

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "L", 321ST INFANTRY
(81ST INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CAPTURE OF
THE ISLAND OF PELELIU, 23 - 29 SEPTEMBER 1944
(WESTERN PACIFIC CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE
COMPANY ATTACKING A RIDGE LINE FORTIFIED WITH
CAVES AND PILLBOXES

Captain Pierce B. Irby, Jr., Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2, 3
Introduction	4
Palau Islands - Prior to Invasion	5
Invasion - Palau Islands	6
General Situation	6
Preparation for Attack by 3d Battalion, 321st Infantry, 23 September, 1944	9
Operations 24-25 September	13
Operations 26-27 September	20
Operations 28-29 September	24
Analysis and Criticism	26
Lessons	28
Map A - General Orientation, Pacific Ocean Area	
Map B - General Situation, 15-23 September 1944	
Map C - Perimeter Defense, 23 September	
Map D - 3d Battalion Advance Prior to Attack, 24 September	
Map E - Attack, 24-25 September	
Map F - Attack, 26-27 September	
Map G - Attack, 28 September	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Campaign Summaries, Part II (World War II)
Department of Military Art and Engineering
U. S. Military Academy, West Point, N. Y. 1946
(TIS Library)
- A-2 Biennial Report of General George C. Marshall,
The Chief of Staff of the United States Army,
1 July 1943 - 30 June 1945, to the Secretary of War
Fighting Forces Series, Infantry Journal Press
(Personal possession of author)
- A-3 Battle for Peleliu
By Major D. M. Schmuck
Military Review, May 1945, page 48 (TIS Library)
- A-4 The Island War
By Frank O. Hough, Major, USMCR
J. B. Lippincott Company (TIS Library)
- A-5 Marines in the Pacific War, Chapter 20
Peleliu, the Hardest Battle
By Fletcher Pratt
The Marine Corps Gazette, February 1948, page 39
(Personal possession of author)
- A-6 The 81st Infantry Wildcat Division in World War II
The Infantry Journal Press (Personal possession of
author)
- A-7 The Japanese Defense of Peleliu
Military Reports, Number 26, February 1945, page 1
Military Intelligence Division, U. S. War Department
(TIS Library)
- A-8 Operation Report, 81st Infantry Division
Operation on Peleliu Island, 23 September -
27 November 1944 (TIS Library)
- A-9 Coral Comes High
By George P. Hunt, USMCR
Harper & Brothers (TIS Library)
- A-10 The Victory in the Pacific
By Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, U.S.N.
Journal of the Royal United Service Institution,
November 1946, page 539 (TIS Library)
- A-11 Counter-Landing on Peleliu
Tactical and Technical Trends, Number 57, April 1945,
page 124
Military Intelligence Division, U. S. War Department
(TIS Library)

A-12 Japs continue Extensive Use of Cave Fortifications
Tactical and Technical Trends, Number 58, May 1945,
page 23
Military Intelligence Division, U. S. War Department
(TIS Library)

A-13 Japanese Island Defense
Tactical and Technical Trends, Number 59, June 1945,
page 40
Military Intelligence Division, U. S. War Department
(TIS Library)

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "L", 321ST INFANTRY
(81ST INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CAPTURE OF
THE ISLAND OF PELELU, 23 - 29 SEPTEMBER 1944
(WESTERN PACIFIC CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

The year 1944 was destined to be an eventful one for the American Military Forces operating in the Pacific Theatre. One of the major events was to be the long-awaited junction of the Forces of the Central Pacific Area under Admiral Nimitz and the Forces of the Southwest Pacific Area under General MacArthur. (1)

This junction was made possible by a series of hard-fought amphibious operations by both Forces. (2)

By the end of July 1944 General MacArthur had advanced west along the northern coast of New Guinea to Sansapor Point. (3)

On 10 August 1944, the Island of Guam was secured by the Forces of Admiral Nimitz. (4) (See Map A) Before this convergence of Forces was made, well-coordinated amphibious invasions were executed by the landings on Morotai by General MacArthur's Forces and the landings on the Palau Islands by the Forces of Admiral Nimitz. (5) (See Map A)

The enemy possessed a heavily fortified and important Air and Naval Base in the Palau Islands. (6) These bases covered the approaches to the Philippines. (7) They were too strong to be left at our rear. (8) The possession of these bases by our Forces would: (See Map A)

1. Secure the right flank of General MacArthur's approach to the Philippines. (9)

(1), (2) A-1, p. 53; (3) A-2, p. 130; (4) A-2, p. 132; (5) A-1, p. 53; (6) A-3, p. 48; (7) A-4, p. 294; (8) A-5, p. 40; (9) A-4, p. 297.

