrin or Myitkyina - Radhapur Roads. So far, enemy activity was slight in this area. (25) (See Map C)

The Japanese succeeded in reinforcing the Myitkyina garrison and by 23 May were passing over to the offensive. (26)

At 2200 on the night of 23 May, the enemy attacked Charpate. The attack was repulsed but on the 24th they attacked again and took the town. The 3d Battalion retired to the railroad $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south. (27) (See Map D)

On 26 May, the enemy attacked and took Namkwi and the 2d Battalion pulled back to a ridge about halfway to Myitkyina. (28)

On 27 May, Company C of the 209th Engineer Combat Battalion, which had been working around the airstrip, was attached to the 2d Battalion and shortly thereafter the 2d Battalion was evacuated to Ledo, leaving the company of engineers to carry on. (29)

The 1st and 3d Battalions were now both back near the airstrip, both badly depleted. Evacuations had reduced the Marauder strength of about 700 by 1 June. Evacuations continued until by 15 July there were less than 200 original Marauders left in the Myitkyina area. (30)

Let us now leave the Myitkyina scene and return to the States for the background to the second chapter of the Myitkyina operation.

In late March 1944, organizations in the States were canvassed for volunteers for a special assignment in the tropics, with no further information

All American combat operations in Burma were supplied by air drop; (24, 25) A-2, p. 111; *This river was 600 yards wide and very fast; (26) A-2, p. 110, 111; (27, 28, 29) A-2, p. 112; (30) A-2, p. 118.

as to the nature of the assignment. Qualifications were either experience with tropical troops or duty in the tropics and basic arm - Infantry. (31)

The volunteer status was filled 100 per cent as far as officers were concerned, with the exception of a couple of medics who were given no choice. Most of the officers came from two sources: about 36 from the 2d Filipino Infantry Regiment and the remainder from the 71st Light Division (Mountain Infantry from Camp Carson, Colorado). (32) Many of the officers from the 71st Division had had tropical experience but the officers from the 2d Filipino Regiment were accepted under the erroneous impression that because they were with a Filipino outfit they were jungle trained. (33)

The enlisted side presents a different picture. They came from just about everywhere and from almost every branch of service, and, as far as I am able to ascertain, not more than 100 in the total of 3000 had volunteered. (34) They were mainly Shanghai's castoffs, misfits and men whom someone wanted rid of for one reason or another. These people were assembled at Fort Meade and augmented by an additional group of odds and ends that were at Fort Meade, men who had missed other shipments by being in hospital, AWOL, etc. (35)

The officers spent about ten days at Fort Meade being processed and waiting. During this time they had no definite idea that they were going to take enlisted men over. (36) The afternoon that they left Fort Meade for Camp Patriok Henry, they were taken to a loading point and there, for the first time, received shipping lists and saw their men. (37)

Two days were spent at Camp Patriok Henry in checking equipment and preparing to sail. (38)

The group boarded the USS General H. W. Butner on 24 April and sailed at 1830 that evening. The group was not combat loaded. (39)

(31, 32) Statement by Lt Col A. K. Harold, then ExO, 3d Bn, 5307 Composite Unit; (33) Statement by Capt James D. Holland, then CO, Hq Co, 3d Bn; (34) Personal knowledge, result of talking with the men, other officers, etc; (35) Statements of officers comprising shipment, many of whom served with these men; (36) Statement, Lt Col Harold, then ExO, 3d Bn, 5307 Composite Unit; (37, 38, 39) Statements by Lt Col Harold, Capt Holland and other officers of shipment.

On board, organizations were split and scrambled. Some of the men were in compartments commanded by Air Corps officers of a different unit shipping on the same boat. There was neither space nor opportunity for any kind of organizational activity. (40) The whole lot was commanded by Transportation Corps escort officers who had one mission: to deliver this crowd in Bombay and get a receipt. These TC officers and the so-called "convoy officers" complemented each other in forming the perfect useless team.?

On 18 May, the ship's newspaper carried a story of the fall of Myitkyina and many aboard wondered if they would ever see that part of the world. A little over two weeks later, many of these men were dead at Nankwi. (41)

The ship arrived off Bombay on 26 May. Before docking, a Lieutenant Colonel from General Merrill's staff came aboard. All officers were assembled in the ship's wardroom and this officer informed them that they were to join the Marauders in forming a light division. He stated that they would train in India as a regiment, and then join in the Burma fight. He did say that the present situation was in a state of flux and plans were subject to change. (42)

The troops debarked in battalion order, wearing woolen OD uniforms, field jackets, full packs, and carrying overcoats. (This in India in May.)
Should discuss climate
or... castle after transport
The 1st Battalion disembarked first (upon reaching Myitkyina, this unit was redesignated the 3d Battalion; henceforth, I will refer to it as the 3d Battalion) and immediately boarded a "troop train" for the trip across India.

There apparently was no planning connected with the transportation across India by anyone in authority. Troops suffered for lack of water, and upon arriving at Ramgarh on the 30th, after four hot, dusty days, no one was prepared to receive the battalion. Apparently they had not been advised of its coming. (43)

(40, 41, 42) Statements, Lt Col Harold, Capt Holland, and other officers of shipment; (43) Statement, Maj Holland and other officers of this bn.

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10

The battalion was finally billeted in some tents and an improvised mess was set up to serve K-rations, tea, and lemonade. (44)

After some hurried staff conferences, things began to happen. Planes were flown to Calcutta for weapons. Lieutenant Haraldson, designated Battalion S-4, began to issue this hodge-podge assortment of weapons at 2000 that night: carbines, M1's, .03's, 45-caliber pistols, *TSMG's and Lee-Enfields. That night the battalion was alerted for an air lift to Burma. (45)

The Battalion Commander took off in the first plane with most of his staff, leaving no one in definite charge of the battalion. The Battalion Headquarters Company Commander took off in plane No. 2 and landed at Chabua, India, and found great difficulty in obtaining transportation to get to Burma. No one seemed to be advised of their coming or knew what to do with them. Captain Holland, later Major, talked the base commander at Chabua into furnishing another plan to complete the trip. The first plane carrying the Battalion Commander had already left for Burma. The groups that were following the Battalion CO's plane had no idea where they were going. They were not briefed - had no maps or orders. What little information they did get was from the pilots of the planes. (46)

In spite of the lack of planning, the battalion managed to reach Myitkyina after two days of confusion and tie-ups.*

The following day was spent in attempting to organize this group into a tactical battalion. This was easier said than done. With absolutely no knowledge of their men, all the officers could do was line them up and ask for all those who had ever fired a machine gun, a mortar, etc., or who had any special training. Captain Holland, the Commander of Headquarters Company, assisted by Lieutenant McFadden the Battalion S-1 and with the aid of the shipping lists, attempted as best he could to assign the men according to MOS

(44, 45, 46) Statement, Maj Holland and other officers of this bn; *The men and officers arrived at Myitkyina still carrying baggage, "A" bags and suitcases.

numbers whenever possible, although the percentage of infantry men was small. Men who had apparently never done anything became riflemen and medics. (47)

The Heavy Weapons Company was equipped with three castoff 81 mm mortars (plus an extra base plate) and four heavy machine guns, all of which had been through the Marauders' campaigns and were in foul condition. The few 60 mm mortars issued to the Rifle Companies were from the same source. Communications equipment consisted of a few SCR 506 radios and a few field telephones with some salvage wire. (48)

The battalion was then given the mission of setting up a perimeter defense of the airstrip and immediately did so. (49)

The 2d Battalion, after similar experiences and difficulties, arrived at Myitkyina during 1, 2, 3 June, went into bivouac northeast of the airstrip, and on 5 June took over the perimeter defense of the airstrip from the 3d Battalion.*

Now begins the most tragic and controversial episode of this whole campaign.

