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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 511TH
PARACHUTE INFANTRY (11TH AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN
THE ADVANCE THROUGH THE MAHONAG-ANAS PASS TO
THE WEST COAST OF LEYTE, 27 NOVEMBER - 25
DECEMBER 1944

(THE LEYTE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Mortar Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY BATTALION
ATTACKING IN MOUNTAINOUS JUNGLE TERRAIN

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INTRODUCTION

The 11th Airborne Division, an inexperienced unit that had not yet received its combat indoctrination, underwent its first trial by fire in the rugged mountains of Central Leyte. This monograph covers the main effort of this indoctrination, setting forth a record of the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry, in the advance through the Mahonag-Anas Pass to the west coast of Leyte, 27 November - 25 December 1944.

Before going into the actual events which took place during this period, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the events leading up to them.

On 7 August 1942, United States Marines invaded Guadalcanal Island, our first real offensive in the Pacific War.

(1) Since that time, in the Central Pacific, Admiral Nimitz was advancing by a series of "island hopping" campaigns toward the Philippines. By September, 1944, the great Japanese base at Truk had been isolated and the Palaus Islands had been invaded. (2)

In the South Pacific, General MacArthur was advancing up the coast of New Guinea, by-passing the strongest enemy resistance and seizing airfields by which each successive jump could be ^{supported} covered.

(1) A-18, p. 51; (2) A-18, p. 53.

The landings on Morotai in September were closely coordinated with the landings in the Palaus by Admiral Nimitz. The two forces converging on the Philippines were now approaching a juncture. (3)

The original planning for the invasion of the Philippines called for the invasion of Mindanao on 15 November, and the invasion of Leyte on 20 December, 1944. However, intelligence sources and other reports from our aircraft and guerrillas, showed that the bulk of the Japanese forces were in Mindanao and that the Island of Leyte was lightly held. It was decided by the high command to by-pass Mindanao and advance the date for the invasion of Leyte from 20 December to 20 October, 1944. (4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Island of Leyte is the eighth largest in the Philippine Group. It is approximately 107 miles long and it's width varies from 42 miles in the north at it's widest point, to approximately 15½ miles in the center at it's narrowest sector. Along the coastline are found three valleys: the Ormoc Valley along the northwest, the Tacloban Valley along the northeast, and the Leyte Valley along the north and east. From Carigara Bay in the north, to Cabalian Bay and Sagod Bay in the south, the central portion of Leyte is traversed by an extremely rugged chain of mountains. This chain of mountains formed a natural effective barrier between the eastern and western coastal areas to all but

(3) A-18, p. 53; (4) A-6, p. 18.

lightly equipped infantry. (5) (See Map A)

The mission of taking Leyte was assigned to the Sixth Army. On 17-18 October elements of the 6th Ranger Battalion made preliminary landings on Homonhon, Suluan, and Dinagat Islands at the entrance of the Leyte Gulf.

(6) (See Map A) On 20 October, the 10th and the 24th Corps landed on the east coast of Leyte on four beaches and quickly exploited their initial successes. (See Map A) By 2 November, the 6th Army had control of all Leyte Valley and its airfields and practically all organized resistance *in this*

area had ceased. (7) The Japanese had withdrawn to the center of the island and were using the mountainous terrain to slow down the advance of the American troops. By 7 November the heavy enemy reinforcements and the extremely bad weather had stopped the advance of the 6th Army at the foothills of the mountains. (8) (See Map B)

THE JAPANESE SITUATION

It was apparent to the Japanese now that their situation in the Philippines had become critical. General Karuda had been relieved of his command and replaced by General Yamashita, one of Japan's best generals. Soon after taking command, General Yamashita sent the following message to the commanding general of the 16th Division fighting a delaying action in the mountains: "The Army has received the following message from His Majesty, the Emperor": "Enemy ground forces will be destroyed". (9)

(5) A-6, p. 5; (6) A-10, Map 15; (7) A-10, p. 102;
(8) A-10, p. 103; (9) A-11, p. 74.

