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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 57TH INFANTRY (P.S.) (PHILIPPINE DIV.)
ABUCAY, JANUARY 1942
(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE DEFENSE

*Author had a hard
time finding someone
to type from longhand.
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Major Ernest L. Brown, Infantry

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 57TH INFANTRY (PHILIPPINE SCOUTS)
PHILIPPINE DIVISION IN THE ABUCAY - BATAAN DEFENSIVE
JANUARY 1942

(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 57th Infantry (P.S.) Philippine Division in the Abucay Bataan Defensive, from 1 January 1942 to 25 January 1942.

I think it well to orient you as to the strength, organization, and background of the 57th Infantry (P.S.) and the events that lead up to the focal point of this operation.

The 57th Infantry (P.S.) consisted of American trained Philippine soldiers known to the Army as Philippine Scouts. They were a complement of the United States regular Army, but restricted to duty in the Philippines.

The officers of the Scouts were United States Army officers who served a normal tour of overseas duty and returned to the States.

The Scout soldier was a product of a highly selective recruiting system as it was considered an honor to belong to this organization. His service to the United States dated from the first World War.

The Philippine Division consisted of two Scout Regiments, the 57th and 45th plus the 31st United States Infantry, the latter made up of American soldiers who served a normal tour of duty in the Islands. However, the Regiment has been a permanent part of the Philippine Division since 1919.

The 57th Infantry (P.S.) at the outbreak of the war was about 55% T/O strength in officers and about 95% T/O strength in enlisted men. The authorized strength was 114 officers and 2,162 enlisted men. (1)

Many officers and men had been placed on detached service with the Philippine Army to train the newly inducted troops, to act as advisors and assist in training, not to command. However, during combat these men exercised command. (2)

Our regiment had been expanded in the early months of 1941 from a strength of approximately 1100. (3)

Since the service of the scouts ranged from 9 months to 30 years it is apparent these men were professional soldiers. They were well known to the rest of the United States Army for their proficiency in marksmanship and their love of soldiering. Court-Martials were rare and venereals unheard of. Their standard of discipline was among the highest in the Army. Their willing and immediate obedience to orders provided inspiration to their American officers in combat.

We recruited to a strength of 2,162 men by a highly selective basis and the general calibre of our recruits were high. (4)

Since nearly all of the company commanders had gone to the Philippine Army, the companies of the regiment were commanded, without exception, by young officers with little experience, mostly reserve officers with an average of six months to one and one-half years service. (5)

Fortunately, two of the Battalion commanders were commanded by older experienced officers of World War I service.

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

They were Lt. Col. Philip T. Fry and Lt. Col. Frank E. Brokaw. Lt. Col. Hal C. Grandberry was to join us soon. The last battalion was commanded by a young captain, Royal Reynolds. The Regimental Commander and executive officer had seen service in World War I. The inexperience of the youthful company commanders were in a large part balanced by the experience of our senior officer. (6)

Rifle men were armed with the M1 Garand rifle. Our organic mortar equipment consisted of 81MM and 60 MM mortars, however, we fired three inch stokes ammunition in the 81MMs and no ammunition for the 60MMs was ever received. We were armed with both the light and heavy machine guns. (7)

Our organic transportation consisted of new all live ~~axel~~ vehicles, however, it was far short of the number necessary to move the regiment. The organic equipment of the regiment could be moved by overloading. Personnel carriers were secured from commercial bus companies. (8)

Radio and wire communication was adequate for the most part. (9)

For Anti-tank we had three M3 (37) in the regiment, the remainder were model 1916. (10)

Our medical detachment was inadequate for combat needs. Months before, men were selected from the companies and adequately trained as aid men. Later they were augmented by the band who served as stretcher bearers. Two doctors were assigned to each battalion, one captain and one first lieutenant, three medical men to each company as aid men. The medical detachment was sorely overworked the entire campaign.