2. Provide landbased aircraft support for the coming Philippines invasion. (10)

3. Provide air and sea bases from which the neutralization of all Japanese bases and operations in the Caroline Islands could be completed. (11)

4. Provide an important link in the Pacific air channels. (12)

This monograph covers the operations of Company "L", 321st Infantry (81st Infantry Division) in the capture of the Island of Peleliu, Palau Islands, 23-29 September 1944.

PALAU ISLANDS - PRIOR TO INVASION

The Palau Islands consist of a group of Islands located on the western boundary of the Caroline Island Group. To the west at a distance of 525 miles lies the Island of Mindanao in the Philippines. (13) (See Map A) The land masses ^{of Palau Island} are of coral formation of the most rugged type, permitting them to be easily defended. (14) For years the Japanese had fortified these islands and had intensified their defensive efforts as American forces swept across the Central Pacific. (15)

The Island of Peleliu possessed a large airfield, and for this reason it was especially heavily fortified. (See Map B) Its beaches were covered by pillboxes and blockhouses which were protected by obstacles. (16) Northeast of the airfield, and running parallel to the western peninsula of the island, was a ridge line festured with caves, pillboxes, and artillery and mortar positions. (17) (See Map B) Positions on this ridge

(10), (11), (12) A-6, p. 47; (13) A-7, p. 1; (14) A-7, p. 2; (15) A-3, p. 48; A-5, p. 41; (16) A-7; (17) A-5, p. 44.

line were prepared in depth for all-around defense. (18)

The enemy garrison on Peleliu consisted of crack front line troops who had seen action in Manchuria. (19) The strength of the garrison prior to invasion was estimated to be 8,000. (20) Identified enemy units that participated in operations on Peleliu were: (21)

2d Infantry Regiment, 14th Division
2d and 3d Battalions, 15th Infantry Regiment, 14th Division
346th Independent Infantry Battalion, 53d Independent
Mixed Brigade
Miscellaneous Naval and Service units.

INVASION - PALAU ISLANDS

The Third Amphibious Corps was designated as the invasion forces for the Palau Islands. This Corps was commanded by Marine General Roy S. Geiger and consisted of the Marine 1st Division and the Army 81st Division (Reinforced). (22) The Regiments of the 1st Marine Division were the 1st, 5th, and 7th Regiments. (23) The Regimental Combat Teams of the 81st Division were the 321st, 322d, and 323d. (24)

The 1st Marine Division landed on 15 September 1944 with the mission of seizing the Island of Peleliu. The 81st Division (Reinforced), less Regimental Combat Team 323, landed on 17 September with the mission of seizing the Island of Anguar, six miles south of Peleliu. (See Map B) Regimental Combat Team 323 was floating reserve of the Corps for these landings. (25)

GENERAL SITUATION

The assault landings went off as planned, and since this initial operation met with success, Regimental Combat Team 323

(18) A-7, p. 4; (19) A-6, p. 135; (20) A-6, p. 46; (21) A-8, p. 101; (22) A-8, p. 5; (23) A-8, p. 131; (24) A-6, p. 55; (25) A-8, p. 5.

was released from Corps reserve on 18 September. On 20 September this combat team sailed for operations at Ulithi. Also on 20 September, Anguar Island was secured by the 81st Division, (Reinforced); less Regimental Combat Team 323. However, on Peleliu it was a different story. Strong enemy resistance from the ridge line was holding up the advance of the 1st Marine Division. (26) (See Map B)

The Commanding General 81st Division received a message from Commanding General Third Amphibious Corps on 21 September, requesting information as to when one Regimental Combat Team could be made available for employment on Peleliu. Third Amphibious Corps was informed that Regimental Combat Team 321 could be ready for release immediately upon being resupplied. (27)

On 22 September instructions were received from Third Amphibious Corps for the departure of Regimental Combat Team 321 from Anguar and its attachment to the 1st Marine Division. (28) The commanding officer of Regimental Combat Team 321 reported to Commanding General 1st Marine Division for instructions. Orders were received for the relief of the 1st Marine Regiment by 1800, 23 September. (29)

Regimental Combat Team 321 began embarkation from Anguar at 0700, 22 September, and embarkation was completed just after daybreak on 23 September. (30)

The organization of the Regimental Combat Team for operations on Peleliu consisted of the following units: (31)

(26) A-8, p. 5; (27) A-8, p. 5; (28) A-8, p. 5; (29) A-8, p. 7; (30) A-8, p. 9; (31) A-8, p. 7.

