

# “Hell” 700:

## THE KEY TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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The strategic plan was clear: Move up the Solomon Islands chain, opening up a direct route to the Philippines, and from the Philippines, on to Tokyo.

In 1942 the U.S. Marines drove the Japanese out of Guadalcanal, the first island in the Solomons. In 1943—painfully, bloodily, in the equally impenetrable jungles—the U.S. Army’s 37th Infantry Division crossed New Georgia, sweeping what was left of the 15,000 defending Japanese into the sea (Map 1). The next and final island in the chain was

Bougainville, and here the tactics were dramatically altered, although the strategic concept remained the same.

In early November 1943 the 1st Marine Division and the 37th Infantry Division invaded Bougainville with a mission containing elements of both offensive and defensive operations. There was no thought of pushing across this 250-square-mile island to eliminate the 25,000 Japanese in a slow, brutal, costly action. Instead, the plan was to take only a small piece of it, perhaps six square miles, including the

deepest, best port at Empress Augusta Bay; build a perimeter defense along a line three miles long and about two miles deep; erect pillboxes, machinegun nests, gun emplacements; put up barbed wire; and cut fields of fire in front of a perimeter, stocked with floodlights in case the enemy attacked across the fields of fire at night.

Within those six square miles, a major airfield would be built, from which U.S. planes could range over the South Pacific as far forward as the Philippines, assuring the security of the convoys and task forces that, a year later, would invade the Philippines.

By 13 November the Marine Corps and Army units reached their two-mile deep objective against moderate enemy ground resistance and air strikes. During the next four months, the position was consolidated, the airfield was built, and the springboard to the Philippines was set (Map 2). Fighting had been limited. It was obvious that the Japanese had assumed, and hoped, that the U.S. troops would come after them in the jungle terrain. There, the Japanese could inflict heavy casualties as these troops cut their way, yard by yard, through this jungle.

By March 1944, however, the Japanese realized the Americans were going to sit this one out, manning defensive lines. If the Japanese wanted to inflict damage on these troops and take out the dominating airfield, they would have to attack head on.

The perimeter was dotted with hills and valleys, and Hill 700, the commanding height in that sector, was right in the center overlooking the airfield, and its precipitous sides swept down, unbroken, into the coastal plain. This hill was the linchpin of the defenses, the key to holding the perimeter positions to its right and left, and eventually the airfield itself.

Units of the 1st Marine and 37th Infantry Divisions were spread thinly along this two-mile perimeter, but there were

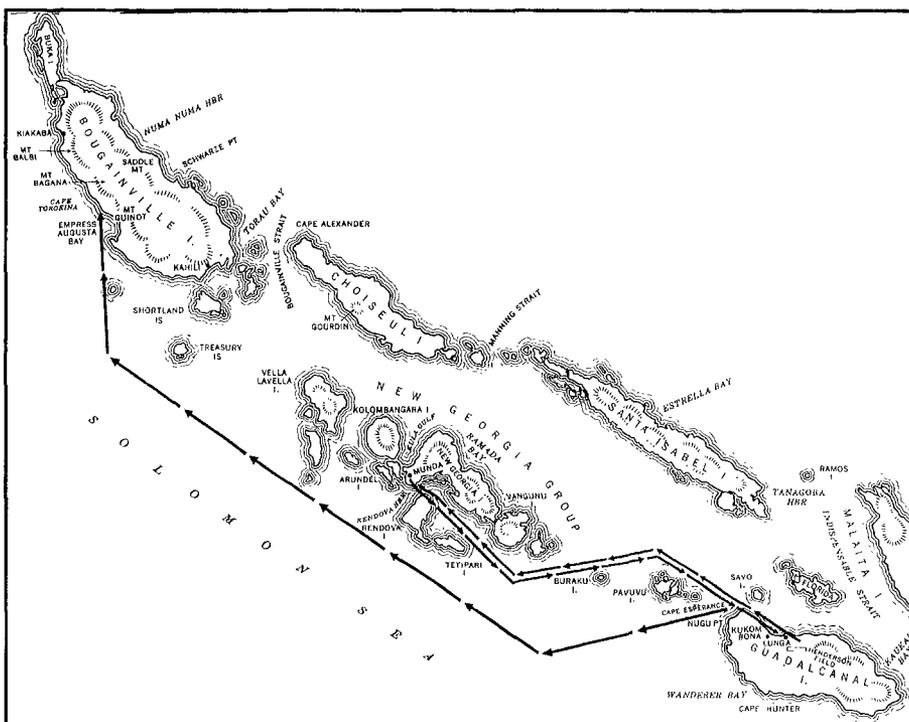
reserve forces that could be brought to the front to counter a Japanese breakthrough. Patrols were sent out from the front lines, every day, dawn to dusk, to find and fix Japanese troop concentrations. A few Japanese prisoners who were taken quickly “confessed” that the Japanese command had finally understood the U.S. defensive concept and tactical plan, with Hill 700 as its heart.