The organization of the regimental staff and battalion

(6, 7, 8, 9, 10) A-1, p.1

commanders at the start of the war were:

Colonel George S. Clarke	Commanding
Lt. Col. Edmund J. Lilly	Executive
1st Lieut. John E. Olson	S-1
1st Lieut. Franklin O. Anders	S-2
Capt. Harold K. Johnson	S-3
Major George Fisher	S-4
Capt. Royal Reynolds	Commanding First Battalion
Lt. Col. Frank Brokaw	Commanding Second Battalion
Lt. Col. Philip T. Fry	Commanding Third Battalion

The regiment was alerted early 8 December 1941 and moved into an area adjacent to the post where groves of trees furnished cover from air observation. (11)

Our first days of action consisted in participating with the 45th Infantry (P.S.) and the 14th Engineers (P.S.) in firing at all airplanes, friendly and enemy; our total for the day was two low flying American airplanes. Fortunately, the pilots and observers were able to parachute out. One of the observers, First Lieutenant Al Fangman, had been a member of my regiment some months before and had transferred to the Air Corps as an observer. He had bullet wounds of a nature serious enough to place him on the one hospital ship set out. ~~Last accounts~~ Lieutenant Fangman was very grateful to his old outfit for securing passage for him to Australia, something that was to become very hard to get as the war progressed. (12)

On 9 December 1941 Nichols Field was bombed by large number of Japanese bombers, and one spare ³ was dropped directly on top of the radio tower at Fort McKinley. Incidentally this put doubt in the minds of a few people about the inaccuracy of Japanese bombing. (13)

(11, 12, 13) Eye witness, self.

On 10 December 1941 the regiment was ordered to move to Arayat, Pampanga and capture Japanese paratroopers. Personnel was moved by commercial buses. Civilian drivers supplied with each bus. (14)

The 57th Infantry (P.S.) was assigned no mission at this time. Local security measures were taken and the training of personnel against aerial observation was conducted. (15)

On 12 December 1941 the Third Battalion was detached and sent to Abucay Hacienda, Bataan to destroy Japanese paratroopers in that area. We assaulted the Abucay Hacienda and found nothing but scurrying dogs and a few children playing in the area. The paratroops proved to be leaflets. (16)

On 19 December 1941 the Third Battalion was sent to Olonyapo to repel a reported enemy landing in Subic Bay. This report proved to be false and the battalion rejoined the regiment about 5 kilometers south of Angeles. I think it worthy of mention that I made a landing in that exact area three years later when the ship I was on engaged fifty United States Navy dive bombers in combat. I swam in, however. Greeting party consisted of Japanese Marines occupying the former United States Marine Base there. (17)

On 30 December 1941 the 57th Infantry (P.S.) was ordered to move to Abucay, Bataan, and occupy the right of a main Battle position that was to extend from Manila Bay on the east coast to Mauhan on the west coast. The 57th Infantry was to occupy the M. L. R. from Manila bay, astride the east road extending through Barrio Mahatang in a general east, west direction. The 41st Infantry (P.A.) was on the left. The first Battalion occupied the right of the line and the Third Battalion occupied the left sector. The Second Battalion was to occupy the regimental reserve line. The Second Battalion was directed to

(14, 15, 16) Eye witness, self; (17) A-1, p. 2

formulate counter attack plans and to defend the beach on the right flank of the 57th Infantry (P.S.) sector. (18)

The position was heavily wired, the Barrio of Mahatang razed and fields of fire cut. (19)

The front of the right (First) Battalion was secured by artificial fish ponds and were not vulnerable to tank attack, in fact, the water was so deep and the walls of the fish ponds so steep this obstacle would tend to discourage an attack by foot troops. (20)

The open field in front of the Third Battalion constituted a perfect tank approach, the field was open ground for about forty yards and flanked the most important hard surface road leading from Japanese held territory into Bataan, ^{it} continuing ^{ed} on to Mariveles at the tip of Bataan. Approximately two thousand mines were placed in the Third Battalion front for that reason. (21)

It was felt that the Japanese would attempt to come through our position. We knew they liked to stick to roads when ever possible and if attacks failed would slide to the flank in repeated attacks until they found a weak spot which is exactly what they did in Bataan.

The bridges to the north of the main line of resistance were burned. (22)

A suitable road which we will refer to as Engineer Road was built parallel to the east road and leading from the south into the Third Battalion Area. (23)

The three M3 37s of the Anti-tank Company covered the east road. (24)

We were forced to go on half rations, feeding before day
(18, 19, 20) A-1, p. 2; (21) Eye witness, self; (22) A-1, p.3;
(23, 24) Eye witness, self.

light and after dark on 4 January 1942. (25)

It was unique that we had a Battery of the 24th Field Artillery 75MMs in the immediate M. L. R. of the Battalion to furnish anti-tank protection mainly. It was dug in directly on line with the rifle men of the Battalion. (26)

Company K occupied the right of the Battalion Area. Company I occupied the left of the Battalion Area. Company L in reserve. (27)

