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OPERATIONS OF "B" COMPANY, 32ND INFANTRY (7TH INFANTRY  
DIVISION) IN THE CONQUEST OF OKINAWA, 10-20 APRIL 1945.  
(RYUKYUS CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: RIFLE COMPANY IN ATTACK OF  
A WELL DEFENDED TOWN.

1st Lieutenant Edwin W. Emerson, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

15927

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OPERATIONS OF "B" COMPANY, 32ND INFANTRY (7TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CONQUEST OF OKINAWA, 10-20 APRIL 1945.  
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INTRODUCTION

Early in December 1944, the Tenth Army was informed that in March 1945, it was to take part in the invasion of, and the capture of the island of Okinawa, in the Ryukyus Retto chain. This island, from 2 to 18 miles in width and approximately 65 miles in length, is located a mere 360 miles from the island of Kyushu, the very entrance to the Japanese homeland. (See Map A) Okinawa's nearness to Kyushu had been an important factor in its selection as a target. In securing a position in the Ryukyus Islands, it was believed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff that four major missions could be accomplished: the establishment of bases for the invasion of Japan proper, (Kyushu was scheduled for attack in the latter part of 1945 and Honshu itself to be invaded shortly thereafter); the gaining of a well organized island for additional operations against the Japanese in areas bordering the East China Sea; the severance of Japanese supply lines to the south; and the maintenance of continuous pressure against the enemy, with the consequent fatal attrition of his air and naval forces. (1) It was believed that the assault on the island would result in a stubbornly contested, last ditch stand in an effort for the enemy to hold their inner defensive perimeter. (2) Although the nearness of the Japanese homeland was extremely desirable

(1) A-1, p. 57; (2) A-1, p. 58.

for use in future operations, this gave <sup>the Japs</sup> ~~him~~ a decided advantage until <sup>when</sup> ~~such time that~~ our forces were well established on the island. The great distance of Okinawa from our nearest land-based air power on Iwo Jima, which <sup>was still</sup> ~~was as yet~~, also in the planning state; and from bases in both China and Luzon, in the Philippine Islands, meant that the Pacific Fleet would alone be responsible for the neutralization of the enemy's still powerful air force which would be operating from bases on Kyushu as well as other islands in the Japanese chain. (3)

The general plan for the assault of the Tenth Army on Okinawa called for the 77th Infantry Division, designated as the Western Islands Landing Force to seize the Kerama and Keise groups of islands prior to L-Day. This mission was to be accomplished by the force assaulting the Kerama islands on L minus 6 in order that a protected anchorage, seaplane facilities and a base for logistic support might be secured. (4) The Keise islands were to be captured on L minus 1 so that long range artillery might be placed there to support the landings on Okinawa. (5) On L-day and L plus 1, the Second Marine Division was to execute a feint on the southeastern coast of Okinawa. The purpose of the feint being a diversion, to create confusion among higher echelons of the Japanese garrison. Two major forces, the Northern and Southern landing forces, comprised of the III Amphibious Corps and the XXIV Corps were to land on the west coast, with the XXIV Corps on the right. Each Corps was to have two Divisions abreast, and each division to land two regiments in the assault. (6)

- (3) A-1, p. 59; (4) A-2, Chap. 3, p. 10, A-1, p. 62;  
(5) A-1, p. 64, A-2, Chap. 3, p. 11, A-2, Chap. 7, p. 1;  
(6) A-1, p. 62.

H-hour was designated as 0830 on 1 April 1945. (7) (See Map B)

Upon landing, both Corps were to drive across the island and upon reaching the coast, the XXIV Corps was to establish an east-west line across the island to prevent the enemy from sending reinforcements from the south. The left division of the III Amphibious Corps was to turn north immediately upon reaching the western shore, the right Marine Division to drive to the east coast, thereby preventing the arrival of any reinforcements the enemy might send from the northern sector of the island. By holding the central portion of the island, both the northern and southern sectors would be completely isolated, thus an area would be afforded from which a north-south attack could be launched. In this area were the Yontan and Kadena airports, reported by intelligence sources to be in excellent condition. The availability of two airports intact would also lend to the logistical as well as the tactical support of the north-south attacks. (8)

*that will be*

#### GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The terrain alone on Okinawa offered a tremendous obstacle to the invading forces. The island is, for the most part, mountainous with a rugged ridge line running generally from the north to the southern tip. This ridge line is crossed by deep ravines and small mountain streams with smaller ridges which generally end in the vicinity of the coast, or at the ocean. Generally speaking, along the coast lines, from the ocean to points varying from a few yards to

(7) A-1, p. 60; (8) A-1, p. 63.