Japan had decided that the battle for the Philippines would be fought in the rugged terrain of the Leyte mountains, and during the month of November an all out struggle developed. (10)

The lack of air facilities on Leyte and the almost continuous rain, plus the primary mission of gaining air superiority, greatly restricted the air force in providing close support. Because of this air weakness and taking full advantage of the weather and darkness, the enemy succeeded in landing a large number of reinforcements at Ormoc. (11)

During the month of November it was discovered that one of Japan's finest divisions, the 1st Division from the Kwantung Army, had landed on Leyte. (12) The exaggerated reports of success from the commanding general of the 35th Army, brought in from Cebu, made General Yamashita decide to crush the United States forces opposing him. (13)

Initially, the enemy on Leyte had consisted of only the 16th Division, numbering approximately 16,000 troops; but during a period of two months, the Japanese had brought in an estimated 60,000 reinforcements. (14)

THE 11TH AIRBORNE SITUATION

From June to the first part of November, 1944, the 11th Airborne Division had been undergoing intensive jungle training in the vicinity of Oro Bay, New Guinea, over the

(10) A-10, p. 103; (11) A-6, p. 70; (12) A-11, p. 75;
(13) A-10, p. 104; (14) A-3, p. 11.

same area where our forces had met and defeated the enemy in 1943. On 8 November the division was alerted for a water movement and on 11 November set sail for Leyte Island. (15) No mission as yet had been assigned to the division and no specific plans could be made. (16) On 18 November the 11th Airborne Division landed non-tactically on a 6000 yard front between Abuyog and Tarragona. (See Map B) A camp site, just off the shoreline, was set up and all cargo was unloaded and sorted. (17)

The ~~Military~~ Situation at this time could be summed up by the following quotation from Time Magazine, 20 November 1944: "The U. S. drive on land slowed down to a walk after it had overrun about 50% of the northern half of Leyte. Ormoc, the key western port where the Japs landed and deployed in a 10 mile semi-circle, could be approached only from the north or south unless the U. S. troops attempted to come over the mountains between Dagami and Jaro, a long, difficult pass". (18) (See Map B)

The Japanese in Ormoc were being attacked from three directions: in the north the 24th and the 1st Cavalry Divisions were pushing south below Carigara Bay; to the east the 96th Division was unsuccessfully attempting to move west across the mountains from Dagami; and to the south the 7th Division was attacking north along the west coast highway. (19) (See Map B)

(15) Personal knowledge; (16) A-1; (17) A-7, p. 2;
(18) A-17, p. 1; (19) A-5, p. 6.

The first mission given to the division was to relieve the 7th Division along the line Burauen-Lapaz-Bugho, and to destroy all Japanese in that sector. (20) (See Map C) By 27 November all elements of the 7th Division had been relieved and the 11th Airborne Division had started its drive to gain control of the trails and passes that led to the west coast through the central mountain range. (21) (See Map C)

SITUATION OF THE 511TH

The tactical plan of the 511th was to send one battalion to Burauen to relieve a battalion of the 17th Infantry of the 7th Division. This battalion was followed by the 3rd battalion on 23 November, and the 2nd battalion on 26 November. (22) Moving by amphibious trucks to Dulag and then shuttling to Burauen by borrowed trucks, the entire regiment assembled in the mud flats, next to the Daguitan River by 26 November. (23) (See Map C)

The 511th was given the mission to attack through the mountains and secure the western exits from the mountains into the west coastal corridor. This was to assist the attack of the 7th Division ^{up} from the west coast. Its secondary mission was to destroy all enemy forces encountered and maintain contact with the 96th Division on the right. (24)

The organization of a parachute regiment at this time was somewhat different than a regular regiment. Each

(20) A-7, p. 2; (21) A-7, p. 2; (22) A-1; (23) A-7, p. 7;
(24) A-1.

battalion had only three rifle companies and no heavy weapons company.

The heavy weapons company was the battalion headquarters company, consisting of a communication section, a light machine gun platoon, and a 81 mm mortar platoon.

Substantive
The mission given to the regiment was ideally suited to such a streamlined light outfit, for the terrain from Burauen to the west coast of Leyte is rugged mountainous country, covered with dense tropical growth. Only steep and dangerous foot trails crossed these mountains; but by occupying these trails and blocking the passes, the 511th could prevent the Japanese from attacking the important installations at Burauen, Dagami and the surrounding flat country. (25) No heavy equipment could be carried; weapons heavier than mortars were out of the question. Even mortars were to present a serious handicap on the steep, slippery trails, both to the weight and the ammunition supply problem. (26)

THE MOVEMENT TO MAHONAG

On 27 November, the 511th pushed into the mountains west of Burauen, with the first objective being a small guerrilla camp called Lubi. Lubi stood astride the junction of two trails going into the mountains to the west. There were two trails going into Lubi from Burauen, a north trail and a south trail. (See Map C) It was decided that the 1st battalion, by companies, would move up the north trail and the 3rd battalion, by companies, up the

(25) A-1; (26) Personal experience.

south trail. The 2nd battalion was to remain at Burauen with the mission of mobile defense of the San Pablo air strips, until ordered forward. (27)

