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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 1ST INFANTRY
(6TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE NIGHT DEFENSE OF
ORION, BATAAN, P.I., 15-16 FEBRUARY 1945
(LUZON CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION IN THE
PERIMETER DEFENSE OF A TOWN AGAINST A JAPANESE NIGHT
"BANZAI" ATTACK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY	2
ORIENTATION	3
Introduction	3
The General Situation	4
The Advance Into Bataan .. Dispositions of the 1st Inf ...	6
NARRATION	7
The Battalion Situation	7
Evolution and Outline of the Battalion Defense Plan	14
Organization of the Defense	16
The Japanese Attack	20
Withdrawal of the Japanese.....	27
The Morning After.....	27
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	30
LESSONS.....	40
MAP A Landing on Luzon	
MAP B Advance into Bataan	
MAP C Orion--Battalion Defense Plan.,The Japanese Attack	

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- A-9 Information is lacking on the exact dispositions of
E Company except in cases in which various E Company
positions played an important part in the night's
action. Reconstruction, then, of the E Company
situation is, for the most part, diagrammatical based
on the battalion and company SOPs and upon the
assumption that the battalion defense order was
carried out as intended.

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry, 6th US Infantry Division in the night defense of ORION, BATAAN, P.I., the night of 15-16 February 1945.

The LUZON Campaign, which embraced the operations of the 1st Infantry on BATAAN, was a natural development in the great US offensive in the Pacific. By January, 1945, Allied offensive operations in the Southwest Pacific Theater had progressed northward and westward to include the invasion of LEYTE Island in the PHILIPPINES, thus affording United States forces the forward base area required for an attack on the main island of LUZON itself. The important sea battles in and near PHILIPPINE waters had resulted in the destruction of Japanese sea power and a series of powerful air sweeps across the PHILIPPINES had removed any threat of serious interference with an attack on LUZON by Japanese aircraft.

On 9 January 1945 the U.S. Sixth Army had landed against negligible opposition on LINGAYEN Gulf, site of the main Japanese landing in 1941, and had swiftly cleared the Central Plain of LUZON, penetrating to MANILA. (See Map A) By 11 February most American units were attacking well prepared Japanese defenses in the mountains fringing the Central Plain and in MANILA and were proceeding with the clearance of Southern LUZON. (1)

(1) A-2, p.64

On 29 January elements of the American XI Corps had landed at ZAMBALES and after stiff opposition in ZIG-ZAG PASS on Highway 7 leading from SUBIC BAY toward MANILA, had cut across the neck of BATAAN Peninsula to contact U.S. troops from the MANILA area at DINALUPIHAN.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Sixth Infantry Division, of which the 1st Infantry was a part, had just completed the destruction of a Japanese armored division at MUNOZ, in NUEVA ECIJA Province, and the capture of nearby SAN JOSE and RIZAL in the same province when the next missions were assigned. (2)

On 11 and 12 February 1945 the 1st Infantry, moved by motor to DINALUPIHAN for operation under XI Corps. At DINALUPIHAN, the regiment was assigned the mission of seizing the important road net in the BALANGA-PILAR area on the east coast of BATAAN. (See Map B) It will be noted that all movement from southern BATAAN and from the west coast was channeled through this area. Implicit in the mission was the task of locating and destroying Japanese forces in the regimental zone of action and of preventing the escape to BATAAN of Japanese from MANILA, which was under heavy attack by the 37th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division. (3)

Elements of the 38th Division would land on the southern tip of BATAAN and would push northward along the coasts, particularly the more important east coast. (4)

Relatively little was known of Japanese forces remaining on BATAAN. Their strength was very roughly estimated at

- (2) A-2, p.101
- (3) A-3
- (4) A-8, p.38

5000. Reported locations were vague or erroneous, but the bulk of the forces were believed to be in the mountains between BAGAC, on the west coast, and PILAR with outposts and delaying forces in the ABUCAY, BALANGA, PILAR area. For the most part, Japanese forces on BATAAN consisted of three groups: (a) remnants of groups which had opposed the 38th or which had fled southward from engagements on the edge of the Central Plain; (b) individuals and small groups which had escaped across the bay from MANILA; (c) small garrison detachments from the coastal villages of BATAAN itself. Elements of the 39th Infantry, 10th Japanese Division had been identified. It had to be assumed from experiences in earlier engagements by the 38th Division in the BATAAN area and from the experiences of American units elsewhere in the PHILIPPINES that (1) the enemy's combat troops would be skilled in small unit defense, particularly in rough or jungle terrain; (2) any service troops, encountered would attempt to make up in fanaticism for lack of skill; (3) the Japanese would be lacking in artillery and anti-tank defense but would be adequately equipped for isolated defense by small units in difficult terrain; (4) his physical condition would be satisfactory. (5)

The advantage of terrain lay with the defender. BATAAN consists mostly of two mountain masses extending successively down the peninsula in extension of the ZAMBALES Mountains. Along much of the coast, particularly on the west, the mountains or their foothills extend to the water's edge. These mountains are jungle covered and sharply dissected. Along

(5) A-3

the northern part of the east coast and on the southern tip, however, there is a coastal plain which varies from low, rolling, bamboo-covered hills cut by parallel streams and ravines, found mainly near the mountains, to flat lowlands planted in rice or sugar cane or, along the shore, broken up into high-banked fishponds.

The weather, on the other hand, favored the attacker. The attack on LUZON had been carefully timed to coincide with the dry season. Trafficability was excellent, affording the attacker maximum mobility and employment of armor. Streams were at low levels and uncovered streambeds were relatively firm. Vegetation was dry, and where necessary could be burnt away.

U.S. troops suffered no important logistical limitations.

THE ADVANCE INTO BATAAN--DISPOSITIONS OF THE 1ST INFANTRY

The advance into BATAAN was rapid. With battalions hedge-hopping, leading elements of the regiment stopped for the night at SAMAL on 12 February, and at ABUCAY on 13 February. On 14 February the regimental objective, the BALANGA-PILAR area, was secured and Companies E and G were sent on to BANTIAN PEQUENO.