On the left flank of the Battalion Area was a large sugar cane field approximately one hundred fifty yards in front of the main line of resistance. It was tactically speaking neutralized as an approach to the enemy by artillery. We were to learn a bitter lesson later for failing to cut the cane field. (28)

It was relatively quiet for a week before the Japanese increased the tempo of their artillery and attempted to feel out our position by strong patrols. During the days we were organizing the position, Japanese planes had been flying overhead almost constantly during day light hours and seemed to devote most of their time in an attempt to direct artillery fire on our friendly artillery supporting us. Day after day dummy positions were shelled and bombed and our artillery suffered few casualties. (29)

For several days, before the attack, the Japanese used to fly over at night and drop firecrackers which caused a general state of nervousness among the units. Since the fire crackers sounded exactly like Japanese rifles and the troops thought snipers had infiltrated through as indeed

(25, 26, 27, 28, 29) Eye witness, self

some had. No one dared appear on a sky line even back in the regimental reserve area. To flash a light was a sure invitation to be shot at. It took us several days to discover the phantom rifle shots were firecrackers, but they had served the purpose of keeping the troops on edge. (30)

During this period we were constantly being bombarded with Japanese propaganda leaflets which we used to good advantage. (31)

Our reconnaissance patrols contacted the enemy for the first time one kilometer south of Harmosa 9 January 1942. (32)

On 10 January our out-post line of resistance made contact with the enemy and the enemy withdrew. (33)

11 January found us resting contentedly behind our barb wire and mines. Our rest was to be soon disturbed for at 2300 we began to be harassed by artillery and long range small arms fire. We did not realize they were attempting to feel out our position and plot our automatic weapons therefore the hour or so delay before attacking in force. (34)

The fire drew closer artillery concentrations were called for on the cane field when our outposts discovered the Japanese were massing troops almost in our area. When the concentrations began the cane field seemed to vomit Japanese in great numbers, screaming, howling, yelling "Banzai" as they charged.

They continued to come, threw themselves against our wire and the waves behind them leaped on their comrades up and over. It seemed they were acrobats in the manner they crossed the moon lit stretch of ground between the cane field and our position.

The fire did not seem to stop them nor did they pay much attention to our mines.

(30, 31) Eye witness, self.

The trails on the 75MMs were moved to allow them to fire point blank into the cane field, yet they still came on.

At that moment they attacked from the rear as well. We learned then the Japanese lesson of infiltration. Their tracers seemed to be coming from all directions and many of the Japanese were killed by their own comrades. We shot at everything above ground.

When they were among us they ceased to yell, the only sound we heard was their officers and non-commissioned officers shouting. However, soon there were no more officers or sword wavers to shout as their drawn Samuri swords made them most conspicuous. They seemed to lose organization when they were among us. Suddenly it was over and we anxiously awaited morning to repair our damages, fearing a second attack at any moment.

The Japanese failed to press their advantage and as light fell we were a little awed by the great numbers of dead in our position. They were everywhere, in our gun positions, and trenches, in the open ground to our front, hanging on our barbed wire.

The Field Artillery Battery had been in the thick of it. The shields of the 75MMs had dozens of bullet marks ~~on the shields~~ and the artillery men had suffered casualties. (35)

Our casualties had been amazingly light as the Japanese had attacked in close packed waves, and the fact that they had become disorganized when they reached our position.

We lost the company commander of I Company, 1st Lieutenant Gerth, and his executive officer, Lieutenant Maynard. *W. F. Green*

The company commander seriously wounded and never returned to the regiment; the executive officer was killed. (36)

(35, 36) Eye Witness, self.

We had driven off a Battalion. (37)

The next day was to pass in minutes. Night found us unable to perform many of the things we deemed so necessary. We had been constantly harrassed by snipers during the day, it seemed they realized our every move.

About 2400 12 January our position was struck again, first ^{by} ~~consisting of~~ sporadic small arms fire and artillery fire. This time we kept our automatic rifles and machine guns quiet so they could not be plotted.

We had called for concentrations on the cane field again as soon as the fire drew close but the cane field yielded no Japanese. Suddenly the cane field again vomitted Japanese, but most of them were killed before they reached our wire. With the help of artillery they were driven off. (38)

At approximately 1630 ^{0430(?)} 13 January the enemy resumed the attack with great fury. Mines started going off by the dozen to our front. Caribou appeared, the Japanese had stampeded a large herd across the field and followed quickly in the cleared path, simultaneously they poured out of the cane field again a combined flank and frontal attack. Our artillery continued to pound the cane field as well as our machine guns and mortars, but they continued to pour out. Again they over-ran the position massing the attack on "I" company.

