General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 27TH INFANTRY (25TH INFANTRY DIVISION) ON GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS 10 JANUARY 1943 - 13 JANUARY 1943 (GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN) (Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

Captain Winston L. Olson, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
The General Situation	4
The Division Situation	6
The Division Plan of Attack	7
The Regimental Situation and Plan of Attack	8
The Battalion Plans	12
The Attack of 10 - 11 January	13
The Attack of 12 January	19
Analysis and Criticism	24
Lessons [redacted]	26

Map A - Japanese Expansion

Map B - U. S. Held Area 17 December 1942

Map C - Plan of Attack 25th Infantry Division

Map D - Plan of Attack 27th Infantry

Map E - 27th Infantry 10 - 11 January 1943

Map F - 27th Infantry 12 Jamary 1943

Map G - 27th Infantry 13 January 1943

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A-1 Operations of the 25th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal. 17 December 1942 - 5 February 1942. Compiled under the direction of J. Lawton Collins, Major General, USA, Division Commander. (TIS Library)

A-2 Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff of the United States. 1 July 1941 to 30 June 1943. (TIS Library)

A-3 Pacific Counterblow. The 11th Bombardment Group and the 67th Fighter Squadron in the Battle for Guadalcanal (TIS Library)

A-4 The War With Japan. Part I. 7 December 1941 to August 1942. An account of the war with Japan written for use in the instruction of Cadets at the United States Military Academy. (TIS Library)

A-5 The Island
By Capt. Herbert L. Merillat, USMCR
A History of The 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal.
7 August 1942 to 9 December 1942.

A-6 The Landings in the Solomons. 7-8 August 1942
Combat Narratives
Office of Naval Intelligence, U. S. Navy.
(TIS Library)

A-7 The Army and Navy Journal, 20 February 1943
Navy Department account of the capture and consolidation of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. (TIS Library)

A-8 Infantry Combat, Part Four: Operations on Guadalcanal
A Talk given by Major General Robert L. Spragins, Chief of Staff of Troops on Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Florida Islands during the Operations. (Personal files of the author)

A-9 Major Robert Bereuter, S-2, 27th Infantry, during the period described. (A personal interview by author 30 December 1947)

A-10 Lieutenant Colonel William R. Cole, Company Commander, Cannon Company, 27th Infantry, during the period described. (A personal interview by author 5 January 1948)

A-11 Major Billie B. Salter, Headquarters Commandant, 27th Infantry, during the period described. (A personal interview by author 30 December 1947)

A-12 Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Davis, Executive Officer, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry, during the period described. (A personal interview by author, 30 December 1947)

A-13 Lieutenant Colonel Allen M. Strock, Company Commander, Company G, 27th Infantry, during the period described. (A personal interview by the author, 30 December 1947)

A-14 Major James M. Browning, Company Commander, Company C, 27th Infantry, during the period described. (A personal interview by the author 30 December 1947)

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 27TH INFANTRY (25TH INFANTRY DIVISION) ON GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS
10 JANUARY 1943 - 13 JANUARY 1943
(GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

The 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th US Division, proudly shares the commendation awarded the Division by the late Lieutenant General (then Major General) Alexander M. Patch in General Orders Number 52, Headquarters XIV Corps, dated 7 March 1943 which reads in part. "***It was largely through the sustained drive of the 25th Division that the last vestige of organized resistance on Guadalcanal was crushed and possession of this strategically important Island, so vital to projected operations, finally wrested from the hands of the Japanese on 2 February 1943.***" (1)

The participation of the 27th Infantry as part of the 25th Division's offensive operations on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, was continuous from 10 - 27 January 1943; however, herein is contained only the action of the Regiment during the period of 10 - 13 January.

In order to more fully understand the significance of this operation as it applies to early US offensive moves against the Japanese, certain events regarding the war in the Pacific must be reviewed.

Since the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Japanese expansion in the Pacific by early August of 1942 had taken the form of a gigantic perimeter, included in which were convenient naval and air bases from which to continue their southward thrust. Together with their mandated possessions, this perimeter extended from the Aleutians in the north, to the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, the Netherlands Indies and Maylaya in the south and southwest. (See Map A)

Evidence that the enemy had designs for further southward enlargement of this vast cordon was manifested in the discovery on 4 May 1942

(1) A-1.

that Japanese forces had established a naval base at Tulagi and had started construction of an airfield on Guadalcanal, both in the southern tip of the Solomon Islands. (See Map A) From Guadalcanal they would be in a position to use land based bombers against the New Hebrides Islands to the south, the next step in their advance toward Australia. (2)

Previously, the battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942, and the battle of Midway in June 1942 had taken a heavy toll on Japan's Naval forces. This discouraged her in further designs on our Central Pacific possessions, so she turned her attention toward further expansion southward. Conversely, these two victories had restored the balance of sea power to the United States, thus offering the first opportunity to strike an offensive blow northward. With the discovery of Japanese activity on Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the time had definitely arrived for a move to the north as the first step in safeguarding our long lines of communications to Australia. (3)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The United States Marines inaugurated land offensive moves against the Japanese in the Pacific on 7 August 1942. On that day the 1st Marine Division, reinforced under the command of Lieutenant General (then Major General) Alexander A. Vandegrift, landed on Guadalcanal and Tulagi. (4)

The Marines landed unopposed on the north shore of Guadalcanal between the Ilu and the Tenaru Rivers. It was learned later that the enemy force holding the Island consisted mainly of laborers and a few naval personnel who had taken to the hills at the start of the bombardment. By the evening of 8 August, the valuable airfield prize was captured, and on 20 August it was made operational. The strip was named Henderson Field in honor of a Marine pilot killed during the battle of Midway. (5)

The Japanese were quick to recover from this surprise blow.