Inevitably, then, the massive Japanese attack (Map 3) began on 8 March and didn’t wane until 13 March when Hill 700—which had been partially overrun by the Japanese—was taken back by 37th Division forces, who annihilated several thousand more Japanese in the recapture phase.

At 0630 on 8 March the first artillery shell from the attacking Japanese hit in the 145th Infantry Regiment sector. The 135th Field Artillery (FA) Battalion forward observer (FO) at observation post (OP) 0 in the sector, was immediately alerted. Within the next hour the Japanese dropped shells on the airstrip. The FO spotted the flashes and made a rapid adjustment, and his battalion poured a heavy concentration on the suspected positions. An observer on duty at the airstrip reported that 15 rounds of 15-centimeter shells had landed there. An observer at OP 6 on Cannon Ridge spied these flashes, and directed more counterbattery fire at the enemy guns.

The U.S. beachhead was on a coastal plain at the foot of the towering Crown Prince Range of volcanic mountains. The Japanese occupied the rest of the island. Two U.S. divisions could not spread their perimeter beyond the nearest foothills overlooking the beachhead. The best they could do was hang onto the lesser heights that dominated the airfield and deny those hills to Japanese artillery.

The hostile fire was coming from Blue Ridge, Hills 1001, 1111, 500, 591, and the Saua River valley. Although only a few pieces could hit the airfield from those positions, these



**Map 1. The 37th Infantry Division's path through the Solomons.**

rounds hinted at the potential for destruction if the Japanese could emplace their cannon on the dominating hills—mainly Hill 700, which the 37th was committed to defend.

At 0700 the division's 2d Battalion, 145th Infantry, took a few stray rounds from small arms, just enough to alert all positions and encourage the soldiers to clean their M1 rifles. Short-range patrols discovered that the Japanese were assembling in front of the battalion and that their major attack was expected to be against Hill 700.

The hill had immense strategic significance, a fact the Japanese realized as well as the Americans. One captured document reported that Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo—after a study of Bougainville's terrain and American defenses—had specifically designated Hill 700 as the focal point for the suicide effort. Japanese commanders announced to their hungry soldiers that there were enough rations around this hill to feed an army for ten years.

Shells continued to fall, not only on the airstrip but on the 145th Infantry, the 6th FA Battalion, the 54th Coast Artillery Battalion, and the 36th and 77th Construction Battalions (Seabees). Although casualties were light, blood pressures were high; the very inaccuracy of the Japanese fire subjected even the least strategic installation to these wild shells.

Helmeted repairmen kept the bomber strip in operation, filling up holes and smoothing out shell craters. Planes landed and took off with casual disdain, but a few were destroyed, and the U.S. XIV Corps commander seriously considered the possibility of declaring the bomber strip off limits. Light observation aircraft observers augmented the FOs in locating these guns. The 6th FA Battalion, to the right of the 145th sector, joined in the fire, and the 136th FA Battalion smashed their big shells into enemy bivouacs and dumps farther out.

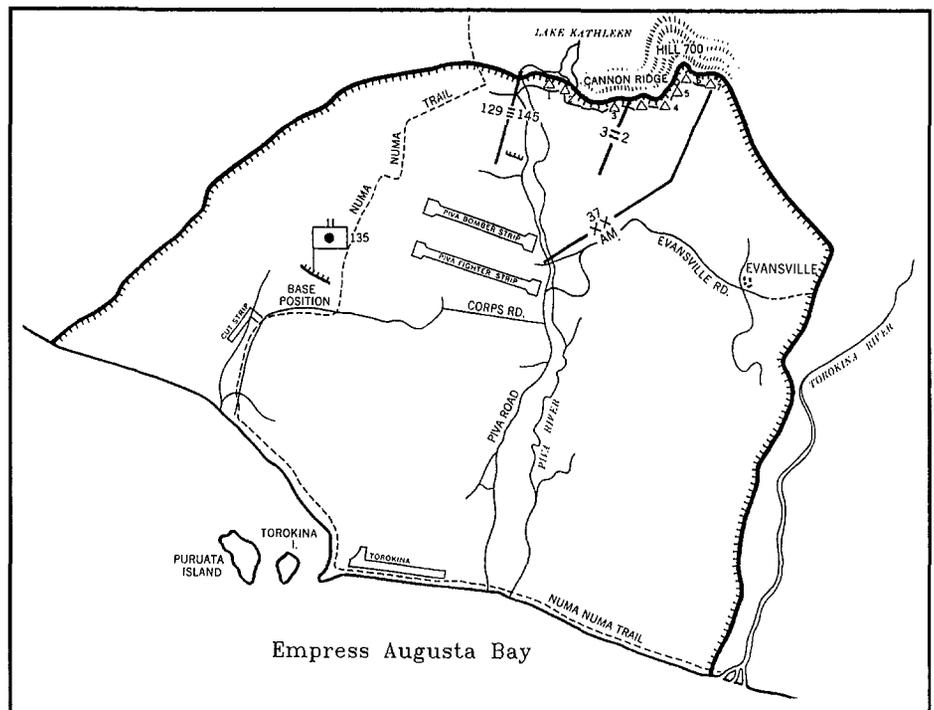
At noon, the last patrol was reported in by the 145th, and the combined guns of the 135th, 6th, 140th, and 136th FA