The expected Japanese resistance to movement south had not materialized. The only contact with the enemy had involved a small group escaping from MANILA who had attempted to land at SAMAL. Most of these were killed; four or five escaped southward along the bay shore. (6)

On the morning of 15 February, the regiment proceeded with a new mission. The occupation of PILAR had uncovered

(6) A-3

the highway leading westward across the peninsula to BAGAC. Hence, the 1st and 3rd battalions were sent along the highway toward BAGAC. It was along this highway that the major enemy forces were thought to be, and possession of the corridor between PILAR and BAGAC would prevent enemy movement north and south in the mountains. (7)

The 1st Field Artillery Battalion, as it came forward went into position in the vicinity of ABUCAY, and the 1st Infantry CP and train was established in BALANGA. Company F was detached from the 2nd Battalion and was retained under the direct control of regiment for the protection of the line of communications. (8)

The 2nd Battalion, less Company F, was sent to occupy ORION, the next important town to the south. Leading elements of the battalion reached ORION at 1130 and assembly areas were occupied pending the receipt of a further mission. (9)

NARRATION

2ND BATTALION SITUATION

The 2nd Battalion learned that it was to defend ORION shortly after it had closed on the town. There was received via radio from regiment an order which had three important parts: (1) 2nd Battalion would "secure" (sic) the town of ORION for the night and be prepared to resume the advance the following day; (2) one platoon would be sent ahead to outpost the town of LIMAY, securing the bridge across the LIMAY River which flows through the town; and (3) road-blocks

- (7) A-3
- (8) A-4, Personal knowledge of author
- (9) A-3

would be established on the roads and trails leading from the south and east into ORION.

Upon receipt of the regimental order, the battalion commander directed G Company to dispatch a platoon reinforced as necessary to LIMAY to secure the bridge and turned over to the Heavy Weapons Company commander the mission of preparing the plan for the defense of the town for the night. (The preparation and organization of battalion overnight defensive perimeters had become more or less the SOP mission of the Heavy Weapons Company commander.)

At about the time the order was received, a small group of Filipino guerrillas reported to the battalion. They had been sent to the battalion by regiment and constituted a part of a larger guerrilla unit which was working under the control of the 1st Infantry. The guerrillas were attached to G Company for direction pending their active employment.

The Commander, Company G designated his 3rd Platoon for the LIMAY outpost mission. This platoon accompanied by a forward observer of the 1st Field Artillery and reinforced with a section of heavy machine guns moved out promptly.

A number of factors complicated the development of a defense plan.

First, the town of ORION and its surroundings should be examined in some detail. (See Map C) ORION itself was typical of the coastal towns of BATAAN and of most small towns of LUZON. It was located on the low (elevation one to two meters), flat coastal plain at the point where the SAN VINCENTE River, flowing from the interior mountains, emptied into MANILA Bay. (10)

(10) A-5, Appendix no.5

The town was laid out astride the river. The river formed a large "U" which partially enclosed the northern section of town and formed a large spit of land along the eastern edge of town. River crossings in the town had consisted prior to 1941 of a highway bridge, two light vehicular bridges and several foot bridges. All bridges had been destroyed in the 1942 fighting, however, and a single one-way vehicular bridge had been reconstructed one block east of the original highway bridge. Fords were located east of town as shown on the map. Except for the fords, the depth of the river was unknown. The river banks varied from about eight feet at the bridge to about five feet at the west edge of town, and to the east descended gradually to a three-foot sea wall which extended from the mouth of the river southward along the bay shore on the east edge of town. West of the bridge the mud banks were steeply sloping; east of the bridge the banks were retained by steeply sloping concrete or rubble walls.

The town, about 1000 yards by 500 yards in size, was laid out in semi-rectangular blocks. The principal streets were the highway, which extended through the town near the west edge, and an east-west trail, which crossed the highway south of the river becoming the principal east-west street as it entered the town. With the exception of the highway, which was a narrow two-way concrete or macadam road, the streets were quite narrow and for the most part unpaved.

The most important building of the north section of town was the stone, cathedral type church and its adjoining cemetery. In front of the church, i.e., between the church

and the highway, there was a large, grass-covered open area with a few trees on the north edge. This church yard was enclosed by a low, stone wall. The church was a strong, tile-roofed structure. Its dome dominated the town. There were at least two doors in the front. In the rear of the church, one or more doors opened directly into the cemetery. The cemetery consisted of a maze of raised concrete and stone vaults heavily overgrown with weeds. It was surrounded by a stone wall of about six feet in height which was tied in to the church at both ends.

The most important building of the south section of the town was an old stone fort which probably was used as a municipal building. The rear doors of this building opened into a large, stone-walled paddock.

Other buildings of the town were mainly of two types. The first type included Spanish-style stores and dwellings with first floors of masonry and upper stories of wood. The second type consisted of native construction of thatched frame or bamboo dwellings and sheds. In many cases the wooden portions of the more substantial buildings had been burned during the 1942 fighting leaving only weed-filled stone walls. It is important to note that with the exception of the church and probably the old fort, all buildings were at least in part inflammable, and in the case of the frame and bamboo structures, highly so. Only the stone structures afforded any protection whatever from gunfire or shell fragments.

The north edge of the town was bounded by a small stream which crossed by culvert the highway about 400 yards north of town, then flowed southeast to the north edge of

town, thence eastward to empty into the river at its mouth. From the point where the small stream turned eastward to flow along the edge of the town, the ground along the stream was very low and swampy. In fact, a small group of frame and thatch dwellings north of the stream was reached by a bridge and narrow mud causeway.

The bay shore in the vicinity of ORION was fringed with mangrove swamp or with other types of salt water marsh. Tidal fluctuation was low and governed the flow of the stream to the point where it meandered from the town toward the mountains. (11)

On the fringe of the southern section of the town, a frame school and several small associated buildings were located at the end of a street at the southwest corner of town and a number of small dwellings extended southward along the bay shore from the southeast corner of town.