several hundred yards the land is under cultivation, being planted with rice and sweet potatoes. The southern part is characterized by rolling hills with plateaus which end in rugged formations at the very end. The rock formation of the southern tip is made up mostly of limestone, natural drainage lines creating escarpments with heights of from a few feet to as high as one hundred feet. This type of terrain, mountainous with the escarpments, serves to work hand in glove with the Japanese defensive doctrine, that of mutually supporting cave defenses and pillboxes. For a defense in depth, the terrain left nothing to be desired. (9)

A man-made sea wall varying from four to ten feet in height and three to ten feet in depth, completely encircled the island. Aerial photos show<sup>ed</sup> a maze of rifle pits, automatic weapon pits, trench systems and other emplacements of different types in all areas where there exists even the remotest possibility of an amphibious assault. All these beaches are capable of being covered by automatic weapons, mortar and artillery fire from the nearby mountains. To further discourage a landing, several hundred yards off shore a rugged coral reef exists. These reefs are in some places several inches below, and in other instances may be clearly visible above the surface of the water. The reef, however, did not present an unsurmountable obstacle as it could be overcome by such vehicles as Am-track's transporting personnel to the beach and amphibious tanks to support the assault wave. Reserve units landing at low tide were to be transported by

(9) Personal knowledge.

LCVP's, LSM's and other craft of this type. Such craft were to come to the edge of the reefs, deposit their equipment and/or personnel who walked across the reefs to the beach.

(10)

Information from intelligence sources stated that diseases such as Typhus, Cholera, Bubonic plague, Tuberculosis and Malignant malaria were in a continual epidemic state. <sup>on the island</sup> Also, the island was infested with deadly snakes, and flies uncontrolled, due to the Okinawan, by nature being a filthy race of people. Furthermore, the natives of the island, approximately 450,000 in number, even though a mixed race, were believed to be pro-Japanese and would have to be considered as enemy until proven otherwise. (11)

The best aerial photos showed the road system to be very poor, with a principal north-south road on each side of the island, and with very few secondary roads and trails running laterally. (12) With the rainy season starting during the month of April and lasting from 70 to 90 days, unsurfaced roads would present a great problem. (13)

Even each individual house appeared to be a small fortress. The chain of islands undergoes a tremendous hurricane every year between the months of May and October (14), therefore, each family has constructed a rock wall approximately four feet in height around every house. (15) These barriers serve to make house to house fighting in towns extremely difficult. (16)

(10) Personal knowledge; (11) A-1, p. 59; (12) Personal knowledge; (13) A-6, p. 27; (14) A-6, p. 27; (15) (16) Personal knowledge.

## SEVENTH DIVISION INVASION PREPARATION

On 8 February 1945 when the division received the field order from Headquarters, XXIV Corps specifically assigning the mission of landing in the assault echelon on Okinawa, the division was still actively engaged in fighting the enemy on the western coast of Leyte, Philippine Islands. (17)

The overall mission assigned the division was as follows:

- (1) Land on L-Day on Beaches Purple and Orange with two infantry regiments abreast, and defeat and destroy all enemy forces encountered in its zone of action.
- (2) Advance rapidly inland, secure the Kadena Airfield, and continue the advance in its zone of action pushing elements to the east coast at the earliest practicable moment.
- (3) Secure the objective line, L plus 10, in its zone of action at the earliest practicable time, and be prepared to continue the attack to the south along the east coast of Okinawa Island on Corps order.
- (4) Coordinate its advance with elements of the III Amphibious Corps.
- (5) Hold one infantry regiment in Division reserve ashore to be committed only on authority of the Corps Commander. (18)

The division, battle worn and much understrength was relieved of fighting in the Philippines on or about the 12th of February and all units were returned to the east coast of Leyte in the vicinity of Tarragona. There remained only six

(17) A-4, p. 4; (18) A-4, p. 1.

weeks for rest, rehabilitation, receiving of replacements, training and countless other important, time consuming details involved in staging for an Amphibious operation. (19)

Immediately upon arrival in the so called "rest area", troops were busily engaged in establishing a garrison in an attempt to make the small amount of remaining time as comfortable as possible. (20)

Shortly after the assembly of the division, briefing of Regimental Commanders, Battalion Commanders, Staffs and Company Commanders was initiated. Governed by the information available at that time, all key personnel were briefed to the minutest detail. (21)

As to the conduct of training for units, very little was done. There were, however, special schools established to give replacements a general orientation<sup>and</sup> to train flame thrower operators and operators of the new secret weapons, the Sniperscope and Snooperscope. Regiments managed to sandwich in at least one tank-infantry team problem for all rifle companies. Engineer-infantry training was effectively covered. Problems were conducted in the breaching of sea-walls, reduction of beach obstacles, blowing of pillboxes, removal of mine fields and wire entanglements. (22)

The greatest factor effecting the training program for the pending operation was the utilization of units for service as port details. Battalions worked on a 24 hour basis loading out ships with all classes of supply in sufficient quantities to make the division self sustaining for a period

(19) A-4, p. 4; (20) Personal knowledge; (21) A-4, p. 6;  
(22) A-4, p. 28, 29.