Battalions and two battalions of Americal Division artillery were readied for area fire on the Japanese who were moving toward our lines from assembly areas behind Hills 1111 and 1000. The Japanese 3d Battalion, 23d Infantry, and the 13th Infantry (less one battalion), of the Imperial 6th Division, crowded toward Hill 700 to join the 2d Battalion of the 23d, which had filtered in earlier.

For two hours, thousands of rounds of medium and heavy artillery fire blanketed this zone of activity. A Japanese prisoner later admitted that the Japanese 3d Battalion, 23d Infantry, was practically annihilated during this bombardment and that the rest of the troops escaped a similar fate by using a threadbare Japanese trick—moving close enough to our lines to get within our umbrella of safety. Anticipating this ruse, artillery observers had called for fire closer and closer to the 37th Division's front lines. Unit commanders ordered the men down into their holes, but common sense had anticipated the formal orders. The inevitable short rounds did little damage, except to sleep. Still, the Japanese were in excellent defilade, and it was difficult to reach an enemy hiding literally under our front lines. Mortars pounded away in the dark with unobserved results. The 136th FA alone expended 1,239 rounds on this day. OPs yelled back that the Japanese were scrambling up the hill now and that the artillery had subsided, so the artillery liaison officer with the 2d Battalion requested fires closer to his lines.

At night several booby traps and warning devices were exploded near the positions of Companies E and G, 145th Infantry, and the men in the perimeter holes replied with small arms and mortars. The Japanese retaliated with more rifles and now knee mortars. Fog and rain made the darkness impenetrable.

Invaluable during this night attack was a device cooked up by Staff Sergeant Otis Hawkins to light the area as soon as the



**Map 2. The Empress Augusta Bay Perimeter.**

first Japanese started jimmying the barbed wires: First, he ordered mortar flares fired; then, at the forward pillbox from which he observed mortar fire, he pulled wires that set off gallon buckets of oil ignited by phosphorus grenades. With this artificial lighting, Hawkins directed 600 rounds from 60mm mortars, and the infantrymen picked off many Japanese who had counted on darkness and confusion.

At the boundary between Companies E and G, two Japanese soldiers who had squirmed through the wire were killed by an alert sentry, and the 2d Battalion, 145th Infantry, admitted a possible enemy penetration at Hill 700. The Japanese—covered by the heavy rain and the darkness—using bangalore torpedoes and dynamite to blast holes in the wire and pushing one full battalion directly at our lead pillboxes—had shoved a foot in the door.

Refusing to withdraw, the hopelessly overwhelmed soldiers of the 2d Battalion, 145th Infantry, lived or died where they stood. The Japanese assaulted an isolated Company E mortar OP situated on a knoll on the outer perimeter. They had cut three of the four double aprons of protecting wire

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before Staff Sergeant Thompson crawled out of his pillbox to investigate the noise and discovered them.

Just as the Japanese placed a bangalore torpedo under the fourth double apron, Thompson opened up with his Browning automatic rifle (BAR) and caught eight Japanese soldiers in the wires. Holding more enemy soldiers off with his BAR, he called back for a 60mm mortar concentration, adjusted it in and around the wire, ducked back in his pillbox, and then had a steady concentration dropped around the pillbox (often behind it) during the night. He and his men lived.

Not so fortunate were four men from Company G. Fighting desperately from their large emplacement, they were quickly engulfed by Japanese soldiers who attacked them from all sides. Recognizing the strategic importance of their assignment, they disregarded a possible escape route and stuck it out, hoping for reinforcements. They fired rifles, threw hand grenades, and knifed one Japanese soldier who got in too close. Then they were dazed by a bangalore torpedo a Japanese soldier shoved in next to the pillbox, and the Japanese rushed the emplacement. Semiconscious, the four men fired at and wrestled with their enemy. The next day when their bodies were recovered, 12 dead Japanese soldiers were also found inside the pillbox. Probably, many of the hundreds found around the position had also been killed by these four soldiers.