The first serious enemy resistance of the regiment was encountered by C company the following day. The forward command group of the regiment, with C company, was following the other elements of the 1st battalion by about three hours. A native guide led this company along the wrong trail and instead of joining the rest of the 1st battalion, which had reached Manarawat without opposition, ran right into a large Jap ambush. (See Map C) The Japs closed in behind them and had completely surrounded them in a short time. (28) The dense jungle growth, plus the bad weather, made location of the company extremely difficult. It was not until four days later that a liaison plane on search duty located them by a momentary flash of a mirror. Meanwhile, the executive officer of the 511th had jumped from a liaison plane at Manarawat, to take command of the regiment. (29)

Meanwhile, the 3rd battalion, leaving H company at Patog to investigate reported Japanese activity, had moved out to Mawala, just across the gorge from Manarawat, and set up a perimeter. (30) (See Map C)

Late in the afternoon, prior to arriving at Mawala, the 3rd battalion saw and killed their first Japs. Captain Clinton A. Ashford, of Headquarters company, surprised and killed three Japs with his M1 rifle. After being searched (27) A-1; (28) A-17, p. 2; (29) A-17, p. 2; (30) A-1.

one of the Japs was found with a detailed terrain map of the area west of Burauen. This map was later flown out by liaison plane and dropped to the battalion three days later, translated into English. (31)

The next morning the 3rd battalion moved out along a creek bed from it's perimeter at Mawala, to join the 1st battalion at Manarawat. As the last of Headquarters company was leaving the perimeter, it was brought under intense rifle fire from the gorge below. Upon investigation, it was found that the creek bed had made a hairpin turn and that the lead elements of the battalion were firing at the top of the hill where they had just left. Luckily, all shots were wild and no one was hurt. (32) The rest of the trip to Manarawat was upstream and very slow; but by late afternoon, the battalion, less H company, joined the 1st battalion and became part of the perimeter defense.

Upon arriving there, the battalion found that Manarawat was being cleared for a liaison plane strip. The next few days were spent in clearing the strip and in receiving a small amount of supplies, dropped by liaison plane. (33)

The 81 mortar platoon, of Headquarters company, left Burauen without any of it's mortars. The probability of it's employment in our advance to the west, made it necessary for the platoon to be able to provide at least a small amount of support to the battalion. As a result, two mortars and approximately 60 rounds of H.E. light

(31) Personal knowledge; (32) Personal experience;
(33) Personal experience.

ammunition were dropped by liaison planes. The tube, bipod and ammunition were dropped by parachute; but the base plate was merely thrown out of the plane. It was here that the 3rd battalion received the first of several casualties by aerial drop. Pfc. Jack Jones, of the mortar platoon, was hit on the back of the head by a free falling base plate and died the same night. (34)

Company G, with the regimental executive officer leading, moved out from the strip to relieve C company. Their attack combined with the attack of the 2nd battalion, moving up from Burauen, finally effected their relief. (35)

At Manarawat, the division made it's first combat jump. Battery A of the 457th Parachute Field Artillery, utilizing one C47 with pararacks, dropped four 75 mm pack howitzers with ammunition and crew ready to fire. (36)

It was a short, difficult point to hit and only three or four men were able to jump at each pass. This battery was destined to fire thousands of rounds with a 6400 mil firing sector and a maximum range in support of elements of the division. (37)

In the meantime, H company had joined the 3rd battalion from Patog and the 2nd battalion was on its way to the strip from Burauen. (38)

At Manarawat the regiment received the mission to proceed to Mahonag and secure the Jap supply trail in that vicinity, with the secondary mission of attacking west on

(34) Personal knowledge; (35) A-17, p. 2; (36) A-7, p. 2; (37) A-17, p. 2; (38) A-1.

7 December in a coordinated attack with the other elements of the 6th Army operating on Leyte. (39) (See Map C)

On 2 December, Lt. Fenske, from I company, was ordered to take a patrol and locate the route to Mahonag and the Jap supply trail. By 1700, Lt. Fenske, had returned with the information that he had located a route to Mahonag, but had failed to locate the Jap supply trail. The route taken was from the strip to Mt. Catmon, over Mt. Catmon to Mahonag, a distance of about 7 miles. (40) (See Map C)

At 0800 the following morning, the 3rd battalion moved out by companies, over the same route that Lt. Fenske's patrol had taken the previous day.