According to many of the company grade officers, they were told that they were going out on a "Field Problem" when the battalion moved out from the airstrip on 5 June. (50)

The battalion, less K Company which had been assigned a separate mission, bivouacked about two miles southeast of Namkwi.

(47) Statements, Lt Col Harold, Maj James D. Holland, and Lt Patsy Algieri, then ExO, Hq CO, and Plat Ldr of the 3d Bn, respectively; (48, 49) Statement, Maj James D. Holland, then Bn Hq Co CO; "This bn boarded a troop train at Bombay four hours behind the 3d Bn, but due to British hospitality and the remarkable inefficiency of the Indian railway system, this grew into a 36-hour interval. The train was watered at Bombay and by the end of the second day had not been resupplied. The Bn Comdr put two officers in the cab with pistols and refused to allow the train to move until a supply of water was put aboard. It was not until then that they got the first inkling of what was in store for them. A British official appeared greatly agitated, informed them that they were a high priority shipment, greatly needed in Burma, and couldn't stop for such trivial things as water. He threatened with court-martials and firing squads, but the train did not move until water was put aboard. (Statement, Lt Col H. K. Harold and other officers of this bn.); (50) Statement, Lt Algieri, ldr of 1st Plat, L Co, 3d Bn.

That night a Lieutenant Colonel joined the battalion whose place in the picture has never been made clear. He acted as a sort of advisor and gave the battalion its mission, which was to take Namkwi, then turn right and drive on to the Irrawaddy River. (51) They were told that there was about one platoon of Japanese in the area and that they were in bad shape. (52) This was the first of a long series of misinformation that plagued this battalion.

The officers and NCO's spent most of the night instructing the men in the use of their weapons. Many of them had never seen an M1 or a TSMG and the great majority had had little or no range firing. (53)

Captain Brubeck* who up until this time was not sure of his place in the battalion because of the indecision of the Battalion Commander was finally told that he was in command of the Heavy Weapons Company. He spent the remainder of the day and night canvassing the battalion for men with experience to fill out his MG and mortar crews. (54)

The battalion was to attack with two companies abreast: I Company on the left with its flank on the Namkwi River and L Company on the right with its flank on the railroad. On the right of the railroad was a unit of the 236th Engineer Combat Battalion. Captain Brubeck was to provide support with his 81 mm mortars from the high ground on the south side of the paddy field (see Map D). The heavy MG's were attached to L Company. There were NO RESERVES. (55)

Three phase lines were established and these were drawn on all of the aerial photos that were available and issued to the officers. The companies were to move forward until phase line one was reached. Halt there and send out patrols to reconnoiter to the front, then move forward to the second and third lines in a similar manner.

(51, 52, 53) Statement, Maj James D. Holland, then CO of Bn Hq Co; *This very efficient officer later won the DSC in the final attack on Myitkyina; (54) Told to the author by Capt Brubeck, then CO of M Co, 3d Bn; (55) Statement by Maj Holland, then CO, Bn Hq Co.

Many of the officers in the attacking companies and apparently all of the men were under the impression that they were going on a Field Problem. (56)

The companies moved out and the first phase line was reached without incident.

Soon after leaving the first phase line, the units lost contact with each other and shortly after crossing the paddy field the companies were out of radio contact with battalion due to the short range of the SCR 536 radios.

They continued on. The men taking no interest in the "problem" appeared bored with the whole thing. (57)

Halfway to phase line 2, the leader of the 1st Platoon of L Company noticed some officer equipment on the trail with blood on it, but attached no importance to it as he had been told that there had been a few Japs in the area but they had been cleaned out. However, he was suspicious enough to warn Sergeant McDowell, his platoon sergeant, to be alert. (58)

The companies crossed the flooded paddy field. The men were being hurded forward, bored with the whole affair when suddenly the Japanese opened up with mortar, rifle and machine-gun fire. Men went down; near panic ensued. The officers making a gallant attempt to establish order and to press the attack were going down like ten pins. Almost complete disorganization was prevented from becoming a rout only through the heroic actions of Lieutenants Schwartz*, Ken Campbell, Jim Applegate, Jim Blocker, Billy Payne, Patsy Algeri, I Company's 1st Sergeant whose name I do not recall, and Lieutenant Mitchell who was wounded. Captain Corey, Commander of L Company, and his radio operator were killed in the first few minutes and the radio destroyed. (59)

The leader of the 1st Platoon of L Company, who was next to the railroad, determined that the fire on his platoon was coming from the vicinity of a

(56) Statement, Lt Algeri, ldr of 1st Plat of L Co, and later CO of L Co, following the death of Capt Corey in this action; (57, 58) Statement, Lt Algeri, then ldr of 1st Plat, L Co; *Later killed in the Central Burma Campaign; (59) Statements, Maj Holland, Lt Algeri. Much of the information was told to the author by officers present after he joined the bn.

Platoon Leader

railroad bridge to his right. His platoon sergeant reported many men were hit. The Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Algeri, sent out two runners, one to the left in an effort to contact the 2d Platoon on his left and the other to the rear to obtain support from the machine-gun and mortar sections that were supposed to be following the 1st and 2d Platoons. Soon these runners reported that they could not contact either one. He then ordered his platoon sergeant, Sergeant McDowell, to employ all the automatic weapons against the bridge while he attempted to pull back the platoon with the wounded. (60)

During the withdrawal, the men of the light machine-gun and mortar sections were discovered sitting under a group of trees smoking. The fuming Platoon Leader, demanding to know the reason for this, was told that they had heard the firing but thought it was part of the problem and so did not bother to investigate. The platoon had eight wounded, one of whom was to die upon reaching the aid station. (61)

A noise was heard from the other side of the railroad. Upon investigating, Lieutenant Algeri discovered the combat engineers digging in there. They joined forces and dug in. The engineers had a radio and Lieutenant Algeri contacted the battalion and was informed that the battalion had withdrawn to its original position on the south side of the paddy field and for him to stay where he was for the night and rejoin the battalion next day. (62)

Upon rejoining the battalion the following day, he was informed that he was in command of the company as the Company Commander, Captain Corey, had been killed. (63)

Casualties in the battalion were very heavy, including 12 officers. (64)

Two days later, on 8 June, the battalion was moved to the vicinity of the road fork at Radhapur (see Map D) where it remained for one day. (65)

The following day, it moved on to Mankrin on the river (see Map D) without opposition, thus cutting the enemy route from Myitkyina to the north.

(60, 61, 62, 63, 64) Statement, Lt Algeri, then ldr, 1st Plat, Co L; (65) Statement, Maj James D. Holland, then CO, Bn Hq Co.