(2) A-2, p. 13,14; A-3, p. 1,2. (3) A-2, p. 14; A-3, p.2; A-4, p. 115.
(4) A-2, p. 14. (5) A-5, p. 66,67; A-6, p. 41.

They immediately rushed reinforcements onto the Island, and the next five months was characterized by a series of fanatical attacks to recapture the airfield and annihilate American forces. These attacks were started on 21 August against Marine positions on the Tenaru River and continued in September against the ridge positions south of Henderson Field. On 9 October, elements of the Americal US Division began reinforcing the weary Marines. Later the same month the determined Japanese made another strong but unsuccessful attempt to retake the Island; this time the attack came from the west and is remembered as the battle of the Matanikau River. (6)

The crisis on Guadalcanal continued into November and it was not until the 25th US division under the command of General (then Major General) J. Lawton Collins began arriving on 17 December 1942 that sufficient forces were available to initiate an offensive to drive the remaining Japanese from the Island "so vital to projected operations." (7)

Upon arrival on Guadalcanal, the Division came under operational control of XIV Corps commanded by the late Lieutenant General (then Major General) Alexander M. Patch, U. S. Army, who had assumed command from General Vandegrift. (8)

Guadalcanal is approximately 90 miles long and 25 miles wide. For the most part it is covered with dense jungle growth. Bordering it on the north is a flat, grassy plain which extends several thousand yards inland to a series of grass and jungle covered ridges. A central mountain range running east and west extends almost the entire length of the island. The northern coastline is also dotted with a series of large cocoanut groves. (9)

When the 25th Division landed, US forces held an area along the north coast approximately 25 miles long and 5 miles wide. The main forces were employed against Japanese concentrations some 12 miles west of Henderson Field. The 2nd Marine Division held this

(6) A-4, p. 24; A-7, p. 707,708; A-5, p. 14. (7) A-1, p. 2; A-7, p. 707,708. (8) A-2, p. 14. (9) A-8, p. 19; Personal Knowledge.

line from Point Cruz several thousand yards inland. The line then curved eastward to the Matanikau River and was taken up by the 3rd Battalion, 182nd Infantry, Americal Division. The 132nd Infantry of the Americal Division was holding a line against strong enemy concentrations on the western slope of Mt. Austen to the southeast of the Matanikau River. The remainder of the Americal Division held an inner perimeter around Henderson Field and other vital installations. The 147th Infantry, a separate regiment, guarded a fighter strip under construction several miles to the east of Henderson Field. (See Maps B and C) (10)

THE DIVISION SITUATION

The 25th Division was activated in Hawaii on 1 October 1941 and received all of its training there. Its infantry units consisted of the 27th, 35th and 161st Regiments. The Division left Hawaii for Guadalcanal, S.I. in three convoys; the first on 25 November 1942; the second on 6 December 1942, and the third on 16 December 1942. The 27th Infantry sailed in the second convoy and arrived on Guadalcanal 30 December 1942. (11)

Immediately upon landing the Division went into bivouac in a cocoanut grove just east of Henderson Field near the coast. Twenty-four days at sea, on a crowded transport had been considerably detrimental to the physical condition of the personnel; however, due to the time occupied in unloading ships, sorting equipment and making final preparations for combat, no time could be spent in training or conditioning. (12)

On 5 January 1943, XIV Corps gave the 25th Division its mission for the all out attack to be launched 10 January, only six days after the last convoy had arrived on the island. (13) The reason for such rapid committment was to fully utilize the maximum efficiency of the Division before the personnel became sick with malaria and dysentary. (14)

(10) A-8, p. 20,21. (11) A-1, p. 1,2; Personal Knowledge. (12) Personal Knowledge. (13) A-1, p. 4,5; Personal Knowledge. (14) A-8, p. 19.

In the plan of XIV Corps, the 25th Division was given the mission of attacking westward through the presently established lines to envelope the enemy's south flank, reduce the enemy position on Mt. Austen, and sieze the Corps objective, approximately 3000 yards to the west. (See Map C) The 2nd Marine Division was to maintain contact with the Division on the right. The Reconnaissance Squadron of the Americal Division, the 1st Battalion 2nd Marines and the 3rd Battalion, 182nd Infantry would be attached to the 25th Division. (See Map C) (15)

THE DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

Japanese dispositions in the Division zone were fairly well known; however, their actual strength could not be determined. They were known to hold the western part of Mt. Austen in force and were also known to have well organized positions on Hills 52 and 53. An area called the "water hole" in the ravine southwest of Hill 66 was also reported by the Marines to be heavily defended. (See Map C)