Initially, a few caribou were used to carry the mortar and ammunition; but they soon had to be discarded. The condition of the trails, due to the almost continuous rain and the steep inclines, made them entirely too slow. At some places it was impossible for caribou to pass. (41) The mortars and ammunition were unloaded and hand carried the rest of the way. By late afternoon the 3rd battalion reached Mahonag without opposition. (See Map C)

Mahonag was a stump studded clearing on top of a commanding hill, about 400 by 500 yards, that had been used by the natives and Japs as a camnote (sweet potato) field. It was covered by prepared positions and showed evidence of a Jap bivouac; but ^{the Japs} they had withdrawn to the surrounding jungles and hills. (42)

(39) A-1; (40) A-1; (41) Personal experience;
(42) Personal knowledge.

When the battalion arrived at Mahonag, a perimeter was set up to ward off any attacks and again Lt. Fenske was sent out with a patrol to locate the Jap supply trail. By 1700 he had returned to the perimeter with the information that he had located a trail about 1000 yards to the south and had surprised and killed 10 Japs. A Jap wire was tapped, but there was no conversation.

(43)

In the meantime, regimental headquarters, with most of the 1st battalion, arrived in the perimeter. One company was immediately ordered to set up an ambush on the Jap supply trail, that Lt. Fenske had discovered and to take along a wire tapper and an interpreter. (44)

The mortar platoon, of the 3rd battalion, had been busy digging in their two mortars on top of the hill inside the perimeter. Before nightfall, the mortars had been dug in and registrations fired on three different points.

On the night of 5 December a small group of Japs using an American B. A. R. attempted to enter the perimeter, but were not successful. (45)

The next morning a message was sent from Mahonag to division headquarters, that all troops were out of rations; and if rations, oil, ammunition and signal supplies were not sent to the positions, we would not be able to continue the attack. By 1600 one C47 and two liaison planes dropped some ammunition and K rations in a small quantity. (46)

(43) A-1; (44) A-1; (45) Personal knowledge; (46) A-1.

During this ration drop the 81 mortars, of the 3rd battalion, did their first firing. While the liaison planes would circle the drop zone they would be fired on from the surrounding jungle by a Jap machine gun. A hurried shift would be made and a few rounds fired in the general direction. This went on for about 5 minutes. Whether or not any rounds hit or even came close to them is not known; but they soon stopped firing. (47)

On 6 December the 3rd battalion S-2 section was sent out to reconnoitre a route from Mahonag to Anas to prepare for the advance on the following day. This patrol returned with the information that they had discovered a well developed Jap supply trail that seemed to continue on through the mountains to the west coast. (48)

THE ATTACK TO THE WEST

On 7 December, as a part of a general drive by all units, to wipe out the last resistance in Western Leyte, the 511th pushed west from Mahonag to Anas. (49)

At this time it is appropriate to describe briefly, the general drive by the units in Leyte. On 5 December the 7th Division launched an attack from Damulaan on the west coast and was proceeding north towards Ormoc. On 7 December the 77th Division landed at Deposito, 3 miles south of Ormoc and the 11th and the 96th Divisions started their push over the mountains to the west. (50) (See Map B)

(47) Personal experience; (48) Letter from Lt. Colonel Edward H. Lhati, then commanding officer of the 3rd battalion; (49) A-16, p. 1; (50) A-4, p. 15.

The 3rd battalion moved out of Mahonag in the order I, G, Headquarters and H companies, at 15 minute intervals. Just before Headquarters company moved out of the perimeter, two artillery rounds landed; one in the C.P. and one about 100 yards north of the C.P.. No one was hurt and no further artillery landed. (51)

The ration supply had been limited since leaving Manarawat and when the battalion started out each man had two days ration, consisting of four boxes of K's per man. All the small arms that a man could reasonably carry were issued and, in addition, each man had two or three hand grenades. The 81 mortar platoon of Headquarters company carried two complete mortars, and each man who was not carrying part of a mortar carried two rounds of H.E. light ammunition. No ammunition bags were available and the men were left to carry the bulky rounds as best they could. The platoon carried around 30 rounds. (52)

The battalion moved out generally west along a narrow, undefined trail. The trail was even more difficult than the one from Manarawat to Mahonag. The heavy rains had made it ankle deep in mud in some places and dangerously slippery in others. At some places it was necessary to pass the parts of the mortars up to a man on a ledge above, and then, the men had to help one another over the ledge. Frequent breaks were necessary and the movement of the column was very slow. (53)

(51) Personal experience; (52) Personal experience;
(53) Personal experience.