321st Infantry Regiment,
 Company A, 306th Engineer (combat) Battalion, plus
 Detachment Headquarters and Service Company,
 Company A (plus Company D, less two platoons), and
 Detachment Headquarters 306th Medical Battalion,
 Detachment 781st Ordnance Company,
 154 Engineer (combat) Battalion (less one company), plus
 Detachment Headquarters and Service Company,
 1138th Engineer (combat) Group,
 Detachment 592d Joint Assault Signal Company,
 Detachment 481st Amphibian Truck Company,
 Company B, 726th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, plus
 Detachment Headquarters and Service Company,
 Company A, plus Mortar Platoon, 710th Tank Battalion,
 Detachment Provisional Graves Registration Company,
 Detachment Translator-Interpreter Team "A", Head-
 quarters Central Pacific Area.

By 23 September the enemy had been driven, with heavy losses, from the airfield and approaches to the ridge line on Peleliu by the 1st Marine Division. During this drive the 1st Marine Division's combat efficiency had rapidly depleted. (32)

The enemy, still in considerable strength, now occupied the heavily fortified and easily defended Umurbrogal and Kamilianlul Mountains. (See Map B) From this position he had observation over operations of American Forces on the southern portion of the island. In addition, his routes of communication were defiladed from our naval gunfire and artillery, and he could be reinforced from the northern islands of the Palau group. (33)

Regimental Combat Team 321 began debarking at 1200, 23 September, and by 1500 had relieved the 1st Marine Regiment on the left flank of the 1st Marine Division. (34) (See Map B)

The 1st Marine Division planned to attack at 0700, 24 September, with two regiments abreast, to seize the O-4 line. Regimental Combat Team 321 would attack west of the West Road and seize the O-4 line within its zone. The 7th Marine Regiment

(32) A-4, p. 9; (33) A-8, p. 9; (34) A-8, p. 15.

would attack east of the West Road and seize the O-4 line within its zone. The 1st Marine Regiment was to occupy a defensive position on the eastern peninsula of the island. The 5th Marine Regiment would be Division Reserve. (35) (See Map B)

Regimental Combat Team 321 planned to attack with two battalions in column, the 2d Battalion leading, followed by the 3d Battalion. The 1st Battalion would be Regimental Reserve. (36)

PREPARATION FOR ATTACK BY 3D BATTALION, 321ST
INFANTRY, 23 SEPTEMBER, 1944

Upon debarkation at Peleliu the 3d Battalion moved across the airfield to an assembly area astride the West Road and just north of where this road turns to the northeast. Immediately upon arrival in the assembly area a perimeter defense was established. Although the 2d Battalion had relieved the 1st Marine Regiment just north of this assembly area, the enemy occupied the ridge line on the 3d Battalion's right flank. The enemy was capable of executing a counterattack from this ridge line. (See Map B)

This perimeter was organized with Company "I" on the west of the road, facing north and west, and Company "L" on the east of the road, facing north and east. Company "K" was located south of Company "I" and Company "L", facing west, south, and east. The Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company and the 81mm Mortar Platoon of Company "M" were located in the center of the perimeter. One Machine Gun Platoon of Company "M" was attached to Companies "I" and "L". (37) (See Map C)

(35) A-8, p. 131; (36) A-8, p. 17; (37) Personal knowledge.

Company "L" organized its assigned sector by placing the 3d Platoon on the left with its flank on the road, and the 2d Platoon on a small ridge located on the right flank of the company. The 1st Platoon was positioned 100 yards to the rear of the 3d and 2d Platoons and extending across the entire rear of the company's sector. The attached machine guns from Company "M" were placed with one section on the right flank of the 3d Platoon and one section on the right of the 2d Platoon. The 60mm mortar section was placed in the center of the company perimeter with barrages prepared to the front of the 2d Platoon. The Light Machine Gun Section was placed on the right flank of the 1st Platoon, protecting the company's right flank and right rear. The company command post was located at the base of the ridge in the rear of the 2d Platoon. (See Map C)

After a reconnaissance of the position, the company commander believed that, if attacked, it would come from the ridge line on his right. Accordingly, he placed the bulk of his company's fires in this direction. (38)

Since the battalion commander had not fixed responsibility for the road on the right, the company commander contacted the commander of Company "I", and the two agreed to place one light machine gun from a rifle platoon to cover the road. The commander of Company "L" directed the 3d Platoon leader to place his light machine gun in position to cover the road and "I" Company's right flank. (39) (See Map C)

Each rifle company of the battalion had been issued one light machine gun, one portable flame thrower and submachine (38) Personal knowledge; (39) Personal knowledge.

gun per rifle platoon, and one additional automatic rifle per rifle squad. (40)

The men began to dig in, which was extremely difficult due to the makeup of the terrain. The ground was of solid coral rock as hard as concrete. The individual positions prepared were more like double slit trenches than foxholes, since it was impossible to dig deeper than twelve inches. Many entrenching tools were bent or broken in this operation. Each position was occupied by two men, in order that one could be awake for security purposes at all times. Coral rocks were abundant in the area, and these were piled up around their positions for additional depth.