On its landward sides, ORION was surrounded by rice fields. South of town, the coastal plain narrowed to a thousand yards or less at PANDAN POINT. About three thousand yards south of ORION, the low, bamboo and shrub covered foothills closed in to the shore line. This higher ground extended northwestward so that southeast and east of ORION the rice fields gave way to the shrub at a distance of only about 1500 yards. Slightly to the north the coastal plain widened to several thousand yards. Several small dry stream lines, in addition to the streams previously described, wandered across the rice fields.

Roads led out of ORION in three directions. First, there

was the highway north to PILAR and BALANGA. Second, the highway continued south to LIMAY, a distance of about 7000 yards, LAMAQ, about 6000 yards beyond LIMAY, and then on to the southern tip of BATAAN. Third, the main east-west street of ORION continued westward across the rice fields, degenerating into a small trail somewhere in the fields. This trail continued onward into the hills toward the mountains. (12)

A second important factor was the low strength of the battalion; companies were at about 60% of authorized strength. The battalion had suffered heavy casualties shortly before. No replacements had been received and few men had returned from the hospitals. Effective strength had been lowered further by the detachment of F Company and the separate mission of the 3rd Platoon of G Company. (13)

A greater deficiency than the numerical understrength was the fact that most of the leaders were relatively inexperienced in their positions. The battalion commander had assumed command only a week earlier. All company commanders had assumed command since the landing only a month earlier. One had commanded an infantry unit in combat for only one week; one had been with the regiment for only three weeks; the other two, platoon leaders until only two or three weeks before, had had no experience in commanding companies. The battalion executive officer also had assumed his position since the landing. (14)

Another important result of the earlier actions on LUZON was an attitude of fatigue. To a considerable extent the

- (12) A-5
- (13) Personal knowledge of author
- (14) Personal knowledge of author

keen-edged offensive spirit which had prevailed at the time of the landing had been dulled.

Although the 2nd Battalion was considered a seasoned outfit, certain other attitudes which had developed as a result of experiences in jungle warfare in NEW GUINEA, were to prove important. First, there was a reluctance to move about at night. There was a lack of confidence in night offensive action, and for the unit in contact, prevailing tactical doctrine did not incorporate any sort of activity other than perimeter defense.

The perimeter itself had developed certain characteristics which had paid off in the jungle and which had been carried along in the tactics for the action in the more open terrain of LUZON. Perimeters were usually small and tight-- visual and whisper contact had to be maintained between each "watch group" regardless of the darkness of the night. Movement along and within the perimeter was sometimes a dangerous thing, as whenever there was any doubt at all, any person moving was assumed to be enemy. Night defensive patrolling was not considered. Normal machine gun fires were uncoordinated. Guns were employed with swinging traverse with sectors of fire generally immediately to the front of the gun. 37mm anti-tank guns were employed on the perimeter with cannister loads. Due to the extreme effectiveness of the cannister against grouped personnel, 37mm's usually were sited to cover the most dangerous avenues of approach. Close-in defensive fires for mortars and artillery were carefully prearranged. 60 mm mortar fires, under the control of the company commander, were preregistered about 50 yards -- often less --

around the perimeter. 81 mm mortar fires were a little farther out -- 50 to 100 yards. Artillery barrages were usually laid out parallel to the line gun target in order to get them in as close as possible to the position, -- about 100 yards out. Concentrations were registered on likely assembly areas and routes of approach. (15)

EVOLUTION AND OUTLINE OF THE BATTALION DEFENSE PLAN

It had become apparent to the commander, Heavy Weapons Company, that his task might not prove to be simple one. In the first place, what did regiment intend by the word "secure" in the regimental order? As he saw it, it could have either of two quite different meanings. First, it could mean quite simply "to deny to the enemy the tactical use of the town." This would present no problem in defense, for it could be accomplished by defending a small portion of the town with a tight battalion perimeter of a size permitted by the troops available, by defending a few important areas of the town, or even by establishing a battalion perimeter in the open fields just outside the town. On the other hand, regiment might mean "to deny the enemy access to the town itself." This would present a most serious defensive problem, even with a full strength battalion. (16)

With this problem in mind, the Heavy Weapons Company commander went to Commander, Company G, the senior company commander, to discuss it with him. After discussing the pros and cons, they agreed that regiment probably intended a defense of the town itself, possibly to prevent any Japanese outrage of the townspeople who had returned in great

(15) Personal knowledge of author

(16) Personal knowledge. Statement of Capt.(initials unknown) Johnsey, 15 Feb. 1945

numbers during the day. This, as was pointed out earlier, would require a perimeter defense of the town, itself. Such a perimeter would measure about 500 yards in width and would approach 1000 yards in length. Several factors would contribute to weakness in such a defense. First, the low strength of the battalion coupled with the excessive size of the perimeter would stretch the line very thin. Second, the return of most of the inhabitants would make for a serious security hazard during the night. Third, the battalion would be split by the river and the nature of the town itself would make contact within the perimeter itself difficult.

Balanced against these was the fact that there had been no contact with enemy combat units since the arrival of the battalion on BATAAN. There had been no reliable reports of the nearness of any enemy elements.

After weighing these factors, the two officers decided to enclose the town with a perimeter of small outposts rather than with a continuous perimeter. Since G Company (less the 3rd Platoon) was the smaller of the rifle companies, it would outpost the smaller northern section of the town, and E Company would be responsible for the southern section. G Company, however, would furnish personnel for one road block. This plan was explained to the battalion commander. The weakness of the plan was apparent, but since it seemed to be the best possible under the circumstances, he finally approved. (17)

The plan as finally worked out in detail was as follows:
(See Map C)

a. Company sectors were as the two company commanders
(17) Personal knowledge of author

had earlier decided -- G Company north of the river, E Company south of the river. The river, inclusive to each company, formed the boundary between the companies.

b. The trace of the perimeter of outposts would coincide roughly with the edge of the town, the exact location to be determined by the rifle company commanders in conjunction with the commander, Heavy Weapons Company.

c. The perimeter would consist of small posts of three to five men each spaced at intervals of about 30 to 50 yards.

d. The battalion heavy machine guns, less the section attached to the platoon sent to in LIMAY, were distributed about the perimeter, single guns reinforced with one or two riflemen serving as some of the outposts.