*Handwritten note: [unclear] [unclear] [unclear]*

of thirty days. (23) Combat loading was completed on 26 March 1945, only four days prior to the landing on L-day. A division, understrength, undertrained, underequipped (in "B" Company, 32nd Infantry alone, there existed an acute shortage of items of equipment such as BAR belts and mortar ammunition bags.) BAR's were finally supplied in sufficient numbers just prior to shipping, with many of these scarcely serviceable,) and over tired, but long on combat experience, was in readiness to fight an enemy fanatically determined to die in his hole while protecting the land of the Rising Sun from an invading American horde. (24)

#### EMBARKATION

The majority of the personnel were embarked on 12 and 13 March. Assault battalions were transported on LST's, usually having one infantry company as the basic load, plus all attachments or supporting elements for that unit. Amphibious tractors in sufficient numbers to transport the entire company plus the supporting machine gun or mortar section, Amphibious tank units or other supporting arms were loaded on each LST. Reserve battalions were generally embarked in APA's to be transported to the beach from the rendezvous area off the coast of Okinawa in LCVP's, LST's or LSM's. (25)

Following the embarkation, two full scale landing rehearsals were conducted on the Tarragona beaches of Leyte. Assault elements established beachheads on beaches designated as Orange and Purple, those assigned the division for the

(23) A-4, p. 30, 32; (24) Personal knowledge; (25) A-4, p. 32.

*not pertinent in operation.*

invasion. The initial practice landing was not too successful, due to a number of factors. Several LST's and other ships had been late in arriving at the staging area, therefore key personnel had not been properly briefed and certain small units, which are vital to a team of this type, were forced to complete the last minute working details. The majority of difficulties encountered on the first rehearsal were eliminated in the second. Those not corrected in the actual rehearsal were studied, disseminated and corrected during unit critiques following immediately thereafter. Despite the fact that the long, flat, sandy beaches of Leyte Gulf in no way resembled those to be encountered on Okinawa, the practice received in such matters as coordination, control between the LST's and the beaches, and the assembly of units after being landed proved of great value in the execution of an excellent landing on the target. (26)

#### MOVEMENT TO TARGET

The division cleared Leyte Gulf at 1130 hours, 27 March and proceeded to the objective area. While troops were enroute to the target, detailed briefing was given to all personnel. Officers lectured to their units on enemy dispositions, health and weather conditions to be expected on Okinawa and the native personnel. Excellent maps, relief models of the target and aerial photographs had been supplied by G-2 and were at the disposal of all troops. Troops taking part in the Ryukus campaign were briefed in every detail, both as units, but particularly the individual soldier. (27)

(26) A-3, p. 16; (27) A-3, p. 28.

The voyage was made during a terrific storm, but movement to the target was executed without enemy interference, either from surface or aircraft. This was no doubt due to the heavy weather which prevailed during the voyage. Shortly after dawn on 1 April the enemy staged sporadic suicide and bombing attacks but met with only limited success initially. Weather for friendly air cover was excellent and carrier based planes fulfilled their mission in a highly efficient manner. When the anchorage off western Okinawa was reached, the storm subsided and the dawn of D-day presented invading forces with an ideal sea. (28)

#### THE ASSAULT

Under cover of intensive surface and aerial bombardment, the largest Amphibious assault in the history of the Pacific war was launched. The fact that the enemy did not choose to defend the beaches was a Godsend! The Navy had given assurance that seawalls were breached and would present no obstacle. On the contrary, the seawalls, so thick, high and well constructed were merely "pock marked" by the huge naval guns and had to be scaled. Engineer demolition teams actually breached the walls or finished the job started by the Navy. The invasion could easily have been another Tarawa had the enemy chosen to defend his beaches. (29)

On the whole, landings were unopposed. Occasional mortar and artillery fire fell along the beaches but the inaccuracy of these fires inflicted little damage and but few casualties. After landing, the assault moved rapidly inland against

(28) A-3, p. 23; (29) Personal knowledge.

scattered enemy resistance. This success was exploited and by dark of the first day the L plus 3 line had been taken. The island was cut in half at 1500 hours on 2 April by elements of the 32nd Infantry, the entire operation far ahead of schedule and the North-South attacks ready to be launched.

