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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION 45TH INFANTRY (PHILIPPINE
SCOUTS) AT THE HACIENDA AT MT. NATIB, LUZON, 15 - 25 JANUARY 1942
(THE BATAAN CAMPAIGN)
(PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A BATTALION EXECUTIVE OFFICER)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN APPROACH MARCH,
COUNTER-ATTACK, CONDUCT OF DEFENSE AND WITHDRAWAL

Major Louis B. Besbeck, Infantry

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- III Lt. Colonel Edgar Wright, Infantry, S-3 45th Infantry (P.S.) during the Bataan campaign; after two conferences in December 1946 and January 1947, in Atlanta, Georgia.

IN MEMORIAM

MAJOR DUDLEY G. STRICKLER, INFANTRY

On 8 December 1941 (Philippine Islands time) a unit which its Corps Commander, General Jonathan Wainwright, referred to as "this great Battalion" went into the field. At every point where the Battalion was committed it met an enemy superior in numbers, equipment and supporting arms. Despite this disadvantage its aggressive spirit carried it through to accomplish whatever mission it was charged with, and to set a glowing example for other units. For all of this enviable record, its leader and Commander, Major Dudley G. Strickler, Infantry, was solely responsible. All those who were near him until the time when his luck ran out believe this. They believe, too, that in not quite two months of war-time duty in Bataan Major Dudley G. Strickler completely balanced things up for any peace-time shortcomings he had. He was killed in action at Quinauan Point near Aglaloma Bay about 1 February 1942. (1)

This narration is recorded by Major Strickler's former Executive Officer in the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (Philippine Scouts). Though five years have passed since the events took place, the inspiration left by a strong war-time leader remains fresh.

Louis B. Besbeck

Major, Infantry

21 January 1947

(1) Ref. No. I page 55

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION 45th INFANTRY (P.S.)
AT THE HACIENDA AT MT. NATIB, LUZON, 15-25 JANUARY 1942
(THE BATAAN CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

INTRODUCTION

The entire operation took place in January 1942. All dates refer to that period. The recording of the operation took place months and years after occurrence. Consequently slight discrepancies of time, dates and locations may crop up. In its larger picture, however, the account is as correct as cross-checking with available persons and records can make it.

This monograph covers the operations of the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (P.S.) in the defense of the Bataan Peninsula from the move from Bagao 15 January, through the counter-attack at the Natib Hacienda, the conduct of the defense on the Labangan River-Natib Hacienda position, and the retirement to the Bagao-Pilar Road 25 January.

A brief summation of the situation in Bataan 6 - 12 January will provide the reader with the necessary background to orient him;

THE GENERAL SITUATION ON LUZON, 6 JANUARY 1942

The strength and aggressiveness of the Japanese Forces which attacked Luzon Island 8 December 1941 forced Headquarters United States Armed Forces in the Far East to an unpleasant decision about 23 December 1941. (2)

In accordance with the long-standing last-ditch defense plan, War Plan Orange #3, the desperation withdrawal was ordered. The American-Filipino forces of North Luzon and of South Luzon converged at San Fernando, Pampangas, and descended into Bataan peninsula by the morning of 6 January 1942. Japanese forces then controlled all the remainder of Luzon, and continued heavy pressure on Bataan. (3)

(2) Ref. No. I page 36

(3) Ref. No. I page 45

A TWO CORPS ORGANIZATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF BATAAN

The area of the peninsula was divided for defense purposes into the West Sector, called the I Corps under Major General Jonathan Wainwright; and the East Sector, called the II Corps under Major General George M. Parker. The boundary between sectors was Mount Natib - Maldica - the Pantingan River (all to the West Sector). (4)

The main battle position followed the general line Abucay - Mt. Natib - Moron. The reserve battle position followed the general line Orion - Mt. Samat - Bagao. (5)

THE TROOPS ON THE MAIN BATTLE POSITION

The strong 57th Infantry (P.S.) was on the right of the II Corps where the Japanese main attack was expected. The remainder of the troops on the main battle position, except for a few thousand trained Philippine Army soldiers, had been under mobilization or Philippine Army recruit training when the war began just a few weeks before. They were lacking in organization and training, and were woefully deficient in equipment and vital supplies. Due to lack of food and quinine, hunger and sickness were soon to be added to their problems. (6)

THE PHILIPPINE DIVISION

There were three well-trained infantry regiments in the Philippine Division. These were the 31st Infantry Regiment (U.S.) with American officers and American soldiers; and the 45th and 57th Infantry Regiments (P.S.) with American Officers and dependable Filipino Scout soldiers. (7)

The 31st Infantry (U.S.) and the 57th Infantry (P.S.) were assigned to General Parker's II Corps on the East. The 45th Infantry (P.S.) was assigned to General Wainwright's I Corps on the West. The 31st Infantry (U.S.) was in II Corps reserve; the 45th Infantry (P.S.) was in I Corps

(4) and (5) Ref. No. II page 18

(6) Ref. No. II Introduction

(7) Personal knowledge and eyewitness, self.

reserve. There was no real Army reserve organized as such. (8)

Because of the road crossing Bataan Peninsula from Bagac to Pilar between Mt. Natib of 4200 feet elevation, and Mt. Samat of 4700 feet elevation, Bagac was considered especially vulnerable to enemy landings. (9)

The 45th Infantry had been organizing the beach area at Bagac Bay for defense since 15 December 1941. (10)

Occasional bombings took place, one burning out the center of the town of Bagac. Jap observation ships were regularly overhead morning and afternoon. (11)

THE ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT OF THE 3RD BATTALION
45TH INFANTRY (P.S.)