It then turned south with its left flank on the river, and had the opportunity been properly exploited could probably have advanced almost to Myitkyina. However, the enemy was given adequate warning and the opportunity was lost. K Company was sent out to reconnoiter the area. All was quiet and everything appeared clear when suddenly the enemy attacked. The company broke and fell back in confusion leaving their wounded and dead. The twice wounded Company Commander, Captain McMasters, was killed while trying to rally his men. (66)

The next day, the battalion attacked and moved forward about 150 yards, then stalled and the men dug in. They had advanced far enough to recover some of their dead. In some cases these were found to have been mutilated. (67) This fact posed a new morale problem for the officers. The men developed a morbid fear of having their bodies fall into the hands of the enemy. (68)

Half-hearted attacks were continued for the next two days without gaining a yard. (69) The battalion remained here until 24 June when they were relieved by the 2d Battalion. (70)

The 3d Battalion then moved back to the airstrip and took over the defensive perimeter that was vacated by the 2d Battalion. (71)

The author took command of Company K on 15 July 1944. At that time, the company was occupying a section of the perimeter around the airstrip. It was during the monsoon season and the rain and sun alternated during the day with the rain dominating the night. The men were in pitiable condition. Many did not have either blankets or shelter halves and were simply living on the ground without the slightest cover, exposed to the elements. Sleeping in rain and mud. Many were even without toilet articles. Their weapons for the most part were in a rundown condition due to a lack of cleaning

(66, 67) Statement, T/Sgt Newman, Plat Sgt, Co K; (68) Personal knowledge; (69, 70, 71) Statement, Lt Algeri, then CO of L Co.

materials and a general feeling of despair and bitterness that permeated the whole battalion. (72)

Every effort on my part to obtain supplies was unsuccessful.* The Battalion Commander would refer me to the S-4 and the S-4 insisted that he tried many times and could not get any supplies. He stated that he several times requested the Battalion Commander to do something about it but with no results.

A startling contrast was immediately apparent between the miserable conditions existing in the companies and the relatively regal splendor of the Battalion CP. This consisted of a British wall tent for the exclusive use of the Battalion Commander and three American pyramidal tents for the staff and the remainder of the CP personnel. In the CO's tent was a sand-bagged foxhole at least eight feet deep. Next to it was another excavation six feet deep, six feet long and three feet wide, lined with sandbags and with an additional four feet of sandbags protruding above the ground. At the bottom of this excavation was a cot with numerous blankets and four chairs with two folded blankets on each chair as cushions. (Many men in my company were without blankets.) Numerous souvenirs and two orderlies completed the picture.

The following days were a struggle against the weather, official apathy and negligence, and a general feeling of suspicion, bitterness and despair, to try to whip the company into condition for what I was certain was in the offing - a death struggle against the enemy in Myitkyina. My chief concern was in correcting the mental attitude of the men. There existed an under-current of distrust. Every new project or field exercise was greeted with suspicion.**

Second in importance was instruction in the care and use of their weapons, and third, organization. Although these men had been associated as a company

(72) Personal knowledge; *The most serious shortage from a tactical point of view was in entrenching tools. Less than half the company had shovels.

**The term "problem" had an ominous meaning for these men.

for six weeks, they were so spread out, occupying such a large section of the perimeter and almost never assembled, that outside of their own squads and, in many cases within squads, they still did not know or have any confidence or trust in each other.

To correct this, I assembled as many as possible and as often as possible for informational talks and instruction. I required daily inspections of weapons and succeeded in impressing on the men the vital necessity of keeping their weapons in such condition that they could be depended on in any emergency. I preached the great importance of teamwork and the right of every soldier to feel that he could absolutely depend on the man on his right and on his left to do his part as they moved forward in the attack.

At the same time discipline was not overlooked. I refused to allow them to feel sorry for themselves. They were required to shave daily. It was necessary for many men to share their razors with others.

On 25 July I was instructed to send a representative to go with the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Harrold*, to reconnoiter a new area that the battalion was to occupy. It was understood that the 3d Battalion would occupy a position extending from the rifle range to the 236th Engineer Battalion area, thus relieving two Chinese battalions and the 236th Engineers. This would have given us a front of about 2000 yards.

The next morning, 26 July, the battalion, under the Executive Officer**, moved out and after proceeding for about two hours, we were about to move into the new positions when some runners met the column with instructions for the battalion to move into the area behind the engineers. We did as directed and bivouacked along the road to Radhapur. (See Map D) The engineers moved out and the Battalion CP was established in the one vacated by the engineers.

Late that afternoon I was instructed to report to the Battalion CP.*** There I found the other Company Commanders, the Executive Officer, and staff,

*It was a tragedy of rank that this officer was not in command of the bn;
The Bn Comdr had gone up to the Regtl CP at the road fork at Radhapur; *
The Bn CP was about 1200 yds south of my Co area.

but the Battalion Commander was not present. Everyone was simply sitting around and waiting - waiting for what, no one knew or showed much interest in - all appeared bored. I asked, "What's up?" Someone mumbled, "Who knows?"

Along toward dusk, the Battalion Commander came in. No one paid any attention to him nor he to anyone else. He was in no hurry and gave not the slightest indication that anything unusual was afoot. He spoke a few words to different people around the CP and had some coffee. Time was the least of his worries. I was getting impatient as were the others. About thirty minutes after he arrived, he called the Company Commanders together and informed us that we would attack the next morning at 0500. The formation would be a column of companies with the companies in a column of platoons.* My company was to lead the attack, followed by I, L, and M. One platoon of L Company under Lieutenant Lee Nelson was across the Irrawaddy River under direct control of Task Force Headquarters.** The I & R Platoon, under Lieutenant Jordan Adkins*** was on the river at Pamati, also under Task Force Headquarters.

The plan was to attack directly across a flooded paddy field nearly 400 yards wide (see Map E), and establish a perimeter on the other side. No further mission was given, but everyone assumed that after building up supplies we would continue the attack into Myitkyina. L Company's mission was to turn north and defend against Japanese force supposed to be between us and the 2d Battalion. The 2d Battalion was then occupying a position south of Mankrin and they too were to attack on the 27th.

The attack was to be supported by a 30-minute artillery preparation that was to start at 0430.

*Stipulating the company formation by the Bn Comdr was a violation of American teachings; **The "Myitkyina Task Force" comprised all of the Allied troops besieging Myitkyina; ***Killed in action in the Central Burma Campaign.

The plan was to have my company move out at 0415 to a point about 150 yards from the enemy side and then wait for the artillery to open. When the artillery lifted at 0500 we were to move in. This plan I considered as unnecessarily risky. The field was covered with water - in some places knee deep - and a body of troops moving across in the stillness of early morning would probably alert the enemy into firing his FPL. Inasmuch as there was no cover available, this could result in excessive casualties and would probably cause the attack to fail.*

My suggestion was to wait until the artillery opened and then to move out under cover of the noise. We had nothing to gain by moving out early and everything to lose. This suggestion was ignored.

I was to have the head of my company on the road opposite the Battalion CP at 0330. There I would pick up one platoon of heavy machine guns that was to be in direct support of my company. I was to pick up one reel of wire and then proceed on down to the jump-off point.

I was not satisfied with either the plan or the formation. The critical period in the attack would be the few seconds from the time the artillery lifted until we could reach the enemy position. Common sense dictated the necessity of getting as many men as possible in on top of the enemy in the shortest possible time. This could only be accomplished by having two companies attack abreast and then charging the enemy the moment the artillery lifted. Going across in a column of platoons meant that only a few men would reach the enemy in the first critical moments, leaving the remainder of the battalion spread out in a long column, completely exposed to any flanking or mortar fire that the enemy could bring to bear. Another great disadvantage was in the necessity for reshuffling troops on the enemy side in the face of an almost certain counterattack.

My greatest concern was the reaction of the men if another blunder

*I was skeptical of the ability of these men to absorb heavy losses and still continue on.

occurred. I felt that I had succeeded in convincing them that from now on things would be different, that all of the blundering was in the past. I was sure that another affair in which they were unnecessarily cut up would so disillusion them in their leaders that they would never become an effective force.