At dawn, elements of the Japanese 23d Infantry had occu-

ped a portion of the north slope and two strategic positions on the crest of Hill 700, penetrating U.S. lines 50 yards in depth and 70 yards in width.

At 0730 the forward observer from the 135th FA sensed a new attack and told his battalion, "Pour it on as close to me as you can get." Americal Division artillery relieved the 37th Division artillery of the counterbattery firing missions, and the 135th and 136th Battalions, plus the cannon company of the 145th, took him at his word. These artillery preparations seemed to melt the new Japanese attack. Further, the enemy salient was boxed in when 145th Infantry's lines were extended around the south slope of Hill 700. The division reserve was released, and the New Georgia-tested 117th Engineer Battalion was rushed into the vacated reserve trenches.

At noon, elements of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 145th Infantry, counterattacked to regain the lost pillboxes. Although some progress was made to the east of the penetration and on the south slope of Hill 700, the Japanese dagger still cut into the American perimeter. Japanese artillery and mortar shells dropped on these troops, and snipers picked away at their number.

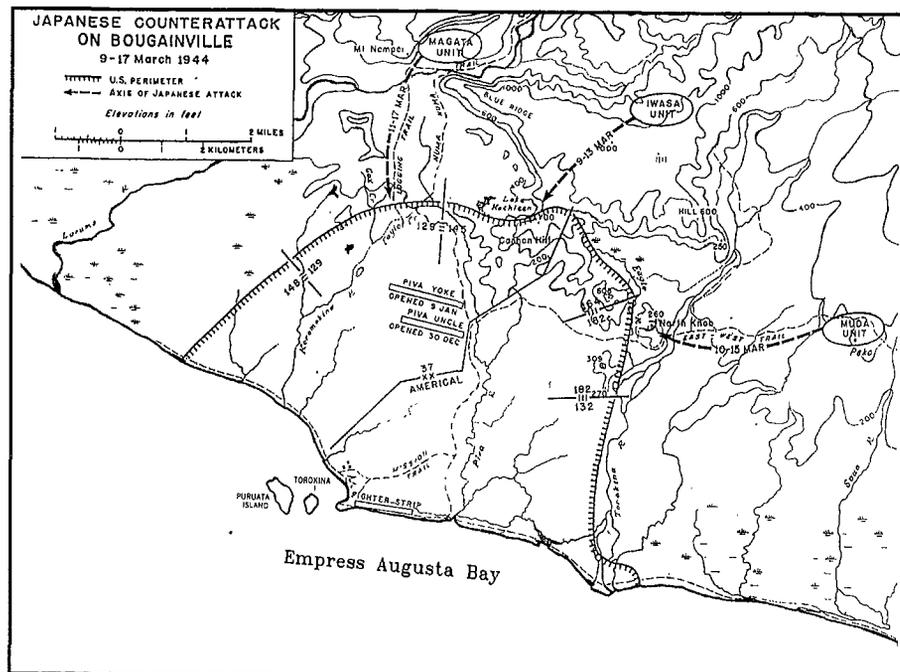
Japanese field artillery positions were spotted on Blue Ridge, and the 135th FA plastered them. Chemical mortars, adjusted by aerial observers, fired shells into the rear of enemy avenues of approach. By 1000 a few more pillboxes were recovered, but the Japanese repulsed attempts to cover the remaining positions on the commanding ground of Hill 700. The reverse slope, pitted with Japanese foxholes, spewed up reinforcements who kept pushing forward over the dead bodies of their comrades, clashing head-on with the attacking Americans.

Although darkness discouraged aggressiveness, during the night the Japanese chattered and whistled as they replenished American sandbags and enlarged American foxholes to strengthen their own precarious penetration.

The 135th FA alone had expended 2,305 rounds during the day. That afternoon, two light tanks from the 754th Tank Battalion had tried, with little success, to wipe out pockets firing on McClellan Road between the Rock and Hill 700. During the day, one U.S. officer and 28 enlisted men were killed and four officers and 135 men wounded. Japanese losses were 511 killed.

The night of 9-10 March was ominously quiet. The next morning the Americans pounded the Japanese, who seemed to gain strength with each hour of digging time and infiltration. A provisional battalion from the 251st Antiaircraft Artillery occupied a sector of the 145th's regimental reserve lines and, with terrifying accuracy, laid its 90mm antiaircraft guns on point-blank targets in the hills. At 1115, 18 scout bombers and 18 torpedo bombers pounded the targets marked by artillery smoke shells. The 135th, 140th, 136th FA Battalions and the 145th Infantry's cannon company kept pounding away. At noon, aircraft reported Japanese troop movement south along the Laruma River, and these troops were riddled by the big guns.