A small ammunition dump that had been abandoned by the Marines was found on the road near the position of the 1st Platoon. The company commander directed the 1st Platoon leader to place sufficient guards on the dump to prevent destruction or use by enemy infiltration patrols. (41) (See Map C)

As positions were being prepared, the company commander visited all platoons to inspect preparations and selection of automatic weapons positions. After positions were prepared satisfactorily, an inspection of equipment was held by all platoons.

Shortages in ammunition were replenished. Each man was given three grenades, two fragmentary and one white phosphorus. In addition, enough grenade cases (25 grenades each) were found in the abandoned Marine ammunition dump to place one in each (40), (41) Personal knowledge.

squad position. It was learned on Angaur that a good supply of grenades increased the confidence of the men, especially at night.

The night's supper consisted of C-rations, and one ration was issued for the next day's operation.

Wire was laid to all platoons and to the 60mm mortar section. A line from the battalion command post to the company command post was also laid. The SCR-300 at the company command post, operating in the battalion command net, was left on but not used throughout the night because it was felt that this would invite attacks by enemy infiltration groups. The SCR-536 radios of the platoons were turned off to conserve batteries. (42)

At 1730 the company commander was called to the battalion command post where instructions were issued for the following day.

The battalion was to follow at a distance of 1000 yards, the attack of the 2d Battalion along the road to the northeast and be prepared to exploit any gains made by the 2d Battalion. This information was passed on to platoon leaders at the company command post at 1830. (43)

Enemy activity throughout the night consisted of infiltrating individuals and small patrols. Five Japs were killed with grenades in front of the 3d and 2d Platoon positions and one in the rear of the company by the 1st Platoon. One of the Japs killed in front of the 2d Platoon had jumped into a hole between two men. All three parties were quite surprised, and as the Jap tried a hasty withdrawal, he was promptly killed with a grenade. (42) Personal knowledge; (43) A-8, p. 17; Personal knowledge.

An examination of these dead, the next morning, revealed that only two carried rifles. All were well equipped with grenades and wore the familiar split-toed rubber-bottomed shoes. No casualties were inflicted upon the company by these light infiltration tactics on the part of the enemy. (44)

OPERATIONS 24-25 SEPTEMBER

At 0700 the 2d Battalion moved out in the attack, followed by the 3d Battalion, to seize the area south of the O-4 line and west of Umurbrogal Mountain. Both battalions advanced on the left of the road. Forward movement was slow due to the dense undergrowth. The commands "Off your feet" and "On your feet" were to be heard many times during the day. (45)

The 3d Battalion advanced in column of companies with Company "I" leading, followed by Company "L" and Company "K", in that order. Company "L" advanced in the column with the 3d Platoon leading, followed by the Company Command Group, the 2d Platoon, Weapons Platoon, and 1st Platoon, in that order.

At one lull in the advance, the company supply brought forward large cans of tomato and grapefruit juice, which was rationed out to platoons. The men opened the cans and passed them along the line, each man taking a swallow. This was a welcome addition to the rations, after drinking C-ration lemon juice. (46)

By 1530 the head of the battalion column had reached a point where the road turns toward the north. (See Map D) Here the column was halted. A radio message was received directing company commanders to report to the battalion commander at the rear of the (44), (45), (46) Personal knowledge.

column. The 1st Sergeant was informed to assemble all platoon leaders in the rear of the 3d Platoon. The company commander, accompanied by the communications sergeant, radio operator, and two messengers, then proceeded to the rear of the column.

Just west of the road, near the head of Company "K", the company commander found the battalion commander and the battalion S-3. (See Map E) As soon as all company commanders were assembled, orders were issued for a battalion attack of the ridge running parallel to and east of the road. (47)

The battalion plan was to attack the ridge over a wide front with three companies abreast; Company "I" on the left, Company "L" in the center, and Company "K" on the right. (See Map E) Company "M" was to support the attack from positions west of the road along the entire battalion front. Company objectives were pointed out on a map, as they could not all be seen from where the order was issued. Time for the attack was set for 1630. The West Road was designated as the line of departure.