Following the issuance of the order, the Battalion Commander said he would show me the jump-off point. We left the CP and proceeded to a spot near the west side of the paddy field. In the gathering dusk, he pointed to the other side and said to go across there.

Attacking across "there" appeared to me to be a formidable undertaking. The place chosen was the widest part of the paddy. I said, "OK" and we turned back towards the CP.

As we walked back in the gathering darkness, he amazed me by saying, "I want you to bring your lieutenants up here and show them the ground and bring your NCO's up too. Make sure everyone is thoroughly oriented." He completely ignored the fact that it was now almost dark and my company was over a half-mile distant.

I left him at the Battalion CP and proceeded on down the road towards my company. I assembled my platoon leaders and NCO's and told them the plan. I had an aerial photo of the area over which we were going to attack and by the use of a flashlight I oriented them as best I could.

I ordered the company alerted at 0200. They were to be on the road at 0230.

THE ATTACK

The next morning we moved out on schedule. The night was pitch black. As we moved on down the road past the I Company area, that unit, waiting by the side of the road, fell in behind. The night was so black it was like walking through an ink well. Leading the column, I tried vainly to make out some landmark. After walking for about twenty minutes, I heard some activity on the side of the road. I suspected we were close to the point on the road

where I was to turn left to reach the jump-off point. I halted the column and contacted the leader of the heavy machine gun platoon* that was to support my company and told him to follow my last platoon.

We moved on to the edge of the paddy field. It was now about 0345. I formed the company as silently as possible and waited.

The night before I had impressed on the leaders the vital necessity of moving in fast the moment the supporting fires lifted. If discovered and brought under enemy fire, the sensible way to go was forward. In any case, no matter what happened, once we started across the paddy, no man would take a backward step.

For purposes of morale, I decided to lead the attack. The operation looked like a suicidal one. I was uneasy that a sudden exposure to enemy fire in that naked field would cause a panic and failure. I was certain they would follow me.

0415 - We moved out.

We proceeded across as silently as possible until we reached a point about 150 yards from the enemy side. I halted the column. I checked my watch - 0425 - not a sound from the enemy side.

I now regretted that an artillery preparation had been planned. I was certain we could have moved in under cover of the inky blackness without firing a shot. Too late now. I checked the time again - 0430 - when a whistling swish - the artillery was right on time.

The first few rounds fell short, less than 50 yards from my company. I was telling Sergeant Smith, who was next to me carrying an SCR 300 radio, to inform battalion the artillery was short and to increase the range when an avalanche descended right on top of the column and all the way back to the Battalion CP.

Smith said he could not contact battalion. I told the men to pass the

*Lt Delores; wounded twice in the subsequent battle and winner of the DSC; severely wounded a third time in the Central Burma Campaign.

the word back to stop the firing. "Stop the artillery" went roaring back along the column, but the artillery kept coming.

The artillery that was firing was one Chinese battalion of 105 mm guns firing from a position east of the airstrip and one American battery of 75's (3 guns) from the vicinity of the road fork at Radhapur. (See Map D)

I greatly feared this was the straw that would break the camel's back.

Not a man broke. They held their general formations while taking as much cover as possible. I moved from squad to squad and told them to stand firm and assured them we would get it stopped soon.

The fire that was landing on the leading companies was from the Chinese battalion of 105's. The Battalion CP was being hit by the American 75's from Radhapur. The American battery was soon contacted and its fire stopped, but that did the companies no good, especially mine that was exposed in the middle of the paddy like ducks on a pond.

My chief concern now was in maintaining our formation. The fire continued on as intensive as ever as the hands on my watch moved closer to five o'clock. I could not understand why this fire could not be stopped. Later I was to learn of the incredible fact that not only had the artillery not been registered in but that there was no communication with the Chinese artillery, so the fire came down, men were hit, and nothing could be done about it.

I checked the time - 0455. The first streaks of light heralded the new day - only five minutes to go. I alerted my men and urged them to move in as rapidly as possible the moment the fire lifted.

Five o'clock! The fire began to slacken. Get ready! I was too optimistic. The artillery was supposed to fire from 0430 to 0500. Now at 0500, when "Cease Fire" should have been given, it came down with greater intensity than ever, most of it on my company. The men flattened as best they could in the flooded field.

Five past five. The fire continued. The morning now was becoming rapidly lighter. The enemy side could be clearly seen; so could the sitting ducks.

Ten past five - gysers erupting all over the area.

Five fifteen - no change. Broad daylight now.

Five twenty - wont those b----- ever stop? I looked back towards the rear of the column. Everyone not in the paddy had taken cover. The mortars that were to support our crossing were not firing, the crews having been driven away from their guns by the fire.

Five twenty-two - fire began to slacken.

Five twenty-five - Still Firing!

To hell with it - let's go!

The company moved forward as one man.

We raced for the enemy side. Next to me was Sergeant Smith and Privates Sardella and Tickey, my runners. Immediately behind me was Lieutenant Algieri with Corporal Duncan leading the 1st Platoon. I glanced to my left. Sergeant "Pete" Pestrano, a tough Regular Army Indian, was driving forward.

We gained the opposite side. Two Japs in the first dugout died. Ten yards in from the paddy's edge, we knocked out a machine-gun crew of three. Corporal Duncan killed a Jap rifleman just beyond the machine-gun nest.

The 1st Platoon was now driving up the trail. A machine gun opened into their flank from a position almost under my feet. It apparently was firing from the same dugout as the one we had just destroyed.* This second gun was immediately destroyed and three more Japs died.

The 3d Platoon was now across and pushing to the south along the paddy. The 2d Platoon moved in on the left of the first. The Machine gun and Weapons Platoon was now over. We now had a half-moon perimeter with its flanks on the paddy. I ordered the men to dig in quickly in anticipation

*There were two separate dugouts and as far as I could see they were not connected. This was unusual.

of a counterattack. The machine guns were in position and Lieutenant Meade began registering his mortars.

I Company was pouring over now, the 1st Platoon led by Lieutenant Newman.* He asked, "Where do you want us?" I pointed to the trail that separated the perimeter and told him to deploy from the trail to the left, that I Company would occupy that part of the perimeter. When they were in position, I moved all of my men to the right side of the trail. We then moved the whole perimeter forward about 25 yards to make room for so many additional men.

L Company followed, less one platoon**, and drove to the north to guard against a Jap force that was supposed to be between us and the 2d Battalion. They established a number of outposts to the north and west and reached out as far as 900 to 1000 yards or almost to the 2d Battalion. They had no major action here, but encountered numerous Jap patrols and suffered casualties from infiltration groups.

M Company now came over and was a welcome addition, for by now the Japs were putting heavy pressure on my right. We soon determined that the enemy was defending almost exclusively from the south (direction of Myitkyina). We faced our whole line south with I Company extending to the east. My right was now on the paddy with my left tied in with I Company on the north-south trail. I Company extended to the east 100 yards and bent back to tie in with M which guarded the rear of the perimeter.

I had three men badly wounded. Among other things we were not provided with stretchers. I told my Executive Officer to call and have some sent over if available. After a short conversation*** he said there were none at

* This officer in the fighting around Myitkyina killed 27 Japanese, won the DSC and Silver Star and had been wounded twice; **One platoon was on outpost duty across the Irrawaddy River; ***I later learned that the Bn Hq Commandant took the phone call and requested the Bn Comdr for use of a stretcher that he was using for a bunk. The answer was, "Let them use bamboo." This was told to me by the officer who took the phone call while we both were patients at the 20th General Hospital, Ledo, India.

battalion and that we would have to construct stretchers from bamboo.* This was done and the wounded carried back across the paddy, which was under constant Japanese sniper fire.