At 1700 the now thoroughly intermixed 1st and 2d Battalions, 145th Infantry—assuming that the Japanese were suffi-



**Map 3. The Counterattack.**

ciently softened—attacked again. Using bangalore torpedoes, rocket launchers, and pole charges, the infantrymen tried for the enemy pillboxes on the crest of Hill 700. The main line of resistance was tenuously reestablished with the exception of a 30- or 40-yard gap. Four pillboxes in possession of the Japanese had not been recovered. Ammunition supply was a knotty problem, and the men ran out of hand grenades in the middle of the attack. Japanese artillery and mortar shells dropped sporadically. At 1800 the 37th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop was brought south and east of Hill 700, then advanced into ticklish main line of resistance positions in the Company G area. During the night, increased Japanese activity was detected in front of Cannon Hill; the 3d Battalion on Cannon Hill reported that the Japanese resorted to firecrackers and other ruses to draw fire. Seven enlisted men were killed that day, and seven officers and 123 enlisted men were wounded. The Japanese lost 363. The 148th Infantry sector, along with that of the 129th Infantry (not mentioned earlier or later), had been relatively quiet although patrols invariably ran into enemy squads and platoons.

During the afternoon of 10 March, Brigadier General Charles F. Craig, assistant division commander, along with the division G-3, visited the regimental and battalion commanders of the 145th Infantry on the south slope of Hill 700 to observe the situation for the division commander. It was late at night before they could return in halftracks over the bullet-swept road down which they had come.

During this night, Staff Sergeant William A. Orick, of the regimental intelligence section, and two other soldiers had a brush with the Japanese on top of Hill 700. His companions received bayonet wounds and were evacuated to the battalion aid station. Returning alone to the site of the struggle, he slipped a noose of telephone wire over the foot of a Japanese soldier killed in the struggle and pulled him down over the crest of the hill. The soldier proved to be an officer, and on his body were complete plans, with maps and directions, for

the attack on the beachhead. This information was rushed to the Division G-2 section and proved very valuable.

During the early morning hours of 11 March, the Japanese moved forward and occupied an empty pillbox on the forward slope of Hill 700. Using their reverse slope positions in front of the hill as a stepping stone, they launched a new assault at dawn. The 23d Infantry attacked along the front from Hill 700 to Cannon Ridge. They came in waves, one whole battalion attacking on a platoon front. Brandishing their prized sabers and screaming battle cries, the officers climbed up the slope and rushed forward in an admirable display of blind courage. Mowed down by heavy fire from the dug-in U.S. infantry, the Japanese soldiers unwaveringly advanced toward the spitting guns, tumbling over the bodies of their comrades.

The battle on Hill 700 and Cannon Hill was at such short range that infantry weapons had to repulse the assault waves, while the artillery hammered supply dumps and rear trails. The attack on Cannon Hill was stopped, and by 0800 the dazed remnants of a Japanese battalion had withdrawn, leaving hundreds of their dead comrades stacked up in front of the 145th Infantry line.

During the heart of the Japanese assault, Lieutenant Clinton S. McLaughlin, Company G's commander, dashed from pillbox to pillbox encouraging and coaching his embattled men. He stopped only occasionally to return the fire of a few persistent Japanese whose bullets tore his clothes to shreds and painfully wounded him twice. When the Japanese were within a few feet of the platoon's forwardmost position, McLaughlin jumped into the lead emplacement, which had already been outflanked by the Japanese. Then he and Staff Sergeant John H. Kunkel, firing point-blank at the invaders, killed enough of them to dissipate their threat. Both men were later awarded Distinguished Service Crosses.

On Hill 700 the Japanese had succeeded in holding onto a part of their salient, and fresh troops kept thrusting forward,

trying to occupy new positions and reinforce old ones. By this time, the men of the U.S. 145th Infantry were near physical exhaustion from the continuous three-day fight. The companies were intermingled beyond recognition, as were the platoons and squads, and their heartbreaking stand, outnumbered by a defiant enemy, had numbed their reflexes and their minds.

At this point, Lieutenant Colonel Herb Radcliffe's 2d Battalion, 148th Infantry, having been alerted the night before, arrived in a rear area and prepared to assist the 145th.

The difficulty of retaking the enemy-held positions on Hill 700 was obvious. The U.S. forces had to assault these pillboxes by crawling up a slope so precipitous that a foothold was difficult to secure and maintain. In addition, the Japanese guns swept all approaches from positions only 25 yards from the main supply road and overlooking it. Their guns on the crest of the hill could cover the ridge itself with intense, accurate, and deadly grazing fire. About 100 yards to the rear of these ground-emplaced weapons, other machineguns in trees on the spur of the hill also swept the entire front. With the exception of a few scattered trees and a series of shallow trenches, little cover was available to the troops moving up the slope.