The 3rd Battalion, like the other two Battalions of the 45th Infantry, had a strength of nearly 600 men and Officers. These included 151 men in Company M, the Heavy Weapons Company, and 139 men in each Rifle Company. Plus the Battalion Headquarters and a Battalion Medical Detachment. (12)

Officers, all Americans, included the Battalion Commander Major Dudley G. Strickler; the Battalion Executive Officer Captain Louis B. Besbeck; Captain Bethard the S-4; Captain Clifford Crocm, Lt. Mc Carty and Captain Henry Pierce commanding Companies I, K and L respectively; Lieutenants George Moore and Anthony Ulrich platoon leaders; and Captain Ralph Berkelhamer and Lt. De Backer the Battalion surgeons. This totalled one Major, four Captains, three Lieutenants, and two medical Officers. The non-commissioned officers and men were all loyal Philippine Scouts with from six months to twenty years service. Most of them were graduates of Philippine High Schools and all spoke English fluently. Their equipment included late model light machine guns, though the mounts had not arrived for the guns; 45 caliber automatic pistols; M-1 Garand rifles; latest gas masks; 18-30 Caliber heavy Browning machine guns; one 81 millimeter mortar without ammunition; one 50 Caliber

(8) (11) (12) Personal knowledge and eyewitness, self.

(9) (10) Ref. No. II pp. 18 & 23, and self.

air-cooled Browning machine gun; clinometers, compasses, field glasses, latest web equipment, bed rolls, and unlimited ammunition, except for the 81 millimeter mortar. They wore fine leather shoes made in the States for their special last, woolen Olive Drab clothing and the steel helmet from the last war. Their morale was excellent. (13)

It was announced on 5 January that due to the Jap blockade all forces would be provided only half the normal ration. (14)

12 JANUARY - THE ALERT

On 12 and 13 January parties of key non-commissioned officers and officers of the Regiment went on reconnaissance to the area North West of Bani. Mission: to select positions from which to launch a counter-attack in case a threatened breakthrough developed in II Corps. (15)

On 15 January it was announced that "Soon the sky will be black with planes, and they will be ours!" It helped morale -- for a while, but some weeks later soldiers stopped scanning the sky at the sound of a mortar, as they gave up hope. (16)

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Though the mountains in the part of Bataan that now concerned the Regiment do not quite reach 5000 feet in elevation, they, and their approaches are quite rough. Many streams flowing generally to the East cut across the path of the move to the North. Their channels were rocky ravines of precipitous sides requiring slow and careful traverse. The cane fields on the approaches to Mt. Natib were cultivated lands which were easily crossed. But the bamboo thickets in the same vicinity required considerable chopping in order to advance even one yard. (17)

The ground attacked over was of a varied nature. There were groves of Mango trees in and around the Hacienda, with several open fields, and one

(13) (14) (15) (16) Ref. No. III, and self.
(17) Self.

bald ridge. But most of the terrain was of tall sugar cane of a height greater than headhigh. There was little concealment, and no cover from enemy small-arms fire. The many ravines made possible enemy infiltration into the position using the concealment of the high banks. The enemy-held high ground on the upper slopes of Mt. Natib provided excellent observation of all important terrain features to the East to Manila Bay. (18)

THE REGIMENTAL MOVE TO BANI JANUARY 15-16

The Regiment was ordered to Bani, from the bivouac area near Bagac, at K P 153, during hours of darkness. At 1900 the 45th Infantry moved out by bus, by truck, and by marching to K P 149 on the Pilar-Bagac Road, then North on the Back Road to Bani. Arrived and bivouaced early morning 16 January. The day was used in reconnoitering for positions Northwest of Bani. A few small Japanese artillery shells fell in the vicinity. They were believed to come from an unlocated Jap mountain gun somewhere behind friendly lines. (19)

THE BREAK-UP OF THE 51ST DIVISION 12 - 16 JANUARY

That portion of the Main Battle Position running astride of Mt. Natib between the occupied portion of the West Sector to the occupied portion of the East Sector of approximately 9000 meters was not organized for defense, but was covered by patrols. The terrain was extremely difficult, traversed by deep gorges and covered with dense jungles. It took two days to cross it. Contact between sectors was never satisfactorily established. The 51st Philippine Army Division occupied a part of this area in a defensive position which extended approximately 5000 yards West of the Hacienda into the heavy undergrowth on the approaches to Mt. Natib. (20)

(18) Self.

(19) Ref. No. III

(20) Ref. No. I p. 20

On 12 January the enemy attacked the position of the 51st Infantry Division (Philippine Army). A gap was opened, but a counter-attack closed it up. On 14 January the Division withdrew to the South bank of the Labangan River under continued enemy pressure. By 15 January all the Division reserves had been committed and Headquarters II Corps was notified of the critical nature of the situation. On 16 January the 51st Division (P.A.) had disintegrated, the troops utterly routed. Thus the left of the unit on the right, the 43rd Infantry (P.A.), had been exposed. The 43rd Infantry then refused its left flank from its Main Line of Resistance to its Reserve Line of Resistance. (21)

THE PHILIPPINE DIVISION ORDERED TO COUNTER-ATTACK

In danger of having his left flank enveloped the Commanding General II Corps (Major General Parker) ordered the Commanding General Philippine Division (Brigadier General Maxon Lough) to counter-attack at daylight 17 January to regain the MLR within the 51st Division Sector. (22)

Since the 57th Infantry (P.S.) was already committed on the East, the only Infantry available in the Philippine Division were the 31st (U.S.) and the 45th (P.S.).