The company commander ^{was} dead with two of his officers, the first sergeant dead and one platoon sergeant alive. The men were in utter confusion and the Japanese literally pushed them out of the position by force of numbers and occupied their emplacements.

(37, 38) A-2, p. 29

"K" Company refused their left flank and managed to stop the assault, temporarily. The reserve company had been committed as well as all available men in Battalion Headquarters. Fortunately, the men from I Company ran into L Company. They were quickly reorganized and forced to participate in the counterattack. By then it was just turning light, the reserve company reached the main line of resistance, the Japanese were driven back and most of the gap was closed. However, we had closed off a large number of Japanese to the rear of I Company position and thus they had formed a salient in the form of a large tear drop. (39)

Sporadic fire from both sides continued and we were surprised that we were not subjected to artillery fire and that the Japanese had not received reinforcements. Suddenly, artillery fire began to burst in the trees above our head, we realized that it was our own friendly artillery. (40)

It was seemingly impossible to get a messenger out and above the open ground as ^{witnessed} demonstrated by one soldier when a shell fragment knocked off his lower jaw. He jumped out of his fox hole, rifle in his hand, his bloody cheeks waving unreal as he ran and ducked, seemingly as if he were unhurt trying to get out of the area. He was shot after he had covered ten yards. (41)

Fortunately, some one in the First Battalion saw what was happening and got word back to the artillery which lifted. We thought then that our own forces thought our position had been occupied by the Japanese, however, later the artillery explained that a mistake ^{had been} made and that reduced charges were accidentally used.

(39) A-1, p. 3; (40) Eye witness, self; (41) Eye witness, self.

Not knowing what had to be done we counterattacked again in an attempt to completely cut off the Japanese behind our M.L.R. and also gain contact with the 41st Infantry (P.A.). In this action the first Medal of Honor of World War II was awarded to First Lieutenant Alexander R. Nininger. He had been successful in grenading several enemy groups in fox holes wounded he ran towards the machine rifle that had wounded him, hurled a grenade, caught a burst of fire full in the face, but succeeded in killing the crew of two and a Japanese officer who was in the position. The troops came close on his heels and we occupied still more of the position, we had lost the night before. (43)

The enemy lacking the power to do more than create a small salient in our line slid off to the west seeking a safer spot. Our artillery support was in a large part responsible for the enemy failure to penetrate our position. (44)

That morning we found members of our outposts, who had been captured and evidently forced to lead the Japanese into our position. Their hands were tied behind their backs, they were gagged and face down in the shallow creek that ran through our position. This was our first experience with Japanese atrocity, however, several days later one of my men was captured while on patrol. We found him hanging from a tree, a rattan rope around his neck, he was unmarked except for beatings, the marks of which he plainly bore. (45)

Many acts of singular heroism had taken place, Among them, Corporal Narcisco Ortilano Company M, 57th Infantry (P.S.)

(43) Eye witness, self; (44) A-1, p. 3; (45) Eye witness, self.

grasped the blade of a bayonet of one of two attacking Japanese, lost one finger on the blade, but succeeded in taking the rifle away from the Jap and killed him with his own bayonet, firing point blank at the second Jap. Ortilano was wounded in the arms, back and legs by the bayonet of the second Jap. (46)

We put ^{an} outpost in the cane field, they discovered shallow ditches dug the day before when we were occupied with snipers. The trenches had afforded the Japanese the necessary protection from artillery fire and the question of how they had continued to pour out of the cane field was answered. (47)

We remained in position anxiously awaiting reinforcements. We were low on ammunition, the men were dead tired and felt that they should be relieved. They were hungry and many needed medical attention. (48)

As darkness closed in we managed to get in contact with the regiment, we were ordered to withdraw through the Second Battalion who were in position approximately in the area of our Battalion reserve line. They had made contact with the 41st Infantry (P.A.) on our left and had also tied in with the First Battalion. The Third Battalion occupied the Regimental reserve line and reorganized. (49)

On 13 January the 21st Infantry (P.A.) consisting of two Battalions was attached to the 57th Infantry (P.S.). At 1500 on 13 January the 21st Infantry supported by two Battalions of light artillery attacked the tear drop salient that the Japanese had dug in so completely they failed to reduce it completely. The Second Battalion remained in the area to reinforce the line during the night, fearing another large scale attack. (50)

- (46) Eye witness, men 3rd Battalion, 57th Infantry (P.S.);
(47) Eye witness, self; (48, 49) Eye witness, self;
(50) A-1, p. 3.