The Division Commander decided on the following scheme of maneuvers the 35th Infantry, would relieve the 132nd Infantry and contain the strong enemy force on Mt. Austen with one Battalion. The remainder of the Regiment would make a turning movement south of Hill 27 to capture Hill 44. Upon capture of Hill 44, the Regiment would continue its attack westward to sieze that portion of the Division objective in its zone. (See Map C) (17)

The 27th Infantry with the Reconnaissance Squadron of the Americal Division attached, would sieze Hills 50, 51, 52, 53 and 57. It would also be prepared to assist the 35th Infantry. (18)

The 3rd Battalion of the 182nd Infantry would advance its position to form a block southeastward from Hill 50 to prevent the escape of any enemy between Hills 43, 44 and 27 during the attack of the 35th Infantry. (See Map C) The 161st Infantry would be in reserve. The only artillery preparation to be fired would be placed

(15) A-1, p. 1; Appendix II. (16) A-1, p. 6,8. (17) A-1, p. 6,69, Appendix VI. (18) A-1, p. 6,7,25; Appendix VI.

on the"water hole" southwest of Hill 66. This was to be augmented by an aerial bombardment. (19)

THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION AND PLAN OF ATTACK

On 4 January, the Regimental Commander, Colonel William A McCulloch, received the Division warning order, and plans were begun immediately for the attack. (20)

The zone of action assigned to the Regiment was approximately 2000 yards wide. The terrain consisted mainly of grass covered ridges, which sloped generally to the north and south into dense tropical undergrowth. When viewed from the air the outline of the jungle on the ridges resembled a giant galloping horse with neck stretched to westward. Hill 50 comprised the tail, 51 the rump, 52 the back, 53 the head, 57 the forelegs and 54 and 55 the hind legs. (See Map D) (21)

Hill 54, occupied by the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, sloped almost vertically to the south into a deep bowl, flanked by Hills 50, 51 and 52. The south slope of Hills 50, 51, 52 and 53 were covered with dense jungle growth and dropped almost perpendicular into the Matanikau River. A ridge ran from Hill 52 in semi-circular fashion to the north and northeast, and terminated in a high rise of ground, which dropped again into a deep gorge southwest of Hill 54. A pair of smaller grass covered ridges, named Exton and Sims, in honor of Officers who were killed, formed cross compartments between Hills 52 and 53. Running generally north from Hill 57 were two slender fingers forming the "horse's" forelegs and hoofs. These fingers dropped off precipitously into the west fork of the Matanikau. Hill 56 occupied by the Reconnaissance Squadron of the Americal Division was under the "horse's belly" and could be likened to an island, falling off steeply in all directions into a sea of jungle. Rising to the north from the west fork of the Matanikau was Hill 66. (See Map D) (22)

(19) A-1, p. 7,8. (20,21) A-1, p. 25; Personal Knowledge. (22) Personal Knowledge.

The only vehicle approach into the regimental zone from the east was a jeep trail, which crossed the Matanikau River just to the northeast of Hill 55. This trail extended only to Hill 55. Supplies would have to be hand carried from that point forward. (See Map D) (23)

In summary, the terrain in the regimental zone of action provided the Japanese with excellent observation and fields of fire from Hills 52, 53, 57 and Sims and Exton Ridges. In addition his tactics of defending jungle covered reverse slopes provided adequate cover and concealment for his forward positions and routes of supply. Conversely, the attack of the 27th Infantry would have to be made over extremely rugged, open terrain, flanked on both sides by dense jungle. In addition, the single vehicle trail into the regimental zone would not support more than one Battalion. (24)

The only other vehicle approach into the regimental zone was from the north through the area of the 2nd Marine Division. This consisted of a jeep trail from the Beach Road to Hill 66. With the problem of supply uppermost in the Regimental Commander's mind, arrangements were made with the Marines to use this trail for the movement of troops and supplies. Arrangements were also made for the use of a forward assembly area just to the northeast of Hill 66. (See Map C) (25)

Very little information was known, or could be obtained concerning the strength of the Japanese in the regimental zone. Commanders and Intelligence Officers of the Marine units stated that an area called the "water hole" in the deep draw between Hills 66 and the "horse's" forelegs was known to be strongly defended. It was also learned that the enemy had strong defensive positions on Hill 52. This was based on the fact that two Marine attacks in battalion strength had been made against that position and both had failed. Heavy casualties had been suffered in both attacks, the last of which had taken place only two weeks previously. In addition, it was learned

(23,24,25) A-1, p. 25,26,42; Personal Knowledge.

that Marine Patrols dispatched along the south and southwest forks of the Matanikau had always become heavily engaged. (26)

The Regimental Commander decided to employ two battalions in the attacking echelon. The 1st Battalion, with the Reconnaissance Squadron of the Americal Division attached, was assigned the northern portion of the zone of action. Its mission was to attack south through the lines on Hill 66 to sieze the forelegs of the "galloping horse" and Hill 57. (See Map D) The 1st Battalion would move to attack positions from a forward assembly area northeast of Hill 66. The 3rd Battalion was given the mission of attacking westward in the southern portion of the regimental zone. It would move through the line held by the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines on Hill 55 and 54 to capture Hill 53, the "horse's head." (See Map D) The forward assembly area selected for the 3rd Battalion was just east of the jeep bridge over the Matanikau at the base of Hill 55. (27)

The boundary selected between Battalions ran generally westward from Hill 54 through the edge of the jungle south of Hill 52, to Hill 57.