About 1700 on 16 January Headquarters ~~II~~ Corps issued an order over the telephone to Regt'l S-3 45th Infantry then with the Regiment at Bani "to proceed to the area Southwest of the Labangan River and Northwest of the Capitangan Valley to be in reserve behind the 31st Infantry (U.S.)." (23)

Shortly before dark the Heavy Weapons and some personnel loaded up and the 45th Infantry started marching to the Capitangan Valley. The route was generally North, following a road-track. The night was particularly black, with no moon, no stars, no signs, and in places, no road.

(21) Ref. No. I pp. 31 & 32

(22) Ref. No. II pp. 20

(23) Ref. No. III

About 2300 the track turned sharply East and was lost in a maze of small tracks. Artillery nearby to the North was firing at a fast rate, making splashes in the inky darkness.

The column was lost. It stopped. A uniformed figure appeared at the side of the leading vehicle. The Battalion Commander and the Executive Officer went to him with questions about roads that might be available to the column to reach the battle position. He was a General, the Commander of the 41st Division (P.A.), and was still under the effects of battle shock. All he could say was to repeat, "It was awful. They just faded away. It was awful."

An American artillery officer appeared out of the dark, and began to tell of a track that led North. As the group moved away the other figure followed babbling. (24)

The Regiment was hearing its first heavy artillery fire. Action seemed imminent. Tension increased.

Slowly advancing until daylight, the column went into a widely dispersed bivouac at daylight in the Capitangan Valley. Seven feet high Cogan grass and a few tall Mango trees cut the visibility down. The Regiment less the 1st Battalion and a few spare parts was present. The 1st Battalion was lost somewhere Northwest of Bani in the Capitangan Valley. (25)

As the day broke enemy bombers and observation planes became active.

On the morning of 17 January 31st Infantry (U.S.) attacked in a Northerly direction with the 2nd Battalion on the right and the 1st Battalion on the left, to restore the line of the 51st Division (P.A.). (26)

The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry still had some six thousand yards to go over rough country to arrive at the battle position. A telephone call placed on a line that happened to run through the area, went through to the

(24) (27) self.

(25) Ref. No. III and self.

(26) Ref. No. II p. 32

Commanding Officer of the 31st Infantry (U.S.). He plotted his general position on the map, then requested utmost speed in joining him. (27)

At approximately 1100 a conference took place between the Commanding Officer of the Regiment, the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion and the Regimental S-3. Known at the time: The 31st Infantry was to the Northwest and needed help. Observed enemy artillery fire on the Abucay-Hacienda Road denied that road to our vehicles and troops. No other East-West routes were known. Rough, broken country lay ahead. Speed was of the utmost importance. (28)

The Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion made a short reconnaissance, then returned at 11:15. His order was: The battalion would move North at 1200 from the clearing. Cross country, by hand. The Battalion Commander would go on ahead as rapidly as possible with the faster-moving three Rifle Companies in the leading column. The Battalion Executive Officer would follow with the slower-moving Heavy Weapons Company and Medical Detachment. Future ammunition supply indefinite-carry everything possible. Weapons carriers were to be sent back to Service Company. Direction of advance 353° Magnetic Azimuth. In case of any later change of direction by the leading column a messenger or sign would be found. (29)

THE MOVE CROSS-COUNTRY TO THE HACIENDA 17 JANUARY

At 1200 the Battalion point moved out, the 2nd Battalion a half mile to the East, the 1st Battalion lost far to the West. For the next seven days the 3rd Battalion had no contact with any other combat unit of the Regiment. (30)

At 12:05 a Battery of truck-drawn 75's came wheeling into the clearing. In a hurry to fire trails were dropped, trucks scurried into the high Cogan grass. Then a Jap observation plane glided in and leisurely circled over-

- (27) self.
- (28) Ref. No. III and self.
- (29) self.
- (30) Ref. No. III & self.

head. No firing took place.

The 3rd Battalion was a singing outfit. The soldiers liked to sing the Filipino rice-planting songs as they marched. But in the second column for the following 24 hours,) across rough hills, dry rice paddies, rocky streams, each soldier carried eighty pounds of machine gun ammunition. Normally, with all his equipment, he weighed up to 140 pounds. There was no singing then with that increasingly heavy load on his back, and an empty stomach.

As the second column soon lost sight of the faster moving Battalion Commander and the riflemen, the compass became the guide on the announced azimuth. While crossing the southern side of the Capitangan Valley the Regimental Commander and the 2nd Battalion Commander, marching unescorted, joined the column from the southeast at about 1530. At 1600 the 3rd Battalion was united again, as the Battalion Commander and his group were waiting at the old) native trail which paralleled the East-West ridge between the Capitangan and the Santa Cruz Rivers. Here the emergency rations were ordered to be eaten, but the soldiers to a man had already eaten the emergency ration from their packs without orders. They were very hungry. (31)

After a short rest the column changed direction and marched due West along the old native trail. At about 17:30 the head of the column started across the deep, wide and steep-sided gorge of the Capitangan River. Slowly, in single file, the column worked its way across the stepping stones and collected in a Mango grove on the north side. Again the Battalion Commander hurried on to the West as soon as most of the riflemen had arrived. His instructions to the Executive Officer were to follow a trail leading West out of the grove when all the slower elements had gathered. (32)

It was 19:30 and dark when the last man finally crossed. The column moved out, but encountered a fork in the trail at 20:30. No sign or marker was evident in the pitch-black night. Security outposts were set out, the

(31) (32) Self.

men were told to go to sleep on the trail. The Battalion Executive Officer took his runner and went on reconnaissance. An outpost of a Philippine Army unit was discovered, but no information about anything was forthcoming. Throughout the early morning hours the sound of 155 mm. artillery projectiles going north into enemy territory from behind the trail was most reassuring. (33)