Around 1300, after the leading elements of I company had advanced up a steep, jungle covered mountain ridge, approximately one mile, they surprised a platoon of Japs on top of the mountain. (54) After a sharp fire fight, the mountain was taken and most of the Japs killed. One officer, Lt. Maloney, of I company, was killed in this action. (55)

After capturing the mountain (named Maloney, in honor of Lt. Maloney) I company discovered that the main Jap supply trail in our sector came over it. The battalion commander ordered H company to organize and defend it and the rest of the battalion passed through and continued the advance west along the supply trail. (56) After moving about 800 yards against light resistance, I company captured another high mountain which was even larger than Maloney Hill. It was late afternoon at this time, so the battalion, less H company, organized a perimeter for the night. (57)

The mountain just captured, named Rock Hill (in honor of the late Colonel Orin D. "Hard Rock" Haugen), was a narrow, thickly wooded ridge, about 400 yards long and 35 yards wide, with an elevation of about 3000 feet. The slopes on the northwest side toward Ormoc were very steep, averaging around 60 degrees. Around it skirted the Jap supply trail. (58) (See Map D) At one point on Rock Hill could be seen a beautiful view of Ormoc Bay to the northwest. This was indeed a welcome sight and the words "I'm dreaming of an "Ormoc" Christmas" were being sung by everyone. We had many more days in store for us, though, before

(54) A-1; (55) Personal knowledge; (56) A-1; (57) Personal experience; (58) Interview with Major John M. Cook, then commanding officer of Regimental Headquarters company.

we were to have an "Ormoc Christmas".

During the day and throughout most of the night, H company, back on Maloney Hill, had repulsed a number of Banzai attacks. (59)

At 0700 the following morning, G company moved out from Rock Hill to continue the advance along the supply trail. After proceeding a short time they were held up by heavy machine gun fire coming from a ridge to the west. One officer and one enlisted man were missing and three men were wounded by this action; and, by 0830 the company was ordered back to Rock Hill. The battalion had received orders from regiment to hold on to Maloney and Rock Hill, pending the arrival of the C.P. group and the 1st battalion. (60)

During the day a series of attacks were made on the battalion perimeter by Japanese using light mortar, machine guns, and riflemen. All attacks were repulsed. During these attacks the poor quality of the Japanese mortar ammunition was noted. Many rounds landed close to troops but the powdery fragments seemed to have little effect. (61) A few men from H company tried to join their company on Maloney Hill but were unable to do so because of the heavy sniping between the two hills. (62)

The next day the battalion started clearing the top of Rock Hill so it could be located by liaison planes, for the dropping of needed rations and supplies. A trail was made on top of the hill so that the Jap trail running along the side could be used in setting up ambushes. (63)

(59) Personal knowledge; (60) A-1; (61) Personal experience; (62) A-1; (63) Personal knowledge.

Company H, back on Maloney Hill, had counted 244 dead Japs up to date and were continuing to repulse all attacks. Captain Van Epps, from the battalion aid station on Rock Hill, fought his way through the Jap snipers to the H company position to take care of three badly wounded men.

(64)

On the morning of 10 December the regimental headquarters group and the 1st battalion moved out from Mahonag to join the 3rd battalion on Rock Hill. (65)

On this day the 81 mortars, of Headquarters company, participated in an attack for the first time. A strong point had been located about 200 yards southwest of our position and a platoon of I company was ordered to take it. This was to pave the way for the continuation of the attack to the west the following morning. One mortar was set up on the trail on top of Rock Hill facing down the route of the Jap supply trail. (See Map D) Two wiremen with a roll of assault wire followed the observer as he moved out behind the rifle platoon. The attack moved for about 100 yards when the lead riflemen were brought under fire by machine gun on the high ground to the front. One squad was sent around the left and two squads continued down the trail but all of them were soon pinned down by the fire. The mortar observer and wiremen crawled up to the lead riflemen and had the approximate location of the machine gun or guns pointed out. One round was fired at a range that was sure to be substantially over and from there the mortar fire could be worked up to the target. The first

(64) A-1; (65) A-1.

round was way over to the right and a big deflection shift was made to get the fire approximately on line. The next round was almost on line but was still way over. A small deflection change was given and about twelve turns up on the elevating crank. This brought the next round on line and just a little over. It was difficult to sense the rounds because they could not be seen. They had to be sensed by sound. The next round was brought in just a little closer by coming up four turns. This brought the round in very close to the troops but another burst of machine gun fire proved that it was not close enough. The men were told that the next rounds would really be close and the command was given for up two turns - three rounds. These rounds landed practically on top of our men; but after the third round had hit, they walked in and took the hill. Only one man was killed and he was killed before the mortar started firing. After the mortar was brought in on the target area, the rounds could have been placed at any point on the hill and eliminated any troops or machine guns that insisted on staying there. (66)

At 1500 H company had been relieved from Maloney Hill by one of the companies from the 1st battalion, and had occupied the hill that had just been taken by the platoon from I company. (67)

On 11 December, H company moved west along the supply trail towards Anas but was unable to advance because of a strong Jap position about 600 yards west of Rock Hill. Company G was then ordered to by-pass this position. The (66) Personal experience; (67) Personal knowledge.

company was given the primary mission of contacting the lead elements of the 7th Division that were attacking up the west coastal plain, and a secondary mission of reconnoitering a route from which to attack the ridge that held up H company. (68) It was unable to carry out it's secondary mission due to lost contact but continued on it's primary mission of contacting the 7th Division. (69)

The rest of the battalion withdrew to the same position that they had held before and the elements of the 1st battalion were withdrawn from Maloney Hill, in preparation for the continuation of the attack to the west.