(30) (See Map C)

On L plus 2, the Seventh Division turned south with two regiments abreast, the 32nd Infantry on the left, 184th Infantry on the right and the 17th Infantry in reserve. On the right of the 184th Infantry was the 96th Division which was already encountering stiffening enemy resistance. The 32nd Infantry attacked with two battalions abreast, the 1st going along the seawall in the coastal area called the "flats", due to its extremely flat terrain; the 3rd Battalion attacking south along a ridge of mountains running generally parallel to the coast, and the 2nd Battalion in reserve. (31)

Enemy opposition stiffened on L plus 3. Against enemy infantry supported by artillery fire the 32nd Infantry advanced approximately 1,000 yards.

During L plus 4 the advance continued for approximately 2,600 yards against very little enemy resistance. On L plus 5, however, ~~the~~ <sup>was contacted and was found to be</sup> enemy was well dug in with extensive trench systems, supported by pillboxes and barbed wire on rugged mountainous terrain in the 184th Infantry area. The 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry pushed another 2,000 yards in the coastal area, under flanking fire from the ridge of mountains several hundred yards inland and overlooking the flats. (32)

(30) A-3, p. 25; (31) A-4, p. 49; (32) A-4, p. 49, 50.

Between L plus 6 and L plus 8, the Japanese stubbornly defended his line across the island. Artillery and mortar fire grew increasingly heavy and the enemy had to be dug out of every hole. It became apparent that gains could no longer be measured in hundreds of yards, but just in yards. By nightfall of L plus 8, 9 April 1945, the 32nd Infantry had secured a line extending from the seawall, west several hundred yards across a precipitous ridge of mountains known as Skyline ridge. (See Map C) This ridge overlooked all the coastal area from the seawall up to the line of mountains, and from observation posts on this commanding terrain, every move made by the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry in this completely exposed terrain could be readily observed by the enemy from the ridge, as well as Conical Peak, one of the most critical terrain features on the island. (33) (See Map C)

#### "B" COMPANY ATTACKS

With two battalions abreast, the 32nd Infantry was ordered to resume its drive to the south at 0600 hours on 10 April with the Second Battalion on the right attacking along Skyline ridge, the First Battalion on the left attacking across the flats and the Third Battalion in reserve after having received heavy losses in its advance along the high ground.

The First Battalion was ordered to attack with B and C Companies abreast, C on the right to support the attack by firing from positions along the line of departure into the lower end of Skyline ridge and the unnamed village to the right of Ouki. B Company was assigned the mission of seizing

(33) A-4, p. 50.

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the town of Ouki initially, then attacking right across the battalion front and take Skyline ridge. The attack formation was first and second platoons in the assault, the second on the right with the third in support. The weapons platoon was to be in general support of the company. After taking Ouki and turning right through the unnamed village and to the base of Skyline ridge, the second platoon was ordered to assault the ridge. One platoon was to be used due to the narrowness of the objective.

At H-hour, when three tanks supporting the attack opened fire on Ouki, the Japs commenced throwing artillery as they had never been known to do before. Within the first minute of fire, the three supporting tanks were knocked out by direct hits. Japanese light machine guns, rifles and knee mortars firing from both Ouki and Skyline ridge pinned both B and C companies to the ground, neither being able to move. It was apparent that the enemys' strength had been underestimated. Fires of all types continued their tempo until about 1030 hours when elements of C company on the right broke and ran. Panic stricken men poured through the second platoon of B company in an attempt to get to the seawall or the village to the rear in search of protection. Upon observing panicky C company, the first and third platoons of B also broke. These units leaving the line left only the second platoon of B company, with the company light machine gun section, a 60 mm mortar observer, a forward observer party from the 49th Field Artillery Battalion and the remaining elements of C Company in the line from the seawall to the mountains on the right. The

battalion was then extremely vulnerable to a counterattack. The enemy had excellent observation into the flats from Sky-line ridge and Conical peak to the south. The First Battalion front line was completely disorganized as well as demoralized. The second platoon and a few supporting elements remaining braced themselves for a counterattack that was almost sure to be launched by the enemy.