e. Two road blocks, each consisting of a 37 mm AT gun and a rifle squad or half-squad would be established - one at the point where the highway from LIMAY divided at the south edge of town, and one west of town at the point where the east-west trail crossed a stream bed.

f. The battalion CP and aid station would be located in the church. The 81 mm mortars, ammunition vehicles, and a kitchen would occupy the churchyard.

g. No fire plan was specified, but it was SOP for company commanders to prepare plans for their 60 mm mortars and for them to work out with the Commander, Heavy Weapons Company the employment of the 81 mm mortars in their own sectors. Company SOPs called for the registration of defensive fires. (18)

ORGANIZATION OF THE DEFENSE

The companies were already in their assigned sectors and

the organization of the defense proceeded. Platoon boundaries and positions of platoon leaders are as shown on Map C. (19)

Rifle company CPs were located in buildings. The site selected for the E Company CP was in a tin-roofed shed which might have served at one time as a market-place or as a warehouse of temporary storage. It occupied a street corner just south of the river and one block east of the highway. The G Company CP occupied a two story Spanish-type dwelling on the river bank slightly east of the center of the G Company sector.

The rifle company mortars were located near the CPs. The E Company mortars were emplaced below the highway embankment one block west of the company CP. The G Company mortars occupied the yard of the house in which the CP was located. This yard was surrounded by a low stone wall.

Communications were laid out according to the SOP. Wire connected the companies with battalion headquarters and battalion had wire communication with regiment. Emergency arrangements were made for radio contact between the companies and battalion and between battalion and regiment (SCR 300 between companies and battalion) and arrangements were made for SCR 300 contact with the platoon at LIMAY during the daytime. Within the companies, sound-power wire was strung from the company CPs to each of the platoon leaders and to the mortar sections. Also, provisions were made for emergency contact by SCR 536.

It may be presumed that provisions were made for the registration of mortar night defensive fires by the E Company (19) Personal knowledge of author

Commander. As soon as the organization of the position was under way, Company Commander, G Company directed that mortar fires be registered on all important terrain features in the company sector.

During the afternoon word was received that the 3rd Platoon, G Company had arrived at LIMAY without incident and was digging in for the night. This report furthered the belief that the enemy was not nearby. However, shortly afterward, Filipinos reported that a large number of Japanese had landed in the vicinity of PANDAN POINT, about 3000 yards to the south between ORION and LIMAY. Little credence was given to this report, but the guerrillas attached to G Company were directed to go to the vicinity of PANDAN POINT and keep the area under observation until the next day. They were to move out after the evening meal which was scheduled for about 1630. (20)

The meal was ready as planned and a jeep and trailer with hot food and extra ammunition was sent to the platoon at LIMAY. A few minutes after the jeep had departed, it returned. The mess personnel reported that they had shot a Japanese soldier who was crossing the highway just south of PANDAN POINT. The two reports of enemy in the PANDAN POINT area caused the G Company commander some concern for his platoon at LIMAY; so, taking several riflemen with him, he set out in his jeep to lead the mess truck to LIMAY. On his way out of town he reported the incident to the battalion S-2 who asked that if the Japanese soldier was alive he be brought in for interrogation. The Japanese soldier still
(20) Personal knowledge of author

lay in the center of the highway, apparently undisturbed and apparently dead. He was equipped with a canteen, a bayonet, no firearm, and a small shoulder bag. No further evidence of the enemy was seen on the way to LIMAY.

The position of the platoon at LIMAY seemed to be a strong one. It was almost dusk when the party began the drive back to ORION. The road was a "spooky" one lined with overhanging trees and bamboo. The party was by this time fearful of ambush. As the Japanese soldier was approached, he was seen to be sitting erect in a dazed condition in the center of the road. As the jeeps drew near, Commander, Company G instructed his party to halt and the mess truck to continue on. One of the soldiers in the rear seat of the jeep, however, cried out to the driver to go on. At about the same time someone opened fire on the Japanese and then everyone opened fire. Even the fire of the .50 cal. pedestal mounted machine gun was turned on the lone soldier. Ultimately he toppled over and the jeep raced on to ORION without the prisoner. (21)

In ORION the organization of the battalion perimeter had been completed. Individual positions had been dug and many of the men had bathed at the several artesian wells in the town. An important exception was the personnel of the battalion and company CPs who for the most part did not dig in but had bedded down in the buildings housing the CPs.

Commander, Company G returned to ORION just before dusk, just in time to bathe at a nearby well. He did not make the usual inspection along his perimeter nor did he locate and

(21) Personal knowledge of author

visit the platoon CPs.

THE JAPANESE ATTACK

The first hour or so of darkness was quiet. At the battalion CP, the first indication of the presence of the enemy was sporadic rifle and machine gun fire from the western portion of the E Company perimeter. There was no report from E Company at this time. This was not unusual, as it was not customary to report anything but definite information and the firing might well have been occasioned by movements of civilians.

Very shortly after the firing in the E Company sector, or possible during the firing, the platoon leader of G Company's left (west) platoon reported to his company commander that he had heard movement on the other side of the river and felt that a group of Japanese was crossing the river from the south by the upper ford. This the company commander reported to the battalion commander who instructed that the platoon leader adjust mortar fire on the enemy group. It was at this point that the company commander realized that no registrations had been made in the left platoon sector nor had any fire data been prepared for fires in that area. He relayed the battalion commander's orders to the platoon leader intending to register with the 60 mm mortars of the company. The platoon leader, speaking over the sound-power telephone in a very soft whisper, was reluctant to adjust the fire or to talk at any length because he felt that the enemy were almost on his position and he did not want to disclose his position. When the company commander relayed this to the battalion commander, the battalion commander granted the

platoon leader's plea. (22)

Sporadic firing continued in the western part of the E Company Sector. About 1100 hours the road block on the highway first heard and then saw a large group of people walking down the highway toward the town chattering loudly as they came. The immediate assumption of the soldiers at the roadblock was that it was a large group of Filipinos returning to the town. As the group drew nearer, however, it was discovered that it was a large body of Japanese. By that time the Japanese column was almost upon the roadblock and the roadblock withheld fire feeling that to open fire would be certain annihilation. The Japanese column, which appeared to be well over one hundred strong, continued down the road toward the center of town. If the position of the roadblock was discovered, the enemy deliberately ignored it.