From my right platoon came a report of a Jap sniper that was making the right squad's area untenable. This platoon was dug in in very thick jungle growth. Visibility was limited to a few yards. Every effort to locate him was fruitless. He had already hit two men. I had been checking the perimeter and was on my way to the CP when I was told that he got another. At the CP my Executive Officer told me that the Battalion Commander ordered patrols sent out.

As we were talking, a shell exploded near the edge of the paddy - not twenty yards from us. We took cover instantly, then a series of explosions raked the perimeter. Normally an artillery shell can be heard coming in. We had no warning that these were coming. The answer was obvious. The Japs were firing a field piece from such an extremely short range that the shells exploded before the sound of the muzzle blast reached us. The soldiers immediately named it "Whistling Willie". It was not a very appropriate name because it didn't whistle or make any other noise until the explosion.

When the firing, which had only lasted a few seconds stopped, I asked the lieutenant if there was anything special that the Colonel wanted the patrols to do. He said that no mention was made of any specific mission, just send out patrols.

As we were talking, the phone rang. The 3d Platoon reported another man hit by the same sniper.

The phone rang again. It was the S-3. The Colonel wanted to know if the patrols had gone out. I asked him what the patrols were supposed to do. If it was to locate the enemy, then there was no need for patrols. I could throw a rock and hit a Jap in almost any direction. He said the Colonel

*90% of our evacuations were by this improvised method. Two lengths of bamboo would be cut and together with a shelter half, raincoat or two or more fatigue blouses, a suitable device could be made to carry the casualties.

didn't state any mission, just send out patrols.*

I called my platoons and assigned each a sector and told each of them to send out a patrol. Platoon Sergeant Connery, of the 3d Platoon, sent word that he would lead a patrol but he would "get that sniper first". This gallant old Sergeant (5 years Marine service, 10 years Regular Army carrying a submachine gun) walked boldly in the direction of the enemy. He had not taken five steps when he went down with a bullet through the heart.

Shortly thereafter all platoons reported their patrols fired on almost immediately upon leaving the perimeter.

The remainder of the day was spent in improving our positions and in stocking ammunition. For several hours this was accomplished by hand carry across the paddy. These kids "ran the gauntlet"**, many times carrying mortar and small arms ammunition from the battalion supply point. Then a mule train was made available. These were heavily loaded at battalion with ammunition and rations and then led across. This greatly alleviated the supply situation, but unfortunately the mules presented such a large target that at least one and sometimes two were lost on each trip.

To cut down the casualties of men and animals crossing this field, our 81 mm mortars fired a smoke concentration along the edge of the paddy in an effort to blind the Jap snipers. This greatly aided the crossings.

About the middle of the forenoon, the Artillery Liaison Officer, Captain McRae, introduced himself to me. He was attached from the Chinese artillery L Group. He was to direct the American battery of 75's based at Radhapur. This battery had only 3 guns and seldom had any ammunition. After each attack, McRae would have a few rounds fired to register on the FPL and that's all they could afford. They never had enough to support an attack and so we wisely saved what they did have for emergency fires on the FPL.***

*Patrolling from a perimeter in the jungle while in close contact with the Japs is the "most likely to succeed" method of committing suicide that has yet been devised; **The paddy was under constant sniper fire; ***Lt Col Harrold, then Bn ExO, stated that he kept abreast of their supply status by counting the rounds fired and many times they were below 50 on HE and in the 20's on WP.

As dusk was gathering, the phone rang. The Battalion Commander ordered me to send a three-man patrol with an SCR 300 radio into the village of Sitapur which was on the northern edge of Myitkyina. They were to move out after dark, pass through the enemy lines, enter the village, and report every 20 minutes directly to battalion. This was an incredible order amounting to almost a death sentence for whoever was chosen.

An analysis of this mission reveals its suicidal character. These men, besides carrying the essential weapons and equipment of war, were to take a 38-pound radio and proceed one mile behind Japanese lines into an enemy-held village and, furthermore, on a night mission where silence is paramount, they were to open a 300 radio with its resulting noise every 20 minutes all during the night, then make their way back again through enemy lines and find their way into a small perimeter.* Aside from the extreme danger, their chances of obtaining any useful military information was practically nil. Needless to say, the patrol did not get very far. The enemy, always disagreeable about such things, soon convinced the patrol leader that the path to Sitapur led but to the grave. After two futile attempts he withdrew back into the perimeter commenting audibly and quite profanely on the ancestry of certain leaders.

The remainder of the night was quiet save for the bursting of grenades thrown by our men as they heard or imagined they heard or saw Japs attempting infiltration** and the harassing enemy mortar fire.

The next morning the Battalion Commander again ordered patrols out.***

*Our perimeter was not over 200 yds in diameter; **A favorite trick of the Japanese was to arouse our men into firing, especially their automatic weapons in an attempt to locate them, then to crawl forward an inch at a time and grenade them. Each night we stocked each foxhole with all available grenades and warned the men NOT to fire during the night except to stop an attack; instead to throw grenades at suspected enemy. This proved quite productive. Several mornings dead Japs were found close to the perimeter; ***It was the concensus of all officers in contact with the Japs that patrolling under existing conditions was stupid, wasteful of manpower and morale wearing with no compensating results. We knew where the enemy was, his approximate strength and weapons. Patrols could not obtain any information that we did not already know. The enemy was trapped in the Myitkyina area without hope of reinforcements. The only sensible course to follow was to stockpile ammunition and attack until he was destroyed.

I determined to make them strong and to support them with mortars if necessary. I ordered each rifle platoon to send out a seven man patrol, gave each a definite sector, provided them with radios. I contacted the Heavy Weapons Company Commander** and requested mortar support in case they got into trouble.

The patrols moved out; shortly thereafter, they reported contact with the enemy. The patrol from the first platoon was evidently in trouble. I went over to the Heavy Weapons Company area. Captain Brubeck was talking over the radio. His 81 mm mortars were firing. The patrol was being fired on by two machine guns and the patrol leader was attempting to direct the mortar fire on these guns. They were not getting anywhere, claiming they could not see the burst in the brush.

I asked him where they were. He replied, "To the right of the trail and about 100 yards from the perimeter."

I walked down the trail. I heard firing but could not see anything. I continued on about 100 yards. Off to the right of the trail was a huge bomb crater. In it was the patrol deployed around the run. The leader was talking over the radio. The firing was from a position further on. I walked to the edge of the crater. One of the men looked up at me and said, "You better get down, Captain, there's a machine gun behind you." I jumped into the crater and instantly two guns opened fire, one from a position across the trail directly behind where I had been standing and the other from off to our left front. I attempted to locate these guns and could now understand the difficulty the patrol leader had encountered directing mortar fire from this position. The machinegun fire was skimming the top of the crater. It was very dangerous to chance more than a glimpse over the top. The surrounding area was covered with a thick undergrowth. The mortar bursts could not be seen.

*Capt Brubeck, the same officer who was given command of the Hv Wpns Co as it was moving toward contact with the Japs at Namki on the "Problem". He won the DSC for extraordinary heroism at Myitkyina.

The firing to our front was from the patrol from the 2d Platoon which was in a fire-fight with a group of enemy about 25 yards south of the crater. I crawled toward them and directed the patrol leader to withdraw to the perimeter and I would cover him with the patrol in the crater. I crawled back to the crater, and after they had passed us, all crawling, I ordered the men with me to crawl back towards our lines. When the last man had moved out safely, I followed, by now pretty well fed up with the stupid patrolling.