Artillery, mortar and small arms fire continued until about 1115 hours when a cold, drenching rain commenced. The skys were completely overcast and clouds were hanging so low that the enemy lost his observation of the coastal area and ceased firing. The company was reorganized under harrasing small arms fire from the front by the second platoon leader who took command of the company. It was found that during the morning the first and third platoons suffered heavily, receiving heavy casualties, being cut to pieces by Japanese artillery, mortar and small arms fire while running frantically from their holes to the seawall. The second platoon, still completely intact had but one minor casualty, despite the fact that it had received a proportionate share of the High Explosives and small arms fire. The company commander, one runner, a radio operator and three riflemen were killed, and 16 men were wounded during the morning. The first platoon leader was seriously wounded and the company executive officer was in a dazed condition and slightly wounded due to a near direct hit by a 150 mm artillery shell. The Company Command Post had been located too near the front line. A few hours after the reorganization, Lt. Paul Hayman, the executive

officer returned from the battalion aid station and assumed command of the company. The morning's action had taken its toll of the company. The beachhead was made with approximately 130 men, or about 50 understrength. Action on L day cost 9 wounded and 1 killed; 6 more were killed or wounded on 8 April and with a loss of 20 men and 2 officers, the company was left with less than 100 men, the second platoon being the largest with only 23 men.

Rain continued throughout the day of 10 April and all that night. The weather was cold, holes dug into rice paddies were beginning to fill up with mud and water and were caving in. In general, troops were in a miserable condition and morale was at a low ebb. The enemy continually harassed the troops by throwing sporadic artillery and mortar fire at the front lines.

During the entire day and night an intense artillery duel was carried on between friendly and enemy artillery until ammunition stockpiles were practically non-existent, (34) and to make matters worse, several ammunition ships had been sunk in the harbor just off the invasion beaches by Japanese suicide planes. Rains had soaked the few unsurfaced, narrow Okinawa roads until heavy ammunition trucks were unable to traverse them. Only enough artillery ammunition remained in the Division artillery as well as other reinforcing artillery unit ammunition dumps to fire against enemy counterattacks. This presented a serious problem.

On April 11th the same line was held and the enemy con-

(34) A-4, p. 106.

tinued to look down the throats of the first battalion and kept throwing artillery shells; B company <sup>suffered</sup> having several more casualties. A patrol from the company was dispatched to the town of Ouki but met bitter enemy opposition.

After receiving another tremendous pounding from Jap artillery, on 12 April, it was decided to move the first battalion out of the flats, or at least to an area offering less observation to the enemy. At 1500 hours the Battalion withdrew from its positions to an area approximately 200 yards to the north. The new position in the rear of a small unnamed town at least gave concealment to the troops as the enemy no longer had direct observation.

During the night of 12-13 April the Japs attempted to make a landing behind American lines but were repulsed when Naval vessels in Yonaboru harbor blasted two boats from the surface of the water. It is believed that all aboard the two landing crafts were either killed outright or drowned with the exception of four men who reached the shore at about 0500 hours on the 13th. These four men were wet, cold and unarmed, their weapons no doubt being dropped into the ocean during their struggle for survival. As they advanced toward the company line along the seawall an order was given to hold all fire and take the Japs prisoner. When they were approximately 25 yards from the seawall, the right platoon commenced firing, killing all of the men. Here an excellent opportunity for taking prisoners had presented itself, but a platoon led by a jittery lieutenant permitted it to slip from our hands. The men as prisoners would have been invaluable, as up to this time,

absolutely no information of the enemy was available, no prisoners had been taken and natives had proven to be worthless as far as intelligence was concerned.

On 13 April eight more casualties were sustained, the day being spent under heavy artillery fire. New locations of the company made little difference to the enemy as he apparently had the complete area surveyed in and was receiving excellent practical work in massing his fires, which was done with great success. Over five hundred known positions, either field artillery or coastal guns had been pin-pointed up to this time in the small area at the end of the island. ~~CSA~~<sup>CSA</sup> The majority of these were located in caves, many having steel doors which were opened only when their guns were in operation. This made a direct hit necessary to put the gun out of action. Others were located on reverse slopes in caves with the weapons mounted on tracks. The heavy guns were rolled out when in action, then after a few rounds were fired, were pushed back into the cover of the caves. Counterbattery fire by our own pieces was but slowly effective. Naval guns on ships out in the harbor and carrier based Marine and Navy fighter-bomber planes were meeting with some success.

At about 1900 hours heavy artillery fire fell into the Battalion Command Post area, killing and wounding a large number of men, including some of those already on litters in the Battalion aid station. Practically all wire communications were knocked out by the fire. At 2100 hours an order for a withdrawal was issued and the Battalion was finally ordered

to conduct a night retrograde movement from the completely exposed coastal area to covered positions about 500 yards to the rear and behind a ridge, extending from Skyline to about 200 yards from the ocean. The Battalion would remain there until sufficient supplies and ammunition were stockpiled to support a coordinated attack.