By XIV Corps order, the 2nd Marine Division was to maintain contact with the 25th Division on the right. However, a gap existed between the 8th Marines' positions on Hill 66 and the 25th Division's right boundary, which was also the right boundary of the Regiment. This gap presented a dangerous threat to the right flank of the 1st Battalion, and would have to be closed prior to the attack.

"To insure closing the gap between the left flank of the 8th Marines and the Division boundary took more time than any other project and was only settled after a conference of all parties concerned late in the afternoon of January 8th, when a round table discussion, fast getting nowhere, was brought to a conclusion by the timely arrival of the Corps Commander and Division Commander.

(26) A-9. (27) A-1, p. 25,26.

This resulted in an additional Company of Marines jumping off after the bombardment, extending the line south to the boundary and filling the gap, thus insuring safe conduct of the 1st Battalion to that point." (28)

The Cannon Company was to be employed in support of the attacking Battalions. One platoon, from positions approximately 800 yards east of Hill 55 would support the attack of the 3rd Battalion, and one platoon approximately 300 yards northeast of Hill 66 would support the attack of the 1st Battalion. Due to the necessity of packing the 75mm howitzers to firing positions, only two guns from each of the platoons would be used. (29)

The 2nd Battalion would be in reserve just east of the Matanikau at the base of Hill 55, and would occupy this position after the 3rd Battalion had moved out in the attack on 10 January. (30)

The 8th Field Artillery Battalion, which had always teamed with the Regiment in training was to continue this role when the attack started on 10 January. Supporting fires were planned "on call" following the participation of the Battalion in the artillery preparation on the "water hole." Liasion Officers were to be sent to Regiment and the 1st and 3rd Battalions; in addition, one Forward Observer from each of the three firing batteries would join each Battalion. (31)

In addition to the fire support of the 8th Field Artillery Battalion, the entire Division Artillery was to be prepared to mass its fires in support of either the 27th or 35th Infantry. This was stipulated in the Division order. (32)

The problem of supply for the coming attack was complicated by a shortage of transportation, inaccessible terrain, and a lack of roads. This was especially true in the 3rd Battalion zone of action as the jeep trail extended only to Hill 55. The 25th Quartermaster Company, would haul rations, gasoline and ammunition forward to the

(28) A-1, p. 25,26. (29) A-10. (30) A-1, p. 26; A-12. (31) A-1, p. 39
(32) A-1, Appendix VI.

end of the truck roads. For the 27th Infantry, this point was at the junction of the Beach Road and the Marine Trail. From there, only eight jeeps and two ½-ton trucks were available in the entire Regiment for hauling supplies forward to the Battalions. (33)

To provide for the hand carry of rations and ammunition, 75 native carriers were hired, all of whom were to follow up the 3rd Battalion. The Anti-tank Company would also be used to hand carry supplies for both the 1st and 3rd Battalions. (34)

To keep down sickness, the only mess gear to be carried by front line troops was a canteen cup and spoon. (35)

The site selected for the command post was at the base of Hill 67 immediately east of the Matanikau River. It was to be occupied on 9 January. The ardnous task of laying wire to forward Battalions would start on 8 January. (36)

On 8 January, the entire Regiment began the twelve mile march by foot toward forward assembly areas. That night the three Battalions went into bivouac near the Beach Road just east of the Matanikau River. The following morning, the 1st and 3rd Battalions moved into their forward assembly areas, to begin preparation for the attack the next morning. (37)

THE BATTALION PLANS

The plan of the 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Claude E. Jurney, was briefly as follows: following the artillery and air bombardment on the "water hole," and the closing of the gap between Marine positions on Hill 66 and the Division right boundary, the Reconnaissance Squadron, Americal Division on Hill 56, would secure the left flank of the Battalion by blocking the ravine between Hill 56 and the rear foreleg of the "galloping horse." One Company of the 1st Battalion, with a section of heavy machine guns attached, would then move out and secure the draw between the Marines unit on

(33) A-1, p.42; Annex 6, p. 1. (34) A-1, p. 25,42. (35) Personal Knowledge. (36) A-11. (37) A-1, p. 26; Personal Knowledge.

Hill 66 and the front forelegs of the "horse." When these units were in position the Battalion would attack in column of companies across the jungle covered ravine south of Hill 66 and sieze the objective. (See Map D) (38)

The plan of the 3rd Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George E. Bush, was briefly as follows: Hill 52, selected as the intermediate Battalion objective, would be captured by double envelopement. Company L, attacking on the left would descend the south slope of Hill 54 under cover of early morning darkness, and take up positions on Hill 51. When the attack started, Company L would envelope Hill 52 from the left. One platoon would remain on Hill 51 to protect the left flank of the Battalion. Company I would attack on the right by moving through the edge of the woods under the "horse's belly" to envelope Hill 52 from the north. One machine gun platoon from Company M would be attached to each assault Company. The 81mm mortar platoon would support the attack from positions on the north slope of Hill 54. Company K would be in reserve between Hills 54 and 55. (See Map D) (39)