COMMANDING OFFICERS 45TH INFANTRY (P.S.) AND 31ST INFANTRY
(U.S.) CONFER 18 JANUARY

About 02:00 guides from the 21st Engineer Unit (P.A.) met the leading column and escorted three 45th Infantry officers, the Regimental Commander, the Regimental S-3, and the 3rd Battalion Commander, to the Command Post of the 41st Division. Colonel Steele, Commanding Officer of the 31st Infantry (U.S.), and Colonel Fortier of the 41st Division (P.A.) were there. The 45th Infantry (P.S.) was requested to bring up the remainder of the Regiment with all speed to the area South of the 31st Infantry (U.S.). It was expected that the entire Regiment would attack on the right of the 31st Infantry. The Commanding Officer and the S-3 45th Infantry departed at 04:00 to bring up the other two Battalions. (34)

The map used during the conference was an Engineer blueprint map having no coordinates and showing no detail. Neither the definite location of the 41st Division Command Post nor the definite location of the 31st Infantry troops could be plotted on the map. (35)

THE ARRIVAL OF THE 3RD BATTALION 45TH INFANTRY (P.S.)
AT THE HACIENDA 18 JANUARY

The leading column of the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (P.S.) moved to an attack position to the rear of the 31st Infantry and 1000 yards East of the Hacienda. (36)

The second column on the trail was awake at daybreak to see two P-40's

- (33) Self.
- (34) & (35) Ref. No. III
- (36) Self.

jump three Japanese planes and shoot one down over Abacay to the East. The Air Force was visible for the first time, and things looked brighter. As the sky brightened a marker was found; a piece of toilet tissue was discovered ten yards along on the North Fork of the trail.

The column was almost light-hearted as it moved off. But the trail gradually ascended a long, narrow ridge which had curved to the northeast and led into intensely thick vegetation on the lower slopes of Mt. Natib. Four hours marching toward known enemy territory where everything was awfully, awfully quiet, brought a feeling of concern. Then a foghorn North Carolina voice roundly cursing its luck about something, turned the column toward a heavily wooded slope 500 yards to the northeast. The voice belonged to the Commander of Company I. The Battalion was on the other side of the Santa Cruz River. When the attack was made two hours later, enemy fire came from 1500 yards farther up the trail.

The Battalion Executive Officer crossed the Santa Cruz River, chopped through bamboo for half an hour, and discovered the three Rifle Companies sprawled out in the sugar cane patch, resting, and eating the sugar cane. The Battalion Commander was crouched in the road at the edge of the cane field, 1000 yards East of the Hacienda, studying a map. The Battalion Executive reported that all the Heavy Weapons Company, the Medical Detachment, and a few riflemen of Company L were then crossing the river 1000 yards away. The Commander wanted to know how soon they could attack from where we were. They could not be ready for an hour. (37)

THE DANGEROUS SITUATION OF THE 31ST INFANTRY (U.S.) AND
THE CHANGE OF PLANS 18 JANUARY

On 18 January the 31st Infantry (U.S.) failed to make any advance. (38)

The 31st Infantry's left flank was about 500 yards east of the Hacienda, and 150 yards north of the main road. The sugar cane extended several hundred

(37) Self.

(38) Ref. No. II p. 33.

yards east and north where a bare nose of a low ridge showed above the cane about a thousand yards short of the tree-lined river bank. Two large gullies curved about the cane field and then northeast toward the river. With this very vulnerable flank the 31st Infantry was receiving automatic and small-arms fire from the east and from the north. Though the plan had been to commit the three 45th Infantry Battalions on the right of the 31st, enemy pressure made it necessary for the Commanding Officer 31st Infantry to send the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry to the left. (39)

The decision of the Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry was: To attack immediately without the Medical Detachment and Company M, which were still crossing the Santa Cruz River: To use instead, the Medical Detachment of the 2nd Battalion, which had become lost from its own unit and was at hand: To attack at 12:00 (in thirty minutes) West toward the Hacienda along the Road in extended approach march formation: Order of March; Companies L, I, K. The leading elements were to reach and clean out the seven one-story buildings of the Hacienda: Then all three companies were to turn 90° to the right and attack due north on a total front of about 500 yards. Company K on the right was to maintain contact with the left unit of the 31st Infantry. Objective: the curving Labangan River Bank 1800 yards North. (40)

THE ATTACK FROM THE HACIENDA BY THE 3RD BATTALION 45TH
INFANTRY (P.S.) AND THE SEIZURE OF THE LABANGAN
RIVER LINE 18 JANUARY

The attacking Battalion moved out at 12:00 as planned. The point had moved out about 300 yards across open fields when a single shot from the left front brought the point man down with a hole in his head. (41)

The point pulled back. A flank patrol was sent out. The point moved out again and completed the occupation of the buildings without resistance. The three Rifle Companies faced north and attacked in that direction. Company K on the right found its men climbing the backs of the left company

(39) (40) & (41) Self.

of the 31st in the heavy sugar cane. The attack halted and was called back.

Company K moved around from the 3rd Battalion right flank to the left, making the order left to right K, L, I.

By this time (13:00) the Medical Detachment and Company M had arrived and were ready to join in the attack. The Senior Medical Officer of the 3rd Battalion Medical Detachment insisted that that was his party. So the 2nd Battalion Detachment was relieved. One platoon of four Company M Heavy Machine Guns, 30 Caliber, was attached to each Rifle Company. The 50 Caliber Machine Gun and the 81 mm Mortar were set up at the Line of Departure with 360° sectors of fire. The two weapons constituted the sole Battalion Reserve.