The period of 14 to 18 April was spent in comparative inactivity in covered positions behind the ridge. The mission formerly being carried out by the company was executed by sending a reinforced platoon to the area last occupied in the flats as a combat outpost during the night and with a reinforced squad during the day. The original front lines were held without casualties for four days whereas there had previously been a daily toll. Enemy activity was confined to infiltrating patrols armed with demolitions and grenades, but these were usually picked up by the outposts, a number of Japs ~~being~~ killed each night. On the 15th the Battalion received 40 replacements, all of <sup>which</sup> had just finished basic training prior to overseas shipment. The longest period for any of them ~~to be~~ in the army was six months. Of the group received by the Battalion, B company was allotted 7 men. Morale was bolstered considerably by the arrival of replacements; the enemy slackening up on his artillery fire and the Red Cross bringing doughnuts and coffee to the company area. All men were able to catch up on their correspondence, and mail fresh from the States was distributed. While in the "rest" area information was received that the Germans had surrendered and the Russians had declared war on Japan. Everyone had

visions of a large number of divisions jumping across the line into Manchuria and perhaps it might have an influence on the longevity of the Pacific war. After everyone had written letters to friends and relatives, the correct message was disseminated which stated that General Eisenhower had made a statement to the effect that "If the Germans surrender, Russia may declare war upon Japan." With the same message, came the tragic information that President Roosevelt had died.

On the 18th a reconnaissance patrol was dispatched with the mission of going as far south as possible to the vicinity of the northern end of the Yonaboru air strip to determine the useability of the strip, also to scout the town of Ouki for enemy, and on the way to determine whether or not the large number of pillboxes along the seawall were occupied or showed evidence of having been recently used. The second platoon departed the company area at 0800 hours and proceeded on its mission. The route used was along the seawall to a point abreast of Ouki, scouting out all pillboxes and enemy entrenchments, none of which showed signs of activity. The platoon went through the town of Ouki on the movement south, and moved approximately 500 yards beyond the town, taking advantage of cover and concealment and halted at a position overlooking the airstrip. From the strip the rear side of Skyline ridge to the west could also be observed, but no enemy activity was discerned. There could be observed, however, a maze of enemy caves and entrenchments. The airstrip was grown over with grass but appeared to be in fairly good condition. On the return trip the platoon was fired upon by six Japanese

soldiers in the town of Ouki, this fire not being returned. The platoon arrived at the Battalion Command Post and reported to the S-2 at approximately 1200 hours. The report given stated that the airstrip appeared to be in condition for at least liaison planes, and with a little construction might be able to accommodate planes comparable to the Navy or Marine fighter. All pillboxes had been searched and showed no signs of activity. There was however, a considerable amount of field wire running laterally across the coastal area, which might indicate that the enemy had intentions of using the bunkers at some future date. The six Japs in Ouki were reported as being armed with rifles and were believed to be the only troops in the town. This patrol had penetrated the farthest distance into enemy territory that American troops had gone to date, and with opposition only from the six Japanese in Ouki.

During the afternoon of 18 April orders were issued for a coordinated attack to be launched at 0730 hours on the 19th. This was to be the biggest push thus far in the campaign, with three divisions abreast attacking along a line scarcely three miles in length. Supporting the attack for all elements were 22 Battalions of field artillery, ranging from 75 mm to 8 inch howitzers and Long Toms. In addition, each assault Battalion operating near the beach on each side of the island had on call a destroyer, Regiment a ship of larger size and Division had one or more of several types of vessel available for support. Plenty of ammunition and supplies were now on hand and it looked as if the enemy were in for a shellacking.

All troops were thoroughly briefed. B Company's mission was to seize the town of Ouki and the small village to the west, reorganize and cover the advance of the second Battalion attacking along the high ground. By organizing positions south of Ouki the company could bring fire on the reverse slope of Skyline ridge denying the use of covered routes of approach to the enemy, thereby preventing him from bringing reinforcement and supplies to troops on the ridge. Both A and C Companies were in reserve, to follow along by bounds behind B Company. Heavy weapons company was to be in direct support of the main effort.

The night of 18 April was uneventful until about 2330 hours, when the Japs came through with the heaviest artillery barrage of the campaign to date. S-2 reported that during the period 2330 until 0130 over 700 rounds of mixed 75 mm, 105 mm, 155 mm artillery, large coastal guns and 81 mm mortars fell. The enemy pounded our troops heavily for two hours and stopped just as abruptly as he started. Inasmuch as the company was dug in on the reverse slope of the hill, no casualties were received. The first platoon out in the flats on outpost duty was molested by two small infiltrating patrols, but these were squelched before the enemy slipped through the outpost.

B Company's plan for the coordinated attack was as follows: The second platoon, having been into the town of Ouki and beyond <sup>held</sup> only the day previous, was to assault that part of the objective, clean out any pillboxes which may have been occupied during the night and reorganize just south

of the town. The third platoon was to follow the second until it reached the first tank trap (See Map D), turn right and move west until abreast of the small unnamed village, attack and seize the small town, move through, make contact with the second platoon on the left and reorganize. The first platoon in support, <sup>part</sup> a section of heavy machine guns, was attached to <sup>each</sup> both assault platoons, and the 81 mm mortar platoon from D company was in direct support of the attack.