By the time the enemy column reached the E Company mortar position the column was moving quite rapidly, almost at a dead run. The reaction of the mortar crews was immediate. The mortarmen opened up into the column with pistols and hand grenades. Although Japanese casualties at this point were considerable, they apparently ignored the mortar positions also and raced around the corner toward the E Company CP.

At this time the E Company CP group were sitting in the river end of the shed talking in low tones. They noticed a group of people talking among themselves enter the far end of the shed and assumed them to be Filipinos. It was not until the group was almost upon the CP personnel that a Filipino identified them as Japanese. There was no time to

(22) Personal knowledge of author

to open effective fire; the enemy simply ran over the CP, killing and wounding several Americans. (23) The Japanese column then ran across the bridge and turned toward the church. By this time the attack had developed into a shrieking, headlong "banzai" charge. (24)

Concurrent with the attack from the south, at least two enemy machine guns had opened up from positions near the highway north of town. Accurate fire was placed on the machine gun outposts in the vicinity of the church. Several men were killed and the rest were driven from their positions, fleeing westward along the outside of the cemetery wall. Covered by their machine gun fire, another column, smaller than the southern group, ran quietly but rapidly down the road directly into the battalion installations. A BAR outpost east of the highway did not open fire, thinking that the group moving along the road was Filipino. (25)

In the area of the battalion installations, the first indication of the imminence of attack on the installations themselves was sudden dash of the Japanese southern column into the midst of the battalion installations. Several incendiary bombs were tossed onto the ammunition vehicles and the entire area lit up. Several of the soldiers attempted to offer resistance at this point, but some were killed and the remainder had to get out as best they could.

The rush of the enemy into the CP area was so swift that enemy soldiers were entering the church before anyone in the church was even aware of their nearness. The situation in the darkness of the church was so confused that the

(23) Among those killed was the 1st Sergeant.

(24) Personal knowledge of author

(25) Personal knowledge of author

only course open to the CP and aid station group was to get out by the back entrances. That they did, separately and by two's and three's, dispersing into the darkness to hide or to seek out friendly units.

Among those caught in the church was the chaplain. Unlike those who escaped through the rear, he sought safety upstairs. In a room on the second floor were two cabinets of a type used by the clergy for storing clothing. He slipped into one of the cabinets and pulled the door shut behind him. After a short while, thinking that things had quieted a bit, the chaplain slipped out of the cabinet with the idea of slipping down the stairs and possibly out the rear of the church. However, as he started down the stairs, two Japanese soldiers started up the stairs. The chaplain quickly returned to his hiding place. The two soldiers, apparently seeking loot, soon entered the room. For some unexplained reason, they opened neither cabinet. Instead, they sprayed the empty one with bullets and fired a few shots into the one occupied by the chaplain. Miraculously, the chaplain was unharmed. (26)

The battalion S-3 reached BALANGA in an excited condition. When he could speak coherently, he reported that the battalion had been "wiped out" (sic) that he and the few others who reached regiment were the only survivors.

With its right flank destroyed or dispersed and the enemy in possession of the battalion area in its rear, the 1st Platoon of Company G crumbled away entirely, most of the soldiers hiding in the vicinity of the town or escaping across the rice fields toward the regimental CP at BALANGA. One,
(26) A-4

in an attempt to join the other G Company platoon, ran across the entire company front stopping at the edge of the bay. Having found no one, he worked his way through the swamp to BALANGA.

The situation at the G Company CP appeared serious. The burning vehicles around the church sharply silhouetted all buildings between the church and the company CP and created impenetrable shadows behind the buildings. The street leading toward the church was brightly lit. While the Japanese could be heard in the church area, two silhouetted figures appeared about a block down the street moving slowly toward the CP from the direction of the church. As they neared the CP, it was seen that one evidently was badly wounded and was being helped along by the other. When they had almost reached the house, one called out, "George Company? George Company?" Finally someone recognized them as belonging to Battalion Headquarters Company and they were taken into the CP building. While the wounded man was being given emergency treatment, the other reported to Commander, Company G that the battalion installations had been "wiped out" (sic), that he believed that he and his companion were the only survivors.

A few minutes after the arrival of the two soldiers, someone in a group of buildings across the street from the CP fired a submachine gun into the air, apparently in an attempt to draw fire from the CP. The men in the CP area stirred, but no one returned the fire.

In another few minutes, a group of four or five men, armed and wearing light packs, moved up the street from the direction of the church, past the CP, and on up the street

to the east. It was impossible to identify the men. A challenge brought no reply, although the group halted about 50 feet from the CP. To fire on the group would risk firing on American soldiers from the church area who might have been confused as a result of the nights events, so the CP group withheld their fire. After pausing for a moment, the group passed on into the darkness.

The G Company CP could establish communication with nobody. Attempts to reach battalion by phone were fruitless. Occasionally over the phone could be heard snatches of far-away sounding conversations in a foreign tongue, presumably Japanese, indicating that the church area had indeed been over run. The sound-power phone reached only the nearby 60 mm mortar position. Neither the platoons of the company, E Company, nor battalion could be reached by radio.

Since almost all firing had ceased, the assumption was that most of the rest of the battalion had been destroyed or dispersed. The Japanese, apparently in considerable strength, could be heard in the church area. The submachine firing together with the behavior of the unidentified group led the company commander to believe that the enemy had located the CP preparatory to an attack in full strength. It was then that he really felt the extremely exposed position of the CP. Altogether, the CP group and mortar section numbered only about 20 men. By their actions most of the men had indicated that they had had little training or experience in defense in built-up areas. However, all the men were rearranged to provide for as effective a defense as possible. After consulting with the more experienced of the

group, Commander, G Company decided that if necessary a withdrawal might be made down the river.