Shortly after 13:00 the entire Battalion jumped off. Under the impetus of eighteen firing Machine Guns and approximately five hundred fifty determined Filipino Scouts the Battalion had gained its objective by 16:30. Then the three Rifle Companies spread out to the right and left to securely hold about 1400 yards of Labangan River Bank. (42)

Contact on the right was made with Company C 31st Infantry (U.S.) by Company I 45th Infantry (P.S.). (43)

Company K on the left had an exposed left flank but could cover much of it by fire from the river position. (44)

The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (P.S.) attacked to the left of the 31st Infantry (U.S.) and reached the Main Line of Resistance. It was in contact with the 31st Infantry (U.S.). (45)

The cost had not been light. Heavy Jap Machine Gun fire from the left flank and left front knocked out most of the men and weapons of the Heavy Machine Gun Platoon attached to Company L. Many snipers in the grove of Mango trees to the front of Company K were shot down by the Machine Guns attached to that Company, but only after the snipers had caused numerous casualties

(42) & (44) Self.

(43) As telephoned to Bn C.P. by Capt. Clifford Croom C.O. I Co.

(45) Ref. No. II p. 33.

among troops who had not yet learned to look into trees.

Coming of darkness soon after the firefight delayed the finding of many wounded in the thick sugar cane until the next day.

Forty five casualties were treated at the Battalion Aid Station. (46)

Shortly after the consolidation of the River Line a semi-perimeter defense was set up.

Because of the Japanese infiltration methods the Battalion Commander wished to burn the extensive cane patch which covered the center of the Battalion Defense area. He could not do so because of the Filipino wounded who might yet be alive in the canefield.

The first meal in 36 hours arrived about 21:00. Approximately eleven more meals reached the Battalion in the next seven days.

THE SECOND ATTACK OF THE 31ST INFANTRY (U.S.) AT
THE HACIENDA 19 JANUARY

During the morning a Company attack was made by a unit of the 31st Infantry. Attacking from the Hacienda Road; from behind the positions of Companies L and I 45th Infantry; in a northeast direction. The attack failed to gain.

THE DEFENSIVE POSITION ON THE LABANGAN RIVER

The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (P.S.) was attached to the 31st Infantry (U.S.), on the 19th January, and was the left element in the Abucay-Mt. Natib line. Their left (West) flank was exposed. The country was very broken, and wooded. (47)

On the south bank of the river Companies K, L, and I, 45th Infantry, were dug in in contact with the left unit of the 31st Infantry (U.S.) Rifle and Machine Gun positions covered the river and the opposite bank for a Battalion front of about 1400 yards.

On the exposed hill to the South of Company K's dangling flank Machine Gun positions were occupied at night only. During daylight hours the area

(46) As told to self by Bn Surgeon Capt. Berkelhamer 19 January 1942

(47) Ref. No. II p. 32

was covered by fire by Machine Guns from the left rear and from Company K's position.

Four Machine Guns constituted the main defense of the left rear, with riflemen protecting them. Riflemen to the rear and right rear occupied 2-man fox-holes. Battalion Headquarters Detachment personnel occupied a ring of one-man fox-holes around the hole where the Battalion Command Post was in the open space between two buildings of the Hacienda.

One telephone wire to Company I connected the Front line with the Battalion Command Post. Another wire connected with Headquarters 45th Infantry (P.S.) several thousand yards to the East.

The Japs used harassing measures nightly. Small groups infiltrated to about the center of the Battalion area and fired tracer bullets from automatic weapons during the night. Other Japs to the rear of the position then replied with more tracers, emulating a fire fight.

They discharged large firecrackers which produced the hollow sound of discharging mortar projectiles. (48)

The Japs blew bird whistles all night long. Fires started up in the sugar cane to the rear. Long range Machine Gun and Mortar fire fell on the rear areas. Long strings of Jap firecrackers dropped by airplane with delayed fuses, would start popping at different times from all parts of the position. The firecrackers duplicated the crack of the Japanese small-bore ammunition. (49)

The Filipino soldiers were disturbed by these tricks the first night. But by the second night, the veteran garrison soldiers had become battle veterans. Firecrackers and bird-calls were wasted on them. (50)

The first known deserter was recovered by a patrol to Mt. Natib; a six-month recruit from Company L. (51)

The Japanese fired many red flares at night from all about the Battalion position. Whenever they fired a flare, Company I fired several more. (52)

(48) Self.

(49) - (52) All references personal knowledge and conversation with persons concerned.

A heavy Machine Gun of Company L burned out. One of M Company's from the left rear was sent to the Rifle Company on the kitchen truck that night. (53)

Most of the old 3" mortar ammunition proved to be duds. (54)

All these were the small matters of light housekeeping, as the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry sat in a dangerous defensive position with its flank wide open in air and with a half dozen avenues of penetration which a clever enemy could find to gain surprise in a day or night attack. But, nothing happened. (55)

A Filipino rifleman of Company I on the river line sat up somewhat too erect in his fox-hole. A Jap bullet went through his forehead. (56)

Using the Battalion telescope of about three inch lens circumference, a Battalion Headquarters soldier viewed the enemy position across the river from the roof of a building of the Hacienda hundreds of yards from where any Japs should be. A single shot struck the lens of the scope. (57)

Enemy movement was seen occasionally in the distance across the river to the left flank. (58)

A lone Jap soldier stealing to the river for a can of water at dusk didn't make it. A Jap observer with a telescope was shot out of a tree across the river from Company I. (59)

But nothing happened.

Then, a patrol of three Philippine Scouts to Mt. Natib returned with the information that as they hid near a trail on the mountain, a regiment of Jap soldiers had marched past them going South around the left flank. (60)

JAP ACTIVITY IN THE ABO-ABO RIVER VALLEY 17-24 JANUARY

Hostile raiding patrols moving South and East along the Abo-Abo River Valley harassed the rear areas. One Philippine Army Regiment secured the Guitol-Hacienda trail until 21 January at 21:00 when it was attacked by Japs

(53) - (56) All references personal knowledge and conversation with persons concerned.