THE ATTACK OF 10 - 11 JANUARY

At 0550 on the morning of 10 January, the massed fires of the Division artillery and one Battalion of Marine artillery began firing on the "water hole." At 0620 the artillery fires lifted, and planes from the 2nd Fighter Group began releasing their loads of depth charges on the same target. At 0635 the bombardment was completed and the 1st and 3rd Battalions jumped off in the attack. In the 1st Battalion zone Company F, 2nd Marines moved forward to close the gap to the Division right boundary, and the Reconnaissance Squadron, Americal Division on Hill 56 moved toward the rear foreleg of the "galloping horse." Company B with one section of heavy

(38) A-1, p. 30. (39) A-1, p. 32; Personal Knowledge.

machine guns attached, followed the Marine Company and proceeded into the ravine to close the gap between Hill 66 and the front foreleg of the "galloping horse." The effect of the artillery and aerial bombardment was fully realized, when by 0730, no opposition had been encountered and all three units were in position. (40)

The remainder of the 1st Battalion then began the attack on Hill 57 by moving south from Hill 66 in a column of companies between the flank security furnished by Company B and the Reconnaissance Squadron. Company A was in the lead followed by Company C and D. "After slight resistance from three light machine guns," the Companies moved up the forelegs of the "horse" and on to Hill 57. By 1140 the 1st Battalion had captured its objective. The Battalion then dug in and prepared an all around defense. (See Map E) (41)

In the 3rd Battalion zone, Company L from Hill 51, and Company I from Hill 54 moved into the attack as planned. (See Map D) From Company L's jump off position on Hill 51, a last minute reconnaissance by the Company Commander revealed that an almost perpendicular drop off to the south of Hills 51 and 52 prevented a wide envelopement from that direction. Consequently, one platoon of Company L moved fully exposed from Hill 51 onto the approaches of Hill 52. Another platoon of Company L took up positions on Hill 51. The remaining platoon stayed in support. The light machine gun section was in position on Hill 51, but the attached machine gun platoon had not yet taken up a firing position. (42)

The platoon from Company L moved rapidly towards Hill 52 without opposition until it reached a point along the eastern slope approximately 100 yards from the crest. The leading scout, silhouetted against the sky then peered over the edge into the Matanikau Valley and fired one round from his 12 gauge shotgun into a Japanese machine gun crew just going into position. Suddenly Japanese mortar, grenade, machine gun and rifle fire swept the ridge killing four men. The platoon

(40,41) A-1, p. 31. (42) Personal Knowledge.

prepared for a second assault by shifting its position gradually to the right. The Japanese, from their positions on the reverse slope continued to place mortar fire on the platoon. Grenades were thrown by the platoon, but fell far below the Japanese before exploding. In an attempt to get the grenades to detonate in the enemy position, many of them were held ignited for four seconds before being thrown. (43)

The remainder of Company L on Hill 51 was also feeling the effect of the cunning and flexibility of the Japanese defense of Hill 52. Machine gun fire from the reverse slope of Hill 52 began sweeping the Company's position on Hill 51, inflicting several casualties.

The action in Company L's position of the 3rd Battalion zone was steadily deteriorating. It reached a climax by approximately 0930 when the Company Commander sent a runner to the assault platoon on Hill 52 with a verbal message to withdraw 200 yards so mortar fire could be placed on the Japanese strong point. While enroute to deliver the message, the runner was badly wounded. By the time he reached the platoon leader on Hill 52, the only word he could speak was, "withdraw." The platoon withdrew and except for the firing of the 60mm mortars on Hill 52, Company L's attack came to a standstill.

Later, the Company Commander of Company L, in constant touch by 536 radio with the Battalion Commander advised him of the impossibility of envelopement of Hill 52 from the left because of the almost perpendicular south slope. (44)

Meanwhile Company I, enveloping Hill 52 from the right, was also meeting stiff resistance. (See Map D) Moving generally southwest from the line of departure on Hill 54 the Company proceeded along the edge of the woods north of Hill 52 and across the open ground along the semi-circular ridge leading to Hill 52. Almost immediately upon crossing the line of departure the Company met opposition, mainly from snipers in the woods to the right. This fire was so effective in delaying

(43,44) A-1, p. 34; Personal Knowledge.

the advance of Company I, that one platoon had to be employed on an anti-sniper mission. Finally, much later than the time of Company L's withdrawal, Company I progressed to within 200 yards of the objective. At this time they came under fire from Japanese reverse slope defenses on Hill 52, and could move no further.