Tanks and armored cars manned by reconnaissance troop drivers were the only safe means of moving casualties and supplies up and down the main supply road. Evacuation had been hazardous and backbreaking from the start.

On the first day of the fighting, litter bearers hand-carried the wounded over a back mountain trail to the reserve area of the 1st Battalion, 145th. That route was long and painful, and the only alternative was this supply road. On 9 March, ambulances tried to run the gantlet and succeeded. Encouraged, a convoy of litter jeeps and ambulances from Collecting Companies A and B, 112th Medical Battalion, drove to the Com-

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pany G motor pool, an area that was safe for motor vehicles. But the route from here was dangerous, and the commander of the 145th would not order the drivers to run this Japanese blockade. Eight men went ahead on their own and, though under fire for most of the trip, brought their casualties back safely. Two drivers were slightly nicked by mortar fragments. One ambulance was ripped in the hood, cab, and windshield by two Japanese snipers, and the ambulance orderly was hit. After this experience, half-tracks from the cavalry reconnaissance unit were used.

Seventeen half-tracks made constant round trips from the lines to the aid stations and, although the litter bearers still had

a long haul, solved the most acute problem. Occasionally, the enemy was able to plunk a lucky mortar round or lob a grenade into the open tops of the half-tracks. But these were exceptions, and the reconnaissance drivers courageously backed up the infantry and their own troopers in the regiment's front lines by shuttling along this vital artery day and night.

Against these handicaps of terrain, supply, and determined Japanese resistance, the 2d Battalion, 148th Infantry, prepared to go into action. Lieutenant Colonel Radcliffe, with the battalion S-3 and his five company commanders, made a reconnaissance of the sector, and then presented his recommendations for an attack to General Craig, who was representing the division commander at the 2d Battalion, 145th Infantry command post. These plans called for an immediate envelopment of the remaining enemy positions on Hill 700 by Company E, and at 1320 the first Company E scout moved cautiously over the line of departure.

Company E edged forward and met the same Japanese tenacity and obstacles. The lead squad of the company's right platoon crawled awkwardly up the precipitous slope. Led by Lieutenant Broadus McGinnis, 11 men of the squad went over the crest together and met machinegun fire from their front and flanks. Eight men were killed instantly. McGinnis and three others dived safely into a connecting trench on the enemy's side of the hill and captured a pillbox, killing the three occupants. From his vantage point in the pillbox, McGinnis shouted instructions back to the rest of his platoon throughout the afternoon. At 1600, as he peered out of the pillbox trying to discover enemy intentions, he was killed by a burst of machinegun fire.

Further advances were suicidal, and at 1900 Company E was ordered to cease the attack; reorganize and dig in; hold the ground it was able to occupy; and supplement its defenses with one platoon of heavy machineguns from Company H. Wire teams from Company G strung concertina wire in the gap between the platoons, which was covered by fire from positions on the reverse slope of the hill. The rest of the battalion, meanwhile, had settled down for the night in the forward assembly area. The operations for the day, although unsuccessful in restoring the main line of resistance, did prevent further enemy penetration.

At 0800 the next day, after a night of intermittent firing, Companies E and F attacked again in a coordinated double envelopment, with Company G in reserve and Company H in general support. The two attacking companies glided slowly around the hill to the right and left, remaining in defilade as much as possible to avoid the Japanese machineguns that dominated the ridge in both directions, and then dispersed along the steep slope. The Japanese resistance had in no way lessened, but the U.S. troops—using every trick and weapon at their disposal, from smoke and fragmentation grenades to flamethrowers, rocket launchers, and dynamite—began their ascent to the top of Hill 700.

On Company F's side of the hill, a flamethrower team from the 2d Battalion headquarters company crawled up to destroy an enemy pillbox from which machinegun fire held up the company's advance. These two soldiers—Privates First Class Robert L.E. Cope and Herbert Born—had joined the

regiment after the New Georgia campaign and were now seeing their first action. They worked their way forward, dragging the bulky equipment over terrain dangerously exposed to automatic fire until they were ten yards from the pillbox. At this point, they suddenly rose up in full view of the Japanese and doused the emplacement with liquid fire. Then they came back through the same vulnerable area, recharged their flamethrower, and returned to destroy another pillbox. Altogether, they moved through the exposed sector five times and destroyed four enemy positions, along with their occupants and weapons.