(57) (58) (59) Self, eyewitness.

(60) The patrol from 3d Bn 45 Inf. Told to self by Bn C. O..

from the East and North. Several attacks and counter-attacks on both sides took place in the area until 24 January and the withdrawal to the South. The threat to the rear was serious, but it was kept under control. (61)

THE REFUSAL OF THE FLANK FROM THE LABANGAN RIVER POSITION

21 January a Lieutenant Colonel from the General Staff of Headquarters II Corps arrived at the Battalion Command Post 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry at the Hacienda. The Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion 31st Infantry (U.S.) discussed the withdrawal from the position. A Jap dive bomber dropped one bomb seventy-five feet from the group. The conference ended with the immediate disappearance of the representative from II Corps. (62)

On 22 January the situation on the left flank grew worse. Repeated attacks and counter-attacks were made, but no material gains were made. On the contrary the 1st Battalion 31st Infantry (U.S.) was forced to withdraw from the Main Line of Resistance to a position south of the Abucay-Hacienda road, and facing Mt. Natib. (63)

At 1300 22 January the Captain Commanding Company I telephoned the Battalion Command Post to report that men of Company C 31st Infantry could be seen withdrawing South; that a patrol he had sent to the East to contact the 31st Infantry reported that nobody was on the position; that the Japs were not attacking; that all was quiet. (64)

In the absence of the Battalion Commanding Officer the Battalion Executive ordered the Commanding Officer Company I to send Security detachments to his right flank; to advise Commanding Officers of Companies L and K that a change might be imminent; and to hold the position. (65)

At 13:45 Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry returned to 3rd Battalion Command Post. A withdrawal from the Labangan River Line had been ordered; to refuse the extreme left flank at 14:00. (66)

(61) Ref. No. II pp. 35-36.

(62) Self, eyewitness.

(63) Ref. No. II pp. 34.

(64) & (65) Self. Personal telephone conversation.

(66) Self. Personal conversation and observation.

At 14:00 the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry withdrew south-east from the Labangan River to organize a position behind the 31st Infantry. Company I streamed across the open ridge in the center of the Battalion position; Companies K and L through the sugar cane to the West. Contact with the enemy was broken easily. The Battalion Commander led the Companies to their new positions. (67)

At the extreme left flank the Battalion Executive Officer with four machine guns and a squad of riflemen formed a screen until all units of the Battalion had passed through the 31st Infantry position. (68)

At once the preparation began of organizing the Battalion position 100 yards behind that of the 31st Infantry. The new position extended from a point 1000 yards east of the Hacienda at the Hacienda Road, to the south and southeast about 1000 yards through the sugar cane. (69)

Enemy air activity became intense as observation and bombing planes droned overhead continually for the next two days. (70)

Enemy 105 mm artillery fire bracketed the Battalion Command Post at two hour intervals for the next two days. Hot fragments showered in all directions. A fire was started in the sugar cane threatening the entire position. With a Jap observation plane circling just overhead the entire Company M came out of concealment and extinguished the blaze in an hour. (71)

Heavy outbursts of delayed fuse firecrackers popped on all sides day and night. The hostile rifle fire to the left front and the firecrackers in all directions sounded almost identical. (72)

A Filipino driver reported that while his half-ton Weapons Carrier was parked in the Mango grove at the extreme right of the Battalion position it had been stolen. An American soldier of the 31st Infantry walked up, jumped into the truck, and rapidly drove away to the east. Neither the truck, the load of ammunition or the soldier were ever seen again. (73)

(67) Self. Personal conversation and observation.

(68) - (73) All references after observation or conversation with persons concerned.

The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry (P.S.) had been on the M L R and on the extreme left; it was withdrawn through the gap between the 3rd and 1st Battalions 31st Infantry (U.S.) and placed in 31st Infantry reserve. It made several counter-attacks to stop the enemy who was making determined efforts to penetrate the gap. (74)

It was now evident that the M L R in the 51st Division (P.A.) Sector could not be restored by the Philippine Division. (75)

THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ABUCAY - HACIENDA POSITION TO
THE RESERVE BATTLE POSITION - THE II CORPS PLAN

On 22nd January Major General Sutherland, Chief of Staff USAFFE, discussed the situation with General Parker, decided that withdrawal from the Abucay - Mt. Natib position was essential.

The reasons for the withdrawal at this time were apparent:

- (1) Disintegration of the 51st Division (P.A.) had left a gap in the main battle position for six days.
- (2) Failure of the counter-attack of the Philippine Division to re-establish the M L R within the 51st Division (P.A.) sector.
- (3) Unknown strength of the enemy that had penetrated into the Abo-Abo river corridor through this gap.
- (4) Loss of contact between I and II Corps.
- (5) All reserves of the I and II Corps had been committed except elements of the 31st Division (P.A.).
- (6) Possible enemy envelopment of the Abucay-Mt. Natib position thus making a later withdrawal impossible.
- (7) The enemy was in the rear of the Main Battle Position in the I Corps Sector. (76)

The II Corps plan of withdrawal was:

- (1) Heavy artillery and service installations to start withdrawal the

(74) & (75) Ref. No. II p. 34

(76) Ref. No. II p. 37

night 23-24 January, to be completed daylight 25 January.

(2) A covering force to be established along the general line Wawa - Cupang - Bani - Guitol. Withdrawal of covering force troops to this line to start at 19:00; from this covering force line to the new battle position at 23:30; to be completed by daylight 26 January.