Before noon the entire attack of the 3rd Battalion was stalemated. The Japanese had in turn, held back the attack of the two enveloping companies. In addition, the intense tropical heat was taking a heavy toll. Canteens were empty and heat exhaustion was sweeping the Battalion. (45)

The Battalion Commander then ordered Company K to move to the right of Company I and while Company I held, to make a wider envelopment of Hill 52. Company L was ordered to leave one platoon on Hill 51 for flank and rear protection and move the remainder of the Company across the entire zone to take up a reserve position behind Company K. The attack was to be proceeded by a heavy mortar and artillery concentration on Hill 52 to be fired when Company K reported that they were in position. (46)

As the rifle companies slowly moved into their attack positions hand carrying parties were sent forward with the badly needed water. (47)

During this lull in the attack, arrangements were made for air support of the Battalion in its second assault on Hill 52. To insure recognition of the target the Flight Commander reported to the Battalion Commander on Hill 54 and was shown the location of the Japanese reverse slope position holding up the attack. The tentative time set for the bombardment was 1500, as the Battalion Commander did not know at this time whether or not it would be needed. Additional arrangements were made with the Flight Leader that when his planes arrived over the area, one round of smoke would be fired on Hill 52

(45,46,47) A-1, p. 34; Personal Knowledge.

to mark the target and as a signal to proceed with the mission. (46)

Company K was having difficulty getting into position for the attack. Not only were they meeting resistance to their front, but they also had to secure a small ridge northwest of Hill 52 to protect their rear. It was not until 1345 that they reported that they were ready for the attack. Only one platoon of Company L was in position. (49)

At 1345 a five minute artillery concentration was called for on Hill 52. The final assault was to follow. For some unknown reason, the artillery fire was not received and the attack had to be delayed. (50)

By this time it was 1445, and the six planes on the bombardment mission appeared over the area. However, Company K was in prolongation to the direction of the aerial attack and had to be moved back to a covered position and out of line of the aerial attack. At 1500, the Battalion Commander called for one round of artillery smoke on Hill 52. The round was fired, but fell just south of the battalion OP, short of the target. The Battalion Commander immediately called for one smoke round from his own mortars. As the smoke shell billowed on the target, the six planes, with depth charges as bombs, started their approach from the southeast. One by one the planes dumped their depth charges on the Japanese reverse slope positions on Hill 52. Four perfect hits were scored and two were duds. (51)

When the aerial bombardment was completed, the five minute artillery concentration was fired, and the attack started. Company K moved in from the northwest and Company I moved in from the northeast. One platoon of Company L moved between Companies I and K. Steady progress was made in this attack, which ended in almost hand to hand combat with the few remaining Japanese on Hill 52. At 1625, nearly 8 hours after the jump off, Hill 52, the initial objective of the 3rd Battalion, was captured. (See Map E) (52)

(48,49,50,51,52) A-1, p. 34,35,40; Personal Knowledge.

Shortly after the capture of Hill 52 by the 3rd Battalion, the Regimental Commander issued orders to consolidate positions for the night. The first day of the 27th Infantry's attack on the "galloping horse" was successfully completed. (See Map E)

The 2nd Battalion in reserve, was used to assist the 3rd Battalion in consolidating positions for the night. Shortly after the attack jumped off, the Regimental Commander had ordered one Company to occupy Hill 50 and establish a block to the Matanikau, while the remaining two rifle Companies remained ready to occupy Hills 51 and the south-east slope of Hill 52 after their capture by the 3rd Battalion. By nightfall, all Battalions of the Regiment were in a cordon defense, and contact by patrol had been established between the 1st Battalion on Hill 57 and the 3rd Battalion on Hill 52. As soon as water could be brought forward the next morning, the attack to Hill 53 would be continued by the 3rd Battalion. The 1st Battalion was to remain on Hill 57. The 2nd Battalion would occupy the positions on Hill 52 vacated by the 3rd Battalion when the attack started. (See Map E) (53)

The night of 10 January was relatively quiet in the regimental sector. At daylight, 11 January, the 3rd Battalion began preparing for its attack on Hill 53. Carrying parties, including men from the rifle companies were sent back for water, and the attack was scheduled for 0900. The 3rd Battalion Commander decided to again employ two companies in the attacking echelon. Company L with one machine gun platoon attached was to attack on the right to capture Hill 57 and contact the 1st Battalion. Company I, with one heavy machine gun platoon attached, was to attack on the left along Sims Ridge toward Hill 53. One platoon of Company I was to occupy Exton Ridge. Company K would follow the attack of Company I, prepared to pass through Company I and assault Hill 53. An artillery preparation on Hill 53 would precede the attack. (See Map E) (54)

(53) A-12; A-1, p. 27; Personal Knowledge. (54) A-1, p. 35. Personal Knowledge.

At 0900, although sufficient water had not yet arrived to fill all canteens, the 3rd Battalion jumped off in the attack. The Companies moved very slowly and heat exhaustion, as on the day before, soon began overtaking the Battalion. Company L, moving in column, managed to get one rifle platoon and the heavy machine gun platoon on the lower approach to Hill 57. However, this advance was soon halted when enemy machine gun and rifle fire from the "horse's knee" (Hill 57) and from along the edge of the jungle to the south pinned the platoon to the ground. The remainder of Company L advanced no further than the bottom of the deep gorge between Hills 52 and 57.