The rocket launcher, or "bazooka," was a comparatively new infantry weapon that the soldiers of the 148th had not yet fired in anger. Staff Sergeants Jim Spencer and Lattie Graves volunteered "to take a crack at it." Preceding the company until they reached a shallow trench 20 yards from the nearest Japanese pillbox, they selected their target and with much anticipation launched their first rocket. Although this round completely missed the target, they immediately reloaded, aimed more carefully, and launched a second rocket. This time they scored a direct hit and demolished the pillbox. Now greatly encouraged, they concentrated their rocket fire on other Japanese positions, with Spencer holding the bazooka and Graves reloading it, yelling, "Make way for the artillery." The two dodged from one covered position to another, blasting away, either killing the occupant of the pillboxes or scaring them into flight. During the intervals between loading the launcher, Graves would resume fire with his rifle and on one occasion killed three fleeing Japanese. Spencer and Graves fired the bazooka periodically for three hours.

Privates First Class Jennings W. Crouch and William R. Andrick, armed with Browning automatic rifles, advanced with their platoon in the initial movement across the fireswept ridge. Then, under the withering Japanese fire, they ran toward the enemy-occupied pillboxes on the crest of the hill. From their final position 15 yards from the pillboxes, they began their assault, firing their rifles from the hip as they advanced. Japanese hand grenades wounded them but failed to stop them. Upon reaching the pillbox, they poured a steady stream of fire into the entrance until all the occupants were killed.

Over in the Company E sector, Private First Class John E. Bussard was out for vengeance. Thirty-six years old, married, and the father of three children, Bussard was draft-exempt but enlisted immediately after learning that a younger brother had been killed in action on New Guinea. Evidently, his one idea was to avenge his brother.

In the unsuccessful afternoon attack on 11 March, Bussard volunteered to climb the high slope to observe the enemy installations, although four others of his company had been killed and eight wounded in earlier attempts. Snaking his way inch by inch, he reached a large tree from which he could watch the enemy. The Japanese, well aware of his presence, kept him pinned down to prevent his return, and not until an hour after darkness was he able to report back to his commander with his observation.

The next morning, when the attack was in danger of bogging down, Bussard again volunteered, this time with anti-tank grenades to knock out the installations he had approached the day before. Passing through the same intense fire, he gained the shelter of the same tree. He fired eight rounds, but was unable to observe the effect because he had to fire between bursts of enemy guns and then pull in his head and shoulders to escape the hail of bullets that answered every round.

Since the results could not be determined, Bussard was summoned to his platoon's command post, a mere dent in the side of the hill partially sheltered by a three-foot boulder. Now someone decided to use a rocket launcher against the pillboxes, and again Bussard volunteered for the assignment,

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saying convincingly, "I know my way up there better than anyone else."

Setting out a third time, now carrying a bazooka as well as his rifle, he reached the tree that had sheltered him twice before. To overcome the ammunition supply problem, the soldiers passed each round by hand along a continuous line extending up the side of the hill until the top man could toss it over the last 15 yards to Bussard. Twice, a rocket fell short of his reach and he had to risk enemy fire to recover it.

After six rounds he was told to cease firing, again because of the inability to observe the effect. He threw the launcher over the cliff and rushed to a hole 15 feet away where three members of his platoon had remained, pinned down, throughout the previous night. With these three men, he waited to take part in the assault they knew would follow and, during the next few minutes, they were fired upon by Japanese in the trees to their left. Bussard was wounded in the shoulder, but he remained to return the fire, killing one of the Japanese. Shortly before Company E attacked, six Japanese riflemen, with bayonets fixed, charged out of a position 20 yards away toward the hole harboring the four soldiers. All six were killed, two by Bussard, but his luck had run out. He, in turn, was killed by their fire.

Although the effects of his grenades and rockets could not be observed while he was using the weapons, two of his pillbox targets were later found to be demolished and 250 dead Japanese, many of them doubtless his victims, were counted in the 50-yard area immediately in front of the tree behind which he had taken up his position.

Meanwhile, Private First Class Vernon D. Wilks, a BAR man from Company E, had reached a one-foot depression protecting him from a machinegun 30 yards away. During

the next two hours, he remained in the depression, firing more than 25 magazines of ammunition and using four different BARs, although two members of his company were killed and 11 wounded within a few yards of him. Rising to a kneeling position between enemy bursts and firing accurately and rapidly before the Japanese machinegun was again directed at him, Wilks inflicted heavy casualties on the gun crew that was holding up his company. He also distracted the attention of another enemy machinegun crew firing on Company F.

By noon, Captain Richard J. Keller of Company E and Lieutenant Sidney S. Goodkin of Company F reported by radio to the battalion commander: "We believe we have got them. We are going over the top together." They personally led the assault, shouting defiance at the Japanese and encouragement to their own men.