(3) A shell consisting of one rifle company and a platoon of machine guns from each front line Battalion, and a battery of 75 mm. guns from each front line regiment to start withdrawal at 03:00 25 January. (77)

During 23rd and 24th January the 31st Infantry reported increasing pressure coming from south of the Hacienda. All mortar ammunition was exhausted. 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry mortar developed a cracked collar clamp, so the remaining twenty rounds of mortar ammunition were taken to Company H 31st Infantry. (78)

One Battery 24th Field Artillery reported to Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry, and fired several missions on 23rd and 24th January. (79)

THE 31ST INFANTRY (U.S.) PLAN OF WITHDRAWAL 24 JANUARY

During the mid-afternoon 24 January Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry was called to the Command Post 31st Infantry. A withdrawal was ordered;

In accordance with general withdrawal ordered from the Abucay-Mt. Natib battle position to the Reserve Battle Position on the Bagac - Pilar Road the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry would organize a screen in its present area. The two 31st Infantry Battalions in the front of that area would break contact with the enemy and withdraw through the screen at 20:00 that night 24 January. A screen consisting of tanks only would be in position 3000 yards to the east. The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry would pass through the tanks, and proceed to buses which would be waiting, by 03:00. After

(77) Ref. No. II p. 38

(78) & (79) Self. Personal knowledge and observation

03:00 the tanks would fire at anything that moved. (80)

Orders from General Wainwright's I Corps Headquarters were received 23 or 24 January. The 45th Infantry Regiment would revert to I Corps upon withdrawal, and would proceed to Bagac. (81)

Note: Though it is used ordinarily in a somewhat different manner, the term "Screen" was used by the Headquarters and persons concerned, to describe the delaying force in this action.

3RD BATTALION 45TH INFANTRY (P.S.) PLAN FOR WITHDRAWAL
OF THE SCREEN - THE RETIREMENT 24-25 JANUARY

The Commander 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry decided to use two companies in the screen. The order was given:

Companies K, M, Battalion Medical and Headquarters Detachments, and all trucks, at 21:00 would proceed East on the Hacienda Road from the nearby Mango grove, then to the former bivouac area near Kilometer Post 147 on the Pilar-Bagac Road.

Company I on the left and Company L on the right would organize a screen extending to the left and to the right of the existing Battalion position.

At 20:00 31st Infantry troops would withdraw through the Battalion position.

The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry, less the retiring Column, would slowly withdraw fighting a delaying action until 03:00. At that time the Battalion would pass through a screen of tanks 3000 yards to the east. Buses waiting on the other side of the tanks would carry the troops to Kilometer Post 147 where the Battalion would bivouac. (82)

About 16:00 24 January Japanese pressure became heavy along draws leading into the position from the west. A substantial fire fight was in

- (80) Self. Informed by Bn C O at the time.
(81) Ref. No. III
(82) Self.

progress. At 18:00 a hot meal of cooked rice was fed the 3rd Battalion on the position. At 19:00 troops began to leave the 31st Infantry position, running to the rear through the troops of the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry. At 20:00 the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry had taken over the fire fight almost as planned. Some Company K troops could not break contact as a full Jap night attack was launched. At 21:00 the Battalion Executive Officer led the retiring column to the Bagac-Pilar Road rendezvous, the trucks by way of the East Road, and marching troops by way of the Back Road. (83)

Burning straw piles and Nipa huts dotted the area for miles as infiltrating Japanese sought to disorganize the rear areas. (84)

In the delaying force, the particularly dark night, flurries of heavy firing, and similarity in height and uniform between the Japanese and our own Filipino soldiers presented problems in controlling the maneuvers of the two Companies. But the solid defense of the sharp-shooting Philippine Scouts slowed down the Jap rushes. (85)

Armed only with a pistol, and wearing an old khaki cap instead of his helmet, the Battalion Commander worked up and down the screen and kept the two Companies working together. About six hours later he brought his entire force through the tank position to the east. (86)

The promised buses were not available. The retirement by marching by way of the Back Road and the Bagac-Pilar Road was a forced march. The miles of road were covered with retiring troops, but no bombing was seen. The last of the 3rd Battalion troops reached the bivouac at Kilometer Post 147 by 10:00 25 January. (87)

"The withdrawal which had to be effected by the morning of January 26, had an obvious purpose. It moved the I and II Corps back to less mountainous ground, relieved the pressure on Parker, and got us away from that infernal

(83) & (84) Self.

(85) & (86) As told to self by C O Co. I 25 January 1942

(87) Self. Personal observation.

mountain which separated our Corps in the first position on Bataan." (88)

(88) Ref. No. I p. 52

ANALYSIS, CRITICISM AND LESSONS LEARNED

For analysis the operation may best be divided into two phases: First; the move to the battle position 15-18 January, and second; the counter-attack and the defensive maneuvers at the battle position. The first phase:

I. About the delay in dispatching the 45th Infantry Regiment to Mt. Natib. Though it must be noted that the threat of a Jap landing on the West Coast of Bataan, which actually materialized about 22 January, could have been ^{the} determining factor in keeping the 45th Infantry at Bagao until 15 January, the record must show that the Regiment was finally dispatched to the II Corps. The conclusion must be drawn, then, that the dispatching authority was either unaware of the situation on the M L R or, being aware of the need for the Regiment in two different places at the same time, was unable to come to the correct decision until quite late.

LESSON LEARNED - Promptness. A good decision made too late had already lost value even before action is taken.

II. Then, when the desperate need for help was recognized on 15 January, three-and-a-half days were spent traversing the comparatively short distance to the battle position. The attempt to maintain the secrecy of night marches over unfamiliar, unmarked, broken country, was finally abandoned. The last frantic march to the actual battle position gave up all pretense to secrecy. One notes that ^{the} Japanese Air Force was not interested in bombing marching foot troops 17-18 January in the I Corps.)