Colonel Clarke was relieved by Colonel Arnold J. Funk
on 14 January. (51)

On 15 January the 22d Infantry was attached to the 57th
Infantry (P.S.) and one Battalion of the 21st detached. (52)

Successive attacks completely reduced the salient. (53)

On 21 January Colonel Arnold Funk went to Second Corps as
Chief of Staff. Lt. Col. Philip T. Fry assumed command and re-
ceived a one grade promotion. (54)

On 21 January the First Battalion was replaced on the line
by a Battalion of the 21st Infantry (P.A.) At this time total
attachments consisted of 22d Infantry (P.A.) and one Battalion
of the 21st Infantry (P.A.) a total of four battalions. Three
of these battalions were on the main line of resistance and the
fourth reinforcing the Regimental reserve line. (55)

On 15 January, Japanese attacked again attempted to pene-
trate through the 42d Infantry (P.A.) but were repulsed.

On 16 January, Japanese attacked again in force in the 51st
Infantry Area, forcing the abandonment of the Abucay, Mauban line.
The Regiment moved to the West coast of Bataan to rejoin with
its sister regiment, the 45th Infantry (P.S.) a reinforced regi-
ment of Japanese Marines, who had landed. Supported by two
Battalions of tanks and a provisional Air Corps Regiment, we
were successful in the annihilation of an estimated 2,500 ^{ser} marines
ending the action on 14 February. (56) *final*

(51) A-1, p.3; (52, 53) A-1, p.4; (54, 55, 56) A-1, p.4.

In making a study of this operation it will be seen that if the Japanese had been successful in breaking the line at Abucay and becoming firmly established behind the Main Line of Resistance, The Fall of Bataan would have been in January instead of April because the East road was the main avenue of withdrawal to all troops in the Second Corps. Had a column of Japanese gone past Abucay, it would have reached the Reserve Battle line before the Philamerican Forces, since most of them would have been forced to go across country abandon ^{ing} motor equipment and artillery and had they been able to reach the Reserve Battle line would not have had sufficient time to organize a deliberate defense line. It was realized after the attacks were replac^{ed} and two regiments of the Philippine Army ^{were} attached to the 57th Infantry Combat Team and one regiment occupied the Main Line of Resistance, another less one battalion the Regimental Reserve Line, and a Third Regiment the 57th Infantry (P.S.) held as a counterattack force in reserve.

The failure of our higher command intelligence to keep up with the situation, for example, the 57th Infantry (P.S.) was ordered to proceed with haste to repulse paratroops at Arayat which proved to be false. Secondly, to Abucay Hacienda which proved to be false and to Alongapo to repulse an enemy landing which was also erroneous. They were prone to accept any source of information without checking the credibility of the source. This caused a definite drop in morale and lack of confidence in our intelligence.

The failure to cut the cane field on the left flank of the Battalion as it provided a perfect approach to the Main Line of Resistance. Had it been cut it is unlikely that the

Japanese would have been able to storm our position. The rest of the Battalions positions proved to be tactically sound for the situation including the unorthodox emplacement of the Field Artillery Battery which assisted greatly in repulsing the Japanese.

It can be seen that success in Battle depends greatly on subordinate commander^s. The situation moved so fast that it was the individual on the spot who made the decisions and carried them out.

The loss of leaders on both sides resulted in the disorganization of the Japanese in their attacks on the position and the route of I Company when the commanders were killed. To sum up the results the 57th Infantry repulsed three attacks by an enemy of superior numbers and defeated the Japanese for the first time in World War II in their planned assaults, as I demonstrated by the fact they abandoned the plan of securing the east road which tactically speaking should have continued to be their primary mission.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. The adoption of ^rRuses are beneficial and will tend to keep the opposing forces guessing. Ruses like the firecrackers dropped at Abucay definitely worked to the advantage of the Japanese.

2. Never underestimate the efficiency of an enemy. We ^{were} are all guilty of underestimating the Japanese. Respect of an enemy's capabilities ^{will} will tend to keep us alert and prevent surprise moves.

3. Troops should be trained to exercise initiative, and assume command in their absence of their commanders. The actions of the Scouts and the Japanese show a definite lack of training along that line.

4. Remove or adequately cover all natural avenues of approach when in a defensive position. The neglect to do this regardless of the work entailed will result in passing the advantage to the attacking force.