Shortly after noon, I noticed a curious activity on the other side of the paddy. About 50 yards out from the bank were four men who appeared to be walking double sentry duty. They were walking back and forth as if on guard. I asked my Executive Officer what they could possibly be doing other than trying to commit suicide. He studied them a while and said, "Beat's me." I told him to call battalion and find out.

By this time, I was prepared for almost anything emanating from the Battalion CP, but this was a classic.

The Battalion Commander himself was going to cross the paddy to join his battalion that had been fighting alone for a day and a half; that is, he would cross under certain conditions. The day before, when the snipers were so active, was not the time, even though the passage was made many times by privates carrying ammunition over and wounded back.

This morning had been quiet as far as sniping was concerned, probably because of the patrolling. Still, anything so indispensable could not take chances. To make sure, he ordered these men to move out into the paddy to act as a decoy. They ^{went} were back and forth to see if they would draw fire.*

The unpredictable Japs did not fire. Reassured, he loaded two mules with his personal equipment. These formed part of the next train to cross.

*Nothing that had happened up to this time so clearly demonstrated how utterly unfit this man was to command anything. Aside from a complete disregard for other people's lives, he had not the slightest conception of tactics. Throughout the entire operation, his chief concern was in his own comfort and welfare.

The mortars fired the usual smoke concentration and the train started out. They reached the middle of the paddy when they were brought under fire from the same area as the day before. On this trip two mules were lost, but they were carrying ammunition. The first shot changed the Colonel's march table. He made a quick estimate of the situation and decided he was more valuable with the homeguard.

The remainder of the day was uneventful. Firing was spasmodic around the perimeter. "Whistling Willie" paid his respects a few times and, of course, the snipers fired on anything that crossed the paddy.

The night was quiet save for the usual grenades and harassing mortar fire.

The next afternoon, 29 July, Captain Brubeck, the Heavy Weapons Company Commander, got a call from battalion. He was ordered to attack with the forces across the paddy, less L Company, which was on outpost duty to the north.

The three Company Commanders got together and determined on a plan. The terrain and size of our force ruled out any maneuver. We decided to attack straight south with our right on the paddy. Mortars of the Heavy Weapons Company and the 60's in the Rifle Companies would support the attack.*

We jumped off and from the start the going was very slow. The jungle growth in front of my company was so dense, visibility was limited to a few yards. The terrain in front of I Company was more open, more in the nature of hedgerows but almost as hard to traverse. The Japs would not back up a yard. It was necessary to kill each one individually and to grenade every dugout or opening that might possibly house a Jap. I made my way over to my left platoon whose left flank was on the trail, the boundary between I and K Companies. The aggressive Captain Brubeck was there, personally directing the fire of his heavy machine gunners who were trying to knock out some enemy across the trail who were delaying the advance. The guns were right on the front line. I made my way along the line to my right platoon. They were

*The artillery could not afford the ammunition.

stopped by a solid wall of interwoven jungle growth 8 feet high, broken only by one opening and only large enough to admit one man at a time. On the enemy side was Sergeant Jasinsky, leader of the second squad, and one of his men engaged in a fire-fight with an enemy just a few yards to the front. On our side of the wall, Lieutenant Meade, my weapons platoon leader, was removing a mortar tube from the base plate.* He suggested pulling Jasinsky back and let him drop a few on the Nips.

I told Jasinsky and the other man to pull back. He began to crawl back and then jumped up to dash through the opening. As he did so, a grenade came hurtling towards him. The man with him screamed, "Down". Jasinsky hit the ground the instant the grenade exploded. He was not hurt and both men managed to make their way back. I noted from where the grenade came and Lieutenant Meade began firing and brought the shells progressively closer until they were exploding less than twenty yards to our front and on the spot where we were certain the Japs were. Captain Brubeck came up as this was going on and after Meade had fired a few rounds, Brubeck said, "Let's get the a--- of b-----" and we rushed through the opening and in on top of the Japs, killing three not ten yards beyond the hedge wall. The men now came pouring through, fanning out to the right and left forming a skirmish line. I could see only part of the line because of the heavy growth. I directed the men to put a fresh clip in their weapons, keep contact to right and left, and fire straight to the front as we went forward and to fire into any opening or clump of brush or anything that could conceivably hide a Jap.

We went forward with marching fire, shooting up every clump, raking every tree, and grenading every hole. We made good progress, halting several times to replenish ammunition.**

*This officer was very accurate firing a mortar without the base plate, especially at such extremely close range as in this case; ** This is an excellent method to use with green troops. Men lined up almost shoulder to shoulder gives a feeling of strength and security and the noise of the firing constitutes a favorable morale factor. If inexperienced troops can be kept firing, they will continue to move forward. The one great disadvantage is the prodigious expenditure of ammunition and the danger of the excited men firing their last round.

We reached our objective line about an hour before dark. I halted the company to regain control and to determine the exact location of the unit on my left, to insure that we were still in contact.

My radio operator said that the Battalion Commander wished to speak to me. He asked me how things were going. I replied that we had reached our objective and were preparing to organize a defense. He screamed, "Keep going, keep going, gain as much as you can", completely ignoring the fact that we had only about one hour of daylight left.*

A few moments later, Captain Brubeck came over. I remarked that we had reached the designated line but that the Battalion Commander had ordered the attack to continue. He expressed his opinion, quite emphatically, and then said, "Well, I guess we bster keep going."

From that point on we ran into serious opposition. We kept driving forward through the tangled growth. My third platoon, under Lieutenant Rowe, was next to the paddy field. A thick hedgerow now separated his platoon from the rest of the company. I could not see him but kept him abreast of the company by verbal directions.

We came to a trail running perpendicular to our line of advance. One side was bordered by an old bamboo fence. I kicked a section of it down and proceeded on through in a small clearing with thick, tall jungle growth on all sides. Behind me was Private Cooper and several others were on their way through the fence.

Two machine guns opened fire, one from my right front from a position near the paddy field, the other from my left front. The first burst struck Cooper who was a few yards behind me. He said quietly, "I'm hit." I looked back. He was lying on his back. I asked him where he was hit and he answered, "In the leg." That didn't sound very serious to me. I directed a

*Every attack over any type of terrain against ^{the enemy} a prepared enemy, especially in the jungle should be halted at least one hour before dark to enable men to dig in, site their weapons, and allow the mortars and artillery to register on the FPL. This cannot be properly accomplished in less than an hour. The only exception to halting before dark is when the enemy is retreating in disorder.

soldier who was a few feet from Cooper to crawl over and help him.

Lieutenant Meade, my Weapons Platoon Leader, came up to the fence and said, "It's getting dark. What are we going to do?" I said, "We'll dig in along that trail and tie in with I Company." The soldier who was attempting to aid Cooper remarked that he couldn't get Cooper's uniform off. I tossed him my trench knife and told him to cut it off. Then one of our aid men, Pfc Sheppard*, came running up and took charge of Cooper. I walked over to where they were working and for the first time realized the seriousness of his wound. The burst had torn a gap in his thigh, cutting an artery. He bled profusely. I ordered two soldiers to cut some bamboo and make a litter. Sergeant Jasinsky came up and when Sheppard had applied a tourniquet, he helped carry him back beyond the trail and into the perimeter. Sheppard gave him a bottle of plasma, the last he had, but it was too late. Cooper was dead.

From the time he was hit until he was carried back was less than ten minutes.

