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SOME ASPECTS OF THE OPERATIONS OF  
SMALL INFANTRY UNITS DURING THE ATTACK  
IN THE JUNGLE WITH NIGHT APPROACHING

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PREFACE

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The kindness and courtesy of the librarians of The Infantry School Library were extremely helpful to me in making the necessary research for the preparation of this paper. Even when harried and rushed by a large crowd, those employed in the library always seemed to find time to give me the necessary help in locating material in the files and on the shelves.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author - not necessarily that of The Infantry School or the Department of the Army.

*Robert W. Spode*  
Signature

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to show the importance of holding, after dark, key terrain seized in a daylight attack in jungle areas. The discussion of this subject will be limited to battalion and smaller sized organizations operating in the jungle, for that is where and when it is most often violated. The intention of the author is to show why key terrain is often given up in the jungle after it has been seized and then to trace through three combat examples involving this point, showing the penalty for violations and the reward for holding the terrain vital to the operation. The author intends to recommend actions that can aid in the retention of this critical terrain. The author will also show some of the effects night has on offensive operations in the jungle.

The author does not intend to ridicule either the courage or the character of any of the troops or commanders used as examples in this monograph. The examples are only straws in the haystack of operations of small units during the Second World War. And the examples used in this monograph are used because they illustrate the very points that are the basis for this paper. It would certainly be unfair for the author, with his limited experience, to attempt to castigate these commanders after ten years and more for decisions made in combat. The author is sure that it is much easier to look dispassionately upon a problem from The Infantry School Library or his home than it would have been from the position of command

when and where the problem arose. No amount of research could place the author in the shoes of these commanders in the years 1944-45.

The lessons of our past wars are still there, and constructive criticism of the operations of our armed forces in those wars is certainly to the profit of our nation. That is the purpose for the submission of this monograph.

A need for the emphasis of this point was revealed to the author during the search for a subject at the beginning of the monograph work. It is not, therefore, an old pet subject of the author, but the need to stress the point seemed to leap out while the author was tracing down another tentative subject. Current army manuals do allude to this point (7:9) but it seemed to the author that it should be brought out in greater clarity.

There is no personal knowledge involved in this monograph, for the author has never been in combat, in or out of the jungle. The research by the author was to investigate the incidents found in the initial research and to locate additional similar incidents.

The jungle is dark, dank, dismal, and it can be so frightening. Fear can be one reason that this failure to hold key terrain often arises in the jungle as night draws near: fear of the darkness, inherent in many from the days of the childhood bogeyman; fear of the unknown, which is common to almost all people; fear of the enemy, combined with belief in the enemy's superiority in the thickness of the jungle. In the case of the examples used in this monograph the Japanese were

the enemy, and some of the tales that were told concerning their prowess would frighten most troops new to a jungle theater. Not that all the stories were false; for some must have been true. If and when there is a next war, the enemy would almost surely be a nation not so heavily industrialized as this country, and they too would use a great deal of stealth and cunning no matter on what terrain they were encountered.

## DISCUSSION

Let us build a mythical situation in some jungle area of the world. It could be Indo-China, Malaya, some Pacific Island, anywhere that you can find a jungle on this planet. Our unit, the 1st Battalion, Xth Regiment, is assigned the mission of capturing Hill Zebra, heavily defended by the enemy. The enemy is in heavily fortified positions on Hill Zebra in a perimeter defense. The attack is launched and makes progress against steadily increasing enemy resistance as it nears the objective. Before the battalion reaches the objective, the battalion commander realizes that it will be dark before he can complete the occupation of the hill.

In the situation facing the 1st Battalion there seems to be three main possible courses of action: withdraw from the objective and form a perimeter in an area previously secured; halt the advance in its present position and pull up the tail of the battalion into a tight perimeter; or to continue the attack in order to attempt to complete the mission assigned the unit at or after dark and consolidate in the thick night of the jungle.

If the first course is adopted, that is, to give up that portion of terrain already seized, it means the abandonment of the mission for a certain period of time. That is not commendable. In all likelihood the enemy will occupy the terrain that we voluntarily give up, causing additional casualties as our forces reattack the positions the following day, if the mission is not changed. And if the terrain is very

critical some one is going to have to accomplish the mission.