The company commander felt also that something should be done toward reestablishing the battalion position. He considered efforts to move through the houses to the churchyard in order to catch the enemy exposed in the lighted opening. He thought also of contacting E Company and the right platoon of G Company, if they still existed. These ideas were discarded, however, since it was certain that many people, friendly and enemy, already were moving about the town. Since no adequate recognition system had been set up, it would be impossible to distinguish between friend and foe. (27)

Meanwhile, back in the church area the Japanese systematically went about the looting of the abandoned arms and supplies. Apparently this phase of the action had been very carefully planned; small groups went directly to the aid station, the kitchen, the ammunition supplies, and the abandoned machine guns and mortars. An attempt was made to destroy that which could not be carried away. The battalion intelligence sergeant, who had remained undiscovered in a hiding place behind the kitchen, watched the Japanese rummage about for over an hour. During this time he heard repeated calls for "Hasitaoto", who appeared to be a commander. (28)

After the period of looting, the enemy began a well-planned withdrawal from the town. The largest group moved down the street toward the bridge. As they reached the corner to turn toward the bridge, the E Company 60 mm mortars

(27) Personal knowledge of author
(28) A-4

placed highly accurate and concentrated fire in the street at the corner. 15 or 20 Japanese fell under this mortar fire. Undeterred, however, the column moved back across the bridge over the route by which they had entered. Many were killed or wounded by fire from the E Company CP, the E Company mortar positions, and the roadblock, but without returning the fire they dashed on out of town.

Another group moved out over the highway to the north. This group was fired on by the BAR outpost to the east of the highway and suffered several casualties.

A third group apparently moved west along the street past the church and crossed the river at the lower ford. This group attempted to take a jeep with them, but were unable to make it run for more than 200 yards or else abandoned it as being impractical. (29)

WITHDRAWAL OF THE JAPANESE

The withdrawal of the Japanese left a silence which was as disturbing as the earlier noise had been. Except for those who had actually witnessed the withdrawal, all of the small groups of soldiers were fearful that the silence was caused by the enemy's assembling for a new attack on their own, small, isolated groups. The silence was broken only by the occasional sound of exploding ammunition near the church or murmurings in the homes of the terrified townspeople.

THE MORNING AFTER

As daylight approached there was a stirring throughout the town. None of the groups or individuals knew whether
(29) Personal knowledge of author

daylight would reveal them to be in the midst of friend or enemy.

A few minutes after daybreak, a number of patrols and individuals converged on the church. A patrol from E Company moved stealthily across the bridge. A small patrol from the G Company CP threaded its way along the northern edge of town. And from all over the northwest section of the town, from the cemetery, and from the high weeds along the river bank, individuals who had hidden during the night warily looked about them and then cautiously worked their ways toward the church. As more and more people returned to the church it became apparent that the wild, supposedly disastrous night had been far less costly than everyone had believed. The battalion commander and the battalion executive officer were at the church in time to greet the E and G Company patrols. Others continued to filter in for the next hour or two, a few returning from as far away as BALANGA. (30)

During the night regiment had had only the confused report of the battalion S-3. At daylight F Company was assembled as rapidly as possible and was sent to ORION to determine who held the town, the 2nd Battalion or the Japanese. This company also arrived at the church during the early morning. (31)

The reorganization of the battalion was automatic and rapid. Most of E Company and the right platoon of G Company were found to be intact in their positions. As the left platoon of G Company assembled on the CP the men were re-equipped with various items of equipment which had been lost.

(30) Personal knowledge of author
(31) A-4

The morning also disclosed that one Japanese straggler had been hiding near the church. He was brought in to the battalion CP at about the time of the arrival of F Company. As was true of most Japanese prisoners, he talked freely, revealing most facts concerning the nature of the Japanese attacking force. (32)

According to the prisoner the total strength of the Japanese was 250 - 350. It was a polygot force assembled and commanded by Capt. Hasitaoto, the former Japanese garrison commander in ORION. The prisoner identified Capt. Hasitaoto among the dead and his identity was confirmed by papers found on the body. The raid had been planned after a thorough reconnaissance by two Filipino agents who had come into the town during the afternoon of the 15th with the crowds of returning townspeople. (33)

Early in the afternoon G Company was sent to LIMAY to join the 3rd Platoon, and the battalion moved from the town into the open rice fields on the north edge where a normal, close perimeter was set up. This perimeter was to serve as a base for patrol operations against the foothills to the west of the line BALANGA - LIMAY for the next five days until the regiment was withdrawn from BATAAN for operations in another sector.

During the night fighting at ORION the 2nd Battalion had lost 11 killed and 15 wounded, mostly from Battalion Headquarters and Heavy Weapons Companies. Damage amounted to the destruction of two 2½ ton trucks, one ½ ton truck, one ½ ton trailer, four flamethrowers, all ammunition being

(32) A-4
(33) A-2, p.105

carried on the ammunition vehicles, and many smaller items. Not officially carried as lost, but of considerable interest were two heavy machine guns which the Japanese took with them as they withdrew. In their place, the enemy had left two patched up machine guns of exactly the same model, which presumably were captured on BATAAN in the 1942 fighting. (34)

Japanese losses were heavier than anyone expected. Of the force of 250-350, 80, including the Japanese commander, were killed by the defenders or when wounded were killed by their compatriots. In addition, a number of others were known to be wounded. (35)

Notwithstanding the heavy losses, however, it must be conceded that the Japanese accomplished at least a part of their mission, i.e., the securing of supplies and the destruction of important materiel. There are indications also that had it not been for the death of the enemy commander early in the fighting there might have been attacks on a number of the relatively isolated American groups within the perimeter with probable heavy losses for the defender.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. THE JAPANESE ATTACK

The outstanding feature of the nights action was clearly the excellence of the enemy attack. It was a vivid demonstration of what an inferior force can accomplish with accurate estimation of the enemy's situation, careful reconnaissance, thorough planning, and vigorous leadership.

The accuracy of Capt. Hasitaoto's estimates were almost

(34) A-3
(35) A-3

uncanny. He clearly foresaw the confusion in the town during the afternoon and took maximum advantage of it by the infiltration of the reconnaissance agents. He foresaw also that the Americans would have difficulty during the night in recognizing the enemy. And finally, he must have calculated very carefully the effect of surprise on the conduct of the defense of the thin perimeter.