*under cover* → The company moved out under cover of preparation fires which had been in progress since 0420. The entire front was thoroughly drenched with artillery, mortar and naval shells.

The second platoon moved quietly down the second tank trap into the edge of Ouki, taking the enemy completely by surprise. Actually, the attacking platoon was ~~almost~~ <sup>not</sup> surprised to discover the town was heavily defended, as only the day prior it was virtually unoccupied. The enemy, in the northeast corner of the village took advantage of the small rock walls surrounding every house and fought frantically, employing rifles, light machine guns, knee mortars and grenades. The second platoon, only 19 men strong when the attack was launched, suffered heavily. After about an hour of close combat, including two bayonet clashes, ammunition was almost expended, and the platoon had 7 casualties including the aidman, it became apparent that the position could not be captured with the small handful of men ~~attacking~~ <sup>attacking</sup> it. Just as the company commander radioed for the platoon to withdraw, the enemy was observed forming for a counter-

attack approximately 100 yards to the south. Smoke grenades were thrown to cover the withdrawal, and members of the platoon carried out their wounded men and equipment. One squad left to cover the withdrawal of the remainder of the platoon was hit quite badly as it moved toward the seawall, and 5 more men were seriously wounded. In the second platoons action there were 12 casualties, all of which were gotten out of the hot spot, some able to walk, others being carried by the remainder of the platoon. One Browning Automatic Rifle and belt was left about one half the way down the tank trap when the gunner was shot in the back by a Jap rifleman. The man who carried the wounded Browning Automatic Rifle man out was unable to retrieve both the man and the weapon. As the platoon withdrew, our own artillery was laid down in the village to cover the movement and soften the town for a subsequent attack. The viciousness of the attack may be illustrated by the fact that Japs brought their own artillery and mortar fire down on the village held by their own troops.

The third platoon on the right met with similar success. Intense rifle, machine gun and mortar fire made it suicide to cross the flat, open rice paddies into the village. The platoon could neither attack nor withdraw, so was forced to rely upon artillery and mortar fire and a hasty defense to contain the enemy and prevent him from launching a counter-attack.

After the second platoon was brought out of Ouki, it was relieved by the support platoon. The company commander then made a decision to attack along the seawall, reach a point of

cover just south of the present positions and hit the town from the rear. When the first platoon moved out it was met with intense automatic weapons and rifle fire from pillboxes along the seawall and a number located in the open field about 50 yards inland. Knee mortar fire became so intense that the ground was darkened by the black powder from the exploding shells. When a squad dropped down over the wall to attempt a flanking movement under cover of the embankment, the enemy opened fire with machine guns from pillboxes which mutually supported those up on the top. It became evident that the enemy too had been "biding" his time for the past ten days and had moved into the organized defensive area during the night and was not going to give them up without the attackers paying the maximum. Artillery fire was brought down upon the emplacements, many of them receiving direct hits, but the fire was not affected. In short, the coordinated attack was stopped almost before it got under way.

Several more attempts were made by the company to get into the villages after intense concentrations of artillery and mortar fire, but to no avail. Tanks could not get across the traps and flame thrower teams were unable to get across the flat ground to positions within operating distance of the enemy.

It has been said that "Battles and campaigns are broken down into thousands of small unit actions, victory going to the side winning the majority of them".<sup>(36)</sup> B Company was unable to contribute even one small victory at this time.

The attack was called off at nightfall and the third platoon was unable to find author.

toon was able to withdraw under cover of darkness. The company organized a perimeter defense along the seawall northeast of Ouki and dug in, prepared for a night of banzi attacks. Luckily however, with the exception of sporadic artillery fire and intermittent small arms fire, there was very little activity. This was perhaps due to gains on the right by the Second and Third Battalions which placed the Japanese in the village in the same predicament that the First Battalion had been in for the past ten days, with someone looking down their throats, so they withdrew.

On 20 April the first battalion was withdrawn from the flats and committed on the right in the high ground, the coastal area being secured by intensive patrol activity. B Company, about 50 men strong, was employed as Battalion reserve with A and C Companies on line.

Patrols going through Ouki on the 20th discovered 37 Japs killed, and captured several light machine guns and knee mortars which had been left behind. From all appearances, especially after viewing the lowlands from commanding terrain, even a Battalion would have experienced somewhat the same experience that "B" Company did, had it been employed in assaulting such a well defended town as was Ouki and the small village to the west. (36)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The most outstanding criticism of this operation is the lack of soundness in the decision to leave "B" Company, as well as the remainder of the battalion in the flat, coastal area for the extended period of time it was employed there.