Company I on the left crawled forward followed by elements of Company K. Upon reaching the bottom of the draw, they too were halted by enemy machine gun fire from the high ground to the southwest. Although one platoon of Company I managed to occupy part of Exton Ridge, all forward progress in the left of the battalion zone soon came to a complete standstill. Mortar and artillery fire was placed on suspected Japanese positions to the front, but no effort was made by the rifle companies to move forward. The Japanese, with excellent observation from Hill 53, soon took advantage of the situation by placing mortar fire into the congested area, causing many casualties and adding to the rapid disintegration of the attack. Before noon, heat exhaustion had swept the entire Battalion as the men lay prostrate due to the lack of water. Water, which did come forward was only in small amounts and never sufficient to go around. (56)

Seeing that further attempt to continue the attack was hopeless the Battalion Commander issued orders at noon to withdraw to Hill 52. (See Map E) No further attempts were made on 11 January to capture Hill 53. (57)

THE ATTACK OF 12 - 13 JANUARY

Early on the afternoon of 11 January the Regimental Commander

(56,57) A-1, p. 36; Personal Knowledge.

issued orders to the 2nd Battalion to pass through the 3rd Battalion on the following morning and continue the attack to Hill 53. The time set for the attack was 0630 and would be preceded by aerial strafing and bombing. A 15 minute artillery preparation would also be placed in the general vicinity of the "horse's head. (Hill 53). (See Map F) (58)

During the late afternoon and early evening of 11 January, the 2nd Battalion moved into position behind the 3rd Battalion on Hill 52 to be in readiness for the attack the next morning. Briefly the plan of the 2nd Battalion was as follows: Company G was to capture Hill 57 by attacking westward through the jungle, north of Hill 52. Company F was to attack Exton and Sims Ridges and proceed to Hill 53. Company E was to remain in reserve. (See Map E) (59)

Immediately following the aerial and artillery bombardment the attack jumped off. Company G moved into the jungle north of Hill 52 and proceeded west toward Hill 57 and Company F moved toward Exton Ridge. Company G reached the approach to Hill 57 at 1030 and suddenly came under enemy machine gun fire from the point of the "horse's knee" (Hill 57) and the edge of the jungle to their left. (See Map F) Enemy mortar fire also fell on the Company at this time. However, they continued to push forward and by 1130, gained contact with the 1st Battalion on Hill 57. Japanese machine gun fire from the extreme left of Hill 57 near the edge of the jungle prevented the capture of the entire ridge until 1330, when the Company Commander and four volunteers maneuvered through the jungle to the southwest and knocked the position out. The Company then prepared an all around defense extending south from the 1st Battalion to the jungle covered ravine north of Hill 53. (See Map F) (60)

Meanwhile, Company F advancing in the left of the Battalion zone quickly reached the north half of Exton Ridge only to be completely

(58) A-1, p. 27, 37; A-12. (59) A-12. (60) A-13.

stopped by machine gun fire from Sims Ridge and the head of the draw between Exton and Sims Ridges. The Battalion Commander then committed Company E to the left of Company F to capture the remaining portion of Exton Ridge and to continue to Sims Ridge. At 0730, one platoon of Company E gained their assigned portion of Exton Ridge, only to come under heavy machine gun and mortar fire from Sims Ridge, as had Company F. The platoon leader was killed and the platoon moved back. Later, a small group from Company E, including a light machine gun section, moved back on the ridge, remaining there together with elements of Company F until relieved by a machine gun platoon from Company H. (61)

With elements of both companies remaining on Exton Ridge, a hasty reorganization took place and one more attempt was made that afternoon to capture the objective; this time under the personal supervision of the battalion executive officer, Captain Charles W. Davis, who had volunteered to go forward and coordinate the attack. (62)

Companies E and F were moved to the northern end of Sims Ridge, and supported by the fire of the heavy machine guns on Exton Ridge advanced toward the enemy resistance at the high point of Sims Ridge. This attack crept to within 40 yards of the enemy strong point and was again stopped. As the Battalion had suffered heavy casualties and the men were exhausted from the hard fighting and lack of water, the Battalion Commander issued orders to dig in for the night and defend in place. (See Map F) (63)

The third day's battle of the "galloping horse" had thus netted only small gains over the advances made on 10 January. Although some ground gains were made by Company G in siezing Hill 57 and extending the lines of the 1st Battalion, the hardest part still remained ahead. (See Map F) It is well to note here that after

(61) A-14. (62,63) A-12.

capturing Hill 57, Company G was able to witness the action of the remainder of the Battalion on Exton and Sims Ridges, including much of the defense activity of the enemy. The Company Commander of Company G requested permission to fire his mortars in support of Companies E and F, but the request was denied. (64)

On the morning of 13 January, the attack of the 2nd Battalion was resumed. Company F was ordered to skirt the woods northwest of Sims Ridge and advance to Hill 53. Company E was to capture Sims Ridge and continue on to Hill 53. (65)

As the attack started, the heavy enemy fire on the high point of Sims Ridge again started taking heavy casualties. Mortar fire placed on the Japanese position had no result. The enemy fire continued to cover all approaches to Sims Ridge and Hill 53. (See Map F)

Captain Davis, who had remained all night with Company F, then realized that the attack was gradually following the pattern of the previous day. Consequently, he borrowed an M-1 rifle, and with four volunteers from Company F, began crawling up a small gully toward the Japanese position. With Captain Davis in the lead, the small group crawled to within 10 yards of the muzzle of the Japanese machine gun and began throwing grenades into the position. The Japanese retaliated by throwing several grenades at the assaulting group, three of which landed in their midst, but failed to explode.

Finally, behind a last volley of grenade fire Captain Davis, followed by the four volunteers, leaped forward directly into the enemy position. As he fired the first round into the group of defenders his rifle jammed. Immediately discarding it, he drew his pistol and together with the others killed the last remaining Japanese in that position. Captain Davis and his small group did not stop here, but continued to push forward.