No single event of the whole eight days of battle have I regretted more than the death of this one man. His death can be attributed to two causes. First, his quiet courage completely deceived me into thinking his wound was not serious. He didn't scream for a medic or beg for someone to do something quickly; never excited or hysterical as many soldiers are when they see their life blood running away. He seemed to realize that the soldier who was helping him was doing the best he could. He simply and quietly said, "I'm hit" and when asked where, said, "In the leg". He never spoke another word.

The second reason was the lack of first aid training among these men.

In my concern for the safety of my company with night coming on and in close

*This young soldier, about 18 years old, was extraordinarily brave, and was possessed of an intense devotion to duty. For six days, he attended to the wounded under any and all conditions, with complete disregard for his own safety. On 1 August he was severely wounded while attending a stricken soldier. He received the Silver Star for gallantry.

contact with the enemy, I lost sight of the probability that the soldier I directed to help Cooper might not know what to do. He tried and did the best he could, but while he fumbled, Cooper was bleeding to death.*

As Cooper was being carried into the perimeter, a soldier came up to me and said, "They got Rowe." I asked, "Is he dead?" He said, "Yes." I directed a soldier to help Sheppard give a blood plasma to Cooper, then walked over to check our tie-in with I Company. The men were still digging their foxholes. I was walking back towards the place where they were working on Cooper when this same soldier came up to me again and said, "What are we going to do about Lieutenant Rowe?"* * I said, "Where is he?" He pointed towards the enemy and said, "Out there". He said Rowe had been killed at the farthest point of our advance. He evidently was abreast of me when the machine guns opened fire and, like Cooper, was probably hit by the first few rounds.

I said, "OK, we'll get him."

I was not enthusiastic about going out for him. The Japanese usually fired their machine guns "right down the alley"; that is, without traversing or searching. I knew that anyone going near Rowe was flirting with the same fate.

I called Lieutenant Meade and one of his light machine gunners. I instructed the gunner, upon signal, to fire into a suspected area and for Meade to have one of his mortars fire into another suspected area. I was carrying a submachine gun which was heavy and clumsy, so I exchanged it for a carbine and was ready to go out when the platoon sergeant came up and said, "I'll go out with you, Captain." I said, "OK." I gave the signal to fire and we went out. Rowe was lying face down, near the edge of the paddy field.

*This incident made a lasting impression on me. From that time on, no unit that I ever commanded was deficient in first aid training; **For morale purposes, before moving up to the attack, I had given the order that we would not abandon the dead.

Next to him, face down, was another soldier: Private Garcia. Both were dead. Rowe was a large man. It was all we could do to drag him back, making sure to bring the M1 he was armed with back too. As we were carrying him into the perimeter, someone remarked that Garcia was out there too. Lieutenant Meade ran out and as Garcia was a small man, he was able to drag him back.

I had three seriously wounded men who had not yet been evacuated. It was nearly dark. I called the Battalion CP* to send up some men to take them back as I could not spare that many men from the perimeter.** I was told to leave them until morning; that no one could go up there during darkness.

I directed that three deep holes be dug large enough for a man lying down. Put brush and grass in the bottom, wrap the men in shelter halves, and place them in the holes for protection against the inevitable mortar fire. I used my own and two other officers' shelter halves, to put a cover over the holes to help ward off the rain, and then dug a drainage ditch around each hole. Before we finished, complete darkness had descended. Lieutenant Lane, my Executive Officer, then dug a hole for ourselves. All during the night the rain came down in torrents and as we had no cover, we spent a disagreeable night, made more so by the groans of the wounded who were next to us. Early next morning, 30 July, we evacuated the wounded and dead.

After cleaning our weapons, we remained in the perimeter until about noon when we attacked again. Progress was again slow. We had not gone far when fired on by two machine guns. One heavy machine gun was firing from a position off to our right front near the paddy's edge. Sergeant Jasinsky yelled to me that the other gun, a light Nambu, was firing from a Basha***just beyond the hedgerow. Lieutenant Delores, Leader of the Machine Gun Platoon,

*The Bn CP was now established at the crossing site. The Bn Comdr came across the paddy under a smoke screen after we had cleared the Japs from the paddy's edge for about 300 yards; **On 27 July, when we attacked across the paddy, I had 96 men and 6 officers in my company; ***A native thatched hut.

went in and captured the heavy machine gun, killing three Jap soldiers. I was attempting to find a passage through the thick wall of hedge separating us from the open field containing the Basha. In the meantime, the heavy machine gunners had worked their way forward and were firing into the hut. Then Sergeant Jasinsky yelled, "Hold your fire, I'm going in and get that s--- of a b----." He jumped up and rushed in. An instant later, Lieutenant Algieri and Corporal Touhet rushed forward. Algieri was on the left of the Basha and Touhet on the right. The front and two sides were closed right to the ground with only an opening in the front for the enemy to fire through, but the back was open. Jasinsky went right in through the rear and killed the crew of three. We were running short of mortar ammunition and as we had only a few hours of daylight left, we decided to dig in for the night.

The night again was active with the usual attempts at infiltration. Our grenades exploding and the usual Jap harassing mortar fire.

After the death of Lieutenant Rowe, I put Lieutenant Van Matre in command of the 3d Platoon. He was assigned to my company the day before we crossed the paddy. As I already had five officers, I did not have an appropriate assignment for him until now.

On the afternoon of the 31st, we were ordered to attack again.* We jumped off and the going was very slow again because of the nature of the enemy and terrain. We were in hedgerow country now and visibility was a little better.** After gaining about 200 yards, we decided to dig in as we had less than an hour of daylight left. The men were digging in and after checking the perimeter and being satisfied with the tie-in with I Company, I walked back to my CP.***

Lieutenant Van Matre came up and was elated over the way his men had fought. He said that when notified that we were to attack again, they grumbled

*The "attack order" consisted of calling up one of the CO's and telling him to attack. It was then up to the CO to get together for coordination; **I still could not see my 3d (Lt Van Matre's) platoon that was next to the paddy; ***A CO's CP in this fight was a foxhole.

and were becoming reluctant to continue these constant attacks, but that he had talked to them and when we jumped off they went forward in great shape. He left me and went back towards his platoon. Two minutes later, a soldier came running up to me and said, "They got Van!" I asked him if he was dead and he said, "Yes." I walked over to the 3d Platoon area. Van Matre was shot through the head. He was not yet dead, but did die after being evacuated.

In this day's fighting, Lieutenant Delores was wounded for the second time and was evacuated.* Lieutenant Pearson took command of the machine guns.

I was checking the perimeter and stopped for a few moments to talk to Sergeant Jasinsky who was checking his squad. I had left him only a few moments when Jap mortar fire came in and "Whistling Willie" opened up. He was hit. I ran over to him. There was a large gash in his arm. I was opening a first aid packet when the aid man, Sheppard, ran up. He put a bandage on his arm and he was evacuated. Later in the day Sheppard was hit and evacuated.

The I & R Platoon had been relieved from outpost duty on the river and had taken position on the left of I Company. It was given an attack sector and participated in the day's fighting. Its leader, Lieutenant Adkins, besides fighting with his platoon during the day, led several night patrols behind the Jap lines. He was extremely brave. He was later killed in the Central Burma Campaign.

On 1 August L Company moved up on the right of K. We attacked on this day with three companies abreast, plus the I & R Platoon and made the usual gain of a few hundred yards after heavy fighting. In this day's fighting, I lost two more lieutenants: Lieutenant Lane, my Executive Officer and Lieutenant Campbell, 2d Platoon.

Toward evening of this day, Lieutenant Algeri was wounded and evacuated.