(36) Personal knowledge.

After it was discovered that the enemy had excellent observation, his pieces were located so as to permit him to mass artillery and mortar fire and place it at will on the helpless troops; to maintain the Battalion front line in these exposed positions meant sacrificing needless numbers of men. The terrain was perfectly flat from the seawall to the high ground approximately five hundred yards to the right. By withdrawing the whole battalion to the positions taken on 14 April and leaving smaller elements to cover the front by fire, the same mission was accomplished. These troops on the outpost line of resistance had observation over the whole front during the day and by employing only a reinforced squad from each company, movement was kept to a minimum, targets for enemy artillery were smaller and the mission was accomplished with a minimum of losses. During the night, reinforced platoons were able to place automatic fires along sectors which denied the enemy all avenues of approach, thereby forcing him to utilize the high ground to the right, which was heavily defended by the remainder of the regiment.

The poor leadership displayed by leaders of the first and third platoons when elements of "C" Company broke and ran could well have cost the company considerable amounts of hard earned ground. With only one platoon of riflemen and a section of light machine guns remaining on line in the company area, if the enemy had chosen to counterattack at this time, undoubtedly the positions would have been overrun. When the Japanese continually failed to launch counterattacks after their field artillery had so thoroughly pounded our front

lines, it was then indicated that sooner or later we would literally "run up against a brick wall" and that the enemy was conserving his troops for the all out stand.

The reluctance of American troops to take prisoners when the opportunity to do so presented itself seriously impeded the progress of our own intelligence. This is perhaps a carry-over from the very beginning of the Pacific war when troops seemingly acquired the habit of shooting every Jap that was not already dead, rather than turn him over to Battalion S-2. On the morning of 13 April, as the 4 Japs approached the shore, to have taken them prisoner was no problem at all. At that time we had absolutely no information of the enemy, as to where his main line of resistance was located or what his intentions were. Native Okinawans either would not or could not give any information of the enemy, therefore these four men could have proved of indeterminable value. Yet, due to lack of force in issuing orders, the third platoon leader let a valuable asset slip from our fingers.

The night attack could have been effectively utilized. Patrol activity between the 10th and the 18th of April indicated that there was very little opposition to the front, either in the town of Ouki or beyond. Due to the fact that the enemy had such good observation during the daytime, it is believed that to have attacked during the hours of darkness prior to the 18th of April would have met with success. Both commanders and troops had an inborn fear of movement at night, when a night attack was mentioned, the statement merely met with a great deal of comment along the lines that such a thing

is suicide, and is entirely out of the question. Later on in the battle, however, night attacks were launched and met with tremendous success.

Considering the number of men left in the company after the pounding it received on 10 April, the company did a commendable job. Morale dropped to the bottom after five days and nights of continuous pounding and all could see the futility of laying out in the flats day after day for no apparent reason. This brings out the point that too many commanders during the Pacific war were often overly reluctant to drop back a few hundred yards after a days operations to an area where the ground could be defended. After "B" Company dropped back to the rear of a hill mass on 15 April, the same mission was accomplished by fewer troops and with scarcely any casualties.

Japanese artillery was excellent. <sup>with</sup> Of the known five hundred pieces in the southern end of the island, he was able to mass great numbers of them on any one position. This was an accomplishment that the enemy had been unable to execute in previous operations.

### LESSONS

1. Good leadership is paramount. Through this means, the break of panic troops on 10 April could have been prevented, and the four Japanese could have been captured on the morning of the 14th.

2. To leave units in flat, exposed terrain for great lengths of time with the enemy on commanding terrain is suicide.

3. Surprise will frequently result in success, but against a fanatic enemy, determined to die in his hole without thought of surrendering, <sup>Surprise Attack</sup> it must be launched with sufficient forces to exploit the success which surprise may achieve.

4. Never underestimate the strength and capabilities of the enemy.

5. The enemy's newly acquired ability to mass artillery fires must be taken into consideration in all future operations.

6. That an enemy, ~~both~~ well dug in and determined, will withstand enormous amounts of artillery fire, both light and heavy, and still be able to carry on effective combat.

7. Against heavily fortified positions such as thick pillboxes and seawalls, fire alone will not succeed. As was illustrated by pillboxes just south of Ouki and the seawall surrounding the island, direct hits by both artillery and naval guns did not breach them.

8. The company Command Post must be located far enough to the rear of the front line platoons that fires containing the front lines will not knock out the Command Post.

9. The safest place to be during an artillery barrage is in a hole. To break and run invites disaster.

no shit