MOPPING UP

On 12 December, the mission of the regiment was changed from attacking west, to holding the Anas-Mahonag Pass and destroying all enemy in the vicinity of Mahonag and Rock Hill. (70) The battalion commander of the 3rd battalion insisted on following G company but was emphatically told by the regimental commander, that he would stay where he was. (71)

The battalion aid station at this time had eighteen serious casualties on hand and the medical supplies that were desperately needed were not available. The men had not had rations for four days and the supply of ammunition was low, especially ~~in~~ hand grenades. (72)

Headquarters company of the 3rd battalion was ordered to carry all the litter patients over the Jap supply trail to the advanced hospital at Mahonag, and on the return trip

(68) A-16, p. 2; (69) Personal knowledge; (70) A-1;
(71) Personal knowledge; (72) A-1.

to bring rations. After spending most of the morning improvising litters out of cut trees and panchos, the company was ready to move out. (73)

One squad of the mortar platoon with a machine gun attached, was ordered to proceed in advance of the main column. This squad had moved out of the perimeter about 25 yards when the lead elements suddenly hit the ground. Upon investigation, a lot of activity and the clicking of bolts was heard immediately to our front. The machine gun was set up in the middle of the trail and started firing rapid fire on both sides while the litters were withdrawing into the perimeter. This fire was returned by machine guns and rifles. No casualties occurred. (74)

*Author not shown
Perimeter not shown*

These Japs had come from Maloney Hill between our position and Mahonag; a position formally held by H company and elements of the 1st battalion, before they were left unoccupied on 11 December. (75)

In the meantime, the Japanese forces on Leyte were in the process of launching a well planned, but poorly executed counter-offensive through the mountains to the east.

Beginning around 4 December, a marked increase in ground activity west of the Burauen airfields was noticed, with a large number of Jap troops infiltrating through the mountains. (76) These troops launched an attack on the Buri strip, near Burauen, at dawn on 6 December. At dusk on the same day, an estimated 400 Jap parachute troops

(73) Personal experience; (74) Personal experience;
(75) Personal knowledge; (76) A-3, p. 12.

Not a clear transition

landed on Buri and San Pablo air strips. They destroyed several liaison planes and a few drums of gasoline before they were dispersed and driven into the mountains. (77)

Captured orders and prisoner of war statements indicated that the Japanese 35th Army had planned to participate on a major scale with the airborne landings. The 16th Division succeeded in moving large forces into the area west of the airfields, but the 26th Division, advancing through the Mahonag-Anas Pass was stopped by the 511th. (78)

Back on Rock Hill, the 3rd battalion was making a series of attacks on Maloney Hill but all were repulsed. (See Map D) The men were tired and weak from lack of food. Even walking down the muddy trail a few yards would exhaust them. Everyone had been wet from the time they had left Mahonag and the continuous rain and dampness had kept them wet. Most of the panchos and shelter halves had been utilized in making litters and in the protection of the many wounded at the aid station. (79)

On 13 December the skies cleared for the first time in many days and the liaison planes dropped rations and medical supplies for over an hour. After the first drop, each three men were issued one box of K rations. (80) During the course of the ration drops, in the next few days, two men were killed by falling boxes and there were many "near misses". One of the men killed was a casualty in the aid station.

(77) A-7, p. 2; (78) A-3, p. 14; (79) Personal knowledge; (80) Personal knowledge.