This abandoned plan for secrecy cost the 45th Infantry counter-attacking force two days time and the loss of a possible co-ordinated attack of two regiments, instead of piecemeal attacks. Had the Regiment left Bagao by daylight 15 January and rendezvoused with the 31st Infantry (U.S.) prior to the attack, a coordinated counter-attack of possible success could have

been made by noon 18 January. The following might have been avoided:

(1) The piecemeal desperation attacks of the 31st Infantry Regiment on 17 January, of the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry on 18 January, and of the 1st and 2nd Battalions 45th Infantry on 19 January.

(2) The bogging down and frittering away of the units of the 31st Infantry prior to the arrival of any assistance on the battle position. When help arrived the 31st was spent.

The advantages of ordering a night march over a day march when the enemy controls the sky are obvious. But in an emergency the logistics table must be consulted. The decision, now, is not so obvious. The decision to permit troops to slowly creep forward at night when extended marching order during the day would save precious time, proved faulty.

LESSON LEARNED - When emergency dictates, handbooks must sometimes be pushed aside and risks taken.

III. The approach march was made in a vacuum from information of the enemy. By mere chance two hundred members of the 3rd Battalion's second column were diverted from the tragedy of walking into an enemy position on 18 January.

The absence of markers, signposts, or human guides in the II Corps at the time that large organizations of troops were blundering about over the unfamiliar terrain, proved a costly and serious handicap. It should not be a too great demand on a Corps headquarters to provide a half-dozen guides with signs, or to provide one guide in a jeep to lead the way.

LESSON LEARNED - Efficient troop movements require preplanning, and close co-operation with the moving units while on the way.

IV. A good map existed. Copies had been issued to a few units of the Philippine Division. But most units had mere sketches, blue-prints or gasoline road maps. The difficulty of co-ordination between units, due to other causes of terrain and situation, was increased by this lack of a standard, reliable map. The possession of adequate maps by higher head-

quarters alone is not sufficient.

LESSON LEARNED - It is a responsibility of command that adequate maps be available for all echelons down to the platoon.

The second phase, the counter-attack and defensive maneuvers at the battle position:

V. Despite the lack of information of the enemy or of the terrain, the initial counter-attack was made with no reserve against an enemy which could have been in position on the ground for four days or more. The Battalion Commander used every man and weapon in the organization in one strong push for the objective, the first time the troops saw action.

The gamble succeeded handsomely.

LESSON LEARNED - When confusion exists, with no information available, a quick, energetic attack with everything available sometimes carries through.

VI. The withdrawal of Company C 31st Infantry from the battle position one hour before the established time without advising the adjacent unit on the left fortunately caused no damage. There was only a loss of confidence in any future close liaison.

LESSON LEARNED - The Golden Rule should exist on the battlefield, but protect yourself at all times.

VII. The refusal of the extreme left flank during daylight hours when enemy pressure was not heavy can be criticized. A withdrawal after dark six hours later would have kept the enemy uncertain as to the disposition of troops for sixteen hours longer, and would have provided a breathing spell. As it worked out, the enemy was pressing on the refused line the same afternoon of a mid-afternoon withdrawal, troops unprepared.

LESSON LEARNED - When at all possible hold in the position until darkness, then withdraw.

VIII. The larger-than-ordered delaying force worked out as ordered. The force was ready and took over the screen function shortly before schedule.

Several decorations were won during its operation. The officers and men concerned deserve high commendation for executing a difficult but successful operation only six days after their first being committed to battle.

Two other Battalions which were in another part of the same operation (Co's C and F of 45th Infantry) had organized screens of only one rifle company each. The Japs infiltrated through them and cut them off behind the Jap lines. The Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry brought back his troops.

LESSON LEARNED - (1). Troops of high morale and good training require but one good firefight to emerge as combat veterans of considerable resource.

(2). The problem of the number of troops to use in a given operation may be solved most economically by committing more troops and by having a greater percentage of them return to fight again.

IX. The 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry attacked at the Natib Hacienda without any support whatsoever. There was no Artillery, no Air, no Engineer, no Navy, no Tanks, no G-2, no Corps, no Division, no Regiment, no food.

The Battalion had to attack to reach its assigned Line Of Departure.

While attacking to the front it was vulnerable to the rear.

The ordered frontal attack was made in mid-day, through sugar cane over head-high, which gave a false sense of security to a unit in its first skirmish, against an invisible enemy which had had control of the terrain for four days.

The troops were hungry and tired, the last meal was eaten 25 hours before.

The Battalion jumped off, met resistance, pushed on to gain its objective, taking casualties as it advanced 1800 yards.

The lack of long-range pre-planning on a higher level; the consequent lack of close co-ordination between units of the same attacking force; the confusion and final grasping-at-straws as a result of ordered missions which were impossible of accomplishment in the time ordered; All these cumulative

shortcomings can be overcome on the battlefield itself.

During the three-and-one-half days leading to its first battle action the 3rd Battalion 45th Infantry had been under orders from five headquarters. The 45th Infantry Regiment, The Philippine Division, The I Corps, The II Corps, and the 31st Infantry had all told what to do. When the Battalion reached the attack position it was finally being run by one RESPONSIBLE headquarters. At Battalion level it was possible, finally, to have orders given and to see them carried out without having to submit them to the killing detachment of official liaison.

The dependability of the worthy Philippine Scout in a small unit; under the aggressive leadership of a low-ranking Field Officer; in but little more than three hours of victorious combat; made up in some measure for the fumbling about of the previous three days.

LESSONS LEARNED - Small units win the battles.