Fifteen minutes after the charge began, Captain Keller was struck down by Japanese fire and seriously wounded in the chest, but Lieutenant Sam Hendricks assumed command of the company with no interruption in the advance. Lieutenant Goodkin was leading his men despite painful arm burns he had suffered earlier when a smoke grenade exploded amid several incendiary grenades and ignited them. When the fires menaced two wounded men in the same hole, Goodkin had tossed out the burning grenades one by one to safeguard his men.

The troops stormed up the hill and over the crest. Staff Sergeant Jack Foust of Company E spotted an abandoned light machinegun, disengaged the weapon from its mount, and, firing as he held it in his arms, killed a Japanese machinegunner who was shooting from a tree at the troops leading the charge. On both sides of the hill the remaining enemy emplacements were being systematically wiped out. By 1600 the 2d Battalion had regained Hill 700, and the U.S. lines were restored.

A few Japanese who had survived the onslaught would not give up. Mopping-up operations were repeatedly interrupted by spasmodic fire from two pillboxes, each occupied by a lone rifleman who had apparently tunneled into the steep hill and could not be dislodged by rifles, Thompson submachineguns, or bazookas.

But there was one trick left, and it remained for Sergeant Harold W. Lintemoot and Private First Class Gerald E. Shaner, of the 2d Battalion ammunition and pioneer platoon, to pull it out of their bag. Bringing demolition equipment to a point behind the crest of the hill, they prepared explosive charges, fastening six half-pound blocks of TNT to a board about four feet long and attaching a slow-burning fuse. In turn, Lintemoot and then Shaner scurried up to the pillboxes. The hill provided cover until they were within ten yards of the emplacement. Then they rushed over the remaining distance, placing the charge on top of the pillbox and withdrawing to a nearby position that offered them protection from the flying debris. In five seconds, the pillbox was liquidated, and no Japanese now contested the U.S. occupation of the hill.

The battle for Hill 700 was the bloodiest in which the 37th Infantry Division had yet participated, exceeding in carnage

any single action of the New Georgia campaign. A great brown clearing stood on the reverse slope of the hill where the Japanese had made their attack up the hill. Fifteen hundred Japanese soldiers were buried in graves and foxholes on that side of the hill. Captured prisoners claimed that the four days of fighting had resulted in the virtual annihilation of the 2d and 3d Battalions of the Japanese 23d Infantry and the 13th Infantry Regiment, which had been pitted against this thin, narrow front of the U.S. 37th Infantry Division.

The battle for Hill 700 was the 37th Division's first defensive action. Heretofore, the division had been on the offensive. Its mission on Bougainville was to set up a perimeter and defend the airfield, the capture of which would have imperiled the whole installation on Empress Augusta Bay.

The Japanese staff work in this battle was good. They had correctly evaluated the importance of the hill and had cleverly approached it through the defiles in the mountains. They had performed magnificently in transporting supplies and ammunition over the mountains and through the jungles. They had hand-carried large guns and emplaced them on almost inaccessible heights. They fought up a steep slope that would have been difficult to climb empty-handed. They attacked in force on a narrow front and took advantage of a dark, rainy night to penetrate a key section of U.S. lines. They took tremendous losses without wavering. They held their advantage until they were exterminated. This attack was planned as their main effort. Never in their campaigns in the Pacific did the 37th Division meet Japanese soldiers equal to these in valor or ability. This was the real test of the division's fighting power.

The defense of the hill was committed to the 145th Infantry. Although the point of the attack was within the 2d Battalion sector, the whole regiment was eventually engaged in the fight. Behind it was the support of the entire division. The artillery of the division and of the entire corps area had been emplaced so that it could be used in support of an action on any part of the perimeter, and it was used as planned. The division's reconnaissance troop took a place in the line. The 117th Engineers laid aside their picks and shovels and, taking up rifles, took the place of infantrymen. The 2d Battalion of the 148th Infantry made the counterattack that cleaned off the ridge. Quartermaster troops, ordnance men, and medics brought up the supplies and ammunition and carried away the wounded. The MPs patrolled the roads and fought off the souvenir hunters; the straggler line was used not to keep the front troops from coming back but to keep the sightseers from going forward.

The game was over!

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**Stanley A. Frankel** was drafted into the Army in January 1941, attended Officer Candidate School in Fiji Islands in early 1943, was commissioned and served in the 148th Infantry Regiment until his discharge as a major at the end of the war. In addition to numerous articles, he has written two major books: *The 37th Infantry Division in World War II*, published in 1948 by the Infantry Journal Press, and more recently, *Frankel-y Speaking About World War II in the South Pacific*, published in 1993 by Woods Books (185 E. Hartsdale Avenue, Hartsdale, NY 10530) and now in second edition.

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