What advantages accrue from this course of action? Well, the efforts of the enemy to infiltrate may not be quite as intense, although generally there were almost always such attempts made to some extent by the Japanese in the Pacific. The danger from strong counter attacks on the part of the enemy will certainly be lessened, for he will be more than accomplishing his mission if he can reoccupy his positions without a fight and maintain his line of resistance. To sum up this entire situation, the enemy has accomplished his mission and we have not accomplished ours during the period of time under consideration, and we have done very little to facilitate the accomplishment of our mission in the future.

An example of the above course of action is the action of the 1st Battalion, 152nd Infantry Regiment, 38th Infantry Division, engaged in clearing ZIG ZIG PASS on Luzon Island of the Phillipines on 4 February, 1945. (Map A) The mission of XI Corps (composed of the 38th Infantry Division and the 34th Regimental Combat Team) was to prevent the retreat of the Japanese forces on the island of Luzon to the Bataan Peninsula. The accomplishment of this mission involved moving from OLANGAPO to DINALUPIHAN along HIGHWAY 7, which crossed the ZAMBALES MOUNTAINS in a series of hairpin turns and twists. This crossing site soon acquired the name ZIG ZAG PASS. At the beginning of this operation the effectiveness of the 1st Battalion, 152nd Infantry, was excellent, as it was in the entire corps. (L4:7) The Japanese enemy in the ZIG ZAG PASS area was, as usual, well dug in, using all his knowledge of

pillboxes, dug outs, and mutually supporting weapons. The camouflage was excellent on the Japanese positions and the American intelligence of these positions was scanty. (14:16)

In the phase of the action with which we are concerned, the 1st Battalion had been assigned the mission of capturing HILL 508, (Map A) dominating HIGHWAY 7. The 1st Battalion moved up the hill capturing several positions on the north slope of the hill, but near the top of HILL 508 the battalion encountered a strong Japanese position and suffered heavy casualties. (14:22) The 1st Battalion was not able to complete the occupation of its objective as evening drew near, so withdrew off the hill to a battalion perimeter along the road. The purpose of this withdrawal was to consolidate for the nightly attempts of the enemy to infiltrate our lines.

The following day, 5 February, the 1st Battalion resumed its attempts to capture its objective, HILL 508. Once more the enemy positions of the north side of the objective had to be taken, because the Japanese had returned to them upon the withdrawal of the American troops. These positions were taken and the 1st Battalion moved near the top of HILL 508 only to meet the large enemy force again. The advance of the battalion was stopped and as night neared the battalion was withdrawn once more down the hill to the perimeter along the road. (14:24) The 1st Battalion was finally successful in seizing its objective on 6 February 1945.

The above example is included in this monograph to bring out the following points: that critical terrain seized or partially seized was given up in the jungle, that this was done

voluntarily by small unit commanders without being pushed off the critical terrain by enemy action, and that fear of infiltration and night raids were probably the cause of many of these withdrawals.

The battalion was successful in reaching a portion of its objective and it appears that it should have been able to hold on through the night. There was no evidence to indicate that the battalion was in danger of being decimated due to sufficient enemy counter action. The only evidence available indicates that the battalion commander desired to form his battalion into a tight perimeter and hole in for the hours of darkness on ground that was secure. (14:24)

Now let us think a moment and see what happens if our unit pulls up its tail (reserve, fire support units, and some administrative elements) and forms a perimeter on the position already gained. It is quite likely that our unit will be subject to all the pressure the enemy can bring to bear to dislodge it from its position. And during these efforts it is almost certain that the unit will not be able to be resupplied with ammunition. It is also most likely that any casualties that are incurred during the night will not be evacuated. There is danger that we may lose our entire unit if we do not have sufficient ammunition to last out the night and we may lose lives that could have otherwise been saved by prompt evacuation.

The advantages so gained are many. If the enemy does attack, we have succeeded in getting him out of his holes, while we take advantage of what cover we have made available.

The biggest portion of the casualties resultant from the fight will in all likelihood be borne by the enemy. If the enemy does not choose to attack, we are well on our way toward the accomplishment of our mission on the following day, without having to retake the positions occupied by the enemy the previous day. We will at least have accomplished our mission in part and can continue in its accomplishment in the future.