Earlier in the day a patrol had left the perimeter to reconnoitre a new trail to Mahonag, for the purpose of bringing more supplies to Rock Hill. By late afternoon, a message from the 2nd battalion at Mahonag, stated that the patrol had arrived safely and that a continuous line of supplies would be started in the morning, over the new trail. (31) (See Map D)

*not on
map*

A coordinated attack was planned to retake Maloney Hill. Two companies from the 2nd battalion at Mahonag would attack from their direction, and H company would attack from Rock Hill. The plan for H company was to leave Rock Hill under the cover of darkness to a position near Maloney Hill, where they could attack at dawn. The forward observer, from battery A of the 457th, would be with the 2nd battalion. (82)

*Not
on map*

The preparation for this attack by H company, was very poor and disorganized. In the early morning when the company was trying to organize, everyone seemed to be confused. There was excessive and loud yelling by the subordinate leaders trying to assemble their men. Finally, after it was already daylight, the company started to move out. The lead elements had just started to leave the perimeter when they were met by Japs, who had crawled up to within a few yards of the outer foxholes. A sharp fire fight took place, which lasted most of the morning. (83)

In the meantime, the two companies from the 2nd (81) A-1; (82) Personal knowledge; (83) Personal knowledge.

battalion were closing in on Maloney Hill but had not taken it. Company E was finally ordered to by-pass it and join the rest of the regiment on Rock Hill. Company B had to withdraw because of approaching darkness. (84)

On the same day, word was finally received about G company. Elements of the 32nd Infantry, pushing up towards our position, had contacted them. (85) These men had been without rations for ten days and most of them were suffering from malnutrition. (86)

A marine observer had been with the regimental C.P. and had contact with a battery of 155's back on the beach. These guns had not been used in close support, due to the difficulty of adjusting in the jungles. The small daily allotment of ammunition had been expended on commanding terrain features, some distance away. (87)

On the morning of 18 December, a large concentration of fire from these 155's was put on Maloney Hill. A short time later, B company attacked the hill and took it without any opposition. This artillery fire, from the 155's, had been very effective. A large number of dead Japs were scattered over the hill in their battered emplacements. An ambush had been set up on the Jap trail running off to the west and it accounted for around 100 Japs, as they retreated from the artillery fire. (88)

(84) Interview with Captain Hobart B. Wade, commanding officer of E company; (85) A-1; (86) Personal knowledge learned after the campaign; (87), (88) Interview with Major Lyman S. Faulkner, then regimental S-2.

CONTINUING THE ATTACK

With the mopping up complete, the regiment prepared to move out to the west. H company was sent out on a reconnaissance in force to the west ridge, about 800 yards from Rock Hill. An artillery concentration from battery A of the 457th was placed on the ridge prior to this attack. By 1800, H company had withdrawn without being able to advance. (89)

On 20 December, the 3rd battalion made a coordinated attack with I company going to the right and company H going to the left. Prior to this, the 75's, now firing at almost a maximum range from Manarawat, layed a very heavy volume of fire in support of this attack. (90)

The 81 mortar platoon had sent an observer with each of the companies and had cleared a position in the jungle to support the attack. Again only one mortar was used.

Company I made good progress and by noon had reached the top of the ridge where the supply trail made a sharp turn to the right. (See Map D) On arriving here, it was discovered that the Japs had gone around their position and had infiltrated between ^{I Co.} them and H company. A strong patrol was sent down the trail from I company, to clear it of the Japs and to reach H company. (91)

During this attack, company I received all the mortar support. It was necessary for the observer to crawl (89) Personal knowledge; (90) A-1; (91) A-1.

up the trail with the lead riflemen and place the fire on located points of resistance. The initial adjustment required a great deal of time because the bursts could not be seen. All sensings again had to be made by sound.

S/Sgt. Mille, a mortar section leader, was killed during this action while eliminating a machine gun close to him. After being slightly wounded by the machine gun just to his front, Sgt. Mille brought in three rounds at a very close range. One of the rounds hit a tree a short distance away and killed him. (92)

The radios were out by this time and communication was by W130 wire. In a short while the wire ran out and communication was maintained by utilizing the Jap wire that was on the trail. (93)

By late afternoon, the ridge had been taken and the mortar platoon moved up and joined the new perimeter for the night. This was the last action by this platoon.

The next day the 2nd battalion passed through the 3rd battalion and continued the attack down the trail, towards Ormoc. The attack was vigorously pushed for the next two days to prevent the Japs from reorganizing. Two bivouac areas were passed through that looked like they had just been vacated and two 75 mm field guns with approximately 100 rounds of ammunition were discovered. (94)

At noon on 22 December, the regiment was ordered

(92) Personal experience; (93) Personal experience;
(94) Interview with Major Lyman S. Faulkner.

by division to hold up and let the 187th Glider Infantry pass through. At this point, D company had advanced to the foothills and had to withdraw about 2 miles to allow the 187th to take over. (95)

The 511th spent the next two days collecting all the litter patients from Mahonag and Rock Hill; and by 25 December, the regiment had cleared the mountains and had completed it's mission.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A study of the operations of the 3rd battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry, during the final stages of the campaign in Leyte presents a good picture of the difficulties involved in fighting over mountainous, jungle terrain.