His choice of objectives was skillful. It is clearly shown that these included the E Company CP, and probably that of G Company, in addition to the principal objective, the battalion installations in the church area. The seizure of the battalion area would at once make possible the accomplishment of his mission--resupply and maximum destruction. It would probably disrupt the bulk of the supporting fires of the battalion (no artillery fires had been registered prior to darkness). It would destroy the communications center, thereby destroying the unity of the defense of the perimeter. It would place the Japanese forces in the center of the defense in position to strike at any section of the perimeter from the rear, if he so chose, and also would split the defense north of the river. By destroying the two company CPs, all semblance of direction in the defense would be eliminated and the defense reduced to the piecemeal action of the platoons.

In his planning and preparation, Capt. Hasitaoto never lost sight of his objectives. The plan called for his columns to converge on the churchyard so that the maximum force was brought to bear at the critical point and at the critical time. He selected easily recognizable, short routes (the north-south

highway) leading directly into the objective. And in the case of the E Company CP, an important secondary objective could be reduced in the movement into the principal objective with the expenditure of a minimum of additional effort.

The plan was a simple one, entirely within the capabilities of Capt. Hasitaoto's polygot force. Surprise was achieved by capitalizing on American security problems and by surprise fire rather than by a complicated scheme of maneuver. The withdrawal evidently had been carefully planned beforehand. The selection of the routes of the attack as the routes of withdrawal reduced the reconnaissance problem and ensured that the withdrawal could be carried out with a minimum of direction.

The vigor of Capt. Hasitaoto's leadership was evident throughout the attack, even after his death. The advance was rapid. The column refused to be diverted from its objectives by engaging the E Company mortars. The action in the E Company CP was swift and sure. The convergence upon the churchyard was so skillfully carried out as to overcome a force of some 50 men with hardly any resistance.

As soon as the initial objective had been taken, all soldiers proceeded immediately with assigned tasks. Looting was systematic. Reconnaissance units such as those operating against the G Company CP apparently fanned out promptly, and it seems reasonable to assume that had Capt. Hasitaoto lived the reconnaissance would have been followed up with attacks in force on the G Company CP and possibly other small units.

There apparently was little confusion in reorganization

and the columns moved out in compact groups. The impact of the E Company mortar concentration must have been considerable, but the casualties suffered by going on through probably were less than would have occurred had the column attempted to change routes at that stage of the action.

2. THE MISSION

Various published histories portray this action as an unqualified victory for the 2nd Battalion; and it was insofar as the battalion carried out the mission which it was later discovered that regiment had intended, i.e., the denial to the enemy of the tactical use of the town. Certainly the heavy casualties suffered by the attacking force would lead one to consider the night's action a success. In the minds of the personnel of the battalion, however, the action was a miserable failure, for the battalion had failed in the mission they had thought was intended, i.e., the prevention of enemy entrance into the town.

The conduct of the entire action hinged upon one word of the message from regiment -- "secure". Although the intent of regiment may seem quite clear to the reader, a number of intelligent officers on the spot found it to be ambiguous and were led into a tactical decision which they felt to be unsound but unavoidable.

3. THE DEFENSE PLAN

Even in retrospect the defense plan appears to be about as sound as could have been devised for the accomplishment of the mission the battalion officers felt to be theirs. According to this mission, there had to be a perimeter around

the town, and the line of outposts would seem to have satisfied the requirement. The absence of any important contact and the sketchy reports of enemy did not convey the idea of any significant enemy body nearby. The terrain surrounding the town was perfectly suited to defense. These factors seemed to counteract partially the uneasiness over the thin outer line of outposts.

The size and composition of the outposts was such as to cover a maximum perimeter while giving to each post some combat strength. Depth was provided along the main entries into the town by the CP groups and mortar positions, although the proximity of the battalion installations to the perimeter was a weakness.

The battalion SOP provided for adequate coordination of supporting fires and for the registration of these fires. The 37 mm AT guns were sited to cover the most likely avenues of approach of both foot and armored units. The machine guns were sited to cover very well the approaches to the perimeter and in general had maximum fields of fire.

While it could not be taken into consideration at the time owing to the assumed mission, the real weakness of the plan lay in the fact that few members of the battalion were psychologically prepared for such defense tactics. In the close perimeter each individual knew that in case of any difficulty the entire battalion was closely packed beside him. He could touch his buddy and knew that his buddy could touch someone else. His fire was almost entirely limited to the enemy attacking him or those nearest him and by firing always at that enemy he was a part of the coordinated fire

scheme. The same attitude was evident in the employment of the machine guns. They were employed in self-protective fires which, due to the configuration of the close perimeter, contributed in the best way to the defense.

When the interval between groups was increased so that physical contact between groups was lost, each small group felt all alone, that it was facing the enemy unassisted. At the same time, the open defense required aggressive fires and a high degree of mutual support, but at a time when the outposts felt that to open fire in the absence of contact with others was to invite destruction. This was evidenced by the action of individuals at almost every phase of the action.

4. PREPARATION OF THE DEFENSE

The preparation of the defense illustrates the paramount importance of supervision in troop leading procedure, for it was due to a lack of supervision that the defense was poorly organized even though well planned.

Neither the battalion commander nor the company commanders got around to make sure that their sectors were prepared as they intended. An inspection by the Commander, Company G upon his return from Limay would have revealed that: (1) the CP of his left platoon was in an undesirable position almost on the outer perimeter from whence no effective control could be exercised; (2) 60 mm and 81 mm mortar fires had not been registered. An inspection by the battalion commander would have revealed the complete lack of mortar registrations and the lack of any provision for artillery fires. Thorough inspections by the various commanders would also have

acquainted them with the locations of all their CPs and other groups. This might well have enabled them to regain control of the situation after all communications went out during the enemy attack.