Inspired by the gallantry of Captain Davis and his small

(64) A-13. (65) A-12.

group, the remainder of the 2nd Battalion reacted quickly. Company E raced to complete the capture of Sims Ridge, while Company F moved rapidly along the edge of the jungle toward Hill 53. By 1130, the two companies joined on Hill 53. Shortly thereafter, Company G from Hill 57 pushed south through the strip of jungle to contact Company F on Hill 53 to complete the accomplishment of the 2nd Battalion's mission. (See Map G) (66)

The battle of the "galloping horse" was over and the 27th Infantry had accomplished it's mission. In four days of fierce fighting under conditions of extreme tropical heat, shortage of water and precipitous terrain, the Regiment had severely beaten a fanatical enemy to further justify its motto - "Fearless."

(66) A-12; Personal Knowledge.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In my opinion, the decision to commit the 25th Division so soon after its arrival on the Island was based on sound reasoning. Guadalcanal is located in one of the heaviest malarial areas in the world, and had time been allowed for training and conditioning, disease would have materially reduced the combat efficiency of the Division. Fighting divisions were not readily available in the Pacific at this time due to the high priority of the European war. It was necessary, then, to take advantage of every opportunity to fully utilize all available forces.

In my opinion, a lack of radio communications in the rifle companies was the most detrimental factor in causing the early standstill of the attack of the 3rd Battalion in the left portion of the Regimental zone. The initial attack of Company L was vigorous, and a good foothold on Hill 52 was gained in a very few minutes. Although several casualties had been suffered and the situation of part of the Company on Hill 52 looked "bad" from the Battalion and Company OP, artillery fire should not have been planned on the Hill until the actual condition of the platoon was known. As it happened, the platoon leader had barely enough time himself to analyze the situation before the wounded runner appeared with the ill fated message. If the platoon leader could have communicated directly with the Company Commander, the events that followed could have been avoided and the early hold on Hill 52 retained.

The method of coordination for the aerial bombardment in support of the 3rd Battalion on Hill 52 left nothing to be desired. Briefing the Flight Leader by an actual ground reconnaissance paid off in welcome dividends when the first round of smoke fell into the middle of the battalion zone. Evidence that the pilot knew that this round had gone amiss was presented when he led his flight in a circle over the area while awaiting another signal.. This also brings out the

fact that organic means should have been used for marking and signalling; namely the 81mm mortars.

Lack of water led directly to the disintegration of the attack on 11 January. This should not have happened after the experiences of the day before when the same shortcoming existed. The 3rd Battalion should have waited until water was available in sufficient quantities even though the attack might have been delayed an entire day. The failure of the attack contributed greatly to a reduction in morale and combat efficiency of the men in the rifle companies. Water was established as second only in priority to ammunition before the attack started, but still the need did not seem to be fully realized. True, the supply was complicated by a shortage of transportation and lack of roads, but the main breakdown was in the improper supervision of hand carrying parties. The water which did start forward was usually consumed before it reached the front line companies. The 75 native carriers were of little help in getting water all the way forward because of their extreme fear of the sound of rifle fire. Upon hearing the crack of a snipers rifle they would drop their loads and head for the rear. The water problem was not solved until a supply cable was installed from Hill 54 to a knob protruding from Hill 52 and forward distribution handled under the personal supervision of the Anti-tank Company Commander.

Company G, and the 1st Battalion, from positions on Hill 57, could have safely fired in support of the 2nd Battalion in its attack on Hill 53. It is my opinion that had mortar support been given the capture of Hill 53 would have taken place much quicker. Company G and the 1st Battalion had good observation from Hill 57, and watched the activity of the Japanese in the vicinity of Sims Ridge for the better part of three days. With careful coordination, this fire could have been crept in from Hill 53 with adjustments made by observers located on Exton Ridge.

LESSONS

1. - Electrical means of communication are needed within the rifle companies.

2. - In combat in the tropics an adequate source and method of water re-supply is absolutely essential. To reduce the problem of re-supply all individual soldiers should be equipped with two canteens.

3. - The fire of organic high angle weapons should always be used to fire smoke on a signal mission. These weapons, namely the mortars, are always more readily available for quick adjustment.

4. - Foot messengers should never be dispatched with an important verbal message.

5. - Leaders must at all times take positive steps to break up the bunching of the men in their command. The enemy is quick to place fire on a congested area.

6. - A reverse slope defense is the most effective if the position cannot be easily approached from the flanks and rear. The Japanese demonstrated this in their defense of Hills 52 and 53.

7. - Hand carrying parties must always be given adequate anti-sniper protection by riflemen distributed throughout the column.

8. - Fighting in a tropical climate is extremely exhausting to the individual; therefore, only the minimum of equipment should be carried. If the soldier is overburdened he will only throw away the item he does not need.

9. - Salt tablets must be included in the daily diet of troops in extremely hot climates. They contribute greatly to the reduction of heat exhaustion.

10.- In fighting the Japanese, there is no substitute for fire power. He will not give up a position without a fight and the best method of keeping casualties down is to precede every attack with the massed fires of all available weapons.