As the order was issued in the vicinity of the Company "K" area of departure, the commander of Company "K" took one look at his company's objective and stated that it was suicide to attack that position and that he would not attack. This company had received quite a few casualties in the assault of a strongly-held pillbox on Anguar and its morale was low. The commander of Company "K" was given a direct order by the battalion commander to attack. The company commander again stated that he would not attack. Standing nearby was a Company "K" platoon leader, the (47) Personal knowledge.

only other officer remaining with the company. The battalion commander relieved the company commander on the spot and directed the platoon leader to take command of the company. This officer stated that he agreed with the relieved company commander and that he would not attack the position. The battalion commander then relieved him on the spot and directed the commander of Company "L" to send for his 3d Platoon leader, who would assume command of Company "K". Some of the men of Company "K" were nearby and heard the statements made by their Company officers. It was apparent that their morale had been greatly affected. (48)

The time was now 1600. The attack was to jump off in 30 minutes. This meant that the commander of Company "L" had to make his reconnaissance, formulate his plan of attack, and issue his orders in 30 minutes. Due to the shortage of time, his reconnaissance consisted mainly of a map study on the way back to where the company had been halted in the battalion column. He decided to attack with two platoons abreast - the 3d Platoon on the left and the 2d Platoon on the right. (See Map E) The company commander and command group would follow just in the rear of and between the 3d and 2d Platoons. The Light Machine Gun Section was to follow closely, the Company Command Group, prepared to fire on targets of opportunity and on any targets the company commander might direct. The 60mm Mortar Section was to support the attack from positions in the present company area of departure by initially firing on the company objective and then on targets of opportunity. A 60mm mortar observer would go forward with each assault platoon. The 1st Platoon

(48) Personal knowledge.

was to follow the Light Machine Gun Section and be prepared to go into action on either of the company's flanks.

The objective was that portion of the hill mass directly east of the company's present position. (49) (See Map E)

The company attack order was issued by 1620 to the assembled platoon leaders and the 1st Sergeant. The objective was pointed out both on the ground and on the map. The maps were very inaccurate, having been made from aerial photographs when the hill masses were covered with vegetation. By now this vegetation had been almost entirely cleared by naval gunfire and aerial bombing. Contours indicated the general trace of the ridge line, but details of ground forms so vitally needed for small unit actions were omitted. (50)

The attack jumped off with platoon leaders receiving little or no time in which to orient their platoons. 81mm mortar fire was not effective as preparations were dispersed over the entire battalion front and never massed on the company objective.

As the assault platoons crossed the road and moved toward the objective, they were met with a heavy but inaccurate volume of rifle and automatic weapons fire. It was impossible to tell where this fire was coming from. The company commander called for 81mm mortar fire on the objective, but this was slow in arriving. In the meantime he directed his 60mm mortars to concentrate their fires in the center of the company objective, a likely spot for enemy weapons. The company jeep, with mounted 50-cal. machine gun, was placed just west of the road in defilade and used (49), (50) Personal knowledge.

to fire across the ridge and in trees for likely snipers.

The platoons reached the base of the objective by 1700 and received no casualties in their approach to the ridge, due to the inaccuracy of the enemy fire. They were now faced with scaling a cliff of solid coral rock approximately 40 feet in height. The men had to pick their way very carefully up through the rocks. Often it was necessary for one man to climb to a place where he could get a foot hold and pull other men up to him with his rifle or foot. The progress was measured in inches.

Darkness was now approaching rapidly, and as man after man cautiously felt his way up the treacherous cliff he was met with a shower of enemy grenades from the top. As the platoons reached the top they were pinned down by machine gun fire and rifle fire from the right flank and thought to be in the vicinity of the Company "K" objective. The company commander tried to contact Company "K" by SCR-300 radio, but was unable to do so. The 2d Platoon reported that they had not seen Company "K" during the attack. It was apparent that the company's right flank was exposed. (51)

The 1st Platoon was ordered to move up on the right of the 2d Platoon and take the machine gun. As the 1st Platoon attempted to climb the ridge in the vicinity of the enemy machine gun it was met with a heavier shower of grenades than had been encountered by the 2d and 3d Platoons. However, the enemy fire ceased on the 2d and 3d Platoons, permitting them to advance across the ridge.

By this time darkness had set in. The 1st Platoon was unable to reach the top of the cliff to its front. This platoon (51) Personal knowledge.

remained at the bottom of the cliff during the night. (See Map E)

The company commander ordered the 2d and 3d Platoons to halt in place and dig in for the night. (See Map E) However, it was impossible to dig in at all in the rock. Individuals took up positions behind boulders or in natural cracks or crevices on the ridge.