5. COORDINATION OF FIRES

The battalion SOP for the employment of supporting fires was sound but in this instance broke down in application. No one person in the battalion assumed the responsibility for the coordination of the battalion weapons, so that when the companies failed to do the job properly, there was no one to catch the omission. Had the fires been registered earlier, fires could have been placed without delay on the unit attacking from the north and on the machine guns at the culvert. Had the artillery concentrations been registered on the flanks, that same enemy unit might never have reached its attack position, for the G Company platoon leader could have called down the concentration when the enemy unit was first reported.

The most telling blow of the defense was the fire of the E Company mortars on the withdrawing Japanese column. Although the street corner had not been previously registered on, fire was adjusted without delay. Had registrations been made within the perimeter as a part of the defense plan, the effect of the lack of an adequate inner perimeter would have been greatly lessened.

6. INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY

The return of the civilian population to ORION during the afternoon of 15 February had an important influence on the action. During the afternoon, the infiltration and uninterrupted, unrestricted reconnaissance of the Japanese agents

was made possible. It was the movement of the civilians from the surrounding hills into the town which led to the most serious mistaken identity at the south roadblock and also in the case of the enemy column approaching from the north. And the continued movement of civilians within the town was the direct cause of the overrunning of the E Company CP.

The problem should have been recognized earlier and drastic steps taken to correct it. The mayor or other important citizen should have been instructed that no civilians were to move about within the town at night, that anyone moving would be presumed to be enemy and treated accordingly. Runners could then have been dispatched to civilians yet in the hills with the same message and with a caution against entering the town during darkness. Finally, anyone not furnishing adequate recognition immediately should have been so treated; the military mission must be paramount even though mistakes may sometimes occur.

The lack of an adequate recognition system immobilized all units of the battalion once a penetration had been made. The Commander, Company G failed to take remedial action for this reason, and it is probable that the same factor similarly influenced the Commander, Company E.

The lack of an adequate communications authentication system was undoubtedly the reason why the Commander, Company G was unable to reach anyone by wire or radio. Everyone was afraid of Japanese deception and attempts to locate positions via communication.

A serious intelligence and security deficiency was the almost total lack of adequate patrolling and reconnaissance

in the area surrounding the town, and even within the town itself. There was adequate time during the afternoon for extensive patrolling into the surrounding foothills and along the swamps. And in the case of the Japanese activity in the Pandan Point area, the prompt dispatch of a combat patrol might well have established the presence of the large enemy force.

During the early part of the evening listening posts outside the perimeter would have been most effective and probably decisive. Listening posts along the highway could have alerted the entire defense to the approach and strength of the enemy in time to avoid any mistake in recognition.

Weakness in intelligence training was spectacularly demonstrated in the failure of the G Company personnel to grasp the importance of the wounded Japanese soldier. In view of other experiences in the theater, it is probable that the prisoner would have talked freely, and if he was a member of Capt. Hasitaoto's force, the enemy intent and possibly the presence of the agents in Orion might have been revealed.

7. TRAINING

All the shortcomings of the 2nd Battalion in the defense of Orion can be traced to an interesting paradox--veteran outfit can become a poorly trained unit as replacements are assimilated and as the unit moves into new conditions of combat after long experience in the old ones. In the case of the 2nd Battalion, as replacements were received from the pipeline, they were sent directly to line companies. There, training, for the most part, was that offered by the developments in the day to day combat situation. They had to pick

up as best they could the combat principles and techniques needed to round out their replacement center training. In this manner, bad combat habits as well as good ones were developed. Leaders, as they assumed new positions, received relatively little guidance in the manner of performing their new duties. That which they did receive usually was offered by subordinates of greater experience, not always a satisfactory source. At no time was there any conscious effort to indoctrinate newcomers during combat.

The Orion action made it evident that there was no planned effort to analyze past actions in an effort to improve tactics or to adapt proved tactics to new situations. Keen analysis would have revealed much earlier that even some aspects of the long established close perimeter defense were fallaciously based. For example, it was proved at Orion that there must be provision for free movement at night, particularly for the shifting of forces within the perimeter and for the mounting of counterattacks to restore lost sections of the line. Also, it was indicated that skilled security elements outside the perimeter might pay dividends in almost any terrain. Studies of other actions will reveal that many of the deficiencies of this type of defense were obscured by the apparent success against a weaker enemy and that more aggressive tactics have, under identical conditions, yielded better results.

It was also shown that no matter how successful tactics have proved in one type of terrain, necessary modifications must be made to fit new situations, and the personnel must be thoroughly trained in the new tactics.

LESSONS

1. Inferiority in strength and firepower can be overcome by good intelligence, accurate estimates, ingenious planning, and the vigorous execution of the plans.

2. Forces should not be dissipated in actions which do not contribute directly to the accomplishment of the mission.

3. The skillful selection of objectives is basic in the action of a unit of any size.

4. Night attacks must be so planned that their success is not dependent on the presence or direction of any one individual.

2a 5. In combat, wherever there is any doubt as to what higher headquarters intends, higher headquarters should be asked.

2b 6. The possibility of ambiguity in combat orders must be eliminated.

3 7. The best defense plans can break down completely in the absence of supervision of their execution.

3 8. Responsibility for the coordination of the supporting fires of the battalion should be retained by the battalion commander.

4 9. All defensive fires must be registered before nightfall.

5 10. Plans for mortar fires within the perimeter are as important as the preparation of fires within the defense area in the more normal defense situation.

11. In perimeter defense in close terrain, artillery barrages should be laid out parallel to the line gun-target in order to move the barrage in as close as possible to the

perimeter.

12. A thorough knowledge of the locations of the individuals, units, and installations in a defense position will enable commanders to establish control under most difficult conditions.

13. The safety of civilian populations must always be secondary to the accomplishment of the military mission.

14. Strict control must be established over friendly civilians in the proximity of tactical positions.

15. It is not enough to control the position occupied. The battlefield must be controlled under all conditions.

16. Provisions for free movement throughout a defense position must be SOP.

17. Communications must not be permitted to break down for want of electrical means.

18. Training in battle must be conscious, continuous, and intensive.

19. Commanders must constantly seek to discover weaknesses in accepted tactics and techniques and to devise better ones.

20. New situations must be anticipated and their effects on prevailing doctrine analyzed.