It is apparent in this type of operation, that the side that wins is the side that gains control of the trails and the key terrain features on those trails. The supply trail that the 3rd battalion discovered just beyond Mahonag was the most important trail in the central portion of the mountains. The Japanese made many attempts to dislodge the regiment from that trail and regain control of Rock Hill and Maloney Hill.

The troops from the 511th were inexperienced, making many mistakes that might have meant their downfall against a better organized enemy.

(95) Interview with Captain Hobart B. Wade, commanding officer of E company.

*What were their
mistakes?
How many?*

When the 3rd battalion sent a company that was short of rations and ammunition, through enemy territory along an unknown route, they made a big mistake. This company was lost to the battalion for the remainder of the campaign; and it was just good fortune that prevented them from being destroyed.

The withdrawal from a commanding terrain feature astride the main supply trail (Maloney Hill) was another mistake. Throughout the time that H company occupied this hill, they were subject to numerous attacks by the enemy in an attempt to dislodge them. If it was necessary for the regiment to continue the attack and evacuate the hill, then some element of the division to the rear should have occupied such an important position. As a result, many unsuccessful attacks were made and unnecessary loss of life resulted, before it was retaken.

Every possible attempt should be made to supply front line elements in the jungle. Troops that are hungry and short of ammunition are not capable of attacking with the necessary vigor and drive that will insure success. The position to the west of Rock Hill was, supposedly, strongly fortified. However, after the 3rd battalion captured the ridge, the so-called fortifications were nothing but logs placed on top of the trail for better footing.

The care of the sick and wounded, present a major problem to the advance of a unit in this type of terrain.

The lack of adequate medical supplies and facilities, made comparatively light wounds turn into more serious ones. Moving a litter patient over the difficult trails, required a team of eight men; four men to carry the litter and four men for a relief. Platoons and companies had to be taken from their combat duties to move these men.

The liaison planes performed an outstanding job of re-supplying the advance elements in the mountains. The difficulty of locating units in their small areas and the continuous bad weather made the liaison plane very effective. Their slow speed and maneuverability made them much more effective than higher performance aircraft.

The use of reconnaissance patrols over unknown territory proved to be very effective. Lt. Fenske's patrol from Manarawat to Mahonag, enabled the 3rd battalion to quickly secure the position in preparation for the attack on 7 December. The second important reconnaissance patrol was that taken by the 3rd battalion S-2 section to reconnoitre the route from Mahonag to Anas, on 6 December. This patrol located the route to the main Jap supply trail which ran over Maloney Hill and Rock Hill, and enabled the 3rd battalion to attack and occupy these two important positions.

The 81 mortar is one of the finest close supporting weapons that a battalion commander has at his immediate disposal. Due to the almost impossible ammunition supply

problems that occur in this type of terrain, the 81 mortars should not be used in battery and should not be employed in firing large concentrations and barrages. All ammunition and weapons have to be hand carried, and two rounds is about the most that a man can be expected to carry over a period of time.

These mortars should be attached singly, or in pairs, to the assaulting companies, and should be used in the destruction of isolated points of resistance along the route of advance. The initial adjustment may require a good deal of time; but after one point is registered, a good observer can place his fire on any point with amazing accuracy and speed.

Every officer and N.C.O. should be capable of directing mortar fire. Casualties must be expected among the forward observers, and the loss of one of these men, should not preclude the continuation of the support.

Fighting in this type of terrain requires the maximum in physical condition and in aggressive action by every individual. Small units utilizing automatic weapons and taking advantage of the terrain, are capable of holding up the advance of much larger units. The only way to overcome this, is by aggressive action by small unit commanders and individuals.

When the enemy is once on the run, the attack must be pushed vigorously. Any delay will permit the enemy to reorganize and continue to resist your advance. The

3rd battalion and later the 511th were held up by orders, thus allowing the enemy to further delay our advance to the west coast.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

Not brought out specifically

1. Units should move with the slow^{est} elements regulating the speed of advance.

2. Reconnaissance patrols (over unknown terrain) should be habitually employed.

3. Good physical condition and aggressive action is essential to success.

4. Large units should move along trails by companies and with time intervals.

5. Mortar ammunition should be conserved and fired only on known points of resistance. *(when necessary indicated)*

6. Commanding terrain features should be held at all costs.

7. Every possible attempt should be made to supply front line units.

8. The control of key trails is of primary importance.

9. Equipment for the individual soldier should be kept to the minimum.

10. Special measures should be taken for the evacuation of the wounded.

11. Ambushes can be used with great success.

12. Small forces on key terrain are capable of holding up much larger forces.

There is better terrain as it is more difficult to attack.