The company had taken its objective and had driven a wedge into the enemy-held ridge, but it was in a dangerous position if the enemy chose to counterattack. Both flanks were exposed. It had been learned that Company "I" was 800 yards to the north. (See Map E) The men had approximately half the ammunition they had jumped off with, since very little firing could be done as they scaled the cliff. It would be next to impossible to bring ammunition up the cliff to the rear in the darkness.

As usual, the Japs came out of their caves during darkness, and throughout the night a grenade battle took place, but this time the situation was reversed. The company was on the ridge, with the Japs at the base of a cliff to the company's front.

The company's casualties were light during the assault of the ridge and throughout the night, considering the nature of the defense and type of terrain over which the company had to advance.

At the break of dawn on 25 September, the enemy placed artillery concentrations on the company's rear, between the road and the beach. One of the 60mm mortar positions received a direct hit, which killed the squad leader, wounded the gunner, and destroyed the mortar. (52)

(52) Personal knowledge.

At 0530 the company commander was called to the battalion command post where instructions were issued for the day's plan of attack. The battalion was to continue its efforts to cross the ridge lines to its front. The plan was for Companies "L" and "K", each supported by one section of machine guns from Company "M", to hold their present positions and support by fire, the attack of Company "I". (See Map E) Company "I", with a platoon of machine guns from Company "M" in support, was to swing south from its present position and assault the ridge line forward of the positions now held by Companies "L" and "K". Time of the attack was to be 0700. (53) (See Map E)

Company "I" was now in position 800 yards north of Company "L". Company "K" was in position 500 yards south of Company "L".

The company commander returned to his company position and decided to support the attack of Company "I" by placing three rifle platoons on line. (See Map E) Orders were issued at 0600 for the 2d Platoon, 3d Platoon, and 60mm Mortar Section to remain in position, and for the 1st Platoon to move on to the ridge to position on the right of the 2d Platoon. (See Map E) The Light Machine Gun Section was to remain on the left flank of the company. The Heavy Machine Gun Section from Company "M" would support the attack from positions on the company's right flank.

Resupply of rations and ammunition was accomplished with great difficulty over the cliff to the company's rear. A line of men strung along the cliff had to manhandle these supplies to the top. (54)

(53), (54) Personal knowledge.

At 0700 all the fires that the company could make available were placed on the position to its front. The enemy position was honeycombed with pillboxes and caves capable of withstanding a tremendous amount of punishment. Some of these caves ran all the way through the ridge line and had multiple entrances. Fire slits had been erected between cave entrances. All the fire power that the company could place on this position was not enough. The enemy held a strong position and was determined to hold it. He returned the company's fire as if to show that his position could withstand anything that could be placed on him. Fire from rocket launchers and mortars appeared to have little, if any, effect.

Company "I" had hardly moved from its position, becoming pinned down when trying to advance. (55) (See Map E)

By nightfall the company had suffered 23 men killed and wounded, including five squad leaders. Two of the three aid men attached to the company were wounded while caring for wounded men. It was impossible to determine what losses were inflicted on the enemy.

During the night of 25 September enemy activity consisted of the usual infiltrating groups and patrols. Grenade battles took place throughout the night. (56)

OPERATIONS 26-27 SEPTEMBER

At 0530 on 26 September the company commander was again called to the battalion command post for instructions for the day's attack.

The battalion plan was to attack to the east with the (55) A-8, p. 21; Personal knowledge; (56) Personal knowledge.

mission of seizing the ridge to its front. Company "K" was to move to a position on the left flank of Company "I". As soon as this was accomplished the two companies would attack abreast to seize the battalion objective.[?] Company "L" was to remain in its present position, prepared to move on order to exploit any gains made in the zones of Companies "I" and "K". The time of the attack was set at 0700. (See Map E)

The attack jumped off at 0700, and as Company "K" tried to come abreast of Company "I" it became pinned down by heavy fire from the ridge to its front. Company "I" was unable to advance due to heavy enemy fire to its front. (57) (See Map F)

At 0730 the commander of Company "L" received instructions from the battalion commander through the S-3 that his company would be relieved by the 7th Marine Regiment at 0820. The company, after being relieved, was to move into an assembly area in the vicinity of the battalion command post, and the company commander was to report to the battalion commander. (58) (See Map F)

By 0900 the company closed into the assembly area, where ammunition shortages were replaced, and the company commander reported to the battalion commander at the battalion command post. The battalion commander issued instructions for the attack of Hills X and Y on the ridge to the right of Company "I". The attack would be supported by the 81mm Mortar Platoon and a section of heavy machine guns from Company "M". The time of the

(57) A-8, p. 23; Personal knowledge; (58) A-8, p. 23; Personal knowledge.

attack would be 0930. (59) (See Map F)