The action of the 3rd Battalion, 20th Infantry, 6th Infantry Division in the capture of LONE TREE HILL at MAFFIN BAY, NEW GUINEA, beginning 11 June 1944 is an example of the course described above. This was the first combat mission for the division, although they had had intensive training in jungle warfare in Hawaii. (10:3) The units of the Division were surprised to find themselves in a combat situation upon their arrival for the ship had been administratively loaded at MILNE BAY, NEW GUINEA. At this time the enemy was evasive, the first contact with the Japanese forces in the area being made by an L Company patrol on 18 June. The patrol leader and three men were killed by the Japanese as the patrol extricated itself from the trap in which it had been caught. (10:5) It was believed at the time that the Japanese in the area were remnants of the Japanese 36th Division that had been defeated at Hollandia.

The 3rd Battalion, 20th Infantry, was to attack to seize LONE TREE HILL.

On 20 June 1944 a strong reconnaissance patrol pushed to a point half way up the hill, split, and circled the flanks of the hill. Rifle fire that the patrol ran into withdrew

in the face of the patrol. After pushing this far into the Japanese positions the patrol withdrew back to the battalion perimeter as night was approaching. Other patrols had operated in the same area (LONE TREE HILL) and found bivouac areas of the Japanese but had not been able to locate the main defensive line of the enemy. The action of the second patrol mentioned is one example where the aggressive seizure and retention of critical terrain would have greatly facilitated the accomplishment of the mission of the unit in question.

The 3rd Battalion attacked LONE TREE HILL at 0800 on 21 June 1944. The battalion attacked with companies in column with L Company leading, using an azimuth to maintain direction. Visibility was restricted to about twenty yards. Flank guards were maintained, keeping visual contact with the column. (10:8) After going about 800 yards, the advance of the battalion was halted by scattered Japanese forces of automatic weapons and riflemen. The battalion continued the advance after these enemy elements were forced to withdraw by flanking forces from the battalion.

The battalion once more continued the attack in column with stronger security forces to the flanks. After moving no more than one hundred yards the lead unit of the battalion, L Company, discovered the route obstructed by a twenty foot cliff. The leading platoon of L Company scaled the cliff to discover a relatively open area to their front. After reconnaissance revealed no other way to cross the obstacle formed by the cliff, the rest of the battalion began an ascent over the route used by the initial platoon. It was soon discovered

that the battalion was headed into intense fires arranged by the enemy on the open area above the cliff. The battalion commander decided to withdraw his battalion under the cover of smoke to the perimeter it had departed from earlier in the day. (10:10)

The following day the battalion renewed the attack using two companies to advance to the objective over different axis. L Company was to attack over what was roughly the same route as used the day before until it reached the ridge line, then up the ridge line to join K Company. K Company was to move down the beach and reach the objective from the ocean side. I Company in reserve was to follow the company that offered the most chance of success.

The attack moved forward as planned, with a striking similarity to the previous day's attack with close flank security in the jungle. The battalion commander became a casualty when a quarter ton truck towing a 57 mm antitank gun "knocked the battalion commander sprawling" (10:12) in K Company's column. Previously planned artillery fire was falling on the objective as K and L Companies moved toward the objective. K Company succeeded in reaching the crest of the hill after running a gauntlet of fire from enemy positions in caves and well hidden snipers. When the company reached the crest it went into a tight perimeter without clearing the enemy from the jungle around it, to clear the area being an impossible task for a unit its size.

L Company was successful in reaching the ridgeline against continual fire from enemy small arms and mortars. As the

company advanced to join the K Company perimeter it ran into the most serious opposition of the day, a system of mutually supporting pillboxes and snipers. These enemy positions were bypassed and L Company entered the perimeter now held by K Company.

The remainder of the battalion's tactical troops together with some elements of the 2nd Battalion were now drawn into the battalion perimeter. This perimeter, containing four companies, was about thirty yards wide and 90 yards long. The troops were unable to penetrate the coral with the entrenching tools at hand and had to be satisfied with what cover they could improvise by the use of the shallow crevices available combined with the piling up of rocks and logs. (10:19) All during the establishment of the battalion perimeter the soldiers of the battalion were subjected to sniper fire and harassing mortar fire.

The battalion maintained its position of the objective throughout the night of 22 June despite the efforts of the enemy to dislodge them with a night attack combined with well registered concentrations from indirect fire weapons. The Japanese made attempts to infiltrate the perimeter after the failure of their night attack to dislodge the battalion. These attempts caused several bayonet fights as they were discovered by the closely packed troops. The enemy made a second strong attempt to dislodge the battalion with a coordinated dawn attack of foot troops supported by indirect fire weapons causing many casualties to be added to those already inflicted on the troops in the perimeter. The 3rd Battalion held its

position on the objective and was reinforced the following day by the 2nd Battalion that had been unsuccessful in its attempt to reach the ridge line further south. (Map C)

The operations of the 3rd Battalion, 20th Infantry, indicate that often it was possible to maintain a position on terrain that is critical to the accomplishment of the mission. But even in the operation of the 3rd Battalion described above there was opportunity for more aggressive tenacity. Patrols from the 20th Infantry and other friendly units had been operating relatively freely on the very terrain that the 3rd Battalion had to pay for in blood and time. (10:11) And these patrols were of sufficient strength that they could have probably maintained their position on the critical terrain until reinforced.