*This officer was hit in the leg on the 30th, but after being treated at the Bn aid station he returned to his platoon. He won the DSC for his work at Myitkyina. He was severely wounded for the third time in the Central Burma Campaign.

I now had one lieutenant left: my Weapons Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Meade.

On 2d August, L Company attacked to the southeast to secure a wooded area. They accomplished their mission but this left a large gap between L and K Companies. The remainder of the battalion was ordered to attack straight to the south to close the gap and protect the flank of L.

The men were out of their foxholes and we were forming for the attack when the Japs opened with everything they had, including "Whistling Wille". I lost 17 men in about five minutes.

This completely disrupted the attack and it was called off. The Battalion Commander called me and I explained the situation to him. Then he gave me this GEM of advice: "When caught in an artillery or mortar barrage, the best way to go is forward."*

After the casualties were evacuated came the order to attack again.

My 1st Platoon was now commanded by a Private. He commanded two other privates. There were six men in the 2d Platoon, commanded by a Corporal. Lieutenant Duncan**, who had been on duty with Regimental Headquarters, was sent up and I gave him the 1st Platoon of 12 men. My Weapons Platoon consisted of Lieutenant Meade and 4 men.

For this attack, I consolidated the 2d and 3d Platoons (9 men) and commanded them myself.

The field to our front was bordered by hedgerows. I ordered Lieutenant Duncan to advance along the left hedgerow, keeping contact with I Company on his left. I would go up the right row and at the same time protect the right flank.

The attack was supported by my one remaining 60 mm mortar and two mortars from I Company.

We moved out almost immediately and came under mortar fire. We continued on for about 75 yards when "Whistling Willie" joined in and wounded two of my
*This is true if it can be done; **This officer served with the original Marauders.

men, leaving me with seven. This fire stopped my group. I then attempted to make contact with Lieutenant Duncan who was supposed to be moving up on my left. I then discovered I was doing a solo. When the mortar fire came down, Duncan moved out but I Company did not. Duncan advanced a few yards, but because the unit on his left had not moved out, he withdrew to the perimeter. Now realizing the attack was completely disorganized, I withdrew to the perimeter.

A short time later, Major Harrold* came up with the Battalion Headquarters Company Commander, Captain Prevo, to see what the trouble was. He asked me to show him L Company's position. We were walking down a trail towards L when the Japs laid down another mortar concentration. In attempting to escape the fire, the three of us took cover in a hole not large enough for one man. Major Harrold then agreed that we should not attack without more supporting fires and went back to the Battalion CP. Because of its exposed position, L Company withdrew to its original position and tied in with K Company.

The next day, 3 August, after stocking up some mortar ammunition, the battalion attacked, driving straight for the river.

We came out of a hedgerow into a clearing when "Whistling Willie" opened up not 50 yards to our front. It was behind a clump of bamboo at the end of a hedgerow. I moved up the left followed by Privates Sardella and Tickey.

Lieutenant Pearson, the Heavy Machine Gun Platoon Leader, came running across from the right, straight for the gun. He threw a grenade right into the clump of bamboo and when it exploded we moved in right under the muzzle of the gun and killed the crew.

We continued on and soon reached the river. Eight Japs committed suicide on the river bank. The only fire now was coming from a temple in L Company's sector. As our men were closing in, the seven remaining enemy committed suicide.

*The Bn ExO. A superior officer in every sense of the word. He later commanded the 3d Bn, 475th Inf in the Central Burma Campaign.

While I Company guarded the rear (north) of the battalion, K and L formed a line to the south facing Myitkyina. The artillery liaison officer said he still had about 50 rounds left. I told him to fire them. He did and we jumped off and overran a Jap position designated as a "strong point" on our aerial photos. It proved very weak, containing only a few Japs. We soon made contact with the Chinese force that was driving north and the 78-day battle of Myitkyina was over.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS - *No Real analysis made*

In my opinion, the original attack on Myitkyina on 18 May should have been led by a unit of the Marauders. Admittedly they were physically worn, but a few hundred could have been made available for this last effort. The Chinese, through seven long years of defeats, had developed a defensive complex. In most cases, light resistance would cause them to dig in. Two battalions should have easily taken Myitkyina.

If the situation was so critical as to justify the employment of raw recruits, then the great majority of the Marauders should not have been evacuated. They were worn and suffering from the common jungle diseases, but that was true of everyone fighting in the Pacific.

I can see no justification for the June 5th attack on Namki and still less for the attack at Mankrin three days later. The fact that a whole battalion of Chinese had been flown in from Ledo on the afternoon of 17 May proves that getting manpower to the Myitkyina area was not a problem. This was supposed to be an Allied offensive and there were several hundred thousand trained Indian and British troops in India. If it was necessary to employ these men at all, they should have been used defensively until they were trained and properly equipped.

The conditions and manner under which they were employed at Namki on 5 June was nothing short of criminal and needs no further expose.

For the attack on the 27th across the paddy field, the formation pre-

scribed was in my opinion not the correct one to use in a situation where seconds are critical and success depends on the number of men that can be put on the enemy position in the first few moments after the preparatory fires lift.

LESSONS LEARNED *W end* *Miss* *Thomson*

1. When it is necessary to employ green, raw troops against a veteran enemy, one for whom they greatly fear because of previous experiences, all commanders must violate a basic American instructional concept (which is to play up the enemy) by an attitude of sneering disdain for his fighting ability in order to instill a sense of confidence and superiority among our own men. This has been successfully employed by both the Germans and Japanese. In addition, it is not enough for all leaders to show a complete lack of fear. They must exhibit reckless bravado.

2. There are two things that are contagious in battle; one is fear, which will spread like wild fire; the other is bravery which has an equal effect. Any leader whom the troops know has their interests at heart, who is self-sacrificing and who shows no fear, will invariably be successful. Troops will follow him down the mouth of a cannon. ✓

3. An attack should never be launched unless the means are available to sustain it. In this operation, we were constantly held up and hampered by lack of supplies. This results in prolonged fighting with resulting high casualties.

4. Patrolling, the most dangerous phase of war, should be planned and have a definite objective. Excessive, unnecessary patrolling is costly in manpower and morale wearing. Men should not be exposed to the hazards of patrolling simply because a commander can't think of anything else to do.

5. Thorough training in first aid should be given a high priority in the training of combat troops.

6. There are not enough medical aid men attached to attacking units. When aid men are needed, they are needed in quantity and in a hurry. The

present allotment of one per platoon should be at least doubled.

7. The bayonet should be replaced by the trench knife. The bayonet is useless except for opening a C-ration can. The trench knife is an all purpose weapon. In extreme necessity, it can be used in close combat. It proved invaluable in the jungle for cutting bamboo for stretchers, cutting uniforms away from wounds, etc.

8. All commanders should spend considerable time with the forward units so as to keep abreast of the situation. They should pay frequent visits to the companies and platoons, but never with the thought in mind of "inspiring the troops." American troops are not easily inspired. A commander should visit the front with the object in mind of seeing what he can do to help the combat elements or for his own information. A commander usually has weapons at his disposal that he can employ to aid those who need help most, and unless he is prepared to help the company and platoon commanders with firepower, he is wasting his time going forward. Anyone can "inspire" troops by grabbing a tommy gun and an armful of grenades and saying "follow me", but he doesn't have to be a Colonel or Captain or Lieutenant. Any private who jumps up and says "follow me" will get men to follow him. When troops are being shot up they want something done about it and anyone who is not prepared to help with firepower or decisive action is about as inspiring as a sticky door knob. When an American Captain or Lieutenant is held up, he needs less inspiration and more artillery.