After a very hasty reconnaissance, the company commander issued his attack order to platoon leaders at 0915. Objectives were pointed out on the ground and on the map. The company plan was to attack with two platoons abreast. The 3d Platoon would seize Hill X on the left, and the 1st Platoon, with a Light Machine Gun Section attached, would seize Hill Y on the right. The 2d Platoon in support would follow the 1st Platoon at a distance of 200 yards and protect the company's right flank. The 60mm Mortar Section would support the attack from defiladed positions near the road, which was the line of departure. The company commander and command group would follow the 3d Platoon. (60) (See Map F)

The attack was launched on time under an 81mm mortar preparation. By 1145 both assault platoons had advanced, after a hard and slow climb, to the top of their objectives. Mortar fire had been lifted by assault platoon leaders to the next ridge to the east. As the platoons prepared to advance over the ridges they were met by a heavy volume of enemy fire from a reverse slope defensive position and from caves and pillboxes located in the next ridge to the east. This fire included mortar fire and timed 75mm gun fire. The 3d Platoon was also receiving fire to its rear from enemy caves located at the base of the hills on which Company "I" and the 1st Platoon were located. The Japs had held their fire until the 3d Platoon had reached the top of Hill X. In order to cover the rear of the 3d Platoon, the com- (59), (60) Personal knowledge.

pany commander moved the 2d Platoon to the south nose of the ridge occupied by Company "I". The Heavy Machine Gun Section from Company "M" was also displaced to this position. From this position they were directed to fire into the enemy caves at the base of the ridge held by the 1st Platoon. The Light Machine Gun Section was moved to a position on the left flank of the 1st Platoon and began firing into caves below the Company "I" position. 60mm mortar fire was placed in the draws on both flanks of the 3d Platoon. 81mm mortar fires were drawn in and placed on the forward slope of the 3d Platoon's position. The 1st and 3d Platoons were suffering many casualties. Men who were hit fell or rolled to the bottom of the steep ridge. Some men wounded slightly were injured falling to the bottom. The bodies of those killed bounded off fallen trees and boulders. (See Map F)

The men of the 3d Platoon tried desperately to hold their position but were compelled to withdraw due to the continued heavy enemy fire. The platoon withdrew to a position between and slightly to the rear of the 1st and 2d Platoons. The 2d Platoon, while moving to its position to cover the withdrawal of the 3d Platoon, had suffered few casualties, but these included the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant. (See Map F)

The remainder of the day and the 27th were spent strengthening the company's position, which was again difficult, as the terrain was of coral rock. All possible efforts were made by all leaders to reconnoiter the front to definitely determine the location of enemy positions. Positions located during the attack

on the 26th were kept under fire. (61)

On 27 September Company "K" relieved Company "I" on the left of Company "L". (62)

OPERATIONS 28-29 SEPTEMBER

At 0430 on 28 September, the company commander reported to the battalion command post for instructions for the day's plan of operations.

A composite battalion was to be organized, consisting of Companies "E", "F", and "I". This battalion, commanded by the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, was to attack along the east road from positions now held by the 2d Battalion and seize the area southward to the O-X line. Company "K" was to be withdrawn from its position on the left of Company "L" and moved to a defensive position in the 2d Battalion area. Company "L" would assault Hill X to its front to divert the enemy's attention to the west and thereby assist the attack of the composite battalion. The 81mm mortar platoon of Company "M" would support the attack of Company "L". (63) (See Map G)

The Company "L" plan was for the 3d Platoon to clear both draws in front of the 1st and 2d Platoons with satchel charges and flame throwers. The 1st and 2d Platoons, with the Light Machine Gun Section and the Heavy Machine Gun Section from Company "M", would support the attack of the 3d Platoon with overhead fire. The 60mm Mortar Section would place its fires on the reverse slopes of Hill X. After clearing these draws, the 3d Platoon would seize Hill X. (See Map G)

(61) Personal knowledge; (62), (63) A-8, p. 29; Personal knowledge.

The attack began at 0700, and by 1100 the 3d Platoon had cleared both draws by knocking out four caves. This was accomplished by a close coordination of supporting fires from the 1st and 2d Platoons. Caves were neutralized with automatic weapons fire until individuals could advance close enough to use the flame thrower and to throw satchel charges into the entrances.