The third alternative open to the unit commander is to continue his operations until or after night fall to seize the objective and then reorganize and consolidate. This certainly is the preferred course of action. Some elements that enter into the practicality of this course are the strength of the enemy, the morale, training, and experience of the unit, the aggressiveness and confidence of the unit commander, and the distance to the objective.

An example of a commander availing himself to the third course of action can be found in the operations of the 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, 38th Infantry Division, on 12 February, 1945, in the ZIG ZAG PASS operation. The mission of the 38th Division and the enemy situation were explained in the first example of this monograph. The 149th Infantry had

followed a guerrilla trail around the ZIG ZAG PASS and was advancing to the west to link up with the remainder of the Division that was following HIGHWAY 7 to the east. The 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry was on the regiment's south (left) flank, with the 2nd Battalion on the right (north of HIGHWAY 7).

A heavily fortified enemy position was blocking the advance of the battalion to the west. This position was the objective of the 1st Battalion ~~for~~ 12 February. The story of this battalion accomplishing its mission can be told simply: "This position was captured and occupied at dark by the 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry". (14:32)

The operations of this battalion indicate an unwillingness to concede to the enemy the hours of darkness for his tactical use. The battalion commander exhibits a belief that the American soldier is capable of meeting a wily foe on even terms in the jungle. The operations of the 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry, also show that often it is possible to complete the seizure of an objective by making limited objective attacks to gain an entry into the enemy's defense line prior to nightfall. This entry will give our forces the advantage of cover and surprise during the night.

It is important that the American soldier and his commander be given confidence that they can operate successfully during the hours of darkness. This is particularly true when fighting in the jungle. All too often the American troops felt it necessary to halt all operations in mid afternoon in order to prepare for the night, no matter how close the objective was.

The Department of Army has faced this problem because of the problems arising in World War II and Korea. The Army's answer to this problem is to require one third of the applicatory stage of all tactical training to be conducted during the hours of darkness. (8:5) This policy should be a definite deterrent on the fears of the American soldier toward attacking and consolidating objectives at night. The policy should also serve to bring to the minds of all commanders that the enemy is not to be conceded the hours of poor visibility for his maneuver alone, if by moving at night we can improve our position.

## CONCLUSION

What then are the lessons to be learned from the points in this monograph? Many new realizations of the problems of jungle warfare and ways to meet these problems came to the mind of the author during the preparation of this monograph. Many of these realizations were entirely beyond the scope of the paper, but others bordered so closely on the scope that it was felt that they had to be included in this section.

Unit commanders will be tempted to withdraw to familiar ground previously organized during the hours of darkness in future jungle combat. This tendency can be combatted by aggressive leadership and extensive training in the techniques of night combat. The present Army policy of a minimum of one third of all tactical training to be conducted during the hours of darkness will go far in remedying this situation. Special training in jungle terrain should be conducted prior to the commitment of a unit to that type of combat, if possible.

During World War II some unit commanders surrendered key terrain once occupied by their units in order to maintain a tight perimeter during the hours of darkness while conducting offensive operations. This would result in a higher casualty rate to American forces due to the losses incurred in regaining the surrendered positions.

While it is true that the American soldier is most effective during daylight due to the large amount of firepower available to him, it is also true that when needed he has sufficient capability to operate effectively in small units

against the enemy in the jungle at night with infantry light weapons. He must, however, be imbued with confidence in his weapons through thorough and efficient training.

The principles of offensive combat concerning the seizure and use of critical terrain apply fully as well in the jungle as in any other type of operation.

Commanders must be alert to the possibility of the seizure of key terrain not occupied by the enemy. Patrols will often discover this terrain, and aggressiveness on the part of the commander will allow the acquisition of valuable ground without loss.

There is no substitute for excellent military leadership combined with tactical proficiency in the accomplishment of the mission in jungle combat.

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