The men of the 3d Platoon then began their tough climb to the top of Hill X. As the platoon reached the top, again heavy enemy mortar and 75mm gun fire began falling on Hill X and the 1st Platoon on the right. Due to the steep slope, which made footing insecure, and the coral rock, which offered no protection, they were compelled to withdraw after suffering many casualties. The platoon withdrew to the position from which they had attacked at 0700. (See Map G)

The remainder of the day and night of 28-29 September, was spent in this position. (See Map G)

The company strength consisted of 90 men of 183 that had debarked on the island on 23 September. The casualties included all rifle platoon leaders, two platoon sergeants, and twelve squad leaders. (64)

Hill X still remained untaken, but the attack of the composite battalion had been greatly assisted in its advance to the O-X line. It was not possible to determine how many of the enemy had been destroyed in the knocked-out caves. (65)

At 0700 on 29 September, the tired men of Company "L" were relieved by a company of the 7th Marine Regiment. The company (64) Personal knowledge; (65) A-8, p. 31; Personal knowledge.

joined the remainder of the 3d Battalion in an assembly area along 321st Infantry Trail 1000 yards to the northeast. The company spent the remainder of the day in the assembly area, except for a reconnaissance detachment sent to Ngabad Island, which was to be occupied by the company on 30 September. (66)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation, I believe that the attacks of the 3d Battalion on the Umurbrogal ridge line were committed in detail without coordinated fire support, sufficient reconnaissance, or proper planning. At no time was artillery used, yet the 1st Marine Division Artillery was in support of the attack.

All attacks were made frontally across cross compartments where the enemy was strongest, thereby permitting him to use maximum fires from caves and pillboxes. This was proved during the advance of the 2d Battalion along the 321st Infantry Trail. This trail was an avenue of approach into the northeastern flank of the Umurbrogal ridge line, and, once secured, it was comparatively easy to advance along the terrain corridors southwest to the O-X line. (67) Likewise, the 3d Platoon of Company "L", supported by fires of the 1st and 2d Platoons, cleared the draws to the front of the company on 28 September by advancing up the draws, knocking out caves systematically.

The attack on 24 September was executed by all three rifle companies assaulting the ridge line frontally with large gaps existing between them. Adequate 81mm mortar and heavy machine (66) A-8, pp. 31, 32; Personal knowledge; (67) A-8, p. 31.

gun support was nonexistent in the assault of Company "L". It would have been impossible for one company to have received the fire support of another.

This was proved on 25 September when Company "I" was not able to advance because of enemy resistance between that company and Companies "L" and "K". (68)

Had Company "L" succeeded in crossing the ridge line, resupply would have been extremely difficult, as there were no trails in the battalion zone to permit the use of vehicles.

The attack on 24 September was executed without allowing leaders on company level and below, sufficient time to make adequate plans. The company objective of Companies "I" and "L" was pointed out on a map which was very inaccurate. The attack was launched just before dark. Company "L" arrived on its objective during darkness, which, in addition to the difficult terrain, permitted little or no ^{time} plan for reorganization.

The attack on 26 September was a frontal assault by Company "L" of a ridge line that was already holding up the advance of two companies of the battalion. On 28 September, Companies "I" and "K" had been withdrawn, and Company "L" was given the mission of assaulting the same ridge that had held up the advance of the entire battalion on the 26th.

In summary, from the regiment's viewpoint, the operation was a success. By securing the 321st Infantry Trail, the regiment had succeeded in splitting the Japanese forces located in the Umurbrogal and Kamilianlul Mountain areas. This kept the
(68) A-8, p. 21.

enemy from reinforcing his strong garrison in the south with troops from the north.

Although Company "L" did not take Hill X, its assault thereon did contain the enemy in the area, thereby contributing greatly to the success of the composite battalion's advance to the O-X line on 28 September.

LESSONS

1. In the attack of a strongly-held position, well-planned and coordinated artillery and mortar fire support is essential.
2. In the attack, companies of a battalion committed separately, permit little chance of success.
3. Small unit leaders must be allowed sufficient time for reconnaissance and planning in any combat situation.
4. Where possible, company objectives should be pointed out on the ground.
5. Small unit leaders become casualties first unless during training, they are taught to command their units instead of doing everything themselves.
6. Training of infantrymen in the use of demolitions is necessary to success in combating enemy caves.
7. Enemy in caves can only be neutralized with small arms and mortar fire. The job of destroying them goes to the individual soldier equipped with the flame thrower and satchel charge.
8. In combating an enemy that consistently uses infiltration tactics, time must be allowed units to accomplish their mission and to organize a perimeter defense during daylight hours.

P.W.

9. In attacking over rugged terrain where there are no trails, the problem of supply should be considered.

P.W.

10. The reverse slope defense is strong if supported by caves in ridges to the rear.

11. Grenades increase confidence of men at night when confronted with an infiltrating enemy.

12. To attack frontally with one company in an area where two companies have failed to advance permits little chance of success.

P.W.

13. To attack a position with the same unit where one attack has already failed affects the morale of the men.